

The New Discipline



“Theater provides the unique experience of watching the body in real time, inside a story...there is reality occurring in front of viewing eyes, and the combustible mix of reality with what is being presented on stage is enticing and electric.”

— Richard Maxwell, *Theater for Beginners*

“...I was born with an ectomorphic body, all skin and bones. However, after being inspired by a passage from the diaries of the Pop artist Mr. Andy Warhol – a passage where he expresses his sorrow after learning in his middle-fifties that if he had exercised, he could have had a body (imagine not having a body!) – I was galvanized into action.....Hence, I now have a body.”

— Douglas Coupland, *Generation X*

“The New Discipline” is a term I’ve adopted over the last year. The term functions as a way for me to connect compositions which have a wide range of disparate interests but all share the common concern of being rooted in the physical, theatrical and visual, as well as musical; pieces which often invoke the extra-musical, which activate the non-cochlear. In performance, these are works in which the ear, the eye and the brain are expected to be active and engaged. Works in which we understand that there are people on the stage, and that these people are/have bodies.

Examples of composers working in this way include: Object Collection, James Saunders, Matthew Shlomowitz, Neele Hülcker, François Sarhan, Jessie Marino, Steven Takasugi, Natacha Diels, myself.

The New Discipline is a way of working, both in terms of composing and preparing pieces for performance. It isn't a style, though pieces may share similar aesthetic concerns. Composers working in this way draw on dance, theatre, film, video, visual art, installation, literature, stand-up comedy. In the rehearsal room the composer functions as a director or choreographer, perhaps most completely as an auteur. The composer doesn't have aspirations to start a theatre group – they simply need to bring the tools of the director or choreographer to bear on compositional problems, on problems of musical performance. This is the discipline – the rigour of finding, learning and developing new compositional and performative tools. How to locate a psychological/physiological node which produces a very specific sound; how to notate tiny head movements alongside complex bow manoeuvres; how to train your body so that you can run 10 circuits of the performance space before the piece begins; how to make and maintain sexualised eye contact with audience members whilst manipulating electronics; how to dissolve the concept of a single author and work collectively; how to dissolve the normal concept of what a composition is.

And always, always, working against the clock, because the disciplines which are drawn from have the luxury of development and rehearsal periods far longer than those commonly found in new music. Then again, the New Discipline relishes the absence of that luxury, of the opportunity to move fast and break things. In this way, it is a *practice* more than anything else. And the concomitant: the New Discipline is located in the fact of composers being interested and willing to perform, to get their hands dirty, to do it themselves, do it immediately.

The New Discipline thrives on the inheritance of Dada, Fluxus, Situationism etc but doesn't allow itself to be written off merely as Dada, Fluxus, Situationism etc. It's a music being written when Dada, Fluxus, Situationism etc have aged well and are universally respected. It takes these styles for granted, both lovingly and cheekily, in the same way it takes harmony and the electric guitar for granted. As starting points. As places to begin working.

New Discipline works can easily be designated, even well-meaningly ghettoised, as “music theatre”. While Kagel and others are clear ancestors, too much has happened since the 1970s for that term to work here. MTV, the Internet, Beyonce ripping off Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Stewart Lee, *Girls*, style blogs and yoga classes at Darmstadt, Mykki Blanco, the availability of cheap cameras and projectors, the supremacy of YouTube documentations over performances. Maybe what is at stake for the New Discipline is the fact that these pieces, these modes of thinking about the world, these compositional techniques – they are not “music theatre”, they *are* music. Or from a different perspective, maybe what is at stake is the idea that all music is music theatre. Perhaps we are finally willing to accept that the bodies playing the music are part of the music, that they're present, they're valid and they inform our listening whether subconsciously or consciously. That it's not too late for us to have bodies.

— Jennifer Walsh, Roscommon, January 2016