

SoundEffects



An Interdisciplinary Journal of Sound and Sound Experience

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**Sound installation art and the
intervention of urban public
space in Latin America**

www.soundeffects.dk



SoundEffects | vol. 10 | no. 1 | 2021

issn 1904-500X

Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between sound installation art and the appropriation of urban public spaces in Latin America.

Latin America is a continent full of contrasts, and in various places throughout the countries, space reflects the history of each nation through its architecture. We find pre-Hispanic pyramids coexisting with colonial churches and modern buildings. In the last two decades, these sites have been used for purposes other than those for which they were created. On the one hand, these spaces have been used to provide cultural experiences for people in areas that cannot access traditional venues such as concert halls. On the other hand, political manifestations have adopted such places as icons of social change, and sound has been used to provide a social/cultural meaning, using the space as a medium. These activities have changed the ways in which audiences and creators relate to sound and space.

This research paper explores how sound art and technology have been used to re-formulate public space in cities. The study analyses the strategies of major works and installations (that have used space as a medium of creation over the last twenty years in Latin America) from social and spatial perspectives. This paper highlights the potential of sound installation art and intervention of space as a way to engage audiences in urban contexts.

Introduction

Space and sound were important concepts in pre-Hispanic societies as was the use of public spaces for communal activities and artistic expression. Space and sound played an important role in religious calendars and in the everyday life of societies during the colonization period and have remained important after the countries gained their independence. The Mexican muralist movement at the beginning of the 20th century is a key example which displays how artists took advantage of public spaces to address social issues. With the advent of technological advances during the latter part of the 20th century, artists were able to incorporate these tools to explore new ways of using space in sound installation art in public areas. It is important to note that it is not only composers who use sound in their works, also various visual artists have incorporated sound into their practices. This research paper will explore sound installation art in public spaces in various Latin American countries, focusing on recent works of the 21st century. As an analysis of works from the entire Latin American region goes beyond the scope of this paper, we decided to focus on examples of works from the four countries with the largest population sizes: Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, and Colombia. According to the World Bank (2020), these four countries have had the largest populations of all Latin American countries since 1960 and will continue to do so until 2050. Also, the geographical loca-

tions of these countries provide an overview of the different areas of Latin America: Mexico is located in North America, Colombia is located in the northern part of South America, whilst Brazil and Argentina encompass the southerly region of South America. In addition to the four countries with the largest population sizes, it is also pertinent to include Chile in the discussion because of a pioneering sound art work with political motivations that was presented in a public space in Santiago in the 1970s.

In Mexico, prior to the arrival of the conquistadors, sound was incorporated into everyday life and festivities of the Náhuatl culture. Music was believed to have a divine origin and claimed to originate from *Ehécatl* (the Náhuatl God of the Wind), whilst songs were considered as a method of dialogue with one's own heart. Sound played an important role in battles, birthdays, marriages, and funerals as well as in the accompaniment of the festivities of the solar calendar. An example of this is the *Fiesta de Atamalculiztli* (a spring planting festival which marked the start of the rainy season), in which the *sacerdotes* (priests) sang in addition to playing wind and percussion instruments. The center of the ritual was the sound itself and not the spoken word. Music was so fundamental that it was referred to as a source of life for the cities. The Florentine Codex claims that cities such as Culhuacán, Xochimilco, and Chalco were formed through music. Singing, dancing, and praying accompanied a culture that appeared to die out with the colonial period (León-Portilla, 2019, pp. 32-33).

On the other hand, in the Mayan tradition, music was associated with ritual ceremonies. Evidence of this is found in the murals of the Mayan city of Bonampak in Chiapas (Both, 2008). Moreover, Ishihara (2009) argues that music was the main element in ritual ceremonies for the rain and played an important role in the rituals in El Peten, Guatemala.

However, after the Spanish conquest, sound was incorporated into the new religion and the new way of thinking. In 1645, a chronicler described how parties in the new colonial society resembled the festivities of the past as they continued to take place in the streets, incorporating the use of pre-Hispanic instruments. Rhythm remained a key aspect of these celebrations. A *tocotín*, an onomatopoeic term to describe the sound of drums, called the participants to dance. The echoes of the past resonate in today's Mexican culture. In modern day Mexico City, *toquín* (a term related to the ancient word) is a colloquial phrase that describes a street party where the residents appropriate the public space and close the street to traffic. Portal & Álvarez (2011) argue that Mexico City's urban social groups have incorporated ancient traditions into the catholic tradition. Instead of worshipping pre-Hispanic gods, catholic saints are celebrated in parties which take place in streets, squares, church grounds, and markets. In modern day Mexico City, there is a "blending of

symbols, traditions and practices of the pre-Hispanic past with the colonial preindustrial period and more recent urban capitalism” (Ramírez-Kuri, 2015, p.28).

Daumal et al. (2015) argue that each city has its own sonic fingerprint, meaning that each city has its own specific set of characteristic or trademark sounds through which we can identify and discuss its history, culture, and architecture, an idea which resonates with the pre-Hispanic notion of sound as the source of formation and life of the city. Latin American cities such as Mexico City often contain complex sonic fingerprints due to its contrasting spaces. An example which illustrates this spatial juxtaposition is the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas* which reflects three different periods of Mexico City’s history: the pre-Colombian, the colonial, and the independence periods. Within the plaza, the ruins of a pre-Hispanic pyramid stand alongside the *College of Santa Cruz* (a colonial church built in 1564) and a 20th century housing complex (built in 1964). The complex sonic fingerprints of Latin American cities can provide stimulus for the realization of sound installation art in public spaces. According to *Ocupa Tu Calle, ONU-Habitat & Fundación Avina* (2018), a public space is defined as a non-profit space that is freely accessible to everyone. It includes: streets, parks, open spaces, and public buildings (libraries, museums etc.). It is stressed that these public spaces are important for a citizen’s individual and social wellbeing, for community life, expressions of diversity, and for establishing identity.

The emergence of sound installation art in public spaces has brought about fundamental changes with regard to the way in which artists use and respond to space as well as in terms of how they communicate with the public. According to Sanio (2019), the musical discovery of public space by Fluxus artist Max Neuhaus in the 1960s was an important breakthrough in the sonic arts. Moreover, Ouzounian (2013) states that throughout the latter part of the 20th century, the evolution of sound installation art triggered a variety of changes with respect to the use of public space and led to artists using architecture as a means of communicating, in the same way as the Mexican muralists used the walls of public buildings to convey historical moments in the country’s past to incite public consciousness and deliver socialist political messages (Coffey, 2012). In the muralist culture, the spectator was of the utmost importance and public spaces were used to engage directly with the public. Bishop (2006) defines installation art as being directed to the spectator and serving as a literal presence in the space. However, sound installation art in public spaces has been criticized for not effectively engaging with the spectators to the same extent as the art works of the Mexican muralists. Casacuberta (2003) argues that sound installation art in public spaces attracts more interest from aficionados of the arts than the general public who do not have a sense of ownership of these works, leading to a lack of interaction with new audiences. Sound installation art in public spaces which involves active public participation in the creation of the work

creates a more convincing interaction with the audience (Casacuberta, 2003). Similarly, Ouzounian (2013) questions whether sound installation art in public spaces can truly engage with the public, arguing that when space is “socially and politically constituted”, an effective dialogue with the public can be achieved (p. 73).

It is necessary to highlight that the aforementioned studies deal with sound installation art within the European context. With respect to Latin American literature, Ortiz Cerón (2018) has provided a definition of sound installation art which focuses on the importance of the spectator’s experience and the relationship between sound and space. Ortiz Cerón argues that sound installation art is related to territory as it implies an association between the listener and the place. Within sound installation art you see an experimentation with the plasticity of sound and the architectural space which transforms the spectator’s impression of the space (Ortiz Cerón, 2018). The Brazilian authors Campesato and Iazzetta (2006) also highlight the importance of space in sound installation art, claiming that the space in which a work is presented is part of its construction, and that it is not just the acoustic elements of the space that come into play, but the totality of meanings that space generates (Campesato, Iazzetta, 2006). These definitions point to the importance of space for the Latin American concept of sound installation art.

Other studies of sound installation art in Latin America have been carried out, such as Chaves and Iazzetta’s discussion of the history of Brazilian sound art and its links to the countries’ political and social landscape (2019) and Kühne’s examination of the political discourses of sound installation art in various Latin American countries (2019). However, as Noya (2019) states, within the Latin American context, these artistic manifestations have not been adequately studied, leading to a lack of documented material. Noya (2012) argues that sound installation art incorporates sound in a way that goes beyond the boundaries of musical formality, and that many of the first works were created by visual artists and not composers. This has led to sound installation art becoming an ambiguous genre which does not fit into one specific field. Furthermore, Ouzounian (2013) believes that due to its disorientated position in comparison with other more established art forms, sound installation art has been largely neglected. In order to address this lack of documentation of sound installation art in Latin America, this research paper presents a series of case studies of recent works in various Latin America countries: Chile, Argentina, Colombia, Brazil, and Mexico. A full examination of sound installation art in the entire Latin American region goes beyond the scope of this paper. We have decided to focus on a selection of prominent works of sound installation art from the aforementioned countries in order to examine how artists use and respond to public urban space, thus providing an introduction to current artistic practices in this geographical area.

Narratives of Space

In order to analyze the way in which Latin American artists have approached the use of public space in sound art installations, we will use the following terms proposed by Schroeder (2016, p. 149):

- sonic activism
- sonic preservation
- sonic participatory action
- sonic narrative of space

Schroeder has proposed these narratives of space in order to enhance our understanding of the relationships between sites and sound and of the way in which artists use spaces to create an aesthetic discourse to deliver social messages (2016, p. 249). This taxonomy was originally created to describe a work of sound installation art which took part in a public space, specifically a cathedral, but these terms can also be applied to installations in other kinds of public spaces.

Sonic activism involves the use of space to convey a political message (Schroeder, 2016). Sonic participatory action makes the public aware of its own sonic environment through the process of listening or through direct involvement in the creation of the work (Schroeder, 2016, p. 257). Sonic preservation means to “preserve a particular space and its sonic properties” that have a cultural meaning for a community, whilst the “sonic narrative of space interweaves sites with sounds or sounds with sites, drawing out narratives from the sonic-spatial potential of the sites” (Schroeder, 2016, pp. 250-256).

We complement these four narratives of space with an additional term, sonic “innovation of the social space”, which has been proposed by Ocupa Tu Calle, ONU-Habitat y Fundación Avina in Lima, Peru (2018, p. 68). The innovation of a public space includes the transformation of its perceptions and meanings by using the space in a new and periodic way which can either entail using the space by itself or adding extra resources and materials to complement the space (Ocupa Tu Calle, ONU-Habitat y Fundación Avina, 2018, 68). We can observe this sonic innovation of the social space in everyday Latin American culture in the example of the *toquín* (street parties) in working class neighborhoods in Mexico City. In these neighborhoods, there is no designated space for parties or group festivities, but the residents appropriate the space by adding speakers, tables, lights, and stages to transform the meaning and usage of the space. Another example of sonic innovation of the social space is the Mexican *Sonideros* which has similarities with the *Picotereros* in Columbia and the *Technobrega* in Brazil (López-Cano, 2015). According to Kun (2015), all of these share a basic structure which comprises a sound system that can be transported

and set up anywhere in order to customize or hijack the public space with the objective of performing music for large audiences in working class neighborhoods. Kun (2015) describes these activities as “communal rituals” which mimic the “microcosms of the social, cultural and economic sonic relationships of the areas in which they take place” (p. 535).

López-Cano (2015) and Kun (2015) agree that “dialogic messaging” is a main feature of the interaction with the community during these street performances. This dialogic messaging involves interspersing personal messages provided by members of the community before, after or during the musical performance (such as prayers, dedications of love, greetings and political commentaries about local issues) (Kun, 2015). These spoken messages are delivered by the DJ, and various electronic sound transformations, such as delay, pitch shifting, and reverb, are applied to the voice. In the examples of the *Sonideros*, *Picoterros* and *Technobrega*, sonic innovation of the space is present because extra resources (the portable sound system and electronic equipment) are added to the space to transform its use. These examples display how sonic innovation of public urban space can be observed in everyday Latin American culture and in working class environments, showing that the tendency to incorporate sound in public spaces continues to be an important aspect of life in these countries. Social gathering in the public space is a key feature of both past and present Latin American societies.

Sonic activism in Chile: An artistic reply to politics

Some of the first examples of sound installation art in public spaces in Latin America appeared in Chile in the 1970s. The Chilean coup d'état in 1973 triggered a range of political artistic responses in the country. The Chilean interdisciplinary artistic collective CADA was formed in 1979 and included a writer, a poet, a sociologist, and two visual artists amongst its members. The group's first work *Para no de morir de hambre en el arte* (*Not to Die of Hunger in Art*), created in 1979, was the very first example of a public sound intervention in Chile. The aim of the work was to raise public awareness of the lack of food resources in deprived communities in Santiago, and it was realized in different stages. During the first stage, 100 packages of milk were provided to the inhabitants of a deprived community and, afterwards, the empty containers were recovered to be included later as part of the work's documentation. The second stage was to publish a text in a magazine, designed to provoke readers to imagine a blank page as a metaphor for the milk and to draw awareness to the privatization of milk and milk shortages. During the third stage, a text was read aloud in the five official languages of the United Nations (Chinese, Spanish, French, English, and Russian) in front of the building of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. During the reading of the text, the speech

was recorded and amplified through loudspeakers. Finally, the group documented all the stages of the work. The used milk containers, the page of the magazine, and a recording of the live performance outside of the UN building were placed in a transparent box which was exhibited in an art gallery.

Para no de morir de hambre en el arte is a clear example of sonic activism, as it includes the reading and amplification of a text outside of a public building that represents political power. The artists appropriate a politically significant building to create a sonic political discourse to diffuse their ideas to the surrounding community. According to Schroeder (2016), sonic activism entails the use of a “public site perceived to be politically or culturally meaningful being infiltrated or appropriated by sonic activities” (p. 255). Sound is a significant component of the work. In this work, “what is important is that the sound is used as a vehicle to express an idea. Sound is absolutely irreplaceable, since in the context of the work, the only way that this discourse reaches all people is through the amplification of the discourse.” (Estrada Zuñiga & Lagos Rojas, 2010, p. 70). A feature of the work was that it connected the gallery and museum space with the public space, and this enabled the diffusion of the political message to a wider audience. It originates from the public space of the deprived working-class neighborhoods, transfers to the politically significant public building, and finally rests in an art gallery.



Figure 1 The Inside of Victor Jara Stadium, Santiago, Chile. Photo by Jaime Soto Ceura.

Sonic activism continues to be a key feature of sound art installations in Chile in the 21st century. *Estadio Chile I, II & III* (2009) by Lotty Rosenfeld (1943–2020) is a trilogy of sound art installations presented in public spaces that display characteristics of sonic activism. *Estadio Chile I* uses sound samples taken from a previous video installation called *El empeño latinoamericano*¹ (1988). The visual aspect of the work is projected onto the outside of the Stock Exchange building in Santiago whilst the sound is diffused around the perimeter of the building (Hemispheric Institute, 2007). The work's aim was to criticize the excesses of the neoliberal economic policies. The following two parts of the trilogy use sound and space, rather than visual projections, as the principal parameters to create immersive experiences.

Estadio Chile II is a sound intervention of the Victor Jara Stadium in Santiago which was used as a military detention center during Pinochet's regime. Rosenfeld used six audio tracks of fragments of vocal materials which contained social and political commentary. In juxtaposition to this vocal material, Rosenfeld also included soundscapes of the neighborhoods close to the stadium. The work was designed to call out the modern day authorities' lack of response to the Pinochet regime.

Estadio Chile III uses audio recordings from the first two parts of the trilogy which are now amplified inside a coal mine (called *El Chiflón del Diablo*) located in Lota (a city in southern Chile). This location is significant because the closing of the mine in 1997 provoked social problems in the local area due to the loss of employment (Hemispheric Institute, 2007).

All three parts of the trilogy are presented in spaces that have political and cultural significance which is a key characteristic of sonic activism. The second part of the trilogy displays a particularly complex approach to the use of public space as, although its main feature is sonic activism, other sonic narratives are also present in the work. Sonic narrative of space is observed, as the sonic-spatial potential of the Victor Jara stadium is being explored through the use of several audio tracks with specific sound materials, such as body noises, spoken words, and soundscapes. These sonic entities interact across the space, using the stadium as a sounding board. The addition of the soundscapes of the local communities surrounding the stadium conveys sonic preservation as they act as a means of preserving sonic properties that have meaning for the community. These soundscapes could also serve as sonic participatory action as they encourage the local community to actively listen to their own sonic environment. All parts of the trilogy give new meanings to the spaces where the sonic interventions take place, creating innovation of the social space.

Sonic preservation in Argentina: A dialogue with the past

In the case of Argentina, the works we will discuss both use architecture to establish a dialogue with the past and use sound to evoke images of important moments



Figure 2. Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

and figures from Argentina's history. The work *Mayo, los sonidos de la Plaza (1945-2001)*, created in 2003 by the artist collective *Buenos Aires Sonora*, was specifically conceived for the public space in which it is realized, the *Plaza de Mayo* (the *May Square*), located in Buenos Aires. The square has been described by Martin Luit (one of the members of *Buenos Aires Sonora*) as “deeply symbolic” as it has been the location for various cultural events and demonstrations (2009, p. 86). According to Luit, the work is “an attempt to convey other ways of perceiving and understanding the city, not only in auditory terms, but also in social and political terms through the use of an artistic approach that stresses sound instead of visual media” (2006, 86). The collective's aims are to “evoke memories of historical events through *sonic images*” to “demonstrate that the public space could be seen as a great theater, a container of acoustic art” and “to show that there is musical potential in the objects present in the space” (Luit, 2006, p. 86).

The work's audio system comprised a ring of nine columns of loudspeakers placed in a circle around the square's main monument. The main objectives of this audio configuration were to sonically immerse the public and to create a polyphonic dialogue with the sound material. The audio materials contained fragments of key

historical speeches from figures such as Juan Perón, Evita, and Menem, to name a few. These historical speeches were juxtaposed with soundscapes of political demonstrations and events that had taken place in the square, such as the Bombing of Plaza de Mayo of June 16, 1956, and the riots of 2001 known as *cacerolazo*. The *cacerolazo* riots are important in the narrative because sound played a key role in the demonstrations as people went into the streets, banging on saucepans in order to draw attention (Luit, 2009).

Tertulia, Intervención en el Cementerio Recoleta (2005), an audio-visual intervention by Nicolás Varchausky and Eduardo Molinari, also aims to create a dialogue with Argentina's past. The artists state that the "project proposed a metaphorical conversation with important cultural and political figures or national *heroes* from different spheres", (Varchausky & Molinari, 2016, p. 17). The work took place at night in the *Recoleta* cemetery in Buenos Aires. Archival audio extracts of historical figures' speeches, which formed the work's primary sound material, were juxtaposed with sounds of animals, cries, guns, and diverse objects. The artists selected forty tombs in the cemetery, and next to each one they placed visual and sound material which related to the person resting in that space. The sound system comprised forty speakers which were placed next to the forty tombs. According to Pablo Di Liscia (2016),



Figure 3. Cementerio de la Recoleta, Argentina.

this work attempted to extend the historical and emotional meaning of the place into the acoustic environment in order to add new meaning to the original space.

These two works are examples of sonic preservation. In the case of *Mayo, los sonidos de la Plaza (1945-2001)*, an iconic place is used to produce a dialogue between the past and the present through the diffusion of sonically preserved materials. Sounds of the past, sounds of recent events, and the soundscape of the actual environment are blended into one single sonic experience. In the same direction, *Tertulia, Intervención en el Cementerio Recoleta*, uses archival recordings, images, and architecture for the purpose of bringing the spectator into a dialogue with the important people of Argentina's past. *Tertulia* in Spanish means an informal meeting where people gather to discuss everyday life and topics which concern them. The intervention tries to accomplish this gathering of people and create a space in which they can converse. In sonic preservations, there is a "real concern for the psychological impact that soundscapes can have on humans" (Schroeder, 2016, p. 256). In both works, the listener's psychological response is important as both are designed to provoke emotional responses in the listener, using sound and space to evoke memories.

Sonic participatory action in Brazil:

Community as performance

The work *Promenade (2013)* created by the Brazilian artist Dudu Tsuda is an example of sonic participatory action as it directly involves members of the community in the performance and realization of the piece. The work's audio material comprises ten sonic textures that are distributed to the residents of ten different apartments in a street. Each resident receives a different sonic texture, and the residents are encouraged to play their texture out of their apartment window, all ten apartments at the same time. The selection of the apartments and the decisions about the distribution of the sound textures are carried out according to an acoustic plan which is adapted to the particular spaces available. The intention is that more acute and diffuse textures are distributed to apartments on the upper floors whilst the textures with more attack, which contain the main melodic lines, are given to apartments on central and lower floors. The project is subject to any type of limitation that may occur in the street in which it is realized. This might include practical limitations concerning facilities (for example, power availability or lack of equipment) as well as limitations concerning the residents and their time availability and willingness to participate. The process of personal negotiation with the residents is a fundamental part of the work (Tsuda, 2016).

A significant feature of the work is its portability. *Promenade* can be realized in any street, and this characteristic is reminiscent of the previously discussed Mexican *Sonideros* and the Brazilian *Technobrega* which involve the transportation of a

sound system which can be set up in any location to transform the space. In this way, the work is also an example of the Latin American cultural tendency to sonically innovate a social space. The work transforms a street into a performance space which changes its use, meaning, and purpose.

Sonic innovation of the social space in Columbia:

Transforming the social space

The Latin American tendency to sonically innovate a social space is demonstrated by the permanent sound-sculpture *Escenario en Construcción (Scenario in Construction)* (2017) by Oswaldo Maciá, located in a busy roundabout in the university district of Bogotá. The sound sculpture is formed by five steel cones and open cubes, and in the last minute of every hour, from 7am to 7pm, it reproduces one-minute of audio which is composed from the sounds of 1900 species of birds which inhabit Columbia (Maciá, 2017).

Ocupa Tu Calle, ONU-Habitat & Fundación Avina (2018) define innovation of a social space as the transformation of its perceptions and meanings by using the space in a new and periodic way which can either entail using the space by itself or adding extra resources and materials to complement the space. As a new additional resource in the space, the sound-sculpture has transformed the meanings and perceptions of a busy urban area, converting it into a meeting point between urban territory and the nearby natural landscape of the surrounding mountains. It has expanded the traditional notion of a monument or sculpture because it aims to interact and propose a new relationship with the passers-by in that it calls for them to “pause and stop and think” (Maciá, 2017). As the work reproduces audio in a ritualistic manner and according to a defined daily timetable, it also uses the space in a periodic way which, according to ONU-Habitat et al., is a characteristic of sonic innovation of the social space (2018).

Sonic narrative of space in Mexico:

Mexico City’s complex sonic fingerprint

500 años de Resonancia 1500-2015, Ciudad de México (500 years of resonance 1500-2015, Mexico City) by Lorena Mal uses the sound of 42 bells located in 12 colonial bell towers in the churches of Mexico City’s historic and commercial center. This piece is a sound art installation event which took place on November 5, 2015, at 9 pm, and 60 musicians participated in the performance of the score. Each bell has an inscription which details the date that it was created, with the dates spanning a 500-year timeline. Mal took this 500-year timeline and mapped dates of important events which happened throughout Mexico’s history. To create a score from this 500-year timeline,



Figure 4. Performance of the piece in Mexico City, Mexico. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

the artist translated the years into seconds with five minutes being equivalent to a century. Each bell was aligned to a different event so that the striking of each bell within the piece signifies a uniquely important moment in the history of Mexico.

The sonority of the bell has always had significant meaning in the sonic imagination of the Mexican people: the independence was rung in by a bell, and a bell is still ringing every year to commemorate this historical moment. The sound of the bell substituted the percussive sounds of the rituals of pre-Hispanic Mexico. The bell is a call to the masses in the same way that the percussive sound of the previously discussed *tocotín* was a call to dance. Nowadays in Mexico, when someone rings a church bell outside of the usual mass schedules, everyone in the community understands that this means they should gather in the public space in order to discuss an important matter. This is another example which shows that sound in the public space is an important aspect of everyday life in Mexico. The sound of the bell belongs to the sonic landscape of the historic center of Mexico City and is a symbol of the changing historic periods in Mexico. Mal's work takes advantage of this historical significance of the bell and its important role in Mexican society to create a sonic narrative of space. The work draws out a narrative from the sonic potential of the site as its only sound source comes from objects found within the public space in which it is realized.

Empatía 5.1, Ritual tecnochamánico para sitio específico (Empathy, techno-shamanic ritual for a specific site) was created by *Bioescenica* which is a transdisciplinary group

based in Mexico City which explores the connections between arts, science, and technology. The aim of this project was to perform a *techno-shamanic ritual* that involved several elements from the past and future, including: a *ritual purification*, music from the *Wixárika* indigenous community, a dance performance, a drone, and use of the lights of the 104 meter monument *Estela de Luz* (Stele of Light) which was built to commemorate the 200-year anniversary of the Mexican independence movement. According to the artists, the aim of this project was to perform a ritual and establish a “connection between what is above and below, inside and out” to become “one and connect to the spaces that surround us” (Hemispheric Institute, 2019).

The performance was developed on the grounds of the *Estela de Luz* monument. It is important to mention that this monument is located in the heart of the financial district of Mexico City where several major avenues converge, and where one of the busiest metro stations of the city is found. A ring of speakers was set up at the base of the monument, and the spatialized audio material was generated from a sonification process that took data information from the *Laser Interferometer Gravitational Wave Observatory (LIGO)* (Hernández-Trejo, 2019). These audio materials were interweaved with the sonic-spatial properties of the specific space, the music of the *Wixárika*'s ritual purification, and the loud soundscape of the city. By placing the speakers around the entrance of the building, the base of the building became a sounding board from which the audio was reflected back into the urban surroundings, blending with the soundscapes of the city, creating a sonic narrative of the urban space.

Another key feature of the work was that the spectators at this performance were asked to use their mobile phones to access a webpage with an interface. Through tapping the rhythm of the pulse of their hearts into the interface, the spectators could control one of the 1704 lights of the *Estela de Luz* monument. This allowed the public a participatory action, but in terms of the visual, rather than the sonic element of the work.

We can relate these two Mexican works with the sonic fingerprint concept proposed by Daumal et al. (2015) which claims that every city has sounds from which it can be identified. Due to its contrasting spaces, Mexico City has a complex sonic fingerprint (Daumal et al., 2015). Both these works interact with this complexity as the historic center contains the ruins of a pre-Hispanic pyramid, the colonial cathedral, and urban commercial centers, whilst the *Estela de Luz* monument is located in the modern financial district which also contains the *Chapultepec Castle* (built during the French attempt to colonize) and the *Paseo de la Reforma* (the first important avenue in the country). Both works intend to create sonic narratives which link aspects of Mexico City's pre-Hispanic and colonial past with its urban present, and the complex spaces in which they are realized enable the works to achieve this blending of sonic narratives.



Figure 5. Performance of the ritual in front of the monument Estela de Luz (Stele of Light) Mexico City, Mexico. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

Conclusions

The countries of Latin America share cultural links and bonds: history, religion, and language. Amongst this unity there is diversity and vibrancy as each country has different ways of artistically responding to the social issues that concern them. Each Latin American city has a unique sonic fingerprint and architectural features which influence how artists respond to public spaces. Latin American cities' sonic fingerprints can be described as complex, and the pieces we have discussed above respond to this complexity. However, rather than being a disadvantage to the artists, the complexity enables and helps them to create works which can convey social or political messages. Sonic activism is connected with every stage of the work processes as, to a certain extent, all the works aim to convey a social, cultural, or political discourse. Sonic preservation and sonic narratives of space are important features of the works as many of them have taken advantage of the unique characteristics of each space to connect with the spectators. In some of the examples, sonic participatory action was used to directly engage audiences.

The works reflect their Latin American context in a variety of ways. The majority of the works discussed are realized for one unique occasion, reflecting the ephemerality of daily life in Latin America. The present is important for Latin Americans as many of the residents of these countries live *al día* (they live one day at a time, economically speaking). The works also carry on and extend a variety of pre-Hispanic cultural tendencies, such as the use of sound in the public space as a way of calling or gathering people together and the use of sound as part of social ritual. The way in which many of the works sonically innovate the social space reflects present day Latin American cultural practices, such as the *Sonideros* in Mexico. The works display a blending of past and present Latin American contexts.

The intention of this paper was to discuss key examples of sound art installations in urban public spaces in a number of Latin American countries in order to provide an overview and introduction to current practices in this area. It is necessary to point out that, in this geographical area, there is a large range of examples of this artistic practice which goes beyond the scope of this discussion. To provide

an overview of practices in the Latin American region, we decided to focus on the four countries with the largest population sizes and to provide examples from both North and South America, at the same time including Chile in the discussion in order to recognize the pioneering sound art that took place in public spaces in that country in the 1970s. Each of the narratives of space proposed by Schroeder (2016) provides starting points for further analysis of how sound installation art responds to and uses public space. As previously mentioned, Noya (2012) states that sound installation art in the Latin American context has not been adequately studied, and most of the sources available for the study of these works have been produced by the artists themselves. This discussion has shown that new generations of artists in Latin America are displaying a tendency to realize sound installation art which is transdisciplinary, and which incorporates the use of urban public space. This tendency is changing the ways audiences and creators are relating to sound and space.

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Notes

- 1 This title has been translated in English as *The Latin American Commitment*, but the word empeño has several meanings in Spanish. On the one hand it means to fall into debt or to pawn, and on the other hand it can mean to put effort into a task.