

Perturbations

performance installation for large ensemble

Stephen F. Lilly

(2009)

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Stephen F. Lilly (*1976)

Performers

This piece requires a large number of performers, each with his/her own dictionary. The audience should not be able to distinguish any individual's voice from the collective sound of the ensemble unless they are standing directly in front of one of the performers. In a small reverberant space, this many only require 10 or so performers, but in a dryer and/or larger space more performers would be necessary to achieve the same effect. The performers should be uniformly distributed throughout the space, and no effort should be made to disguise them. The performers should remain stationary while performing the piece and in no way interact with the audience. If a performer wishes to cease performing the piece for any length of time, he/she should exit the space with their dictionary.

Environment

The space should consist of single room, like an auditorium or a small gallery. The space should be sonically isolated, i.e. sounds, especially voices from outside the space should not be audible inside. If desired, the piece maybe attached to the beginning of a concert, in which case it should be performed as the audience enters. If performed as an installation, the audience should be allowed to freely enter and exit the space (through one or more doors). In either case, a sign should be posted at each entrance that reads, "As you enter, please remain silent."

Actions

Each performer should select a page at random from his/her dictionary and in a whisper (completely unvoiced), read the entries sequentially. The performers should only read entries; introductions, keys, and prefaces should be skipped. If during the course of the piece, a performer should reach the end of his/her dictionary, he/she should immediately begin reading entries from the beginning. The ensemble should blend perfectly; no one voice should stick out. The overall volume should be just loud enough to mask most of the ambient background noise. If one voice should accidentally become louder than the others or if an audience member's whisper should stick out, the overall volume should rise to absorb the voice(s) and then quickly return to the lower level. If any other sudden noise is heard (speaking, a cell phone ring, a dropped book, etc.) all whispering should cease for five seconds—audience shuffling, footsteps, page turning, and other such sounds should not be considered as triggers for this. As an installation, the piece should begin and end when the space is empty, for instance before the gallery opens and after it closes, respectively. If any performer should need a break, he/she may exit the space as described above, but care should be taken so that there are always a sufficient number of active performers. In a concert setting, the piece should begin before the house opens and should end when an announcer's voice silences the performers. This announcement should be natural to the concert setting: silence cell phone reminder, program change, performer/organization introduction, etc.