SONIC INTERSECTIONS: MAPPING CONTEMPORARY SOUND ART PRACTICES IN EGYPT

Master Thesis

Handed in to
Department of Communication and Psychology
Aalborg University
Academic Director Erasmus Master of Media Arts Cultures
Morten Søndergaard Ph.D
And the
Media Arts Cultures Consortium

Course
Media Arts Cultures
Supervisor
Prof. Morten Søndergaard Ph.D
By:
Habiba Sallam

11 August 2025
Declaration of Authorship

I, Habiba Sallam
Born the: 11 February 1999 in Cairo, Egypt
here by declare,

1. That I have written my Master Thesis myself, have not used other sources than the ones stated and moreover have not used any illegal tools or unfair means,
2. That I have not publicized my Master Thesis in my domestic or any foreign country in any form to this date and/or have not used it as an exam paper.
3. that , in my Master Thesis concerns my employer or any other external cooperation partner, I have fully informed them about title, form and content of the Master Thesis and have his/her permission to include the data and information in my written work.

Aarhus, Denmark

9 August 2025

Abstract **4**
Acknowledgements **5**
Introduction **6**
Historical Context & Problem Statement 7
Sounding the West/Listening in the East: 7
What is Egyptian sound? What is Egyptian art? - Working Definitions 11
Methodology 12
Theoretical Framework 14
The Rhizome & Resisting Orientalist Aesthetics 14
Constellational Thinking & Reckoning with Modernity 15
Sound Studies in the Global South 17
Chapter One - Rhizomatic Beginnings: Hassan Khan's Experimental Sound in the 1990s **18**
Case Study: Lungfan (1995): Absorbing the City / Encountering Opacity 21
Case Study: Tabla Dubb no. 9 (2002): Multirooted Sounding and Listening 27
Concluding Remarks 31
Chapter Two - Circuits of Resistance: Ahmed Basiony and Emergent Sound Communities **32**
The Rise of Media Art in Egypt 34
"Reckoning" with Media Art 39
Sound Art for Imagination and Resistance 42
Ahmed Basiony: Artist, Mentor, Catalyst 42
Technological Failures as Creative Opportunity 44
Ahmed Basiony's Sound Art Practice: Imagination through Sound 47
Case Study: Madena (2007) – Surveillance and a Sewing Machine 48
Chapter Three - Sacred Sounds: Understanding Listening in Islamic Tradition **54**
Embodied Listening: The Ear, Mind and Spirit 54
Baraka in the Modern World *58*
Chapter Four - Critical Frequencies: Magdi Mostafa and Sonic Politics **61**
Case Study: Sound Cells: Fridays (2010) - Rituals and Rhythms 62
The Position of Sound, Noise and The White Cube 65
Non-Cochlear Approaches to Sound Art 69
Curatorial Notes 71
Concluding Remarks **74**
Notes **76**
Bibliography **76**
Artwork References **82**
Appendices **83**
Appendix A - Interview with Hassan Khan (Transcript) 83
Appendix B - Interview with Shady al-Noshakaty (Transcript) 93
Appendix C - Interview with Shady al-Noshakaty (Transcript) 102

Abstract

This research project traces the use of sound art practices in the contemporary Egyptian art context, starting with its earliest emergence. While simultaneously challenging the notion of a definitive "beginning" or a "root" from which a single trajectory can be drawn. Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, is instrumental in identifying this starting point in relation to Hassan Khan's early sound experimentations with *Lungfan* (1995). The multirootedness exemplified in Khan's approach and his work introduces a pluralistic sonic perception, which is explored further in *Tabla Dubb no. 9* (2002). The rhizomatic identity of Egyptian sound art positions in between institutional art practices particular to the postcolonial Egyptian context, as well as traditional Egyptian and Islamic listening practices. These concerns are the focus of Chapter One. In Chapter Two, the relationship between sound art and institutional art practices takes a different form nearly a decade later. With the rise of new media art in Egypt, sound art emerged as a form of resistance, specifically against conservative traditional modes of art education and amid broader currents of social and political activism. This chapter explores the excitement, tensions and challenges that accompanied the adoption of new media, reflecting what Jessica Wingear (2006) calls a "creative reckoning". Ahmed Basiony's pedagogical approach and his collaborative audiovisual performance *Madena* (2007) with Magdi Mostafa exemplifies this shift, using sound as information and community-building. Chapter Three anchors sound within the Egyptian Islamic tradition, exploring the epistemological assumptions which afford it the capacity for spiritual and intellectual transformation. This chapter challenges the dominant reliance on vision in aesthetic experience in Western tradition and frames sound as a transformative force that blurs the boundaries between art and life. This idea is carried into Chapter Four, through an analysis of Magdi Motafa's *Sound Cells: Fridays* (2010). Using Jacques Rancière's theories on aesthetics and politics as a point of departure, the chapter interrogates the institutional marginalization of sound art, particularly in the context of the White Cube model and the application of this model in a non-Western setting. It also considers how the use of sound in the Egyptian context offers strategies to navigate these tensions.

Acknowledgements

This master's thesis was completed with the support of the Media Arts Cultures Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree, funded by the Erasmus+ Program. I am very grateful for this opportunity.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Morten Sondergaard for his reassurance, patient support and thoughtful guidance. My thanks extend to all the professors and staff at Danube University Krems in Austria, Łódź University in Poland, and Aalborg University in Denmark.

My sincere thanks go to Hassan Khan and Shady al-Noshokaty for generously sharing their time in interviews, and to Mohamed Allam, Ismail Fayed and Bassam al-Baroni for their recommendations and suggestions in the early stages of this project.

To the Media AC cohort, thank you for the warmest hugs in the coldest winters. To Suphon, for your insightful feedback. And to Carlos, Hong and Zlata, for being my home away from home and for countless memories.

To my family, for your unwavering support, this thesis may give you a slight idea of what I have been doing for the past two years. Teta, Anna and Geddo, your prayers are always with me, thank you for being my source of peace. To Mohamed Abo Yousef, for your invaluable feedback, I truly could not have done this without you. Alya, Hana, Hooza, Farida, Kareema, Menna, thank you for remembering to check up on me.

Finally, thank you to Chat GPT, which was used for checking grammar, refining sentence structure and providing moral support.

Introduction

Sound art is an interdisciplinary yet historically framed field. From its deep entanglements with the Western avant-garde movements to its intersections with experimental music, science, performance and visual art, sound art's development has been anything but linear. The interdisciplinary nature of sound affords sound art its flexibility and dynamic, yet its development has largely been shaped by institutional histories that define what is included as "sound art". This legacy complicates any attempt to fix a clear definition. As artists and scholars continue to experiment with sound technologies and conceptual approaches, the field expands in new directions.

Yet, many working definitions still fall short, particularly in situation sound practices from beyond the Euro-American context, which may draw from this history but rely on other contexts and cultures to appreciate its sonic, aesthetic and conceptual potential. In recent years, sound art research and practice is expanding to include postcolonial and decolonial perspectives and methodologies from outside of the Western framework. Making space for more localised, embodied and historically situated forms of sonic perception, memory and heritage across the world. This shift recognizes that sound art is not just an academic pursuit, but manifests across music scenes, art festivals, collective practices, and media archives. Michele Hilmes (2005, p.249) writes, "the study of sound, hailed as an "emerging field" for the last hundred years, exhibits a strong tendency to remind that way, always emerging, never emerged." It is precisely this continual re-emergence that allows sound art to remain responsive to the changing context and culture through which it moves. Moreover, it is essential to explore modes of practice and listening outside of the Western context to recognize and engage with diverse sonic traditions that challenge these dominant frameworks and expand the conceptual and aesthetic breadth of what is classified as sound art.

Egyptian sound art is not easily defined within the framework of a single tradition. Rather, it often emerges as an amalgamation of cultural practices associated with the experience of sound. While Western histories remains connected to the transfer of sound art practices to the Middle East, Africa and beyond, its appropriation in its new context involves a reworking of technological practices within local traditions. This, in turn, introduces a new set of historical encounters that have influenced these practices and continue to nurture its progression.

This research project traces the use of sound art practices in the contemporary Egyptian art context, starting with its earliest emergence. While simultaneously challenging the notion of a definitive "beginning" or a "root" from which a single trajectory can be drawn. Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, is instrumental in identifying this starting point in relation to Hassan Khan's early sound experimentations with *Lungfan* (1995). The multirootedness exemplified in Khan's approach and his work introduces a pluralistic sonic perception, which is explored further in *Tabla Dubb no. 9* (2002). The rhizomatic identity of Egyptian sound art positions in between institutional art practices particular to the postcolonial Egyptian context, as well as traditional Egyptian and Islamic listening practices. These concerns are the focus of Chapter One. In Chapter Two, the relationship between sound art and institutional art practices takes a different form nearly a decade later. With the rise of new media art in Egypt, sound art emerged as a form of resistance, specifically against conservative traditional modes of art education and amid broader currents of social and political activism. This chapter explores the excitement, tensions and challenges that accompanied the adoption of new media, reflecting what Jessica Wingear (2006) calls a "creative reckoning". Ahmed Basiony's pedagogical approach and his collaborative audiovisual performance *Madena* (2007) with Magdi Mostafa exemplifies this shift, using sound as information and community-building. Chapter Three anchors sound within the Egyptian Islamic tradition, exploring the epistemological assumptions which afford it the capacity for spiritual and intellectual transformation. This chapter challenges the dominant reliance on vision in aesthetic experience in Western tradition and frames sound as a transformative force that blurs the boundaries between art and life. This idea is carried into Chapter Four, through an analysis of Magdi Motafa's *Sound Cells: Fridays* (2010). Using Jacques Rancière's theories on aesthetics and politics as a point of departure, the chapter interrogates the institutional marginalization of sound art, particularly in the context of the White Cube model and the application of this model in a non-Western setting. It also considers how the use of sound in the Egyptian context offers strategies to navigate these tensions.

Historical Context & Problem Statement

Sounding the West/Listening in the East:

The beginnings of sound art traditions are closely tied to the Euro-American contexts in which they emerged. As an example, Alan Licht (2019) identifies a correlation between the

emergence of sound art and sound ecology. Some of the earliest sound artworks in the 1960s addressed issues of noise pollution and to contrast urban and rural soundscapes through. This period coincides with the rise of land artists and earthworks in the 1960s and 1970s. Many of these artworks were driven by a sense of ecological awareness, which continues to influence many sound artists working today. These historical and situational circumstances shaped not only the trajectory of sound art but also how sonic culture is framed and received in context beyond the West. The arrival of sound art in Egypt and arguably many areas around the world, did not carry the same environmental sensitivities it gained along the way. Recognizing these discrepancies is essential for reassessing existing conceptions of what sound art is, what it looks and sounds like.

Alongside the development of sound art was the expansion of philosophies on how to listen. These philosophies broadly explore listening to the sounds of the city, nature and other surroundings to situate our place within it. Listening becomes a way to understand our positionality and decoding the rhythms we are inherently a part of (Lefebvre, 2004). Parallel with his earliest experimentations with sound, Pierre Schaeffer developed the concept of “acousmatic listening”, which is the process of listening to a sound without seeing or knowing its original source. The approach reduces sound to a purely auditory experience, revealing the “sound object”, liberated from its original context (Kane, 2014). More recently, Pauline Oliveros introduced the idea of Quantum Listening and Deep Listening, emphasizing its meditative and transformative potential which is central to her composition process and also expands to consciousness and activism in daily life (Oliveros, 2024). Yet, even with clear intentions to foster collective consciousness and solidarity, this form of listening carries interpretations generated and practiced in predominantly Western context. It leaves out the privileges that allowed Oliveros the space to retreat and informed her practice of selective listening. The extension of this listening by contemporary artists runs the risk of perpetuating the silences generated by Oliveros’ subjective selectivity. (Loveless, & Zinovieff, 2025, pp. 33-47).

The central role of technology in sound recording, mediation and manipulation also raises critical questions about its colonial implications. Sound and field recording practices have been critiqued as modernist colonial tools that undermine the intuitive and transcendental nature of global sounding practices (Chattopadhyay, 2022). Thus, the use of such technological practices inherently follows colonial routes for cultural and technological transmission with not enough

careful consideration. In response, Steingo & Sykes (2019, p.1-25) suggest reorienting the relationship between sound and technology towards investigating technological application beyond its normative uses and its exploring this adaptation in specific cultural contexts.

In all cases, while there is a rich body of knowledge that has not yet been integrated into the "sound studies canon" (Steingo & Sykes, 2019, p.6), there still exist many gaps in the literature and explored areas of research mainly due to the geopolitical circumstances of these contexts. In Egypt, there are various approaches to sonicity ranging from the religious, political and social life of Cairo to the spatial sonicity of bedouin life in the Sinai desert. Some studies conducted on sound culture which investigate the contemporary soundscape of the city through a social, historical or political lens (Hirschkind, 2006; Fahmy, 2020; Simon, 2022). Apart from a wealth of research on the legacy of Halim al-Dabh (Khoury, 2013; Bradley; 2015; Collier, 2020), there is a notable shortage of research on sound as an experimental medium and art practice in Egypt. While cases of such experimentations can technically occur anywhere (disciplinarily), this investigation focuses specifically on practices connected to Egypt's institutional art scene. This choice highlights the dissonances between, Western influences, Egypt's colonial history and its rich local cultural context.

Sound's temporal and spatial dimensions structure how we perceive and inhabit environments. In that sense, it is important to understand sound art's reliance on our perceptions of space and time which shape the circumstances for your listening. Sound's transformative power lies in its ability to immerse the listener in an alternative space and time. It is the role of the listener, whether the artist or microphone, to transport this sonic situation through various forms of sonic meditation. Based on this notion, I argue that the reception of sound (art) depends on a shared perception of space and time to begin with. This can relate to our conception of public and private space, ecology, socially dedicated spatial settings and other societal norms. Particular to the case of Cairo in comparison to many parts of Europe or America, there is a clear variance in how these concepts are experienced and understood. The streets in Cairo function as liminal space between public and private life, a negotiation that also occurs sonically.

The sonic density of Cairo is often described as chaotic or noisy, but this definition of noise is subjective and carries deeper social meaning. It is tempting to describe the sonic density of Cairo by its citizens as an act of resistance. Pinned against the collective sense of political powerlessness, the insistent honking and blaring music from car sound systems can be seen as a

way to exercise power over an unclaimed (sonic) space. The outcome is a consistently loud and erratic city, and Cairo often being described as noisy, but noisy for whom? Conversely, silence in Cairo also carries political significance. Maria Malmstrom (2019) discusses the sound of silence following the change in government in 2013. This silence, as a result of military-imposed curfew acts a form of sonic domination. Silence not only reveals politics of sound and the power of the silencers, but also means a loss in navigation and orientation for citizens (Malmstrom, 2019).

Religious beliefs and sonic practices further inform Cairo's soundscape. Charles Hirschkind (2006) investigates and shows how Islamic sermons disseminated via cassette tapes act as spiritual guides for Muslims, permeating everyday spaces like shops, taxis and through personal listening devices. Listening in the Islamic tradition is an embodied experience. Ibn Arabi, a 12th century Sufi mystic, poet and scholar illustrates this process of listening by distinguishing between listening with the mind and listening with the body. He says:

> "He who listens with his mind hears in everything, from everything, and through everything, without restriction and the sign of that [type of listening] is silent amazement and physical motionlessness. He who listens with his flesh (*nafs)* - not with his mind (*'aql*) - can hear on through melodies and sweet, yearning voice; and the sign of this is his motion while listening, in a manner of passing-away (*fan'a*) from perception."
>
> (Shaw, 2019, p.70)

This mode of embodied listening described by Ibn Arabi highlights the transformative power of sound in stimulating spiritual ascension, engaging space and time beyond the physical realm. Halim al-Dabh sought this quality when recording *Expressions of Zar* (al-Dabh, 1944). Through wire recording and sonic manipulations, his aim was to harness sound's spiritually transformative power and transmit these sonic elements.

There is a notable difference between Western and Egyptian listening rhetorics, even if they arrive at similar outcomes. In Western settings, "deep listening" often entails uncovering faint, hidden sounds and revealing invisible sonic layers beneath silence. In Cairo, however, listening involves peeling back dense layers of sound to discern what has been drowned out by the cacophony. In both cases, sonic layers are taken apart and examined, but the means to reach that point vary.

Cairo's obvious sonic density demands urgent aural awareness, while also complicating the very process of listening. This makes sound an exciting and rich entry point to exploring the political and historical layers of the city. Thinking of sound in this way privileges the aural senses, and reshuffles the hierarchy of the senses, moving away from the traditional Western ocularcentrism. In turn, this shift implicates the modes of listening and, consequently, the mediation of sound. Unlike the model of "deep listening", where the listener often assumes an outsider's role, attempting to draw the environment closer, the listening in Cairo is removed from this central position. The city's soundscape is so pervasive and intrusive that it obstructs this process. The listener is already enmeshed, almost sonically suffocated by sound and becomes an inseparable part of it.

Taking these local contexts into account, which present valuable reading of sound and its intersection with contemporary art. This investigation will develop in two parts. The first aim traces the early developments of sound art practices and the emergence of sound artists in Egypt. The second aim is to further explore local modes of listening that enable sound to function as a transformative medium, focusing on the interplay between power forces particular to the Egyptian soundscape. Both aims consider the situation of sound art in Egypt in relation to institutionalised art practices and the social political backdrops.

What is Egyptian sound? What is Egyptian art? - Working Definitions

As previously introduced, sonic practices in Egypt emerge from a wide range of cultural, religious practices and political framings, including music, storytelling, and spiritual rituals. However, to engage critically with the global discourse on sound art, one that is dominantly shaped by Western definitions, this research adopts a framing informed by the Western understanding of "art". Accordingly, this investigation focuses on the use of sound within the formal visual arts scene in Cairo, tracing its presence and development within institutional and exhibition-based settings. Hereby excluding sonic experimentation in music, film and theatre. This scope is limited to visual art contexts in order to better understand how sound operates within and against the assumed boundaries of Egyptian contemporary art.

With this, it is important to note that the Egyptian contemporary art scene is neither stable nor homogenous. The works examined in this research reflect varying degrees of affiliation with institutionalised art practices. This framing intersects with long-standing debates about

"Egyptianness" in art. Art and artists in Egypt have often navigated complex negotiations between national identity, state agendas, local cultural narrative, and global artistic expectations. The relationship between contemporary Egyptian art and its perceived "authenticity" is shaped by tensions among the state, the international art market, and independent cultural institutions each with their respective agendas. Artist practice is often assessed in terms of which of these agencies it aligns with or resists the most. As Sakr (2023, p.106) points out, artists are not blind to this exchange, they are aware of these pressures and respond with critical intentionality. In the early 2000s, for example, many young artists deliberately distanced themselves from state-sponsored (and concurrently censored) institutions, while also expressing skepticism towards neoliberal, market-driven models often tied to foreign funding and private galleries (Shakry, 2010).

Art utilising digital tools and new media, including sound-based art, faced particular resistance during this period. The use of these mediums was contested in terms of artistic legitimacy and also perceived as alien to national artistic identity. This complicated its acceptance within Egypt's art and culture institutions. One of the earliest examples of sound art installation in this contest terrain is Magdi Mostafa's *Walls Talk* (2003), which was exhibited at the Cairo Youth Salon[1] in the Palace of Arts. It consisted of around 100 speakers that were dispersed around the walls, floors and ceilings of the venue and played a loop of ambient sounds which gradually moved from one group of speakers to another (Coussonnet, 2016). After struggles of obtaining the permit for showcasing this work, it was taken down four days following the opening.This preliminary example, sets the tone for the resistant attitudes that were inflicted on sound art as an artform. It highlights how sonic experimentation particularly when coupled with digital technologies was treated with skepticism, if not outright hostility.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative methodological approach grounded in mixed methods, combining archival research, semi-structured interviews, as well as contextual, semantic and aesthetic analysis of selected sound artworks and installations. The overarching approach is deductive, aimed at tracing the origins of contemporary sound art practices in Egypt

[1] The Youth Salon is an annual competition for young Egyptian artists held by the Ministry of Culture, established in 1989.

by identifying key figures and artworks that articular the relationship between sound, art and cultural context.

Initially, this project was informed by a preliminary literature review that revealed a significant gap between Halim al-Dabh's pioneering experiments in the 1940s and the more recent wave of sound artists in Egypt and the Egyptian diaspora. This gap, coupled with the growing number of contemporary Egyptian artists working with sound, prompted the questions: *What other experiments with sound and technology occurred during this unexplored time period? And how was it incorporated with other artistic or cultural practices?* To address this question, I began with archival research, which included visits to Dar al-Kutbb in Cairo. However, due to the lack of digitized catalogs and limited accessibility to relevant materials, this phase was too time-consuming and therefore short-lived, ultimately leading to almost no relevant findings.

As a result, I reoriented my strategy. Rather than tracing a historical progression from al-Dabh forward, I chose to work backwards from the present. Starting with identifying contemporary practitioners from Egypt and the Middle East and seeking out the earliest instances of what could be considered "sound art" in the Egyptian art context. This shift led me to the works of Yara Mekawei, Nancy Mounir, Rami Abadir and Sara Hamdy who have an active online presence and accessible works. Additionally, I utilised my own network in the local Egyptian art scene to reach out to professionals and cultural practitioners such as Mohamed Allam, Ismail Fayed, and Bassem el-Baroni, who provided further recommendations and insight into the broader scene. Based on these conversations and my own working definition of sound art (which excludes artists working primarily in music), I borrowed my focus to Hassan Khan, Ahmed Basiony, and Magdi Mostafa who were amongst the earliest to formally engage with sound in an institutional art context.

Due to the scarcity of scholarly material and accessible documentation from the early 2000s, artist interviews were essential. I conducted interviews with Hassan Khan, who shared insights and materials from his earliest experimentation *Lungfan* (1995), and with Shady al-Noshokaty, a key figure in the development of new media art in Egypt and mentor to Ahmed Basiony. Although I was unable to interview Basiony (due to his passing) or Magdi Mostafa (due to time constraints), sufficient documentation of their practice and sound art repertoire presented enough content for analysis. After identifying those three figures, I selected representative

artworks that presented a strong relevance to both institutional art practices and broader socio-cultural dynamics. These included *Lungfan* (Khan, 1995), *Tabla Dubb no. 9* (Khan, 2002), *Madena* (Basiony & Mostafa, 2007) and *Sound Cells: Fridays* (Mostafa, 2010).

Each was analyzed through contextual, semantic and aesthetic lenses. Contextual analysis focused on the social and political conditions in which the work was produced and exhibited, supported by artist interviews and secondary literature on modern and contemporary Egyptian art. Semantic and aesthetic analysis engaged with sonic, visual and spatial elements of the works considering aspects such as composition, audience interaction, and the context of the performance or installation. This analysis was further supported by theoretical frameworks from sound studies, postcolonial theory and Islamic epistemologies of listening, as well as historical studies on modern and contemporary Egyptian art. By integrating these sources, the research situates the emergence of sound art not as a derivative of Western traditions but as part of a localized, multirooted set of practices shaped by institutional, technological and political forces.

.

Theoretical Framework

The Rhizome & Resisting Orientalist Aesthetics

Based on the discussion illustrated above, Egyptian sound art is difficult to frame with a single artistic tradition, it emerged and is practiced and received through a mixture of existing institutionalized practices and ideologies. Édouard Glissant's notion of the rhizome provides a helpful conceptual foundation illustrating this process. For Glissant, the rhizome resists hierarchical roots of singular origins and emphasizes multirootedness instead, where connections form laterally not vertically. Egyptian sound art can be seen through concept, in the sense that it does not emerge from a single point of origin, but exists through a network of influences such as, Islamic listening practices, colonial entanglements, experimental methodologies, resistance movements and everyday urban life. The way that encounters occur within this network is not through blind assimilation, nor absolute rejection. Because of the rich sonic tradition embedded in Egyptian culture, the identity of contemporary Egyptian sound art is under continuous negotiation, similar to the notion of Egyptian culture itself[2].

[2] This refers to disputes over Egyptian identity over whether it is Pharaonic, Islamic, Coptic, Arab, Mediterranean and/or others.

The way that sound art practices travel and are continuously moulded by varying contexts models Glissant's perception of sameness and difference. This process of difference is consistent but it is not unified. Glissant encourages us to accept difference and sameness as contradictory and coexisting states. The term "experimental" also carries its own definitions and connotations, when defining the work of artists outside of the western canon, the essence which identifies their work can be mislabelled and misunderstood as accessory. For the sake of this argument, I suggest shifting the point of departure so that the standard form is embedded in Egyptian sonic culture and the experimentation is attributed to the utilization of new technologies, sounds or contexts. Building on Glissant's ideas of multi-rootedness, it is essential to think of the Egyptian tradition as equally relevant to situating sound art practices.

Moreover, the turn to the traditional also becomes a means to reclaim the narrative and erase the exotic and orientalist allure surrounding sonic cultures, such as the *souq*[3], the *moulid*[4] and the Cairene streets. Orientalist attitudes in the world of experimental music and sound art manifests in the ways that artists select sonic features based in non-European cultures to create a presumably foreign and authentic feel. The extractivism of this practice stems from and reinforces the distinction between the Other and the Occident, and subsequently political and cultural domination (Said, 1978). Glissant expands this argument by equating the "exotic" with the "opaque" in the eyes of the colonial occupier, and claims that the quest for transparency shapes the relationship to the Other and consequently, the strive for colonial hegemony. Opacity is a key concept, as Glissant later argues for the "right to opacity", which grants the right for non-dominant cultures to exist without assimilation.

Constellational Thinking & Reckoning with Modernity

Discerning "Egyptianness" in art can be traced back to the late 19th century, and the construction of the Egyptian nation. Roughly starting with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the beginning of the British and French occupation in the region, followed by the independence of Egypt from colonial forces and the establishment of a "national" identity. Throughout these moments in history, the notion of Egyptianness was constantly under construction. Today, remnants of all these historical encounters permeate through Egyptian culture, architecture and art. In Alex Dika Seggerman's art historical investigation of Egyptian

[3] Local marketplaces which are usually loud, colorful and chaotic.
[4] Festivals for celebrating the birth of the Prophet or other religious figures.

modern art, she utilizes a “constellational” approach to identify a set of physical and virtual relationships between art and history. This idea stems from the struggle of identifying Egyptian modernism through Euro-American standards which do not take into account deviations from it. And also, a rejection of the term “global modernism” which accounts for deviation from the Euro-American definition, but not the specificities of difference and is still defined by its difference to the Euro-American standard. Metaphorically, a constellational approach functions two-fold. First, it disperses power amongst all points of encounter and therefore disorients the concept of center and periphery. As such, there is no hierarchical understanding of the west in relation to the other. Secondly, it frames modernism as multiple overlapping units rather than a series of concentric circles emanating from a single center (Seggerman, 2019, pp.16-35).

The constellation proposed by Seggerman, considers Egypt’s political history as well the artist's influence and relationships with European art movements and institutions. Additionally, it considers Islam as a star in this constellation, and consequently its role in defining Egyptian modernism. This does not pertain to its confirmation to a doctrinal Islamic purpose, nor to a specific Islamic aesthetic defined by Islamic art, it is also not concerned with the artists’ religious observance. However, Islamic culture as defined by Seggerman, “intersects occasionally with the ideas of doctrinal Islam, [yet] is much more connected to the everyday embodied experience of being Muslim or living in a Muslim society” (2019, pp.25). It should be considered in the way it plays a part in shaping the reality of artists living and interacting with this culture. I adopt Seggerman’s approach in her understanding of contemporary Egyptian sound art as I believe it adequately applies to the sonic world of Egypt as well. Applying the constellational framework to the investigation of sound art practices in Egypt will aid in identifying points of encounter between artists, local history and western art movements.

Jessica Winegar (2006, pp.1-36) describes how Egyptian artists, critics, and curators act as "interlocutors" who navigate multiple genealogies of the modern.. This pertains to the various and multifaceted trajectories of “modern” life in contemporary Egypt. The genealogies constitute a balance between aspects of Egyptian culture including religion, western politics, etc depending on a conscious vision of a “modern nation”. Which differs according to class and generation. This process of “reckoning”, as described by Winegar, is central to understanding how artists locate themselves within (and occasionally against) various systems of value and legitimacy. In the case of sound art in Egypt, this reckoning involves negotiating between imported

technologies and local sonic traditions between the global language of experimentalism and embodied knowledge of place and history.

Sound Studies in the Global South

Finally, the framework proposed by Steingo and Sykes in *Remapping Sound Studies* provides a vital theoretical lens. Through their analysis of sound practices from the global south, they attempt to re-conceptualise our ways of thinking about sound outside of the normative Western framework. I extend this methodology to my examination of case studying of sound art in Egypt by working within the following proposals. The first proposal is concerned with sound's relationship to technology, with a focus on how technologies are utilised not through the fulfilment of its technical purpose, but through the role it adopts in specific cultural and artistic contexts. The second approach is more of an ontological approach, it deals with, the question of sound as a relationship between "the listener and something being listened to" (Steingo & Sykes, pp.11), and builds on the idea that sound is only the sensory indication of what exists beyond human perception, whether it is ecological, technological or spiritual. The third and final proposal is "a conceptualisation of sonic history as nonlinear and saturated with friction". This approach allows our understanding of sound to be deeply embedded in its social, political and historical situation, and allows for sound to reveal the forces that define its cultural diversity. The third proposal aligns adequately with Seggerman's "constellational" approach to modern Egyptian art objects (Seggerman, 2019).

This theoretical framework draws together notions of multirootedness, rhizomatic thinking, constellational thinking, reckoning with modernity and nonlinear sonic histories to situate contemporary Egyptian sound art beyond Western trajectories of sound art. Rather than focusing on how Egyptian artists replicate or diverge from Euro-American models, this research begins within Egypt's own sonic traditions and moves outwards.

Chapter One - Rhizomatic Beginnings: Hassan Khan's Experimental Sound in the 1990s

Tracing the history of early sound art practices presents a challenging task. The inherently interdisciplinary nature of sound art and sound studies complicates efforts to identify which sound works can be considered "sound art". Such a task becomes even more challenging, particularly in non-Western contexts, where limitations to archival access compromises research efforts that seek to chart the early trajectories of the field. This, coupled with an ambiguous definition of sound art, particularly one that does not readily practice and sonic qualities beyond the boundaries of Western traditions. As a result, my exploration follows certain practitioners whom I consider pioneering figures in their intersection between institutionalised art practices and sound practices. This focus naturally centered my methodology around the interviews with these figures, and their perspective on Egyptian sound art, sonic culture and the circumstances surrounding these beginnings. Followed by, a close listening and analysis of their works and documented installations.

At the beginning of my exploration, I reached out to Hassan Khan, an artist who started his career in the early 1990s. From the start, his practice spanned multiple fields including music, visual art, film and literature. Until today, Khan maintains a fluid approach in terms of medium and content, and he remains intentionally, and strictly in-between categories and titles. His convictions in doing so also inform his understanding of music and sound in art, which he does not strictly separate from a broader artistic language. Throughout my conversation with Khan, I learned that one of his earliest experimentations was an audiovisual performance under the title *Lungfan* (1995), which he performed with a friend, Amr Hosny. This marked the earliest accessible example of sound artworks made and shown in Egypt. The ambiguous circumstances surrounding his beginnings including his initial separation from the local art scene and his multifaceted artistic practices allowed me to view this area of creative expression through a wider and more inclusive lens. I use Khan's personal experience and practice as a parallel for

these beginnings to sound art and a useful metaphor in coming to terms with the idea that the search for a clear beginning is a hopeless cause. The multirootedness exemplified through *Lungfan* (1995) also gains relevance in one of his later pieces, *Tabla Dubb no. 9* (2002). In this piece, the material utilisation of elements of Egyptian sonic culture provides an effective entry point to exploring a nuanced form of sonic perception existing between tradition, technology, music and art.

In this chapter, I highlight some of Khan's earliest sound works starting with his first art piece *Lungfan* (1995) and one of his later works *Tabla Dubb no. 9* (2002). Khan's initial experiments are materialisations of an interconnected network of influences and experiences embedded inside and outside of the Egyptian context. While these outcomes were Khan's earliest pieces, they also mark a beginning of experimentation with sound in the Egyptian contemporary art sphere. The circumstances of these "beginnings" resonantes with Glissant's notion of the Middle Passage as a beginning, and how it leads to our understanding of Relation. The Middle Passage refers to the path of slave ships from the African continent to the American continent and Caribbean islands. A path that historically witnessed tragedy, death, and violence and led to the severance of ties with the African land and heritage, yet no connection to the New World. In his exploration of Caribbean identity, Glissant rejects the reliance on a single African, European or Caribbean root and proposes a reconstructed way of thinking about root and identity, one that accepts the middle point as a root and accepts identity as unfixed and ever-changing.

The point of in-betweenness, geographically and temporally, which defines the Middle Passage aligns with how the earliest sound art pieces in Egypt occurred in-between disciplines and generations. Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* is an exploration of the Middle Passage, which draws threads from Africa, Europe and the Caribbean to imagine a Creole identity from the poetic traces of this journey. Adopting *Poetics of Relation* as a theoretical framework is rooted in dismantling the perception of identity as being fixed and single rooted (as in either African or European etc.), but to accept that it can be multi-rooted, erratic and subject to transformation.

This framework becomes especially relevant when situating art movements such as sound art outside of the Euro-American context, which are not as appropriately documented or centralised. Depending on disciplinary considerations, the development of Western sound art practices can be traced back to trajectories related to experimental music (Cox & Warner, 2004), media and intermedia art (Kahn, 1999), the evolution of audio recording technologies (Sterne,

2003) or phenomenological engagements with listening (Voegelin, 2010). It becomes a process of gathering evidence and navigating these disciplinary trajectories. The privilege in this flexibility is granted due to the heavily documented and established histories of artworks, supporting documents and more. Access to these sources allows for clear historical research, and for sound art to be understood through an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary lens. However, this western academic endeavor also functions in a way that aims to assign historical objects to a single origin, i.e. a single root. Alternatively, in many areas outside of Europe and in Egypt in particular, the significant lack of documentation of media practices outside of state-sponsored media problematises this process. In Egypt, even if some archives exist, they are often not publicly available or accessible. This challenges the process of attempting to trace a certain beginning or define an end. These challenges further destabilise the notion of a single history and essentialises the search for a more applicable framework to trace histories with no history. As such, *Poetics of Relation* becomes relevant to this area of my exploration to situate our current understanding of contemporary Egyptian sound art. Viewing sound works by Hassan Khan such as *Lungfan* (1995) and *Tabla Dubb no.9* (2002) through Glissantian concepts like opacity, multiplicity and rhizomatic identity can help illustrate an understanding of sound art practices in Egypt, which has no clear beginning, is continuously changing and perpetually incomplete.

Moreover, outlining these works as beginnings of sound art practices in Egypt is done with consideration to the wealth of sonic practices in Egyptian culture that have not been precisely categorised as such[5]. I believe the cultural embeddedness of this form of reception in Egyptian culture assumes that sound art practices can not be unentangled from it, and finds ways to manifest in modes of listening to varying degrees. So if we utilize rhizomatic thinking to think about how sound art production in Egypt is multirooted, then this thought extends to the way we think about sound art reception as well. One of the frameworks suggested by Steingo & Sykes (2019, p.12) in rethinking sound studies and sonic history from outside of Western canon, is to think through a "conceptualisation of sonic history as nonlinear and saturated with friction", echoing Glissant's sentiment, this also allows us to understand cases in Egyptian history through diverse and possibly connected narratives. This calls for an entanglement of the sociopolitical and gendered circumstances specific to each case study. Starting with Khan's experience as a male and a liberal arts student at the American University in Cairo (AUC) in the 1990s, which

[5] This will be outlined and discussed in Chapter 3.

granted some of the social and academic privileges that allowed his experimentation and simultaneously influenced the criticism he received.

The first part of this chapter examines how the preconceived opacity embedded in experimental practices shaped the initial encounter with a public audience. Specifically, it considers how the institutional exclusion of sound art from the established realm of visual art influences both the reception and the expectations placed on such works. To illustrate this dynamic, I discuss Khan and Lotfy's audiovisual performance of *Lungfan* (1995) in Atelier du Caire, which highlights the tensions that arise at this intersection. The second part of the chapter addresses how viewing the earliest sound artworks as multirooted and rhizomatic, also manifests in the social and sonic reception of said sound art. In this section, I focus on Khan's work *Tabla Dubb. No. 9* (2002) as a piece that aligns more closely with traditional music practices than visual art to discuss the role of these roots in informing the reception of sound art. In both cases, I aim to outline the influence and affinity of different cultural spaces and practices, in which Egyptian sound art finds roots as well as conflict. These roots do not only influence the aesthetic and conceptual components of the work, but also dictate ownership of the physical space of performance, which extends to the ownership and expectations of the sonic space as well.

Case Study: *Lungfan* (1995): Absorbing the City / Encountering Opacity

Khan saw the early 1990s as a period fueled by a curiosity of experimentation with everything. This outlook extended to drugs, art, image making, social happening as well as experimenting with music and sound which accompanied this approach. The experimental nature of *Lungfan* (1995) was a culmination of Khan and Amr Hosny's experimental attitude that encompassed their life and work. It was a product of a subculture eager to endeavor and explore unknown territories, which shaped all aspects of their lifestyle. Khan describes this subculture as "hermetic" although not literally, but culturally. Meaning that it was not isolated from the life of the city, but its engagement with mainstream culture was critical and selective. Khan mentions an overarching "rejection of sentimentality" and an obvious aversion to tradition and the commercial mainstream. According to him, he found no inspiration in Egyptian pop and official mainstream culture, but drew inspiration from various sources including but not limited to popular Egyptian culture, films, art, paintings, poetry, and music from different times and places, as well as most notably, his experience in the city.

During the 1990s, the American University in Cairo's (AUC) main campus was located in Downtown Cairo. The central location of the university campus meant that students were engaging and interacting with the city on a daily basis. Khan describes this engagement as a way of "absorbing the city", and being thrown in the midst of the city's chaos and finding a path through it. Exploring and "absorbing" Cairo as a visual, experiential and sonic stimulus (occasionally under the influence of hallucinogenic pharmaceuticals that were a staple of 90s youth culture) lead Khan to the understanding of "sound as a force" that can be interpreted as ecstatic or paranoid. (H. Khan, personal communication, 2025).

The ability to be active participants and observers of the street, while also maintaining a sense of self-imposed marginality points to a functioning class and gender dynamic specific to Cairo's social and political landscape. At the time, AUC was one of the most (if not the only) prestigious private universities in the country, in which admittance belonged to a higher social class. Furthermore, in an overtly patriarchal society, being a male grants him the social privilege and larger access to public space.

The imagery of absorbing traces of the city evokes the notion of a living rhizome. Biologically, a rhizome is an organism that feeds on various surrounding forms of sustenance and expands horizontally while producing roots below and shoots above (Merriam-Webster). As opposed to a stem root, which anchors a plant while growing in a single direction. Glissant utilises the botanical imagery of the rhizome to reflect the reality of identities as unfixed, multi-rooted and mutable. He says, "rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other" (Glissant, 1990, p.11). The rhizome stands in contrast to the tree as a metaphor for identity and structure. In European tradition, the tree symbolises genealogy through its fixed root, solid trunk and the branches representing linear descent and generational growth. By contrast, the rhizome as articulated by Glissant, rejects genealogy as a framework (Diawara, 2010). Instead, it grows laterally, entangling with and expanding through its environment. While the rhizome retains a sense of rootedness, it challenges the idea of singular, dominant origin. Rhizomatic identity is multi-rooted, interconnected and enriched through its encounters with its environment. The spatial embeddedness of the rhizome is one of its essential features, as it highlights the importance of situating identity within its appropriate context. Rhizomatic thinking

embraces multiplicity and fluidity, and accepts identity as being in flux and continually shaped by relation and place.

Building on the same principle, viewing sound art practices in Egypt as a product of single-rooted tradition dismisses the multitude of influences that shaped its beginnings and progression. For Khan, these influences were based in and outside of Egypt. Yet, Cairo as a visual and sonic stimulus and its influence on artistic practice is a rhizomatic process, which attests to the essence of Egyptian street life and contemporary identity. Cairo is a city characterised by chaos, unpredictability and irreducibility, like a rhizome. This places Khan's artistic practice in the midst and as an outcome of an unbound set of influences. Outlining this moment as the birth of sound art practices in Egypt carries its own set of implications. However, the result is a way of thinking about a set of practices that remain malleable, prone to new relations, and an artistic identity that is intrinsically erratic. This lays the groundwork for thinking about Egyptian sound art as continuously growing and everchanging, rather than stagnant or static.

Glissant uses the concept of the rhizome to frame identity, difference and culture relation. However, the form of this relation is not defined by a specific format. In our case, it can be imagined, and can be built through traces of the unknown. In the 1990s and before the internet, it was difficult to gain access to content from outside of Egypt. This lack of access generated curiosity and certain appreciation for foreign objects. For Khan, it was a source of fantasy and imagination. He recalls reading reviews of bands and performances without having access to their sound or actual performances. As an outcome, he generated a fictional sonic image of these noise bands and improv bands that influenced his music and other artistic outputs. While these reviews shaped his understanding of sound of music and way of working, it is highly unlikely that their content is at all related to what he imagined. Along similar lines, Khan read *Silence* by John Cage during his time in university, but only listened to Cage's compositions a couple of years later when he travelled to Holland. Accordingly, framing these references as sources for inspiration for Khan falls short in crediting the fictional image molded from the negative space. This also correlates with the productive value Glissant places on poetic traces in the absence of tangible remains. Further illustrated by Allar, "[the rhizome] makes do with traces of root, wounded roots, and root of uncertain origin – roots that survive only by tangling together and forming something new in their heterogeneity" (2019, p.11). This reinforces the notion of

incompleteness that surrounds rhizomatic beings and simultaneously offers the space for fragments, traces and remains to function as adequate starting points.

Conventionally, to name influences is to create genealogy (Allar, 2019). However, as described above, a mixture of scattered influences and incomplete sources preemptively disrupts the linearity presupposed by a genealogy. I believe that influence for Khan and his peers in the 1990s was drawn from the negative space created by traces of a hidden source. While written reviews shaped an outline for Khan's fantasy to fall into, the inspiration was drawn from the allusion created around it. Receiving an incomplete image of a source allows imagination to fill the void that was created as a result of it. Most importantly, it generated curiosity. In that way, Khan along with other experimental artists in the 90s were working with the "negative space", attempting to fill a gap with something that is not yet present. These attempts also form a relation to an Other, even if the Other is imagined. In addition to the rhizomatic circumstances and attitude which shaped the early stages of Khan's work, *Lungfan* (1995) is sound and visual collage which reflects many of these rhizomatic qualities.

Working and being in the point of Relation applies to the way that Khan's sonic and visual experiments did not fit into predetermined genres or particular expectations. For example, *Lungfan* (1995) is a "negative" work, visually (using photography negatives), sonically (using noise) and conceptually. The artwork used and presented the opposite of expectations and as a result, generated an active and obvious rejection. Looking back at this, Khan reflects on the piece and identifies a gap that it created between form and meaning. He says:

> [*Lungfan* did not attempt to break any obvious taboos. It's not pornographic, it's not blasphemous. It's just.. Let's say it's taboo-breaking in its form, since it did not try to speak in the language of set meanings, it's very visceral… In terms of form, it was very different to what was circulating in the artistic context back then. I believe this is what happened: there was a gap between the form we produced and the idea of a fixed meaning…

In the first showing of *Lungfan* at Atelier du Caire in January 1995, Khan and Amr Hosny presented a slideshow of Hosny's photographs accompanied with Khan's live mixing of various sound and music recordings. During the live showing of *Lungfan*, Khan used a four-track mixer and two stereos, recording and remixing pre-recorded sounds and music. Despite the artists' optimistic expectations of *Lungfan*'s debut, the first showing was met with aggressive reactions and erratic accusations of being secret agents of the Israeli state (Khan & Cox, 2021).

A few months after the initial screening, the artists scanned the slides to create an image and sound montage which was shown at the American University in Cairo (AUC). The second showing at AUC yielded a relatively positive reaction from students and colleagues. The contrast in both audiences' reactions speaks to a generational drift that existed and shaped cultural life in Egypt at the time. Between an older generation enamoured with traditional artforms and the ways they can be utilized to represent and construct the Egyptian identity and a younger generation curious about new mediums, and eager to experience anything out of their ordinary. *Lungfan* presented nothing short of out-of-the-ordinary. A slideshow of black and white street photography, negative close-up portraits and sequence of photographs of bare feet was far from the audience's expectation of an art performance. Complemented with Khan's live mixing of industrial noise, distorted frequencies and dissonant cadences, which added to the strange and aggressive tone of the piece. The outcome was a visual and sonic collage of elements of the Cairene underground, widely witnessed but rarely portrayed.

While it was common for new media and experimental artists to be accused of propagating Western ideas into local Egyptian culture, political accusations such as those expressed by the crowd at the initial screening were a novel extreme. Because of the historical entanglement of Egyptian art and national politics, artistic production and criticism is often tied to a larger belief system on the future of the nation and art's role in the midst of that (Winegar, 2006). Framing art practice in this light often personalises art criticism to the social and gendered standing of the artist rather than just the work itself. Therefore, in Khan and Lotfy's case, being males affords them the social capacity to be politically active. Also, their status as AUC students almost directly aligns this criticism with foreign influence and politics due to the stigma surrounding AUC as an outpost of American soft power in the Middle East.

Since the early 20th century, modern Egyptian art has been occupied (and often recruited) with the task of constructing and cultivating Egyptian national identity (Karnouk, 2005; Winegar, 2016; Seggerman, 2019). Consequently, dialogue about Egyptian modern art aligned with intellectual discussions of the time which regularly extended to notions of tradition, modernity, women, religion, and poverty. The transparency associated with this form of dialogue is what determines the forms of art which can be well-received or not.

Additionally, Khan was not an art student, and he only formally encountered the Egyptian artworld years later, during his first solo show in Gezira Art Center. At that point, he was already

experimenting with multimedia, music, writing and more, gathering inspiration from a mix of traditional and non-traditional sources. With that in mind, Khan's initial detachment from the institutionalised art world may have granted him the courage and space to experiment with various media. However, his practice coming from somewhere outside of the institutionalised art sphere adds another obstacle before his work can be considered legitimate. While Khan's earliest practices occurred outside of the artworld, the performance of *Lungfan* marks an encounter with an already established mode of thought, practice and criticism, which is equally complex and multirooted. The intellectual framework held by the audience of Atelier du Caire often leaves many aspects of Egyptian culture unexplored, and it is this negative cultural space that embodied potential for Khan and his peers to experiment and endeavor into uncharted modes of creation and expression, along with its predetermined opacity.

Glissant explains that transparency as a western ideal is achieved through deciphering layers and layers of meaning under the clause of rationality (Diawara, 2010). This mode of generating understanding breaks down the Other into familiar parts, which can be confronted, understood and assessed. In this sense, the Other is always portrayed in relation to the Self, which inherently threatens its authenticity and possibly its very essence. Alternatively, the defense for opacity is the acceptance of the Other without assimilation. Fighting for opacity resembles the right to exist without being understood through the lens of the Other.

The audience's reaction to the performance shows an example of this quest for transparency which Glissant opposes. From their perspective, there are certain forms and functions ascribed to the standard of the art gallery, and anything that falls within the formulation of this norm is deemed transparent and therefore accepted. This perception leaves no room for noise, silence or even sound to begin with, and the entrance of these mediums presents opacity. Therefore, since they have failed to interpret it through their expectations and understanding of the gallery space, it is ultimately rejected.

I extend the opacity in layering Glissant refers to in a literal sense, and apply it to the layering in the sonic collage created by Khan in the presentation of *Lungfan*, which adds to the ways in which this piece embodies opacity for an audience accustomed to transparency. As a format, college affords the space for the disruption of convention. A sonic collage implies intermixing and arriving at an unprecedented sonic image, especially when performed live.

Throughout the 13-minute piece, several moments of sudden tonal shifts, disruptions and silences punctuate the listening experience. As a result, the overall tone reassigns the notion of disruptiveness from noise to silence. These moments of abrupt silence create a tension that is emblematic of the rhizome in two ways. First, the coexistence of noise and silence as material opposites underscores the simultaneous differentiation and interconnectedness highlighted by Glissant. The result is a turbulent and unspecified sonic experience, which rejects a linear narrative that the sound can fall into. The fragmented nature of these episodes of noise and silence accentuates the multiplicity of roots in this artwork. Second, the unpredictable silence and tonal shifts emphasize Glissant's conception of the rhizome as a process of "becoming" rather than "being" (Allar, 2019, p.7). The silences can be viewed as transitional nodes, which are fractured yet defining, through which the piece moves in and out of but does not settle into. Rather than anticipating a moment of arrival, of "being", the listener is invited to accept the ongoing state of "becoming", along with the impermanence as a defining condition of the experience.

Case Study: *Tabla Dubb no. 9 (*2002): Multirooted Sounding and Listening

Khan's engagement with Egyptian sound culture was multi-faceted. He was a deep listener of Yassin al-Tuhami, who is a popular Egyptian *munshid*[6]. While al-Tuhami's art is radically different to Khan's, Khan found a connection in al-Tuhami's voice and way of singing. During an interview conducted by Khan, al-Tuhami describes his singing process as one where he visualizes all of the lyrics and poetry he has memorised and selects which speaks to him as a starting point. From then on, he moves between poems and verses, creating novel and spontaneous combinations. This embodied algorithmic approach described by al-Tuhami manifests in one of Khan's latest artworks titled *The Infinite Hip Hop Song* (2019), which is made up of multiple hip-hop lyrics than can be used interchangeably, and the algorithm moves between the recorded phrases throughout the live performance of the piece. The outcome of this process is a distinctive set of lyrical and musical combinations that is unique to each performance. There is an element of opacity in the way that sonic influence does not have a direct impact on his sonic art.

[6] A singer or vocalist of a *nasheed*, which is a form of Islamic vocal music or religious chants.

These roots manifesting materially and conceptually in Khan's performances builds on modes of listening and conceptual engagement rooted in Egyptian sonic culture. Whether this mode of listening shapes Khan's understanding or not is not the main concern. However, it might find relevance in the construction of the mixed mode of listening in the local and public sphere. The work I will discuss in this section is titled *Tabla Dubb no. 9*, which premiered in 2002 in the first edition of Homeworks by Ashkal Alwan in Beirut. This work's proximity to traditional music practices as opposed to visual art, which was in the case of *Lungfan*, points to a different direction of divergence from a perceived norm, and in turn generates a different point of Relation.

There are connections between Khan's artistic practice and Glissantian multiplicity. As Allar (2019, p.10) notes, "For Glissant [...] roots must remain not as markers of origin and exclusion, not as anchors of identity, but as part of the continuous intertwining of histories, languages, cultures, and peoples in creolization". It is difficult to trace a single history that Khan's work can fall into, which is something that he is aware of and consciously embraces. Since his earliest experiments, Khan views everything as inspiration, and does not privilege a specific mode of thought throughout his practice. Khan's utilization of traditional sources is not through a nostalgic or sentimental approach, but more of a materialistic one. In 2001, he composed an album called *Tabla Dubb*, which he continued developing and performed as an audiovisual experience multiple times until 2007. The album constitutes a set of tracks, which mix a set of pre-recorded sounds including but not limited to field recordings, *tabla* rhythms, distorted frequencies, pop-culture references and more. In each track, Khan loops and layers the recordings to transform them into a sound piece with its own structural rhythm. When performed live, Khan uses two CD plates, two VHS players, a video mixer, and an audio mixer. It is often shown as an audio-visual live performance and is accompanied by video loops of Cairene streets and people, also shot and edited by him. The repetitive and looping of sounds and visuals creates a hypnotic almost trance-like effect, reminiscent of Sufi chanting and *moulid* celebrations. Most specifically in *Tabla Dubb no. 9* (2002) in which the heavy down-beat rhythm is most evident, and the allusion is heightened by the use of field recordings of Sufi songs.

While this piece presents at face-value a traditional vs. contemporary conversation, Khan doesn't comply with this interpretation, and actively rejects it in the statement text accompanying this piece. In which he states

> Tabla dubb, an audiovisual performance is an attempt at fashioning a public media that uses the basic element of popular musical culture - without engaging in the reductionist discussions around the 'traditional and contemporary' imposed by orientalizing discourses of dominant institution. This performance is an attempt at creating a new cultural practice where music, video and the direct state- ment are used to investigate, in a concise and concentrated form, the politic of shared co-habitation in a city where power is contested on a daily basis.
>
> (Khan, 2002)

His use of traditional music does not serve the purpose of representing the traditional, but rather he views it as one of his instruments, and as material to engage with. I agree that the conversation does not necessarily have to lie within a larger discussion between tradition and modernity. However, the performance along with many sonic aspects of this piece undeniably builds on existing cultural practices.

The use of the *tabla*, serves as a powerful example of how the reference to traditional musical sounds and practices calls upon culturally rooted forms of engagement. The *tabla* is a hand-played drum commonly featured in social or religious celebrations, which often elicits clapping, chanting and swaying. The familiar rhythms played in such settings often create an embodied conversational dynamic between the player and the audience. This auditory and somatic dialogue exhibits a collective construction of the shared physical and sonic space surrounding the performance. Delegating the role of the performer to a machine, or a set of machines disrupts the nature of this dialogue. For local audiences, the familiarity of the sounds and rhythms may still encourage engagement, leading to either uninterrupted somatic participation or a reluctance to respond to an unfamiliar mode of sonic production. Both outcomes reveal interesting points for interpretation.

In the case that bodily engagement is less evident, such as less clapping or swaying, this reluctance may stem from a shift in the perceived power dynamics of the sonic space. The audience's contributions, when made in response to a machine, are no longer negotiated in a shared cultural language, but are dictated by a foreign entity. Here, "foreign" refers not only to the non-human nature of the machine, but could possibly be accompanied by technological unfamiliarity due to the novelty of the machine. The result is an alienating and potentially intimidating sonic structure through which participation is inappropriate. Alternatively, somatic engagement may remain fluid and uninterrupted through the comfortable integration of sounding technologies within the local sonic scape. Stiengo & Sykes (2019, pp.1-36) point to this

interpretation of the function of technology in the global south. Their framework posits the integration of technology as an extension of human culture that is already embedded and practiced. In this case, the sonic outcome of digital *tabla* beats simply replaces its human counterpart and is renegotiated by an audience accustomed to technological adaptability.

In both cases, the reappropriation of the traditional musical elements into contemporary sound art practices, can be framed within multiple lenses. While sonically, *Tabla Dubb no.9* (2002) relies on sounds that are culturally rooted, it can not be perceived in its original context. Comparatively, within the artworld, this artform was also relatively novel and unheard of, yet uncomfortably calls upon the gallery gaze of the modern artworld. As a result, this form of sound art created a new, multi-rooted form of sonic perception.

Through this case study, it becomes apparent how the diversity of influences leading to the production of Khan's sound art also gives rise to an equally layered mode of reception. While Khan steers clear of resembling an attachment to traditionalism, his work bears evident traces of traditional Egyptian sonic culture. This duality allows his work to be situated between genealogies and histories, maintaining a dialogue with the past while remaining tied to contemporary Egyptian culture. From a traditional perspective, the incorporation of technology including the roles and meanings ascribed to it, plays a significant part in destabilizing traditional modes of reception and sonic engagement. As such, it reframes the sonic experiences, complicating how audiences engage with and interpret the work in relation to cultural familiarity.

Khan continued experimenting with music and sound during many points of his career. He began performing with Mahmoud Refaat as a musical duo from 2002 until 2004. They were mostly performing electronic music, playing with feedback mixers, filters, drum machines etc. Rising from an underground experimental music culture, they worked with an intention to perform in unexpected places. This type of experimental music was not common and likely unprecedented; before them, nobody was participating in this form of experimental sound practice and performance, at least in the public eye. Khan and Refaat's experimental initiatives were motivated by an intention to cultivate a larger underground music scene. In 2006, Refaat launched *100Copies*, an independent music label dedicated to supporting experimental music acts. This initiative gathered a diverse community of artists and musicians who were exploring new sonic territories and performance styles. *100Copies* provided a vital platform for creators and audiences to share and experience music from a spectrum genres ranging from heavy metal

to *shaabi*[7]. In 2007, a year after the label's founding, Refaat organized *100Live*, an electronic music festival which hosted many of that generation's experimental music and sound artists including Ahmed Basiony.

Final Remarks

The examples mentioned above highlight the varying affinities between the firmly situated realms of visual art and traditional music, both of which contribute to the entangled, rhizomatic beginnings of sound art practices in Egypt. While both cases emerge from and with existing traditions, experimental sound art tends to occupy a marginal position, often facing criticism rooted in its institutional situation. This sense of marginalization persists and continues to shape both contemporary sound practices and the introduction of media arts at the turn of the century.

The following section further explores the conditions surrounding media and sound arts, which remain subjects of public skepticism and political scrutiny. More specifically, it considers how the notion of multirootedness described above evolves into what Jessica Winegar refers to as a process of "creative reckoning" (2006). A process through which artists, educators, curators and audiences confront and navigate the multiple and often conflicting histories of Egyptian art in the contemporary landscape. This process resembles the act of untangling the roots, while it acknowledges their presence and significance, it also entails a selective and subjective decision about which roots are deemed most valuable or relevant.

[7] A form of traditional popular music which evolved into electro-shaabi and mahraganat.

Chapter Two - Circuits of Resistance: Ahmed Basiony and Emergent Sound Communities

During the earliest stages of my research, I made a visit to the National Library in Egypt (Dar al-Kutub), which houses a large collection of newspapers, magazines and periodicals from Egypt and the broader Middle East region. Upon entering this building, you're asked to show your ID and leave your belongings at the door except for a pen and paper. Then, you're handed a large worn out and dusty book, which includes an alphabetized list of all the periodicals in the archive that cover a wide range of topics including art, literature, music, sports, education and more. Once you have made a list of selected copies you want to preview, you can only take out one at a time. During my 6-hour visit to the archive, I previewed around 5 or 6 periodicals. Since I was looking for publications related to sound, music and experimental arts, they were some of the key words I was using. In Arabic, the word for sound is *sawt*, which is also the same word used for voice. Skimming through the dusty pages, the word *sawt* came up a lot, often used to refer to the news or opinions of specific groups of people. For example, *Sawt al-Fannan* (the Voice of the Artist), *Sawt al-Suez* (the Voice of Suez Governerate) and *Sawt al-Azhar* (the Voice of al-Azhar University) and many more. On a literal and metaphorical level, the use of the word *sawt* to describe a stance and a critical position really stood out to me, and pointed me to the interconnectedness of voice and sound in Arabic. Through analysis of the sound art (*fann al-sawt)* works during the early 2000s, I view the etymological connection between voicing an opinion as an act of sounding was ascribed new cultural and political relevance.

The following section follows the progression of the situation of sound art within particular social and political circumstances, as well as its relationship to firmly established art practices and expectations. The creation of sound art in the early 2000s was often entangled with intentionally radical gestures and collective efforts aimed at provoking cultural and political

change in the country. Situated amidst these tensions, ambitions, sound art takes on a specifically poetic presence, and frames sound as heightened sense, rising from ordinary expectations and other more "stable" art forms. However, this is not the image I wish to portray of sound art particularly, but rather the generation of artists and activists who embodied this spirit and ascribed political meanings and resistant potential to the tools at their disposal. At that moment, although sound art was more commonly practiced and exhibited in other parts of the world, it was still a radical and unfamiliar form in the contemporary Egyptian art scene. With its arrival, it becomes essential to contextualise the world in which it emerged, and the new meanings, possibilities and tension that arose out of this encounter. I believe understanding the circumstantial relationship between sound art, community and resistance during this moment of Egyptian history highlights the role that sound art played, both in its production and reception.

In this section, I focus on the period between 2000 and 2010 which marked the introduction of digital media and sound art practices in Egypt, with a focus on Ahmed Basiony as a key figure in teaching and producing sound art. While I do not view the developments of this period as a direct continuation of Khan and Refaat's practice mentioned above, I believe there is a correlation in the tension that sound art creates due to the institutional expectations of art and music. Therefore in both cases, sound art remains ambiguous and exists somewhere outside of art. However, I believe that the difference lies in both histories' proximity to visual art and academic artistic practice. While Khan developed his sound art alongside other experimentations with music, photography, film and more, he was not trained as an artist nor was he an art student. On the other hand and as I will further explain, the key figures of the new media movement came with knowledge, experience and resentment from the practice of Egyptian visual art and education. Additionally, the introduction of new media art practices introduced a set of preoccupations and criticisms of the art education system that Khan was not necessarily concerned with. This marks a difference in intention. For Basiony and his peers, an awareness of the expectations of the art world influenced their use of sound alongside new media as deliberately radical and resistant. In contrast, sound in Khan's practice occurred more organically and as an extension of his broader multimedia approach, rather than an explicitly oppositional act.

In any case, this is not to say that the two worlds did not collide. In fact, Khan attended many of the workshops run by Basiony as a guest artist, as did Refaat. Basiony and other sound

artists from his generation also attended and performed in the *100Live* concert series initiated by Refaat, where Khan was also participating. Similar to many aspects of the Egyptian underground art world, there was collective collaboration and cooperation. The *100Live* festival and other experimental music events played an important role in providing a platform for experimental sound practices, primarily in relation to music. However, it did significantly engage with other experimentations with sound happening in the gallery or exhibition contexts.

Therefore, in this section, I examine how artists of that generation utilised the ambiguity of sound art alongside other new media forms in community building and forming localised methodologies of listening and sounding. This trajectory can be traced back to artist and educator, Shady al-Noshokaty's Workshop and its materialisations in Basiony's pedagogical and artistic practice, and the exhibition of *Madena* (Basiony & Mostafa, 2007) at the Cairo Youth Salon. Since this period in Egyptian art history is relatively understudied and under-represented, this section of my thesis relies mostly on talks with Shady al-Noshokaty and archival material found on Ahmed Basiony's website.

The Rise of Media Art in Egypt

To re-evoke Glissantian ethics one more time, I recall Glissant's assertion that, "to declare one's own identity is to write the world into existence" (1989 pp.169). This notion adequately reflects the efforts of this generation of artists to construct a reality in which their art can exist and retain relevance. Amid a time of political and social uncertainty, these artists attained both the power and ambition to envision and implement a future on their own terms. Consequently, social and political activism was deeply embedded in the experience of this generation, culminating on a broad scale, in their pivotal role as leaders in the 2011 Arab Spring. More specifically, the same drive manifested in a conscious reconceptualization of the value of art education, positioning it as equal to if not more vital than artistic production itself. Shady al-Noshokaty underscores this importance in his philosophy and motivations for founding the Workshop *(al-Warsha)* and incorporating media art in his practice as an educator (al-Noshokaty, personal communication, 2025).

In the early 2000s, media art was an unexplored artform, and teaching media art in formal arts institutions was nowhere close to a possibility. Nonetheless, al-Noshokaty chose to teach media art as he was learning and producing it himself, with the belief that to generate effective

and relevant media art, he had to simultaneously cultivate an audience capable of receiving and engaging with it (al-Noshokaty, personal communication, 2025). This ethos of shared learning and reciprocal development also shaped a large part of Basiony's artistic and pedagogical framework. Ultimately, this process of "writing the world into existence" becomes a metaphor for how artists such as Basiony and his peers mobilized language, resources, and education to actively construct the artistic and political world they envisioned, in and outside of the studio. Glissant puts an emphasis on language as the medium through which "writing" becomes possible. In this context, language can be expanded to include technology, education, and artistic tools, which can serve a similar productive capacity. The essence of this process is in the utilization of available resources to realise a reality that would otherwise remain nonexistent.

With the turn of the century, Shady El Noshokaty alongside other practitioners and educators were eager to bring digital and new media art forms into the Egyptian arts and culture scene. The goal was to introduce a new set of tools for art making that had already gained recognition and generated critical discourse internationally. As I will further explain, the introduction of these art forms was supported by a series of lectures and discussions in order to bring forth the ideological concerns for media art and art in general alongside the capacity for technological innovation.

At the time, al-Noshokaty was teaching at the Faculty of Arts Education in Helwan University[8]. His position allowed him to initiate and run a summer program known as the Workshop (al-Warsha) for art students[9] for 3 to 4 weeks during summer vacations. There was no funding to support this program, although the Dean allowed the program to run on campus and for students to use the classrooms and studios. At its earliest stage, the Workshop was similar to an open-studio program, where student-artists could have their own studio space in addition to the opportunity to attend lectures and debates on art, education and philosophy hosted by al-Noshokaty. During these lectures, al-Noshokaty would often preview video and other digital artworks which were personally recorded by him during his trips abroad. He recalls showing his students footage of the works of Shirin Neshat and William Kentridge shown at the Venice Biennale. Upon viewing these works and others for the first time for many students, they collectively contemplated topics varying from the meaning of art to the role of technology in

[8] Helwan University is a public university in Cairo founded in 1980.
[9] The program was initially directed at art students, but with its progression it was open to the general public. However, most of the consistent attendees were art students. (al-Noshokaty, personal communication, 2025)

artmaking.When it was active, the Workshop served as a platform for students and educators to gather, debate and exchange ideas outside of the scope of their rigid art education curriculum.

After four consecutive years of running the Workshop, al-Noshokaty decided to expand and develop the program futher. In the summer of 2004, al-Noshokaty among other instructors, began constructing a general curriculum for the Workshop with a particular focus on the practice of experimental media arts and experimental education. The curriculum brought together specialized workshops, guest artist talks, screenings and lecture sessions. Each of the specialized workshops focused on one media art form which included video art, animation, creative programming, digital sound art and more. These specialized workshops ran in parallel throughout the summer sessions and they varied from one cycle to the next depending on the availability and preference of the instructors. Each participant could choose two or three specialized workshops to take part in, which offered them the opportunity to develop cross-media and conceptual approaches. This framed the general structure of the Workshop, which occurred annually on the university's premises until the eleventh round in 2012. After that, the Workshop relocated to ASCII[10]'s headquarters until its closure in 2016, which also marked the end of the Workshop's activities.

The focus on integrating technology and new media forms was met with great optimism among the instructors and participants of the Workshop. There appeared to be an overarching sense of excitement surrounding the efficiency of technology and the creative and aesthetic possibilities it enabled. This attitude echoes many of the modernist or liberal ideologies often associated with new media such as its democratic potential, its promise of decentralization, and its capacity to operate outside traditional institutional constraints. This optimism is also reflected in al-Noshokaty's assumption that in order for media art to be deemed effective or successful,it must generate an audience, stimulate discourse and eventually attain economic value. Ultimately framing local value in accordance with international visibility and global market demands.

Viewing the formative period of media art production in Egypt with enthusiasm that parallels that of the Workshop's participants' is risky. It undermines our focus on the ideological underpinnings of new media art practices in Egypt by uncritically promoting the liberal modernist values ascribed to the field including technological progress, innovation, and aesthetic

[10] ASCII is a self-funded program for experimental education in media arts and creativity. It was founded by Shady el-Noshokaty and ran from 2012 to 2016.

universality. I argue that this period of media art production in Egypt is marked by an underemphasis on the media itself and the ways these tools might reinforce power structure. Moreover, this view diminishes the influences and affects knowledge produced locally, like vernacular aesthetics and informal networks of cultural production, which plays a role in shaping new media practice in Egypt. Thus, it marginalizes local traditions of knowledge and practice by dismissing their ability to articulate powerful critiques that exist outside of continental and techno-artistic practices. That said, this does not negate or diminish the resistant and critical qualities that were ascribed to the rise and development of these practices. The adaptation of some of these technologies in the local context adds layered and constructive interpretations to media and sound practices, highlighting the way in which artists reframe and utilise these tools to speak to their specific cultural realities.

To understand some of the ways that the initiation of the Workshop and the utilization of new media in art practices signifies ideological dissent from existing institutional structures, it is useful to examine the differences in educational approaches and the philosophies and histories that influence them. In general, the content taught at the university varied greatly from the topics that were discussed at the Workshop. In class, students would be assigned to draw and sketch for long consecutive hours in order to learn formal drawing or painting methods. While at the workshop, they witnessed how machines can do this work for them, in a fraction of the time. There was also a clear difference in the space allowed for creativity relative to the focus on technical skills.

Students that attended the Workshop were introduced to a much wider range of possibilities for the future of their art practice and education. As a result, they began vocalising their resistant sentiments and concerns amongst their peers and tutors, which raised some flags for the university's administration. As the Workshop became more focused on experimental and alternative art forms, the more skeptical the administration grew of the Workshop and its activities. The divergence between the administration's position and the students built on an existing skepticism of the purpose of the Workshop and media art in general (al-Noshokaty, personal communication, 2025). A resentment which continued to grow until it eventually drove al-Noshokaty and the Workshop outside of the university's premises and scope.

At that time when it came to digital arts, interlocutors took clear stances of whether or not they accepted and encouraged it. The argument against new media and digital arts was often

associated with claims of American or European attempts to infiltrate Egyptian culture. However, it was not necessarily an argument for the conservation of traditional Egyptian arts or crafts, but for the established practice of the arts education curriculums and arts faculties in Egypt. Ironically, the resistance against new styles or new artforms also ends up defending the progression of styles imposed on and introduced to the Egyptian art academy through Western influence. Before the Faculty of Fine Arts[11] was formally incorporated as part of Helwan University in 1980, it underwent a series of institutional and political restructuring. It was initially established by prince Yusuf Kamal as *Ecole des beaux-art* in 1908 to train Egyptian artists in French in methods, while maintaining an authentic Egyptian voice (Seggerman, 2019). In the early 20th century alongside the influence of colonial powers, notions of taste and aesthetic sensibilities were often utilized as measures of modernity. *Sawt al-Fannan,* an art criticism magazine founded in the 1950s points to the rhetoric ascribed to artistic discourse and the editorial tone of the magazine often referenced foreign colonizers as ideals and masterpieces while the local art scene was met with a "discourse of lack", of taste, awareness, appreciation, education and so on.

Historically, experimentation with new artistic styles was not typically welcomed within art academies in Egypt. Between the 1930s and the 1940s, Ramses Younan[12] was gradually working to shift the aesthetic discourse away from formalist traditions such as figurative and surrealist painting to more abstract styles (Karnouk, 1988). His efforts were met with considerable resistance from the public, whose perceptions were shaped in large part by the cultural attitudes of the Egyptian ruling class. This resistance reveals an entanglement between the expectations of art and the framing of "good taste" as a measure of modernity which were influenced by colonial and classist worldviews, making them remain somewhat inescapable. A conservative and elitist perspective, mostly inherited from the European bourgeois tradition, played a significant role in shaping public taste and by extension, the direction of the Fine Arts Faculty (Karnouk, 1988). This dynamic was reinforced by the interconnectedness of art schools, exhibition spaces and museum collections, many of which were governed and curated by a particular group of artists who also acted as critics and educators throughout much of the 20th

[11] The Faculty of Fine Arts is another faculty in Helwan university. It is separate from the Arts Education Faculty yet remains relevant to the formal arts education systems in Egypt.

[12] Ramses Younan (1913-1966) is an Egyptian surrealist painter. He was a student at the Faculty of Fine Arts and later a member of the Art and Liberty Group, which is a Cairo-based collective of surrealist artists, writers and intellectuals.

century (Ramadan, 2008). The classist and colonial forces that shaped the art field during this period leaves tangible traces seen in the trends that favor particular foreign ideals over local efforts. This attitude continues to permeate through art and educational institutions and highlights a pattern where new art forms are initially rejected, dismissed or marginalized before they are accepted and absorbed into the formal Egyptian art scene.

“Reckoning” with Media Art

There is a wealth of research on the history and evolution of visual arts in Egypt, particularly tracing its constitution and intersections with colonial legacies as well as the local assimilation and adaptation of Western styles and artforms. This historical trajectory also considers the incorporation of visual arts into the nationalist socialist agenda during the mid to late 20th century, wherein artistic practices were often linked and tasked with the formation of an independent Egyptian national identity. Consequently, the concept of the “nation” becomes a dominant lens through which art is interpreted, shaped and reshaped. In her analysis of modern Egyptian art from the 19th century through the 1960s, Seggerman (2019) employs a “contellational” approach. Through which, she acknowledges and negotiates a network of relationships among artists and artworks on both a material and virtual level. The points of contact within this network reveal the multilayered interconnectedness of Egyptian modernism and its varying trajectories. The connections shaped through this constellation signifies a certain interaction that reflects its own engagement with Egyptian history and the influence of Western artistic paradigms.

Seggerman uses this notion to generate a local and decentralised framework to think about the construction of Egyptian modernisms through artworks that were created during that period. Moreover, she identifies a distinct separation between Islamic and modern styles of art in Egyptian history, mostly based on aesthetic expectations. As such, she suggests formulating a bridge to expand the understanding of Islamic art to include ways in which artists engage with, criticise and embrace Islamic culture and philosophy. She asks us to consider, what is Islamic about this work? In order to evoke the ways in which artists were cognisant, critical and possibly influenced by Egyptian Islamic culture. Even if the artwork does not reference or build on a factor of doctrinal Islam, it does not mean that it should be considered secular and unrelated to this culture.

The points of contact within Seggerman's constellational framework still find relevance in contemporary art discourse and practice, where aesthetics and historical context are continuously challenged and renegotiated. This relevance is particularly apparent when considering the ride of digital and sound art practices in the early 2000s. Similar to the modernist period Seggerman addressed, these newer art forms grapple with the social and aesthetic complexities of adopting Western styles in non-Western contexts. Such practices often face the double bind of either falling short of Western technical standards or being evaluated through the homogenising lens of "Global" or "World" art, which rarely account for the local socio-historical particularities.

The situation of Egyptian modern art is then always in question, in terms of how it stands to its Western predecessors and if not, it is interpreted as a reflection of certain political images and identity politics tied to the Middle Eastern and Islamic society. These interpretations can reinforce gendered, religious or political stereotypes. Thus, if a work fails to meet the expectations of these modernist markers of success, it prompts the question: *Who defines these expectations and to whom do they matter?* Therefore, shifting the conversation back to the local subjective artist, critic and audience.

Here, Winegar proposes the idea of "creative reckoning" to describe a process of dealing with histories and ideologies which seem to be already set, or have varying degrees of fixedness in order to reach a position that depends on a conscious vision of a "modern nation". Winegar argues that the process through which Egyptian modern art is created and criticised occurs through a process of "reckoning" and navigating "genealogies of the modern" (2006, pp.1-36). This pertains to the various and multifaceted trajectories of "modern" life in contemporary Egypt. The various genealogies each constitute a selective balance between aspects of Egyptian culture including religion, western political influence (including colonialism and contemporary globalisation), pharaonic roots etc. Each of these genealogies is constructed based on a conscious vision of the "modern nation", which differs according to class and generation. As such, Winegar explains that while European styles such as surrealism or abstraction were introduced to Egypt through colonial encounters or ambitions, does not imply that they continue to represent and spread the same message. The application of these styles in Egyptian modern art often takes on a local role and identity, which does not escape the process of "reckoning" performed through the efforts to define, criticise and create modern Egyptian art. She argues that this often occurs in

accordance with one's perspective on the future of the nation. She utilises the etymological, nautical and mathematical connotations of the term "reckoning" to illustrate the agentive and processual nature of this process.

In the Egyptian context, media art poses a new challenge to this equation. The introduction of technology and its novel forms of engaging with art posed another category to assess the level of foreignness, and made it difficult for digital art, and consequently sound art to smoothly enter the discourse. Furthermore, experimentations with sound through the pretext of art rather than music, storytelling or poetry added another layer of disciplinary uncertainty. I contend that both the conservative traditional Egyptian arts represented through the university administration as well as the Workshop's instructors and participants each represent a process of "reckoning" with a different trajectory of Egyptian contemporary life and art, which determined the in/exclusion of digital arts into the public sphere. As such, resistance towards its inclusion was generally framed within concerns for not only traditional culture, but national security, cultural infiltration and unregulated western influence in the early 1990s as mentioned by Khan (personal communication, 2025) and in the late 2000s al-Noshokaty (personal communication, 2025).

Even beyond the institutional framework of art practices, the sensibilities tried to Egyptian modernism continue to be reworked and negotiated according to contemporary social and political settings. Winegar (2006) is particularly concerned with how a younger generation of artists navigated their own subjectivities and authenticities in accordance with their positionalities relative to Egypt's part and future on personal, public, and national levels. I believe these concerns also apply to the situation of arts experimenting with new technologies, whose practices reflected deeply local and personal sensibilities, while embracing globally emergent artforms.

Their utilisation of new media forms, offered a sense of liberation from certain aspects of the past. In the sense that, they did not have to directly engage with and were not limited by concepts and aesthetics of traditional or traditionalised art forms. This also applies to the emergence of sound art, where there was an inclination to situate it within an Egyptian context, but not particularly build on existing practice within the scope of art. I believe this shift reflects a broader social and political frustration of that generation and their desire for systematic change. New media art, in this context, became a vehicle for rebellion, experimentation with alternative

solutions. At the same time, being positioned outside of the Euro-American trajectory of media art gave Egyptian artists a space to experiment without the direct influence of external stylistic and institutional pressures. Sakr (2022) frames these efforts and this period as part of a wider movement of technoactivism in the Arab world. She refers particularly to Basiony's life and work as a "glitch" in international expectations, both as a disruption of prevailing narratives around artistic expression in the region and as an embodiment of new epistemologies of being and connectivity.

With consideration to the multiple relevant approaches to situating contemporary Egyptian visual art, the situation with sound art also faces similar entanglements. During this period, sound art as a form of media art was negotiated under similar terms and sensibilities. Although, approaching sonic possibilities broadens the scope for reckoning through the multitude of entanglements brought about by the sonic histories in Egypt. While this manifests in an unfamiliar form, the contexts, histories and associated "genealogies of the modern" remain meaningful and relevant.

Sound Art for Imagination and Resistance

Ahmed Basiony: Artist, Mentor, Catalyst

Prior to his martyrdom in Tahrir Square in January 2011[13]Basiony was building a repertoire of sound art pieces and performance, running workshops on digital sound art and had completed his masters degree on the Creative Potential of Digital Sound Art. He influenced a generation of artists who attended his workshops and upheld his legacy and fascination with sound and open-programming. Basiony was one of the consistent attendees and participants of the Workshop since its inception. He graduated from the Faculty of Art Education at Helwan University in 2000. From 2002 until 2006, he was working at the Faculty as a teaching assistant in painting and drawing, while concentrating his masters' degree with al-Noshokaty as his supervisor. Alongside completing his masters degree, he decided to develop his own sound art curriculum to be included in the Workshop. The first sound art workshop run by Basiony was in 2005 and continued annually until 2010, it was also the first of its kind in Egypt. The earliest sound art workshops were mainly listening sessions, through which Basiony would ask

[13] Ahmed Basiony was killed during the 2011 revolution as a result of gunshot wounds inflicted by the Egyptian Police. He is known as the Martyred Artist.

participants to draw what they were hearing, in lines, waves or shapes (see source image/video), embedding the listener's subjectivity into their perception of sound. The workshop's content evolved in line with Basiony's practice, interests, and general curiosity. Some workshops focused on visualizing sound or exploring the relationship between sound and video. Others centered on the intersection of sound and performance, while some experimented with sound sculptures made from deconstructed old toys and other practical applications of sound (al-Noshokaty, personal communication, 2025).

Photo documentation of Ahmed Basiony and students during the sound art workshops (2005-2010)

Through the various experimentations with sound and its application in media arts practices, and in addition to the social context and skepticism around its beginnings. The lack of integration of such practices in the formal art scene frames it as a movement of resistance. In the following section I argue that the technological failures surrounding the practice of digital sound art in Egypt aided in fostering a sense of communal co-creation, which supported this resistant attitude. In addition, Basiony's dual practice in teaching and producing sound art, indicates a form of "reckoning" (Winegar, 2006), that relies on the understanding of sound as a tool for

political imagination, underscoring its resistant potential. Lastly, the utilisation of sound in the audio-visual installation *Madena* by Basiony and Magdi Mostafa reflects a culmination of "sonic sensibility" (Voegelin, 2021) formed through Basiony's practice and a formation of an "emergent community" (LaBelle, 2017)

Technological Failures as Creative Opportunity

Due to the lack of funding and available resources, the earliest sound art workshops ran with no equipment, and were focused on listening, closer to ear-training workshops. With time, accessibility to some equipment increased but mainly due to individual efforts. For example, Basiony often offered his computer for all of the students to use for editing and other participants also offered their technological devices to be shared by the group. The availability or lack of technology reveals that the engagement with it is not defined by reliance, but by communal adaptation, resistance and reinterpretation. One of the ways Steingo and Sykes (2019) suggest to approach sound studies in the global south focuses on sound's relationship to technology, while shifting the focus from what that technology actually is, but what it can do within that specific culture. This perspective diverges from viewing technology solely as a Western practice with goals to reproduce, isolate and amplify, moving instead towards understanding technology as an extension of human culture, which inherently varies depending on the cultural context in which it is applied. In that case, when technology fails, this failure is just as generative as success as it offers fruitful ground for interpretation.

The movement and transfer of technology and information follows imperial routes that flow between a center and periphery (Wallerstein, 2004). In a capitalist world system, the global south are often receivers of technology and information created and developed by the global north. This puts Egypt on the receiving end of many technological innovations, especially in the early 2000s. However, this process of transfer occurring between the east and the west assumes and carries a very localised mode of usage and consumption. Therefore, when technology fails to function with its intended means or system, it is classified as a failure. A failure to consider the variances in application of that technology according to the culture in which it is applied.

The arrival of technological innovations to Egypt implies its embeddedness into the local economic and political ecosystem, its strengths and shortcomings included. Online piracy in Egypt was not uncommon in the early 2000s (Khalil & Seleem, 2011) and sharing pirated content was widespread among friends and even as a successful business model (Shaver & Rizk,

2010). When it came to gaining access to audio editing software, Basiony along with many of his students used cracked versions of Adobe Audition and other programs. A consequence that would be viewed as a failure in the perspective of Adobe as a corporation and simultaneously highlights its weaknesses, and the meanings of social and political resistance created through this failure. The reliance on pirated media resembles a relation to an existing network of resistance against capitalistic flow of media (LaBelle, 2018, pp. 60-91). Given that the global systems of communication and media transfer are shaped by geopolitical projects and corporate mechanisms, resistance becomes imperative in realizing an alternative way of approaching a new mode of accessibility and sharing media away from these systems (LaBelle, 2018, pp. 60-91). It is not clear whether Basiony and his peers shared these ambitions to begin with, however, the formation of a system rooted in shared responsibility is an effective byproduct of their approach.

Since not many students had access to a private computer, and there were no funds to provide more than one or two computers for over 15-20 students, during many workshops devices were shared and frequently overworked. In many workshops (which took place in peak summer seasons), PCs would heat up and burn due to the immense load placed on them, in addition to the summer heat. To fix this issue, the solution would be to place external fans around the computer to stop it from overheating. This scenario exemplifies how creative potential isn't bound by the limitations of the machine. Instead, it underscores how the very constraints of technology can spark unexpected forms of innovation and resilience. Accessibility to audio hardware and software was challenging for many young artists of that generation. Yet, inaccessibility provided a new platform for sharing and learning. It allowed artists to find creative ways to practice sound art, starting with listening and shaping their understanding of what sound art can be through the resources available to them, digital or not. This speaks to a larger sense of determination to find a work-around, embodied in many artists of this generation, and Basiony was a product and instigator of that ethic (Sakr, 2023). Generally, finding ways around inaccessibility can be viewed as resistance to the normative means of using technology and to the capitalist systems which enable it.

Photo documentation of Ahmed Basiony during the sound art workshops (2005-2010)

The communal, DIY demeanor also extended to participants' attitudes towards each other's projects and works; it was encouraged and expected for them to share new knowledge and skills. This energy was a general byproduct of the Workshop in general, which was prevalent in Basiony's sessions as well. Consequently, when Basiony began focusing his research on sound art, he instinctively began teaching it too. Sharing knowledge for Basiony did not depend on him having previously mastered it, this really challenged the existing educational framework and hierarchy. The treatment of knowledge in this way also resembles a process of reckoning, in Winegar's terms. In the context of the Egyptian art world, reckoning makes room for two modes of knowledge, "knowledge as a process of discovering, and knowledge as something is constantly being made" (Winegar, 2006, p.6). This entails a method of learning while creating knowledge which involves navigating various and overlapping histories and values through

artistic practice, critical engagement or production. This directly speaks to Basiony's practice as an artist and an educator. His work was characterized by a drive to explore new methodologies and embracing the unpredictability of creative processes (al-Noshokaty, personal communication, 2015). He approached his artistic and teaching experiences with the belief that knowledge is not fixed and simply transmitted, but rather something that can be reciprocal, co-created and continually redefined. This marks another aspect through which Basiony's practice and the Workshop itself challenged the hierarchical structures and conventional teaching methods of the arts education systems.

Ahmed Basiony's Sound Art Practice: Imagination through Sound

For Basiony, sound was never separated from the visual (El-Noshokaty, 2025), he always thought about sound in terms of how it can influence imagination, and what kind of fictional images it can produce. Sound offered a new medium to challenge reality, to mix recordings that could never be heard together, to manipulate sounds in a way that could not be experienced by the naked human ear. One of Basiony's earliest sound pieces is titled, *Birth Day - Dead Day* (2001), the one-minute sound piece follows a narrative structure. Starting with sounds culturally associated with a newborn's celebration called a *sobou'*, clarified through the use of bells, a baby crying, and rhythmic clapping and chanting. The sound of the baby persists while the background sounds transform into a burning, distorted soundscape indicating a violent and rough end. Following the narrative structure of this piece collapses time, bringing two points in time that typically never meet using the sound space as a space for two juxtaposing concepts to coexist.

Coming from a visual arts background, Basiony was fascinated about sound's transformative potential when separated from the image, and this detachment plays a significant role in Basiony's work. His early explorations began with digital sound art. In the case of digital sound, once a sound is recorded in a digital format, it is liberated from its original source (Chattopadhyay, 2017). In his initial works, Basiony relied mostly on digitally recorded sounds and the separation between sound and source that enabled him to drive aural imagination. He took for granted the immersive nature of sound and leveraged familiar sonic elements to trigger associations in the listener's mind. These sounds acted as invisible prompts, evoking mental imagery and suggesting scenes or emotions without any accompanying visuals. In doing so,

Basiony utilises sound into a catalyst for imagination while retaining the audience's subjective perspective.

In *Cairo Sound* (2005), the deconstructive and transformative capacity of sound extends from temporal to spatial dimensions. Basiony brings together field recordings from the agricultural outskirts and the industrial heart of Cairo, along with their respective sounds, textures and rhythms. The sound piece places the listener along the journey between the two landscapes, highlighting the contrast between the urban and rural life in Egypt. Creating a vivid tension that reflects the lived experience of many young Egyptians caught in between tradition and modernity.

Both of the pieces discussed above follow a relatively narrative structure, which presents an aspect of abstract storytelling. The narrative structure of both pieces abide by sonic practices embedded in Egyptian culture, which often relate to music and storytelling. Both functioning as transformative mechanisms for emotional, spiritual or social transformation. Furthermore, this connects imagination as a force and purpose for Basiony's sound art. In that political moment, the significance of imagination was present in the mind of many young Egyptians who believed in influencing and mobilising change (Elmarsafy, 2017). The same drive is present in *Madena*, an audio-visual installation created by Basiony and Magdi Mostafa.

Case Study: *Madena (2007)* – Surveillance and a Sewing Machine

In 2007, digital art practices were beginning to gain momentum amongst young artists. While access to the internet was still novel and somewhat limited, this generation was increasingly aware of and excited by the potential of emerging technologies. In relation to the realm of sound art, Basiony was one of the forerunners alongside Magdi Mostafa. Mostafa, a regular attendee of the Workshop, was a close colleague and friend of Basiony's. One of their most prominent collaborative projects was *Madena*, which was presented at the 18th Cairo Youth Salon and went on to win the grand prize. Exhibited in a competitive setting, Basiony and Mostafa intended to make a bold statement with the work, and capture the attention of the jury as well as their peers.

The Cairo Youth Salon is an annual competition and exhibition held on the grounds of the Cairo Opera House, including the Palace of Arts, Mahmoud Mokhtar Museum and the

surrounding areas. Each year, emerging artists from art academies all over the country eagerly apply in hopes of being accepted to exhibit their works at the Salon. Amongst the selected participants, winners are selected to receive a monetary prize and gain both local and international recognition. Established in 1988 by the Ministry of Culture, the Youth Salon was initiated to encourage young artists and act as a bridge between the local art scene and the international art market, offering insight into the shifting tone and aesthetics of contemporary Egyptian art. While the history of the Salon reflects its transition from its socialist-era origins to a contemporary cultural space, it is often criticised for its structural stagnation in maintaining rigid frameworks of evaluation and representation. Within this set-up, conflicting expectations persist, particularly regarding the role of the exhibition and the winners. Still struggling with its historical legacy, the jury is often under pressure to select artwork that not only exhibits artistic merit and authentic integrity, but also symbolically represents the nation. As Winegar describes, the competition operates as a "tournament of values" amongst artists, patrons and jurists alike, revealing the deep entanglement of aesthetics with cultural politics (2006, pp.183). For young artists, the stakes are high. Winning the Youth Salon has historically marked a turning point in an artist's career, providing visibility and institutional validation. This attitude was shared by Basiony and Mostafa, who saw the Youth Salon as a significant career milestone, and also as a vital platform to demonstrate the potential of new media art and assert its relevance within the Egyptian public art discourse.

A few months prior to the exhibition, the artists began collecting field recordings from different neighbourhoods around Cairo. They divided the locations amongst themselves and amassed a large repository of recordings of everyday life in Cairo from multiple angles. This research project manifested in *Madena*, which presented what Mostafa described as an "acoustic panorama of Cairo" (2024). In the exhibition hall at Mahmoud Mokhtar Museum, 50-60 speakers were installed along a semi-circular wall accompanied by abstract map-like, that did not respond to any particular location. The only accurate references were the sounds themselves, and the purpose was to encourage visitors to listen to these recordings, and attune to the sounds and textures of their surroundings in different areas of the city. At the centre of the wall was a visual projection of a series of street recordings and digitally generated visuals. The elements on the wall served as a backdrop for 2 computers operated by Basiony and Mostafa, from which they controlled and modulated live audio components of the installation. Alongside them, a third

performer operated a sewing machine, continuously stitching an endless fabric map of the city. A microphone placed at the center of the installation invited audience interaction, allowing participants to contribute sounds that were captured and modulated in real time by the artists.

Photo documentation of *Madena* exhibited at the Cairo Youth Salon (2007)

The format and content of *Madena* were undeniably radical for their time. Central to this outcome was the way it shaped the viewer's encounter with the work through two elements, the sewing machine and the feedback loop generated by the audience's vocal inputs into the microphone. Together, they confront the viewer with the reality of Cairo as a rapidly growing city and convoluted eco-system. The sewing machine, continuously stitching an endless map, offers a metaphor for urban expansion. However, this growth is not portrayed as autonomous. The performance operating the machine underscores the idea that the city's development is shaped by human agency. This draws attention to who this agency belongs to and how it is exercised in shaping our built environment and political landscape. Furthermore, this gains additional layers of meaning considering the dual symbolism of the sewing machine itself. On one hand, the sewing machine evokes notions of domesticity and traditional gendered labor, often associated with the private sphere. On the other hand, it references the mechanized processes of industrial production that are firmly situated in economic structure and the public

sphere. This duality provides reflection on the forces of labor and agency, both the visible and invisible, which shapes and sustains the fabric of the city. Meanwhile, the feedback loop created through the microphone and live-sound modulation offers an aspect of interactivity, where the audience becomes more than a passive observer but an active participant in the soundscape of the city. Reinforcing the notion that urban life is constructed collectively. However, this element serves as a double-sided sword. On the surface, this gesture appears as an invitation for participation, offering a sense of inclusion and influence. Yet, through the mediation and manipulative elements of the feedback system, it also serves as an illusion.

The microphone as an illusion of power manifests in the way that the audience is encouraged to use their voice, speak into the mic and become part of the sonic ecosystem. However, the live-modulation of these soundings mimics the mechanisms of censorship and surveillance. Through which certain voices are selectively muted and or amplified, echoing the ways public discourse is manipulated by various systems of control. Even as observers, visitors are subjected to forces that determine which sounds can or can not be heard. As listeners explore the sound-map wall, there is a perception of choice and freedom to explore the auditory landscape presented to them. However, before these sounds are presented to them, they have already undergone several processes of mediation, and are continuously manipulated even as they experience the artwork and in return, disorients the perception of agency. The orchestration of sounds in what feels like a representation of the city also resembles the political, environmental and social structures and their capacity to mute, amplify, distort and manipulate. In *Madena,* sound is information, reflection and a warning. It successfully presents new angles to view the dynamics that shape the city of Cairo as well as our passive and active roles within it.

Photo documentation of *Madena* exhibited at the Cairo Youth Salon (2007)

The role and the potential of sound and listening in moments of generating social and political awareness is shared amongst many scholars. Voegelin presents the potential of sound in revealing the invisible, in a social, political and ecological sense. She proposes an acquisition of a "sonic sensibility", which allows us to take part in an "aesthetic, ideological and socio-political engagement with the world" (2021). *Madena*, as a sound artwork, introduces the interconnectedness and multilayered invisibilities of the city and the experience of listening to this work reflects Voegelin's notion of a "listened to work" as a "listened to world" (2021). Through which, we can discern our personal position, shortcomings and roles, underscoring what Søndergaard describes as the "social listening deficit". In *Madena*, the format and metaphors of the work carry currents of how sound and listening can reveal the invisible and generate social and political awareness. Viewing this artwork as a form of "sonic agency" (LaBelle, 2018) reinforces the echoes of resistance which permeate through the artwork itself as well as the artistic and communal practices surrounding it.

In establishing the resistant values within this work, the formation of a community is essential. LaBelle (2017) addresses the function of sound in creating an "emergent community",

wherein sound weaves together bodies that are not necessarily looking for each other. *Madena* not only exposes the concealed mechanisms of control and mediation but also employs sound as means of counteracting this control. Thinking of sound in terms of its capacity to exist in-between and to connect its surroundings transforms the experience of the installation to a collective one. The feedback loop plays a pivotal role in facilitating this communal dynamic, when one speaks into the microphone, the voice carries physical and relational information. The sound of a voice indicates the presence of a body. Through listening, participants tune into surrounding bodies and entities that constitute this environment, expanding the relational field beyond the conventional triad of artwork, performer and audience.

Madena won the grand prize that year. Although, it was not a smooth decision. al-Noshkaty, who was on the committee that year, speaks to a deep divergence between committee members, sustaining the attitude and tensions of the arts education faculties towards experimental arts practices mentioned previously (2025). Mostafa continues to showcase *Madena* at many points throughout his career. The most recent representation was in Japan in 2024 as a staged performance. The audio visual performance is divided into three acts, each act revisiting different elements of the initial installation and the soundtracks of the 50 speakers merged into only four channels. In his other works, Mostafa continues to work with sound and sonic investigations to reveal invisible information and observations about everyday life. Sound's potential to reveal the invisible applies to its specific spatial context as well. Exhibiting sound artworks in the gallery space deals with a wealth of assumptions and challenges presented by the institutional art world. Sound's presence in the gallery puts these assumptions to the test, once again, making the invisible visible. A notion that continues to reappear in future sonic works, as I will further discuss through Mostafa's *Sound Cells: Fridays* .

Chapter Three - Sacred Sounds: Understanding Listening in Islamic Tradition

Before further discussion of specific sound artworks from Egypt, it is essential to identify and discuss alternative ways in which sound and listening operate in this context. The following section aims to recount a localised insight to some sensitives that inform sound and listening in the traditional Egyptian, and specifically in the modern Islamic context. This perspective is significant in counteracting notions of perception and listening that are often dominated by normative western conceptions that do not account for the theoretical, historical and socio-political that inform sensory experience in a non-Western culture. Egyptian society was and remains informed by religious discourse on many aspects of contemporary life including music, sound and sonic perception. This discussion aims to uncover the context in which sound art is developed and perceived, as well as establishing a more grounded social and cultural setting. This section aims to illustrate the centrality of listening in Islamic tradition as a spiritual practice and a cultural value and its contemporary in Egyptian society. While these ideas resonate in many parts of contemporary Egyptian life, regardless of individual religious affiliations, the intention here is not to present it as a dominant or universally representative. Rather, this approach offers an alternative framework for understanding the function and meaning of sound. A perspective that takes a step back from Eurocentric discourse and invites a more inclusive engagement with sound and art.

Embodied Listening: The Ear, Mind and Spirit

In the pre-modern Islamic world, sonic apprehension was regarded the same symbolic status as the visual image in modern epistemologies. In many ways, understanding sound and listening in the Islamic tradition challenges the hierarchy of senses established by Western modalities which places sight as the most reliable way of knowing. In the 9th century, the

philosopher al-Kindi[14] believed that (specifically in regards to music), hearing was more reliable than seeing because of its inclination to recognize rhythm and melody compared with the flawed judgement of distance, motion and form (Wright, 2004 as cited in Shaw, 2019). During the Islamic era, intellectual discourse deeply addressed music, musicality and poetry and their capacity for emotive and spiritual influence towards good or evil. It is argued that sound, whether it manifests through the spoken word or music, calls upon a mode of listening that occurs within the ear and heart simultaneously. This notion challenges western epistemologies on several levels. First, it breaks the Cartesian divide of the mind and body, and relies on the interconnectedness of all the human faculties, including the soul to achieve effective perception. Second, it deviates from the western understanding of aesthetic perception and analysis that requires the distanced, disenchanted and objective viewer. In fact, it privileges the implied subjectivity of perception, which is also what grants sound legitimacy and significance. Finally, it is useful to understand that artistic expression in the Islamic world does not rely on representationalism as the European tradition does.The purpose of expression, whether visual or sonic, is to convey meaning, rather than represent figures or objects.

Deriving meaning in the Islamic tradition, often relies on an existing and somewhat shared understanding of the divine. In Islamic religion and philosophy, there is a common understanding of Allah[15] as a divine, unattainable, and unimaginable being. Yet, it is possible to feel divine presence and to work towards acquiring this feeling through meditation, invocation, prayer and other forms of remembrance. However, the journey itself is an individual and intimate experience. To illustrate how this notion materialises in artistic expression, it is useful to think of the use on Islamic geometric patterns inside mosques and religious monuments. This form of expression is utilized as a means to transmit the *sense* of infinity that defines divine presence. While these patterns can go on forever, they are limited by the physical capacity of the space. However, God is not bound by any form of physicality. Alluding to this *sense* of infinity is enough to instill the meaning of the divine within its receiver, and it becomes the responsibility of the viewer to interpret this meaning within their personal spiritual practice. Another shared belief is that it is through the divine, all manifestations of life are created and connected. In that

[14] Abu Yusuf al-Kindi (approx. 801-866 AD) was a prominent philosopher and mathematician known as the "philosopher of the Arabs". He laid the grounds for many Islamic philosophers after him who theorised the emotional and cosmological characteristics of music. (Shaw, 2019)
[15] The name for God in Islamic belief.

sense, there is no different way of perceiving art as opposed to perceiving life, since it is all created through divine intervention. This helps us understand how the concept of perception is not specific to the perception of art, but can be applied to all aspects of life. Al-Farabi[16] was an Islamic philosopher who wrote extensively on sound and music, in his writing on music theory, he identifies it as a study of a "musical being". He proceeds by explaining that when analysing this "musical being", the theoretician should not be concerned with whether this being comes from nature or art (al-Farabi and d'Erlanger, 1930 as cited in Shaw, 2019 pp.60). This philosophy instills a sense of equality and unity amongst all sounds, discerning no clear distinction between whether a sound is natural or man-made (cultural).

Al-Farabi believed that sound in these forms possesses mimetic qualities, in the sense that it could "provide the soul with imaginings (*takhayulat)*, deposits within the soul visualisations (*tasawuarat)* of things and inscribes the soul with matter it imitates" (al-Farabi and d'Erlanger 1930 as cited in Shaw 2019 pp.59). Part of this process occurs through the function of the word, due the value of the Quran as well as social significance of poetry at the time[17]. The other part is due to the perception of sound itself and the emotive influence of music. Musical mimesis in al-Farabi's articulation, does not rely on the same semiotic inseparability between the signal and the signified described in modern linguistics. Rather it relies on the transformative power of sound through the simultaneous sensorial and spiritual recognition that translates its intended meaning (Shaw, 2019). The physical act of listening was believed to be a transformative process, occurring between the mind, the soul and the body. This transformation allows the listener to envision what is described through sound and poetry, so hearing is also seeing. However, this form of vision should not be equated with representation. The purpose of music, or sound is not to imitate or represent an object, but to transfer its meaning to the heart of the listener. This paradigm challenges the Cartesian mind-body dualism, in the sense that the function of the mind is not separate from the bodily senses. In fact, it is essential for all sensory agencies to be connected in order for this transformation to take place.

---

[16] Latinized as Alpharabius, he authored *Kitab al-Musiqi al-Kabir* (Grand Book of Music) through which he discusses the therapeutic effects of music on the soul (Porter, 2000 as cited in Shaw, 2019)

[17] In relation to music, poetry was dealt with a higher social regard than music. This was not necessarily a result of Islamic authority because it was also prevalent before the Islamic conquest. In pre-Islamic Arabia, poetry was linked to ideals of honor and chivalry while music was seen as a mere pastime. It was also disapproved of due to its association with the cosmopolitan influence of the Islamic conquest. (Nelson, 1985)

This sensorial intertwinedness occurs on both the external and internal levels. Meaning that sound doesn't have to come from outside the body in order to undergo this transformation of the heart and soul. But it can also manifest through one's own oral/vocal practice. *Sama'* is a term commonly used in Islamic philosophy, which directly translates to audition, meaning the power of hearing. However, in Islamic practices it can also refer to vocal recitations of the Quran. As such, this term becomes useful in identifying the entwined nature of sounding and listening. Since the ear is connected to the soul and the heart, listening connects the ear to the rest of the physical body, which can collectively induce a state of spiritual ecstasy (al-Ghazzali, 1991 as cited in Shannon, 2004). This process is most clearly demonstrated through the Islamic practice of *dhikr*. *Dhikr* is also a Sufi[18] ritual which involves the invocation of God through prayer, incantation of sacred texts, and songs (Shannon, 2004). In many cases, this practice creates a repetitive and rhythmic pattern of chanting which intrinsically invites the participation of the rest of the body. Forms of movement could be swinging back and forth, side to side, or twirling in a circular motion. When this practice is performed in a group, it is referred to as a *hadra*[19]. *Dhikr* takes on different forms depending on the geographical and historical contexts. Yet, in all cases, the aim of this practice is the remembrance of God and to bring the practitioner to a state of spiritual ecstasy which can build up to the experience of unity with the divine. In Islamic thought, this spiritual transformation is the culmination of the transformative capacity of sound. Shaw adequately describes this concept:

> Audition imprints divine ecstasy within the Sufi practitioner's soul and becomes manifest in ritual movement of the body. In contrast to the European tradition, manifesting Man in divine form through the externalized visual image, the Sufi tradition used music to imprint an internalized image of the divine with the recognizing soul." (Shaw, 2019 pp.76)

The fifth epistle by the Brethren of Purity[20] describes sound or music as a language that is "directly spiritual because its expression removes the use of matter." The conception of sound as a metaphysical space allows it to become a vehicle for divine connection. This mode of thinking

---

[18] Sufism is the mystical branch of Islamic thought and practice, which is guided by the goal of finding divine love through personal experience of God.
[19] *Hadra* literally translates to presence, denoting the presence of God through collective invocation.
[20] The Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwan al-Safa*) were a semi-secret, anonymous society Semi-secret, anonymous society in Basra, Iraq during the 9th or 10th century. They wrote fifty two epistles on science and philosophy. Their fifth epistle was dedicated to exploring music and cosmology. (Shaw, 2019)

of sound as a spiritual carrier can help articulate the modes of listening which permeate through Islamic thought and practice.

Baraka in the Modern World

In the modern world and specifically in the contemporary Egyptian context, sound and listening continue to carry the symbolic power of spiritual influence. However, against a different socio-political backdrop, this influence is perceived as a form of brainwashing towards extremist Islamic ideologies and practice. With the rise of accessibility and commercial use of sound recording technologies, religious sermons became widely disseminated amongst Egyptian society, reaching both Islamic fundamentalists and moderate Muslim practitioners. As a result, it rapidly occupied the public sonic space and could be heard in markets, bakeries, barbershops, taxi cars and more. The rapid and wide expansion of this practice caused controversy amongst members of society, as some observers began to associate it with militant indoctrination. Recorded Islamic sermons is not a novel exhibition of sonic religious practices in public space, the *athan*[21], recordings of Quranic recitations and sermons before Friday prayers were common and socially accepted aspects of everyday life in Egypt and many Muslim countries in the Arab world and beyond. Nonetheless, this form of religiosity was not as well-perceived. Hirschkind argues that due to the modernist hierarchical organization of the senses which allows sound to be perceived as secondary to sight, it becomes the language of the lower, less educated classes and those who are easily morally swayed. As such, the phenomena fell into the categorisation of fundamentalist propaganda. While this argument shows an apparent flaw in this social conception, I also add that the acknowledged centrality of listening in Islamic religious practice allows anonymous preachings under the pretense of Islamic sermons to be seen as a threat.

Hirschkind (2006) proceeds to argue against this association and claims that it denies the complexity of the "lifeworld" created through this medium. He proclaims that this media gains the capacity to transform the contemporary Egyptian soundscape and reconfigure urban space through a mode of "ethical listening". This mode of listening operates by capitalising on the transformation offered by sound to induce a religious sensibility to guide Muslims through everyday ethical and social dilemmas. This is also the aim of recording and disseminating these sermons, the goal is to appeal to the "sensitive heart" (Hirschkind, 2006) of the Muslim believer.

[21] The vocal call to prayer that occurs five times a day, everyday.

This practice builds on the belief that modern everyday life comes with distractions and spiritual challenges and the means to overcome these challenges is to provide the soul with spiritual and ethical nourishment. This form of sustenance translates into the ways in which the listener behaves on a social and personal level. While the accuracy of this transformation can not be confirmed or denied, and is not the topic of this discussion, it is interesting to note how the city's sonic space allows for this transaction and how sound becomes the mode of transformation. In this case, sound is granted the capacity to also motivate social change through spiritual change. Moreover, it characterises a form of embodiment that is activated beyond only the moment of active listening. It is a mode of listening that enriches the way for listening to the city, to each other, to life and to art.

While the sonic content of these Islamic sermons carries virtue, it is the context in which they are disseminated that detracts from and challenges its virtuosity. This is based on a belief that everyday life is filled with profanities unless it is somehow blessed (Von Denffer, 1976). To illustrate how this model operates, it is essential to explain the concept of *baraka*. *Baraka* is understood as the outflow of blessing that originates from the divine and manifests in worldly life. *Baraka* is a power of blessing that has the ability to imprint this blessed state and influence sanctity on what it comes in contact with. For example the Quran is a sacred text that holds *baraka*, therefore oral recitations of the Quran in certain spaces can enhance its sanctity. Since Islamic sermons often include recitations of the Quran, and often reference sayings of prophets and saints (figures that also possess *baraka*), they are also seen as a mode of transferring this power. This understanding of *baraka* that protrudes from and through sonic expression illustrates how sound functions as a spiritual medium. Or at least, a medium that has spiritual potential. This understanding of the sonic space as a space that is susceptible to this form of manipulation alludes to a unique tension between sanctity and profanity. As such, it can not be defined as one or the other, but rather exists in the liminality of both.

This framework allows for a deeper understanding of the Egyptian soundscape as a malleable space that is shaped and experienced both collectively and individually. Ziad Fahmy (2020) examines several elements that constitute the urban Egyptian soundscape. Through this study, he explores several sonic elements, tracing their histories, acquired meanings and their enduring roles in shaping public space and activities. While his work provides valuable insight into the development and significance of these elements, not much attention is given to how

these sounds are heard, what kind of sonic hierarchies they establish or how they operate in relation to each other.

There is a clear power interplay evident in the sonic scape of Egypt, often guided by conceptions of sanctity. For example, when the call to prayer resounds five times a day, it reorganizes the local sonic environment. Music is expected to stop, voices lower, and other sounds recede in recognition of its presence and *baraka*. The call to prayer functions as a sonic authority that commands attention and temporally overrides other sonic elements. This dynamic invites further reflection on the effects and influences of this mode of perception and brings into question what other forces might similarly negotiate or contest the sonic field in the same way, politically, socially or personally.

This culturally specific mode of listening, grounded in Islamic epistemologies, challenges the modernist separation between art and life, and views them instead as extensions of one another. Bridging this modernist gap, Islamic epistemologies have the capacity to challenge the assumptions of the gallery space on multiple fronts. First, by not privileging one sense over the other, therefore diminishing the visual dominance of the gallery space. Second, it has the capacity to call on the transformative potential of sound in their effective, resistant or political intentions in contemporary artworks. In view of this, it becomes essential to consider the perceptual modes active within contemporary Egyptian culture, which allows the sonic space to become a site of subjective, collective, and spiritual transformation. Essentially opening up more possibilities for understanding sound in an art context.

Chapter Four - Critical Frequencies: Magdi Mostafa and Sonic Politics

Moving on from the turning point when sound art practices emerged as part of a broader movement of rebellion and resistance in the early 21st century, as it grappled with Egyptian art traditions and institutional legacies. Sound art continues to find its critiques amongst the traditional art world. Despite its marginal positioning, it has attracted a growing audience and numerous practitioners, partly due to its perceived novelty and potential for experimentation. However, I also argue that sound's traction lies in the wealth and plurality of entry points offered by the urban Cairene soundscape, which invites historical, social, and political inquiry and supports modes of critical reflection based on everyday lived experience.

This form of sonic criticality is central to Magdi Mostafa's art practice and continues to inform his work. In this chapter, I focus on his installation titled *Sound Cells: Fridays* (2010), which offers a sonic investigation into the sounds that shape the experience of a typical Friday in Egypt. Through his use of noise, everyday machines, and references to Islamic tradition, Mostafa presents a culturally grounded critique that questions the function of sound in everyday life while challenging the position of sound within the art gallery. The work leverages the paradoxical duality manifested in showcasing Cairene everyday life while being situated in a gallery space, which is often perceived as detached from this context. In doing so, sound and noise acquire critical functions while dealing with the tensions between cultural specificity and the presumed neutrality of the white cube, particularly considering the Western origins of this space and its presence in a non-Western context. Mostafa's use of everyday objects and sounds offers an effective approach in resolving and negotiating these tensions.

Moreover, in this work, sound itself becomes a point of reflection. By drawing on the role of sound within Islamic culture, it is important to consider a culturally specific epistemology as an alternative to western ocularcentric paradigms. A way of knowing and listening which

privileges listening as a valid immersive mode of knowing and furthermore, does not require a physical or visible source. As such, the visual dominance traditionally associated with the gallery or white cube becomes secondary, if not irrelevant.

Case Study: *Sound Cells: Fridays* (2010) - Rituals and Rhythms

From sewing machines to washing machines, domestic appliances reappear in Magdi Mostafa's sound works. In 2010, he incorporated a group of washing machines in his sound installation *Sound Cells: Fridays.* This piece was first presented at the Cairo Youth Salon that year, where it received an award. It was also shown at the 11th Sharjah Biennale in 2013. *Sound Cells: Fridays* (2010) is the second edition in Mostafa's series, *Sound Cells*. Following the first, *Sound Cells: analog frequencies (*2009) and preceding *Sound Cells: Element of the Unexpected* (2012). Mostafa has continued to showcase different versions of this work at numerous venues regionally and internationally. For example, *Wisdom Tower* (2015) is a reinterpretation of *Sound Cells: Fridays* (2010) and was displayed at the Echoes and Reverberations exhibition held at the Hayward Gallery Project Space in London in 2015 (Meer, 2015).

To date, there are 8 projects part of the *Sound Cells* series (realpharoh, 2025).Most of the works take on a critical lens in exploring certain elements of time and space Cairo's everyday life. Magdi uses a mix of field recordings and live sound of everyday objects in many editions of this series. For *Sound Cells: Fridays* (2010), Mostafa collected 12 old and unwanted washing machines from households around the city and equipped them with arduino boards. The code prompts the machines to operate, accelerate, and move as if they are alive. This effect is placed in conversation with a recorded Islamic sermon, moralising gender roles for the ideal Islamic household. In Egypt and most countries in the Muslim world, Friday is the first day of the weekend, it is a day for worship as well as household chores. It is common for men to attend the Friday prayer at a local mosque, where usually a sermon is held by a local sheikh. Each week, the sermon tackles a different social issue offering religious advice on the matter and they can be heard inside and outside of the mosque. The recording selected by Mostafa for the installation addresses the domestic role of the women, describing the female body as an "empty vessel for procreation". Mostafa visualises this through the empty spinning old-fashioned washing machines which are mic-ed and amplified.

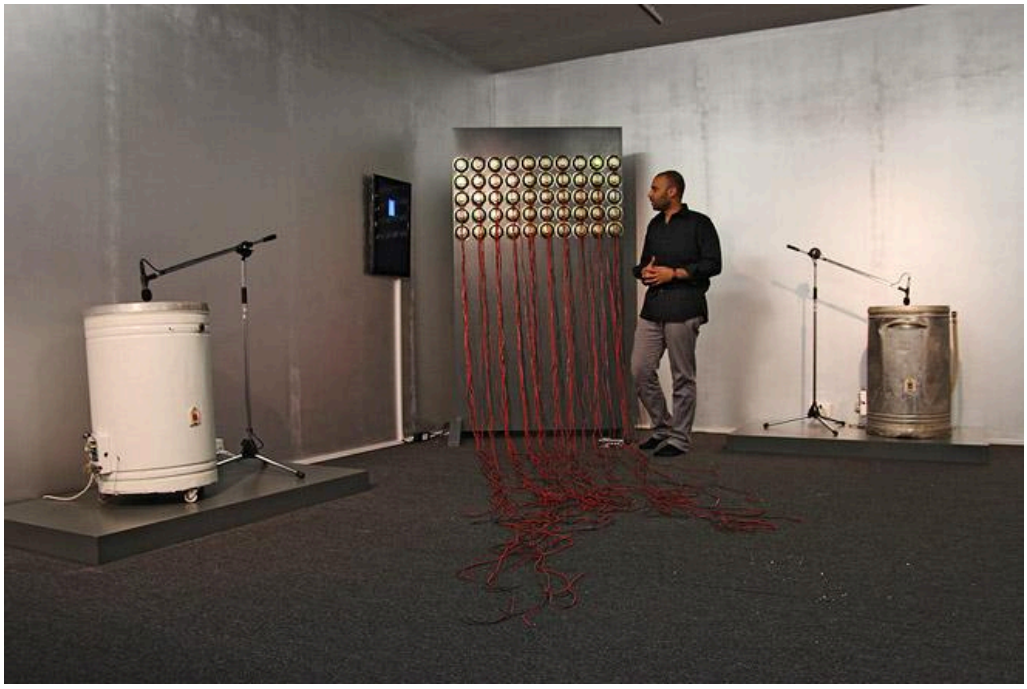

Photo documentation of *Sound Cells: Fridays* (2010) exhibited at Sharjah Biennale (Haupt & Binder, 2013)

This work in particular, presents a unique bricolage of everyday objects and provides a fruitful ground for reinterpretations of Egyptian contemporary culture. In this section, I aim to unravel the critical functions of this artwork through Rancière's scheme for critical art, more specifically his framework for the play and the mystery.

The muffled recording is played alongside the on-site rumblings of empty washing machines.Jacques Rancière's writing on critical art rethinks the relationship between aesthetics and politics, and ultimately art's capacity to be critical. He believes that critical art is not defined by its power to raise awareness or mobilise action, but through its ability to offer new modes of interpretation. Rancière uses the term "distribution of the sensible" to explain how reality is shaped by systems of power, which discern aspects of social life as well as the relationships between objects and signs (2009). The "distribution of the sensible" not only dictates one's experience of reality, but what version of reality is even comprehensible. Through this framework, critical art operates by creating new ways of interpretation, and fostering new relationships between objects and their possible meanings. Aesthetic sensory experience has the potential to influence and disrupt the "distribution of the sensible" and when art is entangled in this equation, it becomes critical and inherently political, making aesthetics and politics interconnected. Rancière proposes that contemporary art can follow one or more of the following schemes to create a critical situation: the play, the inventory, the encounter/invitation and the

mystery. Applying Rancière's framework to sound art offers a discussion of sound's critical potential without overemphasizing its position as sensory phenomena, and allows for sound to be viewed as a "vehicle for aesthetic experience and political activation" (Mullane, 2010, p.2).

According to Rancière, critical art should "negotiate the tension which pushes art towards life as well as that which sets aesthetic sensoriality apart from other forms of sensory experience" (2009, p.46). This understanding positions the incorporation of everyday objects (and in our case, sounds) within art as a central component of its critical function. By doing that, critical art reorients the aesthetic experience beyond the traditional realm of art and simultaneously expands the attention typically given to art towards life as well. The sonic experience in *Sound Cells: Fridays* (Mostafa, 2010), achieves this through isolating two distinct sounds from the urban soundscape, placing them in an intimate and amplified conversation. This dialogue echoes Rancière's scheme of "mystery", which connects elements that instinctively resist narrative and legibility. The work's dialogue between a seemingly typical Friday sermon and empty washing machines confronts listeners with an unfamiliar visual and sonic encounter of two elements of a familiar Cairene cacophony. The isolation itself leads us to question the casual relationship between both sounds (Rancière, 2009), and consequently, how the proximity to the experience of one or the other on a Friday in Egypt is often determined by gender.

Building on that, a closer listen to the content of the continuously looping sermon reveals religious and social decrees that are actively and consciously shaping these roles. Throughout the sermon, women are likened to empty vessels made for procreation, an image supported by the sound of empty vessels in the exhibition space. This parallel prompts a critical reflection on the sermons' tone and attitude which dominates much of the local soundscape and is often accepted as righteous and noble due to its religious foundation and seldom challenged as occupying presence in the public sonic space.

The second aspect of this work which aids in its criticality is the play, according to Rancière, which is characterised by elements of humour, juxtaposition and potential absurdity. The critical power of humour is in its capacity to build on existing normalities and extend them to the point in which they reveal new meanings behind the structures that uphold them. The noise of a washing machine which typically sits in the undesirable background of the soundscape is brought to the forefront, and the juxtaposition is magnified through the use of multiple empty washing machines and the placement of microphones to amplify the noise. In Islamic culture, it

is customary to lower music and voices during the call to prayer, quran recitation or any other form of religious dictation. The sound of the washing machine protruding alongside the sermon points to how the sounds of machinery are usually exempted from this standard. Furthermore, the amplification of the machine poses a new dynamic that challenges an existing hierarchy of sounds based on their sanctity. The juxtapositional function is extended to the placement of 50 small speakers emitting the sermon inwards facing the wall, instead of outwards towards listeners. Which was initially conducted to achieve a muffled electronic sound as is heard in and around the mosques. However, as audiences engage in a listening experience, the visual of inverted speakers positions them as unintended listeners, but mere observers.

Sound Cells: Fridays' (Mostafa, 2010) ironic representation of sounds generates a new mode of listening to the sound of sermons, washing machines and the sonic experience of everyday life in Egypt. It is not just a representation of the sound of Fridays, but an opening onto the social structures shaping the sonic environment, and therefore how sounds surrounding us can reveal the underlying powers that shape those surroundings.

In the case of sound art, this critique extends comfortably to our modes of listening, through which we accept and practice certain norms through the act of listening itself. In Egyptian culture, listening is already regarded as conscious and intentional practice embedded in religious beliefs (see section on listening in Islamic culture). However, when sound art engages with this form of sonicity, it foregrounds and interrogates this process. Prompting us to reflect on the circumstances and forces often taken for granted. This artistic utilisation of sound encourages a deeper reflection on the perception of sound not merely as a feature of our local environments or soundmarks, but as a carrier of meaning and information and an invisible indicator of our social, cultural and political dynamics.

The Position of Sound, Noise and The White Cube

Under varying circumstances, noise in the gallery space takes on a different format and concurrently, a different critical role. For example, the sound of noise presented in *Sound Cells: Fridays* (Mostafa, 2010) strikes an interesting comparison between this installation and Hassan Khan's performance in over ten years prior. The definition, understanding and cultural position of noise has shifted over time, and in the modern era, can be traced back to the late 18th century.

Following the Industrial Revolution and the widespread introduction of machinery into the urban sonic environment, scholars and researchers began investigating the impact of noise on the human body. This led to the earliest attempts to regulate and control noise levels in order to minimize disruption to the productive rhythms of daily life. Concurrently, noise began to acquire its negative modern associations with disruptions and undesirability. It was no longer understood as simply a type of sound, but a particular orientation towards sound often depending on its sonic backdrop. In relation to its mechanised or technological source, noise is framed as excess, the unwanted sonic byproduct of the machine. Its undesirability is not tied to a particular acoustic quality, but its perceived interference with efficiency or productivity. This orientation is also linked to the integration of machinery and technology in everyday life, as their sonic outputs increasingly occupy and shape the modern soundscape. With the ongoing technological advancement and increasing entanglement of media and information systems in our daily life, the presence and perception of noise becomes more complex.

In their theory of communication, Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver (1949) define noise as anything disrupting the successful transmission of a signal or message. In media studies, it can also be framed as technological failure which disrupts the movement of information from the sender to the receiver, causing a disruption or glitch. Through a more critical lens, noise can be seen as tangible evidence of a machine's functioning, a disruption that reveals the otherwise seamless processes at work. In this sense, noise invites us to question the invisible mechanisms generating such mediated experiences. Noise offers a site of reflection, prompting us to reconsider our assumptions about communication, information systems and power. To give a specific and local example, Laura Marks (2014) talks about glitch as noise. She argues that glitch as a form of visual noise in the Arab world not only speaks to the particular technological failure that occurs due sudden voltage change in the transmission circuit. Glitches reveal the capacity of the local political, social and information systems in place, institutionalised or other, that lead to this form of media output and communication. As such, the perception of glitch takes on a new form, and reveals a new aesthetic particular to the Arab world and the larger global south.

Back to its sonic form, noise as a technological phenomena takes on a different role once it is placed in the gallery space. This transition builds upon the complex presence of sound in environments traditionally designed for visual art. The museum, gallery space, or the white cube

as cultural institutions carry historical specificity and their Western cultural context. Adequately described in Simon Shiekh's interpretation of Brian O'Doherty (1976), where he explains that

> [...] the gallery space is not a neutral container, but a historical construct. Furthermore, it is an aesthetic object in and of itself. The ideal form of the white cube that modernism developed for the gallery space is inseparable from the artworks exhibited inside it. Indeed, the white cube not only conditions, but also overpowers the artworks themselves in its shift from placing content within a context to making the context itself the content. However, this emergence of context is enabled primarily through its attempted disappearance. The white cube is conceived as a place free of context, where time and social space are thought to be excluded from the experience of artworks. It is only through the apparent neutrality of appearing outside of daily life and politics that the works within the white cube can appear to be self-contained – only by being freed from historical time can they attain their aura of timelessness. (Sheikh, 2009)

Sound's entrance into the gallery space shuffles the standard structure of reception and engagement with art. As a physical and temporal medium, sound can be shaped by the listener, it can move with the audience according to the spatial context. Unlike a painting or a sculpture, sound is porous in the sense that it overflows onto its surroundings and interacts dynamically with the space and architecture.

Voegelin (2010) further explores the position of aurality in contrast to visuality. She frames visuality as a pursuit of objective, made possible by the perceived distance and physical gap between the subject and the object. Contrastingly, with sound, this gap does not exist, and therefore hearing is immersive, immediate and inherently contextual, offering a more subjective mode of understanding. While the visual object appears stable and unchanging, the auditory unfolds over time and is therefore more dynamic and contingent. This perspective, grounded in the distinction between sound and sight and emphasis on their epistemological differences, may often overlook the ways in which sound and sight are entangled in mediated and lived experiences, rather than neatly separated.

Listening to sound art reveals the relationship between a sound and a space, and when presented in the gallery, it emphasises what Hegarty (2007, p.177) refers to as the "relational aspect of sound art [...] in its other relation to the visual arts and its homes, in the relation between a here and a there." While such concepts often form the conceptual background for curatorial approaches to sound art, Holmboe (2020) shows that the overreliance on sound's phenomenological qualities can lead to "essentialisms implied by a focus on sound's medium

specificity" and lacks the criticality of contemporary art. A tendency that aligns with what Jonathan Sterne describes as the "audiovisual litany", a mode of thinking that idealizes hearing over sight and reinforces binary comparisons rather than questioning them.

Furthermore, presenting sound in the gallery simultaneously shapes the engagement with sound as an art form. When sound replaces visual art, it is often expected to conform to the same interpretive frameworks prescribed by the white cube. This results in what Holmboe (2020) describes as an "ideological division between sound and sociality", parallel to the "ideology of the white cube." Such an ideological disjunction between sound and life limits the relational potential of sound art, confining it to the histories of sound and of the exhibition space itself. If, as Hegarty (2007, p.170) states, "sound in the gallery is noise," then noise capitalises on this dynamic by presenting the "negative" and "unwanted" aspects of sound and further destabilising the norms of the gallery environment. In that way, noise becomes a means of institutional critique, drawing attention to the assumptions embedded with the politics of listening and display. However, as Mullane (2010) suggests, the potential of sound and noise should not be reduced solely to this mode of criticality. Instead, its sonic force can inspire other avenues of critical engagement, allowing new forms of aesthetic and political thought that extend beyond the critique of the gallery's institutional boundaries.

The mechanical noise produced by the washing machines in *Sound Cells: Fridays* (Mostafa, 2010) presents a compelling dynamic between sound, noise and the conventionally visual gallery space. The installation expands the relational capacity of sound beyond its dialogue with visual art and the art institution by incorporating everyday objects and sounds. Here, noise is not abstracted or aestheticized, but remains attached to its source, maintaining a visual and situational presence. The convergence of sound and source stimulates a shift in focus, from asking why noise is present in the gallery, to questioning why a noisy object occupies the gallery space. Additionally, the washing machines are connected to a system that activates and synchronises their noise to other sonic elements of the installation.This positions noise as an active participant in a conversation rather than an invisible force in the background. This encounter exposes the mechanisms by which certain sounds are received as "noise" while others are not, revealing how our normalised modes of listening presuppose and reinforce these distinctions.

This is not to suggest that use of noise in this context lacks a critical stance toward the gallery space. As noted earlier, the intricacies of white cube and the position of sound art within it also manifest in this sound art installation. However, the adoption of Western forms of exhibiting art and culture in a non-Western setting extends the critique beyond the gallery institution and draws attention to the broader influence of colonial power structures on non-Western cultures. Therefore, the presence of noise in that context not only critiques the norms of the art institution, but also importation of these norms from elsewhere.

Moreover, the meaning of noise somehow emerges from a culmination of subjectivities, including its relationship to silence. As such, the understanding of noise as a positive or negative feature is culturally embedded and can vary depending on the context. When presented in the gallery, these norms are not taken into account, even (or especially) if there is an attempt to represent them. This contributes to the perception of the gallery space as something outside of, or detached from culture. In turn, this perception presents a challenge for the interconnectedness of aesthetics and politics proposed by Rancière and reinforces the boundaries between institutionalised Art and life.

Walter Benjamin (2008) argues that Western art has shifted away from having a sacred value towards gaining exhibition value. Yet, paradoxically, spaces such as the art gallery or the museum continue to demand a form of engagement with art that positions it as timeless and transcendent. The spatial characteristics of the white cube and the exhibition hall outline this form of experience, by closing it off from the outside world, sealing the windows, painting the walls white, in order to make the art appear "untouched by time and vicissitudes" (O'Doherty, 1976, p. 15). Nonetheless, in a cultural context where sanctity continues to play a central role in shaping everyday life, this disparity feels misplaced. It creates a detachment between the gallery space and everyday existence and supposes that art should be viewed apart from life, not as a part of it. I believe that Mostafa addresses and attempts to resolve this attention by re-rooting art in the everyday and activating what Kim-Cohen (2009) refers to as "non-cochlear" sound art.

Non-Cochlear Approaches to Sound Art

Kim-Cohen offers a critique of modern sonic arts based on the disconnect between critical discourses in contemporary art and those in sound arts. Specifically referring to the conceptualisations of sound art which tend to overemphasise the phenomenological experience

of sound such as its materiality, presence and immersive qualities, at the expense of its conceptual capacity to move through and in between categories and disciplines. His proposal for "non-cochlear sound art" includes a turn away from the ear and the inclusion of other forms of sensory, aesthetic and intellectual experiences. This approach signifies a movement "against sound's sound-confidence–the confidence in the constitution of the sonic self"(Kim-Cohen, 2009, p.xx), he proposes a shift away from understanding sound as sound, along with its acoustic properties. Further illustrated by van Eyk (2018, p. 123), he says to think of the non-cochlear is to:

> "start from a position that is acutely aware yet functioning beyond concern for the materialist conditions of sound-to-space or sound-to-sound to arrive at broadly yet rigorously contextualized zone in which sound is art and art is sound. It is to shift privilege away from any one sense, any one material, or any one medium to open both conceptual and content channels to resonate on many wavelengths, to amplify an experience of what is truly at stake…"

Even though sonic arts often seek to challenge and counteract the gallery's visual bias by presenting alternative ways of sensing, knowing and connecting, this visual dominance remains stubbornly pervasive. The intrinsic visual logic of the gallery continues to shape how sound is received, even in works that attempt to resist it. However, by engaging "both the non-cochlear and the cochlear, and the constituting trace of each in the other" (Kim-Cohen, 2009, p. xxi), sound art can confront this bias not through total rejection but through a balanced encounter. I see this approach as avoiding the delusion of a pure escape from visuality, instead embracing the complexity of sensory overlap, which allows sound to act critically and confront the structures that shape its reception.

The determination to perceive sound on its own terms, can be traced back to Pierre Schaeffer's model for *acousmatic listening,* which posits that once a sound is recorded, it is inherently separated from its source and becomes its own entity. This concept has dictated many curatorial and artistic endeavours in sound art, many of which aim to explore and understand sound in isolation (Kane, 2014). Schaeffer's notion of the *objet sonore* (sound object) is embedded in this investigation, and continues to manifest in practices dedicated to creating the optimal for sound recording and focused listening. This is not to diminish the value of this form of sonic abstraction in bridging interdisciplinary, communal and empathetic modes of listening. However, the return of sound to its source can maintain this standard while attending to the

cultural contexts of sonic reception. In this regard, Kim-Cohen's notion of a "non-cochlear sound art" responds to the demands, conventions and forms not restricted to the realm of the sonic, while also maintaining a healthy skepticism toward the notion of sound-in-itself (2009).

Sound Cells: Fridays (Mostafa, 2010) relies on the connection between the sound and its source, because the point of criticism applies not to the sound, but to our own listening. Therefore, to understand sound and its functions whether mechanised, pre-recorded, live or other is an essential variety to shape the hierarchical listening structure dictated by Egyptian social and cultural beliefs, and concurrently, entry points to reflect on it. Drawing on Seggerman's framework for analysing modern Egyptian art through the definitions of both "modern" and "Islamic". Seggerman poses the question, "what meaning is added when we refer to this work as Islamic?" (2019, p.22), this becomes useful in pointing to a critical reflection on the position of listeners embedded in a dense moral sonicity. In such a context, sound as a spiritual space and medium can be taken for granted. Therefore, to reconsider that assumption it becomes crucial to foreground that cultural specificity of listening.

This also presents the opportunity to interpret the use of sound as a strategic engagement with the presumed sanctity of the sonic space discussed in the previous chapter. In this work, sound itself becomes an art object, but particularly because of its local epistemological assumptions. Sound's association with spirituality and transcendence lends it an epistemological weight that is assumed to foster active intellectual and emotional engagement. A mode of understanding that functions independently of a physical or visible source, if not relies on its visual absence. Given this cultural context which grants sound a privileged epistemological position, it provides an established and legitimate capacity to transform thinking and feeling. While simultaneously critiquing the structures and assumptions that grant sound this sensorial authority.

Curatorial Notes

Starting with Rancière's framework for critical art, Mostafa's sonic investigation into the Egyptian soundscape reveals the dynamic forces that shape everyday life and the entanglement of politics, religion and gender role within that ensemble. The religious undertones present in the artwork open up space for interrogating how Islamic ways of knowing and listening can enhance the artwork's criticality by extending its critique to modes of listening in modern urban Cairo.

Concurrently, the artwork reveals and interrogates the sonicscape of contemporary Cairo as a political space, one that is sustained and mediated by these acts of listening.

Furthermore, histories of the museum (and the gallery space and the white cube being off-shoots of that format of cultural engagement) are deeply tied to founding myths of western civilisation and move alongside formulations of the West's self-understanding (Sternfeld, 2016). In this light, the placement of artworks in institutional spaces outside of the West can risk hindering its critical and political relevance. While the inclusion of sound into the visually dominated art gallery already challenges some institutional conventions, in non-Western contexts, it introduces a deeper set of tensions. It poses a multifaceted disruption in the artistic and sonic expectations and highlights contradictions in the conceptions of art as a part and separate from life. In this concoction, I see Mostafa's placement of everyday sounding objects supports the reintegration of art into life and life into art and therefore, its ability to remain critically relevant.

The sound of Islamic sermons has been a recurring site of social contestation, particularly following a state-issued decree aimed at unifying all sermons across the country to follow a standardized topic or script. Reflecting a broader effort to regulate independent voices. Sonic practices traditionally intended to allow personal and spiritual reflection have thus become entangled with political agendas and mechanisms of control. Kinda Hassan builds on this idea with a focus on the call to prayer (*adhan*) through her work, *better than Morpheus' arms* (Hassan, 2023). This soundwork consists of field-recordings made during the early hours of the morning in Fayoum, a small agricultural town outside of Cairo. Hassan captures the ambient sounds of birds and desert wind before they are overpowered by the call to prayer, amplified through multiple speakers. As the amplified call crescendos, other elements of the soundscape struggle to situate themselves. Even after the *adhan* concludes, these natural sounds face difficulty in reestablishing their presence and place within the soundscape. This framing places such authoritative sonic expressions within broader social and ecological discussions concerning the understanding and impact of noise pollution. Rana Sadik (Mafak MinRASY, 2025) draws comparison between Mostafa's work and Lawrence Abu Hamdan's *All The Hearing* (2014), in which Abu Hamdan treats the sermon as noise. This work interrogates the power dynamics governing what is classified as noise and who holds the authority to regulate it. For this work, Abu Hamdan convinces two *imams* to deviate from the state-issued sermon topic of that week, to

address the concept of noise pollution. Ironically, the sermon, amplified and projected through megaphones in and around the mosque could be perceived as noise in itself.

From a curatorial perspective, the context in which the artwork is presented also lays a groundwork for coherence and relationality. In its first showing in the Youth Salon in 2010, it may have been the only if not one of very few sound-based artworks presented. In such a setting, the medium itself plays a pivotal role in its position amongst other competitors and its ability to interfere with the experience of the exhibition as a whole. Nonetheless, the conceptual strength of *Sound Cells: Fridays* (Mostafa, 2010) lies not only in its auditory distinctiveness, but in its capacity to operate relationally by appeals to the ear alongside other senses, inviting a multi-sensory and socio-cultural engagement. In this sense, the installation also diverges from the tradition of presenting sound art as pure sound and under the self-acclaimed terms ascribed to sonic arts. *Sound Cells: Fridays* (Mostafa, 2010) also shows how Kim-Cohen's notion of non-cochlear sound art can present a conceptual engagement of sound and its relationality.

By using everyday sounds and anchoring them to their physical sources, the work situates its criticality to other parts of life, not solely within the gallery. It acknowledges and leverages the visual bias of the exhibition space, while simultaneously retaining intellectual attention and sonic engagement. Relating this situation back to its cultural and epistemological context, the work utilises sound as a spiritual medium, leveraging its capacity for intellectual and emotional transformation to expand its critical scope.

Concluding Remarks

This research project has attempted to trace a genealogy of practices, resistances and influences that shape contemporary Egyptian sound art. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Edouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, Jessica Winegar's *Creative Reckoning* and Jacques Ranciere's *Aesthetics and Politics* amongst other ideas, it has argued for an understanding of Egyptian sound art as multirooted and relational. Through analysis of sound artworks by Hassan Khan, Ahmed Basiony and Magdi Mostafa from contextual lens, it investigated the Islamic, technological, political and institutional frameworks it abides by or resists. Proving that sound art in Egypt emerged from varying traditions and aided in generating overlapping modes of artistic reception.

However, this is not without its shortcomings. Here are a few.

First, the absence of women artists in the selected case studies warrants attention. This gap reflects in part, shortcomings in the visibility and documentation of early sound art practices in Egypt and media art in general. While this does not imply a lack of women-led contribution in the field, it reflects a gap in research access and institutional representation. I say this with reference to evidence to a recognisable number of female attendees at Basiony's workshops as well as a compilation by 100Copies titled *Egyptian Females Experimental Music Session* (2016) which included noise and techno works by artists such as Asmaa Azouz, Ola Saad, and Yara Mekawei. I believe this field of study could benefit from the inclusion of gendered perspectives, to correct historical imbalances and to expand the understanding of sonic practice through diverse positionalities.

This is one of the evident biases in this study which occurred partly due the reliance of the study on informal conversations with artists. While these dialogues were essential in shaping the project's understanding of the field including the social and political dynamics, they also introduced particular subjectivities. Relying on a limited number of interviews shaped many of the arguments around the artist's intentions and attitude. Due to the lack of resources, these interviews were valuable. Yet, the study could benefit from a deeper understanding of institutional structures and larger set of interviews with artists and audiences in order to offer a more layered and critical perspective on the meanings and receptions of sound art in Egypt.

The intention of this research was to offer a nuanced, local perspective on the treatment of sound art in Egypt. This requires a broader and deeper understanding of sonic culture in Egypt, including the situated perception of noise and silence. While this thesis touches on the spiritual, religious and political dimensions of listening, it is limited to a particular soundscape of the city and remains on the surface of this concept. Furthermore, incorporating Islamic philosophy into aesthetic discourse supports a broader decolonial narrative that challenges the dominant, Western-centric interpretation of Islamic art and architecture as merely decorative. Studies in this realm are concerned with tracing the epistemological relevance which signifies such artistic practices. While this thesis is not concerned with Islamic sonic art per se, the discussions related to visual aesthetics in this field can surely extend to sound art as well. Yara Mekawei's recent projects and sound art works follow this track by delving deeper into Islamic and Sufi philosophy and translates ancient ideas into contemporary sonic experiences. In *Holy 204* (2022), she uses an ancient method called *hisab al-jumal* which equates letters and words into numerical equivalences based on their spiritual functions. Using this index, she developed a series of sound sculptures which essentially present the Sufi texts in the form of digital sound. The emphasis on Islamic traditions of listening is important and relevant, yet introduces a potential religious bias. Egypt is predominantly Muslim country, yet remains home to a religiously and culturally diverse society and its sonic practices are equally shaped by other heritages and traditions. With that said, utilising decolonial methodology to investigate these particular sonic worlds of Egypt could enrich this discussion. This leads to the final point. While the reliance on Islamic philosophy incorporates some decolonial ideas, the depth of engagement with decolonial theory and practice remains preliminary. The case of sound art in Egypt and its proximation to modern visual arts practices somewhat maintains aesthetic hierarchies and colonial legacies. As such, a deeper exploration of decolonial epistemologies from Egypt, or the larger Arab or African region could benefit this discussion.

Notes

ChatGPT was used in parts of this thesis for checking grammar, sentence structure and citations.

Bibliography

Allar, N. A. (2019). Rhizomatic Influence: The Antigenealogy of Glissant and Deleuze. *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, *6*(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1017/pli.2018.25

Bradley, F. (2015) Halim El Dabh: An Alternative Genealogy to Musique Concrete, *Ibraaz*.

Benjamin, W., Jephcott, E., Livingstone, R., & Eiland, H. (2008). The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility: Second version. In M. W. Jennings, B. Doherty, & T. Y. Levin (Eds.), *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (pp. 19–55). Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1nzfgns.6

Chattopadhyay, B. (2017). Beyond matter: Object-disoriented sound art. *Seismograf/DMT* (Special Issue: Sound Art Matters). https://doi.org/10.48233/seismograf1904

Chattopadhyay, B. (2022) *Sound Practices in the Global South: Co-Listening to Resounding Plurilogues.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Coussonnet, C. (2016). Acoustic encounters: Magdi Mostafa in conversation with Clelia Coussonnet. *Ibraaz*. https://www.ibraaz.org/interviews/178

Collier, D. (2020) *Media Primitivism : Technological Art in Africa*. Durham, Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478012313.

Cox, C., & Warner, D. (2004). *Audio culture : readings in modern music*. Continuum.

Elmarsafy, Z. (2015). *Action, imagination, institution, natality, revolution. Journal for Cultural Research, 19*(2), 130–138. https://doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1080/14797585.2014.982917

Fahmy, Z. (2020). *Street sounds: Listening to everyday life in modern Egypt*. Stanford University Press.

Glissant, É. (1989). *Caribbean discourse: Selected essays.* University Press of Virginia,

Glissant, É. (1990). *Poetics of relation* (B. Wing, Trans.). University of Michigan Press. https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10257. (Original work published in 1990).

Hegarty, P. (2007). *Noise music: A history*. The Continuum International Publishing Group.

Hilmes, M. (2005). Is there a field called sound culture studies? And does it matter? *American Quarterly.* 57(1), 249-259. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/aq.2005.0006.

Hirschkind, C. (2006). *The ethical soundscape: Cassette sermons and Islamic counterpublics*. Columbia University Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/hirs13818

Holmboe, R. (2020). The institutional situation of so-called sound art. *Seismograf Fokus: Silent Agencies*. https://doi.org/10.48233/seismograf2503

Kahn, Douglas (1999) *Noise, water, meat: A history of sound in the arts*. MIT Press https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/5030.001.0001

Kane, B. (2014). Pierre Schaeffer, the sound object and the acousmatic reduction. In *Sound unseen: Acousmatic sound in theory and practice* (pp. 13–35). Oxford University Press.

Karnouk, L., & Vatikiotis, P. J. (1988). *Modern Egyptian art: The emergence of a national style*. American University in Cairo Press.

Khoury, M. (2013) A look at lightning: The life and compositions of Halim El-Dabh. In B J. Harbert, K. Dickinson, & T. Burkhalter (Eds). *The Arab avant-garde: Music, politics, modernity.* Wesleyan University Press. muse.jhu.edu/book/27058.

Khalil, O. & Seleim, A. (2012). Attitudes towards information ethics: A view from Egypt. *Journal of Information.* 10. 10.1108/14779961211285872.

Khan, H. (2002) Tabla Dubb. *Ashkal Alwan Archive.* [https://archive.ashkalalwan.org/resource/keG0XC-r1ca-FxUX7cSGWF2dao5Hf_WsZjVKX-o1fYM=]

Khan, H., Cox, R. (2021) Hassan Khan: Cascades and modulations. *The Contemporary Journal 3.*[https://thecontemporaryjournal.org/strands/sonic-continuum/hassan-khan-cascades-and-modulations].

Khan, H. Vazquez, M.C. (2010) Noise education: A conversation with Hassan Khan. *Bidoun, Noise* Winter 2010. [https://www.bidoun.org/articles/noise-hassan-khan].

Kim-Cohen, S. (2009). Introduction. In *In the blink of an ear: Toward a non-cochlear sonic art* (pp. xv–xxvi). Bloomsbury Publishing.

LaBelle, B. (2018). *Sonic agency: Sound and emergent forms of resistance* (Vol. 1). Goldsmiths Press.

LaBelle, B. (2017) Room Tone in J. White (Ed.) *Soundtracks*. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. https://www.sfmoma.org/read/room-tone/

Lefebvre, H. (2004). *Rhythmanalysis: Space, time and everyday life* (S. Elden & G. Moore, Trans.). Bloomsbury Publishing.

Licht, A. (2019). *Sound art revisited*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Loveless, S. & Zinovieff, F. (2025). Listening to our Listening: Deep listening in critical sites. In S. Loveless, T. Rennie, M. Søndergaard, F. Zinovieff (Eds.). *Situated Listening: Attending to the Unheard*. Routledge.

Diakhaté, L. & K'a Yelema Productions (Producers), & Diawara, M. (Director). (2010). *Edouard Glissant: One World in Relation.* [Video/DVD] Third World Newsreel. https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/edouard-glissant-one-world-in-relation

MacGilp, Alexandra. (2012). Magdi Mostafa. *Nafas Art Magazine.* Retrieved from https://universes.art/en/nafas/articles/2012/magdi-mostafa

Malmström, M. F. (2019). *The streets are talking to me: Affective fragments in Sisi's Egypt*. University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvp2n3k9

Marks, L. U. (2014). Arab glitch. In A. Downey (Ed.), *Uncommon grounds: New media and visual practices in the Middle East and North Africa* (pp. 85–96). I.B. Tauris.

Meer. (2015). Echoes and reverberations. *Meer*. Retrieved from https://www.meer.com/en/16303-echoes-and-reverberations

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Rhizome. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary.* Retrieved July 25, 2025, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rhizome

Mostafa, M. (2010) Magdi Mostafa: Sound cells (Fridays') [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqsdJD4EZmg&t=48s

Mostafa, M. (2024) Madena 2024: Work commentary [Video]. YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iA3BS689LMc

Mullane, M. (2010). The aesthetic ear: Sound art, Jacques Rancière and the politics of listening. *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture, 2*(1). https://doi.org/10.3402/jac.v2i0.4895

Nelson, K. (1985). *The art of reciting the Qur'an*. University of Texas Press. https://doi.org/10.7560/703674

O'Doherty, B. (1976). *Inside the white cube: The ideology of the gallery space*. The Lapis Press.

Oliveros, P. (2024). *Quantum listening*. Spiral House.

Rancière, J. (2009). Problems and transformations of critical art. In *Aesthetics and its discontents* (pp. 45–61). Polity Press.

Ramadan, D. (2008) Cultivating taste, Creating the modern subject: Sawt el-Fannan and art criticism in 1950s Egypt. *Middle East Studies Association of North America*. MESA Bulletin.

Mafak MinRASY. (2025) What Artists Hear on Friday [Video]. YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjUO20k732Q&t=724s

realpharoh. (2025). Museum Talks: Magdi Mostafa @ DAF Riyadh [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7xByRxHPUs

Sakr, L. S. (2023). *Arabic glitch: Technoculture, data bodies, and archives*. Stanford University Press.

Seggerman, A. D. (2019). *Modernism on the Nile: Art in Egypt between the Islamic and the contemporary*. University of North Carolina Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469653068_seggerman

Shakry, O. E. (2010). Artistic sovereignty in the shadow of post-socialism: Egypt's 20th annual Youth Salon. *e-flux Journal*, (7). https://www.e-flux.com/journal/07/61388/artistic-sovereignty-in-the-shadow-of-post-socialism-egypt-s-20th-annual-youth-salon/

Shannon, C. E., & Weaver, W. (1949). *The mathematical theory of communication.* University of Illinois Press.

Shannon, J. H. (2004). The aesthetics of spiritual practice and the creation of moral and musical subjectivities in Aleppo, Syria. *Ethnology, 43*(4), 381–391. https://doi.org/10.2307/3774034

Shaver, L. B., & Rizk, N. (2010). *Access to knowledge in Egypt: New research on intellectual property, innovation and development*. Bloomsbury Academic. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781849660792

Shaw, W. M. K. (2019). *What is "Islamic" art?: Between religion and perception*. Cambridge University Press.

Sheikh, S. (2009). Positively white cube revisited. *e-flux Journal*, (3). https://www.e-flux.com/journal/03/68504/positively-white-cube-revisited/

Simon, A. (2022). *Media of the masses: Cassette culture in modern Egypt.* Stanford University Press.

Søndergaard, M. (2025). The social listening deficit: Sound art as resistance . In *Anthology for Listening* (2025 ed., Vol. 2, pp. 52-61). Bureau for Listening. https://bureauforlistening.com/anthology-for-listening-vol-ii-the-social-listening-deficit-sound-art-as-resistance/

Steingo, G., & Sykes, J. (Eds.). (2019). *Remapping sound studies.* Duke University Press.

Sterne, J. (2003). *The audible past: Cultural origins of sound production.* Duke University Press.

Sternfeld, N. (2016). Deprovincialising the museum: What would a museum be if it were not a Western concept? In Z. Colah (Ed.), *Body luggage: Migration of gestures.* Archive Books.

Universes in Universe. (2013). Magdi Mostafa explaining his work [Video]. Nafas Art Magazine. Retrieved July 20, 2025, from https://universes.art/en/nafas/articles/2013/magdi-mostafa/photos-video/07-video

Van Eyk, J. (2018). From control to the non-cochlear – Evolving strategies of sound art curation. *Interference: A Journal of Audio Cultures*, (6). http://www.interferencejournal.org/from-control-to-the-non-cochlear/

Voegelin, S (2010). *Listening to noise and silence: Towards a philosophy of sound art.* Bloomsbury Publishing.

Voegelin, S.(2021). Sonic sense: The meaning of the invisible. In (J. Grant, J. Matthias, D. Prior (Eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Arts.* Oxford Academic

Von Denffer, D. (1976). Baraka as a basic concept of music popular belief. *Islamic Studies, 15*(3), 167–186. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20847004

Wallerstein, I. (2004). *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11smzx1

Winegar, J. (2006). *Creative reckonings: The politics of art and culture in contemporary Egypt*. Stanford University Press.

Artwork References

Abu Hamdan, L. (2014). *All the hearing.* [Video].
https://youtu.be/7eBbr5PXeqg?si=XZxoBcCIbBJSAqSf

al-Dabh, Halim. (1944). *Expression of Zar (Ta'abir al-Zar)* [Sound].
https://youtu.be/j_kbNSdRvgo?si=87yIx7Tzbht0PsFn

Basiony, A. (2001). *Birth day - dead day.* [Sound].
http://www.ahmedbasiony.com/viewsoundt.php?IssuesID=4

Basiony, A. (2005). *Cairo sound.* [Sound]
https://on.soundcloud.com/zH3wuyQdkYW23brJkz

Basiony, A. & Mostafa, M. (2007). *Madena*. [Video documentation].
https://youtu.be/SdisApeamSI?si=Ghsj3r91Ip3QCj8b

Hassan, K. (2023). *Better than morpheus' arms.* [Sound].
https://on.soundcloud.com/ix5rmgMqtG1OXLqeya

Khan, H. (1992). *Lungfan* [Video].

Khan, H. (2002). *Tabla dubb. no. 9* [Sound]. https://on.soundcloud.com/sPa3IyGaVuZd2CObEi

Khan H. (2023). *The infinite hip-hop song*. [Video documentation].
https://youtu.be/PNh5M9GXVb0?si=mjybgGMj6PAKsfc_

Mekawei, Y. (2022). *Holy 204*. [Video documentation]. https://www.yaramekawei.com/holy204

Mostafa, M. (2010). *Sound cells: Fridays.* [Video documentation].
https://youtu.be/uqsdJD4EZmg?si=vzLD0MPXinzEjljy

100Copies. (2016). *Egyptian Females Experimental Music Session.* [Playlist/compliation]
https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL_AqLOj_gPKI6v6iPi98J08b-KW5JNx4B&si=otPvbg2M0KgSK9Ez

Appendices

Appendix A - Interview with Hassan Khan (Transcript)

This interview was conducted in Arabic and English on May 2022 2025
It was conducted, transcribed and translated by Habiba Sallam

HK: You're looking at it as sound art. That's your perspective, but I don't see it as that. I question this terminology.

HS: I question it as well and I would love to hear your perspective.

HK: Genres and categorisation

- My perspective is personal. It's not necessarily generalised. But from my perspective, the idea of creating division based on media or medium is a bit problematic specially with special types of practices.
- When its basic foundation is not media/medium specificity but other approaches. So I feel that the categorizations such as media art, sound art, video art are a little bit poor in relation to what artists are actually doing. This is not related to just Egypt, but a lot of artists all over the world. So this is just a general note.

HK: History of contemporary art in Egypt

- Ok so let me start with my own biography around this context. Because as you would know, there is no - one of the big problems is that there is no real historicization of contemporary art in Egypt. There are attempts, but I think all of them so far are very patchy and spotty. Which is understandable because any one who is interested in covering something is interested in a specific angle. It's just that there is not enough. When you have enough coverage then you can build a proper historiography of a certain period. But anyways, this is why I will have to rely on a more anecdotal perspective to give you a sense of where this comes from.

HK: Personal beginnings

- Personally, I was a student at AUC in the early 90s. This is where I started. I started as part of a kind of subculture at the time, that was into music, drugs and experimenting with everything that was possible to experiment with. This subculture was not public. It was very introverted. And of course, AUC in the 90s was very different from AUC now. It was based in Tahrir, it was closer to the city, and it was a different kind of sociology even. Because the country was also different.
- So this scene that I'm talking about, which was very private, and very introverted, not out of intention, but it sort of formulated itself like this. But, there was always a desire to make things more public.
- In my case, I would say the first things that I did more publicly. One in 1993 was a concert in Cairo Atelier titled, *Modern Music for the Guitar* and it was me and Sherif El Azma. This was in

January 1993. Then there were many things happening sporadically. Then the second thing which was more public, and I think is actually important, was also in Cairo Atelier in January 1995. This was a performance titled *Lungfan* and it was a collaboration between me and a friend of mine called Amr Hosny - who is no longer active in the field.

HK: Lungfan

- It was a piece that was image and sound. He was a photographer and he put the images together, and I made the sound for this piece. When we exhibited in Cairo Atelier, the audience was yelling at us and accusing us of being agents of the Israeli state. Really, and there was a state of intense attack which we didn't really understand. And you'll see the piece. It didn't attempt to break any obvious taboos. It's not pornographic, it's not blasphemous, it's just, let's say it's taboo-breaking in its form. So since it did not try to speak in the language of set meanings, it's very visceral. The sound is very aggressive, for example. So in terms of form, it was very different to was in the context then. And I believe this is what happened. The gap was between form and meaning. Which I think is an important point because it has something to do with understanding what this work means.
- It was a slide-show. We did it as a slide-show and sound. And afterwards, a friend of ours who was interning at an architecture firm snuck us in at night where we scanned the slides and made it into a video. The video survived as a VHS tape which I then digitized. So this piece somehow survived, even though it was very ephemeral.
- One thing about the sound for this piece. So the sound for this piece was done through many different things. One was like actual recordings from jams with friends. I was very involved in a sort of music scene during this period. Which was very experimental.
- It was a very experimental music scene and the sound that I made for this montage of images involved a montage of sounds but they were all sounds that I produced myself. It was a very primitive way of working. I was editing (stereo-editing on cassette tapes). I was multitracking (had a 4-track machine, like a tape 4-track machine). But before that I was multitracking with two stereos. Which is when you record on a stereo, you play with it and you record another stereo. It was completely DIY. But the lo-fi, DIY nature of these things was part of its aesthetics. They were rough, I think they meant something which very much had to do with the city at the time, the social organisms we were living in, I think.
- So the soundtrack for this piece was produced through stereo editing, where I used (kind of spliced but not literally spliced), moments from specific live jams and things that I recorded and concrete sound and working with a synth and feedbacking guitars. Very different sources. You will hear it in this piece. Anyways this was in 1995. Which had the very optimistic response (sarcastic).
- There's also a blurring between music and sound in art, let's say. In my personal trajectory. Because for example, this piece, we thought of it as a sort of experimental piece. We didn't think of it as a film. We didn't think of it as an artwork. We didn't think of it as a music piece. We just thought of it as something and that's how we dealt with it. It was kind of a performance because it was done as a slideshow.
- And then when we turned it into a video we showed it at the university (AUC). To a more appreciative audience of friends and such. It was also an interesting moment. So it was shown twice.

- The difference between both performances was the audience. In the first performance there were poets, maybe in their 50s etc. so there was a generational difference. And also when you're showing it to student colleagues. It's a very different context, which was also part of the reason behind this difference.

HS: I'm wondering if the reaction to this piece was sort of common to new media art or experimental art generally, or did you feel a stronger reaction towards that performance?

HK: Audience reaction and culture shifting

- Yes, I think the reaction was stronger because, at the time. First of all, there was very little of what you would call experimental or new media art. The kind of things that I saw at the time which did things with new media were much more ambient, meditative, calming, there was a trend towards things that are a little bit soothing. This was the opposite. This was aggressive, harsh and a very different tone.
- I believe that this tone may be consciously or unconsciously, there was a rejection of sentimentality, of certain rejection of this confrontation. However, this confrontation lessened with time, as the general public changed as well.
- My own personal experience was that I had this in 1995 and in 1999 I did my first solo exhibition. Which was in Markaz Funoon al-Gezira in Zamalek. And for this, the reactions were very positive. This was sort of a video installation with 5 monitors. It was a very ambitious piece.. And the reaction was much more positive. I think during those 5 years, something had already kind of changed in the general culture and public. Something had shifted.
- But I was jumping between mediums because I never specified a medium for myself. I was always and remained working with music and soundtracks. Everything was happening for me simultaneously.

HK: Tabla-dub

- The second major thing was tabla-dub, in relation to music and sound etc. This was in 2001. This is an album and a live video experience. On soundcloud, they are the tracks. But actually when I was performing it live, I used two CD players and two VHS players and a video mixer and an audio mixer. I mean I made those tracks. There are also tracks that are not in the album that you hear on soundcloud, other tracks that were on one CD and some on another CD. So I was sort of DJ-ing my own music. That was the approach. It was also accompanied by these videos that I had created very specifically for this piece. They were loops. Which also created a different effect rather than just listening to it.
- I showed this in Egypt in various locations. I showed it at the Cairo International Book Fair, I showed it in El Garage, the last show was on the rooftop at CIC in 2007. I was showing it from 2001 until 2007. Intermittently in different contexts. Some are very public, some much smaller. I believe this piece had some impact because it has this attitude -and actually you're speaking about de-colonialism etc.- my original blurb about this piece from 2001 explicitly says that this rejects the idea of tradition and (vs) modernity. So already, this is consciously being rejected in 2001. Which I think has to do with this approach.
- By the way, I'm also not a fan of the word de-colonial. Partially because decolonial practice has to be extremely radical. I think it's too easy to call things decolonial because it becomes very

performative within the context. Decolonisation as an actual political project needs to be much more radical. That's just my perspective. That's why I'm a little way about using the word too easily.

- That piece, for example, already relates to an understanding of working with the musical culture. The idea is not that I'm not working with music and this is culture etc. the idea is that this exists, and treating the whole of it as if it's material. And I can use it as my instrument to do whatever I want with it.
- So I believe this is a little bit of a different attitude than sampling for example. Or anything like that, like fusion. I'm very critical of fusion. At the time I was also writing. In a magazine called Alive magazine. Which was important then, where I wrote an attack on fusion. Anyways, a bunch of things, but they relate to how to tackle these ideas.
- Then from 2002 - 2004, Mahmoud Refat and I founded a duo. Do you know him?

HS: I know that he founded 100Copies and there was also a series of concerts called 100Live.

HK: Working and performing in Cairo in 2002/04

- Yes, but this was before all of that. 100Copies was founded after we split up as a duo. Before that, we worked together 2002-2004/5. We were a musical duo, we worked with feedbacking mixers, filters, drum machines and we did lots of gigs all over the city. Rooftops, bars, cultural centers etc.

HS: I'm starting to be very curious about the locations you mentioned, like the Book Fair?

- Yes and also the Film Culture Center (?) , 36 Sherif St (?), and many other places. This was my own personal interest. To be performing in spaces or at least part of my performances to occur in a public context. In the context of public culture in Egypt. Which has changed quite a bit now-a-days. And this was before - of course there was always tension between the public and private sector, if you want to put it like this, although I find this a bit … (lame)? But anyways,
- My goal was to enter these spaces and do things that are unexpected. And it was possible. In a way or another. Which is what I did.
- We also performed in Garden City in the Film Culture Center, and we did a concert there. At the French Institute, so that was more institutional and there were also private settings like the rooftop of a friend etc.

HS: When performing in a public or unexpected space, did you have any expectations or what were the boundaries that you were trying to push?

HK: Performing with Refaat

- Not much of an expectation but more of an intention to engage audiences everywhere. This was the idea. I think you would be surprised. There were always some people who were critical which is natural; But also some people who became interested. One of the things that I could say about the audience during this period (1990s and 2000s) - is that they were very curious. The audience generally was not exposed to a lot of things. Then when they see things that are not expected, they become very curious and you get a lot of different [types of] engagement. But you get a lot

of interesting responses. We also did our last concert at a Cabaret in Downtown Cairo called New Arizona. That was the very last concert we did together.

- Anyways, we played in Egypt and outside of Egypt like in Barcelona and Rome, Holland. We played a lot in different places. What I can say about the musical outcome (this is all not in the context of sound art in the context of music, but it's kind of experimental too). When what we were doing was somewhere between improvising and working with sound as raw material. We were using feedback and mixers. Through which we can generate tones and mix them. We were doing this in the logic of musicians in the sense that there is dialogue and structure. We're building something. Sometimes we build beats and break them down. We also played in the Jazz Club (CJC).
- Because before that we also had a band, Mahmoud and I and Sherif Al Azma, a guy called Guy and Valentine. We had a band. It was a straight forward funk band, I think in 2000 and we played then in the Jazz Club.
- I also think the collaboration I had with Mahmoud and the concerts that we performed in were also kind of influential. I think it was. At the time, I did not see other people doing this type of thing. Maybe there were, surely there were, but I didn't see them or hear them.
- I think those who came after both in the music scene and in the art context with sound were then too young. That's my impression. By the end of this period by 2004/2005 I think there were more that I could see.
- For example, Shady's Workshop where he invited me to do a talk. There I met Magdi Mostafa, Ahmed Basiony.

HS: What about before that? Did you have any people who were some sort of inspiration for you? In terms of how they were engaging with the public through their art or engaging with sound or experimental music? In or outside of Egypt.

HK: The scene in Egypt and influences (or lack of)

- In Egypt, no. Because I didn't see anything that was not straight. Straight rock. Metal. Pop. That was just my experience. I do not intend to generalise, but from what I could see there was none.
- What I was interested in.. I was a very big fan of Yassin al Tuhami, he was a munshid [...] this was from the early 90s. But that's a bit different of course.
- But that had an effect in an indirect way. His understanding of how he sings his lyrics has an effect on a piece that I'm showing right now, called the *Infinite Hip Hop Song.* Yassin al Tuhami was saying, actually I interviewed him once for a documentary, they asked me to interview him and I went and interviewed him.
- But anyways, in a different interview he was asked, how do you sing? Then he talked about how before he begins to sing, he closes his eyes and sees the whole text of everything he knows. You know, he basically has a memory of poetry that goes over a thousand years. And he visualises this (and these are his words actually) he falls in love with one sentence, so he starts with that sentence and as he's singing it moves from verse to verse. He doesn't stick to one poem, he could start with some poem and then go to another one and take a sentence from another place etc. So this approach, which is an algorithmic approach actually, had a parallel with a piece that I'm doing. It premiered in 2019 and I'm still showing it, called The Infinite Hip Hop Song, which has an algorithmic structure as its installation format for example.

- I wrote songs, but I wrote them in a way that any one lyric from any one of these songs is interchangeable and can still create meaning. So there's a parallel. It is interesting to see that someone that I was listening to deeply, in the early 90s - 30 or something years ago, has an influence now. But the influence is not (this is the reason why I'm critical of things like fusion) the influence is not just a sign. It's not like you take the aesthetics of this person or the signifiers of this person or the exoticisation of this person and use it to spice up what you're doing. The influence in this case, I think, is very structural, and it's about the logic behind it. So if you listen to *The Infinite Hip Hop Song* it has nothing to do with the work of Yassin al Tuhami, but with the structure and its logic, there is a relationship, a dialogue.
- I think there are more influences of this kind.
- And if I'm talking about my influences in the early 90s, they were really mixed with everything. Film, music, art, all of it in a big jumble. There is no distinction. And I guess that's why I'm an artist who works in very diverse mediums. Because also I didn't go to art school, so all of the disciplines were never categorised for me. I was exposed to a lot of things, relatively. This was all pre-internet. So relatively I was exposed to a lot of things in my youth. Anything from Indian music to John Cage, to experimental film from the 60s, American film from 60s, very auteur filmmakers, early silent cinema, surrealist cinema, you know, different things. All of them jumbled up together.
- What I can say is that beyond the very hermetic scene that I mentioned - the group of friends who were just messing around, doing weird parties, trying to produce things, writings, poems etc - which kind of ended with this piece *Lungfan* for example. That was influential, this combination was a mix of life and work. It was not split. It was really a jumble. We were living this life and doing things like that as part of it. This had an impact.
- But for example, I can give you an example of how Fathi Salama came to play a concert three or four times at Ewart Hall in 1992, and we saw it and we were like "what is this shit?". This was the attitude. Don't come for me (jokingly) - I know Fathy now and this will sound very arrogant. But I'm just giving you an example. That type of art, honestly, I didn't feel like at least for some of that there were these "influential" figures. There are influential figures historically, but in our vicinity, there weren't really. There was a total rejection of pop, such as Amr Diab etc, this was also seen as terrible. I'm not as rigid anymore, maybe it's not my taste but I would think of this in the same way. You know when you're a teenager, everything is extreme.
- In Egypt during this time the metal scene was very big. I was not into it. I had friends who were. But it wasn't something that I was drawn to. Maybe I went to concerts more for fun, than actually being a fan of this music.
- So I can't really pinpoint an actual figure or something.

HS: No it makes sense, that it was all mixed together and whatever you were producing was kind of a rejection towards what was happening around you, so we're just trying to break all the rules and see what comes out of it.

HK:

- I guess yes but I don't think we were thinking with the logic of "let's break the rules", we were thinking, this is what we're doing… Even Lungfan, what's funny about it when I remember it now, our kind of fantasy or imagination when we were performing this in Cairo Atelier, we

thought we were going to become stars. Everyone was going to love it, it's going to be amazing. But if you watch the piece it has very (aggressive sound effects). I have no idea why we thought that a public would like this in this way, but that's what we imagined, naively or something. So I think the issue was not made out of the rejection of these systems, it was just what we are doing.

- But it is an interesting thing and you will find different arguments about it. I'm sure some people would argue, how can you claim to come out without a direct influence of your context. But I believe the influence of the context was not the traditional type of influence that we were acting as a continuation of something. It didn't work in this way. At least for me and my personal taste, I don't think this was the case.
- I think my references were outside of this context completely, and then there was processing in the context of life. The city that we're living in etc. and one big advantage of how AUC was downtown (not in New Cairo), that I was not isolated. None of us were isolated. We used to drink and go out in Downtown, and Downtown at that time was much less gentrified than now. And it was very normal that there would be discourse between us and the city. Not just Downtown but everywhere. We were going all over the place and we were exploring the city. I can definitely say we were exploring the city. And there wasn't a sense of huge distance. Also, to make it clear, at the time, I had very long hair. In the early 90s I was fighting in the street all the time, and the police would search me, all the time, and this was not common. Maybe in a specific context, but in normal life, it was very strange. So even though it was like this, it didn't feel like this, it felt normal. I have very strong memories of exploring Cairo deeply. The whole of the 1990s was like that.

That's very interesting for me, trying to place and visualise Downtown Cairo as a place that's very open, because now the city feels a bit suffocating. You know eyes are everywhere, censorship..

- It was still like that. But I guess I don't know how to describe it, we were just dealing with it.

I had a question, and I feel now maybe it doesn't make that much sense, but if it resonates with you feel free to answer. I was also thinking about the experience of listening to the city because the definition that I'm kind of working with about sound art is that - I'm also unsure where it stands between sound art and experimental music - a form of art that deals with sound as a source and also using sound as a medium. So this doesn't happen without a listening process or a listening strategy, or a way of listening to the city and your environment. So I'm not sure if you can speak to that way of engaging with the city.

- Yeah I mean, not in a pretentious way, you know. That I am like "listening to the city"..

This is also something that I'm trying to challenge, because a lot of the rhetoric around listening and sound walking etc. assumes this position that everything is far away and you can somehow bring it closer and bring yourself closer. In Egypt, it's not like that at all, your starting point is already in the midst of everything.

- You know, I can not take this out of that (?). This period in the early 90s was a period of heavy drug usage. In my case, generally psychedelics etc. not like heroin and stuff. That also meant that, I remember one time, a friend of a friend, his name was Islam he was also a musician, who died. He also did some interesting things, and was a very talented guy. Anyways, we were tripping on something, Amr stood up and he puked, and he stood up and was talking about the sounds and

how they were coming like waves, there's someone talking and the Athan coming from somewhere else and he felt that he was being attacked by all of these sounds. I just remembered this moment, which was literally 30-40 years ago. The reason why I refer to this anecdote is because I think it's a very good diagram of this. You're in the city, you're absorbing it, and then that attitude (with or without drug usage), of that period, specifically that early period (90-95), of experimenting with everything and also letting yourself jump into the soup. I think this had a huge influence, not in the structure of "listening" to the city, but in a chaotic way. In a way that thing naturally became a part of your understanding. And I guess that sense of like sound as whether musical or not, just the force of sound, as something that can be ecstatic or paranoid both was very important and for me was very important. That also played a big role.

- Things that were much more formal, for example the book "Silence" by John Cage was influential on me. I read it before I listened to John Cage. I read this book because it was in the library. Until 1995 (because there was no internet), I could finally listen to John Cage because 1995 I graduated and I travelled and I was in Holland and I went to the library there and I found John Cage's records and I recorded it. That way.
- You also have to imagine a world where the internet doesn't exist. And so you understanding of things is.. I also read a lot of music reviews of things I didn't hear until years later. There were some used copies of The Wire magazine (used to be a good magazine), which somehow I came across sometime in the 90s. So I was reading them and they sort of had different and interesting sounding bands like improv bands, noise bands, drum and bass, very different genres etc. Reading these reviews and articles about bands that I did not know, and that I had no way of really hearing, it means that you create a fantasy of that. And that fantasy has an influence on what you do, even if you never hear these people. It's very strange thing, where your imagination is very active because you're not exposed - you are exposed because you're curious and you have some exposure and some understanding, and a place to start from- and then your imagination fills in the thing. You create a totally fictional band in your head that you can hear and be influenced by, but in reality when you listen to this thing, maybe it has nothing to do with what you imagined at all. But it doesn't matter because you already created something for yourself. So this is already kind of the context.

HK: I realize that this is very anecdotal, because I can't really provide a wider understanding.

HS: Yes, but this was also my expectation because I know that it's very, like what you mentioned, there's no actual history that I can rely on to tell me about this time and what was happening then. So I'm expecting this personalized recount. And I'm trying to gather as much as I can. Maybe another question that I was thinking about. In terms of institutional support, you felt like the audience and the people were ready to hear something like this out of curiosity, were you looking to change something or create something or was that reaction enough for you?

HK: The scene in the 90s, creating an underground scene, confrontation with culture and subculture.

- I believe at the time, there was an interest in trying to create a wider underground. And I think it did happen, but it's something else. It did happen but I'm not involved in it. It's kind of funny. It's something else, it's its own thing and it's great that the situation now is ten times better, there are

so many people and everyone is doing different things. There are amazing musicians, it's amazing. It's really great.
- Definitely in my context, there was much poorer, there was none of this. We really were very few and therefore,
- There was the pleasure of doing this thing and having an audience and enjoying the moment. There was an ambition that a wider thing would happen which did happen, but completely on its own with nothing to do with what we're doing.
- At the university we showed some things sometimes and we did some things privately as well. We would set up gigs in people's houses and things like that. That was the scene that I was in in the 90s.
- Not a lot survives from this period because it was all whatever. But I believe that at least for me, it was formative. It was something. And also because the interesting part of it is that when a confrontation happens between this scene and the general public scene you see the tensions immediately. There was an attitude of anxiety that made it clear that there was something that was not fitting this public idea at the time.

HS: When I look at the history of sound or experimenting with sound the earliest person I could reach was Halim al-Dabh

HK: Yeah, I met him in Beirut in 2005.

HS: How was that interaction?

HK: It was casual, he seemed like a charming old man.

HS: Yeah, I found this like 20-hours of his trip to Egypt and I felt like I was being transported to another time. And then it stopped being about the research I was really enjoying just watching life in Egypt at that time. Anyways, there's Halim al-Dabh and then nothing until the early 2000s.

HK: experimental composers after Halim al-Dabh
- But it's not nothing, because there were composers who had modernist touches. There was Refaat Garrana who was a composer in the 60s, even Baligh Hamdi has weird little experiments that are not very well known. It's definitely in mainstream music but there's a weirdness in it somehow. So there are things of that nature.
- There was also the Cairo Jazz Band, Salah Ragab who I saw in concert but by that time it wasn't so interesting. But maybe in the 70s it was interesting.
- And I'm sure you know about this Sun Ra who came to Egypt in the 70s and 80s. Sun Ra is this African-American cosmic jazz musician who was kind of an incredible figure because of [what he calls] self-mythology. He's a super interesting musician, he did very different and very experimental things.
- He worked with something called the Arkestra where it's 20 musicians, who all live together in a house and worked on his music. Anyways, he's a very
- He wears crazy costumes and he has this whole thing about Sun Ra, so like Ra - the pharaonic stuff and Saturn… Anyways he came to Egypt twice and he recorded with Salah Ragab.

- He came once in the 70s and in the 80s, I actually have a friend who saw him live then. He played at the President Hotel in Zamalek, he played a little gig there and recorded in a studio in Masr Gedida, anyways so I know a little bit about this. But I had a friend who caught his concert in the 80s and anyways, he is an interesting figure generally speaking and there was this collaboration with Salah Ragab.
- Salah Ragab could somehow be placed in this genealogy of music that is not really mainstream. Again this is really music, it's not related to art in a direct way. Because he made the Cairo Jazz Band. He was initially an army officer and he was supposed to make a marching band for the army, but he turned it into a jazz band, so it's also a weird story. But anyways, there's this and that and there are a lot of things that can be placed in between.
- But sure yes, Halim al-Dabh was a pioneer ofcourse, he is definitely. Globally, even. And then the narrative in Egypt - but also Halim al-Dabh did this thing on his own, but it was not the general standard. It was very particular trajectory.

HK: About the rupture of the 90s

- I would say the 90s is the time where something happened in the culture, it's not popular culture, but culture culture. Something shifted, a rupture happened. I would argue for that but I don't know. This is something that different people have different opinions about.

HS: In what sense are you talking about this rupture?

HK: Interactions with the artworld.

- In the sense that when you ask me about my influences etc. I would say that definitely growing up at that time I had zero local influences except people like Yassin al-Tuhami, very specific things which were influential but they were influences that I would not replicate. I'm not a munshid. He's coming out of his own world, and I'm very appreciative, and influenced and impressed, by his artistry and format but it's not my format. So therefore, there is no figure that is doing something that you find your format within. This didn't exist. Definitely not in my case, and maybe not in other people's cases.
- Even in the artworld - this is my own perspective, but even if you want to narrow it down and enter more into an art context, I think. For example, when I did my show in Zamalek in 1999 it was called *Ana Batal, Enta Batal*, when I did this show there was a very strong public reaction. A very positive one. People came and there were a lot of reviews. A lot of young artists were already like enthusiastic and I met then a lot of other artists that I hadn't known such as Wael Shawky, Amina Mansour, Mona Marzouk (who is Bassam's partner) and Bassam El Baroni - or maybe I met him a little bit later. So I met all these people. They were from a different background, they were art students who became artists. So they came with their own context, but they were also doing things that were also not in relation to what's already around them. And so it was almost an accidental meeting. I was coming at this not out of the context of an artist, but out of my own context, and then when we met, we could communicate. It made perfect sense. And I would argue that what made sense is that partially the fact that we were doing things that were not related to what was before it. I know it's a big thing to say, but that's how it was somehow. There was a cut. It really felt like a cut.

- For example, the Egyptian artist that I was really looking at as an interesting artist, was Abdelhadi Al Gazzar, who was active in the 40s,50s,60s, which was already a whole generation after. And so strangely enough, everything else didn't make sense to me.

HS: Would you say it's because it already falls into the mainstream, or already pre-specified, categories that you didn't see yourself in?

- No, I will make a wider argument, a more historical one. I think if you also look at Ramses Younan, George Hanin, these are all very interesting artists. I feel like I could communicate with artists like that and writers like that. For example George Hanin I knew more as a poet, than an artist at the time (in the 90s). But if I were to look at the artists between those two time periods, it was basically the period of framing Egyptian art in the official framework. In the sense that the artist has an official role to play that is presumed. And part of defining this role is that they represent the Egyptian identity so this relationship. Now, I feel like this relationship is a little old-fashioned to speak about. Even though it's kind of coming back now in a different form like the Kemetians etc (laughs). I find this cartoonish to be honest. I see it out of despair, and it's cartoonish and will completely vanish the moment political contexts change.
- During this time, it was much more grounded, the idea of the artist constructing Egyptian identity and presenting it. I had nothing to say to these people. Because what happens is that I felt that they were consumed by these paradigms, regardless of their talents or not they were so consumed by it, that there is nothing else on the horizon. When there's nothing else on the horizon, then the work becomes completely consumed by that. So it becomes very hard for anyone to build a relationship with something like that. Basically these things, they didn't mean anything to me personally. Especially in the 1990s when I was young and everything was sharper, so you take a very strong reaction against things.
- Gazzar was a little bit of a special case because maybe it's a bit more complex, his imaginary world was a bit fascinating because there were other layers. And guess that's part of why I was interested in it then. That's part of what I mean by this rupture.
- But when I met them (Wael, Amina, Mona, Bassam etc.) there was suddenly another conversation. Even if some were thinking about national identity even, it's under other terms. It's not under the terms of representing it and constructing. It's something else, maybe more of a critical engagement or something else.
- There's a lot to say about this rupture, and I think it's kind of related to your topic in some ways.

Appendix B - Interview with Shady al-Noshakaty (Transcript)

This interview was conducted in Arabic on 23 May 2025
It was conducted, transcribed and translated by Habiba Sallam

Ok so just to get our thoughts in order and to make things more precise. Are you interested in the history of sound art in Egypt or the type of sound art in Egypt?

HS: Both

SN: Ok because they're different topics.

HS: In what sense do you mean?

SN: Teaching sound art (creating a foundation and an audience).
If you're doing a historical study on the use [of sound art] and the awareness of artists or the artworld or education for example, and who were the educators of sound art. And sound as an idea and how it can be practiced as an art. And when something is practiced as art, it turns into a part of culture, not just production for the sake of producing something. As a result, when artists choose to do something that society is not entirely familiar with. For example, society has a clear understanding of music, but can not differentiate between experiencing sound culture in the form of sound art or in the form of music. Because music is understood with the goal that it was made with/for, entertainment, experience, rhythm, engagement. And when sound is used in art, it's not used with the same purpose. It has a different function, which is a more imaginative one. Which is more related to the potential of getting into a more imaginative experience, through sound. So this is a different type of intellectuality [on the part of the audience], and demands a different type of readiness amongst the audience/society. And this is what made someone like Basiony who wanted to start working with sound art, his instinct was first to teach sound art. Before or during the time when he began writing his thesis, in 2006. Because he was sure that nothing could be presented/shown without there being an audience to receive it.

And this society consisted of two realms. Firstly the older generation, who were already convinced of their own ideologies and no form of education or lectures would sway their minds. To them, sound art will remain a western (foreign) construct/invention that is attempting to tarnish/change Egyptian identity and threaten tradition. And this is one of the things that we began talking about during the sound art workshop. In return, there's another generation who is eager for knowledge and excited to learn, who might not have any idea about sound art, but their love and hunger [thirst] for knowledge and technology drives them. This gave us the opportunity to create a foundation for this type of knowledge. And this is exactly what happened from 2000 when I started the first workshop, and or teaching new media in general. To begin working with mediums that may not have any foundations yet, maybe does not have any means of production in Egypt, except maybe Hassan (Khan) and Sherif [El-Azma] and a couple of others. With no support. And without people really believing that this is even art. In the midst of this "invention" turning into tradition. There is no longer room for denying that this a western construct, it has become a worldwide practice.

So this is one of the reasons why we resorted to teaching rather than production, and I believe we were the only ones who took on this task in Egypt. Again, it's because of many circumstances that persisted at the time. The lack of technology was definitely the main and guiding factor. The lack of resources. The lack of knowledge, knowledge translated in Arabic in particular. At the time it was really hard to find these kinds of resources, especially because the internet wasn't the way that it is now. Nobody had access to the internet, nobody had a phone. So all of our resources came from somewhere else. From books we find by accident, if somebody was coming from abroad they would bring back books or magazines.

So one of the difficulties we faced in creating a foundation for media art was because media art is built on the availability of facilities and access to technology. It's not just about technology as tools, but

also society's understanding of technology. Until today, we [as Egyptians?] do not understand technology. We have uses for it but not a full understanding of it because we don't produce it. For example, anybody who is using a phone in Egypt is using it with its purpose, but there is no form of local production, which could generate an understanding of how we use technology. So it's not just about production but also the culture around it. Therefore, it's challenging for our culture to understand media art even if we chose to work on it without technology. And this was the most challenging when initiating a program of this kind.

SN: So this is why I'm asking about whether your interest is in this part of the history. Of how we overcame the circumstances with what we had access to. Not just in terms of technology, but in terms of culture. So this is more about how society and the audience's readiness to accept this type of knowledge. A knowledge that had no material resources or outcomes. It's easy to love and accept things that have a material outcome. Audiences like to look at things, and color. So that's why they can be easily drawn to paintings and sculptures. Which are both artforms that are still common until today. Because our culture is one that prefers visuals in relation to our other senses such as sound or the imagination. This is far from the culture. Or more specifically, the culture of imagination. In terms of sonic imagination, this is rooted more commonly in storytelling. So our oral culture has a strong essence and reliance on narrative and storytelling. With our sonic tradition, it's different. The idea of listening and sounds and going into the cultures related to sound or even thinking conceptually about sound. Or even with video. Today video is more accepted as a medium because it has become part of our culture/society, in the way that it's on our phones and TVs etc. so it turned into a form of documentation. So the understanding doesn't really extend to images or visuals that could have a more conceptual format, and somehow demand a more imaginative form of perception. But that's a whole other story.

This is to say that the environment that was prevalent at the time, from 2000 until 2006 when Basiony began suggesting, also in parallel with his research for his masters thesis at the time. And of course, when students see something or hear something for the first time, we have to convince them that this is art. We try to question a lot of the presumptions about art. Must it be something that we can see? Or something we can imagine? Is it something we create? Or something we can imagine? Is the value of art in its production value? Or the value of art in its ability/potential to influence our imagination? Where is art in this value system? There could be a song performed by a 500-person orchestra, but at the end of the day you don't feel anything listening to it. When another type of song performed with 3 people can reach you very deeply. Where is the value here? Is it related to the power and magnitude of production in the first example? Or the depth of the second example? So definitely there are differences in the way people appreciate this. Sometimes it's easier to regard art that has been created using advanced and amazing technology as more valuable than art made with more primitive and amateur means and basic experience, but has a depth. The depth we refer to here varies amongst society and cultures.

Sound art and digital art and everything that is related to new technology and [industrial]? Technology falls within this balance. Where is the value? Is the value in the fact that I can use technology and create sound art or value in the sound arts ability to create a unique experience. Therefore, the value in education was highlighting these differences. Which is not something that needed technology to say, but needed a mode of communication and a way to experiment. They need practical experience so they can see for themselves that a sound experience or a video experience is not something that is defined by the magnitude or the kind of production it utilizes but it's about the depth of experience.

So I believe this makes it clear the beginnings of sound art, net technology artor new media art. As a topic that I (or we) saw urgent to begin teaching it or just to find a way to teach through abstraction.

And in that case, there was no program of any kind that we could use as a reference in any way. Because there were no translated resources, and even resources in English were very difficult to find and gain access to. The universities had no interest in buying or owning such resources either. Most of the writings that existed at the time were focused on traditional art. Even the resources that were found in our libraries did not have what we need. So there was a huge gap in terms of references. In that sense, we had to rely on our own imagination and the use of sound art as personal experience. It was something we were truly convinced by and we were trying to innovate ways to show that to others, so they can also try by themselves and create their own understanding of what it means to them. The idea that sound art is a form of creating experience.

So one of the exercises that we used to practice was going outside, blindfolded and drawing lines (line sound waves?) to try to visualise the sound of the surroundings going on around them. To generate the understanding of the ears as sensors, and that these senses have a depth that can move through space, and this space encapsulates sounds that are near and far away. So how can these sounds be translated to lines? And once they are, they are taken back to the studio where the artists attempt to reconstruct the environment they were placed in a new layer of sound and composition. So they essentially take the daily sonic experience and translate it from one instrument (the ear) to another instrument (sensors). That can decipher the most precise sounds, and can separate sounds based on their distance and their kind (source). This way, they can be more equipped to deal with sound installation for example. So they can disseminate the sound in the same way they experience it [ultimately with the goal of creating an immersive experience]. This is all through simple exercises that can turn the artists' ear from a tool for listening to a tool for recording and translation. This is not through use of recorders, it is solely and immediately through the reliance of their ears, because we didn't even have access to recorders.

HS: So these workshops were not practical workshops, but more listening workshops. Focusing on listening rather than production.

SN: It was both. There were three parts. The first part is theoretical. The theories of listening and sound as material/medium.

HS: And what were the sources that you used for this theory?

SN: We tried to gather as much as we could. The physics/engineering of sound was there. We could find resources of this nature. We also had access to the library for music education, they had a big section on the physics of sound. So all of the texts that we used in this aspect, sound as material and sound waves, how waves move through space, the kind of waves, how we can understand the waves that we perceive and how it's translated through drawings and other forms. And what does this form look like - is it a geometric form or something else. Is this wave light in the way that it goes through space, or is it heavy in the way that it goes under the space. All of this is imaginative and is related to the science of sound, but it was possible to find it in sound engineering books. What we tried to do was put this in the context of art (Basiony took this on mostly), but we set the groundwork together. Me as an organizer/curator and him as a supervisor for the soundart workshop in particular, but also the animation program, video art program, performance program etc. there were multiple workshops/programs running at the same time.

HS: Sorry to cut you off, but you mentioned three parts. What were the other two parts?

SN: Yes, there was the theoretical part, related to the science of sound. The second part was practical, how to physically be in a space and record (when the recording devices were available). Or to record with your ears and record through drawing. All of this was experimental practical work. Then finally, was the production part. The production was different every year and depended on a lot of things, until the workshop ended in 2011 or 2012. I think it was in 2012 when it was done in ASCII. The final version was done by Rami Abadir (who is also relevant, you should speak to him). So the production depended on a lot of things and each one focused on different things. For example, one of the workshops was focused on visualization, another workshop was focused on the idea of sound and image, a third example was on live sound and performance. And learning to play using computer keyboards etc. or to create some sound tools or toys. This was something that happened during the ninth or tenth workshop, which was focused on creating these toys. Part of it was using old children's toys, deconstructing them and using them as sound instruments.

HS: So like sound sculptures?

SN: Yes, exactly, like sound sculptures. It's close to this type of thing. So this changes every year. By the way, this program lasted 3 to 4 weeks every year during the summer. So it was very short and very condensed, for one month in the summer. Started in 2000 and ended in 2012. It didn't completely end in 2012, because ASCII - which is an institute that I founded in 2012, it continued until 2016. So when I speak about the archive I consider it until 2016. Maybe in this module sound art was not as integral, because Ahmed had already passed away. In 2014 I called Rami to come do the workshop. He didn't want to come to Ard El Lewa, so we did it in Medrar at the time. And we did the workshop in collaboration with Medrar at the time. He mainly spoke about live sound, how to play live and how to use the tools (hardwares, rather softwares)

HS: I would like to go back a little bit to how these workshops started, and maybe this question is too precise. But the focus on sound, where did it come from? Did it come from the use of video for example? Or through a specific understanding of music? Because I disagree a little bit with the idea that sound is not prevalent in our culture. I think it exists, but maybe not in relation to art like you said. But it does exist in other ways. So I believe this definitely influences us as humans living in the city, in Cairo or in Egypt in general, and the way that we listen. So I'm just curious if this was taken into consideration when there was a conscious decision to begin experimenting with sound.

SN: When I was speaking about the understanding of the relationship of sound to culture, I'm talking about the year 2000. If you can imagine at the time, there wasn't really that form of culture of sound. It was more linked to music. But the understanding of sound is completely different. And the relationship between sound and imagination is something entirely different. The understanding of sound, a visual art, is also a thing on its own. To consider it as visual art is strange, what about it is visual? And this was a big challenge for us to convince .. it was much easier to speak to a younger audience about this because it made sense, when they heard it they were easily convinced that when they heard a certain sound, they imagined something particular. Which is different than engaging with music, which you can interact with through other means and feelings. Looking at the difference between sound culture and

music culture was something important and integral in our discussions because at the time it really wasn't clear. In the 2000 this distinction was not clear at all, not in the same way that it is today. Maybe in 2008 or 2009, the internet became accessible and mobile phones were more accessible, almost everyone had a laptop, and access to experimental tools. At that point, with accessibility to the facilities, understanding this idea was easier. And this transformation made a huge difference in the way that the students could comprehend ideas and also in the way that they can use these tools to experiment as well. So in that way, the program naturally developed from theoretical and very limited practical experience on computers or computer programs. At that point we didn't even have access to computers other than Ahmed's computer, which everyone used. This was in 2006.

So to answer your question, why did we begin with sound and sound art? When the program began in the year 2000, there was no focus on sound art in particular. It was all theoretical and also video, animation and comics, and the understanding of sound as visual art. We were also discussing the idea of experimental visual art not industrial. Away from what the market requires. And how we can have a program in place to accommodate the experimental form of sound and the experimental form of image or animation as something valid. And something worth value. Because at the time also, everything that had a value is something that can be sold and profited from. Where will this be shown? On TV? On the radio? So we were constantly faced with the question of what value does this have and how can we learn from it? Do you get it?

SN: So as I was saying, Ahmed when he began with sound art he was building on the program that we started in 2000, when we were already discussing this type of art, and attempting to find a space for it in the education system. Even if it was through unofficial channels. This program was not official. We called it a parallel program. 3-4 weeks in the summer. Non-funded. Non-promoted. Everything that happened in this program was under my own personal responsibility. All of this was of course under the permission of the school and the dean to convince them that we were doing something for the future. And we were lucky at the time to have deans that listened to our suggestions and trusted our opinions on the matter. They provided us with the space and studios to work in. This was working fairly well until around 2009/10, when there was a new generation of artists who had a very high sense of criticality towards the education system, and the type of education in the university system. So they expressed this criticality through videos that they recorded and posted online, which created a type of clash with the institution. This clash was not something that I initiated, it was the students who studied with us during the summer, and then got back to the university syllabus during the school year. In the same studios and everything, but they were listening to lectures that completely contradicted what we were saying in the summer programs and also taking part in activities that contradicted what we were saying. So involuntarily, this created a sense of "anti-institution". The idea that everything they were learning at university was useless and a waste of time. As opposed to the summer program where they took part in different activities and had a say and opinion about what we're taught. So the institution/administration started dealing with us with a lot of resentment. At that time, near the end of 2009 and early 2010, that's when I decided to go to AUC and left the Faculty of Arts. At that time, I left Youssef Ragheb and a group of colleagues back then who helped me with the workshops back then to take the lead in the last workshop that took place back at the university in 2012. And then I started ASCII which had no ties to the university. This is a result of the generation that came out of nowhere, and started saying things that we didn't understand where they were coming from. But I believe that the workshops played a big role in shaping and influencing ideologies in that sense. It was not only about creating art. But they were also becoming extremely critical and began

standing out amongst their colleagues and others in general. Even though the time of the workshop was fairly limited. But it was a chance for them to gain a larger sense of awareness, aside from the west, and sound art as a practice, but just about art in general. The ideas and theories related to the purpose of art. So when they go back to their classes in university they learn things that completely contradict these discussions. When they spend 10 hours drawing something using a hand-drawn "dotting" mechanism to create a design, when photoshop can get this done in 3 minutes, while he's spending 3 days drawing it out manually. So it didn't make any sense to them why they were doing things. So this made them very critical of university and university education. And actually this helped us move the program outside of the university's scope. This is all about history of how it began, the workshops and sound art.

Now back to the kind, the kind of sound art that was being created at the time. Starting with the devices, which were very primitive. What was available to us was to use one computer using Adobe Audition. Obviously, it was a stolen cracked version which we tried to set up on the computer. It was Ahmed's computer. Mine was also available. And everyone was working on these two devices. Literally everyone. Everyone who was working on sound art or video art or animation or whatever. They were using these two or one computer. So this was obviously very challenging, even for the devices themselves, which sometimes stopped working and the RAMs were burned out. So they used to place fans in front of the computers so it doesn't work during the summer months.

HS: Around how many people were attending these workshops?

SN: It depends. Because the workshops then turned into separated programs. So there was the sound art workshop, video art workshop etc. Each workshop had a studio. I used to hold theoretical lectures every two days. We also used to have screenings of video arts and documentaries that can help them understand the history. We also used to invite contemporary artists such as Hassan Khan, Amal Kenawi, Wael Shawky and many of my friends who used to come and have talks in a completely voluntary way. It was great that they did that. There were 6 or 7 programs running simultaneously. Student seminars were also a separate programme. Along with visiting artists and theoretical lectures and workshop practices. Sometimes the workshops themselves hosted guest lecturers so Basiony invited Maurice Louca, magdi mostafa, kareem lotfy. He invited people who were related to his workshop. Mahmoud refaat as well. All of these people came. They just came to attend sessions with Ahmed Basiony. So it was talks for all students but each workshop had their own visiting lecture. So it turned into something really big. Much bigger than we expected. Starting with the 8 or 9 round, the workshops started to be very heavy theoretically. We had very deep philosophical discussions as well. It wasn't just about technicalities, it was about theories and philosophies.

This really broadened the scope of the workshop as well. So for example, during the 9th or 10th workshop we started working with open source programs and Basiony himself began working with these programs as well. So he was not just talking about sound, but sound and performance. How can sound become part of the performance and performance become part of sound. So electronics became a huge part of this process as well. Especially when you're working with an open-source program which is free and we're not restricted by any copy rights. So we downloaded Linux and used open-source programs such as PureData etc. this made it easier to work on industrial technologies in a simple and free way. So here I'm talking more specifically about the quality of the industry and the kind of art, which was changing.

The kind of experience also changed. So it's not just about history, but it also changed the trajectory of experiencing art.

HS: So this development came with the availability of technology…

SN: Yes definitely. It's also important to note that this is also closely related to personal experience. So for example me, I don't want to talk a lot about this story but in 2008 I was in a residency in La Boral in Spain. It was still in its early days, open for just a couple of months. I was lucky enough to be the first resident in this institution. It was one of the most important places to study industrial technology and also involved with another important institution called Hangar, which hosts a lot of artists and engineers who were working with coding and industrial technologies, maybe in the whole world. During this residency I got to know Hangar and it was how I was introduced to open-source technologies, I had no idea about it before then. I also made a lot of connections then with programmers, they were all real hippies and artists, amazing creators. Developing amazing technologies all using open-source technologies many of them were Spanish and programmers. They were part of societies that were kind of similar to ours. They came from places that did not have access to high-end facilities, and did not have a lot of money to spend on this type of art and technology. So everything was hand-made. The kite, sound-kite tools were hand-made, the chip itself was handmade.

They used things like arduino. The hardware that was used to export data from computers. Arduino is a chip that allows you to transfer the data that is on your computer to different types of hardwares, like projectors and sound speakers and sensors and you can control them using open-source technologies on your computer like PureData.

So this was a great discovery for me, I was really blown away. It was hard to understand how this complicated experience used almost nothing. A computer that is made from scratch. The Arduino chip, and just using a projector and sensors, which were not expensive at the time. So I started speaking about this experience in areas like Bab al-Louk where people were also constructing mobile phones in random and spontaneous ways. They learned technology by themselves. Just out of intuition. So there was a relationship there.

So I suggested that artists come to Cairo and give workshops on these things for those who are interested. At the time, the head of the Spanish Cultural center, his name was Ramon. He was very sweet and kind. He was the one who invited me to the residency. So when I came back I suggested to him that he invite some of the artists I met there to come to Cairo to give some workshops, within the capacity of the cultural center. So they agreed to do it within another project related to the Biennale so it was part of the Biennale program kind of. And we really held this workshop for two weeks inside the Egyptian Museum on open-source technologies. It was run by three artists who I met in Spain and they did the workshop with Ahmed Basiony and Magdi Mostafa and all the artists of that generation.

At the time, Basiony became really good friends with them and was in contact with them. So they began building the patches for some of Basiony's projects such as *30 Days Running in One Place* which he produced in 2009. So we're talking about a shift in the mentality that occurred within less than a year. The workshop I attended in Spain was in 2008, two months after the artists came to Egypt, it was in January, in April the soundart workshop was happening. And almost 3 months after, Basiony showed his piece *30 Days Running* at the Opera House. So in August when we did the sound art workshop, it was based on open source technology. In 2011, he passed away and our relationship with teaching these programs diminished. At that time, Medrar decided to take these contacts and started Medrar Media Lab

with the artists that came from Spain, with my support because they were just starting at the time. That's it. That's the history, which shows how one initiative can bring many possibilities in a society where there aren't many opportunities but has the potential for many things to change in a short period of time. Or in a society that has individuals such as Ahmed Basiony, Magdi Mostafa, and all of these artists, KAreem Lotfy as well. Who really have the intelligence to gain and benefit from these small opportunities and create something larger from it. Especially in a society like our Egyptian society. Most things happened this way.

HS: It's interesting how you already kind of built a community through these workshops, and so as your practice grows, the community grows as well. And people come in and outside of this scene. So I understand a little bit more about this development.

SN: This is the only way that things could happen. To be able to see something relatively small, and turn it into something bigger. Like the example I mentioned earlier, if someone brings a book from abroad and this book becomes a source of knowledge for everyone who is present. In the year 2000, I was invited to the Venice Biennale to showcase my work there. When I went, I stayed there for 10 extra days. I had some money, so that's what I did. I bought a Grundig camera and I started taking videos of everything I saw for the first time in my life. Like video art, and artists who were showcasing things alongside me, and it was the first time I heard of them and their work. So then this documentation that I made, we used this material during the workshops. So this was in the year 2000.

I just want to show you how the smallest resources turn into a big source of knowledge for people who have no other source. So the videos that I took during the Venice Biennale were the Shirin Neshat, William cartridge. It was my first time seeing these artforms and I was amazed by the biennale so I bought a camera and I recorded all of these works in full length. And I showed it at the workshop and I began speaking about my own reflections on this type of art. And why video art is art and not just a video. Doc Atki (?) had a video installation of over 20 monitors and it was amazing for me, I was in disbelief. And I didn't understand why this was art. I understood that there was greatness, but I could not pinpoint it or where it was coming from. So the first thing I did was recording it for my students, and we began a discussion around this type of art. And the type of art that creates an experience. It's not a kind of production, it's a kind of experience. And there is a great potential for video,sound and animation to create an experience that we're not used to. That we're not familiar with. And this was the beginning, the turning point for the workshop to be focused solely on media art, not on drawing or sculpture etc. (in 2000). Because we were convinced that the experience we needed to create was related to this. So this was the reason behind the initiation.

HS: I'm wondering if you're speaking about these small sources that turn into something larger, if you can remember any particular sources or theories or books from abroad that you used as examples or references or inspiration at the time? For you or Ahmed Basiony or in general?

SN: Yeah this really came into play when Basiony began writing his masters about sound art in 2007 or 2008. I was asking if you're in Egypt because the dissertation is at the library. The university library. So you can go see it there. But I might have the proposal, which was a shorter version like a summary. There's also an introduction to the workshop statement. Which he wrote for his own workshop. Which we had printed for the retrospective exhibition at the American University in Cairo.

Appendix C - Interview with Shady al-Noshakaty (Transcript)

This interview was conducted in Arabic on 11 June 2025
It was conducted, transcribed and translated by Habiba Sallam

HS: In the previous interview, you talked a lot about how there were no resources, and the very obvious lack of technological resources. But I was wondering if you can explain to me what was there. Can you describe to me what kind of minimal resources we are talking about?

SN: It also depends on the time frame you're referring to. For example, starting in the year 2000, there was nothing except a video camera that could possibly be connected to a mic. And simple analog technology. This was available because I could travel, and most of these things were mine. So we had an analog recorder, not a stereo one. And the camera was a grundvig camera, it's even in the archive of the workshop. Gurndig hi8 super 80mm. This was the only camera that we had. I had bought it from Venice in 1990 when I was presenting at the biennale. So I bought the camera and the mic, and they were probably the only resources that I had at the time. In the year 2000, so that everyone who was involved in the workshop had access to it.

HS: Ok so the workshop started in 2000, and when did the sound art program start to be incorporated into it?

SN: In 2005. It was officially incorporated as a program with Basiony in 2005. Because he chose to specifically create a workshop for sound art. But in 2000, when he was still a student, he was a part of the workshop and he had just recently graduated. Since then, we have been experimenting together. Using recordings and videos, and all kinds of experimentation with the logic of play. We were having fun but we're not sure if this counts as art or not.

HS; Can you expand on this further, what was the nature of these experimentations?

SN:

- Not much, there was an idea that maybe we could meet somewhere and create something like a noise sound. Noise of different forms. So for example, one person can be knocking on glass, someone banging on wood, banging two pieces of wood together, without using any musical instruments. So each one of us was making different sounds, and then we began observing collectively our rhythm, and we would divide it up in a way that one of us does 1, then 2, then the other person does 3, and 4 in a row. So it was close to orchestrating sounds so that we can create something as close as possible to a rhythm. So that there can be some sort of harmony… Sometimes we can build up to this harmony, and then it disintegrates. And we can control this type of experimentation. There wasn't someone in charge per se, but someone can start with a motif and others join, this can last up to 3 or 4 hours. This was between 2000 and 2002. After I came back from the States.
- At the time, there was no idea of individual workshops or the program as a whole. It was running with the idea that it was a large, general workshop, all of the artists working on their own

projects, on paintings, drawings and trying out new things etc. There was no program per se (that is practice based), but there was a cultural program. Where we showed videos and films, some artists came to give talks, we also had some seminars. It wasn't an educational program either, more like an open studio. Following the format of a Masters program abroad.

- Starting 2004, we began the individual workshop. It was also closer to an educational program where there is a set curriculum and separate programs, so there was a comic strip art, there was no program for sound art yet (this was in 2004), there was a program for video art, for animation, for performance, and workshops in parallel where everyone had their own room and studio. But there was no longer the open studio vibe that we had before, specifically for artists to practice their art.
- In 2005, Basiony had the courage to start his own program while he was working on his masters degree he decided to lead the sound art program. He wanted to start innovating for this program, all its contents and the performances that were part of it.
- But going back to the idea of facilities, it really depended on which area you're referring to. In the year 2000, there was nothing except the camera and a mic. It was an analog camera and I had a computer (PC) for everyone to produce.
- Starting 2003 and 2004, there started to be more laptops, then later everyone came with their own laptop. And we started digital editing photos and working with sound on Adobe Audition. Then we found ways to illegally copy the programs so that everyone can have access to it.
- In 2007, then more programs were available. It was around that time when programs became more popular, but not everyone had access to them. But at least in each workshop there was not less than 6 computers in one room (for each workshop) where people could use.

HS: How many people attended these workshops?

SN: So the average number of people who attended these workshops. It usually starts off with a large number of people attending the first day of the workshop, maybe over 100 people, who are just curious about what's going on. They come in on the introduction day just to see what's happening. Then later, when we start the registration process, this number drastically decreases. So we ended with around 10-15 people per workshop. In total, not more than 40 attendees. In the first workshop, there would be only around 20-25 people in the workshop. It mainly consisted of people who just wanted to keep doing their practice, and have the space to work on their art outside of the academic year, whether it was painting or drawing or whatever. Because not many people had space at home to do this type of work. Having more space makes artists expand the scale of their thinking and there was an important exhibition happening at the time called the Youth Salon. They were very excited to present their work during the Youth Salon. I mean to say there was a sense of excitement from all angles.

This idea stayed until 2004, when we started to put together the curriculum. So the workshop is no longer an open studio program, but there will be a curriculum and terms and each term will have its own program. So when you join the workshop you have to pick two of the courses to join. For example, you could join the sound art and video art workshop, or the sound art and comics workshop etc. Because each of the courses happened two days in a week. So in total four days per week. So it was divided in a way that students could enrol in two courses at a time.

This is besides the avant garde cinema program or the video art program which consisted of screenings and discussions. Aside from also the visiting artists program, which was also very important. So we had eight different programs aside from the seminars program and the presentation classes where we presented our work. And the final exhibition classes. So all of these happened only during the summer within 2-4 weeks. Every year. So it was very condensed.

HS: From what I understand so far, the students' practice at the university wasn't focused on media art at all.. So they had the opportunity to work on this kind of art only during the summer, right? But after that, how many of the students were able to pursue their practice in that area? What would you say was the percentage of students who were able and willing to take on this practice in their main practice?

SN: Do you mean to what extent students were able to incorporate new media in their work at the university?

HS: Yes, exactly. Or in their practice afterwards..

- SN: No this was not really accepted. Because the university at the time was against the idea of new media to begin with. And the teachers did not encourage students to explore it further under the pretense of it being a western construct and the west constructing new media art because they had no artistic skills. And that skill is a part of art. So the skills they would learn at the university are so much more valuable than learning how to use new media. This was what was said inside the classes and it was said to students in a very direct way. That this "workshop" will ruin your intellect and your expertise and your skills, this is also in addition to the idea that nobody knows who was funding the workshop, and how it was supported, so it made it even more suspicious. This is the kind of stuff that started to be said after the 7th or 8th workshop (in 2007/08) because at that time, it had already been 7 years, a generation of artists were on the rise. They were known as the artists who came from the workshop, and they really stood out amongst their peers. They had very radical ideas, and revolutionary thoughts on what art should be and what academia should be. Even the bachelors' students were also starting to become more vocal inside the lecture halls about the difference in the workshop they attended in the summer and what they're learning all year. They sit in the same hall in the same spot, but they witnessed two completely different ideologies and experiences.
- Starting around the 7th workshop, these things started to be said about the workshop and it entered into a debate about the education system and around what happens at the university. I found myself defending myself always, but I didn't really understand why. Not just me, but a lot of people working involved in this program including the students. While they were still students at the university. Maybe this is what led us out of the involvement with the university, and we had to begin to find a way to do something away from it. We had no other option but to start our own institution, and that was when we started ASCII.
- It was also the time of the revolution in 2011, when it was possible for us to create these institutions outside any government entities. There was also a strong urge to not be associated with any government entity. At the time, the general consensus was for independence, which was a force that pushed many things at the time, from 2011-2013. This was the peak of the political instability, when the Muslim brotherhood took power and there were too many changes

happening that nobody really understood. There was a lot of worry. Everyday we would witness people gathering in the street and we had no idea who they were or what they were calling for. There were also a lot of drifts between groups of people. We didn't know where we stood or with whom. Even in one family or between friends. Society witnessed a change in the structure at the time.

- I don't think the workshop was ever separated from this political atmosphere. We really wanted to create something that can exist apart from the sense of hopelessness. And away from a society, which we saw as being eaten up from the inside out as a result of their ignorance and belief that anything that is unknown is unwanted and unaccepted. We wanted to leave all of this behind, and start from scratch and have our own institution that does not run in parallel to anything and does not belong to any institution.

HS: I just want to quickly go back to the point you mentioned about the goal of the whole program and workshop and ASCII after, with the goal of education. You said that you were working with the ambition of building an audience and a generation of artists that can receive media art and practice it in their own way. And this is what I can see kept driving you from the beginning of the workshop until the end. So when Basiony began teaching sound art, did you ever speak about his goals for the workshop he ran? Did he work with the same philosophy or ambition? Or did he have a separate goal than yours?

SN: No not really, Basiony was one of the people who understood the politics and the real purpose of the workshop. Him along with Youssef (Ragheb?) and all of the people who decided to run their own workshops. Without any pressure. He really saw this from when he was still a student, he was one of the people who closely and truly witnessed the workshop and the development of it through its idea and execution. He was always a part of the trials and errors. Until he decided for himself to take the content somewhere else, to another level. For him to reach the point to decide to have his own workshop, and develop it on his own.

So what Basiony did, (not just him, but everyone who took part in different ways, such as Hala El Koussy, and Sherif al Azma, who were really eager to take part with nothing in return, because of course we had no funding).

- So I believe at the time even those who came from outside of the workshop, like Basiony, Youssef (Ragheb) , Ahmed Sabry, (Ahmed) Elshaer and Magdi (Mostafa) who came from the inside were the most people who saw this progress. It was 16 years, they were these everyday. Even if they're not doing anything, they're there to help.
- Magdi during one of the years, he was not running his own workshop or anything but he chose to be there to help everyone with editing. He helped everyone edit their videos. It was the fourth or fifth year.
- There was a very important artist during the workshop, his name was Hossam Hudhud, he's working now in Kuwait. But at the time, he was still a student and he attended the workshop. He never ran his own workshop. He had enough knowledge to start his own workshop but he was the most consistent attendee of the program. He attended every year. He came and he was ready to help.
- The culture of helping each other and giving expertise and knowledge to each other is something that was inherited and it became the norm. Some more than others. But this was the general

attitude. There were those who went on to do their own thing and look out for themselves. But this all happened as an outcome, not intentionally.

- The workshop is what created this type of energy and it transferred to everyone who joined the workshop, especially those who started when they were students and kept going. And this inheritance of the idea that the workshop is a place to share knowledge and information. This was the general expectation. And this was apparent in the attitude of everyone who attended, the old and the young. The artists and participants and lecturers.
- Basiony of course was one of the pioneers of the artists and participants. He started as a participant and then had his own experiments in sound and interactive media and then in programming and open source programming in his latest work. And all of them developed their relationship to media art and new media alongside his relationship to the workshop. Him along with other artists who developed their practice as artists.
- He saw the area of the educational program as an opportunity to strengthen his expertise as a teacher. Which is a point that many people overlook. There is an important relationship between the experience of teaching and making art. Because the experience of teaching you're building an experience of creation of knowledge. Teaching makes you develop a language for communication, which is an essential in teaching adn education. You can not utilize this language of communication without skills. And these skills can develop alongside teaching. This is an important part of teaching and art meaning. You have knowledge that you have to transmit somehow in a language and performance in a way so that others can understand.
- So how does this feed the art and artistic practice? You utilised and practiced the process of transforming your ideas, which come from your imagination and turned it into a reality. As soon as you share it with others it turns into reality. Once others start realising it, learning from it, and actualising it in their work and experiments it turns into a reality and you can witness this. This process is exactly the same as the artistic process. It is a process of emptying (?)/releasing. And enriching the artistic process. It is not only that you develop your communication skills, but you can also see how you use your personal knowledge in your personal work. Or the opposite, you can experiment with things until you reach a point of value, and when you choose to share this with others, this value becomes greater in a personal sense.
- So this is what happens when people start to teach, even while they're learning. It is a much more enriching process. A situation where you are learning and teaching which grows the knowledge and experience exponentially.
- The dualistic relationship between teaching and art-making for me and Basiony and others who understood this relationship even from the first go, they grasp the big change in their skills and experience even after just one week of teaching. He made his own curriculum, and his students are ones who chose to take this course with him and take part in it, because it was optional. This was unlike his teaching process at the university where he taught drawing and painting etc.
- So at the workshop, he is the one who prepared everything for himself and decided what he wanted to teach. So the environment and the structure of this educational environment is accurate. He prepared the content and he is not taking in the return for what he's doing. Therefore, he has no expectations other than the value. To achieve that he was able to transmit and share his experience and gain new experiences that he did not have before this experience.

HS: Sorry to interrupt, but I'll get back to the point of when he decided to lead the workshop on sound art, he was a visual artist. So why did he choose to focus on sound as a medium? And did he think of sound on its own terms or did he think of it as something that could complement something else that's visual? So where did this fascination come from and how did it develop? If you feel you can speak to this.

SN:

- For Basiony specifically, sound was never separated from the visual. He was originally a visual artist so his relationship to sound came from this area. So whenever he spoke about sound, he linked it back to the visual. How we can imagine through sound. How sound can create or influence a visual. So for example, if I'm sitting in an environment to record a specific sound, and I'm holding a microphone to record a specific noise, even if it's in a garden or park that has certain sounds and echoes. I would record these sounds, not recording with the intention of engineering (documenting). I'm recording it with the purpose of transforming it into another image. I want to take it back to the editing program so I can play with its structure as a sound so when I listen back to it, it gives me back a different image. It's no longer an image of a park or someone talking or an alleyway. I don't want the listener to see the market, or to see the park, I want to create a new image, that's imaginative and completely fictional. And this was the goal of maybe his first workshop. How we can see through sound. Even if we can see the sound, and the source is obvious, he was questioning how we can play with this sound to change its content so that the sound goes to other fictional places. So this is how sound made its way to visual art. It was a source of imagination. This was the main goal of why he chose to make a sound art workshop.
- However, the program developed every year. At one point, there was a whole workshop on the relationship of sound to the image. And the visual was video art. So it was about making sound for video art. Video is also an imaginative medium. It's about reimagining a different reality from a documented source. So for example, the image of a drop of water into a cup. It's very simple, there's no narrative or drama. But it's about questioning what kind of sound can accompany this visual to create a different meaning. To create a scenario that is unrealistic.
- So to transfer something straight out of reality and turn it into something unrealistic, it was a process that was made possible through sound. Sound can do this. Sound has the potential to transfer a realistic image and transform it into something completely imaginative. I mean there was a whole program one of the years on this particular idea. And the relationship between sound and image was a central and essential point in Basiony's practice.
- Even when he played live, there was a visual element accompanying the performance or behind him. And when he performed visually, he made sure to include the role of sound. So I believe the the relationship between sound and image for Basiony was an important relationship.

HS: I noticed on the website that all the sound pieces on the website are about a minute or two long. I think it's a pretty short duration. Were they part of something larger? I'm just trying to understand how these pieces were exhibited or performed, were they part of something else? So how did he present his sound art?

SN:

- He showed his sound art as live sound. So probably these tracks were short pieces that he played with during his performances. So they might be short but the way he played them, they can turn into something else. The way that he manipulated the sounds can have this effect during the live performance. It can be a mix of these recordings and recordings that he made live during the performance. He was mixing all of these sounds. So he creates a relationship between the recorded sounds and the live recordings and improvised live connection and orchestration that he made. All of these decisions were made live. So it wasn't usually rehearsed etc. So when you're listening to a track or a performance it was made live.
- And I think this was the hardest thing about live performance. Is that all the decisions are made instantaneously and with a live listening audience. So all of the decisions that you make can lead you somewhere that no longer resembles anything you know. Because it's all experimental and spontaneous. So you're either in a space where you really capture your audience or you completely lose their focus and lose them. So you have to be aware of the audience and how your decisions influence them and how to keep their focus. So how do you manage the balance between the music you're playing and the focus of the audience and creating a sound you don't even know yourself. It's not prepared. You're creating an experience that you don't even know. Will it be melodic. Will it be enjoyable? Will it trigger memories or imagination. This is all related to live sound performance which is one of the more complex types of performances because no matter how much you have prepared the material and even drawn out the structures, so many decisions are taken instantaneously and you can't control it.
- Very few of his performances were recorded. I think one of the ones that was recorded was with Abo Assala, which happened in Darb1718. He went to look for Abo Asala who was a Shaabi singer at the time, he was a young man who became really famous at the time. He had a really famous track which Basiony really liked at the time. So he found him online and found him in real life and suggested that they play together live.
- So at the time this was a weird mix, why Abo Asala, and how are you going to play digital sound (which is not music) and you're experimenting with someone who is clearly a musician. And performs a very specific type of music. So there was the question of why are you doing this type of mix. Abo Aslaa also had this young boy who was like 12 years old who also sang with him. So there were a lot of questions and uncertainties but he chose to go through with this experiment.
- Ahmed Basiony was never afraid of experimenting. I have never seen anyone like this in my life, who was brave as he was in that sense. He was not afraid to go into something that he had absolutely no idea how it would turn out. Yet he was prepared to accept any result that came out of it. And I will attest to the fact that I have never met anyone with this desire for experimentation in my life. It's something that requires a lot of bravery to face the audience with something you can not control. You'r only a part of it. But he's enduring this process because there is a chance that he could learn something or create something new. That he could go in another direction. Like performing with Abo Asala could put him in the world of electroshaabi music or put his work somewhere else, and unexpected. Even if he disappeared within the large world of this type of music.

  HS: So he didn't really have a distinction between sound art and music? He wasn't afraid that his would would transgress these boundaries?

- No, not at all. He was working within these boundaries and he clearly understood the difference between the impact of music and the impact of sound. So this is why the element of live performance was really important. Usually live performance is perceived as music, which is part of the greater context of the idea of performance. Playing live as a sound artist is a challenging idea because the acceptance of the listening ear of this type of performance is difficult. Because performing pure sound art should be an isolated experience. Where you can really hear the sound and interpret it as imagination. But during live performances you don't have this luxury. The audience is in the context ready to listen to music. But he played with this context. Even Hassan (Khan) and Mahmoud Refaat, they played within this context. They play music but they're playing with the sound and pushing the boundaries and experimenting with it in that way. To blend sound art within the context of music. They convince their audience that they're listening to music but what they're actually listening to is not what they expect. It's music but of a different nature.

HS: And what was usually the audience reaction to this type of performance?

SN:

- At first the audience is silent because they are surprised and unsure of what they're listening to. Is it music? But it's not melodic? Or is it noise? Do you just want to disturb us? And the audience begins to question themselves and why they're here? And wondering things like why pay all this money and bring this expensive equipment to play a bunch of noise? (laughs)
- So you're always in a confrontation with the audience. For example those who are coming to listen to abo asala, or part of 100 Live performances. Where a lot of people who played sound art would perform like Kareem Lotfy, Rami Abadir, (Maurice) Louca, even Yara Mekawei and Asmaa Azoz and all of these were Basiony's students.
- So in this live event, the audience was just a curious general audience and normal general public. And it was normal that there was some sense of rejection or disturbance. Sometimes this feeling would decrease when there were some visuals. So there was a focus on incorporating some visuals to capture the audience's attention. So we used to work with lights and live drawing and pre-recorded animation that can enter in an experimental way. In 2004, 2005 these were new trends but we have seen a lot of them now.

HS: I can imagine that performances like what happened in 100 Live was a little bit different that the Medina, the performance collaboration between him and Magdi Mostafa.

SN:

- Medina was a completely different project and context. It was an artistic project completely. The idea of presenting it as a live performance during an exhibition hall, at the time it was at the Mahmoud Mokhtar Museum. The context of this show is also important because it was a competition. So we should keep this in mind. It's not just an exhibition. It's a competition and this really sets the tone for Youth Salon. It's a competitive exhibition. There is better and worse. There is a prize and there is some sort of assessment.
- At the time, the Youth Salon (it started in 1994). The show was in 2007. In the period before that in 2003,04,05, it was a time when the Salon was in a crisis (and it still is-it's even more of a crisis

now). But at the time it was still influential and it was perceived by students in that way. That young artists can create avant garde this only happened at the youth salon. It was the only platform where young artists can show their skills and ambition in Egypt - not outside of Egypt.

- So this was very important to the context of Medina. And it's safe to say that it was a result of a lot of energy that has been driven up during their time at the workshop. There was a consensus that they did not want to present something that did not have any type of influence or change. It should be something that at least creates a debate. When we show something, it should create this type of debate. And this is closely linked to the ideology of performing. We're not performing to have fun and bring some friends together and take some pictures. We're performing with the purpose of creating a type of revolutionary act. A new kind of performance. Creating a shock. Something that makes the audience wonder what they're looking at. Is it even art or not? This is the true definition of contemporary art. Which forces the audience to question what they know about art, and makes it difficult to place it under the categories they are already familiar with. It's the kind of art that still does not have grammar to describe it and people are constantly questioning whether it's art or not.
- We were always talking about this in the workshop. That art is something that creates experience. It creates an experience that you don't witness outside of this moment. When this kind of art becomes the norm, or the audience gets used to it, it's no longer contemporary. It becomes a part of history and our understanding of art historically. So when I witness another work the next year in the same style, or experience, I will consider it an old work. But it's no longer contemporary.
- Medina was working within this cycle. To create an experience that was unexpected in an exhibition like the Youth Salon.

HS: At the time Medina won the first prize at the exhibition…

SN: Yeah it was a war. I was on the committee. And it was a real fight for Medina to win.

HS: I can imagine, because it was something very new.

SN:

- Yeah nobody on the committee was convinced by that. It reached the point where we started to retrace the steps of the entire art history. It was me and another group of people. Ayman El Semary .. Dawood something. We were all avant-garde supporters. And we were part of a generation who were part of the Youth Salon when it first started, and this was its role. To bring up avant-garde ideas. So it doesn't mean that a painting of a lady lying down that is just done very well wins the grand prize, no. We give the grand prize for the next generation to know that creativity and creating powerful art is acknowledged. This is the main idea. Not whether you draw well or not.
- Some people saw this as westernised thought and we went through the whole loop again. And we were fighting the fight against the idea of the show being run under the Ministry of Culture and its a national platform and that has its own expectations. It was the same contrast between the university education program and the workshop and the Youth Salon's relationship to a work like Medina.

HS: So apparently the views of the committee weren't entirely supportive. What about the audience? Were they eager to accept something new like this? Or did they face some resistance?

SN:

- The audience is excited about anything that is new. We already know this about the audience. The audience is observant and quiet and absorbing. They are adaptable. They come with questions. But the art world, the art practitioners, specially those in the Ministry of Culture, in that area those were very antagonistic. While we did not feel any need for this antagonism. Like those who kill each other over a football game. In the end it's just a game. There's no need for violence.
- I'm personally against the idea of a prize because it pins the art against a price. Against something else. And sets its worth. I asked them to cancel the prizes, especially that year. If we don't have fundamentals to fall back on and we don't have any constructive criteria to assess it clearly, then there is no need for a prize. And when there is no winner, everybody wins and they are all part of a movement (since they got accepted to show at the Salon) and you can just reallocate the money for something else. For artists' support or cultural trips abroad to see the Venice Biennale or something else. This would be better than assessing which is better and which is worse. This was my thought at the time, when I found that we were debating or fighting for my perspective. And it ended up that my personal friends started to avoid me because they didn't agree with my perspective.
- So Basiony and the whole gang were part of the beginnings. I call them beginnings but until today, they are arguments that I still witness happening. But today there is no debate even. There is silence. Nobody even debates about the value of the technique/skill and there is much less criticism.
- There were those who were fighting for the art skills, and questioning how we can teach these things and techniques at the university but then give the prize to something completely different. And I was trying to say that the premise of what you're teaching at the university to begin with is wrong. So then I'm accused of trying to corrupt the Egyptian education system and tarnish the Egyptian identity, and I was supported by the west and the Americans. I became an agent of American policy and imperialism in Egypt. Especially when I went to teach at the American University. Even by my friends.
- This ideological debate was very prevalent then. But none of it happens now. Which indicates that we're actually worse off than where we were then.

HS: Maybe we got bored.

SN: No it's not boredom. It's surrender. It's being in a state when you don't even have the energy to have an ideology. The only ideology that I can see permeating the art space currently, has to do with personal benefit. What will I gain from all of this? How much will I get paid? Who will I be friends with? What enemies will I make? Which was also there back then, and all along. But an ideology that stems from thoughts about culture and the future or an understanding of resistance or experimentation. It's not about experimenting with something that comes from the west or wherever. It can be anything that is different that we want to try.
Back then, this worked in a different way because people were very verbal about what they wanted to say. There was no social media, but when an artist wanted to say something they would put it in flyers and

hand it out in their exhibition. That's how they stated and professed their ideology. Everything about life and the revolution. So it's not to say that we're living in a better time now, I don't think so at all.

HS: Yeah, I wouldn't disagree in that area.
I don't have any more questions. But I'm wondering about the archive if it's available and it's still possible to access it somehow?

SN: Yes it's all here. But it's not yet in a presentable format. I am now collecting everything. Some of it was shown in DAF, just a brief scan of what's in it. But it's missing a lot. I have to check each year and go through all of the content and recordings. So far, I only did a broad scan of each stage, like the first 3 years then after that and then when ASCII started. But I also want to make a documentary about each of these stages and mediums, so sound, video animations, etc. and put it online. But this takes a lot of time. And I have a lot of things to focus on. And I'm debating whether I should put other work on hold or just start it and get it done with.

HS: I believe that if this archive was made public it would solve a lot of problems and would help a lot of people and solve a lot of my problems! So I don't know if this influences you in any way, but I'm really anticipating it.

SN: Yes, this is what I'm saying.. I understand how important it is.