

<https://inexhaustibleeditions.bandcamp.com/album/to-the-memory-of>

Antoine Beuger: 'to the memory of'

composed for and performed by Conceptual Soundproductions Budapest.

Conceptual Soundproductions Budapest was founded by myself, in 2015, at the university of visual arts Budapest (MKE), with the objective of combining conceptual thinking, as is common in contemporary visual arts, with an experimental music practice.

The term 'conceptual sound production' refers to a form of sonic art in which the conceptual element dominates over the metier. A 'conceptual' work of art is essentially one that creates its own context outside of conventional artistic media. A 'concept' is not something inherent in the art object, in the sense of an expressive content; rather, it is an imaginary space created around the object that makes it appear in a particular perspective; and it is only within this space that the object holds an art status. Consequently, the actual creative act consists in the design of this space and not in that of the object. The object itself can be designed by practically anyone.

Antoine Beuger's 'to the memory of', which he wrote for CSB in 2016 at my request, can be seen as a conceptual piece in this sense. The score does not provide any specification of the material other than 'sounds', 'words' and 'silence'. The sounding objects have to be designed by the performers according to their own ideas. The score creates a perceptual space in which the individual object can appear, as it were, as an object of aesthetic observation. Beuger creates this space by placing particular emphasis on attention to the object's appearance and disappearance; as he explained to me by email, the focus is not on the material appearance of the object, but rather on the person who makes their appearance with the object.

Beuger has repeatedly confessed to the practice of unintentionality as exemplified by John Cage with the event piece 4'33". But unlike Cage, who was primarily concerned with liberating the individual sound from its semantic functions, Beuger is also concerned with liberating the individual performer from his function of fulfilling compositional instructions.

In view of this objective, 'to the memory of' marks a preliminary high point in Beuger's oeuvre, in that the score completely dispenses with parametric indications. On first reading, I was immediately struck by the absence of the dynamic indication 'soft' or 'very soft', which I had taken to be a basic condition of Antoine's music, since it appeared in one form or another in all his scores I had studied so far. To be sure, I wrote him an email asking if I could assume that the softness of the sounds was self-evident, or if it actually did not apply to this piece. Antoine replied that he simply did not want to exclude any sounds.

With regard to the performance practice of the piece, however, unintentionality is not a viable path. On the contrary, the more a score is left open with regard to self-responsible decisions, the more determined the performer must be with regard to his or her own decisions. My approach as director of the ensemble was to consider each individual sound as a piece of music in itself; an object to be consciously shaped in every aspect, just like any other art object. In this sense, the composition as a whole became a kind of exhibition of sonic objects.

In the course of the rehearsals we discussed a lot about what the possible criteria of a 'good' sound could be, and how to improve the individual sound, both in terms of expression and playing technique, and not least how to develop a sense of the right timing. With the spoken words, in the second part of the piece,

an additional, so to speak 'poetic' dimension comes into play, since with an object of language the semantic content can never be completely cancelled out. At this point, the question arises as to what the criteria for a 'good' word would be. According to the model that the individual sound is in itself a piece of music, the individual word would be in itself a poem.

following the rehearsals we always had a discussion about what were the possible criteria for a 'good' sound, how one could improve the sounds they produce, with regard to both expression and technique, and how to develop a sense of timing. with the spoken word part, an additional, so to say 'poetic' dimension comes into play, since with an object of language, the semantic content can never be completely suspended. at this point the question arises, of what would be the criteria for a 'good' word in this context. following the model of the individual sound being a piece of music in itself, correspondingly the individual word would be in itself a poem.

This reminds me of an anecdote I once read in Claire Goll's memoirs. James Joyce had once claimed at a dinner party that he had finally found the word he had been searching for all his life. Everyone looked at him curiously; he enjoyed the attention for a moment, then leaned back and said, 'the'.

The individual word, as an object of poetry in itself, is a ready-made. It becomes poetry not through its semantic content, but through its appearance in conceptual space. In principle, it could be any word; nevertheless, a choice must be made. What matters in conceptual space is the act of selection.

I'm not sure if my approach is compatible with Antoine's idea of the piece. I could imagine that he would be somewhat uncomfortable with the product orientation of the whole process; he would possibly say that it is about the intimacy of the situation and not about making 'art'. He would probably also reject the term 'conceptual'. Still, there seems to be some kind of common ground, at least in the final result. After I sent him the recording, Antoine wrote me back, "I have listened to it several times and I am totally inspired."

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