

John Cage

Diary:

How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)

Continued 1966

xxx. THE MOST, THE BEST, WE CAN DO, WE BELIEVE (WANTING TO GIVE EVIDENCE OF LOVE), IS TO GET OUT OF THE WAY, LEAVE SPACE AROUND WHOMEVER OR WHATEVER IT IS. BUT THERE IS NOT SPACE! DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PENNILESSNESS NOW AND PENNILESSNESS THEN: NOW WE'VE GOT UNQUESTIONED CREDIT. "IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD ." PUPUL JAYAKAR (STRAIGHT FROM INDIA), TALKING ABOUT COMPUTERS, SAID: AN EXPLOSION OF THE WORD; COMMUNICATION WITHOUT LANGUAGE! (WE'LL STILL SPEAK: A) FOR PRACTICAL REASONS; B) FOR THE PLEASURE OF IT; C) TO SAY WHAT SHOULD/SHOULDN'T BE DONE.) Bird up and overhead. Friends we no longer see. Gone. Some died. xxxi. MEXICO, INDIA,

CANADA (CHANGING CITIZENSHIP). Electronic democracy (instantaneous voting on the part of anyone): no sheep. World credit. Hearing my thoughts, he asked: Are you a Marxist? Answer: I'm an anarchist, same as you are when you're telephoning, turning on/off the lights, drinking water. PRIVATE PROSPECT OF ENLIGHTENMENT'S NO LONGER SUFFICIENT. NOT JUST SELF- BUT SOCIAL-REALIZATION. Fuller spoke of Semantography, universal picture language devised by C. K. Bliss, said it was rich in nouns while what we need's verbs. *Servant problem.* **What's what? (Russia, U.S.A.) Which is which? I mentioned drugs. Kremen said the human mind's interesting enough in the non-toxic state. XXXII. Asked about housing utility, Fuller pointed out electrically-lit roadside telephone booths, twenty-four hour use of facilities. (How this came about escaped our notice, no voting or purchase involved. Bed, food, bath to be expected, added to telephone or available elsewhere: decentralization of living.) UP BY OUR BOOTSTRAPS! LOST IN TWO DIFFERENT WAYS. THERE WAS ALSO A FIRE TO PUT OUT. ALONE (NO ONE TO DISAGREE WITH). Chess. ASKED WHAT HE DID, HE SAID HE'D STUDIED METEOROLOGY, PASSED EXAMINATIONS, GRADUATED, THAT WEATHER'S SIMPLE TO PREDICT. (WHAT HAD HIS TEACHERS HAD IN MIND?) "THERE'S NO REASON FOR THE MISTAKES THAT ARE GENERALLY MADE."**

xxxiii. Changes in aquariums: all the fish in the same tank; no Latin

information. *Cross-Texas, eighty miles per hour, radio rocks and rolls (now I listen): "If it's a game, I won't play it. Don't just stand there. Tell me what's, what's, what's, what's on your mind."* He registered as a conscientious objector. Drafted

anyway, he was put on a train going south.

He escaped, was caught, spent a year in service. Then, since he never cashed any of the checks they'd given him, he received an honorable discharge.

(Russian chickens had diseased muscles.

Chemical therapies failed. Suddenly, the chickens were healthy. The

muscular tissues'd been reduced to chaos, disorganized by electrical means.)

XXXIV. *Boddhisattva Doctrine: Enter Nirvana only when all beings, sentient, non-sentient, are ready to do likewise.*

Couldn't believe my eyes (stopping for lunch in Red Bud, Illinois): a single photograph of nature (mountains, lake, island, forests) enlarged, printed twice, once left to right, once right to left, the two prints juxtaposed to form a single image, seam down the middle.

Eugenics. Proposal: take facts of art seriously: try them in economics/politics, giving up, that is, notions about balance (of power, of wealth), foreground, background. *They will kill you, she said, with kindness.* There's a temptation to do nothing simply because there's so much to do that one doesn't know where to begin. Begin anywhere. For instance, since electronics is at the heart of the matter, establish a

global voltage, a single design for plugs and jacks. Remove the need for transformers and adaptors. Vary not the connecting means but the things to be connected. XXXV. *Way's being found to overcome problem inherent in painting and sculpture (fact of object): laser projection of three-dimensional images.*

To remove object place your hand in thin air behind it. What's interesting about minds is they work differently.

What's interesting about one mind is that it works in different ways. Hunting for one thing, finding another. Gardens that seem uncultivated: Tinguely's at

*Soissy-sur-Ecole. I remember clams from the Sound exhibited years ago in a Seattle aquarium (near the Farmer's Market, admission ten cents): their movement, their timing of it. They were a bed, immobile, one on top of the other, two feet deep in a tank of water, sand on the bottom of the tank. We were told to wait. xxxvi. *Weather feels good.**

Isn't. More rain is needed. Water.

He played two games, winning one, losing the other. He was continually himself, totally involved in each game, unmoved by the outcome of either. What's the nature of his teaching? For one thing: devotion (practice gives evidence of it). For another: not just playing half the game but playing all of it (having a view that includes that of the opponent). SUDDENLY A CLAM ROSE TO THE SURFACE DIRECTLY, REMAINED THERE A MOMENT, THEN DESCENDED SLOWLY, LEAF-LIKE, TIPPING ONE WAY, THEN THE

OTHER, ARRIVING AT THE BOTTOM TO PRODUCE
 A DISTURBANCE, SUCH THAT CLAM AFTER CLAM
 DID LIKEWISE, SOMETIMES SEVERAL, SOMETIMES
 MANY, SOMETIMES NOT ONE AT ALL,
 PRODUCING A DANCE THAT COMPLETELY
 INVOLVED US. (DOING ALL THAT WE NEEDED TO
 DO.) XXXVII. Projects involving many
 people and many interruptions go well.
 Private concerns stumble along. THE
 FACT THEIR PARENTS HAVE SEPARATED DOESN'T
 DISTURB THE CHILDREN. THEY GO ON
 LOOKING AT TELEVISION. HOW OLD SHOULD
 THEY BE BEFORE THEY SMOKE MARIJUANA? NO
 ONE SEEMS TO KNOW. *Tolstoy: art properly
 arouses religious emotion (conduces to
 brotherhood, all mankind, no
 boundaries)*. Skinner: "Let us agree to
 start with, that health is better than
 illness, wisdom better than ignorance,
 love better than hate, and productive
 energy better than neurotic sloth. We
 invented machines in order to reduce our
 work. Now that we have them we think we
 should go on working (Committee of
 eight on Automation, Economics and
 Employment considering whether U.S.
 society should be geared for employment
 or unemployment voted six to two in favor
 of employment). XXXVIII. "I BREATHE."
Starvation. There's no stopping. The
 garden's a bungalow. The sky's its
 roof. Hedges form the rectangular rooms.
 Apple tree, admired, split as though
 struck by lightning. Coincidence?
 Branch of it's on the lawn like a
 picture that's not hanging straight.
 Flowers are withering. Gardener's on
 vacation. Mud is on the windshield,

fallen branches wherever we go. Sky's ready for launching of missiles. "He hit me first." We're open-minded. Result: idea leaving head that had it returns transformed. Individual's thoughts become social projects. "World's O.K. as is": "Work to make the world O.K." Moksha transformed is artha from which it was a liberation. Spirit's materialized.

Kama? Walking along, it'll happen we touch one another, falling immediately in love.

XXXIX. IF A UTOPIA SUCH AS SKINNER '48 DESCRIBED (*Walden Two*), DOESN'T EXIST, WHY DOESN'T IT? IF IT DOES, WHY AREN'T WE ALL IN IT? WHAT TRAITOR THINKS MAKES CLEAR WHAT NATION'S MIND'S BECOME. POUND'S REFRAIN: DOWN WITH USURY. LINCOLN: UNLESS NEXT PRESIDENT OUTLAWS PRIVATE BANKING, AMERICA IN HUNDRED YEARS'LL BE IN WORSE SITUATION THAN IT (CIVIL WAR) IS. *Rest of the World's suffered surgery so it won't be India. Indian standing by New Jersey waterfall seeing the surface of the pool below white with the suds of detergents, jammed with beer cans, suggested containers that one could eat. Different flavors. Things that return to nature.* XL. To finance Union vs. Confederacy, Lincoln authorized private banking in the U.S.A. Credit (conventionally 9/10ths of economic power, actual money constituting the remaining tenth) became the property of bankers. The notion is that not everyone'll want his deposit back at the same time. Nine times as much as a banker had was safely to be loaned for interest.

As the story goes: Dad ran away, came to a ranch, was given a job irrigating (a job that'd kept several men busy every day all day long). He looked the land over, made something, dug something (can't remember which). No further work was

necessary. Seeing he had nothing to do, they fired him. XLI. WE'RE GETTING RID OF THE HABIT WE HAD OF EXPLAINING EVERYTHING. *Margaret Mead's idea re metropolitan transportation (Duchamp had same idea in 'twenties): private cars parked at city limits; city cars used as one uses carts in super-markets and airports, abandoned at one's destination. Police busy returning cars to parking lots, getting them serviced or repaired whenever necessary. Basic Economic Security (Robert Theobald: Free Men and Free Markets) : everyone'll have what he needs. Wanting things that are scarce, he'll make them, find them, get them (as long as the supply lasts) in return for having done something machines don't do.* The mushrooms appeared sooner even than I expected. XLII. TO

KNOW WHETHER OR NOT ART IS CONTEMPORARY, WE NO LONGER USE AESTHETIC CRITERIA (IF IT'S DESTROYED BY SHADOWS, SPOILED BY AMBIENT SOUNDS); (ASSUMING THESE) WE USE SOCIAL CRITERIA: CAN INCLUDE ACTION ON THE PART OF OTHERS. We'll take the mad ones with us, and we know where we're going. Even now, he told me, they sit at the cross-roads in African villages regenerating society. Mental hospitals: localization of a resource we've yet to exploit. *I visited an aging*

*anarchist. (He had the remaining copies of
 Martin's Men Against the State.) He
 introduced me to two Negro children he'd
 adopted. After they went out to
 play, he told me what trouble he'd had in
 deciding finally to draw this line: No
 jumping up and down on the beds. XLIII.*
 As he travels from one place to another,
 he leaves things behind. He needs help but
 no one knows where he is. Don't know
 what to read, Love's Body or out-of-date
 newspapers that are lying around.
 Everything we come across is to the
 point. *Living underground because
 there was no money. Arizona land and air
 permitted making mounds, covering them with
 cement, excavating to produce rooms,
 providing these with sky-lights. For
 anyone approaching, the community was
 invisible. Cacti, desert plants: the
 land seemed undisturbed. Quantity
 (abundance) changes what's vice,
 what's virtue. Selfishness is out;
 carelessness is in. (Waste's
 characteristic.) "Don't be a
 litterbug." "Keep North Carolina green."
 Scratch the Ten Commandments. One of
 the new ones: Thou Shalt Not Live
 (in addition to birth control, control
 of birth, euthanasia). What nature
 did we now must do. XLIV. Bad politics
 (Souvtchinsky) produce good art. But of
 what use is good art? (Johns said he
 could imagine a world without it and
 that there was no reason to think it would
 not be a better one.) He had been
 trained as a singer. Gave up music for
 cooking. Started a small restaurant,*

busy three times a day instead of theatrically once (even then not everyday). **Julian Beinart said that when, being chauffeured in South Africa, he noticed Negro hitchhikers, tribesmen who cover their bodies with a fly-attracting grease, flies being considered the finest ornament, he asked the chauffeur to pick the people up, the chauffeur refused. Chauffeur said the grease left in the car would be nearly impossible to remove: "You'd never get rid of the flies."**

XLV. A MEAL WITHOUT MUSHROOMS IS LIKE A DAY WITHOUT RAIN. Raised as a Methodist, I've never taken drugs.

When a physicist told me electrodes near my ears would remove my sense of balance or, were I flying through space and the capsule was revolving, make me think my balance was normal, I was fascinated. Asking Duchamp why I accept electronics, refusing chemistry, he said, "It's not against the law." **Mead's discussion of the religious attitude: first one thinks of himself as one of a family, later as part of a community, then as living in a city, citizen of such and such a country; finally, he feels no limit to that of which he is a part.**

XLVI. The past? Fuller's answer: Keep it. Times Square, for instance: cover it with a dome; put in tables, chairs, plastic carpeting. (Keep what remains so it's there to be enjoyed, not just read about.) Chinese proceed differently, Häger reports. Revolting against themselves, they send tradition-maintaining artists, actors, musicians off to

hard labor in distant places. Clean slate.

After each war, industry offers new products for sale. The benefits from the present conflicts (hot and cold, on earth, in space) will be enormous. No organization, school, for instance, will be able to afford them. The only customer (not just rich but big enough to use them) will be the globe itself. XLVII.

All the garbage cans in West Germany are the same size. They have lids designed so that the only thing one has to do is place them at the back of the garbage truck. The truck does the rest: picks them up, turns them upside-down, opens the lid, receives the garbage,

closes the lid, sets them back on the street right-side-up. AFTER GETTING THE INFORMATION FROM A SMALL FRENCH MANUAL, I WAS GLAD TO DISCOVER THAT LACTARIUS PIPERATUS AND L. VELLEREUS, LARGE WHITE MUSHROOMS GROWING PLENTIFULLY WHEREVER I HUNT, ARE INDEED EXCELLENT WHEN GRILLED. RAW, THESE HAVE A MILK THAT BURNS THE TONGUE AND THROAT. COOKED, THEY'RE DELICIOUS.

INDIGESTION. **XLVIII. How will one discipline himself? More than he needs of everything'll do it for him.** He told me one of the things he noticed among the people who were using marijuana and LSD was that they didn't bother with the conventions of greeting one another or saying good-by. OPEN AND CLOSED COMMUNITIES (A BOTANICAL EXPRESSION): DISTURBING THE EARTH, MEN HAVE OPENED IT UP. SEEDS AND SPORES IN THE AIR HAVE A CHANCE TO LAND, TO LIVE. LAWS

WE NEED TO BREAK: LAW FORBIDDING STOPS
ALONG THE HIGHWAYS EXCEPT FOR EMERGENCIES
OR AT DESIGNATED POINTS; LAW PROHIBITING
THE PICKING OF USEFUL PLANTS. XLIX.

Home begins outside. Shelter's inside.

[Buckminster Fuller's *Profile of the
Industrial Revolution*. Technical
acquisition by science of ninety-two atomic
elements accomplished in 1932. Same year
(John McHale comments) gold as a
certificate of wealth was abandoned in
the U.S.A.] Examine the papers, the
books, to see what ideas were had that
could be, but weren't, put to use. Not
only ideas but inventions that worked:

Dad's dehydrator that worked
electrostatically, separating refuse
oil into dry chemicals, water that
could be drunk, oil of the highest grade;
his means for preventing lightning.

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BE HIGHLY INVOLVED IN BUSINESS,
GOVERNMENT AND/OR WAR. L. Abundance.

OFFICIALS CHECKED TO MAKE CERTAIN WE'D
PAID THE AIR-TRAVEL TAX, DIDN'T ASK TO SEE
OUR PASSPORTS. Marcel Duchamp.

"...*Valencia, cathedral - University.
Palma will be interesting again, then
Dardona and off to Milan and after which
the western coast of Yugoslavia & tour
(at southern end) of Grecian Islands
after which plane from Athens to New York.*

*Many travelers, — going everywhere.
Love, Mom"* More irritated by the
schedule than the work, he announced
he'd do all the dishwashing. Shortly the

others were helping. Sometimes he had nothing to do. *Returning from Europe*: "We're all looking forward to the return of the W.P.A. It's the only thing we ever had any talent for." LI. "Utopia for practical purposes."

Tall Jewish teenager just ahead of me, his mother, wanting to go shopping, concerned whether he'd be able to file his passport application without her help. After several departures, always coming back, she finally left the crowded room. Discovering that he'd play chess, I brought out my portable magnetic set. Standing in line, we played two games, leaving the second one unfinished.

The cows in India, not understanding traffic lights, cross intersections whenever they reach them. Motorists never get angry. They wait patiently. The evening air's heavy with the odor of burning cow-dung, fuel used for cooking. Buffalo enterprise: manufacture of contraceptives for cows. Fewer cows: more food for the starving millions.

LII. STORY AGAM TOLD: "I'M LOOKING FOR A KEY I LOST OVER THERE." "WHY NOT LOOK, THEN, WHERE YOU LOST IT?" "IT'S TOO DARK OVER THERE. I LOOK FOR IT HERE WHERE THERE'S LIGHT." Television up-to-date, things televised aren't. Receiving set, appliances up-to-date, home isn't. Architecture: "Environment control facility", "dwelling advantage" (Fuller), "each progressive model obsolete... materials scrapped, reprocessed", ("more with less") "instituting... world industry..." "Include...design of..."

services, maintenance, parts inventories
and transportation performances
required to make...service operable around
the world." (John Mc Hale.) "Allowing any
kind of living." Weights, measures.

**MUSIC HAVING TOO MANY OR NOT ENOUGH NOTES
IN IT (TAKAHASHI'S PREFERENCE). LIII.**

*The father's a dope addict. The mother
(two days ago — they came in white
coats, white car, using flashlights, asking
"Where's the mad woman?") was taken away
in a straight-jacket. The children sleep
at home, playing and having their meals
next door. (Perpetual motion.) Removing
social controls to points where they
escape our notice. Examine situations.*

Make decisions. Implement them. [I
asked Fuller whether he played chess. He
said he used to, but that now he plays
only one (the biggest) game. He does
this energetically, globally ("I have a
strong constitution"), encouraging
youth who've inherited from television,
their "third parent," world
consciousness. "They think 'world'...

Theirs will be the most powerful and
constructive revolution in all history."]

**LIV. More we leave the land, the more
productive it becomes. Technic for
changing society: education followed by
unemployment. Article by Avner Hovne on
automation (*Impact of Science on
Society* 15:1, Unesco publication).**

*Continuity values giving way to flexibility
values. Automation alters what's done and
where we do it. You could always tell
when she was about to go out of her
mind. She would begin to speak the*

truth. April '64: fifty-five global services. September '65: sixty-one global services. No one I speak to knows anything about them. I have no list, don't know what the number, August '66, is. Instead I read what I find in bookstores, libraries, getting clues here and there. World Health. World Food. Listened to Fuller on the 'phone, heard him insist: "World — not international — Man." LV. In connection with space travel, the Russians, they say, have found a means to induce sleep electronically. In twenty or thirty minutes one can get as much rest as eight or nine hours normally provide. Economics (money). Bernard Monnier said: Yes. "It's a question of credit, entirely fictional, conventional." Asked whether it's finally a matter of personalities (not masks but the feelings people give one another), he again said: Yes. "It's a question of one person having confidence in another." *Mobility, immobility. Artists never had enough time to do their work. Their lives always ended before the completion of their projects. Leisure, present or future, is not a social problem. Perhaps the fact we haven't gotten to know one another makes us think that people have nothing to do.* LVI. Urgency. Expression of "losing tempo" in chess. Obligation to retreat, to move a piece one's moved, to proceed in a way having

nothing to do with one's plan. Take time, he says. Move, but only after you're fully aware of all the possibilities. X-quantities. *Indian philosophy and society at loggerheads: Indian society limited to family; family's defined as stopping at the seventh relationship. Another error, Japanese: the refusal to be formally introduced (brings about philanthropies one doesn't want to practice). The property at Pontpoint. Formality and informality mixed: elegance without pretense (an unessential difference between the front and kitchen doors). One mistake: only the servants have TV. At table we converse. After coffee we play solitaire, chess, now and then glancing at the paintings and sculpture ("Everything's been looked at"). Four P.M. we go hunting for mushrooms. "Another part of the forest." LVII. Discussing her travels, a lady mentioned she'd been in Mallorca. When she was asked where that was, she said she had no idea. "We flew." (Sky's heavily clouded: grey, even black, some white. There are patches of blue.) Bureaucracy. He got the notion his ideas belonged to him. He refused to disclose them, fearing someone else would profit from them. He made contracts no one cared to sign. The view that all's equal (equal rights) is not different from the view that all's unequal (unique). No likes or dislikes implicit in either view. Non-obstruction. Criticism becomes*

design (one's faculties used before rather than after something's done).

Dialogue. LVIII. (Music's made it perfectly clear: we have all the time in the world. What we used timidly to take eight minutes to play we now extend to an hour. People thinking we're not occupied converse with us while we're performing.) Suzuki's lecture on Yu, the principle of not-knowing, a not-knowing never to become a knowing.

Towards the end he laughed gently, without expressing any accomplishment, and said, "Isn't it funny? I come all the way from Japan to explain something to you which of its nature is not to be explained?" *Composer, who no longer arranges sounds in a piece, simply facilitates an enterprise. Using a telephone, he locates materials, services, raises money to pay for*

them. LIX. MOTHER WROTE TO SAY: "STAY IN EUROPE. SOAK UP AS MUCH BEAUTY AS YOU POSSIBLY CAN." Cards punched for insertion in telephones so we don't have to remember numbers or spend time dialing. Acceleration. What shall we do with our emotions? ("Suffer them," I hear her saying.) Having everything we need, we'll nevertheless spend restless nights awake with desire for pleasures we imagine that never take place. THINGS ALSO HAPPEN GRADUALLY (ONE OF NEW BABYLON'S ANARCHISTS WAS ELECTED A MEMBER OF AMSTERDAM'S CITY COUNCIL).

We've the right, Fuller explains, to object to slavery, segregation, etc. (the problem of work is solved: machines

take the place of muscles); we've not yet the right to object to war: first we must design, then implement means for making the world's resources the possession of all men. LX. American anarchist, 1900, admitting failure, retired to the South of France. Dad's airplane engine, 1918, flew to pieces before it left the ground. Alloys needed to contain the power were still undiscovered. Discover dielectrics for ultra-high voltages (global electrical networks). Change society so differences are refreshing, nothing to do with possessions/power. OCTAVIO AND MARIE JOSEPH (WE'LL MEET AGAIN IN MEXICO). NARAYANA MENON HAD SAID, "YOU'LL LIKE THE AMBASSADOR; HE'S A POET." I ASKED PAZ WHETHER BEING A DIPLOMAT TOOK TOO MUCH TIME FROM HIS POETRY. HE SAID IT DIDN'T. "THERE IS NO TRADE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. THEY ARE ON THE VERY BEST OF RELATIONS."

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