

Print Run

New music books

Seismographic Sounds: Visions Of A New World

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Norient Pbk 504pp

Bronze coloured satellite dishes are scattered around the Seismographic Sounds exhibition in Kunstraum Kreuzberg, Berlin, part of the CTM festival and accompanying Norient's text collection of the same name. As their caption reads, the parabolic dishes are characteristic of the area around Kottbusser Tor, attached to the 1970s-era apartment blocks, becoming signs of home and signals to homes elsewhere.

These parables could be parables (whether or not the curators' name play is purposeful) for the patterns of broadcast and reception over the Norient network, which begins with three researchers in Switzerland and reaches out to 50-odd countries: connections in Asia, Africa, South America and the Middle East,

established over 12 years of travel. In the gallery the dishes emit samples from this multi-local diaspora, from Accra to Helsinki, while the book gives voice to 250 contributors – musicians, academics, bloggers, critics and producers.

But it is out of digital not broadcast media that *Seismographic Sounds* evolved, and on YouTube that its contributors share a home. Norient asked their contacts to send them current music clips from their home countries, then organised these into six streams (War, Money, Loneliness, Exotica, Desire, and Belonging) and invited written responses to these clips, representative of the contemporary scenes that emerged.

A brief sample: the Turkey and Lebanon based writer Arie Amaya-Akkermans writes that Nguzunguzu's "Mecha" "assumes sound to be the architectural force in conflict", and collages a battlefield fantasy far from war's physical reality. (I think of Chino Amobi of NON Records'

video "Burning Tower" and its pixelated footage of US drone strikes, aesthetic resistance devoid of blockbuster glamour; Amobi also designed the cover art for the book.) The Senegalese *Journal Rappé*, a show launched on YouTube by Dakar rappers Xuman and Keyti parodies national news channels. (The Greek word *parodia*, remind authors Jenny Mbaye and Aisha Deme elsewhere in the anthology, means counter-song.) South African artist Umlilo's references to post-kwaito beats and Xhosa rituals of masculinity, wearing white bandages (post-apartheid wounds, gender surgery) and false eyelashes (camp partying, performativity) embody queerness as a way out of established narratives and identities, though not without struggle. Southern African music is well represented in the book, both visually and in text, from Tshetsha Boys to DJ Invizable and beyond.

Norient's approach is that of net age ethnomusicology, and the results are

polyphonic, though mostly in English. The texts' form and interactions reflect the project's formation – blog-like, with quotes and tags at the foot of pages to trace common concerns between locations. With its transitory visions and reference to music clips, you might ask why they sought to produce a book at all, rather than developing an online platform – something more powerful than the existing blog, where some of these texts can be accessed – that could be continually, communally updated.

While Norient are cultural gatekeepers, with a hunger to represent the new, the material here shows that difference is just that: multiplicitous and ungeneralisable. If the book's production feels as connective as the internet itself (which already implies some level of access and privilege), it is not flattening, but, to use theorist Sara Ahmed's language of intersectional politics, a necessarily bumpy ride.

Hannah Gregory



Images from *Seismographic Sounds*: (clockwise from top left) Tshetsha Boys, Umlilo, DJ Invizable, *Journal Rappé*

Chris Saunders (Tshetsha Boys, DJ Invizable); Jasyn Howes (Umlilo); Xuman (*Journal Rappé*)