

Thoughts about taste – Tobi Hewer – January 2016

When it comes to describing their taste in music, people often tend to explain its development in an essentialist way. A kind of knowledge that has straightly emerged from their very own record collection, a unique and individualistic taste, which is used to shape their identity as a so called cultivated human being. By doing so, they often underestimate the fact that taste, listening, and talking about music also take place as a social practice. In his article *The Horizon of an Untuned Ear* Lawrence English points out that there's a clear distinction between hearing and listening. The former describes the way of hearing from a technical or physical point of view, whereas the latter is used to describe the way someone processes sounds, music, etc... Processing sound and music is a result of living within a social context and it thus becomes far more 'complex' to explain where this so-called taste in music has emerged and why it has evolved in that particular way.

Needless to say a family or a comparable close social context is the very first and also one very important institution where taste in music gets shaped. What are the chances to understand and like abstract compositions, when you're mostly surrounded by chart topping music? As a teenager, other institutions of socialization (peer group, social and mass media) affect your listening capabilities too – for 'better' or for 'worse'. Beyond that, taste, listening and talking about music are matters of power and competition and this is exactly the point where things might become pretty ugly, especially if you're working within the cultural industry. There are people and interlinked institutions (together, they form a complex and abstract whole) within electronic music culture that have a strong vision about the music they are pushing. Sometimes they are in privileged positions (e.g., famous Club X and well known record shop/mail-order Y, Crew Z), sometimes they are struggling to get to the top, sometimes they prefer to stay in the (local) depths of the underground and trying to connect their local communities, etc... These different groups potentially tend to social closure in order to distinguish themselves from different groups, to protect and shape their "vision" of

electronic music, to "push things forward" and to gain attention (a very rare and important currency). It's obvious that every group develops a predominant taste, which is very popular and is (sometimes blindly) reproduced among those, who are or who want to become a part of that group. To put it differently: there's a lot of competition going on in order to gain social/cultural and sometimes economic capital and taste is one possible weapon in this mess. In the worst case these closed groups are oppressive (e.g., against female, LGBT producers and DJs) against their environment and develop a self-referential style.

So what's the deal with this slightly structural point of view? The author of this text is embedded in one such group (more local than privileged, coping with oppression and reflecting general contradictions) and sometimes he wonders, if he really likes the music he's playing or if he should like the music. Is there a coherent (please don't say authentic!) taste or does he tend to reproduce the latest trends? Can someone answer these questions precisely? Is there more competition or more cooperation (hopefully!) going on? Hands down! These questions can be painful sometimes, but they are worth asking, because they can shape the way we think and act. Apart from that, why do we all have to deal with this pile of shit? Couldn't it be much lovelier for everyone? It surely can and – hopefully! – will.