

The Bombshell Cello

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Abstract

This video essay records a process of constructing a new cello out of a bombshell found in the bazaar of Sulaymaniyah City in Iraq. The work gave rise to an experimental musical practice as well as to inquiries about aspects of agency evolving from the “dance” between performer and material—between a body that carries a personal history and the traces of change from violent to cultural material. New instrumental techniques are being developed producing timbres one would not expect from an ordinary cello. Sound may be described as a soft power that affects our vision and taste, whereby listening allows us to see without using our eyes. The essay captures one individual’s experience of the hidden side of war, and through listening invites an audience to consider how war shapes both society and individuals.

Videos can not be displayed in PDF documents. Follow the link to see the source.

[Link to source](#)

In my experience, war creates a new knowledge of both sound and materiality, and of what a musical instrument might be. This video essay records a process of developing, with the help of a welder, a new cello out of a bombshell I found in the bazaar of Sulaymaniyah city (Iraq) in December 2019, the results of which gave rise to an experimental musical practice. I am interested in generating sounds that a Western classical instrument is neither capable of producing, nor invited to suggest. From this point of view, materiality has a considerable role to play in the “dance” between material and performer. Both have agency in their capacity to respond to and agree with, or resist, one another.

Dealing directly with the materiality of the bombshell cello has led me to imagine other ways of employing instrumental techniques with the intention to bring forth sounds that are not expected from an ordinary cello. Thus, material agency places me as the performer in a position of negotiation with new performative procedures redirected by the material, mentally as well as technically. In this context, the technique offered by the material world broadens the sonic possibilities.

Sound may be described as a soft power that affects our vision and taste. The experience of listening allows us to see without using our eyes. In the first half of the video essay, I aim to show the hidden side of war through listening how sound is perceived and how it shapes both society and individuals. What I play is an improvisation, though perhaps not in the Western sense of the word. I play an improvised dialogue between myself and the

material: on the one side there is my body that carries a certain story, a history, on the other the traces of change from violent material to cultural material. Sound and technique emerge in the moment of this transformation, when the clash between us occurs. The cello audio in the video is original and not manipulated.