

((FROM)) WHERE
ARE WE
LISTENING?

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COLONIAL REGIME OF SONORITY

When I arrived in Geneva, in January 2018, one of the things that impressed me the most was its silence. I did not understand why the streets were so quiet, at that moment I simply assumed on the one hand, that as the winter is so cold here, it was normal that people would stay at home, and on the other hand that generally their culture is less noisy than in Mexico or Latin America. Something else which also caught my attention occurred on the day that I received the keys of the studio that I was going to rent in the Eaux-Vives neighborhood. They also gave me a regulation stating that from 10pm to 6am all noise was prohibited inside the studio and the building. Also, on the buses there was a voice announcing the prohibition of playing music inside the bus, and that people who wanted to play music in public spaces had to inform and pay the police to do so. Inform and pay the police to have the right to play music... for a living.

A few months later, I was sleeping in my studio, and between 1am and 2am in the morning the sound of music woke me up. It was music from the Arab World, which was played from a portable speaker of a man who had decided to sit right outside the building where I lived while drinking a beer. Although the sound woke me up, it did not bother me, however a few seconds later some neighbors began to yell at the man to be quiet while throwing objects at him which produced a metallic sound when they hit the ground. The man who was playing the music shouted at the neighbors: "You have no life!" At the moment that he yelled and, and by what he said, I could detect his accent and I knew that the man was not from Switzerland or Europe, that he probably had Arab origins.

Looking back on that moment, the question arose, is Geneva a silent city? Or is it a silenced city? Have people been forced to be silent, to be shut up? If so, by whom is it silenced? By the government, by the inhabitants? Or has their culture and customs resulted in an agreement within and a regulation of the sound space? Due to my insufficient knowledge of Switzerland, it was impossible for me to answer these questions, and still is.

However, coming from a culture that can be considered generally louder, I can understand the man when he yelled at my neighbors insisting that they had no life due to their silence. This silence was difficult for him to understand just as it is for me. Now I wonder what the man of Arab origin and I have in common? Is there a historical or cultural process that we share that makes us feel uncomfortable with silence?

More questions : if the Arab man had chosen to project another type of music, such as music from the Swiss folklore or simply from the Western world, would the same thing have happened? Or if instead of being an Arab person, had he been a white person, would the same thing have happened?

I experienced another episode, one Sunday, when I was again in my studio in Eaux-Vives, and this time it was 11am, and I started to hear the music of an accordionist playing on the street. The music and the musician were clearly European, I think from Eastern Europe. The man was advancing while slowly playing his accordion while he asked for money from the people who looked out to see him, curious about the music. Some people were content on throwing coins at him from their respective windows. This time there was no backlash from my neighbors, even though the music sounded just as loud. Why? Was this very different reaction due to the fact that the music was being played at a different time? Or was it because of the music itself? Because of the musician's origin? Because the person from Eastern Europe was working making music, while the Arab person was hanging out? Do we listen to all people in the same way? Or do we alter our attention and our judgements depending on their skin color, their gender, their origin, their religion, or even their profession, their socioeconomic status, their way of speaking, their confidence? Who has the right to be heard? Who chooses who has the right to be heard? Ourselves?

I have ventured to use this couple of examples as a first step to ask some questions about the use of soundspace, and I am aware that most likely my neighbors reaction was due to the fact that the Arab person projected music at a time when it was supposed that most of us were sleeping. In fact, I have witnessed comments from some swiss people who have told me that they appreciate the silence here, and others who have told me that the soundspace of Geneva seems chaotic to them. For this reason, it seems to me that noise does not have to do with the volume, quantity or quality of sounds, rather it has to do with our experiences and ways of living them. And the same happens with silence.

The notions of noise and acoustic intensity are socially and culturally constructed. There is no universal listening, each person, each social group, each society, has its own way of understanding, meaning and interpreting sounds. And in this interpretation, individual and collective codes are juxtaposed, and will not only vary from one person to another, but the interpretation will probably change for the same person, in different contexts and spaces. What a person expects to hear at a particular time and space, and what that person will actually hear, greatly influence the interpretation of sounds. It must always be considered that context and acoustic space are intrinsically related, mutually shaping and changing each other, and thus the listener's interpretation itself.

Both of us, the Arab person and I, come from Global South countries, colonized countries. And colonialism, which is in turn a project of modernity, has produced an international division of labor in which exist, on one side, the colonizing countries (also called First World, or developed countries, or Global North countries, most of which are in the Western World) and colonized countries, (also called Third World countries, underdeveloped or developing countries, most of which comprise the Global South (Abya Yala, Africa and the majority of countries from Asia and Oceania). The former group has the money to buy or invest, and the latter has the land and cheap labor force. Of course, this second group responds to the price that the developed countries indicate. And particularly over the last decades, due to neoliberal politics, there has been a privatization process of the national industries of the Global South countries, wherein they have sold their natural resources and labor force to private companies of the Global North.

As an example, I, a brown person from Mexico, am writing these lines from Switzerland, on my MacBook Pro computer designed in the United States, assembled in China with materials extracted by Canadian miners in mines spread in Chile or South Africa, from a dubious fare trade between traders and workers. From that same computer I am listening to music from India, played by the Swedish company Spotify, through my KRK Rokit speakers, again designed in the United States, assembled in Taiwan, with materials of dubious provenance. Those same speakers were purchased from a German internet site, delivered to me by UPS, a US company, with European operations based in Switzerland. All this time I am eating some dates from Tunisia, that arrived to my table I don't know how, and some chocolates that I got from Frey, a Swiss company, distributed by Migros, and these chocolates are made with cocoa from Brazil, and again with very dubious working conditions for the workers of Brazil, and the Amazon rainforest and the living beings that inhabit it. And so I can go on describing everything that is in my room, and in my house, and in the street, and in Geneva, and in Switzerland, and in Europe, on the planet. And all this just to point out the processes of extraction of the countries of the Global South by the countries of the Global North, the processes of extraction of raw materials, of natural resources, and cheap labor force. And I did not even mention the contamination and exploitation produced by the transfer of such materials. However, it is not only materials that are extracted, but also people, bodies, voices, ideas, ways of doing, ancestral knowledge, music, arts, longings, dreams

and more-than-human lives.

The result is economic interdependence, defined by precarious labor relations that widen the already inherent inequality gap between the economic classes, and that further result in the expulsion of thousands, if not millions of people from their homes or their countries. In neoliberalism, the people, their social groups, their culture, human rights, matter less and less. They have been placed at the service of economic and financial activity. They have been placed at the service of a system of extraction and exploitation without any social and ecological consideration, without any respect of the land and the living beings of those who inhabit it. Pushing a large part of the planet's biodiversity to extinction, pushing the entire planet to a climate crisis.

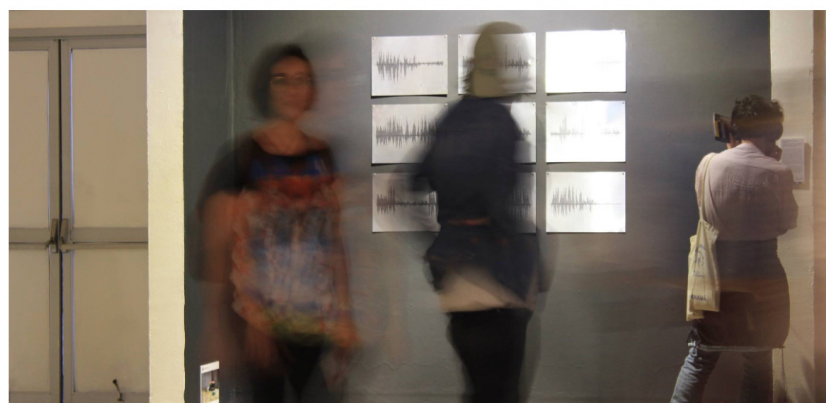
And the signs and damages of the climate crisis are not distributed equally across the planet's population, the people most affected are those living in the Global South, in economically marginalized regions, and those who suffer the most are often racialized people, women, LGBTQ+. These people are the ones who experience first, and most strongly and recurrently, the social and climatic crisis, the environmental racism of the current political and economic systems, derived in turn from a Western-centric worldview, in which the model to follow is that of the white, heterosexual, patriarchal male.

The Honduran artist Pavel Aguilar, exposes this situation in his work *Trazos*, in which we can hear the telephone conversation between two brothers who have been separated for more than two years, since one of them is undocumented and living in the United States. In the conversation we can hear their respective messages of support, affection and hope.

There are thousands, millions of situations like this, many people from Abya Yala have made the decision to go to live in the United States, Canada or Europe, to seek better working conditions and to be able to economically support their families who remain in their countries of origin. Thousands of conversations like this one go totally unnoticed, unheard, unheeded by neoliberal policies. Thousands of sounds, voices, are silenced by the threshold of the limiters controlled by neoliberal policies.



Trazos.
Pavel Aguilar.
Photos obtained
from the artist's
website.



Just as no attention is paid to the noise pollution imposed by economic interests, nor are heard the voices of the victims of this economic and industrial progress. The Mexican sound artist Diego Martinez, in collaboration with Israel Martinez, seek to make these voices heard, with their project *Temacapulín*. Temacapulín is a town located in Los Altos de Jalisco, Mexico. In 2005, the then governor of the state announced the construction of the El Zapotillo dam. The official version argued that such construction was necessary to facilitate access to drinking water and energy in several municipalities of the state. However, it was discovered that the project obeyed economic interests linked to private companies in Mexico and Spain. Faced with the threat of seeing their people submerged by the lowered waters of the dam, residents and supporters organized an intense mobilization against the water project. Since January 2013, Diego and Israel Martinez, along with their collaborators Javier Audirac, Paulina Ascencio, Nelly Carrillo and Alejandro Gallo, have generated a sound archive of Temacapulín, which consists of field recordings and audio interviews, intended to preserve the town's acoustic memory and the voices of its inhabitants.



Temacapulín
Diego Martinez.
Photos obtained
from the project's
website.



The domination of the means of production derives in a domination of the soundscape, and thus, in a domination of all living beings.

Another characteristic of this international division of labor is that in developed countries even if we find products and services that produce noise pollution, such as cars, planes, trains, the noise of construction machinery, and the frequent sound of mainstream music, advertising and social media, and even these same noises will vary in volume and quantity depending on which neighborhood you live in, largely influenced by the social class you belong to. However, we do not see the same quantity, nor the same types of polluting factories and industries that we find in the countries of the Global South. In our countries we can also hear about the production systems for manufacturing these products. And most probably, industries and consumers are not taking into account the noise produced by factories, and the

damage that this can mean for the living beings inhabiting these places. Policies for the alleged development of production and industrialization systems which have been imposed upon the countries of the Global South, have turned them into the countries that pollute the most - and not only the air and the water, but also the acoustic space. The most acoustically polluted cities in the world are in the Global South. “Mechanical noise is not a new noise, it is the sound of work and it changes as the place and techniques of work change.”¹

The Mexican artist Marcela Armas has worked on this topic with her project *Occupation*, in which the artist developed a portable kit with seven different car horns and a control to activate them while she walks. It is an action that problematizes space and vehicular flow by slowing it down with the human body itself and sounds that imitate the sound of cars, thus seeking to generate reflection on humans and their machines as generators and reproducers of noise. At the same time it is also a reflection about the loss of space for the human body, and its voices, and its listeners, due to the priority given to the vehicular flow, and the urban growth without brake. In the performance she places herself in the middle of the street, among the cars, exposing her body and her health to forms of violence from those who drive and are annoyed to see someone who moves at a different speed, without the accelerated rhythm to which we have become accustomed. She also exposes herself to forms of violence when trying to exist in another way among this vehicular noise, which imposes its decibels produced by tires and engines, which hinders the existence of other rhythms of life.

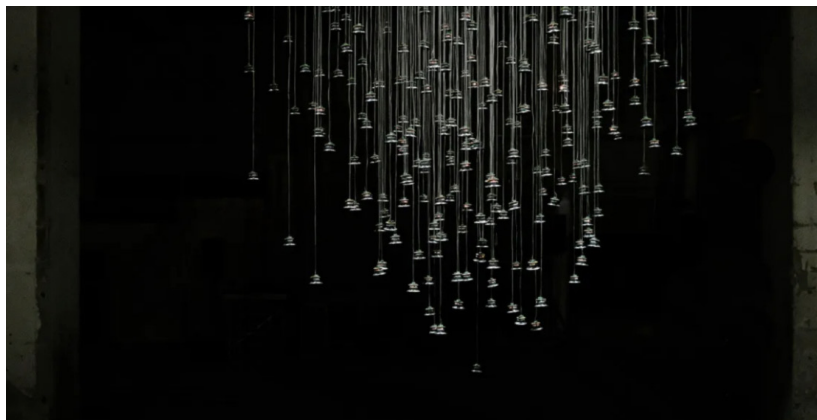
Occupation.
Marcela Armas.
Photos obtained
from the artist's
website.



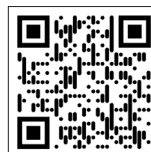
The French sound artist Felix Blume tries to listen to those other rhythms of life, those other frequencies and oscillations, those sounds that are not

1. José Luis Espejo. “(City)-Noise. A project about noise, urbanism and politics,” in *Invisible places. Sounding cities. Sound, urbanism and sense of place*, ed. Raquel Castro & Miguel Carvalhais (Viseu: Jardins Efêmeros, IVa Edição, 2014), 81-91.

directed towards the human ear, but are an integral part of the acoustics of the planet. In his project called *Essaim*, he recorded the sound of 250 bees, recording each bee individually, and subsequently each recording was played back by a respective horn, thus reproducing the sound of the swarm of bees as a whole, with 250 small speakers. What seems important to me is that Felix Blume took the time to listen to the sound of each bee in the swarm, that he took the time to listen to those sounds that go unnoticed and have even been silenced due to industrialization and urbanization. He took the time to lower the threshold of his gate, to let other frequencies emerge, to breathe, to exist.



Essaim.
Felix Blume.
Photos obtained
from the artist's
website.



In the work *Audiopoiesis*, the Ecuadorian multimedia artist Paúl Rosero Contreras seeks to listen to the melting of the glaciers in Antarctica. For this, the artist built his own contact microphones, with the idea of not using invasive technology. The intention is to be able to listen to sounds inaudible to the human ear, which in this case unfortunately is the sound of melting ice, the sound of the climate crisis, the sound of the loss of lives and environments, to be replaced by sounds that obey the anthropocentric, modern, colonial, and capitalist pattern. By trying to listen to such sonorities inaudible to the simple human ear, we seek to generate reflection on our actions as humans, to think that our actions have consequences on different scales, in different decibels, in different frequency spectrums in which there is also life, although we cannot hear it at first hand. And it must be emphasized that these lives, which sound beyond the human spectrum, in infrasonic or ultrasonic ranges, modulate our own acoustic spectrum, give it rhythm, give it life, and are vital for our own existence.

As the world has become noisier, it has also become quieter. Noisy through the machines, silent through the lives lost.

Ecuadorian sound artist and researcher Mayra Patricia Estévez Trujillo calls this re-configuration of acoustic spaces and sound practices themselves

Audiopoiesis.
Paúl Rosero Contreras.



through violence and colonial domination as justified through the project of modernity, development, free market: “colonial regime of sonority.”²

“It is these continuities and discontinuities, as well as the convergences, ruptures, fissures, links between power, representation and knowledge, that situate sound as a tool of domination and control that I call the «colonial regime of sonority»... which historically determines the audible and the inaudible.”³

Mayra Patricia Estévez Trujillo continues:

“Historically the technological systems that obey the anthropocentric-modern-colonial-imperial-capitalist pattern pretend to silence the acoustic heterogeneity of the world. This perspective turns out to be a characteristic expanded throughout the planet. Anthropocentrism-colonialism-patriarchy, are constitutive systems of power and knowledge, whose sonorous dimensions shape a world that progressively loses its acoustic richness, while a multiplicity of noises caused by anthropic activities is imposed, which daily put human and non-human auditory capacities at risk.”⁴

We need to consider the current sound environments, which are the result of current political and economic systems, which are based on processes of natural resource extraction and privatization, labor exploitation, capital accumulation, without any social and ecological consideration, without any respect or the land and the living beings who inhabit it. We need to ask what does capitalism sound like, what does colonialism sound like, what does modernity sound like? But, in bearing in mind that the answers will vary depending on who we are, what our experience is. “It requires recognising the past and present structural processes — capitalist extraction, colonialism, racism.”⁵

That means that we need to consider first that soundspaces and our listening has also been colonized, as well as our voices, our bodies, our lands, our ways of socializing. Through contemporary sound environments imposed by current political and economic practices, derived in turn from the *colonial regime of sonority*, we can realize this, and not only by what sounds we hear, but also by what is no longer heard, by what is silenced, by what is forbidden, by what has been silenced. The sound regime operates at various sonic scales, with decibels and frequencies, affecting both human and more-than-human lives.

AM Kanngieser, Australian sound artist and geographer, reflects on this in their work *Eulogy for the Handfish*, a work they created after the announcement in July 2020 of the extinction of the Smooth Handfish, a fish that used to abound in Australian waters. In the work the artist exposes processes of extraction, possession, loss, death. But above all, it seems important to me that they carries out a process of recognition: we cannot separate the climate crisis of the so-called nature from the extractivist and racist processes of capitalism, of colonialism, of the project of modernity.

“Your extinction is a loss amongst many who have been killed. None of these deaths were just”⁶

2. Mayra Patricia Estévez Trujillo. *Estudios sonoros en y desde Latinoamérica: del régimen colonial de la sonoridad a las sonoridades de la sanación*. (Quito: Doctorado en Estudios Culturales Latinoamericanos, Área de Estudios Sociales y Globales, Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Sede Ecuador. Directora: Catherine Walsh, 2016).

3. Ibid., 88.

4. Ibid., 147.

5. Rory Gibb, Anja Kanngieser and Paul Rekret. “In Sonic Defiance Of Extinction,” in CTM Magazine 2018 – Turmoil, ed. Jan Rohlf, Annie Gärlid, Taica Replansky (Berlin: DISK, 2018) 26-29.

6. AM Kanngieser. *Eulogy for the Handfish*. <https://amkanngieser.com/content/2-work/68-eulogy-for-the-handfish/handfish-transcript.pdf> (accessed 23/04/2022).

"Extinction is a term that collapses things, it is made to grasp what cannot be grasped. It is a word given to those who are seen, by those of us who only attend to the world through what we can name. To name is to see, but more, to recognise. To name, for us, is to colonise, to own and control. To name is to carve the world apart and configure it into what we can claim."⁷

"It is not without precedent to say that there is a freedom in remaining unfound, because if to be found means to be taken, means to be named, means to be lost, then it is better to remain unseen."⁸

"So perhaps all I can say is this, to all that are gone: I hope that wherever you are you have found rest from us. I wish for you to only be seen by those who will leave you to be as you are, who will celebrate you in life. Whatever you are, whatever you were, I hope you are surrounded by plenty, in all that that word means. And for us I wish an end to our endings. I wish us to let go of what must be gone. To learn to leave alone, undone, unsaid, untouched. To learn to leave without doing more harm. To learn to leave each other to be free."⁹

Eulogy for the Handfish.
AM Kanngieser.



7. Ibid.,

8. Ibid.,

9. Ibid.,

BLACK NOISE / WHITE SOUND

June, 2019, Geneva, Switzerland

We arrive at the Rhone river, there are quite a few people, we look for a place to sit, we choose to sit next to a family of Latin Americans, especially it attracts my attention to sit next to them because they have Latin American music playing. We haven't even finished putting on our bathing suits and opening a beer, when two policemen arrive and tell the family to turn off the music, and also fine them for the "noise". Paying attention to the situation, I notice that there are several other groups of people playing music, people of other races, other cultures, music of other genres, western genres. However, the police don't fine anyone else, they don't even approach the other groups, once they finish ticketing the Latin American family, they turn around and leave.

Why did the police only fine the Latin American family for the alleged «noise» they were making, and not the other people who had the same or even louder music? Unlike the situation I described in the first chapter, on this occasion, the music of the Latin American family and the music of the other people were playing at the same time, in the same place, all people were in the same context, resting, in a moment of celebration and leisure by the river, there was only a few meters of separation between all the people present. There were people of different races, playing Western music, what did the police perceive, interpret, evaluate, what did they hear to fine only these people, and not the others?

Perhaps to understand how this soundspace work, we need to understand our modernity. And it is not possible to understand our modernity, its structure and functioning, without talking about colonialism and slavery, which created, through their dominant epistemologies, a system of silencing, "invisibilities and separations."¹⁰ Separating "culture" and "nature", separating "humans, not-quite-humans and non-humans".¹¹ It is an epistemology in which the only producer of "culture", the "human", the "universal", is the white man, and the "not-quite-human" is considered to be all racialized people, who are not considered capable of producing knowledge, its own thinking, so they were pushed into the so-called "nature", with the considered "non-human". As Denise Ferreira da Silva, a Brazilian sociologist and artist, has argued, the racist and patriarchal establishment and imposition of the "universal" served as a strategy of violence, domination and subjugation of racialized people, because they were considered to be objects, resources, materials, to be exploited and extracted, expropriating and expelling them from their own lands, their own cultures, their own bodies, or destroying them.

The production of race, the production of gender, is part of this series of divisions imposed by the dominant epistemology, by this representation of the white man as a figure of universality. Is a system that not only governs land and production systems, but also governs forms of socializing and relating, ranging from the intimate to the public, from the personal to the collective. It is a system that pretends to use as reference, as center, as truth, the whiteness, which not only has to do with skin color, it has to do with ways of behaving, thinking, relating and socializing. It is a system in which all people of color, along with their ways of doing and thinking, along with their songs and emotions, along with their voices and ways of socializing, have been excluded, expelled, from what is considered as humanity, as civilization, along with their ways of doing and thinking, along with their songs and emotions, along with their voices and ways of socializing. This representation of

10. Olivier Marboeuf. *Decolonial Suites*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SlfZ3pJ73vE&t=1953s> (accessed 23/04/2022).

11. Alexander G. Weheliye. *Biopolitics*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQYdBiAN-3vo&list=WL&index=60&t=182s> (accessed 23/04/2022).

the “universal” erased the majority of the world’s population from its narratives. And in many cases it has not only erased them, but has stigmatized them, sexualized them and accused them of violence.

The creation of such separations created the very conditions of today’s neoliberal capitalism.

“The operating modern political forces here, coloniality (juridical architecture) and raciality (symbolic arsenal), support extraction with a mode of governance that relies on total violence to ensure the extraction of the (potential or kinetic) energy of lands and bodies... As indicated by the ‘facts’ of concentration of wealth, such as the levels of dispossession found in the Global South promoted by neoliberal austerity policies, the never-ending wars (colonial conflicts which do not interfere with the extraction of natural resources) on the African continent and the Middle East, like in Afghanistan, and the low intensity conflicts in Latin America – which, along with global warming, account for the current high levels of population displacement.”¹²

I attended a talk by Brazilian artist Mabe Bethônico about project *Lesson of Another World – So Close*, that she was exhibiting in the Contemporary Art Center, in Geneva, Switzerland. Through her work, she talks about the lack of knowledge we have in Abya Yala about everything that happened before and during the colonial period, all the lost lives and cultures, all the violence our ancestors lived during that period. But I dare to say that in Europe, the United States and the other first world countries, the vast majority of people are not aware of what happened in that period either. In the educational systems of Abya Yala, we constantly make references to the history and culture of Western countries. But Westerners rarely turn to see the ways of making and thinking in the countries of the Global South. It is a story that continues to play on today. The story we learn both in the countries of the Global South and in the Global North is the story told by the latter, a Euro-centrist, Western-centrist history, which has already established who has the right to speak, to listen and be heard – a “hegemonic listening,”¹³ as Nikita Dhawan, political scientist from India, has called it, wherein the only valid knowledge and heard voices are those of the hegemonic countries (the countries that until now I have called Global North, or developed, or first world countries). It’s a history in which all the violence that the colonial project inflicted on people different from Western cultures is not seen. In the Global South, some ways of doing, ways of thinking, beliefs and languages have been forbidden, while others have been imposed. The colonialists prohibited the right to speak. They prohibited the right to listen. They prohibited the right to be heard. Voices have been silenced, or they were forced to sound at very low frequencies and decibels.

The book *Peau Noir / Masques Blancs*, by Frantz Fanon, a French-Caribbean psychiatrist, philosopher and writer of Martinique origin, comes to mind. In several passages of the book, he describes various experiences of racism, lived from his black body:

“It was no longer a question of knowing my body in the third person, but in the triple person. In the train, instead of one, I was allowed two, three seats. Already I was not amused anymore. I did not discover feverish coordinates of the world. I existed in triple: I occupied a place. I was going to the other... and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, absent, disappeared. The nausea... I was at the same time responsible for my body, responsible for my

12. Denise Ferreira da Silva. *The Crises of the European Imagination*. <https://artalk.cz/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/AR-4-EN-162016.pdf> (accessed 23/04/2022).

13. Nikita Dhawan. “Hegemonic Listening and Subversive Silences: Ethical-political Imperatives,” in *Critical Studies*, vol. 36, ed. Alice Lagaay and Michael Lorber (Amsterdam: Brill, 2012) 47-60.

race, for my ancestors. I took an objective look at myself, discovered my blackness, my ethnic characters – and smashed my eardrum with anthropophagy, mental retardation, fetishism, racial tares, slavers.”¹⁴

“The white world, the only honest one, refused me any participation. A man was expected to behave like a man. From me, a black man’s conduct – or at least a Negro’s conduct. I was hailing the world and the world was cutting me off from my enthusiasm. I was asked to confine myself, to shrink.”¹⁵

And we cannot separate these bodies, from their voices, their sounds, their noises, their silences. The French writer, storyteller and curator, Olivier Marboeuf, says:

[About the racialised body] “It’s a body that until now has not been allowed to speak too loudly. For a whole lot of reasons, it was never his time, he was never welcome, there was always good reason to find him too loud, too talkative, too messy, inaudible and untimely. He always had an unwelcome excess, a mannerism that didn’t fit. He was brought up in a form of self-limitation, in a way of being against himself, in a shame of himself and, often, an inability to name himself.”¹⁶

Racism sounds too, we can hear it too. I think we could describe it adapting the title of Fanon’s book: *Black Noise / White Sound*. It seems that certain sound practices, certain musics, certain voices, certain ways of speaking, of expressing oneself, certain accents, are perceived as noise, as a nuisance, and are therefore silenced, or pushed to change the way they sound, or to sound in other places and at other times. Often these sounds are considered noise because they do not fit the acoustic references imposed by the white-patriarcal-capitalist norm, which has established what sound is and what noise is, who can make sounds, who is noisy, who is silenced, or not heard.

“With race, sound is noise. Without race, sound is sound.”¹⁷

As in the episode I described at the beginning of this chapter, in which the police themselves were the ones who discriminated against other ways of sounding, the Jordanian artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan has shown through his projects *The Whole Truth*, *The Freedom of Speech Itself*, and *Conflicted Phonemes* that this discrimination on the basis of sound, of voice, is not a thing of the past and is still happening today on a legal level.

Conflicted Phonemes.
Lawrence Abu Hamdan.
Photos obtained from
the artist’s website.



14. Frantz Fanon. *Peau Noir / Masques Blancs*. (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952) 114.

15. *Ibid.*, 116.

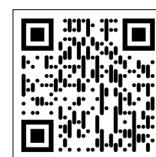
16. Olivier Marboeuf. *Decolonial Variations*. <https://olivier-marboeuf.com/2019/05/09/variations-decoloniales/> (accessed 12/11/2021).

17. Kowdo Eshun said this phrase in a thesis tutorial that I had with him in February 2022.

Focusing on a controversial use of forensic speech analysis, voiceprints and lie detectors used in several European countries to determine the origins of asylum seekers, Abu Hamdan conducted and recorded audio interviews with lawyers, phonetics experts and asylum seekers who testify to unjust rejections of asylum applications and deportations. At the same time, the artist creates diagrams that make visible the complex hybrid condition of accents, particularly when people have lived itinerant lives with constant cultural exchanges, as is the case of many refugees and asylum seekers. This complexity shows the irreducibility of the voice, of accents, of ways of speaking, of languages, to a fixed space

The Argentine artist Dani Zelko, in his project *Language or Death*, carried out in Madrid, Spain, portrays the authorities' deliberate refusal to listen to migrants. In the project the artist interviews several people from Bangladesh, some of whom have been living in Madrid for twenty years, but most of them have difficulty speaking Spanish. One person even explains how difficult it is to learn Spanish, particularly because of the lack of time to study it, as they have to work hard to support themselves. When the Covid-19 pandemic arrived, a Bangladeshi migrant fell ill, several people from his family and friends tried to contact the health systems, but as soon as they realized that they did not speak Spanish, they did not give them due importance, despite the fact that the sick person was seriously ill. No doctor came, no ambulance went to attend him. After six days he died.

Language or Death.
Dani Zelko.



This discrimination of the voice of the racialized people, this discrimination based on our languages, our accents, our ways of speaking, continues today not only at the legal level, by governments, but also in everyday life, by people who have bought into the narrative that defines who can speak, who is "normal" and who is not, who is a bearer of knowledge and who is not, who to trust and who not to trust. The Afro-Mexican-American poet Ariana Brown writes about this in her poem *Dear White Girls in my Spanish Class*:

"You are not special. You are the reason my grandmother feared her children would speak with accents. So afraid, she buried her first language in the space between blood and bone because your grandparents wouldn't let her make a home outside her body. Did your ancestors protect you from pain by withholding what they knew of a country before this one? Let me be clear: Spanish was given to my people at the end of a sword, forced in our throats gory, sharpened under the colonizer's constant eye. Each rolled R is a red, wet, fingerprint pointing me back to this. Spanish is not my native tongue. English is not my native tongue. The languages I speak are bursting with blood, but they are all I have. I own only my hot mouth, speeding against assimilation's clock and a colonial legacy you won't even try to pronounce. So I'll ask again, why are you here? Do you think my grandmother's accent a sickness?"¹⁸

Dear White Girls in my Spanish Class.
Ariana Brown.



The artist and writer from Portugal, Grada Kilomba, in her project *Decolonizing Knowledge*, points out that this discrimination of ways of speaking, on accents and languages is intertwined with ontological and epistemological discrimination. In her project, she states:

"When they speak, it is scientific;
When we speak, it is unscientific.
When they speak, it is universal;
When we speak, it is specific.
When they speak, it is objective.
When we speak, it is subjective.
When they speak, it is neutral;

Decolonizing Knowledge.
Grada Kilomba.



18. Ariana Brown. *Dear white girls in my spanish class*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAb-bGEEstjc> (accessed 14/04/2022).

When we speak, it is personal.
 When they speak, it is rational;
 When we speak, it is emotional.
 When they speak, it is impartial;
 When we speak, it is partial.
 They have knowledges, we have experiences. We are not dealing here with 'peaceful coexistence of words,' but rather with a violent hierarchy, with defines *who can speak*." ¹⁹

Therefore, for those of us who have suffered such discrimination, for those of us who have been marginalized, imagining other possible worlds is necessary and urgent. Decolonizing our spaces, our bodies, our minds, our ways of listening and our voices is fundamental.

Noémi Michel, Swiss political scientist, through her project *Politiques de la Voix*, suggests a series of questions to begin to reflect on this:

"How to theorize and analyze voice?
 How to name and analyze the socio-political and historical logics that constitute certain voices in silence or deafening?
 How do we name and analyze the logics of resistance that amplify minoritized voices?
 What strategies have subaltern individuals and groups developed to give voice and be heard under oppressive conditions?
 How do we imagine horizons in which all voices count?
 How do we think of communities in which ears listen and respond to all voices?
 How do we (re-)orchestrate/(re-)listen to voices to decompartmentalize instituted knowledge?" ²⁰

In this sense, I think that the proposal of the Brazilian writer and performance artist, Jota Mombaça, is very important, as they suggest that instead of asking, "Can the subaltern speak?" ²¹ A question posed by the Indian philosopher Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, it is more important to question the capacity of the hegemonic cultures to listen. In their words: "Can a domineering knowledge listen to a subaltern speech when it comes up?" ²²

19. Grada Kilomba. *Decolonizing Knowledge*, <https://www.goethe.de/ins/br/lp/prj/eps/mmo/priv/15259714-STANDARD.pdf> (accessed 14/04/2022).

20. Noémi Michel asked these questions in her seminar *Pensée Critiques Noires / Pensée (par) la Voix*, held at HEAD, Geneva, from September 2021 to January 2022.

21. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 271–313.

22. Jota Mombaça. "Can a mestizo asshole speak?," in *Artseverywhere*. <https://www.artseverywhere.ca/can-a-mestizo-sshole-speak/> (accessed 09/05/2022).

OTHER WAYS OF THINKING LISTENING IN ORDER TO LISTEN TO OTHER WAYS OF THINKING

December, 2021, Geneva, Switzerland

I was sitting on the train, behind us is sitting a black man, African, who is talking on the phone, he was talking about buying a flight to go to Kinshasa. Less than 10 minutes later a gentleman arrives to check the train tickets, and asks the African man to lower the volume of his voice, because he was "talking too loud". The African man says no problem and that he will speak quieter, however he continues to speak the same way.

The ticket man returns about 5 minutes later, and tells the African man that if he is going to continue talking he has to go to a part of the train where there are no people, the African man insists that he is going to lower the volume of his voice, but the ticket man does not believe him and says that he is going to stay with him until the man lowers the volume of his voice or ends his call. The African man lowers the volume of his voice and says goodbye to the person he was talking to. The man with the bills pulls out a piece of paper, a regulation that says it is forbidden to make "noise", although he never specifies the definition of "noise."

The African man reacts in an untimely manner, grabs the regulation and tears it up, claims his right to speak on the phone and says that this situation is "unacceptable."

In recent years we have seen strong protests in several countries of Abya Yala: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru, Mexico, Venezuela... Many of the protests have been against highly neoliberalized realities, that is, realities that have been placed at the service of the market, at the service of extractivist economic models of the Earth and the living beings that inhabit it, where the social groups, their cultural differences, their economic inequality and their general inequality in terms of human rights, matter less and less.

However, protests have not only taken place against political and economic models, there have been demonstrations against racist violence, sexist violence, gender violence, violence against all people whose bodies, cultures, identities, ideas, emotions, ancestral wisdoms are considered inferior, uncivilized, invalid, according to the assumptions of the project of modernity, the colonialism derived from it, and the subsequent economic and political models that are still in force today, with other names and other forms, always changing, but still acting, subduing and killing different forms of life. And it is in these places where people have been marginalized in many ways, where they have little more than their voice, where the loudest cries and silences are heard, where they fight for the right to be heard.

"As a medium and form of social existence, sound is not something we simply encounter in the world, it is something that is practiced,"²³ as is listening, and in those practices, the social, cultural and political uses of sound become present.

And precisely one of these political uses of sound is through marches and demonstrations. It has been said many times that with marches, demands and claims become visible, through the large number of bodies, pamphlets, posters, banners, graffiti... But also voices, shouts, music, musical instruments and other objects to make noise are of great importance in protest movements, the act of sounding and the use of acoustic space can be political actions in themselves, in fact it could be said that "sound praxis makes political and cultural struggle possible."²⁴ Through protests the protesters

23. Alan Granados. *La sonoridad de los movimientos sociales. Expresividad, performance y praxis sonora en las marchas de protesta en la CDMX*. (Ciudad de México: Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia. División de Posgrados. Posgrado en Antropología Social, 2018).

24. Ibid.,

and each of their voices, multiplies, amplifies, acquiring a collective voice, but multiple, heterogeneous, and sometimes even contradictory, the sonorities of protest movements can be as diverse as the reasons for protest are transversal. Such multiplicity of voices are juxtaposed to the everyday sound environment, temporarily occupying the spaces they cross through a re-sonification of them, transforming them with multiple ways of sounding, thus making audible the polyphonies of discontent, the aural micro-tonality of disagreement, the cacophony of the diversity of ideas, emotions, realities.

There are diverse and often divergent sonorities, but which momentarily and collectively accompany each other. We can hear violence, traumas, sadness; We can also hear hopes, longings and forces converging. These moments of aural force can serve as a factor of social cohesion, of restorative catharsis, through noise, through shouting, through listening.

“Sonic practices as sensitive experiences of participation, collective healing and moral restoration from music, the opportunity for bodily joy in the midst of an active community, the intensification of the use of sound and silence in public space, and the politicization of listening, have finally become forms of contestation of neoliberal individualism.”²⁵

What is the role of the sound arts in such protest situations? How do they help us to expose, criticize, resist, counteract such social, political and economic order? What do they make possible, how do they help, how do they contribute? How do they sonorize protests, criticisms, resistances?

I think there are many answers to these questions, each one will depend on the context. I have actively participated in many demonstrations in Mexico and witnessed several others in Europe, and like many of us through digital media in recent years I have followed the course of the protest and resistance movements in the mentioned countries of Abya Yala and in other countries around the world, Hong-Kong, Thailand, Myanmar, and of course the Black Lives Matter movement. I do not mean to be insensitive to think that in every country you can use exactly the same strategies and tools to make use of your voice, public space, and protest. As I have mentioned before, in each place through the practices of sound and listening, the social, cultural and political uses of sound are present. For the moment I will only say that from my point of view, that in many protests, the use of visual, sound, dance, performance art practices offer other means, other languages, other practices that channel emotions, ideas, that help converge voices, bodies, forces, help cohesion, participation, and even healing.

Fortunately there are many examples, two recent projects have occurred in the demonstrations in Chile. One such project *Momoprot* (Mobile Module for Protest) by Peruvian artist Nicolás Kisic Aguirre, who in January 2020, as the name of the project indicates, created a mobile module to join the protests that were happening in Chile since October 2019. The module is made of paint buckets, a shopping cart and a bicycle. I would like to emphasize that it is an instrument that everyone can play, there is no need to be a musician, everyone can participate, following the same rhythm or simply making noise, but together, collectively, accompanying or being the very engine of the protests, along with the voices and the presence of the bodies themselves. It also seems important to me the construction of the instrument itself, using cheap materials that we can get anywhere: a bicycle, a market cart, and paint cans. There is no need for a big budget, no need to have studied music or design, everyone can build their own versions of the same instrument.

25. Natalia Bieleto-Bueno and Christian Spencer Espinosa. “Volver a creer: Crisis social, música, sonido y escucha en la revuelta chilena (2019-2020),” in *Boletín Música*, #54, Casa de las Américas, Julio-Diciembre, 2020. <http://casadelasamericas.org/publicaciones/boletinmusica/54/p3-27%20Volver%20a%20creer.pdf> (accessed 20/02/2022).



Momoprot.
Nicolás Kísic Aguirre.
Photos obtained
from the artist's
website.



The other project, the performance *Un Violador En Tu Camino* suggested at first by the Chilean collective Las Tesis, which was carried out at the end of November 2019 in the same way in the demonstrations that took place in Chile. On the first occasion that the performance took place, a hundred young women participated, it was so successful that days later they performed it again with 12,000 women, and this time women of different generations, and most of whom do not identify themselves as artists. The performance was so successful that it was later taken up and performed in several cities in Abya Yala and even in Europe.

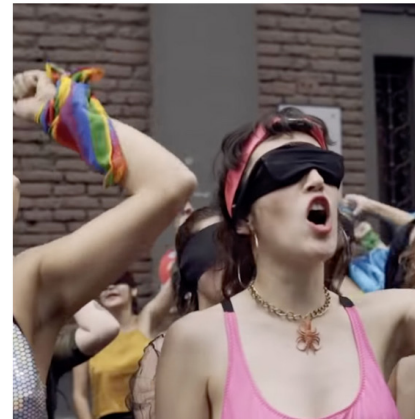
The strength of women raising their voices, shouting, openly and directly accusing the sexist and patriarchal abuse by men and the government. The cry of these women reminds us that sometimes the previous silence is not synonymous of peace, but of silencing, repression and abuse, and that sometimes the noise is necessary, to be heard, to shout “enough”, to unload frustrations and anger and to recharge with the energy of the voice of your friends, family and all the people who have gone through the same as you, to recharge with that energy that can only be achieved through the cry and listening to your companions shouting with you. The Mexican musicologist Natalia Bieletto-Bueno tells us, “rather than melting into the depersonalised massiveness of the unison, the singularity of each voice makes it possible to listen to the pluriphony; that is, to the plurality of the social *phonos*.”²⁶

Through this performance, the women created a harmonic distortion multiplied by decibels of screaming courage, building a summing up of emotions, of support and healing, stretching each other, letting each other know that they are not alone and that they will no longer remain silent. Resignifying, reappropriating, repositioning their body and voice as a tool of resistance, of struggle.

26. Natalia Bieletto-Bueno. “Sonido, vocalidad y el espacio de audibilidad,” in *Boletín Música*, #54, Casa de las Américas, Julio-Diciembre, 2020. <http://casadelasamericas.org/publicaciones/boletinmusica/54/p71-91%20Sonido,%20vocalidad.pdf> (accessed 09/05/2022).



Un Violador En Tu Camino.
Las Tesis.
Images of the video made by
Colectivo Registro Callejero.



The Chilean police sued and threatened the collective Las Tesis, accusing them of “incitement to violence,” again blaming the women and reproducing forms of violence.

In another place and context, the Cuban artist Tania Bruguera, in her *Tatlin's Whisper* project, carried out at the Havana Biennial, places a microphone and invites all the people present to make use of it for 1 minute. The microphone is on a podium, and two people dressed as soldiers are at all times next to the podium, and each time a person decides to speak into the microphone, the people who personify soldiers place a white pigeon on their shoulder. Thus making reference to the famous speech of Fidel Castro in which a white pigeonis placed on his shoulder. However, the open microphone is used to make strong criticisms of the Cuban government. Testimonies, tears, strong and painful emotions, through the microphone and voices we can hear numerous experiences and claims for a more dignified life.

Tatlin's Whisper.
Tania Bruguera.
Images of the video
made by latierraenmarte.



Two other projects seem equally important to me, since they not only take place in the street, but also express criticism through audio recordings, live

streaming and radio. And they also serve as an archive, as a sonic memory of what happened, from the same voice and listening of those who participated in the demonstrations, recounting in their own voices the police violence, the cynicism of politicians. These two projects occurred during the demonstrations in Mexico for the disappearance of 43 students by the police in complicity with the Mexican army and politicians.

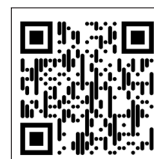
Tito Rivas, a Mexican sound artist and researcher, made the project *¿Esos Fueron Petardos?* on the night of November 20, 2014 in Mexico City, in one of the largest protests held in recent years in that city. It was the second massive march in protest of the disappearance of 43 students from the Normal School of Ayotzinapa. The artist made a field recording of the demonstration, in the most tense moments, while describing the events that were occurring. It is a recording without edits or alterations, it is a continuous flow of sounds and voices of protests, diversity of opinions, interpretations and positions. A sound document that reflects the strength and synergy of the protests.

¿Esos Fueron Petardos?
Tito Rivas.



And the *Escuchatorio* project, by Mirna Castro, Mexican sound artist, and Felix Blume, carried out one year after the disappearance of the 43 students, mentioned in the previous paragraph. The artists made a radio broadcast that lasted 43 hours. Through a call for works, they received more than 400 proposals from many countries, in support of the project and cause: shouts, demonstrations, texts, thoughts, songs, music, radio art... The project was transmitted at the same time through 36 collaborators, FM radio stations and the internet, as well as listening sessions in physical spaces, from different parts of the world.

Escuchatorio.
Felix Blume and
Mirna Castro.



But many times governments, or the hegemony, simply will not listen to the voice of the protesters, or will listen only to what they want, a selective listening to their own interests. Julie Beth Napolin, scholar, musician, and radio producer from United States, illustrates this well in her essay *Outside In: Chorus and Clearing in the Time of Pandemic and Protest*:

“What distinguishes hearing from listening? On June 28, 2020, during the height of the pandemic in the US, President Trump amplified on Twitter the sounds of a rally for his re-election meeting the sound of backlash. One of the supporters rallying for Trump near The Villages, a retirement community in Florida, shouted “white power” from his car window in response to protestors. In recirculating the video, Trump provided that call on a platform for broad dissemination. Responding on his behalf to massive outcry, the White House deputy press secretary Judd Deere said, “President Trump is a big fan of The Villages. He did not hear the one statement made on the video. What he did see was tremendous enthusiasm from his many supporters.” In some ways, I actually believe this statement, as absurd as it is, because it defines a field of selective, hegemonic audition – not simply a failure to listen, but a cordoning off of the hearing sense itself.”²⁷

Nikita Dhawan tells us: “Instead of focusing on the supposed voicelessness of the marginalized, it is more crucial to scandalize the inability of the “dominant” to listen or their “selective hearing” and “strategic deafness.”²⁸

For this same reason, there are artists who have chosen to carry out other types of projects, who have chosen to criticize, to protest, to reject this deaf hegemony or those who decide not to listen, decide not to use the same media and tools, or at least not in the same way they were conceived, giving

27. Julie Beth Napolin. “Outside In: Chorus and Clearing in the Time of Pandemic and Protest,” in *Sociologica*, V.14, N.2. <https://sociologica.unibo.it/article/view/11269> (accessed 14/04/2022).

28. Nikita Dhawan. “Hegemonic Listening and Subversive Silences: Ethical-political Imperatives,” in *Critical Studies*, vol. 36, ed. Alice Lagaay and Michael Lorber (Amsterdam: Brill, 2012) 52-53.

them another use, another meaning, another interpretation, they decide not to use their voice in the same way, or at the same moments, or in the same places where the hegemony would expect them to be.

Silent.
Pauline Boudry and
Renate Lorenz,
with Aérea Negrot.



A project that symbolically illustrates the idea is *Silent*, by Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz, a Germany based duo. The project is performed by the Venezuelan singer and musician Aérea Negrot, who is standing in front of a multitude of microphones, it seems that she is about to speak, but decides not to, she leaves us waiting for 4 minutes, until she decides to leave the scene, later we can listen to her, but where she has decided and in her own way, sitting on a bench and singing, refusing to speak and in the same way and in the same places that so many politicians and businessmen and directors of this and that have become so accustomed to. Aérea Negrot reminds us that we have all the capacity to speak in our own way, wherever and whenever we want, or even to refuse to speak, or to be listened to, if the conditions of speaking and listening do not seem adequate to us.

There are also other artists who create projects in which they no longer ask to be heard, no longer ask to be recognized by a hegemony, be it economic, political, or even artistic and cultural. And in some cases, they even choose silence, to silence, to counterattack the hegemonic discourses, therefore racist, sexist, patriarchal, classist, speciesist. Artists who take the position of no longer listening to hegemony, nor being listened to by it. Especially when the conditions of reciprocal listening are not perceived.

In this regard, the French writer, storyteller and curator, Olivier Marboeuf argues:

“What seems important to me in the attempt to find a situated speech is therefore not systematically trying to find a legitimacy. The power of dominant fictions rests on their capacity to endlessly invent ways of reformulating their legitimacy and that of others, until they occupy positions of fragility and constitute themselves as a minority if that allows them to maintain power – this is what the new strategies of the populist right in the United States and all of Europe painfully teach us today.”²⁹

The Mexican artist Mario de Vega, in collaboration with the Spanish artist Victor Mazon Gardoqui, created the *Radial* project in Germany, which is a pirate radio and television station, created with a USB that works as an FM antenna of 0.5 watts powered and connected to a computer. It can be used to block radio signals with silence, sound or messages in a perimeter of 2 km. Specifically, they blocked the radio broadcast of the MPD, a German neo-Nazi party, broadcasting silence 24 hours a day.

I do not intend to romanticize resistance, marches and protests, in many of them people are injured or lose their lives. I have attended many marches and I know that by themselves, on their own, they will not change the system. When you choose to resist against violence it is a struggle that will take place every day of our lives, and it will have to be fought at various levels, at various rhythms, in different places, at different times, with different means, and it will have to take place both individually and collectively, in the street and in personal spaces, and there will be great moments of joy and other great sadness. To resist, we do not have to wait for the next protest, we can do it every day, from our daily life, from our body, from our voice, from our listening.

For my part I have made the project *Presence-Listening-Presence*, in which I use some resources in the same line as the artistic practices that participate actively in protests, such as the use of banners, megaphones and the

29. Olivier Marboeuf. *The Geneva Lesson (Where will we go to hear these voices?)*. https://oliviermarboeuf.files.wordpress.com/2021/04/geneva-lesson-eng_fini02-1.pdf (accessed 23/04/2022).

presence of my own body temporarily occupying certain spaces. However I do not make a protest as such, on the banners I write questions that invite us to listen, to ourselves and to other people. Through the megaphones I describe the sounds that surround us.

And the Action no. 1 of the project *From the Act to Listening*, of a participatory nature, in which I use mobile devices, which in the same way help function as an invitation to listen. One of them uses audio recordings that ask questions about different aspects of the immediate acoustic context that we can hear. And the other amplifies the sounds of the soundscape, bringing our ears closer to distant or low volume sounds, sounds that we probably would not have noticed before.

Life is a relationship of sounds and silences, which may or may not be noises as well. There are moments to sound, to make noise, to speak, to shout, and moments of silence, of introspection, moments where it is important to know how to keep silent and listen to the voice of others. I think that projects like the ones I have just talked about help us to re-listen to today's world in order to re-imagine new worlds. And that implies re-thinking new ways of listening from our voices, from our cries, from our willingness to remain silent, and even from our refusal to be heard by those who have ignored our lives. In the words of the Mexican philosopher and sound organizer, Zael Ortega Pérez, it becomes necessary and urgent to build "Other Ways of Thinking Listening in order to Listen to Other Ways of Thinking."³⁰ This also implies listening from other bodies, other contexts, other temporalities, other geographies. This implies listening to other ways of listening. Listening from a world in which many worlds fit.

30. Zael Ortega. *Ética y Política de la Escucha*. https://issuu.com/zaelortega/docs/etica_y_politica_de_la_escucha (accesed the 20/11/2020).



Presence-Listening-Presence'.
Balam Ronan.





*From the Act to Listening,
Action no. 1.
Balam Ronan.*



DECOLONIAL LISTENING

Aout, 2021, Geneva, Switzerland

We are traveling by boat, which is about to arrive in Geneva, in the boat is traveling a group of colored men, accompanied by a white woman. Very close to arriving in Geneva, the group of men begin to make music, playing a rhythm with their hands and singing, a typical song of their region, I am very happy about the situation and I think it is a very nice way to end our little trip. When suddenly I hear a lady sitting next to me complaining about the “noise,” and the lady accompanying the group of men approaches and apologizes. She explains that the group of men are refugees, from Eritrea, and that they are finishing a bicycle trip through several states of Switzerland, as part of a project that seeks the integration of refugees, the lady who complains about the noise does not say anything but her annoyance is noticeable.

Why did the lady complain about the alleged “noise”? Why does she qualify the singing of the Eritrean men as “noise”? Why does it bother her so much and why does she react in such a way, seeking to silence them? Why does the lady accompanying the men feel a need to apologize and explain why the men are singing? Why does the lady who complains at first find these explanations insufficient? What types of sociability, relationality, come into play, into conflict, through this permeation of sound in this situation? What politics of sound, of listening, are present? Why is there still so much rejection of other ways of sounding, of listening, of living? Why is it so complicated to listen to each other? What can we do to not be intrusive with our sounds? What can we do to not silence other people?

Can we say that the lady who complains about the supposed “noise” that the man make when they sing, has not opened her listening to difference? Can we say that she is reproducing colonial ways of using the acoustic space? From my point of view, witnessing such rejection in the situations described in this text, inevitably makes me think of the rejection of other forms of life proper to the ways of acting of current capitalism, and its past processes. Because colonial ways of living, based on exploitation and submission of non-Western ways of living, are in a constant refusal to listen, because of their refusal to allow frequencies and oscillations that are usually hidden or ignored, to modulate their frequency spectrum. And in many cases, when they do listen, they do so in order to continue reproducing extractivist methods, extracting bodies, cultures, lands, in order to continue making money.

Perhaps we should continue by questioning the control of the right to decide who speaks and who is silent, who listens and who does not, and who has the right to be heard and who does not. And in that case, who can sing, and who can not.

I agree with the poetess from the United States, Audre Lorde, “we share an Earth and we need each other, but we are not each other, we are different. I can know and respect our differences, you must know and respect mine. That is the only way we can work together.”³¹ It is not our differences that separate us, but the fact of not dealing with our differences, of not listening to them, of not talking about them, of not taking them into account, and of not respecting them.

And it is not enough to tolerate certain differences, certain frequencies, I think we must think the differences as a microphone to ear other ways of existing, other ways of vibrating, of which we can and must take into account, and learn if possible. To listen to the differences is to let ourselves be modulated by oscillations, frequencies, velocities, that we had not heard, and not

31. Schultz, Dagmar. *Audre Lorde. The Berlin Years 1984 – 1992*. Germany, 2012. 79 minutes. DVD; DigiBeta (NTSC and PAL).

because they did not exist, even many times, we felt them long before being able to listen to them, but we had not stopped to listen to them, to feel them.

It seems that we have been taught, or we have become accustomed, to ignore certain differences, or to see them as a cause of exclusion, division, distrust, or even fear. Yet societies are always made up of an infinity of differences, of colors, of genders, of voices, of micro-frequencies and micro-rhythms that shape the complex sonorous jumble of any community, of any society. We cannot really live together if we suppress our differences, or ignoring them, nor if we are constantly adding some filters or pressing the mute button.

Those of us who have grown up within what is considered different, those of us who are marginalised, that is, those of us who are people of color, those of us who are LGBTQ+, those of us who are poor, we know that working with differences, from our bodies, from our voices, from our listening, is not an option, it is a necessity. A need to transform our differences, and turn them into possibilities, into potentialities, to construct an harmonic spectrum in which all frequencies can vibrate at their own rhythm, at their own volume.

Listening changes everything around it, brings everything with it, the ontological and epistemological conditions, the spacial and social conditions. Questions of modernity, coloniality, capitalism. Questions of nature, race, gender. Questions interrelation, interpolation, interpellation. Our way of listening bears a historical burden, on both a personal and collective level; our way of listening is an indication of how we relate to other people and even environments; it indicates the differences we have with other people and also how we can come to understand each other. To listen to other environments, in these environments, to other people, with people, we first need to become aware of and take responsibility for who we are. The philosopher Rodrigo Toro together with the musician Donovan Adrián Hernández Castellanos, both from Mexico, suggest that to listen, we first have to decolonize our listening. What this implies is asking ourselves “not just what we hear, but where we hear it from. This way of listening does not judge as the dilettante or critic does... On the contrary, decolonial listening implies a “taking part in” and a “being part of” (experiencing oneself).”³²

So, what does it mean to decolonize listening? From where can we, or should we listen as a first step to decolonize our listening?

Silence (/ing) is a colonial practice,
(listening to) Silence it is a decolonial practice.

(imposing) Noise is a colonial practice,
(listening to) Noise it is a decolonial practice.

Listening (as surveillance) is a colonial practice,
Listening (to be, to do, with each other and ourselves) it is a decolonial practice.

If the colonial regime of sonority rejects, submits, imposes, decolonial listening should suppose its opposite, acceptance, openness, to what is considered different according to the parameters of the Global North. It would mean undo-gender, undo-race, undo-nature.

In the essay entitled *Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference*, Audre Lorde quotes U.S. poet, writer, filmmaker and teacher, Kamalu ya Salaam: “As long as male domination exists, rape will exist. Only women

32. Donovan Adrián Hernández Castellanos Rodrigo Toro. *Decolonial Listening. Sonorous Bodies and the Urban Unconscious in Mexico City*. (Berlin: Radical Sounds Latin America, 2020), 166.

revolting and men made conscious of their responsibility to fight sexism can collectively stop rape.”³³

It seems to me that we can adapt this phrase to talk about the struggle against racism: As long as white domination exists, racism will also exist. Only the revolt of people of color and the awareness of their responsibilities in the struggle on the part of white people can put an end to racism.

Fortunately, there are white, western researchers and artists who work on it, reflecting and acting from listening, as a form of recognition and acceptance of sounds, voices, bodies, to which they probably would not pay attention in the everyday life..

Brandon LaBelle, artist, writer and theorist from the United States, has reflected on a concept that he calls *Dirty Ear*:

“I’m interested to emphasize that listening is fundamentally a position of not knowing; to listen is to stand in wait for the event, for the voice that may come; it is a preparation for common recognition, for confronting what may be so familiar or what may stand in contrast to myself... listening can be understood as the unsettling of boundaries – sound draws me forward, away from what I know; it interrupts me, it queers the borders of this body, even this thought.”³⁴

He continues:

“The dirty ear is not so much an ear full of too much, but an ear made sensitive to what it previously could not or would not allow itself to hear. A listening in wait: for others who may surprise us with their noises as well as their melodies.”³⁵

For their part, AM Kanngieser, argues that in addition to accepting, being open to sounds that are not common to us, is to assume our presence in the place, the type of listening and the sounds we generate. For them, listening is going to a place and to the people who inhabit it, and the relationships that our presence in that space and with other people entails, and the responsibility that comes with it.

“To arrive as a white tourist into a country that has been colonised, and is still negotiating and untangling the economies and cultures of white supremacy, is to always be coupled with injustice and harm.”³⁶

“Listening is coming to a place as who you are, and who you are perceived to be, in relation to where you are and accepting that this is never benign, and nor is it arbitrary.”³⁷

“Because we are never just one thing and no encounter is ever just one thing, listening is a practice composed by and through difference. Listening tells us that there are infinite ways that encounters happen and infinite interpretations... it gives no answers and offers no absolution – there is no end or conclusion to be drawn... What I take from this is a knowledge that my body inhabits space and that space inhabits my body, that I am always in relation, but I don’t know what that relation is. I can presume, of course. But there is no knowing.”³⁸

33. Lorde, Audre. “Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*, Berkeley: Ed. Crossing Press, 2007.

34. Brandon LaBelle. “Dirty Ideas.” In *Dirty Ear Report #1 Sound, multiplicity, and radical listening*. (Berlin: Dirty Bodies Press, 2013), 5.

35. Ibid., 7.

36. AM Kanngieser. “To tend for, to care with: three pieces on listening as method.” *The Seedbox*, September 11, 2020. <https://theseedbox.se/blog/to-tend-for-to-care-with-three-pieces-on-listening-as-method/> (accessed 24/04/2022).

37. Ibid.,

38. Ibid.,

"It is approaching encounters without anticipation or expectation with an awareness of, but not attachment to, what one brings and how your presence may change or charge the air. It is being generous toward mishearing, misunderstanding, projection, confusion, undoing." ³⁹

In addition to advocating to assume our responsibilities, AM Kanngieser also suggests some questions, as a reflection, and practice, to realize that we live and act constantly in spite of, through, and with our differences, and puts us in direct relation with other people, the places they inhabit along with the more-than-human ways of life, with their risks, compromises and responsibilities, but also with their strengths and their support, with their openness to other ways of living.

"Questions like 'from where do I listen? How do I listen? To what do I attend? What do I hear?' are necessary to thinking about environments and ecosystems. These questions show us that we are always working across difference... The simplicity of such questions belies a profound and critical recognition and responsibility essential to any movement toward abolishing a world built on white supremacist violence and dis-possession. The kind of listening that I am attempting to theorize alongside and play with here is slow and makes up many lifetimes' work and thought undertaken by many people across many places. It seeks to undo how we know, live, relate and comport ourselves. It seeks to undo abstractions of harm, capitalist extraction, domination and complicity. It also places us in definitive relation with how, where and what we inhabit and need to claim. What is at stake, then, in this listening is the dismantling of what we think we know toward an imagination of becoming otherwise." ⁴⁰

Do the amount of migration that happened in Europe in recent years, Escoitar.org, sound art collective from Spain, with its *Entrevistas Auralidad* project conducted interviews with migrants from the city of Vigo, thus trying to better understand the urban space, therein the shared space, having a willingness to listen to people different than themselves, from the perspective of listening that comes from other places, other cultures, other experiences.

The Slovenian sound artist Tao G. Vrhovec Sambolec, made a project called *For a Group: A Score for a Group of Individuals Making a Sound Installation Together * I*. So, as the title already indicates, it is a participatory score that offers a list of instructions for thinking about sound, not only as something personal, intimate, individual, but also as a collective, shared, relational practice. The score says:

"Each individual has one media player and one loudspeaker through which s/ he presents one or more sounds. All the sounds are to be made or chosen individually in advance or on the spot. The sounds can be (pre) composed, found, recorded, original or not. Each sound has to follow more than one of the instructions below.

make or present:

A sound that directs attention towards the other sounds in the room (rather than to itself).

A sound that is precise and incomplete. A sound that is not central.

A sound that is not disturbed by other sounds, neither does it disturb other sounds.

(A sound that listens.) A sound that is active and present, but not in the foreground.

A sound that does not instrumentalize other sounds (in the room) that

Entrevistas Auralidad.
Escoitar.org.



39. Ibid.,

40. AM Kanngieser. *Listening to crisis: attending to relations between people and environments.* Aural Diversities. (London: SoundFjord, 2021).

you might not know.

A sound that questions, comments or responds to other sounds in the room that you might not know.

A sound that makes space rather than fills space.

A sound that is not fixed in its representation.

A sound that does not demand attention, but that creates attention.

A sound that supports other sounds (in the room) that you might not know.

A sound that is unfinished.

A sound that is vulnerable.

A sound that doesn't require structured listening.

A sound that accepts and celebrates its constant immediacy and its continuous dissipation.

A sound that doesn't divide space and time into center and periphery.

A sound that can share territory.

A sound that needs other sounds."⁴¹

On the other hand, artists and researchers of Abya Yala have suggested as a first step, to listen to the noise, the same noise that has been imposed by colonial and capitalist violence, and the "noise", the concept they have of our voices, our music, our songs, our cries, our steps. But using it in our favor, as a process of analysis, of generation of knowledge, of recognition of people other than ourselves.

Again, Rodrigo Toro and Donovan Adrián Hernández Castellanos, tell us:

*"In his essay Humanity and Literary Capacity (Steiner 1963), George Steiner writes that "reading well means risking a lot. It is allowing our own identity, our possession of ourselves to be impinged." This observation, when transferred to the field of sound, takes on a sense of possibility and openness: "Listening well means risking a lot." But what does it risk, what do we risk? We risk difference, identity, the border between the modern/colonial self and the community self. In another sense, we risk the experience of another, of being the other. Decolonial listening, for those who have not grown up in communal forms of organization but in the solitude of the split-self, would be in some respects schizophrenic listening—a way of experiencing sound through which one's own border is violated in order to allow oneself the experience of the sonorous body of another, whether through music, shouting, words, or any other form."*⁴²

They continue: "Mexico City and its zócalo are examples of the complex networks of sonorous relationships in Latin America that reveal another way of listening. To put it another way, "el desmadre" (the mess) is a fortunate starting place from which to build another form of listening in the world."⁴³

On the other hand, Ximena Alarcón, a sound artist from Colombia, carried out a project in Mexico City, in which she interviewed dozens of people about the sounds she heard in the subway, seeking to listen to how people use spaces that on the one hand represent development projects, modernity, but at the same time are used by people as spaces where they can amplify voices, dissonances, which up in the street are dispersed, blurred in the great sound mass of the city, or even repressed. This project reflects the contradiction, the struggle for the right and the desire to be heard in cities in which the projects of the aforementioned modernity, isolates, restricts, the diversity of acoustic and communicative, but that the same people who on the one hand have been left aside, ignored, repressed, have found their

41. Tao G. Vrhovec Sambolec. For a group: A score for a group of individuals making a sound installation together * / . In *Dirty Ear Report #1 Sound, multiplicity, and radical listening*. (Berlin: Dirty Bodies Press, 2013), 8-10.

42. Donovan Adrián Hernández Castellanos Rodrigo Toro. *Decolonial Listening. Sonorous Bodies and the Urban Unconscious in Mexico City*. (Berlin: Radical Sounds Latin America, 2020), 166.

43. Ibid., 167.

ways to sound and exist within these projects and spaces:

"The wagon constitutes a great acoustic studio to amplify what is dispersed in the city above. To listen to others is to amplify cultural habits of conversation.... Indigenous languages are heard; it is as if under the ground what has been socially repressed is amplified." ⁴⁴

She continues:

"In Mexico City, iconic of Latin America, the control initiated by the subway as a project of modernity brings porous listening experiences that expand in possibilities of intervention and reverberation that include the body as an agent of listening and imagination among the machinery, resonances of ancestral, rural and social class time and space, sublime experiences and sound resistances that challenge, from the rummage, modern practices and historical conditions of infrastructure that suppress the sound of human conversation. I propose these as opportunities to listen to ourselves from our contradictions and modernity(ies) and intervene with alternative resonances." ⁴⁵

Noise can mean noise pollution, it can reduce diversity, hinder communication, socialization. But it can also mean the presence of other people, of other forms of life, it can be a symbol of vindication, of affirmation, of protest. Silence can mean absence, death, censorship, obedience, submission. But it can also mean tranquility, equilibrium, and it can even be a form of contestation and resistance. Listening can be a practice of surveillance, of extraction, of exploitation, but it can also be a practice of support, of understanding, of organization.

The Mexican sound artist, Israel Martínez, in collaboration with Emicel Guillén, created the project *The Will of Listening*, in Mexico City, using resources that we regularly see in social protests, Israel Martínez invites the spectators, the listeners, to assume the responsibility of listening and sounding in shared spaces, whether they want to or not, with other people, implies a midwifery towards other people.



The Will of Listening.
Israel Martínez
and Emicel Guillén



Another proposition or strategy or step, to re-think our ways of listening, to think about where are we listening, from where are we listening, is by creating moments and spaces to do so. I have been doing the Action no. 2 of the project called *From the Act to Listening*, in which put a microphone and an amplifier in public spaces and I invite everyone to use it as they want, to say something, read, sing, scream, make noises... as an intent to hear each other, while at the same time by being open to difference, to diversity, to change.

44. Ximena Alarcón. "Bajo la tierra: Escucha porosa de modernidad en el metro de México." In *Revista de Arte Sonoro y Cultura Aural* no. 3, Antropologías de la Escucha (Valparaíso: Oikos Impresos, 2017). 37.

45. Ibid.,

And in my project *Sound Menu*, I share the field recordings of many different places which I have been lucky to visit. The listeners, instead of having a menu to choose something to eat, they have a menu where they can hear a variety of sounds. Through the recordings we can hear the voices speaking or singing different languages, people of all different ages and cultures, sounds from the city, the forest and the beach. The sound of difference, the sounds of a shared world.

According to the artists and researchers with whom I tried to enter into dialogue, who helped me as a reference and support in this text, it would seem that for white, western people -and by this I mean all people who have become westernized, whitened, in their mentality and ways of doing things-, decolonizing listening would mean in part to assume the damage caused by colonization, by imposed capitalism, to no longer consider themselves as bearers of truth, as the only producers of valid knowledge. It would mean listening to the people, to those frequencies that usually do not listen.

For us, people of color, people who have suffered some kind of marginalization, it would mean in part to listen to what has been silenced, to listen to what has not been forbidden to listen to, our own bodies, our own voices, our own songs. It would be to find ourselves and listen to ourselves within the great mass of imposed sound, it would mean to recognize ourselves, to know that we are alive, sufficient, worthy, with the right to exist and to have a place, a body, a voice, a freedom to sound, a freedom to be heard.

And for both white people and people of color, decolonizing listening would mean, in turn, no longer considering ourselves white people and people of color.

There is no formula for decolonizing listening, nor what it would mean or imply, it is always context specific, body specific, voice specific. Because our experience of living a place can be really different depending on each person, particularly when they are people who have historically been marginalized from certain spaces.

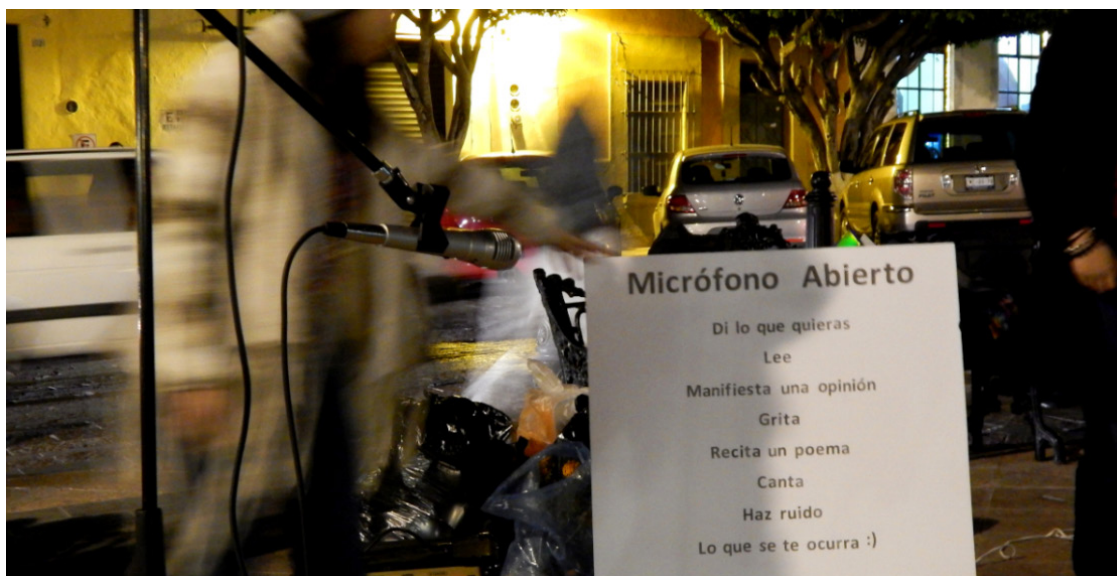
In Mexico, being a man, brown, mestizo, heterosexual, my experience of the city is different from the experience of women, in a city, in a country with high rates of femicide and violence against women, or that of black people who have been erased from the project and the historical narratives of the country, or that of indigenous people who constantly suffer discrimination and violence by the authorities. My personal experience is not enough, hence the importance of listening to each other, listening to our different experiences, but always taking into account where the person is coming from, where he/she/they is/are listening from and where he/she/they is/are talking to.

Likewise, my experience of living in Switzerland is very different from that of white people. Even though physically my body is still the same, male, dark, mixed race, the way it is perceived changes a lot. In a way I could say that my body changed when I changed places. And not only my body, my voice, the way I express myself, the way I do certain things, and the way I am listened to.

At the same time, it must be taken into account that decolonizing listening, the body, a mentality, a culture, is not an event, it is a long-term process that will take several generations to achieve.

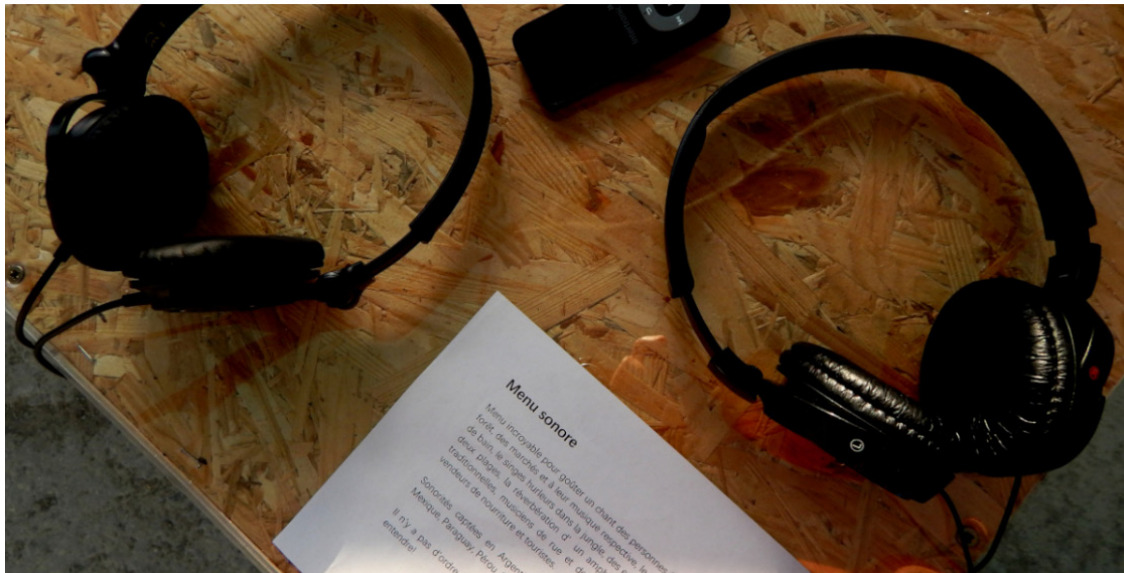
So, in that sense asking about where are we listening, from where are we listening, isn't necessarily literally physical, or geographical, but also means taking a position, a stance.

Listening to take position, taking position to listen.



*From the Act to Listening,
Action no. 2.
Balam Ronan.*





Sound Menu.
Balam Ronan.



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The CCC Master-Thesis 2021/2022 is one part of graduating from the two-year process to study and develop research methodologies crossing theory with practice by the means of art under globalizing conditions. The transdisciplinary and bilingual CCC-Curriculum consists of Writing Research and Situated Art Practices seminars that discuss the students' individual research while Critical Studies, Curatorial/Politics, Theory Fiction seminars and the Reading Group foster the collective formation of new vocabularies.

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(From) Where Are We Listening

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