

Listening is not a natural process inherent to our perception of the world but rather constructed by the conditions of the spaces and times that engulf us. Cairo is popularly known as one of the noisiest cities in the world, owing most of its sonic constitution to traffic. Through the din of vehicles many Cairenes carve out a space for themselves, using loudspeakers to cut through the sonic mass and achieve audibility within it. These multifarious amplified terrains produce a dense and manifold audio-urbanity.

Through a series of devices, this exhibition attempts to employ the technological artifacts of the city as a means to document, inhabit and map its complex acoustic topography. Its main constituent is the cassette sermon, a once hugely popular medium of audio consumption that has almost disappeared from Cairo's streets nowadays. What used to be a prolific and highly political medium of Islamic ethical circulation has now given way to digital means of distribution. Second hand and home duplicated cassettes are nonetheless still available in shops and street stalls across the city.

*Tape Echo* seeks to revive once more this almost extinct audio form. Rather than archiving the tapes or registering their content, they are used as a medium to document the contemporary sonic constitution of the city, overdubbing the original content with recordings of the loudspeaker jurisdictions that make up its acoustic fabric. Since magnetic tape never deletes its content but merely realigns the magnetic particles it contains, the original sermons remain at the base of all new sounds recorded onto them. In that sense, the tapes operate as non-blank canvas here, as a medium which is both part of the city's acoustic history and a means to document its contemporary voice.

The exhibition comprises three sound installations and a series of optical scans of a cassette surface. Each work is titled after the cassette sermon tape used in its production:

Hypocrisy

*Tape delay device, metal suitcase, headphones, 2013*

*Hypocrisy* is based on a homemade version of a looping tape device that artificially produces spatial reverberation. By recording and playing back the same source in quick succession the sound appears to be echoing in a much larger space than it was actually recorded. Versions of this device were famously used to magnify the voice of Elvis Presley and later on applied to create the typical sound of Jamaican dub music. During the looping overdub process the magnetic particles of the tape are constantly realigned on its surface and the cassette tape produces its own acoustic chamber. Much like a sonic counterpart of the microscopic images of the cassette surface in the adjacent room, this echo chamber proposes another means of amplified spatial practice and acoustic cartography in the

battle to cut through the dense sonic topography of the city.

### A Conversation with an Unemployed

*Twelve photo prints on light table, 2013*

This image series successively magnifies the surface of a home duplicated cassette sermon purchased on Cairo's regular Friday market. The different microscopic scans render the topographic layers of magnetic particles of the tape into a visual cartography of the acoustic space it contains. That space not only includes the newly recorded speech but also remainders of every other recording that ever existed on the tape before that. What becomes visible are the palimpsests of multiple spaces and the layered stratification produced by the various recordings made throughout the life of the cassette. Since many or all of these recordings most likely took place in Cairo, the scans geologically excavate a signature of the city's own audio culture.

### Gardens of Death

*Audio composition on cassette player, loudspeakers with lighting feature, 29 min, 2013*

Dozens of open topped party boats line both sides of the Nile, decked out with powerful loudspeaker systems that immerse the passengers on their own sonic island while producing a cacophony that resonates across the river. The recording for this composition was made by steering a small motor boat along these floating loudspeaker jurisdictions with a microphone mapping the acoustic bleed between them. The XENON branded loudspeakers in this installation represent the typical kind of speakers that are roaring on the boats and throughout the streets Cairo; they almost seem to be singularly employed to power the sounds of the city.

### Rendez-vous at Night

*Tape loop composition on five cassette players, 30 sec, 2013*

The final work in the exhibition is located on the roof, where it melds with the arbitrary sounds of the neighborhood. Five cassette players produce a thirty second surround sound installation which as a single unit operates as a study of the different ways in which acoustic space is transmitted across the city. Like all works presented here, Rendez-vous at Night amplifies the auditory aspects of some of the territorial and ideological conflicts and negotiations vibrating in Cairo's daily (and

nightly) life.

Tape Echo has been newly commissioned by *Beirut* in Cairo. An expanded version of the project will be presented in 2014 at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven.

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