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Composition

Memory Pieces 1-6 (2006-09)

Bergstrøm-Nielsen, Carl

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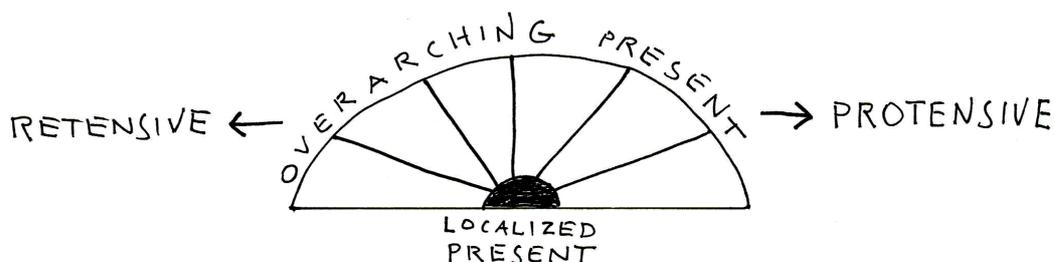
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MEMORY PIECES

GENERAL INTRODUCTION (as of June 2010)

The idea behind the Memory Pieces is to stretch memory beyond usual limitations.



Ed Sarath's article, "A New Look at Improvisation", Journal of Music Theory 40:1, Spring, 1996, was an inspiration for this piece. "Localized present" has "overarching present" as its direct extension. In the latter, there seems still to be a direct feeling with the details you have played shortly ago. Once you've been away from a section into "something else", the feeling is much more vague. But it might be strengthened by applying conscious construction of similarities and differences and thus reach stronger into "retensive" and "protensive" realms. So, each time you force yourself to remember what happened, material is brought up and put to possible new creative life.

Structures provided are schematic, but intended to permit a free spinning-out process. "Just playing" from the scheme would be easy enough, maybe even trivial – it's the combining of shifts with the process that matters. The endeavour here was not to "get rid of" the variety of free improvisation but to follow its life more closely and consciously from different angles. In each piece there will arise several or many criss-crossing relations between sections throughout.

For instance, *neighbouring relations* exist between sections, thinking especially of pieces number 1 and 2:

CHANGE!

or

(MAYBE A DIFFERENT KIND OF CHANGE)

And *distance* relations exist between elements which recur after having been abandoned for a while – like:

OH, NOW WE'RE TAKING THIS UP AGAIN AND DOING SOMETHING DIFFERENT WITH IT!

or...

'AS I SAID BEFORE... HOWEVER...'

- all of which can be taken to use within the improvising process. They can be postponed, prepared, introduced in various ways – since the solo improviser is completely in charge of the action.

Number 1 might be the most difficult. You could consider to start with one of the others.

Proposed durations are estimated on the background of my own experience of what it takes to create the processes demanded for. Minimums seem very short to me. Make sure you have time enough. All of the pieces could be longer, even very long ones. If you wish to make a version that does not take up too much time in a programme, you could practise a longer one first and gradually speed up the process. If you, in the last end, feel confident enough to make the pieces even shorter than proposed, it may be OK. What matters is that the improvised process can unfold genuinely and that contrasts between sections and contrapuntal elements are clearly worked out.

Carl Bergstroem-Nielsen

MEMORY PIECE 1

for solo ad lib.

Proposed duration: may be long, minimum 10 minutes

Carl Bergstroem-Nielsen 2006

Shifting contrapuntal sections which develop.

This piece utilizes shifts of "A" and "B" sections, each of which appear in ever varied/transformed ways.

Play an improvised section. Any duration, but not so long that you cannot overview it as a whole and not so long that it starts to go in too many directions.

Make a pause, or not, as you wish.

Play a new section. Same principles as before, but strive to make it clearly different. To achieve this, you may have analyzed what you do into parameters already while playing the first section and, to the amount the process has allowed, tried to put what you are now doing into an effective contrast. (Parameters could deal with pitches, dynamics, densities, timbres ... or you could use other criteria which you might find helpful)

After the second section, make a pause, or not, as you wish.

Now play a third section. This should continue the first section in a different, varied, transformed way. So you have to remember back what you did and, intuitively and by analyzing it in short moments in between, change it.

After the third section, make a pause, or not, as you wish.

Now play the fourth section – by relating to the second section just like you did before to the first one with the previous section, making it clearly different from that.

Go on playing sections like this ...

The piece may conclude in several ways:

1) if you can still keep the process going and keep sections contrasting: play alternating sections until stopping at the end of a section.

2) if you are unable to go on (this might be because it is difficult to keep sections different in the long run or because you feel that the possibilities of making still more variations become exhausted), you could go on by:

- playing on, accepting that the musical material has become integrated, that is, all of it is available all the time, and keeping basically within this universe.

or

- focusing on one kind or aspect of material which has been treated before but which has proven to be especially interesting

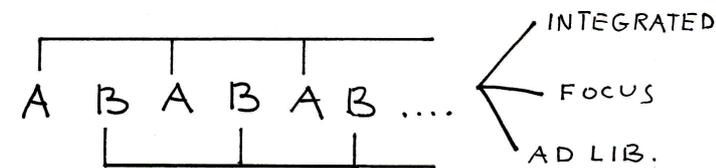
or

- improvising on just ad lib. without restrictions.

(however, only one of the above)

Some additional remarks:

Schematically, the alternating structure (with possible other ways to conclude) can be visualized like this:



All the A's and B's form a continuity which each other of the same kind, interwoven with the corresponding chain of the other elements. Thus, bridges for memorizing of the other elements and for projecting onto the future are created.

A performance suggestion: you may make the process visible to the audience by marking out beginnings of each section (or, later, which kind of final "chapter") by holding up paper sheets saying "A" – "B" – "INTEGRATED" or "FOCUS" or "AD LIB". This takes a little explanation before playing, of course.

2006 (rev. 2007, 2009)

MEMORY PIECE 2

for solo ad lib.

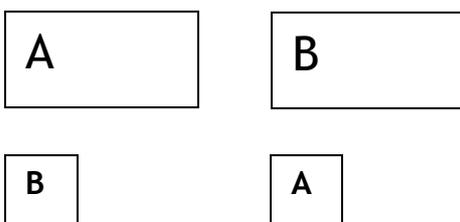
Proposed duration: minimum 4 minutes

Carl Bergstrøm-Nielsen 2007

Main sections and fill-in sections renewing and exchanging their material.

This piece utilizes shifts of sections which are each characterized by a "main" category of material and a "fill-in" category.

Simple version: Two sections only. Play an improvised section that keeps to ONE kind of material. Use a contrasting kind of material for occasional short insertions only. After a while, play another improvised section which reverses "main" and "fill-in" categories.



Length of the sections should be long enough for the categories of material to make some clear and weighty impression on the listener. Probably at least some minutes each.

Longer version (with cyclic permutations): Play according to a scheme – use one of the following or create one along the same lines if you need it:

MAIN	A	B	C	or	A	B	C	D	or	A	B	C	D	E
FILL-IN	B	C	A		B	C	D	A		B	C	D	E	A

It is suggested that the player leaves the number of sections open, to be determined during playing. At each shift of section, one new element is introduced, but at the end of the last one the very first one is re-used.

→ please turn...

Other possibilities: One can use less regular sequences with less predictable structures.
For instance

A C B D
B D C A

- between first and second section there are no direct links, and neither between the two last ones (however, with a link back to the beginning). The example stated suggests a finite, predetermined number of sections.

General remarks: only some kind of schemes mentioned under "other possibilities" would require any written material to be used during playing – although it would be great to omit it there, too. Doing so could strengthen the 'forward-backward' thinking which is essential to the idea of the Memory Pieces series. In any case, the simple versions *must* be played from memory.

MEMORY PIECE 3

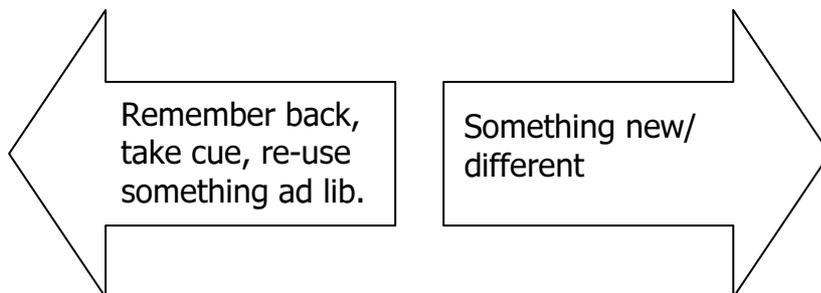
for solo ad lib.

Proposed duration: minimum 4 minutes

Carl Bergstrøm-Nielsen 2009

Sections pointing backwards or forwards.

Assign every new section to either one or the other possibility described below, so as to clearly decide each time.



MEMORY PIECE 4

for solo ad lib.

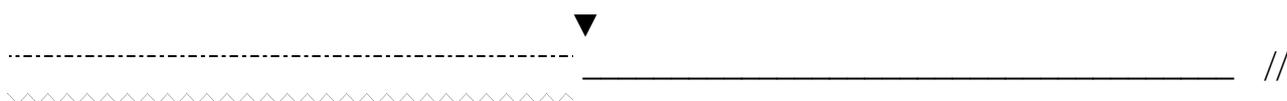
Proposed duration: minimum 3 minutes

Carl Bergstrøm-Nielsen 2009

Two-part counterpoint followed by a unified section.

Play a counterpoint with two elements. Do this by starting out with the first one without thinking too much before, then finding the second in the same way. Accept what comes to you. Elements could be anything characteristic, sounds/elements/ideas/figures. They must be kept well apart from each other. Counterpoint means means changing between the elements in many ways, creating composite structures with them, maybe as a "dialogue", thinking polyphonically.

At a chosen point (▼ in the illustration below), play a new section consisting of something simple (in a reductionistst sense or other) or something unified (like having a central sound to depart from and come back to, maybe in a gradual manner, maybe rondo-like). Sustain this section as long time as the free section. This section may or may not integrate material from the contrapuntal one.



Variants:

play a counterpoint with three parts or an even greater number...

MEMORY PIECE 5

for solo ad lib.

Proposed duration: minimum 3 minutes

Carl Bergstrøm-Nielsen 2009

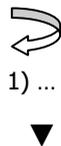
Unified section out of free section.

Play freely. At a chosen point (▼ in the illustration below), choose an *element/idea/figure which you remember from before*. Sustain this at least as long time as the free section. The element/idea/figure may be developed, but not as a springboard to entirely new ideas.



Variant:

Play freely. At a chosen point (▼ in the illustration below), choose *two elements/ideas/figures which you remember from before*. Play them after another, sustaining each at least as long time as the free section. The elements/ideas/figures may be developed, but not as a springboard to entirely new ideas.



2)...

... or choose an even higher number than two...

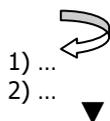
MEMORY PIECE 6

for solo ad lib.

Carl Bergstrøm-Nielsen 2009

Two-part counterpoint out of a free section.

Play freely. At a chosen point (▼ in the illustration below), play a *two-part counterpoint based on two elements/ideas/figures etc. which you remember from before.*¹ Sustain this at least as long time as the free section. Counterpoint means changing between the elements in many ways, creating composite structures with them, maybe as a "dialogue", thinking polyphonically. The ideas 1) and 2) should be both sustained and developed, but not as a springboard to entirely new ideas.



Variants for second section:

play a three-part counterpoint based on three elements/ideas/figures etc. which you remember from before...

play a four-part counterpoint based on four elements/ideas/figures etc. which you remember from before...

etc...

¹ In my own experience, this is a demanding task, exactly after having played freely which requires a certain letting go of control. It may be easier if you dwell on the elements before making intricate combinations with them, if you can keep them well apart from each other, and if they, in the subsequent development, are practiceable on the same instrument(s).

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