

JACE

CLAYTON



2017-2018 DUKE/UNC NANNERL O. KEOHANE
DISTINGUISHED VISITING PROFESSOR

ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE

WHAT JACE IS WORKING ON

Collaboration with UNC Students to Launch New Digital Music-Making Tools

Reading is Fundamental: an installation inspired by and responding to Wilson Library's archive of works by African slaves and created in collaboration with UNC and Duke students

Creation of New Educational Materials for "Art of the MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses)" at the Duke University Social Practice Lab

With music as the fulcrum, Jace Clayton's work spans the centuries and crosses the globe. Whether he is exploring Sufi poetry from 13th-century Persia or examining current aggressive policing techniques in East Harlem, this New York City-based artist and writer focuses on engaging with how sounds create social meaning. Clayton, who is also known for his critically acclaimed work as DJ/rupture, is the author of the recently published book *Uproot: Travels in 21st Century Music & Digital Culture*.

As a Nannerl O. Keohane Distinguished Visiting Professor, Clayton brings his mix of music, activism, and digital exploration to North Carolina, collaborating with faculty and students from UNC and Duke to devise new tools and performances that draw from many disciplines and cultural traditions.

"I have a project called Sufi Plug Ins which is dedicated to creating digital music making tools based on non-Western ideas of sound and music," says Clayton. "For the first version of this project, it was me working in Morocco with a bunch of my musician friends there to come up with alternative interfaces, software, synthesizers, and virtual keyboards tuned to Arabic and North African scales."

"Working in North Carolina presents an interesting opportunity to create another version of Sufi Plug Ins," says Clayton. Together with ethnography students, students who study electronic music and sound engineering, and archivists, he plans to engage the local Karen community from Myanmar and the local Mexican community in a series of discussions to determine which aspects are important in the music they love and that formed their sense of self.

"This body of knowledge will inspire us to create new site-specific digital tools which can then go out in the world and ideally be performed, used, and misused," he says. "This offers a broad look at cultural interaction."

Clayton says that when he began thinking about his residency in North Carolina, he remembered “an interesting fact. During the Antebellum South, literacy rates were highest amongst West African slaves who could read and write Arabic because of the Koran and Koranic schools,” he says. “The most famous of these slaves is Omar ibn Said, a Senegalese man who came to South Carolina in 1807 and then ended up here in North Carolina. In fact, all of his papers and memoirs, written in Arabic, are here at UNC.”

“This is a really fantastic opportunity to both do some archival work—thinking into complexities and nuances of language and power in the American South—and also to think about how we could create new work out of this quirky historic fact,” says Clayton. He plans to work with students to develop a new performance that celebrates the efforts of slaves in the South to preserve their literacy and religious traditions.

Clayton says that this project is an example of the creativity spawned by this residency. “Omar wouldn’t have been on my mind if I hadn’t had the opportunity to be here and his papers weren’t in a library right around the corner,” he says.

The residency will also enable Clayton to collaborate with Duke’s Franklin Humanities Institute Social Practice Lab to share his practices and ideas with a wider artistic community and create a new lesson plan for the lab’s MOOC (massive open online course), as well as hold performances of new and existing work.

Clayton relishes his time on campus. “University campuses are a kind of refuge and havens of intellectual activity,” he says. “They offer a moment where ideally you get to take a pause from other pressures in life and really dig deep into your area of research and examine important questions.”

- MICHELE LYNN

“This is a really fantastic opportunity to both do some archival work—thinking into complexities and nuances of language and power in the American South—and to think about how we could create new work out of this quirky historic fact.”

