

# Volatile Frequencies:

Topologies of Authority, Technology and Production in Contemporary Middle Eastern Music Practices

---

**Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2010**

**City University London**

- 9.00           **Registration and coffee**  
Performance Area Foyer, City University London, Northampton Square, London, EC1V 0HB
- 9.45           **Welcome address**  
*Seth Ayyaz, (PhD candidate, City University London)*
- 10.00 – 11.00    Session one**  
                  **Chair:** *Thomas Gardner (Senior Lecturer, CRiSAP, London College of Communication)*
- 10.00           **“Arab” + “Avant Garde”**  
                  *Keynote 01: Kay Dickinson (Senior Lecturer, Goldsmiths, University of London)*
- 10.20           **Multi-Local Avant-Gardes? From Beirut and Beyond**  
                  *Keynote 02: Thomas Burkhalter (Researcher, Zurich University of the Arts)*
- 10.40           **Audience Questions and discussion**
- 11.00 – 11.30   **Coffee break**
- 11.30 – 12.30    Session two**  
                  **Chair:** *Lisa Skuret (Writer, Independent Researcher, Assistant Curator MazaJ Festival)*
- 11.30           **Lebanese Music Underground scene: a gender arena. The Mashrou3 Leila challenge.**  
                  *Speaker 03: Marina De Giorgi, (MA, School of Oriental and African Studies)*
- 11.50           **Loud, Insistent and Dumb – on New Wave Shaabi Music**  
                  *Speaker 04: Hassan Khan (Artist)*
- 12.10           **Audience Questions and discussion**
- 12.30 – 13.30   **Lunch**
- 13.30 – 14.50    Session three**  
                  **Chair:** tbc
- 13.30           **Tattoos and Other Markings**  
                  *Speaker 05: Thea Farhadian (Artist)*
- 13.50           **Songs of Love and Liberation from Iran**  
                  *Speaker 06: Ed Emery (PhD candidate, School of Oriental and African Studies)*
- 14.10           *Performance: **Songs of Love and Liberation from Iran***
- 14.30           **Audience Questions and discussion**
- 14.50 – 15.20   **Afternoon tea**
- 15.20 – 17.00    Session four**  
                  **Chair:** *Seth Ayyaz, (PhD candidate, City University London)*
- 15.20           **Name that tune: Music from the Middle of the East**  
                  *Keynote 07: Prof. John Hutnyk (Goldsmiths, University of London)*
- 15.40           **Panel discussion**  
                  *Speakers: Kay Dickinson, Thomas Burkhalter, Marina De Giorgi, Thea Farhadian, Hassan Khan, Ed Emery, Peyman Heydarian, John Hutnyk, Mutamassik.*
- 16.25           **Audience Questions and further Panel discussion**
- 16.35           **Final remarks**
- 16.45 pm       **Close of meeting**

## **Volatile Frequencies Concert:** this is the first concert of the MazaJ Festival series.

**7:00 pm**                    **INCIDENCE by Hassan Khan**  
(stereo, 40 minutes)

**INCIDENCE** is a live music and video concert premiered at the Festival D'Automne in Paris and has since been performed in Alexandria, Amman and Cairo (100Live tour) Berlin (Salon Bruit) Delhi (KhojLive Festival at the Goethe Institute) Gwangju (Cinema Gwangju at the opening of the Gwangju bienalle) Yokohama (The Red Warehouse Theatre at the opening of the Yokohama Triennale) Vilnius (CAC at the opening of Contour Video Biennale).

For tonight's evening Khan will present a seamless continuous mixture of older and newer music pieces including: *lust, figure and ground, KOMPRESSOR* (music based on translating sets of dreams), *lamptone, G.R.A.H.A.M., beautiful music* and *host*. The Pieces are accompanied by different video sequences specially shot by the artist (a monochrome Red that slowly shifts colour, vertiginous dream-like tracking/crane shots of solitary public lamps at night, a portrait of a photographer, a Lynchian moment where a desk lamp is transformed into something else etc.). Khan uses a battery of Feedbacking mixers, filters and processors, laptop manipulation, virtual synthesizer and live mikes in tandem to pre-composed and recorded string sections/tabla beats/ney trills/piano compositions in carefully arranged sequences that mix live improvisation with studio arrangements (this is not fusion / this is not beat with effects on top of it- these are worked out unfolding compositions that work with sound and music...).

broken beats / sound waves / frequency alterations / noise abrasion / tension and release / form and function / presence / density / loss and control

[www.hassankhan.com](http://www.hassankhan.com)

**7.40 pm**                    **Makharej by Seth Ayyaz (feat. Amira Ghazalla)**  
(multi-channel, live electronics and voice, 20 minutes)

**Makharej** is an exploration of the sonic potential latent within the dis/embodyment of the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet. The voice is situated in constrained sparse noise. The same voice speaks simultaneously - an impossible embodyment. The authority of the letter is interrogated. A fixed version exists, but *Makharej* is intended primarily as a live piece with a minimum duration of 20 minutes.

Literally *Makharej* means place of origination, or exit and this is taken as a cue to investigate the embodied nature of vocalisation. The keys: Repetition of certain combinations of divine letters is part of an Islamic enculturation, carrying a social / religious authority. An idea around the ownership of the letters is explored, moving between the prescribed "correct" articulation and an exploration of the sonic potential latent within their embodyment in sound. Transformations of the "correct" pronunciation, produces distortions in a cultural, semantic, linguistic sense.

In more everyday use, *Makharej* is "an exit" and can mean a denouement, a way of making a graceful exit from a difficult situation.

The 28 letters were recorded and selected according to somatic production, place of articulation, exit from the body. There are many complex sounds e.g. the laam - tongue, teeth, sinuses; the miim - closed mouth, the khaa' - soft palette, in throat, the 'ayn - throat and abdomen. Following analysis for psychoacoustic cues, two levels of transformation were explored. The voice is treated subtly, with changes still heard as voice, but extending beyond biological constraints. The second tier of processing is overtly electronic. A moment form is adopted to characterise each letter. Processing is partially prepared in the studio to obtain a degree of subtly and level of detail that can elude real-time. These are used alongside real-time processing in the live context to allow for the voice to become situated in a constrained, sparse and noise based world. Just as each letter has its' distinct identity so to does its electronic context. The same voice speaks simultaneously in an impossible embodyment as the sound is diffused live across an array of speakers.

[www.sethayyaz.com](http://www.sethayyaz.com)

**20.00**                    **Break**

**20.15**                    **Sonic Traces of the Arab World, by Norient (feat. Mazen Kerbaj and Sharif Sehnaoui)**  
(multi-media, trumpet, objects, guitar, live electronics, 40 minutes)

In this performance scientists, sound and video artists collaborate to present an audio-visual lecture on experimental and urban music from the Arab World (main focus: Mashriq). We hear propaganda music by various political groups and clans, psychedelic Arabic rock from the 1960s and 1970s, the noise of bombs and machine guns, synthesized «New Wave» Dabké, old and rare shellac recordings, Death Metal, Rap, Electro-Acoustic Music, Musique Concrète, and much more.

[www.norient.com/productions/en/live/sonictracesarabworld/](http://www.norient.com/productions/en/live/sonictracesarabworld/)

## Biographies

**Seth Ayyaz** is composer-performer whose work spans live electronics, free improvisation, noise and electroacoustics. He is a practitioner of Arabic music – principally nay (end-blown flute) ghaita (reed pipe) and hand percussion (darbuka and daf). Ayyaz is a PhD candidate at City University London Music Department, specialising in live electronics, building custom software/hardware ecologies for specific performances. Drawing on his background in neurosciences, his work is concerned with embodied perception and how this resonates across psychological and social spaces. His focus is on listening – and investigating what a sonic body can do. At present, his main interest is improvising with other listening machines, human or otherwise. Projects include work with live artist Franko B, Filastine, DJ Rupture, Badawi and the collaborative Automatic Writing Circle with composer Thomas Gardener. In 2007, alongside artists including Kode 9, hhyScumclash, and DJ Spooky, Ayyaz contributed the two-part piece *The Ocean of Tears* to Raz Mesinai's collaborative project Unit of Resistance. Ayyaz has presented his work internationally and most recently performed a live diffusion of *The Bird Ghost at the Zaouia* at the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology (2010) in Finland. The piece is a composed machine for listening that uses fragmented recordings made in Islamic religious rituals. It exploits and reconfigures the sonic detritus, the sounds designated as non-music, in a polemical and immersive multi-channel work. [www.sethayyaz.com](http://www.sethayyaz.com)

For the evening concert he will be performing *Makharej* with Amira Ghazalla.

**Dr. Thomas Burkhalter** is an ethnomusicologist and cultural journalist from Bern (Switzerland) working in the field of cultural globalisation. Burkhalter completed his PhD 'Creating Sense out of Chaos: New Sounds from Beirut' (2009) at the University of Bern, Switzerland. He is co-editor of *The Arab Avantgarde* forthcoming from Wesleyan University Press with Kay Dickinson and Ben Harber. Burkhalter has written reportages on the music and cultural scenes in cities such as Beirut, Istanbul, Cairo, Dushanbe, and Belgrade for Swiss and international media including *Neue Zuercher Zeitung*, *Swiss Radio DRS2*, *Zeitschrift fuer Kulturaustausch*, and *TAZ Berlin*. He is the founder and editor-in-chief of *norient.com*, an independent network for local and global soundscapes. Burkhalter also produced the documentary film *Buy More Incense* (2002) about Indian and Pakistani musicians of second and third generation in the UK. As a concert organiser, tour agent, and member of the board of trustees of the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia (since 2001), his concerns include the accumulation of knowledge regarding musical and cultural production in a globalised world. <http://norient.com/>.

For the evening concert he is part of *Sonic Traces of the Arab World* with Michael Spahr and Simon Grab.

**Dr. Kay Dickinson** is a lecturer within the Media and Communications department of Goldsmiths College, University of London currently on a Fellowship in the Society for the Humanities at Cornell University. She is the co-editor, with Benjamin J. Harbert and Thomas Burkhalter, of *The Arab Avant-Garde: Musical Innovation in the Middle East* (Wesleyan University Press, 2011), an anthology dedicated to experimental sound and music from jazz and improv to hip hop and heavy metal coming out of and inspired by what we might term "the Arab world". She is the author of *Off Key: When Film and Music Won't Work Together* (Oxford University Press, 2008) and has published on music in a wide variety of collections and journals.

**Ed Emery** is preparing a PhD (SOAS, London) on the transcultural circulation of song forms between Arabic, Jewish and Christian cultures 1100-1300. He is a long-standing translator of Antonio Negri, and writes on music for *Le Monde diplomatique*. As a theorist of immaterial labour and new social subjects he writes on "diasporic musicating subjects of resistance", which is the reference frame for his two London-based concert-seminar series entitled *The Maqam Project* and *Songs of Love and Liberation from Iran*. He is also organiser of a web-based free university, *Universitas adversitatis*.

**Thea Farhadian** is an interdisciplinary artist from the Bay Area, currently based in Berlin. Her projects include electronic music, sound art, performance, and video. Thea's work has been seen internationally at venues which include the Meridian Gallery in San Francisco, the Center for Experimental Art and the Aram Kachaturyan Museum in Yerevan, Armenia, the Alternative Museum and Issue Project Room in New York City, The Verwertung Festival in Berlin, and the International Women's Electroacoustic Listening Room Project in Amsterdam and Los Angeles. Thea studied Arabic classical music in New York City, San Francisco, and in Cairo. She has an M.A. in Interdisciplinary Arts from San Francisco State and an M.F.A. in Electronic Music from Mills College. In 2009, she was a lecturer in the Art Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

**Amira Ghazalla** is an artist working across media and forms. For more than two decades, she has been researching, studying and teaching ancient forms of expression & rituals. This understanding of physical heritage and orally transmitted knowledge is present in her work in theatre and dance. She has recently played in *Plan D* by Hannah Khalil at the Tristan Bates Theatre in London.

For the evening concert she will be performing *Makharej* with Seth Ayyaz.

**Marina De Giorgi** After a Musicology degree (2005) completed in Italy, including exchange program courses at Sorbonne IV, Marina worked in the cultural field of music. In Paris, she worked at the Irma (Centre de ressources pour la musique actuelles) investigating the state of the music market. She, also, assisted world and traditional musicians based in France. After a move to London, Marina followed the world music market through KAPA, an independent productions company, and Radio Peckham. Following on the aforementioned experiences, she studied at SOAS Ethnomusicology, which gave her the theoretical basis to carry out the research in Lebanon in the midst of the underground musicians. She had the opportunity to present part of her dissertation 'Lebanese underground scene: a gender arena' at the Middle East and Central Asia Music Forum in London last May. Marina is currently continuing her research between London and Beirut.

**Professor John Hutnyk** is Academic Director of the Centre for Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths College. He is author of a number of books including *The Rumour of Calcutta: Tourism, Charity and the Poverty of Representation* (Zed, 1996), *Critique of Exotica: Music, Politics and the Culture Industry* (Pluto Press, 2000), *Bad Marxism: Capitalism and Cultural Studies* (Pluto, 2004), and co-authored *Diaspora and Hybridity* (Sage, 2005) with Virinder Kalra and Raminder Kaur. Hutnyk is the editor of several volumes of essays including *Dis-Orienting Rhythms: the Politics of the New Asian Dance Music* (Zed, 1996 co-ed with Sharma and Sharma), editions of the journals *Theory, Culture and Society* and *Post-colonial Studies*, and of a festschrift for Klaus Peter Koepping called *Celebrating Transgression* (Berghahn, 2006 co-ed with Ursula Rao). He writes irregular prose at <http://hutnyk.wordpress.com>.

**Mazen Kerbaj** lives and works in Beirut where his main activities are music, comics, and painting. He has published 10 books, many short stories, and drawings and has exhibited his work internationally. Kerbaj is one of the founders of the Lebanese free improvisation scene, both as a trumpet player and as an active member in the MILL association that in 2001 founded and organises the annual Irtijal international festival for free music in Beirut - now in it's 10th year. [www.kerbaj.com](http://www.kerbaj.com), [www.irtijal.org](http://www.irtijal.org), [www.almaslakh.org](http://www.almaslakh.org)

For the evening concert he will be performing *Sonic Traces of the Arab World* with Norient.

**Hassan Khan** is an artist, musician and writer. Before beginning to exhibit his work in art spaces in the late 90s, Khan was heavily involved in Cairo's alternative cultural scene. His practice over the years has incorporated increasingly diverse media including photography, architectural installation, sound, animation, film and video, interventions in publications, performative actions, lectures and sculptural works, as well as soundtracks and music concerts. Selected solo shows include Gezira Art Center, Cairo (1999), Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris (2004), A Space Gallery, Toronto (2005), Gasworks, London (2006) Le Plateau, Paris (2007) Uqbar, Berlin (2008) and Kunst Halle St. Gallen (2010). Khan has also participated in the Istanbul (2003), Seville (2006), Sydney (2006), Thessaloniki (2007), Contour (2007), Gwangju (2008) Manifesta 8 (2010) biennales as well as the Turin (2005) and Yokohama (2008) triennials. Concert appearances include venues in Alexandria, Amman, Amsterdam, Barcelona, Beirut, Berlin, Cairo, Castellon, Delhi, Gwangju, Geneva, Marrakesh, Paris, Philadelphia, Palermo, Rome, Stockholm, Vilnius, and Yokohama. Khan is also widely published in both Arabic and English and has two books to his name so far *Nine Lessons Learned from Sherif El-Azma* (Contemporary Image Collective, 2009), and *17 and in AUC – the transcriptions* (Merz and Crousel, 2004). [www.hassankhan.com](http://www.hassankhan.com)

**Mutamassik** (meaning 'Stronghold' or 'Tenacity' in Arabic) a.k.a. Giulia Loli is a producer, DJ, artist, pioneer of Sa'aidi Hardcore, Baladi Breakbeats, transcendental sonic experiments, and relentless rhythms from Pan-African immigrant sound sources. She has worked with David Byrne's Luaka Bop, Arto Lindsay, Musicians of the Nile, Elliott Sharp, Bachir Attar, and Kaffe Matthews among others and has performed extensively throughout U.S., Africa, Middle East and Europe. "Before the sounds of the Middle East became de rigueur sampling materials for hip-hop, Mutamassik was exploring ways of fusing various sounds and styles into a compelling, challenging whole, shards a-flying all the while." (Wayne Marshall, Wayne & Wax). [www.roughamericana.com](http://www.roughamericana.com)

**Sharif Sehnaoui** is a free improvising guitarist. He plays both electric & acoustic guitars, with or without extended and prepared techniques, focusing on expanding the intrinsic possibilities of these instruments without the use of effects or electronics. He resides in Beirut after more than a decade in Paris, where he started his career as an improviser in 1999, playing at Instants Chavirés where he was a member of several orchestras. In Lebanon, he actively contributed to the emergence of an unprecedented experimental music scene. In 2001, with Mazen Kerbaj he created the Irtijal Festival, which is currently the only improvised and new music festival in the Arab world. [www.irtijal.org](http://www.irtijal.org)

For the evening concert he will be performing *Sonic Traces of the Arab World* with Norient.