

I have a friend who works at a hair salon, I'll call her Alina, and she also has a job as a dominatrix. She has lots of good stories about how she doesn't even need to do anything, and men will pay her three hundred dollars just for the privilege of cleaning her kitchen. But then she started working more generally as a prostitute and she says most of her work is pretty boring and not very enjoyable, but once in a while she meets a man who gives her so much pleasure, and who she feels such a strong connection with, that she refuses to take money from them. She says she'll have a fantastic afternoon and then the man will go off wherever he goes, she assumes he's married, and she thinks about him and waits for next time. Meanwhile, there are many men who repel her and who have no clue how to be around a woman. It's just about getting their money. But there are those rare moments of intense intimacy that make her imagine what's possible, and that she can even cross that mysterious boundary between a business transaction and falling in love.

- Sarah Cahill

Put your fingers on the keys.
Play faster.
Not that fast.
Now quieter.
Much quieter.
As quietly as possible.
Don't just sit there.
Start again.
Lead to the third bar.
Don't play legato.
Too much pedal.
Take your foot completely off the
pedal.
You're slowing down.
Precisely even.
That's too even.
Now it's too loud.
Start again.
Remember, pianissimo.
Play the first four bars again.
Not that quick.
Give it some room to breathe.
Start again.
Curl your fingers up here.
No, still flat fingers in the beginning.
More articulation.
Still legato.
Longer on the last note.
Not that long.
Start again.

- Timo Andres

My friend was sitting in, subbing, playing baritone sax on a thing for, uh, what's his name... Barry Harris, the great be-bop pianist. Doing a thing for chorus and orchestra and big band, and what-not, and they're rehearsing down in the basement of Cooper Union. So I go and there's like one seat left in the middle of the audience checking out the rehearsal. And it is just smoking, everything is going on, we're having a great time just checking the rehearsal out. And then at one point it hits kind of a fast swing tempo, and I'm sitting in the middle of the audience and all of a sudden the entire audience goes "SCOODY-ABBA-DOOBA-DEEBEE-WOODA-WA-WEEAHH!" And they go "WOW-WOW-WO-WO!" And actually, of course, you figured out after a second or two that you've sat down in the middle of the chorus, that it wasn't the audience, but those two seconds are magical.

- Rob Schwimmer

My first trip to Asia changed my life. I don't say that lightly. It's not that I had no knowledge of Asia. I had a Chinese roommate and spent as much time in Chinatown as the next New Yorker, but that was different. That was a subculture that earned some street cred in the mainstream. In Asia, I'm the subculture – to a mainstream that is nowhere near as inviting to diversity as my own.

Up till then, I'd never found my self immersed in a culture so radically different. It's not just the language. Language shapes thinking. Just going out for food can be an exercise in mind-expansion, of opening new options, of questioning your basic assumptions. No wonder Cage was so taken with Asia. It was his drug of choice.

The stories of Paul Bowles and Somerset Maugham are filled with travelers who, once they find themselves in by a world different from their own, crumble. Their values plummet, they go insane. These are people who can't handle drugs.

It's a steep learning curve. I haven't made as much progress with the language as I'd like, and maybe because of that I take nothing for granted. It's exhausting, but I've never felt more alive.

- Ken Smith

Life isn't what it seems, nor is it otherwise. Om mani padme hum. The six paramitas purify. Om, generosity, purifies pride and the ego. Ma, ethics, purifies jealousy and lust for entertainment. Ni, patience, purifies passion and desire. Pad, diligence, purifies ignorance and prejudice. Me, renunciation, purifies poverty and possessiveness. Wisdom purifies aggression and hatred. I am not even my thoughts. In the end there is no thing. Enlightenment. I don't want what I think I think I want. I want the idea, I want the illusion of what I think I think I want.

- Nona Hendryx

I have a wedge shaped scar on my left ankle that dates back to when I was renting a house in Hobart, New York, across the road from a failed development. They'd laid out plots and dug ponds, but nothing got built. One day I went swimming in one of the ponds with the dogs, our Border Collie mix Mercy and Roscoe, a long haired mutt with Rottweiler dots over his eyes, a street rescue, sweet but unstable. Mercy and Roscoe were aspiring but unskilled predators. That day at the pond, though, they managed to corner a baby woodchuck. I got between the dogs and the woodchuck and for what seemed like a long time, but was really only a few frantic minutes, the four of us danced around the pond and through the underbrush, the dogs barking and lunging until finally the woodchuck bit me, leaving a large gash on my ankle, and then disappeared. That night I let the dogs out to pee, but Roscoe didn't come back for an hour or more. He came loping back to the house with something in his mouth. He dropped it at my feet, a present. It was the woodchuck's head.

- Luc Sante

Alabaster and other regions of
temporary knowledge.

The kinds of things you hear

In the middle of the night

When it is enough to only

Think. Remember the totality

That fading picture of

Elevation maps from a

Distance and then, more so.

There's an airplane! Something

Only a baby could do

Perched on a window sill,

Framed for the neighbors across

The tangled yard. Just for

Kicks, let's move that

Bookshelf from there to

Here and back again on slippers.

The walls may cry.

The doorways breathe.

If I had a choice

I would always prefer a

Quiet meal where no one

Talked.

That way,

We could concentrate on what really matters

How we are.

It is so easy to linger on

Battered hallways draped

In powder. If today isn't

As advertised, I'd like to

Try another. Elephants.

That bear is eating a fish.

I am going to be a better

Person in three years.

Two years.

Regardless of the ancillary nature

Of meaning, the ontology of fear

Is gruesome.

It will take some time
Before this hurts,
But when it does,
It will hurt like hell.
Sterilize a sewing needle
And puncture yourself.
Sound advice though perhaps
Lunch would suffice.

- Aaron Siegel

the earth is NOT expanding
the solar system is NOT expanding
The space between the galaxies is expanding it is not a
performance cooler. less dense. bigger.
gravity is becoming less important now as dark energy takes over,
dominates the attractive, the repulsive effect / increases
dark energy is no longer so affected by dark matter's pull as it
was
in the beginning / slammin / bangin
the energy of the vacuum, the energy of nothingness, even
nothingness
has energy and it is pushing everything apart

undifferentiated consciousness, convincing evidence of
still in the body but different now
still / made deeper / like blasting thru rock
it's easier now to resist / move away / go in another direction
there is nothing holding and nothing to hold together

oh wow. oh wow. oh wow.

- Emily XYZ

In the early 70's I had a loft at the corner of Elizabeth and Bleecker. It was the whole 6th floor, at the top of the building. There was an elevator, but it hadn't been used in years. So, I had a 6 floor walk up. I rehearsed there regularly with the 5 other players who, with me, played in the early days of my ensemble. We had regular Sunday afternoon concerts there and, besides, rehearsed there a couple of nights a week. Almost all of Music In 12 Parts was rehearsed and premiered there. That was all through '71 to '74.

We never shut the downstairs door when we were rehearsing, and especially not in the spring and summer. It never occurred to us that anyone would climb up all those steps to hear us play. Well, one Summer evening we had a visitor. We had been rehearsing for an hour or so, and when we took a break, there he was, sitting on one of the old movie theater chairs which we had found on the street and which lined three sides of a pretty large room.

- a story by Philip Glass
read by Phil Kline

The summer of 1977 was not at all what I had expected it to be - a relief from the seven day work-week of school, church and Saturday trips to St Johnsbury with my four siblings - packed into the Country Squire - for a day of music lessons with Mrs. LeBlanc. That summer it was just my luck that my mother had arranged for me to take weekly lessons with the violinist from the chamber music group that had started a festival in town. I was very upset about having to practice all summer instead of living the the wild and free life of a farm girl, and at first I absolutely balked at the opportunity. The teacher had rented a house on an old farm about a mile and a half up the road. My mother's convincing stroke of genius was to let me drive one of the farm tractors back and forth to my lesson each week. The rest is history....

- Mary Rowell

I was sitting at the keyboard working when my four year old daughter came up to me and said “Daddy, can you guess what I’m doing?” She was making a somewhat violent gesture, she was waving her arm vigorously back and forth across her upper body and at the same time holding her left hand to the side of her chin. I studied this for a few seconds and told her that I could not guess what she was doing, but she persisted, kept making the gesture and then once again said “Daddy, can you guess what I’m doing.” After a few more seconds I asked “are you playing the violin?” and she said “no.” She continued to make the gesture, looking at me, and after a little while longer I told her that I didn’t think I could possibly guess what she was doing and that maybe she should just tell me. She looked at me with extreme exasperation and said “Daddy, I’m playing the viola.”

- Phil Kline

...oh, my...

...oh, that was good...

...that was a...

...sorry...

...I'm sorry...

...oh...

...I apologize.

- Kenny Goldsmith

All right, this is not a true story, but it is a personal one. It involves time travel. Not the important kind of time travel... you know, it's not about changing what happens; it's more about remembering. Because I find that I tend to remember the things that I should forget and then forget the things that I should remember. So my plan is to go back in time and recover some of those memories, so that I can tell stories about them. Because, so far, this is the only story I've ever told.

- Corey Dargel

Immediately after my parents were married, in 1950, my father became a naturalized citizen and was drafted into the US Army. He was assigned to the Seventh Army Symphony and sent to Germany to play viola for two years. My mother, who played the flute, decided to join him, and became the only woman and the only civilian in the orchestra. She brought their cat, Pumpkin, and the three of them traveled through war-scarred Germany together. At some point, my mother composed a song for Pumpkin that went like this:

Pumpkin, schlumpkin,
Dimitri Tiompkin,
Oh, what a wonderful
kitsy.

Twenty years later, when our family moved to Los Angeles, my parents ended up buying a house that had previously belonged to the film composer. Dimitri Tiompkin had already died, or I am sure my parents would have sung the song to him at the closing.

- Eve Beglarian

“Begin Anywhere.”

That’s what the sign says right over my computer at home.

Actually, the sign says:

“Begin Anywhere. John Cage”

From a composer who loved to write pieces that didn’t seem to have genuine beginnings or endings, this is pretty good advice.

Apparently Pablo Picasso once said that there’s nothing worse than a good beginning, because then you spend the rest of your time trying not to wreck it.

I say “apparently” because I heard this second-hand, from Brian Eno. Eno has his own way of starting, or restarting, a project - namely, a set of problem-solving cards known as Oblique Strategies. If you get stuck you’re supposed to pull a card from the deck and read it.

My favorite is “honor thy error as a hidden intention.”

But “try faking it” is a close second.

Anyway, once you get going, there’s another John Cage quote that sometimes fits:

“I have nothing to say, and I am saying it.”

- John Schaefer

Music is the only invisible artform. It works on you like vibrations do. It works on you like perfume does. And that's why it's the most mysterious art form. And to me the most beautiful art form. Arthur Freed said don't try to be different, just be good; to be good is different enough. You know, he wrote the lyrics to "Singin' In The Rain," so he did know a thing or two. And I agree with him.

- Steven Blier

It was late on a wet and cold January afternoon when I finally arrived downstairs at New York public library's archives where 5 people eagerly waited to record my comments concerning Jesse Fuller's San Francisco Bay Blues - music I had used in the first solo I ever performed in New York in 1976 - and a recording I had not requested. I did the interview. Everyone was fatigued and ready to leave for the day. As I put on my hat and scarf, the beguiling, barely recognizable voice of a young Bessie Smith caressed the shelves and followed me down the hall:

He boiled my fresh cabbage
And he made it awful hot.
He boiled my fresh cabbage
But he made it awful hot.
When he put in the bacon
It almost overflowed the pot.

- Bill T. Jones

Instructions for Trouble and Queenie

7 am

dog chews

tell easyö and sitö

walks

Queenie first

Trouble next

water full

2 scoops of food

trashcanö next to food bowls

bag of food on chair

3 or 4 pm

walks

Queenie first

Trouble next

pills

if 4th of July or thunderstorms

cheese is in the fridge

squish half pill into cheese for Queenie

plain cheese for Trouble

7:30ish pm

walks

Queenie first

Trouble next

half pill for Queenie if storms

water full

2 scoops of food

dog chews

- Laura Kline

Years ago, a friend of mine who was an avid cyclist decided to buy a brand new road bike. He had an old bicycle that still worked perfectly and so he gave it to me. Since the old bike, a white Pugeot, looked exactly like thousands of bicycles that one might see around the city every day, my friend replaced one of the pedal reflectors with one of a different color, making it quite easy to identify. I didn't really ride the bike that often, but one time when I did I left it in the hallway of a friend's building and from there it was stolen. A few years later I was standing in a copy shop when someone walked in with an old white Pugeot bicycle. Somewhat instinctively, I looked down and saw it had the odd colored reflector on the right pedal. It didn't make me angry. I thought to myself "it's not your bicycle any more."

- Phil Kline

1231123411234

5123456789121

2345612345123

1234512345678

- Aaron Kline

July.

The water fountain at Columbus Circle made it impossible to hear anything, save for intermittent ambulance sirens, the shrieks of three blond children in the spray and their mother's stern alto as she threatened to revoke TV privileges if they did not behave.

Not too far away sat an elderly Black man with dreadlocks who, having calmly changed his trousers as if at the beach, now sat placidly picking at a scab on his forearm and muttering to himself something completely drowned out by the water jets and the family noise.

As I sat near them in the swampy humidity, I heard the mother interrogating one of the little blonds, asking "What would you do if you got separated from me at the airport? Look at me! What would you do? Where would you go?"

- Bill T. Jones

Once upon a time there was a dog and she was named Little Zoe. And she was Zoe's daughter and one day she got lost and a bear found her and almost cooked her. And then Zoe came and found her and took her home. And then she was safe, but the bear tried to get in but they put a bear lock and they put a fire on him and they put him in the dungeon. The end. And he never lived again and he died and he turned into foam in the water. The end.

- Zoe Fonda

The Day Lady Died

FRANK O'HARA

It is 12:20 in New York a Friday
three days after Bastille day, yes
it is 1959 and I go get a shoeshine
because I will get off the 4:19 in Easthampton
at 7:15 and then go straight to dinner
and I don't know the people who will feed me

I walk up the muggy street beginning to sun
and have a hamburger and a malted and buy
an ugly NEW WORLD WRITING to see what the poets
in Ghana are doing these days
in Ghana are doing these days I go on to the bank
and Miss Stillwagon (first name Linda I once heard)
doesn't even look up my balance for once in her life
and in the GOLDEN GRIFFIN I get a little Verlaine
for Patsy with drawings by Bonnard although I do
think of Hesiod, trans. Richmond Lattimore or
Brendan Behan's new play or Le Balcon or Les Nègres
of Genet, but I don't, I stick with Verlaine
after practically going to sleep with quandariness

and for Mike I just stroll into the PARK LANE
Liquor Store and ask for a bottle of Strega and
then I go back where I came from to 6th Avenue
and the tobacconist in the Ziegfeld Theatre and
casually ask for a carton of Gauloises and a carton
of Picayunes, and a NEW YORK POST with her face on it

and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of
leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT
while she whispered a song along the keyboard
to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing

- "The Day Lady Died" by
Frank O'Hara read

by Darryl Pinckney

The painter JMW Turner did not shy away from horror. In fact, he addressed it head on. Whereas other painters of his generation were creating what might be considered “escapist landscapes,” Turner was painting scenes of war and destruction. Take for example, his Snow Storm: Hannibal and his Army Crossing the Alps. This, like much of Turner’s work, was intended as a reference to Jacques-Louis David, and in this case, to his Napoleon at the Saint-Bernard Pass. But Turner turns this on its head. Rather than depicting a glorious hero in a state of triumph, Turner focuses on the suffering of the foot soldiers about to be consumed by a massive blizzard. Hannibal himself is barely visible, taking the form of an elephant-shaped smudge; one inch of a canvas that is perhaps 6-to-8 feet across.

- David T Little

And from my little brother Tim on 1st of August 1986:

Dear Lisa, to start a traditional letter, I think it appropriate to describe my present surroundings so that you can get a feel for the letter. Firstly, I'm sitting in the front room of Wollongong which has been candle-lit. I am smoking a Drum mild, plus drinking some white wine and Turkish coffee. In addition I am listening to the recording I bought of Mozart's Piano Concerto no.20 and lastly I am devouring a couple of pieces of Callard and Bowser's Dessert Nougat. How much more splendid could a surrounding be? I suppose it would be nice to have a lover around - it really does get bloody lonely at times! Never mind, life still goes on, despite everything....

- Lisa Moore

Once in the late 1980s, I was in a taxi in Manhattan very late at night, a weeknight. I guess it was around 2:30 or 3:00 am. It was mid-winter and snowing, with oversized flakes floating down and covering the streets and sidewalks. There was almost no traffic, and no one visible on the streets.

Then, as the cab moved east on 23rd Street, I saw a lone figure ahead, walking in the same direction. He was hatless, wearing a dark overcoat with collar turned up around his neck, and carrying a rectangular case designed for a musical instrument.

The taxi rolled to a stop at a red light just next to the lone figure, and in the light of a street lamp I was briefly able to clearly see the lone man's face. It was Ornette Coleman, one of my very favorite musicians. As he receded, I thought to myself how wonderful it was to be alive and in New York in the late twentieth century.

- Jim Jarmusch

Now I teach my own students that from whatever perspective they view composition, sound itself must ultimately be the basis, the empirical source for all creative work in music. Sound is our thing, and as William Carlos Williams famously put it, there should be No ideas but in things. Before any attempt at aesthetic evaluation is made, I simply ask: what are we hearing, how is it made audible? This empirical, pragmatic approach is, I think, largely an American attitude, whose origins maybe found in Emerson, Whitman, William James, John Dewey and many others. To me it is an indispensably significant and possibly unique contribution to the making of a democratic, demotic, and inclusive art. I tell students (our beloved Transcendentalists notwithstanding), that their music is exactly, finally, how it sounds.

- Martin Bresnick

Dear scientists: if I wanna Freaky Friday with someone, what's the most reasonable way to go about it?

The aboriginal didgeridoo player by the harbor had to stop because he got a call on the iPhone that was playing his backing track.

Jetlag + this party = my brain creating nnnnts nnnnts remixes of Bach chorale harmonizations in the ladies' room

Make It Or Break It has not been renewed?? I'm having emotions.
#kayliecruz2012

Allora Jenga

Do you remember when you first heard the term "hoodie?" It seemed adorably fitting and also optional. Now my mom's all "hoodie."

Ever have days of just insane clumsiness? Like this morning I spilled coffee on an Orthodox Jew & just now cut my pinkie on a headphone?

Cheddar is the best cheese.

EVERYONE IS WRONG IT'S CHEDDAR.

Who even is responsible for "In New York, anchovies have triumphed as umami-dense stripes on the flag of fine dining."

DANCE MOMS IS GETTING SO REAL.

- Nadia Sirota

What's your favorite season? My favorite season is Halloween and, well, I always go to the Philippines without myself, well, I take off my head and go to the Philippines. On Halloween? Uh-huh, and I hibernate my head under the sand. Oh, that's a complicated answer. You know, my favorite season is summer. That was on purpose? What do you like about summer? You like Halloween better? I love all of this weather, to climb my big rocks, silly. You know, your papa says the birds left from this nest. I think they're up in the trees. Can you hear them? I think they got big and they left the nest. Oh no. Can you imagine that? Hey! Hello?

- Susie Ibarra

When I was a teenager, I was sitting in the living room of my parent's house listening to a recording of organ music by Olivier Messiaen. The piece was entitled The Celestial Banquet. I had the volume turned up rather loud. At one point my mother came walking through the living room, stopping and looking at me, asking "what is this?" I told her it was music by a French composer named Messiaen and, since my mother was a very religious person, I told her that the piece was a depiction of the Holy Communion. After a moment she replied "How can he make it sound so boring?"

- Phil Kline

Hello, this is my first time with my daddy recording me, and he's gonna put me on a CD, and I'm four and a half and I like to sing with my friends at school, and my name is Clementine and I like to dance and sing and my school is called the Third Street Settlement and we do music there. It used to be on Third Street but they moved it and now it's on a different street but they didn't change the name.

- Clementine

In the fall of 1989 I rode British Rail to the Huddersfield Festival in the north of England. There I played Parcheesi with John Cage. He was staying in a fairly nice place, I was staying in an Indian B&B a few blocks away where they thought I was Irish, based of course on my accent. We played in the lobby of this hotel. There was a Parcheesi set there. He held up the dice and would say things like "I like dice, there's a different number on every side." I used the opportunity to ask him about a piece of his that I'd several months in which the percussionist was holding up a hula hoop and slowly moving it around in giant circles. I asked whether he had specified hula hoop or whether that was the percussionist's idea to use it. Cage said "It depends. You'd have to tell me which piece of mine it was."

- Harold Meltzer

I went to see my mother in the nursing home where she lived for the last years of her life. They told me she was not remembering much but was otherwise quite happy. She smiled when she saw me and we walked down to the end of the hall where there was a nice sunroom. I felt nervous seeing her like this, in the quieted environment of a care facility, but we had a very pleasant conversation. At first I didn't know what to say, but then realized that if the subject was something that happened a long time ago, she was much sharper. As we walked back to the main room, she surprised me by singing the old song "The long, long trail." It had never occurred to me to introduce myself, but as I was ready to say good-bye, she said "I don't know who you are but I guess I must love you."

- Phil Kline

A few days ago I decided to finally organize my sock drawer. Some of my sock-balls had been pushed all the way to the back of the drawer, making it impossible to ever fully close the dresser. I was able to reach my arm underneath the ledge and finger my way to 8 differently colored, single socks. I could not throw them out, and so I just put them back where I found them.

When I turned 30, I sent a letter to the adoption agency with a request to meet my birth mother and 5 weeks later I got a handwritten response from her: "Dear Markus" it said...(I had clearly explained that that I was re-baptized), "I did the right thing to give you up, I was young, bla bla bla "...and a meeting is out of the question! My husband knows about your existence, but not my 3 other sons." Two more "Dear Markus" letters later and I realized that she would not change her mind. The other shoe had finally dropped and I would never be able to find the missing sock.

- Theo Bleckmann

He might have been there for some time before we noticed him. He was a tall, lanky fellow dressed in some kind of threadbare suit. He seemed maybe in his 50's, tired, unshaved and a little worse for wear. He greeted us in a friendly way and said he enjoyed our little concert. I thanked him for that and, spotting an old Hammond 'B' organ amongst our instruments and equipment, asked if he could play on it a little. Of course I told him he would be most welcome.

He walked over, settled on it's wooden bench and sighed with pleasure as he quickly set up the draw bars that gives the classic Hammond 'B's their distinctive sound. Without another word or nod to us he began playing. And the guy could really play! Mainly it was Show tunes and the kind of stuff you hear in a skating rink. But, for all it's plainness and simplicity, it was really enjoyable.

- a story by Philip Glass
read by Phil Kline

And so the snow fell
And covered up poetry.
And so the snow fell
And covered up cities like bags of leaves.
And
so the snow fell

And
covered up an architecture.

And so the snow fell

And
covered one red orange sexual flower.

And
so the snow fell

And
covered the bus and the passengers.

And
so the snow fell

And
covered up our friend.

And
so the snow fell

And
covered his clear water-towers, his windows and his door.

And
so the snow fell

And
covered up the word poetry.

And
so the snow fell

And
covered up the snow and a house within.

And
so the snow fell

And
fell on his fallen leaves.

And
oh the snow fell

And
covered up his photographs of snow.

And
so the snow fell

And
covered up even passing clouds.

- "A Song for Rudy Burckhardt" by David Shapiro read
by Aleba Gartner

John?

John?

John?

John.

John!

John?

John?

John, John, John...

John?

John?

John?

- James Nares

The highest purpose is to have no purpose at all. This puts one in accord with nature in her manner of operation. If someone comes along and asks why?, there are answers. However there is a story I have found very helpful. What's so interesting about technique anyway? What if there are twelve tones in a row? What row? This seeing of cause and effect is not emphasized but instead one makes an identification with what is here and now. He then spoke of two qualities. Unimpededness and Interpenetration.

The relationship of things happening at the same time is spontaneous and irrepressible.

It is you yourself in the form you have that instant taken. To stop and figure it out takes time.

John Cage

- "Silence" by John Cage read
by Gwen Deely

Jacob van Deventer was among the first to make systematic use of triangulation. In 1536 he produced a printed map of Brabant, the first such map to be published in the Netherlands. He then launched into an impressive career as a mapmaker. In 1559, he was tasked by King Philip II with the project that was to become his life's work: the systematic cartography of all cities of the Netherlands.[1] The resulting maps were kept unpublished because of their military value. As a result, they later became forgotten and were rediscovered hundreds of years later. Jacobus van Deventer worked on this monumental project until his death in 1575. In the course of fifteen years, he created between 250 and 260 city maps.

- Bluebrain

I came to New York in the 1980s. At that time, the city wasn't that safe, so very different from now. Studying at graduate school at Columbia, I had to be careful walking home at night. Once I took the wrong subway and ended up in Harlem, it was scary.

I went shopping on 34th Street and someone picked my pocket. I was sure it was a gang working together. I was very alert, I found out my wallet was stolen within seconds, I even grabbed the thief. But someone suddenly found my wallet a few feet away, on the floor. Well, it was a close shave.

I've met John Cage, we had a nice chat. He even gave me an autograph. I was holding onto a copy of Silence. He was having fun, and wrote his name twice, one on top of another. I've kept this book for a long time. It's still with me.

- Joanna Lee

What is this talk you are always giving me about these gams, so-called? And delightful digits, what are these? I was telling you the other day about the tourists from Utah, how once in Moscow they were holy cows. Now, sitting ducks. Let us go out into the garden so we can see the flybutters and the flydragons. And no, keep your shirts on, I don't want to see your flabs of steel. Don't give me that mister you're just trying to pull the wolverine over my eyes. You don't know me. Rest assured, I'll have a long and successful plummet to the top.

- Valeria Susanina

I'm saying, yeah, LaMonte Young, but Pythagoras is the guy who was really the most influential composer, he figured out the tuning system, but I digress. The point is that he was very charismatic, like LaMonte or Sun Ra or Andy Warhol, had these talented followers. He had a big fight with one of them, Hippasus. Can you guess why? And Jonathan says I don't know, but it could have been about a woman, and I said brilliant, in a million years you could never guess that. But it wasn't, actually, it was that, you know, an octave is twice, a string that's twice as long, and a fifth is three and a half times as long, and a third is four thirds as long, and everything in math and music would all fit and be described by very simple ratios and Hippasus said, no, you can't do that with the square root of two. So what do they do? They take him out on a boat and they dump him in the ocean, and that's the story. Or, there's an alternate story. They built a mausoleum to him while he was still alive, because Hippasus was now dead to them.

- Dave Soldier

I'm about to prove by contradiction that there's a huge infinity of decimal numbers. Ready? So first imagine that you can count all of the decimal numbers. Not that there's some finite number of them, but that you can count them all. Well, if that's true, put them all in order, from the first one to the second one to the third one, going all the way forever. Well, I'll show you one that you've missed. Here's how you make it. For the first digit, look at the first number you listed and change the first digit after the decimal place. Make that the first after the decimal of your new number. And for the second digit look at the second number you listed, and do the same thing for that second digit, change it and make that the second digit of your new number. Do that forever down the line, the third is different, the fourth is different and so on and you will make a new number that you definitely haven't listed at all before.

- Lainie Pfefferman

My father was a chemist who worked as a research scientist for a large corporation. He taught me about trees and birds and stars and things like that, but his own work was far beyond my understanding. He wrote a chemistry book of which I could not comprehend a single paragraph. Being somewhat in awe of his knowledge, I once asked him, out of all the natural wonders and phenomena of the world, what did he think was the most amazing. He thought about it for a few seconds and said “surface tension is interesting.”

- Phil Kline

Traditional instruments such as piano and violin have lost popularity in favor of instruments that can be played with a maximum of enthusiasm and a minimum of training. Parents and children alike enroll in the Academy of Scrap Metal franchises that have been introduced to urban centers as well as remote rural locations. The high demand and oversubscription of these institutions has led to the phenomenon of parents homeschooling their children in the performance of recycled scrap metal percussion and machine hammer technique. This home study brings overwhelmingly positive effects to familial relations, resulting in a major decrease in domestic altercations and teen truancy. Volume and repetition are valued over melody and sonorous tones, and parents often exhort their children to “turn that noise up.”

- Annie Gosfield

The last time I saw John Cage was in June 1992 in Hall, Austria. We were both performing in a music festival there. I was able to hear a rehearsal of a French ensemble playing John's music before I had to get on the plane for the next stop on my tour. Silence and concentration pervaded the room. The ensemble was working on a piece for piano and solo flute. They played it through once and then John slowly walked over to them and whispered a few things. The flute player left the room. The pianist began the piece again. From far away, at the edge of hearing, I could make out the sound of the flute being played in the next room. The sound was ethereal, as if the air itself were playing. When I left the rehearsal I told John how beautiful it was. He smiled that radiant smile of his and said yes, it's fine. Now you hear the air.

- Meredith Monk

There are questions that composers might ask themselves. I don't know what they are for you, but here are some of mine....

Why do I care so much about new music? Do I care?

Is it true that Nadia Boulanger said, "If you can walk away from music, then thank god and walk away"?

After more than a year of not writing a single note, is that what I'm doing? Walking away? Should I be thanking God right now?

I sometimes feel like I either did everything right, but still nothing worked out the way I thought it would. Or is it more like: I did everything wrong and this is just the logical resting point along the way?

What does it mean to be part of the community? Is it okay if I'm not part it? Is it okay if I am?

How much music could I have written in the time it took me to think through these questions, write them out, and record them?

- Jim Holt

One day, quite unexpectedly, I began a seven hundred mile walk. When I try to explain I need to go back to my childhood on our family's farm in northern Iowa. Every summer predictably just as a great dome of high pressure settled onto the northern plains and quieted everything for a week or so of suffocating heat and humidity, my brother and I were tasked with walking quarter-mile long rows of soybeans to pull weeds. At the end of every row I imagined what it would be like simply to keep walking. Don't turn around, I urged myself. Just keep going. At the end of the eastbound rows I would think that if only I continued in a straight line Chicago couldn't be much more than a month away. Or, heading west I imagined the Pacific Ocean a mere six months ahead of me. I'd be there by Christmas. All I had to do was keep walking.

- Steve Schick

Sometime in the spring of 1989 I was at an ASCAP reception for a group of mainland Chinese composers. It was a big deal. It was probably one of the first such visits from that country. I don't remember the names of any of the Chinese composers and the only Americans I remember were John Cage, Charles Dodge, Pauline Oliveros, Joan LaBarbara and Frances White. There were probably a dozen others. We all got ASCAP digital watches to commemorate the event, milled around, had cocktail party chatter with each other and with the Chinese composers through translators, and then it was time to go. Riding down in the elevator with the above named composers, I thought I would do something cute and I took off my sticky nametag and pasted it on John. Immediately everyone else in the elevator did the same. Without missing a beat he looked down at his chest and said "Well, I'm a community."

- Paul Lansky

At the Venice Biennale in 2009, there was a John Baldessari film piece in the Pallazzo delle Esposizione in which a man literally paints himself into a corner. You see him methodically cutting in the corners, then painting the four walls, then starting in on the floor and working until he's trapped in a tiny unpainted spot in one corner. Then, suddenly, a small door opens, he jumps out and paints the last bit, and the door shuts and he vanishes. If you watch the entire piece, this routine repeats 6 times, each with the painter using a different color. The piece really made me (and everyone else who was watching) laugh with glee. I don't know why exactly. But I do know that the painting oneself into a corner motif, literally rendered there, certainly resonated with me in the context of the way I seem to live my life.

- Pamela Z

He played for more than a half hour or so. When he stopped I asked him where he was from and what he was doing on the Bowery. In those days the Bowery was the end of the line for alcoholics, deadbeats, guys out of luck or out of work. All kinds of people passed some time there. All ages, races, even gender--you name it.

He said right away that he wasn't one of those Bowery bums hanging out nearby. He said that he was from the 'South'. That back home he had a family and he was a successful business man. But, every once in a while he couldn't stand the whole thing anymore – the wife, the kids, his business. Then it was that he would come up to New York and live on the Bowery for a few weeks or so. Most of the time, he said, he was dead drunk. Then, one morning he would wake up sober, go back to the Bus Station at 41st street and go home. His family never knew where he went, and none of his pals on the Bowery even knew his name. I told him that his would be most welcome if he ever cared to visit us again. He thanked us all and left shortly after.

From then on when we rehearsing in the evening, I always made sure that the downstairs door was left standing open. But, after that night, I never saw him again.

- a story by Philip Glass
read by Phil Kline

He has a secret: You will call it music, the host says, bow tie, 1960, holding up a newspaper clipping as a relic of proof.

You teach a course in experimental sound, the host says.

Experimental music, Cage says.

These sounds are in no sense accidental in their sequence. Falling mathematically.

Curtain back, the orchestra is set: water pitcher, iron pipe, bathtub, five radios, grand piano, goose call, more.

There's a union jurisdiction problem. Who will plug in the five radios?

Hit them instead. Knock them off the table. Make an announcement.

I consider music the production of sound, Cage says. If you like it you may buy the recording, the host says.

I consider laughter as preferable to tears, Cage says.

He works with a stopwatch, timing himself, his sounds. Ice in glass, then pitcher, then grand piano (strings), then the rubber duck. The watering can in the tub; that gets a laugh. Cymbals in the tub: a big laugh.

He caps the pressure cooker; his body relaxes, the performance over.

They applaud through the end credits.

- Colin Rafferty

There's an elderly Jewish gentleman in my neighborhood who I am very fond of. He's a post-war Jew; in other words, he's a survivor. He's a tiny man who still wears an old Fedora, and his accent is part Yiddish, part old-New York. I love talking to him on Grand Street, as he taunts my kids in the stroller and talks of his his days in the camps.

Once he said, "My childhood stopped when they got me. They made me chop down trees, some days 70 trees". I didn't know how to respond, so I just closed my eyes and bowed to him, slightly. He smiled a little and bowed back.

Since then he always greets me with a smile and a wisecrack. Sometimes he'll take my hand and squeeze it. Once I saw him on my way into the neighborhood bakery. He said "Hello Pretty Goil!" which really made me smile. Then he suddenly got serious; he leaned in and whispered "You know what I like about you?" I said, "no, what?" He said, "not too much lipstick".

- Janene Higgins

I first met John Cage at the June in Buffalo seminar in 1975 where he was one of the guest artists each there for a few days of lectures and performances of their works. Expectations were high for all of us over-amped young composers who somehow felt that we were being ushered into an audience with the Dalai Lama of contemporary music.

In New York City in 1986, I was to meet Cage again under more relaxed circumstances as part of a series Mondays at Diane Brown Gallery organized by Petr Kotik including Cage, the SEM Ensemble, and my solo performance. Preparing for the concerts, Petr arranged for us to meet at Cage's loft on 18th street to be photographed by Felipe Orrego. It was a chilly rainy afternoon: John made tea and we all made chit-chat. I asked if the tea we were drinking (black and caffeinated) was considered an acceptable part of a macrobiotic diet. John brightened up and stated Well, I usually start the day very very good but finish it very very bad and grinning mischievously, pulled out a bottle of single malt.

- Elliot Sharp

Growing up on East Tenth Street between Avenue J and Avenue K in Brooklyn when I was between the ages of about six and sixteen, my streetmates and I would play outdoors all the time and we had a wonderful repertoire. One of our favorites was playing jump rope in the street. We could do it then because even though it was a regular street, there weren't that many cars. So we're jumping and we're playing and a car is coming and one of us goes "fins!" which means you have to stop and wait a moment until the car goes by. We stop, we freeze, the car goes by, we resume playing. All of a sudden, some adult voice shouts from afar "Janet, milk!" I go "fins!" we all freeze, I go home to drink my chocolate milk, I come back and we resume our game of skipping rope.

- Janet Sussman

I sat trying to imagine a class I might conduct as part of a workshop we were planning to hold at Montclair State University in the summer of 2011:

I would call it “Altogether Quiet.” I would choose an event or destination and direct everyone to gather there. I would ask each participant to bring a chair or something to sit on. We might meet at Lincoln Center or by a small church, synagogue or temple, in the parking lot of a McDonald’s or at a Kentucky Fried Chicken.

We would decide on the position of our chairs: in a circle, all facing in or out, in a straight line, in two parallel lines or scattered.

We would never speak until we were back in the classroom.

As I described this event in writing, I wondered what was I thinking and why was I thinking that.

- Bill T. Jones

My friend Nicolette in Italy recently told me a story about a friend of hers who had a pet boa constrictor. Now this boa constrictor had been his pet for a many, many years. But recently the boa constrictor had been acting very strangely. Her friend kept waking up each morning with the boa constrictor stretched out next to him lengthwise in the bed. It kept happening morning after morning after morning. It went on for a few weeks then a few months. Finally he called a veterinarian and told the veterinarian about the peculiar behavior of his boa constrictor. The veterinarian was silent. And then said "He's measuring you. He would like to eat you."

- Sara Driver

I had a summer scholarship to Black Mountain College around 1950. John and Merce were on the faculty, along with Franz Kline. I had the good fortune to study with both Merce and Kline.

Once, when Merce had to travel elsewhere for a little while, John encouraged our class to dance with chairs. It was difficult but fun and we all loved it.

Merce came back and was furious at John - but I don't remember why. Were we too awkward ?

In 2010, just around the time Merce died, I wrote a poem about seeing trees.

The poem included this line;..... "leafy dancers.....unscripted, silent, unpredictable, like Merce". On this text I superimposed the famous photograph of Merce dancing with a chair on his back.

- Deborah Sussman

It's morning, and Heather comes into the den where I've been sleeping. She doesn't know that I had been up all night working, but really, I have only slept for maybe 3 hours and don't feel especially keen to be up. Heather's very awesome, but relatively speaking is very much a morning person - though I suspect she would laugh to hear me say that. But so she comes into the room where I've been sleeping, and starts checking her e-mail, which somehow feels like a very loud endeavor at this hour. She tries to show me a video, which a friend had sent her, of a horse kicking a man in the face. She's laughing hysterically, but at this moment, I can't really make any sense of it. I had just been in a deep sleep, dreaming of waking up in my own bed to the nasal-but-still-somehow-smooth-sounding voice of Brian Lehrer. A clear sign I missed home.

- David T Little

So my son is about, ah I don't know, maybe two and a half, three years old, and we've been going to this sushi place down the corner since he was born, since he sat on the table in a basket. Ah, but anyway, he's you know, he's comfy there. So I'm trying to teach him how to use chopsticks, which is a ridiculous idea for somebody his age, you know, he's barely fork-like using. So I figure I will inspire him with my tales of chopsticks derring-do, I say "Simon, you know I am so good with chopsticks I can catch a fly out of the air." And he looks at me just totally seriously and he goes "I wouldn't know what to do with a fly." And I just looked at him and thought to myself "yes, zen master, I won't mess with you any more. That's it."

- Rob Schwimmer