

Dominique Petitgand

Without seeming to, Dominique Petitgand capsizes what we (think we) know, and renews our relation to artworks. As a plastic artist, he uses sound and nothing else – and this is not the least of his paradoxes. With the words of others, he draws us into the unsaid and unspoken, into a world where silence tells of things over and above words, where images appear in the void.

After studying at the Nancy School of Architecture and Fine Arts, he created the essence of his work, the recording and editing of images and sounds. In those years, he produced photographs and videos. Subsequently, Dominique Petitgand retained just sound, in a method of subtraction which permeates all his research. From that moment on, sound became the stuff of his work.

To begin with he used a “recycled” or “retrieved” sound, then, in 1992, he decided to create his raw material himself – his vocabulary, otherwise put: voices, one or two, and always the same, a woman, a little girl, a young man... They are captured in the course of his own life experiences, which we know little about, and which never appear as such. These collected voices utter words. Recorded very close to, they are also breaths, sighs and traces. They are offered up, and they escape. They are white, blank voices. “What there is in us (overwhelming life) uses the body and expresses it through the white, blank voice. What is at play in us gnaws at us and disconcerts us, does not appear in words, and whitens the voice” (Dominique Petitgand, *Notes*, 2006).

He likewise captures other noises of life, those of a faraway television, and indoor noises. With these immaterial “materials” he produces compositions the way others mix notes on a staff. No improvising here: the assemblage of sounds creates works with endless tones, which are always special and unusual. Silences bring out the voices, the words brought together by the creative operation of the editing.

Then There Is is a sound installation which unfolds in an empty and unenclosed space. It consists of two voices, the voice of a little girl describing what she can see. A woman’s voice reintroduces the narrative, invariably with the same words. This sensation brings out the landscape, sometimes making it gush forth. Nothing about the situation of the characters is given: neither the place, nor the moment, nor the reason. But with the voices and silences a story is traced. You don’t look into a Dominique Petitgand work, but here you see: the wind, the elements, and the figures. In the time of the narrative, the narrative of the work, there is thus formed a work that is personal to each “listener” for, in the depths of the words, a story takes shape, about the meeting of what is given and what is imaginary.

...

DOMINIQUE PETITGAND

Laxou, 1965; lives in Paris

Il y a, ensuite/Then there is, 1994–2005

Sound installation for four loudspeakers, 1/3
(transcription, excerpt)

Inv. 2006.1060 / Purchased with the help of the FRAM Ile-de-France

Il y a, ensuite

début de la musique
soufflerie alternée /
scansion / frottements

1^{re} voix
il y a les drapeaux
qui flottent,

2^e voix
ensuite ?

1^{re} voix
il y a un bateau
qu’est sur la plage,

2^e voix
ensuite ?

1^{re} voix
il y a des gens qui
se séchent sur la digue,

2^e voix
ensuite ?

1^{re} voix
puis il y a une dame
qui fait sécher, sécher son
linge dehors,

2^e voix
ah ?

1^{re} voix
des habits par terre,
un peu déchirés,
il y a des algues,

2^e voix
ensuite ?

1^{re} voix
il y a une autre dame
en train d’acheter
des habits ou je ne sais pas
quoi,

2^e voix
ensuite ?

1^{re} voix
et puis c’est un magasin
avec, où ils vendent
des livres, des cassettes
vidéo,

2^e voix
ensuite ?

1^{re} voix
il y a une maison, il y a une
dame en train d’éplucher
des pommes de terre,

2^e voix
ah bon ?

1^{re} voix
il y a des, dans
la maison, il y a des cadres,

refrain

2^e voix
ensuite ?

1^{re} voix
il y a des spectateurs qui les
regardent,

2^e voix
ensuite ?

1^{re} voix
ah, le squelette,
il y a un squelette,
il y a...

2^e voix
comment ça ?

1^{re} voix
..des..

2^e voix
hein ?

1^{re} voix
il y a des fleurs,

2^e voix
ensuite ?

1^{re} voix
il y a des guitares,
il y a,

2^e voix
ensuite ?

1^{re} voix
il y a plein de,
il y a plein de gens,

2^e voix
ensuite ?

1^{re} voix
et puis il y a une
barque qu’est au-dessus
d’eux,

refrain

2^e voix
ah ?

1^{re} voix
puis il y a une petite, une
espèce d’île
qu’est sur la mer,

2^e voix
ah ?

1^{re} voix
puis, puis c’est tout,

2^e voix
attends, je ne me
rappelle plus après,

fin de la musique,
une traînée sourde
et grave, fondue dans
le silence

44 Dominique Petitgand

...

While *Then There Is* is a descriptive work, even if the motif is in the negative, *This hindrance* brings on the opposite. It is a work that is created in the negative, around the unspoken. A child's voice pierces the silence and says what it cannot do. We don't know the reason why, but this causes unease and shivers, beyond its nomination, by way of its uncertainty and its existence. The ellipse is here the very process and subject of the work; the unspoken and the silences are loaded with what the imaginary is pursuing. The story sidesteps words – however few. The voice moves us and the character takes shape.

Dominique Petitgand's work is a paradox *per se*. It involves all our senses although it only addresses our ear. It pushes us to imagine, embroider and create, although it is complete, controlled, and precise. In the time it takes to listen to it, the work is unfurled in space. The characters take shape, and pursue us, and the work is incarnate.

A.F.

Il y a, ensuite (Then there is)

music starts alternating blowing/scansion/something rubbing / (1st voice)/there are flags flying/ (2nd voice) then? / (1st voice) there's a boat on the beach/ (2nd voice) then? / (1st voice) there are people drying themselves on the dyke/ (2nd voice) then? / (1st voice) then there's a woman drying her laundry outside/ (2nd voice) ah? / (1st voice) clothes on the ground/a bit torn/there's some seaweed/ (2nd voice) then? / (1st voice) there's another woman buying some clothes or something or other/ (2nd voice) then? / (1st voice) and then it's a shop with/where they're selling books and video cassettes/ (2nd voice) then? / (1st voice) there's a house/ there's a woman peeling potatoes/ (2nd voice) oh really? / (1st voice) there are/in the house there are some frames/refrain**/ (2nd voice) then? / (1st voice) there are people looking at them/ (2nd voice) then? (1st voice) ah the skeleton/there's a skeleton/there'.../ (2nd voice) how come? / (1st voice) ... some... (2nd voice) what? / (1st voice) there are flowers/ (2nd voice) then? / (1st voice) there are guitars/there are/ (2nd voice) then? / (1st voice) there are lots of/there are lots of people/ (2nd voice) then? / (1st voice) and then there's a boat above them/**refrain**/ (2nd voice) oh? / (1st voice) then there's a little... a kind of island that is on the sea.../ (2nd voice) oh? / (1st voice) then/then that's all/ (2nd voice) wait, I can't remember anything afterwards/**end of music adull/solemn trail/merging into the silence****

Cet empêchement (This hindrance)

loop (tune on stairs)/(voice) we can't/yes/loop/(voice) we can't/we can't get out/loop/(voice) we can't/we can't go outside/loop/(voice) we can't have any people at home/because/we're lying down/we can't open the door/loop/(voice) we can't telephone/we can/loop/(voice) we can't do anything/right/loop

Translated from the French for this book by S. Pleasance & F. Woods

DOMINIQUE PETITGAND*Cet empêchement/This hindrance*, 2001-2006

Sound installation for three loudspeakers, 1/3 (transcription)

Inv. 2006.1061/Purchased with the help of the FRAM Ile-de-France

Cet empêchementboucle
(mélodie en escalier)voix
**on peut pas,
oui,**

boucle

voix
**on peut pas,
on peut pas sortir,**

boucle

voix
**on peut pas,
on peut pas aller dehors,**

boucle

voix
**on peut pas accueillir des gens chez soi,
parce que,
comme on est allongé,
on peut pas ouvrir la porte,**

boucle

voix
**on peut pas téléphoner,
on peut,**

boucle

voix
on peut rien faire, quoi

boucle