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Between Sixth Avenue and 18th Street it was a freezing 16 degrees Celsius below zero. This was not New York's most peaceful neighbourhoods. Beggars, chilled and other people passed by without stopping. People with fixed eyes. Sensation of dangerous eyes. The front door of John Cage's building was locked. My work with him and Merce Cunningham had begun in 1985. My professional association with John continued up to his death in 1992. Afterwards, I continued with Merce and David Tudor. I am not sure why, despite the whole time of our friendship, it is this specific occasion that now returns to my mind. I'm seated, writing. Far from that time and space. John was my best friend for seven years. Front door locked. I think it was 1989 or 1990. I rang the bell several times. The cold was bitter and heavier, making hard to breathe. Still the door didn't open. 6 or 7 PM. Almost night. I searched in my pockets for some coins. There was a phone box right there, in the Sixth Avenue. No coins. I looked up. The lights were on in his apartment. Had something happened? I went back to the door and rang the bell a few more times. No reply. There was nothing else for it but to change a note for coins. I walked for some minutes along the freezing street. I manage to get change and came back to the phone and called him. John, how are you? Emanuel! I've been looking for you like crazy, looking for you everywhere, where are you? Outside! Where? On the other side of the street, John, I've rung the bell several times. The bell must be broken. I'll open the

door. I ran back across the street and John opened the first door using the automatic control. Then there was a second door, which also opened automatically. The building was old and large. Ceilings at a reasonable height. Walls in light grey paint, plastic paint, badly painted and dirty. The doors were in glass and white aluminium, large. To the left was a corridor. Small and wide. Also the elevator. Big and old. All I had to do was to enter. John pressed the elevator button on his floor, upstairs. This was to stop burglars from coming up. Security. It took its time. Then the door opened. There was John, looking like he'd been worried. He looked at me with wide eyes open and embraced me. Emanuel, I was worried. I laughed. He laughed too. We embraced each other. He led the way. Slightly steps. His body moved with difficulty. John always wore jeans and a traditional checked or coloured shirt. He wore leather shoes, not tennis, like American – in general – wear. The apartment where John and Merce lived was a loft. Lots of space, last floor, high ceilings. It was previously used as a clothes warehouse. Skylights damp. Baths free distributed in the space, with low walls and free standing glass roof, Losa, the black cat, a work by William Anastasi in the middle of the living room, some square gardens made with pebbles from all over the world, a bedroom half living room, a living room half work room, and all this next to the kitchen – which opened onto the front door. On the wall there were works by Jasper Johns, William Anastasi again, Rauschemberg, Afrika, John, Merce and other things. An old painter's ladder was standing near the office, between the bedroom and the rest. We used the ladder

for hanging things on. There was only one dividing wall in the place, far too small to be a real division. I took my coat and put it in a wardrobe on the right. The floor was wood, English style. The cat walked over everything. John told me that dinner was nearly ready: vegetables and baked fish. Trout. He took some hummus out of the refrigerator – which stood between the kitchen, the bedroom and the office – and some Mexican corn chips. He knew I loved the hummus he used to make. I would simply sit there and eat hummus while talked to him. It was always like this. We would only eat on wooden plates, which couldn't be washed with detergents and soaps. At the bottom end of the living room – by the dining table – there was a heating radiator. Central heating. It leaked and whistled all the time. It was a comfortable temperature inside the apartment. But the windows in the loft were single glazing in wooden frames. One could easily hear the sounds of the street. Cars passing, people singing or shouting. It reminded me of Sao Paulo. He never put on music, like I always do at home. John was also not very talkative. He would come over to me, touch, smile and go back to his cooking. Merce was out. We talked a bit about politics. Is Brazil going to go communist now? I don't think so. But there's a lot of poverty there, don't you think? Yes, there is, John, you can't imagine the quantity... it is very sad. He asked me to tell him about my latest works. He loved the magic world of computers, virtual reality and cyberspace. John, why don't you work on digital music? You know, I've spent my whole life working on acoustic music, with acoustic instruments, with this world

around us, and now I would have to start all over, and I'm nearly eighty years old. There are other people who can do it much better, and its best to leave it to them. The fish was ready. John struggled a bit to get the tray out of the oven. I tried to help him, but he wouldn't let me. If you do what I must to do, I'll get even older, Emanuel. I led him to the table, laid out the plates, glasses, forks, knives, napkins and the austere tablecloth. Everything was austere, simple. I moved away a little potted cactus and the bottle with water. John made beans, broccoli, other vegetables and fish. He was a great cooker. Some years before, he suffered serious health problems and a combination of arthritis and rheumatism. He hadn't even been able to move his hands. He couldn't walk. Condemned by the illness, after seeing dozens of traditional doctors, he heard about a Chinese doctor in the city. That doctor was a specialist on diet and harmony with nature. John had found out about this Chinese person through Yoko Ono, he said me. He was, in fact, American Chinese. He booked an appointment. The doctor told him to completely change his diet. Before that I was used to eat everything, said John. Then, following the Oriental master, he started to create his own design of diet. The saying of Shiatsu "we are what we eat" became part of John's life. He wasn't exactly macrobiotic, in the popular sense of the term. But he was really a macrobiotic in its deeper sense. His diet became part of his body, a way of take it as an extension of the world, and vice versa. When he travelled, his only requirement was that he should prepare his own food. At some point in the conversation I asked

him what he thought about men and women. Was there any difference? I think human beings are like mushrooms. There is no mushroom like another one, but some combine and others do not. Sex between mushrooms does not obey the number two. I think we transform ourselves from men and women into something beyond: something like mushrooms. We laughed. His hands trembled between the bottles of water and wine, the vegetables and the cat, which had climbed onto the table. He was working on another lecture at the time. The telephone rung, and I got up to answer it. It was for him. He got up with difficulty, and walked to the office. It was Louis Malle. Then the phone rang again. It was Laura Kuhn, calling from California. He came back. We talked a lot a laughed even more. John laughed a lot. He had a beautiful smile. We also talked about other things like AIDS, about the American government, about television networks and his visits to Eastern Europe. Have you seen how CNN International is different from CNN over here? Here they only talk about the United States, but we want to be connected to the whole world! John, why don't you go to live in East Side in New York City? The streets there seem to be safer and cleaner. No, I like it here. Here, Emanuel, you get all sorts. Cultures from all over the world. Over there on East Side you only find practically one kind of person. And then I don't think it is less dangerous than there. Here the danger might be in the people on the streets. But there the danger might be in the hundreds or thousands of people who control other people. Private security guards, night watchmen. I don't know who is the more violent. If you

don't dress like them, if you don't behave like them, it can be more violent than round here. But here there's freedom. You can go out as you like. For John, everything was part of a process in continuous transformation. A process without beginning, middle or end. Everything was Nature. We talked about a record of minimalist music that had just been released. A composer who had become very famous. What was it for? There was no mystery in that music. If there's no mystery, then there's no discovery! No curiosity. Why do things without mystery? While other people are seeking for clarity, I am still looking for the mysterious. Things where there is space for people to think, to be curious. I'm interested on things that are always hiding something else to be discovered. I think it was then that we suddenly saw a tall well-built black boy in the middle of the kitchen. We went over. We were very frightened. Would it be an assault? John walked over looking worried. John asked what he was doing. A delivery. At that time of the evening? John had left the door open, and the boy had come in. Yes, it was just a delivery, in the wrong address. It should be to the neighbour. John laughed a lot afterwards. What a fright! The loft belonged to a Jewish gentleman. Cheerful and bearded. Small and fat. Once I met him there. He was sitting on a small chair in the middle of the living room, in front of Anastasi's sculpture, steel squares laid over the floor. The man was listening, quietly, as John told stories and more stories. Then he got up and took his leave affectionately of John and Merce. He left. They told me he was the landlord. That man was intentioned to transform

the whole building, to make money with it. But he didn't know how to do. It would be impossible to transform the building if John and Merce would be there. But he was a good man, and he considered the loft as a real artwork, with John and Merce living there. Now he charges a low rent. He says that it is his way to participate in our work. He is more our friend than landlord. Isn't marvellous? – said John. Everyone liked that gentleman. I met him later, but only a few times. One of these occasions was when we were organising a benefit concert for Merce's foundation, as homage to John. Several interesting people together. Alan Ginsberg, Robert Ashley, the Kronos Quartet, Alvin Lucier, Peter Gabriel, Laurie Anderson, Meredith Monk, Lou Reed. The boys went wild when they heard about Lou Reed. His name seemed to exert a magical fascination on everyone. I was between John on the one side, and Grete Sultan, with her unforgettable wonderful eyes, on the other. The Jewish man was on the other side of the room, talking animatedly to Jasper Johns. I watched to see that the elevator had actually gone down. Then closed the door, carefully this time. I washed up. John organised the papers for the lecture – I think it was for his Harvard Lectures. Then we said goodbye. We had a lot to do next day. We embraced each other. Kisses. I walked along the street looking for a taxi. Snow everywhere In a few minutes I found one. I asked the driver if he knew the great composer John Cage. John who?