

Iterating absences

Numbers as sound, sound as our missing
Composition portfolio of Alejandro Franco-Briones

Portfolio work #3

Title: Forgetting something (eventually, forgetting everything)

Year of composition: 2013-2015

Instrumentation: Solo harp

Duration: 8:00”

Foreword

The works that form this portfolio share some common premises fundamental for the style and interest of the composer. All the works are based on algorithmic and serial strategies that provide unifying and underlying structures. Such structures, implicitly or explicitly, create tension fields between themselves and the actual sound proposed in the scores. The works nourish from the notions of harmonic rhythm (Cowell), trigger impulse (Ferneyhough), time-point, time-span and convergence point (Nancarrow), hence, the present works' discursive strategies are bound to the logic of rhythm-oriented music. The aforementioned concepts provide a sense of coherence as the music ideas coincide and diverge in time; otherwise the chosen music material (pitch, timbre, articulation) tends towards heterogeneity. In other words, different strata are formed and are autonomous and distinguishable among them as they present different trajectories, function and weight. Simultaneously, the sense of discursive linearity (the causality of events during the music work) is challenged by non-relational sections that suggest that i) such lack of linearity reveals a virtual form of temporality which enables listeners to unfold their attention into different planes, enabling the listener with a sense of simultaneity between the actual sound and the virtual aspects of the work. Thus, a way of listening parallel phenomena is proposed in the present music pieces. ii) The non-causal concatenation of ideas instead of suggesting a unified discourse may present an exploration of a topological rhythmic field. Such rhythmic space may affect the way we apprehend time; the proposition is to perceive it in a 'spatialised' manner. This means to conceptualise time in a way reminiscent of space.

Nevertheless, each of the present works explore different possibilities of what the composer calls a rhythm-oriented music. "Study 5" is a study that explores the possible relationships of the numeral 5 as a macro and micro-structural organisational aspect of the work; the formal strategies are quite evident and through them a rhythmic rich texture can be heard. In "A Dark Sun" the composer creates a vast interrelated macro-structure that enables a diverse set of simultaneous layers of activity that often act independently from each other. The most radical of the works is the harp solo in which heterodox forms of scoring devices are taken into the limits of the musical event almost falling into the field of experimental music and radically taken the idea of non-causal relationships to the extreme of audibility. The string

quartet evokes the idea of a topological field best of all. There are works in which form is more relevant (A dark sun, Study 5) and those which experimental means of organisation emerge as central for the proposed exploration tracing a vast scope of possibilities the composer wishes to communicate to his audience (String quartet, solo harp).

The works 'Crackling in the Boundless Time' and 'A Dark Sun' are explorations of complex music relationships as well as reflections of the social and cultural circumstances that persist in Mexico and Latin-america since the beginning of modernity. The former work presents the notion of fascism as a fractal structure that is reproduced in many registers (from the gesture to the macro-formal) and describes its growth as an anomalous issue within a body inhibiting change and the possibility of balanced tension between two forces. The later is a comment on colonial relationship and the objectification of American cultures. Latin-american dictatorships coupled with the extractive logic of colonialism (foreign and domestic) have produced a large number of absence. In the one hand a considerable number of missing people, in the other, an impressive number of cultures and ways of life have been subjugated. This artistic endeavor attempts to open a space of dialogue with the audience in which music reveals a side of modernity that cannot be decoupled with the notion of progress.

Alejandro Franco-Briones

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Mexico City

Brief technical comment on the work for Harp 'Forgetting Something (eventually, forgetting everything)'

The work for Harp with mixed scoring devices (written and audio score) is an experiment in a) unconventional scoring systems and b) radical forms of discursive discontinuity. The work, given its nature, presents broad silences between sections that in live concert conditions generate a tension and discontinuity that reflects the creative impulse behind the proposed idea. As such, it remains difficult to produce a recorded document that reflects the main performative requirements expressed in the score. The aforementioned silent sections emphasize the idea of listening as part of the execution of the piece; hence, the presence of the instrumentalist, in a tense and attentive posture, is fundamental to grasp the full scope of the performance. The recorder document of the piece tackles such problematic aspect of the work with recording, editing and mastering techniques proposed by Giovanni Chimal at the studios of RadioUNAM (Radio of the National Autonomous University of Mexico) when the work was recorded for an anthology of solo harp works by Mexican composers (no release date). As it can be heard in the recorded document attached to this portfolio, the residual noise coming out of the headphones (necessary for the instrumentalists to listen for the audio-score) of the instrumentalist were recorded and enhanced as part of the audiofile. The work should not be understood in any way as an electroacoustic mixed work, but as a solo harp piece with an heterodox scoring device (see score's instructions for further information).

The scoring system proposed (that is formed by a written and an aural document) may form a diptych consisting of the work for harp solo and subsequently the fixed media work, that functions as a score in the first piece. I will like to remark, regardless if this two pieces may be conceptualised in relationship with each other and even may be presented as one diptych, each of them are autonomous units.

The performance of the work was made by Mara Tamayo in Radio UNAM, July 2015.