Program Abstracts (alphabetical by presenter)

**Lawrence Abu Hamdan, The All-Hearing 2014 (screening)** (not attending but will participate remotely for post-screening Q&A),
So pervasive to daily Cairo life is a loudspeaker libertarianism, that the issue of hearing damage and noise pollution was immediately accepted as a topic for a Friday sermon when I suggested the idea to two Cairene Sheikhs. Despite new laws that the military government established that seek to monotonize the delivery of sermons by enforcing Sheikhs to only give speeches according to the weekly government sanctioned topic, our Sheikhs remained even more determined to have the issue of noise heard. And heard not only to their congregation inside the mosque but to all those passers by who were barraged by the mosques loudspeakers broadcasting into the streets outside. The military crackdown on the amplified voices of the city is done in the name of policing noise and the lawless terrain of the loudspeaker yet it is in fact simply a means to direct the flow of voices away from espousing anything against the government. Anything that they do not want heard. Hence on the day the Sheikhs delivered their sermons on noise pollution as far as the ear could hear all the mosques in the surrounding area were explaining the Prophet's Ascension to Heaven, the government dictated topic of that week.

**Rüstem Ertuğ Altınay, Sounds of Queer Worldmaking: Desire and Belonging in the Works of Şelale Akırmak and MC Bebelakl**
How do sonic strategies serve queer politics in Turkey? My presentation will explore this question by focusing on the works of the performance duo Şelale Akırmak (Öyküm Taner) and MC Bebelakl (Oğuzhan Okumuş). Under the successive governments of the economically neoliberal, socially conservative and Sunni Islamist Justice and Development Party since 2002, queer politics in Turkey have been characterized by fundamental tensions. On the one hand, while the party initially employed a pro-LGBT discourse as part of its bargain with liberal circles, this was replaced by intensified political oppression. On the other hand, in part thanks to the work of LGBT organizations, the rise of communication technologies, and global political dynamics, queer engagement and visibility have witnessed an unprecedented rise across the political spectrum. In this context, the political significance of queer performance and aesthetic practices has intensified. In this presentation, I will explore the works of Şelale Akırmak and MC Bebelakl, two young artists whose works combine diverse sonic strategies and found archives, to understand the relationship between sound and queer politics in contemporary Turkey. I will investigate the dynamics of temporality and affect in their works to analyze how the artists propose strategies for queer worldmaking. By studying the aesthetics of synchronicity, I will discuss how the duo employ disidentificatory strategies for queer sociality. As I examine how they employ alternative repertoires of affect in their reparative engagements with nationalist archives, I will explore how sonic strategies may facilitate investment in new subject positions within and beyond Turkey.

**Lara Baladi, Invisible Monument: Audioscapes, Archives, and Social Movements**
Lara Baladi will discuss the history and ideas behind Invisible Monument, as well as the possibilities for installing a volume here at NU in academic year 16-17. Invisible Monument, a
project by Baladi in collaboration with Halsey Burgund. Since 2011, from the Arab Spring to the Occupy movements, the world has experienced an unprecedented number of uprisings. **Invisible Monument** is an ongoing series of contributory audioscapes geolocated in spaces across the world where these social movements started and changed history. The audiences are invited to experience and contribute to **Invisible Monument** using an iOS app available in the Apple store, to reminisce and share their stories, to reflect on the consequences of these social movements and their outcome and to voice their opinion on current debates related to their aftermath. All audio contributions instantly become a part of the evolving audioscape, which will continue to be accessible onsite into the future. This project is part of Baladi’s long term project on the 2011 Egyptian Revolution: "Vox Populi, Archiving a Revolution in the Digital Age". Invisible Monument #1 is located in Dewey Square, Boston, #2 is in Malcom X Square in Washington DC (May 2016) and #3 will be in Tahrir (January 2017).

**Beau Bothwell, Souriali’s New Listening Public**

Syria’s domestic radio during the Asad era, controlled directly by the state until the introduction of private radio in 2006, was specifically tasked with shaping the Syrian public through the act of listening. While state radio was never the only mode available to Syrians, who accessed radio from over the borders in Lebanon especially, and eventually the private stations that arose between 2006 and 2011, the domestic radioscape was conditioned by the two possibilities of the state model and the neoliberal consumerist model on offer from regime-affiliated private stations. As Syrian revolution and civil war have sent Syrians into internal displacement and external diaspora, Syrians have founded new, opposition stations, positing a variety of new listening models and ways to be a listening citizen. This paper describes an alternative listening citizen posited by Souriali, a radio station founded by Honey As-Sayyed and run by engineers, DJs, and broadcasters across the current diaspora. Through interviews, and an analysis of its playlist and two of its programs (Ayyam Lulu, and Alf Serda wa Serda) I describe how Souriali’s broadcasters imagine a new Syrian national public, and alternative relationships between listeners, broadcasters, and the Syrian nation.

**Sascha Crasnow, Aural Occupation: Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme’s Contingency (2010)**

The West’s perceptions of the Middle East are largely informed by the visual imagery of mass media. Due to this visual familiarity, much of the art from the region exhibited internationally references this visual iconography—the checkpoints and apartheid wall in Palestine, for example, having become visual markers for the “Palestinian conflict.” In response, some artists have consciously chosen to avoid this imagery in their work, representing their experiences and realities through alternative means. In Contingency (2010), Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme forgo visual imagery in lieu of a sonic experience of the most notorious checkpoint—Qalandia—which separates Jerusalem from the West Bank city of Ramallah. The installation consists of a pitch black room with aluminum walls, which are illuminated when the red light of LED tickers running along the top edge of the room display English translations of voices heard on the audio. The audio itself dominates. Taken from the artists’ clandestine recordings at the checkpoint, the screeches of microphone feedback, churning of metallic turnstiles, and muffled voices immerse the listener in the aural oppression experienced by those who pass through the checkpoint on a daily basis. Unlike the visual images of the checkpoints whose effectiveness has been blunted by their sheer ubiquity, Contingency brings an immersive sensory experience to its audience. In this paper, I argue that Contingency’s use of the auditory, rather than visual, experience reveals the power of auditory occupation, providing the audience exposure to this experience, while simultaneously revealing the role of the sonic, and silence, in resistance.
Ziad Fahmy, Regulating Bodies and Remembering Lost Sounds: Street Hawkers and their Calls in Early Twentieth Century Egypt

In the last decade, historians have finally started listening to the past. By interpreting how peoples of the past sonically experienced their world, a richer, more embodied grasp of historical events is possible. Historians of the Middle East, however, have yet to join this auditory shift, and with few exceptions, are still largely producing soundproof, devocalized narratives. My focus in this paper will be on the sounds of the urban streets, and more specifically, the cries of Cairene street hawkers. After analyzing the variety of the cries of street hawkers in interwar Egypt, I will examine how Egyptian popular media reflected, celebrated and memorialized some of these calls, which became keynote sounds marking Cairene urban living. I will especially focus on the collective nostalgia invoked by these media as disappearing urban sounds, like the calls of water sellers, were remembered and commemorated by songs, plays and later on movies. As I hope to show in my conclusion, there is much to be discovered if we are more sensitive to the body and we incorporate sounds and soundscapes as part of our methodological toolkit for understanding the past.

Deborah Kapchan (Keynote), Slow Ethnography, Slow Activism: Listening, Witnessing, and the Longue Durée

What are ethnographies of listening and what promise do they hold for utopic and political activism? Since beginning my research on Sufism in France in 2008, I have witnessed rising anxiety levels between secular-identified and Muslim-identified French citizens. Unlike many orthodox Muslims, however, Sufis worship with music and have a practice of deep listening (sama’). The Charlie Hebdo attacks, as well as the Bataclan massacre, while acts of murder and fanaticism, nonetheless stirred up debates about the secular/sacred divide once again: virulent anti-clericalism met discourses of democracy, free-speech vs free-practice, 1789-99 versus 1968 versus 2015. I begin with this context firstly because it is impossible not to reference these events when researching any form of Islam in contemporary Europe, and secondly, because performing what might be called the ‘Sufi sublime’ is not an apolitical realm of mystical experience as many Sufis would like to believe. Rather I suggest that the sublime does the work that many other aesthetic expressions after modernity do: it displaces the human from the center of experience, putting ways of being before ways of knowing and enacting unexpected intimacies that confound rational understanding, insisting rather upon an aesthetic pedagogy that we might refer to as ‘being-with-paradox.’ What part does listening play in sublimity? How do we witness the sublime and to what end? How might listening to sublimity – being an aural witness to a form of temporal utopia – provide political lessons for ethnography? In this presentation, I advocate for slow activism through methods of listening in and to the longue durée.

Maria Frederika Malmström, Loud sirens outside the house and utter silence at night: Disruptions, rhythms and the Thawret 25 yanāyīr

In this paper I will discuss the lack of sound in the floating landscape of Egypt. Several scholars have discussed the role of sound in relation to the uprisings in North Africa. Instead, I will discuss its absence, which is another soundscape, by drawing on fieldwork in Cairo after the ousting of President Mohamed Morsi on July 3, 2013. To experience Cairo empty, dark and mute during the curfew (and state of emergency) that started in mid-August after the bloody turmoil that followed the overthrow of Morsi, was a total contrast to every moment of my previous interactions with Cairo. A city I had sensorially experienced for more than a decade was no longer familiar to me or my interlocutors anymore. It was a new urban terrain. It was a ghost metropolis. It was a move towards something unfamiliar. Everything was floating. Actually it was difficult to orient oneself in this new capital of Egypt. We could not navigate, not only because of security risks, but because everything had been transformed in relation to hearing, sight, scent, touch and taste. Although in many ways a continuation of earlier military governments, the current state has not only succeeded in wielding strong material and affective forces, but also in partly satisfying the
widespread desire for stability these forces have evoked, in part by reproducing a neo-patriarchal state that is seen as defending national interests. Sonic warfare—or the controlled lack of sonic materiality—is an action of corporeal disciplining; the (change of) vibrations stimulate, frighten, and control bodies. The thunderous masculine soundscape from military aircraft or helicopters, or the silence during curfew in 2013, intensely affected the collective body. In doing so, the state has both materialized its presence and provoked still more powerful desires for individual and collective safety, stability, and comfort. By focusing on the sounds of silence, I will further reflect on the role of abrupt changes in rhythm, in the creation of an “old-new” territory.

Peter McMurray, Sonic Pathways: Guestworkers, Refugees and Audible Difference in Berlin
In July 2015, the Berlin Alevi Community organized a massive protest through the heart of Neukölln and Kreuzberg, two major "Turkish" districts in the city since the "Guestworker" migrations of the 1960s and '70s. The annual protest, led by a flatbed truck with a musician playing saz and singing protest music, commemorated the 1993 Sivas Massacre, in which dozens of Alevi poets, writers, and intellectuals died in a hotel fire set by a Salafi-leaning mob after Friday prayers. Just a few weeks after this protest, a new wave of immigrants began pouring into the city—this time refugees from Syria and Iraq (among other places) by way of Turkey and Greece. The arrival of these refugees has heightened awareness of areas in the city, like Sonnenallee, the historical heart of the Arab community in the city since the Cold War—and not coincidentally, part of the Alevi protest route. While thousands of refugees live in temporary shelters, areas like Sonnenallee manifest a striking normalcy to them, made audible above all through the sonic life of shisha bars, outdoor vendors (year-round), phones-as-portable stereos, and cafes. This talk explores the cultural acoustics of diaspora in Berlin through two ethnographic walks—a kind of sonic flânerie—from the same starting place (Hermannplatz). The first marches along with the music and chants of the Alevi protest, the second ambles more comfortably through Arab Neukölln. Drawing on fieldwork and audiovisual recordings, I listen for the sonic traces of Berlin's transnational histories embedded in both, ultimately arguing that sound offers a critical site of difference-making within these communities, differences that in the past year have become an expressly audible part of Berlin's public (and counterpublic) sphere.

Cristina Moreno Almeida, Critical Listening: Academia, Media and The Politics of Endorsing/Silencing Rappers in Morocco
The study of rap music and hip hop culture as well as its global links is a subject that has attracted much attention in the academic community as well as media in general. Rap in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, in particular, has capitalized on as a way of dealing with the 2011 uprisings, also known as the ‘Arab Spring’. However, researchers and media have failed to accurately report on rap music often reproducing stereotypical depictions of Arab youth in constant state of anger. This paper examines the ways in which young rappers in the MENA have served the media as a marketable item without considering the local impact and particularities of these artists. It unravels the ways in which the media and scholars capitalize on hip hop as a global signifier of youth and ‘hype,’ but fail to listen to local audiences and their aesthetic preferences. As this paper suggests, this problem is accentuated when the creators of the cultural production under scrutiny are young Muslims. I employ a Cultural Studies approach and interdisciplinarity to explore the different narratives that emerge employing the act of listening as a conceptual and methodological framework. This paper seeks, therefore, to challenge media and academics by presenting the cases study of two Moroccan rappers: The first, Muslim from Morocco, that has gained popularity in the region but have been overlooked by media and researchers; and the second, rapper LHaqed praised by the media and researchers, but deemed as uninteresting by Moroccan audiences.
**Wendy Pearlman, Hearing Syrian Stories: Interviews as Windows into Lived Experience**

What can Syrians’ stories teach us about who they are and what they seek? I have conducted open-ended interviews with more than 250 displaced Syrians in Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon. My interviews range from 30-minute one-on-one conversations to group discussions involving several individuals over hours, to oral histories recorded over days. In this presentation I discuss the process of collecting, analyzing, and shaping this material into a book of oral histories. Drawing from my book manuscript, I also share a selection of the stories that sketch a humanistic interpretation of the current conflict in Syria and how it has transformed those who have lived it. I propose that individual narratives coalesce into a collective narrative whose arc paints a portrait of silence and intimation under an oppressive regime before 2011, expresses the transformative experience of individuals’ participating in protest against that regime, conveys the suffering and resilience of communities enduring violence thereafter, and offers a window into the challenge of becoming and being a refugee. I conclude with lessons about what we can learn from listening to these and other Syrian voices.

**Shayna Silverstein, The Presence of Connection: Sound, Affect, and Digital Ethnography**

Since the disintegration of Syrian society in 2011, my ethnographic methods have substantively adapted towards digital media and social networking and away from in-situ fieldwork. In the course of making this understandable shift, I have grown more attentive to the role of sound in sustaining a feeling of ‘being there’ and how a particular sense of place emerges despite or perhaps due to the hybridity of lives, on/offline and in/out of Syria. Considering the relationship between the real and digital mediation as mutually constitutive, this paper attends to how sonic mediations amplify such intermediality; it is arguably through the affective politics of recorded sound that I, and others, am able to sustain the presence of connection, however networked, decentered, and partial. Yet the challenge in thinking about the intermedial relations of sound is not only the privilege afforded image in the representational economy, of violence in particular, but also how these mediations affect structures of feeling that are vital to global civic engagement and the narratives that sustain engagement. This paper traces my participation in the formation of particular narratives, their divergences and convergences, among networked publics in the five year period since the Syrian uprising to ask whether and how mediated sound engages us more deeply and intimately in intermedial acts of world-making.

**Darci Sprengel, Listening and the Cultivation of a new “Public” in Post-Mubarak Egypt**

Mini Mobile Concerts (MMC) is a grassroots initiative started in Alexandria, Egypt shortly after the 2011 uprisings by local musicians and activists who aim to bring improvisatory music from private spaces to the public street. It consists of small groups of two to four musicians who hold impromptu jam sessions on busy street corners, an act that prior to the uprisings would have led to their arrest by police. These musicians perform what they call “oriental fusions,” which blend the approaches and aesthetics of Arab art music with diverse genres such as metal, hip-hop, jazz, and rock. By bringing these genres from official concert venues to the popular street, the artists involved in MMC intend to challenge the dominance of working-class popular music, such as sha’bi and mahragan, in public spaces. They believe listening to their own more middle-class “oriental fusions” will transform public mood in ways that continue the revolution. In this paper, I draw on the work of Charles Hirschkind and A.J. Racy to demonstrate how MMC’s musicking is deeply intertwined with local feelings toward the transformative potential of listening. I combine this work on local performance practices with an ethnographic approach to theories of affect to analyze the greater social and political implications of listening in public. Drawing on seventeen months of field research conducted between 2010 and 2016, I argue that listening in Egyptian
public space is politicized in the absence of freedom of speech and assembly due to its close relationship with affective transformation and class politics.

Leila Tayeb, Listening and 2011 Libya
My in-progress dissertation project is essentially concerned with the relation of listening acts to the process through which the sensible can be redistributed (Rancière 2010). Taking the 2011 Libyan revolution as event and social field, I attempt to show that music performances constituted disruptions in the distribution of the sensible that fundamentally altered the categories of possible and impossible during the revolutionary moment. In this presentation, I want to trace this theoretical architecture through the video recording of an ethnographic encounter that took place in Benghazi in September 2011. As performativity is always about reiteration and this symposium is particularly interested in the performativity of listening, I take the chain of iterated acts of listening that this video recording evidences and further enables as a point of departure. In the video, a woman drives through the neighborhood near the university in Benghazi and tells the story of a moment earlier that year, at the beginning of the revolution, when she found a tape to play in her car. Behind the camera, I listen to her tell the story – for the second time – while we both listen to the cassette tape she’s describing and playing again. In the conference, we listen and simultaneously read a translation. From here, I craft a discussion concerned with the overlapping and disjointed worldings that such a chain of listening facilitates. My hope is that these overlaps and disjunctures offer insight into the limits of co-listening, while yet themselves also providing the kind of conflict between sense and sense to which Rancière is attentive.

Michelle D. Weitzel, Pulling Glass: Sonic Infrastructures and North African Migration
Sound—existing at the interface of physiological reception and vibratory signal—enfolds us, saturates our bodies, and constitutes a critical part of our sensory map of the world, yet it is rarely conceptualized or studied as explicitly political. Rather, an apolitical understanding of sound persists despite its well-documented historical deployment in struggles to control physical territory and living populations via mechanisms of privation, amplification, surveillance, and self-regulation. Drawing on fieldwork conducted in Morocco in 2015, this paper builds on extant research pointing to a spatial correlation between burgeoning IT infrastructures—in this case the phone towers that provide mobile coverage—and overland routes chosen by sub-Saharan migrants seeking to make their way northward toward Europe, to examine the central role that cell phones and voice play in the development of strategies of individual resistance or subversion and flexible forms of empowerment. Drawing on French-language interviews conducted in the transient migrant neighborhood of Takadoum on the outskirts of Rabat, it draws attention to specifically acoustic forms of knowledge production and the ways in which sound complicates extant conceptualizations of the power relationships structuring mobility, borders, and national belonging.