This lecture was printed in Incontri Musicali, August 1959. There are four measures in each line and twelve lines in each unit of the rhythmic structure. There are forty-eight such units, each having forty-eight measures. The whole is divided into five large parts, in the proportion 7, 6, 14, 14, 7. The forty-eight measures of each unit are likewise so divided. The text is printed in four columns to facilitate a rhythmic reading. Each line is to be read across the page from left to right, not down the columns in sequence. This should not be done in an artificial manner (which might result from an attempt to be too strictly faithful to the position of the words on the page), but with the rubato which one uses in everyday speech.

LECTURE ON NOTHING

I am here, and there is nothing to say.

If among you are those who wish to get somewhere, What we require is any moment.

but what silence requires is that I go on talking.

Give any one thought a push: it falls down easily.

but the pusher and the pushed enter-
tainment called a discussion.

Shall we have one later?

Or we could simply decide not to have a dis-
cussion. What ever you like. But now there are silences and the words make help make

I have nothing to say and that is poetry as I need it.

This space of time is organized. We need not fear these silences, —
we may love them, for I am making it a piece of music.

just as I make a glass of milk.

and we need the milk into which anything may be poured.

moment, as we go along, talk (who knows?)

an idea may occur in this talk, whether one will

or not.

If across Kansas, talk, whether one will

Arizona, let it.

almost too interesting, momentarily, as

being interested seen, as

in spite of himself

needs the Kansas in him

nothing on earth, while traveling

Kansas is more interesting,

especially for a New Yorker who is

in everything.

Now he knows he

and for a New Yorker very refreshing.

nothing but wheat, or

Does it matter which?

one may leave it, at any instant,

Kansan, as

and whenever one wishes one may return to it.

Or you may leave it forever and never return to it.

for we possess nothing and never return to it.

is the realization, Our poetry now

that we possess nothing

therefore is a delight

and thus need not fear its loss

past: it is gone;

it might reappear and be the present

repetition?

Would it be a Only if we thought we

owned it, but since we don't, and so are we

110/SILENCE
and how uncertain it is

Most anybody knows about the future

What I am calling poetry is often called content.
I myself have called it form. It is the continuity today,

nuity of a piece of music. Continuity is a demonstration of dis-
when it is necessary, That is, it is a proof that our delight

interestedness. That is, it is a proof that our delight

lies in not pos-sessing 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 recapitulation (which is the belief

that one may own one's own home). But actually,

unlike the snail, we carry our 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 airplane

come down in a vacant lot. A piece of string

or a sunset possessing neither,

each acts, possessing neither,

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 ac-
cept the limitations Structure is

simple be-cause it can be thought out, figured out,

measured. It is a discipline which,

accepted, accepts whatever even those

rare moments of ecstasy, as sugar loaves train horses,

train us to make what we make. How could I

LECTURE ON NOTHING/111
better tell what structure is than simply to
tell about this, this talk which is
contained within a space of time approximately
forty minutes long

That forty minutes has been divided into five large parts, and
each unit is divided likewise. Subdivision in-
volving a square root is the only possible subdivision which
permits this micro-macrocosmic rhythmic structure,
which I find so acceptable and accepting.
As you see, I can say anything
It makes very little difference what I say or even how I say it.
At this particular moment, we are passing through the fourth
part of a unit which is the second unit in the second large
part of this talk.

It is a little bit like passing through Kansas
This, now, is the end of that second unit

Now begins the third unit of the second part.

Now the third unit of the second part
Now its third part

part length as the third part)

Now the fifth and last part

You have just experienced the structure of this talk from a
microcosmic point of view. From a macrocosmic point of view we are just passing the halfway point in the second
large part. The first part was a rather rambling discussion of
nothing of form, and continuity

112/SILENCE
when it is the way we now need it. This second part is about structure: how simple it is to accept its limitations. Most speeches are full of ideas. This one doesn’t have to have any. But at any moment an idea may come along. Then we may enjoy it.

Structure without life is dead. But Life without structure expresses itself within and through structure.

Each moment is absolute, and significant.

Blackbirds rise from a field making sound delicious beyond compare.

because I accepted the limitations conference in a Virginia girls’ finishing school, allowed me quite by accident as they flew up and overhead calendar and hours for breakfast

cardinal . and the same day heard a woodpecker.
I also met America’s youngest college president. However, she has resigned, and people say she is going into politics.

Let her. Why shouldn’t she? I also had the pleasure of hearing an eminent music critic exclaim that he hoped he would live long enough to see the end of this craze for Bach.

A pupil once said to me: I understand what you say about Beethoven I agree but I have a very serious question to ask you: How do you feel about Bach? Now we have come to the end of the part about structure.

However, it occurs to me to say more about structure. Specifically this: We are now at the beginning of the third part.

Lecture on Nothing/113
is not the part about material. But I'm still talking about structure. It's the part that structure has no point, and, as we have seen, form has no point either. Clearly we are be-
ginning to get nowhere.

Unless some other idea crops up about it that is all I have to say about structure.

Now about material: is it interesting?

But one thing is it isn't.

If one is making something, which is to be nothing, the one making must love and be patient with the material he chooses. Otherwise he calls attention to the material, which is precisely something, whereas it was nothing that was being made; or nothing is anonymous.

The technique of handling materials is, on the sense level what structure as a discipline is on the rational level a means of experiencing nothing.

I remember loving sound before I ever took a music lesson.

And so we make our lives by what we love.

(Last year when I talked here I made a short talk.)

That was because I was talking about something; but this year I am talking about nothing and for a long time.

The other day a pupil said, after trying to compose a melody using only "I felt limited."

Had she concerned herself with the three tones — she would not have felt limited.

and since materials are without feeling, there would not have been any limitation. It was all in her
mind, whereas it belonged
materials .
by not being nothing; it would have been
something .
materials characteristic of one's time
Now there's a question that ought to get us
slowly
I shall answer it slowly
autobiographically
I remember as a child loving ones.
especially even the unprepared
when there was one at a time
A five-finger exercise
full of beauty all the intervals
gradually liked
I realize that I began liking the octave:
major and minor thirds.
I liked these thirds least
Grieg, I became passionately fond

Or perhaps you could call it puppy-dog love
for the fifth did not make me want to write music:
vote my life to playing the works of Grieg
When later I heard
I took, like a duck to water, to all the modern intervals: the sevenths, the
seconds, the tritone, and the fourth
I liked Bach too about this time
didn't like the sound of the thirds and sixths.
Bach was the way many things went together
As I keep on re-membering, I see that I never
really liked the thirds, and this explains
why I never really

It became something
nothing by being
Should one use the
somewhere
intellectual question

all the sounds
I liked them
for one hand was
Later on I
As I look back
I accepted the
of all the intervals,
Through the music of
of the fifth

LECTURE ON NOTHING/115
Modern music fascinated me with its modern intervals: the
sevenths, the seconds,
always, every now and then,
. Sometimes there were single tones,
. and that was a de-
tervals in modern music that it fascinated
fascinated by it I de-cided
first is difficult:
takes the ear off it.
. I was free to hear
low sound even when both are called by the
working alone,
.

Studying with a teacher, they are not just
meaning; a sound
in their progressions Tonality.
.
I worked at it feeling for it
: gressions called de-ceptive cadences.
. as to imply the presence
fool everyone by not landing on it —
. The whole question is
fooled
to imply 
. but the mind
. However
.

with all its modern intervals
have them
. void having pro-gressions that would
not actually present to the ear
did not ap-pear to me
. that the separation of mind and ear had spoiled
. that a clean slate was necessary.
. not only contemporary but “avant-garde.”
. They had not been in-tellectualized;
directly and didn’t have to go through any abstraction
.

116 / SILENCE
liked intervals. I found that I liked noises liked single sounds.

had been dis-credited against having been trained to be sentimental, underdog

on the side of the I got police permission to play sirens.

I ever found was that produced by means of a coil of wire attached to the amplified.

pickup arm of a phonograph and then It was shocking, and

really shocking, and thunderous Half intellectually and

only, when the war came a-long, I decided to use

to be no truth, quiet sounds

in anything big

were like loneliness

or friendship independent

values, Permanent, I thought

Coca-Cola at least from

but something else is I must say

the old sounds happening

not worn out worn out by

new sounds. Obviously, they are

Thinking audibly as the

had worn them out suddenly they are

And if one stops thinking about them, “If you think you are a ghost

fresh and new. Thinking the sounds

you will become a.

wore them out So you see

worn out brings us back

where we were: or,

if you like where we are

I have a story: “There was once a man

LECTURE ON NOTHING/117
standing on a high elevation. A company of several men who happened to be walking on the road noticed from the distance the man standing on the high place and talked among themselves about this man. One of them said: He must have lost his favorite animal. Another man said:

No, it must be his friend whom he is looking for. A third one said:

He is just enjoying the cool air up there. The three could not agree and the discussion

place where the man asked:

lost your pet animal?

The second man asked:

No, sir.

either the fresh breeze up there?

I am not.

are you standing up there if you say no questions?

I just stand.

no questions, final answer, there are no answers then, of course, makes the than the answers bussy I take all the tones use all the others

When I was young, Now I'm fifty.

Here we are now of the fourth large part

More and more nowhere.

, Slowly we are getting

118/SILENCE
It is not irritating to think one would like a little bit after the beginning of this talk, we have the feeling nowhere.

More and more that I am getting slowly, we are getting which will continue it is not a pleasure if one is irritated it is a pleasure it is not irritating and slowly we were nowhere we are having slowly, the pleasure nowhere. let him go to sleep.

Here we are now of the fourth large part.

More and more nowhere.

Only irritating, fourth large part.

Slowly we are getting It is not irritating to think one would like a little bit after the beginning of this talk, we have the feeling nowhere.

More and more that I am getting Slowly slowly we are getting nowhere.

That is a pleasure.

If we are irritated Nothing is not but suddenly and then more and more (and then more and more) Originally and now, again.

If anybody at the beginning of the talk.

I have the feeling that we are getting as the talk goes on and that is a pleasure.

It is the feeling of the third unit of the talk.

Here we are now as the talk goes on.

We have the feeling That is a pleasure.

Lecture on Nothing/119
which will continue
it is not a pleasure
pleasure if one is irritated
, it is a pleasure
it is not irritating
and slowly we were nowhere
we are having the pleasure nowhere.

Here we are now fifth unit of the fourth large part
More and more nowhere.
, Slowly
we are getting
, It is not irritating to think one would like to be somewhere else. Here we are now
only irritating a little bit after the beginning of the fifth unit of the fourth large part
More and more that I am getting
Slowly

, slowly we are getting which will continue
it is not a pleasure
pleasure if one is irritated
, it is a pleasure
it is not irritating
and slowly we were nowhere
we are having the pleasure nowhere.

If we are irritated Nothing is not a but suddenly and then more and more (and then more and more Originally and now, again

If anybody
Here we are now of the fourth large part

More and more nowhere.

,.

only irritating

, fourth large part

of the fourth large part

More and more that I am getting Slowly

, slowly

we are getting which will continue

, it is not a pleasure if one is irritated

, it is a pleasure it is not irritating

and slowly

we were nowhere we are having

slowly

the pleasure nowhere.

\(\text{lct him go to sleep}\)

at the beginning of the

of this talk.

I have the feeling

, nowhere

to be where one is
to be somewhere else.

\(\text{It is}\)

Here we are now of the

. as the talk goes on

we have the feeling

That is a pleasure

If we are irritated

Nothing is not but suddenly

and then more and more (and then more and more

Originally and now, again

If anybody

at the beginning of the

of this talk.

I have the feeling

, nowhere

to be where one is
to be somewhere else. Here we are now

beginning of the ninth unit of the

LECTURE ON NOTHING/121
that I am getting nowhere
Slowly
slowly
we are getting nowhere.
which will continue
it is not a pleasure
if one is irritated
it is a pleasure
it is not irritating
and slowly
we were nowhere
we are having nowhere.
the pleasure
let him go to sleep

as the talk goes on
we have the feeling
That is a pleasure
If we are irritated
Nothing is not a but suddenly
and then more and more
(and then more and more
Originally
and now, again
If anybody

At the beginning of the talk.
I have the feeling
nowhere
to be where one is
to be somewhere else.
Slowly
we are getting
slowly
we are getting
which will continue
it is not a pleasure
if one is irritated
it is a pleasure
it is not irritating

Here we are now
eleventh unit of the fourth large part
More and more nowhere.
only irritating fourth large part
More and more that I am getting Slowly
we are getting
It is not irritating to think one would like a little bit after the

Here we are now
eleventh unit of the fourth large part
More and more nowhere.
only irritating fourth large part
More and more that I am getting Slowly
we are getting
It is not irritating to think one would like a little bit after the

122/SILENCE
and slowly
we were nowhere
we are having
slowly
,
of being
is sleepy

Here we are now
of the fourth large part
More and more
nowhere.

Slowly
we are getting
It is not irritating
to think one would like
a little bit after the

More and more
that I am getting
Slowly

we are getting
which will continue
it is not a pleasure
if one is irritated
it is a pleasure
it is not irritating
and slowly
we were nowhere
we are having
slowly
,
of being
is sleepy

). ;

the pleasure
nowhere.
let him go to sleep

Originally
and now, again

If anybody

at the beginning of the thir-

of this talk.
I have the feeling

nowhere
to be where one is
to be somewhere else.

Here we are now
beginning of the thir-teenth unit of the

That is a pleasure
If we are irritated
Nothing is not
but suddenly
and then more and more
and then more and more

Originally
and now, again

If anybody


LECTURE ON NOTHING/123
That is finished now.
And now

"Read me that part a-gain where I disinherit everybody The twelve-tone row of each
method is a control note.
There is not enough of nothing in it.
like a bridge from nowhere
go on it
corn or wheat

? I thought there were eighty-eight tones
You can quarter them too

If it were feet?

? Or can we fly from here

124/SILENCE
but it is a method, against the twelve-tone row; not a structure 

We really do need a structure
we are nowhere
uses the twelve-tone
love it.

\[ (\text{My own music does that}) \]
And it seems to me
shakuhachi music

\[ \text{to Japanese} \]

Yeibitchai

stand

any length of time
Chinese bronzes

\[ \text{near Richard Lippold's} \]

which others have made,

the need to possess
nothing
Record collections
that is not music

\[ \text{The phonograph} \]

\[ \text{is a thing, —} \]

A thing leads to other things,
leads to nothing

\[ \text{Would you like to join} \]
(Just so no one would think we were a society called Capitalists Inc.

\[ \text{Anyone joining} \]

To join
records

\[ \text{any piece of music} \]

\[ \text{and even} \]

There is no point a long-playing record

\[ \text{or the point} \]

is to miss the whole point

\[ \text{is nothing;} \]

\[ \text{is a thing.} \]
A lady from Texas said: I live in Texas. We have no music in Texas. The reason they've no music in Texas is because they have recordings.

Remove the records from Texas and someone will learn to sing. Everybody has a song which is no song at all:
it is a process of singing and when you sing, you are where you are.

All I know about method is that when I am not working I sometimes think I know something, but when I am working, it is quite clear that I know nothing.

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Afternote to LECTURE ON NOTHING

In keeping with the thought expressed above that a discussion is nothing more than an entertainment, I prepared six answers for the first six questions asked, regardless of what they were. In 1949 or '50, when the lecture was first delivered (at the Artists' Club as described in the Foreword), there were six questions. In 1960, however, when the speech was delivered for the second time, the audience got the point after two questions and, not wishing to be entertained, refrained from asking anything more.

The answers are:

1. That is a very good question. I should not want to spoil it with an answer.

2. My head wants to ache.

3. Had you heard Marya Freund last April in Palermo singing Arnold Schoenberg's Pierrot Lunaire, I doubt whether you would ask that question.

4. According to the Farmers' Almanac this is False Spring.

5. Please repeat the question . . . And again . . . And again . . .

6. I have no more answers.