

#9

THOMAS GORBACH INTERVIEWS ANNETTE VANDE GORNE

THOMAS GORBACH AND ANNETTE VANDE GORNE

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Following her initial classical studies first at the Royal Conservatories of Mons and of Brussels and later with Jean Absil, Annette Vande Gorne chanced upon acousmatic music during a training course in France. She became convinced by the quality of the compositional work developed by François Bayle and Pierre Henry and the revolutionary nature of this new art form: disruption of perception, renewal of composition through spectromorphological writing and listening conduction. Vande Gorne took a few more training courses on acousmatic music and then she studied musicology at ULB, Brussels and electroacoustic composition with Guy Reibel and Pierre Schaeffer at the Conservatoire National Supérieur in Paris.

Vande Gorne founded the research group *Musiques & Recherches* and the *Métamorphoses d'Orphée* studio in Ohain. In 1984 she launched an acousmatic music festival called *L'Espace du Son* in Brussels, assembling a 60-loudspeaker system—an acousmonium—derived from the sound projection system designed by François Bayle. She is the editor of the musical aesthetics review *Lien* and *Répertoire Électro-CD* (1993; 1997; 1998), a directory of electroacoustic works. She founded the composition competition *Métamorphoses* and the spatialized performance competition *Espace du Son*. She has gradually put together Belgium's only documentation centre on this art form, available online at electrodoc.musiques-recherches.be

Annette Vande Gorne was professor of acousmatic composition at the Royal Conservatory of Liège (1986), Brussels (1987), and Mons (1993). In 1995 she was awarded the *Prix SABAM Nouvelles formes d'expression musicale* (SABAM Prize for New Forms of Musical Expression). She still gives numerous spatialized acousmatic music performances, consisting of works both from her own repertoire, and those of other interna-

tional composers. Her current work focuses on the study of energetic and kinesthetic archetypes. Nature and the physical world are models for her abstract and expressive musical language. She is a passionate researcher of the various relationships created between spoken word, sound and meaning through electroacoustic technology. Relevant works include the *Tao cycle* and *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Est*, which have renewed electroacoustic music's ties with the past. She has also made a few incursions into other art forms, including theatre, dance, sculpture, etc.

Part 1

Thomas Gorbach (TG): In your 'Treatise on Writing Acousmatic Music on Fixed Media' you build on the notion of 'play-sequence'. What is 'play-sequence'?

Annette Vande Gorne (AVG): Play-sequence is the result of playing a 'sounding body' or 'sound body' with a special category of energy-movements in your head and the adaptation to its surface. One sound body can create different energy-movements.

TG: I would like to ask you about what you refer to as a 'sound body'. Can you define its role in the setting of a play-sequence and an energy-movement?

AVG: It is the instrument, or better the surface, to play on. It has no relationship to the body, and it can be anything that makes sound. I prefer to reject the notion of 'instrument' because it is too close to the traditional conception of an instrument.

TG: Is it possible to call it a sounding object?

AVG: I reject the term 'object'. It is a term imported from the phenomenology of Husserl and Schaeffer which mostly deals with the perception of the 'objet sonore'. The 'objet sonore' is tied to our listening perception.

It is the notion of the 'archetype'¹ that interests me more, not the notion of the sound body. This idea was initially developed by François Bayle, although the choice of archetype comes from Guy Reibel's practice. The central question is: What can I communicate directly to the imagination of the audience so that they can immediately recognize the archetype's category I propose? For instance, falling, flying, rubbing, friction, oscillating, etc. In order to make a play-sequence I always have in mind a special archetype and then I play the sound body in such a way that I can produce this archetype. It is not a question of the physical gesture that I produce with my body. It is about the archetype's category, imported from the physical world, that I choose for the piece. I always look for 'sound bodies' that can produce this kind of energy in the best possible way.

However, it is necessary to add a musical layer to the 'play-sequence'. This musical layer is what I improvise from my personal experience as an instrumentalist, in my case the piano, but always in the kind of energy-movement I have chosen. The choice of an

¹Note: Vande Gorne refers to energy archetypes that can be perceived in sonic events.



Figure 9.1: *Annette Vande Gorne in her studio performing a play-sequence with a 'sound body' (Photo: Annette Vande Gorne, 2021, CC BY-NC 4.0)*

appropriate musical layer is as important as the energy-movement and the sound body. But the play-sequence is not the composition. When I work in the studio exploring the recordings of a play-sequence, the miracle is that the musical layer of the play-sequence is constantly conserved during the process of composition. This the reason why I always start from a play-sequence.

TG: Let's talk about the embodied gestures instruments we have built. One of the project's basic ideas was building surfaces that could by their appearance and physical design alone afford an idea of how they might sound. Like when we see a violin, we also know how it sounds.

AVG: Yes, although you have put them in a sonic layer, because they do not sound by themselves.² You made a step more that is the programming of the microchip, and I see that you have searched for a relationship between the acting bodily gesture and the sounding result.

²Vande Gorne explains here that, as the instruments are digital, they have to be connected to a synthesizer to sound.



Figure 9.2: *Annette Vande Gorne's objects for producing play-sequences (Photo: Annette Vande Gorne, 2021, CC BY-NC 4.0)*

TG: Talking about the embodied gestures, it would be interesting if you could comment on the following instrument (Figure 9.3). We designed it with the idea of friction in mind. Its activating gestures would be pressing and rotating. Do you observe these energies in the surface of the controller?

AVG: I observe that there are two kinds of pressure. One is friction with few iterative results and the other is pressure understood as deformation. In the latter, there is a change in the sonic spectral compound during the direction of the pressure. Like the instrument called the jaw harp. So this instrument could in fact perform two types of energies. Although, for the instrument, it would be the same movement. It depends on the mapping.



Figure 9.3: *Embodied Gesture Instrument: The 'friction' interface* (Photo: Elisa Unger, 2021, CC BY-NC 4.0)



Figure 9.4: *Embodied Gesture Instrument: Vessel interface for granular control* (Photo: Elisa Unger, 2021, CC BY-NC 4.0)

TG: The following instrument is a vessel (Figure 9.4). Which energy comes to your mind?

AVG: Rotation and Spiral. The difference is that in the case of rotation pitch is constant while at a spiral the frequency goes higher when the movement accelerates.

TG: Rotating could also be possible by displacing the vessel around us. . .

AVG: No, then it is oscillation. It does not depend on the surface but on what is inside the vessel. Ah, correction, it is not oscillation, because it is possible to produce a balancing movement with this sound body. It is difficult to control the balancing. Oscillation is

always mechanic, quick and regular. It is always possible to hear two poles but not the trajectory. Balancing is not regular and it is possible to hear the trajectory between the poles.

TG: Let's observe this instrument made of metal (Figure 9.5). What energy-movement do you associate with this surface?

AVG: It is a singing saw and I see in that the energy-movements of flexion and pressure/deformation.

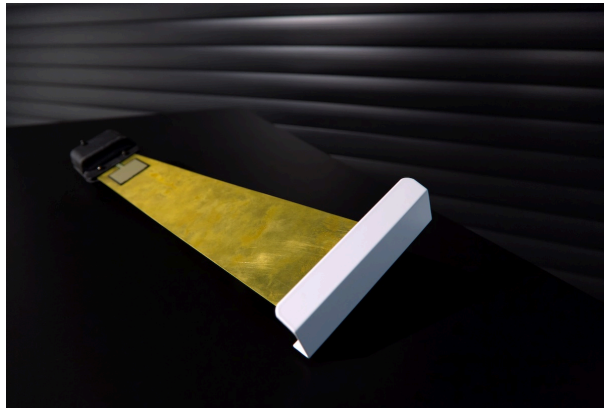


Figure 9.5: *Embodied Gesture Instrument: The 'bending' interface* (Photo: Elisa Unger, 2021, CC BY-NC 4.0)



Figure 9.6: *Embodied Gesture Instrument: The 'oscillatory' (noisy-rotation) interface* (Photo: Elisa Unger, 2021, CC BY-NC 4.0)

TG: Finally, this is the first controller we created (Figure 9.6).

AVG: This is more complex. It is possible to make friction. It is also possible to use the tension and vibration of the string holding the intermediate object. It would also be possible to produce rebounding sounds.

TG: The string is not elastic, so rebound doesn't seem possible to me.

AVG: Then friction is the right energy because it is possible to go up and down and left and right with the handle in the middle. It is also possible to combine panorama with left and right, and pitch with up and down.

TG: You have experience with tape speed modulation in analogue studios. It is obvious to combine left and right movement with the speed of the tape, isn't it?

AVG: Yes absolutely. It is possible to use left-right movements to control the speed of the tape in correlation with frequency change.

Part 2

TG: Do you think these interfaces could be useful for composing in the studio?

AVG: It depends on which parameter you use during this process.

TG: Maybe for any special transformation?

AVG: Yes, for example I could use them for progressively changing the central frequency of a filter, its 'Q' parameter or its spectral envelope. We would be working in the sphere of sound transformation. For me, there are four different possible actions in the domain of transformation. The first is the 'fixed action'. This means that we will not change the parameter controlling the transformational tool while the music passes through different sound files. In this case the transformational tool acts like a sieve. Practically, it usually consists of a fixed preset of parameters with changing sound sources.

The second way to deal with transformation is what I call the 'mobile' mode. It means acting in a mobile way over the tools' parameters. The correlation, also called the mapping, between the quality of mobile acting and the final parameters' values is crucial.

The third acting mode is called 'control'. In this case, there always exists an external system like an LFO, a ramp or a square signal, which acts on the parameter without any relationship. Thus, in this case, it is also possible to hear or perceive the external system.

And the fourth acting mode, more electroacoustic, is the 'cross-synthesis', in which one parameter of one sound acts on another parameter of the same or another sound.

TG: Do you mean that the amplitude values of one sound can act on the frequency values of another sound?

AVG: Yes, this is most frequently done. But everything is far from gesture in this domain.

TG: Do you think that these [embodied] instruments could be used in a special musical setting? In other words, who could become a good user for these instruments?

AVG: They could be useful to control parameters of cycling musical parts with the gestures of my body. I could act livelier. This means that I have to have a previous idea of how the result would be, or an expectation in my imagination. This question is outside of the typical 'concrete' (musical) procedure, because in the 'concrete' method I do not know the musical result before my acting. With these controllers, and with any controller, I have to configure the parameters in relation to the bodily gesture. That means always before physical action happens.

TG: You have also experience in educating children. Would these instruments be useful for children interested in electronic music?

AVG: Yes, I see these instruments as being highly interesting for them. The most important thing to consider would be making the mapping process³ in an adequate and intelligent way. However, I have an objection. When we make a play-sequence with physical sound bodies, the variety of results tends to be higher. For instance, two similar bells are never exactly the same object. If children use headphones to record play-sequences, they may hear small differences on what exactly is being played by each instrument. This is not a problem related to gesture. It mostly depends on the sound body used for playing our gestures. Thus, in the case of using controllers for education, it is crucial to define the kind of sounds. When I was asked by the direction of the music conservatory to teach 6- and 7-year-old children for a period of six years, I refused to teach *do, re, mi, fa...* Instead, I invented games to record play-sequences with sound bodies. My experience was that they need to develop communicative relationships with other children during these games. One by one, or with the whole group.

After these experiences, I developed some other workshops with older children. About 10 to 14 years old. I observed that they first needed to understand the mechanism—how the technology of acousmatic music works. I took my Revox⁴ and some tape, and built a studio in the classroom. They did the whole process of recording play-sequences, but they also liked to perform sound transformations towards building a result, a structure.

Finally, I would like to point your attention to the confusion created around the notion of 'gesture'. Bodily gesture and musical gesture are not the same. Musical gesture comes from the imagination of conducting sound along time.

³With mapping process Vande Gorne refers to the mapping sensor data to parameters in the synthesizer.

⁴The classic Revox tape recorder: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revox>