

DIFFICULT MUSIC FOR EVERYBODY
Adam Overton, Jan 2006

written and performed for the series, *Difficult Music for Everybody*
at Machine Project Gallery, 12 Feb 2006

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I. *Remembering [first loves (and the music you loved them to)] is [not] difficult*

(from *Variations on Alison Knowles' Piece for Any Number of Vocalists* (2005))

think back to one of the first times you made love to or had sex with someone where there happened to be music playing in the background

try very hard to remember anything you can, the melody, rhythm, lyrics, guitar part, drum part, etc, whether in fragments or from beginning to end

after taking some time to silently remember, the group will attempt to sing what it has found

remember together.
then, sing together.

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The following Movements II and III can be performed separately or can be combined into a single movement; in the case of simultaneous performance, Movement II should be performed considerably softer than Movement III.

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II. *Living is [not] difficult*

(partly from *For Kinah Boto* (2005))

for 1/3 of those in attendance
check your pulse and count in cycles
snap your fingers on 2 and 4
and "swing"

for another 1/3 of those in attendance
very very quietly express a single tone, first by thinking it, then by humming it, and then by singing it
use your blinks to repeatedly shift through this pattern:

thinking / silence [blink] ..
 mmmm [blink] ..
 ahhhh [blink] ..
 then repeat

and for the remaining 1/3 of those in attendance
repeatedly hold your breath for as long as possible
when finally unable to hold it for any longer, very quietly but audibly release your breath: "puhhh"

...

III. *Aloneness is [not] difficult*

or

Being over [t]here is [not] difficult [but you sure do look beautiful tonight]

2 or more pairs of dancers, in a traditional slow-dance position (think: *unchained melody*)

each couple holds a balloon between them, separating them (like at a prim & proper 1950s-style high school dance), and each balloon is connected by a contact microphone to a nearby amplifier

dancers:

stand motionless, staring into your partner's eyes

observe your own and your partner's blinks [without trying to consciously control them]

with each blink take a step and sway

and

with each step, take turns with your partner:

either

describe something you notice about your partner ("your palms are sweaty", etc)

or

describe your own condition ("i'm cold", etc)

[*without repeating yourself*]

sing it or speak it, quietly but audibly

continue until it is time to stop

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IV. *Crying is [not] difficult*

(from *For any instrument* (2005))

for several people

and several amplified acoustic instruments

performers quietly attempt to drip tears on their instruments

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Since the time of John Cage we have learned to experience music as less a substance than a process induced through listening. Happener Allan Kaprow, one of Cage's students in the 1950s, even extended this feeling to the realm of art: "What if art was just paying attention?" In the meantime, various new musics have rolled in, and tonality, rhythm and other traditionally musical elements now stand alongside the many other possible fashions at the disposal of the composer and performer. With such a chaotic swirl of potential variance in material and strategy, a primary bond between most

performed musics has remained the presence of the performer, which suggests that even the earlier forms of traditional performed musics had existed as a branch of body art, a field that philosopher Alain Badiou states is concerned primarily with an "experimentation of death." This in turn supports the traditional notion of the virtuoso - the performer who sets him- or herself apart from the spectator through [seemingly] death-defying feats of musicality. Although failures in this arena have probably rarely resulted in any actual physical deaths, the threat of economic death (no more gigs) or of social death (no phone numbers after the gig) have always proven quite real. However, understanding music performance now as a body-based form that can exist even beyond conscious intention has led us into an era of revised virtuosity; the role of the virtuosic performer has been extended to even the "commoner," whose temporarily pulsing body dances in a barely successful experimentation of death. The performance of music will then continue to serve as a celebration of our presence among others sharing the gift of this common virtuosity, and as a celebration of the invisible performance still churning within our being.

- Badiou, Alain. (2005). The Subject of Art. *The Symptom: Online Journal for Lacan.com*, Issue 6, Spring 2005. Retrieved October 19, 2005, from http://www.lacan.com/symptom6_articles/badiou.html
- Cage, John. (1939). *Silence*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press.
- Kaprow, Allan. (1983). The Real Experiment. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (pp. 201-218). Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993.