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Sprechstimme

for two to five non-fluent speakers

PLAINSOUND MUSIC EDITION

For Simone Forti and Terrence Luke Johnson

Sprechstimmung (2009)
for two to five non-fluent speakers

Instructions for the Individual Performer:

Using a dictionary, written in your native language, choose a word at random.

Write for five minutes without stopping, in your native language, on the theme of or themes suggested by the chosen word.

Read through the writing several times, familiarizing yourself with the contents, then put the writing away.

Relate, from memory, the content of the writing in a language in which you are not fluent, but in which you can construct (reasonably) correct sentences.

At every stumble or point at which you cannot find the correct word or grammatical structure to convey your meaning, perform one of the following tasks: sustain a clear tone; glissando upward with an even, clear tone; glissando downward with an even, clear tone. The duration of all to be governed by the expulsion of all the air in the lungs at the time of initiation, which may or may not be immediately preceded by an inhalation.

Observe the collected sound generated by the ensemble, and allow this to inform your choices regarding pitch material.

Continue until you have exhausted the resources of your content, your grasp of the language used in performance, or both.

Coordinating the performance with the rest of the ensemble:

The performers should base their writings on the same randomly selected word. In the case that they are not all native speakers of the same language, translations of the word chosen in one of the native languages may be used. As far as possible, each member of the ensemble should perform in a language other than those used by the others.

Variation for two performers:

The two performers are to be seated in chairs facing opposite directions. The chairs are to be staggered, with the front right corners only a few inches apart. Perform as though conversing – though two different languages will be used – taking turns (for the most part). When overlapping (speaking or singing) with the other performer, stand; when one performer speaks or sings and the other listens, sit. Be polite but sincere.

It is preferable that the performers not understand the language used by the other.

This variation was suggested by Simone Forti & Terrence Luke Johnson.