

CHAPTER 4

Artistic Artifacts

In this chapter, I propose artistic practices as multimodal. I delve into today's multimodal anthropology debate by bringing my artistic practices used in this research—sound, collective listening, and critical walking—as methodological tools for ethnography. I explore their multi-sensory, collaborative and affective dimensions to engage with critical, political, and decolonial approaches beyond traditional ethnographic display methods.

4.1 What Is Multimodal Anthropology? Re-thinking the “Modes” through Artistic Practices

Since my first presentations of this research project in various German academic contexts within the social sciences, I was aware of the challenges my work would face in the years ahead—particularly in terms of validation, evaluation, and institutional recognition. My initial methods, based on artistic practices developed through my earlier art projects—such as soundscapes, art actions, and participatory art—caused discomfort among some academic colleagues. They were perceived as “too arty,” raising concerns about the “superficiality” of the affective and sensorial dimensions of art, and the ethical challenges that emerge when artistic practices engage with the social (see Chapter 3). Later, in conversations with the anthropologist (and my supervisor) Regina Römhild, I came to understand that “too arty” carries a different meaning for anthropologists and artists. For anthropologists, it signals the risk of artists conducting research “just for the sake of experimentation,” without the aim of understanding social phenomena. For me, however, the expression “too arty” pointed to the fact that my research moved beyond traditional ethnographic methods—such as text-based formats, interviews, and participant observation—toward sensory experiences that connect body and mind, including sound and critical walking art, marking an early engagement with what is now discussed as multimodality.

From this anthropological perspective, I began to question the interpretation that emerges when anthropologists “invent” an image of the artist. The mere as-

sumption that artistic practices might be “superficial” carries the danger of “othering,” something central to criticism within the discipline. This brings me back to the tensions between art and anthropology described in Chapter 3, where the ethical challenges defined by anthropology remain tied to the idea that art exists only on the “aesthetic surface” of the issue under investigation (I will return with this in the following sections).

Looking for more-than-textual ways to deal with my research was a risky move for traditional forms of ethnographic methods, especially in a German academic context. Before 2017, the ethnographic texts distributed in institutes for European ethnology and anthropology in Berlin universities were mainly from a traditional normative and standardized approach of ethnography, like the handbooks or manuals of ethnography, leaving aside the inventive and creative anthropological experiments developed in the 1980s mainly in the USA and the UK (see Chapter 3). Subsequently, in some German anthropological communities and laboratories—such as Stadtlabor at the IfEE, an academic laboratory for reflection on urban anthropology in conjunction with science and technology studies (STS)—began to address new forms of ethnography engaging in multi-form documentation and research. It was no longer only visual anthropology, where photography and film were the basis of this sub-discipline; still, other modalities were emerging, such as sound, comics, collaborative actions, performative processes, technological interventions, and the creation of “devices,” which were already known in the English-speaking sector but, in a German context, were “innovative” ways of dealing with the fieldwork. Today, the term “multimodal anthropology” (see Collins and Durrington, 2017) is already recognized in various academic circles, anthropological journals, and university courses as a sub-discipline of today’s anthropology. The “multi” has now opened a spectrum of more-than-text modalities in social sciences methodology¹.

In this sense, multimodal anthropology highlights the quality of experiment, innovation, invention, and creation in the field. It provides a space between the inventive freedom of creative strategies and its academization and scientification, framed in an era of hyper-technology and digitalization reflected in the varieties of technologies used in the field. These “new” methodological forms reopen the desired window to bring artistic practices into anthropology, which the discipline had closed since the 1980s by ignoring the seriousness, effectiveness, and affectivity of arts, literature, and creative processes. The anthropologists James Clifford and George E. Marcus, in their renowned book *Writing Culture* (1986), were amongst the few in the 1980s who said that anthropology needed to rethink issues of representation, as it

1 As discussed in Chapter 3, even as multimodality gain acceptance in anthropology, their institutionalization remains contested. Current debates focus on how to value and validate multimodal work in contrast to traditional text formats, and on efforts to find common standards for academic evaluation (see Criado, Farias, and Schröder, 2022).

was a very classical, conventional, and hierarchical way of describing culture; they also proposed other forms of research in which artistic practices, and aesthetic and sensory processes were an opportunity for the discipline to escape the traditional canons of capturing the field of study. Once again, the possibility today for artistic practices and creative processes to be part of anthropological methods creates a space for artists, practitioners, designers, and cultural producers to enter the scientific academic field—specifically in the social sciences—but also raises questions about disciplinary hierarchies, academization, and valorization (see Chapter 3).

Building on this, what I perceived during my first years navigating German academic social sciences alongside my artistic practices is that it was very difficult to be fully part of anthropology. One of the multimodal trends I noticed at the beginning was that, rather than being recognized as methodological approaches in their own right, artistic practices were often framed simply as the adoption of techniques, forms, and modes drawn from the arts and creative disciplines—such as sound installation, video art, artistic photography, performance, collaborative art, art workshops, design outputs, and urban performative interventions—without fully acknowledging their role in knowledge production. In some cases, it still happens that the artist, designer, and cultural practitioner are perceived as providing a “service” for the anthropologist and their research—the old colonial patterns of anthropology as “a curiosity turned into a discipline” (Trouillot, 2003) in this scenario reemerge. This specific use of multimodal artistic approaches mirrors the old idea of the anthropologist’s curiosity, characterized by a fascination with, and sometimes even an exoticization of, artistic practices. In these projects, depending on the contextual framework, hierarchical distinctions in knowledge production persist, with theorization having greater validation than the practices of creative, sensorial, and inventive processes, even though they are labeled as “transdisciplinary projects,” highlighting the rich idea of interweaving theory and practice. In such instances, creative production remains positioned as a “result” or “outcome” of the research, diverging from the transdisciplinary notion of a collaborative and transversal approach to conducting research and generating knowledge. However, over time, I became aware that in other types of projects, multimodality is not merely about producing outputs or providing artistic services for research; rather, it becomes a process that actively participates in and transforms the production of anthropological knowledge itself.

Volume 121 of the journal *American Anthropologist* published the article “Introduction: Multimodal Anthropology and the Politics of Invention” by anthropologists Ethiraj Gabriel Dattatreyan and Isaac Marrero-Guillamón (2019). This was one of the first texts to conceptualize in more detail the notion of multimodality as no longer a mere outcome, representation, or dissemination of anthropological knowledge. It goes beyond this, involving different modes of doing anthropology and contributing to a “politics of invention” where the anthropologist moves away from the text to

produce multi-form contributions that shift from representational and descriptive to performative and inventive anthropology. Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón reimagine an anthropology that has to distance itself from traditional forms of authorship, scholarship, representation, and academic publishing to experiment with inventive forms in the field and new modalities of collaboration with communities and participants. This draws from the analyses of anthropologists Samuel Gerald Collins and Matthew Durlington in their paper “Multimodality: An Invitation” (2017), published in the *American Anthropologist*, where they emphasize that multimodality stresses new modes of research in the field in which the anthropologist is experimenting with different ways of relating to the community, public, students, and colleagues from other disciplines. In other words, “modality” is not necessarily new technological uses in the field but somewhat different “modes” and means of operation, which empowers the rethinking of anthropological practices per se (Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón, 2019).

The (re)turn of “new” research modalities, which once served mainly as a support or adjunct to anthropological practices, are now increasingly valued as research modes in their own right—approaches that understand the research process through and with diverse methods of experimentation (Criado, Farias, and Schröder, 2022). Multimodality creates a space for testing, sharing, and documenting these methods of experimentation and invention, which have always existed within ethnography but often went unspoken or undocumented due to their more-than-textual nature, and thus found little place in anthropology’s textual modes of description and representation. As noted by anthropologists Tomás Sánchez Criado and Adolfo Estalella (2023) in *What Is an Ethnographic Inventory?*—the introductory text of Xcol inventory, an open-access platform for cataloging, archiving, and documenting inventive, creative, and artistic processes within the anthropological field—ethnography has always been, in itself, an act of invention. Yet this inventive quality has often gone unrecorded because it exists outside conventional text formats, resulting in the loss of many modalities that ethnographers have “discovered” or “invented” in the field. In this context, the growing interest in multimodal practices not only acknowledges these inventive processes but also makes it possible to initiate, catalog, and archive them—mapping connections and identifying affinities with other creative and experimental techniques across disciplines, including research-creation and artistic practices (I will return to this point in the next section).

Understanding ethnography as “an act of invention” is closely tied to the diverse challenges anthropologists encounter in the field. Anthropologists face obstacles which cannot be documented and described only through fieldnotes and ethnographic vignettes, especially when they involve the collaborative processes and participatory observations that today’s public and engaged anthropologists seek to foster. There are not enough scripts or methods for these collaborative relationships

to be built within the field. Criado and Estalella conceive of ethnography as more than a method but rather as “an act of invention,” where creative, inventive processes are the means by which material is collected and then analyzed anthropologically. These inventive acts are usually not documented in standard ethnographies, such as the handbooks or manuals of ethnography. Criado and Estalella highlight how, in the past, in the field, there were empirical processes including gestures, creative acts, and inventive interventions, while afterward they were ignored as the ethnographer was seen only as an “observer” and “describer” of society. It is from this observation that I wonder whether the erasure of these inventive processes throughout anthropological history has been one of various attempts to distance the discipline from creative, affective, and sensorial acts in order to validate its scientific modality and status. This reflection aligns with Criado and Estalella’s engagement with the notion of “invention” proposed by the anthropologist Roy Wagner, who, in his book *The Invention of Culture* (1975), considered a classic of ethnography and theory, acknowledges invention as an integral element of anthropological methods, proposing that rather than “discovering” the cultures they study, anthropologists “invent” them. Criado and Estalella propose ethnography as an inventive process recognizing the creative, playful, and experimental aspects experienced by the researcher when engaged in fieldwork.

Multimodal Invention: Where Is the Politics?

During one of my conversations with Römhild about the themes of this chapter, she raised an important concern: multimodality is at risk of becoming “too arty” when it relies solely on experimentation and invention as its *modus operandi* in the fieldwork. For her, the enthusiasm for exploring novel forms of experimentation may devolve into a mere fascination with adopting “innovative” methods for “the sake of novelty,” possibly leading to the undesired “superficiality” of art practices often criticized by anthropology. This delicate balance between becoming a mere “artifact” or “device” for fieldwork could divert the researcher from uncovering crucial insights within the field. Römhild raises a pertinent question about why experimenting with new methods in ethnography is important rather than adhering to traditional methodological forms like interviews or participatory observation. This inquiry doesn’t seek to devalue innovative and novel approaches of multimodality but emphasizes challenging the politics of engaging with these new research forms within the community under study.

Building on this concern, the discussion turns toward the broader context in which these methods operate. Thanks to the recent influence of decolonial, postcolonial, indigenous, and feminist scholars in the multimodal debate, the political dimension of alternative ways of knowing and producing knowledge in academia has become a key component. Beyond incorporating “innovative” more-than-text ele-

ments in research, the multisensory and affective aspects of these discourses inspire a shift from traditional anthropology, characterized by a distant and observational stance, to a politically engaged researcher advocating for social change. The rise in transacademic and transdisciplinary projects today to break with the problematic past of researching “about the other” present opportunities for pioneer research approaches.

For example, by attempting to cross the boundaries of traditional academic research, the new notions of public and collaborative anthropology offer a sociopolitical strategy for breaking down barriers within the discipline. By attempting to disrupt and question its own research hierarchies, anthropology is shedding light on significant social issues by promoting more public and collaborative debates to drive social transformation (Borofsky, 2004). Looking at social problems in ways other than hierarchical academic and scientific forms of knowledge production engages with the non-academic public, contributing significantly to the discipline’s self-reflectivity, especially in the context of an anthropology that focuses on deconstructing the notion of the “other.” In this sense, looking at multimodality as “merely” formal inventive process risks falling into a “superficiality,” prioritizing formality, functionality, and aesthetics over the social and political motivations inherent in anthropological research projects that aim at social change (Römhild, 2023).

Nevertheless, this “superficiality,” where formality, sensoriality, and affectivity prevail as a starting form of engagement in the field, raises a crucial question for me: does this inventive and creative form strip multimodality of its political power, reducing it to an experimentation “too arty” for its own sake? This is where Criado and Estalella’s position becomes relevant. For them, rethinking ethnography as an inventive process does not neglect the social and political aspects of anthropology but, on the contrary, opens a window to making it even more socially engaged. The “politics of invention” lies in recognizing the transformative potential of multimodal approaches as inclusive social research methodologies. By seeking new ways to engage with the community, researchers can uncover connections that remain hidden through traditional ethnographic perspectives. Adopting diverse forms of participation in the fieldwork not only broadens the scope of the research but also fosters tangible actions aimed at social change, transcending the often distant academic engagement and activism on social issues.

Drawing from this, current debates on multimodality increasingly incorporate decolonial, indigenous, and feminist perspectives. These perspectives highlight the political importance of producing alternative knowledge that challenges colonial scientific paradigms. This shift owes much to collaborative efforts between scholars, artists, and cultural practitioners, who offer alternative avenues for knowledge dissemination beyond conventional academic and scientific formats. This collaborative emergence speaks to a multisensory affectivity that challenges the idea of “innovation” as part of multimodality. By incorporating decolonial, postcolonial, and

feminist perspectives, socially engaged artistic practices find a space to contribute methodologically to anchoring multimodality in political and affective meaning, preventing it from falling into mere apolitical innovation. In this way, I highlight how multisensory and affective practices actively confront Western norms of “representation.” These dimensions are essential in maintaining the political engagement of multimodal approaches.

Returning to my concerns about the idea of being “too arty,” I see this critique as stemming from Western art ideals rooted in colonial aesthetic standards. Such critiques risk prioritizing surface-level beauty over deeper engagement with social, political, and cultural concerns. Socially engaged artistic practices (where my own artistic practice is based), by contrast, maintain a critical lens on the aesthetics and sublimations of art. Many of these practices don’t “fit” neatly into today’s Western, postcapitalist art scene, which is dominated by galleries, museums, and curators primarily concerned with the economic, entertainment, and heritage aspects of art. Artists who explore social themes often find themselves on unpredictable terrain within an art world governed by Western aesthetic standards. They frequently grapple with social and political issues related to anthropology, fostering potential collaborations between the two disciplines. These artists navigate the turbulent paths shaped by colonial legacies of representation and Western aesthetic norms, aiming to address the challenges of postcapitalist societies and the negative impacts of imperial globalization, as articulated in the concept of “decolonial aesthetics” (Mignolo and Vázquez, 2013). As Walter Mignolo and Ronaldo Vázquez write, the aim of decolonial aesthetics “is not to produce feelings of beauty or sublimity, but of sadness, indignation, regret, hope, and determination to change things in the future.” In this context, I turn to decolonial aesthetics as a framework for unpacking the complex interplay between *aesthesis*—the sensory and emotional dimensions of experience—and *aesthetics*—the philosophical Western inquiry into beauty. This distinction, I believe, lies at the core of anthropology’s recurring concerns about the perceived superficiality of the “arty” in multimodal work.

In his paper “Decolonial Aesthetics: Collective Creative Practice in Progress,” Raul Moarquench Ferrera-Balanquet (2011), a scholar, artist, and media activist, describes *aesthesis* as “an unelaborated elementary awareness of stimulation, a ‘sensation of touch’ ... closely connected to the processes of perception.” *Aesthetics*, on the other hand, is defined “as a philosophical branch that focuses on the study of beauty as a rational investigation about existence, knowledge, and ethics” (Ferrera-Balanquet, 2011: 89). The dominance of Western aesthetics has erased the importance of *aesthesis*, perpetuating the colonization of artistic expression. Today, there is an urgent need to dismantle this colonial legacy and liberate *aesthesis*. Socially concerned artists, including artists from the so-called Global South, draw inspiration from the legacies of the Bandung Conference (1955) and the Non-

Aligned Movement (1961),² imagining other art worlds beyond the colonial, contributing to the vision of a “decolonial aesthetics” (Ferrera-Balanquet, 2011). From this perspective, artistic practices based on decolonial aesthetics become a powerful counterpoint to the superficiality and apoliticization that can impact multimodal research. By focusing on *aesthesis*—the sensorial, affective, and embodied dimensions of the experience—these practices shift the focus from aesthetic formalism to deeper, more politically engaged modes of interaction. In this way, they not only open up alternative avenues for knowledge production but also forge spaces for sensitivity, collaboration, and self-reflexivity in the field.

Therefore, as will be discussed in the following paragraphs, my great interest is in looking at *research-creation*—the methodological practice of conducting academic research through artistic processes—as a key role in multimodal debates by offering an academic articulation of sensoriality and affectivity. Research-creation emphasizes thinking “with” and “through” *aesthesis*, highlighting the affective and sensory aspect of the research, in contrast to the purely cognitive and rational forms inherent in the sciences. In this light, “thinking through making” (Yalouri, 2022), already discussed in Chapter 3, can be read as a “politics of creation,” resonating closely with the “politics of invention” proposed in multimodal ethnography.

By embracing experimentation, free from the moral traditional aesthetic frameworks, artistic practices invite researchers into unexpected and accidental moments. This openness fosters greater sensitivity and empathy with the environment, allowing ethnographers to perceive nuances and complexities that conventional methods and theory might overlook. Moreover, centering *aesthesis* in the fieldwork can help dismantle colonial biases embedded in academic research by moving away from rigid, hierarchical methodologies toward more inclusive, collaborative, and politically engaged approaches. In essence, by highlighting the creative, sensorial, and effective potential of artistic practices, researchers can transcend the limitations of superficiality and apoliticality, forging new pathways for knowledge production that challenge the colonial structures still present when one is doing academic and scientific research. My proposal here is that artistic practices working through the lens of *aesthesis* are essential for the future of multimodality in the social sciences and beyond.

2 As Fidel Castro emphasized in 1979, the task of the Non-Aligned Movement is to guarantee “the national independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of the non-aligned countries” in their “struggle against imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism and all forms of foreign aggression, occupation, domination, interference or hegemony, as well as against great power and bloc politics.” See Fidel Castro speech on October 12, 1979. Latin American network information center, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110611014358/http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro/1979/19791012>

Approaching the Field through Research-Creation

It is within this broader commitment to *aesthesis* that research-creation offers a particularly generative framework. As a methodology, it merges artistic exploration and expression with academic inquiry, promoting knowledge and innovation through creative and scholarly practices. It engages critically in diverse media or art forms beyond performance, technological development, or educational curricula creation. Research-creation focuses more on processes and *aesthesis* than on outcomes of communication, operating as a speculative, future-oriented practice and an invented relational technique (Springgay and Truman, 2016). The artists and scholars Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman (2016) argue that research-creation is the complex intersection of artistic practice, theoretical concepts, and research: “It is an experimental practice that cannot be anticipated or determined beforehand.”

It is transdisciplinary and is used by artists, designers and culture producers, who incorporate a hybrid form of artistic practice between arts and science; academics attuned to the role of arts and creativity in their own areas of expertise; and educators interested in developing curriculum and pedagogy based on cultural production. (Springgay and Truman, 2016)

This flexibility and openness naturally raise questions about how research-creation might fall within academic criteria, and how this methodology can address the complex intertwining between creative, artistic, and scientific academic production. Research-creation in scholarship criteria is a space of analytical knowledge production, where the artist or practitioner must negotiate problem settings, which in artistic and creative practices is usually addressed through the “making of things” (Cohen, 2015). This practical “making” of research-creation as a mode of producing knowledge is the connecting crossroads that multimodal ethnography seeks to achieve with the notion of “inventing.” Negotiating problems through inventive and creative modalities are present in research-creation. These are considered expansive and suggestive, operating by delimiting the research process, offering opportunities to invent, create, and produce any event. As well, the idea of looking for “more possibilities” to counteract framings, borders, rules and parameters that the scientists seek in their research methods. Another core aspect is the notion of “creating problems,” referring to the fact that research-creation is not a practice that pretends to describe, explain, or solve problems. On the contrary, they are “events” that create conceptualizations that further problematize the research (Springgay and Truman, 2016). Lastly, the socio-ethical aspect of research-creation that brings it closer to the social sciences lies in the practice of “observing what arises,” which refers to reconsidering the concepts, forms, and modes that emerge from the re-

search-creation process (Springgay and Truman, 2016). This involves understanding the work from political and ethical perspectives, reflecting on how it is created and invented, and on the effects it has on the environments it seeks to engage, while emphasizing modes of representation rather than simply representing what drives the creation.

This juxtaposition between the inventive, ethical, and processual is where anthropology and artistic practice find a particularly productive meeting point, where the synergy between research-creation and material, affective, and sensory processes can be navigated effectively. Criado and Estalella propose ethnography as an “inventive process,” recognizing the creative, playful, and experimental aspects experienced in the fieldwork. These aspects are the significant points of encounter with the research-creation of the artist, practitioner, and cultural producer at the moment of producing and creating works, and artistic and cultural experiences. The delicate balance between the inventive process and simple appeal represents a crucial aspect of the collaboration between art and anthropology. Anthropology can contribute reflexivity and ethical considerations, while artistic practices can offer experimentation and expansive modes of engaging with the fieldwork.

In this way, research-creation becomes a hybrid practice and a methodological stance that invites more reflexive and politically engaged forms of multimodal research. Through an open and experimental attitude, research-creation cultivates deeper levels of holistic engagement with the research topics. By embracing the unknown and allowing for uncertainty outside traditional methodological parameters, research-creation can create space for new forms of understanding to emerge, offering an opportunity for multimodal research not to fall into undesirable “superficiality” and “apolitization.” This mutual support contributes to the validation and academization of both.

Seen in this light, the potential for research-creation to shape the future of multimodal ethnography becomes both methodological and political. Therefore, in this chapter, using my own artistic methods, I propose a “politics of creation” as an expansive form for a future multimodal anthropology. This proposal leads to the practical question of how the politics of creation might be implemented in the fieldwork. The following section turns to the idea of testing *artistic artifacts* as a way of applying research-creation’s principles during ethnographic work, exploring how inventive and creative gestures can challenge traditional ethnography and, in turn, politicize today’s multimodal anthropology.

4.2 Testing “Artistic Artifacts” in the Field

How can the researcher ‘let go’ of their preconceived assumptions about the social and actually listen to the fieldwork through an inventive and creative gesture?

How can the ethnographer move away from traditional ethnographic methods rooted in the colonial and look for alternative ways of getting a deep and holistic understanding with an open and experimental attitude? (Garland, 2024b: 1).

Throughout this research, these questions have stayed, especially during my return to the fieldwork with an ethnographer lens. Various external factors, such as the evictions at two of my study sites—the Dzingal and Tiburtina—the pandemic lockdown and subsequent regulations, and the social upheavals in Chile prompted me to explore alternative methodological approaches to data collection beyond the conventional ethnographic methods of participant observation, interviews, and focus groups. However, I wanted to depart from these methodological frameworks that focus on a person-centered approach as the main research method, and thus address the important issue within anthropology regarding the power dynamic between the “researcher-academic” and the “subject under study.” As outlined in the Prologue, this book challenges the person-centered approach as the primary method for researching places where migration movements and conflict arise from contemporary border regulations. Instead, I have chosen to focus on territory and urban regeneration to examine how the Dzingal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales have engaged with these territorial and urban spaces and how they have given social meaning to abandoned urban spaces through the creation of alternative placemaking. Through various artistic-ethnographic methodological experiments, I seek alternative approaches to connect with these places. In doing so, the focus shifts away from an emphasis on individuals toward a relational and holistic perspective that encompasses places, people, and non-human entities.

Deciding to move away from the person-centered research encouraged me to take a more experimental approach. By letting go of preconceived assumptions of migration study where the “migrant body” is the center of the research, I was able to return to the idea of “listening” to the fieldwork. This requires a mindset that encourages experimentation and openness, without predetermined positions of interest. To achieve this, I had to move away from the classical forms of person-centered ethnography. This shift toward a more expansive attitude allowed me to discover alternative ways of dealing with the case studies: my practical approach to the fieldwork moved closer to the research-creation methodology, which, as previously discussed, has multiple points of contact with today’s multimodal discourse and its notion of a “politics of invention.” By incorporating research-creation, I experimented *through* and *with* materials, techniques, and forms that go beyond mere theorization and representation. In the following section, I detail my experimentation with a selection of key methods that I used in this research, encompassing sound, listening, and walking as means of documentation and artistic creation (I will not delve into all the different methods, artworks, and experiments conducted in this research, which can be viewed and listened to on this book’s website). The methodological artistic

artifacts detailed below serve as an example of “thinking by doing” that challenges thinking *through* and *with* decolonial aesthetics, opening up other ways of producing knowledge in which affectivity and sensoriality come into play, contributing to a political expansion of the more-than-textual research in which today’s multimodality is engaging.

The Politics of Sound and Listening

Text fragments from the sonic-essay: “Attempting to Decolonize Oneself: Sonorities between the ‘West’ and the ‘South’” (Garland, 2024a).

SENSORY SATELLITES³



Sound and listening have enjoyed in recent decades a significantly growing interest in many disciplines outside the arts, music, and performance. Social scientists, anthropologists working with sound, science, and technology scholars, and literary and cultural researchers, among others, have become interested in sound and listening as an enriching avenue of research within the academy. For instance, one of the pioneers of the anthropology of sound, Steven Feld (2004), has taken sound into ethnography. Through sound, listening, recording, and post-production, specific lived experience acquires a very distinct tangibility (Feld, 2004). Sound, with its potential for acoustic-spatial imagination and situational experience, delivers a unique quality of environment awareness, which, through composer and accordionist Pauline Oliveros’ (2005) method of “deep listening,” makes it possible to experience “sound-temporal spaces” (Ndikung, 2020). These “spaces” differ from visual forms as captured in images. Oliveros (2005: 5) formulates the method: “Deep Listening involves going below the surface of what is heard, expanding to the whole field of sound while finding focus. This is the way to connect with the acoustic environment, all that inhabits it, and all that there is.”

Sound, for its part, allows listeners to understand, feel, and sense our surroundings with an auditory consciousness as a means to not only document and shape reality, but also to amplify it. Sound and the technological power of recording allow us to register and amplify sonorous experiences that we cannot hear simply through

3 To read and listen to the sonic-essay *Attempting to Decolonize Oneself: Sonorities between the ‘West’ and the ‘South’* see: <https://somerwhereinbetween.cargo.site/Between-West-and-the-South>

our ears and that would have gone unnoticed by our hearing. From a decolonial perspective, as the art theorist and curator Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung described in a 2020 seminar entitled “Space–Time Continuum of Sonority: Deep Listening Sessions,” listening becomes a political act of sound and voice amplification, a strategy to combat the omnipresence of the image, especially nowadays, when the hyper-speed of social media is dominated by the visual. Sound and deep listening turn into instruments that allow one to hear the “marginalized” that usually go unheard, becoming a political practice of listening through situated knowledge. Here, this practice opens reflections on how we listen today and whether it is possible to decolonize our listening and thus overcome the hegemonic power structures dictating the way we listen. (Garland, 2023)

This seminar was the starting point for my interest in experimenting with art and ethnographic research methods that involve sound and listening. For my PhD research, which investigates stories of places and people in a migratory setting of permanent precariousness and vulnerability due to border regimes, the question of how to represent “the other” has been vital. I did not want to reproduce visualizations of the “migrant body,” especially since my work is situated within the discipline of anthropology. The mainstream narrative of contemporary migration based on the vulnerability and victimization of the “migrant body” via television and social media, through video and photography has been an essential reason for my search for other ways of engaging with migratory experiences. Thus, I began to experiment with sound, from collecting ambient sounds, creating sound archives, recording sound walks, soundscapes and seascapes, and curating collaborative listening sessions as part of my fieldwork, thus going beyond the classic ethnographic methods. (Garland, 2024a: 25)

Recording Oceans

SENSORY SATELLITES⁴

My interest in sound and listening as a way of approaching fieldwork was echoed by my attention with the sounds of non-human entities such as oceans, elements that were present not only in my encounters with places and people in the fieldwork that had a connection to the oceans, but also in encounters with non-human beings where the sound of the ocean became an important aspect that helped me to interconnect these (hi)stories in a sensory and affective way (Garland, 2024b). For this chapter, I delved into the sonic archives I recorded during this research. The collected sounds guided me on the main question of this research: how the places of

4 To listen to the sound piece **Oceanic Memory** through the QR code, see section 1.2 from Chapter 1. Or click on <https://soundcloud.com/someinbetween/oceanic-memory-becoming-water-oceans-and-seas>

the Dzjanganl, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales—so-called non-places—evolved into social places, and how the concepts of liminality and inbetweenness might play a role in their transformation.

Inspired by field-recording artists⁵ and ocean-sound artists such as Nick Kuepfer⁶ and Jana Winderen,⁷ who pay close attention to maritime sound environments and small underwater animals, during the fieldwork travels between 2021 and 2022 I recorded ambient and underwater soundscapes of the Mediterranean Sea, the English Channel, and the Pacific Ocean. I was interested in archiving these tones not only for their poetic and material quality but also for the symbolic value that the sea represents to the people of these places. For example, the Mediterranean and the English Channel often represent ongoing and recurring tragedies and dangerous journeys in the migratory narratives of the inhabitants of Tiburtina and the Dzjanganl in Italy and France. Likewise, past colonial trade voyages in the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans are present, albeit deep down, in the narratives of Afro-Caribbean communities who want to reach northern Chile to set up settlements informally in abandoned areas of the Atacama Desert (Garland, 2024a: 26). [See Chapter 1]

In turn, in my investigation of the sonorities of the oceans, I came across colonial sonic archives that allude to layers of the tangled histories of the Dzjanganl, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, which, digging deeper, reveal the legacy of colonial navigation between Europe and Latin America. Looking particularly at residents' narratives of these places, I was able to understand their relationships to the colonial past. This past includes not only colonialism in Africa and Central-South Asia—specifically the British Empire in Afghanistan, Sudan, and Somalia and the Italian empire in Somalia and Eritrea, countries from which Dzjanganl and Tiburtina residents hailed—but also colonial trade in the Atlantic, the Haitian revolution and its legacy in the Caribbean, which is essential to understanding the current migration to Chile. Los Arenales residents are mainly Afro-Caribbean communities originating from Colombia, Venezuela, Haiti, Bolivia, and Peru. Los Arenales is a physical place where different layers of histories are entangled that, at first glance, are invisible in today's reality, but which come to the surface through the violent racist acts that are taking place in Chile against Afro-Caribbean communities. (Garland, 2024a: 26) [See Chapter 6]

5 By "field recording artists," I mean artists who engage in the artistic practice of field recording, as described by the curator Manel Benchabane: "[F]ield recording consists in recording sound landscapes in specific natural or built environments, in order to give sustained attention to the sounds that make up these landscapes" (2017). Field recording practice is the "sound perception" recorded and produced outside of a recording studio, focusing on recording human and non-human sounds as well as soil vibrations and underwater field recordings, among others (see Benchabane, 2017).

6 See Nick Kuepfer's website: <https://cstrecords.com/pages/artist/nick-kuepfer>

7 See Jana Winderen's website: <https://www.janawinderen.com>

For the sound installations I worked on during these years as part of the multisensory aspect of this research, I was mainly interested in using found tracks from the Huntley Film Archives and Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico, namely fragments of the film *Italia Vittoriosa* (1936), which depicts Italian migration to South America and its subsequent transmission of the colonial idea of a “glorious Italian past” to the South American territory, and from the film *Colonial Africa* (1940), featuring the paternalistic propaganda of British colonialism. In deciding to experiment with colonial archives sonically, I kept in mind the poetic idea of the ocean as a guiding thread and a catalyzing track as well as a compositional and theoretical container for colonial and contemporary stories of journeys through the Mediterranean and the English Channel toward the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. (Garland, 2024a: 27) [*To listen to a sound piece with these found tracks, please engage with the sonic-essay **Sound map of a migration Journey***⁸ (Garland, 2022)]

I am inspired by Johannes Ismaiel-Wendt’s (2013) notion of “track.” In his essay “Track Studies: Popular Music and Postcolonial Analysis,” Ismaiel-Wendt analyzes the idea of overlapping and looping in popular music as a counter-response to traditional linear-chronological narrative structures. My overlapping of tracks in the sound installations becomes a decolonial response to this linear way of storytelling, where mixing colonial sound archives (past) and sounds of the oceans and seas (present) allows for breaking with the linearity of storytelling. (Garland, 2022: 79)

In Ismaiel-Wendt’s words: “The track does not imagine a fixed entity, it does not know a single order of events—and thereby lacks a hierarchy between melody, sound, and rhythm—and it is polymorphous and free from the sole task of representation” (2013: 98).

I use the idea of the “catalyzing track” to refer to the movements of the oceans: not only to the flux of colonial trade and contemporary migration, but also to their power to connect and intertwine flows. In my sound installations, marine sound, ambient and underwater, conveys this poetic idea of navigating between the “West” and the “South,” allowing me to reinterpret colonial sonic archives [see Chapter 1]. I am interested in bringing these colonial soundtracks into an experimental and poetic context that differs from other sonic modalities dominated by a single narrative and colonial legacy, thus highlighting the idea that “sound cannot be sounding without the use of power” (Ong, 1999: 65). I consciously attune listeners to the sounds that occurred in a particular space–time, besides being careful not to reproduce a sense of violence and dominance when editing these sonic materials. (Garland, 2024a: 27)

In this context, I reflect on the possibility of sound and listening as an approach to political listening practices through situated knowledge. I borrowed the idea of decolonizing listening from the cultural center and sound residence Tsunami-BASE in Valparaíso, Chile. Their line of work focuses on how we listen, whether

8 click on <https://somerwhereinbetween.cargo.site/Sound-Map>

it is possible to approach the decolonization of listening, and to what extent this can be a liberating experience from the hegemonic power structures that define our ways of listening. Deep and decolonizing listening are possible responses to political acts toward the classical and academic ways of engaging with our surroundings. As I mentioned earlier, rethinking our approach to fieldwork allows us to go beyond the colonial structures present in scientific and academic methodologies and (in this case) to ask the question of “who can listen” (Ndikung, 2020) and “who can be listened to,” from a decolonial lens to the activation of the other as a political entity in response to the Eurocentric colonial legacy. (Garland, 2023)

Listening Oceans

Text fragments from the sonic-essay: “Collective listening as an ethnographic method: ‘Oceanic Memory’ a sonic experience as an active listening exercise.” Tsunami Ediciones Valparaíso (Garland, 2024b). My English translation.

SENSORY SATELLITES⁹

As part of one of my research exchange trips, I was invited by the Italian Center for Artistic and Nature Research L'Aquila Reale outside Rome to be part of an art residency to continue researching and collecting material on one of my case studies: Tiburtina in Rome. I was interested in focusing on the residency with the frame-idea of “listening and letting people be listened to,” working with the community of L'Aquila Reale. Through sound recordings of previous Roman urbanscapes and a collection of colonial sound archives, I was interested in providing a space for collective listening through sound. I designed a listening session called “Oceanic Memory,” highlighting the idea of collective listening not only to actively listen to the sound fragments I was exploring and collecting as part of the residency but also “to tune into the listening of the other,” to actively listen to the person who is close at the moment of listening. These collective active listening exercises are part of my juxtapositions between art and anthropology, where my initial questions were: Who do we listen to? (Ndikung, 2020); Who do we allow to be heard? This was inspired by the reflections of the anthropologist Bruno Latour, “How do we listen socially” (Latour, 2007). The theme produced was to engage with a space for reflection on the listening of people’s experiences on the notion of territory, heritage, and impact on the landscape. These threads are the ongoing thoughts of the L'Aquila Reale directors, reflecting on how the cultural center impacts the daily lives of people and the surrounding ecosystem (L'Aquila Reale Manifesto, 2020).

My initial interest in the residency was to create a space for collective listening to Italian colonial sound archives that I had encountered in my previous fieldwork as an alternative reflection on the cultural heritage underlying the tension of

9 To view and listen to the collective listening **Oceanic Memory** held in Italy, please click on <https://somerewhereinbetween.cargo.site/Oceanic-Memory>

Italian national pride and their approach to it today. In particular, I was interested in juxtaposing different historical layers between colonial archives and the African diaspora's contemporary migrations on Italian territory, layers that are not linked in the main national narrative of Italian heritage. These sound archives were mainly collected from the Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico (AAMOD). My interest in accepting the invitation to the residency at L'Aquila Reale and including it in my PhD exchange program was because they actively collaborated with the Museo delle Migrazioni of Lampedusa,¹⁰ a project of the Museum, Archive, and Center of Mediterranean Migration that rescued from destruction and collected hundreds of objects belonging to "migrants" who had landed on the island of Lampedusa since 2008.

During the residency, I focused on analyzing different recordings from these colonial sound archives to find the best way to share them with the community. I went back and forth many times about how I could make these records heard, or even whether it was appropriate to present them in an artistic-community context. One of my concerns was how these archives should be exhibited, since my intention was not to intervene in the sound material in any way, but rather to create accessibility. For me, it was important to handle these recordings with care—not only because of their quality and their historical and heritage value, but also to avoid a violent listening process for participants when presenting a past that could be uncomfortable for those who might "read between the lines" for the colonial propaganda (see Garland, 2022). I was concerned about how the community would react when a space was created to talk about Italian colonialism, its influence beyond Europe, its connection to the current reality of migration, and border regimes. These concerns arose from the fact that L'Aquila Reale is located in a mountain village inhabited mostly by people between 65 and 90 years old, born in the area. Therefore, it was a very specific audience facing urgent topics that are rarely addressed in everyday Italian life.

My intention was not to confront the community, much less to create discomfort by sharing these sound archives, but rather to test alternative modes of perception, where "listening and letting oneself be listened to" would serve as the basis for finding ways of "tuning in" toward openness and understanding of the information. I was inspired by decolonial and feminist ideas about ways of listening, based on care and affection for others as essential elements for an "affective and effective" listening. Because of these concerns, and given the short time of the residency, I decided to set aside the colonial sound archives and focus instead on natural soundscapes I was recording in parallel during my fieldwork. For this occasion, I used ocean recordings from the Mediterranean and the northern seas, such as the English Channel, without losing the essence of this collective listening, which sought to continue reflecting on the relationship between the colonial legacy, current migrations, and their confrontation with the border regime, taking

10 See <https://isole.blog/isola-06-2/museo-delle-migrazioni-di-lampedusa/>

care to consider what kinds of sounds could be shared with a specific community such as that of L'Aquila Reale.

I am aware that the transition from listening to colonial archives to marine soundscapes may at first seem like a complete change of perspective. Initially, it may be difficult to understand the logic behind incorporating ocean sounds into a collective listening experience about colonialism. I recognize the risk that this decision may seem superfluous, focused solely on the sonic aesthetics of a sea voyage, where the allure of the delicate ocean sound could divert attention from the focus of exploring the hidden layers of Italian colonialism within a contemporary migration context.

On the contrary, here the sensorial experience of immersing oneself in the sounds of water served as a respectful and symbolic mode to guide listeners through the different layers of past colonial histories and present migratory contexts. The interconnected narratives of the inhabitants of the Džjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, intertwined with the diverse legacies of colonialism spanning the Atlantic and Pacific oceans as well as the Mediterranean and Nordic seas, served as pivotal factors in my decision to present my archive of seascapes. The sensory stimulus of marine sounds acted as a gateway to a sonic exploration of colonialism, moving away from the dominant voices of power present in the propaganda of these archives. Instead, the ocean emerged as a non-human voice, guiding attentive, critical, supportive, and reflective contemplation.

The audio shared in this experience was a post-produced recording from my sound archive of oceans and seas, compiled over four years of this research, with approximately 50 samples from different areas of the Mediterranean, the North Sea, and the Pacific Ocean—particularly from the coasts of Calais, Naples, Lido di Ostia, Antofagasta, and Valparaíso. The recordings were made using environmental recorders and hydrophones to capture underwater sound. I was interested in using the poetics of ocean sound tracks as compositional and theoretical narratives of both colonial and contemporary journeys across the Mediterranean, the English Channel, and the Pacific Ocean. Rather than bringing the sounds of the colonial archives to start discussions about the European border regime, I wanted to open these reflections through the ambient and underwater sounds of these oceans, setting aside the propagandistic voice that resonates in the colonial archive and amplifying the texture and rhythms that nature—and in this case seawater—holds.

Through this exercise I sought to explore how audio tracks from the Mediterranean and the North Sea could create an environment conducive to addressing current migration in Italy and its colonial legacy. To achieve my purpose through a "Sonic-Lab" listening workshop, I used different types and formats of loudspeakers that I collected during the residency. Thanks to the help of some neighbors, as well as the village priest who lent me a megaphone from the nearby church used for processions during Holy Week, I obtained loudspeakers mainly from the 1960s. The particular narratives associated with each of these loudspeakers were also present in the collective listening. For me, it was important to recognize where

the loudspeakers came from, what they were used for, and their acoustic qualities, since there was a great difference in quality between the loudspeakers and the megaphones, where the lower tones were more noticeable, producing a more diffuse texture compared to the high-quality loudspeakers that could better reproduce the more sensitive details of the water recordings.

After our collective listening, the conversation opened up, unfolding different topics, relationships, and connections. The dialogue flowed naturally without a predetermined guide or dominant voices. We were able to talk about the tragic events currently unfolding in the Mediterranean, the shipwrecks that have become a daily occurrence, and how the sea has become a vast graveyard of drowned bodies, reminding us of the violence of border regimes. The participants made connections with Italian colonialism, especially seeing the links between Italy's colonial past in Eritrea and the current migration of this same community to Italy. In this circle of exchange, there was a calm and respectful atmosphere toward all participants. Thus, in this collective listening, it was possible to understand and demonstrate that dialogue without confrontation is possible. The absence of explicit conflict showed how participants were able to connect with each other, not only through shared sounds but also by listening to each other, leading to intellectual and emotional dialogues. In this sense, the decision not to share the recordings from the colonial archive was not only due to the fear of it becoming a violent act toward the community, but also opened up the possibility of sharing the sounds of water, of the oceans, which offered a more holistic mode of multisensory reflection.

In this context, I observed how ten minutes of collective listening to ocean sounds allowed participants to synchronize, vibrate, and resonate with one another. By tuning in to nature, we unlocked the potential for reciprocal listening: an intertwining of “affective and effective” engagement. This approach connects with the ideas of Michalinos Zembylas (2021) on “affective decolonization,” where the decolonization process involves not only knowledge and ideas, but also the emotional dimension. Decolonization, in this sense, must involve a transformation in the way we feel about and relate to colonial structures, especially in social and everyday contexts. In my experience with the collective listening method of the ocean sounds, I have observed how the process of tuning in and listening to the ocean allows participants to tune in and resonate with each other, creating a kind of emotional supportive body that goes beyond intellectual analysis. Zembylas argues that this type of transformation affects the “sensory structures” of colonialism, deeply rooted in our institutions, particularly in the Global North. In this sense, the emotional synchronization and resonance among participants while listening to ocean sounds can be understood as an exercise in “decolonizing solidarity” (Zembylas, 2021). Listening becomes a practice that goes beyond the simple passive reception of information and is transformed into a tool for building new ways of relating to others, to nature, and to the colonial legacies we are trying to understand and overcome.

Thus, the interrelation between affective listening and effective listening becomes relevant. By connecting with the sound of water, a space is opened where the past, present, and future coexist in a kind of space–time intertwining. This deep listening unlocks the potential for mutual attunement, where participants not only listen but are also being listened to, creating a space for affective encounter that challenges traditional hierarchies of knowledge and power. “Affective decolonization” requires a profound reconfiguration of our daily practices, especially in the way we facilitate learning and communicate with each other. In this sense, being able to facilitate a space for affective group listening, without imposing dominant narratives or voices and moving away from confrontation, become the core elements for affective decolonization. The acoustic elements of intonation, reciprocal listening, and emotional resonance invite a dialogue that decolonizes not only intellectual knowledge but also emotions and sensibilities, creating spaces of solidarity and deep understanding. (Garland, 2024b)

The Politics of Walking

SENSORY SATELLITES¹¹



My interest in documenting and producing sounds goes hand in hand with walking as a method of data collection during my fieldwork. The direct ties between sound and movement guide my artistic practices and ethnographic methods. Throughout my fieldwork, I critically engaged with walking and its performative nature, drawing upon concepts such as walking art, sonic and critical walking, the notion of *flânerie*, *dérive*, and sensobiographical walking—approaches that I experimented with as a form of multisensorial ethnography.

“Listening, walking, and recording became a kind of socially oriented and artistically informed performative act that guided me through the sensory experience” (Garland, Maier, and Taleb, 2024: 178), through a steady audio track that served as a means to engage with the diverse urban narratives encountered while traversing and engaging with the communities of the Dzjanganl, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales. The conscious decision to keep the recorder in “recording mode” throughout

11 For examples of walking exercises from the fieldwork, see: <https://somerwhereinbetween.ca/rgo.site/Critical-Walking>

my walks allowed me to immerse myself in urban sounds amplified and intensified by the recorder, many of which are imperceptible to the human ear. This amplification acted as my guide as I walked. By directing the microphone toward my surroundings, distinctive sounds would emerge, prompting me to pursue them. While the people walking through the cities of Calais, Rome, and Antofagasta served as my guides, the particular sounds I heard prompted me rhythmically and helped me make subtle decisions regarding my own position as a walker among others (see Garland, Maier, and Taleb, 2024).

By using a single, uninterrupted recording, I was able to cross different temporal and spatial forms of urban narratives that I came across during my walks. The entanglement of historical layers, especially those that trace colonial legacies on the city fabric, with the immediacy of the field, where languages, architectures, infrastructures, rhythms, and soundscapes converge, breaks with hierarchical sound narratives. This approach moves away from the colonial drive to impose a singular, linear narrative (Adichie, 2009). It aligns with Ismaiel-Wendt's (2013) claim about the analytical importance of "the track" versus the song in sound and music studies. By juxtaposing diverse perceptions within experiences of walking, it broadens the understanding of sound within the dynamics of movement, community, space, and time (Garland, 2022). "Listening and recording while walking" (Garland, Maier, and Taleb, 2024: 178), led me to reflect on how traces of fieldwork are collaboratively shaped by their inhabitants, their environments, and myself as a researcher. This marked the beginning of my reflections on mapping these encounters sonorously, uncovering alternative paths through the city, challenging conventional European cartographies by bringing a decolonial approach to walking (Garland, Maier, and Taleb, 2024).

My first experiment with walking as a method and an artistic process took place in Rome in 2021, during my first fieldwork trip as a PhD student, as part of my research on the Tiburtina community (see Chapter 1). As I have mentioned in previous chapters, this research started full-time when the pandemic began, which led me to restrict myself in many research areas, as in the case of traveling to the fieldwork location in 2020. By the middle of 2021, European restrictions were loosened, allowing me to travel to Italy. However, there were still restrictions on moving within the city, and public transport was one of the significant areas of contagion. Due to the great fear of contagion, I started to walk around the city between important spots for my research. My daily walks were between 5 and 17 km, totaling 219.5 km in one month, nearly the exact distance from Naples to Rome. These walks become a process of walking art, which highlights walking as an artistic practice, engaging walking to an aesthesis of performative approach, fostering a profound connection between body, mind, space, and time (see O'Rourke, 2013).

Walking art finds its roots in the work of the Psychogeographical Society and the Letterists, who between 1952 and 1957 explored the concept of the *dérive*, draw-

ing on the aesthetic and conceptual influences of Dadaism. By embracing the unguided walks of the *dérive*, they explored the construction of the city and its impact on one's sensory experiences while traversing it. The artist Guy Debord encapsulates the "*dérive* [literally: 'drifting'] a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. *Dérives* involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects" (Debord, 1958: 1). These modes of walking through the city have been a significant influence on my own way of walking through the urban space, which, through the lens of the migratory routes encountered in my fieldwork, gave me the opportunity to grasp in very humble way some of the tactics used by the inhabitants of the Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales when crossing European and South American urban and land spaces by foot to reach the cities of Calais, Rome, and Antofagasta.

My daily walks were a means for casual encounters with people-in-transit wandering around the city. In some cases, the starting point of conversation was about "walking." Many of them had walked (and sporadically taken buses and cars) from their hometowns in Somalia, Sudan, and Ethiopia via Libya and Tunisia (approx. 6,000 km), and were starting a new walking route from Calabria, the last Italian city, to Rome (approx. 600 km). Mainly, they mentioned it was safer to walk in Italy than to go by car, train, or bus, avoiding the border controls Italy was already at that time implementing more frequently in train and bus stations. These narratives were echoed in the stories of Venezuelan and Colombian walkers, mainly couples, families, and single women, whom I met on the desert route at the Antofagasta, Chile gateway, where they traveled by foot from their homeland to Chile. Their journeys were from Venezuela and Colombia, crossing the jungles and forests of Ecuador and Peru, then to the Bolivian Altiplano, and from there through the Atacama Desert to the northeast of Chile (approx. 7,000 km).

As I listened to these accounts, it became clear that these collective groups of walkers embody some of the most extreme strategies of mobility today, confronting the resistance inherent in the act of walking itself, including its physical and emotional aspects on both personal and collective levels when crossing borders. "Migrant Caravans," currently a hot topic in migratory studies—such as the well-known paths from Central America to the United States—are a good example of embodying the collective nature of walking as a form of protest and resistance against border regimes. The politicization of the "walking migrant body" in these contexts offers a political perspective on migration journeys.

By collectively walking through land and urban spaces, these communities reclaim the mobility and agency that contemporary border regimes have restricted (Wurtz, 2020). Despite the numerous dangers encountered during long walks, such as human traffickers, police checks, adverse weather conditions, and wildlife, the risks are perceived as minor compared to those faced daily when traveling alone, especially in the case of women and children, as is often seen in journeys from Central

to South America. Paradoxically, the road can be perceived as safer than their own homes, as anthropologist Polly Pallister-Wilkins suggests in her essay “Walking, Not Flowing” (2019), quoting the poet Waeshan Shire’s touching observation: “No one would put their children on a boat unless the water was safer than the land.” This stresses the idea that people would only venture on journeys of thousands of miles if the road seemed safer than their homes.

Building on these embodied experiences of mobility, these narratives also resonate in the realm of walking art, inspiring many artists-in-transit to weave their personal journeys into their creative expressions, whether to ponder the act of crossing borders or to explore the barriers to their own body and mobility. During my fieldwork in Rome, I had the privilege of encountering Kinga Araya, a well-known Polish artist whose notable work includes the performance piece *Ten Steps: Walking in Circles, Performing Exile*, presented at ICI Berlin in 2008 (see Mythogeography, 2010). In this performance, Araya intertwines the principles of walking art with her own narrative of exile, recounting her journey from Poland to Canada, navigating various European borders on foot. Araya’s artistic endeavors stand as a testament to the potential of walking art in conveying the resilience of the human body amidst the challenges of displacement. Araya’s personal account reminded me of the various stories I encountered during my walks through Rome, Calais, and Antofagasta. The walkers I met, with their unique life stories, represented singular positions on the experience of migration. On the one hand, Araya, a woman in her 20s at the time of her exile, occupies a particular positionality as she recounts Poland’s political past. On the other hand, the young people of the African diaspora who crossed Italy and France in search of refuge, or the Venezuelan and Colombian families who traveled the desert route in Chile, offer another perspective on the “migrant” experience. Different periods and locations are shaped by forced and dangerous mobility.

In this sense, by approaching these experiences of mobility through a performative and embodied lens, the “migrant walker” highlights the sensory dimensions of these experiences. Beyond recounting their journeys, these travelers embody the act of walking—physically, psychologically, and emotionally—offering a visceral account of their realities as they navigate unfamiliar urban landscapes. Many of those I met during my walks spoke of the transformative impact that walking had on their bodies. The physical exhaustion served as a tangible marker of the miles traveled, distinguishing between the arduous journey from their countries of origin to their final destination. A journey steeped in uncertainty, where walking became synonymous with “waiting” and “passing time.” This phenomenon echoes the themes explored in Chapter 6 of this book, in particular the idea of *waiting as motion* (SAVVY Contemporary Berlin, 2022). The interaction between time, bureaucracy, and the “integration” process shaped by the border regime underscores the profound implications of mobility, or lack of it, for the people crossing the turbulence of today’s border regimes.

In turn, these embodied experiences shaped a shared awareness among the people I encountered. This was the embodiment of the “foreigner” experience in cities that often don’t welcome them. Many expressed a tangible sense of rejection, experiencing a feeling of being an “outsider.” This was particularly present in cities like Calais, Rome, and Antofagasta, where the “migrant body” presence was starkly evident, especially against certain urban backdrops that accentuated the contrast between the “insider” and the “outsider.” The presence of the “migrant body” as an outsider was clearer during the pandemic, when the police more often asked them for identity and vaccination documents. In this time, it was possible to observe how the borders were moving within the territory: checkpoints at terminals, borders between cities and neighborhoods, so-called “sanitary cordons.” Paradoxically, these shifting borders were already visible to people-in-transit within Europe before the beginning of the pandemic—as in the case of France, where the English border was already demarcated in Paris and other big cities, facing the migratory flows traveling toward Calais. These checkpoints in Parisian terminals were only for “the migrants.” The French and English police stopped these groups, asking for their documents and checking if they were already in the European Union database. What we could experience globally in times of pandemic had already been done many times before, only the “target” was different, reaffirming the difference between “who can cross” and “who is stopped.”

Therefore, walking becomes not only a way to pass time, but, in the case of people-in-transit, a vital means of reaching destinations within and outside the urban space. By avoiding border controls within cities, these walkers resist the label of “outsider,” disappearing through the city streets. In this sense, the daily experiences endured by these walkers as they traversed the urban landscapes were characterized by transient and deeply personal narratives, etched primarily upon their own bodies. These walks take place in a context of danger, rejection, and racism, where the road offers little refuge. Walking art encapsulates this essence of the ephemeral and the personal, transforming the act of walking into a sensory and emotional documentation in which the body itself becomes the “artifact” and the “archive” that witnesses the countless experiences lived along the way.

It is in this regard that the practices of “Walking Art”—whether along migratory routes with political significance or in conceptual artistic works—could share a common language of transience, embodiment, and the traces they leave behind. Richard Long’s 1967 exhibition *A Line Made by Walking*¹² is one of the most emblematic examples of walking as trace-making (see Tate Collection, 2007): Long walks back and forth across an area of grass, documented with a single photograph of the field and the trampled line. Long turns the idea of walking and its notion of ephemerality toward documentation of it through an intervention by his footsteps in the grass. This

12 See <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/long-a-line-made-by-walking-p07149>

linear trace produced by his repeated walking shows that art is the walk itself: “walking as art,” as he argues, which by its temporary nature cannot be documented *per se*. With this, Long claims that walking is itself the art and documentation will only be able to address some of the elements of the walking process. The photographic image of the line as a trace of his footsteps is the presentation of the figure of walking that is lost, uncapturable, mysterious, and modest, where the walker is absent, and only his traces can be perceived (Overend and Smith, 2010). Long’s work took walking art in a new direction of interpretation, recognizing that walking is a “private performance,” as the art critic Waldemar Januszczak (1983) points out when referring to Long’s work. By dealing with the absence that walking produces, it becomes a performative process between body and mind, an intimate and private process.

However, when contrasted with the realities experienced by people-in-transit, walking as a solitary, almost contemplative act carries a different weight. The wanderings experienced by people-in-transit within the cityscape stand in stark contrast to the romanticized notion of the “flâneur”—a literary figure popularized in 19th-century Europe, particularly in France, and later embraced by the European bourgeois upper classes. Throughout the history of walking art, this archetypal figure was initially portrayed as an urban white male wanderer—writers and artists like Charles Baudelaire, Vito Acconci, and Paul Smith, among others—leaving aside the portrayal of the “migrant,” destitute, female, and other figures representing the idea of the absent other. Recent scholarship, notably exemplified by feminist historians, has sought to challenge this masculine hegemony surrounding the concept of the “flâneur.” Drawing on the works of writers like Virginia Woolf and George Sand, scholars have advocated for a more inclusive perspective, represented by the notion of the “flâneuse.” This concept, as described by Stephanie Loveless in her text “Tactical Soundwalking in the City: A Feminist Turn from Eye to Ear” (2020), re-frames walking as a feminist and ecological endeavor—an embodied engagement with the environment that counters the detachment associated with the traditional male flâneur.

Loveless, building upon the insights of Lauren Elkin, presents the flâneuse as an active participant in her surroundings, avoiding the aimless wandering of her male counterpart in favor of a more purposeful and attentive exploration. Unlike the emotionally detached flâneur, the flâneuse is acutely aware of her environment, her body visible and receptive to the multisensoriality that surrounds her. This reimagining of the urban experience extends beyond gender to encompass the people-in-transit perspective, where the “migrant’s body” becomes both a vessel for absorbing the city’s burdens and a target for invisibilization. Walking through unfamiliar streets, the “migrant” navigates a landscape that simultaneously marginalizes and alienates—a visibilization of invisibilization is experienced, where the “migrant’s body” absorbs the burden of their environment. These alternative perceptions of the urban experience, which highlight marginalized voices, underscore the vulnerabil-

ity inherent in walking through the postmodern urban landscape. By adopting a sensory and bodily approach to walking, based on feminist principles, walking becomes a political-performative act, in which the marginalized body actively engages with the city environment, even in the face of hostility and indifference.

It is within this reframing of walking as both embodied and politically charged that the notion of “Decolonial Flânerie,” introduced by anthropologist and colleague Adela Taleb (Römhild et al., 2021) and produced since 2020 by Amo collective Berlin¹³, becomes particularly relevant. This method challenges the traditionally individualistic, white, male, and bourgeois nature of flânerie, instead exploring its potential as a transformative practice that uncovers marginalized histories within the urban landscape. Decolonial flânerie involves exploring hidden traces of forgotten and marginalized communities that traversed European streets. This method encourages envisioning how these marginalized groups would navigate city spaces and engage in flânerie, while also valuing their alternative perspectives on urban life and movement. Thus, the approach of decolonial flânerie interprets the city as an archive that challenges dominant narratives. Urban infrastructures in the European cities carry historical colonial imprints, but the decolonial flâneur interprets these inscriptions from a different perspective. By reading the city topography involving imagination, storytelling, and speculation, decolonial flânerie offers a non-canonical view of urban landscapes (Garland, Maier, and Taleb, 2024: 177).

From the experimentations of decolonial flânerie as a critical and collective walking method, we initiated together with colleagues Carla Maier and Adela Taleb questions of how we feel about the city from a decolonial perspective, through an invitation from the editors of the book *Owned by Others: A Map to Possession Island* (Springer and Walch, 2024), which examines the scope for action of artistic interventions by exploring the gaps of an “institutionally mummified city center.” It interrogates the Museum Island zone in Mitte-Berlin as a place constituted by layers of locations and objects and narratives accumulated in collections (Springer and Walch, 2024: 10). Within this framework, we produced the piece “Decolonial Flânerie: Sensing the City ‘Otherwise,’” an interactive essay about our experiences and reflections around the second decolonial flânerie event by Amo collective Berlin (2022).

We investigate the public walk as a critical intervention into urban space that seeks to highlight the forgotten layers of the city. And we seek to encourage other

13 **Amo Collective Berlin** is a group of students, artists, scholars, and members of civil society based at the Institut für Europäische Ethnologie, part of Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. The collective emerged through the anti-racist and decolonial struggles surrounding the renaming of our street after Afro-German Enlightenment philosopher and anti-racist pioneer of the early 18th century: Anton Wilhelm Amo. See more in <https://amo-collective.org/>

decolonial flâneurs to engage in performative, collective walking, and how it may encourage us to sense and to listen to the urban space “otherwise”—that is, to read and perceive the city’s archives against the grain of its colonialist inscriptions—and to make space for excluded and silenced voices, bodies, and stories. (Garland, Maier, and Taleb, 2024: 176)

This collaborative engagement with decolonial flânerie continued to resonate beyond Berlin, shaping the way I approached my own walking practices in Rome, Calais, and Antofagasta. In these cities, the method took on new dimensions, leading me to reflect on walking as a form of decolonial action within the rigid colonial urban frameworks that still define cities today. As I immersed myself in the sounds and sensations of these landscapes, intertwined with the stories of walkers crossing border regimes, I was able to perceive walking more clearly as an act that challenges and resists the power structures so deeply entrenched in urban spaces. Questions surrounding the notion of what constitutes a decolonial walk and how people being marginalized can engage with the city from their unique perspectives guided my reflections. I came to view walking as a method of intimately documenting and experiencing the city through a sensory lens that transcends conventional modes of exploration. This *aesthesis* became a methodological cornerstone of my fieldwork, allowing me to navigate and interpret the complexities of postcolonial urban environments through the lens of a “decolonial flâneuse.”