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# MY LISTENINGS

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## **bilingual**

The taxi driver speaks on the phone in a language I do not know, from which emerge some fragments of French, brief clues to follow the conversation from a distance.

The passage from one language to another, cuts, slippages, automatisms, play.

I search for a rule, in vain.

### **sideways**

I am sitting in the midst of  
people I do not know.  
A conversation begins, they  
chat as though I weren't there.  
I look away and keep them out  
of frame to continue listening  
and to appear absent: it's  
the direction of my gaze, not  
my body, which testifies to  
my presence or absence.  
Knowing that I need only resume  
a frontal position and look at  
them once again, to stop their  
imprudent words in their tracks.

### **alarm**

I've always felt a slight shame  
in reproducing, despite myself,  
the binary melody of sirens,  
at the passage of emergency  
vehicles.  
In making it the point of  
departure (the key) of my  
sing-songy expansions.

### **bursts**

A group over there.  
Bursts of laughter as slaps,  
sharp, stinging.  
Small ascending waves, cascades  
with no fall, suspended, on the  
edge of saturation.

### **chat**

That moment during a trip with  
a little-known acquaintance,  
when, after having spoken for a  
moment to share a few personal  
details and to show that each  
is paying attention to the other,  
with a tacit agreement, finally,  
each is quiet.  
And at which each turns aside,  
only to speak again on arrival.

### **train station**

Standing, outside, on the edge of the platform, the passage of a non-stop train and the sensation of having your head sliced off.

### **to exhaust a record**

A vinyl.  
To plan the inescapable stoppage (the end of each side), having to get up, sometimes even to rush, to protect the sapphire (shorten the time it takes to rub itself out).  
To plan the end: the day the record is no longer listenable.  
The groove has lived, the record is scratched, skip points have appeared, a saturation has developed as a result of successive listenings (actually criminal, insidious, exhausting).

The fatigue of a record: it still plays, more weakly, clogged up (the throat of one who has smoked too much), the record is damaged, by my fault.

### **disc-jockey**

From time to time, walking down the hallway, I whistle a tune, discreetly (nonetheless reaffirming the few identifiable notes each time I pass) with the idea that it will be mentally taken up by others, whose paths I cross or who hear me through their doors.  
The others, who then wonder, all day long, about the origin of their melodic obsession.

### **offbeat**

A neighbour learning to play the drums saturates my hour with arrhythmia.

### **pillow**

To rediscover on the phone, having surprised her at the moment of awakening, her still sleeping voice.

### **illusion**

Each time I fully open one of the taps in the bathroom, I think I can hear the phone ring. Sometimes to such an extent that I rush over to try and answer it.

### **the echo chamber**

Because we had neither a garden nor a garage, I decided instead to put the ping-pong table I had bought in my bedroom. I did not anticipate all the echoes the bouncing ball, reverberating in the empty spaces and doubled by the table's legs (which banged on the floor and came into contact with the structure of the whole building), would engender, compulsive and amplified to-ings and fro-ings, ricocheting from one storey to another, propagating themselves throughout the entire building, vertically and horizontally playing themselves out, reaching the ears of some neighbours, bouncing off others.

### **breath**

On the telephone, the white noise that conveys the voice (breath that I perceive in the silence between sentences and that nourishes itself from the pileup of parasites on the line) speaks to me of remoteness and gives shape to distance.

### **the ventriloquist**

It often happens to me that I only realise after the fact that I have been singing some melody for several seconds.

The point of departure of the song, concealed, and its source, unknown (in me, something that starts up involuntarily). Carrying on for an instant (the time it takes for me to notice it), then stopping, speechless.

### **stop**

It's enough for me to block a single ear to bear the arrival of a train that is braking.

### **dubbing**

The doubled sound of the television (muffled by the walls, echoed by the courtyard) when a neighbour is watching the same channel as I am.

The sonic shadow of voices, of music, with the tiny delay (slight deferral) due to the distance of the sets.

And the provisional uncertainty, until I mute my own set to notice the quasi-synchronicity of the (neighbouring) sounds and of my (domestic) images.

### **resonance**

A short sentence, that I have just spoken out loud and for myself, while surrounded by silence, stays in my head, deposits itself, later reactivated despite myself, deprived of its meaning.

Its trace there is so pregnant (its air in floatation), that I do not know how long it has been since then.

### **delay**

The time-lapse between the pre-recorded announcement that the train is about to depart and to mind the closing doors (and the train's departure ten minutes before), provokes the amusement of passengers, who promptly turn to one another, over their seats, to share, with a look, their smiling disbelief.

### **behind the walls**

I have never wished to know my neighbours, preferring to their company a telepathy, productive of non-verbal and involuntary exchanges aided by our movements, actions, words and sonic outputs.

### **throat**

The second day of a cold, I hear my voice as unusually deep and rough, accompanied by several layers of residue, as though swaddled.  
Vocal and coarse Michelin Man that resembles the voice, coated in gravity, that I would sometimes like to have.

### **the last word**

I sometimes feel obliged to add at the very end, after the usual and automatic series of 'good-bye', 'thank you' and 'see you soon', a less official last 'good-bye', more personal. Less controlled, more fragile, without an answer, almost for myself.

### **sound obsession**

To keep a sound in oneself, to  
lug it around wherever one goes,  
an echo that does not diminish,  
contained although faint.  
Toying with it, putting it aside,  
in reserve, reactivating it,  
immersing oneself in it.

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These extracts are taken from *Mes écoutes*, an ongoing project begun by  
Dominique Petitgand in 2005, which will culminate in the publication of a book.  
Translated from the French by Ellen Mara De Wachter