

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

John Cage

*If you think something is boring, try doing it for two minutes. If you still think it's boring, try it for four. If you still think it's boring, try it for eight, then sixteen, then thirty-two, and so on and so forth. Soon enough you'll find that it's really not boring at all.*

*Presented here in eight parts – total duration approx 5 hours, 40 minutes.*

"I began the Diary optimistically in 1965 to celebrate the work of R. Buckminster Fuller, his concern for human needs and world resources, his comprehensive scientific designs for making life on earth an unequivocal success, his insistence that problem solving be continuously regenerative ... This text is a mosaic of ideas, statements, words and stories. It is also a diary. For each day, I determined by chance operations how many parts of the mosaic I would write and how many words there would be in each. The number of words per day was to equal, or by the last statement written, to exceed one hundred words." (Cage in foreword to *M: Writings '67-'72*)

John Cage continued writing this Diary – it is, of course, unlike most diaries you've come across – until 1982, publishing parts of it in pamphlets and the books that collect his writings. An excerpt of the text, showing the unusual layout and typography, is shown on the next page. In 1991, the year before he died, John Cage recorded the eight parts (of ten that were originally planned). During the recording in the studio each change of typography in the printed text of the Diary corresponded to a change in the stereophonic position and a simultaneous change in the volume of John Cage's voice. Each of these changes was determined by a random process brought about with the help of the old Chinese oracle book *I Ching*.

As well as to Buckminster Fuller, Cage refers many times to Marshall McLuhan, Marcel Duchamp, Ivan Illich, Henry Thoreau, other contemporaries such as Robert Rauschenberg, and his eccentric aunt Sadie. Cage is quoted in the sleeve notes, "I still think that Fuller and McLuhan had a sense of the future that is very helpful for those who want to make it". With reflections on how to short-circuit the dysfunctional contradictions of society, Cage mixes in anecdotes of lost wallets, stopping smoking and loving bankers. He has a fascination with international collaboration, less so at the level of UN peacekeeping forces or diplomacy, more in standardisation of telecoms, postage, electricity sockets and water supply. These, he asserts, are instances of anarchy in action.

"I told [my mother] I'd written three texts on world improvement. She said: *John! How dare you? You should be ashamed!* Then she added: *I'm surprised at you.* I asked her, in view of world conditions, whether she didn't think there was room for improvement. She said: *There certainly is. It makes good sense.*" (from the foreword to Part 3 of the Diary, 1967).

Interviewer: "How to improve the World (You will only make Matters worse)" is not a very optimistic title.

John Cage: But it's very classical, it come from Chuang-T'se in China. And it was the response of Chaos to the question that was put to him by one of the Winds. He wanted to know how to improve the world. And Chaos was simply hopping around like a bird and he was silent three times and finally he said: *Oh, you will only make matters worse.*

John Cage was born in Los Angeles in 1912 and died nearly 80 years later in New York. At the age of 37 he received an award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters for having extended the boundaries of music (three years before he composed 4'33"). At 70, he was named Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters and decorated by the French Minister of Culture. He lectured in America and internationally, hunted wild mushrooms, and had a collection of more than 200 houseplants.

(Adapted from: back cover of John Cage, *M: Writings '67-'72*, Wesleyan University Press.)

DIARY: HOW TO IMPROVE THE WORLD  
(YOU WILL ONLY MAKE MATTERS WORSE)  
CONTINUED 1971-72

CLXXIX. Edwin Schlossberg: "Raising animals so people will have daily protein intake doesn't make sense; think of all the land that's necessary for pasture."

Solution of world food problem will involve sources of protein that stay in position, terrarium-like places, Fuller domes, self-supporting, weather-controlled environments: organic reproduction of plant foods.

*Education and Ecstasy* (George Leonard). It would be better to have no school at all than the schools we now have. Encouraged, instead of frightened, children could learn several languages before reaching age of four, at that age engaging in the invention of their own languages.

Play'd be play instead of being, as now, release of repressed anger. CLXXX.

**On the plane I sat next to a psychologist employed at the Galesburg mental hospital. I said I was glad students had succeeded in changing the institution. He said, "What are you talking about?" I said, I understand patients leave the hospital and enter enliveningly into community life. He said, "That isn't true."**

**Use the same opening until you know all its pitfalls. Walking toward Greenwich and Bank Streets, I noticed an open**

# Sounds of Harris & Lewis

## Greg Wagstaff/Touring Exhibition of Sound Environments

Disc 1 *Sounds of Harris & Lewis* contains a diverse range of environmental sounds recorded on the islands, ranging from the sea's edge to Stornoway town centre, including looms, peat cutting and song.

Disc 2 *Sound Portrait and Poetry* provides local contributions from Cross Primary School and volunteers from Ness. (Disc 3 *Machair Soundwalks* is not included in this playlist).

"Far from being separate, the soundscape is integral to the ecology of life. We are largely responsible for it. The sounds we make in turn can affect us, influencing us both emotionally and physiologically. Noisy soundscapes – perhaps at work or in the classroom – have been proven to cause stress and affect our ability to learn and communicate. This ill effect extends to other species too, like birds and marine mammals. But the soundscape also has its positive aspects too; those sounds or places we like to listen to, sounds which reflect the richness and diversity of life." (From the CD booklet.)

Disc 2 mixes in the sounds of the social environment with the physical, and includes poetry and haikus, written and read by children from one of the primary schools. This is no misty-eyed nostalgia, though, and includes the sound of electronic games alongside sounds that are unique to this environment.

It's difficult to follow throughout which sound is which, but the titles are still useful as an overview.

### Disc 1 (73 minutes)

Cuckoo  
Mistle Thrush (Meavag, Harris, 27/5/00)  
Starlings (Leverburgh, Harris, 7/4/99)  
Sheep On Croft (Barvas, Lewis, 19/4/99)  
Sheep Herding / Whistle (Adabroc, Ness, Lewis, 3/4/01)  
Sharpening Scissors / Sheering  
Barvas Fank (Lewis, 3/7/99)  
Generator Start (Distant)  
Electric Sheers  
Generator (Close) (Bru, Lewis, 3/7/99)  
Vibrating Strap And Bolt On Old Trailer (Barvas, Lewis, 21/5/99)  
Peat Cutting (NB5261, Ness, Lewis, 5/4/01)  
Mechanical Peat Cutting (NB5160, Ness, Lewis, 21/5/99)  
Water Dripping From Cliff (Northton, Harris, 7/7/99)  
Electricity Substation In Wet (NG134944, Harris, 5/7/99)  
Passing Car / Cattle Grid (NG096971, Harris, 20/5/99)  
Electric Wool Washing Machine  
Warp Winding (Carloway Mill, Lewis, 6/7/99)  
Cockerel And Croft Ambience  
A.D. Munroes (Tarbert) Mobile Shop Arriving At MacLennan's (Drinishader, Harris, 2/7/99)  
Interior: Buying Groceries  
Scraping Crotal  
Traditional Wooden Hand Loom (Joan MacLennan) (Drinishader Harris, 2/7/99)  
Hattersley Loom  
Rapier Loom (Lewis Castle College Tweed Workshop, Stornoway, 7/11/99)  
Butt Of Lewis Cliff Ambience (Ness, Lewis, 6/5/01)  
Helicopter Fly-Past (Stornoway Airport, 28/8/99)  
Sea / Harbour Walls (Port Of Ness, Lewis, 21/5/99)  
RIB Motor Boat  
Salmon Jumping In Pen  
Feeding Salmon / Broadcasting Pellets (Crossbost, Lewis, 24/8/99)  
Seas Edge - Gentle (St. Clement's, Harris)  
Lapping Lochan (Loch Steisevat, Leverburgh, Harris, 12/4/99)  
Beach Waves - Big (Northton, Harris, 8/1/99)  
Wind Gusting In Trees (Lews Castle Grounds, Stornoway, 21/5/99)  
Mistle Thrush (Lews Castle Grounds, Stornoway, 7/11/99)  
Pedestrian Crossing  
Pedestrians - Cromwell St. (Stornoway Town Centre, 7/11/99)  
Preacher (Stornoway Pedestrian Square, 3/7/99)  
5 O'Clock Bell (Stornoway Clock Tower, 21/5/99)  
Water Feature / Fountain (Stornoway Pedestrian Sq, 31/5/00)  
Choir Practice For Mod (Cross Primary School, Ness, 1/5/01)  
Waulking Song (Donald John MacDonald, Seilebost, Harris, 2/7/99)  
Hymn (6pm, Exterior Of Free Presbyterian Church, Tarbert, Harris, 4/7/99)  
Calmac New Ferry And Public Safety Announcement (Tarbert, 7/5/01)  
Calmac Old Ferry And Public Safety Announcement (Tarbert)

### Disc 2 (46 minutes)

#### Ness Sound Portrait

Flue Wind  
Rain On Window  
Loom  
Door Latch Open/Close  
Fire Making And Crackle  
Guitar  
Tea Making  
Light Switch & Teeth Brushing  
Sea Gulls  
Scythe  
Paraffin Tractor  
Sea And Oystercatcher  
Fishing Boat, Reel & Radio  
Gutting Herring  
Poem - Do Mo Mhathai (Gaelic)  
Poem - Do Mo Mhathai (English)  
Ness Carnival 2001  
Stornoway Pipe Band  
Bus Journey  
Beginners Melodian Practice  
Tea Room  
Ness Melodian Band  
Stornoway Ferry Terminal Interior  
Seas Edge  
Mackenzie Sisters At Taigh Dhonnchaidh

#### Sound Diaries

Alasdair Smith  
Lily Greenall  
Playground

#### Poetry

Richard John MacFarlane  
Christian Homer  
Alasdair Smith  
Alexander Paul Hope  
Kyle James Campbell  
Calvin Kenneth Cupit  
Stephen Campbell  
Michelle Campbell (Haiku)  
Innes MacSween (Haiku)  
Angela MacLean (Haiku)  
Lily Greenall (Haiku)  
Emma Wren (Haiku)  
Ina Ferguson (Haiku)

# The Horse was Alive, the Cow was Dead

Peter Cusack

*Presented here in two parts – total duration 71 minutes.*

Peter Cusack mixes short narratives from people who work and live around the River Lea in East London with 'naturalistic' recordings (some done under water) and a few instances of Alan Wilkinson's saxophone played in different acoustic spaces. If he were a film maker, he'd be part-Loach and part-Godard, part-Pennebaker and part-Attenborough (David, not Dickie).

*The Horse was Alive...* was mostly recorded between 1998 and 2000, long before the bid to host the Olympics in this area, and subsequent transformation of its scrapyards, marshes and forgotten spaces. The album presents its documents more or less as found in the environment: in only one of the 45 tracks is there a commentary on what's unfolding, and in a few others music (live and recorded) is played to bring out the qualities of the environment. When it works, this approach sustains interest precisely by making you interpret, deduce and guess what you're hearing.

Example: in the recording "The Dog Thinks it's a Duck" you have to project a sequence of events onto a series of splashes, barks and grunts. The sleeve notes are terse: "Dog diving in after a stick — the title was his owner's comment"; the rest is up to you.

Cusack's recordings also bring out the potential of audio for surrealism. They include the sound of toads calling underwater, and tadpoles trying to eat the underwater microphone. The British Waterways man employed to maintain the river environment recounts a story of two bodies being spotted in the river, both still six feet long despite being decapitated. It turned out a circus had skinned and then disposed of two brown bears. A local prankster later left bear footprints in the snow, summoning helicopters and police marksmen.

*The Horse was Alive...* has a recording of the 96% solar eclipse of August 1999 as it sounded on Walthamstow Marsh. This track features a commentary, describing the progress of the eclipse. Perhaps the eclipse's effects on wildlife and ambience would not have been evident without the commentary, but unfortunately it gets in the way of listening and its literalness obscures as much as it elucidates.

Peter Cusack is based in London, and works as a sound artist, musician and environmental recordist with a special interest in environmental sound and acoustic ecology. Projects move from community arts to research into the contribution of sound to our senses of place to recordings that document areas of special sonic interest, e.g. Lake Baikal, Siberia, and Xinjiang, China's most western province. His recent project 'Sounds From Dangerous Places' examines the soundscapes of sites of major environmental damage, e.g. Chernobyl, the Azerbaijan oil fields, controversial dams on the Tigris and Euphrates river systems in south east Turkey. He initiated the 'Your Favourite London Sound' project to discover what Londoners find positive in their city's soundscape, an idea that has been repeated in other world cities including Beijing and Chicago. He produced 'Vermilion Sounds' a monthly environmental sound program on ResonanceFM radio, London, and is a Senior Lecturer in 'Sound Arts & Design' at the London College of Communication. (Source: <http://www.lcc.arts.ac.uk/research/research-staff-profiles/peter-cusack/> – see also Peter's database of London sounds at <http://www.petercusack.org/>)

## Part 1

Old Ford Lock Gate 1 Opening  
Lapping Water Stonebridge Lock  
Items Pulled Out Of The River  
Old Ford Lock Gate 2 Opening  
Boat Motor Power  
Canalside Atmosphere  
The Dog Thinks It's A Duck  
Up Down  
Bag Of Gold  
Cuckoo, Walthamstow Marsh  
Train 1  
Tunnel Drips, Near Stratford  
Towpath Footsteps  
Body In Canal  
Toads Calling Underwater  
Tadpoles Eating

Two Headless Bears  
Heron Cry 1, 2  
Evening Out  
Nightingale Sub Station, Fisher's Green  
Broken Train Fizz  
Train 2  
Heronry  
It's Got To Be The Coot  
Coot Fight

## Part 2

Spray Painting Outside Markfield  
Beam Engine  
60 Football Pitches  
Natural Amphitheatre 1, 2, 3  
Blackbirds Mobbing Owl  
Springfield Marina Party

Naked Rituals On The Banks Of The Lea  
A Quiet Day Beneath  
Stomping Across Horseshoe Bridge  
Catching Frogs  
Edible Frog Chorus, Walthamstow Marsh  
Eclipse Of The Sun, August 11th 1999  
Summer Bees  
Summer Wine  
Outside The Anchor And Hope Pub  
Acoustics of the Rail Arch  
Footsteps Through the Rail Arch  
Flight Path Trace  
Dawn Chorus Walthamstow Marsh

# Longplayer

Jem Finer

*Presented here in three parts – total duration 86 minutes.*

Longplayer is a one-thousand-year-long musical composition. It began playing at midnight on the 31st of December 1999, and will continue to play without repetition until the last moment of 2999, at which point it will complete its cycle and begin again. Conceived and composed by Jem Finer, it was originally produced as an Artangel commission, and is now in the care of the Longplayer Trust.

Longplayer is composed for singing bowls – an ancient type of standing bell – which can be played by both humans and machines, and whose resonances can be very accurately reproduced in recorded form. It is designed to be adaptable to unforeseeable changes in its technological and social environments, and to endure in the long-term as a self-sustaining institution.

Longplayer was developed and composed by Jem Finer between October 1995 and December 1999. It was managed by Candida Blaker, with a think tank comprising artist Brian Eno, British Council Director of Music John Keiffer, landscape architect Georgina Livingston, Artangel co-director Michael Morris, digital sound artist Joel Ryan, architect and writer Paul Shephard and writer and composer David Toop. A full account of Longplayer's development can be found in the 2003 book *Longplayer*, published by Artangel, London.

Jem Finer is a UK-based artist, musician and composer. Since studying computer science in the 1970s, he has worked in a variety of fields, including photography, film, music and installation. *Longplayer* represents a convergence of many of his concerns, particularly those relating to systems, long-duration processes and extremes of scale in both time and space. Among his other works is *Score For a Hole In the Ground* (2005), a permanent musical installation in a forest in Kent. Self-sustaining and relying only on gravity and the elements to be audible, the project continues Finer's interest in long-term sustainability and the reconfiguring of older technologies. Finer is also co-founder and member of The Pogues.

(Source: <http://longplayer.org/what/overview.php>)

The three excerpts of Longplayer featured at Uncivilisation 2011 were recorded from the continuous live stream between 5th and 6th August 2011. You can hear this live stream on the Internet via the Longplayer website at <http://longplayer.org>

Many thanks to the Longplayer Trust and to Jem Finer for giving permission to record and replay these excerpts. Donations are always welcome to secure Longplayer's short-term and long-term future – again, visit <http://longplayer.org> for details.

Download Citation on ResearchGate | Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) Continued, 1970-71 | If you think something is boring, try doing it for two minutes. If you still think it's boring, try it for four. "I began the Diary optimistically in 1965 to celebrate the work of R. Buckminster Fuller, his concern for human needs and world resources, his comprehensive scientific designs for making life on earth an unequivocal success, his insistence that problem solving be continuously regenerative. This text is a mosaic of ideas, statements, words and stories. It is also a diary. A typographer's principal aim is to design printed matter with art and skill in order to transfer the author's message to the reader's brain. The process should occur quickly and easily. We want to improve this website and your participation is fundamental. If you need more information, you can contact us. Thank you very much for your help! Thank you very much! Your reply will help us improve this website. We use cookies to enhance your experience. If you continue browsing, we understand that you accept their use. An early disciple of Arnold Schoenberg, Cage made his biggest creative breakthrough by studying the I Ching, Zen Buddhism and the art of Marcel Duchamp. The composer decided to let elements of chance into his work. He started to write pieces for a "prepared piano" where things like thumbtacks, nails and forks were placed into the instrument's strings to alter its sound in unexpected ways. Cage's most famous work, "4'33", took conceptual music about as far as it could go. The folks over at Ubu.com have placed online another one of Cage's work, Diary: How To Improve The World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) (1991). Clocking in at over 5 hours total, the piece is something of a Mount Everest of sound art.