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► **To cite this version:**

Florence Lethurgez. What is communicating for an electroacoustic music composer?. Electroacoustic Music: Is it still a form of Experimental Music?, Electroacoustic music network, 2018, Florence, Italy. hal-03940932

HAL Id: hal-03940932

<https://hal.science/hal-03940932>

Submitted on 16 Jan 2023

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What is communicating for an electroacoustic music composer?

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Introduction :

My work is a part of a broader research program on the development of discursive forms of contemporary music mediation, as well as the critical text and its reception effects¹. I have decided, to continue this research on the case of composers of electroacoustic music, by addressing the question of the still experimental nature or not of this kind of music, to base my study, on the verbatims of a renewed sample of composers, on broader issues of communication.

What about the representation of communication and the resulting practices by composers of electroacoustic music?

Thus, the reflexive return about a certain practice of his speech is an opportunity for the composer to re-evaluate or establish the links between his compositional thought, the questions of the meanings of music and the forms of communication with the listener that flow from it, the process by which it establishes a relationship with him, as well as the meaning and the place that communication takes in his profession of composer.

I am particularly interested in program notes. Indeed, it is a forgotten, transparent research element. At the same time, its existence and use carry tensions and contradictions.

For example, how can a message designed to guide and open listening also be misleading or distracting? About them, the composer is never neutral. I therefore make the hypothesis that the program notes are a topic of research at the intersection of musicology and social sciences. I also chose to study the program notes from the composer's point of view.

My research topic is not directly related to the link between the sound and its textual presentation in the program notes, but on what the composers may think of these texts and the way they write them. What interests me, more deeply, is to understand the meaning that composers give to this practice, and, more broadly, to their communication practices with the public. How to learn, reciprocally, from music, here electroacoustic, and communication, in the context of our contemporary societies?

I will present here excerpts of interviews, ordered according to the nuanced concerns of the composers, as regards their communication with the public.

What are their representations and practices of program notes?

Is this a new space of expression for the composer, in which he records, in order to transmit it to the public, what presided over the composition of his piece?

Beyond that, what does it mean for composers to communicate about their works? What universe of meaning do they build around communication?

The most recurring concerns and judgments allow us to distinguish, mainly, two types.

¹ We have presented two stages of our work on this issue of the communicative regime of electroacoustic music at the EMS14 in Berlin (« Read music at the concert : program notes of electroacoustic music composers », *Electroacoustic Music Beyond Concert Performance*, [on ligne] http://www.ems-network.org/IMG/pdf_EMS14_lethurgez.pdf) and the EMS15 in Sheffield (« Word on word : Interviews with electroacoustic music composers on the written presentation of their Works », *The Art of Electroacoustic Music*, [on ligne] http://www.ems-network.org/IMG/pdf_EMS15_Lethurgez.pdf).

The composers interviewed are as follows : François Bayle, Pascale Criton, Beatriz Ferreyra, Graciane Finzi, Christine Groult, François-Bernard Mâche, François Paris, Elzbieta Sikora, Jean-Claude Risset, Gilles Racot, Daniel Terrugi, Nicolas Vérin.

All of them are French or live and work in France. Interview excerpts are anonymized, as this must be done in social sciences. I interviewed them between 2013 and 2016. The interviews, called "thorough", lasted from one hour for the shortest to three hours for the longest. They took place in Paris, most often at the composer's home.

The internal composition of the corpus obeys a strict gender parity. This distribution is still present in the two subgroups that the analysis allowed us to build. At this stage of the analysis, it can be said that gender does not intervene in communication problems, or less than other factors. The concern for communication, linked closely or foreign to the concern for musical composition itself, does not seem to depend on the genre.

The corpus is made up of several generations of composers. It is distributed as follows: four composers born in the thirties, three in the forties, five in the fifties. The corpus is concentrated around the generations that knew the origin, then the generalization, finally, the current evolution of the notes of program, in relation with the evolution of the electroacoustic music. These twelve composers all have in common to write electroacoustic music, but at a different level of engagement, or sometimes, at a different time in their career². They are also divided into two groups, depending on the importance they attach to communication, either as a core activity or annex to the composition itself, as an organic element or, conversely, artificial.

1. The « organic » type

The program note : a social communication practice

Composers of the "organic" type have a built-in thinking about program notes. They give it a social and communicational dimension, and find the subject of research particularly interesting. They develop a reflexivity on the social meaning of their practice, which they place in his context. The subject is placed in a critical perspective, dealing with the situation of the composer today.

A : masculine gender, born in 1958 :

The composer is also tempted to guide, in a good way, listening to the listener ... It is commendable, and perhaps even necessary, as most of the works of today will be heard only once, by a determined public. And we must not miss this moment, otherwise the work is done.

Il y a aussi une tentation du compositeur de guider dans le bon sens l'écoute de l'auditeur... Elle est d'autant louable, et peut-être même nécessaire, que la plupart des œuvres aujourd'hui vont être entendues une seule fois par un public déterminé. Et donc il faut faire mouche du premier coup, sinon l'œuvre est foutue.

A template for writing program notes

² The commitment to electroacoustic music is a plural phenomenon. In order to evaluate it, several indicators must be taken into account (training, works, teaching, institutional insertion, etc.). They have to be collected in the biography, the program notes, and in several kinds of documents or interviews. That is why they are also asked about their career in this survey.

From this conception of their practice, built over time, "organic" composers have an elaborate template for writing program notes. They mobilize a set of criteria, the relevance of which they explain. The reasons for writing these texts, their functions, are classified and prioritized. They do not proceed to an inventory of the possible cases, but to a typological analysis. They thus demonstrate reflexivity about this phenomenon, which they constantly placed in its widest context. The historical or institutional collective contexts are, for them, the most decisive explanatory criteria. They evoke "schools" of program notes. For example, Ircam's program notes are not those of the GRM.

B : female gender, born in 1954 :

There was this school, around the CIRM and Jean-Etienne Marie, or in a way, there was a program note template. There was a kind of circle in relation to the program note, in which one could take the time to say the things.

Il y a eu cette école, autour du CIRM, ou d'une certaine manière, il y a eu une forme de notice. On peut dire qu'il y avait une espèce de cercle qui avait un certain rapport à la notice, dans laquelle on pouvait prendre le temps de dire des choses.

A unified conception of writing

"Organic" composers define a singular and constant way of writing their program notes. This corresponds to the close links they establish between composition and communication. Over time and reflection, a writing model has stabilized, which does not depend primarily on the musical works, but on their reception, located in a communication circuit. They describe the characteristics of an ad hoc speech registry, that they mobilize consciously. They constantly question their writing principles. They wonder what are the relevant questions to ask yourself when writing a program note.

C : masculine gender, born in 1952 :

Since some time, I have a way of proceeding (silence). Often, I try to explain the title, why I chose this title, and what is the relationship between this title, the project and the musical work. These are program notes that explain a little general context of the idea, the reason for the title, and then it stops there.

Depuis quelque temps, j'ai une façon (silence). Souvent j'essaie d'expliquer le titre, pourquoi j'ai choisi ce titre, et quelle est la relation entre ce titre, le projet et l'œuvre. C'est des notices qui expliquent un peu généralement le contexte de l'idée, la raison du titre, et puis ça s'arrête là.

A : masculine gender, born in 1958 :

I try not to use too much specialized vocabulary, and not to dwell too much on the composer's point of view, the form, the technique, but rather to give some leads ... that people to be a little on the lookout for that, and that should help them to follow what is happening, and to have a listening conduct.

J'essaie de pas utiliser un vocabulaire trop spécialisé et j'essaie de pas trop m'appesantir sur le point de vue du compositeur, de la forme, de la technique, mais plutôt de donner des pistes... que les gens soient un peu à l'affût de ça, et ça devrait les aider à suivre, ce qui se passe, et à avoir une conduite de l'écoute.

The reference of the discourse is less an isolated musical work, than the music to which the composer is deeply committed. This is the main reason why it is the composers themselves

who write their program notes. At the same time, they believe that the composer is poorly placed to promote himself.

A : masculine gender, born in 1958 :

Baudelaire talks about it, he says that the creator is the least well placed to talk about his work ... the idea is that a creator works in a very focussed way on his questions. When he creates. When he produces, there are things that pass through without him realizing it. Then, there are things he works a lot more, which generally corresponds to difficulties he is not aware of.

Baudelaire en parle, il dit que le créateur est le moins bien placé pour parler de son œuvre... l'idée, c'est qu'un créateur, travaille de manière très focalisée, sur ses questionnements. Quand il produit, il y a des choses qui passent à travers, sans qu'il s'en rende compte. Puis il y a des choses qu'il travaille beaucoup plus, qui en général correspondent à des difficultés dont il n'est pas conscient.

Writing as composer or composing the writing

For "organic" composers, the writing of the program note is concretely linked to the composition of the musical work. They describe the interconnection between the two practices from a reflection on the creative function of the written medium. Communication is closely linked to creation. Indeed, the dynamics of writing is interlaced with that of the composition.

B : female gender, born in 1954 :

It is made of things that are written over time and composition of the work. They are not ripped off like that, at the last moment. They come from further away, from the accompaniment of the composition.

C'est fait de choses qui s'écrivent au fil du temps et de l'écriture de l'œuvre. Ils ne sont pas arrachés comme ça, au dernier moment. Ils viennent de plus loin, de l'accompagnement de la composition.

The communicational concern is sometimes integrated into the composition itself.

A : masculine gender, born in 1958 :

I think that today, there is a need in works, to contain their "instructions for use". The beginning of a work must clearly identify what it is, and how to listen to it.

Je pense qu'il y a nécessité aujourd'hui dans les œuvres de contenir leur « mode d'emploi ». Le début d'une œuvre doit permettre d'identifier clairement de quoi il s'agit et comment l'écouter.

The written rather than the oral

Both groups make a distinction between the respective contributions of the written or oral communication. The organic group prefers the written medium because it respects the autonomy of the public.

A : masculine gender, born in 1958 :

Oral, didactic side, may have a bit heavy side, while program notes have the advantage that you read them only if you want, and when you want...

L'oral, côté didactique, ça peut avoir un côté un peu pesant, alors que les notes de programme ont l'avantage qu'on les lit seulement si on veut, et puis au moment où on veut...

The program note : a communication tool

We have already mentioned the distinctions composers mobilize between information and communication, content and relation, fund and form, presentation and mediation. "Organic" composers tend to consider these notions as a couple that is attracted and repulsed at the same time. The relationship partly conditions the content. It is a relevant dimension, that the composer must work. These composers have a precise idea of the act of communication that they want to achieve. This is to balance these two dimensions : content and relationship. They are clearly aware of communication modalities involved in this exercise.

B : female gender, born in 1954 :

It's extremely narrow. One can not talk. One have to slip his word.

C'est extrêmement étroit, on ne peut pas parler. Il faut glisser sa parole.

Writing well and composing well

"Organic" composers show a concern to write their program notes well.

E : female gender, born in 1950 :

It's a real moment of writing, it's very short and complex, dense ... I'm very sensitive to writing, to beautiful writing, to beautiful formulations between the idea and the way of saying it.

C'est un vrai moment d'écriture, c'est très court et complexe, dense... je suis très sensible à l'écriture, à la belle écriture, aux belles formulations entre l'idée et la façon de la dire.

Reserves are issued by both types of composers, when the "writted well" is not followed by the "composed well". The first group is just sorry for that.

F : masculine gender, born in 1951 :

There are program notes that are very flattering, very promising. One reads a notice, one says: it will be superb and then, the work, there is nothing ... nothing is happening musically. It is appalling.

Il y a des notices qui sont très flatteuses, très prometteuses. On lit une notice, on dit : ça va être superbe et puis, l'œuvre, il n'y a rien... il ne se passe rien musicalement. C'est consternant.

A writing temporality during and after the composition

The temporality of writing program notes is evoked by all the composers interviewed. For "organic" composers, the program note is never written before, because, as we mentioned, this is part of the composition process. A presentation text of a musical project to a grant committee is described as the exact opposite of the program note. The composers of this group are therefore very aware of the pragmatic dimension of the different texts they must produce to accompany their works.

F : masculine gender, born in 1951 :

I reuse the text of the project, in the record, because I kept some things ... but there are big differences. Especially when it's formal: the composition transforms the project itself.

Je reviens sur le texte de projet, dans la notice, parce que j'en ai gardé des choses... mais il y a de grosses différences. Surtout quand c'est formel : la composition transforme le projet lui-même.

A program note can be rewritten

"Organic" composers consider the possibility of rewriting a program note according to the changes, whether personal or contextual. The musical work evolves in a changing environment, who resort to changing conceptions and means of communication. The work, even completed, is an open object. The musical work, even completed, is an open object. His blurb is not a definitive archive.

F : masculine gender, born in 1951 :

The musical work is taken in its listening context, the note of program must follow it, and thus evolve.

L'œuvre est prise dans son contexte d'écoute, la notice doit suivre, et donc évoluer.

C : masculine gender, born in 1952 :

I rewrote them as the works were replayed, and when I was asked for a program note. So, I destroyed the old one. I do not keep a philological trace.

Je les ai réécrites au fur et à mesure que les œuvres ont été rejouées, et où on m'a demandé une notice. Alors, j'ai détruit l'ancienne. Je ne garde pas de trace philologique.

An attachment to "openness" manifests itself through this posture³. Communication is considered as social adjustment tool.

A unified and general conception of communication

For "organic" composers, the program note is a partial element of a larger communication circuit. They have a general representation of its operating modes. They define and articulate their main constituents and analyze the logic that governs it.

A : masculine gender, born in 1958 :

With the multiple evolution of music, from the early to mid-20th century, where we are no longer confronted with single and clearly identified language, where we can assume that we share a lot of acquired with the listener, and fundamentals... Codes are no longer common. There are some, but they are much smaller, and the work must be self-explanatory. And as in addition to this, there is more criticism...

Avec l'évolution multiple de la musique, à partir du début-milieu du 20^e siècle, où on n'est plus confronté à un langage unique et clairement identifié, où on peut supposer qu'on partage avec l'auditeur énormément d'acquis, de fondamentaux... Les codes ne

³ It seems to be articulated finely with an attachment to the "indeterminate". But we did not directly address this association in the interviews.

sont plus du tout communs. Il y en a, mais ils sont beaucoup plus réduits, et l'œuvre doit s'auto-expliciter. Et comme il n'y a plus de critique, en plus...

They refer to this general communication circuit to give meaning and coherence to their writing practice program notes, as we have seen above.

C : masculine gender, born in 1952 :

Where the title becomes important, beyond the point of view of the composer, it is for the public. It is for him a way to identify, it is a gateway to the musical work. This is where I will orient myself, in relation to the program note. It is a beginning of meaning, a musical precondition, a context of reception, which the reader, the listener in this case, will have in relation to the work. He will resonate with this text, or not!

Là où le titre devient important, au-delà du point de vue du compositeur, c'est pour le public. C'est pour lui une manière d'identifier, c'est une porte d'entrée dans l'œuvre. C'est là où je vais m'orienter par rapport à la notice. C'est un début de sens, un préalable musical, un contexte de réception, que le lecteur, que l'auditeur dans ce cas, va avoir par rapport à l'œuvre. Il va entrer en résonance avec cet écrit, ou pas !

Thus, communication is, for them, included in the repository of skills and composer tasks. These composers redefine, during the interview, the perimeter of the object under investigation, just as the researcher usually has to do. Thus, according to them, dedications and biographies are also to be paid to the corpus ; they experience the same contextual effects.

C : masculine gender, born in 1952 :

There is a lot to say about biographies, especially about how composers will change their biography throughout their career. We put a lot of things at the beginning, and less and less at the end (laughs). Then, there is another element that you must have seen, which can be used with great ambiguity, it is the dedicatee.

Il y aurait beaucoup à dire des bios, surtout de la manière dont les compositeurs vont modifier leurs bios, tout au long de leur carrière. On met plein de choses au début, et de moins en moins à la fin (rires). Après, il y a un autre élément que vous devez avoir vu, qui peut être utilisé avec beaucoup d'ambiguïté, c'est le dédicataire.

A porous professional identity

The identity boundaries are considered porous by composers of the "organic" type, even if it is not without asking questions. The composer must, for example, exert mediation tasks.

A : masculine gender, born in 1958 :

To bring the audience to the concert halls, you have to do things around, you have to involve them in actions where they are also actors, not just spectators ... And so, we will do workshops, and the show will be an illustration of what they did. There may even be a participation somewhere, in the show, it's even better.

Pour amener le public dans les salles, il faut faire des choses autour, il faut les impliquer, dans des actions où ils sont également acteurs, pas seulement spectateurs... Et donc on va faire des ateliers, et le spectacle sera une illustration de ce qu'ils ont fait, il pourra même y avoir une participation quelque part, dans le spectacle, c'est encore mieux.

Composers perform many functions and related tasks: creators, teachers, researchers, concert organizers, mediators, sometimes directors of institutions, critics, communicators, agents, etc. But it is the link they establish between these different functions, which differentiates the two groups.

A : masculine gender, born in 1958 :

I totally agree with that. the trouble is that it mobilizes considerable resources, not only financially, but also in number of people, and time. I can't be everywhere either, because we are asked to be much more present on all aspects of our projects, for example, with our multimedia opera.

Je souscris tout à fait à ça. L'ennui, c'est que ça mobilise des moyens assez considérables, pas seulement financièrement, mais en nombre de personnes, mais en temps. Je ne peux pas non plus être partout, comme on nous demande d'être aussi beaucoup plus présents sur les aspects de nos projets, par exemple, d'opéra multimédia.

Being with the public

For "organic" composers, public is an essential pole of their practice. We evoked the hierarchy of functions they give to program notes. The first is, for them, the preparation, then consolidation, of listening. They establish more often the link between composer and listener than the composers of the other group, which privilege, for their part, the articulation compositor-work.

F : masculine gender, born in 1951 :

Prepare the audience to listen, on a formal level. For example, specify the typologies of the sound effects, if it is characteristic for the piece, the type of articulation. I can talk a little about it, orient the audience on a "reduced" listening, a morphological listening of the sound...

Préparer l'auditeur à l'écoute, sur le plan formel. Par exemple, préciser quelles sont les typologies des effets sonores, si c'est caractéristique pour la pièce, le type d'articulation. Je peux en parler un peu, orienter l'auditeur sur une écoute « réduite », une écoute morphologique du son...

These texts must be written from the very act of listening, so from the point of view of the listeners. Listening is considered an act in its own right by these composers. The empirical practices of the public are object of attention ; the logistic conditions of reading the program notes, object of concern. Composers take into account, in the management of the concert hall, times devoted to read program notes.

E : female gender, born in 1950 :

In Pantin, I organize a lot of concerts. I turn on the light between each work, so people can read. I put myself in the place of people and say : it's not worth making a program, if one can't read it.

A Pantin, j'organise pas mal de concerts. J'allume la lumière entre chaque pièce pour que les gens puissent lire. Je me mets à la place des gens, et je me dis : ce n'est pas la peine de faire un programme si on ne peut pas le lire.

At the level of communication with the public, among "organic" composers, the aesthetic dimension of the activity is coupled with an ethical dimension. It is little present, at this level, among other composers.

F : masculine gender, born in 1951 :

Already, the listening is important. It is the finality, in any case, of the composition. The listening preparation it is the program note, it is verbal introductions... On the human level, it is good that this communication is done...

Déjà l'écoute c'est important, c'est la finalité, quand même, de la composition. Les préparatifs de l'écoute, c'est la notice, ce sont les introductions verbales. ... sur le plan humain, c'est bien qu'il y ait cette communication qui se fasse...

A : masculine gender, born in 1958 :

I've always hated abscond texts, where finally, I felt that it was “smoke and mirror”, or, if not, contempt for the reader.

J'ai toujours détesté les textes abscons, ou finalement, j'avais l'impression qu'il y avait un peu d'esbroufe là-dedans, où, si ce n'était pas de l'esbroufe, du mépris, vis-à-vis du lecteur.

That is why this binding practice is accepted and considered legitimate.

An open reading chronology

The timeline of writing program note compared to that of composition is a sensitive subject for all composers. However, the timeline of reading program note, compared to that of listening, does not concern organic composers.

C : masculine gender, born in 1952 :

What seems interesting to me is that program note does not act in a certain order. I do not have to read the note to listen the work. I can listen to the work without reading the note. I can read the note after. I can read the note during. And if the note then found, online or on a CD, it will allow another type of appropriation, at a later time, in other listening circumstances, which are not those originally conceived for that particular moment, the moment of the concert.

Ce qui me paraît intéressant, c'est que la notice, elle n'agit pas dans un certain ordre. Il ne faut pas que je lise la notice pour entendre l'œuvre. Je peux écouter l'œuvre sans lire la notice. Je peux lire la notice après. Je peux lire la notice pendant. Et si la notice ensuite se retrouve, en ligne ou sur un CD, elle permettra un autre type d'appropriation, à un moment ultérieur, dans d'autres circonstances d'écoute, qui ne sont pas celles conçues initialement pour ce moment précis, le moment du concert.

The communication function of the title

Composers in the first group consider the title as a particularly important element of the composition and communication process. The title rather than the program note, to which it is closely associated, is considered the most specific text with respect to the musical work⁴.

C : masculine gender, born in 1952 :

The first thing that comes to mind, upstream of the note, is the need to name things. The works have names. And the corollary of this name is this multifaceted object, called the program note.

⁴ See Françoise Escal, « Le titre de l'œuvre musicale », *Paratextes*, Poétique 69, Seuil, 1987, p. 101-118. The title acquires, with contemporary music, an increasing importance.

La première chose qui me vient à l'esprit, et qui est en amont de la notice, c'est le besoin de nommer les choses. Les œuvres ont des noms. Et le corollaire de ce nom, c'est cet objet multiforme, qu'on appelle la notice.

In this, finding a title is also, if not more difficult, than writing a note.

E : female gender, born in 1950 :

Title is worked throughout the composition, then suddenly, it happens, it arises (laughs).
Le titre se travaille pendant toute la composition, et puis tout d'un coup, il arrive, il se pose (rires).

It refers to the key idea that inspired the act of composition. It can be mimetic, like the sound print of the work. It is therefore oriented towards the listener. Reading is here in continuity with listening.

F : masculine gender, born in 1951 :

The title is a longer work than the note. I like that it concretizes, it synthesizes both the form and the sound. So the title must have something that is close to the sound, the roughness of the work, its fluidity ...

So the title itself already has this sound dimension, the sound print, which will remain especially after listening?

It is totally true. With the title, already, I have a part of the note. The title is a small reduced synthesis; explaining the title, I explain the work.

Le titre, c'est un travail de plus longue haleine que la notice. J'aime que ça concrétise, que ça synthétise, à la fois la forme et la sonorité. Donc le nom doit avoir quelque chose qui se rapproche de la sonorité, de la rugosité de l'œuvre, de sa fluidité...

Donc le titre lui-même a déjà cette dimension sonore, de l'empreinte sonore, qui restera notamment après l'écoute ?

C'est tout à fait ça. Avec le titre, déjà, j'ai une partie de la notice. Le titre est un peu une synthèse réduite ; en expliquant le titre, j'explique l'œuvre.

This gives a precise function to the note, responsible for explaining the title, concerning the listening process.

Program notes specific to electroacoustic music

One of the hypotheses on which our work is based is that electroacoustic music appeals to a specific discourse in the composer, because traditional mediations have disappeared (instrument, interpreter, notation ...). The composer defines his music and defines himself differently. In this he communicates differently. Following a reflection and a practice built and unified, mixing composition and communication, organic composers emphasize the singularity and specificity of electroacoustic music program notes. This position depends more on their commitment to communication than electroacoustic music. The composers strongly involved in this music are also present in the second group. The "organic" composers give very precise reasons, which concern both music and listening. For example, they evoke the main foundational oppositions between electroacoustic music and traditional acoustic music.

C : masculine gender, born in 1952 :

I think that the works and the electroacoustic music have a particular type of program note, which is closely related with the technical nature of what is being done, and the sound nature of the music.

Je pense que les œuvres et la musique électroacoustique ont un type de notice particulier, qui a une forte relation avec la nature technique de ce qui est en train de se faire, et de la nature sonore de la musique.

Electroacoustic program notes record specifically the effects of the absence of partition. But, it can not be analytical substitute. The organic composers are less "graphocentric" (attached to the written traces) than those of the second group⁵.

For the first group of composers, working directly on the sound, implies using a very specific vocabulary.

F : masculine gender, born in 1951 :

The "paces" is a terminology a little GRM... There is no dictionary, but it refers to the *Treaty of Musical Objects* of Schaeffer... it is precise, it is a periodic variation, either on height, either on dynamics.

Les « allures », c'est une terminologie un petit peu GRM... Il n'y a pas de dictionnaire, mais ça fait référence au Traité des Objets Musicaux de Schaeffer... c'est précis, c'est une variation périodique, soit sur la hauteur, soit sur la dynamique.

These composers readily evoke, to answer the questions on the program notes, the fundamental bipartitions between reduced or referenced listening, abstract or concrete listening. We clearly see how their categorization of music depends on listening criteria.

A : masculine gender, born in 1958 :

There are two main categories in music, two great ways of listening to music: a "programmatic" way, where there is a story, references to the real world, and a pure way, where it is a purely mental construct, from sounds.

Il y a deux grandes catégories dans la musique, deux grandes façons d'écouter la musique : une façon programmatique, où il y a une histoire, des références au monde réel, et une façon pure, où c'est une construction uniquement mentale, à partir de sons.

First group composers are sensitive to the mediation function of program notes.

C : masculine gender, born in 1952 :

So, from the composer, there is the function... let's call it « reassuring », of the program note. Because the composer works in his workbench, his solitude, his space. But there comes a time when he is ready to give to hear, to transmit to the other... He needs this intermediation, which is carried by the title, the paper and the text of the note, the bio. This kind of reassuring object is... the plush of children (laughs), the transitional object, transactional. And it is a way of preparing the listening, before it starts, taking into account that one is in a context, in general, of ... competition, with multiplicities of music.

⁵ « Graphocentrism » corresponds to considering the written notation, the score, as the essential mediation of the music. See Rémy Campos, éd. « Musique, musicologie, sciences humaines : sociabilités intellectuelles, engagements esthétiques et malentendus disciplinaires (1870-1970) », *Revue d'Histoire des Sciences Humaines* 1/2006, n° 14, p. 3-17.

Alors, vu du compositeur, il y a la fonction... appelons-là rassurante, de la notice. Parce que le compositeur travaille dans son établi, sa solitude, son espace. Mais il arrive un moment où il est prêt à donner à entendre, à transmettre à l'autre... Il lui faut cette intermédiation, qui est portée par le titre, le papier et le texte de la notice, de la bio. Cette sorte d'objet rassurant, c'est... la peluche des enfants (rires), l'objet transitionnel, transactionnel. Et c'est une manière de préparer l'écoute, avant qu'elle ne commence, en tenant compte qu'on est dans un contexte, en général, de... compétition, avec des multiplicités de musique.

They retrace the historical evolution of the program notes, according to that of electroacoustic music itself. There were tendencies, modes : for example, that of the technique, or that of the poetic expression.

A : masculine gender, born in 1958 :

At one point, technology was much emphasized. It was said : it is a work with computer. It was doing very well like that at that time. Now it is said : new technologies, interactivity, digital cultures, digital arts. We find a little the same thingummys, twenty years later.

A un moment donné, on mettait beaucoup en avant la technologie. On disait : c'est une œuvre avec ordinateur. Ça se faisait très bien à une époque. Maintenant on va dire : nouvelles technologies, interactivité, cultures numériques, arts numériques. On retrouve un peu les mêmes trucs, vingt ans plus tard.

An atypical and militant path

The organic composers emphasize how the choice to engage for electroacoustic music is linked to an atypical career.

A : masculine gender, born in 1958 :

There is also the fact that my career was atypical. I did not do the Conservatoire de Paris, at least in composition. I did it in electroacoustic music at a time when it was quite marginal. Coming from the suburbs, arriving at the Conservatoire de Paris, I felt an extreme difference, in front of all the students who were there... The electroacoustic class was still quite opposed to the dominant musical practice. Then I went to the United States. There, the sociological context is very different...

Et il y a aussi le fait que mon parcours a été atypique. Je n'ai pas fait le Conservatoire de Paris, du moins en composition, je l'ai fait en musique électroacoustique à une époque où c'était assez marginal. Venant de banlieue, arrivant au Conservatoire de Paris, j'ai ressenti une extrême différence, vis-à-vis de l'ensemble des étudiants qui étaient là... La classe d'électroacoustique était de toute manière assez en opposition à la pratique musicale dominante. Et puis après, je suis parti aux EU. Là-bas le contexte sociologique est très différent...

This anchoring in an atypical career may be present in other composers, but it is expressed here by a militant dimension, on the social and political level, more marked towards the public: the affirmation of the need to reach a wider audience, the affirmation of the contributions of electroacoustic music, sometimes through the program note.

E : female gender, born in 1950 :

There is a militant side, because I believe a lot in the virtue of electroacoustic music. There is something very attractive about the sound, the sound processing, the immediate side of this work, because you do not need to do ten years of music theory to compose.

Il y a un côté militant, car je crois beaucoup à la vertu de la musique électroacoustique. Il y a quelque chose de très attrayant dans le son, le traitement du son, le côté immédiat de ce travail, parce qu'il n'y a pas besoin de faire dix ans de solfège pour créer.

The historical origin of program notes : a white box

We have mentioned several times the historical dimension of the program notes. But the question is distinct from that which concerns its historical origin: spontaneous or inscribed in filiation. It is true that the "contemporary", and the ideology of rupture that accompanies it, does not favor explanations in terms of filiation. It is perhaps for this reason that the subject is poorly documented, at this historical level, by composers, and alike, musicologists. It gives rise, during the interview, to a reflection in real time, the differences of which are significant, between the two groups of composers. The reflexive posture of the composers of the first group is here also manifested by a problematized and relatively precise analysis of the historical origin of the program note. It is, according to them, linked to a singular situation, of which they underline at the same time the continuities and the breaks.

A : masculine gender, born in 1958 :

This is a very special moment, the integral serialism, and finally very short, but where there was perhaps, for the first time, a speculation, which left aside, very largely, the sound criterion, and where one was really in something very abstract and which could only be perceived if we followed the abstract procedures. Hence this need for explanation, justification...

C'est un moment très particulier, le sérialisme intégral, et finalement très court, mais où il y a eu peut-être, pour la première fois, une spéculation, qui laissait de côté, très largement, le critère sonore, et où on était vraiment dans quelque chose de très abstrait et qui donc ne pouvait être perceptible, que si on suivait les démarches abstraites. D'où cette nécessité d'explication, de justification...

A reflexive dynamic of the interview

Reflection manifested about communication and program notes by organic composers, is extended by a reflexive attitude during the interview.

B : female gender, born in 1954 :

All these questions that you ask yourself, it could encourage me to rethink my way of doing things.

Toutes les questions que vous vous posez, ça pourrait m'inciter à re-réfléchir à ma façon de faire.

Let us now observe, with regard to the same themes, how much the positions of the second group composers are opposed to those of the first.

We call this group "artifact" because of its distant link to communication, which it consider an extrinsic element to its composition activity.

2. The « artifact » group

The program note : an insignificant practice

For "artifact" composers, program note is an insignificant, a "weak" object, for sociological analysis, because of its brevity, function and status pragmatics.

F : masculine gender, born in 1935 :

The program note is too short to expose somewhat complex ideas and, like these ideas, you have to justify them, so give examples, analyze, discuss, and a note is not the place to do that.

La notice est trop brève, pour exposer des idées un peu complexes, et parce que ces idées, il faut les justifier, donc donner des exemples, analyser, discuter, et une notice n'est pas le lieu pour faire ça.

However, the research object value is redefined, as a new archive, under a content analysis: the traces, more or less consciously deposited, by the composer.

G : masculine gender, born in 1932 :

As an explanation of his work, I say, it is worth zero. But as a para-work, as an work too, because it's a work, because it's coming out of the same hand, the same brain... It is part of the supporting pieces, in order to show what it denotes about the author, his culture on certain points, his ignorance about others, the terms he uses frequently, or never, while they would be so appropriate ...

En tant qu'explication de son œuvre, moi je dis, elle a valeur zéro, mais en tant que para-œuvre, en tant qu'œuvre aussi, parce que de la même main, sortie du même cerveau... elle fait partie des pièces à l'appui, pour montrer ce qu'elle dénote de l'auteur, sa culture sur certains points, son inculture sur d'autres, les termes qu'il emploie fréquemment, ou jamais, alors qu'ils seraient tellement appropriés...

The program notes: a cases inventory

"Artifacts" composers also state the functional dimension of the program notes, but to criticize it, often severely.

G : masculine gender, born in 1932 :

The first thing that proves, is that the composer needs... to manifest his existence, in relation to his peers, real, or supposed. And this manifestation is almost as important to him as the manifestation of his music. There is Cocteau's wonderful comment: "since this mystery surpasses us, let's pretend to arrange it" (laughs). So, I will say that it is the summary of all the program notes.

La première chose que ça prouve, c'est que le compositeur a besoin de... manifester son existence, par rapport à des pairs, réels, ou supposés. Et cette manifestation lui est presque aussi importante que la manifestation de sa musique. Il y a le merveilleux commentaire chez Cocteau : « puisque ce mystère nous dépasse, feignons d'en être l'organisateur » (rires). Alors moi je dirai que c'est le résumé de toutes les notices.

Composers "artifacts" manifest primarily a classificatory spirit. They emphasize the contingent and variable nature of an object fundamentally subordinate to another: the work.

The program note is only an outgrowth, rather a label, more or less adequate. This is why the global analysis of this elusive social practice seems vain and irrelevant to them.

H : masculine gender, born in 1951 :

After, on the contents of the notes, we find everything. It goes from anecdote, intimate unpacking, to the most abstract thing imaginable, which no one understands. It goes from the note which one understands immediately the relationship with the work that one will hear or have heard, until the note which is completely disconnected from reality. I think there are as many notes as formulas.

Après sur le fond des notices, il y a un peu de tout. Ça va de l'anecdotique, du déballeage intime, jusqu'au truc le plus abstrait imaginable, auquel personne ne comprend rien. Ça va de la notice dont on comprend immédiatement le rapport avec l'œuvre qu'on va entendre ou qu'on a entendue, jusqu'à celle qui est complètement déconnectée de la réalité. Je pense qu'il y a autant de notices que de formules.

The ranking of the program notes ultimately corresponds to that of the works, and to what the composer wants to deliver to the public on a case-by-case basis. The composer controls the keychain.

K : female gender, born in 1943 :

Each composer tries to adapt his way of writing the note to what is going on around him, each doing according to his sensitivity, his way of seeing his music to approach the public. (...) I do not like to reveal everything: I throw something in front and I want it that echo. I try to give one or two keys to the listener, but they are not simple, direct keys ; I do not open the door, I half-open (laughs).

Chaque compositeur essaye d'adapter sa façon d'écrire la notice à ce qui se passe autour de lui, chacun fait selon sa sensibilité, sa façon de voir sa musique d'approcher le public. (...) Je n'aime pas non plus dévoiler tout : je jette quelque chose devant et je voudrais que ça fasse un écho. J'essaie de donner une ou deux clés à l'auditeur, mais qui ne sont pas des clés simples, directes ; je n'ouvre pas la porte, j'entrouvre (rires).

With these composers, the interview about the most relational or formal aspects of the notes "runs out of steam" quickly. We must quickly return to the documentary content of the notes, to relaunch the debate. For them, these communicative aspects are superficial; they belong to a fashion.

F : masculine gender, born in 1935 :

Musicology now has a great tendency to be interested in drafts, in speeches that try to enlighten a little the musical approach. It is very fashionable.

Il y a une grande tendance en musicologie maintenant, de s'intéresser aux brouillons, de s'intéresser aux discours qui essayent d'éclairer un peu la démarche musicale. C'est très à la mode.

A variable and contingent way of writing

"Artefact" composers describe, above all, their practice of writing notes as dependent on works. They do not describe, during the interview, a general principle of writing, nor a theoretically constructed approach. The answer to this question, considered difficult, takes the form of a list of the different existing elements that can be mobilized from one program note to another.

D : female gender, born in 1945 :

My way of writing changes according to the works and from one work to another. These are the works that will change my writing, and when I find old notes, I do not feel the need to change them...

Ma façon d'écrire change au fil des œuvres et selon les œuvres. C'est les œuvres qui vont faire changer mon écriture, et quand je retrouve des notices anciennes, je n'éprouve pas le besoin de les changer...

The writing conception, for this composers, is presented as contingent, therefore not general nor methodical.

Writing on the composition

For composers "artifacts", it is to present the work as a closed object, definitively finished.

D : female gender, born in 1945 :

When I am asked for a note, I can do it the day I manage to do it. Not because I do not want to start right now, but because I can not get started. I have to revise the work, or focus on a particular passage that I want to explain.

Quand on me demande une notice, j'arrive à la faire le jour où j'arrive à la faire. Non pas parce que je ne veux pas m'y mettre tout de suite, mais parce que je ne peux pas m'y mettre. Il faut que je révise l'œuvre, ou que je m'attache à un passage particulier que je veux expliquer.

For composers "artifacts", the note is mainly intended to account for compositional work.

An oral presentation rather than written

The group "artifact" prefers an oral form of presentation, because it is based on the presence of the composer, who can better adjust his message and control its reception by the public.

F : masculine gender, born in 1935 :

At the concert, we come with friends, we do not have time to read the program. That's why I'm rather in favor of bringing in the composer, who makes contact with the public.

Au concert, on vient avec des amis, on n'a pas le temps de lire le programme. C'est pour ça que je suis assez partisan de faire venir le compositeur, qui établit un contact avec le public.

Public behavior is posed as fundamentally elusive, a black box that, as such, is also an vain object of study.

J : masculine gender, born in 1938 :

One is never sure that an auditor will read the program note before, or in the dark. You never know, you do not control what is going on.

On n'est jamais sûr qu'un auditeur va lire la note de programme avant, ou bien dans le noir. On ne sait jamais, on ne maîtrise pas ce qui se passe.

Uncertainty is expressed as a principle by these composers, given the extreme diversity of the corpus, the situations and the public. This principle of uncertainty dissolves the social dimension of the object.

The program note : an information medium

"Artefact" composers ignore or devalue the formal and relational aspects of program notes, as opposed to "organic" composers.

F : masculine gender, born in 1935 :

It's curious that you use the word object, because when you write a text for a program it's more a message than an object. You are not interested by the way it's written, but in the ideas you want to convey.

C'est curieux que vous employiez le mot objet, parce que quand on écrit un texte pour un programme, c'est plutôt un message qu'un objet. On ne s'intéresse pas à la façon dont c'est rédigé, mais aux idées qu'on veut faire passer.

Well compose rather than write well

Artefact composers are more ambivalent about the quality of writing program texts. Exercise is usually sloppy, but at the same time, we must not lose face. We must therefore pay attention to what and how we write.

G : masculine gender, born in 1932 :

It's something that's usually pretty sloppy, well done, because it's something that still requires work, despite everything, because, if you want it to be well written, it's always difficult to write, it's always painful. If we write what goes through our heads, we read again, it's stupid. Oh no, I give a very bad image of me ! But despite everything, we know very well that it is something secondary, and, downright ... useless.

C'est quelque chose qui en général est assez bâclé, enfin vite fait, car, c'est quelque chose qui demande du travail malgré tout, parce que, si on veut que ce soit bien écrit, c'est toujours difficile d'écrire, c'est toujours douloureux d'écrire. Si on écrit ce qui nous passe par la tête, on relit, c'est stupide. Ah non, je donne une très mauvaise image de moi-même ! Mais malgré tout, on sait très bien que c'est quelque chose de secondaire, et même, carrément... d'inutile.

For them, the usefulness of writing notes, if any, concerns the composer who, over time, can be enlightened about his own practice.

J : masculine gender, born in 1938 :

Finally, I realized by making notes of programs, or by making the pieces, that I often developed a kind of scenario, a scenario telling a kind of story.

Finalemment, je me suis rendu compte, en faisant des notes de programmes, ou bien en faisant les pièces, que je développais souvent une espèce de scénario, un scénario racontant une espèce d'histoire.

The "write well" can not be dissociated, in the two groups, from the "well compose". But the second group, with regard to this dissociation, is dismayed and worried. It also evokes, beyond the judgment on the artistic quality of the work, the dangers incurred by a listening deceived by a too beautiful reading.

D : female gender, born in 1945 :

We very much want to listen to a work because the note “makes your mouth water”, it can be very appetitive, and that's where we can have a disappointment. If it is very beautiful, you can really have a delight reading it. This is dangerous, because it can give a grand opening of the imagination, and disappointment can be all the greater.

On a très envie d'écouter une œuvre parce que la notice vous met l'eau à la bouche, elle peut être très apéritive, et c'est là qu'on peut avoir une déception. Si elle est très belle, on peut vraiment avoir une délectation à la lire. C'est dangereux, parce qu'elle peut donner une grande ouverture de l'imaginaire, et la déception peut être d'autant plus grande.

Write after compose

For "artifacts" composers, the work is an closed object. The note is entirely dedicated to the expression of the work once completed, to the expression of "lived" rather than "alive", one could say.

D : female gender, born in 1945 :

How to write a note a priori? The note would be very common, it would not come from an experience. I would not have lived my adventure. It's an adventure a work, we tell our adventure. That's why the note exists only by composers.

Comment écrire une notice a priori ? La notice serait très banale, elle ne viendrait pas d'un vécu. Je n'aurais pas vécu mon aventure. C'est une aventure une œuvre, on raconte son aventure. C'est pour ça que la notice n'existe que par les compositeurs.

The note speaks more of completed work than of the creative process. It focuses on a singular work ended, itself put into perspective related to the composer entire « Work ». The work is the result of an empirical experience, that the note must relate after, at a time which is no longer that of creation. The recoil is therefore a necessary condition for the writing of the note, as if the temporality of the creation was distinct from that of the communication, contrary to the composers of the "organic" group which envisage their concomitance.

H : masculine gender, born in 1951 :

There are composers, including you, who can write a note according to the public?

Oh no. Because when you make a note, you make a note. I never made a note again. You have finished a work, you have finished a work. I'm not able to explain a work until I finish it, because I do not know where I'm going - well a little bit - and thankfully, because here we go back to hyper-serial conception.

Il y a des compositeurs, dont vous également, qui peuvent écrire une notice en fonction du public ?

Ah non. Parce que quand vous faites une notice, vous faites une notice. Moi, je n'ai jamais refait de notice. Vous avez fini une œuvre, vous avez fini une œuvre. Je ne suis pas capable d'expliquer une œuvre avant de l'avoir finie, parce que je ne sais pas où je vais - enfin, quand même un peu -, et heureusement, parce que là, on revient à la conception hyper-sérielle.

The program note : an archive

"Artefact" composers do not conceive the rewriting of the notes, at the time of a later programming of their work. The note is linked to the finished work, in its time. Its content is valid once and for all.

K : female gender, born in 1943 :

As I rarely touch to my music, I do not make changes, I consider it's over. So change the note, if the work has remained the same, I do not really see the necessity.

Comme je touche rarement à mes pièces, je ne fais pas de modifications, je considère que c'est fini. Donc changer la notice, si l'œuvre est restée la même, je ne vois pas trop la nécessité.

When the composers of this group rewrite their notes, they do so in a "philological" perspective (the term is due to Daniel Terrugi). They are intended to recontextualize earlier versions.

F : masculine gender, born in 1935 :

That's why in my book, each original note is followed by a comment that corrects, redoes, or completes it.

C'est pour ça que dans mon livre, chaque notice d'origine est suivie d'un commentaire qui corrige, ou qui la refait, ou qui la complète.

The note derives its value from its informative content, and not from its communicational power with the public, which, in their opinion, is limited.

G : masculine gender, born in 1932 :

I take a sideways look to the notes, although as a composer, I am, like everyone else, used to saying things, in the excitement of work, in the wake, more or less moving, of the effort. It's a kind of "phew". I stand at another place, which is the documentation of a musical work. That is to say what are the contextual information necessary, to apprehend a music usefully, to put it in its true listening situation.

J'ai, par rapport aux notices, un regard de biais, bien que comme compositeur, je me sois comme tout le monde évertué de dire des choses, dans l'émoi du travail, dans le sillage, plus ou moins émouvant, de l'effort. C'est une espèce de « ouf ». Je me place à un autre endroit, qui est la documentation d'une œuvre musicale, c'est-à-dire quelles sont les informations, contextuelles nécessaires d'avoir pour appréhender une musique utilement, pour la mettre dans sa vraie situation d'écoute.

The recipient is thus more the musicologist than the public. Notes document analysis, not listening.

G : masculine gender, born in 1932 :

The note can not do it!

La notice ne le peut pas !

This posture is accompanied by a particular conception of listening, as a progressively constructed process, documented by information and, above all, the re-listening of the same musical works.

G : masculine gender, born in 1932 :

(...) the work on support, will need much more than another, a paratext, and indexing, for a good reason, very simple and very coarse, is that to hear a piece of music, it takes time. Because the work takes time, it takes place in time. (...) The secondly, which comes after the firstly: "music is made to be heard", is: "no, not quite, the music is made essentially to be re-heard.

(...) l'œuvre sur support aura beaucoup plus besoin qu'une autre, d'un paratexte, et d'une indexation, pour une bonne raison, bien simple et bien grossière, c'est que pour entendre une œuvre de musique, il faut du temps. Parce que l'œuvre, elle prend du temps, elle se déroule dans le temps. (...) Le deuxièmement qui vient après le premièrement : « la musique est faite pour être entendue », c'est : « non, pas tout à fait, la musique est faite essentiellement pour être réentendue. »

Listening is referenced to that of this "great listener" who is the composer. Beyond, it is the listening of the composer, as interior interpretation.

D : female gender, born in 1945 :

What I composed, I can interpret it, in the sense of the inner interpretation. So my note is going to be written about that.

Ce que j'ai composé, je peux me l'interpréter, au sens de l'interprétation intérieure. Donc ma notice va être écrite par rapport à ça.

The communication circuit: a black box

The communication circuit is considered a black box by composers of the "artifact" type. Therefore, they do not produce any real description during the interview. Absence of verbalization can also be meaningfully.

A waterproof professional identity

For them, communication gives rise to additional tasks, which are not mains part of the composer's activities and skills, and which unfortunately displace professional boundaries.

H : masculine gender, born in 1951 :

We will ask for notices, because we have to publish. We will try to have a very clear vision, as a festival for example, of what we will present. We want to give the public the desire to come, so we want to publish online soon enough. There are also many considerations, but basely material in all this.

On va demander des notices, parce qu'on va mettre sous presse. On va essayer d'avoir une vision très claire, en tant que festival par exemple, de ce qu'on va présenter. On veut donner au public l'envie de venir, donc on veut mettre assez tôt, sur Internet. Il y a aussi beaucoup de questions, mais bassement matérielles, dans tout ça.

The composer facing the public

« Artifact » composers try to limit the reading time of concert programs, in order to favor pure listening.

H : masculine gender, born in 1951 :

There are two problems with the program notes. The first problem is that if you put paper programs in concert, you have this pretty unpleasant phenomenon: people who turn pages to read, who light them with their phone, who fanning themselves with. So, we put them on Internet. The pieces are announced at the concert, and we send back who wants precisions to the site. Read a note while we hear a work! Either read it before, or read it after; that does not mean that it is interesting or not interesting, but in any case, we do not read it during the concert.

Il y a deux problèmes avec les notices d'œuvres. Le premier problème, c'est que, si vous mettez des programmes papier au concert, vous avez ce phénomène assez désagréable : les gens qui tournent des pages pour lire, qui les éclairent avec leur téléphone, qui s'éventent avec. Donc, on les a mises sur Internet. Les pièces sont annoncées au concert, et on renvoie qui veut des précisions, au site. Lire une notice pendant qu'on entend une œuvre ! Soit on la lit avant, soit on la lit après ; ça ne veut pas dire que c'est intéressant ou pas intéressant, mais en tout cas, on ne la lit pas pendant le concert.

"Artifacts" composers are less focused on the public, during the interview, than on their situation and the relationship they have with their work. The program note writing is mainly oriented towards composition. It is very little considered in its interlocutive dimension. Moreover, as the note is unable to graft "big ears" to the listener, there is little about the listening.

D : female gender, born in 1945 :

From the moment I speak of this work, I address someone, so that this person understands what I want.

A partir du moment où je parle de cette œuvre, je m'adresse à quelqu'un, pour que cette personne comprenne ce que je veux.

The dangerous influence of the words

The question of the influence - or not - of verbal language on listening is evoked by all composers. Those in the second group insist on the risks that "the shadow of language" would pose to music.

I : female gender, born in 1937 :

The music is made to be heard, not watched. It's appalling. They do not listen but interpret according to what they read. What one asks to write is what the public can not hear, so it is vain. You do not need anything apart from the music. The public have the right to this freedom. It is "caught in vise" with a note.

La musique est faite pour être entendue, pas regardée. C'est consternant. Ils n'écoutent pas mais interprètent en fonction de ce qu'ils ont lu. Ce que l'on demande d'écrire, c'est ce que le public ne peut pas entendre, c'est donc vain. Il ne faut rien qui soit en dehors de la musique, le public a droit à cette liberté-là. Il est pris en étau dans une notice.

This is the point where the listener is mainly considered by the "artifact" type. They fear as much to hinder his freedom of listening, as to distort their own intention, by resorting to written mediation. Their thinking revolves around the question of the irrelevance of verbal language on music.

G : masculine gender, born in 1932 :

These are works in themselves, far removed from the music you hear. To wonder if he has any relation. Finally, it's the same person who writes both. But these are two faces: it's Janus.

Ce sont des œuvres en elles-mêmes, avec pas mal de distance, avec la musique qu'on entend. A se demander si ça a le moindre rapport. Enfin, c'est la même personne qui écrit les deux. Mais ce sont deux faces : c'est Janus.

The program note is primarily a problem for them, not a theoretical question. According to a principle of division of labor, it belongs to musicologists and other researchers. Studying and putting them in theoretical perspective does not correspond directly to the composer's tasks, as we have already mentioned.

We remember that composers of the first type closely integrate their practice of writing notices with both artistic and aesthetic considerations. Those of the second type refer to the philosophical conception of musical autonomy or ineffable⁶. It rests, among the composers "artifacts", on an ideal of adequacy between the work and the public, on a form of transparent musical communication, released from the weight of the language.

D : female gender, born in 1945 :

I would not want to write any. I think music has to talk. The music goes from my heart and goes to the heart of others. It is written for what I feel, and I try to make feel the same, or something else; and if this music is difficult to understand, make feel something anyway. So, there is no need for notes.

J'aimerais ne pas en écrire. Je pense que la musique doit parler. La musique part de mon cœur et va au cœur des autres. Elle est écrite pour ce que je ressens, et j'essaye de faire ressentir la même chose ou autre chose, et si cette musique est difficile à comprendre, de faire ressentir quand même quelque chose. Donc il n'y a pas besoin de notice.

The visual neutrality of the concert is essentially devoted to music. Notes, likewise, must be as neutral as possible.

H : masculine gender, born in 1951 :

If people are in black and white on stage, there is a very good reason for that: we put them in black and white, so that we do not see them, because we are here to listen.

Si les gens sont en noir et blanc sur scène, il y a une très bonne raison à ça : on les met en noir et blanc, pour qu'on ne les voit pas, eux, parce qu'on est là pour entendre.

A determinate reading chronology

The proper time to read the program note is more determined for the second group composers. A later reading is preferred, so as not to distort listening, which must always be first. The note is a "weak" document, because it is a means, not of knowledge, but of recognition.

G : masculine gender, born in 1932 :

In fact, it's only interesting afterwards. Its annunciator side, its preparatory side, is totally illusory.

⁶ We find this posture in a survey we conducted on the use of metaphors in program notes. See Florence Lethurgez, « Les métaphores dans les notes de présentation des œuvres contemporaines : un outil de communication avec les publics ? », *Métaphore et musique*, PUR (Presses universitaires de Rennes), 2015, p. 77-102.

En réalité, ça n'est intéressant que lu après. Son côté annonceur, son côté préparateur, est totalement illusoire.

The title: an element of composition

The title is considered a "private matter" by the composers of the group "artifacts". They judge the search for its originality as a mannerism, and its explicitation as a common place to avoid.

H : masculine gender, born in 1951 :

I remember that when I was a young composer and student at the Conservatoire de Paris, there were *Concerts on Tuesday* at Radio France. So, the traditional question was: "Then, H, why this title?" It was not very an in-depth question.

Je me souviens que, quand j'étais jeune compositeur et étudiant au conservatoire de Paris, il y avait les concerts le mardi à Radio-France. Donc, la question traditionnelle, c'était : « Alors, H, pourquoi ce titre ? » Ce n'était pas très approfondi.

I : female gender, born in 1937 :

The title should not be evocative for the public, it only concerns the composer. It is a specific element not to be addressed in the note.

Le titre ne doit pas être évocateur pour le public, et ne concerne que le compositeur. Il est un élément spécifique à ne pas aborder dans la notice.

Composers "artifacts" also evoke the claim of the note to give a trace to a music without trace, and thus to constitute a particular form of notation.

J : masculine gender, born in 1938 :

It's really peculiar to tape music, because, instrumental music, there is a score, which is a document. There was this debate: we can not analyze tape music because there is no document... and that's not wrong. Is the instrumental score really alpha and omega? I do not think it completely, but finally, it is an inescapable reference.

C'est vraiment particulier à la musique sur bande, parce que la musique instrumentale, il y a une partition, qui est un document. Il y a eu ce débat : on ne peut pas analyser une musique sur bande, parce qu'il n'y a pas de document... et ce n'est pas faux. Est-ce que la partition instrumentale, c'est vraiment l'alpha et l'omega ? Je ne le pense pas complètement, mais enfin, c'est un repère incontournable.

The interest in communication is equally considered by the oldest composers of the group "artifact" as a sign of "cultural relaxation" peculiar to the younger generations.

J : masculine gender, born in 1938 :

Currently, among the younger generations, I am struck by a kind of pugnacity that lives in them. They have a lot of talent, but they seem, to me, to have a concern of immediate success: to have a "sound", as we say for pop bands, characteristic, and immediately recognizable.

Actuellement, chez les jeunes générations, je suis frappé par une espèce de pugnacité. Ils ont beaucoup de talent, mais ils me paraissent avoir un souci de réussite immédiate : avoir un « son », comme on dit des ensembles pop, caractéristique et tout de suite reconnaissable.

Recall that for the "organic" group, it is not a question of obeying a fashion, of being quickly known, but of wondering how to communicate, how to speak otherwise of music, in the today's world.

The electroacoustic music: more atypical than militant?

The question of an atypical character of electroacoustic music is not directly associated with an ethical and militant dimension by this group of composers, at least in the interviews, than on a strictly artistic dimension.

G : masculine gender, born in 1932 :

With the acousmatic situation, we moved the music, to make it an object of auditory plastic, since we work on a medium and no interpreter is obliged to intervene. Except that, nevertheless, it is interpreted, that is to say that it is staged. It's not interpreted, in the usual sense of the word, but it still requires a number of settings, acoustic conditions, a broadcasting hall variable, and a public always variable.

Avec la situation acousmatique, on a déplacé la musique, pour en faire un objet de plastique auditive, puisqu'on travaille sur un support et qu'aucun interprète n'a à intervenir, sauf à dire que, néanmoins, ça s'interprète, c'est-à-dire que ça se met en scène. Ce n'est pas un interprète, au sens habituel du terme, mais ça demande quand même un certain nombre d'ajustements, de conditions acoustiques, d'une salle, qui est toujours variable, et d'un auditoire, qui est toujours variable.

The origin of writing notes: a very black box?

"Artifact" composers invest favorably the historical question which concerns the origin of the notes, but in a very different way from the composers of the first group. They admit their total ignorance or, on the contrary, give very precise references. But they do not seize this question as an opportunity to put their practice into perspective. They can equally make multiple assumptions, case by case, on the fine scale of individual personalities and their personal experiences.

H : masculine gender, born in 1951 :

Let's say that in the 1950s there was a lot of theory, Darmstadt, where you had to write. I remember that some of my fellow students preferred to take two hours of lectures rather than having a work performed at the concert. They were fighting more for space to get out of big theoretical statements...

Disons que dans les années 50, il y a eu beaucoup de théorie, Darmstadt, où il fallait écrire. Je me souviens que j'avais des collègues étudiants, qui eux, préféreraient prendre deux heures de conférences plutôt que d'avoir une œuvre jouée au concert. Ils se battaient plus pour avoir un espace pour sortir de grands propos théoriques...

The question of the still experimental nature or not of electroacoustic music can be asked about this occasion by composers⁷.

⁷ For "organic" composers, the question of the still experimental nature of electroacoustic music is also raised. But they do it rather about poorly thought communication and mediation. The program notes, asked without reflection by the organizers of concerts, are the symptoms, if not the agents, of the contemporary music routinization today.

But, finally, as for the communication circuit, the historical dimension of the program notes is considered a black box by the composers "artifacts". Its study, according to a clear division of labor, concerns academic research.

The interview dynamic : a traditional alternation of questions and answers

The very principle of the relevance of the interview with the social science researcher goes so far as to be called into question by composers "artifacts". Especially because it is not centered on the content of the notes, in connection with the analysis of the works of the composer interviewed. They find redundant oral questioning on their notes, thinking that the interview is devoted to the more detailed commentary of their notes. What seems uninteresting to them.

F : masculine gender, born in 1935 :

What I do not see well is what interviews can add to the writings themselves.

Ce que je ne vois pas bien, c'est ce que les interviews peuvent ajouter aux écrits eux-mêmes.

The note is at best a new archive for the analysis of the work of a composer, his compositional "being", possibly unconscious. The subject of the interview is not considered as an opportunity for reflexive questioning on the communication design that a composer can have today. It is not considered as a phenomenon of social communication, observed specifically since the contemporary music, more particularly here electroacoustic, but like a document centered on the figure of the composer and his work⁸. What is particularly interesting is that, for both types of composers, these communication issues are considered in relation to their professional ethos. But for the "artifact" composers, about the professional ethos, the emphasis is more on authenticity than on reflexivity, as well in the program note as in the interview.

D : female gender, born in 1945 :

The note, I'm living it. You made me say things that I thought at the moment, spontaneously; and indeed, there are evidences that have appeared to me.

La notice, je la vis. Vous m'avez fait dire des choses que j'ai pensé au moment même, spontanément ; et effectivement, il y a des évidences qui me sont apparues.

Conclusion :

The inventory of these different items, from the richness of the interview verbatim, shows how much the main dimensions of the profession of composers were evoked and invested with meaning by all the composers, about this practice. These two types, organic and artefact, are clearly and systematically opposed.

A first group, "organic", brings together composers particularly committed to communication issues. For this type, communication is a global problem that he has already thought about. It is not for them an autonomous function, but it is integrated in a global poetics. They give the same importance to the two poles of communication : the content on the one hand, the

⁸ The reflexive engagement of "organic" composers, on the other hand, is reinforced during the interview and manifests itself in a constant dialect of reasoning. They are ready to question in real time their practice if their perception of the phenomenon moves.

relationship of the other⁹. The program note is a particular element within a communication circuit in which they seek to organically integrate their compositional practices. They accompany their compositional practice with a global reflection, which integrates the question of the publics. They agree to see the great boundaries of the profession of composer move, to be more porous, as long as they remain what constitutes, politically and aesthetically, its essential dimension : the meeting of public and creation... If audiences read program notes, composers "read" audiences. We will find in this type, the most engaged composers in electroacoustic music on the one hand, the youngest on the other.

A second group, "artifact", brings together composers a little less involved in these communication issues. They may even be cautious and circumspect, especially towards program notes. It is an "artifact" extrinsic to creation, useless, even potentially harmful... They refer to a functionalist representation of communication, close to information theory : hierarchical and sequential, in which the program note is a small, separate informational element. Program notes are cataloging and indexing devices, more or less effective. The composer who writes them is asked to become his own archivist and documentalist: the one who creates, but also the one who thinks and classifies (to paraphrase Perec). It is important for them to optimize the match between the composer's intention and the audience's reception, by referring to an ideal communication circuit. Communication issues are poorly invested both empirically and theoretically. We will find in this type, composers less exclusively engaged in the MEA, on the one hand, or belonging to older generations, on the other hand.

Older composers are those who combine least questions and practices of composition and communication. This signals a generational effect, so historic, more than age effect, interesting, that need further analysis. This is why the survey plans to be extended to younger generations of composers, often referred to with relevance by our respondents.

The extensions of this long search also call for an in-depth analysis of the points of convergence between the two groups, and finally, the confrontation with points of view on these questions of exclusiv acoustic music composers.

⁹ According to Paul Watzlawick, from the Palo Alto School. See for example Paul Watzlawick, *Une logique de la communication*, Paris, Seuil, 1972.