

CAGE : TWO

(Diary and Letters)

Where there's a history of organization (art), introduce disorder. Where there's a history of disorganization (world society), introduce order. These directives are no more opposed to one another than [a] mountain's opposed to spring weather.¹

So John Cage concluded the first section (1965) of a text he styled *Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)* and which he described as a mosaic of ideas, statements, words, and stories. He quipped: *It is also a diary.*² A diary, but with a difference: a meandering self-observation of the unselfconscious life of the mind: a revelatory rendering of the flux of the social world welling up into thought to generate a monologue of poetic insight dispersed in agile anarchy over a narrative field, punctuated by the incisiveness of Zen. The constructed world of technology and the disordered

simultaneity of world events intrude and retire into interludes whose center is everywhere and nowhere. Mushrooms and friends appear and disappear. The process never quite arrives at a full stop for the diary takes shape as a mindstream breaking into disjunct sidestreams of flow, always inflected with good humor, sometimes with penetrating admonition, but adhering to the guidance of chance operations and the model of nature. Cage's experimental diary presents a portrait of the artist and public intellectual at the peak of his musical career (1965-1982) attempting to escape from demands on his time by an admiring and often astonished public and from his own exacting compositional regime mirrored here in an amiable and charming piece of writing. For those unfamiliar with John Cage the writer, the *Diary* is a

wonderful place to begin reading. Formerly found in fragmentary form across several of Cage's earlier Wesleyan University Press publications, it is now available in a super-colorful new edition by Siglio (2015).

The diary's mordant title – *How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)* – alludes to our current predicament, which is the same as saying it resembles the world's predicament in 1965 when Cage began to publish this project in installments. Take it, if you will, as a manifesto for change, a book of changes. Cage's prescience concerning the complications of technology in the twenty-first century seems uncanny. A few examples will suffice: *We need for instance an utterly wireless technology*, he stated; adding: *all technology must move toward the way things were before man began changing them: identification with nature in her*

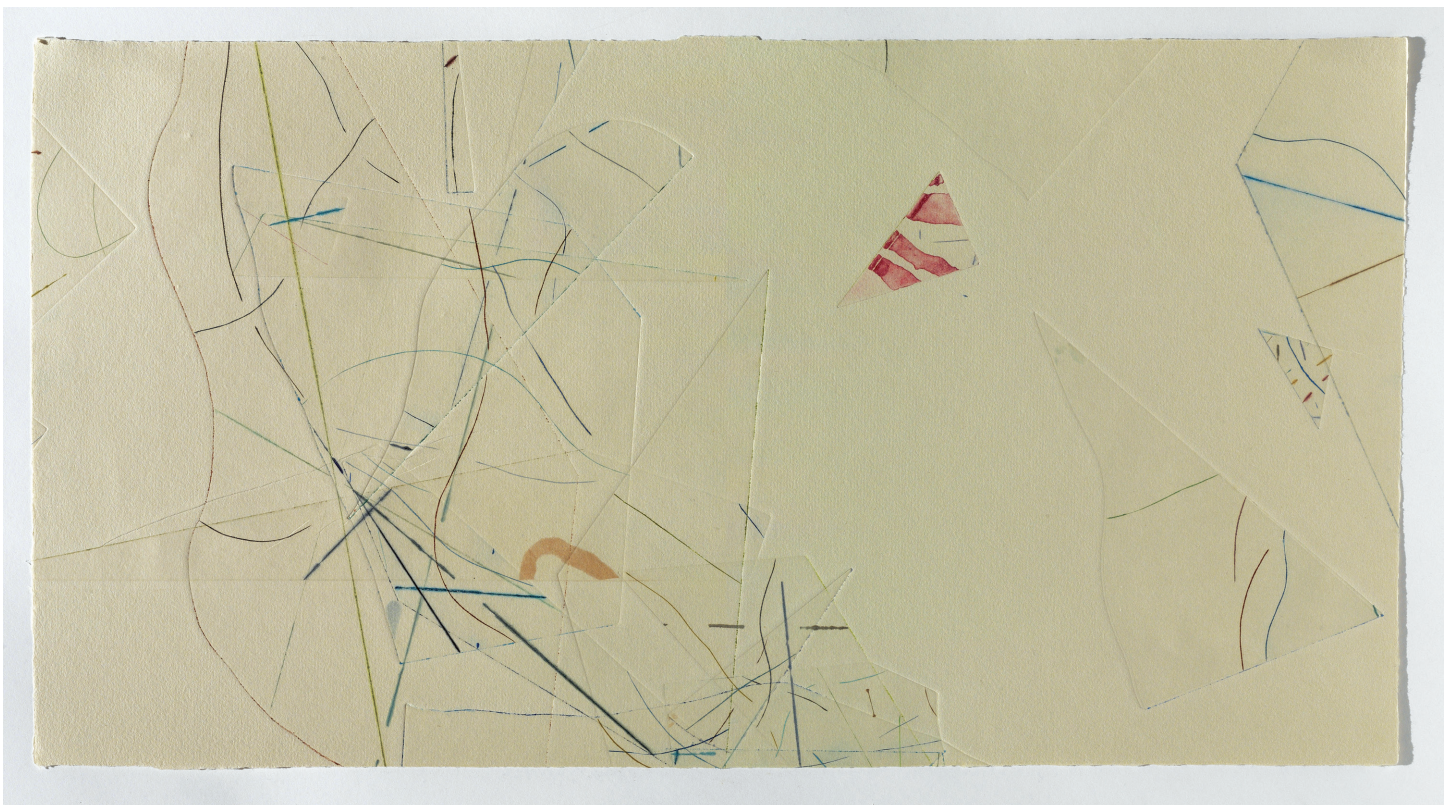
manner of operation, complete mystery. Reminded of the entrepreneurial futurism of telecommunications mogul David Sarnoff, Cage imagined the internet in 1965 as a *universal language, a universal culture, and a universal common market*. He foresaw *instant universal voice communication ... but also instant television, instant newspapers, instant magazines and instant visual telephone service ... the development of such global communications system would link people everywhere*.³ Like his compadre Marshall McLuhan, he understood convergent media, as in this imagining of smartphone and ebook: *Add video screen to telephone. Give each subscriber a thousand sheets of recordable erasable material so anytime, anywhere, anyone'd have access to a thousand sheets of something (drawings, books, music, whatever)*. His approximation of digital activity trackers is no less amusing or less accurate: *Wrist watches with alarms that tell us as we travel around when we should eat. ... New function for doctors: adjusting our wrist alarms*. He even pinpointed the structural deformations of terrorism over state warfare: *War will not be group conflict: it'll be murder, pure and simple, individually*

conceived.⁴ As for the Facebook 'like' button, Cage foretold this in discussing Ludwig Wittgenstein's pocket clicker, used to confirm any personal assent to beauty with the approbation of a click. Of course, all of these digital utilities mask their dystopian consequences: disordered hyperuniformity, conglomerated mediocrity, the replacement of quality by convenience, and the authoritarianism inherent in the marketplace of 'capital T' Technology. John Cage also foresaw that we might become digital tourists in a state of terminal duplication. In any case, the *Diary* in question reveals his perspicacity as an artist whose subtly powerful reflections about social inequality and environmental catastrophe often remain unacknowledged in the common appreciations of his life's work in music and mycology. His benevolent projection of life through the world's chaos shines resplendently in *Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)* and even more so in his recently published letters. In these, too, we find him candidly affirming:

The problem nowadays is that our experience is necessarily social: we can no longer tolerate the division of

human beings into those who have what they need to live and those who do not have what they need to live; and we can no longer tolerate our continuing actions which bring the environment close to total destruction. ... We are in a situation where disastrous mistakes must cease being made.⁵

This timely letter – as timely today as in 1973 when it was written – appears in *The Selected Letters of John Cage* (2016), edited by Laura Kuhn, Director of the John Cage Trust at Bard College. This collection is an absolutely essential contribution to the literature of the twentieth century's most iconoclastic musical composer. Covering the period from 1930, when Cage made his first intellectual foray to Europe to secure a footing among several directions of artistic talent, to letters written just weeks before his death in 1992, we find Cage patiently argumentative, incessantly busy, intellectually curious, tenaciously devoted to friends and lovers, and equally committed to ideas. Not surprisingly, he found America void of the latter: *The great trouble with our life here is the absence of an intellectual life. No one has an idea. And should one by accident get one, no one would have*



John Cage, *Changes & Disappearances* (1979) #21 1/3, ED 35. Thirty-five related engravings with dripping and photoetching, in two or three impressions each. ©John Cage Trust.

the time to consider it.⁶ Laura Kuhn suggests that taken together with the *Diary*, the *Letters* form “something akin to autobiography” – this is excellent tactical advice for beginners interested in approaching John Cage. In the sense that each of these books (diary and letters) interweaves the enterprise of musical composition, the business of everyday life, and the theme of world improvement, we can more easily come to grapple with the provenance and gestation of Cage’s entire *oeuvre*. Kuhn’s introduction to each decade of letters sets the stage perfectly. The meticulous detail of her footnotes – all 1159 of them – upholds a standard of scholarship that supports biography completely and fluidly; and without imposing unnecessary wear and tear on the habits of the ordinary reader.

As one might expect in such a comprehensive selection, Cage’s correspondents are far-flung and wide-ranging: his parents, early mentors in music (Henry Cowell, Adolph Weiss), musical collaborators (David Tudor, Lou Harrison), artists (Herbert Matter), and poets (Jackson MacLow). In the *Letters* we find Cage’s devotion to his partner Merce Cunningham and their long professional collaboration in the Cunningham Dance Company (Cage was musical director). The saga of Cage’s solicitation of music manuscripts for the Notations collection to benefit the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts (FCPA) is not as well-known, but appears here in some detail. In this project Cage sought music manuscripts from a remarkable array of composers, including examples of John Lennon and Paul McCartney received through Yoko Ono, to document how contemporary composers practiced and experimented with notation. Cage’s own scores were infamous for their wild originality with chance operations.

The genesis and production of major compositions from *Sonatas and Interludes* (1946-1948) to *Européras 1 & 2* (1987) are given in abundant detail. There is a lovely personal reflection on 4’33” the inscrutable silent piece: *What we hear is determined by our own emptiness, our own receptivity; we receive to the extent we are empty to do so.*⁷ To Peter Yates, editor of the journal *Arts and Architecture*, Cage defends the musical integrity of Eric Satie: *How*

*on earth can you call him a dilettante? With Webern he is, from my point of view, the 20th century.*⁸ In a letter to Karlheinz Stockhausen he identifies in a detailed list all eighty-six dedicatees of his orchestral piece *Atlas Eclipticalis* (1961-1962), the first of whom was *Guy Nearing, my teacher in mycology.*⁹ And in a brilliant moment of prickly humility, Cage declines to accept an honorary degree from Pomona College with these pointed words to college president David Alexander: *Innovative acts in the arts are criminal. (Duchamp agreed with me on this point.) Though I’ve not been able to refuse punishments, I can refuse rewards. In fact, it is my obligation to do so.*¹⁰ Cage was steadfast in rejecting the cult of celebrity, believing in a *social life which is free of rewards and punishments.*

As in the kaleidoscope of narrative fragments that populate his writing, the letters reveal John Cage in the profound serio-comic enterprise that was his life and his art. The universality of his interests and the workaholic habits of a truly revolutionary maverick may all be found here. What is more, we enter the simple plenitude of everyday life with John Cage, splicing magnetic tape with Morton Feldman or fretting with solicitude over his aging parents. Just as Allen Ginsberg chronicled a politically divided nation in great ferment in *Planet News* and *The Fall of America* while crisscrossing the nation with ears glued to the car radio, so too Cage saw the minutiae of everyday life through the windshield of a van – diners, and streets, and sidewalks, and people: the gritty face of America experienced firsthand while traveling to the next performance, a folksy jukebox America where ambient sounds percolated into ideas about musical structure. These homespun sounds and visions *were* his musical structure! John Cage’s droll observations on hamburger stands, recording studios, parties and gatherings, the surprises of travel, restaurants, cigarettes, phonograph records, a specimen of *Collybia platyphylla*, and the frozen food department of Gristede’s supermarket all flow leisurely through his writing, but if we fail to notice the texture of visual detail under the scrutiny of his documentary eye then we sorely need to take the turn that silence requires: to pay attention. Cage loved sounds; he wrote to Pierre Boulez *you know I love*

music with all my heart, and this without a trace of irony or slip into naiveté.¹¹ He also loved the visual silence that echoes auditory experience in space/time. And like his friend and chess partner Marcel Duchamp, he was predisposed to bring the non-art elements of everyday life into an aesthetic frame of reference. This, of course, included the fungi.

Cage routinely mentioned his mushroom discoveries in his letters, treating it as a topic before one and all as if it was familiar as sports or the weather. To the composer Luciano Berio, mezzo-soprano Cathy Berberian, and their daughter Christina he wrote: *I’ve found coprinus micaceus and polyporus squamosus and eaten ferns, dock, watercress, dandelions and many other greens.*¹² Cage was committed to mycophagy, wrote of enjoying chanterelles and ceps, and adhered to a macrobiotic diet in his later years. He even prepared a macrobiotic meal with Icelandic mushrooms for 150 guests at the “Eat-In Symposium” in Reykjavik in 1980.¹³ To David Tudor he told of finding a specimen of *Hydnum caput-medusae*, an edible fungus now known as *Hericeum erinaceus* though the earlier species epithet is more flamboyantly poetic: “head of the Medusa.”¹⁴ On another occasion he related to Tudor a fairly ludicrous encounter at Tanglewood involving Luciano Berio and afterwards Olga Koussevitsky, wife of the Russian conductor Serge Koussevitsky:

A lady came up to me at Tanglewood [sic] and said, Who are you? I said I was a friend of Luciano’s. He said to her, Don’t you know him, he’s J.C., the composer. She said, Why didn’t you say you were a composer. I said, How could I, since many don’t think it’s music. Perhaps I should have said Decomposer. Luciano almost flipped. It took quite a lot of trouble to explain decomposition to him, and he was a little tipsy. I met Mme. Koussevitsky. She is delightful and told me a lot of Russian names for the mushrooms which I collected for her.¹⁵

Only one of the letters in *Selected Letters* relates directly and fully to mycological affairs, and it stands out for Cage’s tiptoeing into the thick of an administrative contretemps in the very organization he had helped to create, the New York Mycological



Charles E. Burchfield (1893-1967) *The Four Seasons*, 1949-1960; watercolor on pieced paper mounted on board, 55 7/8 X 47 7/8 inches; Krannert Art Museum and Kinkead Pavilion, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign Festival of Arts Purchase Fund 1961-2-1.

Society (NYMS). The letter (December 11, 1964) was posted from his residence in Stony Point, New York,

a house with glass walls that gave an instant advantage to a person given to pine for mushrooms growing in

the surrounding woods. The letter is a polite ultimatum confronting some unmentioned unrest among

the club's membership. He alludes to disagreements, public unhappiness, squabbling. Cage's Taoist approach to leadership – *to lead the people walk behind them* – is clearly evident, for he states right off his conviction that a *fairly unorganized anarchic situation* was to be preferred; whether other members shared his laissez-faire approach remains in doubt. Cage explains his lack of faith in hierarchical design by tracing the club's woes to a visit that he and Guy Nearing had made to the New Jersey Garden Society, a comparable amateur group *where, during an extended parliamentary meeting, members took the opportunity to haggle with one another and to produce several hours of mutual misery and...boredom*. Cage would have none of this in the NYMS but had tolerated it to the point of attempting to correct the petty squabbling that possibly spelled dissolution of the club; hence, his letter. He frankly chided the club that one *might complain that politically speaking the [NYMS] has been and to a lesser extent still is an oligarchy*. Oligarchy or not, Cage put forward twelve questions requiring general deliberation and consensus, and one has the sense that he was exasperated by what he considered adolescent behavior, concluding in his letter *Please ignore the above or reply to John Cage, Stony Point, New York, 10980*. If egos were bruised mattered little to him, for he consistently reached beyond ego in the interest of enhanced perception and the quest to render the mind susceptible to divine influences through music and mushrooms. The letter *in toto* remains instructive for the problems that sometimes beset mycological clubs even today.¹⁶

To appreciate Cage's pleasant obsession with mushrooms *versus* his anarchic approach to administration, consider this story from the collection *Indeterminacy*:

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 Köln 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.¹⁷

That was all I needed – off I went.

What a telling remark to express his intellectual hunger for mushroom identification. This was fascinated passion as much as empirical science, but the equivalence of mushroom exhibition and electronic music concert reveals something more. Mycology for Cage was far deeper than a mere hobby: it became as indispensable an oracle as the *I Ching* in exploring possibilities for musical composition. The murmuring cosmos of the fungi concealed the secret of silence throughout the rhizosphere and off into the deep woods, and the process of encountering mushrooms helped to spark the realization that silence was ambient sound. Cage himself masked the profundity of this idea by joking about it, writing, *I have spent many pleasant hours in the woods conducting performances of my silent piece, transcriptions, that is, for an audience of myself, since they were much longer than the popular length which I have had published*.¹⁸ Despite the deliberate tongue-in-cheek, this self-deprecating remark holds the distinction of approximating a methodology. Cage released the spore of this idea into his compositional techniques after recognizing the congruence between the chance appearance of mushrooms and the marvelous flux of the auditory.

The parable about attending the *Exposition du champignons* of the *Société de mycologique de France* from *Indeterminacy* finds Cage immersed in the joy of learning an esoteric subject as a function of the quality of attention paid to that study, something that the inattentive crowd in Köln was not given to do at the electronic music concert. During the time he began to learn mycology, Cage wrote to Lou Harrison:

...if, at the moment, you think of me as musician, it must be in terms

of birds and wind in the trees, which, when I hear, I think of you. Very often I think of you as I go through the woods, 'stalking' as one of my manuals has it ... I have discovered such a full hunger for nature within me that now nothing is as important as rocks and plants are. On the whole I am more attracted to flora than to fauna. I find the occupation of attempting an identification of a toadstool, for instance, one of the most difficult and absorbing tasks I have ever taken on.¹⁹

The biologist Edward O. Wilson called this feeling of reverence *biophilia*: "the innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms."²⁰ The *hunger for nature* that Cage confessed to Lou Harrison also revealed his predilection for self-education, which invariably led to the education of others whose lives he touched. The educational imperative was apparent in all of his activities, not only his lectures. Following Buckminster Fuller, Cage believed that he was *more alive when not knowing*, preferring the role of the student over the teacher, but always potentiating the synergy of both. His definition of education: *People together without restrictions in a situation abundantly implemented*.²¹

For John Cage, mushrooms abundantly implemented silence (i.e., non-intentional sound, erroneously labelled 'noise'). Mushroom hunting was the perfect enterprise for appreciating silence and engaging with chance: in any ramble through the woods one might be well-informed about the natural parameters of what mushrooms one *might* find, but that would never ensure what one *would* find. One could never predict an encounter:

As we left the valley to enter the desert, I gave up all thought of finding mushrooms. But for some reason we stopped along the road. There underneath the pepper trees I found *Tricholoma personatum*, excellent, in quantity.²²

Even though he befriended and learned from Alexander Smith, Guy Nearing, Orson Miller, and Clark Rogerson, all masters in the field, Cage ultimately tried to shake mycology loose from its fixation on the imperatives of classification to channel its empiricism first into heightened awareness and

then modifying it in later practice as an open-ended literary pursuit. One might imagine him assenting to the following equivalences in the transcendental phenomenology of mushrooming:

Spores = Microtones
Mycelium = Silence
Fruiting bodies = Sounds
Music = Life = Mushrooms

This is not pure fancy, for Cage believed in the possibility of designing recording instruments to capture the sub-audible pings of spores raining from pilei onto leaves. The point here is that he positioned mushrooms as a para-musical phenomenon all the while he was adhering to the practical requirements of identification. The title of his series of etchings – *Changes and Disappearances* – is in one sense a summation of the activity of the fungi in their manner of operation as well as a trope for existence as evanescence, manifested in the appearance and transformations of fungi, the weather, the seasons, or birdsong. Following Ananda Coomaraswamy, Cage believed that the “true knowledge of an object is not obtained by merely empirical observation ... but only when the knower and known, seer and seen, meet in an act transcending distinction.”²³

The appearance of the fungi is also a function of the seasons. In a letter to Peter Naumann, a German researcher on the relation between nature and music, Cage wrote:

In my thinking, and in two musical works (The Seasons; String Quartet) the seasons themselves (Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter) are as Indian thinking has it Creation, Preservation, Destruction, Quiescence. The String Quartet begins in Summer; The Seasons (for orch.) begins and ends in Winter.²⁴

The natural cyclical progression of the seasons is familiar as that of night and day (though its amplitude is longer), having a deep resonance in our relationship to nature, though today overwhelmed by commercialization and quaint overlays of nostalgia for simpler times in childhood when seasonal change seemed somehow more vivid. At the most reductive, the seasons are compartmentalized by a progression of holidays that have an attenuated relation to natural transformations. Yet the changing

of the seasons is an enduring theme in Western culture as in Antonio Vivaldi's portrayal of *The Four Seasons* as a baroque musical drama. The mycological lesson of John Cage was that mushroom identification depends not only on knowing gill attachments and spore colors, but on penetrating the gestalt of figure and ground in stalking them and on understanding their place in the hierarchy of life and in the transformations of seasons. Cage's oft-repeated observation that Indian philosophy correlated the seasons to stages of life – that Spring is Creation, Summer is Preservation, Autumn is Destruction, and Winter is Quiescence – is fundamental. Following this schema, his composition *The Seasons* adds four preludes and a reprise to its four major movements, which brings to mind another artist's perspective on seasonal transitions: Charles Burchfield (1893-1967). Burchfield was a visionary painter whose engagement with nature and seasonal transformation was vividly captured in watercolors whose settings explored landscapes in the mid-West, Ohio, and New York.

The conventional schema that every school child knows is that in Spring, flowers bloom; in Summer, hot weather arrives; in Autumn, leaves change colors and fall; in Winter, snow and cold weather arrive. In his paintings – *Winter, East Liverpool* (1927), *In May* (1939), *Approaching Storm, August* (1942), *Autumnal Fantasy* (1917-c.1944), and many other landscapes Burchfield found evidence of seasonal process in extravagant renditions of seasonal moments. He preferred the complexity of Winter and Spring over the fixedness of Summer and the glories of Autumn; his painterly eye was more in tune with the charting the transformations correlated with emotional moods in his portraits of wayside flowers and dark recesses of swampy woods. Burchfield posited *seven* phases of seasonal change that underline his special reverence for Winter. In his schema we have (1) Winter giving way to Spring; (2) Spring; (3) Summer; (4) Autumn; (5) Autumn giving way to Winter; (6) the depths of Winter; (7) Winter waning yet retaining its grip.²⁵ In this preference for change over essence Burchfield revealed the way attributes of one season can be

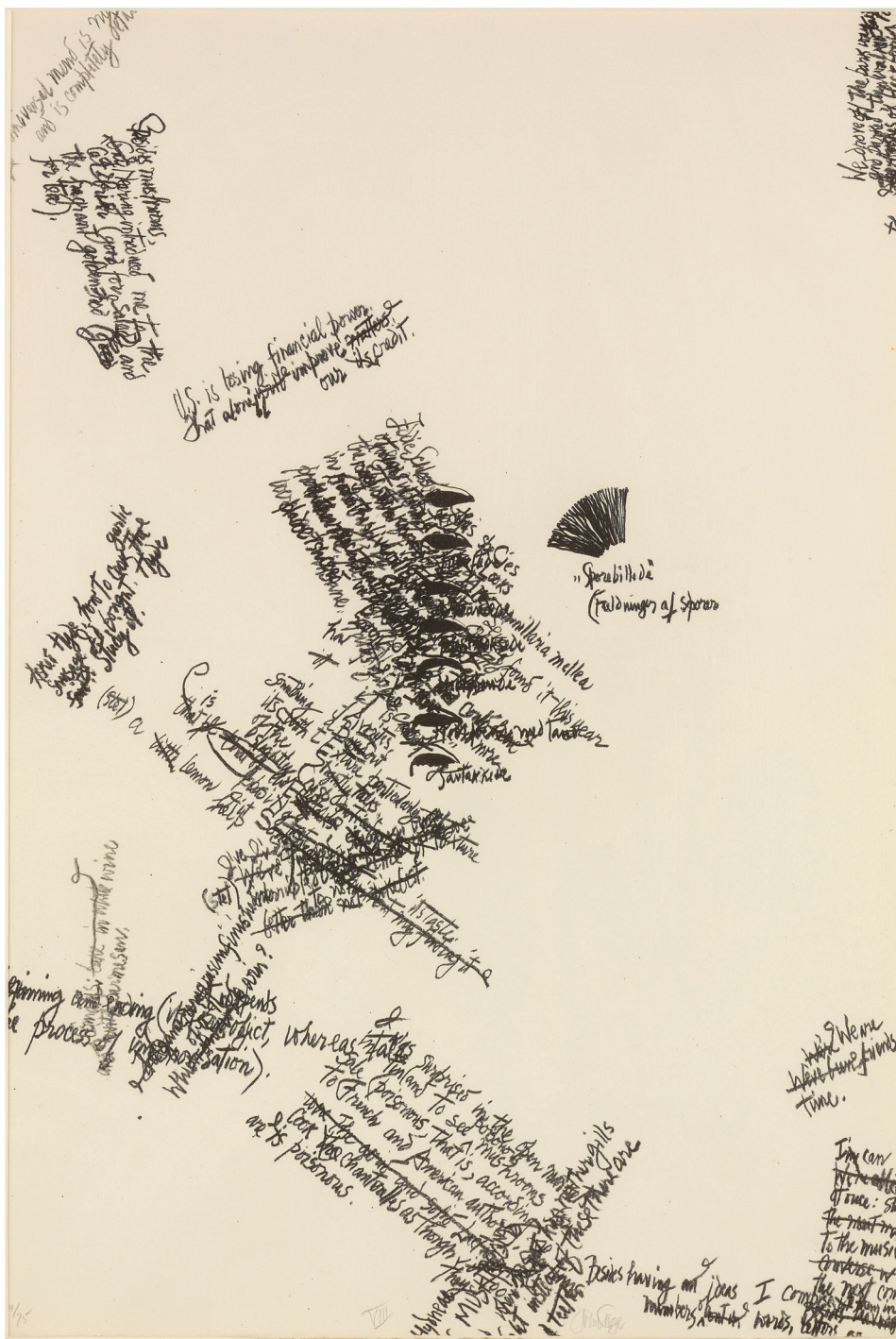
detected in the prior and subsequent ones. In one magnificent image, Burchfield saw all four seasons coalesce into a single frame – *The Four Seasons* – which focuses on seasonal transitions in minute detail. Burchfield, too, relished the pleasures of mushrooming in a process of chance encounter that anticipates John Cage:

The finding of the first mushroom is nearly always unexpected. It was so today. I was walking cautiously down the lane towards the orchard... when my eyes were attracted to the ground. There, pushing up from the edge of some cow-manure, were the nubby tops of two mushrooms. The sight of them is an excitement; the pulling of them is a rare joy; and the smelling of them amounts to an aesthetic pleasure. In their odor are combined all odors, sights and sounds of late summer, in general, and in particular, the essence of a cool dewy morning of dense mists and warm sunshine. Looking around, I perceived another pair, which led to the finding of still more. This is one of the joys of mushroom hunting; our course is not mapped out, we advance unconsciously from one find to another, and thus weave an irregular trail up and down over the field.²⁶

Cage's specificity may seem a bit more sophisticated than Burchfield's generality only because he entered the study of mushrooms at a time when amateur mycology was gaining real popularity. All the same, each of them recognized the living gestalt and aleatory discovery inherent in the encounter with fungi because both appreciated seeking and finding mushrooms in their natural habitats (as Alexander Smith once titled a book). Cage's approach is very similar:

An hour or so ago I was out in the woods looking for mushrooms. There didn't seem to be any. Finally up a hill I found a patch of hair-capped moss. I thought here I'll certainly find some *Cantharellus umbonatus*. I wandered around looking carefully through the moss; there didn't seem to be any mushrooms. Finally I noticed one little one. And then, suddenly, wherever I looked there was *Cantharellus umbonatus* flourishing. Now I have enough for dinner.²⁷

In their artistic practice Burchfield



John Cage, *Mushroom Book* (1972) with Lois Long and Alexander H. Smith. Plate VIII/X ED 64/75, from a set of 10 original color lithographs by Long and 10 lithographs by Cage in handwriting, one pair on each sheet. ©John Cage Trust.

and Cage found a connectedness to mushrooms and nature in seasonal transformation, both drawing on Henry David Thoreau's exacting observations of natural phenomena in his journal: "The year has many seasons more than are recognized in the almanac."²⁸

John Cage's mycological musings are scattered like mushrooms growing in sawdust through a corpus of writing and

composition that is prolific and highly variable. His masterwork in this field is without question *The Mushroom Book* (1972), created in collaboration with Lois Long and Alexander Smith.²⁹ There is a French edition translated by Pierre Lartigue. In *Silence* (1961) we find his "Music Lovers' Field Companion" and some of the stories that appear in *Indeterminacy*. His long mesostic poem

Mushrooms et variations was first presented in part at the Mountain Lake Workshop in Virginia on a foray with Orson Miller in 1983, and it presents a meditative if fragmentary thought-stream around a vertical column of mushroom names that included *Entoloma abortivum*, *Clitocybe nuda*, *Sparassis crispa*, *Lepiota americana*, and eight other species. One wonders how this unfamiliar pastiche was received by the foray participants that had just listened attentively to Orson Miller's rather straightforward lecture. In his introduction to the poem Cage explained that we need to go beyond ordinary expression to open our minds to things that were not usually in them. Yet more accessible to many would be his mushroom recipes or the simple mesostic poem "Mushrooms" in which he summarizes the experience of finding a mushroom as "a sudden refreshMent / reassUrance / Surprise / deligHt / thRill / push in the right directiOn / inspiratiOn / Moment you'll never forget and on top of that / a continuing enveloping myStery."³⁰

In his life John Cage experienced both homelessness and international fame and yet always seemed brightly optimistic: *We have only one mind (the one we share)*.³¹ If this salutary idea now seems threatened in the bitter divisiveness of the rise of fascism and tribal nationalism in America that blindly claims to improve the world but is only making matters worse, he expanded on this principle of the interconnectedness of the shared mind in the way he selflessly championed musicians, dancers, and artists yet suffered the barbs and brickbats of intolerant traditionalists. The *Diary* and *Selected Letters* are formidable testaments that serve to acquit Cage of the charge of obscurantism. The detractors that cried "dada" at his lectures and carped fractiously that Cage was "devoid of intellectuality," that he brought "meaninglessness into music," misrepresents him and willfully brushes aside his lessons about non-obstruction and indeterminacy. The cognitive scientist who suggested in mockery that his silent piece 4'33" is best heard on a café jukebox to mask "the racket of clinking dishes and jangling silverware" fails the lesson utterly, presenting a tableau that Cage

would have gently unmasked with genial laughter.³² As for the ugly reverberations of politics, Cage pointed out in his long mesostic poem “Overpopulation and Art” that *politicians are on the moon*.³³

In the early 1990s, filmmaker Henning Lohner worked with Cage on his only film production, titled *One*. In 1993, Lohner also released *The Revenge of the Dead Indians: In Memoriam John Cage*, a “composed film” of aleatory episodes and interviews.³⁴ The title derives from dramatist Heiner Müller who is interviewed in the film, remarking that John Cage was “the revenge of the dead Indians on European music.” Quite what this means is ours to suppose, and perhaps the obscurity of his observation is clarified by Cage himself, who gives voice in the film to some familiar themes: *Just as mushrooms are close to music in the dictionary, so I found that chance, which I use in all my work whether it's music or literary, is close to chaos*. With the largesse of his infectious smile Cage professed that he had enjoyed a *friendship with chaos* for forty years. *The Revenge of the Dead Indians* concludes with a filmed performance of 4'33” recorded by Cage and Lohner on the day of the demolition of checkpoint Invalidenstrasse in Berlin, August 1, 1990. In a coda at the very end the filmmaker asked Cage three fundamental questions by way of edging the film towards a philosophical conclusion. To the first question, *What is music?* Cage replied thoughtfully and (characteristically) slowly: *It's one of the arts.... It's a way of paying attention, and I think that attention is paid to sound*. Lohner then followed with the question, *What is art?* Cage replied without hesitation: *The same thing*, but he tempered this glib response with a qualification: *But if you're referring to visual art, then I'd say paying attention to looking, or seeing*. Finally, Lohner posed his ultimate question: *What is love?* Cage paused, and letting the answer hang fire in the question itself, he expressed perhaps the most beautifully candid and honest response one might ever imagine from anyone, saying with great faith: *We don't know*. Then – slowly and carefully – he added: *We think it's loving some one, – but we suspect that it may be loving ourselves. ... We just don't know*.

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- 1 Cage, John *Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)* (2015) Siglio, p. 26. Hereafter cited as Cage, Diary. Note: except for extended quotations that are indented and in smaller font, all John Cage quotations in this essay appear in italics rather than within quotation marks. For an earlier essay on the genesis of John Cage's involvement in mycology, see David W. Rose, “A Plurality of One: John Cage and the People-to-People Committee on Fungi,” *Fungi Magazine*, Winter 2008, 1(4): 25-35.
- 2 Ibid, p. 167
- 3 Ibid, pp. 24-26.
- 4 Ibid, pp. 99-100; p. 52; p. 15.
- 5 Kuhn, Laura, ed. *The Selected Letters of John Cage* (2016) Wesleyan University Press; John Cage to Mirek Kondracki, January 29, 1973; p. 428. Hereafter cited as Kuhn, *Selected Letters*.
- 6 Ibid, John Cage to Pierre Boulez, January 17, 1950; p. 136.
- 7 Ibid, John Cage to Helen Wolff, c. April 11, 1954; p. 176.
- 8 Ibid, John Cage to Peter Yates, September 9, 1948; p. 81.
- 9 Ibid, John Cage to Karlheinz Stockhausen, June 7, 1962; p. 266.
- 10 Ibid, John Cage to David Alexander, June 25, 1973; p. 430.
- 11 Ibid, John Cage to Pierre Boulez, January 17, 1950; p. 133. Cage would later prefer to say that he loved sounds themselves rather than “music.”
- 12 Ibid, John Cage to Cathy, Luciano, and Christina Berio, April 30, 1959; p. 202.
- 13 Ibid, John Cage to Ornlolfur Arnason, May 13, 1980; p. 498.
- 14 Ibid, John Cage to David Tudor, October 15, 1959; p. 208.
- 15 Ibid, John Cage to David Tudor, August 1, 1960; p. 234.
- 16 Ibid, John Cage to The New York Mycological Society, December 11, 1964; pp. 297-300. The content of the letter deals with NYMS business, fees, forays, membership, etc.
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- 18 Cage, John “Music Lovers’ Field Companion,” (1954) in *Silence* (1961) Wesleyan University Press; p. 276.
- 19 Kuhn, *Selected Letters*; John Cage to Lou Harrison, May 20, 1955; p. 182.
- 20 Wilson, Edward O. *Biophilia* (1986) Harvard University Press.
- 21 Cage, *Diary*; p. 79.
- 22 Ibid, p. 103.
- 23 Coomaraswamy, Ananda K. *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (1934) Dover, p. 6.
- 24 Kuhn, *Selected Letters*; John Cage to Peter Naumann, December 11, 1973; p. 438. See also the recording: Cage, John *The Seasons* (2000) ECM New Series 1696.
- 25 Maciejunes, Nannett V. and Michael D. Hall *The Paintings of Charles Burchfield: North by Midwest* (1997) Harry N. Abrams
- 26 Townsend, J. Benjamin (ed.) *Charles Burchfield's Journals: The Poetry of Place* (1993) SUNY Press, journal entry, August 24, 1913; p. 228.
- 27 Cage, John “Remarks on Theater Song and *Ikon* (1961)” in Kostelanetz, Richard (ed.) *John Cage Writer: Selected Texts* (1993) Cooper Square Press, p. 89.
- 28 Thoreau, Henry David *The Journal*, 1837-1861 (2009) New York Review Books, journal entry May 31, 1850; p. 34.
- 29 For a consideration of *The Mushroom Book*, see David W. Rose, *op. cit.*, *Fungi Magazine*.
- 30 “Mushrooms” (1979), in in Kostelanetz, Richard (ed.) *John Cage Writer: Selected Texts* (1993) Cooper Square Press, pp. 143-46. Note that the poem excerpt as presented here does not conform to its mesostic structure. A “mesostic” poem presents a word or words arranged vertically, around which are “wing words” arranged horizontally.
- 31 Cage, *Diary*; p. 63.
- 32 Hofstadter, Douglas R. *Gödel, Escher Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid* (1979) Basic Books, pp. 156, 175, 700.
- 33 Cage, John “Overpopulation and Art” in Perloff, Marjorie and Charles Junkerman, eds. *John Cage: Composed in America* (1994) University of Chicago Press.
- 34 Lohner, Henning *The Revenge of the Dead Indians: In Memoriam John Cage* (2008) Mode Records. ↑