

Sie sind allein

for actor and live electronics

Stephen F. Lilly

(2016)

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Program Notes:

Several years ago, I attended a book reading of a famous author. Following the performance, he chatted, signed books, and told off-color jokes to anyone willing to wait in the line snaking through the lobbies, hallways, foyers, and bathrooms outside the auditorium. While autographing my book, he asked who had accompanied me to the concert. When I replied that I had come alone, he looked both ways and conspiratorially whispered, “Sie sind allein.” Then, he wrote the phrase on the title page he had just signed, told me a joke about Jesus, and bid me farewell. Even though it would take me a couple more years to finish the piece, I realized then that the title was perfect.

Texts:

The last seven pages of the score consist of texts grouped into four categories: Beginning, Escalation 1, Escalation 2, and Escalation 3.

The horizontal lines signify the end/beginning of each text.

Scene:

A single table, stage center

Placed on top of it:

a laptop running Max, its screen facing upstage
an RE-20 microphone on a short desk stand, centered
a tall water glass filled three-quarter full
the texts, stacked neatly

A single chair, stage center directly upstage of the table

Sequence of Actions:

Enter from stage right.

Sit on the chair, and cozy up to the table.

Take a drink of water.

Ensure that “BEGIN/OFF” is on (the box will have an “X” in it).

Selecting and reading texts:

Take ownership of the texts as if they are notes for your autobiography ordered into four broad categories and you are reliving the memories and emotions as you attempt to establish an order within each category.

Within each category, the texts should not be read in printed order, but do not read texts outside of a given category until Escalation 3 has been engaged—see below.

Before reading each text, click the dull red dot between “START” and “STOP;” it will change to bright red.

Read the text:

Speak, whisper, or shout using conventional conversational speeds and volumes—after Escalation 3, speed and performance may become more exaggerated.

After reading each text, click the red (now bright) dot again; it will change back to dull red.

The “ESCALATIONS” increase the activity and density of the live electronics.

Engage them in order (1-4), and once an “ESCALATION” is engaged, leave it on.

After “ESCALATION 4” is engaged, all five boxes across the top of the Max Patch will contain an “X.”

Always read at least two texts before engaging a new “ESCALATION.” Excepting that, trigger an “ESCALATION” whenever desired.

You may pause at any time before engaging “ESCALATION 3” to take a drink of water.

Before engaging “ESCALATION 1,” read only texts in Beginning category.

In general, the mood should be calm and the pacing slow (a 1-2 seconds pause between texts).

Engage “ESCALATION 1” shortly after the live electronics begin producing sound.

After engaging “ESCALATION 1,” read only texts in the Escalation 1 category. The mood should be slightly more agitated and the pacing faster—read faster and use shorter pauses between each text.

After engaging “ESCALATION 2,” read only texts in the Escalation 2 category. The mood should again be more agitated—with a hint of panic and frustration entering the performance—and the pacing faster. The texts, within Escalation 2, may be repeated—only after one or more intervening texts. When a text is repeated the performance of it should be more agitated and exaggerated than the previous reading.

After engaging “ESCALATION 3,” the performance should become slightly frantic--think agitation, panic, and frustration. The performer should focus on the Escalation 3 category but may incorporate one or two of the shorter texts from the previous categories. When repeating a previously read text, push toward extremes. The texts should follow one another with little or no break in-between them. Do not take any more drinks of water.

After engaging “ESCALATION 4,” the performance focuses on repeating texts—this category does not have any texts of its own but uses instead the shorter texts from the previous categories. In this category, immediate repetition of a text is permissible. The overall pacing should be as fast as possible. Exaggerated emotion—agitation, panic, and frustration—should be at a maximum.

The performer can exit at any point after engaging “ESCALATION 4” provided that at least six texts have been read following the engagement of “ESCALATION 4.” Exit in a confused flurry, stage right. The electronics will slowly die away, after which the performer may reenter to take his/her bows.

Beginning

Not having to work redefines Monday, but Sunday is still anxious—reflecting on all the projects you failed to complete and anxiety-ridden preparations for the coming week. On Saturday, there's too much pressure to relax, and by Friday, you're too tired to enjoy it. Thursday and Tuesday really are workdays whereas Wednesday is just a false Monday. Monday, however, is like a free day.

I've been working on this piece for more than a decade, but I don't revisit it every night—slowly polishing it into some sculptural wonder. In truth, I work fast, a flurry of productivity—initiating, developing, perfecting—separated by long idle gaps.

Waiting up to an hour is manageable. One can read, observe, mull over something, even flirt. At two hours, a headache sets in, but anger takes another hour or two. After the fifth or sixth hour, acceptance—the headache is not unbearable. Now, however, there's the perception of a fever—a humid ache behind the eyes and ears. In the end, there is no anger, no aches, just a numbness...I also get headaches when I go to Ikea with other people, and long plane trips can be like Ikea.

In an average week, how many days do you lose to depression? What percentage of your decisions are misguided? How would you rank your sense of humor?

A life consists of unrelated events interrupting boredom and exhaustion. Again, I lose interest and wander back to my to-do list to see if it's updated itself in my favor.

I'm not so bad off: mild case of lazy, aloof, uncommitted, but I could be more self-destructive—as it is, I take too many naps.

I enjoy being intoxicated, as if with maturity came an appreciation for loss of control.

Old paper feels softer.

Wait here.

Escalation 1

It's like being on a first date that lasts five days. Every joke needs explanation, meets a dismissive scoff, or inspires a non-comprehending scowl. Questions are met with monosyllabic responses that do little but punctuate unending silences. Observations are contradicted, ignored, or grudgingly acknowledged. Even subjects initiated by them are only set-ups for angry, frustrated counter-responses. This would have been indescribably beautiful with someone less annoyed—less distant—but for now, the rain drives me back into close quarters with this stranger.

Why can't children control their food, and why does it have to be so sticky, viscous, and unidentifiable? It coats their hands, face, and anything they come in contact with—uneven, sickeningly clumped here and there glistening with saliva.

Why are we—you, them, someone—so obsessed with feet and exotic footwear? Long, tapered heels—there's violence. Boots—military. Leather and vinyl—skin. Loafers aren't sexy.

When intoxicated, I crave social interaction and become verbose but am not necessarily eloquent.

I'm short but charming. I enjoy procrastinating, running until my calf seizes, and revealing intimate details for shock value.

I'm not desperate; I'm impatient.

I prefer typing. Longhand is painful.

I'm annoyed. Some middle class, twenty-something white woman with "hill" aspirations says, "Immigration reform is very dear to my heart." It feels so...what? Pretentious? Naive? Condescending? I hate her.

The left side of that stereo hasn't worked in years. I keep meaning to have it fixed or replaced, but you can't trust anyone around here.

It's because you're out-of-shape.

When someone compliments you on a new car or your haircut, don't say "thank you"—you didn't do anything.

Poetry is hard.

Escalation 2

I find myself staring at butts more than I use to. I remember failing to notice, but now the most unflattering, poor-fitting jeans does it for me.

This mole is cancerous—I can feel it changing. Beauty mark or growth? Was it asymmetrical vertically or horizontally? And how rough before I should... Would a scar look worse? Can't trust a dermatologist—getting paid by the cut: on commission.

My elbow is stiff, and I think I'm developing "old man" knees. I have to keep my weight down because of my lower back, and I'm watching my dairy intake.

I haven't received any mail in almost a week. Could be a postal conspiracy or perhaps an escalation of the hatred my property manager harbors for me.

I'm eating too many burritos. I took a week off, but it still feels like too many.

I need to change my eating habits.

Eat smaller portions.

I work (as in toil) and try to remember which friend I can call without being labeled "clingy." Too late about the clingy part I suppose. I think there's some solace in being the best friend of an asshole. The best of friends justify and encourage assholery—at least I try to. Think about the biggest asshole you know. You're probably sitting next to them right now.

Damn it, my throat is scratchy. I'm coming down with something. Why do I always come down with something this time of year? I had a flu shot for godssake!

Escalation 3

Who wants a taco?

I sweat too much.

Did my appendix just burst?

I blame that second cup of coffee.

My skin has the scaly sheen of corned or roast beef.

Now, I'm drinking too much coffee and watching too much TV. Am I fat? I'm fat. What if I have a heart attack right here?

Hopefully, he won't see me. I hate talking to people. They'll probably fire me; I know it. Act like you're interested. Say something witty.

Too much red meat. This is bad; I should've had the fish.

Someone reached out—tried to communicate—but my phone didn't alert me.

My socks keep falling into my shoes, coffee's gushing over the lid and onto my gloves, and my coat. Even that stranger's smile seems too happy.

Why am I so angry?