

Strikes (the tremor shaking my legs)

Coming to Valparaíso in November of 2019, I left the french Yellow Vests movement behind to discover the Chilean social movement. There is no doubt that the line connecting these two sets of events is much shorter than the half round-the-world trip it got me to do. Expressed through different circumstances, the issues are quite similar, so much so that the amazing economic, political, or climatic complexity that determines the current state of the world might be summed with a simple formulation, applicable anywhere: the neo-liberal power against the people.

“No estamos en guerra (we are not at war)”, have answered the people of Chile to Sebastián Piñera. And yet, if we are certainly not all exposed on the frontline, the fact is there: the neo-liberal power has declared war on the people, through the voices of its incarnations established in Santiago, Rio, La Paz, Paris, Beirut, or Hong-Kong.

In all of my activities as a sound artist, the matter of listening has always been as much of an issue as sound itself. It has always been about composing the listening as much as composing the music. But even if it has significantly nourished my work, the practice of “deep” or “active” listening feels a bit insufficient and frustrating today. Current crises, and with them the sense that the artists community is not always rallying as much as it should, increase the trouble: as precious as it may be, the serenity of my own listening feels in contradiction with the noises of the times. Some sounds can only be heard standing up and being outside walking, jumping, or shouting with others. In the auditoriums I am sometimes invited to play my music, I got the confused feeling that staying too long might make me deaf to what is happening outside. Electroacoustic music is to be listened to with a composed sense of letting go, and with the closed eyes of acousmatic seriousness. I know that exercise and I know what I owe it. But lately I had a hard time keeping my eyes closed and staying motionless.

It is actually a rather strange thing, this immobility of the audience of art musics, confined as it is within architectures that are as much made of stones as of a mesh of political, cultural, and social strings. Electroacoustic music, as revolutionary as it might have been, has maintained some of the habits of the bourgeoisie, among which is that privileged practice of listening in comfortable chairs, eyes-shut and motionless. Compared to the vast majority of more popular or commercial musics, which always come with some kind dance, the singularity of not inducing and kind of movement in the bodies of our audience is worth taking note of. Unless that immobility should be regarded as a dance as well? After all, the absence of motion is not excluded from the possibilities of dance.

As much as every loudspeakers are weapons, every dances are martial practices. Among them, many have been absorbed by the entertainment industry, and turned into empty gestures for the rituals of the cultural and economical power. But some others remain, as techniques of political self-defense and as performative acts of symbolic resistance: slave dances training for revolt, queer dances reinventing bodies, dances opposing cultural domination, disenchanting normativity and counteracting expectations of docility. In that sense, dancing can be an active, performative and political form of listening: it channels the sonic energy of music to empower subordinated bodies.

Listening to electroacoustic music, on the other hand, sometimes made me wish that my body could disappear, or even got me to resent the occasional exhibit of misplaced physical expressions. This might feel like the exact opposite of dancing, and yet it is a physical act, it is a practice that requires some learning and training, it comes with figures and attitudes, however discreet. The dance of “serious” musics has made the absence of movement possible because the requirements of the bodies, such as protection, union, and expression, have been delegated to architecture, technology, and cultural legitimacy. It might even qualifies as a martial practice as well, but maybe only as the

cool-headed composure of strategists and rearguard officers, who have the privilege of staying away from the agitation of the frontline.

Coming to Valparaíso, in a festival in crisis within a city in crisis, I wanted to experience my own crisis to its full extent. It was not so much about disowning my commitment to electroacoustic music or my remaining desire for deep and serene listening. Rather, it was about accepting to feel the tremor that, for a while, has been shaking my legs when I close my eyes to listen. In fact, and despite the bourgeois and institutional legacy that helped putting up their walls, I believe that auditoriums too will soon need to be defended against the blind destruction of neo-liberal powers, as well as the serenity of all our future listenings.

For < *strikes* >, however, I needed follow the energy, the rhythm and the violence that prevented me from sitting down and compelled me to open my eyes. I wanted to make something that would induce movement and dance. And maybe I also wanted to see if my music could contribute, even in the smallest way, to make people want to go out and take part in some demonstration, because I feel that we might need that more and more.

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