

MY LISTENINGS

(excerpts)

Dominique Petitgand

fanfare

I make myself a handle with thick sticky tape to carry my packet with. When I have taken a few steps (once I have steadied my steps and my arms were swinging regularly), the tape rubbing against the cardboard begins to produce a regular sound that has the same (rhythmic, percussive) tempo as a brass band tune that I used to copy a lot as a child, imitating the snare drums and the bass drum.

not understanding everything

I don't always (and don't really try to) understand everything that people are saying to me when I also have to think about what they are saying to me. And I only manage to do these two things at the same time when someone is not reading or describing something to me (when there is no need to decipher or follow word by word, and my attention can do what it wants).

When someone is explaining a route to me and, following the instructions, I am supposed to visualise the landmarks and turnings and make my mind remember everything I am told, I switch off after a few sentences, while nevertheless nodding as required in token of statutory but fake concentration. When someone speaks to me in a language that I know only a bit of, I listen, I think, I cannot (or can only half) understand what they are telling me, my mind tries to go too fast and, in these circumstances, where it can only do one thing at a time, chooses to daydream.

When people around me are talking a language I really don't know at all, then I can really listen (without feeling guilty).

supermarket

When I'm shopping, lost in my search for a product and its shelf, the unexpected sound of a song I like makes me freeze. Glues me to the spot in the middle of it all.

station

Standing, outside, on the edge of the platform, when a train passes and doesn't stop: the sensation of being beheaded.

lung law

To know how long a silence lasts, I need to feel it. I listen to it happen, let go, don't hold my breath—on the contrary, I use it.

The cycle of breathing in and out as a tool, as a measure.

Time passing, as dictated by my lungs.

sound obsession

Keeping a sound inside yourself, carrying it wherever you go, an echo that doesn't fade, sustained even when slight. Playing with it, putting it to one side, in reserve; reactivating it, plunging into it.

metro

Every time a magnetic pass is slipped into a turnstile it produces a prolonged sound, a clear, sharp open-sesame that becomes a continuous aural ribbon at rush hour, undulating like a musical saw. The driven crowd moving nervously underground creates a sinuous melody.

the fault

Underground, between two metro stations when everything suddenly slows down and stops: darkness, silence. Clothes rubbing together, nervous coughs. The moment of waiting, alone among others.

And when, little by little, everything falls back into place, stirs and the carriage starts going again. We have touched on something that resembles an end.

the domestic tyrant

The fridge, its capricious motor, its sudden starts (the whole flat lived under its law) and the violence in the micro-spasms of the purring, ambient vibration (imposing its metronome). The waves that ricochet from wall to wall and spread into other rooms (slyly taking over the space). Its sudden stops that jog the floor and suddenly lower domestic tension.

the speaking clock

I call the speaking clock. I dial the number. I listen without answering (the one-way line) to the litany of announcements and the flatness of the voices. The sentences, produced every twenty seconds so that the temporal data can be grasped immediately at any moment, create a languor that hypnotises me and prolongs my call.

When, after reluctantly tearing myself away, I hang up, slightly stiff with the last sentence still buzzing in my ears (the answer to my question), I hurry to set my clocks. Official time can never be displayed there exactly: the time it takes me to set them becomes a new delay.

tinnitus

When the alarm of an absent neighbour starts ringing in the empty house, the sound is so slight and insistent that after a while I no longer know if that is what I am still hearing, or if it's the lingering trace left by the bell in my mind.

breath

On the telephone, the white noise that carries the voice (the exhalation I hear in the silence between the words, and that is fed by accumulated interference on the line) speaks to me of distance and puts a form on remoteness.

go softly

When the intonation of a new sentence unfailingly tells me that a "but" is coming up. That word of rupture which takes us straight into frankness. The tone of the voice and the nature of the inflections reveal to me what the deceptive comfort of the first words (that have taken on the advance role of consoling) are awkwardly trying to delay.

alert

The siren that tells me that it is midday, that it is Wednesday, the first of the month.

light sleep

What is the minimum input volume beyond which the sounds around me catch my ear, solicit my consciousness and wake me up?

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Mes écoutes
(*My listeners*) is a book
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