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Notes

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intention

It has never happened to me before to make a piece which is the shaping of a preliminary intention, of a subject which I would have liked to tackle and for which I would have sought the best representation, of an idea or an opinion I would have liked to defend or develop, of a feeling I would have liked to express. I have never done such a thing.

listening

At the beginning, at every single stage, the listening act. I can say: what I work most is the listening (as opposed to: working the sound). The capture, the approaches, the receptions, the resonances.

the two times

The first time is the recording and editing, the quest for a shape and a story. Once the sound piece is achieved (in stereo most of the time), it is put on hold, waiting to be shown.

The second time is the show. The context and the medium (installation, public listening or publishing) prompt me to choose a format, to precise a sound diffusion device (mono, stereo or multitrack) and a specific mode of listening. Then the work is to be unfolded, to be tightened (as one would do with an elastic) according to the media and the spaces.

The first time requires some kind of isolation. It is important for me to be able to work without any deadline. I can never say beforehand how much time the making of a new piece will take. Therefore, I need

some vague, disconnected time, with no end wall, unrelated to any exhibition or broadcasting schedule. At that very moment, I do not wish the temporality of requests and circumstances to exert any pressure on me. And I refuse to give anything to be listened to which has not been followed through and thought out, whose gestation would have been shortened or rushed because of the deadline.

The second time, on the opposite, feeds on everything. Then all the contingencies, all the determining factors and details as to the way the piece is going to be shown must be taken into consideration. Since I no longer need to think out the shape and editing of the selected work, I can focus on its mode of appearance, on the way it is going to be heard.

listening at home

By using CD's, I began to listen to the music and songs I like differently. With the LP's, the pieces which followed one another up in an autonomous way were rather short. The silences in between (like divisions) resetting the listening process at each stop and preparing it for the next track. With the cd's, the tracks are longer so the silences fill up what is empty by connecting the different parts of a whole.

The change of medium has modified my way of purchasing and conditioned my behaviour. I switched from the rat-a-tat to the ongoing flow, from a rather frivolous approach (the sleeves often influencing the purchase of an LP) to a listening at home close to (I now realize it) what I develop in my own sound installations: the approach and habit mechanisms resulting from the way sounds unfold, appear, disappear and reappear. It is up to the surrounding dilution to trigger sudden transports and progressive attachments in the listener.

The listener in my exhibitions looks like myself when I listen at home. Making his way through the installation with his body and his thought (in his own reserve), he can experience what is at work when I listen to music at home.

skeleton

The photographs of my installations represent empty spaces with loudspeakers. Mounted on stands, hanging on walls or set up on the floor. To see the space, the number, the layout of the loudspeakers and the way they hang or they stand, is to already perceive a first element of the installation: its skeleton.

Also my drawings/sketches, a spatial intention is being revealed there.

my installations

Each one of my installations is the result of a specific listening and reflection as to the constraints and possibilities of the utilized places. Besides, what I choose to diffuse is an arrangement of one of my former pieces (re-mixed, unfolded, uncoiled). A piece which on other occasions can be modified again so it can be heard differently: on a record, during a concert performance, or even for another installation, with a different device.

Those sound diffusing and appearance devices (the number of loudspeakers and where they are set up, the duration of the silences, the respective sound volumes and the hierarchies of the resulting mixings) are designed to serve the sound pieces which are shown, to serve their own issues. They suggest listening modalities that echo the architecture: the layout of the spaces, their shapes, their sizes, their own acoustics, their functions sometimes.

The visitor is made a proposition by each installation: it is up to him to build up his own listening. As a result, the space and the emitted sound piece act as two triggers of his experience.

the place

I intervene in the places I empty out.

The space is taken into account, it keeps on being. It is material and becomes a medium for the listening. What is being seen and heard there, even from beyond the windows and the walls, is neither denied nor erased and gets integrated into the hollow part of the piece (silences as a way to frame the surroundings) or through addition (one layer upon the next).

acoustics

The floors, the surface of the walls, the ceilings

I choose resonant and bright spaces to diffuse the musics, noises and voices which do not belong to any language (calls, shoutings, songs). The sounds, whose source is not precisely localized, hit the surfaces and bounce against them and outline an aerial or underground volume. Background, distance, echo.

I choose mat and muffled spaces for the words and close figures, at ear level, localized, dots.

Then perspectives between fields and dots must be created; distances between distant sounds and a neighbouring voice (swapping their roles as the visitor moves), between a background and a figure, an echo and a spoken word must be heard.

format

The number of loudspeakers depends upon the sound piece which is being shown. This number corresponds to its "format". It logically results, on the one hand, from the possibilities of the place and, on the other hand, from the number of sound elements which are dialectically present. Coincidences and tensions between the division and structure of the place and of the sound piece being shown.

hanging

For the voices: loudspeakers mounted on a stand, not far from the walls. One walks around them at ear level.

For the other sounds, noises, musics: loudspeakers hanging on the walls, from the ceilings, set up on the floor or concealed. As if they were part of the architecture: a volume that contains us.

neutral

Colours of the carpets and of the stands, visibility (or not) of the cables, aspect of the light: difficult to choose sometimes.

Only certainty: aim at neutral (which does not exist).

approaches

One can catch a glimpse of the integrity of the work, approached through stages and framings (the many listening spots, the division and scattering of the sounds through space and time) only when it is fully pieced back up together in the listener's mind.

Like a dotted line one can visualize only when it has been completed (installations with one voice only and silences, which can be either present or absent, according to the attention the listener pays to them).

Like a mountain whose symmetrical slopes are only discovered once we stand on the top of it (installations with two voices or two sounds, two terms which oppose one another).

Like a building whose layout is understood only once we have drawn its plan ourselves (pieces with multiple layers).

headset

The space is a medium for the listening. There is this three-tiered relation: work / space / listener. I do not like to use a headset.

To work: while editing, I want to listen directly from the loudspeakers, I want the sounds to get mixed with my environment, I want them to breathe, to resound.

To diffuse a piece: to use a headset is to establish the failure of the space, its negation, that is to say: a non-installation. The space does not play any part there, the sound piece does not develop itself, it is self-centered, un-diffused, like some sample put on hold.

Exceptions: the so-called "open" headsets which, as opposed to the so-called "closed" headsets, also enable what the environment produces to be heard and allow the listener to mix with the surrounding sounds. Then, the space reasserts itself. The environment can be a background, something on the side or the second term of a dialogue between what is inside and what is outside.

someone else

What I look for when I record the people I feel close to is the strongest kind of otherness. Shaping this otherness, which is embodied in the form of a resistance with regard to what affects us most. And working all possible gaps. Between the other and myself, between oneself and oneself. Between thought and words, between words and voice.

pair

Each word taken half-way, between the words and the voice, between the narrative and the speech act. On the one hand, language (sentences), on the other hand the body (breathing). Vocabulary / lung.

direct / indirect

Both notions constantly cohabit.

What is indirect in any kind of word, which results from a gap (temporal: a time has passed, something can be told now, or spatial: to isolate oneself or put oneself aside so as to bear witness), the gap which is a necessary condition to any kind of narrative.

At the same time, what is direct in any kind of speech, in any kind of recording. Because it is all about the sound, each word being a gesture, captured as it is being performed.

background / figure

Subtraction: to isolate the figure from the background, to make the voice stand out from the recording place (as far as it remains audible). The listener hears "my" voices as if he could perceive them mentally: standing out from the scenery, out of context, as if they were floating in the void. This is the general way voices are present in our thoughts: for themselves, without a background, without a resonance.

This mental dimension is a construction which needs a trick, a device. Because the microphone, during the recording, is not going to reach directly this form of representation (on the contrary, it tends to take everything, to capture everything at the same level, without any discrimination, background, figure, details, things on the side, things around, environment)

voice-off

All my voices are (like) cinema voice-off. Narrating instances, coming from nowhere, from no place. Without any space around them and mat, with no acoustic resonance. Inner voices made his own by the listener.

Exceptions: songs, whistling, shoutings and calls. All those unintelligible, voiceless words, the source and resonance (the space around) of which being heard.

distances

When I record someone, I reduce distance to its maximum; by getting the microphone as close as possible to his mouth (the voice at the closest), I minimize the background sound and send it blow at the periphery (beyond the threshold of perception). Closeness (which enables the texture, the breathing, the exhalations to be heard) as an opposite pole with regard to the arbitrary of editing, to the distance of the words, to the absence of documentary information, to the gaps in the narrative.

It is altogether different for a noise where I shall rather record the distance which separates me from its source

Other distance: the one necessary for me to be able to work the editing. Time making oblivion. Forgetting the context of my recordings and showings, so I can make myself available for what is really going

on and not for what I thought I put in them. Time not subjected to contingencies, autonomous and selfish.

still neutral

The only way for me to be neutral is to be incomplete. Through subtraction, emptiness, failures.

What I mean here is that I cannot intervene in the protagonists' speech, their performance. I cannot flatten out their voices, make them atonal. Their expression is tinged with a liveliness, a spontaneity which I do not want to thwart during the recording and which I cannot change when editing. Neutrality must be worked elsewhere.

tone

A sentence whose tone is different from the others cannot be part of my editing. On the paper, all works fine: I am interested in the recorded words (which I have transcribed in a notebook), they could change the story in a way I like but the sound itself, when I quickly go back to the recording, does not work. The wrong tone would stop the tension and would reduce the piece to something that would not matter much: a succession of bits and snatches and not the tight thread I am looking for.

about the blank voice

What is within ourselves (a very moving life) uses the body and expresses itself through a blank voice. What is at play within ourselves is eating away at us or worries us, does not appear in the words and flattens the voice.

The blank voice is like speaking without properties, saying things without thinking out the way we say things, when what is uttered does not go through the "interpretation" phase.

The blank voice is the voice after, after an extreme emotion, when we no longer are (apparently) in the wording phase but connected with ourselves. It is serenity found again after a shock, the voice carried by a fright that has been appeased, an inner quietness after we have come within an ace of chaos. It is the contrast between a terrifying disruption and this apparent serenity. It is non-panic (panic could be chosen, but we choose blank voice instead).

When something within ourselves has the upper hand, gets in control, stalls and leads our way of expressing ourselves (on autopilot), the words that come out are the right ones and the voice is blank.

The blank voice is a form. It is precisely the form I am working on (my pieces are stores of blank voices). The blank voice can be recorded, stopped, taken back up, and hollowed out by silences.

The blank voice is uneven, it is neither monotonous nor atonal, it does not exclude the song, the laughter, the depth of the sentence, of expression. Once heard, it potentially makes everything tragical or strange, in any case, uneasy, because it is undefined and shaky.

lexicon

Because the sound is always a flow (a time that lasts), what I aim at doing in the first place is to interrupt this flow, to stop this time. The silences are temporary stops, breaks. Those silences, before and after each sound, sever a continuity into autonomous fragments (like a sliced sausage).

To elaborate a lexicon as the first stage of writing.

dotted lines

To interrupt the sounds, to break up a recording, as we tear out blades of parsley, to scatter it all so we free the flavour out of it.

off camera

Without any images, all the sounds can be considered as off camera and all the voices off as well.

The notion of off camera can also refer, inside a sound piece itself, to all that cannot be perceived. The silences in the first place.

silence

Silence is the place I give to the listener. It is a space in which I do not intervene, a blank. Each sound piece is structured by the silences, by what is not a "sound", and it is being built up around this void.

solo

Nothing can ever be alone, things cohabit with the notion of their not being there.

loss

The feeling of loss, as applied to each protagonist. These are my subtractions.

Through a cut editing (clear-cutting) which interrupts the speech (the sentence hanging over the void, on the very edge of the cliff) and the silence that it entails. Through the voice recording device (outlined figures floating with no background, with no scenery) and their diffusion (the non-visibility of the bodies).

The listener will feel this all the more as he will have cherished and followed those whom he can no longer hear (to give in order to take back).

change

The listener must feel this sudden loss very strongly. This precise moment of change when he says to himself, first hung on what is familiar and then suddenly disrupted: "I am lost".

But this feeling within himself must not last whatsoever. He could get out of his depth, get out of his listening, get bogged down and get bored. What is important is to try to trigger this change in him, whenever he is listening, and to make him stay continuously on this threshold, on the edge.

sequence

While editing, the new sequence of words (sentences and breathing). A temporality that imitates the present (something that is going on and to which we bear witness) and which is an illusory continuum.

embedding

Each new voice makes a new character appear and distances the narrative from another, containing it.

repetition

The haunting repetition of a motif.

After a certain time, disoriented, we cannot say, although we are under the impression that it keeps evolving, whether it is what we are listening to that modifies itself or whether it is our listening that moves and changes its own focal point.

rhythm

On the one hand, we have the music of the heart (a pulse) and on the other hand the music of the lungs (a breathing).

Most of my musical atmospheres, be they horizontal or linear, belong to the second category: breathing that rises and then falls. Clockwork music. The beatings with a regular spacing are used as pillars and represent time: scansion, stopwatch.

accompanying

To spend time with.

likenesses

Two ways to act with things that look alike.

To put them side to side: the closeness makes the genuine differences appear. Or to distance them away and assign them the same position in different ensembles.

differences

Similarity. In a first time, likenesses and common grounds are to be sought, the same language is to be used and a platform must be set up to begin the dialogue. What gathers.

Singularity. In a second time, differences are to be compared, to be made stand out, sent away without pronouncing in favour of either. What separates.

arbitrary

In order to choose the right duration of a silence (the gap between two fragments, sentences or sounds) while editing, I just need to test it: I listen to the passage, I do not compute anything, I let myself live, do not hold my breath, quite the contrary, I use it. The cycle of breathing in and out as a tool, as a measure.

By extension: the rhythms, the duration of the cycles, the suspensions, the repeats. The cutting table, and its running time meter, according to what my lungs dictate.

various temporalities

The story. The linear pieces, with a beginning and an end: it moves on, has a beginning (A) and a destination (B).

Then being stuck. The cyclic pieces, the ones that stumble, with the integrated notion of the loop, mimicking infinity. Entrance and exit of the listener, of his attention, without any incidence.

the presents

The present of a story, of an action, of what suddenly has been going on.

The present of what is going on an endless number of times, the present of habits.

Neutral, timeless present.

Recording present, live utterance.

volume

Mixing and editing go together: to find the place and the function of an element within a whole is determining at the same time its sound volume.

format still

To stand up to the short form. I have always wanted to do something long, but I cannot.

miniature

Any passage, even a very short one or apparently hollow one (like a moment of transition which could go unnoticed) gets upgraded to the rank of work when it is entitled. Its construction asserts itself, gets revealed to the listener who, taking it at face value, pays his full attention to it.

title

Any artistic discipline, except for visual arts, requires the author to entitle his work. There has never been a book, a film or a song being entitled: "Untitled".

My titles are often framings: I isolate a sentence which becomes a title. It is more difficult for me to find a title for a speechless piece (silent pieces, musical atmospheres).

documentary

The adjective, not the genre. The documentary genre has its own history, conventions to be respected (a minimum information to identify the people, the places, the events is required) and some duties (the author must take a stand) which are not mine.

The adjective "documentary" refers to the way things are captured: recording. Any capturing is a document.

on the edge

Space or time position which characterizes me. On the edge, right next door, at the periphery (between such and such thing, such and such field). About to, right before, on the fringe of everything.

fiction

Fiction when working, as a representing, memorizing and imagining activity. One that feeds on beginnings, ends and failures of the narrative and fills in the gaps.

All my pieces are potential fictions for the listener. They stop at the threshold of this mental activity, like dehydrated sponges (the ones that need tap water to get swollen back again). It is up to each listener to make them change and flourish into a fiction.

Unlike compressed sponges which all take on the same aspect once under water (the one the manufacturer has programmed through his operation), each fiction flourishes in a singular (specific to each listener, to each listening act) and plural (with no end and no key) way.

stories

My stories are not "images" for the listener which they would then exclude (in the same way an image excludes the one who sees it by keeping him at a distance). On the contrary, they trigger in him a feigned and thinking activity which integrates him. Each uttered word, each sound, are like a hand that would literally come and get the listener to get hold of him.

language

A stay abroad confirms me in my intuition that I cannot record anyone with whom I do not completely share the language. The musicality of the voices? Perhaps, but I need to know the precise meaning of the words so I can take off from them what I do not wish to keep when I edit.

First understanding is required in order to control the terms and mechanisms of the riddle to be, the ambivalences, the distant echoes found behind each word. A speech in a language I do not understand becomes music to my ears, and only for me. Not for some listeners who are familiar with this language.

translations

My pieces are in French. When they are shown in non-French speaking countries, I have translations and bilingual versions done.

My oral translations (by adding a voice that gets inserted into the gaps of the story, like a parrot which would get distanced from the French voice) are performed in reported speech ("she says that..., repeats that..., wonders if...") and become arbitrary, subjective, non-

final comments (one translation one day does not prevent other translations from being done other days).

The indirect style and present of each recorded translation (unlike my other recordings which aim at deleting any reference to the context) designate each translator as a commentator of the actions, not as a protagonist in the story. In a playhouse, those contributors would not be on stage but in the room amongst the audience.

The distances get reversed during the exhibition: on the spot, what is close and what is distant swap their statuses. The native visitors are closest to the translators and to the words pronounced in their language and far from the protagonists who speak French.

Both languages cohabit (someone who can speak one of the two listens to the second one with a musical ear). Bilingual people are privileged (from either sides of the border).

comment

To translate is not only to enable the words that are heard to be understood (*at least*), it also allows the comment upon the piece to be integrated into the very core of it, to add a layer, to carry off the meaning, to bounce back on disruption and the absence of what is not given (intaglio stories, unspecificity of some words). Translation as a first (on-the-spot) reading of the piece, the translators as first listeners.

subtitles

This dual presence of the languages, resulting from a new editing cut, establishes de facto a relationship between two terms. Some pieces, the ones which already have this kind of binary tension as a principle, cannot admit a third term when edited. Then I need to make a subtitled bilingual version on a video screen.

The reading of the translated words, synchronous with the words that are being heard, does not scramble what is taking shape orally and leaves the sound alone, as it is being performed on an altogether different level. Then the distance is spatial. The subtitles are shown on a small screen set in a nook or on the side, of which we become aware only in a second time and which can be either read or ignored. The musicality and grasping of the meaning of the words get gradually introduced through a progressive and plural approach.

transposition

What slowly proceeds through time during a concert type or radio broadcast kind of linear listening act (adjusted by myself through sound successions and sequences), now proceeds through space during the installations.

We go from a time approach to a space approach, from a horizontal composition (sounds appear the ones after the others) to a vertical composition (sounds cohabit in adjacent spaces). "After" becomes "next to": the listener himself creates the succession of events by keeping on moving and standing still, by making his way through the different parts.

aloof

As long as it is not listened to, as long as it is not being paid attention to, the work does not exist. The most difficult: group listening sessions. The most obvious: during some openings. The hubbub of the people who are not listening which partially, and even sometimes completely, muffles the sounds of the installation. Complete silence is required for the work to be finally revealed (if it was not meant for this particular situation). It stands there, next door, alone in its place, on hold.

For a group listening, I would rather have a concert kind of listening session than an installation which is meant for isolated listeners, cut from the people around them.

media

The various media (installations, listening sessions, radio, publishing) and the way they specifically, neighbouringly or antagonistically relate to the listener, the space, the duration.

My installations last several weeks. They are meant for one person at a time (maybe with someone else but still alone, in his reserve) who chooses when to enter and when to exit (the duration of his experience and that of the piece, by extension), free to move about or to stand still somewhere. The place is in broad daylight (that of the environment). The listening is scattered.

My public listening performances (concert type, sometimes called "sound diffusions") are one-day events. They are meant for an audience who have gathered for the occasion, at a specific time: it is the ritual of the performance (the show). The sessions have a beginning, an end, a programmed duration, the same for everyone. It is a frontal and stereo kind of listening (two loudspeakers in front of the sitting audience). They take place in the dark.

There is a periodicity in the radio broadcasts which makes them close to the ingratiating and haunting listening of an installation (to live with). What I like about the radio is the idea of a schedule, of a recurring programming, not a unique programme which would liken it more to a concert. The schedules of the day, of the week, of the month.

Like for the published items, the place where we listen to the radio is a home, the conditions depend upon everyone, are chosen by everyone and the same technical device is used to hear very different things.

Unlike a record, the listener does not choose what he is listening to on the radio. He can choose to switch off the set anytime, even though he knows he is going to miss something that he will not be able to hear again.

darkness

Unlike the installations, my public listening sessions take place in the dark. The listeners are side by side, each one isolated, amongst the others. Darkness establishes the isolation amongst the others. Isolation, modesty. Therefore, I need darkness since I must do with some imposed ritual to which I only react by default: the characters of my stories are absent (only the trace of their words can be heard), I cannot be seen as a musician or performer (I am concealed somewhere to control the technical aspects). As a consequence, there is no drama, no concert really. Darkness is some incidence disrupting the ritual and enables an individual act of listening, with no markers and no expectations with regard to something I do not propose.

Unlike some however, I do not need or feel like having pitch blackness. It is not about a complete, confining experience. The room appears gradually, the place is revealed and shakes itself (just the time for each eye to get used to it).

telepathy

During public listening sessions, the two communities face each other – the voices of the protagonists and the audience sitting – and breathe, cough, laugh and shake themselves. Their telepathic exchange, out of touch or responding each other, sometimes in unison. The momentary deafness of someone who makes some personal sound in the room (like when someone is sneezing or when our awareness goes away for a fragment of a second) and the doubt then, for the other listeners, as to the source of what they have just heard ("from the piece or somewhere in the room?"). The ongoing suspicion which questions the status of what is being heard. By extension, all that is perceived around the room (both closed and present to the world), what is outside and what is distant, what is

framed and revealed by the silences, what remotely dialogues with the underlayers that have been recorded and emitted indoors.

silent pieces

I call the pieces with voices but without a text my silent pieces. They are exhalations. One voice, in the foreground, which indicates the scale: human. Something, which is not language, can be heard from a body. The dotted presence of the voice (breathing, sighs, coughing and various noises) as a sign: someone is there, something is happening to him, but he does not speak. The breathing in at the onset of each sentence, when the mouth opens, can only be heard once they are isolated while edited and separated from the words. Because the words often have the main part and require our attention in the first place, their absence can reveal what our language hides away.

keeping quiet

In the world of my pieces, where all is word, when someone keeps quiet, it means that something abnormal is going on.

intaglio

I cannot make the whole world be heard, only what is moving in it, in action, animated, shaking or touched. Since I only make sound pieces, I cannot frontally tackle what is thought, memory, sleep, inertia, disappearance, absence, death. I can only tackle these notions indirectly, in the negative, through the recording. I reach here what I used to like about maths, reasoning ad absurdum: the demonstration that a thing is true only when we have demonstrated that its opposite cannot be true.

my writings

First, the transcription of the recordings. Listening the recorded words and the copy, in a notebook, of the lexicon (as close to the sounds as possible), like a paper memory, archived references for my editing.

Then the assembly outline, when the editing is taking place (a syntax that searches itself). The way, then, the writing goes forth and back to and from the sound (the use of a sentence subjected to the nature of its sound, to the speed and texture of the diction).

Later on, once the piece is over, the transcription of the words as they are being edited. Incomplete representation of the sound work (absence of all that is not a text: exhalations, vocal noises, correction of the elisions) for publishing and catalogues. The excerpts from the transcriptions get visual and become elements of communication. The sentences are addresses.

Finally, the notes, interviews, comments and texts surrounding the pieces. There, I do speak, the words are mine, I say « I ».