Silence; Lectures and Writings Study Guide

Silence; Lectures and Writings by John Cage

Contents

Plot Summary

This collection of essays and presentations by noted composer and musical innovator John Cage attempts to capture on paper both the intellectual and stylistic creativity with which he approached his work. In both the themes of the collection and the internal arrangement of the individual pieces, the author explores the nature of music, music's relationship to sound, and the value of incorporating randomness into what had previously been an ordered, carefully considered art form.

After a brief forward, in which he introduces the basic principles that formed both his theories and the writings (in this collection) that developed from them, the author's first few essays discuss the practical manifestations of those principles—specifically, how they influenced the creation and performance of new and/or experimental music. Two further essays examine how both principle and practice were applied to the creation of three specific compositions, with introductory notes to all the essays (here and throughout the collection) relating the specific circumstances and/or techniques that went into their creation.

The author then examines the development of modern/experimental music, both its theory and its applications in America, and offers brief, semi-biographical sketches of two of its earliest proponents. He then, in four essays, explores the ongoing development of the symbiotic, mutually beneficial relationship between modern music and modern dance, suggesting that the experience of each was expanded by the influence and incorporation of elements of the other. Finally, he also explores the parallels between these music/dance experiments (not to mention the intention behind them) and similar experiments and intentions manifesting in the world of visual art.

Two lengthy presentations in the middle of the collection expand upon the Buddhist theory at the heart of the author's theories and practical work. This theory, simply stated, suggests that while values are based on expectations and judgment, an experience's actual worth ought to be based on what it is, not on what an individual thinks it should be.

Two further, and equally lengthy, lectures juxtapose experimental form with philosophical content. The first, written to be presented in a tightly proscribed period of time, expands upon the author's theories about the relationship (tension?) between randomness and structure, and upon the idea that composition (and by extension art in general) ought to be interpreted as a representation of existence rather than an explanation of it. This essay is a reiteration of his often repeated assertion that there is no such thing as silence (something, he suggests, is always making a sound). In the next essay, he again uses intricately calculated form and content to reinforce his idea that meaning in life is hard to come by, but is possible to achieve in glimpses.

The book concludes with a collection of anecdotes, humorous but illuminating in tone and similar in both tone and content to the anecdotes appearing throughout the book,

that further proves his central point that relationships between experiences may not always be apparent, but are always present.

Throughout the book, the author presents anecdotes of his personal experience exploring the book's central themes. While he leaves understanding of the relationship between anecdote and theme up to the reader, there is the clear sense throughout that in structuring the book in this way, he is offering the reader an opportunity to understand the relationship between theory and practice—specifically, the parallels between theory, practice and the experience of existence.

Part 1

Part 1 Summary and Analysis

"Forward" The author introduces the writings in this collection by explaining that they were written and presented in ways deliberately chosen to be non-traditional (as opposed to the traditional manner of a presenter reading his/her text from beginning to end following a linear structure of thought and idea). He writes that this approach was influenced by "Dada" and "Zen" (see "Objects/Places" and "Quotes—Forward"), commenting that the influence of both seems to have waned at the time of writing (the mid-20th Century).

"The Future of Music: Credo" (1937) This lecture has two components. The first (printed in all caps) is intercut with the main body of the text (standard type) and expresses the lecture's main idea—that in the future, all sounds can and will be electronically reproducible and usable in music. He goes on to suggest that composers will become equivalent to "organizers of sound," able to present their work without having to go through a performer. This section concludes with three anecdotes commenting on how the expected can fail to happen, how the jarring and inappropriate can somehow seem beautiful, and how Zen enlightenment comes when least expected.

"Experimental Music" (1957) The author begins by explaining that he had once resisted his creations being called "experimental," but came to realize that "new music" is ultimately all about experimenting with sounds, and with silence—how they relate to each other, transform each other, and illumine each other (see "Quotes," Experimental Music—2). He comments that the growth of experimental music follows a general rule about what might be summed up as evolution (see "Quotes," Experimental Music—5). The section concludes with two anecdotes—how persistence led to success for the author and his wife, and how the coming of an idea is more valuable to a creator than the value of the idea itself.

"Experimental Music: Doctrine" (1855) The introduction to this article suggests that its question-and-answer structure is a reference to an Asian doctrine of philosophy. The first part of the article is a straightforward analysis of the term "experimental," repeating several points from the previous essay. The second part appears to be a stream-of-consciousness commentary on the nature of sound and how, if examined closely on its most basic level, it neither can nor should be interpreted. The third part of this section is written in question-and-answer form as the author (as answerer) amplifies his belief that experimental music should be considered only as sounds.

In this section the author introduces (and reiterates) his central theories about the nature of music, theories he expands upon throughout the rest of the book ("credo" is another word for belief). Those theories can easily be seen, even now (several decades later) as being potentially quite controversial, which indeed they were and continue to be. They were not widely adopted, but in the decades since they were first presented

composers have explored them, expanded upon them, and introduced countless variations on the author's intellectual themes.

It must be remembered that the lectures here, and throughout this collection, were written over a period of several decades, a span which covered major world events like World War II. In other words, the world was in a period of social, political, and spiritual upheaval, a time of extreme change. This suggests that on some level, the ideas and work of the author, along with those composers of similar mind (whose work he discusses later) was a reflection not just of a movement towards change in art, but a movement towards change in the world.

Part 2

Part 2 Summary and Analysis

In an introduction to this section, the author comments that these three lectures were given in Germany in 1958.

"Composition as Process—1: Changes" This lecture is constructed in four vertical columns placed side by side on the page. Each column is interrupted by space without words, which (according to the author's introduction) is intended to be a space in which underscoring from a pre-recorded composition, playing underneath the entire lecture, can be heard. The content of the lecture consists of the author's commentary on how his process of composition has evolved from early experiments with sound, silence and structure to later works of a much more indeterminate nature (see "Quotes," Composition as Process—1: Changes (3).

Composition as Process—2: Indeterminacy. This lecture is written, according to the author's note of introduction, in "excessively small type ... in an attempt to emphasize the intentionally pontifical character of this lecture." The content of the lecture explores ways in which various composers (including Bach, Stockhausen, Morton Feldman and Earle Brown) incorporate elements of randomness and "indeterminacy" in their compositions and in their directions as to how those compositions are to be played. The work of each composer is each explored in a section that begins with an identical, repeated phrase, and discusses the same points of comparison in each section with very similar words and phrasing. The lecture draws to a close with the comment that compositions "indeterminate with respect to their performance" are by definition experimental, since "an experimental action is one the outcome of which is not foreseen." An anecdote printed at the conclusion of the lecture recounts the comment of Dr. Suzuki who, after an evening debating the merits of various writers and various spiritual practices, comments that he loves philosophical debate. "No one wins."

Composition as Process—III: Communication. The author's note of introduction describes the content of this lecture as quotations and questions, the "order and quantity of the quotations" being determined by chance operations (in previous lectures, he has left the content to be determined by the toss of a coin). As the author asks his question, each answered by another, he examines ideas relating to the nature of what music communicates (if anything), the nature of experience (not only of music but of life), and the nature of music itself (what makes a noise or a sound become musical). The section concludes with a series of personal anecdotes relating to the limiting nature of having any kind of expectation.

There are several noteworthy points about this section. The first is that it becomes fully apparent, for the first time in the book, that the author is approaching his ideas and work from a philosophical perspective, mining words and phrases for their deepest possible meanings and implications, and then juxtaposing them with others to initiate new

perspectives. The second is the emerging sense that for the author (and, by implication, those who share his perspective) is as much concerned with experimenting with process as he is with product. In short, and to put it bluntly, he and his colleagues/allies seem more concerned with how their music is created than they are with how it is perceived/received by its hearers.

The third point to note about this section is the way its content is presented on the page—specifically, as an evident reproduction of the author's original presentational intent. While it is difficult, if not impossible, to get a fully accurate impression of how the lecture was/should be presented (certain components such musical underscoring are missing), the presentation here does create a vivid sense in the reader of just how committed the author was to experimentation in form. In other words, he does not just talk about innovation and change, he puts it into active practice.

For consideration of the relationship between the anecdotes and the body of the various lectures, see "Style—Tone".

Part 3

Part 3 Summary and Analysis

The author's introduction portrays these two essays as being highly technical in nature.

"Composition: To Describe the Process of Composition Used in 'Music of Changes' and 'Imaginary Landscape No. 4'" In this lecture, the author describes (in considerable detail) the process by which he created this piece of music scored for twelve radios. As he portrays it, the process was simultaneously mathematical (based on careful graphing) and completely random (the result of coins tossed in the manner of the I-Ching—see "Objects/Places").

"Composition: To Describe the Process of Composition Used in 'Music for Piano." In this lecture, the author describes how this piece was created, a process involving layers of paper and making musical notation where flaws overlap, and random generation (again through the I-Ching like tossing of coins) of tone, quality of striking, pitch, and the order in which each layer of paper is to be read in performance. The author concludes this lecture with the suggestion that, because so much is determined randomly, "What has been composed?"

"Forerunners of Modern Music" The introduction to the following article comments that it first appeared in a music journal published in 1949. The article itself consists of brief commentary on the purpose of music, definitions of what defines music, the strategy of creating music, and an analysis of the nature of rhythm. These commentaries, it seems, are all presented with an eye towards suggesting that all earlier ideas involving some kind of defined form are what modern music is breaking away from, in the name of giving individuals the opportunity to reach emotional and spiritual heights "at special moments." The section concludes with a trio of anecdotes in which the value and truth inherent in random events, as well as the Buddhist perspective about such values, are all celebrated.

"History of Experimental Music in the United States" This article, according to the author's introduction, was written and published in 1959. It begins with a series of anecdotes relating the perspective of various innovators in philosophy and art that neither the past nor the future has any real relevance—there is only the present. The article then discusses how contemporary composition has moved away from traditional definitions of music into the more "experimental," a term defined here (as the author has done in previous lectures) as suggesting the outcome is unknown. He describes how contemporary techniques of composition have evolved with an eye to making the outcome of actually playing the compositions unknown, and goes on to suggest that America (with its cultural and social rejection of tradition) is the ideal environment for true experimental music to emerge (see "Topics for Discussion—Why do you think ..."). He comments that many people fear such experimentation and such originality, but

adds that history is defined by the beliefs and actions of such people (see "Topics for Discussion—Consider the author's comment ...")

Again, there are several noteworthy points in this section. The first is an apparent tension and/or contradiction between the ideas of randomness and form—if the author is so devoted to incorporating randomness in music, why write down anything at all? Why not just set up the parameters for the creation of "music" and then let it take what form it will during performance in front of an audience? It could be argued, and probably was, that random compositional techniques can only go so far, and indeed there is the clear implication throughout the book that the author believed this to be the case. Meanwhile, in this context it is interesting to note that the author rarely, if ever, comments upon improvisation in music, a practice most often employed in jazz whereby an instrumentalist improvises, or makes up, music within a set tonal framework.

The second noteworthy point is the author's raising of a question that, while presented explicitly here, subtextually underpins the entire collection—what indeed has been composed? Answers to that question would probably be determined on the definition of "composition" used, meaning that those same answers would probably be as varied as the perspectives of those asking the question.

The third point to note is the reference to Buddhism at the end of "Forerunners of Modern Music," which has an echo in the opening paragraphs of "History of Experimental Music..."—specifically, in the reference to there only being the present. This principle is a central one in Buddhist philosophy, a fact that suggests (along with the reference in the previous chapter) that the author's approach to/perspective on composition is, at its core, essentially Buddhist in nature. For further consideration of this idea, see "Themes—Manifestations of Buddhism."

Part 4

Part 4 Summary and Analysis

The writings in this brief section analyze the contribution of two important composers to the development of experimental music.

"Erik Satie" The introduction states that this article, in the form of a conversation between the author and composer Erik Satie (see "Important People), is in fact imaginary, since Satie died several years previously. Satie's "comments," the author writes, are based on things he is supposed to have said and "excerpts from his writings." As the author argues that new music has moved beyond Satie's experiments (while arguing that those experiments and Satie's works are indispensable), "comments" from Satie are interjected that reveal a near-poetic sensibility that contrasts with what the author is portraying as a purely mathematical intent. Both essentially argue that the concept of music must expand to include sounds of the world and of life.

"Edgard Varese" This article, the author notes, was written for a magazine published in 1958 in tribute to the innovative composer Varese, whom the author describes as having "more clearly and actively than anyone else of his generation ... established the present nature of music." The article is followed by a collection of anecdotes in which the author relates further experiences of important truth emerging through chance encounters and patience.

The essay on Satie can be seen as an evocation (perhaps deliberate, perhaps not) by the author of the relationship between past and present innovation, with its implication that not only does modern music owe its existence to the work of previous, like-minded composers, but also to the work of more traditional composers. In other words, if the innovators had not had something to rebel against, their work would not be possible. Meanwhile the article on Varese is essentially a work of admiration and praise, with the anecdotes presented at its conclusion suggesting here, as wherever else they are presented, that the principles of experimental music creation are in fact supported by principles of creation and/or existence in general.

Part 5

Part 5 Summary and Analysis

The writings in this section explore the relationship between modern music and modern dance which, as they evolved, influenced each other significantly.

"Four Statements on the Dance" The author begins this section with a description of how he became involved in creating compositions for dance companies, in particular the company formed and led by Merce Cunningham (see "Important People.")

"Goal: New Music, New Dance" (published 1939). This essay argues that as contemporary music evolves, freedom from the "old sounds" will emerge, at least partly as the result of new emphasis on, and new understanding of, rhythm and the value of percussion instruments. The author suggests that dancers and choreographers, whose work is ultimately defined by rhythm, will benefit a great deal from this transition. The article concludes with anecdotes from the author referring to how what had once been true is revealed to be false, but at times (after contemplation) true once more.

"Grace and Clarity" (published 1944). This analysis of modern dance starts with commentary that it has yet to find a consistent approach and/or way of working—it is, the author contends, still founded in the dance teachings of the past and in the age-old practice of student emulating teacher or mentor. The author then comments that while classical ballet is devoid of meaning, it is nevertheless clear in its structure (as defined by the music to which it is set), and therefore in what (and how) it communicates with an audience. This clarity, he adds, is missing from modern dance ... along with grace, which the author never specifically defines but suggests is warm, free, and flowing. He also suggests that modern dance, like all art, must strive for a balance between that which is clear and ordered, and that which is enigmatic and free. The essay is followed by a collection of anecdotes portraying how the same subject (such as a piece of experimental music) can trigger vastly differing responses in different people.

"In This Day ..." (written in 1956, published in 1957). The author first comments that, in the age of television, the appeal of public performance seems to be waning. He then comments that the aim of both modern dance and modern music is to simply create an experience of movement and/or sound, as opposed to meaning (see "Quotes"—Four Statements on the Dance: In This Day...") The article is followed by a pair of anecdotes in which well-intentioned lies backfire on the people uttering them.

"2 Pages, 122 Words on Music and Dance" (1957) The author notes that the number of words in this article was determined by random generation, while the placement of those words was determined by judging the relationship between imperfections on the paper on which the words were written. He comments that the arrangement has been altered for publication. The substance of the piece comments that true impressions of

music and dance must begin from a place of no expectations and continue through an experience now exclusive of past and present.

This section is noteworthy for its apparent contradictions—specifically the idea developed in "Grace and Clarity" that modern dance must find a balance between randomness and order (ie meaning), and the idea developed in both "In This Day ..." and "2 Pages ..." that the ultimate purpose of both modern dance and experimental music is to present pure sensation without meaning. The apparent contradiction here is defused, however, when one remembers that the essays were written at least twelve years apart—in other words, the contradictions can be seen rather as an evolution of idea.

Meanwhile, consideration of the compositional process described in "2 Pages...", not to mention the processes described elsewhere in this collection, raises the philosophical question of just how random the author's compositional technique actually is. Think about it—the process he describes is a plan (albeit one that leads to incorporate elements of randomness). But can anything that has aspects/elements of a plan truly be considered as entirely random? There is also the possible argument that everything is planned—that in spite of his efforts at ensuring randomness, the ways of the universe are such that what emerges is what was destined to come into being. It is what it was meant to be. In other words, what the author is in fact exploring in his life and work is the age old tension between chaos and order, randomness and destiny, free will and fate.

Part 6

Part 6 Summary and Analysis

"On Robert Rauschenberg, artist, and his Work" (1961) This essay is a commentary on, and analysis of, the work of painter Robert Rauschenberg who, according to the free-form language and structure of the essay, painted in the same way as composers of contemporary, experimental music composed—with an emphasis on the random, and the free.

"Lecture on Nothing" (1959) An introduction describes the calculated method by which the words of the lecture were printed on the original pages. As published, the lines of words are broken down into columns, with punctuation appearing in a separate column and small figures indicating transitions between sections. The lecture itself begins with commentary on how poetry "is the realization that we possess nothing," and continues with the statement that whatever we experience "since we do not possess it" is a delight but that its loss must not be feared. Through the structure of the lecture, he says, he is commenting on the relationship between structure and life (see "Quotes—Lecture on Nothing: 1), and speaks of his love for music and sound that began when he was a child, which evolved into his love of sound. Most of the rest of the lecture consists of repetitions of his explanation of structure, his contention that the lecture is getting nowhere, and his suggestion that anyone who wants to go to sleep can do so. In the final section of the lecture, however, the author suggests that "Everybody has a song ..." and "when you sing you are where you are" (see "Quotes—Lecture on Nothing: 2). In an after-note to this lecture, the author comments that he prepared six standardized answers for potential questions, the use of which quickly led the audience to stop asking questions. The lecture is followed by anecdotes in which various poems of Japanese poetry are satirized, how the author avoided psychoanalysis, and how a sound technician during a recording session was easily influenced by the author's suggestions on what he might expect from his music.

"Lecture on Something" (printed in 1959, written some years earlier) The author introduces this essay by commenting that its subject, composer Morton Feldman, had a "tendency towards tenderness," and concludes it by suggesting that anyone who owns a recording of the music should not think he owns the music itself. "The very practice of music," he writes, "and Feldman's eminently, is a celebration that we own nothing."

The essay itself is a lengthy discussion of how nothing and something are defined by each other, in the same way as sound defines silence (and vice versa), death defines life (and vice versa) and, in music, tonic defines the dominant (and vice versa). To illustrate his point, the author includes in the printed version several empty pages, which when the speech was presented were moments of silence. The author suggests here that Morton Feldman was not afraid of either sound or silence, and understood the necessary relationship between not only that pair of opposites but the other pairs of opposites at work in the universe as well.

The first point to note about this section is the author's development of the idea (in "On Robert Roschenberg ..." that the principles of randomness he advocates manifest not only in modern music and modern dance, but in modern painting as well. The implication here is that the author is, in fact, discussing an evolution in the general expression and/or understanding of human existence.

This idea is developed further in "Lecture on Nothing" which in spite of its form (which might well be perceived by both the reader and the listener as incomprehensible) makes a profound suggestion about the human experience, a development of the point introduced in "On Robert Roschenberg..." This is the idea that the ultimate value and joy of human existence is its freedom, and that experimental music is an artistic expression of both the value and the joy. Meanwhile, the after-note again raises the question of what exactly is random in the author's work and what exactly is ordered. Yes, the content of his prepared answers is determined by random chance, and yes they are delivered in a random order in response to questions. But if the answers are prepared in advance, are they truly random?

"Lecture on Something" is, on one level, similar in intent and content to the lectures on Satie, Varese and Roschenberg—that is, a celebration of the work of a colleague and perhaps even a statement of solidarity ... the idea that he (the author) is not alone in exploring ideas that some (many?) might find extreme. On another level, however, it can be seen as a re-development of the book's theme of Buddhism. Without actually saying so, the theories discussed by the author are an evocation of the Buddhist principle of yin/yang, a principle expressing the theory that the universe and all the relationships within it are defined by relationships between opposites.

Part 7

Part 7 Summary and Analysis

"45' For a Speaker" The author introduces this essay by explaining the process of its creation in relation to a musical piece which was, in its turn, defined by random chance. He explains that the title refers to the length of time (45 minutes) that he intends for the speech to be spoken in. He also describes the circumstances of its writing—how his original plans for writing it (where and when) were disrupted by random events of chance. Finally, he describes how he randomly determined which of a series of verbal and/or physical gestures should happen when, and incorporates those determinations into the written text.

That text is marked with the time (noted at ten second intervals) the author has determined each section should take. The content of the speech explores the relationship between chaos and order, between random determination of events (such as notes in music) and structure (which, the author contends, is not indicative of a genuine truth of existence). At times, he refers to both his presentation and his compositions as "theater" rather than a lecture, a representation of existence rather than an explanation of it. He refers to how constantly and thoroughly everything is changing, suggesting that his work and the random determinations of what that work involves are manifestations of that central principle. He adds that there is no such thing as error, only misplaced expectation, and concludes the lecture with the suggestion that "there is no such thing as silence. Something is always happening that makes a sound."

Following the essay, there is another series of anecdotes. The first is about the author's secret drinking of his favorite alcohol at a party (after telling the host he preferred something else) and a misunderstanding about a coat, about which he lies. The second one about a friend's careful sorting of a box of foodstuffs and spices that had been mixed up in transit, an action portrayed by the author as being both unnecessary and almost obsessive. The third relates to a monk's comment after enlightenment that he is just as miserable as ever, while the fourth is about Meister Eckhardt's struggle for respect, which ends after his death with his excommunication.

The themes of this essay/lecture are essentially the themes of the collection, expressed in different ways and with different levels of intensity throughout. The relationship between structure and randomness, the function of his art as a representation rather than an explanation, the idea that there is no such thing as silence—all are ideas repeated throughout the book in one form or another, albeit with differing degrees of assertiveness. Here they are presented with a degree or two more firmness, in a more didactic fashion, than they are presented with elsewhere.

That being said, a very interesting idea presented here and developed nowhere else in the collection is the idea that there is no such thing as error, only misplaced expectation. For further consideration of this, see "Discuss the implications of ..." Here is one of the

most vivid examples in the book of how the author's analysis/commentary goes beyond philosophies of composition and into philosophies of existence.

For a further understanding of Meister Eckhardt and the implications of the reference to him here (and of other references throughout the book) see "Important People."

Part 8

Part 8 Summary and Analysis

"Where Are We Going? And What Are We Doing?" The first part of this section describes how the lecture is to be delivered—with a single speaker reading one version of the speech while three other versions (which the speaker has recorded in his/her own voice) play simultaneously. The second part of the introduction explores the author's train of thought that led him to this style of presentation—an examination of the paradoxical question of whether "man is in control of nature or is he, as part of it, going along with it?" He then comments that the form of this lecture makes meaning "not easy to come by," but that he has chosen it "out of regard for the way in which [he understands] nature operates. This view," he adds, "makes us all equals ..."

The first layer of the speech focuses on the process of change—how the author, like other experimental artists and, in his mind, every human being on the planet, is in the process of going somewhere new and different from where s/he was going before. He illustrates his point through several references to change, to embracing and exploring it rather than resisting and judging it.

The second layer consists of a series of random images, expressions of insight, and ideas juxtaposed with more coherent discussions of how fully experiencing such randomness (chaos) can lead to a deeper, more insightful understanding of the nature of existence. "There is therefore no problem of understanding," the author writes, "but the possibility of awareness."

The content of the third layer is in many ways as random as that of the second, but is anchored by the author's contention that "We are not just going, "we are being swept away..." into a universal field of being and experience. He comments that that field is, in essence, the ongoing process of change, and that every human being can find value and ultimately peace in acceptance of that change ... in other words, in willingly entering the field. "Some people," he writes, "are coming out of church and others are on their way in. Apparently it's continuous."

In the fourth layer, the author suggests that moving into the "field" as described above can be frightening—because it is unknown, and because it means change in perspective and experience. He suggests, however, that such a move is ultimately inevitable, necessary, rewarding and fulfilling.

Throughout all four layers, there are references to hunting for mushrooms and enjoying them once they have been found, and to the author's attendance at a Christmas Candlelight Concert (at which the candles were electric rather than wax).

If this book were a novel, and structured along traditional narrative lines, this essay would be considered its climax, its high point of narrative tension, emotion, and thematic

clarity. As it stands, it is certainly the point at which the collection's themes and concerns all come together, if one takes the time and makes the effort to look at each layer of text individually (as the author surely did when he was creating it). He comments in the introduction that the piece's meaning will not be easy to come by and in many ways it certainly is not.

The question, of course, is whether the author's means of presentation (with all four layers being presented at the same time, albeit with occasionally integrated periods of silence) would have allowed for the listening audience to glean any meaning at all. Without actually hearing the speech delivered as intended, the question may be difficult to answer, but it is possible to perceive that, in the periods in which only one layer of text is heard (there being silence in the other layers), glimpses of meaning can occasionally be perceived. And as the author himself might suggest, is not this in fact a representation of life ... that in all the noise and layers and activities of day to day existence, a human being catches rare, brief glimpses of what it might all be about?

Several of the ideas glimpsed in the speech are evocations of Buddhist philosophy and principles. These include the evocation of the inevitability of change in the first layer, the statement in the second layer that "There is therefore no problem of understanding, but the possibility of awareness...", and the idea in the third layer that everyone is part of a universal experience. All these ideas are components of Buddhist philosophy (see "Themes"), which is underpinned by the central premise that while human beings may both strive and long for understanding and insight, the nature of existence is such that an individual can become aware of only possible, not absolute, meaning.

Meanwhile, there are glancing references to mushrooms throughout the narrative, but it is only here that the author's near-obsession with them is discussed and/or presented in any detail. For further consideration of this aspect of the author's experience, see "Objects/Places—Mushrooms" and the content of the following section.

Finally, the repeated references in this essay to the electrical nature of the candles at the Candlelight Service can be seen as a metaphoric echo of what the author implies throughout—that work with electronic musical tools is supplementing, if not replacing, more traditional aspects of music making.

Part 9

Part 9 Summary and Analysis

"Indeterminacy" In his introduction, the author describes how a friend and fellow composer urged him to create a lecture solely out of anecdotal material, and how he (the author) embraced the idea as an example and/or manifestation of his belief in the principle of randomness. He then relates how over the years he wrote over ninety anecdotes (to be mixed and matched as the impulse took him) and how the anecdotes at the end of each section of this publication are taken from his collection. Finally, he reveals that each anecdote is designed to be read in one minute, that they are evocative of his belief that everything is related, and that the complexity of that relationship "is more evident when it is not oversimplified by an idea of relationship in one person's mind."

Several anecdotes relate to the author's fascination with mushrooms—how important it is to examine the subject of an experiment (such as cooking wild mushrooms) to ensure its safety and how a particular philosopher's words and meaning often came clear later (at one point, the author says, while he—the author—was out looking for mushrooms). Other mushroom-related anecdotes include a story of how a sauce made of wild mushrooms was at first awful but aged into something wonderful, how the author was at times mocked for his interest in mushrooms, and how a fatiguing search for mushrooms ended with no mushrooms but a glimpse of the Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights). Yet other mushroom anecdotes include the comment from a member of the author's "mushroom class" that "Life is the sum total of all the little things that happen...", and the story of the mushroom "expert" whose specialty in "jelly fungi" prevents him from identifying a toxic fleshy mushroom that the author can (and does) identify.

Non-mushroom anecdotes include an analysis of Bach (who, according to the author, is generally viewed as a representative of order, musical and otherwise, in a chaotic world) and tales recounting the perspectives of a Mrs. Coomaraswamy (a friend from India) on the unpredictable nature of commerce. There is also the story of how a woman looking for lost money found what she thought she had lost, but later found what she had actually lost in a shopping bag, and the brief tale of a teacher who, when told by a student that he did not allow self-expression, said her signature was what he called "self-expression." Another anecdote refers to how the author's mentor, Schoenberg, told him the most important part of a pencil was the eraser, and how the author's friend David once gave him an expensive, versatile pencil with no eraser.

In another anecdote the author writes that "A four year old child had just then committed suicide," and goes on to suggest that the Indian sage Ramakrishna said "that the child had not sinned, he had simply corrected an error; he had been born by mistake."

"Music Lover's Field Companion" The introduction to this brief essay comments that it was prepared for a publication devoted to humor. In the essay itself, the author

comments that "much can be learned about music by devoting oneself to the mushroom," suggesting an investigation of mushrooms for the sounds they make and the incorporating of those (amplified) sounds into music and entertainment, and expressing the hope that music might one day be found that could transform the poisonous into the edible. He concludes that, as the result of an incident in which he calculatedly experimented with eating a poisonous plant, "...it behooves us therefore to see each thing directly as it is, be it the sound of a tin whistle or the elegant Lepiota procera."

The lighter, almost playful, overall tone of this section is something of a relief following the intellectual intensity of the rest of the book. This is not to say, however, that its content is any less evocative of the book's central themes. On the contrary, the overall sense of the various anecdotes is that they are all explorations of the book's themes of Buddhist perception and philosophy. Here this manifests in the linking principle that everything is what it is, that there is both randomness and order in existence, and that meaning (beauty, value, etc) can be found in and/or emerge from the most unlikely sources (even a sauce that, on a first try, tastes horrible).

Meanwhile, the author's comment about expectation at the end of the introduction can be seen as having clear echoes with his earlier comment (Section 7) that there is no such thing as error, only mistakes in expectation, which is also echoed in the quote from the philosopher Ramakrishna). The implication of all these statements is that human existence is, or at least might be, less troubling and more peaceful if individuals went about their daily lives without expectation, only experience and awareness. Here again is an evocation of Buddhist thought/philosophy.

Finally, the author again evokes the tension (Buddhist balance?) between randomness and order by suggesting that each anecdote is to be read within a minute. Here again he suggests that at least some degree of order is to be imposed on the apparent chaos of creation, order of purpose and intent if not of understanding and perception. In other words, he again places authorial and/or presentational intent as a higher priority than the audience's capacity to interpret that intent.

Characters

The Author (John Cage)

John Cage has been referred to as one of the most important composers, not to mention one of the most important figures overall, in American music in the 20th Century. An innovator and rule breaker, he is perhaps most well known for a piece he composed entitled 4'33", which consists of a pianist sitting in silence while the audience listens to the "music" in the sounds around them (at least that was Cage's stated intention). His work and ideas were generally controversial but embraced by composers and performers of the so called "avant garde" 1960s and 1970s, who were interested in any form of art that both broke the rules and celebrated the breaking.

Silence: Lectures and Writings gives the impression that Cage approached his work from a philosophical as well as artistic perspective. This is conveyed in two ways. First, the language and style of the pieces contained in the book are reminiscent of works of philosophy, in their excavation of meaning in language and argument, and in their profound exploration of ideas. Second, Cage is interested not only in music, but in why music is perceived the way it is, what makes it what it is, exploring why some things are perceived as music and others as simply noise, and whether there are ways of blurring the boundaries between the two. In other words, he is interested in the same sort of basic questions (what is the nature of what is?) with which non-musical philosophers examine life and existence in general.

Finally, the book also gives the impression of a sense of curiosity and wonder actively playing a role in Cage's thought and work. This is conveyed in two ways. The first is through the subplot-like references, appearing throughout the book, to his interest in mushrooms and his ongoing search for knowledge of which mushrooms are safe, which mushrooms are poisonous and which mushrooms can be found where. The second way in which Cage's curiosity is portrayed is through the anecdotes that appear at the conclusion of many of the writings and which make up the entirety of Section 9. These anecdotes give the very clear sense that Cage's mind is open and perceptive, looking for the smallest glimpses of meaning and insight in the most casual of relationships and circumstances, and for ways of finding echoes of both meaning and insight in his musical work.

Arnold Schoenberg

Schoenberg was a German composer actively working and teaching in the early-mid 20th Century. A mentor to Cage, Schoenberg was himself a musical innovator, exploring and advocating the use of what has come to be known as "twelve tone composition" (the employment of all twelve tones in the chromatic scale in mathematical configurations known as "tone rows"). Anecdotes recounted by Cage in this book portray Schoenberg as harsh and insensitive and also suggest that Cage felt clearly and

strongly that he had taken his musical innovations far beyond those of Schoenberg and other pioneers in the field of "new" and/or "experimental" music.

Erik Satie

A French composer who, like the author and Arnold Schoenberg, was an advocate for new and experimental music—music created and performed in non-traditional ways. Like the author he was a student of Dada (see "Objects/Places," and one of the leading proponents of the artistic movement that came to be known as minimalism (music focused on the value of sound without emphasis on emotional content or context).

Edgard Varese

A composer born in France who worked in America, Varese was another of the composers whose work actively rejected traditional forms of music and incorporated sounds that were/are more commonly referred to as "noise." He left very little record of his life and work.

Merce Cunningham

In the 1940s and 1950s, Merce Cunningham (a protégé of renowned dance innovator Martha Graham) led an innovative, experimental dance company in New York City. Cage worked closely with him in the creation of a new dance vocabulary and the development of a new relationship between music and modern dance. Anecdotes about Cunningham and his parents also appear in the anecdotes in Section 9.

Dr. Suzuki

A Japanese philosopher, referred to frequently throughout the essays (and particularly in the anecdotes that often follow the essays) as being a teacher or mentor to the author.

Morton Feldman

A fellow composer of so-called "contemporary" or "experimental" music, Feldman is the subject of the lengthy essay "Lecture on Something," in which he is described as having insight into/understanding of the necessity and value of opposites such as silence and sound.

Meister Eckhardt

Eckhardt was a German philosopher, teacher and spiritualist who lived and taught in the 12th and 13th Centuries. His belief/ethical systems transcended the traditional boundaries of Christianity, with the result that he was branded a heretic and tried for blasphemy. Echoes of those belief systems, however, can be found in the teachings and systems of contemporary, so-called "new age," philosophy.

Xenia

Xenia is the author's wife, a peripheral, sometimes bewildered, always supportive figure in many of the book's anecdotes.

Mrs. Coomaraswamy

This character appears in passing in several of the author's anecdotes, her experiences providing commentary and perspective on commerce in general, and in India in particular.

David Tudor

In several anecdotes and essays, the author refers to David Tudor, a pianist and fellow composer of experimental music. He was very often the individual who premiered Cage's work, seems to have been something of a protégé of Cage's, and eventually took Cage's place as composer-in-residence of Merce Cunningham's dance company.

Objects/Places

Dada

"Dada" is the name given to a philosophical perspective on art popular during the early part of the 20th Century. "Dada" valued the random over the structural, the illogical over the logical, the absurd over the reasonable, and the un-traditional over the conventional. In other words, it was about breaking the rules for the sake of breaking them, in the hope of freeing a new kind of artistic expression and communication.

Zen

"Zen" is the name given to a branch of Buddhist philosophy emphasizing the value of individual insight (gained through intuition as heightened through meditation) in the search for spiritual enlightenment over textual teaching and/or study. The goal of "zen" practice is to achieve sudden understanding of situations both specifically individual and universal. In other words, like "dada" above, "zen" has as its principal goal and virtue individual expression and experience (as opposed to that which is mandated by group and/or cultural teaching).

Music

Throughout the book, "music" is generally perceived and/or portrayed by the author as being traditional, conservative, confined, and rigid. He seems to see himself as called to break down beliefs and practices about such music and awaken audiences, creators and interpreters of "music" to a new understanding of what music is, understood to be, and can be.

New/Experimental Music

The work of Cage, his predecessor Schoenberg, and his fellow innovators (see "Important People—Erik Satie, Edgard Varese, Morton Feldman and David Tudor) has, since it first appeared on the music scene, been defined as "New" or "experimental" music. Such music, at least in terms defined by Cage throughout the book, is hallmarked by a sense of randomness and unpredictability, a philosophical intention that every piece of music contains an element of randomness and that its effects are, and should be, unpredictable.

Modern Dance

So-called "modern dance," as pioneered in the work of choreographers like Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham was similar in form and intent to new music. Its

deliberate lack of formalized structure and movement vocabulary came into being in response to the rigidity of ballet, in the same way new music's lack of form and structure came into being in response to the perceived rigidity of classical music. It may therefore seem only natural that the innovations of new music and modern dance intersected with and/or fed each other in ways portrayed here in commentary by Cage on his work with Cunningham.

Anechoic Chamber

The author refers to this chamber in several essays, describing how it is designed and constructed to eliminate all sound but how it, in fact, awakens an individual in the chamber to two sounds that never go away—the high pitched sound of the individual nervous system, and the lower pitched sound of the circulatory system. In other words, according to the author the experience of being in an anechoic chamber proves there is no such thing as true silence.

Silence

The author explores the nature of silence in several ways but seems to always return to the contention that there is, in fact, no such thing as pure silence. There is always sound, he says, suggesting that sounds "are called silence only because they do not form part of a musical intention," the implication being that those same sounds are called silence when they do not fit with any other intention. He is repeatedly exploring the relationship between "silence" and "music" and "noise," consistently suggesting that it is impossible to have silence without the others, but implying that the others are present even in silence.

The I-Ching

The I-Ching is an ancient Chinese philosophical text that, over the centuries, has also evolved into the source of a means of divination, more commonly known as fortune telling but which, in more contemporary perspective, can be seen as a means of connecting with/understanding the movement of the individual spirit. In the essays in this collection, Cage refers repeatedly to using the "fortune telling" techniques of the I-Ching to determine the order in which musical events take place, or musical ideas are expressed, in his music.

Chance

The author portrays himself and his work as employing chance as the primary means of shaping the creative impulse. In several essays, Cage describes various processes of incorporating acts of randomness (chance) into his work—through the tossing of coins, the marking of musical notation at points where the paper upon which he is working is flawed, among other examples. This is diametrically opposed to the work of most pre-

New Music composers, whose work came into being more as the result of careful crafting and deliberate shaping.

Mushrooms

In the lectures, the essays and the anecdotes that follow both, the author frequently refers to mushrooms—the hunt for wild mushrooms, questions of safety in knowing which ones are edible, among other examples. There is possible metaphoric reference here to the author's theories about randomness and chaos; in the wild mushrooms, like most fungi, grow where opportunity presents itself, rather than according to plan.

Themes

Chance vs. Structure

Throughout the collection, the author expresses his belief that random chance can, does, and should play a role in the act of artistic creation. In his experience, that act is musical composition, but he also refers to the active presence/manifestation of the principle in terms of choreography and painting. Both the principle and the practice, he repeatedly suggests are manifestations of an essential force of creation, and a perspective on that force (see "Manifestations of Buddhism," below). In other words, he believes randomness and chaos are as actively functional in the universe and in the life of the human individual as order and structure and should therefore be accepted, if not embraced, as a fundamental aspect of existence.

The author argues that the act of creating music (and, by implication, the act of creation in general) has for too long been defined by principles of order and structure. The implication is that his work and approach are in fact an evolution, a movement forward in the expression of the universal and individual creative impulse. There is something almost messianic about his writing here, a sense that he is on a mission to awaken his readers and audiences, and perhaps audiences in general, to new ways of thinking and experiencing music and particular and existence in general.

The idea of meaning emerging from chance and randomness is also evoked through the inclusion of the anecdotes at the end of several of the essays and at the end of the book. The exploration here is practical rather than theoretical, an almost fable-like presentation of how the principles discussed by the author in his essays apply and/or manifest in day to day existence.

Manifestations of Buddhism

There are very few actual specific references to Buddhist thought and principles here, but they are enough to awaken the sense in the reader that such principles, in both theory and application, form a substantial portion of the author's perspective. A detailed analysis of Buddhist thought and practice is perhaps better suited to another source of reference, but there are several basic principles at work in Buddhism that manifest here.

The first is the principle of balance between opposites, the so-called "yin-yang" principle. For there to be light, there has to be darkness. For there to be tallness, there has to be shortness.For there to be structure, there has to be chaos ... and vice versa. Several of the author's writings, both anecdotal and formal, incorporate this principle (in fact, the inclusion of both anecdotal and formal writings can be seen as just such an incorporation)

The second is the principle of acceptance, that every act, every entity, every thing is what it is. The corollary to this principle is that human attitudes are based on/defined by

judgment and expectation—that as individuals we predetermine our attitudes towards what we see, hear and experience. Through his exploration of experimental music, the author is challenging expectations of what music is, asking his audiences and fellow artists to expand their understanding from what should be to include what is.

The third is that true understanding of every aspect of existence is ultimately impossible, but that an individual should strive for awareness of self and the ways of the world. Here the author's contention is that human awareness can/needs to expand to include the idea that sounds other than those traditionally believed to be music can be perceived as music.

The fifth and final aspect of Buddhism at work here is another of the book's central themes—the essential nature and purpose of change.

The Necessity and Value of Change

One of the most significant, and often difficult to integrate, teachings of Buddhism is that change and evolution are a fundamental experience and process of existence. The author's contention is that the evolution of music as he defines and experiences it (and leads it) is ultimately a manifestation of that principle. His definition of that evolution is itself defined by two main points.

The first is that music is moving from a more structured to a more random form. The music of the past, he repeatedly contends, was restricted by dictates of rules, mistaken beliefs and/or perceptions of what sounds could be defined as music. Here he is essentially suggesting that the sounds of the world can, and should, be considered as musical as the sounds of a piano, violin or harp. To that end, he writes of integrating natural and/or environmental sounds into his work and indeed making music out of silence (which, he repeatedly suggests, is not as truly silent as we have come to and/or been led to believe). This is, in fact, the second manifestation of change that the author suggests is at work in the current evolution of music. He contends that the traditional definitions of what makes music musical (notes, keys, instrumentation, etc) not only need to change but are changing, transforming and expanding in a way that, in the author's beliefs, echo and/or presage a transformation in beliefs about what gives human existence its humanity. In other words, as the perception of music expands, so the perception of what it means to be human expands.

Style

Perspective

The author is clearly writing from a place of profound personal belief and philosophy—the book creates the very clear impression that the author has lived and worked with an intention and commitment to come to a new, ever-evolving understanding of the relationship between music and sound. While the book's sense of autobiography extends only into revelations of present perspective (there is little or no sense of how, in the author's past, that perspective came into being), the fact remains that the book's philosophy is lived and practiced, not just considered and analyzed. In other words, the author has actually done the things he talks about, applied the theories he espouses, and is apparently continuing to do so even as he is writing.

The author is reaching for a broad audience with both his ideas and the applications of those ideas; he is striving to awaken the broader public to a deeper understanding of music in general and new music in particular. There is also the sense, however, that both the ideas and the execution of those ideas, both in terms of the music itself and the presentation of the essays/lectures here, will have limited, somewhat esoteric appeal. Some will definitely find his ideas and presentations intriguing, perhaps even affirming of their own beliefs and practices. Others, those whose tastes in and beliefs about music are more traditional and/or conservative, will probably find much of the book, both in manner and matter, challenging if not incomprehensible.

Tone

The book's tone is clearly and entirely subjective, presenting its analysis of music, in theory and practice, from the unique personal perspective of the author. This is what he believes, this is what he has come to understand, and this is what he wants the reader to understand as well. It is interesting to note, however, that the author's opinions are presented with a veneer of objectivity, within a context of an approach that seems to have a sense of the scientific—of the analyzed, rather than the experiential. This idea is supported by the author's repeated reference to the theoretical, literal definition of "experimental," which he says contains the implicit statement that the outcome is unknown. He presents this definition, this theory, within the context of an analysis of why the term "experimental" is appropriate for his type of music—as he repeatedly demonstrates, the outcome of his compositional work is, in fact, unknown, affected and defined by randomness.

As is the case with the book's perspective (as discussed above), the overall effect of the book's tone will differ according to the person/audience reading it. Some will find the book's tonal qualities supportive and affirming. Others will find it lecture-like, almost sermon-like in its ideological fervor.

Meanwhile, an interesting point to note about the book's tone is that in many cases, the author leaves understanding of the points he is making up to the reader. In other words, he does not often explain why he includes a particular anecdote at a particular point, or what the anecdote's point is. He leaves it up to the reader to glean the anecdote's meaning from its placement, either in terms of structure (ie which lecture or essay it follows) or overall theme (see "Themes"). While the overall tone of the book is intellectual and a bit rarified, there are moments when the author chooses to bring his ideas down into the realm of the real world. This relates to the next stylistic point considered, that of style.

Structure

On one level, the book's structure is fairly orderly, a fact that the author, with his faith in, and adherence to, the principles of randomness, might find inappropriate (but, he might also say, a series of writings such as this has to be presented in some order). The point is not made to suggest that the book's structure is linear, or that there is a clear progression from idea to idea and narrative to narrative. While there are certain thematically relevant groupings—the essays on modern dance, for example, all appear together—on the whole, there is little sense of direct, straightforward movement through the text.

There is, however, one structural pattern or motif that recurs with a regularity that cannot be seen as random. This is the author's practice of following many of the essays in the collection with one or more anecdotes taken from his life and/or experience. While not explicitly offering explanation or insight into the preceding essay, the anecdotes do bring the author's theories into the realm of everyday life and reality. They are a bit of a breather, in terms of both language and content, from the heavily intellectual approach of the essays themselves. At times almost fable-like in their content and style, the anecdotes can be seen as functioning in a similar fashion to the sorbet at a multi-course fancy dinner, or the intermission at a play or a concert. They act as a refresher, a cleanser of the mental palate, a way for the reader to simultaneously relax into the author's insight and continue to develop their own.

Quotes

"... neither Dada nor Zen is a fixed tangible. They change; and in quite different ways in different places and times, they invigorate action." Forward.

"Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating. The sound of a truck at fifty miles per hour. Static between [radio] stations. Rain. We want to capture and control these sounds, to use them not as sound effects but as musical instruments." The Future of Music: Credo.

"A composer knows his work as a woodsman knows a path he has traced and retraced, while a listener is confronted by the same work as [a woodsman] is by a plant he has never seen before." Experimental Music.

".. in this new music nothing takes place but sounds: those that are notated and those that are not. Those that are not notated appear in the written music as silences, opening the doors of the music to the sounds that happen to be in the environment." Experimental Music (2)

"... one may give up the desire to control sound, clear his mind of music, and set about discovering means to let sounds be themselves rather than vehicles for man-made theories or expressions of human sentiments." Experimental Music (3)

"New music: new listening ... just an attention to the activity of sounds." Experimental Music (4)

"... the coming into being of something new does not by that fact deprive what was of its proper place. Each thing has its own place, never takes the place of something else; and the more things there are, as is said, the merrier." Experimental Music (5)

"Composing's one thing, performing's another, listening's a third. What can they have to do with one another?" Experimental Music: Doctrine.

"Composition, then, I viewed, ten years ago, as an activity integrating the opposites, the rational and the irrational ... a freely moving continuity with a strict division of parts, the sounds, their combination and succession being either logically related or arbitrarily chosen." Composition as Process - 1: Changes.

"What does [the mind] do, having nothing to do? And what happens to a piece of music when it is purposelessly made? What happens, for instance, to silence ... how does the mind's perception of it change?" Composition as Process - 1: Changes (2)

"The later [works] ... begin anywhere, last any length of time, and involve more or fewer instruments and players. They are therefore not preconceived objects, and to approach them as objects is to utterly miss the point. They are occasions for experience ..." Composition as Process - 1: Changes (3)

"CONTEMPORARY MUSIC IS NOT SO MUCH ART AS IT IS LIFE AND ANYONE MAKING IT NO SOONER FINISHES ONE OF IT THAN HE BEGINS MAKING ANOTHER JUST AS PEOPLE KEEP ON WASHING DISHES, BRUSHING THEIR TEETH, GETTING SLEEPY, AND SO ON." Composition as Process—III: Communication.

"It is thus possible to make a musical composition the continuity of which is free of individual taste and memory (psychology) and also of the literature and 'traditions' of the art ... a 'mistake' is beside the point, for once anything happens it authentically is." Composition.

"...the past and the present are to be observed and each person makes what he alone must make, bringing for the whole of human society into existence a historical fact, and then, on and on, in continuum and discontinuum." History of Experimental Music in the United States.

"We cannot doubt that animals both love and practice music. That is evident. But it seems their musical system differs from ours. It is another school." A quote from Satie, "Erik Satie."

"To be interested in Satie one must be disinterested to begin with, accept that a sound is a sound and a man is a man, give up illusions about ideas of order, expressions of sentiment, and all the rest of our inherited aesthetic claptrap." A quote from Satie, "Erik Satie."

"Personality is a flimsy thing on which to build an art. (This does not mean that it should not enter into an art, for, indeed, that is what is meant by the word 'style.')" Four Statements of the Dance: Grace and Clarity.

"The activity of movement, sound, and light ... is expressive, but what it expresses is determined by each one of you ..." Four Statements of the Dance: In this Day ...

"As we go along, (who knows) an idea may occur in this talk. I have no idea whether one will or not. If one does, let it." Lecture on nothing (1)

"Structure without life is dead. But Life without structure is unseen. Pure life expresses itself within and through structure. Each moment is absolute, alive and significant." Lecture on nothing, (2)

"All I know about method is that when I am not working I sometimes think I know something, but when I am working, it is quite clear that I know nothing." Lecture on nothing, (3).

"When a composer feels a responsibility to make, rather than accept, he eliminates from the area of possibility all those events that do not suggest the 'at that point in time' vogue of profundity. For he takes himself seriously, wishes to be considered great, and he thereby diminishes his love and increases his fear and concern about what people will think." Lecture on Something (1)

"It is quite useless in this situation for anyone to say [the] work is good or not good. Because we are in the direct situation: it is. If you don't like it you may choose to avoid it. But if you avoid it that's a pity, because it resembles life very closely, and life and it are essentially a cause for joy." Lecture on Something (2)

"The acceptance of death is the source of all life ... not one sound fears the silence that extinguishes it. And no silence exists that is not pregnant with sound." Lecture on Something (3)

"...in those silences that occur when two people are confident of each other's friendship, there is no nervousness, only a sense of at-one-ness." Lecture on Something (4).

"...I write in order to hear; never do I hear and then write what I hear. Inspiration is not a special occasion." 45' For a Speaker.

"What I think and what I feel can be my inspiration but it is then also my pair of blinders. To see one must go beyond the imagination and for that one must stand absolutely still as though in the center of a leap." 45' For a Speaker (2).

"An error is simply a failure to adjust immediately from a preconception to an actuality." 45' For a Speaker (3).

"Reading music is for musicologists. There is no straight line to be drawn between notes and sounds." 45' For a Speaker (4).

"There is all the time in the world for studying music, but for living there is scarcely any time at all. For living takes place each instant. Unimpeded." 45' For a Speaker (5).

"I have nothing to say and I am saying it and that is poetry." 45' For a Speaker (6)

"It is not a question of decisions and the willingness or fear to make them. It is that we are impermanently part and parcel of all. We are involved in a life that passes understanding and our highest business is our daily life." "Where are we going and what are we doing?" Layer 1.

"Ideas take on a kind of material reality but essentially they are intangible. My question is: why do we, as it were, imprison them? Of all things, they are best equipped, wouldn't you say, to fly in and out of the most unlikely places?" "Where are we going and what are we doing?" Layer 2.

"There are those who go part way but can't go any farther. And there is a great interest in going and staying at the same time: naturally not in the physical world, but in the world of art. These people want somehow to keep alive the traditions and yet push them forward. It gets rather superhuman as a project. The others don't care so much about tradition, but hang on anyway." "Where are we going and what are we doing?" Layer 4.

"It takes time to find something you're thinking of, but in the course of looking for it all sorts of things come up that one was not looking for. You might call living in chaos an exteriorization of the mind." "Where are we going and what are we doing?" Layer 4.

Topics for Discussion

Do you agree with the author's philosophical contention (see "Part 1—Experimental Music" and "Quotes—Experimental Music (5)) that "something new does not by that fact deprive what was of its proper place"? Consider this maxim in a variety of contexts—social (does gay marriage, for example, deprive heterosexual marriage of its place), technological (does the DVD deprive VHS of its place, does personal communication by email deprive letter writing of its place), spiritual (does new age spirituality deprive Christianity of its place)? Debate your answers.

Discuss the author's comment in Experimental Music that "Composing's one thing, performing's another, listening's a third." Is there a point to the act of composing if there is no performance, or no listener? Is there a point to the act of composing and performing if there is no listener?

Consider the author's comment in "History of Experimental Music in the United States" that history is defined by the beliefs and actions of people who think and act with originality, a sense of experimentation. Who do you think are some of the specific individuals that he might be referring to? Do you agree or disagree with his statement? Why?

Why do you think the author believes that America is the perfect place for the sort of experimentation he advocates? What is it about America (its history, its socio-cultural perspectives) that leads him to this conclusion? Do you agree or disagree?

"The activity of movement, sound, and light ... is expressive, but what it expresses is determined by each one of you ..." In what way does the author's statement about the relationship between dance, music, and the viewer apply to other forms of art? Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?

Experiment with music and sound on your own. Sit in what might be defined as silence—no music in the background, no television or radio, no youtube or ipod. Listen to what sounds are going on in the background—is there music there? Experiment with different locations—what sounds are in the silence in your bedroom? Your classroom? On the street? In a restaurant? What do these sounds/silences tell you about your feelings about/relationship to the world around you in general, and to music in particular?

Discuss the implications of the author's contention that there is no such thing as error, only misplaced expectation. What is your understanding of/perspective on errors and/or mistakes? Of the relationship between expectation and outcome, whether desired or mistaken? Do you agree or disagree with the author's suggestion?