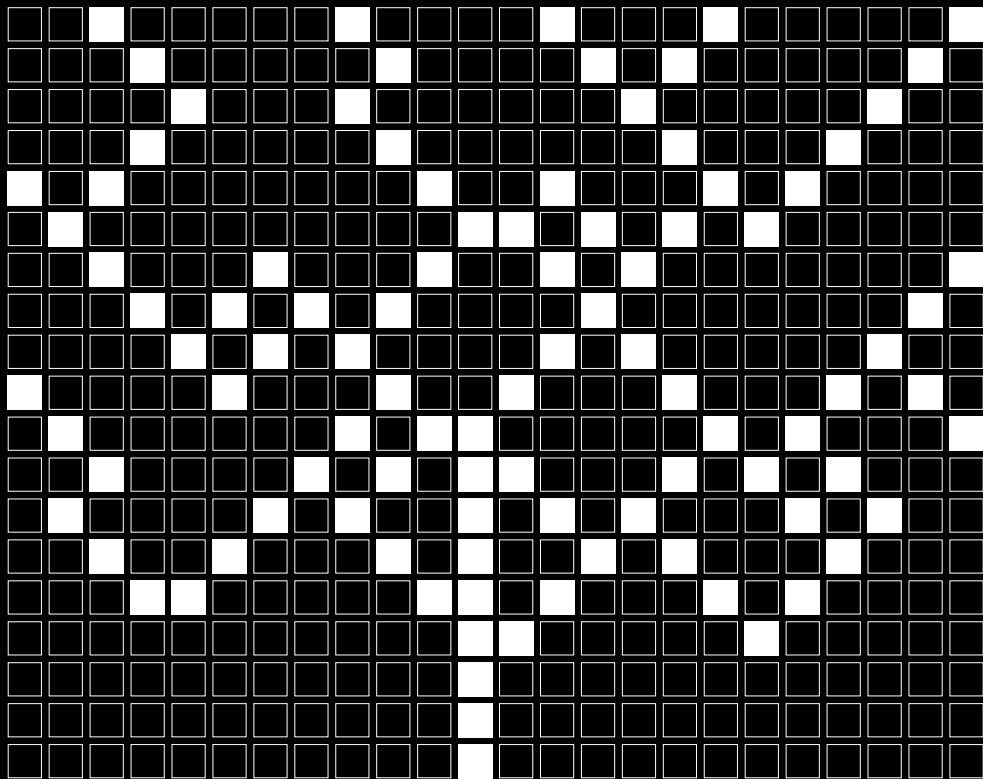
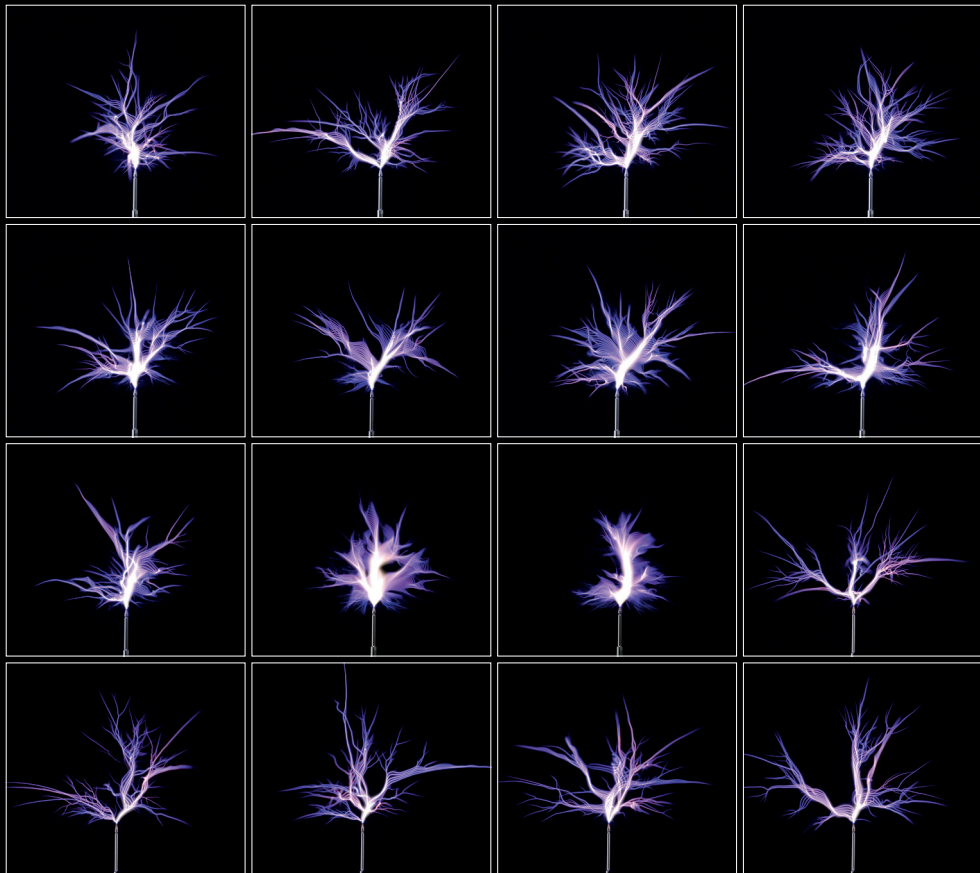


TESLA HERVÉ BIROLINI _ FRANÇOIS DONATO





After *Arrays Extension*, a performance created more than ten years ago as an organic reaction to the increasing hold exerted by digital systems over our lives, the enigmatic figure of Nikola Tesla inspired the stage piece *Tesla*. This piece crystallises a continuation, a reflection on an era pre-dating the computer. It allows us to go deeper into our research, into the heart of what makes systems work: energy.

All of humanity's actions, organisations, inventions, have always relied on the availability, circulation and sharing of energy. Antoine Lavoisier's famous saying; "nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed" perfectly illustrates this particular phenomenon. In different states, under different forms, energy is present everywhere. Through mechanical friction, it goes from embers to flaming branches, from plant to human body in order to feed it, from petrol to the internal combustion engine to create movement, from battery to screen to create an image. For us, via Nikola Tesla, electrical energy became both subject and material for the writing of the piece. To make this tangible, in the stage version, we landed on a scenography that suggests a range of possibilities. In this stage design, there are sixteen Tesla coils (organised in a matrix), sixteen omnidirectional speakers (placed under the coils), lit like sculptures, and a quadraphonic sound system surrounding the audience. But here, we invite you to move from the collective experience of a staged performance to the intimate hearing of it through a different medium. This is always a challenge. Starting from a version recorded live at *la Muse en Circuit* in Alfortville, we had to rework lengths, rethink continuity, recompose spaces, enrich certain passages and meticulously mix the recordings to find the right balance as performance became record.

In the end, we still have these three spaces (the coils, the omnidirectional speakers and the quadraphonic sound) along with the voice. They interact naturally, mutually organise themselves to progressively build a whole organic form, a protean listening field in which, on the live installation, the echo of our gestures sculpted the multiple states of electrical matter.

Commissioning Dominique Petitgand to write the text was the opportunity to request textual material from an artist in the habit of writing his own pieces using the sound and the meaning of words. François Donato then directed the recording session where Denis Rey gave these words a powerful human shape. This material, which had thus become the voice of Nikola Tesla, then transformed into poetic form: a form embodied by a man who expresses, thinks up, conceives and manipulates the devices he attempts to master.

Very early on Nikola Tesla had the idea to stage his discoveries and to make them into public demonstrations. But beyond the genius engineer, the visionary, the man can also be seen as an artist, an inventor, a creator who attempted to express his vision of the world through the controlling of a fundamental force of reality: electrical energy, without which everything stops, from motors to networks, from computers to artificial intelligence. Sound production, through electroacoustics, just like other modern human activities is no exception to the rule.

Electricity usually carries a wave, a message, a code. But then, does this raw material, viewed as a medium, allow, through its flexibility, to create sonic emotion? Can we sculpt energy itself? Can this energy be turned into poetry? What if we made you hear the raw material? This is what we will attempt to let you discover in the record version of the piece.



TESLA CREATION AT ARSENAL (METZ) — PHOTO © MADELEINE DECAUX

When Hervé Birolini approached me in 2015 and asked me to write a text inspired by Nikola Tesla, it was immediately clear to me that I wasn't going to write a libretto but a selection of materials, of textual attempts, without order or fixed arrangement. I knew that the order and arrangement would be the result of secondary procedures, editing procedures involving not myself but the two composers Hervé Birolini and François Donato after their rereading and re-composition of the text. I therefore felt free to go in every possible direction, without worrying about following a narrative framework or producing a coherent speech. I could go on a writing adventure, unbridled, unrestrained, without any prior plan or intention.

I started off with a glossary. A glossary that I had to define, to forge like an initial repertoire. Guided only by my ears, I gathered words from old texts, treatises, manuals about the invention and development of electricity. I picked words that appealed to my ears, that had a musical quality, disregarding their meanings and purposes, as if this lexicon was in a foreign language that I wasn't trying to understand or translate. And from these precious words that all bore an unknown quality, I started building sentences. In the end, the fragments chosen in 2019 by the two composers for their musical piece were extracted from an ensemble of five bundles of sentences, five texts for which I had to progressively establish some sort of rule, a logic in the delivery – what narrative voice or what person is pronouncing these words? – a logic in the structure, rhythm and speed, a colour to match the story or the abstraction.

The first of these textual bundles of materials is a little different because it was written prior to the commission: it derives from a personal project called

“Mes écoutes” (*My Listenings*), written between 2004 and 2019. The segments chosen by the two composers describe certain situations – of my day to day life or memories – in which electricity plays an aural, trivial role, either in the narrative or in the scenery. Electricity as a power causing trouble, an actor of domestic disturbance and involuntary poetry. It is while writing the second text – titled “Le pouvoir des pointes” (*The Peak Effect*) – that I really started playing with the words of this unknown glossary that I had compiled, as if unfolding a foreign language found in an imaginary twisted research notebook. A language of ventriloquy (I don't know where the words comes from, I don't know who speaks through me) and that is out of true (its technical nature asserts itself without grip, aim or control).

The third text, “La fréquence du secteur” (*Supply Frequency*) turned into a polyphony where the voices piled up in stages, gradually echoing one another.

The fourth text, “Monologue du laboratoire” (*Laboratory Monologue*), is a hallucinated soliloquy that takes place both in a laboratory and in the head of someone experimenting and inventing endlessly.

Lastly, the fifth text, “La tierce personne” (*The Third Party*) lays out the scattered and reinvented elements of a possible biography, a fragmented portrait.

Giving a title to these different parts enabled me to give each of these texts a status of its own, an autonomy beyond the first impulse of the commission and their dilution inside the musical piece, an independence that could potentially lead to further development.

1 _ PROLOGUE _ 2' 11"

2 _ LEXIQUE _ 3' 06"

electricity
power
energy
mechanism
remote action
imitation
hydrodynamics
attraction
electromagnetic movement
hertz
wave
repulsion
alternating magnetic field
line of force
entrainment of light
ponderable matter
atmosphere

3 _ METAPRAKTA _ 2' 32"

lightning

4 _ NOTE _ 4' 55"

I can't forget this vibration that chimes in my body

the current that circulates in the switchboard
the circuit breakers
the plugs
the cables
the lamps and the household appliances
produced at one point on the chain
where one of the elements stops functioning and one of the connexions
is bare
weakening the transport
a tremor in its activity that is heard from up close
and spreads into the air
electrifying the surrounding area

the background noise that carries the voice
the breath I feel in the silence between sentences
and that feeds off the piles of interference from the phone line
speaks to me of the distance
and gives shape to the vast space between us

5 - ALTERNANCE - 4' 35"

in the head
as in the dream
denuclearized
in wriggling circulation
I drag and convey the passing of time
I scatter
weightless
I supervise contacts
and free myself from fields of influence

cooped up in my laboratory
gripped by the voltage
ageless
unsure
the future
under my nerves
within earshot

I instruct, throw and gush lightnings
an arc
two arcs
and another
I add
I mix
what comes smashes frequencies
from the North tip to the South tip
bounces back in reciprocity
paralyses its surroundings
and summons something immeasurable in the distance

twenty-four
three hundred and seventy-eight
I audition the great faraway
the extreme
the extreme frame
in boundless
leaden fallout
I scatter the raw tension
into satellites
shimmering
into shattered rain
into broken constancy
radiant
night and day
night and day
I transfer
I visualise

I see the lightning
the lighting
the flattened rhythm of hindered connexions
I drink in the wound of material dispute
competitive
I edit defiance
to the line of soft disjunction
I polarize
inhale the signal
blink
open an eye
close it again
open

seven thousand five hundred and thirteen

in the heart of an inverted pyramid
sleepy angles
I wander
I listen to the horizontal panic
overwhelmed
forever free
forever cyclical
forever free
forever cyclical
the new figure
the new sign
of a toggling cylinder
and the skin crumbles
crushes the end of the vocal tissue
not rash
an echo to the curvaceous springs
the bursting into whispers

shielded from the workbench
the voice alone
mental traveller
if not the required exhalation
that sneaks in as a complex mass
as a rising snow

without making a sound a swirl a trap
without ridge
or dome

without making a sound a swirl a trap
I can feel the fence losing
abdicated
I prick up my ears
hear the system dissolving
I see the frightened chord accepting the vacuum
dull
stoneless
I rejoice under the sky
synchronous
manifold

resonating
in my skull
reality, digit and voice

6 _ LEXIQUE 2 _ 4' 46"

Earth's magnetic field
lightning conductor
steam
battery
osmotic balance
elasticity
pyromagnetic machine
permeability
recalcrescence
transformer
alternating current
electrolytical
electrometallurgical

cell
switch
motive power
drill
triple extension
condensation
generator
dynamo
divided excitation
reversal
busbar
canalization
interlocking
blade
fuse
keylock switch
ammeter
flow
voltmeter
incandescent light
tower
battery
shunt
multitubular regulator
cylinder pressure
alternator
turbo
trigger
generating force
turbo
trigger
expansion valve

7 _ LA FREQUENCE DU SECTEUR _ 5' 11"

Partly movable
disorganised
supply frequency
burned-out plastic
twisted
crushed
I challenge the dialled number
whole
smutty
polished
worn down
broken
defeated
yet again rid of its tangible functions
clipped and then enlarged
I declare the damage
not pacified either nor ever silent
strong
flat
neutral
bland
fluid

overripe
raw
dry
dotted with dark flashes
blotted out of all proportion
sanded up
cosseted
the impoverished snow
frequently assailed
yet soft
shunted
scattered
enrolled nervousness
acknowledged under the strain but never caught out
I listen
I note
I make a carpet out of it
a disciplinary pattern
a griped cable
unwoven
tears on the side
with oppressive ribs
set off by a speed trap
stunned
contentious
I follow the sequence
a carrier apart
each Grain
point
trait
an aggravating factor
line
curve
wave
sphere
tank
hollow
thrown to the wall
in the rebound shop
I welcome the consequence
increased hairiness
deserted supply area
unfrequented
I fray the loose change
meagre
scarce

its temperamental engine
moving off arbitrarily
the whole apartment under its thumb
and the violence in the micro-tetany of the surrounding humming
vibration
establishing itself as metronome
the waves that bounce off the walls
and are propagated in the other rooms
slyly invading the space
the abrupt stops that bang on the floor
and suddenly lower the domestic power
the little wheel goes wild inside the electric meter

the worry about a future bill takes
on the ultra-high-pitched tone of a mini circular saw
that spreads beyond the hall

8 — LE POUVOIR DES POINTES — 3' 35 SECS

electricity looms
power smiles at us
when energy comes crawling slowly
the mechanism gives in to the highest bidder
the action stands out from a distance
but the convection?
imitation doesn't look like my mother
attraction runs away
and movement learns the game
the wave reflects
the repulsion gets ready
the magnetic field is unfazed
motive power again?
the phenomenon tires
then the circuit corrects
the blade wonders after all
if the steady state current might not be able to
dot the output
the direction of flux settles in
the static charging does the same
when the solar light excuses itself
the atmosphere answers
and the electrode moves on
of the drum type
or the disc type
it is the altitude of the coiling clouds
it is the secular variation
if Earth's magnetic field strides along towards a decision
lightning accepts itself
and the conductor plummets
if the accumulator runs out
the ebonite goes off-colour
or the more turbulent turbine
parodies the zigzag
commutator aside
is it the triple extension?
plead divided excitation
or the busbar
it is not the angular velocity
it is not the cylinder pressure
but the keylock switch
be it the drill
or the transformer
they present in front of them
a possible inversion
condensed

9 — BALANCEMENT — 2' 40"

the wounded direct current
alternating
half disruptive
consider shutting up
then shuts off

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