

HERE HISTORY BEGAN. TRACING THE RE/VERBERATIONS OF HALIM EL-DABH

A PROJECT BY SAVVY CONTEMPORARY, IN COLLABORATION
WITH MAERZMUSIK – FESTIVAL FOR TIME ISSUES
RESEARCH, EXHIBITION, PERFORMANCE AND PUBLICATION PROJECT
EXHIBITION 20.03.–09.05.2021
OPENING HOURS Thursday–Sunday 14:00–19:00 (visits only with online registration)

WITH Halim El-Dabh and Leo Asemota Black Quantum Futurism (Camae Ayewa aka Moor Mother & Rasheedah Phillips) Vivian Caccuri Jessica Ekomane Jihan El-Tahri Theo Eshetu Satch Hoyt Aryan Kaganof Tegene Kunbi Yara Mekawei Magdi Mostafa Joe Namy Camille Norment Emeka Ogboh Matana Roberts Lorenzo Sandoval Sunette L. Viljoen

ONLINE INVOCATIONS 20.03.2020 16:00

WITH Halim El-Dabh and Medhat Aldaabal Lois Alexander Jessie Cox with Wu Wei and Nicola Hein Ali Demirel Jessica Ekomane Mena Mark Hanna Ali Hasan Sofia Jernberg Mazen Kerbaj Magda Mayas Lorenzo Sandoval Ute Wassermann

SAVVY Contemporary respects the current measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. We wish everyone good health and safety. The lockdown regulations have just changed and we will be open for visits with online registration and a negative COVID-19 test.

PROJECT PARTNERS MaerzMusik – Festival for Time Issues and Deutschlandfunk Kultur
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SAVVY CONTEMPORARY
THE LABORATORY OF FORM-IDEAS

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CO-CURATOR Lynhan Balatbat-Helbock
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LIGHT DESIGN Emilio Cordero
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TRANSLATIONS Anna Jäger (German) Muhammad Salah Abdulaziz (Arabic)
OUR GRATITUDE TO all former members who have built this project with us:
Olani Ewunnet Mahnoor Lodhi Beya Othmani Marie Hélène Pereira and Heba Habib

GRATITUDE

The final steps towards the grand presentation of this project were overshadowed by the sad passing of our colleague and friend, Bona Kingsley Manga Bell, to whom we dedicate this whole project. May these two sons of the African continent, Halim El Dabh and Bona Kingsley Manga Bell, meet and chant in unison in the great beyond.

Over the last five years, and together with artists, writers, curators, musicians and composers from all over the world, we have been revisiting the work of Halim El-Dabh which spans through the 20th century, and was made possible only by the immense generosity and knowledge shared by Halim El-Dabh, and with continued support by Deborah El-Dabh.

This ongoing research has been built paper by paper, sound upon sound, through intensive research and collaboration with those who worked closely with Halim El-Dabh, his friends and family, and various institutions. We would like to extend our warm thanks to: Habeeb El-Dabh, Dawn Carson, Ron Slabe, Grant Marquit, Magda Saleh, Cara Gilgenbach (Kent State University Libraries. Special Collections and Archives), Jan Senn and Melissa Olson (Kent State Magazine), Nick Patterson (Music Librarian at Columbia University), Seth Cluett (Columbia Computer Music Center), Oliver Tobin, Ellen Graff, and Peggy Lyman (Martha Graham Company), Alice Shields, Thom Holmes, George E. Lewis, James Vaughan, Hasan Hajuri, Tommy McCutcheon, Greg Adams, Cecilia Peterson (Rinzler Archives at the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage), Karen Milbourne, Robert Leopold, Michael Mason (Smithsonian Institute), Colette Lucas (The MacDowell Colony), Janet L. Stanley (Smithsonian Institution), Jeff Ingram (Standing Rock Cultural Arts), Robin the Fog (BBC Radio 4), Jeff St. Clair (WKSU), Nasri Zacharia and B. Lorenzo Roaché (Harlem International Film Festival (Hi)) and the archives of Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Archives, and Howard University Archives.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU to Deborah El-Dabh who continues to carry Halim El-Dabh in her ongoing generosity to keep his music, spirit, and legacy alive. Without her guidance and support our collective work would have not been possible.

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TRACING HERE HISTORY BEGAN

“Since my traditions are rooted in Egypt, my language of sound tends to bring into being the sounds of Africa. In Africa singing is a function of life. One sings as an activity, not in order to be good. To be a good musician in Africa is to make total use of the instrument, not to select only certain capabilities of the instrument and make these capabilities the law of the instrument.”
Halim El-Dabh, liner notes *The Osiris Ritual, Ptahmose and the Magic Spell*, 1972

“What I love about music is it connects me with the universe. It puts me in contact with every human being. Music is not just what your ear can hear, but what your body can experience. Every human being has a gesture, and that gesture explains your life history in a way — the way you use the body. There are thousands of gestures to explain a culture of a society, between the gesture, which I’m very interested to learn, and the relation to sound, a fantastic tool to become liberated and find yourself.”
Halim El-Dabh in conversation with Maha ElNabawi, *MadaMasr*, 2016

HERE HISTORY BEGAN. TRACING THE RE/VERBERATIONS OF HALIM EL-DABH is the culmination of a five year long research, and our second homage to the oeuvre of the Egyptian musician, Pan-Africanist, creative musicologist, and philosopher Halim El-Dabh, one of the most seminal composers of the 20th century who this March would have turned 100 years.

With this endeavour into sound and its spaces, we honour our elder Halim El-Dabh. His work is an inspiration to us and guides us through a multifaceted history of music, philosophy and tools accessed and explored by El-Dabh through the years. With this research and exhibition we question: what are the mechanisms by which Halim El-Dabh could be excluded from the canon? An artist whose legendary composition “It is Dark and Damp on the Front” (1949) brought him international recognition before he received formal music training; who collaborated with the modern dance titan Martha Graham; who composed one of the earliest pieces of electronic music known to date, “Taabir El-Zaar” (1944), which launched a wave of experimental electronic music flourishing until today; whose sound installation “Here History Began” (1961) has become synonymous with the pyramids in Giza;

and whose Pan-Africanist vision led him throughout the African continent to connect and collaborate with thinkers, musicians, and politicians like Leopold Sedar Senghor and Haile Selassie while collecting sounds and instruments from around the continent and the diaspora. A composer who, through a span of over seven decades, cross-pollinated sonic disciplines ranging from music for voice and electronic music to opera, symphony, ballet, orchestra while conducting significant research into the sonic traditions of Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Morocco, Greece, Macedonia, Uzbekistan, Brazil, Mexico, and Jamaica, and the United States.

This exhibition leads into a series of concerts, lectures, performances, radio programmes, a publication and workshops throughout 2021, expanding our prelude at the 2018 Dak’Art Biennial: Canine Wisdom for the Barking Dog Sextet: Exploring the Sonic Cosmologies of Halim El-Dabh. We are interested in that which “might prevent that ongoing work of agnosia from deleting the future memory of the black avant-gardes”¹ as Kodwo Eshun underscored during SAVVY Contemporary’s and MaerzMusik’s joint focus on Julius Eastman in 2017-2018, yet another composer actively excluded from past and future history.

We will bend time and re-mix history – fast-forwarding, pausing, rewinding, forwarding again, and stopping, almost as if physically spinning on a turntable through temporalities, sonic methods, sonic geographies, (un) timing time and “extending the same mix based on repetitions and recirculations of the same thing.”² SAVVY Contemporary has commissioned contemporary artists, composers, and performers to produce sonic, visual, installative and extra-disciplinary works to pay tribute to, to reflect on, and to get inspired by Halim El-Dabh over his seventy years of work.

This exhibition allows us to enter the life and work of Halim El-Dabh, not only as a means of documentation but also as a source of inspiration and as a ground to build on for new sonic endeavours, taking a cue from his phenomenal graphic scores, writings on colour, movement, and improvisation. At the same time, HERE HISTORY BEGAN becomes a re/verberation of history, complexifying here both temporally and geopolitically,

and hinting at unexplored routes of thinking, composing, and contemplating on African sonicity and its effects on historicity.

Artists, writers, thinkers and performers are invited to seek inspiration from his legacy and find new languages and forms of creative expression: SAVVY Contemporary is embraced by the sound piece of Matana Roberts who tells stories of her ancestors and of travels throughout different geographies in Africa finding mutual points with El-Dabh’s journeys, which all convene into an ecology of sound. Upon entering the space, visitors are welcomed by *The Constellations of Halim El-Dabh*, an archival display of curtains displaying the ongoing research of SAVVY Contemporary designed by Lorenzo Sandoval and channeled through the sound of Halim El-Dabh’s fourteen Visitation pieces from the album *Laiyla and the Poet*. In Al Mujahid –The Mechanism, Yara Mekawei continues to pay homage to El-Dabh through investigating sound and its source, looking at where the machine’s life begins, she uses sound to create motors that instigate minimal sounds when scratching the surface of a speaker.

Leo Asemota’s work is an interventive series of pieces which include two music dictionaries, a neon light installation, and a manuscript displayed on a collapsible music stand which can be read as an annotation of histories of omission, and an intervention into how they can be retold. Joe Namy’s sound installation is based on two sound scores composed by Halim El-Dabh titled *Sonic No. 7 and 10*, articulated in the understanding of the multifaceted elements of playing the derebucca. This installation draws attention to the deep-rooted correlation between culture and agriculture as well as musical differences embedded within the score. Jihan El-Tahri’s installation weaves a pattern made out of a variety of material and mediums for us to follow El-Dabh’s travels through the African continent which informed his sonic practice, that also coincides with El-Tahri’s own path towards and through Africa.

Theo Eshetu presents us an audio-visual work that comments on how history is written and how the colonial gaze witnessed it, thus exposes the colonial logic and its absurdity. The work is composed of sound and images, collaged from films and historical material on Egypt. Satch Hoyt’s interactive sound installation, made of a magnetic tape textile stretched over eight drum heads, *"Tape Head"* *The Unscoring of the Hyenas Sonic Migrations* places Halim El-Dabh at the beginning of the history of tape machines and experiments with electronic music. Through their video work, Black Quantum Futurism (Camae Ayewa aka Moor Mother & Rasheedah Phillips) invite the visitor to question and break the order of time that is divided into past, present and future, as the future appears in the past through different symbols and generations.

Camille Norment’s triptych drawings are made of iron filings displayed on a transparent film and glass, and is a sensitive reflection upon ‘sympathetic vibration’ as a contagion for hysteria, and the dissonant attraction and repulsion of magnetism. The drawings relate to the scarring of the individual mind and body, to the cyclical historical scarring of socio-cultural phenomena. Tegene Kunbi’s work is a visualization of musicality, compositions and the translating of the sound, tastes, and the colours of the quotidian – especially an Ethiopian quotidian – into geometric forms. The work is about the interaction between these different realities such as how sounds intersect in the markets or in the streets. Jessica Ekomane’s work takes cue from El-Dabh’s investigation into rhythm as both a sociopolitical as well as musical phenomenon. This psychoacoustic sound installation is an abstract sonification of people’s behavior, and syncopation heard in the constantly shifting psychoacoustic patterns which reflect on the time of the history of labor, and El-Dabh’s reading of the rhythm of the history of labor, rhythm of the soil, and the destandardization of time in music.

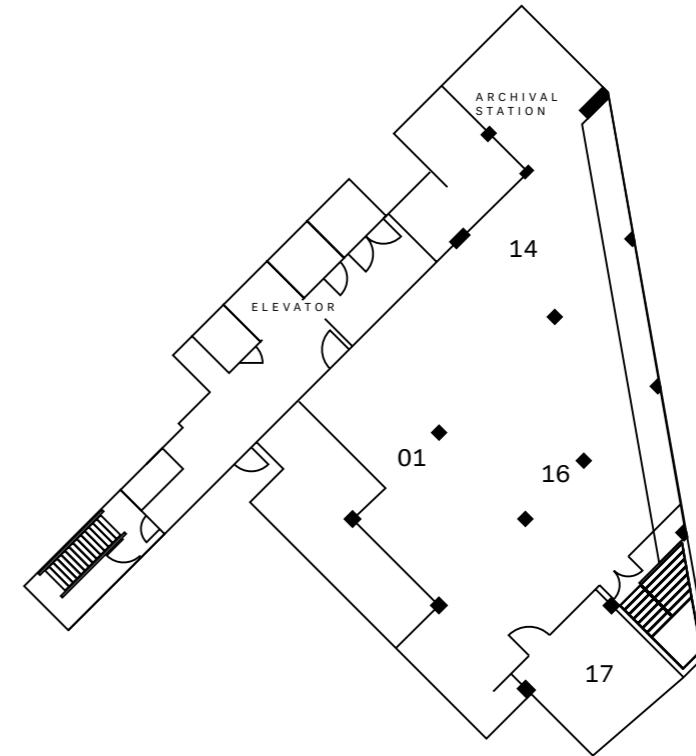
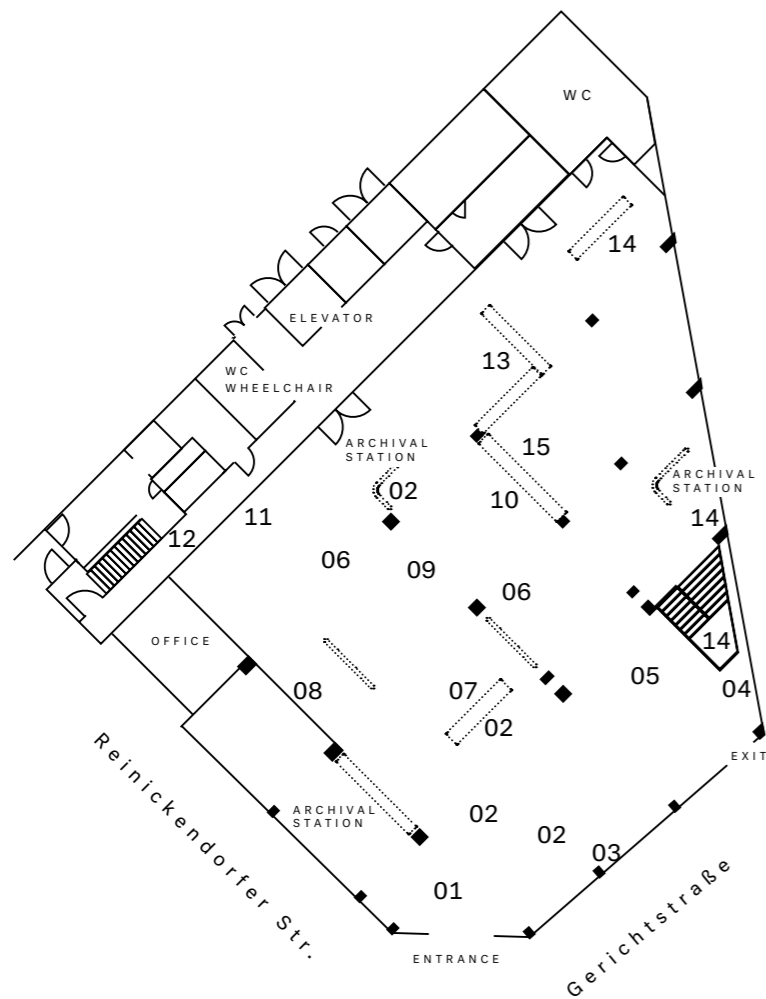
Aryan Kaganof’s video work uses a selection from Halim El-Dabh’s sound works and extends his sculptural approach to the image, the choreography of the narration is entirely dependent on an interpretation of image as music, a music sculpted onto the retina. Sunette L. Viljoen’s series of lightweight, movable wall surfaces is installed throughout the exhibition space with the intent to soften, break apart and engage with the room’s sonic and visual states. Conversing with the scenography of an exhibition space where sound is both the content and concept. Magdi Mostafa interactive sound installation consists of two top load washing machines connected to four sound wave generators. It is an abstracted evocation of the artist’s neighborhood as heard on Fridays; a day of prayers, and also a day of household chores and washing. The work highlights how machine sounds have been fundamental to our sound landscape since they became a part of our daily lives.

Vivian Cacuri’s installation reflects on a specific type of mosquitos found in the Amazonas region which face extinction due to deforestation. The work reflects on sounds that are steadily escaping our soundscapes, due to an increased man made source of noise. Instead of associating noise with the unwanted – such as the sound of a mosquito, Cacuri seeks inspiration in El-Dabh’s philosophy that noise is rather a space of accepting all sounds to cohabit spaces. Lorenzo Sandoval’s sonic travelogue dives into archives of El-Dabh, bringing its contents into relation with materials and concepts of color, waves, mathematics, rhythm and space, to explore the notion of divergent genealogies from the logic of Lefebvre’s rhythmanalysis. Lastly, through Emeka Ogboh’s installation, Halim El-Dabh’s sonic and musical practice finds a new visuality in the moving images when sonic waves mesh into each other while both of them are inseparable sensory experiences.

¹ Kodwo Eshun in his lecture "Unbinding Eastman", during SAVVY Contemporary's INVOCATIONS on Julius Eastman, 2018

² Josh Kun in his lecture on Border Atonalism, during SAVVY Contemporary's INVOCATIONS on Julius Eastman, 2018.

FLOORPLAN



01 LORENZO SANDOVAL

The Book of Vibration. Can't You Hear the Whisper of One Another's Touch?

A Sonic Travelogue From Within Halim El-Dabh's Work
Installation with archive curtain, hammock, sound and video, 2018-2021

02 LEO ASEMOTA

The Workbook for Exploring The Sonic Cosmologies of Halim El-Dabh

Music dictionaries, hand-written notes, neon light installation, 2021

03 MATANA ROBERTS

Laying Track

Audio, speakers, field recordings, recorded improvisation, collage, 2021

04 JOE NAM Y

Study for Sonic No. 7 & No. 10

Installation, plant, sound, text, photos, 2020

05 JIHAN EL-TAHRI

Weaving Connections

Installation, sound, fabric, beads, 2021

06 YARA MEKAWEI

Al Mujahid: "The Mechanism"

Sound installation, motors/speakers, 2021

07 BLACK QUANTUM FUTURISM

Time Travel Experiments (Experimental Time Order)

Single-channel HD video, 9:30 min, 2017

08 THEO ESHETU

Here History Began

Sound and video installation, 12'42", 2020

09 CAMILLE NORMENT

Deviations and Resonance 1-4

Drawings, iron filings on transparent film and glass. 210 x 297 mm, 2017

10 SATCH HOYT

"Tape Head" the Unscoring of the Hyenas Sonic Migrations

Sonic fabric, (magnetic tape) Drum-heads Drumhoops Sonic wand, (playback Tape head) wood, audio components, each drum is 50 x 50 cm

11 TEGENE KUNBI

Sensing Sound Through Color

A series of paintings, oil on canvas, various dimensions, 2018-2021

12 JESSICA EKOMANE

Worlds Within Worlds

Installation, Max/MSP, Speakers, 4-channels, 2021

13 ARYAN KAGANOF

Silence In the Beginning

Film and Sound Projection, 2021

14 SUNETTE L. VILJOEN

Opening Ambience

Sculpture, aluminium, felt, steel, acrylic, 2018-2021

15 MAGDI MOSTAFA

Sound Cells

Sound Installation, two washing machines and four tone generators, 2021

16 VIVIAN CACCURI

Cyclone Aegypti

Installation with concrete, speakers, audio cables, wood, amplifiers, blue lights and soundtrack, 2021

17 EMEKA OGBOH

Untitled

Live visual installation of works by Halim El-Dabh

WORKS & BIOS

01 LORENZO SANDOVAL

The Book of Vibration. Can't You Hear the Whisper of One Another's Touch?

A Sonic Travelogue From Within Halim El-Dabh's Work
Installation with archive curtain, hammock, sound and video, 2018-2021

This project is developed in three different parts; the first two were originally made for “Canine Wisdom for the Barking Dog – The Dog Done gone Deaf. Exploring The Sonic Cosmologies of Halim El Dabh” at Dakar Biennial 2018.

THE CONSTELLATIONS OF HALIM EL - D A B H , consists of six curtains with archival material printed on canvas, conceptualized and displayed by Lorenzo Sandoval. The display of the archival material of Halim El-Dabh works as a literal soft archive printed on textile. These six textiles are organized in two different ways. In the external area, instead of a classic linear timeline format, there are three different constellations organized around three chapters around El-Dabh's artistic and sonic philosophies which are: meanings of sounds, crossing the electric magnetic, and trans-sonority. The information of these constellations can be interpreted as a color score, creating resonations in between the different circles, proposing an understanding of wave-form circular time, instead of a linear one.

H A M M O C K S C O R E N O . 1 is a textile pattern composition, acrylic paint on canvas, and ropes. While composed of a painting inspired by textile patterns, the painting works as a hammock, a functional object that can be used for resting, sitting and laying: a place to hear the surroundings and practice deep listening. Another layer of the work is that it is a score to be eventually played (as we can see in the video work, played during the opening in Dakar), inspired by Halim El-Dabh's use of the old Egyptian color notation system. Within these layers, the piece seeks for opening the perception about the understanding of where a score can be found, and how to apply a sonic understanding of the patterns of everyday life, proposing a series of transactions and translations with the surroundings.

THE BOOK OF VIBRATION. CAN'T YOU HEAR THE WHISPER OF ONE ANOTHER'S TOUCH? A SONIC TRAVELOGUE FROM WITHIN HALIM EL DABH'S WORK is a looped film developed in collaboration with Pedro André takes as a departure

the sound and image archive gathered at S A V V Y Contemporary. From these materials, the work proposes five different chapters (color, waves, mathematics, rhythm and space) to explore the notion of divergent genealogies from the logic of Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis. Alongside the voice of El-Dabh, the voice-overs are by Kamila Metwaly and Lynhan Balatbat-Helbock.

L O R E N Z O S A N D O V A L works as an artist and curator. He received curatorial prizes such as Inéditos 2011, Can Felipa Curatorial Prize and Nogueras Blanchard 2012. He won the art prize Generación 2017; presented in La Casa Encendida (Madrid) and V Beca DKV- Álvarez Margaride for “Shadow Writing (Algorithm /Quipu)” at LABoral, Gijón, 2017. Sandoval was nominated for the Berlin Art Prize 2018 and Premio Arte Contemporáneo Cervezas Alhambra 2020. He was part of the Miracle Workers Collective representing Finland in the Venice Biennale 2019. In 2020, presented “Shadow Writing” with pieces from all the chapters of the project, curated by Emanuele Guidi at Centro Párraga in Murcia. Together with Tono Vízcaíno, he is preparing “Industria. Matrices, tramas y sonidos” for IVAM. Since 2015, Sandoval runs The Institute for Endotic Research, which opened as a venue in 2018, co-directed by Benjamin Busch, and recently by Aouefa Amoussouvi too.

P E D R O A N D R É is a sound and visual artist and electronic musician. He worked as a composer and sound artist for the project Museu da Cidade, Porto, 2020. He is a member of the art collective Piso and the electronic music label Marvellous Tone. With the artist Nils Meisel, Pedro André develops the creative workshops CSF. Among others, Pedro André worked with different musicians and sound artists, Nils Meisel, Gil Delindro, experimental dub producers, Jonathan Saldanha, Pedro Augusto, turntablist Ignaz Schick, or piano player Gonçalo Moreira. He developed work for the curators Nuno Faria, Eglantina Monteiro and the artist Lorenzo Sandoval. His recent collaborations include works with Mariana Caló and Francisco Queimadela for the audio-visual installations, Meia – Noite, Animal Vegetal Mineral and composed the soundtrack for the short-film Sombra Luminosa.

02 LEO ASEMOTA

The Workbook for Exploring The Sonic Cosmologies of Halim El-Dabh

Music dictionaries, hand-written notes, neon light installation, 2021

This work includes a number of music dictionaries, a neon light installation titled “Ideas express you”, and a manuscript displayed on a collapsible music stand as an annotation of histories of omission, and an intervention into how they can be retold.

I. Arthur Jacobs

A New Dictionary of MUSIC

First published 1958

Reprinted with revisions 1960, 1961, 1963

Second edition 1967

Insert with revisions by Leo Asemota 2018

Set in Monotype Times

II. Arthur Jacobs

The New Penguin Dictionary of MUSIC

First published 1958

Reprinted with revisions 1960, 1961, 1963

Second edition 1967

Reprinted with revisions 1968, 1970

Reprinted 1971, 1972

Third edition 1973

Reprinted 1974, 1975, 1976

Fourth edition 1977

Reprinted with revisions 1978

Insert with revisions by Leo Asemota 2018

Set in Monotype Times

III. Erratum

“Sounds of New Music” album cover, liner notes, and magnifier

IV. Untitled

Printed aluminium on manuscript paper in a frame and collapsible music stand

V. Ideas express you

Neon light and transformer

L E O A S E M O T A has places of residence in London, England, and in his birthplace Benin City, Nigeria.

03 M A T A N A R O B E R T S

Laying Track

Audio, speakers, field recordings, recorded improvisation, collage, 2021

Laying Track is a sound quilt composition that Matana Roberts created by utilizing a compositional platform she refers to as P.S.Q (panoramic sound quilting). This particular sound quilt is inspired by Halim El-Dabh, paying particular attention to his archival process that revolved around a longtime interest in field recordings, travel research, and constant interest in cultural immersion for the basis of sonic witness, appreciation and immersive understanding. The main sonic fabric herein includes a variety of field recordings that the artist herself has made while doing extensive travel stateside and abroad for an ongoing durational audio project called “Coin Coin”.

M A T A N A R O B E R T S is an internationally renowned composer, saxophonist, and mixed-media practitioner. Roberts works in many contexts and mediums, including improvisation, dance, poetry, and theater. She made two records as a core member of the Sticks And Stones trio in the early 2000s and has gone on to release a diverse body of solo and ensemble work under her own name on Constellation and Central Control over the past decade. She is perhaps best known for her acclaimed Coin Coin project, a multi-chapter work of “panoramic sound quilting” that aims to expose the mystical roots and channel the intuitive spirit-raising traditions of American creative expression while maintaining a deep and substantive engagement with narrativity, history, community and political expression within improvisatory musical structures. Constellation began documenting the Coin Coin project in 2011 and has released the first four of a projected twelve album-length chapters to date.

04 J O E N A M Y

Study for Sonic No. 7 & No. 10

Installation, plant, sound, text, photos, 2020

This sound study is an excerpt from the score *Sonic No. 7 & No. 10* written by Halim El-Dabh for solo derebucca, a very loose interpretation of the Variable, section G. The text is a coda for this recording. Much like the sonic score is an exercise in fingertip gymnastics, the text is an exercise in reaching the limits of interpretation in written improvisation. The elements in this installation draw attention to the deep-rooted correlation between culture, agricultural, and musical differences embedded within the score.

J O E N A M Y is an artist, educator, and composer, often working collaboratively and across mediums — in performance, sculpture, photography, text, video, and installation. His projects often focus on the social constructs of music and organized sound, such as the pageantry and geo-politics of opera, the noise laws and gender dynamics of bass, the colors and tones of militarization, the migration patterns of instruments and songs, and the complexities of translation in all this from language to language, from score to sound, from drum to dance.

05 J I H A N E L - T A H R I

Weaving Connections

Installation, sound, fabric, beads, 2021

Out of Abyss, which Halim El-Dabh painted on canvas in 2007 as a musical notation, is reminiscent of Ibn Sina's concepts on music and healing, attributing and explaining specific colors to music notes. This continuum in Ibn Sina's music as healing interpretation was adopted by Halim in his daily attire. Fabric and texture, especially that of cotton in its different forms, crosses the African continent as an uninterrupted evolution transmitting the similarities of the cultures,

weaving connections to El-Dabh's daily relationship to color, textile, fabric, and sound in African countries.

Cloth 1: "Out of the Abyss" Print of a Halim El Dabh painting 2007: Rayon fabric

A versatile fabric made of semi-synthetic fiber using wood pulp as its main ingredients. Although rayon as a textile often resembles nylon, it can imitate the feel and texture of most fabrics from silk, wool or cotton and linen. The fibers are known to most accurately and easily dyed in a wide range of colors.

Cloth 2 & 3 (black and white): Bogolan / Bògòlanfini Bambara: Bogo = "earth" or "mud," lan = "with", fini = "cloth."

A handmade Malian cotton fabric traditionally dyed with fermented mud. Although usually translated as "mud cloth," bogolan actually refers to a clay slip with a high iron content that produces a black pigment when applied to handspun and handwoven cotton cloth. The textile, indigenous to Mali, has been made and worn for generations. In traditional Malian culture, bògòlanfini is worn by hunters, serving as camouflage, as ritual protection and as a badge of status. Women are wrapped in bògòlanfini after their initiation into adulthood and immediately after childbirth, as the cloth is believed to have the power to absorb the dangerous forces released under such circumstances. In the past, bogolan was made exclusively by women, who created it for use in specific ritual contexts. Bògòlanfini patterns are rich in cultural significance, referring to historical events, symbols, objects, mythological concepts or proverbs. Since about 1980, the bògòlanfini has become a symbol of Malian cultural identity and is being promoted as such by the Malian government.

Cloth 4 (Green): Thioupe, also referred to as Batik Means to dye in Wolof

Mostly made of cotton fabric, it is the technique of dyeing the cloth, practiced in west and central Africa, that distinguishes this form of textile. African tie & dye technique dates back as early as the sixth century, where by specific ways of folding, dipping in dye and tying strings to form distinct patterns symbolizing diverse cultural references. The bright colours are extracted from plant juices, flowers, leaves and barks of trees. Traditionally tie-dye garments were reserved for Royals and wealthy traders.

Cloth 5 (striped black and purple): faso dan fani Means "woven cloth of the homeland" in Dioula: fani = cloth, dan = woven, faso = homeland.

The Marka people of Burkina Faso created the textile based on a traditional indigo textile woven from cotton, kapok, and indigenous silk called tuntun. Their thread is handspun, dyed, and woven on double-heddle looms into sets of striped cloth. Most of the work is completed

in family workshops. Women are typically spinners and dyers, while men generally weave and sew the cloth. Many of the dyes used in the production of faso dan fani have medicinal properties, and because of this the cloth is associated with healing and protection, both spiritual and physical. The stripes of each cloth are woven to correspond to a proverb. Thus, wearing the cloth conveys a message associated with a pattern. Faso dan fani may be worn in a variety of situations to express a range of opinions and political views. What makes this cloth special is its connotation when President Thomas Sankara made it into a national symbol making it mandatory that the faso dan fani be worn in the workplace. He underlined that it was a form of identity that would unite a people freshly emancipated from colonialism, stating in 1986: "To wear the faso dan fani is an economic, cultural and political act of defiance to imperialism."

Cloth 6 (Pharaonic print): Egyptian Cotton

Ever since the time of the pharaohs, spinning and weaving has been considered a leading industry in Egypt. Monuments, inscriptions in Pharaonic temples and shrouds used for wrapping up mummies are evidence that the ancient Egyptians used cotton since the earliest Nubian dynasties. However, it wasn't until the 1800's that Mohamed Ali, the founder of modern Egypt, introduced a new staple producing long fiber that produced the finest cotton. The crop was cultivated throughout the Nile Delta and became the country's leading export. While cotton earnings sparked the move towards industrialization, the fluctuation in prices particularly due to the American Civil War, were also responsible for Egypt's massive debt which eventually heralded colonial rule.

Cloth 7 (Blue): Guinea Brocade/ Bazin Riche

Dating back to the Middle Ages, brocade fabric was one of the few luxury fabrics worn by nobility, made from 100% cotton. The unique designs are intricately woven into shiny and starchy fabric. Bazin fabrics are made differently than other materials, they all start as a plain, white untreated cloth. Bazin is first batiked, or painted with wax, then dyed an array of colors. The batik process leaves behind undyed patterns that make every piece of fabric unique. The material is then washed in a starch bath and softened with a wooden stick. Bazin, traditionally known as "Guinea cloths" were made in imitation of the Indian goods in West Africa, where cotton was grown, spun, and woven well before direct trade with Europeans opened up. Today, it is used for religious garments and ceremonial attire.

Cloth 8 (Burgundy and Blue): Melhaf Shegga

Literally means "cover or envelop" in Hasanya Arabic: Lahaf = wrap, Shegga = Gauze
An age-old textile commonly worn in the Atlantic

Sahara since the 11th century continues to be worn today from the south of Morocco to the Anti-Atlas, the Senegal River, and Mauritania. Made from a variety of light weight fabrics especially cotton and rayon. Shegga is the term and common name for lightweight, 100% cotton, plain weave fabric with a very low thread count. Apart from the very traditional solid indigo melhfa (called nila), today's melhfa have ornate designs created using two types of "tie and dye" techniques. Although the textile can be used for any purpose, it is most widely used today in Sudan, Mauritania and The Western Sahara as women's garment. For Sahrawis it is one of the strongest cultural weapons used against Spanish colonialism in the 19th century and continues to serve as a symbol of national identity and struggle against colonial oppression.

J I H A N E L - T A H R I is a multi- award-winning film director, writer, visual artist and producer. She currently serves as the General Director of the Berlin based documentary support institution DOX BOX. El-Tahri has been a member of The Academy (Oscars) since 2017 and is currently on the selection committee of the Locarno International Film Festival. She has directed more than 15 films and her visual art exhibitions have travelled to renowned museums and several biennales around the world. Her writings include *Les Sept Vies de Yasser Arafat* (Grasset) and *Israel and the Arabs, The 50 Years War* (Penguin). She continues to mentor in various documentary and filmmaking labs. El-Tahri has served on the boards of several African film organisations including the Federation of Pan African Cinema and The Guild of African Filmmakers in the Diaspora.

06 Y A R A M E K A W E I
Al Mujahid: "The Mechanism"
Sound installation, motors/speakers, 2021

This sonic tableau seeks inspiration in Halim El-Dabh's lifelong research of the very source of sound, and the way sounds from different sources co-live in space and time. Just like Halim El-Dabh was looking for the source of sounds that surround us, connecting all sounds to the spectrality of noise, Mekawei's work is a deliberation on where machines' lives begin and their sound sources. She uses motors that instigate minimal sounds when scratching the surface of a speaker. The sculpture consists of 150 DC motors scratching the surface of 5cm raw speakers, activated by a tone generator.

Y A R A M E K A W E I is a Cairo-based electronic music composer and sound artist. A prolific artist and scholar, Mekawei's sonic bricolages draw inspiration from the flow of urban centers and the infrastructure of cities. She is interested in the philosophy of architecture, history, and literature. Mekawei implemented the optical transfer from the musical conversation and replaced sound waves with visual forms. Her work is based on sound as a tool

of vision, the philosophy of composition is shaped by sophisticated practices that convey messages of abstract dimensions to the public. Mekawei uses research literature on social ideologies in her concepts. She follows her work through a research point of uniting a project and the other, the work shows an intangible aspect of her personality as a woman living in an East African society.

07 B L A C K Q U A N T U M F U T U R I S M
Time Travel Experiments (Experimental Time Order)
Single-channel HD video, 9:30 min, 2017

Do-it-yourself time travel experiments from an embedded time travel manual appear in the speculative fiction book *Recurrence Plot (and Other Time Travel Tales)*, written and published by Rasheedah Phillips. Depicted time travel experiments employ the concept of Black Grandmother Paradoxes, which emphasize matrilineal or matri-curvature timelines that are feminine and communally-generated, where the future emerges into the past by way of omens, prophecies, and symbols, while the past is a space of open possibility, speculation, and active revision by multiple generations of people situated in the relative future.

B L A C K Q U A N T U M F U T U R I S M is an interdisciplinary creative practice between Camae Ayewa and Rasheedah Phillips that weaves quantum physics, afrofuturism, and Afrodiasporic concepts of time, ritual, text, and sound to present innovative works and tools offering practical ways to escape negative temporal loops, oppression vortexes, and the digital matrix. BQF has created a number of community-based projects, performances, experimental music projects, installations, workshops, books, short films, zines, including the award-winning Community Futures Lab.

08 T H E O E S H E T U
Here History Began
Sound and video installation, 12'42", 2020

First composed as a sound piece, this video is brought together with a method of improvisation inspired by the sound and composition used by Halim El-Dabh through the years. Images of Egypt, shifting from one to the other, are posing a history. And this history occurs in a place that is imagined by colonial logic. Eshetu's work brings forth the dominance of perceptions of Egypt as products of appropriation by the colonial logic and questions the reason they inhabit, which is immanent in colonialism. The imagery construction of colonial logic, when edited with improvisation, exposes the absurdity of itself; namely, its claim to *reason over instinct* as an old form of hierarchy, which fed colonialism in various ways, at various times. It is with this understanding of improvisation that the images produced by colonialism become an image of colonialism itself.

T H E O E S H E T U , working primarily in video,

examines the imagery of the collective unconscious through a complex interplay of signs and symbols exploring the nature of perception and the complexity of identity. Throughout his prolific Oeuvre – spanning over 35 years – he has created a distinctive visual vocabulary based on a rhythmic montage and at time hypnotic, syncopated, collage of images. His work encompasses a diversity of genres and media, ranging from experimental cinema to large-scale video installations and live performances, in which the artist moves freely from seemingly abstract visual montage to concrete essay films. Both philosophical and whimsically playful, his videos possess a dream-like quality in which gestures, fragmented actions, and the mirroring of images into kaleidoscopic patterns question the very reality of what an image can reveal.

09 C A M I L L E N O R M E N T

Deviations and Resonance 1–4

Drawings, iron filings on transparent film and glass.
210 x 297 mm, 2017

The forms in *Deviations of Resonance* belong to a series of iron filing drawings of the same title. They are a kind of signal-noise reminiscent of music notation sheets, waveforms, and the closed system of Western music notation – a system in which “extra musicality” is denied entry – as a symbolic motif. Some of the drawings in the series manifest themselves in the shape of a scar, giving them the bodily reference of lived experience. While a wound is a trauma or separation, the scar is what reconstitutes a whole. In Norment’s schema these scars are signifiers of dissonance – a transformation from noise, violence and a wound. Dissonance, in this way, is about healing, and the scar is the trace of an event. In the face of current anxieties, there is also the question of reopening historical scars. Tones that are abrasive or sound out of tune, social tensions and traumas, even magnets that refuse to connect to one another can all constitute states of dissonance. Dissonance can be described as an unresolved space, a state of instability, but one that is also constantly shifting, and open for new possibilities.

C A M I L L E N O R M E N T utilizes in her work the notion of cultural psychoacoustics as both an aesthetic and conceptual framework. She defines this term as the investigation of socio-cultural phenomena through sound and music – particularly instances of sonic and social dissonance, and works through sound as a force over the body, mind, and society. Composing artworks through forms including recorded sound, installation, drawing, and live performance, she applies this concept towards the creation of critical artworks that are preoccupied with the way in which form, space, and the body of the viewer create experiences that are both somatic and cognitive. Norment performs widely with glass armonica – an instrument that was once banned in fear of the psychological, social, or sexual power its sound was thought to have over the body, and the challenge it represented to social control – and with

electronics, sonic feedback, and voice as performative utterance.

10 S A T C H H O Y T

"Tape Head" the Unscoring of the Hyenas Sonic Migrations

Sonic fabric, (magnetic tape) Drum-heads Drumhoops
Sonic wand, (playback Tape head) wood, audio components, each drum is 50 x 50 cm

Halim El-Dabh is the father of musique concrete. His early tape manipulations preceded Pierre Schaefer by four years. With *"Tape Head" The Unscoring of the Hyenas Sonic Migrations* and, in using magnetic tape in his work, Satch Hoyt pays homage to this sonic continuum. The number eight represents the octave in music. In the Bible the number eight signifies resurrection and regeneration, Halim El-Dabh was raised in the Coptic Christian faith. The Africanisation of Christianity is extremely loaded and is implicit in the unmuting and unpacking of African sonicities. Consisting of eight drum elements the work is installed onto the wall, the visitor is invited to gently stroke the tip of the sonic wand over the sonic fabric in a diagonal direction, on contact, sound will be omitted from the adjacent guitar amplifier.

S A T C H H O Y T was born in London of British and African-Jamaican ancestry, is currently living and working in Berlin, Germany. He is a self taught interdisciplinary artist whose work includes installations and sculptures accompanied with sound, music, performance and painting. Hoyt’s current, large scale, global mapping project, Afro-Sonic Mapping seeks to trace the migrations of the Afro-Sonic signifier and understand its transfer through the black Atlantic passage. Sonic Mapping is a method developed by Satch Hoyt, based on research of the earliest factually recorded polyphonic and polyrhythmic sounds from the African continent, and further tracing these sonic threads through the middle passage chapters into our current post-colonial epoch. This method becomes a tool to perceive and understand the existence and migrations of the Eternal Afro Sonic Signifier. Sonic Mapping links the uncharted waters of anthropological field recordings to the contemporary urban frequencies of London, Kingston, Bahia, New Orleans, New York, Los Angeles and Cali.

11 T E G E N E K U N B I

Sensing Sound Through Color

A series of paintings, oil on canvas, various dimensions,
2018–2021

- I Blue microphone
- II Sign
- III Oclock
- IV Electric magnetic
- V Sign 2
- VI Reballs
- VII Sensation 1

- VIII Symphony
- IX Soufiane
- X Sign 3
- XI Phoenix
- XII Dry Retch
- XIII Electric shock
- XIV Soufiane 2
- XV Letter C
- XVI Between you
- XVII Mini bas

Tegene Kunbi’s multilayered composition is an invitation to enter the realm of tangible translations of sound. Pushed and pulled via the ratio of the individual works the body is activated to become a viewer in motion. To “see” the 17 parts of this composition is to be in rhythm. The work also reminds us of the notion of *The Mekta in the Art of Kita*, it is a call for us to see a particular entity embedded within the holistic perspective.

In his synesthetic composition, Kunbi has carefully woven the colours, tastes and rhythms of the quotidian into geometric forms. If we follow his path and listen carefully we find ourselves in the interactions between realities, sounds intersecting with markets, olfactic promises and ultimately the corporeal visualisation of the sonorous.

T E G E N E K U N B I was born in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), where he studied at the Fine Arts School and subsequently taught at the College Academy. He came to Germany in 2008 on a DAAD scholarship and continued his training at the Universität der Künste. His paintings have been shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions in Germany and abroad (e.g. Berlin, Frankfurt, New York, Nairobi, Dakar, Amsterdam, Casablanca) and he has also been active in international art education, including an ifa-funded residency project in Mauritania in 2020. His art has been awarded the Espinette Studio Award (Blaricum, Netherlands), among others.

12 J E S S I C A E K O M A N E

Worlds Within Worlds

Installation, Max/MSP, Speakers, 4-channels, 2021

Through rhythms and sine wave frequencies shifting in real time, *Worlds Within Worlds* brings to experience the resulting data of a paper called "Finding the Probability of Doors Being Open Using a Continuous Position Logger". This study is an attempt at establishing the frequency at which doors are opened over time to evaluate working places safety in prevention of fires. Its authors however cite the "Hawthorne Effect" as an unknown factor possibly invalidating those numbers. This term refers to the incalculable effect that behavior changes due to being monitored, in this case because of the manager's pressure to ensure that their building will meet safety objectives.

The energetic pace of drums are dedicated to the 8-5

work cycle, whereas sine waves frequencies are slowly alternating during non-working hours.

J E S S I C A E K O M A N E is a French-born and Berlin-based electronic musician and sound artist. Her practice unfolds around live performances and installations. Her quadrasonic performances, characterized by their physical affect, seek a cathartic effect through the interplay of psychoacoustics, the perception of rhythmic structures and the interchange of noise and melody. Her ever-changing and immersive sonic landscapes are grounded in questions such as the relationship between individual perception and collective dynamics or the investigation of listening expectations and their societal roots. She released her debut album, *Multivocal*, on Important Records in 2019.

13 A R Y A N K A G A N O F

Silence In the Beginning

Film and Sound Projection, 2021

In responding to Halim El-Dabh’s electronic music, this video work has explicated for the artist the results of a more than twenty year long research into understanding and avoiding the conventional relationship between sound and image in films. Whether it be "amplification of the drama" in narrative cinema or "illustration of the themes of the song" in video clips I have always felt a deep repugnance for the ossification of possibilities that film scores and film music continually re-impose on the medium. Aryan Kaganof presents the culmination of a decades-long experiment to treat image as music and work with the visual as one usually works with sound and music. He chooses three works of Halim El-Dabh to use as a triptych: *Electronics and the Word; Meditation in White Sound; and Michael and the Dragon*. Instead of trying to assemble a visual "clip" or narrative assemblage that would reduce the music to a "film score" he uses editing and re-filming of existing found footage to create a duet whereby the imagery operates in the way that an improviser would with the musical territory that Halim has carved out of time (as a sculptor would). Allow the viewer to hear the El-Dabh compositions as never before. This duet across the mediums fulfills, the promise in El-Dabh’s approach to music, as described by Mike Houry: "Halim El-Dabh compared his consideration of the sonic to how a visual artist might relate to her media; he believed that, like the creations of a sculptor, sound could be carved and shaped out of noise."

A R Y A N K A G A N O F is a South African filmmaker who studied at the Netherlands Film & Television Academy from 1990 to 1994. His first film as Aryan Kaganof was *Western4.33* – a documentary about the German concentration camps in Namibia used to massacre the Herero people in 1906. The film won Best Film prize at the 12th African Film Festival of Milan as well as Best Documentary Prize at the 1st Africa & Islands Festival of Reunion. The film was also selected for the 2004 Berlinale. Kaganof’s concerns

with documentary filming are with the role that music and politics have in shaping our memory of ourselves. Kaganof has continued to make documentaries and feature films and the overlap between the two is his field of interest. He made the first feature length film shot on mobile phones: SMS Sugar Man. Other films of his are Unyazi Of The Bushveld (2007) and Giant Steps (2005), among others. He is a Fellow of the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS) and is currently editor and curator of the online cultural journal herri.

14 S U N E T T E L . V I L J O E N

Opening Ambience

Sculpture, aluminium, felt, steel, acrylic, 2018-2021

Opening Ambience is a series of lightweight, movable wall surfaces installed throughout the exhibition space with the intent to soften, break apart and engage with the room's sonic and the visual states. Conversing with the scenography of an exhibition space where sound is both the content and concept. The claddings are somewhere in between an angled awning for an exterior, and an interior blind. It is a narrative tool that attaches to the anecdotes told by El-Dabh in the exhibition – picking up tones from his colour notation paintings of *Out of the Abyss*, his descriptions of synesthesia, his use of movable panels to reflect sound, as well as his experiments with sound for agricultural purposes. The fabric affects how sounds are experienced in space and creates a hospitable, yet very specific environment to see, hear and engage with the legacy of El-Dabh.

S U N E T T E L . V I L J O E N lives and works in Berlin. She received her MFA from the University of Cape Town's Michaelis School of Fine Art in 2012 and was a participant at the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht, the Netherlands in 2014. Recent exhibitions include: Gallery Momo, Cape Town, South Africa; the 13th Dakar Biennale, Senegal; Manière Noire, Berlin, Germany; Hotel Maria Kapel, Hoorn, the Netherlands and Project Probe, Arnhem, the Netherlands. She was a fellowship recipient at Braunschweig University of Art, Germany (2013); and artist-in-residence at Akademie Schloss Solitude (2020), Villa Ruffieux in Sierre, Switzerland (2018) and the Centre for Contemporary Art Andratx, Mallorca (2015).

15 M A G D I M O S T A F A

Sound Cells

Sound Installation, two washing machines and four tone generators, 2021

Sound Cells is an abstracted evocation of the artist's neighborhood in Cairo. In the installation, old, worn and sometimes even hand-made washing machines of different kinds and sizes (all acquired from homes in the artist's neighborhood) appear in the space and carry a part of Cairo's soundscapes. Each machine is accompanied with a single microphone that listens and amplifies the sonority of each interior of the washing machine/sound cell, transforming the empty vessels

spinning in the background, imbued with layers of personal and social sonic values. *Sound Cells* thus raises a richly complex tapestry of social issues. In addition to capturing the aural character of a particular space, the piece also touches on gender roles in a society at the intersection of religious conservatism and globalized modernity, and the questionable fetishization and anthropomorphization of banal utilitarian objects.

M A G D I M O S T A F A's practice has been radically reoriented into nascent areas of research since 2011, departing from geographic and historical specificity and instead focusing on the conceptual, spiritual and physical notions of experimental 3D sound. He is increasingly interested in notions of ambiguous, unclear, difficult-to-decipher "third forms of action" that are neither normative nor contradictory, positive nor negative; a type of behavior that sociologists, political scientists and psychologists can't determine the motivation for. He seeks to capture the sounds of this behavior in space and insert them in an ambiguous parenthesis in a current "historical" moment that has been too sharply defined by the parameters of either-or, obey or dissent, acquiesce or revolt.

16 V I V I A N C A C C U R I

Cyclone Aegypti

Installation with concrete, speakers, audio cables, wood, amplifiers, blue lights and soundtrack, 2021

V I V I A N C A C C U R I's installation reflects on a specific type of mosquitos found in the Amazonas region which face extinction due to deforestation. The work reflects on sounds that are steadily escaping our soundscapes, due to an increased man made source of noise. Instead of associating noise with the unwanted – such as the sound of a mosquito, Caccuri seeks inspiration in El-Dabh's philosophy that noise is rather a space of accepting all sounds to cohabit spaces.

The sound installation is composed by six concrete speakers that play a sound piece made with natural and digitally-simulated mosquito sounds. The artist manipulated these recordings with an artificial intelligence software that harmonized the chaotic mosquito buzz to approach a "humanized" sensation, a quasi-human voice. The composition evokes the circular movements of a cyclone and the terror that a mosquito tornado might provoke.

V I V I A N C A C C U R I uses sound as a vehicle to cross experiments in sensory perception with issues related to history and social conditioning. Through objects, installations, and performances, her pieces create situations that disorient everyday experience and, by extension, disrupt meanings and narratives seemingly as ingrained as the cognitive structure itself. She has developed projects in many cities in Brazil and abroad, including the Amazon, Accra, Detroit, Helsinki, Vienna, Veneza, Kiev, Valparaíso and more.

17 E M E K A O G B O H

Untitled

Live visual installation of works by Halim El-Dabh

Visualization of sound and music is not a new phenomenon. Halim El-Dabh however was inspired by one of the earliest systems of music color notation of the ancient Egyptians that utilized circles and colours in seeing and visualizing the process of reading music. "My intention and philosophy as a music composer is to open the door to a very old yet very new reality – the ability to hear color as well as the ability to see sound. This is a way to experience new feelings and new sensitivity to a world full of creativity" ("Color Music Paintings", Halim El-Dabh). With today's technology, the possibilities of reimagining such old systems within new realities is made possible. There are more ways to imagine and create parameters for visual and sound as the computer has become an instrument for creating connections between those two senses; the sonic and the visual. Using Alexander Scriabin's "Clavier à Lumière" colour system, but moving in a circular motion, Ogboh's *Untitled* departs from El-Dabh's experimentations with "Color Music Paintings" and the visualization of sound and music. The work has been redeveloped for the Berlin iteration together with Fredrik Olofsson.

NOTE	COLOR
C	red intense
C#	violet or purple
D	yellow
D#	flesh (glint of steel)
E	sky blue (moonshine or frost)
F	deep red
F#	bright blue or violet
G	orange
G#	violet or lilac
A	green
A#	rose or steel
B	blue or pearly blue

E M E K A O G B O H connects to places with his senses of hearing and taste. Through his audio installations and gastronomic works, Ogboh explores how private, public, collective memories and histories are translated, transformed and encoded into sound and food. These works contemplate how sound and food capture existential relationships, frame our understanding of the world and provide a context in which to ask critical questions on immigration, globalization, and post-colonialism. Ogboh has participated in numerous international exhibitions including documenta 14 (2017), Athens and Kassel, Skulptur Projekte Münster (2017), the 56th edition of La Biennale di Venezia, Italy (2015), and Dakar Biennale (2014).

EXPLORING THE SONIC COSMOLOGIES OF HALIM EL-DABH

A PROLOGUE FOR A TRIBUTE TO HALIM EL-DABH
WRITTEN BY BONAVENTURE SOH
BEJENG NDIKUNG FOR THE DAKAR BIENNIAL 2018

For twenty-five centuries, Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for the beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible.

Jacques Attali. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, 1977¹

So it's the energy and vibration that I'm working with. That's what I want to materialize, with the harps, with new sounds of the orchestras. This is the thing I want to express more, the energy that comes from the frequencies of colors, and how to relate to it and how to materialize it. There's a huge energy there. It's always good to work with musicians in an open way, to explore the relationship of color and art to sound and noise and elements of vibrations, to project them, to create a vibration that is positive and in line with the Earth's positive vibration. Maybe that's too much to ask for?

You know, the philosophy of ancient Egypt says that everything in life, everything in the environment, has a feeling, and that's a whole different thinking process than our modern Western one. For them, the sun itself had feelings, and it can reflect back and forth.

Halim El-Dabh. *Unlimited Americana: A Conversation with H. El-Dabh*, 2017²

Rocks are her (earth's) ears recording all of her events from the beginning
My earth body returns to hers
Where the earth worm also sings
Inside/outside vibrations
My bones resonate
My stomach, spleen, liver, kidneys, lungs and heart resonate
The organs are sound
Contain sound
Pauline Oliveros. *The Earth Worm Also Sings*. 1992³

¹ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Translated by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).
² Halim El-Dabh, "Unlimited Americana: A Conversation with Halim El-Dabh", *Music & Literature*: 2017, <http://www.musicandliterature.org/features/2017/6/1/unlimited-americana-a-conversation-with-halim-el-dabh>
³ Pauline Oliveros, "The Earth Worm Also Sings: A Composer's Practice of Deep Listening," *Leonardo Music Journal* (Vol. 3 no. 1, 1993), 35-38.

Canine Wisdom for the Barking Dog/The Dog Done Gone Deaf is a spin-off, a twist, an amalgamation that takes its cue from the eponymous album *The Dog Done Gone Deaf* by Halim El-Dabh, which he performed with *The Barking Dog Sextet* for the Suoni Per Il Popolo Festival in Montreal, Quebec, in 2007.

The Dog Done Gone Deaf seems to me an appropriate entry point into a venture of reflecting on and paying tribute to one of the greatest composers from the African continent and worldwide, Halim El-Dabh, in the framework of Africa's most important and most consistent art manifestation, the Dakar biennial. *The Dog Done Gone Deaf* encompasses the musical dexterity, the sophistication and complexity of El-Dabh's artistic oeuvre that spans a period of seventy years, and reveals the way he integrates allegories, myths and pluriversal cosmogonies in his compositions, in an effort to reflect on and disseminate sonic/ aural epistemologies.

This research and sonic exhibition project will seize the chance to deliberate on non-humanocentric relations, knowledge systems and ways of being in the world, as prescribed by the aforementioned album. The exhibition project will also serve as a platform for deliberations on, and experimentations as to what is and where is sound art in contemporary African art, putting a spotlight on transdisciplinary artistic practices between the visual, performative, installative and sonic mediums.

The project's iteration in Dakar is a prelude to an extensive retrospective on Halim El-Dabh's artistic practice. The exhibition will bring together El-Dabh's scores, notes, compositions, paintings, theories, archive materials of performances and listening stations for El-Dabh pieces. Fourteen other artists from across the African continent are invited to relate, tribute, get inspired by, reflect on El-Dabh's practice that spans electronic music, ethnomusicology, compositions for dance and theatre, and sound installations. The artists are also invited to engage with the narrative nature of El-Dabh's compositions and his interests in allegories, myths and legends like the legend of canine wisdom.

In the foreword to Denise A. Seachrist's *The Musical World of Halim El-Dabh*, Akin Euba writes that he regards Halim El-Dabh as one of the most important modern African composers, one of the world's leading exponents in the theories of "African pianism, intercultural composition and creative ethnomusicology."⁴ Euba set the pace by placing

⁴ Akin Euba, "Foreword", in Denise Seachrist, *The Musical World of Halim El-Dabh* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2003), xii.
⁵ *ibid* 4.
⁶ *ibid* 2.
⁷ Fari Bradley, "Halim El Dabh. An Alternative Genealogy of Musique Concrète," *Ibraaz* (009/5, 2015). <http://www.ibraaz.org/essays/139/674717249719021568>

El-Dabh in a genealogy of some of the best African composers in the diaspora over generations like Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, William Grant Still and Fela Sowande, or at par with J.H. Kwabena Nketia, and on the other hand in the same line with creative ethnomusicologists and composers like Mikhail Lysenko and Bela Bartók.⁵ Seachrist in her postscript, like Euba, questions why El-Dabh has been omitted from "virtually all past and current general music history and literature textbooks for music majors and non-music majors alike," especially taking into consideration the fact that El-Dabh had already attained prominence in the New York musical scene in the 1950s, studied with Aaron Copland, Irvine Fine and Luigi Dallapiccola, collaborated with the likes of Otto Luening during his work at the legendary Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music centre (upon its founding in 1959 where he composed the unique electronic music piece *Leiyła and the Poet*), worked briefly for Igor Stravinski, composed and performed with the likes of Alan Hovhaness, played with Henry Cowell and John Cage or composed for Martha Graham amongst others. How could someone like El-Dabh vanish into oblivion? A man whose legendary 1949 composition *It is Dark and Damp on the Front* already brought him international recognition before any formal music training, whose *Sound and Light of the Pyramids of Giza*, composed in 1959-60, still plays daily at the pyramids, who travelled the African continent meeting the likes of Leopold Sedar Senghor and Haile Selassie, and collected sounds and instruments around the continent and the diaspora. As Tommy McCutcheon points out "it's difficult to look at any area of avant-garde music-making that he (El-Dabh) was not at the very forefront of, in some way or another, at some point in his career (...). Since an excerpt of his 1944 work *The Expression of Zaar* was released on CD in 2000, as *Wire Recorder Piece*, he has increasingly gained credit for being perhaps the first composer to use the techniques that Pierre Schaeffer would later (1948) formalize as *musique concrète*."⁶

As Fari Bradley describes, "'The Expression of Zaar' (Ta'abir al-Zaar) by Halim El-Dabh premiered in an art gallery in Cairo 1944; among the first known work ever composed by electronic means, and also the first intended for electronic presentation. Based on recordings of women chanting at an Egyptian healing ceremony, a sound perhaps as prevalent in 1940 Cairo as canal boats were in Schaeffer's Paris at the time, 'The Expression of Zaar' played out on a magnetic tape recorder (a shorter composition of the work became known as 'Wire Recorder Piece', 1994). The resulting sound, rather than a premonition of Fluxus montages of the machinery of industry and travel as Schaeffer's had been, was the melded overtones of combined female voices conducting a *zaar* healing or exorcism, a ceremony common to parts of West Asia and North Africa."⁷

It is crucial to revise the way histories are written, and from what vantage points they are narrated. It is primordial in our times to offer other and complex narrations, genealogies and derivations other than those narrations by those with the facilities and possibilities of power. Only so would we be able to study and appreciate the technologies, experimentations, denotations which El-Dabh implemented early on and through his career as a composer and artist. That said, we also need to pay attention to not falling into the trap of wanting to be the first or placing El-Dabh as the founder of. And it is especially important that we do not reduce El-Dabh and his lifelong practice as composer, musicologist, educator and investigator to a collation with Pierre Schaeffer and *musique concrète*. Halim El-Dabh is much more and will not be pigeonholed.

He was born in Cairo, Egypt, in 1921 where he studied agriculture and practiced in the field. He attended the First International Ethnomusicological Conference/ Congress of Arabic Music (Cairo, 1932) where he witnessed Bela Bartók and Paul Hindemith. He emigrated to the USA to study at the University of New Mexico, Brandeis University and the New England Conservatory of Music. He was University Professor Emeritus of African Ethnomusicology at Kent State University, Kent, Ohio, and has also taught at Howard University and Haile Selassie University, where he organized the Orchestra Ethiopia. As an ethnomusicologist, he has researched in Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guinea, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, as well as in the African Diaspora – Brazil, Jamaica, and USA. El-Dabh has written for African instruments and African themes and his works in opera, symphony, ballet, orchestra, chamber and electronic music are inspired by African and Asian cultures.⁸

T A K E I I I

You wake and keep praying throughout night
Dogs also keep praying throughout night
They are superior to you

They do not stop barking
and ultimately sleep on a dirty pile of waste
They are superior to you

They do not leave their master's door even
if they are beaten by shoes.

Bulleh Shah! perform good deeds otherwise dogs
will supersede you.
They are superior to you.

Syed Abdullah Shah Qadri (Bulleh Shah)

El-Dabh has widely implemented and explored folktales, legends and myths in his compositions. Since time immemorial, legends and myths – be they complete fiction or half-truths – have played an important role in human societies and cultures worldwide, essentially addressing humanity's concerns of its origins, its being in the world and its relation with other animate and inanimate beings with which it shares space and time. Legends and myths have served as moral compasses for societies, framing what is considered ethical or not, good and evil as embodied by each culture's pantheon of mythic characters. It is thus not surprising that myths became precursors of religions, informed and influenced literatures, arts, music and languages, as well as philosophies and sciences from around the world. It has been claimed that myths are a reflection of various societies' shared consciousness.

In El-Dabh's oeuvre, one finds compositions like *Leyla and the Poet* (electronic composition with tape, 1959) based on Nezami's (1141-1209) "The Story of Leyla and Majnun"; *Bacchanalia* (excerpt from *Clytemnestra* ballet, for string orchestra, 1958) referencing the Roman festivals of Bacchus and Clytemnestra – the wife of Agamemnon and queen of Mycenae; *Ramesses the Great: Symphonie No. 9* (for string orchestra, 1987); *Bahai: Father of the Orishas* (concerto for trombone and orchestra, 1981); *Go Down Moses; the Planet Earth is the Promised Land* (for voice, instruments, 1991); *Ogún: Let Him, Let Her Have the Iron* (for voice, instruments, 2000); *The Eye of Horus* (dramatic music, 1967); *Lucifer* (Ballet, 1975) – just to name a few.

In *The Dog Done Gone Deaf* which he performed with *The Barking Dog Sextet*, El-Dabh narrates the legend of the Navajo indigenous American people on the relation between man and dog, who are best friends. Man fell in an abyss and dog came to man's rescue, risking its own life. After man was saved, man turns around and bullied the dog. The dog got fed up, covered his ears and the dog done gone deaf. But dog eventually pitied man and forgave him, as they found out that the *homo sapiens* and the canines are both earthlings. Listening to El-Dabh's presentation in this conceptual album, one can't fail to think of the bigger picture. The abuse of hospitality and generosity by generations of invaders and colonialists in the Americas and all over the world. El-Dabh animates the listener to reflect on non-humanocentric/ non-anthropocentric knowledges and on our dependence on other earthlings, for our survival is only guaranteed by some other beings, as Bulleh Shah points out. The album is tonal exploration, a convocation of transcendentality and the mystical, a journey through the experiences at *The Dawn, The Fall of Man, L'Abime, Out of The Abyss, Emergence, Canine Reflection, and Canine Wisdom*. Listening to the music of El-Dabh, one gets flashes and sparks in the back

⁸ Biography on Halim El-Dabh's website, <http://www.halimeldabh.com/bio.html>

of one's mind of Navajo legends, but also of Thomas Mann's *Bashan and I* (1916) or Patrice Nganang's *Dog Days: An Animal Chronicle* (2001) as they so vividly explore the man-canine complex and the effort of seeing the world allegorically through the canine vantage point.

T A K E I V

Listening to, reading about, cogitating on Halim El-Dabh's sonic oeuvre that spans eight decades, a couple of philosophies⁹ of the sonorous crystalize. These include but are not limited to:

— In 1949, El-Dabh composed a piece *Evolution and Decadence*, which explored the idea of music evolution. The notion of musical and tonal emergence and decay. Seachrist writes about the 1949 interview by A.J. Patry with El-Dabh in which the latter reflects on simple sounds, a single tone, and explored the evolution of the tone through time and the different elements of the universe until the single sound converged with other sounds, postulating that there was only one tone in the world and all sounds came from that single pitch. The idea of an Ur-sound that later divided like a fertilized egg. El-Dabh's research led him to explore how sound from ancient Egypt migrated to Europe and influenced the sound of modernity. "El-Dabh's new philosophy dealt with how the elements that cause a tone to emerge are also the elements that cause it to decay (...) as the tone evolves it simultaneously begins to decay."¹⁰

— *Mekta' in the Art of Kita* (1955), for example, embodies El-Dabh's compositional philosophy with respect to the fact that irrespective of what generates a sound, the sound is meaningful. That is to say that his interest lied in the exploration of pure sound and the combination of instruments of a symphony orchestra to attain different sound spectra, textures and expansions of the instruments. The title of the piece embraces the Egyptian poetry notion and structure that the whole (Kita) is part of the unit (Mekta) and the unit part of the whole. The concept is geared towards the listener rather than the composer, as each listening session is a shared experience between the listener (Kita) and the performer (Mekta).

— According to Seachrist, El-Dabh's harmonic style is characterized by the fact that in order to break the regimentation of tempered tuning, he determined that a new harmony evolves from "frictions," i.e. dissonances around points of unison in superimposed melodic lines. This allowed him to manipulate tones without tuning the piano, thereby accepting and working the instrument within its confines.

⁹ Denise Seachrist, *The Musical World of Halim El-Dabh* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2003), 4.
¹⁰ Denise Seachrist, *The Musical World of Halim El-Dabh* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2003), 19.
¹¹ Title page from *Tonography*
¹² Carl P. Snyder, „New Concept in Theater Getting Showing Here,“ Gloucester Daily Times, May 25, 1966.

— In *Meditation on White Noise* (1959) for electronic tape, El-Dabh explored the physicality and materiality of noise, from which he could chisel out a sculpture. By collecting and meditating on sounds he found in his quotidian like vacuum cleaner, cars, trains and even to the human ear inaudible sounds, El-Dabh worked on the transformation of potentially harmful noise to enhancing and positive sounds.

— As a music teacher, El-Dabh developed a system of teaching music through colour notations devised for piano, based on an ancient Egyptian musical notation system using colours. Being synaesthetic, El-Dabh always related colours to specific sounds and vice versa. In *Harmonies of the Spheres: Ten Nations Rejoice* (1991) for wind symphony, El-Dabh implemented this method of notation using varied colours in circles of varied sizes.

— The relation to sound, colour and movement in space was explored too in *Tonography* (1981). Inspired by Egyptian and Ethiopian chants, the piece examines the new possibilities of performing artists to experience their bodies in relation to tone and space. "Movement-gesture in the process of generating sound, help shape the production of tone. Sound tones after inception shape up the space. The musician follows the tone in gesture movements to delineate the action of his tones in space by the guidance of a language of symbols and designs."¹¹

— El-Dabh had previously worked on the relationship between sound and space when he was involved with the Theater of Sound and Movement. For Ina Hahn's theatre piece *Extension* (1966) *Meditation on White Noise* (1959) was used. In an interview he states that "sound generates space which is then captured by movement," and that "when sound comes into conception it has three parts, the attack, then growth, and decay."¹²

T A K E V F E E L I N G T H E F R E Q U E N C Y O F C O L O U R

In the middle of the live session for *The Dog Done Gone Deaf*, El-Dabh invites the audience to close their eyes and breathe together in order to engage in a collective participatory performative moment, in an effort to experience the colour frequencies. This animation to share a time and space of synaesthesia very much speaks of El-Dabh's navigations between the sonic and visual arts, and his affinity to extra-disciplinarity. In his career, El-Dabh has done numerous collaborations with performing artists and always had an interest in the visual arts. It is remarkable that in 1944, El-Dabh's work *The Expression of Zaar* was exhibited in an art gallery in Cairo as an installation artwork of recorded material. This was preceded by many years of experimentation with noise since the mid 1930s. As he says "in the late 1930s I did work with noise, to discourage crickets. (...) I

didn't want them to eat the corn (...) I would take pieces of scrap metal, hang them from a pole, and they would have, like, wings to them. When the wind came they would vibrate and hit the pole and create noise.”¹³ Such experimentations are epitomic to most avant-garde artistic movements and artists in the early half of the 20th century. While it is very difficult to find where and how El-Dabh was/is involved within the visual arts, once in a while, one stumbles on clues like the composition *Pirouette* (combination of manipulated audiotape and sound sculpture) in *Crossing Into The Electric Magnetic* (2000), which is said to have been recorded in a New York art gallery circa 1974.

Of his numerous collaborations with performing artists, it is worth mentioning *Clytemnestra* ballet (1958), *A Look at Lightening* ballet (1961/62), *Lucifer* ballet (1975), *One More Gaudy Night* ballet (1961) with Martha Graham; *In the Valley of the Nile* ballet (1999) with Cleo Parker Robinson; *Theodora in Byzantium* (1965) with Rallou Manou; *Yulei, the Ghost* (1960) with Jerome Robbins; *Extension theatre piece* (1966) with Ina Hahn.

T A K E V I

The aims of putting the spotlight on Halim El-Dabh and his over eight decades of experimentation and composition, more than five decades of researching and teaching are manifold.

First and foremost, this research and exhibition project *Canine Wisdom for the Barking Dog/ The Dog Done Gone Deaf* will be a possibility of presenting (for the first time within a visual art festival in Africa) Halim El-Dabh's compositions, scores, archive materials, photography, and paintings in the framework of the Dakar Biennial. By providing listening stations, the exhibition will offer the possibility of a wide African audience to listen and appreciate El-Dabh's electronic music, music for chamber (single and multiple instruments), percussion ensembles, string orchestra, orchestra, concerto, wind ensemble, choral music, dramatic music and film music. Sounds collected by El-Dabh from around the African continent and the diaspora will also be made available for listening.

The aim is also to assume our responsibilities of narrating our own histories and defining our own milestones and pillars within a framework of a Pan-Africanist ideology.

This exhibition is an effort to re-establish a genealogy of modern arts and sound arts in Africa and beyond, and contemporary sound artists, painters, video and installation artists are hereby invited to relate, extrapolate from, get inspired by El-Dabh's practice – his compositions, installations, theories and research.

This exhibition also envisions installing two musical pieces in a market place in Dakar. This should imply a coming back. Both pieces were recorded at a market place in Dakar in 1962 and in 1967, wherein El-Dabh improvises with a Mbira at the market place after meeting with president Leopold Senghor in Dakar, Senegal.

M O R E I N F O R M A T I O N

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S A V V Y Contemporary – The laboratory of form-ideas is an art space, discursive platform, place for good talks, foods and drinks – a space for conviviality. S A V V Y Contemporary situates itself at the threshold of notions of the West and non-West, to understand and deconstruct them. S A V V Y Contemporary has realized a kaleidoscope of art exhibitions, performances, film screenings, lectures, concerts, readings, talks, dances. S A V V Y Contemporary has established a participatory archive on German colonial history, a performance arts documentation centre, a library, a residency program, as well as educational projects with schools. The art space engages in its neighborhood's history and socio-political realities which are entangled with the reflections and discourses of the project.

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13 *ibid.*

