WOLF NOTES

Publishing writing by musicians, artists, critics and listeners of contemporary music and associated arts practices.

James Saunders 'Things To Do'

Each of the constituent pieces in my series *things to do* (2014) uses a set of instructions in different categories (such as noises, pitches, devices and processes) which are spoken by players and other participants during the performance and which govern the actions made by the players. In a performance, the players respond to instructions they can hear by realising the defined actions as soon as possible after they are spoken. They may use any instruments, sound-producing objects, devices or sound processing equipment (digital, analogue, or acoustic), and performances are characterised by the wide range of personal choices brought together as a group.My aim in these pieces is to make the inter-personal relationships between the players evident as part of the composition. The differences in each piece, and the relationships between the players, are determined by constraints which govern who each player responds to and who gives instructions. It creates modes of interaction between individuals, allows group behaviours to emerge, and reveals the personal characteristics of each performer in an immediate way. For example, in *everybody do this* every player gives and receives instructions to create a many-to-many network of cues and responses. Here the focus is typically on the group as a whole, with more dominant voices momentarily standing out as they impose themselves on others. In contrast, in *you say what to do* a group of assistants give cues to a single player (many-to-one), while in *I tell you what to do* a single speaker gives instructions to the whole group (one-to-many). The passive instruction-receiving role of the players in both these pieces transfers the balance of power to those giving the instructions and who are not involved in sound production. This division of roles creates a different social context for the interaction. Other pieces in the series explore these combinations further, such as *I decide what it is I am going to do* in which each player operates autonomously and only instructs themselves, or *choose who tells you what to do* where players give and receive instructions but are not obligated to respond to everything they hear.

In each of these pieces the instruction words form a simple *lingua franca* that allows players to communicate their intentions to each other within the system of the piece. By naming each action through the instruction words, it makes intention explicit, and evident to listeners outside of the networked group. The processes in play are made transparent as a result and

the spoken instruction words form part of the sonic material, fusing with the instrumental resources.

In *things to do* some of the ideas were developed from business management models, especially in relation to task definition, formalization of decision-making rules, and the degree of centralization. I am interested in creating situations that connect people on a personal level through participation and engagement, and that need many people working together in order to function.

END

Wolf Notes #8 collected short pieces of writing by eighteen composers discussing one of their own works. The full edition is available as a limited edition riso-print booklet from Compost and Height.

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