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COMPOSITION AS AN ACT AND EXISTENTIAL TRACE

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Abstract

In this paper, I use the words of philosophy to investigate my compositional practice. I turn specifically to Martin Heidegger's thought, as developed in the central part of *Being and Time*, in relation to the *Being-in*. From the reflections of the German philosopher, I develop an interpretive scheme to explain my compositional approaches, highlighting a specific aspect of my practice, which I define through the notions of compositional act, compositional instant, existential trace, and projection. In this paper, I discuss these notions and advance a hypothesis on musical language, presenting musical instruments as signs of the acoustic experience and the musical language as a reflection and presentation of this experience.

1. Introduction

At times, composers and philosophers view musicians who refer to disciplines such as philosophy to speak, present, or think about their own music with suspicion. In one of the composition exams that I took to complete my diploma at a French conservatory, I was asked to write a short dissertation in addition to the scores. In this dissertation, I attempted to interpret my compositional practice through reflections made by the composer György Ligeti¹ and the philosopher Roman Ingarden². I concentrated especially on certain excerpts that Ligeti had dedicated to the syntactic aspects of the musical language. According to the Hungarian composer, musical syntax takes place in a virtual space, a space in which music is conceived through the notion of "object"³. I presented this Ligetian hypothesis in relation to Ingarden's conception of the musical work, as an intentional object whose forms inhabit a specific musical space. In my dissertation, I argued that my music was based on a similar idea; that the music I wrote tried to resonate with this virtual space, soliciting the psychological limit between music and the ordinary experience of sound. In a nutshell, I was interested in identifying and presenting the moment when sounds, placed closed to each other, become music. Through such an act I turned to the listener: composing meant playing on his or her ability to imagine links between sounds. Unfortunately, the composition diploma jury made only one comment about it. Presumably because the jury knew that

¹ György Ligeti, *L'Atelier Du Compositeur. Écrits Autobiographiques. Commentaire Sur Ses Oeuvres*, ed. Philippe Albero, Catherine Fourcassié, and Pierre Michel (Genève: Contrechamp, 2013).

² Roman Ingarden, *The Work of Music and the Problem of Its Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

³ Ligeti, *L'Atelier Du Compositeur. Écrits Autobiographiques. Commentaire Sur Ses Oeuvres*, 149.

I had studied philosophy, one of the members argued, provocatively, that I had simply gathered together some notes taken during my studies in order to make my dissertation longer. While this was not true, his saying as much felt as though he had degraded my reflections.

Many years on, I now realize that the jury had not understood that the ideas illustrated in my dissertation really shaped my inspiration and stimulated my compositional practice. Re-reading them today, ten years later, I realize this even more strongly.

In this paper, I propose to establish a connection between music and philosophy, and to use philosophical reflections to express my compositional approach. It is neither a question of doing philosophy through music, nor elaborating a philosophical discourse. It is about placing my compositional practice in dialogue with philosophical thought, and making it resonate with some relevant theoretical aspects. This endeavor has one main reason: I believe that music benefits from words. Words, in this case the words of philosophy, can help musicians – as well as the audience – in articulating the complexity of their own musical acts. The transposition of musical practice into linguistic form can spur musical reflection in itself and induce music too.

2. Reflection as an act

Musical practice is often described through metaphors, especially visual and linguistic ones. For example, music can be said to have a form, be it composed of objects, defined by sentences, or shaped by motifs. These metaphors define the composer's operating space and frame his or her compositional approach. Composers also create their own metaphors in order to think about their music⁴. The elements of a compositional approach (e.g. objects, things, events, episodes, etc.) are potentially infinite, as many as composers are. Thinking of music through conceptual metaphors (e.g. sentences, surfaces, masses or directionality, processes, imaginary bodies, mathematical formulas, vector spaces, themes, architectural spaces, etc.) guides the search for sounds and the sense of their interrelation. These metaphors guide and condition the composer's work, emerging from a reflection on their musical experience. Thinking music is in certain ways a creative act, oriented towards the compositional outcome. Therefore, composition can be regarded as a reflexive activity, as much as thinking about music through certain metaphors can be understood in itself as an act of composition – an act in that it finds its justification in the concrete realization of a piece of music. This circle is based on acts, and therefore on explicit choices. Each compositional reflection on music is thus a form of act that presents itself as an event. This act, experienced instantaneously, remains a potential tool for future acts; the focus of this event is produced during the composition itself. The act of composing then begins with the progressive, seemingly interminable focusing of a musical vision, which constitutes the heart of the act⁵. Through these acts, music decants progressively and becomes defined in its totality. Composing is an act that summarizes many different acts, including noting, verbalizing, drawing, listening, and reflecting. It uses words and inserts them in a circle; in turn, the act itself becomes part of it. The compositional act uses words to think about itself, but expresses itself through the choices that become sound. Sound is therefore the basis of these same choices, and at the same time the consequence of the words expressed during its implementation. This implementation erases the words in their activity, leaving them as traces. In this sense, I suggest that reflecting on composition is in itself a compositional act.

⁴ The Argentinean composer Horacio Vaggione rightly proposes that music should be thought of through the notion of composable space: Horacio Vaggione, "Composable Space: Concerning Some Operating Categories in Electroacoustic Music," in *L'espace: Musique/Philosophie*, 1998, 153–66.

⁵ Susanne Langer uses the notion of *commanding form* to describe this type of vision: Susanne Langer, *Feeling and Form. A Theory of Art* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), 122.

3. The compositional act

In this section, I tackle the main question of this paper: I will discuss the theoretical framework of my compositional approach through a reflection relying on the language of philosophy. Firstly, I define the compositional act principally as an act of communication. By communication I mean the articulation of being together as human beings. Subsequently, I define my compositional practice as an act in a shared space characterized by a set of acts that follow one another and overlap, all oriented – implicitly or consciously – towards a final decision about the possibility of making public that set of choices. The compositional act then results from a series of decisions oriented towards this final decision, the culminating moment of a tension that grows through a series of previous acts that are subsequently erased, albeit leaving traces⁶. This decision concludes an action, it summarizes it. Therefore, not all decisions are of equal importance: the decision that closes the act is then the most important. Once the act is finished, its outcome will be part of the series of ensuing actions that did will not necessarily concern the composer at the origin of that specific act⁷.

To address the hypothesis of the compositional act, I propose a model drawing on the paragraphs that Martin Heidegger dedicates to the theory of the *Being-in* in his book *Being and Time*⁸. In this theory, the philosopher discusses the structure of the human being (*Dasein*) in his *being-in-the-world*. Heidegger considers the fact that the human being is in the world as a constitutive aspect of his being, and hence conceives this relationship as fundamental. Following this line of thought, I suggest that composing music is inevitably an act constituted by this being-in-the-world. Music itself populates this world. All human beings can experience music, not just those who make it and realize it. Music is an activity that creates specific entities (i.e. musical works) and, more generally, everything that can be referred to as music. Musical activity shares essential aspects with most human activities. Thus, if we accept Heidegger's hypothesis, the structure of being a musician, of any kinds (as well as that of anyone who enjoys music), is then fundamentally characterized by the structure of *Being-in*.

3.1 The Heideggerian *Being-in* model

Martin Heidegger describes *Being-in* as the mode of being-in-the-world: human beings dwell somewhere, practice activities, travel in space, use things, or act according to objectives. What Heidegger calls *Being-in* defines a certain structure of the interaction with and through the world. The existential structure of *Being-in* is defined by four fundamental elements: attunement, understanding, interpretation, and discourse.

“Attunement” defines the mood range. Human beings are always fundamentally affected by their mood, and are always in constant relationship with their “thrownness”, which refers to the facticity of the *Dasein* as delivered over to somewhere through its mood. It indicates a substantial foundness of existence. For Heidegger, the human being is “delivered over the fact that it must always already have found itself, found itself in a finding which comes not from a direct seeking, but from fleeing”⁹. This attunement that assaults us comes neither from the outside nor from the inside. It is simply a way of being-in-the-world. This type of situation puts the human being to face with himself, as a fact with which we cannot escape but only come to terms with. The attunement is a “disclosive submission to the world out of which things that matter to us can be encountered”¹⁰. The fact of being-in-the-world is then the basis of our behaviors. This means that this structure of *Being-*

⁶ Gaston Bachelard, *L'intuition de l'instant* (Paris: Gonthier, 1932), 22.

⁷ Gaston Bachelard, *La Dialectique de La Durée* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950), 17.

⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

⁹ Heidegger, 128.

¹⁰ Heidegger, 130.

in is constitutive and possesses a certain existential necessity of its own. According to Heidegger, the human being tries to act according to his attunement. This action is constituted by a movement of evasion, a diversion, from such a situation, and constitutes one of the fundamental moments of *Being-in*. In the case of this article, the act of composing is conceived of precisely as a sort of evasion when confronted with the sonic experience.

Alongside attunement, the other co-original aspect of *Being-in* is “understanding”. Understanding is the “mode of being of Da-sein as a potentiality”¹¹. It is about the relationship with the world as a possibility. Understanding has the existential structure of the project. The project is a way of being which plans – that is, anticipates – its own possibilities. This original way of understanding situates the individual as far away as possible from his own attunement. The project then presents the possibility of its own development. In this sense, “understanding harbors in itself the possibility of interpretation, that is, the appropriation of what is understood.”¹² This type of development is defined by Heidegger as “interpretation”. Interpretation is “not the acknowledgment of what has been understood, but rather the development of possibilities projected in understanding.”¹³ This interpretation is not abstract, but is based on the encounter and interaction with the reality in the everyday experience. Such a relationship defines what Heidegger calls *Bewandtnis*¹⁴, i.e. a certain conformity, involvement, between the tension caused by the attunement of the individual and his or her project. In this sense, involvement plays a fundamental role in interpretation because it somehow defines its success. Heidegger clarifies this perspective by introducing the concept of meaning, or sense – i.e. that in respect of which the project becomes understandable, explainable as something. Meaning is that “upon which of the project in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something.”¹⁵ Involvement is important in the compositional act. This act can make sense when a certain piece of composed music satisfies the act of composing. This satisfaction concerns the composition and its public reception. In this sense, the potential public success of a composition in a given context comes into play at the very moment of the compositional act, as this is in part a constitutive aspect of it.

An “extreme derivative of interpretation” is the “statement”¹⁶. For Heidegger, “communication” is one of the meanings of “statement”. For the German philosopher, language “has its roots in the existential constitution of the disclosedness of *Da-sein*”¹⁷; that is, in the fact of living intimately in a shared space. This shared space constitutes the foundation of what he defines as “discourse”, a further element of *Being-in*. Discourse is the “articulation of the intelligibility”¹⁸, the set of elements that can be interpreted and possible, and it lies “at the basis of interpretation and statement.”¹⁹ According to this hypothesis, meaning and discourse are linked. If meaning is “what can be articulated in interpretation”²⁰, then, discourse articulates the “totality of significations” as an “existential language”²¹. These meanings are always meaningful and have access to the word – that is, they are conveyed by language. Consequently, “the way in which discourse gets expressed is language”²². In this sense, discourse is constitutive of the essence of the individual: it articulates the

¹¹ Heidegger, 134.

¹² Heidegger, 150.

¹³ Heidegger, 139.

¹⁴ *Involvement*.

¹⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 142.

¹⁶ Heidegger, 150.

¹⁷ Heidegger, 150.

¹⁸ Heidegger, 150.

¹⁹ Heidegger, 150.

²⁰ Heidegger, 150.

²¹ Heidegger, 150–51.

²² Heidegger, 150.

comprehensibility of the human being as communication; it acquires its worldliness, that is, it becomes a usable entity, through language. Communication is an articulation of the human being as a whole, it is a sharing of the common attunement. Therefore, communication cannot be reduced to what we commonly call information, that is the transmission of a message from the interiority of one subject to another.

Communication is the expression of *Being-with*, the way of being among other existences. Therefore, discourse has the character of this type of expression. Individuals express themselves as being-in-the-world, therefore already outside themselves: “all discourse about ... which communicates in what it says has at the same time the character of expressing itself. [...] Da-sein expresses itself [...] because as being-in-the-world it is already outside when it understands. What is expressed is precisely this being outside, that is the actual mode of attunement”²³.

Consequently, the tone of the voice, the cadence and the perceived time are indexes of the attunement or emotions of the speaker in, and conditioned by, a given context. Therefore, according to Heidegger, the poetic discourse communicates the existential possibilities of the attunement²⁴. Discourse can then be defined as the “articulation in accordance with significance of the attuned intelligibility of being-in-the-world”²⁵. Some languages are also non-verbal. However, they are all anchored to this basic existential structure. In this sense, the compositional act concerns individual choices, which are constitutively linked to the context the composer lives in: the compositional act is an act composed of acts that are in a context. It acts in a context and directs the activity of composing towards that type of communication, which in turn has to do with the attunement and its diversions, understandings, and interpretations of its being-in-the-world.

3.2 To pose and to compose

Attunement, understanding, interpretation, and discourse are the fundamental moments of *Being-in*. They are not consecutive, but rather co-exist. According to Heidegger, language, understood as an “expression of discourse” – that is, of that thing that summarizes all the possible senses and contexts to which an expression can refer – articulates the space of communication. Communication is the very interaction that takes place through language. Therefore, language and communication coincide. By “language” I mean everything that forms a part of communication: words, gestures, more or less intentional movements, sound, even silence. Sound is an available language tool. It communicates because it is an event caused by bodies. It communicates the matter of a body or other types of things. Music uses sound, or refers to sound, as it is an act of communication that benefits from the sound qualities of bodies. Music uses sound to communicate, and defines itself as such. Among the sounds that music uses to communicate are musical sounds, which are part of our acoustic experience just like all other sounds. Music inhabits our sound world, and is one sound among others.

These general considerations outline the framework in which I situate my compositional approach. My attunement is populated by sounds. The encounter with a given sound is the starting point of my composing, as evasion of my individual attunement. If a sound presents itself to me and I perceive it as consistent with my sonic attunement, I choose it. So, first of all, I *pose* that sound. This kind of act already accomplishes an objective. Such an act does not take place in an abstract way but, as such, expresses a musical possibility. The act of posing a sound is therefore an act of choosing a sound, already positioning it in a certain space. That sound belongs in the instant of the choice in a given moment.

To pose the sound means to choose it in a certain place. That place is defined by a surrounding space. The act of posing sound is analogous to what Heidegger calls “understanding”. Once the

²³ Heidegger, 152.

²⁴ Heidegger, 152.

²⁵ Heidegger, 152.

sound is chosen and placed in a space, the positioning of the other sounds constitutes an interpretation. This interpretation is at the basis of the subsequent acts and choices: it is the interpretation of that given sound in that given place and moment through another sound. Progressively, this act of posing takes on a more complex form, which in turn references other sounds similarly posed. This compositional act is then cumulative, defined by the addition of binding sounds. Gradually, posing becomes composing as an interpretation of the meaning of the placed sound. In fact, the interpretation of the sound that is placed is accomplished through other sounds. Consequently, posing and composing enter into a circle as part of the same act. Understanding a sound means having interpreted it in a given position, and in the function of a sound that will be added to it later on. The act of posing the sounds side by side as a series of successive acts follows Heidegger's model of understanding and interpretation. These two types of actions make it possible for a single act to concretize the sense of the object through its connection.

This compositional act is projective. The sound connections made and their interpretation, which is effected though during the composition, are at the same time conceived as valid in performance. The compositional act is firstly the result of a project understood during the conception of the piece. Secondly, the choices are made according to the fact that these sounds will be instantiated in a possible future during a possible performance. The choice results from the projection that I, as a composer, make of the piece: imagining the moment of the concert, its future intra-world reification, as Heidegger would probably say, that is, the listening by possible listeners. This moment, which is the public presentation of the work, intimately constitutes the compositional act, which is then the place of the deferred imagination of the moments when written music becomes part of the world and, then, begins to be part of the experience of other individuals and becomes a sound among others. This is when language comes into play. The discourse that takes place through music, composed of sounds, comes into contact with the whole of the gamut of possibilities endowed with meaning. This discourse is inhabited by all the other discourses that inhabit the possible experience of the listeners. Music becomes part of their experience, nourishing the hermeneutic circle of each one.

The act of projecting the piece of music integrates the compositional choices as they are made anticipating the listening of others. The fact of designing the sound that is composed in a context in which my intention is not expressed through words but only through sounds requires specific choices that allow the sounds to express a certain content. In this sense, composition can be understood as an interpretation of sounds within the possibilities offered by the type of possible discourses. This passage concretizes the musical form of communication. If understanding identifies the possible, interpretation articulates its possibilities, conveying its meaning, oriented in a deferred way towards the moment of listening. The organization of sound is therefore inhabited by the space outside the sound object itself and by the future, towards which it heads as this potentially has meaning.

3.3 Composition as the projection of a projection

Posing and composing are not separated from discourse. Posing a sound object occurs both in a given space and in relation to a discourse, i.e. the context and the sense that orients itself in it. In Heidegger's view, meaning is understood as the "existential phenomenon in which the formal framework of what can be disclosed in understanding and articulated in interpretation become visible as such"²⁶. The choice of the object then synthesizes the (musical) being-in-the-world. Such sound is positioned and chosen according to a pre-comprehension of the discourse towards which it is oriented, as sense and as involvement: the composer draws his or her satisfaction from the object he or she projects at the level of discourse, that is, the success, in a given context, of his or her musical choices. The choice of a sound is then the result of a decision that anticipates the effect of

²⁶ Heidegger, 146.

the sound that will be heard. If the project is what is anticipated, then the piece I am composing will be projected at the time of the performance. The moment of the concert is when the choices I have made by posing the sounds and correlating them are expressed. In that moment, the succession of organized sounds are perceived as an organic whole by the listeners; it becomes part of their intra-world experience. The fact of projecting a music composition towards the indefinite future of a performance is then a projection of a project. A music composition interpreted in concert is not performed as such. The interpreter adapts the music to the audience, repeating it but not replicating it. The same piece of music, performed by different performers in different places, is different every time. The fact of composing is then, for me, the projection of a projection as the composer creates the material for a future performance²⁷. The fact of choosing a sound is not a personal matter alone; it is the projection of a real event that will take place at a certain time and in a given place. Its meaning is projected in such a way that in most cases, the communication takes place as it is thought²⁸. All the variables of the sound projection are then always open, and must be re-spaced each time.

The fact that music can be projected in the absence of its author is a constitutive element of the act of composition. The compositional choices include the fact that the music can be projected without the composer: in the composer's *relative* absence, due to an impossibility or unwillingness to attend the performance; or in the composer's *absolute* absence, due to the fact that the author is no longer there. The attunement that characterizes this situation is what Heidegger defines as the "possibility of the impossibility of existence in general"²⁹, that is, anxiety. The conception of the composition is therefore linked to the fact that this project can continue to exist even in the absence of its author, that it makes sense and that it produces the desired effect even when the composer is absent. This project is then the projection of a project, because it becomes the basis of the project of a subsequent interpretation; it is the project of what will be executed, prepared, and interpreted, that is to say another project, a new realization of what was composed. In this sense, every moment in which you choose a sound, pose it, and then compose it, includes this "possibility of the impossibility". Writing, in this sense, carries this possibility within itself, reified through the written track, which projects the project to be realized beyond the individual existence.

The understanding and the interpretation that the project achieves through writing is done through music. My compositional act is then an understanding and an interpretation, achieved via the sound of my musical attunement. This attunement is realized in the project of the piece, which is projected towards a possible future in which it will in turn be projected into a space and into the existences of the beings who project it and listen to it. I may not be present in this possible future; indeed, sooner or later, I certainly will not be there. The performance of the piece is defined then as a subsequent understanding and interpretation that carries out a new project from a project already written. The composition is then, in my view, a sort of deferred, anticipated, or imagined performance, carried out with or without myself. Composing is the exercise of imagining the future as a deferred present, constituted of choices made now that will imply choices and impressions in a future instant. This future is present during the composition, during the performance, and continues to be present from time to time. Thus, composing means building the listening of the others.

3.4 The compositional instant

²⁷ Christopher Small considers the composer as the person who provides the materials for a performance. The composer is not, then, the author of a musical work, but the one who imagines an event that will be constructed from the materials he or she created. This definition of composition perfectly corresponds to the type of compositional approach that I propose in this text. cf. Christopher Small, *Musicking. The Meaning of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1998).

²⁸ I attempted to elaborate this idea in a conference act published in 2016: Eric Maestri, "Notation as Temporal Instrument," in *Proceedings TENOR 2016. International Conference on Technologies for Music Notation and Representation*, ed. Chris Nash Richard Hoadley Dominique Fober (Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2016).

²⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 242.

If the compositional act is essentially projective, what specific type of projection characterizes it? For some authors, music is based on what is sometimes defined as a musical idea³⁰. Arnold Schoenberg thought this notion through the concept of *Faßlichkeit*, that is, of comprehensibility³¹. In my case, this comprehensibility is not the results of the good combination of forms, but the output of choices and projections. Every note, sound, sentence, every element of the language in a given moment; all must be chosen and thought of as it will be realized, understood, and listened to. In this sense, my compositional act is oriented towards the conclusion of the act itself and its concrete realization. The act of composition considers the act of writing, incorporating the imagination of future acts that will concern the use of the materials created for this act itself. The compositional act consists of several acts and moments; in these moments, I imagine the possible acts of the musician and the listener. These moments are all oriented towards the conclusion of the act of projection of the piece through writing, recording or other means of memorization. However, this conclusion of the act of writing does not represent the final objective intended by the author. That moment is the concert, the moment in which the score, the files, the programs, indeed anything that can be performed, resonated, and interpreted, are (re)produced in front of an audience. The realization of the materials for the performance, which represents the end point of the composer's work, is thus the stage or other space for performance. This projection integrates the choice of sound. The instant in which the sound is chosen synthesizes the chosen sound and its projection in the possible future context. Understanding and interpretation allow for the indication of the production of sounds that then become entities towards which the projecting understanding is directed. The writing of the composition is therefore the progressive definition of this possible projection, comprised of all the instants and all the acts performed to accomplish it, and oriented towards making other acts possible, in order to finally perform it. This musical idea does not have the fixity of ideal objects, but it changes following the experience and potentially changes in an infinite way.

I define this series of successive and simultaneous choices, oriented to the projection of the piece as projected in a context outside the written realm, as the *compositional instant*. The compositional instant is the moment in which I choose a sound following an understanding of its meaning within the context for which, and in which, it is conceived. In this moment, I synthesize the comprehension, the subsequent interpretations, and the projection of the music project. The compositional instant projects this project into a future time, in which the project will be realized and then projected in turn. The compositional instant potentially anticipates and summarizes all the contexts and all the possible realizations. It is the moment in which I realize how the instant of that composed moment will be perceived by the listener.

3.5 Composition as existential trace

The image of the compositional instant, which underlines the notion of choice (from that of the individual sounds to that of their organization) indicates the crucial and fundamental core of my practice. I conceive of composition as an existential trace, in the sense that every instant I composed in an act leaves signs, each of which constitutes the starting point of subsequent ones. The compositional choices are then traces of the existential experience of composing, collected in an existential fragment of a series of these choices. This fragment is the result of choices whose temporality is exactly the same as that of individual existence. However, during the composition, I extract the existential experience of my composing and put it to use in writing. The process of understanding and interpretation is then extracted from the time of life and projected outwards. In fact, composing also means finishing the work and projecting it, in its entirety, towards the future.

³⁰ Jean-Louis Leleu, *La Construction de l'idée Musicale. Essais Sur Webern, Debussy et Boulez* (Genève: Éditions Contrechamps, 2015), 39.

³¹ Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), 159.

This projecting closes the hermeneutic circle, putting an end to the posing and the composing of the sounds. The compositional instant incorporates this aspect and delivers the work to the future. The finished piece remains the outcome of a succession of choices made, the sum of the compositional instants. These choices remain as traces, blocked and released by the author. The compositional act is thus an existential trace, because it is the result of the decisions taken in a certain time which leave a two-dimensional imprint, a trace, an accumulation of compositional instants. The composed music remains there, in a place and in the form of the choices made, which are there as a project to be designed.

In this sense, my music is characterized by two fundamental questions – one about the nature of the compositional choice, the other about the limit between sound and music. I constantly try to balance the choice of a sound I hear and that heard by others. The moment when that thought and positioned sound is perceived outside of myself leaves a trace, from which I then perceive the following sounds. I try to compose the listening, and this projection outside is realized through choices and their traces. I try to imagine how my choices will sound as a reflexive act. This auto-analytical observation stimulates and motivates me in my compositional act. However, the fact that one has to perform the acts, and therefore has to erase in an instant all the other acts that led to the final decision, makes this observation disappear as one of the many acts that precede the decision and the preparation of the next act. Here, the reflection is cancelled by the compositional instant.

Instants	Heideggerian model	Compositional model
α	Attunement	Sound attunement
β	Understanding	Pose
γ	Interpretation	Compose
δ	Discourse	Projection of a projection

Table 1: A comparison of the Heideggerian and the compositional models.

4. A hypothesis on musical language

Both notions – of the compositional instant, and of music as a projected projection – are based on a hypothesis concerned with the nature of music. The composer composes at a time when the full realization of what he or she is composing is not yet achieved. The composer projects real sound events into the future. These events are made in such a way as to constitute sensitive units, such as can be understood by the anticipated listener. Indeed, composers imagine real sound events. I understand this as constituting the composer's fundamental act of trust.

I adopt a very empirical notion of language: language inhabits the world and is used as an entity that results from the interaction between individuals. It makes it possible to talk about bodies or experiences in their absence and to reflect on elements of mutual concern in order to know them and understand them. The composer uses sounds as the basis of his or her musical language. However, in what sense is music a language for a composer? What does the composer use to build this language? And, what are the fundamental units that the musician uses to compose, if indeed any do exist?

In order to think of music as a language, we need to ask ourselves what music is about. It is well known that the hypotheses about musical signification are manifold; and that, probably, many of them are at least partially true. Music is often understood by semiologists as a kind of symbolic

form³², which potentially has an infinite number of possible interpretations. These interpretations are both personal – the signification – and contextual – the connotation. According to Susanne Langer, music is a particular type of symbolism suitable for the expression of “unspeakable things”³³, for it articulates types of forms that spoken language cannot articulate³⁴. According to Langer, music is the representation and formulation of emotions, moods, mental tensions, a “logical picture” of the personal feeling³⁵. In this sense, the American philosopher seems to share Heidegger’s view of discourse as “the articulation in accordance with significance of the attuned intelligibility of being-in-the-world”³⁶. Music is an articulation of meanings, an “unconsummated symbol”, whose essence is not assertion but “expressiveness”³⁷. The musical significance is therefore implicit.

Thus, music can be seen as a kind of expression of the unspeakable. It is a language that is complementary to spoken language, dealing with a part of reality hardly identified by verbal language: the sound reality. I contend that music talks about this reality. However, if music does articulate the existential attunement, how does it do so? In my opinion, the articulation of the human invisible part, the composer’s interiority – that is, of the experience that each being individually experiences – is made by activating the invisible part of the bodies, that is, by vibrating their matter. The act of making a body resonate reveals its invisible aspects. After all, when we want to be sure of the matter that makes up an object, we touch it and make it resound³⁸. Do we then use the sound coming from the bodies we experience as a metaphor, in order to articulate the internal experience coming from our own bodies? I believe yes. By resonating with the matter of bodies, human beings learn to resonate with their own matter, and thus express their non-visible sensations.

Composers use bodies to produce sound. Their knowledge consists precisely in knowing how and where to activate the sound sources that they wish to use in a specific way. To do this, composers must know the properties of the bodies they intend to use, and know how to activate them themselves or how to indicate to someone else – the performers – how to activate the resonance of that given body. This primary intention – the indication of the matter, the instrument, and its activation – is, for the composer, transmitted through the score, the use of which is taught orally in schools. Composers refer to that type of practice of activation of the sound source. In this sense, the musicians behave like most human beings and associate the sound they want to produce with sound sources. They rely on ordinary sound experience, which provides the context for understanding the music itself. Indeed, the ecological approach to auditory perception proposed by Gaver underlines this very effectively³⁹. When a score is performed, this something to which the composer refers (excluding interpretation) often conforms to what has been written. After all, the composer constructs future events knowing that there exists a strong probability that these compositional events may be interpreted (or reinterpreted) and reworked in the performance. On this, the composer and the performer negotiate, speak, and rehearse mobilizing their common sonic and musical experience. Composers use their writing as a set of signs whose references indicates at the same time the sound body, the way of activating it and the sound that such action is expected to produce. The combination of these three aspects, if respected, contribute to the realization of the musical idea. Therefore, the composer’s act is grounded in a shared experience which has been

³² Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Musicologie Générale et Sémiologie* (Paris: Christian Bourgeois Éditeur, 1987).

³³ Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key. A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (New York: The New American Library, 1948), 82.

³⁴ Langer, 189.

³⁵ Langer, 180.

³⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 152.

³⁷ Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key. A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, 195.

³⁸ Roberto Casati and Jérôme Dokic, *La Philosophie Du Son* (Paris: Jacqueline Chambon, 1998), 32.

³⁹ William W. Gaver, “What in the World Do We Hear? An Ecological Approach to Event Auditory Perception,” *Ecological Psychology*, 1993a.

mobilized. His or her notation refers to something that goes beyond the music as indicated by the sign. Writing denotes something and this something comes into play in defining the linguisticity of the music.

By “denotation”, one usually meant the principal meaning of a word. For example, when we say or read the word “chair”, we think of any chair. But, if we ask a musician what does a musical sound mean, how would he or she respond? They would answer that sound means the sound itself. However, does this sound means something else? We could say that the musical note means the frequency performed by a specific instrument; or that a certain musical succession of notes means that specific phrase performed by that instrument and musician; or a specific emotion. But let’s think of any sound indicated by a notation: what does that written or thought note, that chord, that gesture mean then? What is the principal meaning of a musical note?

I advance the hypothesis that that note means that given sound made through an instrument, whether it is a body other than that of the musician or through the body itself of the musician. Then, when we answer that a sound means the sound itself, we consider the sound of a musical instrument. The sound of the instrument presents the instrument itself, that is, the sound considered is a musical sound. We listen to it “as if” it is musical⁴⁰. Thus, to understand its signification, we have to think of the instrument as a sign. First of all, the musical sign means a sound produced by a sound body. Secondly, the denotation of music is the sound produced. Therefore, notation allows the use of the musical instrument to create sound events; it makes it possible for the given instrumentalist, or more instrumentalists, do things from certain sound bodies. Hence, musical language is based on the instruments as signs. Music does not associate sounds in the abstract, but rather writes sound configurations starting from the instrumental experience.

If we agree that music denotes instrumental sounds, do these sounds then mean anything at all? As I have argued so far, music denotes sound bodies, instruments and, therefore, sounds. It speaks of their matter through their timbre. But, in turn, does talking about the timbre of sound bodies, connecting them and creating new sounds from their connection, i.e. making music, mean anything? I think that music – talking about sound bodies – means the ordinary acoustic experience. This signification is given by signs that are not visual, or simply sonic. The sign of music is the musical instrument. The instrument is the sign that music uses, that is, a sort of arche-writing, as Bernard Sève claims. According to the French philosopher, the instrument inscribes the discretization of the flow of sound⁴¹ in the very materiality of its body. It is therefore a kind of sign already of its own; a sign of the material that characterizes it, and therefore of all types of materials that the instrument plays. The sound reality then travels through the instrument: one experiences it through this same instrument. The instrument is the fundamental element of the language of music, and the score is mainly a deferred instrument. The instrument means that ordinary sound, as its sound, is listened to as such. It is therefore a reduction of the sound that is implicitly used by musicians to mean the sound experience through more abstract sound entities, detached from that experience and more specifically musical. According to this hypothesis, the instrument, through the types of sound it can produce, is an index of sounds.

Such a semantic relationship can allow “sound” to mean sound. In this sense, the musical instrument expresses the world of sound and allows for an implicit, musical, non-verbal understanding of it, which can be used as a language that articulates a certain type of human experience. It is not true, therefore, that music does not mean anything. If by “meaning”, we mean an instance referred to as a signifier, then the “meaning” of music is the sound and its signifier, the instrument. So, if music is about the instrument making sound, and the instrument is about the

⁴⁰ Alessandro Arbo, *Entendre Comme. Wittgenstein et l'esthétique Musicale*, Collection Du GREAM/Esthétique, Dirigée Par Pierre Michel (Paris: Hermann, 2012).

⁴¹ Bernard Sève, *L'instrument de Musique* (Paris: Seuil, 2013), 208.

ordinary acoustic experience, then music is about the acoustic experience through that instrument. In this sense, then, music could be considered as the “symbolic transformation of experience” that Susanne Langer talks about⁴². In fact, by practicing music, one could gain a deep and conscious sound experience. However, this transformation of the experience would not pass through the word but would use the sound world to understand the sound world itself. The instrument, as a sign of sounds, allows for such an experiential transformation. The musical instrument then provides the music with its alphabet. The instrument itself is a sign: music speaks of sound through the instrument⁴³.

Consequently, music denotes the musical instrument and, by referring to the instrument, it means the ordinary acoustic experience and, therefore, also the music itself. The composer’s ability to create comprehensible sound experiences depends on this connection. Environmental and musical sounds constitute the totality of the sound experience of each one of us. According to this hypothesis, musical instruments can be seen as a first abstraction from the sound world (as the sound world is made of music as well), and thus allow for its more precise interpretation. Instruments are signs of the sound world. Music then has an educational and cognitive function. However, the type of knowledge which it gives access to is not scientific, but musical. Those who practice music by making it or listening to it can regularly and continuously have access to that kind of deepening of the sound experience. It is not, therefore, an intellectual knowledge that can be rationally demonstrated, but a practical knowledge, which can offer the basis for other types of knowledge without having to justify itself or be based on scientific knowledge.

The creation of music through writing, playing, improvising, being together singing and playing, all use the instrument to reflect on sound reality through sound. Music is a reflection on sound from instruments that allow us to produce these sounds. Music lets us know sound reality through the act of playing. Therefore, if music means the musical instrument which in turn means the sound experience, composing means creating a real sound experience which then becomes part of the ordinary sound experience as music. Composing music means adding sounds to the sound experience. These added sounds enrich this experience and its reflective potential, as they are human-made sounds and hence understandable and repeatable. The realization of new sound events that make the instruments play, makes our daily sound experience resound and allows for a new interpretation and awareness. This, in my opinion, is what music means and what its function is.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to delineate the elements of my musical practice. To do this, I turned to the discipline of philosophy. This reference is a reflexive one, as I did not intend to indicate a certain philosophical truth, but rather to explain through philosophy what music cannot. I have identified the elements to conduct this reflection in the passages of *Being and Time* that Martin Heidegger dedicates to the examination of *Being-in*. The description of the structure of *Being-in* offers a model for identifying the elements of my musical practice and my inspirations. This structure is characterized by four components: attunement, understanding, interpretation, and discourse. I have argued that this model is similar to my compositional process. I pose a sound and this posing is already in itself an understanding whose interpretation takes place by association and contact with other sounds placed. This model has enabled me to explain my thought, supporting my idea of composition as a projection of a projection, and the notion – for me fundamental – of the

⁴² Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key. A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, 35.

⁴³ Pierre Schaeffer observed that if we have conquered traditional music, it is thanks to the means of the musical instruments. It would be amazing if we could undertake an inventory of sound by ear. Pierre Schaeffer, *Traité Des Objets Musicaux. Essais Interdisciplines* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966), 402.

compositional instant. If posing and composing are acts that constitute the compositional instant, these acts are oriented towards what Heidegger calls discourse, that is, towards an outside of the sound that projects it as a possible project constituted by the thought of the listening of others. In this sense, the project consists intimately in the construction of the listener's listening. This reflection led me to advance a hypothesis on musical language. I have argued that, in the observation of my compositional practice, musical language has a primary meaning. Music speaks of sound using instruments. I thus proposed to see the instruments as signs of sound. Musical writing can be then understood as a deferred musical instrument. This hypothesis thus aims to clarify how composing is an act that bears an effect on sound reality. The music then has a specific impact on experience. The musical language activates sound bodies, and through their activation can produce privileged access to the ordinary sound experience. The compositional choices made are then thought of as real tracks instantiated at the time of execution. The existential trace of the compositional choice then becomes a trace of information in the performance⁴⁴. Those choices, which are realized in the sounds, are real events made for the experience of the listener: they are imagined acts projected with the hope of becoming real acts, trusting the future realizations of the project conceived.

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⁴⁴ W. Luke Windsor, "Gestures in Music-Making: Action, Information and Perception," in *New Perspectives on Music and Gesture*, Gritten, A., King, E., SEMPRES Studies in The Psychology of Music (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 63.

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