

COMMUNITY OF OBJECTS

for two to four performers

Caitlin Rowley

Community of Objects explores the private act of performing and the private space of the score within the situation of a public performance. The piece's score is also its principal instruments - a collection of handmade paper boxes that are handled with gloves and bare hands, and which are destroyed during the performance.

The sounds of the piece are chiefly the sounds of paper-handling, crumpling, tearing, etc. These very quiet paper sounds are interspersed with sounds and actions prompted by the contents of the boxes, discovered by the performers over the course of the piece. The box contents (which are likely to be different at each performance) relate to the uses of boxes in everyday life, and to the material from which these boxes are made - paper.

Opening the boxes before the performance is forbidden, and as they are destroyed after they have been opened, the sense of private experience when performing this piece should be heightened - as the performer, you are the only person (apart from the composer) who will ever experience this set of boxes, and, crucially, you are the only person who will ever get to experience discovering the contents for the first time. It is hoped that the experience of performing the piece will be one of curiosity and occasional delight.

PERFORMANCE NOTES

Community of Objects comprises a purpose-made collection of handmade boxes created from a range of papers in an assortment of shades of white/cream/off-white, etc. Any design(s) of lidded box may be used to create the boxes, which should be small in size for easy handling. The boxes are both score and instruments in this piece, and may not be opened before performance. They will be destroyed as part of the performance.

To set up

A table large enough to seat all the performers comfortably (and chairs) is required. The boxes should be arranged on the table, in front of the performers' positions in no particular order.

Each performer will need two pairs of white cotton gloves, of which one pair will have been treated so that the fingertips are slightly rough.

To begin

Sit at the table, facing the audience, with your hands flat on the table surface. Take the plain gloves and carefully put them on. When everyone has their gloves on, pause, then choose a box from the pile.

To proceed

Handle your chosen box carefully, open it, follow any instructions as to the contents (either within the box or within these notes), then destroy the box and discard its remains on the floor. Then choose a new box.

When about half the boxes have been opened, remove the plain gloves and discard them. Then put on (again slowly and deliberately) the roughened gloves. There is no need to wait for the other performers - change at your own pace then continue opening boxes.

To end

When there is only one box per performer remaining, all the performers should remove their gloves and discard them. Wait to proceed, with your hands flat on the table, until all performers have removed their gloves, then take your final boxes. Pay extra attention to this final box. Move more deliberately. Pay more attention. Otherwise, process the box as usual, then discard it, gently. Turn your attention to observe the actions of another performer who has not yet finished.

At all times, the boxes should be treated as precious - even when destroying them, they should be destroyed with attention, as if they are something meaningful, not something used up.

There is no designated order for the boxes - choose any box that appeals to you, even if you have to stretch over another performer to get it. With each box, hold it in your hands, feel the nature of the paper, inspect the box thoroughly before carefully opening it. If the contents trigger any kind of emotional response, let it show on your face.

Some contents may need to be unfolded or assembled.

The destruction of each box may be achieved in any way, either gently or brutally – for example, by crumpling, unfolding, smashing, ripping, chewing, etc. A variety of methods of destruction should be explored over the course of the performance. Note that some materials may be resistant to complete destruction without tools – do what you can. Destroyed boxes should be discarded so that the table gradually becomes surrounded by papery detritus.

Some boxes contain instructions to “play with this”: play with the object provided to explore its possibilities and find its sound. This may include interacting with its box, the table or anything that is to hand. Ephemeral objects should be destroyed and discarded along with the box; otherwise, place the object at the front of the table when finished, then destroy the box.

If another performer passes something to you, interrupt what you are doing to receive and process it, then return to your original task.

If any performer is for some reason unable to complete an instruction, the box should be offered to another performer. If no one is able to complete the task, any objects provided should be placed at the front of the table, and the box destroyed.

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