

## FIGURE-TOI...

### Listening to *Sous le regard d'un soleil noir* by Francis Dhomont

*Sous le regard d'un soleil noir* is concerned with schizophrenia and the confusion of perceiving the world in an unusual and often frightening way. It seemed only appropriate that my exploration should engage in vocal counterpoint. Sometimes traditional forms offer subversive routes, it's just a matter of context. Each voice can be read on its own. Or you can choose to embark on horizontal journeys that leap from voice to voice and pursue other allusions. There is space between the words, and sometimes that absence is intended to speak. And there is a **bold** story too, of a fragmentary kind. How you read this piece is up to you and for this reason I haven't given that many clues. Reading, like listening, is a personal endeavour.

Dhomont's work is in eight movements or 'sections', and is over fifty minutes in duration. Each section is separately titled, and discrete in itself. This discussion includes an exploration of the very opening of the first (*Pareil à un voyageur perdu*) and the whole of the sixth movement (*Citadelle intérieure*). These extracts are both on the accompanying CD.<sup>1</sup>

**FIGURE-TOI...**

**PICTURE...**

**SPEAK...**

**LISTEN...**

<p>[A listening to the opening of movement 1 CD [26]</p> <p>All of a sudden, a voice speaks. A man's voice, which occupies a specific point in space and time. Someone is present, but apparently invisible. So - because people are not generally invisible - we must be in the dark. Or at least, that is one way of perceiving reality that makes sense.</p> <p><i>Pareil à un voyageur perdu</i> (section 1)</p> <p>You are <b>listening</b> to a work for sound alone. There were no introductory flourishes. There was not even an ambient space – an empty stage – to herald a commencement. There are none of the conventional signs.</p> <p>This is the opening of <b>Francis Dhomont's</b> <i>Sous le regard d'un soleil noir</i>.</p> <p>A male voice speaks, without preamble.</p>	<p>[A remembrance of listening to Francis Dhomont]</p> <p>I am <b>listening</b> to the sound I <b>recorded</b>. I don't remember there being this much of it.</p> <p><i>Picture...</i></p> <p>Here we are, starting out on our voyage. We are sitting together on a sofa, in a large hotel foyer. It is quite busy.</p> <p>I have asked a question about <i>Sous le regard d'un soleil noir</i>. Now, he is speaking, and I am listening. An interview (an interhear, perhaps)</p>	<p>[Francis Dhomont in interview]</p> <p><i>FD...is it near enough....do you want to listen first to what you recorded on it, to see if it's ok...with headphones.</i> <i>KN I don't have any...it's working.</i> <i>FD: ok, good...shall I move a bit nearer, it's working?</i><sup>4</sup></p> <p><b>Francis Dhomont:</b> When I compose, in general, I always have an idea first, a concept, and very often -almost always - the title. The title is very important. For me, the title sums up the general idea, and is a 'motto' for me...it's a way of thinking.</p>	<p>[A listening to movement 6] CD [27]</p> <p><i>Citadelle intérieure</i> (section 6)</p> <p>This is one way of listening to it.</p> <p>Two objects. And between them, a moment of nothingness. This is a strange, but familiar, way to begin.</p>
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<p><b>Figure-toi ...Figure-toi...</b></p> <p><u>Listen</u>. He says it <b>twice</b> – a repetition, already!</p> <p><i>Figure-toi ...Figure-toi...</i></p> <p>A man speaks, without preamble. <u>Listen carefully</u>. This isn't quite a repetition; something was different.</p> <p>A voice is speaking, to you ('toi'), the solitary listener – the single-figure audience with whom it has an informal connection. This voice knows – by speaking - that you are there, alone and listening. It doesn't take long to endow a voice with a persona; just a couple of words or so is sufficient to create the gender, age, nationality and probable state of mind. In addition, a crowd of other possibilities are hinted at through <b>nuances</b> alone. So just those two words can project an image in our darkness (slightly different for each of us, no doubt). Of course, this complex and insubstantial picture has absolutely nothing to do with visual appearance.</p> <p>You know that this persona is male (the</p>	<p><b>Picture...picture...</b></p> <p>The sonic world about us is a counterpoint of many voices: chatter in the nearby bar; people who pass by either at close quarters, their heels clicking, or far away, their conversations merging into a blurred fog; luggage trolleys rumble across marble floors, followed by the thump of suitcases. And there is music in the distance, and occasional bells from phones and elevators. There is so much unwanted noise <b>surrounding</b> us. And that is just the <i>sound</i> of the experience. We had worried that it might be difficult to talk, but perhaps what we meant was that it would be difficult to listen (an un-sounded implication). But once we've started there is not too much distraction, and very soon there is no distraction at all. All that activity fades into a low murmur as I concentrate on his voice, and on what he's saying.</p>	<p>... there is a moment in the sixth movement, which I spoke to you about, where there is a door, which opens, and one hears a crowd ... that is to say many people, speaking. And this becomes very different, it becomes very low. And that is for me the perception one has of schizophrenia. This crowd of people that is <b>surrounding</b> him is perceived other than how <i>we</i> perceive them. At another moment the door opens again, and there, on the contrary, the sound travels upwards to such a point that it is completely distorted. In my thinking this in fact is a musical element - to go towards low pitch, towards high pitch. And it is also a way to say 'I no longer perceive things like the rest of the world; I no longer perceive truth, reality. I am 'de-realised''. 'Derealiser' – to lose reality. It is one of the symptoms, the traits of schizophrenia – one loses a direct sense of reality.</p>	<p><b>(Figure-toi...Figure-toi...)</b>.</p> <p>It happens <b>twice</b> – but this isn't a repetition First there is the sound of something closing shut with a reverberant finality. Is it a door that shuts me out, or one that shuts me in? Then the same sound, differently: the original sound is split into two halves, and put together in reverse order. Now a surreal door opens (un-closes?) in reverse onto a surreal world.</p> <p>[Later on a very real door will open on a very real crowd of chattering voices. But for now, there are only <b>nuances</b> of what is to come.]</p> <p>This sound is not quite 'real', in that it is only partly familiar. But how can that be? It is either real or unreal. We either know or we don't know. Either here, or there. One or the other. To know otherwise would be insane.</p> <p>This is a piece that deals with</p>
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<p>voice is always a real giveaway). The speech is measured and unhurried, and the timbre of the voice is <b>deep</b>: he is commanding, authoritative, informed on something. Yet at the same time he is quite encouraging, even with a compassionate tone that comes, perhaps, from age and <b>experience</b>. This persona hasn't said much yet, but is worth attending to, so you will listen. He knows this: you can hear it in his voice.</p> <p><i>Figure-toi...Figure-toi...</i></p> <p>Why repeat this phrase? But, <u>listen again</u>. This isn't quite a repetition; something was different. Although words are reiterated, by the same voice, the two enunciations are quite different from one another. They are <i>made</i> quite different from one another. It falls to the listener to perceive the sonic distinction.</p> <p>The first '<b>Figure-toi</b>' is an announcement. The volume - though quite loud enough to impress - does not conjure up a grand declamation. There is an <b>evocation</b> of significance through intonation alone. Reverberation provides distance and slightly accentuates the higher frequencies. There is perhaps a tinge of remoteness. This voice is out there, a little apart from us.</p>	<p>When someone talks to us, we tend to listen. Our inclination is to make sense of speech. We lean into it, bending our ears towards meaning. We turn our sail towards the sounds that speak to us and let them fill the forefront of our <b>experience</b>. Yet there is still a background to provide a context, even if it is just the sound of the sea. An inner sensibility decides which sounds are to be attended to, and which are mere tangents to the main curve of our listening. We trust that sensibility to be making an appropriate choice. We <b>filter</b> background from foreground.</p> <p><i>The ear detects depth from such indices as a reduced harmonic spectrum, softened attacks and transitions, a different blend of direct sound and reflected sound, and the presence of reverberation. (Chion, 1994, p.71)</i></p> <p><b>Picture ...</b></p> <p>I have placed the microphones as near to him as possible, but not too close: I want to capture his voice more clearly than the others that might engulf it, but I also want to catch an approximation of the way that I am actively <i>listening</i> to</p>	<p>... in <i>Sous le regard</i>, the <b>deep</b>, 'profound' voice is that of a philosopher, a friend who is dead now, who had a superb voice. When I was thinking of who could say that text, it was his voice that I wanted. And as he was intelligent, a philosopher, that was very good...</p> <p>...there are quantities of texts that are thrown out, put aside. And when I find those texts that have sense and sound, I look at them. There's no problem. And then I will edit them... And sometimes, for example, I won't preserve more than two or three words from a whole phrase. Because that's enough, the sense is sufficient - one understands it quickly. If one says 'fear' ('peur'), one doesn't need to say 'I am frightened'. ... That means that in the collecting of texts, you can retain just the <b>evocation</b>, the general sense.</p> <p><i>Sous le regard d'un soleil noir</i> and <i>Fôret Profonde</i> are the two pieces that are most difficult to project. They are difficult in concert because musical</p>	<p>gradations of knowing otherwise. Out of that second half-remembered door, that is not yet real, a voice arises. It is a small, pathetic sound that speaks. There are words, but they are beyond our comprehension. As soon as the door opened, we heard this murmuring persona, already talking to himself, or just hoping that there would be someone out there in the dark. It is just one voice - there is only one rhythmic speech pattern going on, and there is no echo - but then again it is several - it is tuned to several pitches. The sound has been <b>filtered</b>: part of its essence has been stripped away, yet - as a result - part has been drawn forward to reveal inherent pitches. We might assume that some kind of harmony is intended. So is it music or sound? Male or female? Who knows if it's one or the other.</p> <p>Her voice is subsumed beneath a dry scrabbling that has a metallic timbre (this is one approximation, but you may have other associations). Perhaps something rattles frantically at the door (let me out, or let me in?). But this inanimate persona behaves in an animal way, with scuttling gestures that move rapidly back and forth in space, mimicking visual movement.</p> <p>The gestures are fragmented; they appear to pause for thought, making</p>
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<p>This section is entitled <i>Pareil à un voyageur perdu</i> ('Like a <b>lost traveller</b>'), and indeed the second 'figure-toi' is an 'invitation au voyage'. Low frequencies are more apparent, as is movement – both in terms of pitch and space. The voice is <b>close</b> to us, and the reverberation now heightens the pitch contour of the words. The speech is slower; this is possibly achieved by technological means since the natural resonance of the voice is also slightly lower in pitch than that which precedes or follows. However, it is not unrecognisable. Speech can be imbued with an amount of sonic processing before we greet it with confusion or disbelief. The reverberation is appropriate for a small space, an intimate space perhaps, and the sound travels slightly, moving to the right (with headphones, moving 'into' the right ear). Movement of sound is significant, in particular over headphones: we notice it. Or, rather, movement alerts us to our own stillness in relation to the sound: we notice the separateness of our Self. So we are involved with the sound's <b>evolution</b> in time, in that it has introduced its presence into the space of ours. A voice spoke, up close, beside me – in the</p>	<p>the <b>voice</b> right now, not just the way that my ears hear it. If I were to turn the microphones away from him, point them instead at a shoal of tourists who may have just swum into hearing, then he would be a <b>lost traveller</b> - one of many.</p> <p>Now, we are seated in <b>close</b> proximity, and I can get some help from watching his face. Later, I will only have my recording of the sound to tell the story.</p> <p>At some point up there <i>his</i> voice became <i>the</i> voice, and I'm on the way to netting <i>my</i> recording of it. <b>Whose voice is it?</b> Did you hear the question I just asked? Are you listening to my voice now, as you read this, or yours? Perhaps it's your voice that recreates the <i>sound</i> of the words on this page. I hope you don't mind me addressing you directly.</p>	<p>sound can move about, the <b>voice</b> ..no. ... ..of course, that's the situation with speakers - or with headphones, that is good, that would be quite appropriate, that was how I made the piece (with headphones).</p> <p>...diffusion, when it's well done, it works well. In general ...one is in the dark. It is necessary to bring the voices <b>close</b>. That's to say to have the speakers very near to the audience. One doesn't want speakers at a distance when there are texts that ask for a voice 'in the head'... one can do it, one can do it if one thinks about it, but it's difficult.</p> <p>And although I may also do this with a piece that has no text, with a piece with text I am preoccupied, interested, in the development through time (this is music: time and music are bound together) ...and how this can be developed musically, and in the case of a work with text, how this can be developed from the point of view of general sense, and if one can have a real <b>evolution</b> that goes from one point to another: a thing, a work in which the sense... in which the listener understands new things, little by</p>	<p>decisions. Her muted <b>voice</b> is there between them, in the spaces. On the one hand, it is possible that they are one and the same: perhaps these scrabbling sounds are the frantic machinations of a mental activity that goes beyond words. Maybe we are listening to her unconscious thoughts. And, if so, she cannot know what we infer from this, since she is unaware. Or perhaps, on the other hand, she <i>is</i> aware of these agitated beings as separate from herself. There is a moment of muffled intelligibility 'a l'exterieur' – barely discernible. Is she hearing them, beyond her? If so, she is either with us, or we are with her. Though it is not necessarily one or the other.</p> <p>They – we? – are trying to get out of there. The sounds approach us: there is an increase in volume as they hurtle through time. They (or she, or we – <b>whose voice is it?</b>) have an end in mind, an horizon in view. They are coming closer. The goal is the door. Here.</p> <p>[Now a very real door opens on a very real crowd of chattering voices. Later there are only nuances of what was to come.]</p> <p>This sound is quite 'real', in that it is familiar. But how can that be? It is either real or unreal. We either know or</p>
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<p>space where I ‘am’.</p> <p><i>Figure-toi...</i></p> <p>What is happening between the voice and the sound of the voice?  <u>Listen</u>, while I try to explain what I mean.</p> <p>Reverberation puts his voice in a place. The voice is clothed with another, separate <b>presence</b> that echoes, and thus confirms, its existence. The reflection provides an aural mirror for the voice but also, in its timbre and duration, indicates the dimensions of the place. We – in our darkened, limited perception – like to think that there must be something out there. This is a voice attached to a bodily presence.</p> <p>By being in a space, the voice is made ‘real’, even though the reverberation is not exactly realistic. (In a minute, this semblance of <b>reality will fall apart</b>).</p> <p>Sounds have a natural contour for their existence and subsequent demise in time. Clap your hands in a cave and wait for the echo to fade away. You can</p>	<p><i>Picture...</i></p> <p>He is speaking, and I am listening. I am trying to understand. I am putting in some effort because French is not my first language – far from it. This is not a language I am familiar with. So listening is currently a more-than-usually conscious process of relating sound and sense. I am acutely aware of both the distinction between the two, and the necessity to re-integrate them back into a whole. I need both. If I lose one of my two oars, I will be locked into rowing in circles on an opaque sea of <b>nonsense</b>. But even so, I will know that it is <i>not</i> nonsense. And this could be truly horrible because I will <i>know</i> that he is making sense, but it is just that I will <b>no longer perceive</b> it under the surface. <b>Reality will fall apart</b>. I will be alone in my boat, under the glare of a black sun. And the smallest confusion may bring that state about:</p>	<p>little...like that. And I reflect a great deal on how to achieve that.</p> <p>In my thinking this in fact is a musical element - to go towards low pitch, towards high pitch. And it is also a way to say ‘I no longer perceive things like the rest of the world; I <b>no longer perceive</b> truth, reality. I am ‘de-realised’. ‘Derealiser’ – to lose reality. It is one of the symptoms, the traits of schizophrenia – one loses a direct sense of reality.</p>	<p>we don’t know. Either here, or there. One or the other. To think otherwise might not be insane.</p> <p>You might feel that you’ve heard that before. This piece is full of unfaithful repetitions.</p> <p><i>With the alterity of the ‘unconscious’, we have to deal not with the horizons of modified presents – past or future – but with a ‘past’ that has never been nor will ever be present, whose ‘future’ will never be produced or reproduced in the form of presence. (Derrida, 1973, p 458)</i></p> <p>This crowd is too vividly present for a context where unreality has become the norm. There are many individuals, speaking to one another. Here they are, like an excited audience, squashed into the bar with their glasses and programmes in hand. They are uncomfortably close together as they talk <b>nonsense</b>, and listen for a signal that the interval is due to end. Everyone is speaking, but nobody is communicating anything as an individual. The listener (she, you, me, we? – it’s getting to be quite a crowd) is not privy to their discourse. Is this an intermission?</p> <p>The voices subside into a murmuring, background throng. They move</p>
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<p>anticipate an approximate duration from your real-time analysis of the sound. It's called listening, and we're all undercover experts. Half the time we don't even know that we're doing it, it's an unconscious judgement; and perhaps that's one reason why our creative sonic manipulations can proceed at such subtle levels and still have effect.</p> <p>'Figure-toi' <b>disappears</b> too quickly. In both cases, the decaying reverberation around the words is curtailed. It is not gradually damped down in volume or covered up with another sound, it is faded out – rapidly. And this is very abrupt: after he has spoken the sound merely hangs around for a moment, like the vestige of a thought, and then it's pinched away to nothing. Rien.</p> <p><i>Figure-toi...Figure-toi...</i></p> <p>There is a silence between the two iterations of 'figure-toi', and another after the second iteration and what follows.</p> <p><u>Listen to it</u>; there's a void you cannot avoid. It has several <b>possible meanings</b>.</p> <p>What happens <i>between</i> those two iterations?</p> <p>The effect of that abrupt envelope, that cuts the 'natural' (i.e. expected) decay</p>	<p>He has a cough. I am sidetracked into worrying about whether to get us a drink or not, and how to express this. In my preoccupation, my mind switches back into 'normal listening' and my ability to understand French <b>disappears</b> for a few seconds. When he replies I have absolutely no idea what he's saying. Instead the sounds of language are cleverly processed <b>allusions</b> that, I know, should make sense.</p> <p>But, of course, it can be delicious to paddle aimlessly in the shallows, as long as we're near the edge.</p> <p>When somebody puns on a word we are momentarily ensnared in a contrapuntal net of meanings, but we know where we are. For a pun there are at least two <b>possible meanings</b>, each dependent on different possible scenarios, both of which come to mind for a moment when we hear the phrase. We are torn between the two and left appreciating difference rather than meaning.</p>	<p>In this work I tried to be a schizophrenic. I tried to imagine what kind of perception of the world a schizophrenic has. We are all of us a little threatened, no? Life is not clear for us, one can see things in one way or another, and sometimes it's divided - 'divisé'. Just as Plato's text says that perhaps there is difficulty for Man in perceiving the world, there is difficulty in perceiving the truth. Then there are several places in the movements where there are <b>allusions</b> to that.</p> <p>I believe that it is important in a musical work - even if it is in a completely different musical language than the traditional language - it is necessary to have a structure, necessary to have a thought. It is not sufficient to make</p>	<p>downwards. Sonically they are transformed into a different level of perception by a process of filtering that gradually numbs perception. They are not transposed to a different pitch by a swooping glissando. Instead, high frequencies disappear by stealth, so that fricatives, consonants and plosives are gradually rubbed away, leaving only the darkness of incoherence. And yet, disconcertingly, the volume has not yet been dimmed significantly. So they are still near us but have merely faded from consciousness. For the time being.</p> <p>The scrabbling recommences, this time tethered by a low resonance from the fading crowd, or perhaps a distant closing door. The attempt reverberates to nothing. Then comes a more determined and aggressive recommencement, a contrapuntal scrabbling now, that builds up from nothing to a swelling fury, escapes the low-pitched grounding of reverberation and is filtered to gain the higher ground. And they arrive, bursting through an unsounded door (or perhaps they are the door) to reveal the crowd, now seen from a different viewpoint. Now the voices are alien, a filter has allowed only the high frequencies through, and the result is distant, mediated audibly by someone or other. There is no depth to the sounds that reach us, only hissing and cracking of the ashes of speech.</p>
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<p>of the reverberation imposed on the first figure-toi' is to throw the silence that follows into relief.</p> <p>Without a fading decay to fill the void, the 'holes' in sound – silence – come hurtling forward. Silence should not be heard, in fact it cannot be heard (and I mean silence, not the un-intended sounds of 4'33"). But here is an abyss, loud and in the foreground. This is a real silence: this is blank tape. <i>No</i> sound is transmitted. The effect is particularly apparent when listening over headphones, but even over speakers there is a moment of sudden nothingness where <b>sound and sense</b> are audibly sucked away. For me, no amount of creaking chairs or coughing can placate it. Perhaps there is only one thing more disturbing than too many voices, and that is no voice at all.</p> <p><i>Figure-toi,,</i></p> <p><u>Listen to silence.</u></p>	<p>A pun requires a little time travel: we backward-engineer our 'processing' of the sentence to separate the available possibilities, and relish the unusual experience of a divided sense. So we allow ourselves (we are in control) an imaginative nuance that is largely absent from our listening to our own language – the language that we both own, and which owns us (it thinks our thoughts for us).</p> <p>There is amusement in it for us; there's no threat – we can throw the differing senses from hand to hand, weighing the options. Our sensitivity to the distinction between <b>sound and sense</b> is heightened, enjoyably. And of course we have to hear it: if we see it written down the pun is lost, the word is fixed in a single meaning.</p> <p><i>Picture ...</i></p> <p>He's talking to me. I listen,</p>	<p>sound.</p> <p>... .. There are other pieces ... .. that are truly a discourse, like a novel, like a work of theatre. These are things that have a sense. Very often, in electroacoustic music, I really have the impression that there is no sense there, there is only sound. So sounds...Of course I love sound I find....I am a lover of sound, but not on its own. Not....a sound, it is very good but...<b>sound and sense</b>.</p> <p>KN: ...I don't know if it's the same in English for this text but '<b>Figure-toi</b>' is 'intimate' - as one would talk to a child, or perhaps a friend....yes?</p>	<p>And rapidly these disintegrate into distortion, then a white-noise splashing in the highest frequencies, which dissolves and -</p> <p>- there is complete emptiness. Worse: like a bare light bulb in a prison cell, a solitary sine wave illuminates a void to reveal its true awfulness. There is nothing human to be heard, there is only sound. The sine wave is pitched on a high b natural, beyond the range of a human voice. Other, microtonally close, pitches accumulate around it and a regular oscillation rotates in the background. If it was dreadful to encounter this inhuman, unflinching sound, now there is an implication that something inexplicable will evolve in a world that is not surrealised, but de-realised. When a sharp-edged attack announces the first clearly discernible word in the movement – the first time language has had <b>sound and sense</b>, it's as if she confirms our feelings:</p> <p>'Peur'</p> <p>I said she, but there are others now, including a male voice. This is a small explosion of responses, by different</p>
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<p>The first time we hear that silence we have no idea how long it will last. If I were to hit pause on the CD player, you wouldn't have a clue. He has spoken, and we are listening (for various imperative reasons): but now we are listening to absolutely nothing. What do we <i>do</i> during that brief (but we do not know that yet) silence? We ask questions. <b>What will happen now? Where am I? Am I alone? How long will this be for?</b></p> <p>Perhaps rather than asking these existential questions anew, we are made aware of their continuing and continual presence. If movement of sound alerts us to our Self, perhaps a sudden absence of sound throws us back to the chatter of the unconscious. Silence is an absence that makes conscious the murmur of indiscernible voices that, nevertheless, belong to us. Deleuze and Guattari postulate that this internal activity – which they call indirect <b>discourse</b> – contains the whole of language. Thus language, and speech and writing, arise from an indirect discourse of babbling voices, from which we make our Self.</p> <p><i>... the collective assemblage is always like the murmur from which I take my proper name, the constellation of voices, concordant or not, from which I</i></p>	<p>hear sounds, come up with a selection of probable words - given the context - and make astute choices, or guesses, or mistakes. I'm confused, but when he repeats a word my ear grabs hold of some familiar consonants and I've got the sense of it. I'm back in context. Even if I wanted to, I would not have time to open my dictionary. I am too busy listening to another, internal, voice, that's 'doing French into meaning' for me (for it isn't, quite, translation).</p> <p><i>...one suspects that the reception of meaning is as much, or even more, a process of internalised mimesis, of reconstructive <b>decoding</b>, as it is one of immediate hearing.</i> (Steiner, 1975, p. 125)</p> <p>Later I will need to write all this down, in English, and then there will be yet</p>	<p>FD: Yes. It is a free translation, in the way that many have translated Plato. It's a translation that I had in a French book, and which was ... to the taste of, my philosopher friend who says the phrase. And moreover he worked a little on the translation, and then I reworked some of the elements: I repeated things 'Figure-toi, figure-toi' etc. It's the 'mise en scene'.</p> <p>When one hears a schizophrenic's <b>discourse</b>, one is very surprised. One wonders at what they say - they are mad! But are they 'mad' or do they have another way of perceiving things.... .But that isn't to say that the person doesn't think. His manner of speaking is, above all, to translate his thought. That's not the same thing. Well...this is what I suppose; I am not a psychiatrist... but ..I think there are</p>	<p>voices, in different places, with different inflections. But the fragmented identity is united in one respect:</p> <p>Fear.</p> <p>It is the halfway point of the movement. We are neither here nor there. As the voices fade into an echoing space, there are perhaps other unspoken questions. <b>What will happen now? Where am I? Am I alone? How long will this be for?</b> The sine wave material slowly resurfaces again, unperturbed. It is stronger, augmented with a looped pattern of synthetic pulses, which are high-pitched and artificial. The precision of exact repetition is here disturbing in its persistence. It is foreign in this sonic world which has progressed through change and unpredictability and has not, as yet, asked us to be aware of pitch, rhythm or harmony in any musically structured way. This pattern has an invasive claim on our listening because it is like a 'transmission' from another place: it sends out a message in a Morse code that we cannot crack. We lack the key necessary for <b>decoding</b>. Yet we cannot help but listen as it scutters about from ear to ear, repeating a phrase that has structure, is important (there is repetition – please listen), and evidently has a system - but is beyond words.</p>
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<p><i>draw my voice. I always depend on a molecular assemblage of enunciation that is not given in my conscious mind, any more than it depends solely on my apparent signs. Speaking in tongues. To write is perhaps to bring this assemblage of the unconscious to the light of day, to select the whispering voices, to gather the tribes and secret idioms from which I extract something I call my Self (Moi). (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 84)</i></p> <p>In this way we fumble through the dark silence, wondering what he will say next and, indeed, what we will say next. And while we wonder he moves forward – silently – and speaks again:</p> <p><b>Figure-toi...</b></p> <p>What is being said? What is being meant? What is expected of us? <u>Listen</u> for sense now.</p> <p>‘Figure-toi’. The first time that comes we do not know what to expect, except that we expect some thing (a tree, house, woman, time...?). Without any clues as to what to picture, we are abandoned in murmuring silence, unable to comply. But then, ‘Figure-toi...’ again. The second time he speaks we remain in anticipation but have an idea of the silence that may follow (we are experienced now) and await further</p>	<p>another voice to contend with. George Steiner (himself trilingual) offers an opinion, that a bilingual speaker is not necessarily a good translator, the ‘frontier between the two languages is not sharp enough in his mind’ (ibid, p.119). In the bilingual mind the voices are perhaps too tangled, indistinguishable from one another. They all make sense, together, as an undefined mass of <b>knots</b>.</p> <p><b>Picture ...</b></p> <p>We need frontiers, edges against which to come to a stop – a point at which we recognise distinction, and difference. We need a place to tie up our boat. This is in French. C’est en Anglais.</p> <p>When he unexpectedly said something in English, I ran aground on his foreign accent. There was a familiar word with an unfamiliar timbre. This is perhaps the opposite of a pun, and more disconcerting because now there are two sounds – my sound for this word and your sound for this word - and one meaning. There are too many voices,</p>	<p>some things like that. It doesn’t require a big thing to pass from one state to another</p> <p>... in <i>Sous le regard d’un soleil noir</i> I had the idea, starting out from the reading of ...er...what’s it called in English, [in English:]‘Knots’.</p> <p>KN...er...?</p> <p>FD: ...noueds...knots...the little book. You know it...the little book?</p> <p>KN: ah, yes, <b>Knots</b> . I’ve read it.<sup>5</sup></p> <p>FD: And it was this that gave me the idea, the desire, to work with these texts. But I wasn’t familiar with the author, Laing, and I wanted to know his work. So I bought the books, above all <i>The Divided Self</i>, and it was that really - reading this book – that brought the piece together in my mind.</p> <p>But, for me, it is always an almost interactive process between reading and experimentation.</p>	<p><i>I call semantic listening that which refers to a code or a language to interpret a message: spoken language, of course, as well as Morse and other such codes. This mode of listening, which functions in an extremely complex way, has been the object of linguistic research and has been the most widely studied. One crucial finding is that it is purely differential. A phoneme is listened to not strictly for its acoustical properties but as part of an entire system of oppositions and differences. (Chion, 1994, p. 28)</i></p> <p>That b natural begins to absolve itself. Now there is a ‘b’ at a lower octave, warmer and sustained. And this is joined by fragmentary clusters, now chords, as accordion-like timbres offer e natural, f sharp, g natural, an occasional c. There is hope of a resolution to a world in E minor, but nothing is fixed. The texture has the aimless purpose of an orchestra tuning up (an orchestra that is tuning to a ‘b’ rather than the conventional ‘a’ – but who’s to say what’s right, what does it matter as long as we are in tune?). There is a sense of preparation as the pitches hang around, providing a place of security where things are made safe. In music, many nonsensical things make sense: a chorus of voices is quite appropriate, and counterpoint is a trivial thing; a repeated abstract pattern need not be</p>
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<p>developments.</p> <p>There is an imperative here, something that must be done. That's to say; grammatically speaking 'Figure-toi' is in the imperative. The imperative is always in the present: do this – <i>now</i>. Moreover an imperative is an unusual speech form because it is an 'illocutionary act'. This is an <b>utterance</b> where 'saying' is the same as 'doing' (see Crystal, 121). For instance, in saying 'I swear that I told you...', the words 'I swear' are illocutionary – to say 'I swear' is to <i>do</i> swearing. An imperative, such as 'figure-toi', is illocutionary also in that to say an order is to give an order. This has nothing to do with what the order actually <i>is</i>. So these words are unmediated, in terms of both tense and intention.</p> <p><i>Figure-toi...Figure-toi...</i></p>	<p>but it's the meaning that's lost.</p> <p>Again, when he pronounces 'Platon' ('<i>Plah-tohn</i>') in French my internal sonic database is thrown into confusion for a moment, and then aggrieved – this is not <i>my</i> <b>Plato</b> ('<i>Play-toe</i>'!), the philosopher with the English accent. The <b>utterance</b> has fractured something previously familiar into two. Plato has betrayed my limited perception.</p> <p>An <b>accent</b> puts <i>noise</i> between sound and meaning. It 'interferes' by drawing attention to the sound of speech. But this is a subjective noise, in the sense that it arrives inside one person's head, but not another's. We notice an accent that is not <i>ours</i> (we do so like to <i>own</i> our voices) but we <b>cannot hear</b> our</p>	<p>(So ....in fact the myth of the cavern, in <b>Plato</b>, is not exactly the same) It was simply an association with the position on Man's perception of what surrounds him, and how he perceives the world. How he perceives his world, and how the schizophrenic perceives the world.</p> <p>...yes, I think about timbre...and also about pronunciation, and the accent. For example, in Quebec I sometimes have difficulty in finding a voice for French texts that doesn't have too much of a local <b>accent</b>.</p>	<p>significantly disturbing; a harmonisation does not necessarily imply fracture, but rather a coming together and strengthening of intent. So we are removed from the raw threat of the scrabbling activity at the opening and the frozen horror of the pulsating sine wave. We are released from encountering sound in that moment by moment basis, in which listening creates questions, and feeds a constant flow of inward 'confusion'. Now we are hiding down there in the orchestra pit, reassured that we are listening to music – and not just 'music' but 'tried and tested' pitch and harmony. It can't last: as this music continues it does not progress in any real sense, other than taking time. It is trapped in a slow revolution of harmonic colours around one set of pitches. This does not bode well. This could be merely a new kind of prison.</p> <p>Things continue in this manner for quite some time before a male voice starts to speak. Previously we were listening in on someone's world; perhaps we were in there identifying with them. Now a distinct persona talks <i>to</i> an audience: he has looked up and seen us. This is the first voice in this movement to communicate outwards. Or at least it appears that way at first. The pitched 'music' has not stopped, but this persona <b>cannot hear</b> the music that</p>
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<p>Why would someone repeat this phrase? Isn't it enough to sound an order once? Might I suggest (another illocution, that) a way of hearing some other voices <b>between sound and sense</b>?</p> <p>Figure-toi, the first time, is the very first sound we hear in the work, and we are unprepared for it. There is no conductor's upbeat to a work for sound alone, no violinist lifts a bow, no singer inhales, no pianist sits poised above the keys. There is no possibility of that significant moment of stillness that comes twixt the lifting of hands and opening chords. Now <i>that</i> moment or stillness before the piece begins is an illocution in itself. <u>Listen</u>.</p> <p>Figure-toi. The words say one thing and mean another. Perhaps there are other imperatives in that first enunciation of 'figure-toi...': be quiet, settle down, and make yourself ready. Silence the activity in your head. Hush now. The other imperative is one that I have been trying to underline. <u>Listen</u>; there is another meaning under the words. Picture (you must)/Listen (to me). Both commands are reinforced by the timbre of the speaker's natural voice, and the subtle manner in which the sound has been placed in time and space. Our listening is sensitised by the reverberation, we are made aware of what we should be doing now is making</p>	<p>own accent. An accent is outside our experience of producing the sound of speech. But once we perceived it in other voices, it lies strewn atop the stream of speech, <b>between sound and sense</b>: whether we regard it as a drift of petals or a disfiguring patch of oil is a matter of personal opinion. While an accent may indicate all kinds of values to do with social class, region, nationality, or age it perhaps says most about the person who notices it and contrives to skim off these nuances. There can be a separation now, between what a spoken language sounds like, and what it doesn't (or '<i>shouldn't</i>') sound like. An accent prises apart sound, opening a chasm between known and unknown, between mine and yours. The sense is perfectly comprehensible, but the familiar is <b>distorted</b>.</p> <p>It doesn't do to write it down. Gunther Kress describes how we ignore the sound of an accent and 'normalise' speech in order to spell correctly, and this a learnt, rather than natural, ability. He gives an example of a child writing down a recipe, dictated in a heavy Northern England accent that was foreign to the listening child. Among several other similar 'mistakes', the child writes 'walnut croosh' for 'walnut crushed', the former being closer, sonically, to the accent heard. (Kress, 124-5).</p>	<p>And there is a relationship with the part of <i>Sous le regard d'un soleil noir</i> where one arrives at a moment at a perception of the world which is expressed noticeably, by a <b>distorted</b> text. ...</p> <p>...So in the passage on the burrow, there, the Kafka text [movement 6], I reverse the words. I made an inversion of the words to make a text that one comprehends but one doesn't comprehend. ...if one changes the words two by two, one rediscovers the exact sense of Kafka's text. It was for me a way to suggest how the language</p>	<p>surrounds him any more than an operatic character is 'conscious' of his orchestral accompaniment. For the character itself to perceive a separation between the two would be to lose the plot. And, like a diligent accompaniment, the rotating sequences of fragmentary chords and pitches are – without changing in the slightest – becoming illustrative: he tells us of the burrow he has created while the sounds throw their dark covering around him.</p> <p>Everything appears to be making sense. Unlike the voice that opened this movement, the timbre of this voice has not been changed significantly. There are no echoes, save a slight reverberation that puts it in a place, and there is no harsh filtering to accentuate, or remove, the frequencies that define humanity. There is no distance at all between it, and us and there are no other voices to crowd the issue. Sonically, nothing could be clearer.</p> <p>And this persona is secure: he tells us something in confiding, calm, tones. <i>He</i> knows that he is making sense. Unlike the murmuring crowd that jostled reality earlier, he speaks to us alone. His words are jumbled – in an ordered manner. The sentences have been split into parts, and the parts have been reassembled with pauses between them (if you remember, we've been through that</p>
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<p>a space for listening.</p> <p><b>Time passes</b>, then ‘Figure-toi’, again. But now we’re listening– to a voice, no, a <i>man</i> who is asking us – telling us – to picture something. After the first ‘figure-toi...’ we did picture something after all, without being conscious of it: we conjured our version of a man, who is going to tell use something. We grasped our own meaning from the air. But we do not know what to picture consciously, yet. We stumble into a cave, even before he talks of Plato’s myth of the cave, and cannot perceive</p>	<p><i>Picture...</i></p> <p><b>Time passes</b>. I’m still listening to the sound of his voice. It’s an interesting voice, but I have no idea what <i>kind</i> of French accent he has. I’m not privy to that, still contending with the nuts and bolts of a foreign language. His accent is beyond my comprehension; its voice is masked by an internal voice that keeps reminding me ‘these are sounds which make up words in the French language’. I hope I’d be able to tell if he was getting bored. He’d be too polite to</p>	<p>of a schizophrenic is not empty of sense, but there is a sense that <b>we don’t understand</b>.</p> <p>Yes, it often happens that I reprise, revise a work after a year or two, or even three or four years. In certain cases it’s impossible, in certain cases I am too far away, I am no longer there in that work. In other cases I have many notes, I keep many of the musical elements also, and therefore I can go and research all that and rediscover the spirit of the piece. But in general when I rework a piece I <i>know</i> what I am going to rework, I know what I want to change. So although <b>time passes</b>, I still want to change the same thing.</p> <p>Yes. Yes, I believe that one can take it on several levels. That’s to say that one can think about Plato’s text in the sense in which he wrote it – one could think</p>	<p>door before). We know that he reveals his secret. The problem is that <b>we don’t understand</b>. The meaning of each sentence is obscured, though nothing in <i>his</i> tone of voice appears to be aware of this failure to translate sound to sense. The voice is not processed, but our relationship with words is. And there is just a hint of a reflection in that knowing accompaniment, whose harmonic shards collide in incoherent combinations, offering a partial tonality.</p> <p>It is a world not quite mad enough to have lost all reason.(But are we not mad or sane, one or the other?) There are still words, but to heal the fractures created by their displacement would require revisiting the text – that is, we would have to go back in time, and listen again. That would be more like reading than listening to music, where <b>time passes</b>, regardless. And yet there is some space between each group of words, for us to try and figure sense out of the world. We don’t have long enough: the scrabbling sounds reappear and their activity and volume masks what we were attending to. Their recommencement precedes the words ‘de dehors’ (‘from outside’). And, incidentally, the first time those scrabbling gestures occurred, right at the beginning of the movement, their interruptions revealed a moment of</p>
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<p>what lies ahead. And we are made ready for the metaphor because we are currently experiencing its theme.</p> <p><i>Figure-toi...Figure-toi des hommes qui vivent dans une sorte de demeure souterraine en forme de caverne possédant une entrée qui s'ouvre largement du côté du jour. A l'intérieur de cette demeure, ils sont, depuis leur enfance, enchaînés par les jambes et par le cou, en sorte qu'ils restent à la même place, ne voient que ce qui est en avant d'eux, incapables de tourner la tête en raison de la chaîne qui la retient</i></p> <p><i>[Picture...Picture men living in a cairn-like underground dwelling, with an entrance opening widely unto the daylight. Inside this dwelling, they are chained at the legs and neck, since childhood, in such a way they remain in the same place and see only what is in front of them, incapable as they are of turning their heads restrained by the chains.]<sup>2</sup></i></p> <p><b>listening</b> <b>Francis Dhomont</b> <i>Figure-toi...Figure-toi..</i></p> <p><b>twice</b></p>	<p>yawn I think. It can be enough to hear a tone of voice, but my perception of this is <b>limited</b> at the moment.</p> <p><b>Picture...</b></p> <p>We are engaged in vocal counterpoint, he and I. Listening and speaking, and sometimes the two together.</p> <p><i>Whatever it is that speakers have in mind, in speaking they are bound by the logic of sequence in time..... For writing, the limitations of sequence...are far less significant, and in many forms of writing they are replaced by processes of complex syntactic design, such as the subordination of one clause to another, embedding, for instance.</i> <i>(Kress, 1997, 15-16)</i></p> <p>I have some questions written down but</p>	<p>of it as the presentation of ... .. how man in general perceives the world - in a very <b>limited</b> way.</p> <p>And sometimes, for example, I won't preserve more than two or three words from a whole phrase. Because that's enough, the sense is sufficient.</p>	<p>muffled intelligibility 'à l'extérieur'. Is he hearing them, beyond him? If so, he is either with us, or we are with him. Though it is not necessarily one or the other. We've heard these sounds before.</p> <p>And are we outside or inside? At this point we are not at liberty to say: we are trying to attend to a voice whose speech seems rational but isn't. While we try to reassemble sense we are, at the same time, struggling to keep an aggressive, all-consuming distraction 'outside' of our listening. Hence the piece – in both its sonic strategies and the very subject of the words – illustrates our own listening predicament.</p> <p>Is the scrabbling sound that eats at our listening worth attending to? Perhaps its role now is illustrative: it is a programmatic depiction of the manic struggle to build a safe burrow in the ground. Or perhaps it depicts the fury and determination of some slaving invader, trying to gain access to this burrow. Perhaps it is both. Perhaps such abstracted sounds are not to be trusted as illustrations since they leave us choosing between conflicting allusions. But, whether the sound is inside or outside the burrow, both allusions are impregnated with fear.</p> <p>Earlier on in this movement this gesture</p>
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<p><b>nuances</b> <b>deep</b> <b>experience</b> <i>Figure-toi...</i></p> <p><b>evocation</b> <b>close</b> <b>evolution</b> <i>Figure-toi</i></p> <p><b>presence</b> <b>reality will fall apart</b> <b>disappears</b> <b>possible meanings</b> <b>sound and sense</b> <i>Figure-toi...</i></p> <p><b>what will happen now?</b> <b>where am I?</b> <b>am I alone?</b> <b>how long will this be for?</b> <b>discourse</b> <i>Figure-toi...</i></p> <p><b>utterance</b> <b>between sound and sense</b> <b>time passes</b> <i>Picture...</i></p>	<p>they seem irrelevant now. As he speaks his words anticipate my queries, or throw up new currents that I would like to pursue. This is not a reading and there are no fixed <b>texts</b>.</p> <p><i>Sous le regard d'un soleil noir</i> gives time to its subject, and to its texts. Plato, R.D.Laing, and Kafka may be the sources for this dark exploration of schizophrenia, but the texts are a starting point for a deeper interrogation of sound, sense and listening to voices.</p> <p>Francis Dhomont reads these texts aloud. We are listening to his voice. But by this I do not mean that they are merely spoken by him, through one or other human voice. More than this, they are interpreted, experienced and recreated through this new work, through his <b>thought</b>. This is a new kind of reading undertaken through the composition of sound. It goes far beyond words.</p> <p><b>listening</b> <b>recorded</b> <i>Picture...Picture...</i></p> <p><b>surrounding</b> <b>experience</b> <b>filter</b> <i>Picture...</i></p>	<p>KN: And even though one doesn't use all the <b>texts</b>, it's important to read them all...it's in the music.</p> <p>FD: Yes, yes ...absolutely. It is very important to have a ...to live a little with them.</p> <p>Yes. The work of art, for me, is not simply [a case of] taking what exists and saying 'this exists' - a little like Cage, saying 'there, here it is, one has nothing to do but listen'. By doing this, of course, Cage changed the way we listen. But I believe that the 'plastic' arts - literature, music - must be a 'human' work. That's to say, they have human <b>thought</b>. Art, the arts...in the end is fabrication, a way of making. So it's a fabricated thing, a thing that Man, who is human, makes. Therefore it needs to be made well, with a form, with a thought, idea. And it's quite difficult.</p> <p><b>recorded</b></p> <p><b>Francis Dhomont</b></p>	<p>had achieved things. At the outset, it dragged a muffled, filtered 'inner' voice into an 'outer' place. To do this it rose in pitch, through filtering, changing timbre as it hauled itself upwards towards the light, thereby gaining access to a shockingly convincing room: it arrived at a door, that opened with audible reality on to a crowd. And then it scabbled up even further, to burst into another space where voices had become unreal, before pursuing its climb to the heights of a single, inhuman, b natural sine wave.</p> <p>Now it is more aggressive, with more lower frequencies at the start, and more 'verismo' reverberation that accentuates its presence. It is still on a mission. They – she, he, me, you, we? – are trying to get in, or out, of there. The sounds approach us: there is an increase in volume as they hurtle through time. They (or she, or we – whose voice is it?) have an end in mind, a horizon in view. They are coming closer. The goal is the door. Here.</p> <p>This time it does not open. This time we are locked in. Or are we locked out? Thwarted, the gesture continues, becoming ever more frantic. The sounds fly wildly from place to place, shaking the locks of a hundred different doors. Then the lower pitches are gnawed away. The timbre strives upwards,</p>
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<p><i>Figure-toi..Figure-toi..</i></p> <p>twice</p> <p>nuances</p> <p>filter</p> <p>voice</p> <p>whose voice is it?</p> <p>presence</p> <p>nonsense</p> <p>sound and sense</p> <p>what will happen now?</p> <p>where am I?</p> <p>am I alone?</p> <p>how long will this be for?</p> <p>decoding</p> <p>cannot hear</p> <p>we don't understand</p>	<p>a lost traveller close whose voice is it? <i>Picture...</i></p> <p>no longer perceive reality will fall apart disappears allusions possible meanings sound and sense <i>Picture...</i></p> <p>decoding knots <i>Picture...</i></p> <p>Plato utterance cannot hear accent between sound and sense distorted time passes limited <i>Picture...</i></p> <p>thought</p>	<p>surrounding</p> <p>deep</p> <p>evocation</p> <p>voice</p> <p>close</p> <p>evolution</p> <p>no longer perceive</p> <p>allusions</p> <p>sound and sense</p> <p><i>Figure-toi...</i></p> <p>discourse</p> <p>Knots</p> <p>Plato</p> <p>accent</p> <p>distorted</p> <p>we don't understand</p>	<p>accentuating the higher frequencies, scrabbling towards metallic edges, going beyond purely sonic associations with soil or water to an abstracted animal chewing, gobbling: the sound of an unconsciousness trying to reach outside itself. And while it goes on, following a doomed trajectory, a muffled voice murmurs in the background, submerged and indiscernible. Then a clear and authoritative voice cuts through this muddle. Here is the voice that started it all – this is the sonorous persona that led us into the cave at the beginning of <i>Sous le regard d'un soleil noir</i>. He is an outsider who is not part of the torment, that continues around him. He enunciates the words that also started this movement, although then they were indiscernible and uttered by a whimpering, muted voice. He speaks of inside and outside, of eating and being eaten, and of emptiness. Perhaps he has been listening all the time.</p> <p>His words appear to be accompanied by a distorted repetition, filtered but completely intelligible. The timbre of this echo has the hollow lack of substance we associate with a voice on a telephone or radio: it communicates 'this is being transmitted'. But to whom? And behind this there is the echo of an echo: that submerged female identity from the opening is now</p>
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<p><b>time passes</b></p> <p><b>key</b></p>	<p><i>Picture... ..yourself</i></p>	<p><b>time passes</b></p> <p><b>limited</b></p> <p><b>text</b></p> <p><b>thought</b></p> <p>KN: ... ..One has need of a key...and a door.  FD: Yes, absolutely..that's it. One has need of a <b>key</b>. But that isn't to say that the person doesn't think. His manner of speaking is, above all, to translate his thought.</p>	<p>speaking clearly. He explains, and she (her voices made multiple by filtered harmonisation) repeats his explanation, perhaps in some kind of muted acceptance. Her voice is cut off abruptly, in the middle of nothing ('rien'). This is the final word. His voice has gone. Her voice has gone. But behind them that submerged voice had continued, and now continues for a few moments before closing its indiscernible communication. Finished.</p> <p>There are no voices left, but it isn't yet over. While we were concentrating on the words – the speech that claims attention – a rhythmic pattern returned, with familiar synthetic, high-pitched pulses, and a repetition that still speaks of an intelligence tapping on the wall of its prison, trying to be heard. But we still have no <b>key</b> to the code. The repetitions become louder and louder until the pattern fills the present and is all consuming. It is the only thing audible now. It is all there is to listen to. Inside, outside, here, there, one, other. Suddenly, at its loudest point, the pattern is curtailed without warning. Although it had not finished, that is the end. After this abrupt cessation of an untranslatable signal, there is nothing.</p>
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<i>Figure-toi...</i>	<i>Sous le regard d'un soleil noir</i> is the history of a shipwreck. <sup>3</sup>	...one understands it quickly. If one says 'fear', one doesn't need to say 'I am frightened'	On est à l'intérieur.
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<sup>1</sup> The recordings, the texts, and the English translation, are provided by kind permission of empreintes DIGITALes. See Appendix I for the full texts and English translation.

<sup>2</sup> This text is from Plato's *Republic*, as it appears in the work (with English trans from CD liner notes).

<sup>3</sup> From liner notes to CD.

<sup>4</sup> The material in this column is taken from an interview by KN with Francis Dhomont, made in Havana, Cuba in September 2001. English translation by KN.

<sup>5</sup> R.D. Laing, *Knots*, Penguin books, 1970.