

## "On the margins of what?": Bastard Assignments and New Discipline on the London experimental music scene

As a composer I like to work with materials that are able to articulate ideas instantaneously. My work is made up of juxtapositions of minimal, repetitive and found materials. I am also interested in using instructional scores to explore bodies and movement. The conceptual nature of my work and the physicality of my compositional materials associate my practice with Jennifer Walshe's concept of the New Discipline.

I am the co-director of Bastard Assignments, a London based composers' collective that organises regular new music and performance events showcasing work by emerging artists, mainly in their mid-twenties. The established way of building a career as an unknown composer seems to me and my collaborators to involve asking for permission, or waiting to be asked, to make work. In Bastard Assignments we make work on our own terms by doing everything ourselves: writing, performing, curating, fundraising, marketing, accounting, lighting, sound, moving chairs and clearing up. In 2014 and 2015 Bastard Assignments were putting on events as frequently as every three or four weeks, each with entirely new work. My role with the collective intensified my existing compositional preoccupations. The work that I was contributing to these events I was performing myself, or with other Bastard Assignments composers, with very little or no rehearsal. We were showing work in noisy venues without PA systems, technical support or stage lighting. The motivation of my work became: how do I create a focused atmosphere in these contexts? I found that the quieter the sounds and the more minimal the material, the more powerful the work became. In a freezing February event in a bombed out chapel I gave everyone in the audience a comb and instructed them to start clicking their comb's teeth for the piece *Hive*; we slowly unwound transparent tape through our friend Clare's house for *Tape Piece*; in the back room of a pub a tuba player played a high note for as long as he could, waited until his breathing returned to normal and then repeated again and again for *Returning to Normal*.

Around this time I started to introduce into my work instructions that required no sound at all. These were physical actions that attempted to draw attention to performers' individual physicality. I wanted to subvert conventional classical music's tendency to turn performers into conduits for art by reasserting their person-ness. For example I asked performers to silently pretend to smoke for the second half of *Blow/Suck*. In *Everyone Kissing Everyone Else* the performers take turns to kiss each other. The pianist in my piano trio *BETTER THAN ANYONE* plays the piano with her head.

Bastard Assignments operates as one part of a collaborative and densely networked experimental scene in London where composers routinely perform in each other's work. At a Bastard Assignments event, participating composers might perform in two or three pieces with radically different modes of performance each time. There have been nights where I have sung in a choir before imitating ASMR youtube videos; reinterpreted field recordings with objects and star jumped to exhaustion; and been a bamboo percussionist and sung TV themes. It is a fast-moving way to work that promotes communalities of artistic practice built on close working and personal relationships over technical virtuosity and performative specialism.

Compositional practices that could be described as operating within the New Discipline in Bastard Assignments are driven by a combination of aesthetic concerns and our economic circumstances. The desire to perform our own work at self-organised events aligns us with experimental music traditions in Europe and America and the realities of making work with few resources in an expensive city generates modes of working that force us to become adaptable, physical composers and performers.