

Some notes about “2005(1) - ort / zeit / (klänge)”

Jason:

Shortly before seeing your performance of "2005(1) - ort / zeit / (klänge)" from September 1-30, 2009 on the shores of the Limmat River in Zürich I'd just finished a realization of Michael Pisaro's composition "Only [harmony series no. 17]", which, besides asking for the performer to sit quietly and listen, also specified "A few times, playing an extremely long, very quiet tone." Your piece seemed to take the sitting quietly and listening to another level (although you were standing), in that there seemed to be not just an "intake" of sound and situation going on but also a projection, an insertion of your presence into the space (the shores of the Limmat River). As a performance I found this fascinating and at the time I didn't know anything about the score. I was interested in the aspect of your presence, of you standing on this one spot by the river as a performance of a score. Aside from enjoying the experience of partaking in your experience of standing by the river listening, of being there, I began to ask myself, "how could one realize a piece like this in the context of a documentation, i.e. of a recording?"

I liked the idea of contrasting this, what in my opinion was, very radical approach to a performance (for whom? for the composer, for the space, for anyone who happened to walk by, not knowing this was a performance, maybe just seeing this as a man standing by the river looking / listening, "being there," attentively?) with the very classical, time-worn practice of recording a composition. How would this translate to the listener? And what would be my experience if I were to "interpret" this piece, not as a performer as much as an "instrumentalist" (a recordist), yet in fact by default playing the same role as you by the river: a person standing at a particular location somewhere over one month's time, to all passersby as someone perhaps not noticed at all, perhaps only slightly obvious as someone more still, more attentive than the average person relaxing or waiting somewhere. After thinking about this for a while I decided to ask you for the score and see about realizing the piece.

I guess my first question is, how did you feel about someone recording this composition? I would almost say it is a contradiction in the conceptual precepts of this piece to have it performed or, even further, to have the performance recorded.

Manfred:

When working on a score, I usually don't think of possible performances. The score and the performance seem to have two different reaches, each with its own potentials.

So, when working on “2005(1) - ort / zeit / (klänge) -,” I actually dealt with some compositional

questions which had appeared at that time; for instance, how could I work the performance space in the score - the performance space which had become so important, so present by the mere fact of a certain absence of produced sounds by the performers?

To a certain extent I wanted to mark in the score that which emerges through the absence of produced sounds (instead of keeping on structuring a few sounds to be if at all performed). And, I was looking for something like a "structural matter of fact" rather than a "prescription for action." Something that could be just there and occurring regardless of any performance approach.

Already before, I had replaced a term like "performance" by "realization" or "actualization." I thought that a word like "performance" would restrict our ideas of a practice of working on sound, by still referring to an object to produce which however had meanwhile become such a thing like the alteration of a given atmosphere.

A word like "actualization" would allude more to a practice of working on situations that are occurring to some extent by themselves, and where the "performer" finds herself intrinsically as part of a situation (and not as its creator).

So, regarding your question, I'm definitely interested in challenging our notions of both the score, and a practice of performance which today includes that of recording, and your beautiful project with this piece allows us to reflect and ponder our complex role as performers and recordists.

Jason:

In a sense, I'm wondering now, despite the fact that you are a composer (defining this term as "a person who organizes sound"), how much this piece actually has to do with sound per se. Rather, perhaps this piece is more about creating a situation for focused perception of a space, a place, a situation encompassing all of this, including sound, light, smell, temperature and so.

Standing in Zürich's main train station roughly thirty minutes every day for a month, I realized within the first few days that this piece was about much more than the sound of the train station, the sound I was recording and documenting as a realization of this piece. I felt in a sense that I was focusing less at times on the environment around me than on how I was perceiving this environment, the perception of my perception, as it were. This, of course, gradually cast into doubt my idea of somehow documenting a realization of the piece (sound recording), thinking that perhaps this piece was beyond documentation, was purely about the experience of me being in a place for a certain period of time; and of others (an "audience" come to watch me "perform") sharing this time and space with me, experiencing this situation in their way (which, I know, is in fact not any different than a traditional musical performance). In the end, I settled with the idea of the sound recording as a means of documenting several aspects of the piece: the

sound experienced, the action of "being there," a sense of the time passing. Which brings us back to your statement that "The score and the performance seem to have two different reaches, each with its own potentials." And with time I began to realize this was one of the beauties of this piece, that only with the time of being there in the "performance space" did the various reaches of the composition manifest themselves.

I know that, as you said here, you are "interested in challenging our notions of both the score, and a practice of performance" but beyond this, when you are performing this piece what is your focus, how do you feel yourself in relation to the space and its identity as a place (as defined by its sound, its light, its presence)? How did the reaches of this piece reveal themselves to you?

Manfred:

Maybe we can say that all music is about much more than just the sounds per se because producing sounds has always been a way of locating and confirming one's existence in a world that is infinitely sounding.

I prefer your description of an "intake of sound and situation," and at the same time a "projection, an insertion of the performer's presence into the space" that is happening, rather than the idea of a focused perception which still seems to relate more to a subject - object structure which maybe has been at the "beginning" of a long and very problematic history. I don't like so much a certain kind of exploratory spirit because, it usually takes up a space and destroys the place for its personal purposes. Each place is intrinsic multiplicity and doesn't need any intervention of ours. So, I try to approach a place regarding a performance almost unnoticeably, unimposingly.

I think when performing I'm looking for a situation where for a certain time something like "the world" would appear. Not one to look at or listen to. Not one to project concepts onto. One to be part of, where in a chaotic and infinite becoming something like a real sense of meeting and sharing would emerge. I remember having been so overwhelmed and moved by the mere fact of finding myself in this great abundance of life on the shores of the Limmat River. I love Deleuze's call for "giving consistency without losing anything of infinity (donner consistance sans rien perdre de l'infini)," it's such a beautiful statement, and I read here your sentence "thinking that perhaps this piece was purely about the experience of me being in a place for a certain period of time" as a way of working on such a consistency.

How can we think our practice of producing sounds so as to touch upon an idea or sense of an infinite situation?

I'm roaming the cities regarding possible places for projects, and revisit places to ponder their potentials.

When performing I'm not so much interested in discovering certain identities of a place, but

more in sensing that I actually interact in its infinity.

Regarding your question of how the reaches of this piece might reveal themselves to me, I would say, very personally, in the way the ongoing practice of private and public realizations of this score has heightened and transformed my experience and sense of the surroundings. This has been so enriching, and subsequently has deeply informed my later scores. You have anticipated some possible reservations towards documenting such a project. I would say our practice of producing sounds has of course changed, and so have our ideas of interpretation and documentation.

Almost paradoxically we could add that an existing documentation retains its potential in that what is not and cannot be documented.