*Journal of the Society for American Music* (2017), Volume 11, Number 3, pp. 354–369.
© The Society for American Music 2017 doi:10.1017/S1752196317000244

# John Cage and George Herbert Mead: The Unknown Influence of Van Meter Ames

SERENA YANG

***Abstract***
*As John Cage wrote in his book* A Year from Monday, *the "current use for art [is] giving instances of society suitable for social imitation—suitable because they show ways . . . people can do things without being told or telling others what to do." Cage's ideal anarchic music emphasizes not only renouncing compositional control, but also the process of self-discovery happening to everyone, a process that leads participants to discover their creative abilities. This paper argues that Cage's penchant for self-discovery came from his understanding of George Herbert Mead's theories of the process of individuation (the "me" and the "I"). Cage discovered Mead through reading* Zen and American Thought *(1962) by his friend Van Meter Ames, a professor of philosophy at the University of Cincinnati, who saw the compatibility between Zen and Mead's concept of self in the capacity of the "I," a phase of self whose unpredictable steps contribute to human innovation. Cage found the possibility of overthrowing the thought of the world through triggering a self-discovery of the "I" in everyone. He realized this idea in his happenings, such as* 0'00", *by requiring performers to respond to the simple descriptions without specifying sound or duration.*

From January to May 1967, John Cage was composer-in-residence at the University of Cincinnati (UC). He had been invited by his friend Van Meter Ames, a professor of philosophy, who was fourteen years Cage's senior (see Figure 1). Their friendship had begun a decade earlier, on 15 February 1957, at Cage's lecture recital at the Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center.[1] After David Tudor performed Cage's *Winter Music* (1957), Ames approached Cage during the intermission and told him that he thought he detected Zen Buddhism in his music.[2] Cage recalled Ames's insight in his speech at UC's Student Union on 28 January 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."[3] Living in New York and Cincinnati respectively, Cage and Ames corresponded throughout the 1960s and 1970s, becoming more and more familiar as time went

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

[2] 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 this article (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.

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



https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196317000244 Published online by Cambridge University Press

**Figure 1.** Photo of Van Meter Ames and John Cage, 15 June 1966. Courtesy the Archives and Rare Books Library, University of Cincinnati.

by.[4] Cage wrote in a 1968 letter to Ames, "I just this minute got back and was somewhat exhausted but your lovely note, Van, was there."[5] At first, their relationship was based on their common interest in Zen Buddhism, American social philosophy, and art. Later, especially after Cage's residency at UC, they became more personal and shared intimate details of their lives.

During their twenty-nine-year friendship, Cage read several of Ames's publications:[6] Ames sent and Cage read *Japan and Zen* (1961) in December 1961; Cage bought *Zen and American Thought* (1962) at a bookstore and read it in July 1962; Ames sent Cage "The New in Art" (1965) on 11 April 1966 and "What Is Music?" (1966) on 5 January 1967; and Ames sent the typescript "A Book of Changes" (1967–71), a historical fiction that documents Ames and Cage's friendship and Cage's five-month residency at UC. Cage gave his critique of the latter after reading its first version in May 1968.[7] A 1962 letter from Cage to Ames regarding *Zen and American Thought* reveals one of Cage's reactions to Ames's publications:

[4] For more on Cage's 1967 residency at the University of Cincinnati, see Serena Yang, "John Cage and Van Meter Ames: Zen Buddhism, Friendship, and Cincinnati" (MM thesis, University of Cincinnati, 2013), 44–63.

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

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

[7] Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, *Japan and Zen* (Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati, 1961); Van Meter Ames, *Zen and American Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1962); Ames, "The New in Art," *Rice University Studies* 51 (1965): 19–38; Ames, "What Is Music?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 26 (1967): 241–49; Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, VMAP. Morton Feldman had suggested that Ames write a book about Cage on 20 March 1967 because he believed that Ames possessed a special insight into the composer. From 1967 to 1968, Ames drew materials largely from his diary entries and drafted the typescript "A Book of Changes." The typescript remains unpublished. James Laughlin, the founder and editor of New Directions, replied to Ames in 1971, "I am afraid that our schedule continues [to be] very overloaded, what with pressure from our more prolific 'regulars.'" (Typescript letter from James Laughlin to Van Meter Ames, 19 February

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196317000244 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> Some weeks ago I happened on *Zen and American Thought* in a bookstore, bought it and began reading. Last night I read the last words under quite complicated circumstances: the television channel that I receive was showing C-Man, a grade-B film of 1949 that had remained in my memory as one of the best films I'd ever seen; I finished reading *Zen and American Thought* during the commercials. [ . . . ]
>
> It is clear then that anarchy does not work socially in a scientific technological time. I must say that I have been thinking that anarchic moments are, for any individual, the vitalizing ones. Your book begins, I trust, a change in my thought towards vital sharing.[8]

Ames's book seemed to influence Cage in two ways. First, it illuminated Cage's thought on shared resources. By 1962, he had finished reading anarchist James Martin's *Men Against the State*.[9] While Cage was forming his political stand as an anarchist (he called himself an anarchist in 1961, in the foreword to *Silence*),[10] Ames's book affirmed his belief that the solution to the most pressing problems of the world required abolishing nations, replacing them with shared intelligence and technology, and granting people equal access to natural resources. Second, Ames's synthesis of Zen and American pragmatism inspired Cage to read works on social psychology by George Herbert Mead (1863–1931). Cage felt a strong affinity with Mead's theory of self (the "I" and the "me") because it was compatible with the sense of self that he had learned from Zen philosophy in the 1950s. The spontaneous, impulsive response of the "I" to the organized set of attitudes that the "me" receives from others is akin to the Zen concept of "interpenetration"—one continuously interacts with others. It was through Ames's reading of Mead's social psychology that Cage came to affirm his belief that an individual needs others to be social but also becomes different from others in a social process. Although not studied in the current Cage scholarship, the unknown influence of Ames on Cage later became evident in Cage's 1960s social philosophy, happenings, and anarchic music.

## Cage in the 1960s

As early as the 1940s, Cage had studied self, mind, and psyche to search for a new spiritual and psychological basis for his compositional practice. In C. G. Jung's book *The Integration of the Personality* (1939), he had learned the psychology of the unconscious and found that music can bring together the conscious and the unconscious by integrating split-off parts of the psyche and leading to psychological wholeness.[11] In 1945, Cage's Indian teacher Gita Sarabhai taught him that the

1971, VMAP.) For more on Ames's "A Book of Changes," see Yang, "John Cage and Van Meter Ames," 65–69.

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

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

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

[11] C. G. Jung, *The Integration of the Personality* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1939). For more on Cage's study of Jung, see 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), 78–91.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196317000244 Published online by Cambridge University Press

purpose of music is "to quiet the mind and make it susceptible to divine influences." Sarabhai's concept led Cage's music away from self-expression and toward self-transformation. Combing through the teaching of Jung, Sarabhai, and his own earlier studies of Asian religion and philosophy, he adopted chance techniques in the early 1950s as a way to break down the obstruction of the ego to let in the divine unconscious. Cage saw chance as a process of diminishing the role of the self in the creative act. In short, before 1960, his basic musical goal was helping individuals achieve personal enlightenment.

Cage's turn from musical problems to social issues is not a new topic for Cage scholars. Rob Haskins recently observed that Cage's embrace of social concerns began as early as 1958.[12] From then on and through the 1960s, Cage was increasingly aware that great changes were taking place in the world: overpopulation, unequal distribution of the world's resources, environmental pollution, ecological crisis, etc. In search of solutions to these problems, Cage found himself "in need of all sorts of information."[13] He therefore began to read, in addition to Martin's *Men Against the State*, works by economists, sociologists, and historians: William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), Thorstein Veblen's *The Engineers and the Price System* (1921), C. Wright Mills' *The Power Elite* (1956), and Robert Theobald's *Free Men and Free Markets* (1963).[14] Furthermore, Kenneth Silverman has observed that Buckminster Fuller and Marshall McLuhan, as Cage's close friends, had formative influences on Cage's conviction that technology had benefits for society. Cage drew on Fuller's idea of a global utilities network and McLuhan's of a global village in forming his own answers to the current world crises.[15]

George Leonard has argued that Cage's appeal for world improvement repudiated his earlier statement that his "intention" in composition was "not to … suggest improvements in creation, but simply to wake up to the very life we're living, which is so excellent."[16] Cage's idea that the "world needs arranging"[17] appears to contradict the concept of aleatoric art, which requires composers to renounce control over the details of their works. Leonard claimed that it seemed inconsistent for Cage to adhere to the Zen doctrine of "accepting whatever comes" in the 1960s when calling for changes to a world in which, as Cage wrote in *Silence*, people have

[12] See Rob Haskins, "'Living Within Discipline': John Cage's Music in the Context of Anarchism," paper presented at the annual American Musicological Society meeting, Los Angeles, 2–5 November 2006. See also Rob Haskins, *John Cage* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 72.

[13] Typescript letter from John Cage to Peter Yates, 6 October 1965, Mandeville Special Collections Library, University of California, San Diego. See also Kenneth Silverman, *Begin Again: A Biography of John Cage* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 211.

[14] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience; A Study in Human Nature; Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh in 1901–1902* (New York: Modern Library, 1902); Thorstein Veblen, *The Engineers and the Price System* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1921); C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956); Robert Theobald, *Free Men and Free Markets* (New York: C. N. Potter, 1963). See also Silverman, *Begin Again*, 211.

[15] For more on Cage's relationship with McLuhan and Fuller, see Silverman, *Begin Again*, 211–14.

[16] George Leonard, *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 178.

[17] John Cage, *A Year from Monday: New Lectures and Writing by John Cage* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), 19.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196317000244 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"poisoned our food, polluted our air and water, killed birds and cattle, eliminated forests, impoverished, eroded the earth."[18]

A sweeping change in Cage's musical style from the 1950s to the 1960s reflects this contradiction between an active and passive view of the world. As Rob Haskins describes it, throughout the sixties, Cage gradually began to speak out against musical objects—fixed compositions that sounded the same every time they were performed—in favor of suggesting actions and processes.[19] The score of *0'00"* (1962), for example, does not include any description or ordering of sounds, but only a direction to act—to perform some disciplined action that will fulfill an obligation to others. On one hand, Cage's framing of this work as a suggestion for performers can be understood as a manifestation of anarchy theory. Anarchists maintain that one should not interfere with other people's lives. 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."[20] Cage believed that "musicians can do without government."[21] Without the tyranny of the composer, performers are free to realize themselves. On the other hand, however, Cage's opposition to fixed compositions also sprang from his adoption of nature as an ideal artistic model. He wrote, "If music is conceived as an object, then it has a beginning, middle, and end."[22] Yet if we see music as a natural event, it will be "in process." Just as with the weather, although we notice changes in it, we have no clear knowledge of its beginning or ending.[23]

In addition, Cage understood the simultaneous activities in the natural world. In his chance works of the 1950s, he had already shown that all sounds exist and interpenetrate simultaneously in this world. In the 1960s, Cage applied this concept to all natural events. As Joan Retallack once described his worldview, "The thing we understand least about our world is its random multiplicity, the synchronous occurrence of an infinite number of unrelated events that make up the texture of any given moment of consciousness."[24] Therefore, creating works that represent complex natural phenomena exemplified his ideal world order. Yet Cage drew his musical inspiration not only from the natural world but also from society. He believed that a society arises when one is conscious of others; a society is an impersonal structure where "no matter what each individual does, his actions enliven the total picture."[25]

In the 1960s, Cage broadened his interest to explore how his work could be a blueprint of societal order and exemplify the change he wanted to see in the

[18] Cage, *Silence*, 12.
[19] Haskins, *John Cage*, 106.
[20] David Revill, *The Roaring Silence: John Cage, a Life* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1992), 241.
[21] John Cage, *Empty Words: Writings '73–'78* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1979), 183.
[22] Kostelanetz and Cage , *John Cage* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 49.
[23] Cage, *Empty Words*, 178.
[24] Joan Retallack, "Fig. 1, Ground Zero, Fig. 2: John Cage—May 18, 2005," *Aerial Magazine* 5 (1989), 140.
[25] Cage, *A Year from Monday*, 161.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196317000244 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"global mind" of society at large.[26] He came to believe that the individual could, through a process of self-discovery, realize a change of mindset that would transform life on earth.[27] This idea later formed the foundation of his anarchic music, the music in which all participants—composer, performers, conductor, and listeners—stand on the same level and all sounds have the same value.[28] In the late 1960s, he composed several works that allowed a group of participants to join in the composition process. In *Musicircus* (1967), for example, Cage invited a number of musicians to perform simultaneously in the Stock Pavilion at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign in any way they desired. In *Newport Mix* (1967) and *33⅓* (1969), Cage asked audience members to bring or select musical materials. He aimed to transform all individuals by engaging them in the creative process. In the "Afterword" to his book *A Year From Monday*, he wrote that the "current use for art [is] giving instances of society suitable for social imitation—suitable because they show ways many centers can interpenetrate without obstructing one another, ways people can do things without being told or telling others what to do."[29] This statement not only explicitly describes Cage's ideal of anarchic society but also implies that he wanted everyone to achieve self-discovery, to discover his or her ability to create things, and to change the world. To Cage, in order to save the world, it was not enough to deal with social problems one by one. The most efficient way was to equip everyone with the power and intelligence to change society.[30]

Cage's concept of self-discovery is closely related to Mead's theory of self in social psychology: to reach selfhood, one needs to be *aware of* the "relations between the not-self, the not-yet-self, other selves, and oneself."[31] This awareness is crucial because "one is continually affecting society by his own attitude, because he does bring up the attitude of the group toward himself, responds to it, and, through that response, changes the attitude of the group."[32] These processes of receiving others'

[26] Richard Kostelanetz and John Cage, *John Cage* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 170.

[27] Haskins, *John Cage*, 111.

[28] In her dissertation, Jannika Bock refers to Cage's work with the term *aesthetic analogue*, which is based on a specific idea of how a society should work and the exemplification of that idea in the compositional design of the work in question. Bock claims that Cage first showed his idea of music as an *aesthetic analogue* to alternative societal orders in the "Forward" and "Afterword" to *A Year From Monday* in late 1967. Jannika Bock, *Concord in Massachusetts, Discord in the World: The Writings of Henry Thoreau and John Cage* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2008), 153, 155–58.

[29] Cage, *A Year from Monday*, 165–66.

[30] In a 1973 interview Cage said, "The final thing that I think influences my action more than anything is social concerns, so I try not to write a piece unless it is useful as an instance of society. I don't mean to say that I think I've solved anything socially in the music, but I've tried to give instance of improvements in society." John Cage, quoted in Robert Cordier, "*Etcetera pour un jour ou deux*," *Had (Paris)* (1973), n.p., quoted in Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage* (New York: Limelight, 1991), 258.

[31] George Herbert Mead and Charles W. Morris, *Mind, Self & Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), 278. Mead: "When selfhood is reached in the ability of the individual to be in other places and other persons and to see himself from other points of view, the advance is ... leaping from the long dawn of sensitivity and awareness into the day of relations between the not-self, the not-yet-self, other selves, and oneself."

[32] Ibid., 179.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196317000244 Published online by Cambridge University Press

attitudes and responding to them are two distinguishable phases of self that Mead called the "me" and the "I" (which I will explain more fully later on).

According to a letter to Ames in July of 1962, Cage was intrigued by Mead's anatomy of the self: "The interpenetration that one observes now between social groups diminishes the 'me' and encourages the 'I.' But 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."[33] Seventeen years later, Cage quoted Mead's concept of religious spirit in his article "The Future of Music" (1974):

> 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 open-mindedness among composers (which has affected performers and listeners too) is comparable and kin to the religious spirit. The religious spirit must now become social so that all Mankind is seen as Family, Earth as Home.[34]

In this statement, Cage seems to take up two notions from Mead's psychological theory. The first is the process of individuation (or social process), the process of the "me" and the "I" by which one distinguishes oneself from everyone else in a community and yet gains the attitude of belonging to the community.[35] The second is social interaction, in which each individual relates differently to others and the community, weaving a web of diverse relational patterns.[36] Combining these concepts with his ideal of anarchic music, Cage arrived at the conviction that the composer should develop a religious spirit, that is, a quality of open-mindedness, composing music for all humankind, who is his or her family. The composer's music has to exemplify the ideal social interaction, which shows no distinction among composers, performers, and listeners.

## Van Meter Ames and George Herbert Mead

From the first time Cage learned of Mead through Ames's book to the time Cage recalled Mead's theory in his own writings, Cage's friendship with Ames contributed to his socially concerned philosophy. Understanding Ames's and Mead's ideas helps explain Cage's aesthetic as expressed in some of the composer's works of the 1960s.

Van Meter Ames, born in 1898 in Iowa, studied with pragmatists Mead and John Dewey at the University of Chicago in the early 1920s. From 1925 to 1966, he was on the faculty of the University of Cincinnati in the philosophy department. He 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

[33] Typescript letter from John Cage to Van Meter Ames and Betty Ames, 12 July 1962, VMAP.
[34] Cage, *Empty Words,* 181.
[35] Mead, *Mind, Self & Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, 182.
[36] See ibid., 201.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196317000244 Published online by Cambridge University Press

a 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; French existentialism and phenomenology; and some aesthetic fields, such as the novel, visual arts, and music.

Ames completed several courses at the University of Chicago with Mead, and Mead's best-known theory, social psychology, played an important part in shaping his philosophical psychology and aesthetic thought.[37] During the late 1940s and 1950s, Ames had developed a keen interest in Zen and started to learn Zen from Chinese and Japanese Zen scholars, including Fung Yu-lan, Masunaga Reiho, and Kenneth K. Inada, who emphasized the application of Zen in the modern world. Their worldly approach of Zen in turn inspired Ames to attempt a synthesis of Zen with various American philosophies. Starting in 1951, he wrote a series of articles on the subject of Zen and these philosophies, including "America, Existentialism, and Zen," "Zen and Pragmatism," "Zen and American Philosophy," "Zen to Mead," and "Current Western Interest in Zen."[38]

In 1962 Ames collected his writings on Zen from the 1950s and published a monograph, *Zen and American Thought*, which represents the culmination of his reflections on Zen Buddhism and Western philosophies, specifically those of the Chicago School. Among the Chicago philosophers, he found a strong affinity between Mead's social psychology and the foundational concerns of Zen. As he saw it, self-development in Mead's theory was compatible with the Zen concept of self, the denial of ego, "if 'ego' means sticking at a stage which must be left, for the self-process to go on. The self is a process of becoming more personal and more social at the same time."[39]

Ames drew especially on Mead's concept of the social self from his best-known book, *Mind, Self & Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (1934). As Mead described it, the self is a social process with two distinguishable phases—the "I" and the "me." The "I" is the response of the organism to the attitudes of others; the "me" is the organized set of attitudes of others that one individually assumes. One acquires *experience* when the "I" carries out the act and the "me" receives the reactions to one's behavior. The conversation between the "I" and the "me" constitutes the self. In other words, it is as one takes in the attitudes of the other that the individual is able to realize himself as a self. The response of the "I" to a certain situation as it appears in one's immediate experience is uncertain and is always a little different from anything that one could anticipate. These unexpected steps of the "I" are the keys to human innovation. The process by which one receives others' attitudes and adjusts oneself or fights it out is called *social process*. This process helps

[37] Elmer H. Duncan, "Van Meter Ames: An Examination and Appraisal of His Philosophy of Art," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 15 (1981): 100.

[38] Van Meter Ames, "America, Existentialism, and Zen," *Philosophy East and West* 1 (1951): 35–47; Ames, "Zen and Pragmatism," *Philosophy East and West* 4 (1954): 19–33; Ames, "Zen and American Philosophy," *Philosophy East and West* 5 (1956): 305–20; Ames, "Zen to Mead," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 33 (1959–60): 27–42; Ames, "Current Western Interest in Zen," *Philosophy East and West* 10 (1960): 23–33.

[39] Ames, *Zen and American Thought*, 288.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196317000244 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the individual assert him- or herself in a community and produce *social attitudes* from others. By contrast, one is continually affecting society by one's own attitude by projecting the attitude of the group toward oneself, responding to it, and through that response changing the attitude of the group.[40]

In *Zen and American Thought*, Ames stated that Mead's theory of the social self resonates with Zen based on the bodhisattva ideal.[41] He found, perhaps surprisingly, that both Mead and Zen valued the capacity of the "I": "For Mead with science, as for Zen with its sense, life is up to the individual, to make it what he can."[42] Specifically, humanity's unprecedented capacity to communicate with others and with himself, which must be exercised in questioning, wondering, and wanting to see what further can be discovered, is the key to human improvement and good living.[43]

Ames also read Mead's claim with regard to the self in a society: "[One] is a member of the community, but he is a particular part of the community, with a particular heredity and position which distinguishes him from anybody else. He is what he is in so far as he is a member of this community, and the raw materials out of which this particular individual is born would not be a self but for his relationship to others in the community of which he is a part."[44] Ames saw this statement of inseparability between the self and the community in Mead's theory as similar to the Zen concept of non-duality. He digested this concept in his book *Zen and American Thought*: "We live and grow as social selves; that is, we become persons by becoming members one of another ... since no self is separate, no mind independent of others."[45]

Mead further stated that in the organized structure of the social process, as one becomes a member of a community:

> Each individual self-structure reflects, and is constituted by, a different aspect or perspective of this relational pattern, because each reflects this relational pattern from its own unique standpoint; so that the common social origin and constitution of individual selves and their structures does not preclude wide individual differences and variations among them, or contradict the peculiar and more or less distinctive individuality which each of them in fact possesses.[46]

The concept that one needs others to be social but one becomes different from others in social process is the commonality among Mead's, Ames's, and Cage's social philosophies. When Ames found the compatibility between Mead's self-development and Zen's denial of ego, he described the process of individuation in a society as "a process of becoming more personal and more social at the same time."[47] That is, through social process, one adjusts oneself to be similar to and also different

[40] Mead, *Mind, Self & Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, 175–94.
[41] Ames, *Zen and American Thought*, 263.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 265.
[44] Mead, *Mind, Self & Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, 200.
[45] Ames, *Zen and American Thought*, 287.
[46] Mead, *Mind, Self & Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, 201.
[47] Ames, *Zen and American Thought*, 288.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196317000244 Published online by Cambridge University Press

from others. Cage's anarchic work *Musicircus* (1967) reflects the same idea. In his article "Modeling Anarchy," Charles Junkerman observes that what "[*Musicircus*] implies is that one needs others to become one's best self, but this need does not necessarily bind one to others in solidarity or sympathy."[48] This symbiotic relationship between the self and others underlies Cage's definition of "anarchy": a condition of balanced autonomy—interpenetrating and non-obstructing—in which one is "pushed by the crowd into a creative autonomy that one could not have achieved without them."[49]

## Mead's Social Self in Cage's 1960s Works

Throughout the 1960s, Cage believed that the success of a work should be defined in social rather than in aesthetic terms.[50] He carried out this belief by inviting performers' actions in response to others (e.g., *0'00"* and *Variations IV* [1963]); subsuming music within a program of social action; and organizing musical events in which the audience/participants circulate freely around the performing space, choosing their own way of listening or experiencing (e.g., *Musicircus* and *HPSCHD*), or join the composition process (e.g., *Newport Mix* and *33⅓*). Already in the early 1960s, Earle Brown had suggested that Cage was actually not so much interested in experimental music as in experimental sociology.[51] In composing his music, Cage put into practice several aspects of the social self that are consistent with those of Mead and Ames, including the process of individuation and the pattern of social relations. Mead's notion of religious spirit, interpreted as a quality of open-mindedness, also influenced Cage to share the right to create music with the audience. During Cage's residency at the University of Cincinnati, Ames asked him what would become of composers under these circumstances. Cage replied that composers should involve the audience in making music instead of conveying personal emotion to the audience: "[Cage:] 'I don't mind not being a composer, if I can put sounds together.' ... [Ames:] 'Won't that diminish the composer?' [Cage:] 'It's not a question of diminishing him but of giving [him] a different function.' [Ames:] 'Can it be as important?' [Cage:] 'A lot more, and more fun. It's less possessive, more sharing.'"[52]

After Cage proclaimed himself an anarchist in 1961, he envisioned a revolution that did not involve a violent overthrow of the state but an overthrow of thought.[53] He believed the function of music should be "changing the mind."[54] Through

[48] Charles Junkerman, "Modeling Anarchy: The Example of John Cage's *Musicircus*," *Chicago Review* 38, no. 4 (1993): 166.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Revill, *The Roaring Silence*, 243.

[51] Earle Brown, interview, quoted in ibid.

[52] Ames, "A Book of Changes," typescript, file 3, VMAP. See also Ames, diary, 3 February 1967, VMAP.

[53] Later, Cage's re-reading of Thoreau, introduced by poet Wendell Berry in 1967, reinforced his political view and even shaped him into a "Thoreauvian anarchist." See Sara Heimbecker, "*HPSCHD*, *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and Utopia," *American Music* 26 (2008): 480–81.

[54] John Cage, quoted in Michael John White, "King of the Avant-Garde," *Observer* (London), 26 September 1982, quoted in Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*, 212.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196317000244 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Mead's theory, Cage realized the ability of the "I" in every individual. Thus, the goal of his music was to make people aware of their ability—including creativity and the power to change the world—and to exemplify the ideal social interaction. As Cage 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."[55]

Cage's "happenings," with their simple descriptions of methods whereby neither sounds (materials) nor durations (structure) are specified, experiment with the social process of self. In *0'00"*, he instructs performers, "In a situation provided with maximum amplification (no feedback), perform a disciplined action."[56] Similarly, his *Variations IV* can be performed anywhere by "any number of performers, any sounds or combinations of sounds produced by any means, with or without other activities."[57] In both works, Cage required the "I" of performers to respond to the simple descriptions. Yet what the "I" would do after the "me" of performers received these instructions, according to Mead, would remain uncertain. It is the unpredictability of the steps the "I" would take that made Cage expect to see bursts of individual creativity from the performers.

In the late 1960s, Cage expanded his experimentation on the self to include all participants in his work, including the audience. During his residency at the University of Cincinnati, Cage composed a happening, *Newport Mix* (1967), for arts patron Alice Weston. *The Cincinnati Enquirer* described the event as the highlight of the residency.[58] Cage planned the work for a party on the Newport (Kentucky) Yacht Club's yacht anchored on the Ohio River. The piece was a broadcast of tapes provided by audience members. Guests invited to dine on the yacht were instructed to send tapes of speaking, poetry, noise, etc., to the party host (probably the mother of Andy Joseph, Ames's close friend) or to bring them to the party. Guests with no tape recorder could use equipment, provided by the composer, to make a tape at the door. Cage edited the tapes on the spot after receiving the materials and then played them simultaneously and *fortissimo* through twelve tape recorder stations located throughout the floating restaurant. Ames, who was one of the guests, wrote in his diary about the event: "John was walking around with a handful [of tapes] hanging down like spaghetti. . . . 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."[59]

*Newport Mix* exemplifies an anarchic society in several aspects: the tapes represented each guest as a member of this musical event, which in turn represented

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

[56] John Cage, *0'00" (4'33" No. 2)* (New York: Henmar, 1962).

[57] John Cage, *Variations IV* (New York: Henmar, 1963).

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

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

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196317000244 Published online by Cambridge University Press

society. Cage provided no musical materials but served as a facilitator—designing the structure of the event and editing the guests' tapes. He allowed all attendees to leave their mark by their own choices of sound materials or on-the-spot improvised materials. Cage aimed to create various personal relations between the participants and the work. When he edited and then played the tapes simultaneously around the restaurant, the "me" of the participants would find their own tapes reframed in a new performance context. They were free to focus their listening on one or more sound sources, mixing with or without the sounds of fine dining and talking (or in this case, shouting). Just as Mead described the various relational patterns within a community, the experience of Cage's audience members would be shaped by their personal perspectives and attitudinal relations to the sound sources.

In *$33\frac{1}{3}$*, Cage further carried out Mead's theory of social process by involving the audience not just in the pre-selection of sound sources but also in the immediate process of composition. Cage composed *$33\frac{1}{3}$* as a part of the one-day exposition, "Mewantemooseicday," at the University of California, Davis, in 1969. In an empty space, he arranged twelve phonographs and more than three hundred LPs on tables and distributed loudspeakers around the space. The audience members were the performers, free to put records on the phonographs in any way they chose. No seating was provided because Cage wanted the audience/participants to circulate freely in the open space. The audience's freedom to choose not only evoked an individual's participation in the community (the composition process) but also made them active listeners with their spontaneous "I" activated. Although for most of the time, the result was a collage of unrelated music, the simultaneous broadcasting made all the diverse sound sources interconnect and interpenetrate each other. This result exemplifies the complex features of relational patterns among people: abundance, multiplicity, unpredictability, and immediacy.

When Cage was envisioning a non-violent revolution overthrowing the thought of the world in the early 1960s, Mead's social psychology fit perfectly into Cage's social blueprint. Cage saw the possibility of carrying out change in the world through emphasizing the agency of the "I" in everyone. Mead contributed to the formation of Cage's social philosophy, including the knowledge of the social self, the process of individuation, the structure of communal groups, diverse relational patterns, and the idea of open-mindedness, which he found kin to the religious spirit.

Though Cage never met Mead, it was Ames, who by synthesizing Zen and the Chicago school thinkers, inspired Cage to study Mead's theory, which helped lay the foundation of Cage's 1960s social philosophy, happenings, and anarchic music. Although Cage and Ames lived close to one another for only five months in 1967, their lives intertwined in terms of their spiritual interests and philosophical outlooks throughout their friendship. Cage recorded his impression of the Cincinnati residency, which Ames had arranged, in a mesostic for the November 1985 Van Meter Ames Memorial Concert in memory of his colleague and good friend. Returning to when they met, Cage recalled Zen as the recurring theme of their friendship and time together in Cincinnati.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196317000244 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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[60]

In Cage's mind, Ames was a lifelong questioner, who searched out a definition of self and improvement in life and society through humanity's unprecedented capacity to wonder, communicate, and discover.

## References

### Archival Collections

John Cage Correspondence, 1901–1993. Northwestern University Music Library. Northwestern University. Evanston, IL.

Peter Yates Papers. MSS 14. Special Collections & Archives. University of California San Diego Library.

Van Meter Ames Papers, 1966–1995 [VMAP]. UA–11–09, Archives and Rare Books Library. University of Cincinnati. Cincinnati, OH.

### Books and Articles

Ames, Van Meter. "Aesthetic Values in the East and West." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 19 (1960): 3–16.

Ames, Van Meter. "America, Existentialism, and Zen." *Philosophy East and West* 1 (1951): 35–47.

Ames, Van Meter. "Current Western Interest in Zen." *Philosophy East and West* 10 (1960): 23–33.

Ames, Van Meter. "From John Dewey to John Cage." In *Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress of Aesthetics*, edited by Rudolf Zeitler, 737–40. Uppsala: Universitetet, 1968.

Ames, Van Meter. "Is It Art?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 30 (1971): 39–48.

Ames, Van Meter. "The New in Art." *Rice University Studies* 51 (1965): 19–38.

[60] John Cage, program for Van Meter Ames Memorial Concert, November 1985, John Cage Correspondence, 1901–1993, Music Library, Northwestern University. ©John Cage Trust. Used by permission.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196317000244 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Ames, Van Meter. "What Is Music?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 26 (1967): 241–49.
Ames, Van Meter. "Zen and American Philosophy." *Philosophy East and West* 5 (1956): 305–20.
Ames, Van Meter. *Zen and American Thought*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1962.
Ames, Van Meter. "Zen and Pragmatism." *Philosophy East and West* 4 (1954): 19–33.
Ames, Van Meter. "Zen to Mead." *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 33 (1959–60): 27–42.
Ames, Van Meter, and Betty Ames. *Japan and Zen*. Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati, 1961.
Bernstein, David W., and Christopher Hatch, eds. *Writings through John Cage's Music, Poetry, and Art*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
Bock, Jannika. *Concord in Massachusetts, Discord in the World: The Writings of Henry Thoreau and John Cage*. Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2008.
Cage, John. "Choosing Abundance." *The North American Review* 254 (1969): 9–17.
Cage, John. "Correspondence." *Grand Street* 45 (1993): 101–31.
Cage, John. "The East in the West." *Modern Music* 23 (1946): 111.
Cage, John. "Empty Words: John Cage Talks Back." In *Loka: A Journal from Naropa Institute*, edited by Rick Fields, 96–97. New York: Anchor, 1975.
Cage, John. *Empty Words: Writings '73–'78*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1979.
Cage, John. *John Cage*. Mayagüez: Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1971.
Cage, John. *M: Writings, '67–'72*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973.
Cage, John. "Questions." *Perspecta* 11 (1967): 65–71.
Cage, John. *Silence: Lectures and Writings*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961.
Cage, John. "Things to Do." *The North American Review* 254 (1969): 12–16.
Cage, John. "Tokyo Lecture and Three Mesostics." *Perspectives of New Music* 26 (1988): 6–25.
Cage, John. *A Year from Monday: New Lectures and Writing by John Cage*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969.
Cage, John, and Daniel Charles. *For the Birds*. New York: M. Boyars, 1981.
Cage, John, and Fredric Lieberman. "Contemporary Japanese Music: A Lecture." In *Locating East Asia in Western Art Music*, edited by Yayoi Uno Everett and Frederick Lau, 193–98. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004.
Cage, John, and Joan Retallack. *Musicage: Cage Muses on Words, Art, Music*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1995.
Cage, John, Michael Kirby, and Richard Schechner. "An Interview with John Cage." *The Tulane Drama Review* 10 (1965): 50–72.
"Cage to Be UC Guest Composer." *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 22 November 1966.
Currie, Hector, and Michael Porte, eds. *Cinema Now 1: Stan Brakhage, John Cage, Jonas Mekas, Stan Vanderbeek*. Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati, 1968.
Detweiler, Robert. "Review: Zen and American Thought by Van Meter Ames." *American Quarterly* 15 (1963): 219.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196317000244 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Dickinson, Peter. *CageTalk: Dialogues with and about John Cage*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006.

Duncan, Elmer H. "Van Meter Ames: An Examination and Appraisal of His Philosophy of Art." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 15 (1981): 97–113.

Fleming, Richard, and William Duckworth, eds. *John Cage at Sevenry-five*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1989.

Gann, Kyle. *American Music in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1997.

Gann, Kyle. *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage's 4'33"*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010.

Gena, Peter, and Jonathan Brent. *A John Cage Reader: In Celebration of His 70th Birthday*. New York: Peters, 1982.

Ginsburg, Horatio Wood. "John Cage Concludes Cincinnati Visit." *The [University of Cincinnati] Department of Psychiatry News and Reports* 2, no. 4 (June 1967): 4.

Griffiths, Paul. *Cage*. London: Oxford University Press, 1981.

Haskins, Rob. *John Cage*. London: Reaktion Books, 2012.

Horosz, William. "Review: *Zen and American Thought* by Van Meter Ames." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 23 (1963): 455–56.

Johnson, Steven. *The New York Schools of Music and Visual Arts: John Cage, Morton Feldman, Edgard Varèse, Willem De Kooning, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Junkerman, Charles. "Modeling Anarchy: The Example of John Cage's *Musicircus*." *Chicago Review* 38, no. 4 (1993): 153–68.

Kahn, Douglas. "John Cage: Silence and Silencing." *The Musical Quarterly* 81 (1997): 556–98.

Kostelanetz, Richard. "The Aesthetics of John Cage: A Composite Interview." *The Kenyon Review* 9 (1987): 102–30.

Kostelanetz, Richard. *Conversing with Cage*. New York: Limelight, 1991.

Kostelanetz, Richard, and John Cage. "His Own Music." *Perspectives of New Music* 25 (1987): 88–106.

Kostelanetz, Richard, and John Cage. "His Own Music: Part Two." *Perspectives of New Music* 26 (1988): 26–49.

Kostelanetz, Richard, and John Cage. *John Cage*. New York: Praeger, 1970.

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

Leonard, George. *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

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

Mead, George Herbert, and Charles W. Morris. *Mind, Self & Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934.

Morgan, Robert P. *Twentieth-century Music: A History of Musical Style in Modern Europe and America*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1991.

Patterson, David W. "Cage and Asia: History and Sources." In *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage*, edited by David Nicholls, 41–59. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196317000244 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Pritchett, James. "Cage, John." In *New Grove Online*, edited by Laura Macy. http://www.grovemusic.com.

Revill, David. *The Roaring Silence: John Cage, a Life*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1992.

Richards, Sam. *John Cage as* . . . . Oxford: Amber Lane, 1996.

Shultis, Christopher. *Silencing the Sounded Self: John Cage and the American Experimental Tradition*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998.

Silverman, Kenneth. *Begin Again: A Biography of John Cage*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010.

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

Suzuki, Daisetz T. "Zen: A Reply to Van Meter Ames." *Philosophy East and West* 5 (1956): 349–52.

Thoreau, Henry David. "Resistance to Civil Government." In *Aesthetic Papers*, edited by Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, 189–213. Boston: The Editor, 1849.

Watts, Alan. "Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen." *Chicago Review* 12, no. 2 (1958): 3–11.

Watts, Alan. *Buddhism: The Religion of No Religion*. Rutland, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 1999.

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

Yang, Serena. "John Cage and Van Meter Ames: Zen Buddhism, Friendship, and Cincinnati." MM thesis, University of Cincinnati, 2013.

Yates, Peter. *Twentieth Century Music*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1967.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196317000244 Published online by Cambridge University Press