

Sound Counter-Practices of Disappearance: reflecting on social & political awareness through sound in Colombia.

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through sound in Colombia.

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A mi madre, mi padre, y mi sobrina Emilia.

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abstract

This thesis analyses the potential of sound as a critical and political medium for engaging with the phenomenon of enforced disappearance in Colombia. Through a practice-based research approach, the project explores how listening can become an act of recognition, resistance, and memory construction in post-conflict scenarios. The result is a sound installation titled *769: At Least Their Names*, which seeks to activate a space for collective reflection and ethical listening, centered on the victims of disappearance in the department of Tolima. Grounded in both theoretical frameworks and artistic practices, the project contributes to the growing field of socially engaged sound art by proposing the act of listening as a form of counter-memory and symbolic reparation.

keywords

Sound art, Enforced disappearance, Listening as political practice, Memory and violence, Practice-based research, Post-conflict Colombia, Sound installation, Socially engaged art, Ethical listening.

abstrato

Esta tese analisa o potencial do som como um meio crítico e político para lidar com o fenómeno do desaparecimento forçado na Colômbia. Através de uma abordagem de pesquisa baseada na prática, o projeto explora como a escuta pode tornar-se um ato de reconhecimento, resistência e construção de memória em cenários de pós-conflito. O resultado é uma instalação sonora intitulada *769: Pelo menos os seus nomes*, que procura ativar um espaço de reflexão colectiva e de escuta ética, centrado nas vítimas de desaparecimento no departamento de Tolima. Fundamentado tanto em quadros teóricos como em práticas artísticas, o projeto contribui para o crescente campo da arte sonora socialmente comprometida, propondo o ato de escutar como uma forma de contra-memória e reparação simbólica.

Palavras-chave

Arte sonora, Desaparecimento forçado, A escuta como prática política, Memória e violência, Investigação baseada na prática, Colômbia pós-conflito, Instalação sonora, Arte socialmente comprometida, Escuta ética.

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1 Introduction.

This project was born during my master's course in Sound and Image at the Catholic University of Porto when I came across an academic paper called *Network Music and Radical Democratization* (2015) by Shelly Knotts, in which a comparative chart shows the different types of musical organizational structures with their democratic capabilities, divided into parameters such as: hierarchy and roles, communication channels, decision levels, autonomy and balance of power. Within this chart the organizational structures that stood out for their democratic potentiality are: electronic music ensembles, free improvisation ensembles and internet-based music creation ensembles.

This idea led me to ask myself how through my artistic practice I can include these elements and question the works under these same parameters. Since my sound practice wasn't developed from collective creation, I transferred these questions to the sound elements and parameters within the sound pieces, such as: parameter randomization, freedom of emergence of events not defined by the author, free structuring, and nonlinearity. I discovered that artists like Schaeffer, Schoenberg, Coltrane, La Monte Young, and John Cage had already brought these questions of emancipation regarding structure, time, and hierarchy to sound and timbre, each in their own way, as indicated in *Soundscape composition as global music: Electroacoustic music as soundscape* (Truax, 2008), *Expanding jazz tonality: The compositions of John Coltrane. Theory and Practice* (Martin, 2012), and *Noise: The political economy of music* (Atali, 1977). This, for me, represents a political thought immersed within an artistic work, because these works imply a subversion towards the established order, against the aesthetic parameters of their times and their approach to the interpretation of art. This critical dimension turns these works into acts of cultural and social reflection, a form of critical expression beyond the achievement of a defined aesthetic precept.

Inspired by these ideas, I experimented designing a system that would allow the manipulation and structuring of a soundscape aside from the linear logic of music, reflecting on hierarchy and the role of the creator in sound work. The format that best suited my needs was the sound installation, therefore I began creating sound installations with this idea of emancipating the work from the author, recognizing in this a political approach to how and who decides what we hear, almost like a politic of listening in public. I also carried out sound experiments with interactive creations and microcomputers where this time the work was fed in real time by the viewers through sensors, leaving room for uncontrolled events and less influence by the author. This experience also contributed to linking this notion of a sound practice that constitutes a political thought on the bases of hierarchy and sonority. It wasn't until the book *Sonic Agency* (Labelle, 2018), that I understood how this way of thinking could reveal something larger, in regards to building support structures for individuals who feel unheard by the public sphere within constricting societies, and using sound practices to indicate this disparity.

As a result of living in times where there is a growing awareness that any act can be a political act, I am personally interested in exploring and investigating artistic and cultural spaces as tools of formation and democratic engagement, recognizing in the artistic practice a public practice with the potential to relate individuals around common perceptions. This work aims to explore this overlapping area between sound art and political awareness in order to illustrate how it is possible to foster conversations on social struggles around sound practices. Therefore I believe this becomes a relevant issue when there is a context where spaces for dialogue, memory building and reparation are needed to help the communities build a post-conflict era, it is my proposal that sound practices (and musical practices) should be considered as a tool for this purpose.

1.2 Object of Study.

This project seeks to question through bibliographic research and artistic practice about the social and political dimension that sound practices can possess to inform a new project. Picking up some questions raised by Brandon Labelle in the book *Sonic Agency* (2018) such as: How does sound as a medium relate to the development of a politics of care and entanglement? How sound practices serve as a relational space for dialogue between different political actors ?

The object of study is then intersectional between sound artistic practices and political activism. Through a search for references and the development of a theoretical framework, we seek to understand how sound and politics can be connected, how this relationship becomes tangible, and how this research can inform the artistic practice being developed for this project. Given the broad scope of analysis, we proposed focusing on Colombian territory due to its social and political context and the fact that it is currently undergoing an important period of transition toward post-conflict. Among the many social issues that arise due to the armed conflict, one that appears to be particularly prevalent is the topic of forced disappearance and displacement. This much more specific approach allows us to go from a general and global view to what is happening in the territory and how that translates to the artist's work and the communities' perspective. The object of study was then defined as cases of sound practices that focused on social and political awareness around the conflict in Colombia.

1.3 Methodology.

The methodology of this project is classified as a practice-based research that seeks to answer the objectives through the compilation and analysis of literature, the reflections and making of the artistic object and the analysis of the results obtained from the public display. This methodology is supported by the work of Linda Candy & Ernest Edmonds on

Practise-based Research in the Creative Arts: Foundations and Futures from the Front Line (2018), and also on the book *Hands on Research for artists, designers and educators* (2024) developed by the Willem de Kooning Academy Rotterdam. In the case of this project we took a linear approach in which the process was divided into 3 parts, initially the collection and discussion of bibliographic material, then the exploration and creation of the artistic object based on the reflections raised, and finally the recompilation and feedback in order to address the objectives and questions raised. In this methodology, research, doing, documenting and reflecting are all equally important and contribute to the purpose of the project.

The bibliographical consultation started from a range of books and publications within the same area of knowledge which allowed to expand the theoretical framework, not only from the field of sound and arts but also from political literature referents. The focus is to generate a framework for soundart and its relation to politics, considering activism and sound as a medium of interaction. This process led to the construction of a state of the art which was arranged in two segments geographically, giving examples of the relationship between sound and politics globally and specifically in Colombia.

The second stage was driven by a practice and experimental approach focused on sound creation based on the compilation of sound archives taken from the territory, the main outcome of this was the sound installation *769: al menos sus nombres* presented for this project. This process recognizes the capacity of sound recording as a methodological mechanism to investigate notions of identity and memory about a given place as it's discussed in the dissertation *Recorridos sonoros como metodología de investigación para visitar el espacio de los recuerdos* (Soto, 2017), and implemented in *Changes in the social fabric of victims of the armed conflict in Colombia based on an analysis of their sound environments* (Rodriguez & Cabedo, 2021).

1.4 Dissertation Structure.

This document follows the structure proposed in a linear approach by the methodology of the project, it is divided into 4 parts; the introduction in which the aim is to describe the project, its expectations and provide a theoretical framework that includes the topics to be addressed; the state of the art which includes the bibliographic research and the reflection carried out upon it; followed by the development of the artistic object which documents and describes how the research led to the execution of the work; and finally the section meant to conclude and reflect upon the process in order to respond to the project expectations.

1.5 Objectives.

The overall purpose of this project is to explore the political side of sound practices in a social sense from a creation and research standpoint. Through an artistic project development and public exhibition, I explore how these practices can promote opportunities for raising awareness about conflictive situations, new views on places and dialogue around a social issue.

This objective is based on the informed hypothesis that sound practices, perceived as aesthetic, relational and performative spaces, can generate social networks which are the basis for active listening, collective care, memory and resistance against contexts of structural violence, as is the case in Colombia. Given the ephemeral, involving and physical nature of sound, it is seen in the hypothesis as a way of expressing non-discursive knowledge, which evokes emotions and connections between individuals, allowing, through active listening, the possibility of reclaiming the territory and the restructuring of relationships, not only between people, but also with the territory and memory, thereby providing a platform for symbolic acts, redefining and shaping the collective memory of the territories.

By means of creation, the aim was to develop a work that functions as a tool for critical reflection on social narratives and listening as an instrument of empathy, within the social context of the Colombian conflict. In this way, the objective is to look into sound and sound practices as an aesthetic and performative medium of communication and awareness of social and political situations in the Colombian context, thus testing if these practices can act as an agent of collective action, memory, and political articulation.

Through a mixed methodology, which combines theory, artistic practice and critical reflection, the project aims to contribute to identify and make visible in which instances sound practices are providers of spaces for expression, care and gathering, acting as tools that promote conversations on democratic participation, social justice and symbolic reparation in contexts that have been historically silenced.

For the development of the project it was important to focus on building an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, in order to comprehend and discuss the link between sound and politics, while referring to key authors in the fields of sound studies and social sciences.

As part of the process of creation, an emerging task is to design and display an artistic work in the layout of a site-specific sound installation, featuring non-linear sound creation using sounds that reflect the social situation to be addressed.

Related to the artwork it is an objective to explore through practice, experimentation and digital manipulation of audio; strategies for sound composition based on the compilation of sound archives from the territory related to the specific case, considering its potential as an element of engagement with the audience.

As an academic project it is important to be able to assess and evaluate the impact of the project, for this purpose it is an important objective to measure the effect of the public

display through a mixed methodology, both quantitative and qualitative, in order to identify the potential for resonance and possible transformative effects on the audience.

This project adopts a positivist approach within the field of sound and sound studies, based on the premise that sound is not only a phenomenon of interaction and an expressive medium, but also a political tool. The objectives outlined herein propose a project that moves between theoretical understanding and practice-based experimentation, recognising art as a means of thinking and acting politically. Lastly, it aims to contribute to the development of a robust artistic ecosystem in which aesthetics intertwine with ethics and politics as constitutive dimensions of artistic practice within the Colombian local and regional context. In this way, the project seeks to position itself as a contribution to the field of sound studies, while also engaging with processes of memory, justice, and recognition in the Colombian context, affirming the potential of art as a tool for interpreting and transforming reality.

1.6 Interests and Motivations.

As a sound professional and politically engaged individual committed to the creation of cultural spaces for the transformation of the country, I regard this project as a means of aligning and advancing my interests in support of my academic, artistic and professional development. I hope that this initiative will open opportunities to connect with others who are interested in working within this intersectional field, thereby enabling me to positively impact my context. As an author, I am also motivated by the prospect of producing a research project that is compelling, valuable, and contemporary, capable of attracting the attention of various research and educational institutions. I must also say that as a Colombian artist I feel a responsibility to link my artistic practice to my context and contribute to my community. Finally, I am interested in continuing to explore this area through my artistic practice in sound art and music, and in promoting critical thinking and research through artistic and creative processes.

2 Framework.

This chapter seeks to inform the reader and the author within the framework that supports the project. This framework contextualises and relates the project on the basis of theoretical references, key authors, fields of knowledge, aesthetic parameters, concepts, critical analysis, technical resources, and lines of research and production; allowing a coherent articulation between artistic practice and research, and giving way to a better understanding of the subsequent chapters. This chapter is divided into 3 parts due to the necessity of the object of study for the project, which is positioned within the discipline of sound art, while bearing a strong implication towards political activism, for this reason this chapter provides an insight into these areas, from the definition of the concept of sound art, to the relationship between art and politics, followed by a closer focus on sound; therefore, the aim is to facilitate an easy transition between the theory and practice set of the project.

2.1 Sound Art Literature Review.

‘Sound art first appeared as a label in the early 1980s by the American composer William Hellerman’ (Licht, 2009). Several artists and researchers have contributed to the development of the concept and the need for a way of gathering sound practices under a specific word, among them Max Neuhaus; Alan Licht in the book *Sound Art Revisited* (2009); Brandon Labelle in the book *Background Noise* (2008); de la Motte-Haber in *Klangkunst: Tönende Objekte und klingende Räume* (1999) and John Cage. All these authors are important references for contextualising contemporary sound practices.

As detailed in Duarte Maltez's *(Un)Censorship and SoundArt* (2022), ‘there is a challenge in summing up a single definition for sound art due to its diversity’ (Maltez, 2022), drawing Campesato, he presents a useful definition of this discipline, which comes from *Referential and contextual aspects in sound art* (Campesato, 2009).

‘Sound art differs from music and from other art forms in which sound plays an important role (cinema, for example) by establishing new possibilities of appreciation and listening. Its distinctive use of sound, the absence of a linear temporal discourse, the exploration of the referential potentialities brought by sound, the effective interaction between the audience, and the space and time in which the work occurs, all of these aspects collaborate to distinguish sound art as a discrete artistic modality’ (Campeato, 2009, pp. 35-36).

Through this work we are presented with the work of Laura Maes who, in her research project *Sounding Sound Art* (2013) carries out a detailed exercise of defining sound art across a set of thirteen parameters, considering its condition of multidisciplinary.

‘We consider sound art to be a hybrid of visual arts and music: art works that have both an aural as well as a visual component, but where the production, muffling or reflection of sound forms the starting point of the work. The static nature of visual arts reveals itself in the fact that the sound has no beginning or end. Therefore, the emphasis no longer lies on the time dimension of sound, but has moved to its spatial dimension (space). As a consequence, most sound works are not narrative. The visitors come and go as they please and can determine independently how long they attend the “performance”. Sound art is like a performance lasting 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Consequently, very few sound works make an appeal to performers to produce sound, instead sounds are generated electronically, electro-acoustically and/or acoustically. The operation of most sound works relies on homemade hardware and/or software or on adapted commercially available technologies and techniques. The sounds are automated or activated either by natural sources, external input, animals or by acts of the visitors. The distance that is commonly kept between the spectator and the work of art or the performers in both

museums and concert halls has largely evaporated. The visitor can often walk around or into the sound work or is even encouraged to touch it. Most sound works are temporary and they will rather be found in public space, alternative locations, museums and galleries than on the stage of a concert hall. Thus, the sound works are regularly based on specific characteristics of that location' (Maes, 2013).

Another valuable resource on visions and concepts surrounding sound art is the work written by José Vasco Carvalho in his doctoral thesis *Espaços Sonoros: A Experiência Sónica no contexto da Arte Pública* (2019) introducing other important authors' viewpoints, such as Galo Follmer and Douglas Khan, which allow new thoughts to complement those already proposed by Litch.

The researcher Garcia Sedano in *Rastreando el sonido. Cartografía de la sonoridad en el arte contemporáneo desde su origen hasta la Asturias del siglo XXI* (2019), refers to sound art as 'a spatial organisation where sound defines spaces and forms as if it were a plastic object that recreates itself in its own transversality and in the search for a plastic absolute. It should therefore be recalled that sound art is a hybrid art that arises from the mixture of different disciplines and platforms, with special emphasis on technological ones' (Sedano, 2019).

The emergence of multiple and diverse sound practices have led to the study of how sound relates to the other elements in which it exists, from the physical, phenomenological, political, poetic and other perspectives, and how this relationship can generate an art work. It is therefore important to ask which elements relate to a sound. Based on several authors consulted for the development of this project like Voegelin, Labelle, Garcia, Maes, etc I propose the following elements as essential for the relationship between sound and its happening: space and architecture, time, sound source, social and political context, visual

deployment, ethics, the listening act and language. This question on the elements surrounding the hearing practice constitutes what Brandon Labelle calls an ecology of sound, being space the most researched and discussed. It is through the study of these relationships of interconnected forces that we can come to the understanding of a notion of sound art, and it is through this analysis that artists have developed different practices and techniques that reflect the potential of sound.

2.2 Politics & Art: from witnessing to activism.

‘Politics, indeed, is not the exercise of, or struggle for, power. It is the configuration of a specific space, the framing of a particular sphere of experience, of objects posited as common and as pertaining to a common decision, of subjects recognized as capable of designating these objects and putting forward arguments about them’ (Rancière, 2009)

Having set sound art practices and its main aspects in context, it is important for this project to consider the relationship between politics, activism and art. Firstly, as a broad starting frame, questioning the political potential of art as a whole, the capacity to connect with people and its role in the context of struggles and resistance.

Several authors have highlighted the importance of art as a witness, and its relation to history and political practice. This issue can be found in different branches of art, such as Brandon Labelle in *Sonic Agency* (2018) in relation with sound and Lilia Schwarcz in *Images of Whiteness: The Presence of Absence* (2024) in relation with painting from Brazil colonial age. In *Witnessing in Contemporary Art and Politics* (Lindroos & Möller, 2017), the authors detail with numerous references what it means to be a witness in different fields such as the social, judicial and political. From this research, the authors cite the work of Avishai Margalit in *The ethics of memory* (2004) to gives us an insight on how an artist can position himself as a witness through the documentation carried out, leading us to think ethically about when an artist is an observer and when a witness. Margalit argues that being a moral witness refers to

a subject who gives first-hand evidence of suffering because of personal experience, and a political witness refers to a subject who documents and collects information for its use in the war for testimony and memory. This statement is important in any work that intends to relate to this type of issue in order to avoid cases of re-victimisation or impersonation of victims. Therefore, this project allows itself to be defined as a political witness, which aims to offer new possibilities of sharing testimonies through the artistic practices discussed in this work.

In *Artists as a Witness* (Lindroos & Möller, 2017) the authors evoke ethical questions that invite us to think about the representation of testimonies: Who can judge the artist and victims testimonies ? How to evaluate the artistic testimony? Is there any guarantee for this exercise in order to avoid re-victimisation? Does it generate an extension of the violence if the artist fails to generate a testimony congruent with the vision of the victims ? I leave these questions unanswered, with the purpose of becoming a recurrent tool for testing our actions as artists.

About art being political, Lindroos and Möller cites various authors in order to achieve an overall concept:

‘While it has been said that art is political on condition that it “extends the thread of recognition and understanding beyond what previously was seen and known” (Elderfield, 2006), any work of art is susceptible to politically informed analysis. Such analysis will reveal, for example, that art is eminently political even if it confirms “what previously was seen and known” (Elderfield, 2006). Indeed, art, while bearing witness to politics, lacks criticality if it mainly reconstructs or anticipates the motives of the political elite (Elderfield, 2006). Such art is political but hardly critical (Möller 2016). Art, thus, is always a contribution to political discourse, shaping “what can be seen, what can be said and what can be thought” (Rancière, 2009). In other words, art contributes to our understanding of what is possible, envisioning what Jacques Rancière calls “a new landscape of the possible”

(Rancière, 2009) or rendering the emergence of such a new landscape difficult.’ (Lindroos & Möller, 2017).

Further on, this paper names different artistic works that have been engaged in representing and documenting historical testimonies through the arts, as is the case of post-conflict representations of the violence on Perú, especially its indigenous population, in connection with the conflict, in this analysis made by Cynthia Milton on *Images of truth: Art as a medium for recounting Peru's internal war* (2017) the author ‘not only explores the connection between art and affect; she also critically discusses the notion of art as historical evidence, noting that art can contradict official histories and represent individual and group memories that deviate from such histories’ (Lindroos & Möller, 2017). At the end of the work, the authors remind us how photography and cinema have historically been important instruments for the preservation of memory, testimony and the promulgation of political or ideological narratives. This is perhaps the clearest example of the relationship between artists and politics in the last century and has been widely covered in academic literature.

In *Does it Work?: The affect of art* (Duncombe, 2016) the author brings up important insights for a politically oriented artistic practice. Through an analysis of different views from different times and cultures, he demonstrates the inherent power of art referring to texts from the Bible, the Quran, Plato's Republic and Immanuel Kant. Then goes on to ask about efficacy and functionality for art and activism.

Renowned political scientist Harold Laswell describes the term activism in the book *Politics; who gets what, when, how* (1936) as ‘the activity of challenging and changing power relations...The common element is an activity targeted toward a discernible end: change a policy, create an institution, mobilize a population, overthrow a dictator. Simply, the goal of activism is action to generate an effect’ (Laswell, 1950). On the other hand, Duncombe notes that delimiting the goal of art is not as simple as that:

‘Art, on the other hand, tends not to have such a clear target. It is difficult to say what art is for or against. Its value often rests in showing us new perspectives and new ways to see our world, its impact is often subtle and hard to measure, and confusing or contradictory messages can be layered into the work. Good art always contains a surplus of meaning: something we cannot quite describe or put our finger on, but which moves us nonetheless. Its goal, if we can even use that word, is to stimulate a feeling, move us emotionally, or alter our perception. Art is an expression that generates affect’ (Duncombe, 2016).

The connection becomes evident, activism is related to effect as art is related to affect. However, the author reminds us that society is not merely an abstraction, it is people who are capable of making changes, as individuals and society are interconnected. Thus, the author questions why people create changes. After considering the classical 18th century theory of democratic and economic development, calling it a model based on faith on political reason, Duncombe argues:

‘As recent developments in cognitive science suggest, we make sense of our world less through reasoned deliberation of facts and more through stories and symbols that frame the information we receive. And, as any seasoned activist can tell you, people do not soberly decide to change their mind and act accordingly. They are moved to do so by emotionally powerful stimuli. As such, when it comes to stimulating social change, affect and effect are not discrete ends but are all up in each other’s business’. (Duncombe, 2016).

It is through the theory of the *Æffect*¹ developed in this research that it is possible to demonstrate the value and need for an ethic of activism in art. The author goes on to develop a method for measuring the effectiveness of an artistic work, giving room to understand the work within the specific pretensions of each artist.

Considering this theory of *Æffect* as a precedent for effect is relevant not only as an

¹ A term coined by Duncombe to explain how, through art, social change can be enacted by appealing to affect and emotion.

artist, but also as an observer of political events occurring today. Politics of emotion sets the latest trends in democratic elections around the world, through discourses that seek to reach the feelings (fear, anger) of voters, even if it is not based on truth and democratic values. On this politics of emotions the art studio KlingKlangKlong has submitted ‘an AI-based analysis of political speeches to reveal overall sentiment, emotional cues (joy, sadness, fear, anger, disgust), potential hate speech, race-related stress, and factual reliability’ (KlingKlangKlong, 2025). An analysis of graphs shows how political speeches appeal mostly to emotions and not to factual arguments. This analysis can be found on the group's social networks as it is a work in progress that is expected to be released in the second half of 2025. It is through these ideas that we can consider how sound generates emotional affections that allow the public to relate stressed issues addressed by sound pieces, in order to have a positive effect on their day-to-day political actions and beliefs.

For some artists the relation between art and politics becomes a moral quest beyond personal expression. Personally impacted by social or geo-political issues, artists decide to record their struggle and the resistance of their people through art, it’s not uncommon that these artists end up under investigation, persecuted, censored or imprisoned. This is how artists adopt a position of visibility and social leadership, taking risks and creating disruptive pieces to the structures that oppress them, an ethic of activism, some examples of artists who serve as references for their approach to art as a tool for political activism are Tania Bruguera, Ricardo Dominguez and Ali Ferzat.

2.3 Politics & Sound.

Published on the 25th volume of the music journal from the *MIT Press Leonardo Music Journal*, the article called *The Politics of Sound Art* (Collins, 2015) serves as an introduction on this topic, by giving a historical perspective on how some 20th century social movements in the United States performed as a point of departure for the relation on sound

and politics. In this context, the occupation of space, sound and social awareness interact towards political engagement, with sound as an engaging element and a medium of entanglement. The use of loudspeakers would become a symbol of this union between activism and sound (Collins, 2015).

Concerning sound and focusing on what an ethic of activism means for sound practices the author Brandon Labelle assesses contemporary struggles in relation to sound events, listening and its visibility in *Sonic Agency* (2018). Through different observations on sound, he demonstrates how listening is a necessary skill for the construction of a communitarian model of collective care and social insurrection. Throughout the book, the author uses four sonic figures to demonstrate social problems related to the phenomenon of sound and how different communities and artists have confronted them. These four figures refer to different properties of sound: invisible (materiality), the overheard (intensity), the itinerant (temporality), and the weak (affective). It evaluates the social, political, ethical and poetic relation between the phenomenon of listening and being listened to, in relation to forms of social resistance, arguing that being heard is a central policy of public visibility, indispensable for the construction of better democracies. A critical sonic sensibility brings us closer to building common perspectives so sound becomes a tool for social solidarity. This potentiality is what the author refers to as sound agency.

‘Sound is political by extending or restricting the limits of the body, in the desires and needs announced in the cry, through the care and compassion listening may yield, and in acts of rupture and fragmentation, improvisation the rapturous and violating noises that return us to the base materialism of bare life. In shuddering the state of matter and energy, bodies and things, in working to restrain or inflect particular violence, sound is a powerful force from which we learn of the entanglement of worldly contact, one that extends from the depths of bodies and into the energetics of social formations and their politics’ (Labelle, 2018).

What the author proposes is an activism of listening, a practice of radical hearing in which the diverse (sound) ecologies that have been culturally and politically overshadowed can be empowered, so that through this practice an ethic for sound practices can be developed as an arena of interrelation and collective care. This concept of the public and the political, the space where we converge, comes from Hannah Arendt's notion of a 'political realm', 'the space where I appear to others as others appear to me' (Arendt, 1958, p. 168). We might ask then what we can research and address through sound in these public (political) ecologies?. Labelle's approach to this question is to establish a correlation between the sonic figures and social concerns: the invisible with systematic disappearances of people, the overheard with populations that have no voice in the public sphere, the itinerant with geo-political borders and migrant communities, and the weak with political violence and hate speech.

In *The Political Possibility of Sound* (2018), Voegelin defends the possibility of soundscape and sound work as an instrument for political imagination. As an example of this, quotes Lawrence Abu Hamdam's work at the Golan Heights, 'the narrative of transgressing borders, the possibility of a voice that transcends the limits of the land, the frontier between Syria and Israel, creates a point of conflict, political and aesthetic, whose lines are practised and contested in sound' (Voegelin, 2018, p. 24). This work seek to transcend institutional politics, leading us to question deep-seated constructs of the modern world, such as borders; this exercise of imagining and deconstructing structured social dynamics is what the author calls 'sound fictions', since they pursue an ethic of possibility and transformation, constituting active political actions and new interpretations of the dominant structures.

Sound being an immaterial and invisible medium, provides an opportunity to challenge normative codes, to comprehend through other senses, to explore what has been hidden, and to navigate the complexity and diversity of our world as a political practice of collective care and liberation. Throughout the book the author explores concepts of the

geopolitics of sound, the ethics of the invisible and unheard, bodies and subjective listening, and sound materialism.

‘Listening is thus a political practice that hears and generates alternatives. It is not an essentialist practice however. Its possibilities go beyond that of its own materiality and sensibility, as well as beyond the dynamics of the telos of its politics, into the possibility of a plural and multisensory world, revealing its norms and giving agency to its transformation: in sight, hearing, touch and smell. The politics of this sonic engagement is the politics of the invisible’. (Voegelin, 2018).

One institution that has worked around these approaches is the *Creative Research in Sound Arts Practice (CRiSAP)* from the *University of the Arts in London*, including researchers Salome Voegelin and Cathy Lane; research topics are organised into: sound and environment, sonic activism (and gender perspective), sonic knowledge and pedagogies, voice and text composition, performance art and technology, and sound history and memory. Such guidelines provide insight into the state of contemporary sound practices and what specific bodies of investigation are being addressed by academia, artistic practice and activist life.

In a complementary perspective, considering the organisation of the artistic sound ecosystems, in *Cultivating Activist Lives in Sound* (2015) by Tara Rodgers, analyses the situation of artists in terms of market and social structures, criticising the impossibilities that many artists face in their practice and looking at how to generate an ethical and supportive creative ecosystem. ‘The propagation of sound waves across space and time is a useful metaphor for thinking about relations of individuals and collectives: consider a sonic-political act at the center, with its ripple effects as the various social, political-economic and ecological impacts that resonate from that act locally and in more far reaching scales’ (Rodgers, 2015, p. 1). Rodgers concludes the article with a proposal on how to cultivate a life of activism for

sound practices. I attempt to summarise it as follows: to democratise resources and time so that there are no social constraints, ensuring access to social services; to encourage creative expressions that foster diversity, a sense of community, recognition of differences, commitments to inequity, and social and environmental awareness; to encourage collective organisation and ownership of the means of distribution and production of the sound arts, recognising their inherent cultural, economic and civic value; to raise awareness of the practices of consumption of electronic and digital elements and to seek to minimise ecological impact. This is what, according to the author, a sound activism should pursue.

In regards to sound installation, in Gascia Ouzounian's work *Sound installation art: from spatial poetics to politics, aesthetics to ethics* (2013), we can find a strong hypothesis on the political dimension of this practice:

‘What is in doubt is whether or not this imagination is critically located or able to engage with the public in meaningful ways. My claim is that it can, when it is founded upon conceptions of space that take into account not only physical geographies, but social and political geographies as well. When space is understood not in abstract or absolute terms, but as socially and politically constituted, a spatial sound practice can emerge not only as a poetics, but as a politics, not only as an aesthetics, but as an ethics. Such a critical spatial sonic practice does not merely ‘happen in’ space, but is poised radically to transform the very terms of its constitution’ (Ouzounian, 2013, p. 74).

In this same paper Gascia refers to the concept of space developed by Henri Lefebvre in the book *The Production of Space* (1974). Lefebvre portrays space as a social, political and cultural construct, and not simply a physical extension that exists. According to him, space is not only shaped by physical or material practices, but by social, economic and political networks, the production of space is influenced by those who control it, design it and inhabit it, therefore this space is permeated by meanings, emotions and social relations.

This comprehension of space is essential to sound practices as it recognises it as a place with significance beyond the material and physical, a relational and therefore political space, in which sound can shape and affect the symbolic and poetical value of the space itself. Several artists such as Abu Hamdan, Rebecca Belmore and Oliver Beer have recognised this value in the space-sound relation, and have used installation practice as a research, not only on aesthetics, but also on politics, social struggles and ethics, most of them moved by contemporary struggles.

This framework allows us to identify a potential activism in sound practices, recognisable in the way they can transmit narratives, awaken our attention, occupy spaces, re-contextualise them, re-construct them, relate to them, or simply invite us to listen. This project aims to explore ways of exercising this political potential through sound installation, by providing a framework that illustrates how sound can build a kind of activism around it, reshaping spaces and encouraging active listening; such elements become the foundations of the project and therefore of the subsequent sound installation, it's through the exploration of these ideas that the project raise questions and explore ways of using sound as a tool for intertwining and political communication.

3. State-of-art.

This chapter presents a detailed and critical review of different authors and pieces of sound art that explore the political realm of sound, with the intention to inform the project and contextualise the sound installation presented as a result of it. Through the analysis of these pieces, we seek to identify dialogues, tensions, challenges and opportunities that enrich this artistic project, in order to feed the creative process from an informed, sensitive and reflexive point of view.

3.1 On Social and Political Awareness through Sound Art: An overview of Global Experiences.

Since in this chapter we aim to cite artists and works that reflect their social and political context in disruptive ways through sound practices, it is important to look at places where there is a strong need to give voice to communities and their demands, whether the problem is one of displacement, denial of rights, systematic violence or ethnic elimination, among others, the goal is to focus on what artists are doing in response to these realities and how to learn from these experiences within the sound practices.

In the article *Considering the Politics of Sound Art in China in the 21st Century (2015)*, Jing Wang elaborates an outstanding analysis of works considered to be political, its relevance considering the country's context and how artists stand themselves to address these concerns. Perhaps one of the most interesting cases to analyse in terms of art and politics.

‘In general, the degree to which a sound work is considered to be political in China depends largely on the sociopolitical contexts in which it is exhibited and performed, as well as the sociopolitical identity of its creators. Even when the work is a pure experimentation in sound and technology, the process of exhibition or performance, the nature of the exhibition space and the larger cultural-economic space endow additional meanings and significance to the work. The more abstract the sound, the easier it is for it to be discursively

and symbolically manipulated in subjective ways' (Wang, 2015).

In the installation piece *Remembering* (2009)² (Fig. 1), the artist Ai Weiwei in his artistic work has researched and criticised the negligence of the Chinese government in the case of the Wenchuan earthquake of 2008, motivated by the lack of information about the victims and the strict control of data by the authorities, he set up a team that searched from door to door looking for the names and details of the victims, and found that 5,219 children and young people died in their schools, state-built structures that were supposed to be seismic-resistant. This work was presented in Munich in 2019, which led to the artist being persecuted, censored and imprisoned in his country.

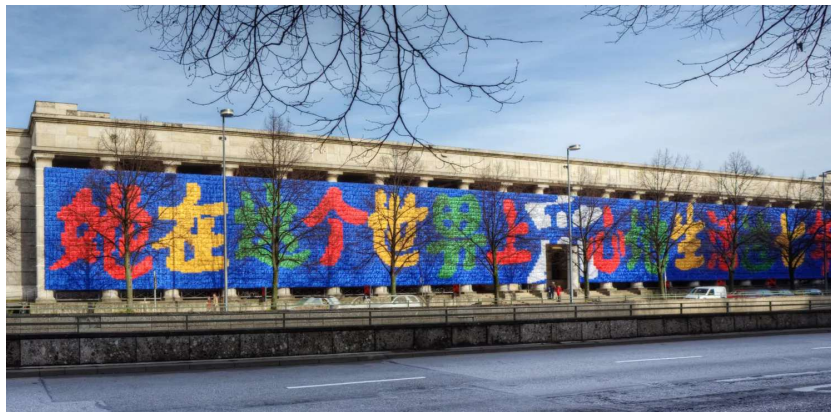


fig 1. Remembering (Weiwei, 2009)

source: Ai Weiwei, 2009.

Nian (Weiwei, 2010) is the continuation of this project, a '3:40:53 audio recording consisting of thousands of readings by volunteers. Each volunteer reads out the name of a student killed in the Wenchuan Earthquake on 12 May 2008. Five thousand two hundred five students' names were read 12,140 times in the piece (Wang, 2015).

Following the above-mentioned Chinese political context, Shengzen-based sound artist Zen Lu presented a sound installation that aims to use field recordings as a technique of affective power; this piece is called *Borderline* (2014). 'The work makes one aware of the electrified fences put up for border management by the Chinese government to separate

² <https://www.5122018.com/remembering>

Shenzhen and Hong Kong...the fences contribute to the increasingly striking gap between the rich and the poor, as well as spatial-identity-related discrimination. *Borderline* is interactive. When the audience makes enough noise, a microphone picks up the signal and activates sounds of gunfire. However, this work has not yet been actualized due to financial difficulties. It is also difficult to find a venue for its exhibition on the Mainland because border issues are too politically sensitive to address in artworks' (Wang, 2015).

Artist Zheng Bo's *Sing for Her* (2015)³ (Fig. 2) addresses the struggle faced by migrant workers and ethnic minorities who have been marginalized in the multicultural metropolis of Hong Kong. Bo worked with 7 communities to record songs that are important to their identity in order to create a public installation consisting of a giant loudspeaker that amplifies the voice and a karaoke system, the installation invites the public to participate and get connected to these populations that have been unheard through music and singing.

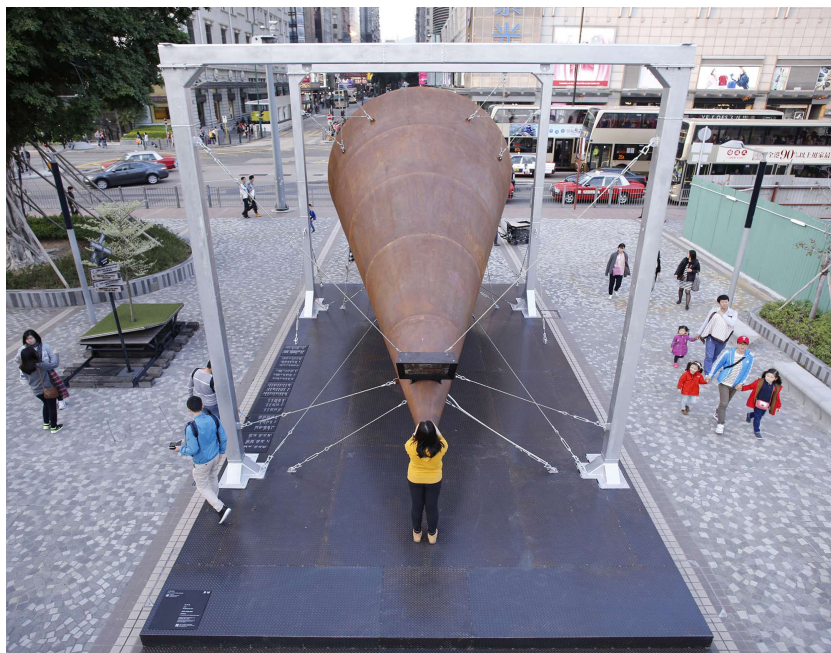


fig 2. *Sing for Her* (Bo, 2015)

source: Zheng Bo, 2015.

Another relevant scenario where the dialogue between sound art and politics has been

³ https://zhengbo.org/2015_S4H.html

raised is in the Middle East, where the political context and the war are inherent themes in the lives of many, including the artists. After October 2023, Israel has increased surveillance policies over Lebanese and Gaza land, including the use of drones in foreign skies, ‘The hum of an Israeli surveillance drone is constant, an unshakable background noise that now defines the daily rhythm of Beirut. The drones hover above our heads like birds of prey, their continuous buzzing frequently punctuated by more violent sounds—distant thuds that signal new airstrikes, for those who fled from the South, the Beqaa Valley, or Beirut’s southern suburbs that are collectively referred to as *Dahieh*, the drones are not merely an annoyance but an unremitting reminder of what the current conflict with Israel has wrought: the displacement of a large population now seeking refuge in public facilities throughout Lebanon’ (Kayssi, 2024) writes Issam Kayssi, a research analyst for *The Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center* on the article *Beirut under the drones* (2024).

Faced with this reality, Beirut-based sound artist Mohamed Choucair⁴ decided to collect and use these sounds as a tool for sound composition, using digital manipulation techniques to create ambient pieces where he seeks to turn the sound of drones from something terrifying into a symbol of resilience. These pieces can be found on his social networks and are free to use.

This initiative has led Choucair to collaborate with artist and researcher Lawrence Abu Hamdam, founder of Earshot, ‘the world’s first non-profit organisation dedicated to the study of audio for the defence of human rights and the environment’ (Earshot, n.d.). *Air Pressure* (Earshot, 2022)⁵ (Fig. 3) is one of the projects developed by this ONG, compiling the different cases of aerial intromission committed by the Israeli government, this archive is materialised in an accessible digital database and has been presented as a sound installation in different cities in Europe. This work not only represents an artistic practice but provides

⁴ <https://www.instagram.com/mohamedchoucair/>

⁵ <https://www.airpressure.info/>

evidence to support judicial campaigns in order to condemn these abuses, as well as a source for journalists and researchers from different media all over the world, having an effective influence on the communication of this concern internationally.

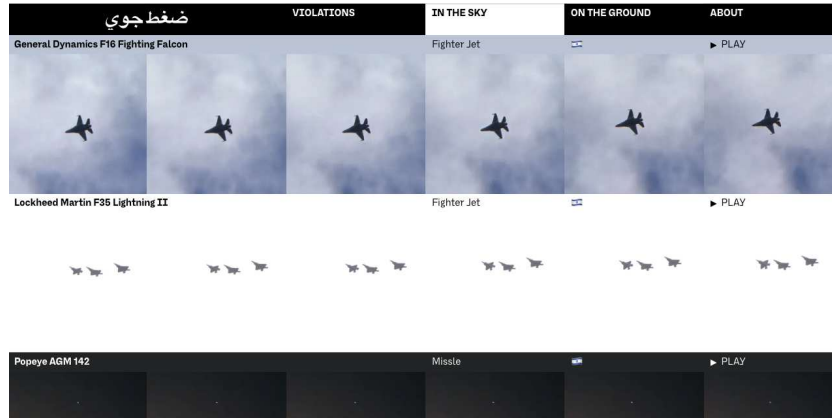


fig 3. Air Pressure (Earshot, 2022)

source: *airpressure*, <https://www.airpressure.info/in-the-sky>.

On 2014 Abu Hamdam was commissioned to research on the murder of two unarmed children in the West Bank of Palestine by Israeli soldiers, through the sound analysis of the weapons and the bullets that were reportedly used in the scene and some recordings done by the community it was acoustically possible to provide enough evidence that confirmed that the bullets used in the shooting were not the ones reported, proving that Israeli soldiers did shoot mortal bullets to the children, this evidence has been used in cases against Israel in different international stances. From this research it was presented in Frankfurt a sound installation called *Rubber Cotted Steel* (Hamdam, 2016)⁶ (Fig. 4) in which its intended to amplify the silence of the victims and make a statement on rights of children in war.

⁶ <https://kadist.org/work/rubber-coated-steel/>

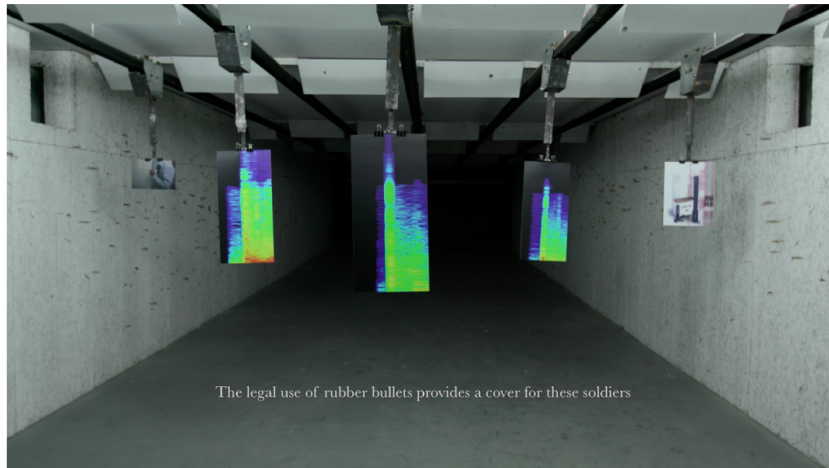


fig 4. Rubber Cotted Steel (Hamdam, 2016)

source: Kadist, <https://kadist.org/work/rubber-coated-steel/>

Acknowledging the potential of sound as a tool for research and reflection on war-related discourses, the *Rizq Art Initiative* organised the sound art exhibition *Listening for Traces: conflict, sound and memory* (Fig. 5), with works by artists from different countries, some of them first-hand witnesses of conflict in their own context. On the event's website, the following information has been added regarding the event held in Abu Dhabi:

‘The works in this exhibition explore not only the sounds of war or protests themselves, but also help us listen to the sonic reverberations of conflicts transmitted through time and space and inscribed in landscapes and bodies. Harnessing the unique power of sound, they navigate the temporal reverberations of our collective pasts, revealing how they shape our presents...the artists in *Listening for Traces* unearth the resonances and cycles of conflict past and present through the medium of sound and how it can feedback and echo through language, the body, place, the built environment, and our relationships with each other’ (Ibraaz, 2024, p. xx).



fig 5. Listening for Traces poster

source: Rizq Art Initiative,

<https://www.rizqart.com/exhibitions/8-listening-for-traces-conflict-sound-memory/overview/>

Some of the works presented in the exhibition included: a multi-channel sound installation focusing on Okinawa, the site of the last battle of WWII; a multi-channel sound installation on how sound and language are used to construct narratives of enemies; a ‘karaoke’ installation exploring the sounds of war as experienced by displaced civilians in Ukraine, and a sound installation addressing memory, trauma and reconciliation.

Focusing on the relational condition and the possibility of activation through listening, the Ultra-Red sound collective have used sound practices to support different social situations such as pro-migration and anti-racism movements, among others. The collective mission is to ‘pursue a fragile but dynamic exchange between art and political organizing’ (Ultra-Red, 2020), recognising in art a possibility for social transformation and political involvement, as Labelle commented ‘acousmatic as the basis for political activism’ (Labelle, 2018, p. 37). ‘Collectively, the group have produced radio broadcasts, performances, recordings, installations, texts and public space actions. Exploring acoustic space as enunciative of social relations, Ultra-red take up the acoustic mapping of contested spaces and histories utilising sound-based research (termed Militant Sound Investigations) that directly engage the

organizing and analyses of political struggles' (Ultra-Red, 2020).

In 2015, the doctoral work *The sound of memory: An artistic exploration of personal and cultural narratives in post-conflict communities* (2015) by Fionnuala Fagan-Thiebot from the University of Belfast, discusses and compiles various situations where sound practices allow the representation of testimonies and historical narratives relevant for the shaping of post-conflict societies. Focusing on social situations in Northern Ireland and Bosnia, the author uses documentation, critical writing and practices such as installation art to analyse how the unseen knowledge of victims' experiences can consolidate general and historical knowledge of significance for broader communities through art-based exposure and communication.

In the article *Las prácticas artísticas en la construcción de memoria sobre la violencia y el conflicto* (2013) Martínez Quintero analyses different artworks within the Latin American context, as a way of representation and reflection on the construction of historical memory against events induced by the violence that has marked the history of its countries, looking at the examples from countries such as Colombia, Perú, Chile and Argentina, the work exposes art as a mechanism to make visible the violence suffered by bodies, spaces and cultural identity. He analyses a number of performative pieces and installations that relate the testimonies and experiences of the victims, that contribute to the construction of a historical memory, necessary to post-conflict societies, linking the social and political framework with the poetics behind art pieces. The author concludes that art and culture in Latin America are an important intertwining device in processes of resistance and collective elaboration of mourning, as well as a testimony of the unspeakable, configuring scenarios of visibility, denunciation, and resignification of the past, all of which are crucial in the construction of memory of violence and the armed conflict.

In 2013 the artist and journalist Luz Maria Sanchez presented the piece titled *Detritus*

(2013)⁷ (Fig. 6), where she displays material compiled from the study of the war between drug cartels and the state from 2006-2012, focusing on the consequences for the civilians who were caught up in this conflict. *Detritus* presents more than 10,000 pieces of digital-media files taken from the national media, which were manipulated and arranged in a random order, leading to an audiovisual installation of 2 large screens and 8 audio speakers. In this installation the artist suggests debating the role of the media in the legitimation of violence and the role of politicians in the deaths of the civilian population.

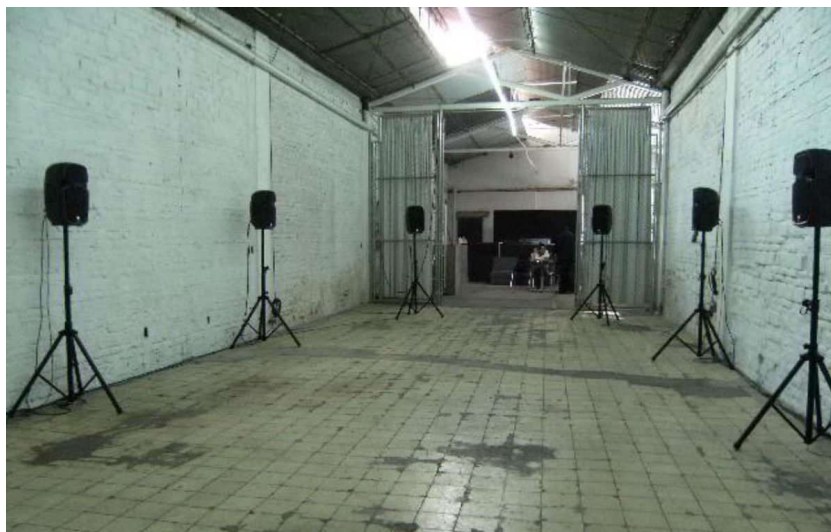


fig 6. Detritus (Sanchez, 2013)

source: Luz Maria Sanchez, 2013.

In the same field of research is the artist Esteban Ferro Astaiza, who has been interested in compiling a sound archive of Latin American political events transmitted by broadcasting radio, recognising in this medium a device of discourse for the communication of political ideas within the continent. *Llamado de Guerra* (Astaiza, 2018)⁸ (Fig. 7) brings together different recordings of political situations across the continent that reveal to the listener a common narrative about the territory and how it has been affected by external politically motivated agents. On this documentation and the exercise of reconstructing and

⁷ <https://www.luzmariasanchez.com/work/artwork-detritus1-2011>

⁸ <https://llamadodeguerra.info>

transforming them, the author comments: ‘In this way, the socio-political contexts of the documents and the sonic materiality of their recordings are explored, thinking about the different layers of meaning that sound adds to these messages’ (Astaiza, 2022).



fig 7. Llamado de Guerra (Astaiza, 2018)

source: Ferro Astaiza, 2018.

Following the work on testimonies and compilation of recordings of Latin American political events, the composer Carlos Vasquez presented *Máquina M* (2011) an electroacoustic sound installation that allowed the audience to interact by activating sounds, which seek to interlace different reports of political situations on the continent such as the military overthrow of power in Chile, the Condor plan in Paraguay, and the tortures carried out by the state in Argentina. Through the manipulation of sound, the artist opens up the possibility for the audience to reconstruct and investigate the violent history of the continent, which sonically results in a composition that varies between noise and monologue.

In conclusion, this review of some sound practices that reflect on their socio-political contexts is proof of the capacity of sound as a critical, affective and testimonial tool. The pieces presented, from different territories, allow us to understand that sound art not only serves to document or represent conflicts, but also offers the possibility of creating spaces for active listening, resistance and memory; this perspective calls for the design of a practice that

is conscious, ethical and resonant with the territories that it inhabits, listens to and transforms.

3.2 The Sound Art of Colombia's Conflict.

Following I will develop a detailed look at sound art pieces that reflect the socio-political context in Colombia. The importance of this chapter lies in the close and intrinsic relationship that the project has with the Colombian conflict, since the object of the project is a consequence of it, so it is important to know how other artists have carried out this approach of reflection and creation, as well as how the sound installation produced by this project interacts and positions itself in this scenario.

Since the agreement of peace with the FARC-EP guerrilla was signed in 2016 one of the greatest challenges has been to research and understand the conflict from the point of view of the victims, it is in the wake of this effort that the *Comisión de la Verdad* was created as a state entity that 'seeks the clarification of the patterns and causes of the internal armed conflict that satisfies the right of victims and society to the truth, promotes the recognition of what happened, coexistence in the territories and contributes to lay the foundations for non-repetition, through a process of broad and plural participation for the construction of a stable and lasting peace' (Comisión de la Verdad, n.d.). This process has allowed different initiatives to be generated around this attempt to disarm a systematic and deep-rooted violence throughout the national territory, with greater focus on rural life and its communities, who have been the most affected.

A major component of this process has been listening to and documenting the stories of the victims and participants in the conflict, from which the *Sonido y Memoria* (Comisión de la verdad, 2022)⁹ serie emerged as part of the testimonial volume, consisting of 'a series of sound stories, atmospheres and resonance networks that invite awareness of the country's armed conflict through immersion in listening' (Comisión de la verdad, 2022). This

⁹ <https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/volumen-testimonial>

compendium provides recordings, photographs, stories, cartographies and other elements in order to make them available to the public for circulation, which opens up a great opportunity for artists and those interested in working on this subject, as the institution itself has already carried out projects such as *Narrativas de vida en guerra* (Comisión de la verdad, 2022)¹⁰ in which, using audio testimonies of first-hand witnesses of the war, attempts to explore the daily and human side behind conflict scenarios, raising a question about human relations between the different actors in the conflict. This project, which has adopted the act of listening and being listened to at the centre of its ethical and methodological approach, demonstrates how such an act constitutes a democratic practice necessary for the promotion of better societies.

Among the initiatives carried out by the *Comisión de la Verdad* is *Itinerarios de Sentido* (Castilejo, Morales & Rivera, 2021)¹¹ by anthropologist and peace commissioner Alejandro Castilejo, who proposes to walk the landscapes and routes described by the victims in their testimonies, documenting and investigating the landscape sonically in order to preserve and present the stories within its context. Castilejo says that this practice is important in order to recognise the intrinsic relationship between social space and memory. 'The aim is to immerse in the story of the invisible human being, creating an intersection between macro-storical processes and the personal biographical dimension' Castilejo explains.

'Itineraries of meaning deals on how space and the body are interrelated when recounting stories of war and violence, and how this connects with the community and identity... There is no experience of the body that is not by walking, in which the meaning of the word sense acquires a different connotation, therefore a notion that knowledge is constructed by walking is born' (Castilejo, 2021, p. xx).

¹⁰ <https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/etiquetas/narrativas-de-vida-en-la-guerra>

¹¹ <https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/itinerarios-de-sentido>

Under this ethic, which seeks to reclaim the experiences of communities affected by violence, various artists have helped to communicate these situations, which are often invisible to the public, through their artistic practice. *Rio la Verdad* (2022)¹² (Fig. 8) from Leonel Vasquez is a sound installation that reflects on the role of the bodies of water, the stories it carries and its symbolic and affective value of the rivers that were historically linked to the conflict. The artist presents how various rivers in Colombia have also been protagonists and victims of the war, often exploited, polluted, dammed, stigmatised or used as weapons. Around these hydro-bodies communities have grown and with them their cultural practices resulting in the emergence of rituals, songs, stories and other activities around the rivers and their histories. Through the use of hydroacoustic speakers the installation reproduces a collection of these practices, while it invites the public to immerse themselves in an immersive sensorial experience where sound and body engage in a dialogue through the vibrations of water. This installation is a call to listen to the testimonies of the victims from a symbolic place, such as an artificial river filled with water coming from the rivers where these stories took place, encouraging the listener to explore the context and the space.



fig 8. Rio la Verdad (Vasquez, 2022)

source: Leonel Vasquez, 2022.

¹² <https://www.leonelasquez.com/obra/rio-la-verdad/>

Cantos Silientes en Cuerpo de Madera (2017)¹³ (Fig. 9) is another sound installation made by Leonel Vasquez with the participation of the community of Santo Domingo, Arauca. This installation seeks to commemorate and remember the death of 17 people by a bombardment carried out by the national army. For this work, 17 chairs with speakers were built and installed in the public space of the village, each one accompanied by a tree as a sign of memory of the victims. Each chair tells the story of one of the people who died there, through a collection of sounds that the community made in an attempt to dignify their lives. The speakers are connected in order to resonate with the chair and the tree, therefore the only way to hear the sound is through the interaction of the body with the space and the elements placed there, placing the public in the context and the exact place where each death occurred.



fig 9. *Cantos Silientes en Cuerpo de Madera* (Vasquez, 2017)
source: Leonel Vasquez, 2017.

In the installation *Retratos No Hablados* (2016)¹⁴ (Fig. 10) by the artist Maria Alejandra Ordoñez addresses the phenomenon of enforced disappearance, the consequences and the space left by the victims. Through conversations recorded and played on old

¹³

<https://www.leonelvasquez.com/obra/cuerpo-para-una-voz-ausente/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CCantos%20silientes%20en%20cuerpos%20de,lenguaje%20simb%C3%B3lico%20del%20arte%20sonoro.>

¹⁴ <https://museodememoria.gov.co/arte-y-cultura/retratos-no-hablados/>

telephones used by the audience to listen, it is possible to engage in a dialogue without response, a conversation lacking reciprocity; it is the sound of the victims' voices that is cut off by the disappearance, the spectator establishes a relationship with the sound but cannot respond to it.



fig 10. Retratos No Hablados (Ordoñez, 2016)

source: Museo de Memoria de Colombia,

<https://museodememoria.gov.co/arte-y-cultura/retratos-no-hablados/>

In *Cartas Inconclusas* (2020) by researcher and artist Estefanía Díaz, the author explores sound installation as a strategy of awareness in response to the forced disappearance of people in Colombia, aiming to ‘investigate the properties of the sound installation to establish links between the sense of listening and the concept of invisibility related to the latent memory of the victims’ (Estefania Díaz, 2020). As part of her research and artistic practice, Díaz has compiled and organised a digital repository of artworks from different disciplines reflecting on war on Colombia from the perspective and role of women, which is of great value to all interested readers.

In the doctoral thesis called *Mundo Sonoro Social: sonoláctica de las irrupciones sonoras asociadas a los actos violentos ocurridos en San Juan Nepomuceno entre los años de 1998 a 2005* (2021), by Eneida Ramírez, the author interlaces the sonorous and the social,

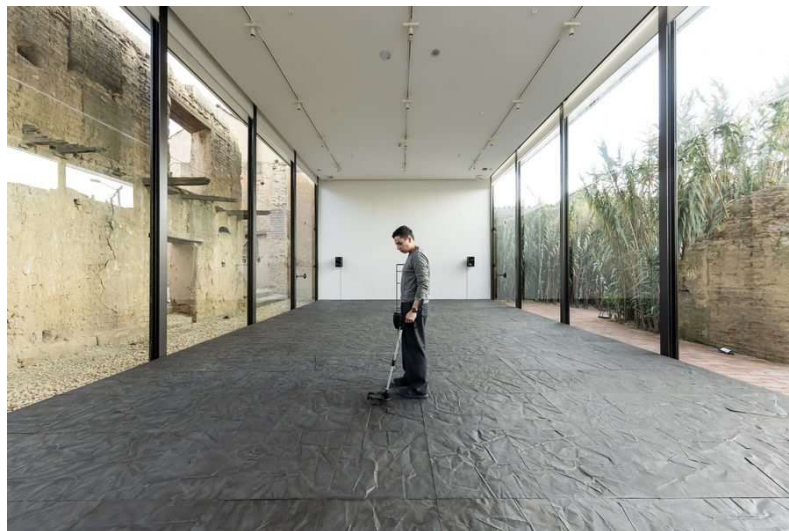
through her research and creative practice she proposes to examine the paramilitary violence from the sound disruption elements such as the sound of bullets, boots on the ground and screams, focusing on the psychological effects and the aftermath that these events left in the imaginary of the communities, exploring not only the sounds but also their absence, the silences that accompany their inhabitants and the absence of cultural expressions of the region silenced by the violence. This reflection is presented through different sound creations that aim to recompose the once silenced identity of the territory.

Several Colombian artists have presented research and creative thesis projects with an emphasis on exploring sound and its social dimension. One example is the work carried out by Luz Ángela Monroy in *El Giro: poética del deseo en la sucursal del duelo* (2022), by reconstructing the sound space, seeks to generate a space of collective mourning, focused on the events that took place during the national strike of 2021. Through the exploration of the affective and symbolic dimension of the soundscape, it aims to generate in the spectators strong emotions that lead to a reflection on how violence has marked the cultural identity of their city and its inhabitants. This work is translated into a theatrical and sonorous performance, guided by the use of Luz Angela's voice in a fragmented and self-generative monologue that evokes unanswered questions to the space through the speakers.

A similar approach towards the voice and the use of voice recordings as a plastic material is presented by the artist Andrea Rojas Gómez in the creation and research project *Vamonos que allá vienen* (2018). Although her result is a video installation, the artist explains how sound was used as a methodological tool to answer her questions about memory and identity, particularly in her own personal experience and her family's, who were displaced by the violence. 'Sound is also space, without it nothing would be woven and it would have no sense of place. Sound is time and atmosphere, and in it is contained what cannot be seen' (Rojas, 2018, p. xx).

Memoria Sonora (2018) by Alvaro Mauricio Martinez seeks to deal with memory through sound, exploring the function of sound as an evoker of emotions, places and memories. The work consists of an installation where the space is constructed from the sound memory of the author, following a non-linear narrative logic where the audience relates to the piece according to their position in the installation, it aims to evoke emotions through the appearance of sounds in each scene composed.

In 2024 the artist Tania Candiani presented an installation called *Desminar* (2014)¹⁵ (Fig. 11) that addresses the reading of space through a mine detector, allowing the public to trigger and explore the sound space, this piece was developed in the same room where the arms belonging to the FARC-EP guerrilla were melted down after the peace agreement, through this exercise of re-signifying a gesture and an object, the artist seeks to poetically explore the stories that have remained behind the guns and the people who have been buried with them. ‘The injuries committed during the Colombian armed conflict that sleep silently on the tiles of the compound will be translated into sound. Just as the mine finder uses a metal detector to unearth the explosives. The piece proposes to give voice to the imminence of violence so that it ceases to be inaudible.’ commented the artist in an interview with the newspaper *Cambio*.



¹⁵ <https://artishockrevista.com/2024/07/19/tania-candiani-desminar/>

fig 11. Desminar (Candiani, 2014)
source: Juan Fernando Castro, 2024.

It is then evident how sound practices can be used as a tool for the promotion of an ethic of peace in processes of reconstruction of the social fabric within the Colombian post-conflict scenario. Thus, it is the artists who echo the approach of the institutions, in order to investigate, document and reflect the reality and the truth constructed from the testimonies of the community and the knowledge of the territories; giving a strong focus to the role of the victims as creators and validators of the artistic and social work. It demonstrates then how sound practices have an important space to occupy within these processes of developing public spaces for discussion and empathy regarding social struggles and resistance.

These works inform and inspire the artistic practice carried out during this project, revealing in a tangible way how sound practices operate as a medium for reflection and as a political and ethical call, strongly implicated in processes of memory. It is towards this aim that the project moves, with the sound installation as its visible outcome, seeking to inscribe itself alongside other works that, through the act of listening, acknowledge a political will to approach the other in the pursuit of reconciliation and reparation. The methodologies presented by artists such as Catilejo, Vasquez or Ordoñez inspire us to consider sound as an emotional activator that creates bonds between space, the body, and memories; in this way we recognise in the aesthetic experience of hearing an opportunity to create a practice of testimony and resistance. Therefore, this project aims to point to these absences, these silenced voices, and to construct an attempt to make them visible through the sound installation, encouraging an exercise of sensitive, emotive and critical listening, where spaces of collective resonance and dignity are generated for the victims.

4 Sound Counter-Practices of Disappearance: ‘769 al menos sus nombres’ Sound Installation.

In this chapter I will introduce the conceptual, political and poetic guidelines that support the sound installation *769: al menos sus nombres*, which constitutes the main output of the present project. Based on the idea of sound counter-practices, I propose a critical exploration of the ways in which art can contribute to a symbolic response to violence, particularly forced disappearance in Colombia, through an act of committed listening.

4.1 Background and Framework.

Revisiting Brandon Labelle's *Sonic Agency* (2018), in chapter one the author seeks to build an argument around what it means to be public. and suggests, what he calls, emancipatory practices and ways of being political. Political (and public) representation is grounded in an ethic of mutual recognition—not only visual, but above all, through listening. (Labelle, 2018, p. 9).

In actively listening to one another, sound emerges as a means of connection, fostering awareness of individual recognition in society, especially for those who are under-represented in the public sphere, those who are not listened to enough. For example, during the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile the practices of disappearance and repression were so strong that a series of counter-practices to systematic violence became necessary. These counter-practices came from victims, women, mothers of the disappeared, peasants, students, musicians, communicators, poets and artists among others, with notable cases being Alicia Lira, Voluspa Jarpa, Diamela Eltit, Raul Zurita and Victor Jara, among many more cases of courageous and resilient characters.

This dynamic of counter-practices as a form of resistance, visibility and political positioning is repeated throughout the world in places where such struggles have existed and still exist.

For this project a counter-practice can be defined as a political and symbolic response to systemic violence (whether governmental, structural, economic, or cultural). This definition draws on Frantz Fanon's argument in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), in which he describes violence in the decolonisation process as a hegemonic force, and views social struggle as a symbolic act of resistance and a natural response to that violence.

Counter-practices may include protests, performances, songs, installation art and related exercises of political participation and public display, that aim to raise awareness about a specific social struggle. However, a counter-practice not only seeks to make violence visible, but also to transform the power structures that perpetuate it, as Laswell recalls 'the goal of activism is action, to generate an effect' (Laswell, 1950). Counter practices (and especially those that are symbolically charged) become relevant as a tool for challenging dominant narratives and reinterpreting reality, helping to shape identities, subjectivities and collectivities. Borrowing from Lindroos and Möller's discussion of *Art as a Political Witness* (2017) it is necessary to ensure that counter-practices empower the affected communities, promoting their visibility and being aware of having an ethic of representation to avoid re-victimisation or impersonation.

An example of a counter-practice is the setting up of anti-monuments, these are not installed by state authorities, but endorsed and encouraged by local communities. On this topic Alfonso Díaz and Lilian Paola Ovalle, authors of *Anti Monumentos. Espacio público, memoria y duelo social en México* (2018) gather different works that helped to come up with a definition around the object. Through their ethnographic work and data collection methodologies they expand the map revealing the importance of these objects for the social landscape in Mexico. 'According to Díaz Tovar, while monuments represent general ideas about the history of a nation, anti-monuments symbolise stories that are not yet finished, that act as a memory that is not closed about something pending and that has not been able to

access justice’ states in a BBC article called *Why anti-monuments are appearing in Mexico* (2020).

Reflecting on art practices as forms of resistance, it is remarkable to highlight art’s potential for communication and expression. Sound art proves to be a great tool for this goal (as it has already been discussed in the present work). For this reason sound installation was chosen to explore during this project in a practical and experimental way.

As we have already seen in various works mentioned above, such as those of Tania Candiani, Estefania Diaz, Leonel Vazques among others; sound deploys a possibility of interaction with affects and memory. Sound and its interaction with the space allows the configuration of a physical (and symbolic) medium that can reveal social issues by reinterpreting narratives and engaging audience sensibilities.

‘In sound, the space becomes a place where voices overlap and contradict each other to produce a true polyphony that follows no hierarchy and creates no unity but resonates with the complex particularity of the situation.’ (Salomé Voegelin, 2018, p. xx).

4.2 Object of interest: Enforced Disappearances in Tolima Territory.

It is through the process of research that I became interested in finding out stories of disappearances in the territory of *Tolima* (where I am from). I learned about *La Masacre del Totumo*, a not well known case among the inhabitants of the region, but of great significance due to proximity to the city of *Ibagué*. During a conference held in April by *La Comisión de la Verdad* on extrajudicial disappearances in Tolima, I heard about Maria Ruth Sanchez, a rural resident who is a first-hand victim of this crime because her brother was one of the 5 men killed in *Totumo* in 2006, 15 km away from the city of *Ibagué*. She, along with other courageous women and relatives of the community, led a battle of resistance and recognition of what happened. Nowadays, as a result of the peace agreements, they have found answers to who killed their relatives and why. They are still trying to tell their story and their truth to

the public since the massacre is not widely known in Tolima. This reinforces the common idea among some locals that the disappearances and executions did not affect the entire country and were not a systematic practice.

‘Between 1997 and 2005, in the department of *Tolima*, there were 20 massacres, 281 civilian homicides, 497 displaced families, and 116 missing persons, among countless other damages caused by the criminal actions of the *Tolima Bloque*’ explained Nubia Russi (2019), director of the *Comite de memoria de la Secretaría de Cultura* on the official website of *Ibagué*.¹⁶

According to *El Espectador* (2012), during the trial ‘the prosecutor’s office presented evidence suggesting that the victims were executed while kneeling by members of the army’s *GAULA* unit and later presented as extortionists killed in combat, furthermore, the crime scene was altered, and firearms were placed in the victims’ hands’.¹⁷

‘On December 20, 2006, a patrol of the army *Gaula Tolima* stopped a vehicle in the village of El Totumo in Ibagué, took out its five occupants, took them to a remote place, and after ordering them to kneel down, killed them. After the events, the victims were presented by the army as extortionists killed in combat, however, judicial investigations determined that they were killed in a state of defenselessness. The Attorney General's Office demonstrated that the military modified the crime scene and placed weapons in the hands of the villagers’ states the research website *Rutas del Conflicto*¹⁸ (Fig. 12).

¹⁶ <https://www.ibague.gov.co/portal/seccion/noticias/index.php?idnt=6632>

¹⁷

<https://www.elespectador.com/judicial/condenados-14-militares-por-masacre-de-totumo-article-317893/>

¹⁸ <https://rutasdelconflicto.com/masacres/el-totumo>



fig 12. 'Masacre de El Totumo - Rutas del Conflicto'.

source: *Rutas del Conflicto*, <https://rutasdelconflicto.com/masacres/el-totumo>

To contextualize the disappearances in Tolima, it must be said that it has been a historically important territory since the birth of the conflict. Due to its central location near major cities and mountain ranges, the region became a strategic stronghold for various armed groups and played a key role in the conflict. As the violence intensified, crimes such as forced disappearances, displacements and extrajudicial executions also increased in this region, as they did throughout the country, reaching a peak in the first decade of the 2000s. This context is widely covered in *Dinámicas del conflicto armado en Tolima y su impacto humanitario* (Fundación Ideas para la Paz, 2013).

According to the records of the *Unidad para las Víctimas* (2015)¹⁹ (Fig. 13), a total of 769 people have disappeared in *Tolima* during the armed conflict, many under circumstances similar to those of the Totumo Massacre, victims of state and paramilitary violence.

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<https://portalhistorico.unidadvictimas.gov.co/es/registro-y-gesti%C3%B3n-de-informaci%C3%B3n/tolima-registra-769-v%C3%ADctimas-de-desaparici%C3%B3n-forzada/13065>



fig 13. '769 cases of disappearances - Unidad para las víctimas'.

source: *Unidad para las Víctimas*,

<https://portalhistorico.unidadvictimas.gov.co/es/registro-y-gesti%C3%B3n-de-informaci%C3%B3n/tolima-registra-769-v%C3%ADctimas-de-desaparici%C3%B3n-forzada/13065>.

Considering this, I used sound to form a sonic anti-monument, a site-specific installation that invites the public to know these events, to make them visible, and to acknowledge the importance of testimonies for the non-repetition of these acts. For this purpose, field recording and sound-recorded testimonies were used to investigate and inhabit the territory where the massacre took place.

4.3 Development & Design.

The first step was to identify the place where the piece was being staged, along the technical challenges it might present. A visit to *El Totumo* (Fig. 14) was made in order to talk to the inhabitants. This is how we found a place to set up the installation.



fig 14. El Totumo landscape.
source: CIMPP Ibagué, 2019.

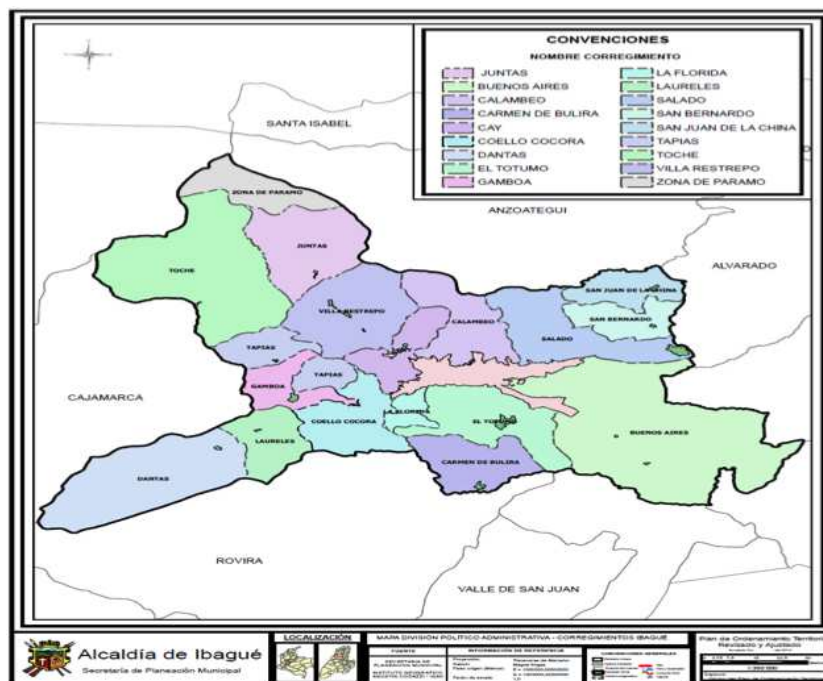


fig 15. Ibagué Map.
source: CIMPP Ibagué, 2019.

During this exploration we looked for sound elements that related to the territory. These sounds (such as the sound of the bells of the parish and the sound of the workers' shovels) were recorded and used in the installation.

The most important elements for the installation were the audio testimonies. At first, it was attempted to record all of them, but after a conversation with the researcher Estefania

Díaz, she suggested to review the already recorded testimonies from the *Comisión de la Verdad* testimonial volume²⁰. This volume of testimonies corresponds to hours of recordings from conversations with victims in the framework of the work of the *Comision de la Verdad*. In this volume there are interviews, podcasts, songs, soundscapes and others. The aim was to search for testimonies about extrajudicial disappearances in *Tolima*. Unfortunately, this volume is not well organised, its access is not intuitive, and it is not known to the public.

I started by browsing and listening to all the audiovisual products until I found the podcasts and radio programmes²¹ in which victims participated directly. These communitarian and public radio programmes were sorted by regions, which made my task easier. I listened to about 20 episodes of one hour each, until I had enough material for the installation. These radio programmes were re-recorded by me and then edited and remixed with sound design of the installation in mind. These sound files can be consulted through the link in the page note²².

Once the audio materials were collected, we proceeded to design an audio playback system within the Ableton software, with the help of Python and the Max for Live tools. The idea was to create a way of playing the sounds by following a chronological scheme that reflected the number of people who disappeared in *Tolima* from 1999 to 2016. In this way, it's created a semi-generative soundscape (partially shaped by predetermined material, while incorporating elements of randomness). This state of flux allows the installation to evolve according to the narrative (following the events of enforced disappearances). This design also avoids repetition, inviting an active listening attitude. The resulting sonic environment aims to be a space for reflection, encouraging the audience to engage with the emotional and conceptual layers carried by sound.

²⁰ <https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/volumen-testimonial>

²¹ <https://wayback.archive-it.org/20948/20230522233054/https://web.comisiondelaverdad.co/informese/escuchos>

²² https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1cCS_4zQglqTWdwFUVaG-3YYZKwpJhU9k?usp=sharing

It was necessary to generate a data timeline in order to relate the number of enforced disappearances with sound (and visual) events. The timeline of the crime was calculated following the dynamics of the national conflict (based on the numbers from *Unidad de las Víctimas*) in order to show how this crime behaved. This was necessary because there is no database for Tolima itself that includes figures per year.

This step was executed using ChatGpt and Python. The system was fed with the data provided by the *Unidad para las Víctimas* and asked to generate a list with the number of disappearances for each year. Once it was obtained, I provided more links to news reports of disappearances in the territory to correct and verify the figures. Finally, I asked the system to consider the dynamics of the national armed conflict in order to cross-check the information and spread out the events in each year. The result can be seen below:

```
# Distribución de desapariciones por año
```

```
distribution = {
```

```
1999: 20, 2000: 80, 2001: 70, 2002: 75,
```

```
2003: 80, 2004: 70, 2005: 65, 2006: 50,
```

```
2007: 40, 2008: 35, 2009: 30, 2010: 25,
```

```
2011: 20, 2012: 15, 2013: 15, 2014: 15,
```

```
2015: 14, 2016: 10,
```

```
}
```

Once this list was created I wrote a Python script (Appendix A) to generate a MIDI file and turn these figures into digital messages. The script generates a MIDI file that audifies a dataset of forced disappearances over time. It uses the *mido* library to encode 769 events (notes) into a MIDI sequence. The temporal distribution of the notes reflects the number of disappearances per year from 1999 to 2016. In order to create this, Python uses data scaling, temporal mapping and note timing. The chosen length of the midi file (and therefore of the

piece) was 30 minutes, in which the dynamics of the disappearances in *Tolima* are shown in a staggered way (Fig. 16). This MIDI file is read as a loop.

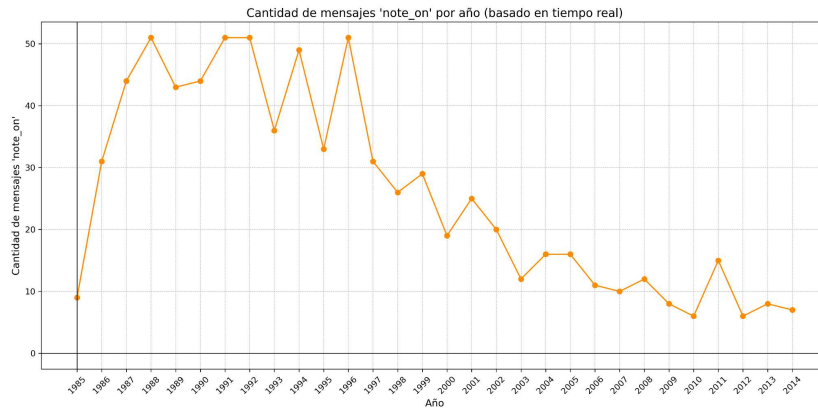


fig 16. Graph of MIDI messages over time in relation to enforced disappearances in Tolima.
source: figure produced by the author using the data gathered.

The MIDI file was split into 5 channels. For each MIDI file every note is being used to trigger a 3-second sound clip from the testimonies, each of these notes represents a missing person. For this design it used the Granulator instrument (Fig. 17) from Ableton Live software, this instrument was configured in order to play from a variable position (Fig. 18) given by the velocity of the note, i.e. a note with velocity 1 plays the beginning of the sound file, while a note with velocity 127 plays the end. This makes it possible to reproduce the testimonies following the dynamics of the generated timeline, thus the reproduction is consecutive but fragmented. The sound is related to the timeline following the numbers of disappearances in a linear way, in this way the piece allows a distinct (artistic) reading of a database. As a result of this design we have 5 audio channels (one per speaker) for the different testimonies.

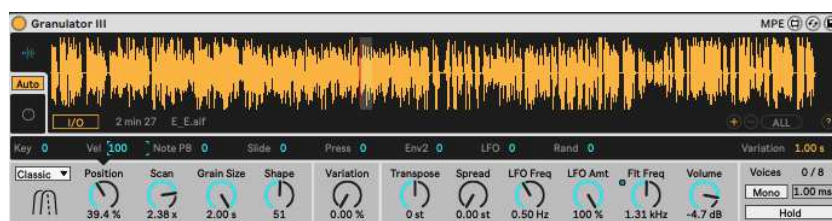


fig 17. Granulator instrument with variable position (notice the Vel 100).

source: figure produced by the author.

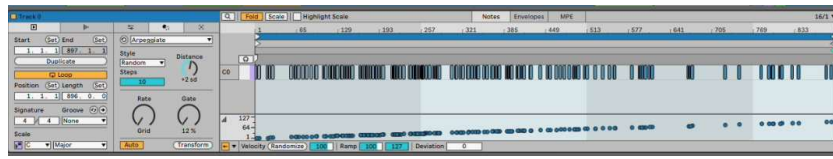


fig 18. MIDI file linked to Granulator position (based on the velocity of each note).

source: figure produced by the author.

In order to hear the complete testimonies the spectator would have to be there for the whole length of the piece, although this would not be easy since the piece aims to generate a dense sound texture. In certain instances there are many notes played simultaneously or one after another (in the highest intensity periods of the conflict), this creates a sonic blur in which the testimonies seem to disappear among the voices that occupy the space.

The audio files of the testimonies are processed in real-time in a not determined way. This is done by applying filters that change parameters by randomness. For this goal it was used the LFO tool (Fig. 19), assigned to the center frequency of the filter (or Track Gain), following a random pattern. This is intended to create conditions for unexpected sound events or textures. The use of the filter is intended to make the testimonies sound as if they were buried.

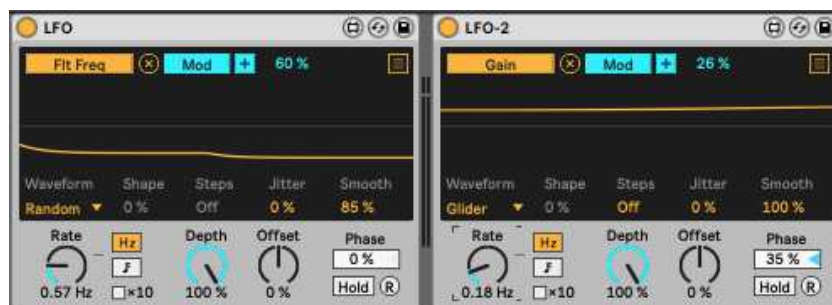


fig 19. Lfo tool as a random sequencer source.

source: figure produced by the author.



fig 20. Screenshot from the Ableton software used for the design of the sound installation.
source: figure produced by the author.

Along with the testimonies, other audio channels were created to enrich the soundscape. These channels correspond to: 1.) melodic drone created for the installation 2.) 11 *tiple*²³ (Fig. 21) melodies composed and recorded by me (processed and played in a random way) 3.) a recording of the parish bells played every minute and 53 seconds (time calculated by taking the figures of 769 missing persons and spread over the 24 hours of the day) 4.) 20 several recordings made by me in the territory using a shovel 5.) Effects like reverb and delay. In the link in the foot page it's possible to access these sounds²⁴.



fig 21. Tiple - a traditional Colombian instrument.

²³ a type of 12 strings-guitar original and traditional from the region of Tolima

²⁴ https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/16v_CNYwoDBUnzNMJEb6WvluTb4EwW4Xz?usp=sharing

source: *El correo del Golfo*,

<https://www.elcorreo.ae/opinion/dixon-moya/tiple-instrumento-nacional-colombia>.

During this phase, it became clear that visual feedback was important to link sound triggers to the topic of disappearances. An interaction between TouchDesigner and Ableton was created to generate sound-reactive visuals. Using the TDableton plugin, MIDI messages were received to trigger a flash of light on the screen, each MIDI message was counted and displayed until a total of 769 was reached (Fig. 22).

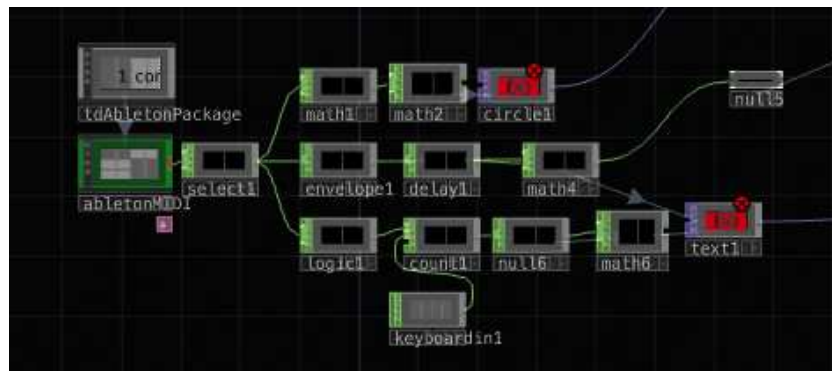


fig 22. Layout of Touchdesigner for counting MIDI messages using TDableton package.

source: figure produced by the author.

An audio path was created in TouchDesigner to receive the sound of the testimonies, the audio was frequency analysed and plotted with the audioAnalysis and audioSpect objects (Fig. 23). This frequency spectrum was used to visually display when the testimonies were activated, changing according to the intensity of the audio (Fig. 24). A teaser²⁵ of these visual effects can be found in the link at the bottom of the page.

²⁵ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fLJODt7C44Ea14_fAoxfhAdf0VlhL3_x/view?usp=sharing

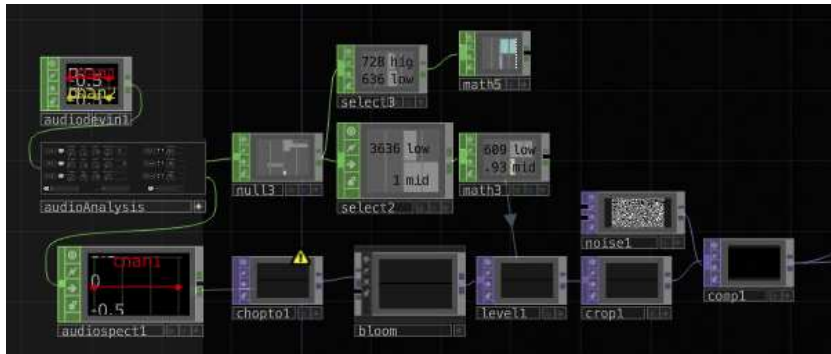


fig 23. Layout in TouchDesigner for audio analysis and visualization.
 source: figure produced by the author.

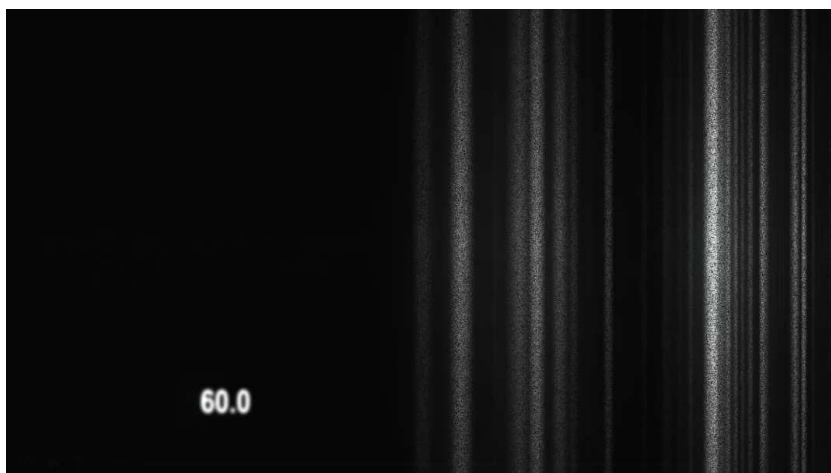


fig 24. Frame taken from the video visuals generated by the analysis of the sound testimonies.
 source: figure produced by the author.



fig 25. Screenshot from TouchDesigner software was used for the audio-reactive visual effects.
 source: figure produced by the author.

4.4 On-site Sound Installation.

Once the piece was designed, the required materials were taken to the planned location in the village of *El Totumo*, about 25 minutes outside the city of *Ibagué*. This exhibition was held on 30 May and had approximately 10 attendees from the local community motivated by curiosity.

The main objective of this exhibition was to integrate the space as an important part of the piece as well as to document this relationship through an audio-visual piece that could be shown in other exhibitions. For this reason, no public announcement was made of the work, but people passing through the place were allowed to approach and interact. The exact location where the display was made is 4.367011, -75.188007 (coordinates from Google Maps)²⁶. This site was chosen because of its proximity to the local community, the aesthetic aspect of the location and the technical facilities it had (electricity and space).

The structure was based on 5 small speakers distributed in the space, at floor height, plus 2 large speakers also on the floor. A 30-inch TV was used to project the visual component, and 2 computers were used to run the software in real time.

This process is documented in the video²⁷ in the link on the foot note. Additional photos for documentation are attached below.

²⁶ <https://maps.app.goo.gl/hWx9VJvoTMckVGwYA>

²⁷ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1etynT7yxvKVRqwl5ZH0TOCCaajd7Xby0/view?usp=sharing>



*fig 26. sound installation being calibrated on site.
source: figure produced by the author.*



*fig 27. sound installation on site, front view.
source: figure produced by the author.*



fig 28. speakers used for the sound installation.

source: figure produced by the author.



fig 29. computers and audio interface setup.

source: figure produced by the author.



fig 30. audio wiring.
source: figure produced by the author.



fig 31. view of the on-site sound installation.
source: figure produced by the author.

4.5 Public Display.

After the first exhibition it was important to make a second public display in order to

present it in a location with a larger public. The exhibition was held on June 16 and attended by nearly 30 people. For the invitation, a brochure (Appendix B) was created and sent to the attendees to provide context with a brief synopsis of the work, which can be found at the footnote of the page. The exhibition lasted from 5pm until 9pm, time when anyone could come in and sit and listen. For a brief demonstration of the installation²⁸ at the exhibition, please refer to the link in the footnote.

This display was held in the center of the city of *Ibagué*, with free admission and public invitation. This location was chosen because it had the necessary space, was easy to get to, had access for people with reduced mobility, while the surroundings were also quiet. These factors allow the installation to be shown in an efficient manner. The acoustics of the place was also a parameter considered. The high ceiling and the air inlet meant that the sound was not enclosed, therefore no significant echoes were created in the room, improving the clarity of the piece.

For this presentation there were 6 speakers distributed in the space, 5 of them for the testimonies and 1 for the other sounds, in addition a television was used for the visual component. The installation was supported using 2 computers on which the software was run in real time. The piece was presented at the end of the evening with the aim that the darkness would contribute to the appreciation of the piece. In the middle of the space a carpet with pillows was placed to invite people to sit and contemplate the installation.

Most of the audience were family, local artists, neighbours and friends. At the end of the exhibition, the material gathered for the project (presented throughout this chapter) was shared with the attendees through a digital link. There was also space for questions and discussion. This event was self-produced and self-managed, without the help of external institutions and self-financed.

²⁸https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1RKf6o3FQj9v1LrHWdHJRbrOVBDdBmdAOH?usp=share_link



*fig 32. Sound installation setup, front view.
source: figure produced by the author.*



*fig 33. Sound installation setup, top view.
source: figure produced by the author.*



*fig 34. Sound installation setup.
source: figure produced by the author.*



*fig 35. Public display.
source: figure produced by the author.*



fig 36. Public display.
source: figure produced by the author.



fig 37. Public display.
source: figure produced by the author.



fig 38. Public display.
source: figure produced by the author.



fig 39. Public display.
source: figure produced by the author.



fig 40. Public display setup.

source: figure produced by the author.

5 Conclusions.

In order to conclude this project I present an analysis of learned experiences and reflections that appeared throughout the course of the work.

Drawing from sound studies authors such as LaBelle and Voegelin, the project positioned itself within a multidimensional view of sound as political and symbolic. The inquiry for the political potential of sound art guides us to case studies of socially engaged works such as the work of Maria Sanchez, Ai Weiwei, Vasquez and Earshot.

For the project I investigated similar initiatives by artists and institutions in Colombia, which led us to recognize that there are plenty of socially-engaged sound art in the country. Most of these pieces come from the interest in contributing to the post conflict stage after the peace agreement of 2016. It was possible to identify this understanding of the sound practices in the work of an important institution like the *Comisión de la Verdad*, which is very meaningful given this institution's responsibility to the country. This vision may encourage many artists and communities to explore these practices, making them more popular, which I hope will result in opportunities and support from the institution. It is important that this institution continues along these guidelines, as well as gaining promotion.

It was important to research sound-based projects aimed at social and political struggles in Colombia. During this quest we found that this approach has been shared by a number of Colombian contemporary artists. These individuals recognise sound as a way of enhancing peacebuilding and memory-building processes with communities. Artists such as Castilejo, Vásquez, Diaz and Candiani are crucial for the promotion of socially-engaged sound art and should be given greater visibility, as it was noted there is no dedicated collection of these works, which make them not visible for the public.

5.1 Thoughts on Sound and Disappearances.

‘Forced disappearance is perhaps one of the most atrocious repressive practices used by regimes and organizations to impose their control and power. It is a form of violence capable of producing terror, causing prolonged suffering, disrupting the lives of families for generations, and paralyzing entire communities and societies’ Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (CNMH, 2014, p. 25).

This practice denies the visibility of the other, and attempts to erase memories, bodies, names and voices. The analysis demonstrates that sound practices are a tool for communities to deal with this disruption, through the use of this discipline as a tool of resistance and social manifestation. To mention the work *Cantos Silentes de cuerpos de madera* (Vasquez, 2017).

From practice it was found that sound can relate to the audience through their emotional responses, this was brought to me from feedback obtained from the public sample, the reactions received about the piece were mostly about emotions and not about the political message, most expressed a sense of terror due to the sound testimonies, this sensation allowed them to share reflections on the disappearance, as well as to confront their thoughts and emotions on the subject. Creating a sound space that is uncomfortable can open up opportunities for active listening. After the development of this work is my opinion that sound art can foster subjectivities, which is desirable if the aim is to inform and sensitise the public about a social issue.

I believe that this project conceptually points to consider sound practices as tools of resistance for communities. As Labelle suggests, they can counteract violence-affected spaces, allowing silenced collectives to reclaim and re-signify denied territories and narratives. As was clear from the project, sound installation holds a strong symbolic power to activate spaces and occupy them. By linking a place where disappearances have occurred to

the sequence of testimonies gathered, it was intended to demonstrate this effect to reclaim spaces for its victims. Since many of these cases are forgotten and leave a negative trace in the territory, I suggest that these sound practices help to at least make them visible. My opinion about these occupations of sites is that showcasing such practices of resistance can change the relationship to territory, from being a negatively connoted space, to a space of resistance and overcoming. This becomes especially powerful when affected communities lead these practices, this is the symbolic power I refer and call for.

In this context, thinking of sound in the local context makes us consider listening as a political act, an act of presence and recognition, in this way this project highlights sound and listening as a practice of resistance and collective memory.

5.2 Considerations on the sound installation.

This section reflects on insights gathered through the design, implementation and public reception of the sound installation presented, this insight comes from empirical observation and experience, as well as feedback from the attendees. The installation designed to evoke states of reflection and emotion on disappearances through sonic means brought several considerations which are exposed below. This analysis looks for elements that contribute to the effectiveness of the work and gives useful guidance to the artistic practice.

One of the most important aspects to assert from the sound installation was the political engagement and awareness that sound could provide. During the first exhibition (on-site) it was clear that there was a lack of information for the audience concerning the piece, an issue that had to be solved for the next exhibition.

The strategy to achieve this consisted of 3 stages: The first was to provide information on the subject of the installation, through the use of the brochure. The second one during the exhibition, through the use of sound-reactive visuals that showed the frequency spectrum of

the voices and the counting of the missing people. And finally, a third stage in which we shared the research that supports the piece with a digital link. These necessary actions contributed to a deeper perception, linking the impact of the piece to the political realm of the spectators. In accordance with this goal, all efforts should be made to provide valuable input for the understanding of the installation. These efforts can come in the form of on-screen media, printed material, QR codes, audio on headphones and more. The video material produced at the on-site exhibition serves this task for future displays.

Once engaged with the installation, attendees related to the piece differently. Some people sat and listened to each speaker, while others tried to experience the whole sonic landscape. The majority of attendees did not last more than ten minutes in the room.

The installation was deliberately presented with little context on how to listen to it, encouraging the audience to make their own path. This intentional lack of guidance aimed to provoke a more critical and attentive way of engaging, however, it was commented to me that not all the attendees understood the piece as proposed. In order to make the experience more effective, this aspect can be crucial. It became evident that in order to carry a statement, the artist must create a strategy for this purpose, reflecting on how the audience is going to experience the work .

Concerns about the ethics of representation should not be overlooked, it is important to include the narrative of the community instead of being the artist's narrative. This can be done by transparency in the consultation of references, cross-checking sources and validating their work with people outside the project and from the community. Within this project this step was done through attendance at victim listening events, and discussion of the project with colleagues such as Diaz and Ordoñez.

A conclusion derived from analysis and empirical experience is that there is a tendency in Colombia to take this discipline out of the galleries and into the territories. This approach is very favourable for the involvement of communities and the democratisation of these practices. The goal of decolonising sound practices has become an important element to bear in mind, a first step is to involve local communities and facilitate access to resources locally.

Another area for improvement is the staging. The incorporation of physical elements that relate the installation with the narrative is also highly desirable, this helps to engage the audience and keep them in the room for more time. An example could be clothes of the victims, soil from the places where the bodies were found, or bricks from the places abandoned by the affected communities.

This sound installation does not aim to represent the people who disappeared, but to set the conditions for these absences to become evident. The pattern of the sound events (conditioned to the dynamics of disappearances) generates an effect of masking the testimonies, such design generates a dense and heavy sound that can be understood beyond aural, the sound depicts the invisibility of the victims behind the magnitude of the armed conflict.

On audience perception, a diverse range of perceptions emerged, informing the project about the strengths and limitations of the piece. It was suggested that the conceptual density of the piece posed challenges to sustained engagement, as it is a sensitive issue for some people. Many viewers agreed that the sound design evoked an atmosphere of anxiety. It was expressed that the visuals on screen along the dark setting were favourable to create an introspective atmosphere, allowing the audience to connect with the piece and pay attention to the sound. These reactions are in line with the purpose of the project, which sought to

create a space that would provoke these emotions in order to raise awareness of the invisibility of the disappeared. However, I reflect on whether setting up a dense atmosphere may result in contradicting the project purpose, which is to increase visibility to the testimonies of the victims, since most of the attendees didn't hear more than a few testimonies.

This gap found between intention and perception highlights the importance of the public involvement in these kinds of projects, since it's from feedback that the project gets informed on how to offer interpretive tools without compromising the work's critical depth.

The audience's responses (both engaged and confused) are important indicators of how emotional and cognitive responses can be stimulated by spatial, sonic, and narrative cues presented in a sound installation. Thus, it suggests that future expositions may benefit from a more balanced integration of guidance and openness.

5.3 Barriers and Challenges.

The first challenge that arose was the gathering of sound art references in Colombia since the information available on the internet is not sufficient and there is no structured database. To overcome this challenge, the support of other Colombian artists such as Ordoñez and Díaz was crucial because they kindly shared their references in this field.

I believe that by writing the chapter on the sound art of the Colombian conflict, I have contributed a bit to conquer this limitation. However, I recognise that it is incomplete and a work in progress, as there are many sound expressions missing that were not included because they were not relevant to the project.

Finding recorded testimonies related to enforced disappearances was also a major challenge. The sound desired required a lot of record material and moreover edit it and clean it. These recordings chosen were not organised and are difficult to access, so it was required

a detailed work to listen to all the files and select the right ones to use. I consider it a positive decision to use the testimonies from the testimonial volume as they add to the political character of the installation while contributing to share the work of the *Comisión* with the public (a task that is much needed in our country).

The most surprising challenge was that there is limited public information on missing persons in the territory of *Tolima*. It was not possible to find a public database with enough figures. There is no chart showing the changes in the number of missing people over the years. This limitation was overcome by comparing different sources and elaborating a timeline that followed the dynamics of the national armed conflict, based on information obtained from the *Unidad de Búsqueda de Personas Desaparecidas*. By doing this exercise, this project has provided useful information that helps to understand the dynamics of this phenomenon in *Tolima*.

On a personal level, an important challenge was to maintain an ethical stance towards representation and appropriation, avoiding re-victimisation. This challenge was assumed through the assessment of my motivations behind the work, a reflection on the author's position, and then, an appraisal of how to present the work in public. Theoretical references such as Kross, Möller and Margalit were of great help in this exercise.

Finally, the public exhibition was a challenge. There's a lack of support from public and private institutions for this kind of event. It was found a need for exhibition spaces that resonate with these proposals in the *Tolima* region. For this reason I held an exhibition in a family home, with enough space, in the centre of the city. I am still waiting to be able to present the complete project in an important public, cultural or historical venue, as my mails and requests were mostly ignored.

Despite these limits and challenges, the project presents an articulated, coherent and transparent look at sound practices in the social and political field, resulting in a conceptually and experientially significant project with a relevant impact.

5.4 Contributions to Personal Artistic Research and Creation Project.

The research and the resulting sound installation seek to enrich the field of socially-engaged sound art within the national context and Colombian post-conflict. I believe that other artists and researchers can find in this project a theoretical framework with references and guidelines for activism through art. Hopefully, it will serve to illustrate approaches to research and creation in a locally contextualised way.

This project strengthens the relevance of research for the creative process. Tools such as plastic sound exploration and field recording helped to inform my artistic project with ways of proposing non-conventional sound aesthetics such as audio reproduction with granular instruments, random sequencing of field recordings, and creative voice processing for drones and sound effects.

This working methodology allowed me to increase artistic sensibility and critical analysis in order to create a contemporary sense of expression for my artistic practice. Through participation in victim listening events, dialogue with community members and peers, and reflection on the dynamics of representation, I developed a deeper awareness of ethical and contextual concerns. In parallel, the design of an audiovisual installation allowed me to explore how audiences perceive and construct meaning from sound-based works. Together, these experiences fostered a more responsible, community-centered approach in sound-based artistic practices, grounded in critical listening, collaborative ethics, and the decolonisation of artistic spaces.

The results of the project on the area regarding sound provides a stimulus to continue exploring this field, as well as to exhibit and display my work. I can say that my artistic and investigative practice has grown significantly with this project.

5.5 Future perspectives.

As a follow-up to this work, I intend to exhibit it in different venues, as well as discuss it and show the research carried out. It is my desire to look for new unconventional situations where the same methodology can be applied. Also, in future exhibitions I'd like to present the installation in a 5-large-screen layout, each in sync with a loudspeaker, since my opinion is that this would make the piece more immersive and impactful, as well as having bigger and more powerful speakers to fill a whole large room. Another aspect of the installation that I am interested in adding is the use of MIDI-synchronised lights. I think this would help to appreciate the space differently and appeal to the curiosity of the attendees.

One of my personal goals is to articulate this field of interest within my career as a university professor. It is my intention to generate opportunities for academic discussion with students and encourage them to approach this area, which I believe has great potential in Colombia academic institutions, yet is not widely known.

The sound practices are very diverse and I hope to continue exploring them in performative acts and concerts. I will aim to build up new spaces of entanglement around sound.

From this springs the idea for a future project on emotional cartographies of territories through sound. I will also pursue the discussion on decolonised sound practices.

Finally, I intended to continue to add content to the chapter on sound art and the Colombian conflict. I believe that it would be an important contribution to the state of the art.

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Note: Parts of the content were generated using the Chat GPT generative model (OpenAI), employed to: create data tables, write Python code, and improve the translation of the document.

Appendix A: Python Script for Midi File.

```
from mido import Message, MidiFile, MidiTrack, bpm2tempo
import numpy as np

# Parámetros principales
total_notes = 769
duration_seconds = 1800
note_duration = 0.1 # duración de cada nota en segundos

# Distribución de desapariciones por año
distribution = {
    1999: 20, 2000: 80, 2001: 70, 2002: 75,
    2003: 80, 2004: 70, 2005: 65, 2006: 50,
    2007: 40, 2008: 35, 2009: 30, 2010: 25,
    2011: 20, 2012: 15, 2013: 15, 2014: 15,
    2015: 14, 2016: 10,
}
scaling_factor = total_notes / sum(distribution.values())
distribution = {year: int(round(count * scaling_factor)) for year, count in distribution.items()}
years = list(distribution.keys())
all_note_times = []
start_time = 0

for year in years:
    count = distribution[year]
    year_span = duration_seconds / len(years)
    year_start = start_time
    year_end = start_time + year_span
    times = np.random.uniform(low=year_start, high=year_end, size=count)
    all_note_times.extend(times)
    start_time += year_span

# Ordenar tiempos y asegurar ticks válidos
all_note_times = sorted(all_note_times)

# Crear archivo MIDI
midi = MidiFile(ticks_per_beat=480)
track = MidiTrack()
midi.tracks.append(track)

track.append(Message('program_change', program=0, time=0))

note_ticks = int(note_duration * 480)
last_tick = 0

for t in all_note_times:
    tick = int(round(t * 480))
    delta = max(0, tick - last_tick)
    track.append(Message('note_on', note=24, velocity=100, time=delta))
    track.append(Message('note_off', note=24, velocity=100, time=note_ticks))
    last_tick = tick + note_ticks

# Guardar archivo
output_filename = "desaparecidos_tolima.mid"
midi.save(output_filename)
print(f"✅ Archivo MIDI generado: {output_filename}")
```

Appendix B: Brochure for Public Display.

769: al menos sus nombres.



Instalación Sonora Multicanal en Sitio + Generación de Video Reactivo.
7 parlantes, 1 pantalla.

Proyecto de Investigación y Creación.
Maestría en Sonido e Imagen, Universidad de Porto.
Junio, 2025.

769 personas desaparecidas son las cifras reportadas por la Unidad de Búsqueda de Personas entre 1985 y 2016 dentro del territorio tolimense. Sin embargo, no es pública la información detallada sobre la dinámica año a año. Por este motivo se generó una base de datos que incluyera los casos de mayor conocimiento público, y adicionara las cifras faltantes siguiendo la lógica de la dinámica del conflicto armado a nivel nacional. Esta base se convirtió en una línea temporal que fue convertida en mensajes digitales y a escala para lograr representar las desapariciones de 30 años en un loop de 30 minutos.

Cada mensaje detona una ventada de audio de 3 segundos de un testimonio, y envía a la vez un destello de luz que sirve como retroalimentación visual. Los testimonios, recolectados a partir del Volumen Testimonial de la Comisión de la Verdad, son distribuidos en 5 parlantes ubicados al rededor de la sala, dando como resultado momentos de diferente densidad sonora, por pasajes la magnitud de estas cifras son tan intensas que no permite entender ningún testimonio, sino una nube sonora que rodea al oyente y apela a su sensibilidad, curiosidad y emoción.

Esta pieza fue elaborada y presentada por primera vez en el sector de El Rodeo, en el corregimiento de El Totumo, Ibagué; cercano al lugar donde se cree ocurrió la Masacre del Totumo, con estas exhibiciones y puestas en sitio se pretende re-significar los espacios y convertirlos en anti-monumentos a la memoria y la dignidad de las víctimas y quienes aún luchan por ellos, además de invitar al público a conocer más sobre estas situaciones sociales.

'769' es una instalación sonora que pretende usar el potencial inmersivo del audio multicanal para sensibilizar y concientizar a los asistentes sobre la historia reciente de la desaparición forzada en el Tolima, partiendo de entender las prácticas sonoras como dispositivos para la reflexión y participación política, específicamente en resonancia con la justicia social y la promulgación de una cultura para la paz.

'Durante mi investigación me fue difícil encontrar datos específicos con fechas sobre las desapariciones en el Tolima, así que con la información que conseguí me propuse diseñar una instalación que funcione como una base de datos que permita visibilizar la magnitud de este crimen a lo largo de los últimos años'

Juan Diego Cardoso Polanía

