

of character, all the momentous taciturnity, that symbol is meant to be the point of the picture. It doesn't even track, let alone serve as a rationale for the upbeat ending.

Well, a new play of Hare's has opened in London that is reportedly in his authentic vein. Brown isn't in it. Here's a hope for Hare's happy private life and an equal hope that he can keep it separate from his work.

Craig Lucas and Norman René are the writer and the director of *Prelude to a Kiss*, a new fantasy-romance on Broadway. They are also the writer and director of a new film, *Longtime Companion* (Samuel Goldwyn), which contains very little fantasy and is only incidentally romantic.

This film, their first, chronicles the lives of a group of New York homosexuals from 1981 to 1989 as AIDS becomes known, begins to do its deadly work on their lives, and becomes an accepted dread circumstance. Several couples who are friends and a young woman who is a friend of them all move through those eight years, from an initial news note about AIDS to its constant threat.

By now an appalling number of us, homosexual or not, have seen at close hand the terror of the disease. But only those who are homosexual can have seen the years since 1981 exactly as Lucas and René's people do. The film takes no account of heterosexual victims, drug users

or not; it concentrates on a circle of gays who work in more or less artistic pursuits. *Longtime Companion* tells us nothing new factually, but it makes those facts stinging immediate.

Lucas's dialogue, as in his play, is generally bright chatter, but here it is progressively more tinged with strenuous attempts to remain bright. Brightness seems almost to be a matter of honor in this group, a refusal to panic even when panicked; and Lucas makes much of it moving. René seems reasonably comfortable with the camera, though he sometimes positions us a bit far from matters we would like to see more closely. His editor, Katherine Wenning, keeps the shape of the film neat and trim. Outstanding in the cast are Patrick Cassidy, as a husky actor who ultimately comes out of the closet, and the oldest of the couples, played by Mark Lamos and Bruce Davison. Lamos, himself a noted theater director, has the one real deathbed scene in the picture, attended by Davison; and they both shun deathbed theatrics in favor of truth.

The film's one regrettable moment comes just before the end—a lame Felliniesque imaginary reunion of the survivors and the dead. Except for that scene, *Longtime Companion* has compassionate power—and may well have future historical value as a record of the advent of a horror. •

This interest may be no accident. As Cage once pointed out, "music" and "mushroom" often appear next to each other in dictionaries. "A mushroom grows for such a short time," he also once said, "and if you happen to come across it when it's fresh it's like coming upon a sound which also lives a short time." His music is pre-eminently mushroom-like in this respect: its sounds are explicitly designed to pass quickly by and never be duplicated. They deliberately defy memory and pattern. "I am not interested in the relationships between sounds and mushrooms," the composer has quipped, "any more than I am in those between sounds and other sounds."

And now Cage has done it again: in the midst of the humid academic overgrowth another of his sporophores has taken root. That ground—provided by the prestigious Norton lectures at Harvard University—was once cultivated, architectonic, severe. Cage's distinguished musical predecessors in these lectures included Igor Stravinsky, Roger Sessions, and Charles Rosen. But for the 1988-89 season at Harvard the heritage of theoretical and critical rigor was put aside. After all, modernism has fallen on hard times, contemporary musical culture has long since subsided into sullen regularity, and many universities have become weary of disinterested scholarship. So Harvard turned its attention to the only remaining sign of life—the sometime avant-garde.

Hence the book: *I-VI* (Harvard University Press, 452 pp., \$34.95). The title is a shorthand abbreviation of the lectures' real title: *MethodStructureIntentionDisciplineNotationIndeterminacyInterpenetrationImitationDevotionCircumstancesVariableStructureNonunderstandingContingencyInconsistencyPerformance*. The volume is well-made, expensively produced, and extravagantly set. It is even packaged with two tapes, one of which contains the entire performance of one of the six lectures that Cage delivered, and the other a session of questions and answers with the Norton lecturer that followed the talks. "Instead of looking for mushrooms in a forest," the composer tells one interrogator when describing his lectures, "I'm looking for ideas in a brushing of source material." Cage doesn't develop ideas, or create them. They just happen to appear as he strolls through his "source material," mushroom basket in hand.

Here, for example, is one specimen that the casual hiker in these pages might come across:

Is/the Number of pages of your next composition this/calleD for an/is no play in thEm for/is noT a blank loss of/Employing the same technique to/what aRe called/their own hands' and provided

Edward Rothstein on Music

Cage's Cage

I'm not sure what made me finally grasp the importance of fungi for the career of John Cage. It may have been the retrospective performances I heard, nearly a decade ago, of some of the composer's most memorable works—the one for twelve radios tuned to different stations ("Imaginary Landscape #4"), or his famed "4'33'" of musical silence, or his scrambling of the phonemes and syllables of James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* to create about three hours of melodically chanted gibberish. (It was a "form of poetry which I devised that enables me to read all the way through a book that otherwise I would not read through.") Like mushrooms that grow wild in the forest, such works lack chlorophyll: they cannot support themselves on light, they seem to grow or thrive in shadowy regions. In fact, too much illumination

and scrutiny would probably cause them to shrivel. These works cannot even be said to exist as "works" without feeding off other, decaying objects, which often happen to be the rituals and the art works that make up our frayed and fragile musical tradition. Cage's Dadaist fungoids have fastened on that tradition for the duration, pushing composition toward compost.

Sporophores keep surfacing in his life and his writing as well. Cage won a mushroom quiz contest in 1958 on Italian television, which is how he made his first substantial sum of money. He has haunted forests and rotting tree stumps in all regions of the world. He is a founder of the New York Mycological Society and a member of a Czechoslovakian mushroom society. He has even had his stomach pumped after mistaking one species for another.

food for theMselves and/have dIscovered legal ties to/burN wooden/points in time when there Are not points but/rejeCted israel and the united states face to/a new job and even a totallY new

The capital letters should align themselves vertically on the page to spell INDETERMINACY. Each set of lines in the lectures, in fact, has one of the words from the lecture's titles—Method, Structure, Intention, etc.—running down its center. Cage refers to these constructions as “mesostics,” a term invented by Norman O. Brown to describe Cage’s peculiar variation on the acrostic. Printed underneath this poesy are three lines of small print, without punctuation or capitalization, that contain the running text of Cage’s discussions with questioners and challengers—as if forming a layer of mulch out of which the text seems to sprout. Cage is asked about the time he played poker with Jacqueline Susann (he doesn’t remember it), or for his views on politics and performance (he is an “anarchist”), or to respond to observations about how difficult it is to concentrate on the lectures.

The source of the difficulty is simple enough. Each line in the lecture had its central word selected by what Cage calls “chance operations.” There is no particular reason why one line should follow another; they are randomly put together. “This frees me,” Cage gleefully explains, “from memory, tastes, likes and dislikes.” Cage once used the *I Ching* as his instrument of liberation—thus giving the choices of tones and phrases a semi-mystical aura as he tossed sticks according to the ancient Chinese oracle. But the aura evidently became less convenient the more exotic Cage’s techniques became. Now he depends on a computer program for assistance, its spit-out numbers determining the locations of words and ideas and sounds.

The most surprising thing about this technique—which Cage has used for nearly four decades—is how influential it has been. Our century has been notable for continuing attempts to create musical systems to replace conventional tonality. One system, popularized by the European avant-garde during the 1950s, involved increasing the territory governed by law, to systematize everything from pitch to timbre. Cage’s system—which affected generations of self-inspired American avant-gardists—abdicated law and control nearly completely by submitting to the vagaries of dice or the *I Ching*. (At the Phillips Gallery in Washington, there is currently a show of watercolors by Cage painted in consultation with the *I Ching*.) Schoenberg, with whom Cage once studied counterpoint (and who was

himself preoccupied with creating a compositional system), called him an “inventor of genius,” but declined to use the word “composer.”

For Cage was not primarily looking for a way to create art music. In the midst of the discussions that accompany these lectures, Cage tells a story he has told before, of a dinner with Marcel Duchamp in which they discussed the aesthetic qualities of bread crumbs falling on the table. The veteran French avant-gardist—who once installed a urinal in a museum—argued that haphazardly dropped crumbs were hardly deserving of much aesthetic notice. But Cage argued that the crumbs, as they landed, were art enough. The point was simply to come upon them and to point to them.

This means not placing the urinal in the museum, but placing the museum around the urinal. It is an idea that Cage has turned into his own distinctive aesthetic religion, mixing it with allusions to Zen. All sounds, all words, all crumbs, are worthy of equal attention. All life is art. All art is beyond judgment. For Cage, the object is almost to become innocent of all choice and rules and distinction, and then to remain ignorant of why one thing is being heard over another. “What is the advantage of not knowing what you are doing?” John Ashbery once asked Cage. “It cheers up the knowing,” the composer answered. “Otherwise, knowing will be very self-conscious and frequently guilty.” Cage’s choice is to avoid choice.

But of course Cage doesn’t treat all events equally. He makes guilty choices; he just hides behind the dice. One such choice is to give “chance” events more value over anything chosen, to value chaos more than regulation. Cage’s art is not just “found” art. It is created as found. It’s as if mushrooms were planted in the woods and harvested as wild.

Cage makes sure to plant them in very particular places—wherever they will hasten the disintegration of ordinary language and meaning, which Cage calls “militarized.” His mushrooms feed off these meanings, destroying them. “During the period of harmony and counterpoint,” Cage once said, “there was good and bad, and rules to support the good against the bad. Today we must identify ourselves with noises instead.” One of music’s purposes, he told one interviewer, is “to undermine the making of value judgments,” and his works take this as their project. Cage once said he would agree to conduct the Beethoven symphonies only if he could assemble enough players to perform every symphony at

the same time. He has also suggested the founding of a university in which all lectures would be given in the same room simultaneously.

So the point is not really some Zen-like appreciation of bread crumbs; it is the Dadaist mess they make. But it is not even fully Dadaist, this mess. Cage has claimed, for example, he wanted his music to “be free of my own likes and dislikes,” and he claims the same for these lectures. Yet the “point” of most of these lectures, the exercise of likes and dislikes in their composition, is unmistakable. Every random word in the lectures is chosen from a long text reprinted at the book’s conclusion—a set of quotations Cage has put together from newspapers and pet philosophers. Thoreau is quoted, as are Buckminster Fuller and Wittgenstein. (“I have long been attracted to his work,” Cage says, “reading it with enjoyment but rarely with understanding.”)

These quotes are organized into fifteen sections, each labelled with one of the fifteen concepts making up the title of these lectures—though, Cage hastens to add, they may have nothing to do with those concepts. He quotes himself as well (“People often ask me what music I prefer to hear. I enjoy the absence of music more than any other”). He quotes McLuhan on the power of the media (“A cliché is an act of consciousness: total consciousness is the sum of all the clichés of all media or technologies we probe with”). He quotes libertarian sentiments (“Maximize human free time, minimize human coerced time”). He cites Wittgenstein’s questionings of ordinary language and Thoreau’s dissent from ordinary society.

Cage also went through *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Christian Science Monitor*, putting together quotations on foreign affairs, mixing phrases from different articles into one sentence, creating a sort of news-style gibberish that manages to invoke nearly all the “military” evils Cage finds across the globe. Such oracular collages include: “Israel said Sunday it might nullify opposition parties in a brief ceremony that would most likely help Panama solve its problems.”

Cage speaks solemnly in the question and answer sessions about his attempts to deliberately “fox” any meanings that might arise out of his texts. But intentions are revealed everywhere. “Why not read a phone book?” one questioner asks. Because if the lectures turn out to make a suggestion, Cage points out, “I want that suggestion to be in a spirit that I agree with”—specifically with the program of “anarchism.” That anarchism is

playfully antinomian. ("I'm looking forward to the time when no one votes," he once said, "Because then we wouldn't have to have a president. . . . We can get along perfectly well without the government.")

Fragments of the source text serve as ideological atoms, full of allusions to pastoralism and Dadaism and anarchism and simple sentiments. These fragments protrude because they are the only elements of ordinary meaning provided by Cage. We hear scattered phrases in the midst of random words: "demonstrators and bystanders were Charged and attacked," or "wrecks The wilderness with its," or "we chose to keep efficiency levels And." The result is a random collection of atoms bumping into each other, creating a Brownian motion of clichés. Cage tries to have it all, hovering above his text like some Dadaist clown, while he drops his pointed allusions for the listening faithful.

What is the direction of this much discussed career? Mainly a traditional, almost conservative avant-gardism—a trajectory unchanged by chance or the *I Ching*. Much of Cage's more traditionally composed works of the 1940s, for example, are little more than anti-bourgeois jest. In "Credo in Us" (1942), nineteenth-century orchestral

music is interrupted by percussive strikes and buzzings; "Living Room Music" (1940) uses ordinary middle-class objects for percussion. Cage's most intriguingly musical compositions—the haunting works from the later 1940s for which Cage stuck foreign objects into the hammers and strings of a piano (creating a "prepared piano")—have a discreet charm and playfulness, echoing Satie. But recently released Wergo recordings show that these pieces are also inherently polemical, the archetypal instrument of the tradition turned into a toy, and Western musical phrases overturned by something resembling Balinese gamelan music. The "String Quartet in Four Parts" of 1950, soon to be released in a recording by the Arditti Quartet, is an active rejection of counterpoint and intellectual intricacy, anticipating the similar turns in taste that created the now defunct movement of Minimalism.

Cage is, of course, a sweet and coy and charming avant-gardist. So sweet and coy and charming that it is tempting to tolerate the obvious polemics, the platitudes and unsophisticated politics, the pseudo-Zen aesthetic. After all, when he is not deathly tedious, he can be quite funny. And, as Cage himself said of his compositional method, "It neither

wounds nor wrongs anyone in the end."

But how harmless are his views? His vision of human life is strangely skewed for one who claims a Whitmanesque embrace of nature and the world. Even his seemingly apolitical anarchism is full of ideological turns. He speaks, for example, of a family of starving "naked human beings" he saw in Bombay, searching for some water as they trudged through mud. His point is not to evoke their suffering, but to add another log to an anti-Western fire he keeps burning in his anarchist heart. "They were dignified," he says proudly of these Indians; but when he turns in contrast to "our poor," he simply asserts, with Third Worldist energy, that "our poor" have been stripped of dignity as well as water.

Cage's ostensible love of anarchism and chance is also shadowed by an attraction to the most extraordinary systems of control and order and regulation. Even in constructing these lectures, all sorts of fetishistic restrictions are made. Between any two consecutive capital letters in the randomly chosen words, for example, Cage insists that neither letter may appear in lower case. This rule is purely lexicographical: it means nothing, particularly since the words with the capitalized letters are arbitrarily chosen. But this method is typical of

Who will get AIDS?

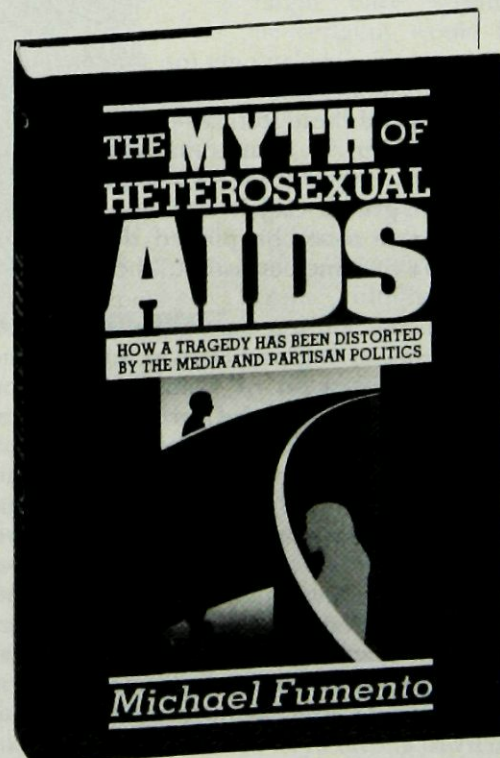
Will AIDS spread to the general heterosexual community? The scientific evidence indicates that it will not, according to Michael Fumento. In this carefully reasoned analysis, he shows how the very real tragedy of the disease has been overshadowed by a collective hysteria often fueled by partisan politics and the naivete of the press.

"The best documented, most provocative and informative AIDS book since *And the Band Played On*."—*Booklist*

"A signal contribution to our understanding of the AIDS epidemic in the United States."—Alexander Langmuir, M.D., former Chief Epidemiologist, Centers for Disease Control

"A merciless—though often legitimate—indictment of the purveyors of panic."—Patricia Cohen, *Washington Monthly*

"The arguments, statistics and perceptions that he adduces to support his position appear almost as irrefutable as they are controversial."—David Shaw, *New York Times Book Review*



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Cage: mixing the random with the rigid.

Yes, all language is arbitrary and all art involves disciplines of arbitrary technique. The rules of the sonnet are even more intricate than those of Cage's mestistics. But such rules also bear some relation to the meanings or the sensibilities created; and if they don't, they are soon enough invested with such meaning. Here "militarized syntax" is rejected only to be replaced by even more confoundingly intricate rules that are deliberately meaningless. Cage's compositional procedures—using star charts or clocks or tossed sticks—become authoritarian in their own way. Cage has the same attitudes in his political commentary. Anarchism may be his credo, but he also seems to welcome authoritarian control when it suits him. In 1972 he wrote: "The Maoist model managed to free a quarter of humanity; that gives cause for thought. Today, without hesitation, I would say that, for the moment, Maoism is our greatest reason for optimism."

Even his strictly musical notions can have disturbing effects. In the Norton lectures Cage recalls a class he was hired to teach by the WPA, which turned out to be a bit of a fiasco because the parents objected to his technique of letting the children just make sounds without teaching them counterpoint. We are now paying the cultural price of musical and intellectual illiteracy for such experiments. Yet it appears that Harvard, in inviting Cage to deliver the Norton lectures, is intent on carrying the experiments even further.

Still, one can't get too solemn about Cage. His career—and these lectures—are best seen as symptoms of our era's poverty, rather than as causes of it. It is best to grin at Cage's caginess, because he will never be pinned down. "You won't find me consistent," he has boasted.

One of the stories that Cage tells seems particularly appropriate as a sort of koan on his career. A woman from Philadelphia once asked Cage, "Have you an explanation of the symbolism involved in the death of the Buddha by eating a mushroom?" Cage explained: "Mushrooms grow most vigorously in the fall, the period of destruction, and the function of many of them is to bring about the final decay of rotting material. In fact, as I read somewhere, the world would be an impassible heap of old rubbish were it not for mushrooms and their capacity to get rid of it. So I wrote to the lady in Philadelphia. I said, 'The function of mushrooms is to rid the world of old rubbish. The Buddha died a natural death.' " •

What kind of a country kept Noriega in power?

Growing Pains in Panama

BY CARLA ANNE ROBBINS

I.

Manuel Noriega has been compared to Genghis Khan, Richard III, and the Antichrist, among others, but he never deserved anything more flattering than the second rank of demonology. Noriega was a fixer—not a major trafficker—for Colombia's cocaine kings, hiding their factories and fugitives and laundering their profits. As an intelligence "asset" for the United States, Cuba, and a half dozen others (including France, Israel, and Taiwan), Noriega traded in scandal more than in state secrets. Even his record as a brute and a dictator was tame, by Central

*Our Man in Panama:
How General Noriega Used the
United States and Made Millions in
Drugs and Arms*
by John Dinges
(Random House, 402 pp., \$21.95)

*Divorcing the Dictator:
America's Bungled Affair with Noriega*
by Frederick Kempe
(Putnam, 469 pp., \$24.95)

American standards: only about a dozen of his opponents died during the struggle in 1987-89 to oust him.

So why were we so fascinated? A part of the explanation, of course, can be found in Noriega's made-for-the-tabloids figure: a physically repellent and sexually ambiguous murderer and con artist who made millions for himself and made a fool of the United States, all with our knowledge. Noriega also had the good (and then bad) luck to be placed, by geography and vocation, at the center of two of America's most frustrating policy failures of the 1980s: the war on drugs and the civil wars in Central America. His overthrow, capture, and trial will not solve these problems, but at least they have given Americans the sense that we are fighting

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back. And some Americans also hope that the exposure of Noriega's secrets might reveal some of our own; if our leaders won't tell the truth about the Iran-contra affair, maybe their rogue will.

For most Americans, the Panama story began and ended with Noriega. It is an impression reinforced by our press, which has largely ignored Panama since American troops pulled back in mid-February. Noriega-centrism has also been promoted by the Bush administration, and by Panama's new government. For years Noriega's opponents titillated reporters with sensational (and difficult to prove) tales of the general's perversions and powers. Within days of the invasion, the U.S. Southern Command was running guided tours of Noriega's house, with its pornography, its "witch house," its Nazi paraphernalia, its 110 pounds of cocaine (which turned out to be tamale flour). The hype was intentional. If Noriega was really satanic, the invasion looked reasonable, looked even like the "Just Cause" that the White House spin doctors called it. Never mind that his sins were rather banal, by the standards of drug lords and tinhorn despots; or that the dispatch of 25,000 U.S. soldiers to oust Noriega is evidence of his opponents' political weakness and of Washington's diplomatic incompetence.

John Dinges and Frederick Kempe trace Noriega's rise to power and crime, and his rise and fall in the favor of the United States. Both their books more than make the case for Noriega as satan, eagerly detailing his public and private crimes and America's complicity in both. Kempe and Dinges say little, unfortunately, about the society in which most of their villain's crimes were committed. What is it about Panama that allowed this monster to rise so high and stay for so long? They never ask the question. Still, even the half of the story that they do tell is fascinating. Although neither book has come up with the smoking gun that conclusively links George Bush to the Iran-contra scandal, there is still plenty of embarrassment to go around.

As early as the summer of 1960, an American intelligence agent cabled Washington that a recent recruit, a cadet named Manuel Noriega, had been arrest-

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