

**Johanna Billing**

***Each Moment Presents What Happens***

**2022**

**Large Print Dialogue Transcript**

Film duration: 27 mins, 25 secs (looped)

*The following is a transcript of the dialogue and readings by students in the film. Please note that this does not include descriptions of sounds or music. The timings are included for reference only, as the film plays continuously on a loop.*

[01.57]

**Excerpt from 'Lecture on Something' by John Cage (1951).**

**Belnice:** This is a talk about something and naturally also a talk about nothing. About how something and nothing are not opposed to each other but need each other to keep on going. It is difficult to talk when you have something to say precisely because of the words which keep making us say in the way. Precisely because of the words which keep making us say in the way which the words need to stick and not in the way which we need for living. For instance: it seems we are living. Understanding of what is nourishing is changing. Of course, it is always changing but now it is very clearly changing. Everything seemed to be an individual matter, just a year or so ago - two sides. Understanding of what is nourishing, is changing. Of course, it is always changing but now it is very clearly changing, so that the people either agree or they don't and the differences of opinion are clearer.

[05.45]

**Belnice:** This is a talk about something. And naturally also nothing. About how something and nothing are not opposed to each other but need each other to keep on going. It is difficult to talk when you have something to say precisely because of the words which keep making us say in the way which the words need to stick and not in the way. When art comes from within, which is what it was for so long doing, it became a thing which seemed to elevate the man who made it, above those who observed it or heard it and the artist was considered a genius or given a rating: First, Second, No Good, until finally, riding in a bus or a subway: so proudly he signs his work like a manufacturer. But since everything's changing, art's now going in and it is of the utmost importance not to make a thing, but rather to make nothing. It becomes infinitely nothing.

[10.09]

**Excerpt from a poem written and recited by Jasleen Singh.**

**Jasleen:** Promises, promises and truth and lies. Promises, promises from people I despise. Dreams, dreams of a place that's safe and

warm. Dreams of a coat that's not yet torn. Nightmares, nightmares of shadows in the night. Nightmares which stem from inky black skies. Truth, truth that I'm yet to see. Truth that I shall be entrapped as I've ever been. Remembrance, remembrance, remember the good things and the bad things too. Remember that life was once all of you.

[12.00]

### **Announcement in the dining hall.**

**Asha:** In 1952 at Black Mountain College in California, USA, composer and professor John Cage made an announcement in the dining hall. There was to be what he referred to as an 'untitled event' later that afternoon.

**Astrid:** John Cage had come up with an idea for an event which was to be the first example of what we would understand today as performance art.

**Asha:** It involved performers of all different specialties working together but independently at the same time. There was no script and there were no rehearsals. Supposedly there were records played, a painting shown, a poet on a ladder, a lecture on Buddhism and a dancer followed by a dog.

**Astrid:** We have limited documentation recording what actually occurred during this event and there are conflicting recollections from audience members. Today we are exploring the ideas of Black Mountain College almost 70 years ago.

[13.54]

### **Discussion while preparing the piano.**

**Mateo:** Lets space out of how much we put in one place because if you put it in one place you get this kind of perfect effect where we can't hear hit any of the note so there's like no trace of what it actually sounds like.

**Tasha:** Should we each play something?

**Luke:** Play through each string.

**Jasleen:** Okay so should we just go through it note by note, so yeah. So, what do people think about the first one?

**Kate:** I think it sounds good.

**Luke:** I think it's not too bad.

**Kate:** Because you can still hear the note but you can also hear what's on top.

**Jamie:** So work at it until you can't really hear the note and then we should probably figure out on those strings.

**Everyone:** Keep going, lower, lower.

**Kate:** This might not be doing anything.

**Jasleen:** Yeah, no, yeah, again, take out things which aren't going to be doing anything.

**Luke:** That spoon there.

**Mateo:** If you like, put some ribbons on to it.

**Makary:** That will fall out.

**Jasleen:** So, is everyone happy with that then?

**Everyone:** Yeah

### **Discussion on silence.**

**Luke:** Four minutes of silence, is still, not doing nothing, it's something.

**Alex:** Is it?

**Luke:** Yes.

**Alex:** How is doing nothing doing something?

**Inigo:** Yeah?

**Luke:** Because it's the absence of doing something.

**Alex:** It's more of a philosophy.

*[General chatter continues among the sound of the piano and DJing]*

**Alex:** ...like copying his piece of work, its' like playing a music composition.

**Luke:** But you need to study some art to be able to experiment...

**Alex:** So, we are studying it?

**Luke:** Yes, I need to learn the saxophone to then be able to compose it.

**Alex:** So, we're studying the silence and then we're making our own type of silence and because silence isn't composed of anything, the only thing that you can change is how long the silence goes on for.

**Luke:** You can change the thought process behind the silence.

**Alex:** But how are they going to notice that in the music?

**Luke:** In the lack of music. I think it's, again, it's about the process, not the outcome. So, like, the audience, they don't necessarily have to understand it. It's just how they perceive it.

**Alex:** But they wouldn't know anything about it, they'd just hear the music.

**Luke:** Yeah, but if you had a really grand introduction, it like sort of conducts it as art.

**Alex:** Yeah, but they may just think the track's just not working or broken.

**Inigo:** But anyway, I think the idea of just randomising the time is an interesting one.

[18.00]

**Poem written and recited by Cara Addleman.**

**Cara:** Capacity for casualty crushed by the weight of your knife in my heart where it missed my back two years ago. And I haven't healed since the hernia of heralded infatuation infiltrating my internalised emotions. That twist in the depths of my stomach and my mind as I leave you behind only to find that you stick sitting in front of my sight line wherever I look like a lingering manifestation of my longing. A feeble attempt at belonging in this life I frequently wish for, without a chance of realisation of this realised half-real recurring dream or nightmare.

*[Sol starts reading Cage's lecture while Cara continues to read her poem]*

Pain and shame while away the days that I'm perplexed with sheer imagination...that is too bright, too sharp for this mind. As I thrive



behind my eyes as it is all in my mind. And yet the impacts echo on through my brain, lit by electrical and illogical impulses that spark from energy or false hope or is it naivety, that or self-pity perhaps leads to my destruction I create my disputation to justify this desolation that dirties my reputation. Because actors cannot lie, that is the primal confliction I know because it makes no sense to such an extent that it could be a cliché, except the fact that it isn't. And surely the irony is evidenced by that. It can be exhilarating if you can only convince yourself of your fake assurances. Didn't I mention this bright imagination that shimmers in my daydreams and false aspirations and prevents me [...] Because this imagination, this bright imagination [...] I have external thoughts. I am an external thought, forcing myself to believe what I want to. Dream what I want to while reality [...]

*[Poem continues but saxophone plays over it]*

[18.32]

**Excerpt from 'Lecture on Nothing' by John Cage (1959).**

**Sol:** That is finished now. It was a pleasure. And now, this is a pleasure. 'Read me that part again where I disinherit everybody.' The twelve-tone row is a method; method is a control of each single



**Inigo:** Last time we did the story with it. So, we started off somewhere and then ended up somewhere else using the music. It made me feel like we were actually telling something.

[23.16]

**Excerpt from 'Lecture on Nothing' by John Cage (1959).**

**Alex:** What I'm calling poetry is often called content. I myself have called it forms. It is the continuity of the piece of music. Continuity today, when it is necessary, is a demonstration of disinterestedness. That is, it is a proof that our delight lies in not possessing anything. Each moment presents what happens. How different this form sense is from that which is bound up with memory. Themes and secondary themes, their struggle, their development, the climax, the...[stutters] recapitulation, which is the belief that one may own one's own home. But actually, unlike the snail, we carry our own homes within us, which enables us to fly, or to stay, to enjoy each, but beware of that which is breathtakingly beautiful. For at any moment the telephone may ring, or the aeroplane come down in a vacant lot, a piece of string or a sunset possessing neither. Each act and the continuity happen. Nothing more than nothing can be said. Hearing or making this in music is not different, only simpler than living this

way. Simpler that is for me. Because it happens, that I write music, that music is simple to make, comes from one's willingness to accept the limitations of structure. Structure is simple because it can be thought out, figured out, measured. It is a discipline which accepted in return accepts whatever, even those rare moments of ecstasy, which, as sugar loaves train horses, train us to make what we make.

*[Students chat amongst themselves]*

[27.21]

**Alex:** Damn recapitulation.

### Bibliography

Cage, John, 'Lecture on Something, 1951' in *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961).

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