**MANIFESTO**

My responsibility as an artist is to challenge people to question their society and to consider the possibility of changing the world as opposed to accepting it as "just the way things are". I want my music to engage myself and others into realizing that there is more to music and life than what we are currently experiencing. In music, this would be done through the exploration of extremes in every sense so that we open new avenues of sound in contexts not previously explored. This idea highlights what I think are the two most important values in art and society: freedom and connection to reality. Society, with all its intricacies in politics and culture, is in a state of perpetual motion that I believe should be communicated in art. In this world of extremes (such preventable brutalities as poverty, slavery, world hunger, war, etc.), a sense of awareness is needed in order to produce meaningful art. I'd like to offer my perspective and invite others to reflect on/challenge the possibility of real democracy, real freedom from exploitation and coercion, and critique of nationalism.

DEMOCRACY, CAPITALISM & NATIONALISM

Dictatorship means total control. By that, I mean as much control as one can have within their context. In any society, the decision of who has total control is a continuous conflict. Democracy is the dictatorship of the majority. Capitalism is the dictatorship of the owners in a workplace. Democracy and capitalism represent degrees of extremes that have a direct antagonistic relationship toward one another. Nationalism is the identification and advocacy for a particular nation’s own interests. It can inspire solidarity for those living under foreign occupation. But, it can also suppress democratic action from “outsiders”. It is a tool that has a constant struggle between its proponents and critics. Inequality is a feature of capitalism whether it be local or abroad, and can exacerbate nationalistic sentiments. Democracy, capitalism and nationalism have an ongoing relationship that is inherently dissonant.

The reason I advocate for expanding democracy is not because I think it is a good or efficient system. It is because it can give freedom to each individual along with the whole of a society. In order for a democratic process to work, the participation must be made available to all people who are of sound mind and share fundamental moral principles (i.e. a person who is against the democratic involvement of others should be disqualified from participating – now there’s a contradiction – the paradox of free speech). In the same vain, a well-fed, well-informed population (i.e. one that is free from hunger and ignorance) are a prerequisite for the functioning of any democracy. These characteristics are relative to what is possible given the amount of resources along with their distributive outcomes.

I’m hopeful that obvious disparities within our political, economic and social systems will lead to the realization of our inevitable collapse as long as we continue down this path. This realization will hopefully result in a demand for freedom that is essential for all people (e.g. freedom from environmental catastrophe). We must deal with the reality that hierarchies will always exist, but we don’t have to accept them as fixed positions. For a long time, we’ve seen the gradual (and exponential) emancipation of ideas from a definite role to generally less defined concepts (e.g. the evolution of the orchestra). To be less defined in the rigidity of a system is to be more free. This is true in art and is equally true in society. I emphasize that although it is a logical progression, it’s important to realize that it is not natural. That is to say, because of the contradictory essence of freedom, it must always be fought for instead of simply waiting for it to be handed.

The artist must be aware of the existence of these systems as concepts as well as knowing how they impact the artist’s perspective. Only then, could the artist truly be free to act consciously in communicating in accordance to this reality. An artist can come up with something deep and beautiful while remaining ignorant to pleasant, unpleasant and “neutral” truths. But, how relevant will it be? Will the work be out of touch? How much can someone contribute to the universe of music without perceiving the same reality as other people?

EXTREMES

Extremes don’t necessarily have to be opposite, but there is a certain polarity associated with them. Contradictions are usually associated with extremes, since they are characterized by dissonance (i.e. lack of clarity, direction, agreement and/or peace). Our very existence as a species is outrageous. So unlikely, yet so inevitable. This is a contradiction that will probably remain unresolved for the rest of our lives. I passionately agree and disagree with these statements simultaneously. Another contradiction.

There is a myriad of ways to depict extremes in art. I suggest that pop music (i.e. the language of the masses regardless of class) could be an incredibly fruitful medium to execute this idea. As a society yearns for more freedom and dissolution of fixed hierarchies, the artist could arrange the coexistence of extreme elements and concepts in music. This could be done to communicate the representation of a mostly undemocratic society as we have now, or a possible democratic one. Both are extremes that I believe merit further inquiry as a necessity for meaningful art. I advocate for using pop music as a space to push boundaries in every direction so as to break it thereby emancipating it (at least in theory).

Of course, there are countless examples of artists pushing boundaries and breaking norms in pop music. But, as I’ve stated, music is a universe that by definition will never be fully explored. I want to aim for the collapse of pop music in the similar way that we are unwittingly heading toward our doom as a species.

REALITY AND FREEDOM

Reality is truth. Truth is arguably relative, but in many cases, we must act as if it were absolute. This is a contradiction in itself. To be connected with reality to any extent, one has to have acknowledgement of the relative validity of some approaches (such as the scientific method) along with perspective(s) that are based on observation of tangible things (like statistics on material conditions). As I’ve hinted earlier, no one is absolutely free and each person has different types of freedom, each to a different extent and with some sort of relationship (many times contradictory) to one another.

Of course, intuition can also be valid and based in reality, but I wonder to what degree. How much should we trust ourselves if we can’t accept irrefutable facts such as human-induced climate change? Freedom is the ability to make conscious decisions with minimal coercion. In a society where one must work in order to survive, material freedom is very limited. Freedom is also a contradiction since it is contingent on which reality people function under. That is to say that freedom for one person may be the ability to own private property while for another person it might be the freedom from exploitation (i.e. the ability to keep surplus value). This is a direct contradiction. Any degree of freedom presupposes a degree of responsibility. If we are ignorant of our accountability and some of the potential consequences that are involved in our decisions, then we are not free.

It is absolutely impossible that anyone or even the whole of a society combined will ever discover the totality of sound possibilities, this includes individual sounds. It is arrogant and unrealistic to think so. Because music is a universe, which by definition is infinite. The fact that each of us has a unique voice easily proves this, but we can also extend this to how each person would play a note on any instrument. Everyone will have some sort of distinctive sound according to such factors as experience, technique, touch, etc. It is for this reason among many others that I support the everlasting pushing of extremes, especially in the context of pop music.

Perhaps, pop music is that which is currently most in tune with the realities we experience. Maybe not. It might be the case that we will only know in hindsight after many years of exploring this endless territory. Either way, I hope that all of my music could one day be considered pop, but this will not happen on its own. Just like society struggles in dealing with internal contradictions so too will my music in the context of being alive and operating under the current system(s).

* Luis Enrique McDougal