

SPIN and INTERFERENCE

The next two compositions I am going to write about—*SPIN* and *INTERFERENCE*—are developed as part of a project that Sohrab Motabar and I started in 2018; *mediantbropy*. I had collaborated with Sohrab in *intra.view* before this project began. The broad aim of *mediantbropy*, in the context in which *SPIN* and *INTERFERENCE* took shape, is to explore the agency of ubiquitous digital information and technology in shaping new modes of connectivity between people, materials, and imaginaries within EEMSI through a series of ethnographically informed compositions and multi-media performances. For the start we decided to focus on randomly documenting our own daily routines through sound, image, video, text, and pieces of computer coding. The idea was to explore how the flood of seemingly unrelated data and the specific ways in which these data are accessed in our daily lives, may produce new insight into the emergence of new ways in which we tend to perceive life and respond to its complexities through practice (and discourse). The specific focus of *SPIN* and *INTERFERENCE*, however, was to explore possible relationships between the aesthetics of experimental electronic music practice in Iran, means of production (software/hardware), common forms of using the internet, and the kinds of data accessed in the daily life of Iranian digital artists/producers.

The composition process began with a survey. An online questionnaire was sent to twenty electronic producers based in Iran, who were chosen at random.¹ Participants only had to open the link of the online survey, fill in the form anonymously, and press submit. Within the form everyone was asked to respond to the following eight questions: 1- How long is your average daily usage of the internet? 2- For what purposes do you mostly use the internet? 3- What sound sources do you frequently draw from in your practice and how do you access those? 4- What software/hardware are more frequently used in your practice and how did you learn to use those? 5- Have you ever been trained, outside your individual endeavours, to manipulate sound, to compose, and to work with the software/hardware you use in your practice? 6- How do you describe your work in terms of genre aesthetics, if at all? 7- Do you see a connection between using the internet and the development of your practice in any shape or form (explain)?

The results demonstrated that participants believe they use the internet around three to four hours per day in average. They spend most of this time to acquire information related to

¹ For selecting the potential participants, I assigned each of my interlocutors a number. The ordering of these numbers corresponded to the sequence of our interviews in the course of the research. For instance, the first person whom I interviewed (the earliest interview in the course of the research) was assigned 1, the second 2, and so on. Then, using a random number generator in Max/MSP, twenty numbers were produced.

their practice, to listen to music, to check their social media accounts, and to watch series. The majority consider themselves autodidacts with little or no directly relevant training outside their individual efforts. YouTube and Wikipedia are most frequently mentioned as sources for information. The most popular production software are (in order of popularity): Ableton Live and Max for Live, Logic Pro, Nuendo and FL Studio, MAX/MSP, Pure Data. Sounds are sourced from personal libraries—recorded and synthesised, or sampled from the work of other producers and artists—and from varied online sources. Nevertheless, Ableton Live, VCV Rack², field recording, and samples extracted from various online sources, including audio archives such as the BBC's and the British Library's, were more frequently mentioned. The majority characterised the style of their work as experimental. The internet is mentioned by all the participants as the main source of music and the most significant influence in shaping their musical 'tastes', in providing information that otherwise would have been inaccessible, and in connecting them with artists, producers, and collaborators inside and outside the country. Social Media such as Facebook and Instagram, audio streaming platforms like Bandcamp and SoundCloud, messaging services like Telegram and WhatsApp, as well as YouTube and Wikipedia are the net-based spaces most frequented by the participants. These data not only served as a basis for the formation of *SPIN* and *INTERFERENCE*, but also, in conjunction with other online ethnographic studies and interviews, broadly informed the material presented in this thesis.

SPIN and *INTERFERENCE* are composed based on samples contributed by Sohrab Motabar and myself. These two pieces constituted my first attempt to map seemingly unrelated data in the context of *medianthropy*, through music. To that aim, all samples were randomly selected from a library of recordings that Sohrab and I had shared via Dropbox.³ Through the latter process a sound library for these two works was formed, which consisted of original recordings as well as samples extracted from two online sources: British Library and BBC archives. In *SPIN*, for instance, the orchestral string sounds that appear at 01:17 belong to a 1950s vinyl recording and is extracted from the British Library's page on Soundcloud⁴ (unfortunately I cannot find the exact link for the relevant recording). The FM radio tuning sounds that appear at 02:43 belong to an archive of BBC recordings, which was officially released

² VCV Rack is an open source and multi-platform modular synthesizer software, initially developed by Andrew Belt. Access VCV Rack's website via the following link (last accessed 22 Apr. 2018): vcvrack.com

³ All samples were arranged alphabetically in a list and assigned with ascending numbers accordingly (1,2,3...). Then, using a random number generator in Max/MSP, a number of samples were consecutively selected.

⁴ soundcloud.com/the-british-library

on April of 2018.⁵ The rest of the material in this piece are all original recordings. *INTERFERENCE* is, however, wholly based around five short samples that are introduced successively at the beginning of the piece until 00:12. These were extracted from Sohrab's samples, which had been generated using code written by himself in SuperCollider⁶. The distorted radiophonic voice that first appears at 01:01 was also extracted from the BBC archive.

Sample-based composition and performance has been around with the Schaefferian musique concrète since 1940s and became 'mainstream' through hip-hop since 1970s. Viewing sample-based music as a source of information mapping, however, can be regarded as a new approach. In the context of my work, this perspective finds its earliest roots in media studies and the work of Marshall McLuhan and Friedrich Kittler. McLuhan wrote in *Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962, 41) that:

[I]f a new technology extends one or more of our senses outside us into the social world, then new ratios among all of our senses will occur in that particular culture. It is comparable to what happens when a new note is added to a melody. And when the sense ratios alter in any culture then what had appeared lucid before may suddenly become opaque, and what had been vague or opaque will become translucent.

Twenty-five years later (1987) in an article that first appeared in *October* journal (101–118) and addressed the challenges posed by digitisation of data, Kittler noted: 'A total connection of all media on a digital base erases the notion of the medium itself.' (Kittler 1997, 32). The experimental electronic music scene that I have written about in this text is a product of the 'digital age'. To understand its underlying processes, therefore, a local-global frame of analysis, although important, would not suffice. A concurrently ethnographic and practice-led study can help articulating the blind spots of in-between; processes that are deeply rooted in producers' simplest everyday life exchanges—with their fellow humans but also with new media technologies and digitised data. The form of such exchanges were significantly different only twenty years ago. These now involve using mobile phones to navigate the geographies, engaging with augmented reality games that extend the digital reach of our devices to the 'natural' environment (urban or otherwise), finding answers to our all kinds of questions rapidly through carrying the most unbelievably large libraries in our pockets, and so on. The aesthetics of EEMSI are above all shaped through such processes, which undermine a clear-cut local-global divide.

⁵ This archive is fully accessible, and downloadable, via the following link (last access 6 Feb. 2019):

bbcsfx.acropolis.org.uk

⁶ SuperCollider is a programming environment and a language for real-time audio synthesis and algorithmic composition. It was initially released in 1996 by James McCartney. See the following link for its dedicated page on GitHub: supercollider.github.io

In this context, *medianthropy* and its earliest outcomes *SPIN* and *INTERFERENCE* are an attempt to document and creatively reflect on the emergence of new modes of connectivity between ‘sounds’ and experimental electronic producers who are ‘physically’ based in Iran. Furthermore, *INTERFERENCE* also aims to challenge the regularities of genre music, especially idm and techno: two popular genres from which EEMSI heavily draws. It does so from ‘within’ the aesthetic confines of such forms—otherwise the work would have lost ‘touch’ and could have no longer been conceived as conversing with EEMSI’s common practices. In parallel to generic influences, such regularities can also be understood in terms of actions that are encouraged by the design of software interfaces such as Ableton Live; the most used software for music production and performance among my interlocutors. In this context, for instance, the regular timing (or placing) of the ‘kick drum’ in techno (aka four-on-the-floor kicks) is repeatedly challenged throughout *INTERFERENCE*. Ableton in particular allows producers to relatively easily craft ‘perfect’ loops, and to trigger them in live sessions. The result is performances in which the music transitions from one perfectly crafted loop to another. *SPIN* and *INTERFERENCE* both aim to challenge such digital-interface-influenced regularities. I should note, however, that these have also been challenged by some of my interlocutors as well: for instance by 9T Antiope’s Nima Aghiani⁷, Sohrab Motabar⁸, Parsa Jamshidi (aka PARSA)⁹, and Parsa Hadavi¹⁰.

⁷ For instance see *Backscatter*, an album by Nima Aghiani self-released on 9T Antiope’s Bandcamp in February 2018, via the following link (last accessed 13 May 2019): 9tantiop.bandcamp.com/album/backscatter

⁸ For instance see *Layers-X*, a single by Sohrab Motabar released as part of the compilation album Noise À Noise 19 through the Tehran-based record label Noise À Noise in January 2019, via the following link (last accessed 13 May 2019): noise-a-noise.bandcamp.com/track/sohrab-motabar-layers-x

⁹ For instance see expopp 1, a single by Parsa Jamshidi released as part of the compilation album Girih through Ata Ebtekar’s record Label Zabte Sote in August 2018, via the following link (last accessed 13 May 2019): zabtesote.bandcamp.com/track/expopp-1

¹⁰ For instance see (*Metamorphosis for Tapes*) *Homage a Gholamali Margiri*, a single by Parsa Hadavi released as part of the compilation album Noise À Noise 19 through the Tehran-based record label Noise À Noise in January 2019, via the following link (last accessed 13 May 2019): noise-a-noise.bandcamp.com/track/parsa-hadavi-metamorphosis-for-tapes-homage-a-gholamali-margiri

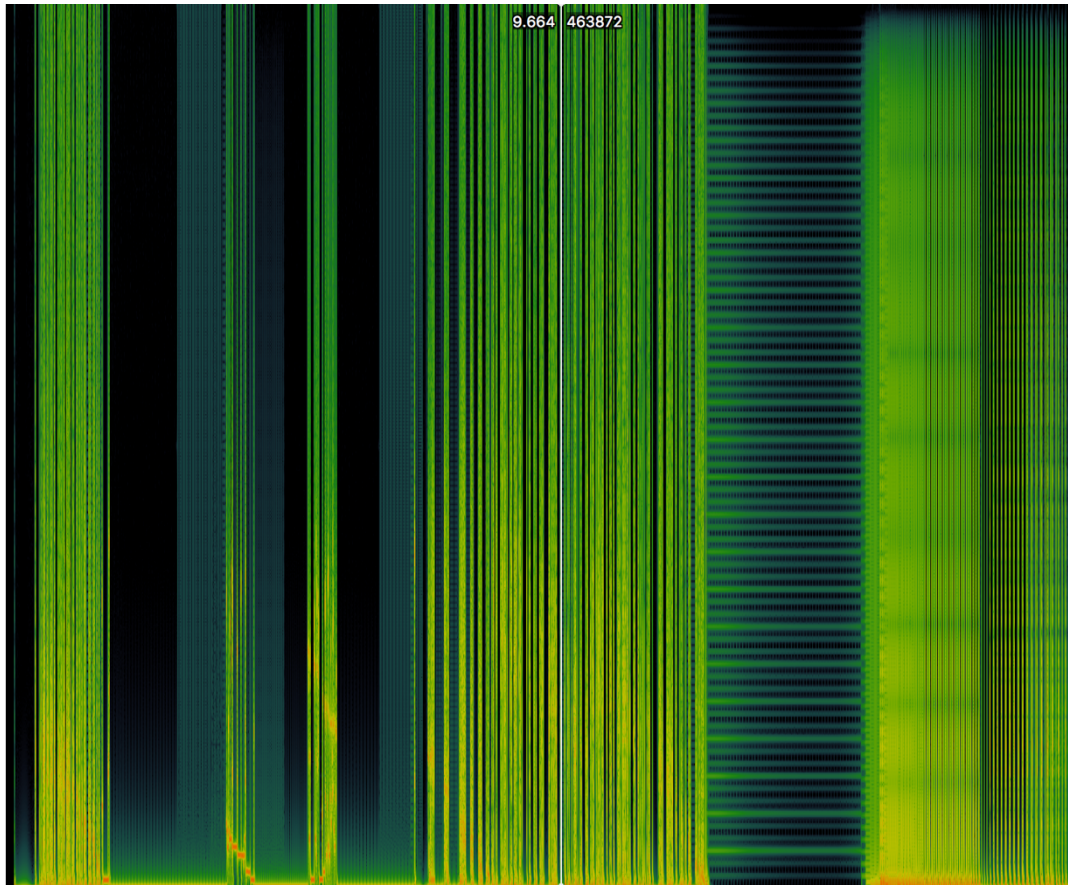


Figure 6-14. Screenshot from a part of the spectrogram of *INTERFERENCE* produced using Sonic Visualiser