

THE AUDIENCE IS DEAD

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In 2000, I was living in London when my partner went mad. I fully realized it the night he obsessively asked me if I understood that millions of people were dying in Africa. I had replied that I couldn't, I just couldn't grasp it. A few days later, he hung himself.

Maybe that's why I left for Senegal shortly after and started to think about figures.

There, I got particularly impressed by how music was played: with people who were there, somehow with the musicians. The audience, big or small, was always integral to the music. This is old news, of course, but when I came back to Europe -to cut a long story short- I embarked on the crazy project of wanting to write a hit - as an art piece. I wanted to put in a museum a symbolic product on what I think Western cultural industries are now working on: **the large audience** often called by extension **people**.

Who is this **large audience**?

I'd say it's the audience consuming popular productions, a group of people defined by its ability to adopt certain products. It's a figure, a big one of course, a calculation. I don't see anything wrong with counting, but I wonder... why is it that when I look for music on the web I'm so often given "the best sales, the most viewed videos"? What is this equation *a lot = good*?

For me, *a lot=good* when it's a lot - for me: a lot of money, a lot of friends, a lot of space to live, a lot of happiness. A lot of money for others, it's good of course but mostly for them! Confusion of interests has always been an extremely efficient tactic.

I'm not against democratic systems (*where the will of a lot = better than the will of a few*), nor commercial logic (*where a lot of money = good for the seller*). **But why good for the seller should be good for me?** When sale figures become the criteria for the audience, doesn't it mean that the audience has adopted the seller's point of view? Isn't it **a very convenient confusion?**

We end up consuming *what a lot of people like, the taste of a lot of people, a figure*. Music by numbers... additions, charts, rankings (*no, the first of the class system is not over yet*) and eventually the producers' market shares... and their earnings. We buy their **earning a lot**!! I'm not even talking here about the promises of wealth, the fantasies of luxury - (you know... big cars, beautiful children, perfect skin, white teeth...) which, like counting, rather legitimate. I'm speaking about figures.

The music business is selling numbers to numbers...

It's revolting! How come I'm not being addressed any more! Me! Unique, unclassifiable, well read, cultivated, demanding, who like thinking, who want to be surprised, always expecting something new and challenging?

Am I just voicing the elite's rebellion here? The cultural bourgeoisie's uprising and claiming its prerogative to quality goods!

Am I jealous that this "large audience" I don't belong to, is getting what they want when I don't? Am I angry because I'm not part of "people"?

Ok, I admit I might have weird taste in music... I'm an elitist. I prefer listening to Public Enemy than the winner of the last ... (music contest show

in like Star Academy) On the other hand, I ask myself: Since when are *people* as an extension "the large audience" being taken care of and respected that much? Hum... I wonder...

I've heard so many times, in music and television circles "People can't understand, it's too complicated, that's not what they want to see..."

A few years ago, a friend played my album *Read my Lips* at a Parisian diner. There was a music producer there who said he hadn't "heard anything so new in years" and he asked to meet me. In his office, he told me that he was very impressed, but he thought -or rather he knew- that people wouldn't understand it... **"Unfortunately"**, he told me **"I don't produce what I like but what people like, what the market is asking for"**. I remember thinking that reggae, hip hop, or house music couldn't have come out of this office, because nobody was asking for hip hop before it got out there! I then thought of a sport channel add I had seen in London saying: "We know what you like: we like it too". Do you, really?

By the way did you know about EMI artists? They've got talent! At least that's what they tell us in France "Our artists got talent"... just in case you'd thought they might issue music which they didn't really like that much, or didn't believe was that good...

If you haven't been ears-dropping in music and television trendy offices, you might have heard politicians say "Statistics tell us that English people want is... blah blah blah" and you might have thought: "Since when are you in my head to know what I think?"

Who can nowadays seriously go against the idea of majorities?

Millions of people voted for the winner! Ultimate justification of what is being eventually produced! Don't you find it weird to watch on TV talk shows and music programs, people sit on benches behind presenters, applauding when they are told to? Next time you watch one of them try and find out how much time you spend looking at this symbolic audience clap. Or maybe don't, since when you do realize it, you might find it very annoying.

When future expeditions discover Western culture of the 21st century, (like they discovered America, and Africa) they might say "These people had the weird habit of watching a bunch of them applaud". Maybe they'll get to some museums too, and see African masks and cartels explaining them they are performing objects used by primitive cultures to tighten human communities by defining social rules through the practice of ritualized cults. They might even make a link with televisions... and think 'star ac' is a cult and exclusion a ritual...

No, I do not claim to unveil the big capitalist plot here -because **there is no plot**. In France, one of the directors of the biggest commercial television openly explained once how he runs his business. Television has clients: announcers or publicists. And what does television sell them? I'm quoting: **"Free brain available time"**.

We also have a radio that plays -between adds- "hit music only". Music, *which a lot of people like* only. If you don't belong to *a lot of people* you can just listen to something else... Fair enough. That's what I said: there is not plot and I'm not being cynical. It's an outspoken and straight-forward strategy.

I spent three years as a student in what is considered to be one of the best schools of management in France. I'm sure marketing has evolved since, but I'm pretty sure its principles remain the same. Marketing is about finding out about your desires or getting at what would push you to buy something. The object of study is YOU. Once the marketing team has outlined "what you want, who you are, or who they think you are or sometimes who they would like you to be if you were receptive enough" they find ways to present you with yogurts... as well as music albums. **You're eventually buying yourself.**

If I didn't like music and art so much I would say this is a **genius work!**

Not only we're made to think that a lot=good, because a lot=good for them, but we're also made to buy what they think we are... I'm telling you: The audience is dead.

That's why I wanted to make a hit enter a museum...

Do you remember Nietzsche? God is dead. Do you remember Barthes? The author is dead. Do you remember God? Nietzsche, Barthes and even Michael Jackson are dead.

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