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Transcript of "A Conversation with John Cage." John Cage interviewed by Richard Friedman. The contemporary American composer (John Cage, 1912-1992) discusses his life and work. Recorded in Davis, California in December, 1969. Broadcast on KPFA-FM on December 7, 1970. Pacifica Radio Archives number BB4151. Program length 00:60:00.

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Transcript

Conversation - John Cage / Richard Friedman

RF: Before returning to his home in Stony Point, New York, after completing a semester of teaching at the Davis Campus of the University of California, John Cage recorded the following conversation with Richard Friedman. This was recorded on December 6, 1969 at the house at which he was staying in Davis.

One of the questions a number of people have asked me to ask you is, "Where are you going?"

JC: Well, I'm about to go East again. (laughter) But you mean it --

RF: Both in the sense of time-space perhaps, where is your next stop? And, then, again, what kinds of things are you doing?

JC: Well, I think many things determine what we do: One is circumstances, and it's very often, often very dictatorial. For instance, here in California, for six weeks, I worked on an arrangement of Satie's *Socrate* for two pianos and that is being -- and nearly already finished. It is being choreographed by Merce Cunningham for a performance in January in New York. But it turned out that Eschig holds the copyright for the *Socrate* and won't permit the use of this two-piano arrangement which I made with Arthur Maddox. And, furthermore, they won't even permit the use of Satie's own arrangement, which is for one piano and voices. They will only permit the use of the orchestral score, of which there's only one copy and that's kept in France. And if we perform it in New York, we would be required not only to use the orchestral score but to perform it as many times as Eschig requires us to, which would be an enormous expense. So I'm writing a simple piece of music which fits the same shoe that the Sokraut fits and I'm calling it "Cheap Imitation." [NOTE: *Cheap Imitations*, 1969] Now if in a profound sense you asked me where I was going, that's, of course, not where I'm going but that's what I'm doing. And it seems to me that that's an illustration of how circumstances affect us.

I have, as far as, oh, a loftier notion of what to do in the future, I have the idea to make another large work that might be considered in the series of *Atlas Eclipticalis*. This would be called *Atlas Burialis*, with the ten thunderclaps, and the ten thunderclaps are from James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*. And they are, as you probably know from MacLuhan a capsule history of technology, so that the last thunderclap refers to the time in which we're living and electronics, uh, specifically. And I want the work to be performed by a conventional orchestra and chorus, but the instruments and the singers provided with contact or throat microphones, so that the tones that are produced, and the sounds that are produced, go through these microphones and are transformed to fill the envelope of an actual thunderstorm. So that, though it would begin as *Finnegan's Wake* in terms of the text and notes taken from a book of maps called *Atlas Borealis*, that the voices would produce the thunderclaps and fill those envelopes of actual thunderclaps and the orchestra probably -- and most of it is string orchestra -- would, um, fill the envelopes of rain dropping on materials suitable to that history of technology. In a sense, it's a project like that that Jasper Johns completed when he made those *Cans of Ale*. In other words, he saw something in his environment and then made it. Also, I remember a girl in Cincinnati who, um, emptied -- took out the yolk and the white from an egg, very carefully. and then inserted wax and then took the shell off and she had a waxed egg. (laughter) And this would be,

so to speak, you'd take a real thunderstorm, with the rain and everything, and you'd take it all out to find out what the shell of it was, you see, and, then, fill it up with people. (laughter)

RF: A number of artists, today, they started out as sculptors, I guess, and now they're also musicians in a sense, and there are a number of artists who are into a whole, um, range of things when they are doing art or pieces, I guess. There's no terminology now for what's currently being done.

JC: Mmmm.

RF: But, the so-called "ecological art," pieces involving the earth -- ideas which, in many cases, require such a level of technology to be accomplished that they almost appear to be an actual research and development program that some scientific laboratory might be --

JC: Yes.

RF: -- into. This is, my particular interest is one of technology and the arts being --

JC: Right.

RF: -- coalescing in some respect. Some people have, have remarked that they don't think that art and technology should get together. Other people have tried it, some artists, and are saying, well, they're deciding to get out of the technology and go back into the art because of many of the social implications of technology right now. There are some artists, however, who feel that the only way that they can, in some way, do their art is through a very sophisticated use of technology. For example, Hans Hoffa [?] is doing some pieces that are involved with -- There's aspects of ecological or monitoring of various natural systems and you have to use computers and so on to monitor these things properly. How do you feel about the intrusion of technology with art or the intrusion of art with technology?

JC: I think it is one of the things that characterizes the present period and that it will probably continue, and the technology will get more and more sophisticated. I think it will ultimately get to the point where we don't notice that it exists, although it will be, then, even more essential, and generally essential, to everyone's life. But I think instead of imposing itself on our attention that it will become more and more invisible. We notice -- Fuller, Buckminster Fuller has noticed that we do more with less -- copper, for instance, and we can notice the difference between, oh, engines of, say, 50 years ago and engines of the present time. And there appears to be an increasing ability not only to do more with less, but to do the same thing with something simpler. And I think it would be marvelous if, say, in some utopia that I hope we're going to that we would have all the advantages of technology with seemingly no presence of it.

RF: In other words, art should eventually become magic?

JC: Yes, if, for instance, I could telephone without bothering with the telephone.

RF: Right.

JC: Mmmm. And I believe there are people who think (laughter) that may be possible (laughter).

RF: I know some people who do it already.

JC: Yes. (laughter) I think that what technology is, is what Fuller and McLuhan have said it is -- an extension of our capacities and our present technology extends the central nervous system. So that I find this very heartening in terms of a change of society because it was through changing their minds that people, oh, in Buddhist terms became "enlightened," and it could be through changing the global mind, which is a mind because of the technology, because of the central-nervous-system extension, that can, then, change society, so that, well, one might call the equivalent of "enlightenment utopia." And in the past, we have thought that "utopia" was a lovely dream but impractical, and I think our technology is now making it practical.

My father was an inventor and he had an idea, which was a very good one, for airplane engines -- before 1920. But

his idea was so pow-, the engine was so powerful that it flew to pieces before it left the ground -- the reason being that the alloys which have since been invented, that could have contained the power weren't then discovered. And I think our technology is, so to speak, um, um, a nervous connection between all of us, um? -- so that, so that we can change the society.

RF: Some people would argue that that is true in the case of communication systems --

JC: Mm-hmm.

RF: -- however, that technology tends to act as a magnifying device for the whole human body, and if this means also not only are the qualities of communication, nervous system and so on magnified by technology, but also the excretionary systems of the body are also magnified. For example, now, thousands and thousands of people are dumping their waste, whether body waste or chemical waste or so on, right into the systems, [inaudible] the natural systems of the planet that the expiratory sys-, respiratory systems and expiratory systems of the body are seen, you know, through technology being magnified, are destroying some of the life systems of the planet as well.

JC: Well, we're liv-, we're living in a period where the proper way to do things hasn't been discovered. You might say we're in a state of society's being psychoanalyzed, and the, when we see, as we're beginning to see, more and more of us, that these problems that you just mentioned exist, then, that, of course suggests the solution. We, more and more of us know that it is senseless, on several counts, to use the fossilized fuels. If we use, the, what Fuller calls, "income energy sources" -- sun, wind, tides, algae -- he has already figured that we have enough energy from those sources to sustain a population from 20-35 billion and we're only three-and-a-half billion now. And if we did that, we would remove the problem of air pollution that I think you were mentioning. If we also, well, use our waste products, as some societies still do, and relate that to an improvement of general health and so forth, we can establish -- It may not be the old ecology, but we can establish something that works with fluency. ummm? It seems evident that we should get rid of those things that, I am told, don't return to Nature. I think those things that don't return to Nature ought to be sent quite quickly to one of the places that doesn't depend on the kind of Nature we have, as apparently these other planets don't, Mm? I think the atomic refuse should be sent to the sun, which, I think, would know what to do with it. Fuller is not optimistic about the use of atomic energy. And, more and more, when I mention my father's notion of a non-violent, space travel, let us say, travel through space unpropelled by fuels, people are delighted.

RF: Well, in the case of traveling beyond, let's say, Mars, for example, traveling to Jupiter, the support systems necessary, the amount of energy necessary using the standard technique of --

JC: Yes.

RF: Jet propulsion is impossible. We just would never get there in a man's lifetime, probably, or the expenditure of energy would be just, the [inaudible] so much. So it can't even be considered in that [overlapping dialogue; inaudible]

JC: Dad's view was that what's needed is an understanding of gravity and, then, a tuning into it, or a tuning out of it. And so one could go without any energy whatsoever. And he said, specifically, that if one built, as one could now with Fuller's architectural methods, if one built a sphere past a certain threshold size, that it would be very difficult to keep it on the earth, that it would just, of its own accord, umm, go into space.

RF: One other question I've been asked to ask by other people is, is there going to be another series of chapters for the diary?

JC: Yes, I've finished two more, but one I gave here at Davis, and I finished the fifth one here and read it to my class. And I believe that reading was recorded for your station [KPFA], so that you have all of them now recorded except the first one which I hope to do before I leave here.

RF: Will they be published?

JC: Yes, the fourth one, unless I hear to the contrary, is to be published in a magazine connected with the University of Illinois where I was for two years. And, then, I'll be next spring, in and out of Wesleyan University in Connecticut, and they want a text; so that's where the two will go. Now, if the Illinois Project doesn't go through, which it may not for circumstantial reasons, then it can go, that one could go to Wesleyan and then the fifth one could go some other place. I'm in the position of not having enough texts for -- to satisfy the requests for them, and I just refuse to give anyone anything if I don't have anything to give. (laughter) That's quite a problem in the society is, the numbers of people increase and the interests, say, in someone's work increases, then people want you to do so much that you can't do what it is you're doing, really.

RF: Right.

JC: So I've decided to just say "No" until I have something to give.

RF: Let's see. One, one thought that I might throw out and see what, how you might react to it (inaudible), when I first heard your music, I was 13 --

JC: Mm-hmm.

RF: -- and, in high school at the time, and discussing that kind of music or, at that time, what was available on record, which wasn't very much [inaudible] -- I think it was just the piano pieces -- with various people in high school and people of my age at that time, there was very much, very little sympathy from people in my culture, [inaudible] culture and so on. And since that time --

JC: What year was that?

RF: Oh, I would s- -- Oh, let's see, '58? '55?

JC: Oh, really? Mm-hmm.

RF: Some time around there. Since that time, much has happened to the younger generation and culture. There are various reasons for it. Again, one is the technology and the media. The other is the music and the art culture -- whatever you want to call it -- [inaudible] the terminology is not really well founded here -- but those, those aspects of the culture which most people of, let's say, below 25, 26, uh seem to agree on on many levels, has taken quite a different stance and different aesthetic than let's say the music or the art of people who were under the age of 25, 26 around 1930, let's say. The difference, I think, is quite remarkable in many respects. There's a great awareness of Oriental thought and Buddhist thought, Hindu thought and so on. The *I-Ching* is studied and read by just about everybody my age --

JC: Mm-hmm.

RF: -- [inaudible] that I've ever met and there were few people who know, who don't know what it is and even fewer who have never used it.

JC: Mm-hmm.

Q: Also, the aspects of theater, for example, The Living Theatre, itself, the New York group, is seen by many people my age as being conservative and reactionary. And things like "peace" festivals, "festival of music" festivals, street theaters, and communal or tribal "happenings" and events, happen by themselves without any forethought or considerations of aesthetics and so on -- it just seems like the natural thing to do. Whereas before, the older generations would say, "To do anything like that, they would first have to put it on off-Broadway to see how -- And things like *Oh, Calcutta!* and plays like that, have to be considered and digested on their aesthetic levels, so on and so forth, where, for the younger generation, these things seem like some, you know -- a play like *Oh, Calcutta!*, most people my age think it's one of the most degrading and degenerate aspects of the older generation and are glad to see it, to see it die.

JC: Mm-hmm.

RF: -- in many respects. This has happened, you know. I've seen it myself. Whereas discussing your music when I was 13, and discussing your music now when I'm 26, the change in attitude has been quite, quite remarkable. Many of the, the music that is, that is, uh, recognized and digested by people of my age group now is, in many respects, just completely incomprehensible to most people, on most, many levels. Many of the younger composers who are, you know, officially calling themselves "composers" and so on, are doing, again, as I mentioned, pieces which have very little music *per se* --

JC: Mm-hmm.

RF: And many, many people when they give concerts now will flatly say that there will be no music at this concert, just to show them, the people that they don't want to be tied down to the formal aspects. Do you think that this sudden change in attitudes and freeing of style and so on is a fad of this generation? Or is it a definite change in the culture? Or how do you feel about it, [do] you see this change?

JC: Well, I think we're living in a, in an overlap period which permits the difference between the generations that you've described, and that we, we are experiencing the end of one way of society's living which, actually, hasn't been so much living as it has been killing, and that we are seeing the beginning of a new way of living which, we hope, will be living. And the, it will take advantage of the technology that we've discussed, and it will be throughout the world; in other words, not the world divided between Occident and Orient, but the whole world brought together. And those two things go beautifully, because the technology, more and more, it can't be confined within parts of the world. And, then, I think a third thing that will characterize the situation will come from the larger numbers of people and the, what you might say, the greater prominence of society, so that the, well, the events like the one of last summer at Woodstock, and the ones I hear of here in the Bay Region [NOTE: San Francisco Bay Area] -- and large numbers of people coming and enjoying being together, not necessarily focusing up on what they went there to see, hm? And if it isn't theater, then, perhaps theater isn't necessary, but it probably is theater because theater is when we use all of our senses and, more and more, this wholeness is, is being demanded -- not in the sense of, of, of, umm, of wanting to get it but in the sense of --- having to have it because one's starved for it. (laughter)

I remember, for instance, about starvation or thirst or something like that that I had, through circumstances, always lived in cities until 1954 when I moved to the country. When I lived in the cities and took those weekend trips that one does in New York to friends who have country places, I noticed that the insects in the country bit people, whereas the insects with which I'm familiar, um, didn't so much bite me as looked around in the kitchen for little scraps of food. So I used to object to going to the country because when I'd come back to the city, I'd spend a week scratching myself. (laughter) But when I moved to the country, I realized that I was starved for Nature, absolutely starved, and I would, day after day, drop everything and just walk in the woods. I never got tired of it, and I still am not tired of it. Circumstances keep me from doing it as much as I would like, but I find Nature endlessly, endlessly interesting. So that one of the problems people speak of in the future, when we don't have so much work, and we have everything we need, they speak of boredom. But I simply can't imagine it, because just paying attention to anything in Nature and forgetting oneself a little bit, results in days that pass very quickly. All you have to do, for instance, is, is walk on a beach and let your attention go to the shapes of the stones washed up. Or do as I do, looking for mushrooms. There are so many things to do, if one doesn't have any work that I don't see the possibility of boredom.

I'm a little off the track. At any rate, I've gotten to the point that the mosquitoes and whatnot of the country don't bother me and, as a matter of fact, the cockroaches of the cities don't either. We even in our country

community near New York have our share of cockroaches. (laughter) And every now and then, I recall that they're edible. (laughter) Perhaps, a little chocolate. (laughter)

RF: Fried

JC: Yes. I was reading in late August, early September, Thoreau's [The] *Maine Woods*, an account of three trips he made to the Maine woods. And, actually, the thing which annoyed him the most in Maine were the mosquitoes. He wasn't annoyed, for instance, by snakes. Once, with his Indian guide, he said, "Let's" -- they were in their canoe and he said -- "Let's camp there on that beach" and when they stopped the canoe and got out, the Indian said, "There are snakes here," and Thoreau said, "Well, snakes don't bother me." Thoreau was not disturbed by snakes but was by mosquitoes, and in *The Maine Woods*, there's the paragraph in which he tells us how irritating he found them and how a French explorer, who was also a priest, was unable in his travels in America, in the North, to drink water except when he was helped by two people who kept the mosquitoes off. Now this is in great contrast to the Bodhidharma who, when he came from India to China, sat square-legged the whole time on the deck of a boat, and he was observed to be covered with mosquitoes but he never showed any irritation whatsoever. And, then, when I went up to Saskatchewan and got lost in the woods up there looking for mushrooms, I was quite used to looking at my trousers and seeing them absolutely covered with mosquitoes, and they were able to bite through the clothes. And, then, when I got lost in the woods, I discovered that they stopped biting at midnight and began, again, at 5:00 a.m. But I think that that irritation with insects will decrease as we are not only together in the sense we've talked about but that we're also together with Nature. Mmmm?

RF: One of the things that many people that I've spoken with -- my age -- have come to the realization of, perhaps, is that one of the things that this society or this culture teaches is -- well, it doesn't necessarily teach it out front but assumes -- is that the human species is something totally removed from the rest of the system.

JC: And we have to give that up entirely.

RF: Yeah. And the only way possibly that this earth can regenerate itself to a state where it can support, um, the human species because when people realize that they are only part, um, of a massive ecosystem --

JC: Right. Now, it's those two things: the cockroaches on the one hand, and the mosquitoes on the other that brought about, didn't they? The DDT?

RF: Yeah. And also, the ruining of Clear Lake in California.

JC: Right. So that from a kind of an ecocentric refusal to be irritated, a grand mistake has been made.

But I was talking with Alan Chadwick, the gardener at [University of California] Santa Cruz, the other day and with Norman Brown, and Chadwick is an absolutely marvelous horticulturist, and he was expounding on the grandeur of Nature with respect to the life of plants, and how the sun is inclining half the year and, then, declining the other half. And how combined with that waxing and waning, you have 12 or 13, 13 isn't it ? -- of those inclinations on the part of the Moon? And the magnificent permutation of that with the Sun, and all of this makes the seeds germinate, the tides and so on. Well, then we got to talking, for a moment, about the pollution of the air and the water and so on, and we both agreed that no matter how powerful Man becomes, his power is pigmy compared with that of Nature and that, if necessary, Nature will simply respond with a grand ecological change, hm?

RF: Yeah

JC: If we press her too far? (laugh)

RF: [inaudible] There are many aspects of so-called general systems theory which a number of people are becoming more and more aware of as a more viable operating principle of this planet and this is a branch of, actually, applied biology. It started off with people like Bertalanffy and so on, who found that the only way that they can possibly describe certain biological actions and reactions and chemobiological reactions was to take into effect, into

account, the entire operational systems and subsystems and look at the whole thing as a system.

JC: Right.

RF: And this completely, if you carry this applied thing to an abstractive level and look at the philosophical approach to life-systems, it's a complete refutation of empirical or rather, logistical, logical positivism, which seems to have been the, the uh, operational philosophy of 19th century and early 20th century thought -- that you can take something completely out of the whole world and look at it as an entity, and not worry about the connections that this thing makes to the rest of the world. If you look at it objectively, in other words -- just remove its --

JC: Right.

RF: -- view --

JC: Right.

RF: -- and everything else from it, and this is, um, you know, down to the smallest level of -- Some of the masonite companies up in Ukiah, all they're worried about is making masonite --

JC: Right.

RF: -- and they dump an incredible amount of garbage into the air, and they really don't care about that 'cause they don't, you know, that's not their concern.

JC: Well, I think this is why Buddhism is so important to so many people now, is that the -- One of the principles of Buddhist philosophy is that everything causes everything else, and that there is nothing that is not caused by everything else, and that each thing is at the center of the universe, and these centers are in interpenetration and non-obstruction. [They sit in silence for about 16 seconds]

RF: I've read and I've -- in an issue of the *New York Times*, I think it was last Sunday or the Sunday before, in one of their usual exposes on "what's happening on college campuses right now," and this was a lengthy article describing that ecological action on the part of students, and ecological awareness, or "ecological consciousness" -- or whatever it's being called -- in many cases is being to replace the Vietnam situation, and political situation, definitely political concentration of thought, um, on the college campuses amongst students. There are many very strong moves on various campuses, mostly in California, I think, to, for example, ban the internal combustion engine --

JC: Right.

RF: -- which, to most people, it seems like such an incredible thing. I mean, I sent a letter recently to the City of Berkeley City Council requesting that they actually consider this thought, you know, banning cars from Berkeley, as an attempt to help make it, prevent Berkeley, for example, from becoming another New York City, ummm, which, you know, was one place that I fled from recently and don't want to see Berkeley become similar to that, in the case of just air pollution. And the last couple of days, in Berkeley and in the Bay Area, have been incredible for many people. I'm still walking around with a sore throat, and it's just because of this, what's called "an inversion," a weather phenomenon having to do with out-putting too much hot air into the air, so that the cold air which normally would come in around this time gets trapped, and the rains, which normally would be coming at this time, are being diverted and not forming in the proper manner. So we get these layers of all this smoky air that we're generating on the surface being trapped, ummm, by the air above which is trying to get through. We've got hot air coming up and cold air,ummm, trying to get down, and they just meet in the middle, and we're just like sitting right now in a plastic bag, actually. It's just as bad as putting a plastic bag over your head and smoking.

JC: But the ecological thinking, which is correct, goes together, too, with the "comprehensive design science" of Fuller, and I'm glad to see the activities of the Portola Institute here, and their Whole Earth Catalog. And this is gaining use, I think, throughout the country, isn't it?

RF: Yeah, it's quite remarkable. I don't think the people who originated it thought that they would have such an audience.

JC: Their attitudes is so open and beautiful; their willingness to accept suggestions and so on. I think it's spreading like wildfire, the interest in that work.

RF: Mm-hmm. One of the, uh, statistics that is bantered around, in most of these discussions of "alternative lifestyles" and so on, is that, I think 90% of the people in this country live on 10% of the land, and that more and more people are making the decision to leave the cities and leave the urban areas and completely start from scratch where there is no communication whatsoever in the levels of, of the rest of the society. And we suddenly realized that we're brought up and educated in a system, in a Gestalt, which completely negates, or does not help us in any way in living out in the environment.

JC: I think something very shortly will have to be done about the, about the country as a whole, because so far you see it's been either sold in small parcels, the land I mean, or it's been granted in huge areas, so that wherever you go, you see these signs, "No Trespassing," no doing this, no doing that. And yet the land is not being used. In many cases, as Veblen pointed it out years ago, the owners are absent, hm? And the land is there to be used and nothing's being done about it. Some reversal of, of the owning of land -- hm? -- is now indicated.

RF: Yeah, yeah. I think that's happening on many fronts. We see Indians on Alcatraz claiming it is their land which, by all rights, it is. I mean, this whole country is their land. We saw this summer the People's Park episode in Berkeley as a dramatic indication of one man's laws having no, you know, not being respected by another man because they seem as arbitrary as anything else. And now I think it's one of the -- For example, People's Park right now is a parking lot, but it's one of the biggest blunders the University [University of California] probably could have done because nobody in their right mind is going to park their car there. So it's one of those parking lots where everybody is absent; it's a piece of land now that has been developed for no one. It's a no-man's-land. The whole land-ownership -- I've just spoken to a number of people who are considering buying land in various places in California and just moving there. But the idea of owning land just seems to be a totally -- It might be a human but it's a, an unearthly concept.

JC: We have a plan that, I think, is working well in the community that I live in near New York. We do own, cooperatively, 116 acres, and houses have been built on the land. And the arrangement is that we pay back the cost of the land and the cost of the houses, amortized over a 30-year period without interest, to the person who had the money to buy it originally -- and who didn't want interest. Once the houses are paid for, no one will ever have to pay for them again. If, for instance, I die at the end of 29 years, the next person coming in would only have to pay for the house one year -- and, then, it would be free. And what we wanted to emphasize was the notion of "use" rather than the notion of "ownership."

Then I was recently at Santa Cruz and I picked up a girl who was visiting there, um, from Taos -- and she lives in a commune there -- and she was talking to other people I picked up along the road, in the back, and I heard her say, "We have houses but we don't have the idea 'keep out.'" And then I recall in Europe where people have been living for more years closer together than we have here, and they have, oh, shall we say, a more general interest in mushrooms than obtains here, and they developed long ago the common law that anyone who sees a mushroom owns it -- hm? -- (laughter) no matter whose property it's on, hm?

RF: Well, the Indians used to have unwritten rules like that. For example, one person owned a section of land only for the right of hunting one particular animal --

JC: Right.

RF: -- but the rest of the land, anybody could live there if they wanted --

JC: Right.

RF: -- to, but the hunting rights for that land were given --

JC: Right.

RF: -- to one person.

JC: In other words, a person can have many ideas and a piece of land can have many uses and it should be given all those uses. Fuller also speaks of the 24-hour use of facilities. When we have a house in which we sleep for only eight hours, umm, it's a waste of bedroom; it could be used by two other families sleeping the other two eight-hours. And this is, in a sense, what the motel is, you see, hm? Willy-nilly, we seem to be coming to our senses. (laughter) They're even renting motels in New York now by the hour (laughter).

RF: Let's see, to go on to --

JC: And you see, the fact that it's owned by a company and rented by them is of little consequence, because the payments to that company and by that company to people they're indebted to are nothing but credit. And less and less, ismoney being used in this society, and all that credit is is confidence, because if someone has confidence in you, you can get credit. So what we need is to have confidence in one another.

RF: [inaudible] another subject. I think I read in one of the books, I think it was *A Year From Monday* or some other book, perhaps, that you had, let's see, stopped composing, as it were, because you didn't want to tell people what to do.

JC: Mm-hmm.

RF: Ah, What kind of vocational guidance would you give a prospective music composition student along those lines? Many people that I speak to say that art and the practice of "Art," with a capital "A," including music and dance and so on, is a luxury right now that this society cannot afford, and that people with that kind of temperament and those kinds of minds should be into the areas of trying to tell people or convert people to an ecological awareness where they, because it's so late, they don't ruin the whole earth and completely destroy the human race, and the planet, as well. And, then, once when we get back into a situation where the earth can regenerate itself, then, maybe Art can go, we can go back and become artists [overlapping dialogue; inaudible]

JC: I'm sympathetic with those ideas but they're essentially critical, and I'm not so sympathetic with criticism. I think that there are many functions for Art now, and that among those functions is to indicate changes in society and,umm, so it will continue. When I say, for instance, that I'm not interested in telling people what to do, I mean that as a social statement and I think we need more and more a society without government. And that we can give examples of its practicality in Art, and those can be imitated in society. We can make our concerts, as we more and more do, instances of the practicality of anarchy.

RF: Hmmmm. Well, I guess, there are some people who are not quite ready for that. One instance was the recent performance at Hertz Hall that Robert Moran did of some of your works and so on, and a number of people, a small number of people, for example, were very willing and waiting to hear that piece of Toshi Ichiyangi. However, the majority of people in that audience were totally, um, passed by and they view this work as something totally inconceivable and, immediately, viewed it as a put-on and so on, and their reaction to it was one of open hostility, umm...

JC: But you have, you had with that concert a maintained art situation. The social situation was not changed by that concert.

RF: No.

JC: From what I hear of Robert Moran's work, his work for automobiles in the whole city, was much more an instance of a changed society than that particular concert was.

RF: Yeah.

JC: When you have people sitting in rows, uh, facing in one direction, watching a performance by a few others, you have a situation which I would agree with the critical statements you made earlier, that it's a luxury we can,um, do without. I think we can still afford it, but I think we could do without it. There are people who, I believe, still need it; so we'll have to afford it.

RF: And the increased number of people who are working on sort of what I tend to call "ecological art" or "ecological systems art," um, for many of the people, they find this is the only kind of conception of art that they can, um, feel comfortable with, themselves. In a sense, what they are actively doing is telling people that it's not necessary to go to a museum to see art; you just have to open up your window and look out in the backyard.

JC: Right.

RF: For example, a number of pieces involving just the mowing of a lawn or riding a horse until it gets tired, and so on. I find this to be a very old form of art and a very conservative one, actually, and one that I appreciate more than anything else. I mean, why paint a landscape when you can just direct somebody to it?

JC: Right.

RF: And then the purpose of art becomes obvious at this point, [that] purpose is to show people their environment --

JC: True, true.

RF: -- and you point your finger. An artist points his finger at the environment and says, "I think that's worthy of your attention." And it's not necessary for him to copy it in any way, just --

JC: No. I agree. I think, though, that even though we see that we don't need art, that we'll go on having it.

RF: Sure. (laughter)

JC: And I think it will, more and more, celebrate a changed society, and I think the first thing that, that one welcomes the disappearance of, is those chairs in rows, and the freedom of going in and out of a place, and of something not beginning or ending, is really a celebration of this other pleasure that you described of using one's aesthetic faculties wherever one is.

RF: [inaudible] something I just came across was a discussion, I think it was actually the Kodak Corporation. In one of their ads, I think the current issue of *Scientific American*. It has a very interesting ad. They said that -- they show a couple walking through something like Muir Woods or some National Park like that, and they said that, through photography, people have become more aware of their environment by having people, you know -- When you can afford a little Instamatic camera -- and everybody has one now -- and they can take pictures of everything. People are noticing that you don't have to just take pictures of your friends and people, but suddenly you find in the backyard, scrutinizing on a leaf and so on. And you realize that you don't really have to go to a National Park, for example, to see Nature; it's right outside. Then, you suddenly -- If you're in the middle of Queens, in a section of tract homes, you realize, "My, god, this is totally unnatural," And people, by themselves, through this kind of new awareness will show the realtors and the producers of housing projects and so on, that this is not what they want, that they want something that is more down to earth, as it were. And this kind of a mass culture where now everyone can afford a camera, for example, and pretty soon maybe everyone will be able to afford a television tape machine, so that not only, in the cases of the video-tape recorder, that some people will have the money to spend for a home tape machine. Their first thought, well, they just will record things like, you know, the birthday parties and things like that. But they've discovered that they can use it as an incredible autopsychological --

JC: Right.

RF: -- analysis. They just watch themselves, you know, they just move around in their house and they have the camera set up, so that everything they do, their interaction with various people --

JC: Yeah. (laughter)

RF: They hide the camera, and the camera will be there, and we may be sitting here and talking and, then, after the whole thing is over, they go and take the tape out and watch it and, they watch themselves in action with other people. And they suddenly realize the image that they're putting out, and people have gone through systematic steps in now trying to change that image by using this home videotape recorder.

JC: Mm-hmm. Beautiful.

RF: I think that this is the kind of magic that --

JC: Yes!

RF: -- technology can afford for --

JC: Yes.

RF: -- a new kind of consciousness. I guess, we're running down to the end of the tape. Are there any parting words that you'd like to say to the Bay Area? (laughter)

JC: Well, I was very glad to be here these months on many occasions. Oh, just the effects of light and, of course, the landscape and the area, even with its pollution, rang all kinds of bells for me because I, I was born here and, though I was born in Los Angeles, I always preferred the Northern part of the state and it's been a pleasure.

RF: It's been a pleasure talking to you.

JC: Thank you.

RF: Thank you.

Announcer: That was John Cage talking with Richard Friedman on December 6th, 1969 at Davis, California.

End of Interview - John Cage

NOTES:
1. Interviewer Richard Friedman -- http://www.rchrd.com
2. Erik Satie's [French composer, 1866-1925] Socrate. *Drame Symponique en Trois Parties avec Voix*.
3. Eschig, Paris, France. Erik Satie's publisher.
4. Jasper Johns [American artist, b. 1930] "Cans of Ale," painted bronze, 1960.
5. Richard Buckminster ("Bucky") Fuller [American architect, 1895-1983] Proselytized "synergistics" and geodesic domes.
6. Marshall McLuhan [Canadian avatar of "new media," 1911-1980] Influential author of *The Medium is the Massage*; Director of the Center for Culture and Technology at the University of Toronto.
7. *I Ching* is an ancient Chinese divination manual.
8. The Living Theater, an alternative, experimental theater troupe founded in NYC in 1947 by Judith Malina and Julian Beck.
9. *Oh Calcutta*. 1960s Broadway musical famously featuring nudity.
10. Woodstock. Generation-defining music festival in upstate New York, 1969.
11. Henry David Thoreau [American naturalist, poet, philosopher, 1917-1862]
12. Alan Chadwick [1909-1980, Gardener, University of California - Santa Cruz]
13. Norman O. Brown [1913-2003, Professor of Humanities, University of California - Santa Cruz]
14. Thorstein Veblen [1857-1929, Professor of Philosophy, University of Chicago; author of *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 1899]
15. Cage, John. *A Year From Monday*, Wesleyan University Press, 1967.
16. Robert Moran [American composer, b. 1937]
17. Toshi Ichiyanagi [Japanese composer, b. 1933]
18. Visit http://www.otherminds.org for further information on John Cage (including audio links).
19. Search "John Cage" in the Pacifica Radio Archives public access catalog for more interviews with John Cage, as well as musical performances and spoken word. http://www.pacificaradioarchives.org

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