

# Aphasia

Mark Applebaum (b. 1967) is a musical inventor and consummate original thinker whose music combines the unrelenting rigor of post-war European Modernism with a strong sense of the ridiculous and whimsical. He zooms obsessively and exactly close to the mundane, finding theatrical and dramatic elements in his own focus. Aphasia, a language impairment condition, typically results from brain trauma, resulting in the inability to comprehend and produce language.

Applebaum calls his *Aphasia* (2010) a depiction of “expressive paralysis” inherent in confronting the act of composition anew. At the same time, the piece also enacts aphasia. A single performer gestures with what Applebaum calls “*a kind of alien, pre-verbal, and rhythmic sign language.*” Their motions are synced precisely with pre-recorded vocal fragments, alternately frenetic and calm, sharp and dulcet—gestural neologisms that appear deeply ingrained but meaningless. All the while, the performer is frozen; “*automatic, robotic, performed, steady, practical, habitual and silent.*” We watch and listen but cannot comprehend. Finally, we escape. Gestures and words align semiotically, counting in ascending numerals in multiple languages, creating a direction that seemed so unthinkable earlier.

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