

# Playing it Back

## Critical Reflections on Curating Sound

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Over the last twenty years, museums and galleries have slowly opened their hearts, doors, walls and websites to the reverberation of sound works, musical performances and immersive installations. Finding microphones, musical instruments, vinyl records, turntables, amplifiers, musical scores, mixers, cassettes, recorders, headphones, wires, speakers and voices is not the rare occurrence that it once used to be. Exhibition halls are no longer the quiet, austere, sanctified spaces for contemplation either; codes of conduct such as measured silence and regulated movement have in many ways loosened. Winning the 2010 Turner Prize for her sound installation *Lowlands*, Susan Philipsz flung sound art into the mainstream focus: it was the first time the award went to an artist working with sound.<sup>1</sup> Three years later, *Soundings: A Contemporary Score* would take place at MOMA in New York, the first large-scale exhibition focused on sound art to take place at an internationally renowned museum.<sup>2</sup>

2012 marked the centenary year of the birth of John Cage, which inspired a number of exhibitions and festival showcasing sound art in Western Europe and North America. In the UK and in Germany, for example, expansive exhibitions such as *Soundworks* (2012) at ICA London that included the work of over 100 artists<sup>3</sup> and *Sound Art. Sound as Medium of Art* (2013) at Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM) in Karlsruhe were held. Across the Atlantic Ocean at MOMA PS1, the Brooklyn band The National performed their single, *Sorrow*, repeatedly for six hours as part of their Sunday

1 Weibel 2019, 52.

2 MoMA's first major exhibition of sound art presented the work of 16 contemporary artists working with sound from a variety of disciplinary angles from the visual arts, architecture, performance, computer programming and music.

3 As an online platform, *Soundworks* sought to create an interactive space that is internationally accessible. Despite the dead link to the official platform, the works are still available for listening on SoundCloud.

Sessions program.<sup>4</sup> Titled *A Lot of Sorrow*, this durational performance was conceptualised by Ragnar Kjartansson to explore the potential of repetitive performance and its relationship to sculptural presence within sound.<sup>5</sup> A couple years later, The Vinyl Factory opened up Store X in London as an exhibition space to present spectacular, immersive audio-visual exhibitions such as *The Infinite Mix* (2016). In 2017, Ari Benjamin Meyers initiated the itinerant institution, Kunsthalle for Music, dedicated to the presentation of music within visual arts environments.<sup>6</sup>

An exhibition preceding the above mentioned was *The Record: Contemporary Art and Vinyl* (2011). Curated by Trevor Schoonmaker at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, this research-based exhibition turned to the vinyl record as the object of aesthetic and conceptual interest, and importantly located the politics of sound within the geographic and economic schemas of the Global South. The exhibition explored the culture of vinyl records, and its transformative power as a means of expression within the history of contemporary art from 1965 to 2010, showcasing the work of 41 international artists. Through this exhibition, Schoonmaker worked to broaden and expand the scope of artistic approaches, taking a more global, diverse approach by exhibiting work from North America, South America, Europe, Africa and Asia.<sup>7</sup> The exhibition demonstrated »how vinyl – conceptually, metaphorically and physically – had been used to investigate ideas and issues far beyond the confines of the medium.«<sup>8</sup>

The scope and premise of *The Record: Contemporary Art and Vinyl* demonstrated a critical expansion of existing limits placed on exhibitions focused on sonic media. The exhibition's geographic diversification was coupled with a direct curatorial focus that did not universalise the effect and impact of the vinyl record and its sound on art. It brought into conversation the socio-cultural manifestations of the vinyl record as a protagonist not only in contemporary art, but also in shaping individual and collective identities. Set against the surge of exhibitions during this period, it becomes clear that, despite working with a diverse group of artists, the curatorial focus of exhibitions such

4 Sunday Sessions is a weekly presentation of performance, moving images, dance, music and discursive programs. Its mission is to embrace live arts as an integral aspect of contemporary practice and ask how art forms produce specific ways of thinking and useful means to engage with the broader world.

5 Kjartansson 2013.

6 The relationship between sound, music and art has long been an intertwined one. Experimental music, sound and art have had a relationship that extends back to the early twentieth century. The overlaps, parallels and connections between art and experimental music movements such as Dada, Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism and Fluxus, have often been referenced with connections drawn between and amongst composers and artists such as John Cage, Marcel Duchamp, Merce Cunningham and Robert Rauschenberg. See Cf. Nyman, 1976.

7 Schoonmaker 2010, 17.

8 Ibid.

as *Soundings: A Contemporary Score, Soundworks and Sound Art. Sound as Medium of Art* remained within a Euro-Western-centric grip.

This is not only the case with curatorial practice, but it is also glaringly evident in the disciplines of Sound Studies and Art History. While there are a number of essays and books expanding on the role of the radio in Africa, or ethnomusicological studies on African music and traditions, I have found very few that argued for creative practices such as art, sound art or electronic music. As I surveyed existing literature, it became apparent that this 'neglect' was rooted in broader disciplinary and epistemological questions, motivating me to move my research into more focused readings on ideas relating to the auditory and arts that lie outside of North America and Western Europe, particularly within contemporary art and curatorial practice.<sup>9</sup>

A poignant example is the case of Egyptian composer and performer Halim El-Dabh (1921-2017). El-Dabh, who had studied agricultural engineering in Cairo, is considered one of the earliest composers of electronic music today. He used recorded samples of the Egyptian practice *zaar* using a borrowed wire recorder from the offices of Middle East Radio. The resulting electroacoustic sound piece *Expressions of Zaar* (1944), often referred to as *Wire Recorder Piece*, was exhibited at a gallery in Cairo, and has now become a seminal work in the history of electronic music compositions. Curatorial endeavours such as Dak'art 2018 biennial that hosted a retrospective of El-Dabh's work as a composer, electronic music pioneer, ethnomusicologist and researcher, introduced his influential practice into an African context. His recognition of producing one of the earliest pieces of electronic music came late, however, and is a stark reminder of how experimental sound art practice from outside the geopolitical North has been, at best, neglected and, at worst, dismissed from the canon of sound studies and art historical discourses. Cases such as El-Dabh demonstrate the narrow, often biased determinations of who gets included into scholarship, curricula, art history books, exhibitions and sound studies readers.

David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny, the editors of *Keywords in Sound* (2015), point to this limited reach, maintaining that while interdisciplinary breadth has expanded, the field as a whole has remained deeply committed to Western intellectual lineages and histories.<sup>10</sup> A quick scan of *sound studies* literature has come to reinforce Western ideals of a normative subject that is placed within a universal and common frame

9 Exhibitions attending to sonic media in the 2010s took a universal approach to their curatorial undertaking. These exhibitions could be thought of as introductory exhibitions to sound and music in contemporary art. These exhibitions and their broad curatorial statements did, however, lay the ground work for subsequent curatorial projects, which would challenge said universal underpinnings and Western-centric focus.

10 Cf. Novak / Sakakeeny 2015.

of listening. The presumed universal body has led scholars to treat sounds as stable objects that have »predictable, often technologically determined, effects on a generalized perceptual consciousness, which might even be reduced to an entire ›human condition«.<sup>11</sup> Much of the work accomplished in sound studies has failed to recognise the constitutive differences that lie within these sonic objects of study as a multivalent field of sounds. While Novak and Sakakeeny do not explicitly foreground modalities of difference in *Keywords in Sound*, they do argue that the increased attention to sound in cultural studies, literary criticism and media studies has contributed to understanding the role that sound plays within formations and relations of difference.<sup>12</sup>

Following the steps taken by Novak and Sakakeeny, Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes address these gaps in *Remapping Sound Studies* (2019), through a collection of essays aimed to develop a new cartography for sound studies, bringing Southern locales into sonic and auditory awareness, while also searching for navigational tools to see and listen differently.<sup>13</sup> Taking the Global South as a set of global externalities, produced through colonialism and contemporary settler colonies in North America and Palestine, as well as neoliberalism and imperialist practices, *Remapping Sound Studies* proposes thinking about sound not as the South (or as analogous with the South), but »rather in and from the South«.<sup>14</sup> They approach ethnography and archives in diverse languages, and situate sound as »diverse sonic ontologies, processes, and actions that cumulatively make up core components of the history of sound in global modernity.«<sup>15</sup>

In many ways, my curatorial practice has been oriented around sonic media that is constitutive of a ›southern-oriented politic,‹ as outlined above. My curatorial investment has been to expand ways of thinking through sound and music within exhibition-making, to offer focused readings and understandings of the individual and collective body in relation to the auditory. What follows is a discussion of three curatorial projects I have undertaken, *what is left of what has left* (2016), *Buried in the Mix* (2017) and *For the Record* (2018) that worked towards creating affective and conceptual exhibition environments for the reception of diverse practices utilising auditory media to investigate, recuperate and contest histories and structural legacies of slavery, colonialism, globalisation, migration and global capitalism.

11 Ibid., 7.

12 Ibid.

13 Cf. Steingo / Sykes 2019.

14 Ibid., 4 [sic].

15 Ibid.

### *what is left of what has left*

The vinyl record has come to represent nostalgic pleasures, or as many would argue, a romanticised resistance to digital consumerism. Importantly, as Schoonmaker has demonstrated in the exhibition, *The Record*, the vinyl record has been utilised as a site of publication and artistic practice.<sup>16</sup> It continues to be a material index to the past and a conduit of culture. The vinyl record is a desirable material object. Its haptic quality, texture, weight and surface, together with liner notes, all contribute to the overall package of the record. Its physical and visual elements provide listeners with something to hold and read. The recent resurgence of vinyl has come with a force, with many reissues of once difficult to find albums released, while platforms such as *Discogs* have made it easy to find scarcer, out-of-print issues. The Vinyl Factory Press has also been at the forefront of working with contemporary artists such as William Kentridge, Neo Muyanga, Arthur Jafa, Theaster Gates and Jeremy Deller to press vinyl editions and signed limited editions.

Constituting a meeting place of voices, ideas and propositions, *what is left of what has left* brought together audio works of various modalities of Black sonic and cultural formations from within the contemporary African diaspora. As an exhibition and vinyl record, the project foregrounded the effect of sound on the production and shaping of social and cultural identities of African diasporas, demonstrating how sonic phenomena figure into our sense of place, belonging and our relationship to the past and present.



Figure 6: *what is left of what has left*, 12 inch vinyl record, 2016.

16 Cf. Schoonmaker 2010.

The 12-inch record album comprises works by John Akomfrah and Trevor Mathison, Tony Cokes, DJ/rupture (Jace Clayton), Em'kal Eyongakpa, Lamin Fofana and Val Jeanty that address cultural dislocations, migrations and transnational flows. The project's title speaks to losses and gains of musical traditions and cultures, catalysed through diasporic events. The six tracks feature musical tracks, sound works and excerpts from DJ mixes and video works that speak particularly to the Black experience, both historical and contemporary, linking in particular the movement of African bodies across the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea. Sonic lineages are expressed through vocoders, samplers and synthesizers to echo the complexity of subjectivities constructed by global, social, economic and cultural exchanges.

To draw from Paul Gilroy's description of the image of a ship in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* as a spatio-temporal matrix, a »micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion«,<sup>17</sup> *what is left of what has left* echoes this matrix as a mobile site through which different artistic and cultural practitioners converge. Extracted from the audio-visual work *1+! (a dubstep primer)* (2015), Tony Cokes re-considers the circulation of music by exploring the sonic lineage of U.K. dubstep that he discovered during the early 2000s. Since the late 1980s Cokes' audio-visual works have creatively re-appropriated texts, lyrics and conversations to reflect on race, capitalism and pop culture. In *1+! (a dubstep primer)*, Cokes employs theoretical concepts such as Jacques Derrida's notion of *hauntology*<sup>18</sup> and Gilroy's concept of the *Black Atlantic* to raise crucial questions concerning the writing, editing, sampling and circulation of (Black) sonic cultures. The excerpt featured on this record includes an audio clip from the short film *How to Listen To... New Dimensions in Sound*, originally produced in 1957 by The RCA Victor Corporation to introduce the wonders of stereo sound.<sup>19</sup> Through quotation and sampling of musicians, theorists and writers such as DJ/rupture, Joe Nice, Jacques Derrida, David Toop and k-punk (Mark Fisher), Cokes demonstrates how Black pop cultural forms are consumed at great cultural distances, re-thought and re-deployed to produce hybrid interventions in today's global contexts.

Another track is Val Jeanty's afro-electronica »Rezistans« (2015) that draws upon the sonic lineage of Haitian culture by bridging traditional musical forms with digital technologies. The track blends Vodou samples, chants and drumming to raise awareness of Vodou traditions and cultural heritages in Haiti. The track was previously featured on Radyo Shak, an independent broadcast radio station, organised in collaboration with Clock Tower Productions on the occasion of the 4th Ghetto Biennale in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti, December 10-21, 2015.

17 Cf. Gilroy 1993.

18 Cf. Derrida 1993.

19 Handy (Jam) Organization 1957, [https://archive.org/details/1099\\_How\\_to\\_Listen\\_To\\_New\\_Dimensions\\_in\\_Sound\\_M04056\\_15\\_24\\_44\\_00](https://archive.org/details/1099_How_to_Listen_To_New_Dimensions_in_Sound_M04056_15_24_44_00), 28.09.2020.

In the same year, a high number of refugees and asylum seekers migrated across the Mediterranean Sea from North Africa, warranting creative responses from musicians and DJs. In 2015, over one million migrants reached Europe via the Mediterranean, while more than 3,700 people died or went missing while undertaking the journey, as reported by the International Organization for Migration.<sup>20</sup> Berlin-based electronic music producer Lamin Fofana released the EP *Another World*, which was born out as a response to the mass migration being undertaken by Syrians and North Africans. The techno track »Lampedusa« (2015) directly references Italy's southernmost island, just over 100 kilometers away from Tunisia, and one of the main points of entry for migrants and refugees entering Europe from Libya. Built on synthesizers and drum machines, while using field recordings and samples overlaid against the repetition of a bass drum, Fofana evokes the sounds of the ocean, the rise and fall of waves and sea-foam hitting the shorelines. The track evokes the liminal, and espouses a sense of foreboding and an un-rootedness coupled with an undercurrent of urgency. The title of the track »Lampedusa« is at once a European holiday destination, and also a place of refuge for migrants and asylum seekers, who manage not to fall victim to the unforgiving sea and European border restrictions.

Drawing two migratory trajectories into conversation, *what is left of what has left* foregrounds these physical migrations and lineages of musical genres and traditions that are tied to the displacement of sound and bodies under distressing conditions and violence across the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea. The record is both an exhibition and archive of recorded sound, a material object that is subject to time passing. Within the context of an exhibition space, the edition of 250 records were displayed in one of the galleries in the Hessel Museum of Art in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. Listening stations were set up for visitors to listen to the album, while copies were also made available for visitors to take home allowing the »record as exhibition« to travel in unexpected and uncontrollable ways.<sup>21</sup>

#### <PLAYLIST>

John Akomfrah & Trevor Mathison, »CATALLAXY« (2012), 9:34

Lamin Fofana, »Lampedusa« (2015), 5:38

DJ/rupture, »Uproot mix (excerpt featuring Ekkehard Ehlers and Stalker)« (2008), 4:32

Tony Cokes, »1!+ (excerpt)« (2015), 5:56

20 Cf. International Organization for Migration 2015, <https://www.iom.int/news/two-years-lampedusa-tragedy-iom-reflects-mediterranean-deaths>, 28.09.2020.

21 *what is left of what has left* was produced as part of my requirements for the Masters of Arts degree at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, May 8–29, 2016. The records were available for visitors to take a copy with them. Design: Jono Lewarne; Mastering: Jacob van der Westhuizen, Pressed by A to Z Media, New York, 2016.

Val Jeanty »Rezistans« (2015), 5:16  
Em'kal Eyongakpa, »dis sonic rituals« (2014), 5:51

### ***Buried in the Mix***

»When you choose, as a listener, to focus on what's buried deep in the layers of a recording instead of what's been placed up front to catch your attention – then *you've* changed what is signal, and what is noise.«<sup>22</sup> These words by Damon Krukowski encapsulated the curatorial propositioning of the exhibition *Buried in the Mix* as a provocation to listen deeper, and more attentively to the buried histories and narratives, including the hegemonic systems rendered invisible and inaudible. The exhibition *Buried in the Mix* took place at The MEWO Kunsthalle in Memmingen in 2017 and sought to raise the question: How do we hear power, histories, cultures and difference? Filling the two floors of the MEWO Kunsthalle, the exhibition showcased the work of artists, curators and musicians who brought to the surface a range of voices, sounds and sensibilities that included 1115, Fatima Al Qadiri, Chino Amobi, Sonia Boyce, Vivian Caccuri, Tony Cokes, Sofia Córdova, Christopher Kirkley, Los Jaichackers (Julio César Morales & Eamon Ore-Giron), Carlos Monroy, Nástio Mosquito, Andrew Pekler, Mario Pfeifer, Andrew Putter, Thibaut de Ruyter, Kemang Wa Lehulere and Samson Young.

The exhibition was loosely separated into four areas: one, ethnological recordings and the reappropriation of archival materials; two, music's relationship to identity, diasporic formations and transnational circulation; three, language as reflections and expressions of power; and four, sound as a medium for critique. Songs, ethnological recordings and musical compositions, genres and forms such as oratorio, cumbia, minimal techno and the Lambada (the song, dance and genre) became the sites through which stories of colonial encounters, (labour) migration and transnational crossovers are narrated and expressed. *Buried in the Mix* as a curatorial proposition sought to engage expanded forms of perception in the shape of listening to express, narrate and critique the often invisible structures of colonial actions, capitalist intentions and the suppression of knowledge and traditions.

The ambience of Vivian Caccuri's *Oratorio (Tidal Waves)* (2017) filled the ground floor of the Kunsthalle. The installation is comprised of a low-frequency sound system and lit candles which pulsed to the bass. Visitors heard a composition by Caccuri, rooted in the Ambrosian hymn *Aeterne Rerum Conditor*, one of the first forms of chanting in Western history practiced by Christian monks. By exploring musical forms in religion,

22 Krukowski 2019, 130.

the artist expands connections and meanings to consider the cultural interrelations between bass and ritual. As religious Christian music has historically distanced itself from percussion, drums and deep pulses in order to privilege the voice, wind instruments and strings, Caccuri's musical interpretation seeks sonic forms in which the bass becomes a vehicle for the mind through the body.

Kemang Wa Lehulere's installation *One is too many, a thousand will never be enough* (2016) is a poetic response to South Africa's education system as an exertion of violence – historically under apartheid and within the current political dispensation. A suspended birdhouse, constructed from salvaged school desks, is home to an African grey parrot that faces a music stand holding cassette tapes of English lessons that are played through speakers above. The parrot is staged to appear as if reciting these elocution lessons in American English, thus drawing our attention to the ways in which we are culturally colonised, and mimic, emulate and reproduce that which has been forced, normalised and accepted. His use of salvaged school desks is a reminder of the legacy of violence inherent in South Africa's educational system – Apartheid that led to the 1976 Soweto Student Uprising and the death of over 700 students to the epistemological violence facing students today – from their language of instruction to the lack of material resources.



Figure 7: Installation view. Kemang Wa Lehulere, *One is too many, a thousand will never be enough*, 2016.

Echoes of violence could also be heard in Fatima Al Qadiri's album *Brute*, included in the listening space within the exhibition. Speaking to the violence enforced upon Black bodies in the United States, the album consisting of 11 tracks, is a celebration of protest and a sonic reflection and response to the ever-increasing scale and force of police

brutality against Black Americans. Written while protests in Ferguson and Baltimore were taking place, the album is a statement on the over-militarization of the United States police departments, and their ongoing abuses of power. Through her manipulation of samples and found sounds, Al Qadiri links virtual worlds with real public spaces. The track »ENDZONE«, featured in this exhibition, uses field recordings of protests and civil unrest in Ferguson – you can hear the sound of gunshots, walkie-talkie beeps, explosions, crowd screaming, Long Range Acoustic Device (LRAD) used by the police as a weapon to »pacify« protesters.

### <PLAYLIST>

Flatbush ZOMBIES, *Blacktivist EP* (2016), »BLACKTIVIST«, 05:00  
XUXA Santamaria, *Chucha Santamaria y Usted* (2011), »Fiebre Tropical«, 02:39  
Farben, *Textstar* (2002), »Beautone«, 07:19  
Chino Amobi, *Paradiso* (2017), »Polizei«, 3:58  
Andrew Pekler, *Tristes Tropiques* (2016), »Humidity Index/ Khao Sok (chopped and screwed)«, 05:47  
1115, *Post Europe* (2017), »Calais 90210«, 03:02  
Fatima Al Qadiri, *Brute* (2016), »ENDZONE«, 01:52  
Mario Pfeifer, Kamran Sadeghi, *Approximation* (2015), »Approximation«, 04:01  
Christopher Kirkley, *Uchronia: Field Recordings from Alternate Realities* (2015), »Barbara Affirmations, Relaxation cassette«, 02:28

### *For the Record*

My enquiry into the often unsounded and inaudible extended into the exhibition *For the Record*, and looked closely at the record as a capsule of sound, history, data and information. Taking place at ifa Galerie Berlin as a part of the transdisciplinary project »Untie to Tie«,<sup>23</sup> the exhibition looked at various modes of listening to the dynamics of power that manifest in musical production and circulation, migrations and displacements of peoples, global financial systems and the hushing of voices under political regimes. The exhibition also turned to listening as an act of mindfulness, paying attention to neglected stories and experiences, while also creating spaces in which re-imagination can occur. Works by Jace Clayton, Geraldine Juárez, Christine Sun Kim, Vivian Caccuri and Julio César Morales in their various conceptual trajectories offered visual and aural insights and responses to repercussions of modern coloniality and global capitalism. The

23 »Untie to Tie« (2017-20) is a trans-disciplinary project conceptualised by Alya Sebti that invited discussions around colonial legacies, movement, migration and the environment.

exhibition dedicated space to discrete artworks and a listening space for visitors to listen to a selection of albums from an ongoing collection of vinyl records I am compiling through the research and publishing platform, Nothing to Commit Records.<sup>24</sup>



Figure 8: Listening space. *For the Record*, 2018. ifa Galerie Berlin.

One of the works on featured by Geraldine Juárez was the 7-inch reissue of *Wealth Transfer* (2013/2018). Tracing the patterns of stock market glitches onto transparency film, Juárez treated these patterns as musical waveforms. Using Renoise with some interpretation, Juárez turned these into digital sound data. *Wealth Transfer* playfully highlights the economies of high frequency trading and the abstraction of capital. The record contains three tracks made from the patterns of three stock market crashes, ti-

<sup>24</sup> Nothing to Commit Records works alongside contemporary artists and musicians from within the global south to encourage inter-disciplinary dialogue and collaboration between practitioners and institutions. Operating at the intersection of art and music, the platform explores the signification of sound and rethinks social, spatial, ideological and geopolitical formations. These include the diaspora, national and cultural identities as well as the contact zones brought about by coloniality, modernity and globalisation. It hosts a collection of audio material, including artist produced vinyl records. The platform makes use of cultural artefacts to recuperate neglected histories and heritage while simultaneously offering a framework to challenge, critique and reimagine those trajectories. NTCR creates a tangible archive; a resource towards future consideration and exploration.

tled, »010 Flash Crash«, »012 The Knightmare« and »The Tweet Crash«, with the cover art done by graphic illustrator Jaime Ruelas, who is well known for his flyer designs for Polymarchs sound systems in Mexico City.<sup>25</sup>

A significant part of the exhibition was dedicated to the work of Julio César Morales and his collaborative and interdisciplinary work with the record label Club Unicornio, highlighting the importance of record labels as experimental, collaborative spaces of practice. The back of the gallery featured watercolour and graphite drawings by Morales from the series *Undocumented Interventions*, (2010-17), *Subterranean Homesick Cumbia* (2014-18), a video installation he produced with Eamon Ore-Giron as part of the collective Los Jaichackers and his collaborative work with Club Unicornio. The label was founded in 2002 by Morales and musician Luis Illades as an urban intervention in San Francisco's Mission District, in direct response to reclaim and bring back the ambient sounds of Latino-based music to the streets of the district. The club has since morphed into a record label called Discos Unicornio, a space for collaboration between visual artists, musicians and DJs. Named after the now defunct Tijuana strip club, Club Unicornio specialised in obscure and underground Spanish language music,



Figure 9: Club Unicornio and Julio Cesar Morales. Selection of Club Unicornio Releases, 2018. *For the Record*, ifa Galerie Berlin.

25 Cf. Wirz 2014.

from Mexican dance punk and rare Latin breaks to the newest in electro cumbia and beyond. Such self-organised, independent spaces for art and music activate and infiltrate both art and music scenes and support local practices.<sup>26</sup>

### <PLAYLIST>

DJ Lengua, *EP* (2008), Discos Unicornio, 12 inch vinyl  
DJ Roger, *Mas Esqueletos* (2009), Discos Unicornio, 7 inch vinyl  
Chicano Batman, *Chicano Batman* (2010), 12 inch vinyl  
Julio César Morales and Eamon Ore-Giron, *Dilo!* (2003), Peres Projects, 12 inch vinyl  
Julio César Morales and Eamon Ore-Giron/Moises Medina, *The Year of The Diamond Dogs* (2006), 12 inch vinyl  
DJ Lengua, *Cruzando* (2009), Discos Unicornio, 12 inch vinyl

*For the Record* also featured *Sufi Plug Ins*, an interdisciplinary project that is both an »art provocation and instrument«. <sup>27</sup> Jace Clayton, together with developers, creatively challenged the presets of music software to intervene into existing Western bias of music production and create audio software based on non-Western musical concepts. Software embedded in music production tools play a crucial role in what types of sounds can be sounded. Arguably most music software is conceptualised and produced in the United States or Germany, and is accompanied by defaults that offer narrow concepts of what music can be. *Sufi Plug Ins* works with commonly used music production software such as Ableton Live, whose default setting of a Western time signature of 4/4 and 12-tone scale creates limits for diverse beats, notes and scales.<sup>28</sup> By introducing *Sufi Plug Ins*, Clayton created alternate options for producing sound more aligned with an Eastern scale. Having worked with music software for more than ten years, he came to the understanding that Western (Berlin, Hamburg and Silicon Valley) music software developers had little to no interest in other groups or traditions that lie outside of the Eurocentric norm. This prompted Clayton to raise the question:

What if you could make music software with different assumptions, limitations, and beliefs built into it? For example, if West African griots were to design mu-

<sup>26</sup> Examples of exhibitions highlighting the work of record labels can be found in *ECM – A Cultural Archaeology* and *Free Music Production/FMP: The Living Music* at the Haus der Kunst brought to the fore the significance of these record labels of music and culture. Curated by Okwui Enwezor in late 2012 and Markus Müller in 2017, respectively, these two exhibitions presented visual, archival and recorded material, bringing together a range of formats including sound, music and film to showcase their impact on new jazz and experimental and avant-garde music within the respective cultural landscapes.

<sup>27</sup> Clayton 2016, 187.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 185.

sic software, what concepts and functionalities would they be most concerned about translating into the digital? Or a Berber muezzin, who performs the call-to-prayer beautifully but frowns upon music – could one make music software for him? <sup>29</sup>

Projects like *Sufi Plug Ins* shed light onto systems and structures that determine what kind of music reaches our ears, highlighting the interrelation between software design, music tools, encoded spirituality, digital art and indigenous knowledge systems.

### Outro

What is the condition of possibility to listen beyond frameworks we are presented with? How can we listen to what is outside the monopoly of representation? How can we listen to those who haven't had the right to talk from the modern locus of enunciation? The questions above are posed by sociologist and decolonial scholar Rolando Vázquez in response to modernity's monopolisation of representation, which he argues has been grounded in the negation of listening.<sup>30</sup> The question of who is speaking and who is listening is critical for understanding who is configuring and determining the world around us, from the art that we see, to the music we listen to.

In privileging the auditory, without setting it against visibility, *what is left of what has left*, *Buried in the Mix* and *For the Record* sought to bring its visitors into relation with histories, systems and subjectivities, to act as an ›interlocutor‹ for how we perceive and attend to the world. As sound and music are able to shape our physical and collective experiences, we as participants of this world also transform spaces we occupy. Emily Thompson makes the acute observation that »[...] our senses most fundamental task is not simply to entertain or distract us, but to situate ourselves within our surroundings. By enabling each of us to understand where we are, our senses allow us to understand who we are, as individuals located within networks of physical and social connections.«<sup>31</sup> Taking the perception of listening as »a shared, social and co-constitutive process that shapes and is shaped by knower and known, perceiver and perceived«,<sup>32</sup> these curatorial projects foreground the entanglement of sound and social cultural bodies of knowledge that are fundamental to inform our relation to the world.

29 Cf. Clayton 2012. See also: <https://beyond-digital.org/sufiplugins/>, 28.09.2020.

30 Vázquez 2017, 43.

31 Thompson 2019, 23.

32 Thompson 2017, 273.

Curatorial endeavours such as *what is left of what has left*, *Buried in the Mix* and *For the Record* extend the relational capabilities of sound into exhibition spaces to conceive of the museum as a place of reciprocal exchange. Listening is a practice that brings subjects into relation. In search for auditory perspectives, these exhibitions prefaced the importance of attentive listening as a means for sharing and exchange, and more importantly, as an opportunity to listen beyond established Western frameworks of knowledge and experience.

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