

signature

DIARY:  
HOW TO IMPROVE THE  
WORLD (YOU  
WILL ONLY MAKE  
MATTERS WORSE)

CONTINUED  
PART THREE (1967)

by JOHN CAGE



1967

A GREAT BEAR PAMPHLET

LXI. U.S. citizens are six per cent of world's population consuming sixty per cent of world's resources. Had Americans been born pigs rather than men, it would not have been different.

Finding one of them acceptable, people say, "You're not like an American."

**She said people she talked to about the global services (and the notion**

**services'd bring about global living without war) said: Yes, of course,**

**that's right. But how is it going**

**to happen? Deep drilling: a slight angle and without meaning to you're taking oil from under someone else's**

**property. Erik Satie's Venetian gold-merchant: He hugs the bag of gold, takes some pieces out, kisses them,**

**carefully putting them back. After other financial-erotic acts, not being able to resist, he gets into the bag**

**himself. Coming out of it somewhat later, he discovers he has a backache. LXII. We**

**open our eyes and ears seeing life each day excellent as it is. This**

**realization no longer needs art though without art it would have been difficult**

**(yoga, zazen, etc.) to come by.**

**Having this realization, we gather energies, ours and the ones of nature, in order to make this intolerable world endurable. Robots. Ivan**

**Sutherland: "...it is not enough for a computer to print an answer. The**

**answer is useful only when it leads to new human understanding.... Widespread**

**use of graphic inputs and outputs with computers will bring about a major increase in scientific, engineering, and**

**educational productivity." LXIII. We talked about Gaudi. Mies van der Rohe admired the Gaudi buildings in and near**

**Barcelona and the Park Güell. Laura**  
**said that driving to the apartment**  
**from the office Mies was**  
**misanthropic. He had said that there are**  
**too few good people in the world. (Duchamp**  
**talking about the human mind pointed**

**out how poorly it works.)** Isolate aspect  
of human nature which brought it about no  
one (not even those devoted to his

work) knows how many pieces of Satie's  
Furniture Music were written or where  
they are. Call it collective

thoughtlessness. There exist, we're  
told, unused areas of the brain. They  
should be put to work. **LXIV. Days**

**spent hunting for non-synthetic foods. At**  
**sunset becoming artists in the kitchen.**

**Other days spent making something inedible**  
**(painting, theatre, etc. and the**  
**sciences), paying attention to things**  
**already made (classics, history,**

**humanities). Plastics. Waddington: "...**

**the richness of individual life depends to**  
**a major extent on constructive**

**enterprises ... which are on such a large**  
**scale that only society as a whole can**  
**undertake them."** Effortless speed

(seven hundred and fifty miles per hour):  
people blown through tunnels downhill from  
Boston to New York. Effortless slowing

down: tunnel goes uphill. Asked about  
religion he said he never said anything  
against it: "It's the only thing that

keeps people in line." What about  
art? Is art, formerly religion's servant,  
now, without our realizing it, a kind of

policing activity? We need a purely  
secular morality. **LXV. Pia Gilbert,**

born in southern Germany, got in a  
taxicab in New York City. The driver  
said, "I'm a Black Muslim." She

replied, "I'm sorry to hear it." "You  
don't believe in the truth?" "That  
isn't the truth." "You don't like

Negroes?" "What makes you think I'm not  
a Negro?"

What it is is a field. Looks  
like we'll have networks in that  
field. Lines crisscrossing on a

multiplicity of levels. There'll be, as ever, the nothing-in-between. Wrist watches with alarms that tell us as we travel around when we should eat (not when the airline hostess gives us food, but when, according to our own systems, we should have it). New function for doctors: adjusting our wrist alarms. LXVI. "They dance the world as it will be...is now when they dance." Technique. Discipline.

Ultimately it's not a question of taste. It's the other way around. Each thing in the world asks us, "What makes you think I'm not something you like?" The use of drugs to facilitate religious experience is against the stream of the times. (He lost interest in the tape-music center, its experiments and performances. He went to the Southwest desert. He removed himself from the others.) Begging: difficult profession. In India, parents main children producing bodies that'll attract pity. His eyes are sheep's eyes; his mind's superb. Decided not to give him a penny. Then did (after reading letter Satie'd written shortly before death, asking for a little money, enough so he could sit in a corner, smoke his pipe). LXVII. Asked the Spanish doctor what she thought about the human mind in a world of computers. She said computers are always right but life isn't about being right. Pia's

defense of property was touching. As she explained, she and people she knew had suffered at the hands of others. She said that by means of things they like and acquire people position themselves with respect to society. Duchamp: Property is at the base of it. Until you give up owning property radical social change is impossible. We ought either to get rid of God or to find Another Who doesn't permit mention of trust in Him on pieces of money. Or taxation could

be augmented to the point where no one has any money at all. In which case we could keep God. **LXVIII. Definition of the word "cosmopolitan:"** 1.

**Belonging to all the world. 2. At home in any country; without local or national attachments. 3. Composed of elements gathered from all or various parts of the world.** Bertrand Russell asks American citizens: Can you justify your government's use in Vietnam of poison chemicals and gas, the saturation bombing of the entire country with jelly-gasoline and phosphorus? Napalm and phosphorus burn until the victim is reduced to a bubbling mass. Ramakrishna said: Given a choice between going to heaven and hearing a lecture on heaven, people would choose the lecture.

**Electronic Sketching. Engineers Focus Light on Screen to Design Visually via Computer. LXIX. Sir Charles Dodds:**

"... assume that cancer and cardiovascular problems are solved. We shall see institutions filled with scientists of many biological disciplines devoting their time to a study of the ageing process." He says no evidence exists that age

accompanied by degeneration is or isn't a natural process. Every death may have been unnatural, due to extraneous causes. **Lecture series on War (a summit series): lectures to be given by heads of states saying whatever they will on the general subject of fighting and why one does or doesn't do it. Disgust. Any proverbs that pass through our heads should be examined in a spirit of skepticism, their opposites in some cases reinforced, e.g., instead of "A rolling stone gathers no moss" establish "He doesn't let the grass grow under his feet."** **LXX. Something needs to be done about the postal services.**

Either that or we should stop assuming just because we mailed something it will get where we sent it. **Not just heads of state for the Lecture Series on War, but heads of corporations too. Let it become household knowledge that being employed by such and such a company is no different from being drafted for such and such a battlefield.** "Now's the time.

Never this opportunity again (plans for centennial celebration: funds available)." Including in our awareness whatever's/whoever's exterior to our focus of attention. In this way eliminating the practices involving guilt/aggression/conscience, "turning our backs," John R. Seeley, "on an anal and phallic world to bring into being a reign of genitality (enjoyment by others must be a condition of one's own enjoyment)." LXXI. Fire. **Not unpleasing additions to water, but the subtraction from it of noxious elements.** American school-teacher in Japan, having been assured she could have a private bath, told attendant she'd arranged to be alone. He said, "I'm here to see that you are." Art instead of being an object made by one person is a process set in motion by a group of people. Art's socialized. It isn't someone saying something, but people doing things, giving everyone (including those involved) the opportunity to have experiences they would not otherwise have had. Indians in northern

Saskatchewan, farmers in l'Isle de France, they've all forgotten what wild plants are edible. I was talking about this loss with Père Patrice. He said they've also forgotten how to sing. LXXII. The children have a society of their own. They have no need for ours. At the airport Ain said he came simply to see whether his mother was all right.

MUMMA'S MUSIC (MESA) FOR CUNNINGHAM'S DANCE CALLED PLACE. SITTING IN THE

AUDIENCE I FELT AFTERWARD AS THOUGH I'D BEEN RUNG THROUGH A RINGER. THEN HAD TO PLAY SATIE'S NOCTURNES, SOMETHING NOT EASY FOR ME TO DO. WRONG NOTES ALL OVER THE PLACE. TONIGHT THE PROGRAM'S BEING REPEATED. I'VE PRACTICED. I'LL BE DEAF AND BLIND. EXPERIMENTATION.

Summit lecture series on War: not to be given in one city, but via a global Telstar-like facility, each receiving set throughout the world equipped with a device permitting hearing no matter what speech in one's own tongue. *LXXIII.*

*Progress.* **Since for long we've been saying that money is the root of all evil, we should get rid of it, lock, stock and barrel.**

Take all the people who are now living in the world, McLuhan told me.

Stand them up. Jammed together, they'd fit into the New York City subway system.

I asked the skin-doctor why skin-doctors do such poor work. "Oh," he said, "We don't do any worse than the other doctors: it's just that you can see the

results of our work." Portuguese lady mentioned Lieh-tzu. Story: man, walking out of stone cliff through fire,

astonishing those who saw him, was asked how he did it. "What?" Came out of stone, walked through fire. "I know nothing," he said, "about either of those two things." *LXXIV.*

Ephemerization. Away from the earth into the air. Or: "on earth as it is in heaven." More with less: van der Rohe

(aesthetics); Fuller (society of world men). Nourishment via odors, life maintained by inhalation: Auguste Comte (*Système de Politique Positive*, second volume). Individuality. Out

of the darkness of psychoanalysis into sunny behavioral psychology (people picking up their couches and

walking). U.S. highway diner: now that I haven't eaten the potatoes, they will throw them away (they should have been thrown away before being served).

**Rich, we** become richer. No way once it begins to impede accumulation.

Universe. **They've put the cart before the horse: they're better about publicity than they are about what they publicize.** LXXV. Sometimes the truth gets out: years ago the double-spread in a New York newspaper showing the faces of the forty or so men

(industrialists) who rule the world.

All of her children were male, twelve of them. "She should be studied," Duchamp said. "She is the solution of a problem." A suite for two. Instead of

transformation into other forms

(reincarnation) regeneration of each individual. Precedent: constant remaking of Shinto temples in Japan. (With his thumbnail Tudor kept the

bass-string in vibration.) Include

changes in design: invention applied to a living body. (Electronics:

reincarnation without hiatus of

death.) **Rembrandt.** We have everything we

used to have. The Mona Lisa's still

with us, for instance. On top of which we

have the Mona Lisa with a mustache.

We have, so to speak, more than we need.

**LXXVI. Electric clothing. The program was**

**changed.** We need news. Not just bad

news: good news and news that's

neither good nor bad. Heads of state

lecturing on war (knowing they are

speaking to people all over the world) will

not be able to promote national objectives.

*We were impatient. So, we telephoned to*

*find out whether the bus was coming, even*

*though the appointed hour had not yet*

*struck.* **Figuéras. Looking for corduroy**

**suit, noticed chamber pots, each with eye**

**and inscription at the base of the**

**bowl, the eye primitively painted with**

**brilliant colors.** The Catalan inscription

was black: I see thee. LXXVII. He

refuses to give up. When he walks

across the room, you wonder whether he's

going to make it (a strange orientation of

the upper body in relation to the legs, an original way of putting one foot in front of the other). Out of Illinois into Sweden. (How will it happen? Will we do it or will it be done to us? **Unemployment.**) Climate control. Stravinsky's objection to Schoenberg's music: it isn't modern (too much like, though more interesting than, Brahms'). Absence of modernity's effect of Schoenberg's accepting tradition, hook, line and sinker.

Sounds everywhere. Our concerts celebrate the fact concerts're no longer necessary. LXXVIII. The rehearsals continued and more concerts were given.

Her playing which had been superb became merely correct. It was necessary to suggest a certain sloppiness, the playing of something that hadn't been written. Computer-made music

(synthesized *Blue Moon*) presented same problem. Random elements introduced. Dad's cold remedy (a cure-all combining menthol, thymol in alcohol: Cowell preferred it to whiskey); Dad's inhalor for quick introduction to bloodstream of vitamins, hormones. American Medical Association prevented general marketing of these products. The doctor telephoned to ask whether Grandfather was still alive. Turned out that instead of analyzing Grandfather's urine he had studied some apple juice that Grandmother had given the hospital messenger when he came to pick up the sample. LXXIX. Get it, she said, so it's unknown which parent conceiving will bear the child.

Responsibility undefined. Circa one hundred and seventy-five kinds of male, sixty, seventy kinds of female. Sterility. He had actually gotten slides showing the passage of the gene from one cell to the next. Destruction.

Reconstitution. (What we want is very

little, nothing, so to speak. We just want those things that have so often been promised or stated: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity; Freedom of this and that.) **Clothes for entertainment, not because of shame. Privacy to become an unusual rather than expected experience. Given disinfection, sanitation, removal of social concerns re defecation, urination. No self-consciousness. Living like animals, becoming touchable. LXXX. Ancient Chinese imperial decree: Burn the books! To have the books that are not yet written, prohibit reading the ones on shelves. Fire takes place of dust producing beneficent ashes.** Tried conversation (engineers and artists).

Found it didn't work. At the last minute, our profound differences (different attitudes toward time?) threatened performance. What changed matters, made conversation possible, produced cooperation, reinstated one's desire for continuity etc., were *things*, dumb inanimate things (once in our hands they generated thought, speech, action). Say lecture series

on war cannot be arranged. Rule that summit meetings must be made public via TV, satellite, the works. Increase frequency of summit meetings. One way or another, that is, let the game be shown for what it is to those having time and interest to observe it. LXXXI. Shirley

Genther's arranging for me to receive the *Kaiser Reports*. You don't pay for them. They just come to you in the mail.

Speakers for lecture series: Mao Tse-Tung, Ho Chih Minh, some African Bushman, Nikita K., LBJ, Charles de Gaulle, etc. We now expect a good deal (that the lights will turn on, the telephone will work, etc.); what we want is a comfortable bed (each one of us has a different notion of

comfort), fresh air, delicious water, fine food, wine (there again, we differ). **Into the night: the days to come.**

Barbara said she'd heard the political situation in some South American country being what it was (bizarre, dishonest and meaningless), a gorilla in the zoo was nominated and elected President.

**LXXXII.** In music it was hopeless to think in terms of the old structure (tonality), to do things following old methods (counterpoint, harmony), to use the old materials (orchestral instruments). We started from scratch: sound, silence, time, activity. In society, no amount of doctoring up economics/politics will help.

Begin again, assuming abundance, unemployment, a field situation, multiplicity, unpredictability, immediacy, the possibility of participation. **Schools we'll live**

*in (their architecture). Spaces without partitions. Noticing what the others are doing (they also think). Giving no thought to graduation. We know it's a melody but it's one we've not yet sung. Power of momentum. LXXXIII.* There are those of course who have no time for improving the world. They are struggling to keep it going. Disciplines that require exercise. **LUNCH IN CHICAGO:**

*SHE ASKED ME WHETHER IT WAS TRUE THAT ART NO LONGER INTERESTED ME. I SAID I THOUGHT WE'D DONE IT (OPENED OUR EYES, OUR EARS). WHAT'S URGENT IS SOCIETY. NOT FIXING IT BUT CHANGING IT SO IT WORKS. Self-service. Time for anger.*

**Miscegenation: generation of a lasting biochemical change.** We gave up judgments, substituted poetry.

*Fire engines in the street below. Smoke in the halls. Called the desk.*

*They said there was no cause for alarm. LXXXIV. "If you and Daddy get a divorce, I'm not going to go with you and I'm not going to go*

with Daddy." His mother said, "Where would you go then?" "I'd go back to

**nature.**" North Pole is on the move: used to be in the Philippines. They give us food because we're traveling by air. Pretty soon they'll do the same even when we're on the ground (trip or no trip). **We have only one mind (the one we**

**share).** Changing things radically, therefore, is simple. You just change that one mind. Base human nature on allishness (soon enough global selfishness will become something **to think about).** **LXXXV. Political steps restricted to those taken in front of**

**television cameras, so people everywhere can see where they're going. Better yet: politicians take no political steps alone. Politicians (via TV) simply make suggestions. Receiving sets equipped with transmission means enabling people to vote on whether or not a proposed step or steps should be taken.**

**Denial of what one's believed in.**

Amplification of the sound of feet, feet one sees walking. [Talked about disintegrating passenger at one end of line, reassembling him at his destination. Pittsburgh Skybus: push a button: following a path, bus goes where you wanted it to go. Northwest plans for shooting people through tunnels with compressed air. Graduated speeds for Synchroveyor travel. Insisted on private transportation (possibly electrical: getting home, plug in car: unused, it gets recharged).] **LXXXVI.**

The lazy dog (a bomb containing ten thousand slivers of **razor-sharp steel).** In one province of North Vietnam, the most densely populated, one hundred million slivers of **razor-sharp steel** have fallen in a period of

thirteen months. These razor darts slice the villagers to ribbons. **Maki thinks Hawaii's another part of Japan. Portugal thinks of Angola**

not as a colony but as Portugal,  
U.S.A. thinks the Free World is U.S.A.'s  
world, is determined to keep it free,

**U.S.A.-determined.** *The possibility  
of conversation resides in the  
impossibility of two people having  
the same experience whether or not their  
attention is directed one-pointedly. An  
ancient Buddhist realization (sitting  
in different seats).* LXXXVII. Exhaustion.

*Sleep disturbed by dream. Said we were  
to have regular tours each year, four of  
them, each to last four months.*

**First one: performances in Alaska,  
North Pole, Russia, Finland.** Parking at

the supermarket, she changed her  
plan, gathering lamb's-quarters, mushrooms,  
and horseradish she'd noticed growing wild  
outside. **Earth a city as Paris was:**

**people seen in love on the streets.  
Electric clothes rechargeable at public  
couches, couches provided with  
adjustable domes, domes raised or lowered  
according to the weather, cataclysmic  
events foreseen and observed as theatre  
from a distance, distance provided by  
immediate mass transportation.**

**Disease removed, the use of faeces,  
animal and human, to enrich the earth  
(economy, no refuse). Starting over again  
from the point of human well-being,  
non-fluent factors in the exchange  
between man and universe (detergents,  
for instance) disused. A new  
ecology. The enjoyment of "dirt."**

**("Hands.")** LXXXVIII. The woods: finding a  
cabin nobody's living in. It'll be  
fun fixing it up. **Details of dawn**

**observed, unstudied. Success. All  
desires gratified, we say No but smile at  
the same time (taking a raincheck).**

**Blessed are the misers: they shall give  
what they have to others. The girls in  
the cities were forced into teams of  
prostitutes for U.S. troops. The Saigon  
government forced literally tens of  
thousands of young girls into camps for**

U.S. troops. Armistice November Eleventh. When's Second World War's Armistice? Need three hundred and sixty-three more wars arranged so each ends on different day, entire year becoming one Armistice after another. Wars cold rather than hot. Lectures on war preferable to war itself. Annual celebration of ends of lectures, each and every day. **LXXXIX. Society, not being a process a king sets in motion, becomes an impersonal place understood and made useful so that no matter what each individual does his actions enliven the total picture. Anarchy (no laws or conventions) in a place that works. Society's individualized.** The doctor didn't know what the disease was. It attacked everyone differently, wherever a person was vulnerable. **Into that world when it's changed things'll reenter we'd renounced, e.g., value judgments (cf. the dominant seventh). They'll not monopolize nor suggest what happens next.** (He hit over the head the mother who'd lost her only child, saying, "This will give you something to cry about.") Constant lamentation. (We cry because anyone's head was struck.) Tears: a global enterprise. XC. President Eisenhower (1953): Let us assume we lost Indo-China. If Indo-China goes, the tin and tungsten we so greatly value would cease coming. We are after the cheapest way to prevent the occurrence of something terrible—the loss of our ability to get what we want from the riches of the Indo-Chinese territory and from Southeast Asia. **If we get through 1972, Fuller says, we've got it made. 1972 ends the present critical period. Following present trends, fifty per cent of the world's population will then have what they need. The other fifty per cent will rapidly join their ranks. Say by the year 2000.**

## Note on the Author and this Work

The New York Public Library has produced a superb bibliography of John Cage's earlier writings; and more recent works (including the text of this pamphlet) will be included in **A Year From Monday** (to appear in late Autumn with the Wesleyan University Press, which also published **Silence**, a selection from his earlier writings). Cage's compositions are available from Edition Peters, together with a catalogue of his works and sufficient biographical materials, so what is needed at the moment is not the usual Great Bear short mechanical bibliography and biography that enables one to locate more materials, but a few remarks on the pamphlet you have at hand.

John Cage has for a very long time treated music as being not only about music, but as a language with whatever relevance it was given. So the essay in this pamphlet does not deal specifically with the musical format, but with the world of such possible relevances. Cage has said that his problems are not musical but social, and in this way his music itself has taken on a relevance that purifies both it and its auditors. Therefore we ought not be surprised at the scope of the "diary," or its quality, which is that of a poem. The painter is not, however, accepted as a dramatist (how about Picasso and Oldenburg?) in our society. How about the composer as poet/designer? Cage has been interested in design and typography since his undergraduate days at Pomona College, where his roommate was the fine printer (deceased) Gregg Anderson. For years he designed programs and posters for dance and music concerts, and many of his writings reflect his interest in painting. In the mid-1950's he supported himself as an art director and designer of typography for a textile firm. Some of his design ideas came through in the **Art News Annual** of 1958, which included a gorgeous short essay by him on Satie, juxtaposed with remarks by Satie and superimposed on visual materials by Satie himself. This pamphlet is an attempt to realize another of Cage's ideas as closely as possible to his intention. Dick Higgins, acting as printing technician, described the uses and limitations of the two-color process we have used and suggested feasible potentials, and in effect he provided Cage with an instrument on which to perform a visual realization of his idea. Cage entered into the proposal gladly, employing color-changes which, like the indentations, type-faces and number of words given a single story or idea, are the outcome of chance operations. The first section of the "diaries," which are collections of thoughts that develop out of working and being alive, appeared in the little magazine **Joglars**, issue number three. The second is in the Spring 1967 issue of the **Paris Review**. You have the third. What will the fourth be like?

**Notations**, edited by John Cage, and including sample works by more than 200 composers, will be published by Something Else Press in the Autumn of 1967.

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