

INTRODUCTION

This project consists of an interdisciplinary performance design with a focus on sonic narratives, local histories and memories in traditional and indigenous artisan cultures in Asia and South America. My contribution involves crossing disciplinary boundaries based on material and corporeal practices to create aesthetic and epistemic spaces which allow for recognition and expression of different forms of knowledge. Through this practice I will experiment with matters and sounds that have partly formed my individuality and cosmology since my childhood. I use ancient/ indigenous technologies and engineering of making crafts and bring them into a sonic scenario, and with them think through art and reflect on soundscapes and practices that are forgotten with time.

ARTISTIC PRACTICE:

(Composition, Artistic Reflection, Inventions & Animated Graphic Score)

This project comprises an interdisciplinary composition, research-creation project that includes an animated graphic score, performance of the score on an interdisciplinary performance design for piano and invented automated instruments, and a scholarly reflection.

The graphic score is embroidered by hand on fabric and uses West Asian and Moroccan traditional and indigenous patterns, pictographs and symbols in handcraft textiles as musical notations. I have designed and built various customized motor driven mechanical devices which are programmed and automated to play alongside the piano in order to reproduce different sounds associated with these artisan cultures.

The core of the activity is Composed Improvisations within Interactive Computer System on this performance system in an experimental contemporary music aesthetic.

I. COMPOSITION

I aim to take the act of listening as a tool for understanding and analyzing compositional processes. It's a study of codification/connotation of the subject and of communicating the complexity of the subject matter. I am exploring and developing a new mode of listening/perceiving the sound in the observer/listener, which allows them to deconstruct the constraints of the music as a discipline and its limitations and open up for new possibilities. Mixed-music involves instrumental and electronic music; therefore a more complex form of listening is required.

II. ARTISTIC REFLECTION

The use of interdisciplinarity in this research-creation work, not only in the research methodology but also in the artistic practice aims at revealing the disciplinary limits. My work extends the horizons of knowledge production in artistic research, and I aim to create a space for potentialities of agential intra-activity¹ between different matters, apparatus and phenomena. Standing somewhere in between sound studies, cultural studies, visual arts, epistemology and archeology, I approach the archeology of sounds, as Malafouris perceives the archeology in material engagement theory, as a way to understand how the various manifestations of humanness are the historical result of a particular biological form of engagement with various assemblages of organic and inorganic materials (Malafouris & Knappett, 2008). The question of human agency has been at the core of the archeology and the worldview of the anthropocene for too long. We now need to break away from the humanist

¹ Agential intra-actions are specific causal material enactments that may or may not involve "humans." Indeed, it is through such practices that the differential boundaries between "humans" and "nonhumans," "culture" and "nature," the "social" and the "scientific" are constituted. Phenomena are constitutive of reality (Barad, 2003, p. 824).

world view and take material agency into account. While agency and intentionality may not be properties of things, they are not properties of humans either: “they are the properties of material engagement, that is, of the grey zone where brain, body and culture conflate”(Malafouris & Knappett, 2008, p.22). This is form the door through which I enter, bringing with me conversations with the material world and engaging with handcrafts, sounds, matter, culture, and apparatus in producing meaning and knowledge.

III. INVENTIONS / REFLECTIVE DESIGNS

I have built various motorized/automated invented instruments that I consider to be hyper instruments (e.g. the electronic version of the traditional instruments) for this project. These instruments are inspired by a few handcrafts and arts that I find interesting to explore. My Designs focus on 2 aspects: the re/production of the sounds of 5 Asian ancient handcraft practices that are nostalgic to the ears of the indigenous/traditional worlds, and the automatization of the work and the building of a machine.

In this project I have aimed at making reflective designs. Building on post-humanist performativity and reflexivity, I believe that “reflection should be a core design outcome of Human-Computer Interaction” (qtd in bath. sengers et al., 2005, p. 49). A ‘Reflective design’ in technoscientifically driven arts — and this work in particular — could provide support for self reflection as critical thinking that renders users aware of unconscious aspects of the experience. It is an experience of listening and observing the lost/soon be lost soundscapes and epistemes that are engaged with cosmologies of the peoples of the region.

Below are the descriptions of handcrafts and arts which inspired my motorized/automated invented instruments:

- Panbeh-zani, Dhunai or scutching: is a step in the processing of cotton, linen or the dressing of flax in preparation for quilting and spinning. The scutching process helps fluffing the cotton and separates the impurities from the raw material. This handcraft is traditionally done in Iran, India and West Asia with the help of a wooden instrument(stick). Because of the wide availability of the raw materials (silk, cotton, wool, flax) in the region, spinning, knitting, and weaving formed an almost universal occupation systems which has been disappearing with the rise of the Industrial Revolution and new machinery systems.

This handcraft is highly known for its sonic representation in countries like Iran. It sounds in between percussive and string instruments. The craft wo/man would consider it as a musical instrument and sing along while working with the cotton. With the development of mechanization and new technologies for the production of blankets, quilts, mattresses and industrial pillows, the prosperity of hand embroidery and cotton quilting has gradually decreased and is almost forgotten in new generations.

- Combing the carpet: is a technique in carpet weaving. It must be done after weaving each ridge with a device called Daft or Daftin. The task of a daft is to pound the knots of the carpet. When entering into a carpet weaving workshop, the sounds of Daftins are first sonic objects that appear to ears, its percussive nature with a metallic timbre creates an almost regular rhythmic pattern in the environment.
- Weaving Loom: is a device that simplifies the process of manufacturing textiles. It holds the warp threads under tension to facilitate the interweaving of the weft threads. The loom creates an open path across and through the warp yarns and while the shed is open, the filling yarn is inserted. The shed is then changed as dictated by the pattern. The earliest evidence of a loom is found on a pottery dish in ancient Egypt, dated to 4400 B. It's one of the important handcrafts in ancient worlds and is getting lost with time and under the effects

of the mass production, fast fashion and mechanization technologies. I was stunned when I first heard an artist working with loom with its interesting sonic and textile production.

- Cowbells: the Cowbell is commonly found in musical contexts and are traditionally designed to be worn around the neck of free-roaming livestock, and was used by herdsman(women) to keep track of their cows' whereabouts. Composers like Karlheinz Stockhausen and Olivier Messiaen have used multiple chromatic sets of cowbells in their compositions. The bells are commonly crafted from iron, bronze, brass, copper, or wood. In my last visit of the copper-smith area of Isfahan Bazar (n my hometown) which is well known for the massive sounds of clang-clang of copper pot crafting in their alley. During that visit, when I started playing with a hand crafted bell and sound field receding, the copper artists started talking to me and explaining how their art is getting forgotten with the effects of modernity.
- Pottery: Pottery is one of the oldest human inventions, originating back to 18,000 BC. "I consider pottery making as a prototypical exemplar and one of the best and diachronic models of the active mind. Not only do I see the ways of potmaking as ways of thinking but I also believe that one can find few other diachronic and cross-cultural examples where all major ingredients of the human cognitive recipe are brought forth and actualised in such an explicit and to a large extent empirically accessible manner (L. Malafouris, p.22)". Considering clay to be one of the earliest truly neurocompatible materials in the history of humanity, it leaves a huge space for exploring the constitutive residual component of the prehistoric mind and its material engagement. In this work I have tried to shed a light on this craft through its sonic representation.

ANIMATED GRAPHIC SCORE:

According to David Cope, graphic and text scores are representations of music through the use of visual symbols and/or text. Most radical means of stimulating improvisation without the stumbling block of notation have been used- graphic scores, and what one might term "text score". Either of these may form a whole composition, or only part of it. Graphic scores may deliberately omit any notational sign or indication of a musical shape. The composer's one aim is to simulate the performer's musical creativity through a graphic design. One wonders whether the final page of the score is the consequence of a primary visual conception, or whether the music came first. (Cope, 2001)

The final score of this piece is embroidered by hand by Iranian artist Niyaz Azadikhah, and is a juxtaposition of animated signs, patterns, pictographs and symbols in Persian and Moroccan tapestry/carpet making tradition. It is a practice to explore the semiological dimensions that trigger informational sign machines (O'Sullivan, 2010, p.3). These patterns are to be considered as musical notations, therefore associated with musical elements and produce and convey significations and denotations in Persian and Moroccan cosmologies. Embroidery is the craft of decorating fabric and was an important art in the Ancient and medieval world in west Asia. The mass production of embroidery and needleworks happened during the Industrial Revolution with the development of machine embroidery; embroidery machines have continued to evolve and are still used for industrial scale embroidery.

I use the format of the patterns as an act of resistance, to challenge assumptions of the domination of the Euro-centrism of artistic practices, and demonstrate the lack of diverse representation in rhetorical practices. I aim to allow reflection on how classifying and normalizing practices and techniques have led to ordering and normalizing human beings.

SCHOLARLY REFLECTION:

By means of this interdisciplinary composition, I aim to criticize the systems of cultural domination, the emergence of dominant technologies into handcrafts and the ways in which the technology itself has become an agent of ordering and structuring. Within this research-creation, I explore the disciplinary and cognitive boundaries between music, visual arts and languages – by suggesting the “semiotic” mode of listening- in order to open up the possibilities for knowledge/meaning production in music and to explore the ways in which dominated subjectivity is constructed contemporarily through complex power-control relations in the oppressive/colonial processes of normalization, social construction and appropriation.

I am inspired by the work of Faig Ahmed’s *Dissolving Order* and looking at his approach to technology as a resignifier and a mechanism of change in systems of subjectification. He uses the technology to dissolve order and open up the existential conditions for social possibility. He chooses complex and chaotic understandings of the world — instead of rational and classified ones — as the dynamics of production of knowledge and subjectivity.

In my work I look at technology from another point of view in relation to the formation of subjectivity. This comes from an urge to examine Technology as an agent of power and control. I therefore look at the concept of technology as practice (Franklin, 1999), a set of socially accepted practices and values and the impact of these new technological practices on human expression, work, community and governance.

The common practice of particular technologies can categorize people and define them under their own label; the practice can define the content. It facilitates the objectification of the work process and defines the content by the way the work is being done or prescribed to be done. According to Franklin, by looking at the technology in this way, we can observe two forms: formwork-related technologies — Holistic technologies and control-related technologies — prescriptive technologies.

“Holistic technologies are normally associated with the notion of craft. Their hands and minds make situational decisions as the work proceeds, be it on the thickness of the pot, or the shape of the knife edge, or the doneness of the roast. These are decisions that only they can make while they are working. The products of their work are one of a kind.” (Franklin, 1999, p.15)

This kind of technology allows for the total control of the process of creating or doing something (in relation to other humans and not to the material agency). This is opposed to prescriptive technology, which is regarded as specialization by process; we can observe how some basic social parameters are changed and affected when the number of people for doing a task that used to be done by a single person multiplies. Control-related technologies increase the control over the task and the people involved. They require external management, control and planning. After the Industrial Revolution, with the rise of machines and their involvement in the workplace, prescriptive technologies started to take over the world.

The contemporary era is dominated by prescriptive technologies and they have historically been fine instruments for structuring and managing of subjectivity; such technologies and disciplines did not appear only when machines came to existence.

The concept of disciplines, well established in theopolitics², as reductive processes serve to “to rule a multiplicity of men to the extent that their multiplicity can and must be dissolved into individual bodies that can be kept under surveillance, trained, used, and punished” (Foucault, 1976, p.242). Stuart Henry (2005) similarly refers to a ‘disciplinary hegemony’ where disciplines function as “general formulas of domination” (Foucault, 1977, p. 137) that have become systems of power that control content, learning systems and resources (p. 4).

“The factory system, with its mechanical devices and machines, only augmented the patterns of control. The new patterns, with their minute description of detail, their divisions of labour, and their breakdown of processes into small prescriptive steps, extended quickly from manufacturing into commercial, administrative, and political areas.”(Franklin, 1999, p.38)

In this contemporary world we can observe that “the modern subject and therefore the modern knowing subject, has become the model of all knowing subjects” (Mignolo, 2011, p. 189). Therefore the “definitions of the human, and, of course, the reach of political, ethical, and aesthetic agency, are limited to what can be reasonably said of the knowable: self-aware subjects separated in their critical awareness (phenomena/culture) from the world in and of itself (phenomena /nature)” (Barad, 2003, p.28). The rhetoric of modernity have founded concepts such as center/periphery, tradition/modernity, and primitive/civilized and the effects of these assumptions are inscribed into the order of representation.

The market for indigenous textiles has decreased with the introduction of European/industrial printed cloth since the late 19th Century. We have seen that designs that were unique, specific and integrated to their local contexts which belonged to semiology and cosmology of the maker, have been appropriated and produced in the so-called “modern” societies by means of massive industrial productions since that time. As a result of this, local and indigenous artists are constantly loosing their jobs and their work is loosing its value in the market place with time. The prescriptive technology is a form of control over what the modern subject calls “primitive” (in dichotomy with civilized); it functions as a tool for cultural appropriation, division of labour and control over processes of “othering”.

Rethinking the concept of technology and investing in decolonial projects create experiences that recognize “the irreducibility of any true pluralism to the principle of the one” (Karkov, 2016, p. 380) and define the Pluriversality as co-existence of multiple cosmologies connected in a power differential (and not into independent units), and therefore it shouldn’t be misinterpreted with multiculturalism. A pluriverse³ is a world which comes into existence by means of its positioning within the colonial matrix of power to deterritorialize from the disciplines grounded on the imperial epistemology of modernity.

² The epistemological foundation of coloniality is rooted in theology - or the theo-politics of knowledge. At first Bio-politics was founded on the cosmology of secularism, which displaced God as the knower, the signifier in kinship with Humanity and Reason and concluded in centralizing the Ego- which can be called ego-politics. Then through the history Bio-politics was replaced by Theo-politics (whose concern was the control of the soul, not of the body), but at some point in history both forces joined to maintain the epistemic and political control of the colonial matrix (Mignolo, 2011).

³ Walter Mignolo in response to a question posed to him about his concept of Pluriverse, wrote what he calls an “auto-biographic op-ed on pluriversality” in which he describes the Hermeneutics in Western tradition as follows:

Hermeneutics, in Western genealogy of thoughts, names a type of reflection on meaning and interpretation within one cosmology, Western cosmology. When you have to deal with two or more cosmologies, as I did in *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, you need a pluritopic hermeneutics. Why? Because you are dealing with a pluriverse of meaning and not only with a universe of meaning. Pluriversality became my key arguments to call into question the concept of universality, so dear to Western cosmology. How so? Western epistemology and hermeneutics (meaning Greek and Latin languages translated into the six modern European and imperial languages) managed universalize its own concept of universality dismissing the fact that all known civilizations are founded on the universality of his own cosmology. (Walter Mignolo, “On Pluriversality”, p.1)

Pluriverse doesn't fall into the linearization of redundancies and processes of normalization but instead it creates a path to new futures formed by flows of interactions, conflicts, and dialogues among coexisting options. I use pluriversality as a metaphor in this project to open up for the necessary epistemic conditions for social possibility. Pluriversality denounces global order, and insists that no human being has the right to dominate other human beings. Complexity and chaotic, instead of rational and classified understandings of the world, should be taken into account as dynamics of production of knowledge and subjectivity (Brown, 2019).

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