

J O H N

C A G E

I N D E T E R M I N A C Y

190 Zen Stories

Edited by Eddie Kohler

<https://www.lcdf.org/indeterminacy/about.html>

AN OVERVIEW

John Cage was an American composer, Zen buddhist, and mushroom eater. He was also a writer: this site is about his paragraph-long stories – anecdotes, thoughts, and jokes. As a lecture, or as an accompaniment to a Merce Cunningham dance, he would read them aloud, speaking quickly or slowly as the stories required so that one story was read per minute.

This site archives 190 of those stories. Each story is spaced out, as if it were being read aloud, to fill a fixed area. If you like, you can also read them aloud at a rate of one a minute.

You can read [a random story](#) (reload or select the asterisk for another), pick one by number using the form on [the main page](#), or choose one through one of the three indices. The [index of names](#) lists people and beings and the stories they are mentioned in, and the [index of first lines](#) lists the first line of each story alphabetically. The stories often end in punch lines; the [index of last lines](#) (my favorite) lists these alphabetically.

The stories are taken from two of Cage's

books, *Silence* and *A Year from Monday*, and from the Folkways recording of him reading 90 of them aloud as David Tudor plays piano (among other things). The numbering is arbitrary, except that the first 90 stories are those on the Folkways recording in order. Stories in the main series from [1](#) through [180](#) were explicitly marked by Cage via inclusion on the recording or typographical presentation in the books. Other text excerpts that read like stories are included in a secondary series, from [X1](#) through [X10](#). Cage probably thought of some these excerpts as stories in their own right; in *Silence*, he writes that “Some stories have been omitted [from special typographical presentation] since their substance forms part of other writings in this volume”, and several of the secondary stories appear in a context such as “I have not yet told any stories and yet when I give a talk I generally do” (“Composition As Process”, in *Silence*, p.32). Nevertheless, we do not know whether Cage believed these secondary stories could stand on their own. The list of secondary stories is not complete: although the crystal clear style of the stories presented here seems to correspond to the late fifties and early sixties, similar short anecdotes are present even in much later texts.

HOW TO WORK IT

Cage sometimes links stories together, either tightly or loosely. On the [story pages](#), these links are represented as ¶ and § signs. A ¶ mark is a link to the next (or previous) paragraph in this story, while a § mark is a link to the next (or previous) story in a more loosely linked chain. Links to a previous story appear just before the story text; links to the next story appear just after it.

Reloading a random story will get you a new random story, but reloading a specific story (if you followed a ¶ or § link, for example) will get you the same story again. The * mark always links to a random story. Each story’s number is a link to a

bookmarkable version of that story.

Each story page lists its sources: the Folkways recording, *Silence*, or *A Year from Monday*. Most of the stories on the Folkways recording were later printed in one of the books, sometimes with revisions. Cage updated the text because time had passed (in [story 26](#), “four years ago” became “four years ago or maybe five”, and in [story 35](#), “just the other day” became “one day”); because he remembered something (in [story 28](#), “his first name escapes me” became “his first name is Eryo” on the recording); to correct errors of fact (in [story 61](#), “mother-in-law” became “stepmother”); or to make tweaks for conciseness (in [story 60](#), “very possibly seriously poisonous” became “possibly seriously poisonous”). In one case, the recording is more expansive than the printed text: the second paragraph in [story 28](#) is not in *A Year from Monday*. This archive follows whichever version I preferred, but the Sources section for each story provides links to its variants, if any.

AN ESSAY

A former roommate and her boyfriend enjoyed European art flicks, preferably Scandinavian and depressing. (“We’re beginning to understand Swedish,” they said.) One evening the boyfriend rented an episode of the British series *American Composers* – Peter Greenaway’s hour on John Cage – and we watched it together. It has four or five of the *Indeterminacy* stories, spoken by Cage from his Folkways recording, and the hour ends with [story 23](#):

“ ‘...now and then, I’ll just keep my trap shut.’ He said, ‘That’ll be a relief.’ ”

My socks were charmed off. All I had really known of Cage was 4’33” (of course), and one compact disc, *Between the Keys: Microtonal Masterpieces of the 20th Century*, which has the *Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano*. I didn’t remember the *Sonatas and Interludes*, though; what I remembered was Harry Partch’s *Yankee Doodle Fantasy*, a schizophrenic Yankee

Doodle for soprano, flexatone, and ensemble tuned to Partch's 43-tone scale:

*Daggers, pistols, swords and guns
Kick about your rump O!
Doodle doodle do papa!
Doodle doodle do mama!
Doodle doodle do papa!
In forty-three tones to the octave.*

I don't listen to this very often.

A couple weeks later, I bought *Silence* and read it all – even *45' for a Speaker*, which felt more like a quest or a trial to be endured than a lecture to be read. Three things stuck like butterflies: *Where are we going? and What are we doing?*; the *Music Lovers' Field Companion*; and *Indeterminacy*, *Indeterminacy* being perhaps the purest. It was his love for life, simple and unconditional, that that won me over. *Music Lovers' Field Companion* is very succinct: Stockhausen is interested in “juggling,” Pierre Boulez *italics!*; John Cage is interested in living.

In the summer I had to complete and write up my Masters' thesis work in computer science, so I spent a lot of time looking for other things to do. [Gifsicle](#) took up the month of June, more or less, and I started to work in earnest in July. By late July, I needed another break, and eventually read *A Year from Monday*. Things converged: the minute-long stories, typography, imageless Web page design, the need to waste time *on the computer* so I could pretend I was *close* to doing work.

I typed in all the stories I could find in print, both in *Silence* and in *A Year from Monday*, spacing them according to sense, as if I were reading them out loud. A script prints out stories, spacing them so as to fill a given rectangle (just as Cage, when reading, varies his reading speed so as to fill exactly one minute). There are three indices. I dreamed of an “*Indeterminacy* of the day.” Unfortunately, August started and I had to work. In the fall, after turning in the thesis on the last day possible at 3:30 pm to two unhappy women, I checked the stories against the *Indeterminacy* recording. It's winter again now, and I'm writing this note.

Now I wonder whether the stories are meant for the Web. It's addictive to click and get a new

story, then to click again, and again, and again.
Repeats are disappointments. The luxury of time is gone – it doesn't take a minute to read a story. Their fragility is broken now that they are all in one place and indexed. How can you type Cage's deliciously evil faux-Japanese accent from [story 78](#)?

Well, it doesn't matter. Here they are.

THREE NOTES BY JOHN CAGE

*I. from the Folkways record,
Indeterminacy: New Aspect of Form in
Instrumental and Electronic Music*

For over 20 years I have been giving lectures. Many of them have been unusual as lectures, simply because I employed in them means of writing analogous to my composing means in the field of music. My intention was, often, to say what I had to say in a way which would exemplify it, which would, conceivably, permit a listener to experience it rather than to just hear about it. This means, essentially, that, being, as I am, engaged in a variety of activities, I attempt to introduce into each one of them aspects conventionally limited to the others. So it was that I gave about 1949 my *Lecture on Nothing* at the Artists' Club on 8th Street in New York City (the artists' club started by Robert Motherwell that predated the popular one associated with Philip Pavia, Bill de Kooning, et. al.). This *Lecture on Nothing* (recently published in *Incontri Musicali**) was written in the same rhythmic structure I employed at the time in my musical compositions (*Sonatas and Interludes*, *Three Dances*, etc.). One of the structural divisions was a repetition of a single page in which the refrain occurred "if anyone is sleepy let him go to sleep" some 14 times. Jeanne Reynal, I remember, stood up part way through, screamed, and then said, while I continued speaking, "John, I dearly love you, but I can't bear another minute." She then walked out. Later, during the question period, I gave 5 prepared answers regardless of the questions. This was a reflection of my engagement in Zen. At Black Mountain College, I organized an event which involved the paintings of Bob

Rauschenberg, the dancing of Merce Cunningham, films, slides, phonograph records, radios, the poetries of Charles Olson and M. C. Richards recited from the tops of ladders, the pianism of David Tudor, together with my lecture which ends: "A piece of string, a sunset, each acts."** The audience was seated in the center of all this activity, and, later that summer, vacationing in New England, I visited America's first Synagogue to discover that the congregation was there seated precisely the way I had arranged the audience at Black Mountain. As I look back, I realize that this concern with poetry was early with me. At Pomona College, in response to questions about the Lake Poets, I wrote in the manner of Gertrude Stein, irrelevantly and repetitiously. I got an A. The second time I did it I was failed. And between the *Lecture on Nothing* and the one here recorded, there are at least a dozen which are unconventionally written, notably the *London Lecture**** which was written by means of chance operations, and the *Rutgers Lecture***** which is largely a series of questions left unanswered. When M. C. Richards asked me why I didn't one day give a conventional informative lecture (adding that that would be the most shocking thing I could do), I said, "I don't give these lectures to surprise people, but out of the need for poetry." As I see it, poetry is not prose, simply because poetry is one way or another formalized. It is not poetry by reason of its content or ambiguity, but by reason of its allowing musical elements (time, sound) to be introduced into the world of words. Thus, traditionally, information, no matter how stuffy (e.g. the sutras and shastras of India), was conventionally transmitted by poetry. It was easier "to get" that way. (Karl Shapiro may have been thinking along those lines when he wrote his *Essay on Rime* in poetry.)

Late in September in 1958 I was in Stockholm in a hotel. I set about writing the present lecture which I was obliged to give a week later at the Brussels Fair.***** I recalled a remark made years before by David Tudor that I should make a talk that was nothing but stories. The idea was

appealing when he gave it to me but I had never acted on it. A few weeks before, in Darmstadt, Karlheinz Stockhausen has said, "I'll publish your Brussels talk in *Die Reihe*." I replied, "You'd better wait and see what it is I write." He said, "No matter what it is, I'll publish it."

When the talk was given in Brussels, it was just the first 30 stories and without musical accompaniment. A recital by David Tudor and myself of music for two pianos followed the lecture. The title was *Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music*. Karlheinz Stockhausen was in the audience. Later when I was in Milan making the *Fontana Mix* at the Studio di Fonologia, I received a letter from Karlheinz Stockhausen asking for a text for *Die Reihe*. I sent the Brussels talk. He published it.

When I got back to America in March 1959, there was a letter from Jack Arends asking me to lecture at Columbia Teachers College. I decided to write 60 more stories and to ask David Tudor to make a 90-minute accompaniment for the occasion. He did this using material from the *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*, employing several radios for noise elements. [*****](#)

A few days after the talk was given at Columbia, I went to see Emile de Antonio. I gave him a copy of the stories. After he read them, he telephoned to say they should be published. I mentioned this to David Tudor. He said, "It should be published as a record." The next day I got a letter from Roger Maren. He wrote to say that he had just seen Moe Asch who was interested in recording something of mine. I telephoned Moe Asch and we made an appointment. The day was set for the recording so that it could be made before David Tudor returned to Europe. David Tudor said, "Instead of radios, I'd like to use tracks from the *Fontana Mix*." I said, "Fine."

It took about an hour and a half for the recording engineer, Mel Kaiser, to set up the studio. Finally he asked me to speak a little to get the level. Then he did the same for the

piano, the whistles, the tape machines and the amplified slinky. Then he said, "We're ready." However, I no sooner started speaking than he stopped me. I said, "What's the trouble?" He said, "You shouldn't pause the way you do between words; you should just speak naturally." I said, "But this is what I have to do. I tell one story a minute, and, when it's a short one, I have to spread it out. Later on when I come to a long one, I have to speak as rapidly as I can." He said, "O.K. I'll just keep my mouth shut." After the first side was made, he said, "I'm beginning to get the idea. I think we'd better do it over again." What had happened was that he had tried to get some kind of balance, rather than just letting the loud sounds occasionally drown out my voice. I explained that a comparable visual experience is that of seeing someone across the street, and then not being able to see him because a truck passes between. We then made the first record over again, and continued with the other three. At the end of the session, David Tudor said, "You may want to cut that last sound I made at the piano. It's an ugly one." Editing, which took place the following week, was minimal. I lowered the level on my voice at one point near the end, and took out an echo that had developed on the tape before one sound somewhere in the middle. I didn't cut out the last sound as David Tudor had suggested, for to my ear it sounded perfectly acceptable. All this time, Moe Asch was out of town. When he returned, he listened to the record, and then called to say he was delighted. I said, "I'm glad you are, because I am too." He said, "When you write the album notes, write as much as you wish. Don't stint. And technical information too."

Most of the stories are things that happened that stuck in my mind. Others I read in books and remembered, those, for instance, from Kwang-tse and Sri Ramakrishna. The [2nd](#), [15th](#), [16th](#), [46th](#) and [75th](#) stories are to be found somewhere in the literature surrounding Zen. The statement, "Split the stick and there is Jesus," ([19th story](#)) comes, perhaps, from Huxley's *Perennial Philosophy*, which I read when it first came out. The [29th story](#) I read in one of Martin

Buber's books. The [61st story](#) is told in Joseph Campbell's *Hero with 1000 Faces*. Xenia (stories [72](#) and [73](#)) is Xenia Cage. She was Xenia Andreyevna Kashevaroff whom I married in 1935; we were divorced 10 years later. Malcolm Roberts first delivered the lecture on Japanese Poetry ([78th story](#)). We (he, Xenia and I) were sitting, quite drunk, in a Seattle gutter; it was a full moon. He claimed that it had been given at the University of Washington by a Japanese scholar. Virgil Thomson told me the story about Chabrier, "the dirty" composer ([story number 58](#)). Henry Cowell told me the story about the Eskimo lady ([the 25th](#)). Merce Cunningham picked up, I don't know where, the one about the Japanese Abbott ([the 13th](#)). It may be discovered that I remembered some of these stories inaccurately. However, this is the way they are now as far as I am concerned.

The continuity of the 90 stories was not planned. I simply made a list of all the stories I could think of and checked them off as I wrote them. Some that I remembered I was not able to write to my satisfaction, and so they do not appear. Whenever I have given the talk, someone comes up afterwards and insists that the continuity was a planned one, in spite of the ideas that are expressed regarding purposelessness, emptiness, chaos, etc. One lady, at Columbia, asked, during the discussion following the talk, "What, then, is your final goal?" I remarked that her question was that of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation to applicants for fellowships, and that it had irritated artists for decades. Then I said that I did not see that we were going to a goal, but that we were living in process, and that that process is external. My intention in putting 90 stories together in an unplanned way is to suggest that all things, sounds, stories (and, by extension, beings) *are* related, and that this complexity is more evident when it is not over-simplified by an idea of relationship in one person's mind.

David Tudor plays material from his part of the *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* (1957-58), using tracks from the *Fontana Mix* (1958-59) as noise elements where these are

notated in the *Concert*. (Manuscript pages of the *Concert*, together with notes and analytical statements, appear in the recording of my 25-year Retrospective Concert at Town Hall, issued by George Avakian, 10 W. 33rd St., N.Y.C. Other manuscript pages, originals, are available at the Stable Gallery, 58th and 7th Ave., N.Y.C.*****) David Tudor was free to make any continuity of his choice. There was no rehearsal beforehand involving both the reading and the music, for in all my recent music (since *Music for Piano*) there are parts but no score. Each one of us rehearsed alone and employed a stopwatch during the actual recording session. Each did what he had to do, bringing about a situation which neither had foreseen.

The manuscript of the *Fontana Mix* is on transparent plastics which may be superimposed in any number of ways. There are ten sheets having points, and ten having differentiated curved lines. There is also a single straight line and a graph having 100 units horizontally and 20 vertically. By placing one of the sheets with points over one with curves and then superimposing the graph, it is possible to connect a point within the graph with one outside by means of the single straight line, and to make measurements which define the production of the sound in a studio for making tape music, specifically, the choice of sound source, alterations of frequency, amplitude, timbre, duration, mixtures, loops, and splicing. More detailed information regarding my methods of producing tape music with special reference to the *Williams Mix* appear in the Avakian album referred to above.

Critics frequently cry, "Dada," after attending one of my concerts or hearing a lecture. Others bemoan the interest in Zen. One of the liveliest lectures I ever heard was given by Nancy Wilson Ross about 1937 at the Cornish School in Seattle. It was called *Zen Buddhism and Dada*. There is a connection possible between the two, but neither Dada nor Zen are fixed tangibles. They change; and in quite different ways in different places and times, they invigorate

actions. What was Dada in the twenties is now, with the exception of the work of Marcel Duchamp, just art. What I do, I do not wish blamed on Zen, though without my engagement with Zen (attendance at lectures by Alan Watts, D. T. Suzuki, reading of the literature) I doubt whether I would have done what I have. Recently, I am told, Alan Watts has questioned the relation between my work and Zen. I mention this in order to free Zen from any responsibility for my actions. I shall continue making them, however. I often point out that Dada nowadays has a space, an emptiness, in it that Dada formerly lacked. What, nowadays, New York-mid 20th century, is Zen?

II. from *Silence*, pages 260-1

Late in September of 1958, in a hotel in Stockholm, I set about writing this lecture for delivery a week later at the Brussels Fair. I recalled a remark made years earlier by David Tudor that I should give a talk that was nothing but stories. The idea was appealing, but I had never acted on it, and I decided to do so now.

When the talk was given in Brussels, it consisted of only thirty stories, without musical accompaniment. A recital by David Tudor and myself of music for two pianos followed the lecture. The full title was *Indeterminacy: New Aspect of Form in Instrumental and Electronic Music*. Karlheinz Stockhausen was in the audience. Later, when I was in Milan making the *Fontana Mix* at the Studio di Fonologia, I received a letter from him asking for a text that could be printed in *Die Reihe* No. 5. I sent the Brussels talk, and it was published.

The following spring, back in America, I delivered the talk again, at Teachers College, Columbia. For this occasion I wrote sixty more stories, and there was a musical accompaniment by David Tudor – material from the *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*, employing several radios as noise elements. Soon thereafter these ninety stories were brought out as a Folkways recording but for this the noise elements in the *Concert* were

tracks from the *Fontana Mix*.

In oral delivery of this lecture, I tell one story a minute. If it's a short one, I have to spread it out; when I come to a long one, I have to speak as rapidly as I can. The continuity of the stories as recorded was not planned. I simply made a list of all the stories I could think of and checked them off as I wrote them. Some that I remembered I was not able to write to my satisfaction, and so they were not used. My intention in putting the stories together in an unplanned way was to suggest that all things – stories, incidental sounds from the environment, and, by extension, beings – are related, and that this complexity is more evident when it is not oversimplified by an idea of relationship in one person's mind.

Since that recording, I have continued to write down stories as I have found them, so that the number is now far more than ninety. Most concern things that happened that stuck in my mind. Others I read in books and remembered – those, for instance, from Sri Ramakrishna and the literature surrounding Zen. Still others have been told me by friends – Merce Cunningham, Virgil Thomson, Betty Isaacs, and many more. Xenia, who figures in several of them, is Xenia Andreyevna Kashevaroff, to whom I was married for some ten years.

Some stories have been omitted since their substance forms part of other writings in this volume. Many of those that remain are to be found below. Others are scattered through the book, playing the function that odd bits of information play at the ends of columns in a small-town newspaper. I suggest that they be read in the manner and in the situations that one reads newspapers – even the metropolitan ones – when he does so purposelessly: that is, jumping here and there and responding at the same time to environmental events and sounds.

III. from A Year from Monday, page 133

Since the fall of 1965, I have been using eighteen or nineteen stories (their selection varying from one performance to another) as

the irrelevant accompaniment for Merce Cunningham's cheerful dance, *How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run*. Sitting downstage to one side at a table with microphone, ashtray, my texts, and a bottle of wine, I tell one story a minute, letting some minutes pass with no stories in them at all. Some critics say that I steal the show. But this is not possible, for stealing is no longer something one does. Many things, wherever one is, whatever one's doing, happen at once. They are in the air; they belong to all of us. Life is abundant. People are polyattentive. The dancers prove this: they tell me later backstage which stories they particularly enjoyed.

Most of the stories that are in this book are to be found below. (The first thirty formed the text of a lecture titled *Indeterminacy: New Aspect of Form in Instrumental and Electronic Music*, which I delivered at the Brussels Fair in 1958. They were printed under that title in *Die Reihe* No. 5 [German edition copyright © 1959 by Universal Edition A.G., English edition copyright © 1961 by Theodore Presser Company] and are here reprinted by permission. [*****](#)) Other stories appear elsewhere, giving, it is hoped, what adjacent articles in newspapers sometimes give: an occasion for changing one's mind.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Indeterminacy: New Aspect of Form in Instrumental and Electronic Music. Ninety Stories by John Cage, with Music. John Cage, reading; David Tudor, music. Folkways FT 3704, 1959. Reissued as Smithsonian/Folkways CD DF 40804/5, 1992.

Silence: lectures and writings by John Cage. Wesleyan University Press, Hanover, 1961, 1973.

A Year from Monday: new lectures and writings by John Cage. Wesleyan University Press, Hanover, 1967.

The 25-Year Retrospective Concert of the Music of John Cage. Various artists. Recorded in performance at Town Hall, New York, May 15, 1958. Reissued as Wergo WER 6247-2, 1994.

A note on permissions: I haven't tried to get permission for the inclusion of the various Cage texts on this site. This is due to lack of time, not lack of desire. I would feel much better with permission.

TECHNICAL NOTES

The stories are stored in plain text. A PHP script parses them and outputs HTML, spacing the story out to a fixed measure.

On these web pages, the stories and the Three Notes are copyright © John Cage; all other text and images are copyright © 1997-8 Eddie Kohler.

[An Overview](#) .
[How To Work It](#) .
[An Essay](#) .
[Three Notes by John Cage](#) .
[Bibliography](#) .
[Technical Notes](#)
[Main Indeterminacy page >>](#)

INDETERMINACY INDEX OF NAMES

Jack Arends 23	Ralph Ferrara 111 122 163	José Pijoan 147
Eryo(?) Ashihara 28	Mary Fleming 94	Poom Poom 94
Johann Sebastian Bach 51 91 149	Mr. Fleming 173	Marian Powys 108
Ludwig van Beethoven 45 51 149	God 12 29 33 97 134 145 146 149	Sri Ramakrishna 18 33 36 79 134
Carolyn Brown 14 159	Ernö Goldfinger 147	Robert Rauschenberg 156
Earle Brown 9 59 159	Grandmother (John's) 82 148	Mr. & Mrs. Reis 145
	Morris Graves 30	M. C. Richards 70

The Buddha [19](#)
[90](#) [103](#)

Richard Buhlig
[68](#) [69](#)

John Milton Cage
Sr. [37](#) [40](#) [68](#) [99](#)
[124](#) [125](#) [130](#) [140](#)
[148](#)

Lucretia Harvey
Cage [37](#) [40](#) [68](#)
[120](#) [125](#) [126](#) [128](#)
[130](#) [135](#) [140](#) [148](#)
[153](#) [180](#) [X2](#)

Marjorie Cage(?)
("Aunt Marge")
[57](#) [153](#)

Walter Cage(?)
("Uncle Walter")
[57](#) [153](#)

Xenia
Andreyevna
Kashevaroff Cage
[72](#) [73](#) [86](#) [177](#)

Joseph Campbell
[22](#) [129](#)

Helen Carter [164](#)

Chaos [27](#) [88](#)

Mrs. Clark [148](#)

Mrs. Ananda
Coomaraswamy
(Ratan Devi) [129](#)
[151](#) [154](#)

Alex & Gretchen
Corazzo [176](#)

Henry Cowell [76](#)
[122](#) [165](#)

Robinson Crusoe

[86](#) [133](#) [177](#)

Maurice Grosser
[171](#)

Peggy
Guggenheim [72](#)
[101](#)

Eugen Herrigel
[26](#)

Dr. Heyman [35](#)

Dick Higgins [97](#)

Betty Isaacs [66](#)
[158](#)

Charles Ives [153](#)

Max Jacob [166](#)

Phoebe James
("Aunt Phoebe")
[X5](#)

Jesus of Nazareth
[19](#)

Jasper Johns [156](#)

James Joyce [38](#)

Jack Kerouac [168](#)

Franz Kline [127](#)

Kwang-tse [21](#) [24](#)
[27](#) [88](#)

Minna Lederman
[153](#)

Richard Lippold
[102](#) [122](#)

Lois Long [81](#) [111](#)
[119](#) [122](#) [155](#) [163](#)
[167](#) [168](#)

[71](#) [148](#)

Mies van der
Rohe [104](#) [172](#)

Mr. Romanoff
[119](#) [120](#) [167](#)

Nancy Wilson
Ross [122](#)

Gita Sarabhai [79](#)

Erik Satie [51](#)

Pierre Schaeffer
[160](#)

Arnold
Schoenberg [44](#) [45](#)
[52](#) [62](#) [68](#) [147](#) [153](#)
[174](#) [X8](#)

Sonya Sekula [32](#)
[100](#) [145](#)

Danny Sherwood
[168](#)

Alexander Smith
[96](#) [114](#) [115](#) [122](#)

Gertrude Stein [38](#)

Karlheinz
Stockhausen [9](#) [14](#)
[28](#)

Doris Suckling
[132](#)

Peter Suckling
[132](#)

Daisetz Teitaro
Suzuki [34](#) [38](#) [83](#)
[84](#) [116](#)

W. Stephen
Thomas [96](#)

[53](#)

Merce

Cunningham [14](#)
[50](#) [110](#) [139](#) [159](#)
[169](#) [178](#)

Mr. Cunningham
(Merce's father)
[169](#) [178](#)

Mrs. Cunningham
(Merce's mother)
[169](#) [178](#)

Esther Dam [111](#)
[122](#)

Patsy Lynch
Davenport [51](#) [149](#)

Claude Debussy
[51](#)

Doris Dennison
[132](#)

Ratan Devi *see*
Mrs. Ananda
Coomaraswamy

The Devil [29](#)

Hazel Dreis [162](#)

Marcel Duchamp
[X1](#)

Meister Eckhart
[84](#) [146](#)

Jean Erdman [129](#)

Max Ernst [72](#)

Muriel Errera [95](#)

Morton Feldman
[9](#) [41](#) [42](#)

Tucker Madawick
[168](#)

Donald Malcomb
[131](#)

George Mantor
[150](#)

Clara Mayer [47](#)

Keith McGary
[110](#)

Charles
McIlvaine [122](#)

Colin McPhee
[118](#)

Guy G. Nearing
[81](#) [87](#) [119](#) [131](#)
[148](#) [155](#) [167](#) [179](#)

Isamu Noguchi [1](#)

Dorothy Norman
[90](#)

Peter Perfect [132](#)

Virgil Thomson
[171](#)

David Tudor [9](#) [11](#)
[12](#) [23](#) [39](#) [54](#) [63](#) [64](#)
[71](#) [106](#) [110](#) [121](#)
[144](#) [148](#) [159](#) [160](#)
[174](#)

Valentina Wasson
[97](#)

Alan Watts [129](#)

Anton von
Webern [14](#)

Adolph Weiss
[165](#)

Paul Williams
[173](#)

Christian Wolff [4](#)
[8](#) [9](#) [14](#) [91](#) [155](#)

One Yen [94](#)

Hidekazu
Yoshida [26](#)

Betsy Zogbaum
[108](#)

Dr. Zukor [148](#)

INDETERMINACY

INDEX OF FIRST LINES

A Chinaman (Kwang-tse tells) went to sleep and dreamt he was a butterfly. [24](#)

A composer friend of mine who spent some time in a mental rehabilitation center was encouraged to do a good deal of bridge playing. [56](#)

A crowded bus on the point of leaving Manchester for Stockport was found by its conductress to have one too many standees. [175](#)

A depressed young man came to see Hazel Dreis, the bookbinder. [162](#)

A lady carrying many packages got on a Third Avenue bus. [105](#)

A mother and son visited the Seattle Art Museum. [133](#)

A very dirty composer was attempting to explain to a friend how dirty a person was whom he had recently met. [58](#)

A woman who lived in the country was asked how cold it had been the previous winter. [92](#)

A young man in Japan arranged his circumstances so that he was able to travel to a distant island to study Zen with a certain Master for a three-year period. [98](#)

A young man who was concerned about his position in society and who was about to get married made his wife-to-be promise not to indulge further in kleptomania. [93](#)

About ten years ago down at Black Mountain College during a summer session, I arranged an amateur festival of the works of Erik Satie. [51](#)

After a long and arduous journey a young Japanese man arrived deep in a forest where the teacher of his choice was living in a small house he had made. [141](#)

After an hour or so in the woods looking for mushrooms, Dad said, "Well, we can always go and buy some real ones." [124](#)

After he finished translating into German the first lecture I gave at Darmstadt last September, Christian Wolff said, "The stories at the end are very good. [8](#)

Alan Watts gave a party that started in the afternoon, New Year's Eve, and lasted through the night and the following day. [129](#)

Alex and Gretchen Corazzo gave a great deal of thought to whether or not they would attend the funeral of a close friend. [176](#)

An Eskimo lady who couldn't speak or understand a word of English was once offered free transportation to the United States plus \$500 providing she would accompany a corpse that was being sent back to America for burial. [25](#)

An Indian lady invited me to dinner and said Dr. Suzuki would be there. [38](#)

An Indian woman who lived in the islands was required to come to Juneau to testify in a trial. [161](#)

An Irish hero whose mother had died was required by his stepmother to set out on a journey to an island beneath the sea and to bring back some golden apples he would find there. [61](#)

An old rabbi in Poland or some place thereabouts was walking in a thunderstorm from one village to another. [29](#)

Another monk was walking along when he came to a lady who was sitting by the path weeping. [16](#)

Anyway, he was explaining one day the meaning of a Chinese character — Yu, I believe it was — spending the whole time explaining it and yet its meaning as close as he could get to it in English was “unexplainable.” [X7](#)

Artists talk a lot about freedom. [41](#)

At Darmstadt when I wasn’t involved with music, I was in the woods looking for mushrooms. [123](#)

At the New School once I was substituting for Henry Cowell, teaching a class in Oriental music. [76](#)

Before studying Zen, men are men and mountains are mountains. [34](#)

Betty Isaacs told me that when she was in New Zealand she was informed that none of the mushrooms growing wild there was poisonous. [66](#)

Betty Isaacs went shopping at Altman’s. [158](#)

Certain tribes in Siberia trade several sheep for one *Amanita muscaria* and use the mushroom for orgiastic practices. [97](#)

Coming back from an all-Ives concert we’d attended in Connecticut, Minna Lederman said that by separating his insurance business from his composition of music (as completely as day is separated from night), Ives paid full respect to the American assumption that the artist has no place in society. [153](#)

“Cultivate in yourself a grand similarity with the chaos of the surrounding ether. [88](#)

Dad is an inventor. In 1912 his submarine had the world’s record for staying under water. [99](#)

David Tudor and I took a taxi down town. [121](#)

David Tudor and I went to Hilversum in Holland to make a recording for the Dutch radio. [144](#)

David Tudor and I went up to New Haven to do a television class for the New Haven State Teachers College. [63](#)

David Tudor gives the impression of not being overly fond of mushrooms. [106](#)

Doris Dennison had been born Doris Suckling. [132](#)

Dorothy Norman invited me to dinner in New York. [90](#)

Down in Greensboro, North Carolina, David Tudor and I gave an interesting program. [9](#)

During a counterpoint class at U.C.L.A., Schoenberg sent everybody to the blackboard. [44](#)

During my last year in high school, I found out about the Liberal Catholic Church. [40](#)

During recent years Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki has done a great deal of lecturing at Columbia University. [83](#)

During that Greensboro concert, David Tudor and I got a little mixed up. [11](#)

Each one of us has his own stomach; it is not the stomach of another. [122](#)

Earle Brown and I spent several months splicing magnetic tape together. [59](#)

“Elizabeth, it is a beautiful day. [108](#)

Four years ago or maybe five, I was talking with Hidekazu Yoshida. [26](#)

Franz Kline was about to have the first showing of his black and white paintings at the Egan Gallery. [127](#)

Generally speaking, suicide is considered a sin. [36](#)

George Mantor had an iris garden, which he improved each year by throwing out the commoner varieties. [150](#)

Have you ever noticed how you read a newspaper? [91](#)

He is a large man and falls asleep easily. [42](#)

However, to come back to my story. [10](#)

I am not a good historian. [X10](#)

I dug up some hog peanuts and boiled them with butter, salt, and pepper for Bob Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. [156](#)

I enrolled in a class in mushroom identification. [60](#)

I have a friend whose actions resemble overwhelming inspirations. [X3](#)

I never had a hat, never wore one, but recently was given a brown suede duck-hunting hat. [X4](#)

I once had a job washing dishes at the Blue Bird Tea Room in Carmel, California. [80](#)

I took a number of mushrooms to Guy Nearing, and asked him to name them for me. [87](#)

I was arguing with Mother. I turned to Dad. [130](#)

I was asked to play my *Sonatas and Interludes* in the home of an elderly lady in Burnsville, North Carolina, the only person thereabouts who owned a grand piano. [157](#)

I was never psychoanalyzed. I'll tell you how it happened. [79](#)

I was on an English boat going from Siracusa in Sicily to Tunis in North Africa. [85](#)

I was surprised when I came into Mother's room in the nursing home to see that the TV set was on.

[135](#)

I was twelve years old. I got out my bicycle and rode over to KFWB. [136](#)

I went to a concert upstairs in Town Hall. [49](#)

I went to hear Krishnamurti speak. [170](#)

In 1949 Merce Cunningham and I went to Europe on a Dutch boat. [50](#)

In 1952 I was asked to write a manifesto about new music. [67](#)

In 1954, when I went to Europe, I no sooner arrived in Paris than I noticed that the city was covered with posters publicizing a mushroom exhibition that was being held in the Botanical Gardens. [48](#)

In 1960 I received a letter from a university president giving me an appointment for the following academic year. [128](#)

In connection with my current studies with Duchamp, it turns out that I'm a poor chessplayer. [X1](#)

In New York, when I was setting out to write the orchestral parts of my *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* which was performed September 19, 1958, in Cologne, I visited each player, found out what he could do with his instrument, discovered with him other possibilities, and then subjected all these findings to chance operations, ending up with a part that was quite indeterminate of its performance. [17](#)

In the poetry contest in China by which the Sixth Patriarch of Zen Buddhism was chosen, there were two poems. [46](#)

In Zen they say: If something is boring after two minutes, try it for four. [75](#)

It was a Wednesday. I was in the sixth grade. [37](#)

It was after I got to Boston that I went into the anechoic chamber at Harvard University. [6](#)

Just before Christmas I visited my mother who lives in a nursing home. [X2](#)

Just before I moved to the country, I called up the Museum of Natural History and asked a man there what poisonous snakes were to be found in Rockland County. [173](#)

Just the other day I went to the dentist. [35](#)

Kwang-tse points out that a beautiful woman who gives pleasure to men serves only to frighten the fish when she jumps in the water. [21](#)

Last October when it was terribly dry I went to visit the Browns in Rochester. [96](#)

Lois Long (the Lois Long who designs textiles), Christian Wolff, and I climbed Slide Mountain along with Guy Nearing and the Flemings, including Willie. [155](#)

Lois Long, Esther Dam, Ralph Ferrara, and I were in the Haverstraw cemetery gathering *Tricholoma personatum*. [111](#)

M. C. Richards and David Tudor invited several friends to dinner. [71](#)

M. C. Richards went to see the Bolshoi Ballet. [70](#)

Merce Cunningham's father delights in gardening. [178](#)

Merce Cunningham's parents were going to Seattle to see their other son, Jack. [169](#)

Mies van der Rohe said, "The least is the most." [104](#)

Morris Graves introduced Xenia and me to a miniature island in Puget Sound at Deception Pass. [86](#)

Morris Graves used to have an old Ford in Seattle. [30](#)

Mr. Ralph Ferrara drives a Studebaker Lark which is mashed at both ends. [163](#)

Mr. Romanoff is in the mushroom class. [167](#)

Mr. Romanoff is sixty years old. [119](#)

Mr. Romanoff says the Sunday field trips are better than going to church. [120](#)

Mrs. Coomaraswamy told another story about business methods in India. [154](#)

Muriel Errera's house is next to the Royal Palace in Brussels. [95](#)

Music and mushrooms: two words next to one another in many dictionaries. [113](#)

My grandmother was sometimes very deaf and at other times, particularly when someone was talking about her, not deaf at all. [82](#)

Now and then I come across an article on that rock garden in Japan where there's just a space of sand and a few rocks in it. [28](#)

Now giving lecture on Japanese poetry. [78](#)

On another occasion, Schoenberg asked a girl in his class to go to the piano and play the first movement of a Beethoven sonata, which was afterwards to be analyzed. [45](#)

On Christmas Day, Mother said, "I've listened to your record several times. [180](#)

On the way back from New Haven we were driving along the Housatonic. [64](#)

On Yap Island phosphorescent fungi are used as hair ornaments for moonlight dances. [112](#)

Once Bill de Kooning gave a lecture in Philadelphia. [43](#)

Once I was visiting my Aunt Marge. [57](#)

Once over in Amsterdam a Dutch musician said to me, "It must be very difficult for you in America to write music. [77](#)

Once when I was a child in Los Angeles I went downtown on the streetcar. [31](#)

Once when I was in Ann Arbor with Alexander Smith, I said that one of the things I liked about botany was that it was free of the jealousies and selfish feelings that plague the arts, that I would for

that reason, if for no other, given my life to live over again, be a botanist rather than a musician. [115](#)

Once when I was to give a talk at Columbia Teachers College, I asked Joseph Campbell whether I should say something (I forget now what it was I was thinking of saying). [22](#)

Once when Lois Long was on a mushroom walk led by Guy Nearing, a mushroom was found that was quite rare. [81](#)

Once when several of us were driving up to Boston, we stopped at a roadside restaurant for lunch. [3](#)

One day down at Black Mountain College, David Tudor was eating his lunch. [54](#)

One day I asked Schoenberg what he thought about the international situation. [52](#)

One day when I was across the hall visiting Sonya Sekula, I noticed that she was painting left-handed. [100](#)

One day when I was studying with Schoenberg, he pointed out the eraser on his pencil and said, "This end is more important than the other." [174](#)

One day when the windows were open, Christian Wolff played one of his pieces at the piano. [4](#)

One day while I was composing, the telephone rang. [53](#)

One evening I was walking along Hollywood Boulevard, nothing much to do. [5](#)

One evening when I was still living at Grand Street and Monroe, Isamu Noguchi came to visit me. [1](#)

One of Mies van der Rohe's pupils, a girl, came to him and said, "I have difficulty studying with you because you don't leave any room for self-expression." [172](#)

One of Suzuki's books ends with the poetic text of a Japanese monk describing his attainment of enlightenment. [89](#)

One spring morning I knocked on Sonya Sekula's door. [32](#)

One summer day, Merce Cunningham and I took eight children to Bear Mountain Park. [139](#)

One Sunday morning, Mother said to Dad, "Let's go to church." [140](#)

One winter David Tudor and I were touring in the Middle West. [110](#)

Patsy Davenport heard my Folkways record. [149](#)

Peck says that if things are doing well in gardens, one can expect, in the woods, fields, and waste places, to find wild plants doing equally well. [109](#)

Peggy Guggenheim, Santomaso, and I were in a Venetian restaurant. [101](#)

People are always saying that the East is the East and the West is the West and you have to keep from mixing them up. [19](#)

Pointing out the five cars in her front yard, the cleaning lady said they were wrecks her son had accomplished during the past year, that he planned to put parts of them together to make a single usable car for her. [138](#)

Question or not (that is to say, whether what I will do will answer the situation), my problems have become social rather than musical. [18](#)

Ramakrishna spent an afternoon explaining that everything is God. [134](#)

Richard Lippold called up and said, “Would you come to dinner and bring the *I-Ching*?” [102](#)

Schoenberg always complained that his American pupils didn’t do enough work. [62](#)

Several men, three as a matter of fact, were out walking one day, and as they were walking along and talking one of them noticed another man standing on a hill ahead of them. [X9](#)

Some years ago on May 30, Mary Fleming noticed a strange amanita growing near her house in Upper Nyack. [94](#)

Somehow I got through the lecture, and the day came to show my work to Buhlig. [69](#)

Sometime after my father’s death, I was talking with Mother. [125](#)

Sonya Sekula said, “Why don’t you come with me to the Reises’? [145](#)

Standing in line, Max Jacob said, gives one the opportunity to practice patience. [166](#)

Staying in India and finding the sun unbearable, Mrs. Coomaraswamy decided to shop for a parasol. [151](#)

The day after I finally won the Italian TV quiz on mushrooms, I received anonymously in the mail Volume II of a French book on mushrooms that had been published in Germany. [107](#)

The day before yesterday towards the middle of the afternoon I noticed I was running out of matches. [X6](#)

The first time the mushroom class was given at the New School, many people signed up for it. [117](#)

The Four Mists of Chaos, the North, the East, the West, and the South, went to visit Chaos himself. [27](#)

The question of leading tones came up in the class in experimental composition that I give at the New School. [103](#)

Then we had to go back to New Haven to do the TV class over again. [65](#)

There was a lady in Suzuki’s class who said once, “I have great difficulty reading the sermons of Meister Eckhart, because of all the Christian imagery.” [84](#)

There was an American man from Seattle who went to Japan to buy screens. [13](#)

There was an international conference of philosophers in Hawaii on the subject of Reality. [116](#)

There’s a street in Stony Point in a lowland near the river where a number of species of mushrooms grow abundantly. [55](#)

This summer I’m going to give a class in mushroom identification at the New School for Social Research. [47](#)

Tucker Madawick is seventeen years old. [168](#)

Two monks came to a stream. One was Hindu, the other Zen. [15](#)

Two wooden boxes containing Oriental spices and foodstuffs arrived from India. [39](#)

Virgil Thomson and Maurice Grosser were driving across the United States. [171](#)

We are all part and parcel of a way of life that puts trust in the almighty dollar — so much so that we feel ourselves slipping when we hear that on the international market the West German mark inspires more confidence. [152](#)

We have the impression that we're learning nothing, but as the years pass we recognize more and more mushrooms and we find that the names that go with them begin to stick in our heads. [131](#)

We've now played the *Winter Music* quite a number of times. [14](#)

Well, since Darmstadt, I've written two pieces. [20](#)

What was it actually that made me choose music rather than painting? [X5](#)

When Colin McPhee found out that I was interested in mushrooms, he said, "If you find the morel next spring, call me up, even if you only find one. [118](#)

When David Tudor and I walked into the hotel where we were invited to stay in Brussels, there were large envelopes for each of us at the desk; they were full of programs, tickets, invitations, special passes to the Fair, and general information. [160](#)

When David Tudor, Merce Cunningham, Carolyn and Earle Brown, and I arrived in Brussels a year or so ago for programs at the World's Fair, we found out that Earle Brown's *Indices* was not going to be played since the orchestra found it too difficult. [159](#)

When I came to New York to study with Adolph Weiss and Henry Cowell, I took a job in the Brooklyn YWCA washing walls. [165](#)

When I first moved to the country, David Tudor, M. C. Richards, the Weinribs, and I all lived in the same small farmhouse. [148](#)

When I first went to Paris, I did so instead of returning to Pomona College for my junior year. [147](#)

When I got the letter from Jack Arends asking me to lecture at the Teachers College, I wrote back and said I'd be glad to, that all he had to do was let me know the date. [23](#)

When I told David Tudor that this talk on music was nothing but a series of stories, he said, "Don't fail to put in some benedictions." [12](#)

When I was growing up in California there were two things that everyone assumed were good for you. [142](#)

When I was in high school I went out, as they say, for oratory. [74](#)

When Sri Ramakrishna was asked why, if God is good, is there evil in the world, he replied, "To thicken the plot." [33](#)

When the depression began, I was in Europe. [68](#)

When the New York Philharmonic played my *Atlas Eclipticalis* with *Winter Music* (*Electronic*

Version), the audience more or less threw propriety to the winds. [126](#)

When Valerie Bettis first got into the movies, someone interviewed her, asked how it felt to be successful. [137](#)

When Vera Williams first noticed that I was interested in wild mushrooms, she told her children not to touch any of them because they were all deadly poisonous. [143](#)

When Xenia and I came to New York from Chicago, we arrived in the bus station with about twenty-five cents. [72](#)

While hunting morels with Alexander Smith in the woods near Ann Arbor, I mentioned having found quantities of *Lactarius deliciosus* in the woods in northern Vermont. [114](#)

While I was studying the frozen food department of Gristede's one day, Mrs. Elliott Carter came up and said, "Hello, John. [164](#)

While Meister Eckhart was alive, several attempts were made to excommunicate him. [146](#)

While we were sitting on top of Slide Mountain looking out towards Cornell and Wittenberg and the Ashokan Reservoir beyond, Guy Nearing said he had known two women who were bitten by copperheads. [179](#)

Xenia never wanted a party to end. [177](#)

Xenia told me once that when she was a child in Alaska, she and her friends had a club and there was only one rule: No silliness. [73](#)

Years ago in Chicago I was asked to accompany two dancers who were providing entertainment at a business women's dance party given in a hall of the YWCA. [7](#)

Years ago when I was studying with Arnold Schoenberg someone asked him to explain his technique of twelve-tone composition. [X8](#)

You probably know the one about the two monks, but I'll tell it anyway. [2](#)

INDETERMINACY INDEX OF LAST LINES

"A few blocks down the street." [157](#)

A few weeks later, KNX took the program off the air. [136](#)

"After all, Nature is better than Art." [123](#)

After hearing all those stories about your childhood, I keep asking myself, 'Where was it that I failed?' " [180](#)

“Am I a butterfly dreaming that I am a man?” [24](#)

“An old shoe would look beautiful in this room.” [1](#)

And how did you know I was interested in mushrooms?” [139](#)

And in a lecture I gave at Illinois, I added, “To life, period.” [18](#)

And meanwhile all the flashing colored lights associated with juke boxes worked perfectly, making the whole scene glamorous. [7](#)

Another, noticing fungi in Bavarian and Milanese markets, sent post cards. [117](#)

Apparently someone forgot to turn something on. [63](#)

At one point in his lecture, when the speaker’s eye fell on this girl in recognition, she opened her coat, showing herself to be stark naked. [93](#)

At the end of seven days, Kwang-tse tells us, Chaos died. [27](#)

At the same time, what concerns me now is quantity. [104](#)

But consider, my dear, how dull life would be without a little uncertainty in it.” [108](#)

But I have a very serious question to ask you: How do you feel about Bach?” [51](#)

Christian Wolff said he’d be glad to, but that it wasn’t really necessary, since the sounds of the environment were in no sense an interruption of those of the music. [4](#)

“Come, dear, mother doesn’t want you to see these things.” [133](#)

Coming to the casket, they discovered they were at the wrong funeral. [176](#)

Did they then or do they now have a place in American society? [152](#)

“Did you hear that?” they will say. [47](#)

“Do they know you’re a Zen Buddhist?” [128](#)

“Do you have to have a tooth pulled out in order to make mistakes?” [45](#)

“Don’t be a square. Read Kerouac.” [168](#)

“Don’t mention that man’s name in my house.” [115](#)

Donald Malcomb finds the dangers of lion hunting largely imaginary, those of mushroom hunting perfectly real. [131](#)

Eventually one discovers that it’s not boring at all but very interesting. [75](#)

Every now and then I managed to tell the Lippolds, whose guest I was, not to worry, that I wasn’t going to die. [122](#)

Everything, it turned out, referred precisely to the subjects with which Joseph Campbell was

concerned, including the number in the upper right-hand corner. [129](#)

For what if we do it — give them up, that is — what do we have left? [149](#)

For, it is said, the Buddha's enlightenment penetrated in every direction to every point in space and time. [103](#)

"Franz, I might have known you'd find the easy way." [127](#)

"Get out!" she screamed, "get out and never come back!" [111](#)

Getting out of her car and seeing him lying on the sidewalk, Mrs. Cunningham said, "What are you doing there?" [178](#)

"Ha, ha! Your mushrooms are gone." [55](#)

He came to the conclusion that the mushroom, nothing else that had been eaten or drunk, was indeed responsible. [96](#)

"He has dirt between his fingers the way you and I have between our toes." [58](#)

He led him to a place where the water was shallow and they waded across. [15](#)

He named a small town in Ohio where she lives to this day. [25](#)

He then dropped everything, ran through the forest to his teacher, and said, "Thank you." [141](#)

He then wrote back that I had been vaccinated, and to prove it he sent along a certificate with his signature. [85](#)

He took me into the house and lectured me for two hours on the importance of time, especially for one who proposed devoting his life to the art of music. [69](#)

He went on to say that people go through their entire lives thinking that things are that when they are actually this, and that these mistakes are necessarily made with the very things with which they are the most familiar. [114](#)

"Hell," he said, "thawashlashyear." [105](#)

Hellebore has pleated leaves. Skunk cabbage does not. [148](#)

How is it I didn't notice it during the winters before I met Keith McGary? [110](#)

How will I do this? That is the question. [17](#)

However, all Graves did was eat the hamburger, pay his bill, get back in the car, roll up the carpet, and drive off. [30](#)

However, he said he'd like to see some of my compositions, and we made an appointment for the following week. [68](#)

However, I have a redeeming quality: I was gifted with a sunny disposition. [X1](#)

However, just before the performance, the Pope died and everything was canceled. [159](#)

However, many in the audience were dozing off, and some were talking to their neighbors. [48](#)

“I can’t come next Sunday because it’s Rosh Hashana, and I’ve arranged with my mother that if I stay home on Rosh Hashana, I’ll be able to come on Yom Kippur.” [120](#)

I do hope you can explode that idea.” [8](#)

“I don’t know anything about her coat; I didn’t take it.” [145](#)

I don’t know how many years it’s been, but every now and then, when I go out, I hesitate at the door, wondering whether a cigarette’s still burning somewhere in the house. [X10](#)

I have it written down right here in my notes.” [170](#)

“I just don’t have any more time to waste talking with you. Good-by.” [169](#)

“I know you’re very busy: I won’t take a minute of your time.” [32](#)

I love this machine much more than I do your Uncle Walter.” [57](#)

I noticed that the music that came out accompanied the swimmers, though they didn’t hear it. [3](#)

I stopped, since he is the pianist he is, and I just sat there, listening. [11](#)

“I think it’s a good idea. Why don’t you do it?” [162](#)

“I think there’s just the right amount.” [49](#)

I was just getting interested.” [76](#)

I’m always first in the parking lot.” [163](#)

“I’m sure you could sell it to a star in Hollywood,” the Abbot replied. [13](#)

“If you don’t know, why do you ask?” [54](#)

“If you think I came to the loony bin to learn to play bridge, you’re crazy.” [56](#)

In gratitude, he bowed ceremoniously, spoke respectfully, and took his leave. [88](#)

In spite of these obstacles, we went on doing what we were doing for about five more months, twelve hours a day, until the work was finished. [59](#)

“In that case I will devote my life to beating my head against that wall.” [147](#)

“Isn’t it strange that having come all the way from Japan I spend my time explaining to you that which is not to be explained?” [X7](#)

“It reminded me of the work of Mondrian.” [144](#)

It took me a year to finish reading it. [79](#)

It took me much longer, about thirty-five years in fact, to learn that orange juice was not good for me either. [142](#)

It was a week or so later, while I was walking in the woods looking for mushrooms, that it all dawned on me. [83](#)

It's downstairs and there are only two of us for each floor and we keep running back and forth." [64](#)

"It's not fresh, but it's fruit." [65](#)

"John, are you ready for the second coming of the Lord?" [82](#)

Karlheinz Stockhausen once told me — we were in Copenhagen — "I demand two things from a composer: invention and that he astonish me." [14](#)

Kwang-tse points out that a beautiful woman who gives pleasure to men serves only to frighten the fish when she jumps in the water. [21](#)

"Life is the sum total of all the little things that happen." Mr. Nearing smiled. [167](#)

Mute, Meister Eckhart was excommunicated. [146](#)

"My mother will hear about this." [119](#)

My signature followed and that was all there was to it. [67](#)

Next day when I visited her, she was sitting on the floor, painting with difficulty, for she was holding the brush between two toes of her left foot. [100](#)

"No difference, only the feet are a little bit off the ground." [34](#)

No sooner had he killed the horse than, lo and behold, it turned into a prince, who, except for the acquiescence of the hero, would have had to remain a miserable shaggy nag. [61](#)

"No, I'll wait for you here." [140](#)

"Nonsense: there are as many hours in a day as you put into it." [62](#)

Not at all the way one reads Bach in public, but precisely the way one reads in public *Duo II for Pianists* by Christian Wolff. [91](#)

"Now that everything's so easy, there's so much to do." Then he went back to sleep. [42](#)

"Now that I'm enlightened, I'm just as miserable as ever." [89](#)

"Now, John, you know perfectly well that I've never enjoyed having a good time." [125](#)

"Oh," he said, "in that case there's no problem at all." [50](#)

On Yap Island phosphorescent fungi are used as hair ornaments for moonlight dances. [112](#)

Once on the boat coming over, and once in the hotel here in Juneau." [161](#)

One moves at any time from one to another of these positions changing thereby the reference of the points to the parallel lines. [20](#)

One of the girls said, "Listen." [10](#)

One thing is certain: Poom Poom is sterile. [94](#)

Originally a dirty gray, it had become black, and, as she told me, it was divine, improving the flavor of whatever it touched. [66](#)

Peck says that if things are doing well in gardens, one can expect, in the woods, fields, and waste places, to find wild plants doing equally well. [109](#)

“Perhaps they were good Buddhists.” [106](#)

Peter Suckling had been born Peter Perfect. [132](#)

“Put her down. I did two hours ago.” [2](#)

Ramakrishna said that the child had not sinned, he had simply corrected an error; he had been born by mistake. [36](#)

“Remember the early Christian Gnostic statement, ‘Split the stick and there is Jesus!’ ” [19](#)

Richard Lippold still does not see eye to eye with me on the subject of chance operations. [102](#)

She said she’d seen a small painting worth a certain amount, measured it, measured hers (which was much larger), multiplied, and that was that. [153](#)

Shortly, Xenia and I were alone. [177](#)

Somewhere in Virginia, I lost my hat. [X4](#)

“Son John, your mother is always right, even when she’s wrong.” [130](#)

Soon, you’ll find, you remember it.” [81](#)

Standing in line, Max Jacob said, gives one the opportunity to practice patience. [166](#)

Suzuki said, “In every sense.” [116](#)

“That difficulty will disappear.” [84](#)

That evening the possibility of lighting a cigarette on an electric stove was mentioned, an action with which I am fully familiar. [X6](#)

“That is none of your business.” [X8](#)

That is, one may choose the kind of point he wishes. There is no eraser. [174](#)

That that was all right as far as I was concerned. [9](#)

“That voice was God’s voice.” [134](#)

That we have no ears to hear the music the spores shot off from basidia make obliges us to busy ourselves microphonically. [113](#)

“That’ll be a relief.” [23](#)

That's the only way we've found in business to keep ourselves interested." [151](#)

"That's what I call self-expression." [172](#)

"That's why I love philosophy: no one wins." [38](#)

The aurora borealis, which neither of them had ever seen before, was playing in the northern sky. [155](#)

The Buddha died a natural death." [90](#)

The cup still belongs to the school. [74](#)

The Devil is on Earth and doing his work beautifully!" [29](#)

The driver said he'd had an operation some years before and that while his flesh was dead and numb, before the wound healed, he was able to predict weather changes by the pain he felt in the scar, that when the flesh lost its numbness and was, so to speak, back to normal, he could no longer know in advance anything about changes in weather. [121](#)

The expression on his face was absolutely beatific. [70](#)

The garden, it turned out, belonged to the man who collected his garbage. [150](#)

The housekeeper said that each year the wall-washer, no matter who he was, was so accused, always by the same lady. [165](#)

"The important thing to do is to develop foreign trade." [52](#)

The low one was your blood in circulation." [6](#)

The man answered, "I just stand." [X9](#)

The older monk replied, "Just a dip. No why." [46](#)

"The past does not influence me. I influence it." [43](#)

The pen was tearing the paper to shreds and splattering ink all over the window and on the advertisement, which, nevertheless, remained legible. [5](#)

The project was not even mentioned, that day or any succeeding day. [37](#)

Then one more of us will get a chance to sell what he has, and so on." [154](#)

"There are so many Latin names rolling around in my head that sometimes the wrong one comes out." [87](#)

"There certainly is. It makes good sense." [X2](#)

"There were only three or four days when we had to stay in bed all day to keep warm." [92](#)

There'll be sweet-smelling flowers, brightly colored birds, people swimming in the surf, and (I'll bet you a nickel) a rainbow at some point during the day in the sky. [97](#)

"There, that'll give you something to cry about." [16](#)

They both got up and left the hall. [80](#)

They fly into one's head like birds. Is that what Dad meant? [99](#)

"They were just the same after as before," he said, "except they were a little more cranky." [179](#)

They're not free: they're fighting over bits of food." [41](#)

This is how I keep you entertained." [71](#)

To make me feel better, he offered a free root beer. I said, "No, thank you." [31](#)

Towards the end of the second day, the student was enlightened. [98](#)

Unpacking her parcels, she discovered the dime in the bottom of the shopping bag. [158](#)

Virgil Thomson said, "You see what I mean?" [171](#)

"We are," she said, "but we agree with you completely." [101](#)

We're going to save you for Robinson Crusoe." [53](#)

"Well, I have a hole in my sock, and, if you like, I'll take my shoes off." [35](#)

"Well, I specialize in the jelly fungi; I just give the fleshy fungi a whirl." [60](#)

"Well, I thought I heard some hissing." [173](#)

"Well, this is the bus to Stockport. Are you getting on or not?" [175](#)

"Well, we can always go and buy some real ones." [124](#)

"What are you reading that for? That's finished." [107](#)

"What do you mean? I've always been a success." [137](#)

"What is the principle underlying all of the solutions?" [44](#)

When I arrived with the frying pans in the candle-lit dining room, everyone was eating dessert. [95](#)

When I saw him after he got back, he said he'd had boiled peanuts again and that they tasted very much like hog peanuts. [156](#)

When she served dinner, they all burst into tears. [143](#)

When she told me this I was surprised, because I thought she was committed in the first place, and because I myself feel more committed the more diverse and multiplied my interests and actions become. [X3](#)

When Sri Ramakrishna was asked why, if God is good, is there evil in the world, he replied, "To thicken the plot." [33](#)

"Whenever you want to get at that box of spices you have, let me know. I'll help you." [39](#)

“Where is the ‘should’?” [22](#)

Why are you so sad, stream? Baby? [78](#)

Would you tell him, please, how much I loved it?” [126](#)

Xenia told me once that when she was a child in Alaska, she and her friends had a club and there was only one rule: No silliness. [73](#)

“Yes, I found them stuffed around everywhere.” [164](#)

“Yes,” he said, “like they say in the sutras: ‘This is not idle talk, but the highest of truths’.” [12](#)

Yoshida told me there was one thing the author failed to point out, that is, there lives in Japan at the present time a highly esteemed archer who has never yet been able to hit the bull’s eye even in broad daylight. [26](#)

You are so far away from the centers of tradition.” [77](#)

“You come all this way and then when you get here there’s nothing to see.” [86](#)

“You don’t expect me, do you, to come all that way for two little mushrooms?” [118](#)

You have only one mother and father.” [40](#)

You know it’s very hard to come out of a wreck with undamaged headlights.” [138](#)

“You should have said, ‘the tie I was wearing yesterday’.” [28](#)

“You’re in the wrong profession.” [X5](#)

“You’re not fussy about music either.” [135](#)

“You’ve made a mistake and I am able to correct it, but what I’d like to know is: How many others have you also invited?” [160](#)

Your room’s ready. Come right over.” [72](#)

INDETERMINACY

190 ZEN STORIES

1

One evening when I was
still living at Grand
Street and Monroe,
Isamu Noguchi
came to visit me.

There was nothing in
the room (no
furniture, no
paintings).

The
floor was covered,
wall to wall,
with cocoa
matting.

The
windows had no curtains,
no drapes.

Isamu Noguchi
said, "An old
shoe would look
beautiful in this room."

Source

Transcript of story 1, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 0'00" to 1'00"

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 0'00" to 1'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.115 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen)

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.133

You probably know the one about the
 two monks, but I'll tell
 it anyway. They were
 walking along one day when they came
 to a stream where a young lady was
 waiting, hoping that
 someone would help her across.

Without hesitating,
 one of the monks picked her up
 and carried her across,
 putting her down safely on the
 other side.

The two monks continued
 walking along, and after
 some time, the second
 one, unable to restrain
 himself, said to the
 first, "You know we're
 not allowed to touch women.

Why did you carry that
 woman across the stream?"

The first monk replied,
 "Put her down.

I did two hours ago."

Source

Transcript of story 2, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 1'00" to 2'00" ([shown](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 1'00" to 2'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.115 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.133 ([shown](#))

Once when several of us
 were driving up to
 Boston, we
 stopped at a roadside
 restaurant for lunch.
 There
 was a table near a corner
 window where we
 could all look out
 and see a pond.
 People were
 swimming and diving.
 There were
 special arrangements for sliding
 into the water.
 Inside the
 restaurant was a juke box.
 Somebody put a dime in.
 I
 noticed that the music that
 came out accompanied the
 swimmers,
 though they didn't hear it.

Source

Transcript of story 3, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 2'00" to 3'00" ([shown](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 2'00" to 3'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.115 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.133 ([shown](#))

One day when the windows were
 open, Christian
 Wolff played one of his pieces
 at the piano.
 Sounds of traffic,
 boat horns,
 were heard not only
 during the silences in the
 music, but,
 being louder,
 were more easily heard
 than the piano sounds themselves.
 Afterward,
 someone asked
 Christian Wolff to play the
 piece again with the windows
 closed.
 Christian Wolff said he'd be
 glad to, but that
 it wasn't really necessary,
 since the sounds
 of the environment were
 in no sense an
 interruption of those of the music.

Source

Transcript of story 4, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 3'00" to 4'00" ([shown](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 3'00" to 4'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.115 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.133 ([shown](#))

One evening I was walking along
 Hollywood Boulevard, nothing
 much to do. I stopped
 and looked in the window of a
 stationery shop. A
 mechanized pen was suspended in space
 in such a way that, as a
 mechanized roll of paper passed by it,
 the pen went through the
 motions of the same penmanship
 exercises I had learned as a child
 in the third grade.
 Centrally placed in the window was an
 advertisement explaining the
 mechanical reasons for the perfection
 of the operation of the suspended
 mechanical pen. I was
 fascinated, for everything
 was going wrong. The
 pen was tearing the paper to shreds
 and splattering ink all over the
 window and on the advertisement,
 which,
 nevertheless, remained legible.

Source

Transcript of story 5, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 4'00" to 5'00" ([see this variant](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 4'00" to 5'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.115 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.134 ([see this variant](#))

It was after I got to Boston
 that I went into the
 anechoic chamber at Harvard
 University.
 Anybody who knows me knows
 this story.
 I am constantly telling it.
 Anyway,
 in that silent room,
 I heard two sounds,
 one high and
 one low.
 Afterward I asked the engineer in
 charge why, if the room
 was so silent, I
 had heard two sounds.
 He said,
 "Describe them." I did.
 He said,
 "The high one
 was your nervous system
 in operation.
 The low one was
 your blood in circulation."

Source

Transcript of story 6, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 5'00" to 6'00" ([shown](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 5'00" to 6'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.115 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.134 ([shown](#))

Years ago in Chicago I was asked to accompany two dancers who were providing entertainment at a business women's dance party given in a hall of the YWCA. After the entertainment,

the juke box was turned on so everybody could dance: there was no orchestra (they were saving money). However,

the goings-on became very expensive.

One of the arms in the juke box moved a selected record on to the turntable. The playing arm moved to an extraordinarily elevated position. After a slight pause it

came down rapidly and heavily on the record,

smashing it. Another arm came into the situation and removed the debris.

The first arm moved another selected record on to the turntable. The playing arm moved up again, paused, came down quickly, smashing the record.

The debris was removed by the third arm.

And so on. And meanwhile all the flashing colored lights associated with juke boxes worked perfectly, making the whole scene glamorous.

Source

Transcript of story 7, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 6'00" to 7'00" ([shown](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 6'00" to 7'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.116 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.134 ([shown](#))

After he
 finished translating into
 German the first lecture
 I gave
 at Darmstadt last
 September,
 Christian Wolff said,
 “The end stories are at
 the very good.
 But they’ll
 probably say
 you’re naïve.
 I do
 hope you can
 explode
 that idea.”

Source

Transcript of story 8, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 7'00" to 8'00" ([shown](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 7'00" to 8'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.116 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From “How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run”, [A Year from Monday](#), p.134 ([shown](#))

Down in Greensboro, North Carolina, David Tudor and I gave an interesting program. We played five pieces three times each. They were the *Klavierstück XI* by Karlheinz Stockhausen, Christian Wolff's *Duo for Pianists*, Morton Feldman's *Intermission #6*, Earle Brown's *4 Systems*, and my *Variations*. All of these pieces are composed in various ways that have in common indeterminacy of performance. Each performance is unique, as interesting to the composers and performers as to the audience. Everyone, in fact, that is, becomes a listener. I explained all this to the audience before the musical program began. I pointed out that one is accustomed to thinking of a piece of music as an object suitable for understanding and subsequent evaluation, but that here the situation was quite other. These pieces, I said, are not objects, but processes, essentially purposeless. Naturally, then, I had to explain the purpose of having something be purposeless. I said that sounds were just sounds, and that if they weren't just sounds that we would (I was of course using the editorial we) — we would do something about it in the next composition. I said that since the sounds were sounds, this gave people hearing them the chance to be people, centered within themselves, where they actually are, not off artificially in the distance as they are accustomed to be, trying to figure out what is being said by some artist by means of sounds. Finally I said that the purpose of this purposeless music would be achieved if people learned to listen. That when they listened they might discover that they preferred the sounds of everyday life to the ones they would presently hear in the musical program. That that was all right as far as I was concerned.

Source

Transcript of story 9, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 8'00" to 9'00" ([see this variant](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 8'00" to 9'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.116 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.134 ([shown](#))

However, to come
back to my story.
A girl in the
college there came back backstage
afterward and told me that
something marvelous had happened.
I said,
“What?” She said,
“One of the music majors
is thinking for the first
time in her life.” Then
at dinner (it had been an
afternoon concert),
the Head of the Music
Department told me that as
he was leaving the concert
hall, three of
his students called,
saying, “Come
over here.” He went
over. “What
is it?” he said.
One of the girls
said, “Listen.”

Source

Transcript of story 10, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 9'00" to 10'00" ([see this variant](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 9'00" to 10'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.117 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From “How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run”, [A Year from Monday](#), p.135 ([shown](#))

During that Greensboro concert,
David Tudor and
I got a little mixed up.

He began to
play one piece
and I
began to play a completely
different one.

I stopped,
since he is
the pianist he
is,
and I
just sat there,
listening.

Source

Transcript of story 11, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 10'00" to 11'00" ([shown](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 10'00" to 11'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.117 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.135 ([shown](#))

When that I told David Tudor
 this was on music
 talk of nothing but a
 series of stories,
 he said,
 "Don't fail
 to put in some benedictions."
 I said,
 "What in heaven's
 name do you mean by
 benedictions?" "Blessings,"
 he said.
 "What blessings?"
 I said,
 "God bless you everyone?"
 "Yes," he said,
 "like
 they say in the sutras:
 'This
 is not idle talk,
 but the
 highest of truths'."

Source

Transcript of story 12, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 11'00" to 12'00" ([see this variant](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 11'00" to 12'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.117 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.135 ([shown](#))

There was an American man from Seattle who went to Japan to buy screens. He

went to a monastery where he had heard there were very special ones and managed to get an interview with the Abbot,

who, however, didn't say a word during the entire time they were together.

Through an interpreter, the American made known his desires,

but received no comment of any kind from the Abbot. However,

very early the next morning, he received a telephone call from the Abbot

himself, who turned out to speak perfect English and who said that the

American could not only have the screen he wanted for a certain price, but

that, furthermore, the monastery possessed an old iron gate that he could also purchase.

The American said,

"But what on earth would I do with an old iron gate?" "I'm sure

you could sell it to a star in Hollywood," the Abbot replied.

Source

Transcript of story 13, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 12'00" to 13'00" ([shown](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 12'00" to 13'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.117 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.135 ([shown](#))

We've now played the *Winter Music*
 quite a number of times. I
 haven't kept count. When we
 first played it, the silences
 seemed very long and the sounds seemed
 really separated in space, not
 obstructing one another. In
 Stockholm, however, when we played it at
 the Opera as an interlude in the
 dance program given by Merce
 Cunningham and Carolyn Brown early one
 October, I noticed that it had
 become melodic. Christian
 Wolff prophesied this to me years ago.
 He said — we were walking
 along Seventeenth Street talking —
 he said, "No matter what we do
 it ends by being melodic."
 As far as I am concerned this happened
 to Webern years ago.
 Karlheinz Stockhausen once told me — we were
 in Copenhagen — "I demand
 two things from a composer:
 invention and that he astonish me."

Source

Transcript of story 14, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 13'00" to 14'00" ([see this variant](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 13'00" to 14'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.117 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.135 ([shown](#))

Two monks came to a stream.

One was the Hindu,
the other Zen.

The Indian
began to cross the stream
by walking
on the surface of
the water.

The Japanese became
excited and called
to him to come
back.

“What’s the matter,”
the Indian said.

The
Zen monk said,
“That’s not the
way to cross the stream.

Follow me.” He led
him to a place where
the water was shallow
and they waded across.

Source

Transcript of story 15, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 14'00" to 15'00" ([shown](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 14'00" to 15'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.118 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From “How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run”, [A Year from Monday](#), p.135 ([shown](#))

Another monk was walking
along when he came to
a lady who was sitting by the
path weeping.

“What’s the
matter?”
he said.

She said,
sobbing,
“I have lost
my only
child.”

He hit
her over the head and
said, “There,
that’ll give you
something to cry about.”

Source

Transcript of story 16, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 15'00" to 16'00" ([shown](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 15'00" to 16'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.118 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From “How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run”, [A Year from Monday](#), p.135 ([shown](#))

In New York, when I was setting out to write the orchestral parts of my *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* which was performed September 19, 1958, in Cologne, I visited each player, found out what he could do with his instrument, discovered with him other possibilities, and then subjected all these findings to chance operations, ending up with a part that was quite indeterminate of its performance. After a general rehearsal, during which the musicians heard the result of their several actions, some of them — not all — introduced in the actual performance sounds of a nature not found in my notations, characterized for the most part by their intentions which had become foolish and unprofessional. In Cologne, hoping to avoid this unfortunate state of affairs, I worked with each musician individually and in general rehearsal was silent. I should let you know that the conductor has no score but has only his own part, so that, though he affects the other performers, he does not control them. Well, anyway, the result was in some cases just as unprofessional in Cologne as in New York. I must find a way to let people be free without their becoming foolish. So that their freedom will make them noble. How will I do this? That is the question.

Source

Transcript of story 17, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 16'00" to 17'00" ([shown](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 16'00" to 17'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.118 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.135 ([shown](#))

Question or not (that is to say, whether what I will do will answer the situation), my problems have become social rather than musical. Was that what Sri Ramakrishna meant when he said to the disciple who asked him whether he should give up music and follow him, “By no means. Remain a musician. Music is a means of rapid transportation to life everlasting”?

And in a lecture I gave at Illinois, I added, “To life, period.”

Source

Transcript of story 18, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 17'00" to 18'00" ([shown](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 17'00" to 18'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.118 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From “How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run”, [A Year from Monday](#), p.136 ([shown](#))

People are always saying that the
East is the East and the West
is the West and you have to
keep from mixing them up.

When I first began to study
Oriental philosophy, I also
worried about whether it was mine to
study. I don't
worry any more about that.

At Darmstadt I was
talking about the reason back of
pulverization and fragmentation:

for instance,
using syllables instead of words in
a vocal text, letters
instead of syllables.

I said, "We take things
apart in order that they may
become the Buddha.

And if that seems too Oriental
an idea for you," I said,

"Remember the early Christian
Gnostic statement, 'Split
the stick and there is Jesus!'"

Source

Transcript of story 19, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 18'00" to 19'00" ([shown](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 18'00" to 19'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.118 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.136 ([shown](#))

Well, since Darmstadt, I've written two pieces.

One in the course of a fifteen-minute TV program in Cologne. The other is *Music Walk*, written during two hours in Stockholm. Neither piece uses chance operations. The indeterminacy in the case of *Music Walk* is such that I cannot predict at all what will happen until it is performed. Chance operations are not necessary when the actions that are made are unknowing. *Music Walk* consists of nine sheets of paper having points and one without any. A smaller transparent plastic rectangle having five widely spaced parallel lines is placed over this in any position, bringing some of the points out of potentiality into activity. The lines are ambiguous, referring to five different categories of sound in any order. Additional small plastic squares are provided having five non-parallel lines, which may or may not be used to make further determinations regarding the nature of the sounds to be produced. Playing positions are several: at the keyboard, at the back of the piano, at a radio. One moves at any time from one to another of these positions changing thereby the reference of the points to the parallel lines.

Source

Transcript of story 20, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 19'00" to 20'00" ([shown](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 19'00" to 20'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.119 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.136 ([shown](#))

Kwang-tse
points out
that a beautiful
woman

who gives
pleasure

to men

serves
only to
frighten

the fish

jumps when she
in the water.

Source

Transcript of story 21, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 20'00" to 21'00" ([shown](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 20'00" to 21'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.119 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.136 ([shown](#))

Once

when I was to give a talk
at Columbia Teachers College,

I asked Joseph Campbell
whether I should say something

(I forget
now

what
it was I was thinking of
saying).

He said,

“Where

is the ‘should’?”

Source

Transcript of story 22, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 21'00" to 22'00" ([shown](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 21'00" to 22'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.119 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From “How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run”, [A Year from Monday](#), p.136 ([see this variant](#))

When I got the letter from Jack Arends
asking me to lecture at the Teachers
College,

I wrote back and said I'd be
glad to,
that all he had to do
was let me know the date.

He did.

I then said to David Tudor,

"The lecture is so soon that I
don't think I'll be able to get all
ninety stories written,
in which case,
now and then,
I'll just keep
my trap shut."

He said,

"That'll be a relief."

Source

Transcript of story 23, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 22'00" to 23'00" ([see this variant](#))
Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.20 ([see this variant](#))

A Chinaman (Kwang-tse
tells)
went to
sleep
and dreamt
he was
a butterfly.

Later, when he
awoke,
he asked
himself,
“Am I a
butterfly
dreaming
that I am
a man?”

Source

Transcript of story 24, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 23'00" to 24'00" ([shown](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 23'00" to 24'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.119 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From “How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run”, [A Year from Monday](#), p.137 ([shown](#))

An Eskimo lady who couldn't speak or understand a word of English was once offered free transportation to the United States plus \$500 providing she would accompany a corpse that was being sent back to America for burial. She accepted. On her arrival she looked about and noticed that people who went into the railroad station left the city and she never saw them again. Apparently they traveled some place else. She also noticed that before leaving they went to the ticket window, said something to the salesman, and got a ticket. She stood in line, listened carefully to what the person in front of her said to the ticket salesman, repeated what that person said, and then traveled wherever he traveled. In this way she moved about the country from one city to another. After some time, her money was running out and she decided to settle down in the next city she came to, to find employment, and to live there the rest of her life. But when she came to this decision she was in a small town in Wisconsin from which no one that day was traveling. However, in the course of moving about she had picked up a bit of English. So finally she went to the ticket window and said to the man there, "Where would you go if you were going?" He named a small town in Ohio where she lives to this day.

Source

Transcript of story 25, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 24'00" to 25'00" ([see this variant](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 24'00" to 25'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.119 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.137 ([shown](#))

Four years ago or maybe five,
I was talking
with Hidekazu Yoshida.
We were on the
train from Donaueschingen to
Cologne. I
mentioned the book by
Herrigel called *Zen in
the Art of Archery*;
the melodramatic climax
of this book concerns an
archer's hitting the bull's eye
though he did so in
total darkness.
Yoshida told me there
was one thing the author
failed to point out,
that is,
there lives in Japan at
the present time a
highly esteemed archer
who has never yet been able
to hit the bull's eye
even in broad daylight.

Source

Transcript of story 26, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 25'00" to 26'00" ([see this variant](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 25'00" to 26'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.120 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.137 ([shown](#))

The Four Mists of Chaos,
 the North, the East,
 the West,
 and the South,
 went to visit
 Chaos himself.
 He treated them all very
 kindly and when they were
 thinking of leaving,
 they consulted among
 themselves how they might repay
 his hospitality.
 Since they had noticed
 that he had no holes
 in his body,
 as they each had (eyes,
 nose, mouth, ears, etc.),
 they decided
 each day to provide
 him with an opening.
 At the
 end of seven days,
 Kwang-tse tells us,
 Chaos died.

Source

Transcript of story 27, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 26'00" to 27'00" ([see this variant](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 26'00" to 27'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.120 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.137 ([shown](#))

Now and then I come across an article on that rock garden in Japan where there's just a space of sand and a few rocks in it. The author, no matter who he is, sets out either to suggest that the position of the rocks in the space follows some geometrical plan productive of the beauty one observes, or not satisfied with mere suggestion, he makes diagrams and detailed analyses. So when I met Ashihara, the Japanese music and dance critic (his first name is Eryo), I told him that I thought those stones could have been anywhere in that space, that I doubted whether their relationship was a planned one, that the emptiness of the sand was such that it could support stones at any points in it.

Ashihara had already given me a present (some table mats), but then he asked me to wait a moment while he went into his hotel.

He came out and gave me the tie I am now wearing. ¶

After he heard this lecture which I first gave in Brussels in the French Pavilion, Karlheinz Stockhausen said, "You should have said, 'the tie I was wearing yesterday'."

Source

Transcript of story 28, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 27'00" to 28'00" ([see this variant](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 27'00" to 28'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.120 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.137 ([see this variant](#))

An old rabbi in Poland
 or some place thereabouts
 was walking in a
 thunderstorm from one
 village to another.
 His
 health was poor.
 He was blind,
 covered
 with sores.
 All the afflictions
 of Job were his.
 Stumbling over
 something he fell in
 the mud.
 Pulling himself up
 with difficulty,
 he raised his hands
 towards heaven and
 cried out,
 "Praise God!
 The Devil is
 on Earth and doing
 his work beautifully!"

Source

Transcript of story 29, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 28'00" to 29'00" ([see this variant](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 28'00" to 29'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.120 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.137 ([shown](#))

Morris Graves used to have an old
 Ford in Seattle. He
 had removed all the seats and
 put in a table and chairs
 so that the car was like a small
 furnished room with books,
 a vase with flowers and so
 forth. One day
 he drove up to a luncheonette,
 parked, opened
 the door on the street side,
 unrolled a red carpet across
 the sidewalk. Then
 he walked on the carpet,
 went in, and
 ordered a hamburger.
 Meanwhile a crowd gathered,
 expecting something strange
 to happen.
 However, all Graves did
 was eat the hamburger,
 pay his bill, get
 back in the car, roll up the
 carpet, and drive off.

Source

Transcript of story 30, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 29'00" to 30'00" ([see this variant](#))

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 29'00" to 30'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.120 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen) ([see this variant](#))

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.138 ([shown](#))

Once when I was a child in Los Angeles I went downtown on the streetcar. It was such a hot day that, when I got out of the streetcar, the tar on the pavement stuck to my feet. (I was barefoot.) Getting to the sidewalk, I found it so hot that I had to run to keep from blistering my feet. I went into a five and dime to get a root beer. When I came to the counter where it was sold from a large barrel and asked for some, a man standing on the counter high above me said, "Wait. I'm putting in the syrup and it'll be a few minutes." As he was putting in the last can, he missed and spilled the sticky syrup all over me. To make me feel better, he offered a free root beer. I said, "No, thank you."

Source

Transcript of story 31, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 30'00" to 31'00"
From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.263

One spring morning I knocked
on Sonya's door.

She lived across
the hall.

Presently the door was
opened just a crack
and she said
quickly,

"I know you're
very busy:
I won't take a
minute of your time."

Source

Transcript of story 32, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 31'00" to 32'00"
From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.273

When Sri Ramakrishna
was asked
why,
if God is good,
evil in the world,
there
is there
he replied,
“To
thicken
the plot.”

Source

Transcript of story 33, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 32'00" to 33'00"

Before studying Zen,
men are men and
mountains are mountains.

While studying Zen,
things become confused.

After studying Zen,
men are men
and mountains are mountains.

After telling
this, Dr. Suzuki
was asked,
“What is
the difference between before and
after?”
He
said,

“No difference,

only the feet are a
little bit off the ground.”

Source

Transcript of story 34, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 33'00" to 34'00"
Filler story, [Silence](#), p.88

Just the other day I went
to the dentist.
Over the radio they said
it was the hottest day of the
year.
However, I was
wearing a jacket,
because going to a doctor
has always struck me as
a somewhat formal occasion.
In the
midst of his work,
Dr. Heyman stopped and said,
“Why don’t you
take your jacket off?”
I said, “I have
a hole in my shirt
and that’s why I have my
jacket on.” He said,
“Well,
I have a hole in my sock,
and,
if you like,
I’ll take my shoes off.”

Source

Transcript of story 35, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 34'00" to 35'00" ([shown](#))
 Filler story, [Silence](#), p.95 ([see this variant](#))

Generally speaking, suicide
is considered a
sin.
So
all the disciples
were very interested
to hear
what Ramakrishna would
say about
the fact that a
four-year-old child had
just then committed
suicide.
Ramakrishna said
that the child
had not sinned,
he had simply
corrected an error;
he had
been born by mistake.

Source

Transcript of story 36, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 35'00" to 36'00"
From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.272

It was a Wednesday.

I was in the sixth grade.

Dad saying I to overheard Mother, "Get ready: we're going to New Zealand Saturday." I got ready.

I read everything I could find in the school library about the New Zealand.

Saturday came.

Nothing happened.

The project was not even mentioned, that day or any succeeding day.

Source

Transcript of story 37, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 36'00" to 37'00"
 Filler story, [Silence](#), p.6

An Indian lady invited me to dinner and said
Dr. Suzuki would be there. He was.

Before dinner I mentioned Gertrude Stein.

Dr. Suzuki had never heard of her.

I described aspects of her work, which he
said sounded very interesting.

Stimulated, I mentioned James Joyce, whose name
was also new to him. At dinner he was

unable to eat the curries that were offered,

so a few uncooked vegetables and fruits were
brought, which he enjoyed.

After dinner the talk turned to metaphysical
problems, and there were many questions,

for the hostess was a follower of a
certain Indian yogi and her guests were more
or less equally divided between allegiance to
Indian thought and to Japanese thought.

About eleven o'clock we were out on the street
walking along, and an American lady said

to Dr. Suzuki, "How is it, Dr. Suzuki?

We spend the evening asking you
questions and nothing is decided." Dr.

Suzuki smiled and said, "That's why

I love philosophy: no one wins."

Source

Transcript of story 38, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 37'00" to 38'00" ([shown](#))

Filler story, [Silence](#), p.40 ([see this variant](#))

Two wooden boxes containing Oriental spices and foodstuffs arrived from India. One was for David Tudor, the other for me. Each of us found, on opening his box, that the contents were all mixed up. The lids of containers of spices had somehow come off. Plastic bags of dried beans and palm sugar had ripped open. The tin lids of cans of chili powder had come off. All of these things were mixed with each other and with the excelsior which had been put in the box to keep the containers in position. I put my box in a corner and simply tried to forget about it. David Tudor, on the other hand, set to work.

Assembling bowls of various sizes, sieves of about eleven various-sized screens, a pair of tweezers, and a small knife, he began a process which lasted three days, at the end of which time each spice was separated from each other, each bean from each other, and the palm sugar lumps had been scraped free of spice and excavations in them had removed embedded beans.

He then called me up to say,
 “Whenever you want to get at that box of spices you have, let me know. I’ll help you.”

Source

Transcript of story 39, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 38'00" to 39'00" ([see this variant](#))
 Filler story, [Silence](#), p.193 ([shown](#))

During my last year in high school, I found out
about the Liberal Catholic Church. It was
in a beautiful spot in the Hollywood hills.

The ceremony was an anthology of the most
theatrical bits and pieces found in the
principal rituals, Occidental and Oriental.

There were clouds of incense, candles
galore, processions in and around the
church. I was fascinated, and though

I had been raised in the Methodist Episcopal
Church and had had thoughts of going into the
ministry, I decided to join the Liberal
Catholics. Mother and Dad objected

strenuously. Ultimately, when I told
them of my intention to become an acolyte active in
the Mass, they said, "Well, make up
your mind. It's us or the church."

Thinking along the lines of "Leave your father
and mother and follow Me," I went to the
priest, told him what had happened, and
said I'd decided in favor of the Liberal
Catholics. He said, "Don't be a fool.

Go home. There are many religions.

You have only one mother and father."

Source

Transcript of story 40, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 39'00" to 40'00" ([see this variant](#))

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.271 ([shown](#))

Artists lot freedom. talk about a
 So,
 recalling the expression
 “free as a
 bird,” Morton
 Feldman went to a park
 one day and
 spent some time
 watching our feathered
 friends.
 When
 he came back,
 he said, “You
 know?
 They’re not
 free:
 they’re fighting
 over bits of food.”

Source

Transcript of story 41, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 40'00" to 41'00"
 From “Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music”, [Silence](#), p.265

He is a large
man and
falls asleep easily.

One evening
driving back
from Poughkeepsie,
he
awoke to
say,

“Now that everything’s
so easy,

there’s so much
to do.”

Then
he went back
to sleep.

Source

Transcript of story 42, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 41'00" to 42'00"

Once Bill de Kooning gave a lecture in Philadelphia.

Afterward, he was asked what painters of the past had influenced him the most.

He said, "The past does not influence me."

I influence it."

Source

Transcript of story 43, [*Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music*](#), ca. 42'00" to 43'00"

During a counterpoint class at
 U.C.L.A., Schoenberg
 sent everybody to the blackboard.
 We were to
 solve a particular problem he had
 given and to turn around
 when finished so that he
 could check on the correctness
 of the solution.
 I did as directed.
 He said,
 "That's good.
 Now find another solution."
 I did.
 He said,
 "Another." Again I found one.
 Again he
 said, "Another."
 And so on.
 Finally, I said,
 "There are no more
 solutions." He said,
 "What is the principle
 underlying all of the solutions?"

Source

Transcript of story 44, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 43'00" to 44'00"
 Filler story, [Silence](#), p.93

On another occasion, Schoenberg asked a girl in his class to go to the piano and play the first movement of a Beethoven sonata, which was afterwards to be analyzed.

She said, "It is too difficult. I can't play it." Schoenberg said, "You're a pianist, aren't you?"

She said, "Yes." He said, "Then go to the piano." She did.

She had no sooner begun playing than he stopped her to say that she was not playing at the proper tempo. She said that if she played at the proper tempo, she would make mistakes.

He said, "Play at the proper tempo and do not make mistakes." She began again, and he stopped her immediately to say that she was making mistakes.

She then burst into tears and between sobs explained that she had gone to the dentist earlier that day and that she'd had a tooth pulled out. He said, "Do you have to have a tooth pulled out in order to make mistakes?"

Source

Transcript of story 45, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 44'00" to 45'00" ([see this variant](#))
From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.265 ([see this variant](#))

In the poetry contest in China by
 which the Sixth Patriarch of Zen
 Buddhism was chosen, there
 were two poems. One
 said: "The mind is
 like a mirror. It
 collects dust. The
 problem is to remove the dust."
 The other and
 winning poem was actually a reply
 to the first. It
 said, "Where is the mirror
 and where is the dust?" ¶
 Some centuries later in
 a Japanese monastery,
 there was a monk who was always
 taking baths. A younger monk came up
 to him and said, "Why,
 if there is no dust,
 are you always taking
 baths?" The
 older monk replied, "Just
 a dip. No why."

Source

Transcript of story 46, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 45'00" to 46'00"
 From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.272

This summer I'm going to give a class in mushroom identification at the New School for Social Research. Actually, it's five field trips, not really a class at all. However, when I proposed it to Dean Clara Mayer, though she was delighted with the idea, she said, "I'll have to let you know later whether or not we'll give it." So she spoke to the president who couldn't see why there should be a class in mushrooms at the New School. Next she spoke to Professor MacIvor who lives in Piermont. She said, "What do you think about our having a mushroom class at the New School?" He said, "Fine idea. Nothing more than mushroom identification develops the powers of observation." This remark was relayed both to the president and to me. It served to get the class into the catalogue and to verbalize for me my present attitude towards music: it isn't useful, music isn't, unless it develops our powers of audition. But most musicians can't hear a single sound, they listen only to the relationship between two or more sounds. Music for them has nothing to do with their powers of audition, but only to do with their powers of observing relationships. In order to do this, they have to ignore all the crying babies, fire engines, telephone bells, coughs, that happen to occur during their auditions. Actually, if you run into people who are really interested in hearing sounds, you're apt to find them fascinated by the quiet ones. "Did you hear that?" they will say.

Source

Transcript of story 47, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 46'00" to 47'00" ([see this variant](#))

In 1954, when I went to Europe,
 I no sooner arrived in Paris than I
 noticed that the city was covered with
 posters publicizing a mushroom exhibition
 that was being held in the Botanical
 Gardens. That was all I needed.

Off I went. When I
 arrived, I found myself in a large
 room filled with many tables upon which
 were displayed many species of fungi.

On the hour from a large
 centrally-placed loudspeaker a recorded
 lecture on the deadly poisonous amanitas was
 delivered.

During this lecture,
 nobody in the hall moved or spoke.

Each person's attention was, so
 to speak, riveted to the
 information being given. A week later,

I was in Cologne in Germany
 attending a concert of electronic music.

There was also an audience and a
 large loudspeaker. However,
 many in the audience were dozing off,
 and some were talking to their neighbors.

Source

Transcript of story 48, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 47'00" to 48'00"

I went to a concert upstairs in
 Town Hall.
 The composer whose works were being
 performed had provided
 program notes.
 One of these notes was to the
 effect that there is too much
 pain in the world.
 After the concert
 I was walking along with the
 composer and he was telling
 me how the performances had not
 been quite up to snuff.
 So I said,
 "Well, I
 enjoyed the music,
 but I didn't agree with that
 program note about there being
 too much pain in the world."
 He said, "What?
 Don't you
 think there's enough?"
 I said, "I think
 there's just the right amount."

Source

Transcript of story 49, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 48'00" to 49'00" ([see this variant](#))
 Filler story, [Silence](#), p.93 ([shown](#))

In 1949 Merce Cunningham and I went to Europe on a Dutch boat. As we were approaching Rotterdam, the fog became so thick that landing was delayed. To expedite matters, the customs officials came aboard the boat. Passengers formed into lines and one by one were questioned. Merce Cunningham was in one line, I was in another. I smoke a great deal, whereas he doesn't smoke at all. However, he was taking five cartons of cigarettes into Europe for me and I had that number myself. We were both traveling through Holland to Belgium and then France, and the customs regulations of all those countries varied with regard to cigarettes. For instance, you could at that time take five cartons per person into France but only two per person into Holland. When I got to my customs officer, all of this was clear to both of us. Out of the goodness of his heart, he was reluctant to deprive me of my three extra cartons or to charge duty on them, but he found it difficult to find an excuse for letting me off. Finally he said, "Are you going to go out of Holland backwards?" I said, "Yes." He was overjoyed. Then he said, "You can keep all the cigarettes. Have a good trip." I left the line and noticed that Merce Cunningham had just reached his customs officer and was having some trouble about the extra cartons. So I went over and told the official that Merce Cunningham was going to go out of Holland backwards. He was delighted. "Oh," he said, "in that case there's no problem at all."

Source

Transcript of story 50, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 49'00" to 50'00" ([see this variant](#))
 From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.270 ([shown](#))

About ten years ago down at Black Mountain College during a summer session, I arranged an amateur festival of the works of Erik Satie.

There were altogether twenty-five concerts, most of them about thirty minutes long. A few were longer. For each one I prepared a talk about the music which was to be heard.

This was necessary because most of the people there had a German point of view and the music I was presenting was French. Satie had little fondness for German music. He told Debussy, for instance, that what was needed was a music without any sauerkraut in it, and he remarked that the reason Beethoven was so well known was that he had a good publicity manager. So after about ten of the

concerts and talks, I gave a good-sized talk about music in which I denounced Beethoven. A few days later, Patsy Lynch (now Patsy Davenport) knocked on my door and said, "I think I understand

what you said about Beethoven and I think I agree. But I have a very serious question to ask you: How do you feel about Bach?"

Source

Transcript of story 51, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 50'00" to 51'00"

One day
I asked Schoenberg
what
he thought
about the international
situation.
He said,
“The important thing to do
to develop foreign trade.”^{is}

Source

Transcript of story 52, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 51'00" to 52'00"
Filler story, [Silence](#), p.85

One day while I was composing, the telephone rang. A lady's voice said, "Is this John Cage, the percussion composer?" I said, "Yes." She said, "This is the J. Walter Thompson Company." I didn't know what that was, but she explained that their business was advertising. She said, "Hold on. One of our directors wants to speak to you." During a pause my mind went back to my composition. Then suddenly a man's voice said, "Mr. Cage, are you willing to prostitute your art?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, bring us some samples Friday at two." I did. After hearing a few recordings, one of the directors said to me, "Wait a minute." Then seven directors formed what looked like a football huddle. From this one of them finally emerged, came over to me, and said, "You're too good for us. We're going to save you for Robinson Crusoe."

Source

Transcript of story 53, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 52'00" to 53'00"
 From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.272

One day down at
 Black Mountain College,
 David
 Tudor was eating his lunch.

A student came over
 to his table and began asking him
 questions.

David Tudor
 went on
 eating his lunch.

The student
 kept on asking
 questions.

Finally
 David Tudor looked at him and
 said,
 “If you don’t know,
 why do you ask?”

Source

Transcript of story 54, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 53'00" to 54'00"
 From “Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music”, [Silence](#), p.266

There's a street in Stony Point in
 a lowland near the river where a
 number of species of mushrooms grow
 abundantly. I visit this street
 often. A few years ago in
 May I found the morel there,
 a choice mushroom which is rare
 around Rockland County. I
 was delighted. None of the
 people living on this street ever talk
 to me while I'm collecting mushrooms.
 Sometimes children come over and
 kick at them before I get to them.
 Well, the year after
 I found the morel, I went back
 in May expecting to find it again,
 only to discover that a
 cinder-block house had been put up where
 the mushroom had been growing.
 As I looked at the changed land,
 all the people in the
 neighborhood came out on their porches.
 One of them said, "Ha,
 ha! Your mushrooms are gone."

Source

Transcript of story 55, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 54'00" to 55'00"
 From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.264

A composer friend of mine
 who spent some time in a mental
 rehabilitation center
 was
 encouraged to do a good deal of
 bridge playing.

After one game,
 his
 partner was criticizing his play
 of an ace
 on a trick
 which had
 already
 been won.

My friend stood up
 and said,
 "If
 you think I came to the loony bin
 to learn
 to play bridge,
 you're crazy."

Source

Transcript of story 56, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 55'00" to 56'00"
 Filler story, [Silence](#), p.56

Once I was
visiting
my Aunt Marge.

She was doing her
laundry.

She turned to me
and said,
“You know?

I love
this machine

more than I do your Uncle much
Walter.”

Source

Transcript of story 57, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 56'00" to 57'00"
Filler story, [Silence](#), p.85

A very dirty composer
 attempting to explain was to
 a friend
 how dirty a
 person was whom he
 had recently met.

He said,
 has dirt between "He
 fingers his
 the way you and
 I
 have between our toes."

Source

Transcript of story 58, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 57'00" to 58'00"
 Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.20

Earle Brown and I spent several months splicing magnetic tape together. We sat on opposite sides of the same table. Each of us had a pattern of the splicing to be done, the measurements to be made, etc. Since we were working on tapes that were later to be synchronized, we checked our measurements every now and then against each other.

We invariably discovered errors in each other's measurements. At first each of us thought the other was being careless. When the whole situation became somewhat exasperating, we took a single ruler and a single tape and each one marked where he thought an inch was. The two marks were at different points. It turned out that Earle Brown closed one eye when he made his measurements, whereas I kept both eyes open. We then tried closing one of my eyes, and later opening both of his.

There still was disagreement as to the length of an inch. Finally we decided that one person should do all the final synchronizing splices. But then errors crept in due to changes in weather.

In spite of these obstacles, we went on doing what we were doing for about five more months, twelve hours a day, until the work was finished.

Source

Transcript of story 59, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 58'00" to 59'00" ([shown](#))
 Filler story, [Silence](#), p.85 ([shown](#))

I enrolled in a class in mushroom identification. The teacher was a Ph.D. and the editor of a publication on mycology. One day he picked up a mushroom, gave a good deal of information about it, mainly historical, and finally named the plant as *Pluteus cervinus*, edible.

I was certain that that plant was not *Pluteus cervinus*. Due to the attachment of its gills to the stem, it seemed to me to be an *Entoloma*, and therefore possibly seriously poisonous. I thought: What shall I do? Point out the teacher's error? Or, following school etiquette, saying nothing, let other members of the class possibly poison themselves? I decided to speak. I said, "I doubt whether that mushroom is *Pluteus cervinus*. I think it's an *Entoloma*." The teacher said, "Well, we'll key it out." This was done, and it turned out I was right. The plant was *Entoloma grayanum*, a poisonous mushroom. The teacher came over to me and said, "If you know so much about mushrooms, why do you take this class?" I said, "I take this class because there's so much about mushrooms I don't know." Then I said, "By the way, how is it that you didn't recognize that plant?" He said, "Well, I specialize in the jelly fungi; I just give the fleshy fungi a whirl."

Source

Transcript of story 60, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 59'00" to 60'00" ([see this variant](#))
 From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.272 ([shown](#))

An Irish hero whose mother had died was required by his stepmother to set out on a journey to an island beneath the sea and to bring back some golden apples he would find there. Should he fail to return within a year, he would lose his right to the throne, relinquishing it to one of his stepbrothers. For his journey he was given a miserable shaggy nag. No sooner had he set out than the nag said, "Look in my ear. You will find a metal ball. Throw it on the path ahead of us and we will follow it wherever it goes." Unhesitatingly the prince did this, and so, proceeding by chance, they passed through many perilous situations. Finally, on the point of success, the horse said to the Prince, "Now take your sword and slit my throat." The Prince hesitated, but only for a moment. No sooner had he killed the horse than, lo and behold, it turned into a prince, who, except for the acquiescence of the hero, would have had to remain a miserable shaggy nag.

Source

Transcript of story 61, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 60'00" to 61'00" ([see this variant](#))
 From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.138 ([see this variant](#))

Schoenberg always complained that
his American pupils didn't do
enough work.

There was one girl in
the class in particular
who, it is
true, did
almost no work at all.
He

asked her one day
why she didn't accomplish more.

She
said, "I
don't have any time."

He said,
"How many hours are there
in the day?" She
said,
"Twenty-four."

He said,
"Nonsense:
there are as
many hours in a day
as you put into it."

Source

Transcript of story 62, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 61'00" to 62'00"

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.271

David Tudor and I went up to New Haven to do a television class for the New Haven State Teachers College. That college specializes in teaching by means of television. What they do is to make a tape, audio and visual, and then broadcast it at a later date early in the morning. In the course of my talking, I said something about the purpose of purposelessness. Afterwards, one of the teachers said to the head of the Music Department, "How are you going to explain that to the class next Tuesday?"

Anyway, we finished the TV business, drove back to the school, and I asked the teachers to recommend some second-hand bookstores in New Haven for David Tudor and me to visit. They did. A half-hour later when we walked into one of them, the book dealer said, "Mr. Tudor? Mr. Cage?" I said, "Yes?" He said, "You're to call the State Teachers College." I did.

They said the television class we had recorded had not been recorded at all. Apparently someone forgot to turn something on.

Source

Transcript of story 63, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 62'00" to 63'00" ([see this variant](#))
 From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.267 ([shown](#))

On the way back from New Haven we were driving along the Housatonic. It was a beautiful day. We stopped to have dinner but the restaurants at the river's edge turned out not to be restaurants at all but dark, run-down bars with, curiously, no views of the river. So we drove on to Newtown, where we saw many cars parked around a restaurant that appeared to have a Colonial atmosphere. I said, "All those cars are a good sign. Let's eat there." When we got in, we were in a large dining room with very few other people eating. The waitress seemed slightly giddy. David Tudor ordered some ginger ale, and after quite a long time was served some Coca-Cola, which he refused. Later we both ordered parfaits; mine was to be chocolate, his to be strawberry. As the waitress entered the kitchen, she shouted, "Two chocolate parfaits." When David Tudor explained to her later that he had ordered strawberry, she said, "They must have made some mistake in the kitchen." I said, "There must be another dining room in this building with a lot of people eating in it." The waitress said, "Yes. It's downstairs and there are only two of us for each floor and we keep running back and forth."

Source

Transcript of story 64, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 63'00" to 64'00" ([shown](#))
From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.267 ([see this variant](#))

Then we had to go back to New
 Haven to do the TV class
 over again.
 This time on the way back
 it was a very hot and
 humid day.
 We stopped again in Newtown,
 but at a different
 place, for some ice.
 There was
 a choice:
 raspberry, grape,
 lemon, orange,
 and pineapple.
 I took grape.
 It was refreshing.
 I asked the lady
 who served it whether she had
 made it. She
 said, "Yes."
 I said, "Is it
 fresh fruit?" She said,
 "It's not fresh,
 but it's fruit."

Source

Transcript of story 65, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 64'00" to 65'00" ([see this variant](#))
 From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.268 ([shown](#))

Betty Isaacs told me that when she
was in New Zealand she was informed
that none of the mushrooms growing wild
there was poisonous.

So one day when she noticed
a hillside covered with fungi,
she gathered a lot and made
catsup. When she finished
the catsup, she tasted it
and it was awful.

Nevertheless she bottled it and put
it up on a high shelf.

A year later she was housecleaning and
discovered the catsup, which
she had forgotten about.

She was on the point of throwing it
away. But before doing
this she tasted it.

It had changed color.

Originally a dirty gray,
it had become black, and,
as she told me,
it was divine, improving
the flavor of whatever it touched.

Source

Transcript of story 66, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 65'00" to 66'00"

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.263

In 1952 I was
asked to write a manifesto about
new music.
I wrote,
“Instantaneous and unpredictable.”
Then
below I wrote,
“Nothing is accomplished
by writing a piece of music.
Ditto
for hearing a piece of music.
Ditto for playing a piece of music.”
Then there was a bracket
and the words,
“Our
ears are now in excellent condition.”
My signature
followed and
that was all there was to it.

Source

Transcript of story 67, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 66'00" to 67'00"

When the depression began, I was in Europe. After a while I came back and lived with my family in the Pacific Palisades. I had read somewhere that Richard Buhlig, the pianist, had years before in Berlin given the first performance of Schoenberg's *Opus 11*. I thought to myself: He probably lives right here in Los Angeles. So I looked in the phone book and, sure enough, there was his name. I called him up and said, "I'd like to hear you play the Schoenberg pieces." He said he wasn't contemplating giving a recital. I said, "Well, surely, you play at home. Couldn't I come over one day and hear the *Opus 11*?" He said, "Certainly not." He hung up. ¶ Then, about a year later, the family had to give up the house in the Palisades. Mother and Dad went to an apartment in Los Angeles. I found an auto court in Santa Monica where, in exchange for doing the gardening, I got an apartment to live in and a large room back of the court over the garages, which I used as a lecture hall. I was nineteen years old and enthusiastic about modern music and painting. I went from house to house in Santa Monica explaining this to the housewives. I offered ten lectures for \$2.50. I said, "I will learn each week something about the subject that I will then lecture on." ¶ Well, the week came for my lecture on Schoenberg. Except for a minuet, *Opus 25*, his music was too difficult for me to play. No recordings were then available. I thought of Richard Buhlig. I decided not to telephone him but to go directly to his house and visit him. I hitchhiked into Los Angeles, arriving at his house at noon. He wasn't home. I took a pepper bough off a tree and, pulling off the leaves one by one, recited, "He'll come home; he won't; he'll come home . . ." It always turned out He'll come home. He did. At midnight. I explained I'd been waiting to see him for twelve hours. He invited me into the house. When I asked him to illustrate my lecture on Schoenberg, he said, "Certainly not." However, he said he'd like to see some of my compositions, and we made an appointment for the following week.

Source

Transcript of story 68, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 67'00" to 68'00" ([see this variant](#))
 From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.273 ([see this variant](#))

Somehow I got through the lecture,
 and the day came to show my work
 to Buhlig. Again I
 hitchhiked into L.A., arriving
 somewhat ahead of time.
 I rang the doorbell.
 Buhlig opened it and said,
 "You're half an hour early.
 Come back at the proper time."
 I had library books with me and
 decided to kill two birds with one
 stone. So I went to
 the library to return the books,
 found some new ones,
 and then came back to Buhlig's
 house and again rang the doorbell.
 He was furious when he
 opened the door. He
 said, "Now you're half an
 hour late." He took me into the
 house and lectured me for two hours
 on the importance of time,
 especially for one who proposed
 devoting his life to the art of music.

Source

Transcript of story 69, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 68'00" to 69'00"
 From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.273

M. C. Richards went to see the Bolshoi Ballet. She was delighted with the dancing. She said, "It's not what they do; it's the ardor with which they do it." I said, "Yes: composition, performance, and audition or observation are really different things. They have next to nothing to do with one another." Once, I told her, I was at a house on Riverside Drive where people were invited to be present at a Zen service conducted by a Japanese Roshi. He did the ritual, rose petals and all. Afterwards tea was served with rice cookies. And then the hostess and her husband, employing an out-of-tune piano and a cracked voice, gave a wretched performance of an excerpt from a third-rate Italian opera. I was embarrassed and glanced towards the Roshi to see how he was taking it. The expression on his face was absolutely beatific.

Source

Transcript of story 70, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 69'00" to 70'00" ([see this variant](#))
 Filler story, [Silence](#), p.6 ([shown](#))

M. C. Richards and David Tudor
 invited several friends to
 dinner.
 I was there and it
 was a pleasure.
 After dinner we
 were sitting around talking.
 David
 Tudor began doing some
 paper work in a corner,
 perhaps something
 to do with music,
 though I'm not sure.
 After
 a while there was
 a pause in the
 conversation,
 someone said to David and
 "Why don't
 you join the party?"
 He said,
 "I haven't left it.
 This is
 how I keep you entertained."

Source

Transcript of story 71, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 70'00" to 71'00"
 Filler story, [Silence](#), p.108

When Xenia and I came to New York from Chicago, we arrived in the bus station with about twenty-five cents.

We were expecting to stay for a while with Peggy Guggenheim and Max Ernst.

Max Ernst had met us in Chicago and had said, "Whenever you come to New York, come and stay with us.

We have a big house on the East River." I went to the phone booth in the bus station, put in a nickel, and dialed. Max Ernst answered.

He didn't recognize my voice.

Finally he said, "Are you thirsty?"

I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, come over tomorrow for cocktails."

I went back to Xenia and told her what had happened. She said,

"Call him back. We have everything to gain and nothing to lose."

I did. He said, "Oh!

It's you. We've been waiting for you for weeks.

Your room's ready. Come right over."

Source

Transcript of story 72, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 71'00" to 72'00" ([see this variant](#))
 Filler story, [Silence](#), p.12 ([shown](#))

Xenia told me once
that when she was a
child in
Alaska,
she and her friends
had a club
and there was
only
one
rule:

No

silliness.

Source

Transcript of story 73, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 72'00" to 73'00"
From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.271

When I was in high school I went out, as they say, for oratory. When the Southern California Oratorical Contest came around, the situation was ticklish. L.A. High had won the contest two years in succession. If we won the third year, the cup would stay in the school's possession forever. I was chosen to represent the school and I passed through the sectional contests and came to the finals, which were held in the Hollywood Bowl before an audience of about thirty-five people. My coach, however, informed me the day before that my speech in its written form had gotten a very low grade from the judges, that in order to win in the finals, every single judge would have to give me first place. I decided that the situation was hopeless, and that the only thing to do was to forget about the contest and just say what I had to say. Apparently that's what happened. The cup still belongs to the school.

Source

Transcript of story 74, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 73'00" to 74'00"

In Zen they say:

If something is boring after
two minutes,
try
it for four.

If still boring,
try it for eight,

sixteen,

thirty-two,

and so on.

Eventually one discovers that it's not
boring at all
but very interesting.

Source

Transcript of story 75, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 74'00" to 75'00"
Filler story, [Silence](#), p.93

At the New School once I was substituting
 for Henry Cowell, teaching a class
 in Oriental music. I had told
 him I didn't know anything about the
 subject. He said,
 "That's all right. Just go where
 the records are. Take one out.
 Play it and then discuss
 it with the class." Well, I
 took out the first record. It
 was an LP of a Buddhist service.
 It began with a short microtonal chant
 with sliding tones, then soon
 settled into a single loud reiterated
 percussive beat. This noise
 continued relentlessly for about fifteen
 minutes with no perceptible variation.
 A lady got up and screamed,
 and then yelled, "Take it
 off. I can't bear it any
 longer." I took it off.
 A man in the class then said angrily,
 "Why'd you take it off?
 I was just getting interested."

Source

Transcript of story 76, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 75'00" to 76'00" ([see this variant](#))
 Filler story, [Silence](#), p.93 ([shown](#))

Once
Amsterdam over in
Dutch musician said to me, a
must be very difficult “It
for you in America
to write music.
You are
so far
away
from the centers of tradition.”

Source

Transcript of story 77, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 76'00" to 77'00"

Now giving lecture on Japanese poetry.
First
giving very old Japanese poem, very
classical:

¶ Oh
willow tree, // Why
are you so sad, willow tree?
// Maybe baby?

¶
Now giving
nineteenth-century romantic Japanese poem:

¶ Oh bird,
sitting on willow tree, //
Why are you so sad, bird?
// Maybe baby?

¶
Now giving
up-to-minute twentieth-century Japanese poem,
very modern:

¶ Oh
stream, flowing past willow tree,
// Why are you so sad,
stream? // Baby?

Source

Transcript of story 78, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 77'00" to 78'00" ([see this variant](#))
Filler story, [Silence](#), p.127 ([see this variant](#))

I was never psychoanalyzed. I'll tell you how it happened. I always had a chip on my shoulder about psychoanalysis. I knew the remark of Rilke to a friend of his who wanted him to be psychoanalyzed. Rilke said, "I'm sure they would remove my devils, but I fear they would offend my angels." When I went to the analyst for a kind of preliminary meeting, he said,

"I'll be able to fix you so that you'll write much more music than you do now." I said, "Good heavens! I already write too much, it seems to me."

That promise of his put me off. ¶ And then in the nick of time, Gita Sarabhai came from India.

She was concerned about the influence Western music was having on traditional Indian music, and she'd decided to study Western music for six months with several teachers and then return to India to do what she could to preserve the Indian traditions.

She studied contemporary music and counterpoint with me. She said, "How much do you charge?"

I said, "It'll be free if you'll also teach me about Indian music." We were almost every day together. At the end of six months, just before she flew away, she gave me the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. It took me a year to finish reading it.

Source

Transcript of story 79, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 78'00" to 79'00" ([see this variant](#))
 Filler story, [Silence](#), p.127 ([shown](#))

I once had a job washing dishes at the
Blue Bird Tea Room in Carmel, California.

I worked twelve hours a day in
the kitchen. I washed all the

dishes and pots and pans, scrubbed

the floor, washed the vegetables,

crates of spinach for instance;

and if the owner came along and found
me resting, she sent me out to the

back yard to chop up wood. She

paid me a dollar a day. One day

I noticed that some famous concert
pianist was coming to town to give a
recital, and I decided to finish my
work as quickly as possible in order to
get to the concert without missing too much
of it. I did this.

As luck would have it, my seat
was next to that of the lady who owned the
Blue Bird Tea Room, my employer.

I said, "Good
evening." She looked the other way,
whispered to her daughter.

They both got up and left the hall.

Source

Transcript of story 80, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 79'00" to 80'00" ([see this variant](#))
Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.88 ([shown](#))

Once when Lois Long was on a mushroom walk led by Guy Nearing, a mushroom was found that was quite rare. Guy Nearing told Lois Long that it was *Pleurotus masticatus*. They then walked along and Lois Long, realizing she had already forgotten the name of the mushroom, said to Guy Nearing, "I just can't get the name of that mushroom into my head. In fact, I have a terrible time remembering any of these Latin names." Guy Nearing said, "When you don't know the name of a mushroom, you should say it first to the person in front of you, and then to the person in back of you. Soon, you'll find, you remember it."

Source

Transcript of story 81, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 80'00" to 81'00"

My grandmother was sometimes very
deaf and at other times,
particularly when someone
was talking about her,
not deaf at all.

One Sunday she was sitting
in the living room directly in
front of the radio.

She had a sermon turned on so
loud that it could be heard for
blocks around.

And yet she was sound asleep
and snoring. I

tiptoed into the living room,
hoping to get a manuscript that was
on the piano and to get out
again without waking her up.

I almost did it.

But just as I
got to the door,
the radio went off and
Grandmother spoke sharply:

“John, are you ready for
the second coming of the Lord?”

Source

Transcript of story 82, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 81'00" to 82'00" ([see this variant](#))
Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.20 ([shown](#))

During recent years Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki has done a great deal of lecturing at Columbia University.

First he was in the Department of Religion, then somewhere else. Finally he settled down on the seventh floor of Philosophy Hall. The room had windows on two sides, a large table in the middle with ash trays. There were chairs around the table and next to the walls. These were always filled with people listening, and there were generally a few people standing near the door. The two or three people who took the class for credit sat in chairs around the table. The time was four to seven. During this period most people now and then took a little nap. Suzuki never spoke loudly. When the weather was good the windows were open, and the airplanes leaving La Guardia flew directly overhead, drowning out from time to time whatever he had to say. He never repeated what had been said during the passage of the airplane.

Three lectures I remember in particular. While he was giving them I couldn't for the life of me figure out what he was saying. It was a week or so later, while I was walking in the woods looking for mushrooms, that it all dawned on me.

Source

Transcript of story 83, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 82'00" to 83'00" ([see this variant](#))
 From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.262 ([see this variant](#))

There was a lady
in
Suzuki's class
who said
once,

"I have great
difficulty
reading the sermons
of
Meister Eckhart,

because
of all the Christian imagery."

Dr. Suzuki said,

"That difficulty will disappear."

Source

Transcript of story 84, [*Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music*](#), ca. 83'00" to 84'00"
From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [*Silence*](#), p.266

I was on an English boat going from Siracusa in Sicily to Tunis in North Africa. I had taken the cheapest passage and it was a voyage of two nights and one day. We were no sooner out of the harbor than I found that in my class no food was served. I sent a note to the captain saying I'd like to change to another class. He sent a note back saying I could not change and, further, asking whether I had been vaccinated. I wrote back that I had not been vaccinated and that I didn't intend to be. He wrote back that unless I was vaccinated I would not be permitted to disembark at Tunis. We had meanwhile gotten into a terrific storm. The waves were higher than the boat. It was impossible to walk on the deck. The correspondence between the captain and myself continued in deadlock. In my last note to him, I stated my firm intention to get off his boat at the earliest opportunity and without being vaccinated. He then wrote back that I had been vaccinated, and to prove it he sent along a certificate with his signature.

Source

Transcript of story 85, [*Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music*](#), ca. 84'00" to 85'00"
 Filler story, [*Silence*](#), p.127

Morris Graves introduced Xenia and me to a miniature island in Puget Sound at Deception Pass. To get there we traveled from Seattle about seventy-five miles north and west to Anacortes Island, then south to the Pass, where we parked. We walked along a rocky beach and then across a sandy stretch that was passable only at low tide to another island, continuing through some luxuriant woods up a hill where now and then we had views of the surrounding waters and distant islands, until finally we came to a small footbridge that led to our destination — an island no larger than, say, a modest home. This island was carpeted with flowers and was so situated that all of Deception Pass was visible from it, just as though we were in the best seats of an intimate theatre. While we were lying there on that bed of flowers, some other people came across the footbridge. One of them said to another, “You come all this way and then when you get here there’s nothing to see.”

Source

Transcript of story 86, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 85'00" to 86'00" ([see this variant](#))
 Filler story, [Silence](#), p.56 ([shown](#))

I took a number of mushrooms to
Guy Nearing, and
asked him to name them for me.

He did.

On my
way home, I began
to doubt whether one particular
mushroom
was what he had called it.

When
I got home I got out my books
and came to the conclusion
that Guy Nearing had made a
mistake.

The next time I saw him
I told him all about
this and he said,
“There are so many
Latin names rolling around in
my head that sometimes
the wrong one comes out.”

Source

Transcript of story 87, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 86'00" to 87'00" ([see this variant](#))
From “Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music”, [Silence](#), p.267 ([shown](#))

“Cultivate in yourself a grand similarity
 with the chaos of the surrounding ether.
 Unloose your mind and set your
 spirit free. Be still as if
 you had no soul.” These words come
 towards the end of one of Kwang-tse’s stories
 which, if I were asked,
 I would say is my favorite. The
 Mists of Chaos had spent much trouble
 trying to come in contact with Chaos himself.
 When he finally succeeded,
 he found Chaos hopping about like a
 bird and slapping his buttocks.
 He phrased his question, which
 concerned the nature of ultimate reality.
 Chaos simply went on hopping and
 slapping his buttocks and said, “I
 don’t know. I don’t know.” On a second
 occasion, the Mists of Chaos had at
 first just as little satisfaction,
 but on pressing Chaos, received the
 advice I quoted. In gratitude,
 he bowed ceremoniously, spoke
 respectfully, and took his leave.

Source

Transcript of story 88, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 87'00" to 88'00" ([see this variant](#))

One of Suzuki's books
ends
with the poetic
text of a Japanese monk
describing his attainment of
enlightenment.
The final poem says,
"Now that I'm
enlightened,
I'm just as miserable as ever."

Source

Transcript of story 89, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 88'00" to 89'00"
Filler story, [Silence](#), p.193

Dorothy Norman invited me to dinner in New York.

There was a lady there from Philadelphia who was an authority on Buddhist art. When she found out I was interested in mushrooms, she said, "Have you an explanation of the symbolism involved in the death of the Buddha by his eating a mushroom?" I explained that I'd never been interested in symbolism; that I preferred just taking things as themselves, not as standing for other things.

But then a few days later while rambling in the woods I got to thinking. I recalled the Indian concept of the relation of life and the seasons.

Spring is Creation. Summer is Preservation.

Fall is Destruction. Winter is Quiescence. Mushrooms grow most vigorously in the fall, the period of destruction, and the function of many of them is to bring about the final decay of rotting material. In fact, as I read somewhere, the world would be an impassible heap of old rubbish were it not for mushrooms and their capacity to get rid of it. So I wrote to the lady in Philadelphia. I said, "The function of mushrooms is to rid the world of old rubbish. The Buddha died a natural death."

Source

Transcript of story 90, [Indeterminacy... Ninety Stories by John Cage, With Music](#), ca. 89'00" to 90'00"
 Filler story, [Silence](#), p.85

Have you ever noticed
how you read a newspaper?

Jumping
around, leaving articles
unread,
or
only partially read,
turning here and
there.

Not
at all the way one
reads Bach in public,
but precisely the
way one reads
in
public
Pianists by *Duo II for*
Christian Wolff.

Source

From *John Cage's Lecture 'Indeterminacy'*, 22'00" to 23'00", in *Die Reihe* No. 5, English edition, p.119 (1961, Theodore Presser Co., ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen)

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [*A Year from Monday*](#), p.136

A woman who lived in
the country was asked
how cold it had been
the previous winter.

“Not very cold,”
she replied.

Then she added,

“There were only three
or four days when we
had to stay in bed all
day to keep warm.”

Source

From “How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run”, [A Year from Monday](#), p.138

A young man who was concerned about his position in society and who was about to get married made his wife-to-be promise not to indulge further in kleptomania. (She had, for instance, once gone into the Piggly-Wiggly, taken a number of items, attempted an exit without paying, been stopped and told item by item what she had stolen, given up those mentioned, crossed the street, sat down on the curb, and eaten a jar of peanut butter the attendant had failed to notice.) She promised her husband-to-be she would never steal anything again. But years later, when they were getting divorced, she told him that when they went to the jeweler's to get the wedding ring, she had left him for a moment while he was considering the relative merits of two rings and, not being observed, had acquired a wrist watch. ¶ This particular girl was a great beauty. When a friend of hers who had been a tutor in the Japanese royal family was giving a lecture in Santa Maria, California, she was at the back of the capacity audience standing on a table, wearing high heels, fur coat, and a red rose in her black hair. At one point in his lecture, when the speaker's eye fell on this girl in recognition, she opened her coat, showing herself to be stark naked.

Source

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [*A Year from Monday*](#), p.138

Some years ago on May 30, Mary Fleming noticed a strange amanita growing near her house in Upper Nyack. She picked the plant, volva and all, and put it to dry in the sun on top of her station wagon. A little later before driving into town she took the mushroom off the car and put it up on an outside window sill, also in the sun. When she did this, she may have been thinking, consciously or unconsciously, of putting the mushroom out of the reach of her cats. She had, at the time, nine of them. At any rate, when she returned home after having run an errand in Nyack, two Siamese cats, Poom Poom, a mother, and One Yen, her kitten, were busy eating the amanita. Three other cats, not Siamese, were standing nearby interested in what was going on. Only about a third of the amanita remained uneaten. Six hours later, the Siamese became ill. They vomited and had diarrhea. Instead of walking, they staggered around. They suffered peristalsis. Eventually they were quite unconscious. They couldn't move at all. When Mary Fleming took them to the doctor, they were "like two fur boards." They were given injections of atropine. They recovered completely. Twelve days later there was a thunderstorm. One Yen, the kitten, died in the driveway. Autopsy showed that the cause of death was heart attack. The mother, Poom Poom, still lives but has never had another litter. ¶ That's one story. Another version is quite different. It wasn't a cat that died in the driveway, but a dog. What happened was that five days before the thunderstorm, Mary Fleming went to Trinidad where her husband was collecting snakes. She stayed there for a month. Back home in July she found that three of the cats that had recovered from the mushroom poisoning were sick. This means — since One Yen was already dead — that at least two of the ordinary cats not only observed the Siamese eating the amanita but themselves partook. $2 - 1 + 2 = 3$. The three cats who were sick in July were taken to the doctor who said they had enteritis. He was able to cure them. The cause of One Yen's death is unknown. Perhaps it was the atropine. Since Mary Fleming was in Trinidad there was no autopsy. One thing is certain: Poom Poom is sterile.

Source

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [*A Year from Monday*](#), p.138

Muriel Errera's house is next to the Royal Palace in Brussels. She said she'd like to give a dinner party and would invite whoever I wanted her to, plus, of course, her friends. Since I was staying in the country south of the city, I asked whether she'd like me to bring along some mushrooms. She said certainly. I arrived at the party with several baskets. I forget what all I had found, but one basket was nothing but *Lepiota* caps fit for the people next door. I was taken in an elevator four flights up to a small improvised kitchen. After making certain that everything I would need for cooking was available I went back downstairs. I met the guests and had some drinks and then, after the first few courses, went upstairs again, this time to cook the mushrooms. It didn't take long. I got myself and the pans into the elevator and pushed the button. I no sooner left the fourth floor than the lights went out and the elevator stopped running. I lit a match and looked for an emergency button, but there wasn't any. Feeling hurried, I began beating on the elevator door and shouting. After quite some time, I heard some voices, and after that the voice of my hostess. She said that word was being sent to the contractor who had installed the elevator and did I want something to read? I said that it was quite dark and that I didn't require any reading matter. The contractor never arrived, but eventually all of the servants, including the cook, the chauffeur, and the doorman, went down to the basement and by their joint efforts sent me inch by inch back up to the fourth floor. The first thing I did was to reheat the mushrooms. As we walked downstairs together, Muriel Errera asked me not to mention the incident to any of the guests. When I arrived with the frying pans in the candle-lit dining room, everyone was eating dessert.

Source

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [*A Year from Monday*](#), p.139

Last October when it was terribly dry I went to visit the Browns in Rochester. I didn't take along any mushroom books, even though I knew that Nobby and I would spend most of our time walking through the woods. No matter where he lives he gets ahold of those United States Coast and Geographic Survey quadrangle maps. He studies them carefully and with their aid explores the countryside conscientiously. He is not a botanist. He is more of a hiker. He likes a good view and solving the puzzle of how to get out of the woods once he is in them. He took me to a swampy area ordinarily no doubt impassable but because of the drought quite easy to explore. There to my surprise we discovered a white *Tricholoma* growing in rings larger than any I had ever seen before. This particular species was new to me. It appeared in every respect desirable and it was not acrid to the taste. We gathered quite a lot and I decided to telephone W. Stephen Thomas, tell him about the mushroom, and learn from him what species it was. ¶ He answered the telephone but didn't recognize the fungus from the information I gave him. He said that there was a scheduled walk the very next day and that someone in the Rochester Club might know my plant. No one did, but one person had Groves along, which I consulted and was pleased to learn described my *Tricholoma*. It was *irinum*, edible and delicious. I served it to a number of students from the University who came to the Browns' the following day for dinner. ¶ A week later I was home again and got to cataloging my mushroom books. I came across a reprint of an article by Alexander Smith entitled *Tricholoma irinum*. Smith tells in detail how for years he has found and eaten the mushroom without any ill effects, how he never had any compunction about giving it to others to eat until two people were seriously poisoned by it. He studied their case quite carefully since he is himself so often sickened by fungi but not by this one. He came to the conclusion that the mushroom, nothing else that had been eaten or drunk, was indeed responsible.

Source

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.139

Certain tribes in Siberia trade several sheep for one *Amanita muscaria* and use the mushroom for orgiastic practices. The women chew the raw mushroom and the chewed pulp is mixed with blueberry juice. This is drunk by the men and is productive of hallucinations. It also changes the relation between the ego and social ideals. Thus, the urine of those who have been affected by the mushroom is in high demand and is drunk with pleasure, for it contains a sufficient amount of the drug to continue its wild effects. The Vikings who went berserk are thought to have done so by means of this same mushroom. ¶ Nowadays we hear of biochemical experiments using *Amanita muscaria* or other hallucinatory mushrooms or the drugs synthesized in imitation of them — experiments in which professors, students, or criminals become temporarily schizophrenic, sometimes for the novelty of it, other times for purely scientific purposes. Just as we soon will travel to the moon and other earths, and add to our telephone conversations the practice of seeing one another while we speak, so one will do with his mind what he now does with his hair, not what it wants to do but what he wants it to do. People in the near future will not suffer from schizophrenia; they will simply be schizophrenic if and when they have the desire. ¶ Life is changing. One of the ways I'm trying to change mine is to get rid of my desires so that I won't be deaf and blind to the world around me. When I mention my interest in mushrooms, most people immediately ask whether I've had any visions. I have to tell them that I'm very old-fashioned, practically puritanical, that all I do is smoke like a furnace — now with two filters and a coupon in every pack — and that I drink coffee morning, noon, and night. I would also drink alcohol but I made the mistake of going to a doctor who doesn't permit it. The visions I hear about don't interest me. Dick Higgins said he ate a little *muscaria* and it made him see some rabbits. Valentina Wasson ate the divine mushrooms in Mexico and imagined she was in eighteenth-century Versailles hearing some Mozart. Without any dope at all other than caffeine and nicotine, I'll be in San Francisco tomorrow hearing some of my own music and on Sunday, God willing, I'll awake in Hawaii with papayas and pineapples for breakfast. There'll be sweet-smelling flowers, brightly colored birds, people swimming in the surf, and (I'll bet you a nickel) a rainbow at some point during the day in the sky.

Source

From "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", [A Year from Monday](#), p.140 ([see this variant](#))

A young man in Japan arranged his circumstances so that he was able to travel to a distant island to study Zen with a certain Master for a three-year period. At the end of the three years, feeling no sense of accomplishment, he presented himself to the Master and announced his departure. The Master said, "You've been here three years.

Why don't you stay three months more?" The student agreed, but at the end of the three months he still felt that he had made no advance. When he told the Master again that he was leaving, the Master said,

"Look now, you've been here three years and three months. Stay three weeks longer."

The student did, but with no success.

When he told the Master that absolutely nothing had happened, the Master said,

"You've been here three years, three months, and three weeks. Stay three more days, and if, at the end of that time,

you have not attained enlightenment, commit suicide." Towards the end of the second day, the student was enlightened.

Source

Filler story, [Silence](#), p.6

Dad is an inventor.
 In 1912 his submarine had
 the world's record for staying
 under water.
 Running as it did by
 means of a gasoline engine,
 it left bubbles on
 the surface, so
 it was not employed during World
 War I. Dad
 says he does his best work
 when he is sound asleep.
 I was
 explaining at the New School
 that the way to get ideas
 is to do something boring.
 For
 instance, composing in such a way
 that the process of composing
 is boring induces ideas.
 They fly
 into one's head like birds.
 Is that what Dad meant?

Source

Filler story, [Silence](#), p.12

One day when I was across
the hall visiting Sonya Sekula,
I noticed that she
was painting left-handed.
I said,

“Sonya,
aren’t you right-handed?” She
said, “Yes,
but I might lose the
use of my right hand,
and so I’m practicing
using my left.” I laughed
and said, “What
if you lose the use of both
hands?” She was busy
painting and didn’t bother to
reply.

Next day when I
visited her, she
was sitting on the floor,
painting with
difficulty, for she
was holding the brush between
two toes of her left foot.

Source

Filler story, [Silence](#), p.56

Peggy Guggenheim, Santomaso,
and I were in a Venetian
restaurant. There were only
two other people dining in the same
room and they were not conversing.
I got to expressing my
changed views with regard to the
French and the Italians.
I said that I had years before
preferred the French because of their
intelligence and had found the
Italians playful but intellectually not
engaging; that recently,
however, I found the French
cold in spirit and lacking in freedom
of the mind, whereas the
Italians seemed warm and surprising.
Then it occurred to me that
the couple in the room were French.
I called across to
them and said, "Are you
French?" The lady replied.
"We are," she said,
"but we agree with you completely."

Source

Filler story, [Silence](#), p.66

Richard Lippold called up and said,
“Would you come to dinner and bring the
I-Ching?” I said I would. It
turned out he’d written a letter to the
Metropolitan proposing that he be commissioned
for a certain figure to do *The Sun*.

This letter withheld nothing about the
excellence of his art, and so he
hesitated to send it, not wishing to
seem presumptuous. Using the coin
oracle, we consulted the *I-Ching*.

It mentioned a letter. Advice to
send it was given. Success was
promised, but the need for patience was
mentioned. A few weeks later,

Richard Lippold called to say that his
proposal had been answered but without
commitment, and that that should make
clear to me as it did to him what to
think of the *I-Ching*. A year
passed. The Metropolitan Museum
finally commissioned *The Sun*.

Richard Lippold still does not see eye to eye
with me on the subject of chance operations.

Source

Filler story, [Silence](#), p.66

The question of leading tones came up in the class in experimental composition that I give at the New School.

I said,
“You surely aren’t
talking about ascending half-steps in
diatonic music. Is
it not true that anything leads
to whatever follows?”

But the
situation is more complex,
for things also lead backwards
in time.

This also does not give a picture
that corresponds with reality.
For, it is said,
the Buddha’s enlightenment
penetrated in every direction to
every point in space and time.

Source

Filler story, [Silence](#), p.66

Mies van der Rohe

said,

least

“The

is the

most.”

I agree
with him completely.

At the same time,

what concerns me now

is quantity.

Source

Filler story, [*A Year from Monday*](#), p.20

A lady carrying many packages
 got on a Third Avenue bus.
 Before
 she was able to get a
 seat,
 the
 bus lurched forward.
 The packages fell,
 several of
 them on a drunken bum
 who had been muttering to
 himself.

Looking up at the lady
 blearily, he
 said, “Whashish?”

The lady answered cheerfully,
 “Those are
 Christmas presents, my good man;
 you know,
 it’s
 Christmas.”
 “Hell,” he said,
 “thawashlashyear.”

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.20

David Tudor gives the impression
of not being overly fond of
mushrooms.

But one night he had
two helpings of morels and then
finished the dish completely,
including the juice.

The next
afternoon while he was shaving
I read out loud the following
quotation from Leonardo da Vinci:

“Lo!

Some there are who can call
themselves nothing more than a passage
for food, producers of
dung, fillers up of
privies, for of them
nothing else appears in the world
nor is there any virtue in
their work, for
nothing of them remains but
full privies.”

David Tudor said,
“Perhaps they were good Buddhists.”

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.20

The day after I finally won the Italian TV quiz on mushrooms, I received anonymously in the mail of a French book on that mushrooms had been published in Germany.

I was studying it in a crowded streetcar going to downtown Milan.

The lady next to me said, "What are you reading that for?"

That's finished."

Source

Filler story, [*A Year from Monday*](#), p.20

“Elizabeth,
it is a beautiful
day.
Let us take
a walk.
Perhaps we
will find some
mushrooms.
If we do,
we shall pluck them
and eat them.”
Betsy Zogbaum asked
Marian Powys Grey
whether she knew the
difference between
mushrooms and toadstools.
“I think I do.
But consider, my
dear,
how dull life would
be without a
little uncertainty in it.”

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.20

Peck says
that if things
are
doing well
in
gardens,
one can expect,
in the woods,
fields,
and waste places,
to
find wild plants
doing equally well.

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.25

One winter David Tudor and I were touring in the Middle West. From Cincinnati we drove to Yellow Springs to drum up an engagement for Merce Cunningham and his Dance Company. In this way we met the McGarys. Keith was teaching philosophy at Antioch College and Donna taught weaving and dancing. My conversation with Keith McGary had no sooner begun than we discovered our mutual interest in mushrooms. I told him that I'd never seen the winter-growing *Collybia velutipes*. He opened the front door and, using a flashlight, showed me the plant growing in the snow from the roots of a nearby tree. He told me what difficulty he was having finding books about fungi. I gave him my copy of *Hard* which I'd brought along. This book deals especially with Ohio mushrooms. The next day I located two copies of the book in a second-hand bookstore in Columbus. I bought them both. Each winter I find the *Collybia*, the velvet footed, in quantity. How is it I didn't notice it during the winters before I met Keith McGary?

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.25 ([see this variant](#))

Lois Long, Esther Dam, Ralph Ferrara,
and I were in the Haverstraw cemetery gathering
Tricholoma personatum. An elderly lady with
a hat on, standing by while a man she was with was
tending a grave, happened to notice us.

She called out, asking what we were doing
there. We said we were looking for mushrooms.

Her voice rose slightly as she asked whether
Lois Long's Volkswagen which was parked nearby
belonged to one of us. The next thing she
asked, her voice sharp-edged, was whether
we had loved ones buried there. Hearing no one
of us did, she spoke firmly and loudly.

"Well, I don't like it; and I don't think
any one else would like it. If the
mushrooms grow here, let them!" Meanwhile
the gentleman with her paid no attention.

He just went on doing what he was doing.

And we, walking dutifully toward the
little car, passed by quantities of our
favorite mushrooms, making not the slightest
attempt to pick them. As we drove off
the woman was yelling. "Get out!" she
screamed, "get out and never come back!"

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.25

1
1
2

On Yap Island

fungi phosphorescent
are used

as hair
ornaments

moonlight for
dances.

Source

Filler story, [*A Year from Monday*](#), p.25

Music and mushrooms:
 two words next to one
 another in many dictionaries.
 Where did
 he write *The Three-Penny Opera*?
 Now he's
 buried below the grass at the
 foot of High Tor.
 Once the season
 changes from summer to fall,
 given sufficient
 rain, or just
 the mysterious dampness that's in
 the earth,
 mushrooms grow there,
 carrying on,
 I am sure,
 his business of working with
 sounds.
 That we
 have no ears to hear the
 music the spores shot off
 from basidia make obliges us
 to busy ourselves microphonically.

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.34

While hunting morels with Alexander Smith in the woods near Ann Arbor, I mentioned having found quantities of *Lactarius deliciosus* in the woods in northern Vermont. He said, "Were the stipes viscid?" I said, "Yes, they were." He said, "It's not *deliciosus*; it's *thyinos*." He went on to say that people go through their entire lives thinking that things are that when they are actually this, and that these mistakes are necessarily made with the very things with which they are the most familiar.

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.34

Once when I was in Ann Arbor
 with Alexander Smith,
 I said that one
 of the things I liked about
 botany was that it was
 free of the jealousies and
 selfish feelings that plague the
 arts, that I
 would for that reason,
 if for no other,
 given my life to
 live over again,
 be a botanist rather than a
 musician.
 He said, “That
 shows how little you know about
 botany.” Later in the
 conversation I happened to
 mention the name of a
 mycologist connected with another
 Midwestern university.
 Incisively, Smith said,
 “Don’t mention
 that man’s name in my house.”

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.35

There was an international
conference of philosophers in
Hawaii on the
subject of Reality.
For
three days Daisetz Teitaro
Suzuki said nothing.
Finally the chairman turned
to him and asked,
“Dr. Suzuki,
would
you say this table
around which we are
sitting is real?”
Suzuki raised his
head and said Yes.
The chairman asked in
what sense Suzuki thought
the table was real.
Suzuki said,
“In every sense.”

Source

Filler story, [*A Year from Monday*](#), p.35

The first time the mushroom class was given at the New School, many people signed up for it. The registrar was alarmed, telephoned me and asked, "Where shall we draw the line?" I said if more than forty people were involved it might be difficult. Something like that number registered for the course, but when the field trips actually took place, there were never more than twenty people in the woods. Sometimes attendance dropped to a mere dozen. I couldn't figure out what was happening. I forget who it was, but one day in the woods one of the lady students confessed that when she signed up for the course it was not with the intention of tramping through the woods near New York City, fungi or no fungi. She was interested in going to Europe. Some airplane company had advertised inexpensive roundtrip fares purchasable only by adults enrolled in the New School. People had studied the catalogue as though it were a menu, looking for the cheapest course regardless of what was being taught. The lady who told me this had had a change of mind, or her particular flight had been postponed, I don't remember which. One way or another, she lost interest in Europe. Another, noticing fungi in Bavarian and Milanese markets, sent post cards.

Source

Filler story, [*A Year from Monday*](#), p.35

When Colin McPhee found out
that I was interested in
mushrooms,
he said,
“If you find the morel next
spring,
call me up,
even if you only find
one.
I’ll drop everything,
come out,
and cook
it.”
Spring came.
I
found two morels.
I called Colin
McPhee.
He said,
“You don’t expect
me, do
you, to
come all that way
for two little mushrooms?”

Source

Filler story, [*A Year from Monday*](#), p.35

Mr. Romanoff is sixty years old. Mr.
Nearing is seventy years old. Mr.
Romanoff's mother is eighty-five. On one
of the mushroom field trips, a photographer
came who had been sent by *The New York Times*.
We took the Stony Brook trail. We
had no sooner gotten started than the
photographer busied himself taking pictures.
Soon Mr. Romanoff was not to be seen.
Mr. Nearing drew Lois Long aside and said,
"Mr. Romanoff has had an accident to his
pants. Would you find out whether one of
the ladies has a safety pin?" Lois Long
complied. A very small safety pin was
found, and Lois Long gave it to Mr.
Romanoff. He came back to the group.
The safety pin, being so small, proved
ineffective. Mr. Romanoff nevertheless
stayed with the group, and, as the
walk continued, the split in his pants
progressed until it was complete, crotch to
cuff. We stopped for lunch at a spring.
Mr. Romanoff looked at his pants and
said, "My mother will hear about this."

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.35

Mr. Romanoff says
the Sunday field
trips are going better
than church. to

However, one Sunday
he said,
“I can’t come
next Sunday because
it’s Rosh
Hashana,
I’ve arranged and
my mother with
if I stay that
on Rosh home
Hashana,
able I’ll be
on to come
Yom Kippur.”

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.35

David Tudor and I took a taxi down town.

He was going to Macy's; I was going on to West Broadway and Prince where I get my hair cut. After David Tudor got out, I began talking with the driver about the weather.

The relative merits of the Old Farmers' Almanac and the newspapers came up. The driver said they were developing rockets that would raise the weather man's predictions from 50 to 55 per cent accuracy. I said I thought the Almanac starting from a consideration of planets and their movements, rather than from winds and theirs, got a better start since the X-quantities involved were not so physically close to the results being predicted. The driver said he'd had an operation some years before and that while his flesh was dead and numb, before the wound healed, he was able to predict weather changes by the pain he felt in the scar, that when the flesh lost its numbness and was, so to speak, back to normal, he could no longer know in advance anything about changes in weather.

Source

Filler story, [*A Year from Monday*](#), p.49

Each one of us has his own stomach; it is not the stomach of another. Lois Long likes lamb chops. Esther Dam doesn't. Ralph Ferrara prefers the way his aunt cooks mushrooms to the way anybody else does, to wit in olive oil with garlic. As far as I'm concerned they're cooked in butter, salt, and pepper and that's that. (Now and then with the addition of some cream, sometimes sweet, sometimes sour, and less often a little lemon juice.) Once I followed a recipe for stuffed morels under glass. When we got around to eating them we couldn't tell what we were tasting. The dish suggested fancy restaurant food. ¶ Henry Cowell told me that years ago in Palo Alto two Stanford botany professors assured him that a mushroom he had found was edible. He ate it and was very ill. Realizing he had eaten other things at the same meal and believing that the teachers knew what they were talking about, he tried the mushroom not once but twice again, becoming seriously sick each time. ¶ Charles McIlvaine was able to eat almost anything, providing it was a fungus. People say he had an iron stomach. We take his remarks about edibility with some skepticism, but his spirit spurs us on. Alexander Smith, obliged as a scientist to taste each new mushroom he finds, is made ill by almost every one of them. Mushroom poisoning is nothing to laugh about. Nancy Wilson Ross told me of a gardener on Long Island who had always eaten mushrooms he collected, who made a mistake, nearly killing himself by eating one of the amanitas. He recovered and lives but has never been the same since. He is more or less permanently debilitated. I went out in the woods in northern Vermont without any breakfast. (This was about eight years ago.) I began to eat several species raw. Among them was *Boletus piperatus*, which is said to be edible even though it has pores with red mouths, a danger sign according to many authorities. By noon I was ill, wretchedly so. I was sick for twelve hours. Every now and then I managed to tell the Lippolds, whose guest I was, not to worry, that I wasn't going to die.

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.162

At Darmstadt
when I wasn't involved
with music,
I was
in the woods
looking for
mushrooms.
One
day while I
was gathering some
Hypholomas that
were growing around
a stump not
far from the
concert hall,
a lady
secretary from
the *Ferienkurse*
Neue Musik *für*
came by and said,
“After all,
Nature
is better than Art.”

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.69

After an hour or
so in the woods
looking for mushrooms,
Dad said,
“Well, we
can always go
buy some real and ones.”

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.69

Sometime after my
father's death, I
was talking with
Mother.
I
suggested she take
a trip to West
the relatives. visit
I said,
"You'll have a good
time."
She was quick to
reply.
"Now, John,
you
know perfectly well
that I've
never enjoyed having
a good time."

Source

Filler story, [*A Year from Monday*](#), p.69

When the New York Philharmonic
 played my *Atlas Eclipticalis*
 with *Winter Music* (*Electronic*
Version), the
 audience more or less threw
 propriety to the winds.
 Many walked out.
 Others stayed
 to boo.
 On Sunday afternoon the
 lady sitting next to my mother
 was particularly violent.
 She disturbed
 everyone around her.
 When the performance
 ended, Mother turned
 to her and said,
 “I am the composer’s
 mother.” The lady said,
 “Good Heavens!
 Your son’s
 music is magnificent!
 Would you tell him,
 please, how much I loved it?”

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.69

Franz Kline was about to have the first showing of his black and white paintings at the Egan Gallery.

Realizing that his mother had never seen his paintings and that she would surely be interested in doing so, he arranged for her to come to New York for the opening.

After she had been in the gallery for some time, she said, "Franz, I might have known you'd find the easy way."

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.69

In 1960
I received a letter from
a university president
giving me an
appointment for the following
academic year.

I called
Mother to tell her the good
news.

I said,

“I’m to be a Fellow in the
Center for Advanced Studies at
Wesleyan University.”

Mother said,

“Why are they always connecting
you with the dance?”

Then, after a pause,

she added,

“Do they
know you’re a Zen Buddhist?”

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.69

Alan Watts gave a party that started in the afternoon, New Year's Eve, and lasted through the night and the following day.

Except for about four hours which we spent napping we were never without food or drink. Alan Watts lived near Millbrook.

His cooking was not only excellent but elaborate. There was, for instance, I forget just when, a meat pie in the shape of a large loaf of bread. Truffles ran through the meat, which had been wrapped first in crepes and then in the crust, in which had been inscribed in Sanskrit "Om." Joseph Campbell, Jean Erdman, Mrs. Coomaraswamy, and I were the guests. Jean Erdman spent most of the time knitting. Alan Watts, Mrs. Coomaraswamy, and Joseph Campbell conversed brilliantly about the Orient, its mythologies, its arts, and its philosophies.

Joseph Campbell was concerned at that time about the illustration of his Zimmer book, *Philosophies of India*.

He was anxious to find a picture which would include certain and several symbols, and though he had searched his own library and several public ones, he was still looking for the right picture. I said, "Why don't you use the one in Jean Erdman's knitting book?" Joseph Campbell laughed because he knew I hadn't even seen the picture. Mrs. Coomaraswamy said,

"Let me look at it." Jean Erdman stopped knitting and gave her the book. Mrs. Coomaraswamy began interpreting the picture, which was of a girl in a sweater standing in a landscape. Everything, it turned out, referred precisely to the subjects with which Joseph Campbell was concerned, including the number in the upper right-hand corner.

Source

Filler story, [*A Year from Monday*](#), p.72

I was arguing with
Mother.

I turned to Dad.

He
spoke.

“Son John,
is always your mother
right,
even when she’s wrong.”

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.72

Doris Dennison had been
born Doris Suckling.

why she changed That her was name.

step-brother, Peter, on Her
other hand, the

took the name she
discarded.

Peter Suckling had
been born Peter Perfect.

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.88

A mother and son visited the
Seattle Art Museum.

Several rooms were devoted
to
the work of Morris Graves.

When they came to one
in which
all of the paintings were
black,

the mother,

placing a hand across her son's
eyes,

said,

“Come, dear,
mother doesn't want
you to see these things.”

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.88

Ramakrishna spent an afternoon explaining that everything is God.

Afterward, one of his disciples entered the evening traffic in a euphoric state and barely escaped being crushed to death by an elephant. He ran back to his teacher and asked, "Why do you say everything's God when just now I was nearly killed by an elephant?" Ramakrishna said, "Tell me what happened." When the disciple got to the point where he heard the voice of the elephant's driver warning him several times to get out of the way, Ramakrishna interrupted, "That voice was God's voice."

Source

Filler story, [*A Year from Monday*](#), p.111

I was surprised
when I came into Mother's
room in the nursing
home to see that
the TV set was on.

The program was
teenagers dancing to
rock-and-roll.

I asked
Mother how she liked the
new music.

She
said,
"Oh, I'm not fussy about
music."

Then,
brightening
up,
she went on,
fussy about "You're not
music either."

Source

Filler story, [*A Year from Monday*](#), p.111

I was twelve years old. I got out my bicycle and rode over to KFWB. They said, "What do you want?" I said, "I'd like to give a weekly radio program for the Boy Scouts." They said, "Are you an Eagle?" I said, "No, I'm a Tenderfoot." They said, "Did the Boy Scouts send you?" I said, "No, I just got the idea and came over." They said, "Well, run along." So I went over to KNX.

They liked the idea and arranged a time for the first program. I then went to the Boy Scouts, told them what had happened, and asked for their approval and cooperation. They said it was all right to give the program but that they would not cooperate. In fact, they never did. Each time I asked for the Boy Scout band, they said No.

Individual Scouts all gave their services willingly. There were boy sopranos; trumpet, trombone, and piano soloists; and Scouts who spoke on their experiences building fires and tying knots. The volume of fan mail increased each month.

After two years, the organization called up KNX, said they'd never authorized the program, and demanded that I be put out and they be put in.

They were. The band finally played. A few weeks later, KNX took the program off the air.

Source

Filler story, [*A Year from Monday*](#), p.132

When got Valerie into Bettis first
the movies,

her, someone interviewed

to asked be how it felt
successful.

She said,

“What do you mean?

always been a I’ve
success.”

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.132

Pointing out the five
cars in her front
yard,
the cleaning lady said
they were wrecks her
son had accomplished
during the past
year,
that he planned to
put parts of them
together to make
a single usable car
for her.

“The only thing we
don’t have,” she
said, “is a good pair
of headlights.
You
know it’s very
hard to come out
of a wreck
with undamaged headlights.”

Source

Filler story, [A Year from Monday](#), p.132

One summer day, Merce Cunningham and I took eight children to Bear Mountain Park. The paths through the zoo were crowded. Some of the children ran ahead, while others fell behind. Every now and then we stopped, gathered all the children together, and counted them to make sure none had been lost.

Since it was very hot and the children were getting difficult, we decided to buy them ice cream cones. This was done in shifts. While I stayed with some, Merce Cunningham took others, got them cones, and brought them back. I took the ones with cones. He took those without.

Eventually all the children were supplied with ice cream. However, they got it all over their faces. So we went to a water fountain where people were lined up to get a drink, put the children in line, tried to keep them there, and waited our turn. Finally, I knelt beside the fountain.

Merce Cunningham turned it on. Then I proceeded one by one to wash the children's faces. While I was doing this, a man behind us in line said rather loudly, "There's a washroom over there."

I looked up at him quickly and said, "Where? And how did you know I was interested in mushrooms?"

Source

Filler story, [Silence](#), p.84

One Sunday morning,

Mother said to Dad,

“Let’s go to church.”

Dad said,
“O.K.”

When they drove up in front,

Dad showed no sign of getting out of the car.

Mother
said,
“Aren’t you coming in?”

Dad said,
“No,
I’ll wait for you here.”

Source

Filler story, [Silence](#), p.85

After a long and arduous journey
a young Japanese man arrived deep
in a forest where the teacher
of his choice was living in a small
house he had made.

When the student arrived,
the teacher was sweeping up fallen
leaves.

Greeting his
master, the young man
received no greeting in return.

And to all his questions,
there were no replies.

Realizing there was
nothing he could do to get the
teacher's attention, the
student went to another part of the
same forest and built himself a
house.

Years later,
when he was sweeping up
fallen leaves, he was
enlightened. He then
dropped everything, ran through
the forest to his teacher,
and said, "Thank you."

Source

Filler story, [Silence](#), p.85

When I was growing up in California there
were two things that everyone assumed were good
for you. There were, of course,
others — spinach and oatmeal, for
instance — but right now I'm thinking
of sunshine and orange juice.
When we lived at Ocean Park, I was sent
out every morning to the beach where I spent
the day building roly-coasters in the sand,
complicated downhill tracks with tunnels
and inclines upon which I rolled a small
hard rubber ball. Every day toward
noon I fainted because the sun was
too much for me. When I fainted
I didn't fall down, but I couldn't
see; there were flocks of black
spots wherever I looked. I soon
learned to find my way in that blindness to
a hamburger stand where I'd ask for
something to eat. Sitting in the
shade, I'd come to. It
took me much longer, about thirty-five
years in fact, to learn that
orange juice was not good for me either.

Source

Filler story, [Silence](#), p.88

When Vera Williams first noticed
that I was
interested in wild mushrooms,
she told her
children not to touch any
of them because they
were all deadly poisonous.

A few
days later she bought
a steak at Martino's
and decided to serve it
smothered with mushrooms.

When she
started to cook the
mushrooms, the
children all stopped whatever
they were doing and
watched her attentively.

When she
served dinner,
they all burst into tears.

Source

Filler story, [Silence](#), p.95

David Tudor and I went to Hilversum
in Holland to make a
recording for the Dutch radio.
We arrived at the
studio early and there was some
delay. To pass
the time, we chatted
with the engineer who was to work
with us. He
asked me what kind of music he
was about to record.

Since he was a Dutchman
I said, "It may
remind you of the work of
Mondrian."

¶ When the session was finished
and the three of us were
leaving the studio,
I asked the engineer what
he thought of the music we
had played. He
said, "It reminded
me of the work of Mondrian."

Source

Filler story, [Silence](#), p.127

Sonya Sekula said, "Why don't you come with me to the Reises'? They're giving a party." I said I wasn't invited. Sonya said, "Come anyway; they won't mind." As we walked in, Mrs. Reis was extremely friendly in her greeting, and even asked what I'd like to drink. I said, "Rum." She said, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I don't have any at the bar, but I'll go down to the basement and get some." I asked her not to bother, but she insisted. While she was gone, I made my way over to the bar and discovered Bushmills Irish whisky, of which I am very fond. I asked for some and began drinking it. When Mrs. Reis came back with the rum, naturally I drank some of that. As the time passed, I drank rum when Mrs. Reis was looking and Irish whisky when she wasn't. After a while Sonya Sekula said, "Let's go. You take one of the bottles of Irish and I'll get my coat and meet you downstairs." I said, "You take the bottle; I'll get your coat." She said, "O.K." I went downstairs, picked up a fur coat; Sonya came running down with the Irish; we went out into the snow. I said, "Do you want your coat on?" She said, "No. The car's right here. Just throw it in the back seat." A few blocks along, Sonya said, "That's not my coat." I said, "How do you know?" She said, "The perfume." We drove on to Grand Street, went upstairs, and killed the Irish. We talked all the time about selling the coat in some distant city. Sonya said she knew a fence in St. Louis. About midnight I called the Reises and spoke to Mr. Reis. I said, "I have the coat." He said, "Thank God!" We made arrangements for my bringing it to his office in the morning. When I got there I explained it had all been a mistake. Before we said good-by, he whispered, "No one will ever hear a word about this." I went to the elevator. He came running down the hall and said, "What about Mrs. Reis's coat?" I said, "I don't know anything about her coat; I didn't take it."

Source

Filler story, [Silence](#), p.193

While Meister Eckhart was
alive, several
attempts were made to
excommunicate him.

(He had,
in his sermons,
said such
things as “Dear God,
I beg
you to rid me of God.”)

None of the trials
against him was successful,
for on each
occasion he defended
himself brilliantly.

However, after
his death,
the attack was continued.

Mute,
Meister Eckhart was excommunicated.

Source

Filler story, [Silence](#), p.193

When I first went to Paris, I did so instead of returning to Pomona College for my junior year. As I looked around, it was Gothic architecture that impressed me most. And of that architecture I preferred the flamboyant style of the fifteenth century. In this style my interest was attracted by balustrades. These I studied for six weeks in the Bibliothèque Mazarin, getting to the library when the doors were opened and not leaving until they were closed. Professor Pijoan, whom I had known at Pomona, arrived in Paris and asked me what I was doing. (We were standing in one of the railway stations there.) I told him. He gave me literally a swift kick in the pants and then said, "Go tomorrow to Goldfinger. I'll arrange for you to work with him.

He's a modern architect." After a month of working with Goldfinger, measuring the dimensions of rooms which he was to modernize, answering the telephone, and drawing Greek columns, I overheard Goldfinger saying, "To be an architect, one must devote one's life solely to architecture." I then left him, for, as I explained, there were other things that interested me, music and painting for instance. ¶ Five years later, when Schoenberg asked me whether I would devote my life to music, I said, "Of course." After I had been studying with him for two years, Schoenberg said, "In order to write music, you must have a feeling for harmony." I explained to him that I had no feeling for harmony. He then said that I would always encounter an obstacle, that it would be as though I came to a wall through which I could not pass. I said, "In that case I will devote my life to beating my head against that wall."

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", *Silence*, p.261 ([shown](#))
Excerpt from "Lecture on Commitment", *A Year from Monday*, p.113 ([see this variant](#))

When I first moved to the country, David Tudor, M. C. Richards, the Weinribs, and I all lived in the same small farmhouse. In order to get some privacy I started taking walks in the woods. It was August. I began collecting the mushrooms which were growing more or less everywhere. Then I bought some books and tried to find out which mushroom was which. Realizing I needed to get to know someone who knew something about mushrooms, I called the 4-H Club in New York City. I spoke to a secretary. She said they'd call me back. They never did. ¶ The following spring, after reading about the edibility of skunk cabbage in Medsger's book on wild plants, I gathered a mess of what I took to be skunk cabbage, gave some to my mother and father (who were visiting) to take home, cooked the rest in three waters with a pinch of soda as Medsger advises, and served it to six people, one of whom, I remember, was from the Museum of Modern Art. I ate more than the others did in an attempt to convey my enthusiasm over edible wild plants. After coffee, poker was proposed. I began winning heavily. M. C. Richards left the table. After a while she came back and whispered in my ear, "Do you feel all right?" I said, "No. I don't. My throat is burning and I can hardly breathe." I told the others to divide my winnings, that I was folding. I went outside and retched. Vomiting with diarrhea continued for about two hours. Before I lost my will, I told M. C. Richards to call Mother and Dad and tell them not to eat the skunk cabbage. I asked her how the others were. She said, "They're not as bad off as you are." Later, when friends lifted me off the ground to put a blanket under me, I just said, "Leave me alone." Someone called Dr. Zukor. He prescribed milk and salt. I couldn't take it. He said, "Get him here immediately." They did. He pumped my stomach and gave adrenalin to keep my heart beating. Among other things, he said, "Fifteen minutes more and he would have been dead." ¶ I was removed to the Spring Valley hospital. There during the night I was kept supplied with adrenalin and I was thoroughly cleaned out. In the morning I felt like a million dollars. I rang the bell for the nurse to tell her I was ready to go. No one came. I read a notice on the wall which said that unless one left by noon he would be charged for an extra day. When I saw one of the nurses passing by I yelled something to the effect that she should get me out since I had no money for a second day. Shortly the room was filled with doctors and nurses and in no time at all I was hustled out. ¶ I called up the 4-H Club and told them what had happened. I emphasized my determination to go on with wild mushrooms. They said, "Call Mrs. Clark on South Mountain Drive." She said, "I can't help you. Call Mr. So-and-so." I called him. He said, "I can't help you, but call So-and-so who works in the A&P in Suffern. He knows someone in Ramsey who knows the mushrooms." Eventually, I got the name and telephone number of Guy G. Nearing. When I called him, he said, "Come over any time you like. I'm almost always here, and I'll name your mushrooms for you." ¶ I wrote a letter to Medsger telling him skunk cabbage was poisonous. He never replied. Some time later I read about the need to distinguish between skunk cabbage and the poisonous hellebore. They grow at the same time in the same places. Hellebore has pleated leaves. Skunk cabbage does not.

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.261

Patsy Davenport heard my Folkways record. She said, "When the story came about my asking you how you felt about Bach, I could remember everything perfectly clearly, sharply, as though I were living through it again. Tell me, what did you answer? How do you feel about Bach?" I said I didn't remember what I'd said — that I'd been nonplused. Then, as usual, when the next day came, I got to thinking. Giving up Beethoven, the emotional climaxes and all, is fairly simple for an American. But giving up Bach is more difficult. Bach's music suggests order and glorifies for those who hear it their regard for order, which in their lives is expressed by daily jobs nine to five and the appliances with which they surround themselves and which, when plugged in, God willing, work. Some people say that art should be an instance of order so that it will save them momentarily from the chaos that they know is just around the corner. Jazz is equivalent to Bach (steady beat, dependable motor), and the love of Bach is generally coupled with the love of jazz. Jazz is more seductive, less moralistic than Bach. It popularizes the pleasures and pains of the physical life, whereas Bach is close to church and all that. Knowing as we do that so many jazz musicians stay up to all hours and even take dope, we permit ourselves to become, sympathetically at least, junkies and night owls ourselves: by *participation mystique*. Giving up Bach, jazz, and order is difficult. Patsy Davenport is right. It's a very serious question. For what if we do it — give them up, that is — what do we have left?

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [*Silence*](#), p.262

George Mantor
 had an iris garden,
 which he
 improved each year by throwing
 out the commoner varieties.

One day
 his attention was called
 to another
 very fine iris garden.

Jealously
 he made some inquiries.

The garden,
 it turned out,
 belonged
 to the man
 who collected his garbage.

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [*Silence*](#), p.263

Staying in India and finding the sun unbearable, Mrs. Coomaraswamy decided to shop for a parasol. She found two in the town nearby. One was in the window of a store dealing in American goods. It was reasonably priced but unattractive. The other was in an Indian store. It was Indian-made, desirable, but outlandishly expensive. Mrs. Coomaraswamy went back home without buying anything. But the weather continued dry and hot, so that a few days later she went again into town determined to make a purchase. Passing by the American shop, she noticed their parasol was still in the window, still reasonably priced. Going into the Indian shop, she asked to see the one she had admired a few days before. While she was looking at it, the price was mentioned. This time it was absurdly low. Surprised, Mrs. Coomaraswamy said, "How can I trust you? One day your prices are up; the next day they're down. Perhaps your goods are equally undependable." "Madame," the storekeeper replied, "the people across the street are new in business. They are intent on profit. Their prices are stable. We, however, have been in business for generations. The best things we have we keep in the family, for we are reluctant to part with them. As for our prices, we change them continually. That's the only way we've found in business to keep ourselves interested."

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [*Silence*](#), p.263

We are all part and parcel of a way of life
that puts trust in the almighty dollar —

so much so that we feel ourselves slipping
when we hear that on the international market the
West German mark inspires more confidence.

Food, one assumes, provides
nourishment; but Americans eat it fully
aware that small amounts of poison have been
added to improve its appearance and delay
its putrefaction. None of us wants
cancer or skin diseases, but there are
those who tell us that's how we get them.

It's hard to tell, come December,
whether we're celebrating the birth of
Christ or whether American business has simply
pulled the wool over our eyes. When

I hear that an artist whose work I admire
gets \$7000 for a painting whereas another
whose work I don't admire gets twice as
much, do I then change my mind?

Ten years ago the New York
painters were for the most part poor as
church mice. Did they then or do
they now have a place in American society?

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.264

Coming back from an all-Ives concert we'd attended in Connecticut, Minna Lederman said that by separating his insurance business from his composition of music (as completely as day is separated from night), Ives paid full respect to the American assumption that the artist has no place in society. (When Mother first heard my percussion quartet years ago in Santa Monica, she said, "I enjoyed it, but where are you going to put it?") But music is, or was at one time, America's sixth-largest industry — above or below steel, I don't remember which. Schoenberg used to say that the movie composers knew their business very well. Once he asked those in the class who intended to become professional musicians to put up their hands. No one did. (Uncle Walter insisted when he married her that Aunt Marge, who was a contralto, should give up her career.) My bet is that the phenomenal prices paid for paintings in New York at the present time have less to do with art than with business. The lady who lived next door in Santa Monica told me the painting she had in her dining room was worth lots of money. She mentioned an astronomical sum. I said, "How do you know?" She said she'd seen a small painting worth a certain amount, measured it, measured hers (which was much larger), multiplied, and that was that.

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [*Silence*](#), p.264

Mrs. Coomaraswamy told another story about business methods in India.

It seems that
early one morning she was at
a kind of craftsmen's bazaar.

There were
fewer shops available than there were
craftsmen.

So a poetry contest was arranged.

The one who
made up the best poem got the
shop. The

losers were going away quite contented
reciting the winning poem.

She asked them why
they were so pleased since they were
actually unfortunate.

They said,
"Oh, it's no matter.

When his goods are sold
he'll have no use for the
shop. Then
one more of us will get a chance to sell
what he has, and so on."

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.264

Lois Long (the Lois Long who designs textiles),
 Christian Wolff, and I climbed Slide
 Mountain along with Guy Nearing and the Flemings,
 including Willie. All the way up and down
 the mountain we found nothing but *Collybia*
platyphylla, so that I began to itch to visit a
 cemetery in Millerton, New York, where, in my
 mind's eye, *Pluteus cervinus* was growing.

By the time we got back to the cars, our knees
 were shaking with fatigue and the sun had gone
 down. Nevertheless, I managed to
 persuade Lois Long and Christian Wolff to drive
 over to Millerton. It meant an extra
 hundred miles. We arrived at the cemetery at
 midnight. I took a flashlight out of the
 glove compartment, got out, and first
 hastily and then carefully examined all the
 stumps and the ground around them. There
 wasn't a single mushroom growing. Going
 back to the car, I fully expected Lois Long and
 Christian Wolff to be exasperated.
 However, they were entranced. The aurora
 borealis, which neither of them had ever seen
 before, was playing in the northern sky.

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.265

I dug up some hog peanuts and boiled them with butter, salt, and pepper for Bob Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns.

I was anxious to know what Jasper Johns would think of them because I knew he liked boiled peanuts.

I was curious to know whether he would find a similarity between boiled peanuts and hog peanuts.

Most people in the North have no experience at all of boiled peanuts.

People who've had hog peanuts speak afterwards of the taste of chestnuts and beans.

Anyway, Jasper Johns said they were very good but that they didn't taste particularly like boiled peanuts. Then he went down to South Carolina for a few weeks in November.

When I saw him after he got back, he said he'd had boiled peanuts again and that they tasted very much like hog peanuts.

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.265

I was asked to play my *Sonatas and Interludes* in the home of an elderly lady in Burnsville, North Carolina, the only person thereabouts who owned a grand piano. I explained that the piano preparation would take at least three hours and that I would need a few additional hours for practicing before the performance. It was arranged for me to start work directly after lunch. After about an hour, I decided to take a breather. I lit a cigarette and went out on the veranda, where I found my hostess sitting in a rocking chair. We began chatting. She asked me where I came from. I told her that I'd been born in Los Angeles but that as a child I was raised both there and in Michigan; that after two years of college in Claremont, California, I had spent eighteen months in Europe and North Africa; that, after returning to California, I had moved first from Santa Monica to Carmel, then to New York, then back to Los Angeles, then to Seattle, San Francisco, and Chicago, successively; that, at the moment, I was living in New York in an apartment on the East River. Then I said, "And where do you come from?" She said, pointing to a gas station across the street, "From over there." She went on to say that one of her sons had tried to persuade her to make a second move, for now she lived alone except for the servants, and to come and live with him and his family. She said she refused because she wouldn't feel at home in a strange place. When I asked where he lived, she said, "A few blocks down the street."

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [*Silence*](#), p.265

Betty Isaacs went shopping at Altman's.

She spent all her money except her last dime, which she kept in her hand so that she'd have it ready when she got on the bus to go home and wouldn't have to fumble around in her purse since her arms were full of parcels and she was also carrying a shopping bag. Waiting for the bus, she decided to make sure she still had the coin. When she opened her hand, there was nothing there. She mentally retraced her steps trying to figure out where she'd lost the dime.

Her mind made up, she went straight to the glove department, and sure enough there it was on the floor where she'd been standing. As she stooped to pick it up, another shopper said, "I wish I knew where to go to pick money up off the floor." Relieved, Betty Isaacs took the bus home to the Village. Unpacking her parcels, she discovered the dime in the bottom of the shopping bag.

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.266

When David Tudor, Merce Cunningham,
 Carolyn and Earle Brown, and I
 arrived in Brussels a year or so ago
 for programs at the World's Fair,
 we found out that Earle
 Brown's *Indices* was not going to be
 played since the orchestra found
 it too difficult. So,
 putting two and two
 together, we proposed that
 Merce Cunningham and Carolyn Brown
 dance solos and duets from Merce
 Cunningham's *Springweather and People*
 (which is his title for Earle
 Brown's *Indices*) and that David
 Tudor play the piano transcription as
 accompaniment. With
 great difficulty, arrangements
 were made to realize this proposal.
 At the last minute
 the authorities agreed.
 However, just before the
 performance, the Pope
 died and everything was canceled.

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.266

When David Tudor and I walked into the hotel where we were invited to stay in Brussels, there were large envelopes for each of us at the desk; they were full of programs, tickets, invitations, special passes to the Fair, and general information. One of the invitations I had was to a luncheon at the royal palace adjacent to the Fair Grounds. I was to reply, but I didn't because I was busy with rehearsals, performances, and the writing of thirty of these stories, which I was to deliver as a lecture in the course of the week devoted to experimental music. So one day when I was coming into the hotel, the desk attendant asked me whether I expected to go to the palace for lunch the following day. I said, "Yes." Over the phone, he said, "He's coming." And then he checked my name off a list in front of him. He asked whether I knew the plans of others on the list, which by that time I was reading upside down. I helped him as best I could. The next morning when I came down for breakfast there was a man from Paris associated as physicist with Schaeffer's studio for *musique concrète*. I said, "Well, I'll be seeing you at luncheon today." He said, "What luncheon?" I said, "At the palace." He said, "I haven't been invited." I said, "I'm sure you are invited. I saw your name on the list. You'd better call them up; they're anxious to know who's coming." An hour later the phone rang for me. It was the director of the week's events. He said, "I've just found out that you've invited Dr. So-and-So to the luncheon." I said I'd seen his name on the list. The director said, "You've made a mistake and I am able to correct it, but what I'd like to know is: How many others have you also invited?"

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [*Silence*](#), p.266

An Indian woman who lived in the
islands was
required to come to Juneau
to testify in a trial.

After she had solemnly sworn to tell
the truth,
the whole truth,
and nothing
but the truth,

she was asked whether she had been
subpoenaed.

She said,

“Yes.

Once on the boat coming
over,
and once
in the hotel here in Juneau.”

Source

From “Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music”, [Silence](#), p.267

A depressed young man
came to
see
Hazel Dreis,
the
bookbinder.

He said,

“I’ve decided to commit
suicide.”

She said,

“I think it’s a good idea.

Why don’t you do it?”

Source

From “Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music”, [*Silence*](#), p.267

Mr. Ralph Ferrara drives a Studebaker Lark which is mashed at both ends.

Sometimes the car requires to be pushed in order to run.

One Sunday when the mushroom class met at 10:00 A.M. at Suffern,

Mr. Ferrara didn't arrive.

Next week he told me he'd arrived late, gone to Sloatsburg,

gathered a few mushrooms,

gone home, cooked dinner,

and two of his guests were immediately ill but not seriously.

At the last mushroom field trip,

November 1, 1959, we ended at my house, drank some

stone fences, and ate some

Cortinarius alboviolaceus that Lois Long cooked.

She said to Ralph

Ferrara, "Mr. Cage says that there's nothing like a little mushroom poisoning to make people be on time."

He said, "Oh, yes.

I'm always first in the parking lot."

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.268

While I was studying the frozen
food department of Gristede's
one day, Mrs.
Elliott Carter came up and
said, "Hello,
John. I
thought you touched only fresh
foods." I said,
"All you have to do is
look at them and then
you come over here."
She said, "Elliott
and I have just gotten back
from Europe.
We'd sublet to some
intellectuals whose names I
won't mention.
They had been eating those
platters with all sorts of
food on them." I said,
"Not TV dinners?"
She said,
"Yes, I found
them stuffed around everywhere."

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.268

When I came to New York to study with Adolph Weiss
and Henry Cowell, I took a job in the Brooklyn
YWCA washing walls. There was one other
wall-washer. He was more experienced than I.

He told me how many walls to wash per day.

In this way he checked my original enthusiasm,
with the result that I spent a great deal of time
simply reading the old newspapers which I used to
protect the floors. Thus I had always to be,
so to speak, on my toes, ready to
resume scrubbing the moment I heard the housekeeper
approaching. One room finished, I was
to go to the next, but before entering any room

I was to look in the keyhole to see whether
the occupant's key was in it on the inside.

If I saw no key, I was to assume the
room empty, go in, and set to work.

One morning, called to the office,

I was told I had been accused of peeking
through the keyholes. I no sooner began
to defend myself than I was interrupted.

The housekeeper said that each year the
wall-washer, no matter who he was,
was so accused, always by the same lady.

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.268

Standing in line,

Max Jacob said,

gives one the
opportunity

to practice

patience.

Source

From “Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music”, [*Silence*](#), p.268

Mr. Romanoff is in the mushroom class.
 He is a pharmacist
 and takes color slides of the
 fungi we find. It was
 he who picked up a mushroom I
 brought to the first meeting of the
 class at the New School,
 smelled it, and said,
 "Has anyone perfumed this
 mushroom?" Lois Long said,
 "I don't think so." With each
 plant Mr. Romanoff's pleasure is,
 as one might say,
 like that of a child.
 (However, now and then
 children come on the field trips
 and they don't show particular
 delight over what is found.
 They try to attract attention to
 themselves.) Mr.
 Romanoff said the other day,
 "Life is the sum total of all
 the little things that happen."
 Mr. Nearing smiled.

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.268

Tucker Madawick is seventeen years
old. He is Lois
Long's son by her first husband.
It was
dinnertime. He came
home from his job in the Good
Samaritan Hospital in Suffern
and said to his mother,
"Well, dear, I
won't be seeing you for a couple
of days." Lois Long said,
"What's up?" Tucker
said, "Tomorrow night
after work, I'm
driving to Albany with Danny Sherwood
for a cup of coffee,
and I'll be back for work the
following day." Lois Long
said, "For heaven's
sake, you can have
a cup of coffee here at home."
Tucker Madawick replied,
"Don't be a square.
Read Kerouac."

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.269

Merce Cunningham's parents were going to Seattle to see their other son, Jack. Mrs. Cunningham was driving. Mr. Cunningham said, "Don't you think you should go a little slower? You'll get caught." He gave this warning several times. Finally, on the outskirts of Seattle, they were stopped by a policeman. He asked to see Mrs. Cunningham's license. She rummaged around in her bag and said, "I just don't seem to be able to find it." He then asked to see the registration. She looked for it but unsuccessfully. The officer then said, "Well, what are we going to do with you?" Mrs. Cunningham started the engine. Before she drove off, she said, "I just don't have any more time to waste talking with you. Good-by."

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.269

I went to hear Krishnamurti
 speak. He
 was lecturing on how to
 hear a lecture.

He said, “You
 must pay full attention to what
 is being said and you
 can’t do that if you take
 notes.”

The lady on my right was
 taking notes.

The
 man on her right nudged her
 and said,
 “Don’t you hear what he’s
 saying?
 You’re not supposed to take
 notes.”

She then read what she had
 written and said,

“That’s right.

I have it written
 down right here in my notes.”

Source

From “Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music”, [Silence](#), p.269

Virgil Thomson and Maurice
 Grosser were driving across the
 United States. When they came
 to Kansas,
 Virgil Thomson said,
 "Drive as fast
 as possible,
 in no case stop. Keep on
 going until we get out
 of it." Maurice
 Grosser got hungry and
 insisted on stopping for
 lunch.
 Seeing something at the
 end of the counter,
 he asked what
 it was,
 and the waitress replied,
 "Peanut
 butter pie."
 Virgil
 Thomson said,
 "You see what I mean?"

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.269

One of Mies van der
Rohe's pupils, a girl,
came
to him and said,
"I have
difficulty studying with
you because you
don't leave any room
for self-expression."

He asked her whether
she had a pen with
her.

She did.

He said,
"Sign your name."
She did.

He said,
"That's what I
call self-expression."

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [*Silence*](#), p.269

Just before I moved to the country, I called up the Museum of Natural History and asked a man there what poisonous snakes were to be found in Rockland County. Unhesitatingly he replied, "The copperhead and the rattlesnake." Going through the woods, I never see either (now and then a blacksnake or some other harmless reptile down near the stream or even up in the hills). The children across the road warned me that in our woods snakes hang from the trees. A man who works for the Interstate Park and who lives just north of us on Gate Hill told me he'd never seen any poisonous snakes on our land. ¶ On a mushroom walk near Mianus Gorge in Connecticut we came across thirty copperheads basking in the sun. Mr. Fleming put one in a paper bag and carried it home attached to his belt. He is, of course, a specialist with snakes, works for the Bronx Zoo, and makes hunting expeditions in South America. However, he told me once of another snake specialist who worked for the Park his whole life without ever having any trouble, and then, after getting his pension, went out tramping in the woods, was bitten by a copperhead, didn't take the bite seriously, and died of it. ¶ Among those thirty copperheads at Mianus Gorge I noticed three different colorations, so that I have lost faith in the pictures in the books as far as snake identification goes. What you have to do, it seems, is notice whether or not there is a pitlike indentation in each of the snake's cheeks, between the eye and the nostril, in order to be certain whether it's poisonous or not. That is, of course, difficult unless one is already dangerously close. ¶ Over in New Jersey on Bare Fort Mountain and once up at Sam's Point we ran into rattlesnakes. They were larger and more noble in action and appearance than the copperheads. There was only one on each occasion, and each went through the business of coiling, rattling, and spitting. Neither struck. ¶ My new room is one step up from my old kitchen. One fall evening before the gap between the two rooms was closed up, I was shaving at the sink and happened to notice what seemed to be a copperhead making its way into the house five feet away from where I was standing. Never having killed a snake and feeling the urgency of that's being done, I called, "Paul! A copperhead's in the house!" Paul Williams came running over from his house and killed the snake with a bread board. After he left, the snake was still writhing. I cut off its head with a carving knife. With a pair of tongs, I picked up both parts and flushed them down the toilet. ¶ When I told Daniel DeWees what had happened, he said, "That's what I thought. When I was working in the dark under the house the other day putting in the insulation, I had the feeling there was a snake there near me." I said, "Was it just a feeling? Did you imagine it? Or was there something made you certain?" He said, "Well, I thought I heard some hissing."

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.269

One day when I was studying with Schoenberg, he pointed out the eraser on his pencil and said, "This end is more important than the other." After twenty years I learned to write directly in ink.

Recently, when David Tudor returned from Europe, he brought me a German pencil of modern make. It can carry any size of lead.

Pressure on a shaft at the end of the holder frees the lead so that it can be retracted or extended or removed and another put in its place. A

sharpener came with the pencil.

The sharpener offers not one but several possibilities.

That is, one may choose the kind of point he wishes.

There is no eraser.

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", *Silence*, p.270 ([shown](#))

A crowded bus on the point of leaving Manchester for Stockport was found by its conductress to have one too many standees. She therefore asked, "Who was the last person to get on the bus?" No one said a word.

Declaring that the bus would not leave until the extra passenger was put off, she went and fetched the driver, who also asked, "All right, who was the last person to get on the bus?" Again there was a public silence. So the two went to find an inspector. He asked, "Who was the last person to get on the bus?" No one spoke. He then announced that he would fetch a policeman. While the conductress, driver, and inspector were away looking for a policeman, a little man came up to the bus stop and asked, "Is this the bus to Stockport?" Hearing that it was, he got on. A few minutes later the three returned accompanied by a policeman. He asked, "What seems to be the trouble? Who was the last person to get on the bus?" The little man said, "I was." The policeman said, "All right, get off." All the people on the bus burst into laughter. The conductress, thinking they were laughing at her, burst into tears and said she refused to make the trip to Stockport. The inspector then arranged for another conductress to take over. She, seeing the little man standing at the bus stop, said, "What are you doing there?" He said, "I'm waiting to go to Stockport." She said, "Well, this is the bus to Stockport. Are you getting on or not?"

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.271

Alex and Gretchen Corazzo
 gave a great deal of
 thought to whether or not
 they would attend the funeral
 of a close friend.
 At the last
 minute they decided they
 would go.
 Hurriedly they dressed,
 rushed out of
 the house,
 arrived late;
 the services had begun.
 They took
 seats at the back of the
 chapel.
 When the invitation came to
 view the body,
 they again deliberated,
 finally deciding to
 do so.
 Coming to the casket,
 they discovered they
 were at the wrong funeral.

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.271

Xenia never wanted a party to end.
Once, in Seattle,
when the party we were at was folding,
she invited those who were
still awake, some of whom we'd
only met that evening, to
come over to our house.
Thus it was that about 3:00 A.M.
an Irish tenor was singing
loudly in our living room.
Morris Graves, who had a
suite down the hall, entered
ours without knocking, wearing
an old-fashioned nightshirt and
carrying an elaborately made wooden
birdcage, the bottom of which
had been removed. Making
straight for the tenor,
Graves placed the birdcage over his
head, said nothing,
and left the room.
The effect was that of snuffing out
a candle. Shortly,
Xenia and I were alone.

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.271

Merce Cunningham's father
 delights in gardening.
 Each
 year he has
 had to move the shrubs
 back from the driveway
 to protect them
 from being run over
 when Mrs. Cunningham backs
 out.
 One day Mrs.
 Cunningham in
 backing out knocked
 down but did not hurt
 an elderly
 gentleman who had been
 taking a stroll.
 Getting
 out of her car and
 seeing him lying on
 the sidewalk,
 Mrs. Cunningham said,
 "What
 are you doing there?"

Source

From "Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music", [Silence](#), p.272

While sitting we were of
Slide on top Mountain
towards looking out
Cornell and
Wittenberg
and the Ashokan
Reservoir beyond,
Guy Nearing said
he
had known two
women who
were bitten by
copperheads.
“They were
just the same
after as before,”
he said,
“except
they were a
little more cranky.”

Source

From “Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music”, [Silence](#), p.273

On Christmas Day,

Mother said,

“I’ve
listened to your record several
times.

After hearing all those stories
about your childhood,

I keep
asking myself,

‘Where
was it that I failed?’ ”

Source

From “Indeterminacy: new aspect of form in instrumental and electronic music”, [*Silence*](#), p.273

In connection with my current
studies with Duchamp,

it turns out
that I'm a poor chessplayer.

My mind seems in some
respect lacking,

so that
I make obviously stupid moves.

I do
not for a moment doubt that
this lack of intelligence
affects my music and thinking
generally.

However, I have a redeeming
quality:

I was
gifted with a sunny disposition.

Source

Excerpt from the Forward, [*A Year from Monday*](#), p.x

Just before Christmas I
 visited my mother who
 lives in a nursing home.
 (Two years ago
 she suffered a severe heart
 attack which left her
 physically helpless.) I told
 her 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."

Source

Excerpt from the introduction to "Diary: How To Improve The World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) Continued 1967", [A
 Year from Monday](#), p.145

I have a friend whose actions
 resemble overwhelming inspirations.
 Constantly
 changing in her course,
 she nevertheless does fully
 whatever it is she is
 doing, so that
 I would say she is committed. She
 would like,
 however, she told
 me, not to have
 two of everything,
 but just one,
 so that she could be
 utterly concentrated.
 When she told me this
 I was surprised,
 because I thought she was
 committed in the first place,
 and because I
 myself feel more committed
 the more diverse and multiplied
 my interests and actions become.

Source

Excerpt from "Lecture on Commitment", [*A Year from Monday*](#), p.115

I never had a hat, never
wore one, but recently
was given a brown
suede duck-hunting hat.

The moment I put
it on I I
realized I was starved
for a hat.
I
kept it warm by
putting it on my head.
I made plans
to wear it especially
when I was going to
do any thinking.

Somewhere in
Virginia,
I lost my hat.

Source

Excerpt from "Lecture on Commitment", [A Year from Monday](#), p.116

What was it actually
that made me choose
music rather than
painting?

Just because they
said nicer things about
my music than they
did about my
paintings?

But I don't have
absolute pitch.
I can't keep
a tune.

In fact,
I have no
talent for music.

The last
time I saw her,
Aunt Phoebe said,
in the wrong profession.”

Source

Excerpt from “Lecture on Commitment”, [A Year from Monday](#), p.118

The day before yesterday towards the middle of the afternoon I noticed I was running out of matches. I went through pockets, under papers on tables and finally found a single match. Having lit a cigarette, I decided to keep one lit constantly whether I was smoking or not. Oppressed by this obligation, I went downstairs to the kitchen, found nothing, but picked up an article by the man at the other end of the hall that happened to catch my eye. I read it, cooked dinner, went on working, and managed through all of this to light another cigarette before the burning one burned out. I determined to go to the movies in order to get some matches. However, in the car, I found some partly used folders of them and just went to the movies uselessly. The next afternoon, the secretary came in and asked for a match. I still had a few left from those I'd found in the car. I realized the situation was growing ticklish. I left and with the single purpose of getting matches. I came back with an artichoke, a sweet potato, an onion I didn't need (for I already had one), three limes, two persimmons, six cans of ale, a box of cranberries and an orange, eggs, milk, and cream, and fortunately I remembered the matches. That evening the possibility of lighting a cigarette on an electric stove was mentioned, an action with which I am fully familiar.

Source

Excerpt from "Where Are We Going? and What Are We Doing?", [*Silence*](#), p.208

Anyway, he was
 explaining one day the
 meaning of a Chinese character
 — Yu,
 — I believe it was

spending the whole time
 explaining it and yet
 its meaning
 as close as he could
 get to it in English
 was
 “unexplainable.”

Finally he
 laughed and then said,
 “Isn’t it strange that
 I come all the way from Japan
 spend my time
 explaining to you
 which is not to be that
 explained?”

Source

Excerpt from “Composition As Process”, [Silence](#), p.32

Years ago when I was studying with
Arnold Schoenberg someone
asked him
to explain
his technique
of twelve-tone
composition.

His
reply
was
immediate:

“That
is none of your business.”

Source

Excerpt from “Composition As Process”, [Silence](#), p.33

Several men, three as a matter of fact, were out walking one day, and as they were walking along and talking one of them noticed another man standing on a hill ahead of them. He turned to his friends and said, "Why do you think that man is standing up there on that hill?" One said, "He must be up there because it's cooler there and he's enjoying the breeze." He turned to another and repeated his question, "Why do you think that man's standing up there on that hill?" The second said, "Since the hill is elevated above the rest of the land, he must be up there in order to see something in the distance." And the third said, "He must have lost his friend and that is why he is standing there alone on that hill." After some time walking along, the men came up the hill and the one who had been standing there was still there: standing there. They asked him to say which one was right concerning his reason for standing where he was standing. ¶ "What reasons do you have for my standing here?" he asked. "We have three," they answered. "First, you are standing up here because it's cooler here and you are enjoying the breeze. Second, since the hill is elevated above the rest of the land, you are up here in order to see something in the distance. Third, you have lost your friend and that is why you are standing here alone on this hill. We have walked this way; we never meant to climb this hill; now we want an answer: Which one of us is right?" ¶ The man answered, "I just stand."

Source

Excerpt from "Composition As Process", [Silence](#), p.33

I am not a good historian.
I don't know
how many years it's
been,
but every now
and then, when
I go out,
I hesitate at the door,
wondering whether
a cigarette's still burning
somewhere in the house.

Source

Excerpt from "Diary: How To Improve The World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) Continued 1973–1982", [X: Writings '79–'82](#), p.169