

FERRAN FAGES

My work environment as a musician

Environment can mean a lot of things. You can reflect on this from a geographical, historical, professional, artistic, emotional, political, social viewpoint... If I consider the word “environment” in my work as a musician, I mainly want to talk about my daily environment that I face up to every day. This is the environment that includes the other more limited environment where the field I work in can be found: the artistic sphere. This daily environment appears as the antithesis and negation of music. As a result, I would like to differentiate between what I will call social environment and personal environment.

My social environment is everything that surrounds me as a member of a large community in which I share a space and time with individuals that I don't know.

My personal environment is everything that surrounds me that comes after my social environment and makes me different from other individuals in this community. This is my personal field of activity.

Our social environment regulates our actions and the way that we communicate with each other, through the resources provided by the powers-that-be. This compendium of acts and thoughts is assimilated, excluded, reinterpreted, appropriated, minimised, and cast aside by a minority... Within this social environment there is an undercurrent of common triviality that forms the basis of our actions: an inability to listen in a physical, symbolic and metaphorical sense.

A short overview:

We hear the powers-that-be tirelessly repeating how our environment is evolving. It does this in order to make us believe that we now have more time to live, and as a result, have a higher level of well-being. I doubt that the time things take has been reduced to provide us with more time to live. They are trying to devote less time to things, or this ends up being a consequence of that. The time that actions take is becoming shorter. However, the time needed to listen for 5 minutes cannot be reduced to 4'50" or 4'25".

Time speeds up in the series of unconscious constantly changing actions that act at the same time on our daily routine and on the need to resolve them, to leave little room for other more conscious acts which would give us a perspective of what we are, and as a result, of what we do.

We accept things without experiencing them. Before we do something, we want to know how it is going to turn out: its result and outcome. We reject experience and risk, and share an inability to listen that goes beyond the run-of-the-mill.

If the compression of time leads to a loss of listening ability, oral expression is also affected in the use of language. When we come to face an explanation of something we tend to reject it. This limitation becomes greater when we want to reduce the time to explain and understand to the detriment of the correct way of formulating things. Our vocabulary is reduced and our reception is crippled: we are functional illiterates. However what is most surprising is when we notice in our daily routine how the negation of an idea becomes more powerful and can be

communicated better than its correct concise definition. Unfortunately, we all tend to fall into this trap.

The ability to listen can be developed. Why is nobody interested in it? However, the inability to listen is not a recent invention. This inability to listen and the functional illiteracy that have been agreed on by consensus by the powers-that-be might be more linked in the physical sense. Two elements could be added to this from a less tangible point: the lie regarding freedom of expression and the control of the media. The former acts as a reassuring illusion and the latter as concealed censorship.

Freedom of expression is the great lie that numbs our collective unconscious. This freedom of expression is proof of the Machiavellian methods used by the people who aim to control public opinion, and do so by making us believe that we can enjoy channels of expression and individual freedom. Both of these are lies that are well maintained by the various powers-that-be. This is fake kind of listening controlled under the pretext of freedom.

Individual freedom is a romantic utopia, but individualism is a fact. It is about giving people an individual conscience as we have lost the ability to think and act collectively. Freedom doesn't exist; it is built on the basis of a need. And this deception is the illusion of this freedom.

Control of the media:-

Information channels are the military arms of the political classes and the powers that be. Allowing people to express themselves when these channels are occupied and controlled is merely a form of premeditated censorship as a channel is being offered that is paralysed and exclusive. This has two consequences that are identical: the message never arrives or goes unnoticed. The only thing that the excess of information produces is disinformation. And whoever controls this will be assured of power. What does power aim to do? Power tries to perpetuate itself, grow and especially not change hands. Once these channels have been controlled, all they need to do is manipulate the information and de-structure the language to achieve this more quickly and efficiently. The constant manipulation of information imposes the themes that have us subjugated, which are vital to keep the population in a constant state of shock. These themes are the pretexts that can make you gain or lose power; as a result, controlling the media that broadcast lies cannot be questioned (consensual state terrorism).

The other factor that the powers-that-be use to cripple our communicative capacity is the appropriation of words to change their use and meaning. The perverse use of complex concepts such as good, freedom, solidarity, love, peace, community, nation, religion - reduced to the level of any old political and commercial slogan. We are bombarded with short phrases in which these words appear in the most mundane situations. Language is trivialised to reduce its importance and meaning. The limitations of language are extended when you consciously distort the meaning of words. Listening suffers this mutilation and simplification process directly. You can train your listening. If you mutilate language, and your ability to perceive it, you also mutilate listening and the ability to make it grow.

We are deprived of the tools we need to understand our surroundings. What we can't see and listen to doesn't exist. Reflection is censured as being hostile to a model of society that is looking for individualists with very little collective ability, and functional illiterates with

blocked hearing. This is a key profile for perpetuating the resources of power. As Walter Benjamin warned us in the context of fascism with the use of artistic resources to serve political aims such as the “aestheticism of politics”, we could take a leap forward and change it to “the aestheticism of not listening”. Controlling listening is based on negating it.

My personal environment is my field of activity, my reflections and my attitude. It's constantly changing, because the points on which it is based are balanced and continuously evolving. It's a fragile environment because it's intimate. It's a place where I reflect on my musical work, and I question my hearing and I wonder what other people's hearing is like. I consider this, together with time and reflection, to be elements that are intrinsic to understanding music. The kind of listening that I require includes taking the physical surroundings into account. It needs a place where you can perceive music with a minimum degree of comfort so that you can experience it directly. How many places would fulfil these simple requirements? We are facing, then, the capitalist context in which music is considered to be merchandise and where the parameter used to assess it is its productivity: CDs sold, concerts given, number of people in the audience, merchandising, articles in the press, advertising... the music that we hear without listening is the same “song” that changes performer every now and then.

There is a tiredness in our hearing that has led to a tiredness in our listening. Our ears are bombarded to the point of collapse. Could anyone understand that your ears cannot be closed? Our ears are exhausted by repetition and volume. The powers-that-be make use of volume as a weapon to threaten us. We give them our consent. We fall into the trap.

Images are exploited explicitly. Since the late 19th century, sound has abandoned its suggestive side to move towards what is explicit. This setting favours explicit sound, without any suggestive reflective elements. The constant loop, that can be identified in a few seconds. Repetition is immobility, and this where the factor of volume appears: the louder the message, the more people who will receive it. Volume is the medium. The content is what is least important. What is important is say it louder to cancel out any other messages and to redirect people's attention. This is the trivialisation of sound by the powers-that-be.

This erotic ode to volume is denied because whoever uses it does so from an intimidating standpoint and a position of strength. For me this use isn't erotic. It's an act of domination and supremacy that cancels out an act of communication. It's not an artistic act but an act that perpetuates power. As for volume, my erotic ode is connected with the actual physical side of sound: the act of producing it and the vibration of space and the body itself (a direct result on our hearing and our bodies).

Is my activity rejected material? It takes the form of rejected material because it genuinely requires time to listen to it, and pay attention to the message, internal movement, and form in time and space... A world of elements that you cannot simplify and that if you do, then this would explicitly result in utter incomprehension. It is rejected because it considers what its social environment doesn't want.

Why do we have this aestheticism of not listening? Why can't my work find a suitable everyday setting where you can listen to it? If my stance is clear regarding my refusal to accept what is mundane, the contradiction lies in my requirements when defining what the

criteria are for listening to it in ideal conditions. If I don't reveal the criteria, my message will easily be lost.

You need to provide criteria so that you can understand things. Given that the guidelines in order to understand the social environment tend to simplify things, I could make use of cryptic elements as a way of aiming to make myself stand out and try and find the most radical contrast as an element to attract attention not to aid comprehension. However, attracting attention is not a general simplistic option that initially aims to stand out but ends up being absorbed by its surroundings. Let's not forget that the very composition of things contains conflicting elements.

What I want is the full capacity to take decisions regarding listening, taking a stand and providing a critique of my personal environment in contrast to my social environment. This is a utopia that becomes even more utopian if I let it grow because of my immobility.

This is a stance that requires other people to listen, criticise and take a stand. Not just to provide a response to a performance that I give, but to offer criticism. I'm not talking about believing that what I do is interesting because I think about everything that I have stated up to now. The lack of criticism is what makes artistic production become insubstantial and self-indulgent.

Doubt becomes the most dangerous weapon for whoever holds power: doubt as a questioning of the past and present that looks towards the future.

Towards a future structure:

My analysis is based on the mechanisms that produce these differences in listening: the powers-that-be and their need to perpetuate themselves as against my awareness as an individual in a repressive context. I need different surroundings in contrast to this cynical social environment of consensual freedom: it is legitimate to negate their perpetuation.

FERRAN FAGES. Self-taught musician. He regularly works on various improvisation projects: *error focus* since 1998 with Ruth Barberán, *cremaster* (<http://www.cremaster.info/>) since 2000 with Alfredo Costa Monteiro, *ambilis* with Dorothee Schmitz since 2001. He has worked with the choreographers Olga Mesa, Constanza Brncic and Carme Torrent and has collaborated with Joan Saura, Agustí Fernández, Jakob Draminsky, Franck Stofer, Anton Ignorant, Stefan Prins, Derek Bailey, Margarida Garcia, Francisco López, Andrea Neumann, Peter Kowald, Taku Unami, Masahiko Okura, Masafumi Ezaki, Bukhard Beins, Guiseppe Ielasi and Mark Wastell, among others. Further information at: http://www.experimentaclub.com/data/ferran_fages/index.htm#bio