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Alberto Barberis

Alberto Barberis wurde 2017 das Werkjahr der Stiftung Christoph Delz zugesprochen.

Fern verweilen, fern hören

Portrait von Giovanni Cestino

Far from being only a traditional composer, Alberto Barberis (1988) is an artist who works with sounds while constantly pushing his research horizon. His musical thinking is grounded in the materiality of sonic events and in the physical urgency of technological explorations. Starting from these premises, Barberis' activity results in two outcomes: traditional compositions, mainly for acoustic instruments with or without electronics; and high-tech improvised performances, where he directly participates as a performer – normally as a guitarist – together with other players (like Alberto Ricca aka «Bienoise», co-founder of the project Alberi), dancers or actors. The relationship between the two sides of his artistic personality cannot be disentangled. In fact, they form a coherent mode of aesthetic investigation, enriched by a solid proficiency in new technologies.¹

The use of technology lies at the core of Barberis' poetics, which is rooted in the idea of distance or remoteness. Fern, far, lontano, τῆλε – a general inclination to investigate what is far from our sonic expectations. This is why his music frequently brings up musical material obtained by drastic technological mediation. The neglected waste of a recording or the boundaries of a spectrum, usually left out and erased, becomes the centre of attention. An example of this interest in the marginal is an ongoing experimental project, supported by the Christoph Delz Foundation, about the possible relationships between orchestral instruments and electroacoustic transducers.

The effort is always «to put at the core of [...] listening the «periphery» of certain sonic places». That peripheral sound is both «inaudibile» and «inaudito», inaudible and unheard: it is something urgently in need to be expressed and strongly expressive in itself. Extending this principle, «listening from afar» («fern hören») might be a new listening behaviour that is socially non-conform, and therefore authentic.

Moreover, the concept of periphery can also be related to other musical parameters. The peripheries are the uncommon «places» of an instrument, or the peripheral actions of a player, which are not involved in traditional performance practice – a tradition the artist often calls into question. Lastly, the periphery between music and other forms of expression is the very place where Barberis' artistic research lingers.

«Verweilen» – to linger – is a word familiar to aesthetics since the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, and it has deep implications for Barberis' music. In «the terrorism of [today's] cultural industry», in «an aesthetic culture that is withering away»², Barberis finds in tarrying a form of contemplation, a peculiar «time-quality [that] is a function of the intensity of the experience»³. The fact that Barberis, in his search for contemplation, uses precisely those technological «weapons» that are often stigmatized as factors of cultural depletion, seems almost like a paradox.

Indeed, it is not by chance that – especially in his improvised performances – the musician takes advantage of technological «bugs» or glitches and reacts to unpredictable situations. In controlling parts of the musical process, the algorithms he

Die grossen Namen von morgen tummeln sich heute auf den kleinen Bühnen: Noch nie hat die Schweizer Musikszene so viele junge Künstlerinnen und Künstler hervorgebracht, die Neues suchen und kreieren. Wir stellen sie ins Scheinwerferlicht.

employs are conceived «not to automate a goal, but to manage a non-goal». Thus, the machine knows a peculiar «verweilen» too: instead of solving tasks, it lingers, dwelling on errors that become fruitful only for artistic purposes. For this reason, improvisation represents the opportunity to discover an extreme degree of complexity that can neither be thought and predetermined, nor written and codified.

It is hard to single out specific works in Barberis' productions. Every piece is the result of an exploration of the fundamentals of his poetics. As a starting point to deepen his music, we would suggest: *Animato dal resto* [«Liven up by the Rest»] (2015) for piano and percussions, *L'inchino di un corale su tre luoghi minimi* [«The Bow of a Choral on Three Minimal Places»] (2015) for flute, clarinet and bassoon, and *Non senso del postumo volo del seme* [«Nonsense of a Seed Posthumous Fly»] (2014, rev. 2016) for solo bass drum.

- 1 Beside his musical activity, Alberto Barberis is now completing his studies in Engineering at the Polytechnic University of Turin. Some thoughts on this relationship with technologies will soon be found in Giovanni Cestino, «Fra cronaca e profezia. Pensieri sul rapporto tra compositori e (nuove) tecnologie. Una conversazione con Giovanni Albini e Alberto Barberis», in *Molimo. Quaderni di Antropologia culturale ed Etnomusicologia*, vol. 9, ed. by Emanuele Fabiano e Gaetano Mangiameli, Mimesis, Milano-Udine (in press).
- 2 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gadamer in Conversation. Reflections and Commentary*, edited and translated by Richard E. Palmer, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2001, p. 77.
- 3 Sheila M. Ross, *Gadamer's Late Thinking on Verweilen*, «Minerva. An Internet Journal of Philosophy», vol. 8, 2004, <http://www.minervamic.ul.ie/vol8/gadamer.html> (last accessed: 06/08/2017).