

Burur & Interactive Wearable Sound Art: Feeling the **Unspoken EXCESS** of Somali Diasporic
Affect

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Abstract

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Those in the Somali and larger Black Diaspora in Canada have learned to navigate this liminal space where we negotiate our cultural identity and expression to fit into white hegemonic society. This practice is known as code switching. This ability to adapt and fit into various settings and situations while still holding on to your culture is often seen as a superpower in the Black Diaspora, but it is also a heavy burden. Code switching is the need to conform and express oneself in a palatable way in colonialist societies. In my research I explore how concepts like the Technovocalic Body, Black technopoetics, sonic substance, and Toloobid might create an alternative way of self expression that allow for those in the Black Diasporic to speak and literally feel their ineffable thoughts and emotions while reaffirming their cultural identity. This project utilizes research-creation to create a wearable interactive sound art piece, the Burur Device, that allows a person to haptically engage with affectively charged sonic media and respond to it by distorting it and imbuing it with their own feelings. The Burur Device was created by attending Somali cultural events and engaging with the sound recordings of these to recreate a sonic space to inhabit, feel and distort. The immersions and immediacy of interactive haptic sound capabilities of the Burur Device offer a way for those in the Black Diaspora to express, materialize and embody the ineffable pressures of code switching that alludes language (for now).

Keywords: Somali Diaspora, Black Diaspora, Burur, Sound, Black Technopoetics, Interactive Art, Technovocalic Body, Wearable Art, Haptic Art, Affect

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irrupting into and erupting out of that self-inflicted, rendering condemnation of [a person] who had seemed to make such ruptive motion impossible, determined to keep returning to—or to keep turning in—that exhaustively locomotive breaking until [they come] round right. What if [people] escape[ed] the labor of the negative via self-inflicted release into the thingly, a simple autodispossessive gift of self to instrument that resets both self and instrument in an ongoing, general recalibration of any and every such relation? (This is a hard question. You have to come around again and start all over and hope that what you do gets close to what you're trying.)¹

-Fred Moten

Introduction

It is 4 am and I am walking down an empty road called Chemin Chambly; one of “the earliest roads created in Canada”². My headphones are playing a recording of an old Somali folk song, called a Zaar³. I am humbled by the fact that this road I am walking on has such a long history. Then I question why it is so important to memorialize the fact that this is the oldest road in Canada with road signs. Is it an attempt to materially legitimize a particular narrative of history and the ongoing colonial project that is Canada? I hear the Zaar performance playing and Somalis clapping and stomping on the ground through my headphones. Hearing these Somali feet hit the ground of Somalia make me reflect on my own footsteps on this road. The song ends, and I am at an intersection. My boots make a muffled squelching sound as I am leaving footprints on the dense snow, and it makes me feel like I am walking on the moon, an alien tenuously invited by a false host. All these footsteps, places and histories collapsing in on each other is beginning to make me feel disoriented (*Dayoobid*, Somali word of disoriented, lost, directionless)⁴. I press the next song to play on my phone adding a new layer to this road crowded with multiple histories and cultures. I walk and try to immerse myself in this (dis)orientation.

The lack of tangible cultural heritage in the form of sculptures, buildings, road names and spaces for Diasporic communities exalts the importance of intangible cultural heritage. Intangible heritage can be songs, stories, beliefs and practices, but at the heart of it is language⁵. Language is the bridge that can connect Diasporic cultures to the homeland they long for and try to recreate⁶. When a Diasporic community tries to recreate their home in a place where a culture already resides, Diasporic Cultures do not supplant. The Diasporic culture creates “altered imaginings that live alongside existing” culture as the Diasporic culture is in a state of “becoming”⁷. As a Diasporic Somali, I “infuse my rhythm” in the spaces I find myself in and

¹ Moten, *The Universal Machine*, 29.

² “Chambly Road National Historic Event,” 1.

³ A Zaar is a spiritual healing ritual involving communal dancing music.

⁴ Mukhtar and Castagno, *Historical Dictionary of Somalia*.

⁵ Naguib, “Museums, Diasporas and the Sustainability of Intangible Cultural Heritage,” 2180.

⁶ Edugyan, *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne*, 33.

⁷ Karim, *The Media of Diaspora*, 9.

have the spaces' "vibration[s]" affecting me⁸. These rhythms are not competing for dominance. They are in a dance as they negotiate how to hold space, but it can sometimes be an awkward and uneven dance.

Inhabiting the liminal space of not being Canadian enough or Somali enough leaves me feeling othered by the two communities I should be able to belong to. I continually feel a pressure to "produce [...] complex shifting identities" to better fit into one community or the other and it never quite feels like I fully belong to either⁹. Being a part of (apart from) the Somali Diaspora¹⁰ often leaves me feeling conflicted about my identity and like I am a passive spectator of my culture. I vicariously learn what Somalia is like, but I am rarely given the chance to participate directly in this culture. Instead, I resort to engaging with the texts, and media either about or from Somalia, more often the former than the latter. I often must translate Somali media to English and as Iain Chambers denotes translation is always incomplete and as a result much nuance and cultural significance can be lost through translation¹¹. For this reason, I use abstraction in the films and soundscapes I create to project the lost nuance and affect caused by the need to translate. (See [Appendix 1](#)).

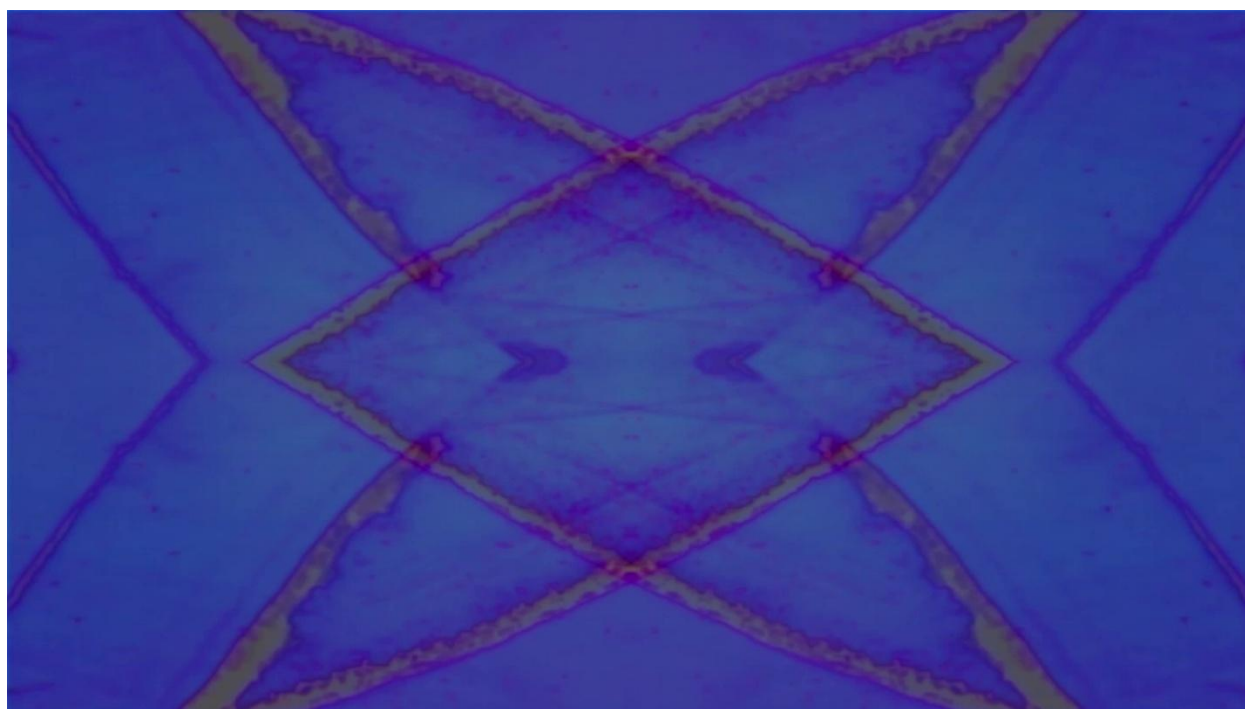


Figure 1 Image of distorted water droplet from the film *Isdhexgal* (Amalgamation).

Rather than seeing the need to translate, and this use of abstraction, as an obstacle, I demonstrate how this can be a form of Black technopoetical gesture. A Black technopoetical gesture "is a moment in which a work's thematic and compositional engagements with race, media, and technology collapse into one another"¹². These abstract audiovisual counter-archives

⁸ Karim, *The Media of Diaspora*, 10.

⁹ Karim, *The Media of Diaspora*, 10.

¹⁰ A Diaspora can be defined as

¹¹ Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, 75.

¹² Rippeon, "Audiovisual Materiality and the Technopoetical Gesture in Recent Black Poetry and Performance," 80.

are my attempt to crystallize my thoughts and feelings towards my *Somalinimo*; this term refers to my Somaliness/Somali Identity¹³. However, despite my efforts, I inevitably begin to feel like a spectator and no longer like a participant when I am stuck merely watching the films or listening to soundscapes I have created. While the most intense connections I have with my *Somalinimo* are when I am editing or witnessing the finished version of a creative piece for the first time, be it a film or sound art, I still feel the urge to edit or remix. While editing I feel the agency of expressing my own story my own way and when watching or listening to an art piece I can meditate and experience the art piece. The origins of this research-creation were an attempt to better understand my own iterative creative practice in relation to wanting to meld the agency and freedom of editing with the meditative immersion that comes from experiencing the media I create. Through the Burur Device, an interactive wearable haptic transducer glove connected to various guitar pedals, I am combining the creation and listening process so that the creation and experiencing of the art piece is simultaneous and immersive. The creating does not need to end and can be informed by how I feel when listening to sounds I can create. I will be able to respond immediately making edits and experiencing the sonic media I produce in real time.

The Burur Device is a wearable instrument that doubles as an “over-hearing” device. Over-hearing is the act of unorthodox methods of “excessive” listening practices to find deeper messages in sonic media. This may involve playing sounds “at slow speeds or in reverse”¹⁴. I wanted to integrate many other different listening techniques, and so when I made the device, I combined guitar pedals, contact mics and transducers. The guitar pedals allow me to shape the affectively charged Somali sonic media and the transducers function by turning anything that it is in contact with into a speaker, or even my body. With these devices working together I can listen, haptically feel and generate sounds using my body movements, archived media and or my voice through a contact mic. I can work with intangible Somali cultural heritage and make them an embodied interactive experience, a ritual. I can participate in this ritual regardless of where I am as it is an interactive wearable art piece. This apparatus is modular and multifunctional allowing me, like a Somali nomad, to adapt and weave into new environments.

The Burur Device

This MA has involved several methods and steps. The first step was to explore Somali cultural events that celebrate and bring together the Somali community in Canada. I attended two in-person Somali cultural events where Somali art of various mediums were exhibited and performed. I archived these events with audio field recordings. I then remixed and experienced them through the development of my wearable over-hearing apparatus hence forth referred to as the Burur Device.

Burur is a Somali tradition wherein a person, after attaining a victory during a competition at a traditional festival, is so ecstatic that they are dared by others to prove it. The community will implore the victor to prove that they are in *Burur*, a state where you are dissolving and going beyond your body, by staining their dagger with their blood. This act of being so elated that you are beyond pain is evidence that you have achieved a state of *Burur*¹⁵. The person extends themselves beyond the confines of their body using an outside tool. *Burur*

¹³ Carver, “7. Somalinimo,” 176.

¹⁴ Papenburg and Schulze, *Sound as Popular Culture*, 225.

¹⁵ Mukhtar and Castagno, *Historical Dictionary of Somalia*, 174. The closest English translation for *Burur* is “to Dissolve”

can be likened to the notions of the “Hypersoul” coined by Alexander Weheliye or the Technovocalic body coined by Jaimie Baron, Jennifer Fleegeer and Shannon Wong Lerner. The Hypersoul is the augmentation and mediation of the soul through electronic media¹⁶. Technovocalic bodies are “imagined bodies” produced “through the appropriation and reuse of recorded voices” that are “related to the real bodies of the recorded subjects”¹⁷. These notions depict a media artist’s creations as an extension of their souls¹⁸. Artists like myself can express more than their body alone could allow them. The Burur Device allows me to express and alter my Technovocalic Body by sampling and remixing the Somali Cultural events I sonically archived. I use these samples to encapsulate and express my affective connection to the event.

The Burur Device creates a new voice and language for me to express my affect towards the event that is recorded and sampled as well as the memories about my experiences as a member of the Somali Diaspora. This new language is not always coherent but leaves ample room to translate seemingly ineffable thoughts teaming with affect. I view affect as “an intensity that is often too extreme to be expressed in words”¹⁹. As I am “trying to pack vast potentials for movement and meaning in a single gesture [...] that burst apart and lose their conventional meaning, becoming like a scream of possibility” I find myself needing the aid of technology²⁰. When using the Burur Device, I hear and feel this new language of affect. Using the Burur Device reveals the materiality and energy of spoken language and its ability to transform me and the spaces around me through the weaving and collaboration of my body with and in this technology. The Burur Device helps me make these sonic imaginaries of Somalia a “wearable space”²¹ and aids me in investigating the key questions of this project: How can a Diasporic Somali feel a sense of community and belonging by engaging with affectively charged sonic media through Interactive haptic art? What are the affordances of using interactive haptic art to engage with affectively charged media? How does the usage of interactive haptic media alter the wearers’ relationship to the media, their body and the spaces around them?

Literature & Media Review

In this literature and media review I delve into a range of theoretical ideas including; mediascapes and the effects of its ubiquity on Somali Diasporic individuals; the process of place-making and identity formation through code switching; and how sound technologies and interactivity transforms and creates immersive imagined spaces that aid in re-examining those processes. These matters will be examined through a lens informed by Somali cultural traditions and philosophies. In examining something that is not perceivable but always present exploring a single term would be inadequate. The terms and ideas I will put into conversation will act as my companions, allowing me to dial into a frequency of Black Diasporic existence that can often allude a clear singular explanation.

¹⁶ Rollefson, “The ‘Robot Voodoo Power’ Thesis,” 87.

¹⁷ Baron, Fleegeer, and Wong Lerner, *Media Ventriloquism*, 200–201.

¹⁸ I will be using the term Technovocalic Body as a guiding theory due to its versatile applications where as Hypersoul mainly to musical productions.

¹⁹ Massumi, *The Politics of Affect*, 9.

²⁰ Massumi, *The Politics of Affect*, 44.

²¹ Hansen, *Bodies in Code*, 220.

Black Diasporic Existence in a Mediascape

[Accessing the electromagnetic spectrum led to] the electrification of private homes, streets, and public spaces, the proliferation of telephones [...] gave a new fluidity [...] of everyday space. These spaces “began to take a new palpability, dense with wires and waves, kinetic and substantial plenum that the new plasticity emerged.”²²

This quote by Sanford Kwinter is a reminder of the transformative effects of electronic media, and its ability to connect and to animate spaces that are already teeming with histories. Examined through the lens of Diasporic thought, as Kwinter suggests, “electronic media re-territorialise[s] [them] through the resonance of electromagnetic frequencies”. We, in the Somali Diaspora, live in and are “maintained” in this space²³. Media connects us where and how we engage with it is as fluid and adaptive as we are. The media environment we inhabit has many metaphysical metaphors to give it shape in our imagination. It is nebula until it is negotiated and materialized into an approximation that can be fathomed and experienced by people. This state of flux is a state Diasporic people are used to

Paul D. Miller aka DJ Spooky proposes a notion on identity formation in this “dense spectrum of media” claiming that “the twenty-first-century self is so fully immersed in and defined by the data that surrounds it [that we are now] entering an era of multiplex consciousness”²⁴. The multiplex consciousness is a state amplified by W.E. DuBois’ Double consciousness theory- the theory of a Black person viewing and perceiving themselves not just from their own perspective but also considering a white settler colonial gaze and how others see them. W.E. DuBois’ double consciousness theory can be updated to include how intersectionality can create a triple consciousness. A good example is the case of many Somali women, who must negotiate their Blackness, gender identity and Muslim identity from patriarchal power structures in the Somali culture as well as from within the white colonial gaze²⁵. The multiplex consciousness is a response to a person's multiple positionalities, the existence of the multiple gazes, within in a dense and hyper-connected media environment. By adding the term “Plex”, DJ Spooky describes a metaphysical structure with multiple layers that Black Diasporic people must navigate and sometimes exist in simultaneously²⁶.

The multiple selves we must code and switch between are multidimensional: it is not simply like sliding a switch board. The transformations and negotiations are far more involved and complicated²⁷. The hypervigilance of being self-conscious of multiple possible opinions of you is an already layered and exhausting process. Updated for a multicultural society and with the added consideration of how intersectionality factors in, it is a lot more than just a double or even triple consciousness. What DJ Spooky is emphasizing is that the layers of media in the Black Diaspora, and the multiplex consciousness, accounts for the “fragmentation” of the Black Psyche in numerous directions. However, this does not imply that the Black psyche is broken, rather it is just in constant flux. The question now is how does a person navigate and modulate

²² Kwinter, *Architectures of Time*, 162.

²³ Karim, *The Media of Diaspora*, 10.

²⁴ Miller and Lunenfeld, *Rhythm Science*, 61.

²⁵ Carver, *Marriage, Gender, and Refugee Migration*, 164.

²⁶ Miller and Lunenfeld, *Rhythm Science*, 61.

²⁷ “Ignorance is only bliss because the burden of it is bored by those who are not.”

-Warsame Isse

between all these different layers of consciousness? How can one craft different forms of existing, new bodies that can hold these complexities?²⁸

The Power of Language and Voices

In the beginning of his rule from 1969 to 1991, Somali President Siad Barre tasked three scholars to create an official written language for Somalia, to create “national unity and a single Somali identity”²⁹. This was an attempt to unify the newly independent nation of Somalia and quickly legitimate the nation under Said Barres governance. The creation of an official written language brought about a hierarchy in the diverse and “turbulent linguistic [and cultural] landscape”³⁰. The Somali language that was used to communicate in a written format imposed the beliefs and customs of that specific linguistic group on others in Somalia. The “colonially constructed concept of homogeneity was also effectually employed to conceal the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity in the country” while elevating the dialect used in the written language giving the Somalis that spoke it a more secure sense of cultural identity. “[O]thering” occurred for under or unrepresented Somali language groups. This led to a “silencing and coercion to conform to the state managed status quo”. This military regime of Siad Barre limited grassroots efforts to educate and preserve other Somali dialects through imprisonment, harassment, exile and even murder³¹. The deterioration of diversity in linguistic cultures in Somalia also silenced other more democratic political views and forms of governance supported by other Somali cultural and linguistic minorities. This was done to prevent any opposition from forming that would undermine and threaten the regime at the time. The forced sense of unity limited cultural expression, allowed for the erasure and rewriting of history and created greater inequality (see [Appendix 2](#)). I summarize this moment in history to emphasize that “[n]o language is neutral.” The language used by a culture is not just a signifier or a tool for naming the world around us³². There are histories, spaces, and power infused in a language that offer “a certain rootedness in [b]eing”.³³

Even within Somalia there is not a unified identity, therefore it is futile to adhere to the idea that there is one cultural identity within the Somali Diaspora. The colonial practices of erasure and rewriting of history in Somalia during the Siad Barre Regime mirrors the strategies used in Canada to erase Indigenous cultures. The naming of streets, celebrations of traditions and colonial moments in history are attempts to homogenize and supplant multiple histories. These acts of reaffirming colonial narratives rely on repetition and “concealment” through the selective and superficial “discourse and policies of multiculturalism”. These efforts normalize a homogeneous Canadian identity, while ‘silencing’ the voices of Indigenous and Black people

²⁸ I am aware of Paul Millers notion/method of Rhythm Science that investigate sound, language, technology remixing and information. I found his notions on media infrastructure and the self to fit within the scope of this project, but rhythm science seemed to overlap with Toloobid and Black Technopoetics so I will delve into rhythm science in future projects.

²⁹ Eno et.al. From Linguistic Imperialism to Language Domination: "Linguicism" and Ethno-Linguistic Politics in Somalia, 25. Siad Barre was in power from 1969 – 1991.

³⁰ Eno et.al. From Linguistic Imperialism to Language Domination: "Linguicism" and Ethno-Linguistic Politics in Somalia, 26.

³¹ Eno et.al. From Linguistic Imperialism to Language Domination: "Linguicism" and Ethno-Linguistic Politics in Somalia, 28.

³² Walcott, *Black like Who?*, 46.

³³ Kwinter, *Architectures of Time*, 162.

that would reveal the “glaring absences that call attention to the mess of making the nation” of Canada³⁴. Like colonialism decolonization is a process. This process is not completed with the gaining of independence but must continue as an on-going evaluation of the systemic and internalized ways colonial legacies impact the structure, governance and thoughts of a nation. If you can not speak about your experiences in your own language, it stifles by relegating your thoughts and feelings to the “margins”, a discursive space where your knowledge and philosophies struggle to exist³⁵.

I suggest going past that space of marginality, but also to the idea that language is just discourse. Language is not just what we utter out loud. Language resides in multiple spaces. It resides in the mind in the body and between minds and bodies. Language is connective, able to permeate boundaries or reinforce them. Some attempt to express language using their voice. According to Lucas Bessire and Daniel Fisher the voice is “what is left over ‘after’ language”. In other words, the voice is the “excess of language”³⁶. The voice is language made material, but it is ephemeral. For example, there is a tradition in Somali music where; despite the rich culture of eloquent poetry, there is a moment of rhythmic “vocal utterances” with “no [specific] meaning” other than to express oneself in a musical performance, to sing³⁷. When we record or distort our voices we are adding to the excess of language and creating “a kind of social Rorschach”. It is a sonic maximalism where seemingly ineffable meanings and affects reside, a place Fred Moten would call the “abyss”. I conjure this abyss proposed by Moten with the Burur Device.

The Burur Device’s “electric noise is heard as the voice and becomes a potent screen onto which [my desires and feelings can be] projected”³⁸. My experience with the Burur Device, as I play and distort Somali sonic media, mirrors this description of the relationship between Black people and Black media given by Moten:

The rough glide of Braxton’s musical movement, the burred terrain of Glissant’s words, sends us to find out more of what it means to have been sent to give yourself away. We are driven to resist this movement, where consent is now inseparable from a monstrous imposition, but we are also drawn, at the same time, against ourselves, to the rail, to the abyss, by the iterative, broken singularity it hides and holds, by the murmur of buried, impossible social life—that excluded middle passage into multiplicity, where pained, breathlessly overblown harmonic striation (Sacrum Commercium, sacred fragment; contramusical moment; catastrophe’s counterstrophic movement), from way underneath some unfathomable and impossible to overcome violation, animates ecstasies driven down and out into the world as if risen into another: impossible assent, consentement impossible, glissment impossible, impossible Glissant, unimaginable axe, unheard of Braxton. We study how to claim this sound that claims us³⁹

³⁴ Walcott, *Black like Who?*, 137.

³⁵ Alhassan, “The Canonic Economy of Communication and Culture,” 141.

³⁶ Bessire and Fisher, *Radio Fields*, 71.

³⁷ Abdullahi, *Culture and Customs of Somalia*, 169.

³⁸ Bessire and Fisher, *Radio Fields*, 72.

³⁹ Moten, *The Universal Machine*, 135–36.

It does not have to be the music of Braxton or the words of Glissant (at least not every time), but when I use the Burur Device, there are words and sounds I hear that feel like a language my soul has been whispering inside me my whole life. These moments are few and far between even when I intentionally search for the words. The voice is framed as the excess of languages “sonic substance” as language is “a spirit-imbued reservoir.” In other words, the “matter of language”, a material that can be interacted with⁴⁰. I can express myself beyond the confines of social discourse and express the excess, “language’s infinite depth as that which colonial discourse cannot digest”⁴¹. However, I do not merely want to express the excess. I want to inhabit, be possessed, become the excess in this “ritual exploration of the heights and the depths of becoming: the abyss”⁴². With the aid of an interactive haptic technology, like my Burur Device, this feeling is now within my reach.

Reciprocal Interaction with Sonic Technologies

Oscar Peterson; the renowned jazz pianist, stated in an interview that hearing the “electronic sounding instruments” when he played a synthesizer “caused” him to play differently⁴³. He revealed two key points in that statement. First, electronic instruments have a distinct sound that stems from them being electronic. Second, “electronic sound[s]” influence his playing⁴⁴. Peterson describes discovering different sonic expressive possibilities in the instrument and in the way he plays because of its electronic nature. The electronic instrument both alters and to an extent modulates how Peterson plays, but it also opens an entire new realm of creativity.

There is a paradoxical relationship between constraint and freedom in Peterson’s description of his relationship to his electronic instrument. On one hand the instrument’s sound “causes [him] to write [and play different] tunes”⁴⁵. However, the affordance of this same instrument allows him to write and “perform” the background music of his pieces “exactly the way [he] want[s] to”, something he could not do before this electronic instrument⁴⁶. The expanded creative possibilities and the unique sonic timbers of the electronic instrument place Peterson in a new liminoid space between control and freedom. This balance is at the heart of all interactivity facilitated by electronic media. The electronic media is coded to perform with specific parameters and only has a set number of variations, but depending on how a person interfaces with it they can draw out a multitude of possibilities⁴⁷.

Peterson goes on to argue that he does not see electronic instruments supplanting “acoustic” instruments. He refers to the acoustic piano as “a special entity in [his] life”, he refrains from reducing the acoustic piano to an object. He ultimately hopes to “meld the [acoustic piano and synthesizer] together”. The interview cuts to the musical notes Peterson is playing, appearing on a computer screen, acting as a visual signifier and budding evidence of his hope to fuse old and new instruments coming to life. The relationship Peterson has with musical instruments and technology denotes a symbiotic relationship, where these multiple “entities”

⁴⁰ An Yountae and Craig, *Beyond Man*, 26.

⁴¹ An Yountae and Craig, *Beyond Man*, 27.

⁴² An Yountae and Craig, *Beyond Man*, 242.

⁴³ “Oscar Peterson Synth.”

⁴⁴ “Oscar Peterson Synth.”

⁴⁵ “Oscar Peterson Synth.”

⁴⁶ “Oscar Peterson Synth.”

⁴⁷ Marshall, *New Media Cultures*, 16.

“cause” each other to behave and create in a certain way. It is not a unilateral relationship when creating; it is reciprocal⁴⁸.

David Rainger a guitarist also recognizes the constraints and reciprocal relationship with electronic instrument that Peterson did. However, Rainger is also a guitar pedal designer. He builds the electronic instruments he is creating music with. This gives him the ability to set his own constraints in programming the parameters of the electronic instrument, the guitar pedals. The brand of guitar pedals is Rainger FX. Rainger FX pedals have developed circuit bent pedals to do “weird” sound distortions. David Rainger prides themselves on their creativity and experimentation when designing new pedals. Almost all Guitar pedals and innovations in instrument design has come from the effort of Circuit bending and creative experimentation (*Who Is Rainger Fx?*, 2:30). Rainger evokes the wildness of creating through pedal names “The Frankenstein” and the compact handheld expression pedal named “the Igor” (*Who Is Rainger Fx?*, 4:05-5:10)⁴⁹. The names of these components denote the relationship between the mad scientist and his assistant as they take the various parts of once living beings and combine them into this reanimated being. This is the feeling I got using any guitar pedal. I felt as if I was bringing something to life as I created sounds I had never heard or felt before, I was creating and adding to the plurality that is my “sonic substance”⁵⁰.

Wearable Technology Creating Immersive Sonic Spaces

Some of the affordances of wearable haptic technology and “interactive spatial media” in Virtual reality (VR) media is that they can create a “spatial immersion and ‘presence’”⁵¹. Presence is defined by Sanchez-Vives & Slater as an “embodied sense of ‘being there’ in a virtual [space]”⁵². This virtual space can be created with sonic media and acts as a liminoid space that a person can experience and move in and interact with. A person using interactive haptic technology does not gain all their sensorial information of a sonic space from the technology and media. This virtual imagined sonic space is created in “the combined effort or auditory perception and [the] imagination of reality” of the person⁵³. The individual or wearer is not merely interacting with the environment through the interactive interface of the technology, but through their imagination of this unseen sonic reality. The wearer “recontextualize[s], explores[s] and reimagine[s] themselves in relation to other spaces and selves” as a form of “escaping from- the everyday spatial [and societal] complexities.” This allows the wearer to reimagine who and what we are, and who[where] we could be”⁵⁴.

In the context of my research project, I am recontextualizing and reimagining myself in relation to both the archived Somali cultural events and the Burur Device. I am resituating myself in that memory and event through an interactive virtual sonic reality, a practice coined by Allen Tucker as “storyliving”. This is a far more “immersive, generative and embodied” way of listening and falls under the practice of over-hearing⁵⁵. According to Alexander Weheliye this

⁴⁸ “Oscar Peterson Synth.”

⁴⁹ “*Who Is Rainger FX?*” produced BY JHS Pedals

⁵⁰ An Yountae and Craig, *Beyond Man*, 226.

⁵¹ Findlay-Walsh, “Virtual Auditory Reality,” 76.

⁵² Findlay-Walsh, “Virtual Auditory Reality,” 76.

⁵³ Findlay-Walsh, “Virtual Auditory Reality,” 88.

⁵⁴ Findlay-Walsh, “Virtual Auditory Reality,” 88-89.

⁵⁵ Findlay-Walsh, “Virtual Auditory Reality,” 74.

form of over-hearing where the person is “plug[ed] [...] into the technical apparatus” can create a sense of superposition or “disembodied[ness] where the person is in multiple places at once and can create a composite identity⁵⁶. This identity is “suspended between” an archived space and time, the machine and the human. A person “flow[s]” between these elements with the sound⁵⁷. The wearer of the haptic technology is not just in their own body they are creating a new bodily experience and corporeal space formed in relation with and composed of affectively charged sonic media.

Technovocalic Bodies and Blackness

This new bodily experience that I am crafting using technology is what James Baron, Jennifer Fleegeer and Shannon Wong Lerner would call a “technovocalic body”⁵⁸. A technovocalic body is an entity created through the manipulation of audiovisual technology. When an artist creates a music video, does a performance, or combines samples from speeches they are crafting their technovocalic bodies. This can be seen, or heard, when sound effects are added to a singer’s voice. These technologically crafted bodies act as a backdrop for strong affective responses, multiple voices and identities. There is a “ghoulish” spectral quality to this body and when performing, a person is in a hybrid state simultaneously existing in their original body and their extended technovocalic body at the same time⁵⁹.

As briefly stated in the introduction, Black technopoetics is the term coined by Louis Chude-Sokei. The term refers to “the self-conscious interactions of Black thinkers, writers, and sound producers with technology”⁶⁰. I have been putting this concept into practice for the entirety of this project. My Somali culture and traditions have been at the heart of the production process. There were times when Black Bodies were seen as technology, as a means to someone else’s desired ends. The very term robot is “derived from the Czech word *robota*, meaning serf [...] slave labor”⁶¹. I aim to view technology as a communion or fusion of two or more entities that can be liberatory. I see the technological assemblage I have created for in my project as an extension of my very self. These assembled pieces of sound technology become pathways and spaces that carry, combine and transmit my culture and my (as well as others’) affect towards it. Each piece of technology helps me create a new body to express and engage with my Somalinimo. Somalinimo is a term that refers to an individual’s relationship with their specific Somali cultural identity, their Somaliness⁶². As a result, this term is highly subjective with contesting definitions.⁶³

Andrew Rippeon expanded the concept of Black technopoetics to include the myriad of artistic and technological forms that can be involved in the production of Black technopoetics. He defined the moment when the ideas of Black technopoetics are put into practice as a technopoetical gesture. This expansion of Black technopoetics to an action is powerful because

⁵⁶ Findlay-Walsh, “Virtual Auditory Reality,” 83.

⁵⁷ Findlay-Walsh, “Virtual Auditory Reality,” 83.

⁵⁸ Baron, Fleegeer, and Lerner, *Media Ventriloquism*, 200.

⁵⁹ Baron, Fleegeer, and Lerner, *Media Ventriloquism*, 3.

⁶⁰ Chude-Sokei, *The Sound of Culture*, 11.

⁶¹ Chude-Sokei, *The Sound of Culture*, 21.

⁶² Carver, *Marriage, Gender, and Refugee Migration*, 12.

⁶³ This is a complex term and cannot be adequately explored in this paper. To learn more, I refer you to read *Marriage, Gender, and Refugee Migration*.

what guides an artist's work may be Black technopoetics, but when put into practice -whether it's a music video, a live performance or the invention of a new instrument- are all technopoetical gestures. They are "moment[s] in which a work's thematic and compositional engagements with race, media, and technology collapse into one another, laying bare the refraction through media and materiality of Black lives, Black archives, and Black afterlives."⁶⁴ This method, stemming from the concept of Black technopoetics, offers a way for Somali diasporic individuals to be more than recipients and reservoirs for the deluge of media that confronts us daily. We are invited to be creators and respond back in a style or production that is separate from and may challenge the colonial gaze. The fact that not only are the critiques we express, as Black artists, an indictment and provocation to the societies that wear a thin veneer of racial acceptance and equity, but the ways that we express those critiques are too. While this still takes conscious effort it also offers a cathartic way to express all the thoughts people in the Black Diaspora must suppress to successfully code switch everyday.

While stemming from an American context, the concept of the technopoetical gesture is very applicable in other western countries like the United Kingdom and Canada. They all contribute to the erasure and suppression of the Black Diaspora in systemic ways. This is noted by Rippeon as he makes the links between Blackness and "ghostliness"⁶⁵. Arguably, Rippeon's comparison between the technopoetical gesture and "ghostliness" is not just a result of the 'precarity' of Black people (among others) in Canada's and other colonial hegemonic societies⁶⁶. And I do not see the comparison to the 'ghostly' as a resignation to a lesser existence, but instead a state of being that can encompass the *multiplicity* of Black Diasporic existence. Technology is shaping how we represent ourselves through the technovocalic body as a technopoetic gesture. Building on this theory, through my project, I aim to take this further and explore how the Burur Device I have built allows for an *engagement* with this technologically mediated spectral entity.

Spiritual Ritual of Self Expression

This state of the spectral entities and music technology is indicative of features found in the East and North African tradition called the Zaar ritual⁶⁷. A Zaar is believed to be a type of jinn or spirit that does not leave the person they possess⁶⁸. They are a part of the person forever and can even be past down different generations of one's family⁶⁹. A Zaar is not an exorcism, but in fact an adorcism. The difference between the two is that unlike an exorcism the goal of an adorcism is not to expel the spirit from the person, but to have the person and the Zaar reconcile. The ritual does not repel the spirit it beckons the spirit to come forth through communal musical performances⁷⁰. A Zaar can be performed multiple times regularly to maintain this harmony. After performing a Zaar ritual, the person and their Zaar are supposed to live in harmony. The Zaar becomes a cloak for the individual acting as a force of protection around the person. This

⁶⁴ Rippeon, "Audiovisual Materiality and the Technopoetical Gesture in Recent Black Poetry and Performance," 80.

⁶⁵ Rippeon, "Audiovisual Materiality and the Technopoetical Gesture in Recent Black Poetry and Performance," 79

⁶⁶ Rippeon, "Audiovisual Materiality and the Technopoetical Gesture in Recent Black Poetry and Performance," 85

⁶⁷ Abdullahi, *Culture and Customs of Somalia*, 65.

⁶⁸ Abdullahi, *Culture and Customs of Somalia*, 67.

⁶⁹ Abdullahi, *Culture and Customs of Somalia*, 66.

⁷⁰ This is now done with modern music technology instead of just drums and human made percussion.

also links the person to a spiritual realm. Turning the person into a “transient”⁷¹ being between two worlds.⁷²

The people who usually undergo this ritual are women, neurodivergent individuals, people in the LGBTQA+ community etc. People who do not ascribe to the hegemonic society or are a part of a counter public tend to be the people who are labelled as requiring this ritual. This does not mean they need *healing*. Often, the person undergoing the ritual volunteers to participate in the Zaar. As it is done on a regular basis and at a somewhat public gathering space it can be a great venue to connect with other people who are from the same or other counter publics that do not adhere to the norms of the hegemonic society. A sense of community and belonging can be built at these gatherings. For some, these gatherings are the only form of a break from societal pressures and expectations as to how they should act⁷³. This is an opportunity to *break*. It is a time and place for a person to shatter and not be judged but supported. They are encouraged to dance and jump and scream with all the ecstasy they can muster⁷⁴. Much like in a song, where the break is introduced, there are no words being rapped, just rhythmic musical expression. It is a moment to express beyond words and allows one to move directly to affect. For people who are a part of the hegemonic society, who may judge them for not abiding by certain customs and norms, they see this as a path to *healing* the individual. However, the person may not feel they need *healing*. They may simply need a moment to express the repressed emotions and thoughts they have building up inside of them. Those ineffable feelings inside of them is their jinn. They are possessed by what they must constantly repress.

Somali Diasporic Media Fighting Erasure

The documentary *Somali Night Fever: the little-known story of Somalia's disco era* reveals the rise and fall of the Somali music scene during the 1980s by interviewing Somali musicians. During the 80's there was a golden age of artistic expression of all types of media in Somalia. Visual art, dances, but the most prolific was music and poetry with the help of radio wave transmissions. The technology required to tune in to the radio was accessible and affordable. So, you would often see groups of Somali nomads huddled around the radio listening to the latest news and poetry. The poetry would often be just as informative as the news and was seen as a legitimate form of disseminating criticism. However, as a result the political regime suppressed critiques of the Siad Barre regime in the late 1980's. This suppression of musical production halted the once vibrant and active arts scene in Somalia. This silencing of free speech was so severe that many musicians and artists left the country⁷⁵.

Sahra Halgan, one of the artists interviewed for the documentary, is a famous singer who lived in Hargeisa. When the Siad Barre regime was trying to stop a succession, the regime resorted to bombing the city of Hargeisa. After that violent attack and destruction Halgan left Somalia and stayed in France for her safety. The documentary uses archival photos and

⁷¹ *The Season of Burning Things*.

⁷² Abdullahi, *Culture and Customs of Somalia*, 66. This state of existence a person experience after a Zaar can exult the person to the title of “alanqad”. An alanqad is a type of Shaman that leads these types of spiritual rituals. You can not become an alanqad without first undergoing this ritual yourself. This builds a sense of empathy and community between the person who is possessed and the alanqad.

⁷³ Abdullahi, *Culture and Customs of Somalia*, 66.

⁷⁴ Abdullahi, *Culture and Customs of Somalia*, 66.

⁷⁵ “Somali Night Fever: the little-known story of Somalia's disco era.”

rotoscoping; that act of drawing over images and footage to animate it and to add embellishments. Her image in the documentary is clear and surrounded by her many titles when she is in Hargeisa, a place where she is well known and highly respected. However, when she is depicted in France, she and her voice over say how "nobody knew [her]"⁷⁶. The surrounding of Somalia changes to France. The titles that adorned her in Somalia are gone in France and the once vibrant colours of her outfit are muted till; they match the background. Her animated self is crudely erased till she is almost blending into the background of an animated France. The documentary reflects her selfhood and fear of erasure on this technovocalic body it has made for her. Moreover, Halgan sees how, through her international concerts with the Halgan trio, she could affirm her culture and reaffirm her cultural identity. A "young woman in a hijab singing with her countries flag in her hand surprised people" the crowd she is singing to is visibly not ethnically Somali, yet they are going along with the rhythmic clapping as she and her accompanying singers perform⁷⁷. The audience did not need to be a part of Somali culture for Halgan to celebrate her, Somalinimo. Her tangled culture heritage in the form of her hijab and dress as well as the Somali Land flag amplifies her singing her intangible cultural heritage. This technovocalic body she is creating is a hybrid technovocalic body since she is performing it. At the time of the performance, she is Sahra Halgan and the technovocalic body she crafted for herself during that concert all at once. She simply needed to feel the support to embrace it and the venue of a concert performance regardless of the country allowed her to boisterously express her cultural identity.



Figure 2 Rotoscoped image of Sahra Halgan in Somalia from the Documentary *Somali Night Fever: the little-known story of Somalia's disco era*

⁷⁶ "Somali Night Fever: the little-known story of Somalia's disco era."

⁷⁷ "Somali Night Fever: the little-known story of Somalia's disco era."

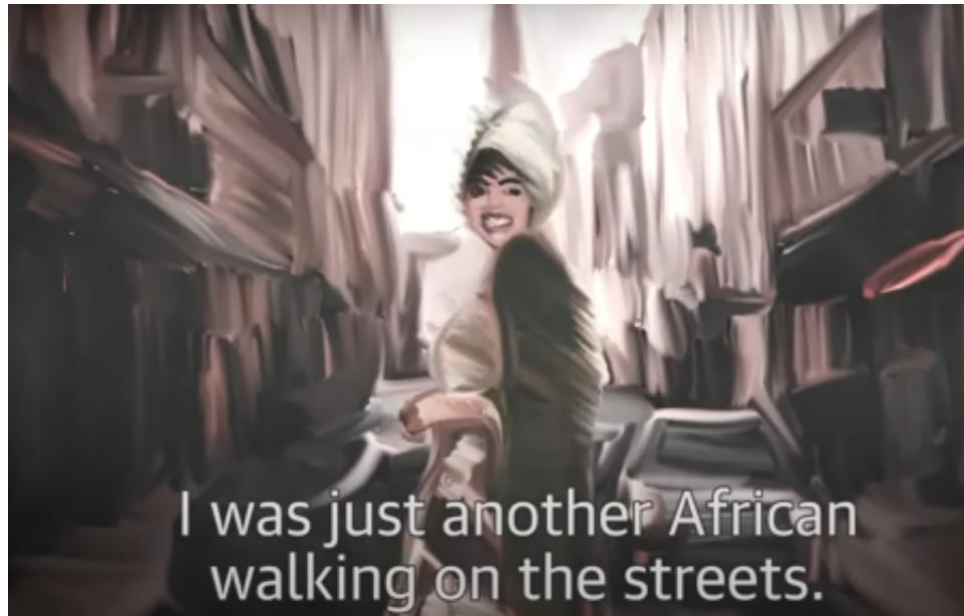


Figure 3 Rotoscoped image of Sahra Halgan in France from the Documentary *Somali Night Fever: the little-known story of Somalia's disco era*

However, this risk of erasure for a Diasporic Somali is also echoed in the Afro surrealist films *The Season of Burning Things* and *Except This Time Nothing Returns from The Ashes* by Somali director duo Asmaa Jama and Gouled Abdishakour Ahmed. The films refer to rituals in the Somali tradition that involve spirits and the act of returning. The characters are spectral beings haunting the city they inhabit. They are in a constant state of being between worlds. This perpetual liminality is depicted by the score of the films and the fluctuating between voices and images from two different times. The film depicts archived images of the authors families in Somalia. There are rotoscoped drawings over them. This adds a layer of redaction and remixing, making Their influence and perspective on the archived media known. The authors of the poems are trying to assert their presence throughout the film. The fact that they are “haunting [the] city” they live in shows that they do not feel entirely at home⁷⁸. They are split between Somalia and the host(ile) country they reside in. They hold and carry these Somali intangible cultural artifacts and inhabit a world that these artifacts could not exist in with out them. These images are given meaning, historical context and a continuity through these Diasporic Somalis in these spaces. The film’s construction of technovocalic bodies to fuse these multiple perspectives into one voice and one message helps to change how the audiences see the city.

⁷⁸ *Except This Time Nothing Returns from The Ashes*.



Figure 4 Image from the film *Except This Time Nothing Returns from The Ashes*

Others may see a welcoming metropolitan city where everyone can call home, but through their technovocalic body we get to inhabit this eerie tenuously negotiated layer of it. The layer among many others these Somali Diasporic poets must fluctuate between. Whether it is the visual language in a documentary or an experimental film or the language spoken with our Diasporic peers Somalis code switch.

Everyday Code-Switching in The Canadian Somali Diaspora

A study was conducted by Awad Ibrahim on the Somali Canadian Diasporic youth. This study focused specifically on young Diasporic Somali's everyday practice of cultural expression and identity formation through code switching. Code switching is the act of negotiation while navigating new and multiple "socio and geo-cultural context[s]", and linguistic spaces⁷⁹. It is not as simple as switching my Somaliness off or on depending on the situation. That is an impossibility and not my desire. I want to feel like I belong where I am, while still being true to where I come from. This third space of mixing of old (Somali heritage) and new (the culture/structure of my host country) is where I and many Afro-Diasporic individuals resided according to Awad Ibrahim. We, as Black Diasporic individuals in Canada, exist in a state of "in-betweens"⁸⁰. We affirm our identity on our own terms in conscious "performative" actions⁸¹. Ibrahim speaks to the turbulent and liminal space navigated by Diasporic Somalis in this quote:

[I]t is [B]lackness that becomes a site of identification for African youth. They identified with a [B]lack Canada and this was 'declared' through language and culture, by invoking ritual expressions and bodily performances. Here, their [B]lackness highlights the extent of their racialized experiences and shows that the [B]lack body speaks a language of its own, a language that is not fully theirs nor is it under their control. On their part, as we have seen, African youth have little difficulty in performing their culture and language along the translated New 'Canadian' context. 'Competition' and 'entitlement', even 'being' and 'becoming', for me,

⁷⁹ Ibrahim, "THE NEW FLÂNEUR," 249.

⁸⁰ Ibrahim, "THE NEW FLÂNEUR," 246.

⁸¹ Ibrahim, "THE NEW FLÂNEUR," 239.

therefore, have to be situated not in their abstract discourses, but rather in their contextual discursive space where to speak is to say - 'I can also be partial, ambivalent, and a product of two'.⁸²

This 'ritual' of performing Black identity while the "Black body speaks a language of its own [and] that is not fully in our control" is at the core of my research. Our identities, as Diasporic Somalis and Black people, do not exist in a vacuum. They have various histories and expectations placed upon them depending on the socio and geo-context we are in⁸³. It can be overwhelming and at times make it very difficult to practice and express our cultural identities due to the lack of tangible cultural heritage that would otherwise affirm our Black Somali Diasporic identity. Moreover, the pressure to definitively answer questions like: *Where are you from?* or *do you consider yourself Somali or Canadian?* *Are you really Black?* are attempts to "reduce" our existence to a definitive comprehensible label that is legible to a nation and those who rely on its categorizing structure to legitimize their status in it⁸⁴. It is common to see Somali Diasporic kids in Canada effortlessly switching from Somali to English to French and back into Somali in the same sentence. It is not entirely Canadian and not entirely Somali, but a new "mix"⁸⁵. We "keep our culture, but at the same time there is the new technologies, the new [music]"⁸⁶. I am inspired by this idea. Somali Diasporic students in Ibrahim's study create a new mix, which affirms the potential to produce new technological and stylistic affordances, a new potential to embody our hybridity as Diasporic Somalis in Canada. This practice of mixing is akin to the principle of *Toloobid*, a word for Somalis adapting to new social settings and finding community while not relinquishing the culture they carry with them. This practice of mixing different cultures to create a fluid space of belonging is *Toloobid* on a larger scale. It is a never-ending daily practice of not being reduced to what you and your "African body in North America" can mean⁸⁷ within the broader white hegemonic culture of Canada.

Theories & Methodologies

Research-Creation

Throughout my project I have utilized a number of different methods to flexibly adapt to varying circumstances and environments. The method at the core of my project that has afforded me this versatility is research-creation, which blends well with the Somali concept of *Toloobid*, over-hearing as a listening practice, autoethnography, and sensory ethnography.

In their article, "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and 'Family Resemblances'" Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk introduce 4 heuristic categories of research-creation: Research from creation, Creative presentation of research, Creation as research and Research for

⁸² Ibrahim, "THE NEW FLÂNEUR," 249.

⁸³ Ibrahim, "THE NEW FLÂNEUR," 249.

⁸⁴ Walcott, *Black like Who?*, 59.

⁸⁵ Ibrahim, "THE NEW FLÂNEUR," 247.

⁸⁶ Ibrahim, "THE NEW FLÂNEUR," 246.

⁸⁷ Ibrahim, "THE NEW FLÂNEUR," 242.

creation. As they explain, each of “these categories are not easily separated, and each is connected to the others”, but they may have moments and research projects they are better suited to one or the other category⁸⁸. The category that best describes my practice is Research from creation “the extrapolation of theoretical, methodological, ethnographic, or other insights from creative processes, which are then looped back into the project that generated them”⁸⁹. Creating Somali cultural events is an art form in and of itself. I would go and visit these spaces not simply gathering information, but seeing *how* these artists transformed a space. I existed in those spaces paying “attention to what the [space] has to tell” me⁹⁰. I knew I could not create an exhibition every time I wanted to create and inhabit a Somali cultural space. Therefore, I extrapolated how these spaces were created at their core so I could recreate the atmosphere while still “tell[ing] new stories”⁹¹. I wanted to still maintain the “messiness” and iterative design process in this project⁹². This allowed me to create various versions and configurations of the Burur Device that I eventually made. This process allowed me to accept and appreciate the “unexpected” and “unknowable” outcomes of the project⁹³. This helped maintain the form content relationship of the piece. I originally designed the Burur Device to allow for a reactive expression to media about Somalia or the Somali Diaspora to address the need to respond to the media that surrounds me with my affect. I realize now that I was trying to also express the ineffable burdens of code switching my Somalinimo.

Toloobid

Since Research from creation is a very “processed-focused-research-outcome”⁹⁴ it requires critical making to be thought of throughout the entirety of, from research the gathering material, assembly, and presentation. I have paid “attention to what the [Somali Diasporic media] is telling me”⁹⁵. To be highly aware and perceptive to how I felt in every environment I was in and how I adapted to each environment. Throughout the multiple facets and phases of my research project I have implemented the Somali notion and practice of Toloobid, Toloobid is the practice of weaving oneself into a new setting and group of people. It is an essential practice for a Somali nomad and even more so for a Diasporic Somali⁹⁶. Toloobid is an autoethnographic and philosophical tool to situate myself into an environment and to engage reflexively with media. Toloobid is a way to understand how I have imbedded myself into different contexts, and responded to the Burur Device and the Somali cultural media flowing through it

This ability to imbed oneself into a new environment while still maintaining their sense of identity, or Toloobid, fits with the idea of sound. Sound travels differently through different media or materials. For example, it travels faster through cement than it does through air and that is why at a concert a person in a seat that is far from the stage and speakers can feel the sound a second before they hear it. It is the same sound permeating the ground and air. The same sound connects the spectator to the performance happening on stage. Sound, just like Toloobid, can

⁸⁸ Chapman and Sawchuk, “Research-Creation,” 21.

⁸⁹ Chapman and Sawchuk, “Creation-as-Research,” 49.

⁹⁰ Chapman and Sawchuk, “Creation-as-Research,” 50.

⁹¹ Chapman and Sawchuk, “Creation-as-Research,” 52.

⁹² Chapman and Sawchuk, “Creation-as-Research,” 50.

⁹³ Chapman and Sawchuk, “Creation-as-Research,” 50.

⁹⁴ Chapman and Sawchuk, “Creation-as-Research,” 49.

⁹⁵ Chapman and Sawchuk, “Creation-as-Research,” 50.

⁹⁶ Mukhtar and Castagno, *Historical Dictionary of Somalia*.

adapt and connect with environments it finds itself in. It may be altered and take on new characteristics because of the environment, but it's the same sound⁹⁷. This ability to connect to your surroundings while changing and staying the same is a feature that Somali Diasporic people practice everyday. I utilize this act of communing while engaging with the Burur Device and all its modular components. I see the Burur Device not only as an assemblage of technical parts, but as a community I am merging with.

The Turn to Autoethnography

I originally intended to have multiple Somali Diasporic artists participate in the research-creation process with me and have them interact with the Burur Device. I was planning on seeing how different Somali Diasporic artists would use it to engage and remediate their art. I would have made alterations to the device according to their feedback afterwards. The purpose of having multiple Somali Diasporic artists as participants was to inform the Burur Device's versatile design through collaboration and various situational factors that would be beyond my control. However, I determined that I could get the same result by placing myself in a variety of different settings and circumstances and reconfiguring the Burur Device to adapt to each setting or situation. I used research from creation as a methodology to guide building the Burur Device. I was presented with opportunities to have many different people from many different demographics use iterations of the Burur Device. Rather than synthesize or document other people's reaction to my piece, I chose to reflect on how people interacted with the device and later try those different ways of interfacing with the Burur Device myself. Thus, I have primarily focused on an autoethnographic style of research. An autoethnographic approach allows me to use my "own experience as a route through which to produce academic knowledge" as the research will be informed by the "emotions [and] sensations [from] embodied activit[ies]"⁹⁸. I was focusing on my own reflections of the device in each of these various settings as a Somali Diasporic artist. I elaborate on my experience as a Somali Diasporic artist with the Burur Device in all the diverse settings and circumstances I was in. I will explain how different locations and technical affordances and obstacles shaped the trajectory of my creation process.

Somali Cultural Events and Mediascapes

I started my process by first immersing myself in Somali cultural art. Two in-person live events both held in 2023 in Toronto: an all-Somali Art exhibition for Niut Blanch in October and a Somali cultural heritage celebration in February. These two events focused on Somali Culture and art. They became the focal point of my research and where I gathered the most information. I gathered audio samples from these Somali cultural events that I attended and have also listened carefully to recordings of Somali music found online. The recorded cultural sonic art pieces found online were more accessible, but the live events offered a more immersive and multisensorial experience for me to draw information from.

To observe and "entangle" myself into the places these Somali cultural events were being held, as the tradition of Toloobid entails. One can think of this practice of Toloobid as a form of sensory ethnography. As Sarah Pink explains, sensory ethnography is "a process of learning through the ethnographer's own multisensory, emplaced experience." This gave me "knowledge beyond language" giving me information from the "sensations" I felt, like the "sound[s]" I heard

⁹⁷ Steinskog, *Afrofuturism and Black Sound Studies*, 17–18.

⁹⁸ Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 64.

and felt. This aided me to experience “other [...] places and recognize how I was being “consumed by” of those places⁹⁹. I traveled to Toronto, the city with the largest population of Somalis in Canada, where these cultural events were taking place¹⁰⁰. At these events various Somali art pieces adorned the spaces and Somali music filled the atmosphere. I would record audio and take pictures while participating in these events. The first was an art exhibition being held at Union Station, a train station. It was the first all Somali art exhibition in the Nuit Blanche festival¹⁰¹. The exhibition was titled “Dhis Bulshada” (In English: *Build Our Community*). Presenting the exhibition itself was a provocation to Toronto to help build the community center Somalis have been trying to build for “40 Years”¹⁰². The art pieces varied from photos, installations, sculptures, paintings and curated artifacts. What tied all these pieces together was the Somali music booming through the exhibition space. The music was classic Somali songs. They were not contemporary. They had subtle static and a lo-fi (low fidelity) quality to the sound that was nostalgic. I was not born during the time this song was first released, but I can recall car rides listening to this song with my family. I documented the event and listened with all my senses to see, hear and feel the atmosphere of the event. I observed how the Somali art pieces adorned this liminal space in a Toronto metro station. I heard crowds of Somalis flooding into this narrow hall with pride and encouragement. I smelt the incense and perfume worn by the Somalis in attendance that reminded me of visiting my aunties apartments. I could feel the vibration through the plastic festival map in my hand. The more gingerly I held it the more of the vibrations I felt (see [Appendix 3](#)). The following week this place may be a narrow hallway in the Toronto Union train station again, but for that night “we were filling the space with the sound of us”, of Somalis¹⁰³. For that night Union Station was a Somali space.

⁹⁹ Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 64.

¹⁰⁰ Mensah Etal, “Seeing/Being Double: How African Immigrants in Canada Balance Their Ethno-Racial and National Identities.”, 44.

¹⁰¹ Recreation, “Dhis Bulshada (Build Our Community) - A Celebration of Somali Culture and Arts at Nuit Blanche Toronto on September 23, 2023,” 1.

¹⁰² Recreation, “Dhis Bulshada (Build Our Community) - A Celebration of Somali Culture and Arts at Nuit Blanche Toronto on September 23, 2023,” 2. africanandrew

¹⁰³ *For the Black Kids in My 8th Grade Spanish Class*.



Figure 5 Art piece titled: we have a seat at the table by Asmaa Bana



Figure 6 Acrylic Black and White Painting titled: Bound By Heritage created by Huda Hussein

The second event I went to was a Somali cultural heritage night in Toronto for a “night of cultural celebration, exploration and affirmation”¹⁰⁴. It was held at a high school. There was art from the first event gracing the hallways¹⁰⁵. There were also musical performances, poetry being recited and a townhall meeting for the Toronto Somali community. The topic of discussion during this town hall meeting portion of the evening was the creation of a Somali cultural center. During the musical performances we sang and chanted together, and even though I had never heard some of these songs before, I just simply followed the rhythm of everyone clapping so easily. My hands and voice joined in this thunderous beat that felt like “the voice [I was singing with was] not my own” but belonged to a larger communal voice¹⁰⁶.



Figure 7 Poster for the Somali Heritage Night (second event)

Whether the event I attended was physically experienced or archived virtually, I did my best to be mindful of how I felt and acted in them. I was also trying to be aware of how people around me treated each other and behaved. I was in awe at the number of Somalis in one space. These were spaces I wanted to stay in for as long as I could. I would arrive early and leave as slowly as I possibly could when the events were over. I made sure to record and capture moments and media that emphasized the communal, sonic and Diasporic aspects of the event. After each event I would take notes on how I felt and what I noticed about the Somali Diasporic art, the general demeanor of the crowd in attendance, the space the event was held in and how I felt when in those spaces. Once I had all the recordings organized, I would listen back to them. I would listen back to them multiple times in various situations and spaces. I would start by listening to them the same night. This was mainly to get the audio files organized. I would then

¹⁰⁴ Event poster.

¹⁰⁵ Seeing the same art pieces in a different space carried the same lingering feeling from the first for me. giving a sense of continuity. Moreover, the fact that these pieces adapted and fit in a new environment further proved the versatility and nomadic nature of Somali art.

¹⁰⁶ Rippeon, “Audiovisual Materiality and the Technopoetical Gesture in Recent Black Poetry and Performance,” 86.

listen to select key moments that clearly featured ideas and sentiments of being in the Somali Diaspora, whether that be the struggles we face or having moments of empowerment and unity. I would listen to the recordings again, but this time playing them through various guitar pedals and audio distortion apps like music speed changer or dual granular synthesizer. As I utilized this practice of over-hearing; the practice of listening to sonic media in excessive and unorthodox ways, I was able to sample moments from the events that elicit a strong affect in me and that resonate with the themes of cultural affirmation, expression, and exploration.

Sampling Ethics

I recorded audio samples with a consideration that the sounds I was using were already made public and were of short duration lasting no longer the 1 minute. The identities of specific speakers are not disclosed, and the samples being used are of recited poems written and published by other authors. The only other main sound sample being recorded by me at these events is communal clapping and chanting. Moreover, these recordings have been heavily edited when incorporated in the soundscape. I include other samples from prominent Black activists, writers and intellectuals such as James Baldwin and Octavia Butler. While they are not Somali, they are a part of the Black Diaspora and have had a substantial influence on my identity building process. The samples, as Paul Théberge describes, are meant to illicit a sense of the “fluctuating [of] multiple temporalities; a [...] collage”¹⁰⁷. I am discussing the Somali *Diaspora* after all, and being in a Diaspora is like being in a deluge of other identities and histories. You can let them compete and drown you or you can let them exist and flow in and out of one another helping you stay afloat. I choose the latter.

After collecting samples from the Somali Cultural events, I distorted them and transform any environment I found myself into a liminoid space by playing/distorting them through the Burur Device. Victor Turner described a liminoid space as a space and time separate from normal everyday life where experimentation and play thrive¹⁰⁸. This environment, full of possibilities and infinite creative direction, can be overwhelming. However, using *Dayoobid*, the Somali state of being disoriented and directionless or to wander, I was able to explore the sonic imaginaries that arose from the creative process and “learn from being disorderly”¹⁰⁹. I would wander and play in these virtual Somali cultural “mediascapes” as I played through the Burur Device¹¹⁰. This afforded me the chance to revisit where I had been, and then to notice the subtle nuances to the sound of the Somali cultural events and media that I had recorded in retrospect.

The guitar pedals I used in my research-creation process were meticulously chosen. I did not just examine what they did individually but how they affected each other and how the sound would adapt and change after traveling through the pedals. I phrase it as the sound traveling because that is what is happening. The signal from the sound I produce, or capture goes through the auxiliary cords or Bluetooth transmitter and receiver on the 2.4 giga-hertz frequency from a sound source to various pedals, ending up at the transducer. The pedals act more like sonic environments that transform the sound to varying degrees. Depending on the order of the pedals, the power source, and environmental factors the sound can be drastically different. This requires me to be very mindful of the settings I choose. However, it also makes it quite empowering to

¹⁰⁷ Théberge, *Any Sound You Can Imagine*, 206.

¹⁰⁸ Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology.”, 65.

¹⁰⁹ Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology.”, 60.

¹¹⁰ Karim, *The Media of Diaspora*, 6.

know that everything I do has an impact on the sound I create in collaboration with these pedals. it also has the added benefit of poetically mirroring the adaptive act of code switching like practice of Toloobid found in the Somali Diaspora.



Figure 8 Assemblage of Burur Device: guitar amp, Bluetooth connectors, guitar pedals, transducer and mini amp.

Assembling the Assemblage

I knew I had to develop an interface that was relatively affordable, portable, and user friendly for many differently abled users. I researched many different musical devices, some preassembled others D.I.Y. (Do it yourself). Many devices were either too expensive or did not have a diverse range of altering and generating sounds. When assembling DIY audio devices, the device would be too fragile and break during transporting it from place to place.

The first variation of the Burur Device was a simple Delay pedal, guitar amp, a mini amp and a Dayton audio exciter. I chose a Delay pedal as it was the simplest and most prominent way to manipulate audio. The ability to alter the rate of repetition and feedback of a sample allowed me to expand and collapse a few seconds of audio. This created various textures and patterns depending on how fast I turned the rate dial and feedback dial. Moreover, I then played these sounds through a guitar amp which boosted and altered the frequency of the audio signal. The signal then needed a mini amplifier that was compatible with the Dayton audio exciter.

A Dayton audio exciter is a small tactile transducer. It is essentially half of a speaker. It is a robust magnet and spring that can turn an electrical signal into audible and tactile vibrations. These vibrations can be transferred to whatever it touches. This turns that object that it touches (a table, a window, the wall) into a speaker for the sound to play through. The clarity and volume of the sound depends on the structure of said object. It can not be too thick, or it will not vibrate enough to generate a loud enough sound, and it can not be too soft, or it will absorb most of the vibrations. I decided this object would be a thin piece of recycled plastic on a glove. This way I

can hear and feel the vibrations generated by the Dayton audio exciter (hereafter referred to as Transducer) and turn my hand into a speaker.



Figure 9 Dayton Audio Exciter (Bass shaker transducer) the component attached to the back of my glove)

I would play these distorted sounds from the delay pedal through the amps and into the transducer. I would hear and feel the vibration of the distorted sample play through my hand and assess how it felt and sounded. Turning the volume too high damaged the transducer. The spring coil in the transducer would overheat and snap if the signal was too strong. The coil would also snap if I played sounds that were too varied in frequency too early. The transducer like most speakers is like a muscle. The spring coil starts off being cold and rigid. I needed to play static with a wide range of frequencies through it for hours, so it got use to the stress. Only after that would the coil in the transducer be flexible and durable enough to handle a wide variety of frequencies. Moreover, if the volume was too loud, I could not feel the different nuances of the sounds. The sound would feel like a violent earthquake in my hand. I wanted to have moments to feel loud powerful sounds but not damage my hand or ears. Hearing a sound and then feeling a sound, you realize how many layers and textures really go into a single sound you hear. A sample that is only a few seconds can be holding a whole orchestra of sounds. It took concentration and subtle adjustments in how I used the device to hear the symphony inside the cacophony of static. The sounds being produced were more erratic and overwhelming. This came from the fact that I had so many factors I could manipulate, and I was not only hearing them I was also devoting my left hand to feel the sound, leaving me only one free hand to turn four dials.

In researching and looking for a guitar pedal with different interfaces. I came across a Ranger FX Echo X Delay Pedal. This was a compact mini pedal with a pressure sensitive expression pad called the Igor. The Igor acted like an expression pedal that would manipulate a setting in the Rainger FX guitar pedal. These were settings I previously had to turn small dials to control. I could now simply squeeze the Igor expression pad to control the rate and feedback of the sound. When I was holding the Igor expression pad, and I clench my hand it was like holding a stress ball. The tighter I clench my fist the more oscillating that would occur from the Echo X Delay Pedal. This interface seemed to be more practical and intuitive.



Figure 10 Igor pressure sensitive expression pad (Left), Echo X Delay pedal (Right)

Crafting and Embodying my Technovocalic Body

The iteration of the Burur Device that I used the most was a broken delay pedal¹¹¹ that I used to create self-oscillation with a pressure sensitive expression pad; the Igor, that I then played through the zoom multi-effects pedal where I created virtual pedal chain presets¹¹² to create my own sonic “virtual space[s]” which distorted the self-oscillation¹¹³. This was then connected to a passive ring modulator that allowed me to fuse the distorted self oscillating signal with affectively charge sonic media like recordings from the Somali cultural events or even my voice. The distorted self-oscillation sound acted as a carrier wave and the affectively charged Somali sonic media was being modulated by it. It is like my self-oscillation is the waves of the ocean and the recordings are a boat riding those waves. I altered and infused the Somali sonic media with my feelings by the way I played and generated a self-oscillating signal. Moreover, I was not in full control of the sounds I was creating. Besides the characteristics of the samples, I was working with the parameters of the various devices which informed how I made sounds. When I sang through the Burur Device I felt the limits of setting in the multi-effects pedal and adjusted how I had sung accordingly, to make the sound I wanted within the capabilities of the

¹¹¹ I Broke it by playing a distorted recording of a crowd from the second Somali cultural event. I played it so loud that it overloaded the input jack of the Delay pedal. Now it generates a static tone, and the self-oscillation is generated only from the damaged circuitry and my interactions with it.

¹¹² Zoom multi-effects pedals come with multiple virtual pedals inside that you can customise and combine to generate unique sounds.

¹¹³ Findlay-Walsh, “Virtual Auditory Reality,” 73.

device. Much like Oscar Peterson playing the synthesiser the electronic sound and settings of the Burur Device changed how I created. Nevertheless, hearing a new distorted, practically unintelligible voice aids in entering a dissociative state. Feeling this material excess of language with the Burur Device simultaneously creates this intimate and removed relationship with my voice and the Somali cultural media which created a state of liminality. It is as if my thoughts and feelings are being processed while my body is being possessed by these fused sounds be they past recordings or my own voice. This ritual of feeling these affectively charged sounds I generated as they flow out of and back into me at the same time is me embodying this technovocalic body I am creating.

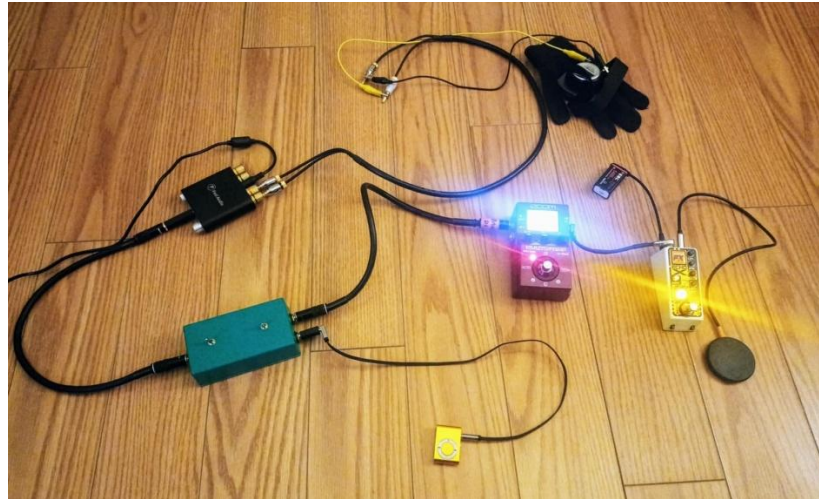


Figure 11 Burur device latest iteration with Ring Modulator



Figure 12 Zoom Multi-Effects Pedal

The variability of the Burur Device serves to create a liminoid space for me to play, explore and experiment¹¹⁴. This liminoid space brought me to a state of being where I could temporarily transform and explore who I could become beyond an internalized and external colonial gaze. I was experimenting as I played samples through the multi-effects pedal and feeling/hearing the outcome with the Burur Device. There was no worry of how what I was creating would be representing my culture and how others might misconstrue my intentions or culture during this solitary introspective ritual. In a world where so many actions are scrutinized in the Black Diaspora the liminoid space created by the Burur Device's variability is a necessary reprieve from the constant considerations of multiple consciousnesses.

Part of sensory ethnography is sensory memory. This is "an individual practice" that is "invoked through [and] invested in ritual"¹¹⁵. As I played a self oscillating signal through the Burur Device it was as if I was undergoing a ritual. I would feel the sound gradually build up in my hand. As it got louder the sound felt more tangible. Depending on which preset of the multi-effects pedal was filtering the sound It would feel like water bubbling or the hum of electricity getting more violent. I would notice the sound getting more unruly the louder it got so I would stifle it. I did so in part out of concern for my surroundings. I was not always in a controlled environment where I could make as much noise¹¹⁶ as I wanted, as we all rarely are. Feeling the sound respond to my use of the Igor expression pad to reduce the sound took time to practice. Aside from playing sounds with chaotic modulation at high volumes to the point that my hand felt like I plunged it into a storm I also learned how to home in on the subtle fluctuation in sounds that I could generate. Some instances the sounds were so quiet they were inaudible, but with the transducer I could feel the tactility of the sound as it was bubbling to the surface before I could hear it. It was like I was summoning some living thing from the 'abyss' mentioned by Moten. In those moments with the Burur Device, I was claiming just a morsel of "the sound the claimed me"¹¹⁷.

I created these sound mirages giving the perception of depth and vastness with the delay and reverb pedal setting in the multi effects pedal. The sounds I passed through the multi-effects pedal could feel like they are being played in a cavernous abyss. I created a sonic imaginary evoking the abyss mentioned by Moten where all the ineffable things reside. I was amplifying the capabilities of my body to express and experience media and express the effect caused by it.

With the Burur Device the wearer can notice the many different sonic and even emotional layers that are imbedded into a song. I could tell from my own use of it that the sensation of feeling an instrument or a singer's voice play through your hand changes the proximity and therefore the intimacy you have with that song. When I played a Somali song and placed the Burur Device on my chest I noticed that the sound seemed much more intimate than other ways of listening. The very sounds of this Somali singers' voice were coursing through my hand, my chest, my lungs. I felt a bond with her, despite never meeting her. This was also due to the fact she was singing a song my mom often sung around the house, when I was a child. This is

¹¹⁴ Turner, Victor Witter. "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology.", 65.

¹¹⁵ Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 37.

¹¹⁶ In a book called *Sensorial Investigations* by David howes he points out that noise is seen as "unwanted sound" denoting a value to sound which leads him to conclude that sound is "rarely neutral" page 154. He makes many other observations around culture and the senses that I will examine in future projects.

¹¹⁷ Moten, *The Universal Machine*, 135–36.

evidence of what Pink's sensory memory where stimuli like sounds could "trigger cultural memories" "bring[ing] the past into the present"¹¹⁸. This triggered a nostalgic and immersive return into that memory through the song and the Burur Device. I closed my eyes, and I let myself be transported to this memory, but as I did, I was still very aware of my body. "I felt like my nerves extended"¹¹⁹ and like my body was hosting a presence. I did not know where the Burur Device ended, and I began.

Collective Experiences: The Joyshops

I had multiple opportunities to present the Burur Device as well as have people of various ages and cultural backgrounds use iterations. Thanks to Professor Kim Sawchuk and the research group engAGE I was able to facilitate a Haptic Listening Joyshop as a part of a series of activities in honour of Black History Month. Another joyshop was held at a field school in Graz Austria which had students from over 25 countries. These events are called joyshops instead of workshops because they are focused on fostering joy, intercultural and intergenerational engagement¹²⁰. In this joyshop people emailed in songs that held significance to them because it was tied to a memory or whether it was a song that a loved one shared with them. These songs varied in genre, era and cultures. However, the common thread was the interest in listening to them haptically in this communal multisensorial listening experience. The Burur Device, in concert with the songs, acted as a catalyst for sharing personal sentiments, memories and an appreciation for the tactility of music. I decided that not giving strict guidelines as to how to use the Burur Device was an important aspect of the joyshops. Instead, I gave broad ideas of what the device did and how to use it safely, but beyond that I wanted to see if anyone would think of new ways to engage with the Burur Device. I did not want to limit people too much by my own preferences, I wanted to see the function creep; the unforeseen uses of a device that go beyond the original intent it was designed for¹²¹, and the variations of how people interfaced with it. Many were what I expected: placing the speaker glove on one's chest to feel the vibrations of a song, placing the speaker glove on a wall or a table to see how the sound might change.

Reflections and Findings

Observations from the Joyshops

One participant in the joyshop placed the speaker glove on the back of their head. I attempted to do the same later with the same song and it felt as if the song was not just in my head but *was* my head. The song reverberated through my skull and my vision vibrated in accordance with the song as well. Another notable instance was when a participant in a joyshop held another person's arm with the transducer glove; with their consent, so the sound would pass through the wearer to the other person. The wearer then touched the person's arm to see how the vibrations of the sound changed as it passed through the second person's arm. People tended to feel the sounds through the table while the wearer channels the vibrations into it, but to channel the sound into another person by holding hands was a spontaneous gesture of sharing that I did

¹¹⁸ Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 38.

¹¹⁹ Miller and Lunenfeld, *Rhythm Science*, 21.

¹²⁰ The difference between Joyshop and workshops is not a matter of semantics. The words we use to describe things have a profound impact on our perception and relationship with things.

¹²¹ Koops, "The Concept of Function Creep," 30.

not expect. It was akin to passing someone your earbud to listen to a song but for a haptic experience. These participants already knew each other, so there was an established trust between them, which factored into that interaction. Nevertheless, that was the first time I had seen that done. That interaction occurred due to the individualized design of the Burur Device.

There is one key difference in the iterations of the Burur Device when the transducer was attached to the center of a large wooden canvas and when it was attached to the back of a glove. The canvas configuration physically allowed more people to haptically feel the songs. It also signified that it was a communal activity. The glove version of the Burur Device was a much more personalized haptic experience. The wearer of the glove had the most intense haptic experience, yet they were able to transfer the vibrations of the song by placing their hand on a surface inviting other participants to gather feel the vibrations. The glove version offered more freedom to adapt the haptic listening experience to the participants preference. The wearer could place their hand anywhere and turn any object they touched into an extension of themselves playing the sounds through them. They could also have different types of interpersonal rituals of sharing with the speaker glove.

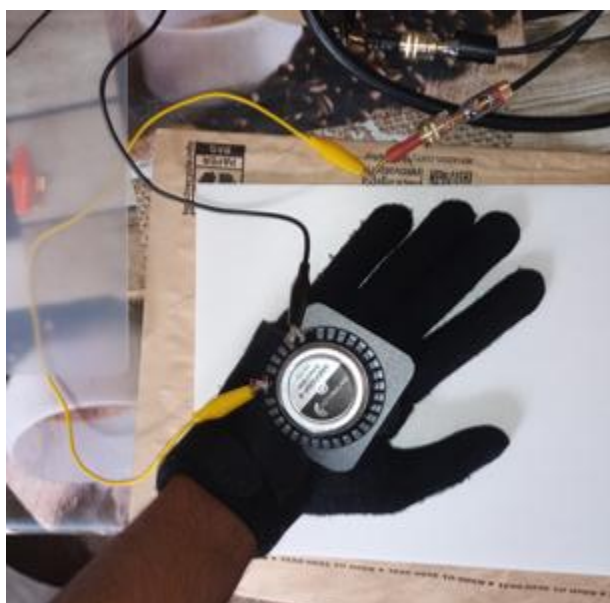


Figure 13 Burur Device (transducer glove)

While the canvas version still offered a communal ritual of sharing, it limited the way people could engage with the songs and haptic transducer. By trying to include as many people as possible from the point of design it limits the technology's function creep and the customizability of the experience. Such design decision should not be made unilaterally but be informed by multiple perspectives. The joyshops allowed me to observe and test new variations out myself. I could gain an embodied sense of what sensations could be felt by using the Transducer glove in these different ways. By having it as a wearable interface it afforded more agency to the individual wearer. They were able to have intrapersonal haptic experiences while others heard, or they could invite people to share in the haptic listening experience at their discretion. Along with being easier to transport (see [Appendix 4](#)), the glove also allowed for various ways of listening, feeling and sharing music. Both versions helped initiate and facilitate a new communal listening experience that encouraged people to share songs and memories or

feelings related to those songs. This was more common the smaller the group was. Moreover, the listening experiences did not require the interactivity of other guitar pedals the act of haptically listening to a song of the participants choice was often all that was required as a form of over-hearing for the participants.



Figure 14 Joyshop group haptic listening experience

Intergenerational & Intercultural Connections

Through the interventions and sharing of the Burur Device I have made connections with many different people, of different ages. I would not have made such a fast and meaningful connection with these people were it not for the ability to share the music haptically with one another. The most enriching part was asking people what song they would want to feel and seeing them put the Burur Device on and place their gloved hand on their chest. They would often close their eyes and just listen intently. The conversations that stemmed from those songs varied from person to person, but I enjoyed when it allowed them and I to share each others culture with one another. Listening to archived music with the Burur Device fostered an environment where despite the culture or the age I could share a bit of Somali culture with someone, and they could share a bit of their culture with me. More importantly, I had a way to create connections with people in a much more meaningful and personal manner.

Critique on Identity Formation and the Ghostly

The use of spirits and ghosts as a metaphor for the Black Diasporic “process of continuous and shifting interaction that constitutes self-consciousness” does not just denote the position of Black bodies in white hegemonic spaces, it also speaks to our fluidity and

multiplicity¹²². We combine and alter the media we are submerged in and that we search for and craft our technovocalic bodies, while in our “private spaces of mental contemplation”¹²³. We utilize unconventional media practices to express the affect and complexity of our fragmented existence. This is not a survival tactic this is self affirmation and calibration through poetics. Somalia is a nation of poets¹²⁴; we have simply found different means to practice the same rituals.

Conclusion

New Language

Being Diasporic you can often feel a sense of nostalgia for things you have not experienced yourself¹²⁵. While I do miss some things, there is nothing about me that is missing. I am a part of my Somali culture whether I have set foot on the land or not. Furthermore, this longing is not the absence of something, it is something in and of itself. It is not quelled when you find missing pieces, it is temporarily coalesced energy taking concrete form when given an outlet. Hearing a word that crystallizes an experience or sentiment you have been living can be that cathartic and epiphanic. When you learn how to express yourself with that word, it is like all the chaos of a storm being channelled into a bolt of lightning and hitting a lightning rod. You feel powerful, like you are finally grounded somewhere concrete; you feel at home in that word. That is the gift of language. It can give refuge for all the disparate, vague, but very lived notions that reside deep in your bones but can not seem to leave your lips. So, what do you do till then? Do you wait? No, you create! You create new ways of communicating and translating these seemingly ineffable thoughts. I built the Burur Device to express beyond language, but I also built it to buy time till I come across the words that speak to my existence. Nothing ever remains ineffable; we merely have not found the words for it yet. A new means for speaking through interactive haptic technology has offered me a new language, a language of affect turned into “sonic substance”. This sonic substance is a “substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen but [can now be felt and] heard”¹²⁶.

Flowing Through Diasporic Media Frequencies

The Somali Diaspora exist, like many Diasporas, in a state of “flow” and flux¹²⁷. This is not a romanticized state of freedom. Rather it is often a state of instability and adaptation to a multitude of factors. The electromagnetic field creates a new plasticity to space and these spaces are further complicated by the multiple consciousness that a Somali Diasporic individual must hold and carry. This space teeming with media is not just filled with information it is filled with narratives and affects. Much like a “Palimpsest” where things are written down, erased and written on top off. The previous inscription is not gone just faded adding to the layers of stories¹²⁸. Diasporic individuals “flow[ing]” through and between these crowded layers are

¹²² Miller and Lunenfeld, *Rhythm Science*, 72.

¹²³ Miller and Lunenfeld, *Rhythm Science*, 72.

¹²⁴ Loughran and Foundation for Cross Cultural Understanding, *Somalia in Word and Image*, 45.

¹²⁵ The English word for this is anemoia.

¹²⁶ Moten, *In the Break*, 191.

¹²⁷ Karim, *The Media of Diaspora*, 10.

¹²⁸ Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 58.

attuned to their multiplicity and complexity. If you do not have multiple consciousnesses to negotiate and fluctuate between you may not be aware enough to see all the same layers of intersecting, competing narratives and affects. However, Somali Diasporic individuals are not, and never have been, “passive”¹²⁹ reservoirs to collect media; we navigate through media and have our own media practices to re-center ourselves.

It is through Black technopoetics that a Technovocalic body can be created. The focus is not on the apparatus of the Burur Device, but what the Burur Device creates. A non-corporeal entity composed of manipulated affectively charged sonic media. this allows me to “resurrect all that communities and nations [like Canada] destroy, foreclose and prohibit in their dominating narratives of collective belonging”¹³⁰. In this great melting pot that we call Canada some things sink to the bottom of the pot and the indifferent chefs do not notice.

We in the Somali Diaspora notice. We notice quite a lot with our “multiplex consciousness”, but we do not always have the time, space, or method to respond. It is like traveling while listening to the radio. Spaces are not inhabited and experienced equally. This is not just of people but the media that represents and surrounds us whether we are aware of it or not. There are considerations and relationships that people of different positionalities must embody and move to accommodate. Some spaces do not accommodate certain media. Even if they do it does not mean people are attuned to access it. These media frequencies are navigated by those who can be hyperaware of them. Being in a Diaspora we are aware of multiple frequencies of different mediascapes all at once. Like coming across a spot where two or more radio stations intersect and drastically fade in and out of the static with the most minute motion of your body. This requires hyper media literacy. It also requires the media infrastructure of the environment you are in to even allow these Diasporic media frequencies to enter. Even if they do, they are often faint. These media infrastructures are unable to host all the depth and complexity of these Diasporic media frequencies and requires a focused listener to notice them. We move to find these frequencies where these signals are stronger. This acts as a cue not only telling us that there is Diasporic media somewhere it also acts as a signal that guides a way out of this seemingly all in compassing hegemonic media structure that did not consider you. This is not just a matter of counter publics, sometimes the media and community are not trying to counter anything but are simply trying to exist which often leads us beyond the limits of colonial societies.

Future Research

I intend to explore the concepts of materiality, spaces, Diasporic media practices and belonging in future research. This next iteration will include the elements of interactivity and haptic sonic immersion but will work in concert with visual distortion, microscopy and projection mapping. Being able to map and visualize the Diasporic media frequencies while engaging with the geological material of a space would be an added layer to making the multiple intersecting sonic substances easier to express in another Black technopoetical gesture. Thus, expanding the range of communicating the complexities and beauty of existing in the Somali Diaspora.

¹²⁹ Miller and Lunenfeld, *Rhythm Science*, 72.

¹³⁰ Walcott, *Black like Who?*, 26.

Final Thoughts

Finding and engaging with these Diasporic media frequencies has required me to use unconventional media practices, but they have helped me commune closer with the full depths of Somalinimo. I have also been fortunate enough to share those parts of me with others and build relationships beyond generations and cultures. I have been able to hold the materiality of my Somalinimo and channel the ineffable pressures of code switching through the Burur Device. Hearing and feeling the intense oscillating vibrations of the Burur Device was so meaningful as my usual state as a Somali Diasporic individual is fluctuation in this “abyssal ritual” of “becoming” but never being¹³¹. If we take the time and find our own poetics we can feel “at home, in ourselves” by the means that afford us to practice sitting and reveling in the overflowing vastness of our Diasporic existence¹³².

¹³¹ An Yountae and Craig, *Beyond Man*, 242.

¹³² Edugyan, *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne*, 33.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

My art practice involves counter-archiving (a practice of counter publics telling their stories that are not archived in the hegemonic structures in conventional ways). I interview a person and after the interview I ask the person if there are any parts they would like redacted. This is to respect the person's privacy or comfort level. Archives are not always meant to be a treasure trove of information for the world to plunder. It can also be a place and a feeling to revisit. So, I ethically redact a person's interview by turning the parts they want private into distorted morse code. I translate their words into morse code then I slow it down. I select a smaller and smaller portion like I am zooming in on the word till I get a sound, or a rhythm that matches the sentiment of the interview and the person's words. I also apply distortion, pitch shifting and filters to the morse code segments. I incorporate the distorted morse code as a soundscape that plays in the background of a Counter-archive film. The visual of a film is composed of distorted water droplets. The water droplets have minerals inside them. They are exposed to the vibrations of the recorded interview so that the person's voice moves the minerals and in the water samples. Thus, transforming them into an abstract visual representation of the story. The minerals can be soil from a place that has meaning to them or spices to dishes that hold meaning to the story of their culture. This piece is all my names traditional, legal nicknames mispronunciations all in distorted morse code accompanying abstract microscopic footage of distorted water droplets. I overlap the visuals with my names "Warsame Isse" in Somali script, and binary code Figure 1. They are all competing for visibility fading in and out of one another creating this technopoetical gesture to technovocalic body to reflect my ever-shifting Somalinimo.

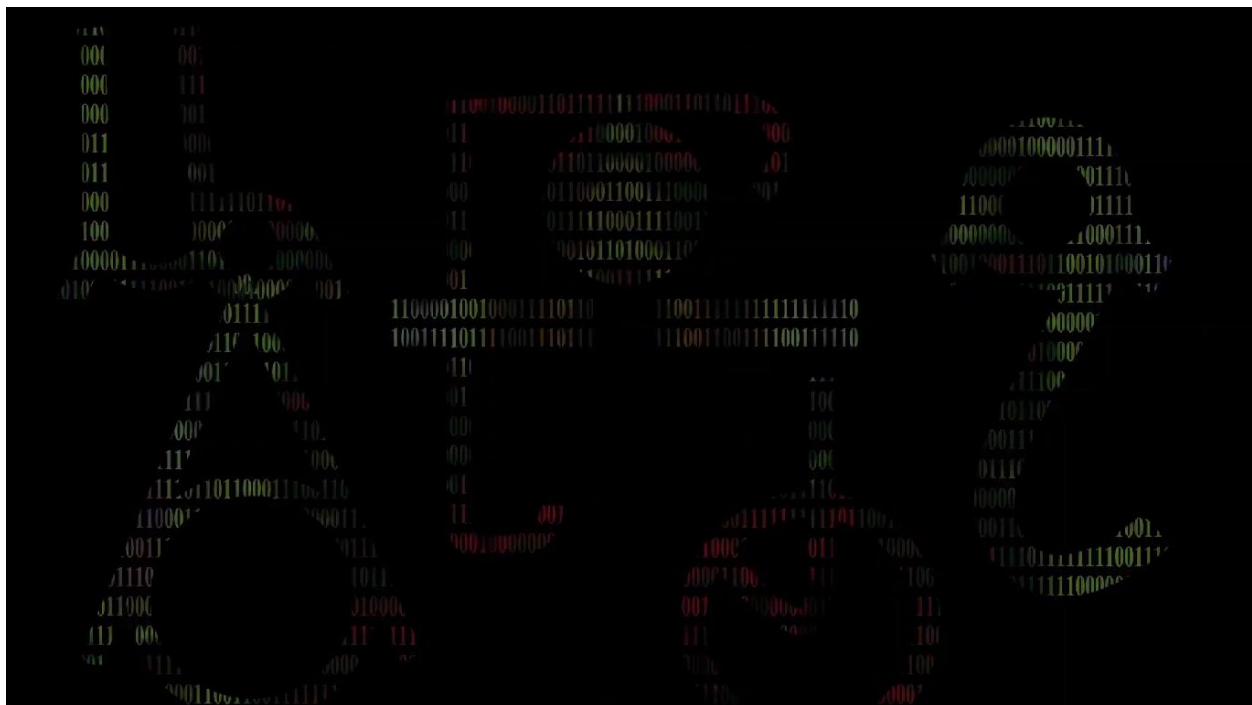


Figure 15 Clip from Short film "Code-switching"

Appendix 2

Unity ≠ Uniformity

It is impossible to create what used to be
 As power conflates unity with uniformity
 Diversity is complicated when control is the goal
 Unwavering respect and kindness can heal a soul
 Of a nation and a person, setting us all free
 -Warsame Isse

Appendix 3

Music was a consistent aspect of making that transition from a none place to a social space possible. Make enough sound and you can disrupt a space, make a culturally influenced sound like a song of a phrase and you can transform any space you are in. This changes the hegemonic power structure as well. This was facilitated with the help of the city government officials. Such cooperation and aid are not always the case. Support should always be critically reflected upon and welcomed if deemed appropriate. However, this sort of visible allyship has taken over 40 years to cultivate. it took effort to get this much, but before that Somalis in the Diaspora had each others' homes, places of worship and other spaces to have a sense of community and presences in Canada.

Appendix 4

Passing through the airport was nerve racking, and not just because I did not want to miss my flight. As a BIPOC individual you are keenly aware of the very likely possibility you may be pulled to the side, detained, and interrogated. This was made especially more likely due to the fact I had a myriad of customised sound equipment in my luggage. Traversing spaces was easier physically due to the modular design of the Glove version of the Burur Device, but the anxiety of being in some spaces did not fade. I took extra care to tuck the Burur device underneath my cloths to lessen the chance of airport security asking me about it.