

DEXTER SINISTER PRESENTS

A COMPOSITION BY ALEX WATERMAN

B

B

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RECEPTION TO FOLLOW

“We would like to commission you to write a CONCERTO FOR MUTED TRUMPET for an upcoming art event of international scope and appeal.”

The context was explained to me, as were the limitations on instrumentation.

I had some hesitations.

A. Because I am an out-of-practice composer; and

B. A Concerto as it is generically understood, is a 19th and 20th century form wherein autonomy is pitted against a/the social order in a kind of bloodless battle. Virtuosity is foregrounded as an industrious flurry of call and response between the soloist and the orchestra. It has been, and continues to be—for those who can afford it—a highly popular form of entertainment; and

C. The voice of the individual (soloist) on the one hand and social order (orchestra) on the other, seem to have been replaced in the present day by what seem to be very odd notions of representation and/or communities.



As Robert Ashley writes in his lecture on THE FUTURE OF MUSIC,

“Music is a commodity, like hamburgers, automobiles, oil, grain, currency and underpaid labor. (REPEAT)

Music is a commodity, like hamburgers, automobiles, oil, grain, currency and underpaid labor.

It can be bought and sold. Every musician, now, wants his or her music to be a valuable commodity, so that the musician can make some amount of money to, as we say, live on. We have no choice.”

I wanted to take the idea of Concerto and examine how this solo voice is formed by its relationship to the ensemble, yet has the power to lay bare its structure and integrity. At different moments in this piece, Bartleby’s virus of language affects the musical production and the copying of the music by the scribes (phonograph player and orchestral musicians playing ‘changes’) the formula “I would prefer not to ...” makes change and copying no longer possible under its conditions.

The instrumentation of our piece will be:  
Muted trumpet  
Stroh violin  
2 Phonographs  
Violoncello con sordini

“B” (for Bartleby) is a piece that features obsolescent technologies. The machines listed above were chosen because they were created in order to distribute information, preserve voices and historical events, and perhaps most importantly, they have made possible the repeatability of a social and/or private experience.

In the 20th century, instruments started to be able to do something remarkable: copy and play back. The phonograph is an example; the photocopier is another. The cello could be seen as a much older type of machine, one dependent on human memory. The Stroh violin, on the other hand, is an example of an instrument modeled on the instrument that will record it. Its body has been replaced by a horn that amplifies its sound in order to be loud enough for the horn of a phonograph to pick up and inscribe. This, in turn, will later be played through the horn of the gramophone.

And in conclusion:

Prior to the notion of the “res facta” or “made thing” there existed only memory. If the “perceived” did not become impressed upon the memory of the subject through the senses, then the thing perceived would cease to exist. The embodiment of music through its performance involved a process of memory storage: the material gets suspended in animation, held on its travels into the past (on its way to oblivion) its transience is lent the quality of permanence through becoming memorized and internalized.

Therefore:

“Proof of the fact that a mechanical device can reproduce personality And that Quality is merely The distribution aspect of Quantity. Journalists have conquered the book form; Writing is now the tiny affair of the individual; The customers have changed: television’s aren’t viewers but advertisers; publishing’s not potential readers, but distributors. The result is rapid turnover, the regime of the bestseller. But there will always be a parallel circuit, a black market.”

Yours Sincerely,

Alex Waterman