

366 text scores

The present publication is a collection of musical text scores. Their writing unfolded over a period of exactly one year between May 2020 and May 2021 and wasn't planned in advance. Its final form established itself gradually without any predetermined design and subject matter. This collection's eventual meaning as well as its title have been found only later through a retrospective interpretation.

Because making this collection and making sense of it have been almost completely distinct, these few introductory pages will first outline the collection's story, thus clarifying its conditions of creation and certain practical choices made while writing. After this rather factual part, I will give my interpretation of the collection as a whole as it began to emerge years after its completion. This will eventually lead me to frame it as accidentally documenting some temporary transformations of my creative thinking.

The writing process began spontaneously on May 22, 2020. At the time, I was looking into conceptual art practices and their associated textual forms of notation. That day I purposelessly decided to document a musical idea that had suddenly come to me in the form of a verbal score. The next day, it was followed by another and this went on informally every day for several weeks.

While the ideas kept on coming, I saw their writing as a simple personal practice which was not intended to be shown or even understood as art. Most of the ideas being sketches, they had no directly foreseeable outcome and I considered a lot of them to be rather trivial taken in isolation. Given that during the writing period, I barely recorded my ideas elsewhere than in this collection, my practice was initially that of keeping a notebook. Curiously enough, it is the only time I was able to consistently keep one.

As the collection grew, so did the tension of knowing when and how it would eventually end. After weeks of continuously having ideas of varying scope and quality, I finally came to the point where no idea occurred spontaneously. I strongly felt that it would be a shame to stop there and, despite the lack of inspiration, I made the decision to maintain the continuity of the score flow for a determined time. The

final period of one year was decided at some later stage, as it implied both a clear unity and a sizeable number of entries.

This preservation of the scores' continuity was enabled by various techniques to circumvent the lack of ideas. The first and most obvious of these was to introduce graphic arrangements into the collection resembling what has historically been called "concrete poems". Provisions have been made, however, to ensure that these relate in some minimal way to the notion of text score. Indeed, they were from the beginning destined to result in a musical performance. Also, their textual character (understood in a narrow and somewhat naive sense) would be maintained by the exclusive use of typographic characters managed in the same file (and software) as the strictly verbal scores. It is noteworthy that they are not distributed over the entire collection, but are confined to around a quarter of it, from #37 to #130. Although these scores were always an absolute last-resort option used as rarely as possible, the ceasing of their use was not intentional.

Other techniques involved a series of mental operations and maneuvers to guarantee the daily output of scores. On the one hand, there was the simple idea of rationing, that is, "storing" an idea in my memory and writing it another day. On the other hand, different tactics of "spinning-off" or recycling a single idea were used to produce new ones close to the original. Finally, I sometimes resorted to more questionable ways of creating scores, such as "counterfeiting" third party ideas by modifying them a little, as well as "partial plagiarism" understood as extracting a particular aspect from someone else's idea and presenting it in isolation. Also, the pure and simple quotation of text without indication of its source was another of these techniques.

The writing process was naturally influenced by the contingencies of my personal life, making the output of scores irregular in terms of topic, precision and originality. There are thus regions of varying merit in the collection. Some periods indeed required more interventions to maintain continuity, leading at times to the proliferation of filler scores between more original ideas.

The end of the writing process came as planned after

one year exactly. Despite some refinement and streamlining of my ability to distill daily ideas, the constant requirement for newness had expectedly become quite tedious. Over time, it also entailed a change of mindset incompatible with elaborating more complex and long-term works. Possibly as a result, I hardly recorded my ideas in writing over the following months.

After its completion, this collection stayed untouched for more than a year as I had no idea how or even if it should be made public. It was lacking a determined overarching topic since no curation had been possible. Indeed, selecting among the scores would have required the daily writing of even more of them, which was beyond my abilities. I was thus regarding the collection as rather meaningless. It remained therefore stored away and untitled for a while.

The preceding paragraphs describe the state of my thoughts at the time of the collection's completion. These are mostly practical and concern how the collection's writing eventually amounted to a simple program: at a regular daily rate, a score with a certain degree of novelty should be composed in natural language (or, exceptionally, with its associated typographic symbols).

It is when I turned my attention to this program and its reasons for being so that I started having a new comprehension of the whole collection. This required some time as it was necessary for some practical and contextual memories connected to the writing to attenuate. At first, the collection presented itself to me as an agglomeration of different writing moments. It appeared as a unity only later, and different things that were not originally intended began emerging from it. This led me to see the scores as being symptomatic of a change in my thinking, probably linked to the circumstances of their writing. My hypothesis ended up being that this collection could be framed as an involuntary (and so somewhat "objective") document of this transformation.

As explained earlier, the collection's development has basically known two states. At first the writing was spontaneous before rapidly becoming a conscious practice with fixed guidelines. This change can be seen as a shift from a

quality oriented thinking to a quantity oriented one. The first scores were written because they were deemed intriguing enough to be recorded. After taking the decision to maintain a continuous flow of scores, my perspective had changed. What really mattered was the collection as a whole rather than its individual elements. Their quality became thus secondary to their regularity.

I would call this transformation a “logistical” turn in the project. The notion of logistics refers here broadly to the discipline of rationally and efficiently managing the circulation of things. In this case, what I would call “mental logistics” encompasses all the above-mentioned techniques involved in the management of the idea flow between the point of origin (my mind) and its destination (the collection). This “logistification” is best seen in the emergence and eventual disappearance of the graphic scores in the collection. The first one appeared on the 37th day and manifested the final program of the collection as it was a by-product of the decision to keep a daily production under any circumstance. These scores’ development resulted in a visual language not without some aesthetic value. However, as already mentioned, these do not span across the entire collection. So, if each graphic score reveals a brief failure in fulfilling the program, their disappearance indicates therefore that the process got streamlined and optimized. There was thus no need for any emergency scores, no matter their aesthetic value.

With these remarks in mind, it is not surprising that this collection appeared between May 2020 and May 2021. Indeed, the dates correspond to the Coronavirus pandemic in which the question of logistics rose to a particular prominence. Indeed, besides the more familiar issues concerning the supply chain management of goods, vaccines and medical equipments, individuals themselves ended up being understood in terms of rationalized flows and circulations in order to hinder the disease’s spreading. The situation meant also a very sudden reorganization, and so a highlighting, of the global circulation system. Some flows got inhibited (like air traffic) while others progressed (postal and delivery services or telecommunications for example). All of this created

laboratory conditions for developing a “logistical mentality”. While it was undoubtedly the only occasion for this collection to exist as it is, I wish to insist that it is ultimately not about the pandemic in itself or my subjective perspective on it. I hope that publishing this book almost three years after its completion helps making this clear.

The way matter circulated during this period certainly shaped the appearance and evolution of this collection as it implied unusual material conditions of living. On the other hand, fulfilling one’s symbolic needs under these circumstances relied extensively on the so-called “immaterial” aspect of global circulation, namely, the movement of information and its main infrastructure: the Internet. In other words, whether it was education, interpersonal contacts, news information, artworks, entertainment, etc... practically all the information I not only encountered but also produced was formatted as online content. The reception of various types of information increased while its access was enabled by the interface of a single device. This led at times to a state of simultaneous confusion and stimulation induced by the stupefying profusion of available information.

Surprisingly enough, it is in wisdom already known by ancient philosophers that I found a way of connecting in hindsight my media-induced “stupor” and my spontaneous personal writing practice. A small text by Foucault called “Self Writing” (that draws on Seneca among others) summarizes it as follows.

*“Writing, as a way of gathering in the reading that was done and of collecting one’s thoughts about it, is an exercise of reason that counters the great deficiency of stultitia, which endless reading may favor. Stultitia is defined by mental agitation, distraction, change of opinions and wishes, and consequently weakness in the face of all the events that may occur; it is also characterized by the fact that it turns the mind toward the future, makes it interested in novel ideas, and prevents it from providing a fixed point for itself in the possession of an acquired truth.”**

* Michel Foucault, *Self Writing* in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, vol. 1

This quote, encountered years after the collection's completion, describes accurately both my state at the time and my attempts to counteract it. Two things are particularly notable here. The stupidity (*stultitia*) at hand is not related to the quality of the information received but to its quantity. Also, novel ideas are a consequence of the mental agitation that ensues. Writing supports of memory (what is called *hypomnemata* in the text) like notebooks and personal registers involve thus a "digestion" of information in order to avoid the dissolution of one's thinking and thus oneself. The present collection in its beginnings can be seen as such a practice. Without too much pedestrian psychologizing, the intensity of my media-induced stupidity at the time could explain the spontaneous emergence of the collection as well as why I was never able to keep a notebook before and after.

Hypomnematic writing being ultimately the processing of a heterogeneous manifold of things, it is reasonable to expect some aspects to have persisted in the process' outcome. Since, this manifold was mostly formatted as "online content", I believe that deciphering this collection involves looking at content's extensive and varied influence on it.

Primarily, this collection's above-discussed program enacts fully the logic (or better the logistics) of content creation. A rapid glance at the history of the Internet makes evident its affinities with logistics since both went from military tools to apparatuses structuring global circulation. Coupled with the capitalist requirement for endless disruption, audiovisual content obeys a program not unlike mine: always new information should be consistently available. Content thus logistically organized presents itself as flows, lists, streams, feeds, etc... as this book might also be understood. Moreover, online content and its "rational" evaluation and distribution follow a quantitative logic enacted by humans and machines alike on platforms structured around accumulation. Content is desirable when interacted with in large numbers and it tends to have various (and not necessarily compatible) features conducive to this, like provocativeness, simplicity, relatibility, fast-pacedness, fragmentarity, derivativity, funniness, orthodoxy, etc... As we have seen,

the prioritization of quantity over quality and some consequences of it are present in this work. The specific nature of the elements being unimportant besides their availability on platforms, there is also no necessary homogeneity or goal. Consequently, this heterogeneity entails a greater fluidity in the performativities of content as evidenced by phenomena like “infomercials” or “advertainment” which is also an aspect of many scores here.

More fundamentally, heterogeneity is also present at the level of media. Any content appears rarely as just one medium to us. Accessing it means going through layers of interfaces comprising at least text, but often also computer generated imagery as well as audio and video. Also, digital computers being essentially machines capable of simulating other machines, they are media that replace and thus contain the main form of communication media of the past like cinema, newspaper, radio, TV, etc... This simulation is enabled by an underlying single-medium code that the computer performs. This duality between code and appearance is directly traceable to the historically musical duality of score and performance. The use of text scores as material in this book and their implied realization in various media could then be understood as an accidental reference to the links between music, computation and digital post-mediality. Both here and online, contents are ultimately heterogeneous results of a single, general and action-oriented code.

Naturally, one can also see the vast influence of online content in the subject matter of many of the present scores. Indeed, a lot of them use the internet as their source for material and aesthetics. Otherwise, some deal with adjacent questions like advertisement, copyright, surveillance and behavioral control as well as their counteracting through “adversarial techniques”. However, I am not interested in addressing this point in detail here since most of this is evident when reading the collection (and not particularly original).

There is however two related aesthetic tendencies that I find worth mentioning here. First, there is a good number of pages dealing with the notion of totality in the collection, for instance by instructing the compression or superimposition of things in time or space. They might be seen in hind-

sight as experiments in logistical or statistical aesthetics, aiming at finding specific qualities in big quantities. Terms like “sweatshop sublime” have been coined to describe the feeling of realizing one’s position in a logistical network so enormous that one cannot grasp it. The possibility for such a logistical sublime of information flows seems imaginable. Sublimity would come from realizing the magnitude of what would have to be perceived and thus computed by a human mind to grasp these gigantic clusters of information.

This leads us to the second tendency: the comparison between the respective limits of human perception and machinic perception. It is most clearly noticeable in the scores instructing the (ab)use of automatic musical, optical and textual recognition and transcription softwares in order to cause misrecognitions and technological apophenia. Not unlike a Rorschach test for humans, feeding noise to a machine and forcing it to understand something from it could be a way to probe its “mind”. In this line of thought, we can reevaluate the textual status of the collection’s graphic scores. From a machinic point of view, they might not just naively but essentially be text scores because their coding is fundamentally the same. This has interesting consequences when online content is concerned. Indeed, humans are less and less the only perceiving subjects on the Internet as evidenced by all of the pattern-recognition algorithms that curate content and decide its future distribution or censoring for example.

Of course, this book’s interpretation could go on and develop additional relevant aspects like the links between strategies originally stemming from conceptual art and their now widespread use in content creation. Following this, it could also be possible to see the attempts of monetizing conceptual art as foreshadowing the latest forms of information commodification (by connecting Siegelau’s “Artist’s Contract” with NFTs for example). I believe however that enough has been written to make the present book conceivable as more than a mere agglomeration of unrelated scores. Naturally, being a retrospective insight, it can’t explain everything and exhaust its whole meaning.

Discussing the title “Contents” offers a way to survey and draw these remarks to a close. It was chosen because it alludes to the four main levels at which I understand this collection. Firstly, it refers to online content as initial and material cause as well as structuring influence of many of these scores. Secondly, it outlines the collection’s program through its paradoxical performativity as a title. While a book is generally titled so as to give clues about its contents, this one merely indicates that some elements are contained. This non-determination thus expresses minimally that the simple presence of some content is more important than whatever it may be. Thirdly, “Contents” describes also the nature of the collection’s elements. To consider them as mere contents without “form” emphasizes their being scores. As such they are inherently incomplete since they call for a (at least imaginary) realization. This book is therefore not the final materialization of these scores and will hopefully be part of a network of events and objects originating from it. Ultimately, the form-content antinomy and its intricacies are embedded in a more profound obsession of mine for thinking mediations between transcendence and immanence. This is apparent in a lot of ideas in the collection dealing with particular forms of this antinomy like form-matter, form-function as well as medium-message, noise-information and hardware-software for example.

To conclude, a few editorial remarks concerning the book in its present form are in order. Since deciding to publish it, I have wondered how much corrections and “improvements” of the original material should be made for an audience. I finally decided to correct unclarities and major English problems with the help of other pairs of human and machinic eyes. I however didn’t try to make the scores better taken in isolation. This would have implied turning them into more legitimate artworks. By remaining content derived from other content, these scores can therefore be used and abused in any way.

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