

Cipher For The Lighthouse Twins

for two readers

David Pocknee

This piece was written for Inlets Ensemble
and was first performed in
Audiotheque, Miami on 19 September 2015.

Special thanks to
Alex Lough and Ana Lemnaru
who helped me hone the rules for this piece.

Set-up

Two performers, from hereon referred to as Readers, sit facing each other, each with a copy of this book.

These Readers will also be referred to as *Reader X* and *Reader Y* where a distinction needs to be made between the two performers, but these denominations are interchangeable between Readers.

The Readers can be sat at either side of a small table, with the books placed on top; cross-legged on the floor; or comfortably sat in chairs, facing each other, with approximately one metre between them.

The performance of this piece should be as relaxed, informal and uncontrived as possible. No attempt should be made to dramatize or apply extraneous performance practices to the work. For an audience watching this work, the primary experience should be of watching two people informally engaging in an activity similar to reading.

Beginning

Before the performance, one of the Readers takes one of these books and flips to a random page. They look at the symbol on the bottom line, on the right side of the equals sign. If this symbol is a ◀ or ◄, they are the Reader who initiates the piece, if it is a ▶ or ► then the other Reader initiates the piece. The player chosen should remember which symbol was found, as this is used to start the piece.

To begin the piece, both performers are sat facing each other with a closed copy of this book, arranged face up, in whichever seating position they have

decided upon. They then both pick up their books and turn to a random page (excluding the introduction pages or blank end pages). The Reader who has been chosen to initiate the piece then recalls the instruction they were asked to remember in the previous paragraph. They search for this symbol in the column of symbols to the left of the equals signs on their open page and then perform the corresponding page-turning action indicated by the symbol to the right of the equals sign. This begins the piece.

The Piece

This is a turn-based piece. Turns alternate between the two Readers, and each turn involves a Reader turning pages backwards or forwards in groups of one or two pages, according to the way in which the book tells them to interpret the number and direction of pages turned by the other Reader on the previous turn. This information is encoded in a series of simple symbols (explained below) printed on each page of the main bulk of the book.

If *Reader X* turns some pages to start the piece, *Reader Y* watches how many pages *Reader X* turns, and in which direction. *Reader Y* then looks at the symbols on the current open page of their book to determine how to interpret this action, how many pages they must turn in response, and in which direction. They turn the pages indicated. *Reader X* then responds by consulting the symbols on the current open page in their book in order to gauge the amount of pages they should turn in response, and in which direction. They turn the pages indicated, *Reader Y* then responds by consulting the symbols on the current open page in their book in order to gauge the amount of pages they should turn in response, and in which direction. They turn the pages indicated ...

This continues until one of the Readers notices that they have reached a loop (defined below), at which point they close their book. This causes the other Reader to follow suit. The Reader who initiated the close can then either end the piece or re-start it.

When the piece re-starts, the Reader who initiated the closing of the books (*Reader X*) waits a brief pause, then flips to a random page, makes a mental note of the symbol in the bottom right hand corner, and closes the book. They then wait another brief pause. Then, both Readers flip to a random page and *Reader X* turns page(s) according to the symbol in the right-hand column opposite the symbol they remembered. *Reader Y* then responds by consulting their page and turning page(s) in response and the piece continues as before.

The number of re-starts can be chosen beforehand, can be based on a pre-chosen duration, or can be decided collectively during the performance.

Ideally, the piece should last just longer than the duration it takes to become boring.

The Symbols

In this book, each page shows four lines, each containing two symbols separated by an equals sign (“=”). Each symbol represents a number of page turns in a certain direction:

- ◀◀ = two pages backwards
- ◀ = one page backwards
- ▶ = one page forwards
- ▶▶ = two pages forwards

On each page of this book, the symbols to the left of the “=” indicate to *Reader X* the four possible actions that *Reader Y* might perform during *Reader Y's* turn i.e. turning two pages forward, turning one page forward, turning one page backwards, turning two pages backwards.

The symbols to the right of the “=” are the pages that should be turned in response by *Reader X* on their following turn. So, if you are *Reader X* and you have just seen *Reader Y* turn their book two pages backwards on their turn, you would then consult the page of your book that is open and look for the line which has the symbol for “turn two pages backwards” (◀◀) to the left of the equals sign, and then perform the action indicated on the same line, on the right of the equals sign. So, for instance, in this example, if your open page looked like this:

◀◀ = ▶

◀ = ◀◀

▶ = ◀◀

▶▶ = ◀

you would perform the action opposite the ◀◀ symbol on the left side, which is a ▶, meaning you would then turn your book one page forwards.

Be aware that, as the Readers are facing each other, the direction of page-turning by the other Reader appears reversed.

When two pages are to be turned, they must be turned one at a time, with the first page being fully turned before starting to turn the second page.

The Reader watching must wait until the other Reader has fully turned all of their pages before beginning to turn their own,

At their turn, a Reader has the choice of following the instructions on their current page or, if they have noticed a loop, closing their book. When one Reader closes their book, the other Reader must close their book as well. A Reader cannot initiate the closing of books if it is not their turn.

Loops

Loops are created when sequences of page-turning between the Readers repeat in succession.

Once a sequence of page-turns has been repeated three times or more it is considered a loop.

e.g.

Reader X: ▶

Reader Y: ◀◀

Reader X: ◀

Reader Y: ▶▶

Reader X: ▶

Reader Y: ◀◀

Reader X: ◀

Reader Y: ▶▶

Reader X: ▶

Reader Y: ◀◀

Reader X: ◀

Reader Y: ▶▶

Loops may be as short as a set of one instruction per Reader that keeps the two readers repeating the same two page-turning actions or may be much longer.

The example above shows a simple loop involving four actions, but much longer and more complicated loops can arise.

Both Readers should constantly be watching for loops.

The Printing

This score should be printed and bound as a book. Copies can be attained from the composer.

dp

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