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New expanded paperback edition—including previously unpublished material

# JOHN CAGE

## Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)

co-edited by Joe Biel and Richard Kraft with a new afterword by David W. Rose

**PUB DATE: OCT 22, 2018** \$24 PB 5.75x8.25 200 pages duotones and full color artist's writings/poetry ISBN: 978-1-938221-21-7  
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Collecting all eight parts into a single volume, this expanded paperback edition reproduces the lauded 2015 Siglio hardcover edition, along with a significant addendum that includes over twenty pages of John Cage's handwritten notebook of a ninth part in progress. These facsimile pages, reproduced from Cage's spiral notebook, bring the reader into compelling proximity to his process and the kind of raw material from which *Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)* was made.

*Diary* registers Cage's assessment of the times in which he lived as well as his often uncanny portents about the world we live in now. With a great sense of play as well as purpose, he traverses vast territory, from the domestic minutiae of everyday life to ideas about how to feed the world. He contemplates the consequences of both unbridled capitalism and an infinite field of information. He excoriates the state and augurs ecological disaster while taking heart in the great capacity for human ingenuity and compassion. A page or two of entries brushes Zen Buddhism with the benefits of legumes, fishing rights with banking in Buttonhole, Ohio, anarchy and revolution with the receipt of a parking ticket, so that the world he is observing is simultaneously intimate and immense.

*Diary* is populated with his intimates, friends, colleagues—such as Merce Cunningham, Marcel Duchamp, Buckminster Fuller, Marshall McLuhan, D.T. Suzuki, Norman O. Brown, David Tudor, James Tenney and Jasper Johns. Cage also invokes writers, philosophers and thinkers like Thoreau, Wittgenstein, Joyce and others, creating a prism through which ideas are refracted to open new ways of seeing, engaging—and changing—the world.

Chance operations determine not only the word count and the application of various typefaces but also the number of letters per line, the patterns of indentation, and color. The unusual visual variances on the page become

*Over sixteen years, beginning in 1965, John Cage compiled anecdotes, observations and koanlike tales, originally typing everything on an IBM Selectric and using chance methods to determine the formatting of texts that twist down each page. The Siglio [hardcover] edition preserves the graphic effects, but, more important, it gives a sense of the company he kept during these years—Marcel Duchamp, R. Buckminster Fuller, D.T. Suzuki—and of his passionate feeling about a world locked in a state of perpetual warfare. Cage has a reputation for being a Zen-inspired wit. He was also much more, an intensely engaged moral thinker.*

— HOLLAND COTTER  
NEW YORK TIMES

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almost musical as language takes on a physical and aural presence. In the editors' note, Kraft and Biel both succinctly elucidate the procedure of chance operation (and the ways in which questions drive it) and demonstrate its application, which gives readers a rare opportunity to see how it transforms the text.

While chance operations expand the possibilities of creating and shaping work beyond the limitations of individual taste and perspective, *Diary* nonetheless accumulates into a complex reflection of Cage's own particular sensibilities as a thinker and citizen of the world, illuminating his social and political awareness, as well as his idealism and sense of humor: it becomes an oblique but indelible portrait of one of the most influential figures of the 20th century American avant-garde. According to Laura Kuhn, director of the John Cage Trust and editor of *Selected Letters of John Cage* (Wesleyan, 2016), *Diary*—in conjunction with the letters—is as close to autobiographical as writings by Cage might come.

The first eight parts were written from 1965 to 1982, and published in *The Paris Review*, *Aspen Magazine*, Clark Coolidge's *Joglers*, William Copley's *S.M.S.*, and as a Something Else Press Great Bear pamphlet by Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles, who devised the color and typographic variables upon which this Siglio edition is based. Cage worked on the incomplete and previously unpublished ninth part from 1982 to his death in 1992.

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Composer, philosopher, writer and artist, **John Cage** (1912-1992) blurred the boundaries between art and life, reframing the world so that it could be listened to and seen anew. A pioneer in extending the boundaries of music, often composing works through chance operations, Cage had—and continues to have—an extraordinary impact as well on dance, poetry, performance, and visual art.

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#### Related 2019 titles published by the John Cage Trust and The Song Cave

**Love, Icebox: Letters from John Cage to Merce Cunningham** (September 2019)

These early letters from John Cage to Merce Cunningham will be revelatory, for while the two are widely known as a dynamic, collaborative duo, the story of how and when they came together has never been fully revealed. Photographic illustrations of their final 18th Street loft in New York City, as well as personal and household objects left behind, remind us of the substance and rituals of their long-shared life. *Published by the John Cage Trust.*  
**Contact:** Logan Pettit, logan@dapinc.com

**Changes: Notes on Choreography by Merce Cunningham** (June 2019)

On the occasion of Merce Cunningham's centennial comes this new edition of his classic and long-out-of-print artist's book, first published in 1968 by Dick Higgins' Something Else Press. The book presents a revealing exposition of Cunningham's compositional process by way of his working notebooks, containing in-progress notations of individual dances with extensive speculations about the choreographic and artistic problems he was facing. *Published by The Song Cave.* **Contact:** Alan Felsenthal, info@the-song-cave.com.

*Language, detail, individuals—  
all of them information—rub  
against one another, stack  
together to form a kind of  
visual poetry that strives to  
give that information definite,  
personal shape . . . all of it  
endeavoring a queer, utopian  
politics that struggles, always,  
to make sense of contradictory  
community. The effect is  
chaotic, clipped, lyrical, but also  
incomplete, open, freewheeling,  
and improvisational. “Your  
thinking’s full of / holes,”  
he quotes an anonymous  
interlocutor. “That’s the way  
I make it,” he responds: a  
vibrating complex.*

— ANDREW DURBIN  
**BOMB Magazine**

*Reading Diary, I'm struck by  
how specific a life Cage led,  
one in fact dependent upon an  
enormous amount of personal  
agency and plain old-fashioned  
willpower. Chance generation,  
whether applied to life or  
art, offered a way out of this  
fastidiously fashioned — at  
times dogmatic and doctrinaire  
— world. Cage was unusually  
free from the determinations  
of all sorts — from the familial  
to the economic — in which  
most people are happily or  
unhappily ensnared. I'm not  
entirely convinced aleatory  
techniques are the primary tools  
that got him to that point, but  
this doesn't diminish their value  
or the inspirational quality of his  
“diary.”*

— ALAN GILBERT  
**HYPERALLERGIC**

**END**

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