

## The poetics, politics, and ethics of sound art installations in the global 21<sup>st</sup> century

Elena Butoescu 

Department of British, American, and German Studies, University of Craiova, Craiova, Romania  
elena.butoescu@edu.ucv.ro

**Abstract:** Soundscapes of conflict can make the global individual identify and empathise with contemporary events that otherwise would not be well understood and absorbed by a public who is not familiar with warsapes. Recent sonic art installations, such as those hosted by the ‘Venice Biennale’ (2024) remind the audience that sound and aural experiences shape individual and collective memories, raising awareness about war, violence, trauma, misrepresented traditions and conservation issues. The 21<sup>st</sup> century interdisciplinary outlook on the humanities has become increasingly common in academia, suggesting how important the marriage of disciplines is especially today, when human rights and values are threatened not only by climate changes but also by a global paradigm shift. Blue Humanities, Ecomusicology, Ecocriticism – these are some recent examples of intellectual intersections between music, sound, space, and environment that show current directions and concern of the humanities. This study aims to investigate how sound narratives inform the audience of various forms of conflict surrounding them: the traumas and consequences of wars; historical changes in traditional societies; the potential threat of climate change and noise pollution; and current approaches to international migration and human rights. Since sound art installations reflect spatial practices and human interaction, this article will look at how acoustic representations of space can become forms of political resistance, reinforcing the idea that collaboration and active participation in resistance are of utmost importance today.

**Keywords:** *soundscapes of conflict; sound art; ecomusicology; spatial practices; noise pollution; political resistance.*



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## Introduction

What sounds do you hear now that you didn't hear as a child and what sounds did you hear as a child that you no longer hear today? (Schafer interview 2011 qtd. in Marontate et al. 527).

The range of foci within the humanities has expanded to include interdisciplinary fields such as ecomusicology, ecocriticism, and sound studies, all of which examine the intersections between culture, sound, and the environment. *Sound art*,<sup>1</sup> as a new art form in the twentieth century, whose meaning remains “elusive” (Licht 1), goes beyond the physical phenomenon of vibrating particles and requires a ‘translator’ to collectively engage an audience in the artistic process of listening and understanding the surrounding world through sound. The role of this ‘translator’ – usually an artist who creates sound installations for public spaces – is to transform noise pollution into a sonic environment in a creative way, for the purpose of lending more thorough consideration onto new ways to flesh out the visual and the environment in the space-time continuum, thus engaging the audience in a purely sensory manner. Sonic art is an evolutionary process that raises philosophical concerns about “new ways to consider art, the world and our position within the production of art and the world through a sonic sensibility” (Voegelin xiv). As long as it engages in a dialogue with the world, it is also conversational. It is a participatory art and a shared social event, entailing public, not private, experience, thus activating spatial and social relations, positioning the audience not as passive observers but as integral agents in the constitution of the auditory field, which was unimaginable in Western art music of the 1950s.

By engaging with space and time in ways that extend beyond traditional mediums, sound art nourishes a dynamic interplay between auditory experience and the physical, spatial, and performative dimensions of these other artistic practices. There are as many definitions of sound art as there are theoreticians, scholars, and artists who have attempted to explain its presence in art, but its spatiality is often regarded as one of its most essential and distinguishing characteristics. Christoph Cox remarks that

Not only has ‘sound art’ emerged as a prominent form of art making and exhibition embraced by galleries and museums across the globe, but the academy has also witnessed the rapid rise of ‘sound studies’ within and across disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. In the field of music itself, composers, producers,

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<sup>1</sup> Nicolas Collins’ definition of Sound Art points to a broad, evolving field that resists strict categorization, reflecting both technological innovations and shifting cultural attitudes toward sound, space, and audience interaction: “The term Sound Art was coined in the late 1960s to describe sonic activities taking place outside the concert hall: interactive installations, listening walks, environmental recordings, open duration sound events – even ‘happenings’ and performance art were occasionally lumped under this rubric” (1).

and improvisers have become increasingly attracted to those sonic domains against which music has always defined itself: noise, silence, and nonmusical sound. (1)

An evolving paradigm is becoming apparent in both artistic and academic engagement with sound. Sound becomes central to the creative process sonic artists engage in, but at the same time the view they express in their sonic artworks includes references to various cultural, social, economic, ecological and technical fields. For the sonic artist, sound serves as a primary medium of expression, one that is employed not only to convey artistic intent but also to explore and negotiate the temporal, spatial, and perceptual dimensions of experience. Posing questions differently means approaching other disciplines from different angles: architects, environmentalists and urban planners cooperate to design buildings with suitable and sustainable materials to reduce noise exposure; restorers, anthropologists and art historians collaborate with sound and media artists in the conservation field; and sonic artists join forces with scientific institutions that place great emphasis on real world problem solving. As sound art is interdisciplinary in nature, diverse manifestations of sound can be studied within epistemological boundaries, which means knowledge is informed by sociocultural, political, literary, and ethical developments. However, artists put certain conventions to the test while producing some innovative language that subverts canons, rules, and existing discourses so as to generate sonic materiality that produces a plurality of meanings: the flesh of sound renders more visible fieldwork turned into artwork. By moving beyond conventional musical frameworks, sound artists engage with space as both a receptacle of events and a material body. Consequently, Christoph Cox draws attention to a redefined mode of auditory engagement: from a linear, time-based experience to one that is spatially aware and physically embodied.

Sound art has been described as “an interstitial activity” (Collins 1) and “a practice situated between and beyond music and the visual arts” (Cox 1), highlighting the growing prominence of sound – as distinct from music – in artistic practices during the final decades of the 20th century. There are opposing views regarding the integration between music and sound art. While some sonic scholars acknowledge music as being essential for sound art, other academics disengage music from sound<sup>2</sup> and view them as distinct practices. After engaging with space not merely as a container for sound but as a producer of meaning, controlling the room acoustics and using site-specific recordings, sonic art transforms and interacts with the physical environment in which it is performed. The sonic environment thus shaped turns into an interactive practice accommodating individuals who not only inhabit but also create and continually reconfigure the auditory dimensions of a space. Steven Connor, for instance, regards the capacity of auditory experience to “disintegrate and reconfigure space” (206) as its most salient characteristic,

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<sup>2</sup> John Cage defies conventional definitions and sees music and sound joined together harmoniously as one: “Music is sounds, sounds around us whether we’re in or out of concert halls: cf. Thoreau” (qtd. in Murray Schafer 5). As Murray Schafer explains, Cage refers to Thoreau’s *Walden*, “where the author experiences in the sounds and sights of nature an inexhaustible entertainment” (5).

a dynamic exemplified by the emergence of radio in the early twentieth century, when “sound’s power to transform and to be transformed seemed to be intensified” (208). Echoing this view, Brandon LaBelle reminds us that what we hear in the clapping of hands “is more than a single sound and its source, but rather a spatial event” (xii), one that is “intrinsically and unignorably relational” (xi). His perspective on the spatiality of sound further emphasises the fluid quality of sound within the space it inhabits. R. Murray Schafer invites the reader to reflect on why our conceptualization of music is not neutral and how the language we use to describe music is heavily influenced by visual and spatial metaphors. New concepts require new terminology:

The theoretical vocabulary of music has borrowed many indications from the visual arts and the world of spatial appearances: *high, low, ascending, descending* (all referring to pitch); *horizontal, position, interval and inversion* (referring to melody); *vertical, open, closed, thick and thin* (referring to harmony); and *contrary* and *oblique* (referring to counterpoint-which is itself a visual term) [...] For sounds to be given exact physical description in space, a technology had to be worked out by which basic parameters could be recognized and measured in exact, quantitative scales (124).

As Marshall McLuhan announces and Peter Weibel validates, the prevalence of the visual over other senses in Western culture influences not only our modes of communication but also the very ways we think and perceive reality. While McLuhan proclaims that “The medium is the message” (vii), Weibel celebrates “the primacy of the eye [...] as the dominant sense organ of the twentieth century” (339). McLuhan advances the idea that, following the advent of print culture,<sup>3</sup> visual and linear modes of perception came to prevail over oral and acoustic ones, a transformation which affects the wholeness of human thought and perception:

During the mechanical ages we had extended our bodies in space. Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned (3).

McLuhan essentially echoes a philosophical stance previously articulated by Martin Heidegger in his essay *The Age of the World Picture*, where he writes that:

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<sup>3</sup> Marshall McLuhan reveals how print technology initiated a paradigm shift that enabled the transition from the medieval lack of insight into spatial depth to the innovative use of linear perspective in Renaissance art. The new cognitive framework reshaped human thinking and the language of scientific discourse: “Print technology transformed the medieval zero into the Renaissance infinity, not only by convergence – perspective and vanishing point – but by bringing into play for the first time in human history the factor of exact repeatability. Print gave to men the concept of indefinite repetition so necessary to the mathematical concept of infinity” (116).

[t]he fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture. The word ‘picture’ [Bild] now means the structured image [Gebild] that is the creature of man’s producing which represents and sets before. (134)

All three authors acknowledge visual accessibility as the 20th-century favourite mode of perception, which objectifies and controls the world the same way as a watcher’s gaze in a museum objectifies a picture hanging in a gallery hall. Just as Heidegger warns of a modernity that reduces Being to a representable object and McLuhan identifies how media environments reconfigure consciousness and reshape reality, Weibel anticipates an age of surveillance in a hyperreal universe, resulted from our contemporary mediascape.

Had Marshall McLuhan lived to witness the rise of sound art and experimental sonic practices, he would have observed that these two art forms challenged the prevalence of visual communication over other senses by creating environments outside our restricted visual field, where listening is the focus. Such a conjuncture dominated by auditory stimuli take participants beyond the narrow linear visual experience. Accordingly, McLuhan might have perceived sound art as counterbalancing visual ideology, a medium that returns culture toward aural senses and oral traditions while simultaneously embracing modern technologies and new forms of reproducibility.

### Charting sound art in an age of conflict

This art form traces back to the groundbreaking experiments of futurist Luigi Russolo, who, between 1913 and 1930, built innovative sound machines that captured the roar of industrial progress and the explosive rhythms of war. In a phrase that frames war not just as a backdrop but as a potent influence shaping the content, tone, and political charge of artistic sound practices, Douglas Kahn states that “Indeed, in the history of avant-garde noise, war is not the continuation of politics through other means; war is the major political source that artistic noise echoes” (24).

During the 1950s and 1960s, sound art began to emerge as a distinct artistic category, evolving in parallel with Performance and Installation art. Whereas some visual artists and composers, such as Bill Fontana, experimented with sound sculptures and electronic media, blending real time sounds and recorded audio to recreate geographical spaces and historical events that explored spatiotemporal dimensions of auditory experience, others worked with algorithmic music. One such example is Marcel Duchamp’s piece for three voices, *Erratum Musical* (1913), where notes were randomly drawn from a hat, or John Cage’s seminal 1952 composition *4’33”*, a score consisting of four minutes and thirty-three seconds of intentional silence, which created an “auditory spatial awareness” (Blessner and Salter ix) by initiating the practice of attentive listening. Since no music was performed on stage, the audience became acutely aware of the sounds they could hear outside the conventional concert setting. Consequently, the experience demystified the act of listening itself and failed the audience’s expectations, thus creating a dynamic sonic environment.

The change in the audience’s perception established the basic framework for the rise of sound art, a form that often resists conventional musical structures while

experimenting with the spatial, conceptual, ethical and political dimensions of sound. Steven Connor reminds us that from the mid-1870s to the mid-1920s technological innovation advanced not only in the visual realm but also in the auditory domain.<sup>4</sup> Building on his insights and analysis, we witness rapid advancements in the technologies of sound capture, amplification, and recording after the invention of the telephone and the phonograph in 1876 (205). A few years later, in 1895, the advent of cinematography by the Lumière brothers marked the introduction of noisy projectors camouflaged by music played by a pianist or an orchestra.

In the context of the postwar period, this development also reflected broader cultural transformations: a reaction to the trauma of war, a critique of institutional authority, and a fascination with new technologies and media. With the rapid development of technology in audio recording, broadcasting, and signal processing, the importance of sound art studies and experiments increased during the postwar period, creating the possibility of reconstructing soundscapes past. New forms of artistic expression responded to the tangible consequences of war: mass psychological trauma, widespread devastation, epidemics and famine. Air raids disrupted the normal rhythms of urban life and affected inhabitants' behaviour by producing intense sensory experiences coated in vibrational form, such as alarms, sirens, explosions, the sounds of aircraft overhead. These keynote sounds of war equally impoverish the people who remember them and those who presently live its horror:

In the twentieth century, the experiences of war and of urban life have been horrifyingly conjoined in the experience of the air-raid. [...] The inhabitants of cities subjected to aerial bombardment during the Second World War and after have had to learn new skills of orientating themselves in this deadly new auditory field without clear coordinates or dimensions, but in which the tiniest variations in pitch and timbre can mean obliteration (Connor 210).

The aural presence of war prompted citizens to attune their senses to a transformed soundscape and occasioned artists to reimagine the very fabric of their art, as they changed the way we listen to our surrounding environment. In the broadest of terms, the acoustic properties of a building is essential for the activity in houses, whether this is an

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<sup>4</sup> Analysing the technological and cultural turn of the 20th century, Steven Connor argues that modernity is defined not so much by the invention of new machines as by a fundamental transformation in the way technology mediates human experience: "Much of the technology of the twentieth century had already been invented during the nineteenth, but we think of the twentieth century as the era of modernity primarily because of this shift from industrial to communicational technologies; from technologies that are an elongation of the arm (or the penis) to technologies that are, as Marshall McLuhan has it, an extension of the central nervous system. The steam-engine, rifle and cannon give way to the computerized missile system; in the Gulf War, we remember, the missiles with video cameras in their nose-cones themselves had eyes – were eyes" (205). Warfare technology relied on accuracy, speed and control. Many of these advancements, such as radio transmission, sonar, and recording technologies, originated in military contexts and were later repurposed or reimaged within artistic practices.

artistic performance or an award ceremony. Joseph L. Clarke, addresses the acoustic conditions in public places, outlining the profound political and ethical dimensions and implications of listening. It is for this reason that he considers the sound of space a political issue, which determines “[...] whose words are heard and by whom. Sound matters not just in specialized buildings such as auditoria and concert halls but in almost every kind of structure” (3). Based on this assumption, the acoustic properties of a space are not merely a technological matter, but should be considered in the context of cultural history, as it can influence whether a given site – used for sound installations, sculptures, interactive sound events, or performances – poses potential risks to listeners or the surrounding environment.

### **The ‘Venice Biennale’ 2024**

While all sound installation art is sound art, not all sound art is installation-based. As a subgenre of sound art, that is inherently spatial, site-specific and often immersive, sound installation art marks the twentieth-century history of art and music through “shifts, extensions and ruptures” (Ouzounian 73). Sound installation and acoustic design situate sound not only in relation to built environments but also in relation to identity, underrepresented cultures, geopolitical conflict and migration. Since listening is the primary skill human beings engage in during the communicative process, its spatial and social dimensions give the full account of how these practices reveal displacement through sound, assert cultural presence while developing a sonic vocabulary, and challenge dominant narratives. Thus, space becomes the gateway to political activism and a powerful tool used to archive collective memory.

On the one hand, at the ‘Venice Biennale’ these topical contributions are increasingly explored through immersive sonic works that respond to pressing global issues. On the other hand, mass tourism and the sustainability of the fragile city of Venice are questioned in the context of this major event. From installations that echo the trauma of war and forceful displacement to ecological art practices that foreground causes and effects of climate change, the Biennale provides a critical platform where sound becomes a medium of resistance, remembrance, and redefinition, amplifying experiences often marginalized in dominant cultural narratives. The Biennale has a long tradition dating back to its founding in 1895, when in 1887 Venice organised a national exhibition of paintings and sculptures that displayed over a thousand works “in provisional buildings constructed especially for the occasion set in the area known at that time as the Napoleonic Gardens” (Di Martino 8). The exhibition was successful and the financial profit was given away to charity. Mayor Riccardo Selvatico appreciated this success and suggested organising a major exhibition to be held every two years for the artists who frequently visited the city. On April 6th, 1894 the Mayor formally announced the foundation of the Biennale, and its first edition took place on April 30th, 1895.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See, for more details about the history and the progress along the years of the ‘Venice Biennale’, Enzo Di Martino, 2005.

Over the years, the ‘Venice Biennale’ has continually provided effective artistic tools to evoke the changing landscape and soundscape of contemporary art, as a route to challenge the mainstream systems of representation. From its origins as a national pavilion display in the late 19th century, the Biennale has expanded to integrate a variety of art forms, including visual arts, architecture, cinema, dance, music, and theater.

The 60th edition of the International Art Exhibition was titled *Foreigners Everywhere - Stranieri Ovunque*, a theme that, in the words of Pietrangelo Buttafuoco, President of La Biennale di Venezia, “hosts samples of marginalised, excluded, oppressed beauty, erased by the dominant matrices of geo-thinking.”<sup>6</sup> Curated by Adriano Pedrosa, currently the artistic director of the São Paulo Museum of Art, the 2024 Biennale highlighted themes of migration, integration hybridity and difference, featuring 331 artists living in and between 80 countries – including Hong Kong, Palestine and Puerto Rico. Since my interest in the Biennale lies in the sounds of conflict and war, I shall focus on installations that employ sonic elements to evoke, represent, or critique the experience of violence, disruption, and geopolitical unrest.

### The Polish Pavilion

As I have argued, the spaces generated by sounds of war and conflict in contemporary sound art installation reveal traumatic experiences and confront the listener with the visceral realities of violence. The sonic qualities of artistic exhibitions are never dissociated from their political urgency. Recordings of gunfire, explosions, sirens, and military commands – either captured from real events or reconstructed performatively – are often employed by sonic artists to create an intimate experience with warscapes and other conflictual environments that disrupt passive viewing and demand analytical reflection. At the 2024 ‘Venice Biennale’, this encounter was exemplified in the Polish Pavilion’s *Repeat After Me II* by the Open Group, where Ukrainian refugees reenacted the sounds of warfare from memory. In this piece, which brought the sound of the outside world into another space, visitors were given the possibility to repeat these sounds and relate to the voices of the refugees as their own, which provided a way for them to engage in a conflict in which they played no part, but were even indirectly affected by its gruesome effects. In such works, sound becomes more than a poetic element – it is a political force that makes audible the invisible structures of power, occupation, and resistance. Visitors who were carried along by the immersive sound experience were encouraged to practice speaking and listening while engaging in a reality that was and still is far removed from their own.<sup>7</sup>

The audiovisual installation *Repeat After Me II* gives voice to the harrowing realities of war and provides solidarity to Ukraine through interaction and performativity, encouraging people to want to take active part in the creative process. By getting viewers

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2024/introduction-pietrangelo-buttafuoco>. Accessed 20 March 2025.

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=polish+pavilion+venice+biennale+2024](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=polish+pavilion+venice+biennale+2024). Accessed 20 March 2025.



involved in the traumatic experience of war and by stimulating them to simulate their real participation in conflict, artists give individuals the feeling of being ‘in the shoes’ of the citizens who are the victims of brutal atrocities. Ukrainian refugees imitate the sound of weapons anchored in their memories. Then, they encourage the audience to repeat after them. Does the work risk trivialising the trauma and memory of war by inviting participants to repeat sounds of conflict? Or, alternatively, are these acts of involvement gestures of solidarity? To counteract systems of profit that attempt to destabilise our Earth’s ecosystem, many cultural institutions have gone beyond aesthetic concerns and shifted from a poetic approach to one that is overtly political, galvanising artists and scientists alike around humanitarian missions.

This project equally addresses significant ethical trajectories, whether it acts as a catalyst for collective healing, or it risks commodifying pain for aesthetic purposes. Whereas powerful emotional responses that transcend traditional modes of witnessing emerged from the audience, repeated exposure to mediated trauma risks desensitizing audiences or commodifying artistic practices. In *Repeat After Me II*, sonic realism facilitates communication, interaction and compassion. Conversely, visual realism is characterised by an aesthetics of detachment that neutralises any form of pain.

Susan Sontag considers that the spectacle of pain seen through the camera lens can produce in viewers a sort of emotional detachment that will turn the image into a commonplace experience, emptying it of moral significance. When compassion is determined by geopolitics and economic interests that pervade the discourse of visual media rather than global solidarity, the objectification of suffering poses ethical questions. In her own words,

The appetite for pictures showing bodies in pain is as keen, almost, as the desire for ones that show bodies naked. For a long time some people believed that if the horror could be made vivid enough, most people would finally take in the outrageousness, the insanity of war. But the images say too much – or not enough. They are a species of rhetoric. They simplify. They agitate. They create the illusion of consensus. (Sontag 41)

It is true that the viewer’s sense of ethical responsibility tends to diminish when passively observing the suffering of others on screen, particularly when mediated through the anonymity of the screen itself. However, commodification is outside the scope of the project *Repeat After Me II*, which invites the audience to embrace the pain of others by stepping beyond the role of silent observer and vocally reproducing the sounds of war in an empathetic manner. Similarly, Claire Bishop’s theories of participatory art<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> By the same token, Julie Reiss’s emphasis on the experiential and relational dynamics between artwork and audience prioritises active viewer involvement as a means to challenge traditional art hierarchies. Nevertheless, the main aim of any expression of art is to build global environmental awareness: “Whatever the form taken by works of this tendency – painting, photography, sculpture, installation, video or public intervention – the goal is always to heighten public awareness of the issues around climate change and global warming” (*Art, Theory and Practice* 51)

acknowledge that the relationship between socially engaged audience and artistic practice is not mediated by the sound artist. Unlike traditional media, where the ubiquitous emphasis is on mediated communication, sound installation art “addresses the viewer directly as a literal presence in the space” (Bishop 6). In this way, the installation cannot turn into a material commodity. Instead of contemplating the pain of others, spectators are dragged into it, a view that challenges the boundaries between physical experiences and systems of referentiality.

### Taiwan in Venice 2024: *Everyday War*

The Biennale also features an exhibition titled *Everyday War* by artist Yuan Goang-Ming, curated by Abby Chen. This project blends video art with the atmosphere of everyday domestic life, offering a reflection on the underlying tensions and challenges of contemporary existence. At its heart is the titular piece, *Everyday War*, which portrays a home environment disrupted by the presence of warplanes, illustrating the shifting and often hidden face of modern conflict. In this 10-minute video, a domestic environment is violently disrupted by explosions and gunfire, only to gradually return to its calm, original state.<sup>9</sup>

The installation art reminds us of the inevitability of war and its long-term consequences that affect our domestic life. Two films are presented in alternating sequence. The first, *Everyday Maneuver* (2018),<sup>10</sup> features aerial shots of Taipei’s eerily empty streets, underscored by the blaring of sirens. The second, *The 561st Hour of Occupation* (2014),<sup>11</sup> documents the 2014 Sunflower Student Movement, when protesters occupied Taiwan’s parliament for over three weeks to oppose the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) with China. The entire concept engages the viewer through the use of blaring sirens, explosive blasts, and sudden pounding noises, all of which evoke a heightened sense of anxiety that reflects the constant tension of a war people need to address on a daily basis. In *Everyday War* the curator Abby Chen ties to put together those elements in Yuan’s work, synthesising, in her own words, [...] the artist’s anxiety and hope, evoking the notion of home and search for ‘poetic dwelling.’<sup>12</sup> This notion of a ‘poetic dwelling’ is not new. In the previous century, speaking of exile and displacement, Salman Rushdie wrote about imaginary homelands and migrants’ necessity to connect to a familiar world that they lost in the process of migration. Rushdie reflects on the condition of writers who leave their homelands in search of a more rewarding place, only to find that they can no longer find proper words to reconstruct the birth place they left behind. Instead, they create fictional landscapes shaped by memory and longing: “we [i.e. the writers] will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost;

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrTkC7ug1IU> Accessed 20 March 2025.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fbqtOICzcug> Accessed 20 March 2025.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwIAKt6jRd4> Accessed 20 March 2025.

<sup>12</sup> <https://contemporary.burlington.org.uk/reviews/reviews/yuan-goang-ming-everyday-war>. Accessed 20 March 2025.

that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands” (10).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the challenge is no longer to create an identity, but to resist losing it. In *Everyday War*, individual identity is contested in the political realm, in the digital world and across cultural boundaries, being constantly questioned and redefined. As conflict invades our domestic lives through social media, ideological divisions, pseudo-scientific narratives and surveillance, identity is no longer an ongoing process of self-construction, but one of survival. The urgent task is not its creation, but its preservation.

### **The Ukraine pavilion: *Civilians. Invasion***

This project by Andrii Rachynskyi and Daniil Revkovskyi, featured in the Ukrainian Pavilion at the 60th ‘Venice Biennale’ as part of the group exhibition *Net Making*, presents archival videos related to the experience of war and “collected from open sources, shot by civilians before and during the Russian invasion.”<sup>13</sup> This was one of the four mixed-media Ukrainian projects displayed in this exhibition, where the artists employed digital search algorithms to locate the content. The filmmakers viewed and curated thousands of these clips, which were shot by everyday people trying to document what was happening around them: airstrikes, destruction, displacement, survival in shelters, and even moments of quiet defiance amid chaos. Just as sound installations might use ambient, fragmented, or field recordings to evoke memory or place, *Civilians. Invasion* uses unedited, videos shot by civilians that maintain the acoustic texture of lived experience: sirens, wind, muffled speech, silence. There is no imposed emotional score; instead, authentic sound becomes the narrative, much like in sound installations where meaning emerges from listening rather than explanation.

Moreover, the film foregrounds what scholars of sound studies refer to as the ‘politics of listening:’ the ethical implications of who is heard, how, and under what conditions. From an ethical standpoint, *Civilians. Invasion* adopts a non-interventionist aesthetic by deliberately avoiding any instrumentalisation of voice-over narration, dramatic scoring, or overt editorial manipulation. The decision to do so is not merely stylistic, it is foregrounded by deeply ethical principles.

### **Conclusion**

In this article I have engaged with the concept of *acoustic space* in conjunction with the associated notion of *soundscape*,<sup>14</sup> which is grounded in human interaction and

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/reel/C4SrW5VtgKj/>. Accessed March 20 2025.

<sup>14</sup> The concept of ‘soundscape’ was popularised and developed by the Canadian composer, writer and acoustic ecologist Raymond Murray Schafer, who aspired to reconnect people with their sonic environment by writing a history of the world through its soundscapes in 1977, where he outlines the main themes and features of a soundscape, explains soundscape terminology and mentions the changes that soundscape has undergone throughout the years. In a nutshell, “[t]he soundscape is

in political resistance, central forces in redefining the production and experience of these sonic environments. Sound operates both as a medium of spatial perception and as a site of social and political negotiation. Due to its spatiotemporal configuration, sound art intersects with and draws upon other art forms, such as architecture, sculpture and choreography. While the poetics of sound lies in the artist's creative exploration of the dynamic between sound and digital tools, the politics of sound emerges as a response to broader convergence of media technologies and communication practices. The aftermath of World War II saw the rise of high technology industries, advancements in nuclear weapons, mass dissemination of television and the acceleration of the communications industry, all being crucial in shaping public opinion and creating novel ways of knowing. This technological landscape created by sounds which are the result of technological mediation profoundly shaped the politics of sound through modes of listening, established power structures, and mechanisms that media technologies used to control perception and social behavior. Sound narratives inform the audience of the surrounding society and culture that produced it.

The ethical and social implications of the global soundscape prompted sound artists and theorists alike to introduce the audience not only the harmonies but also the dissonances created in the interaction between a space and an individual. Both artists and theorists critically engage with how sound is instrumentally projected not only within an enclosed space but also across cultural and political contexts. Ethically, *Everyday War* confronts viewers with the normalisation and desensitisation of different forms of violence, thus putting a lot of psychological and emotional pressure on them while politically it challenges the invisibility of war's impact on people. *Repeat After Me II* embodies a profound ethical and political commitment by amplifying the voices of those affected by the devastating realities of war. *Civilians. Invasion* may be understood not only as a filmic archive of war but as a sound-based installation in cinematic form. Taken together, all principles of sound art – spatial immersion, acoustic authenticity, and ethical minimalism – overlap and inform each other to create a collective memorial that demands sustained listening. In this way, the work stands as both an artwork and an act of witnessing, as it invites the viewer to inhabit the dissonant sonic textures of war from the perspective of those most vulnerable. Most of these sound art installations remind us that conflict is not only fought on distant battlefields but also insidiously embedded within the routines of domestic life and that instability is a constant presence in our daily existence, as many people still hear now the sounds of conflict that they heard when they were children.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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any acoustic field of study. We may speak of a musical composition as a soundscape, or a radio program as a soundscape or an acoustic environment as a soundscape” (*Our Sonic Environment* 7).

## ORCID

Elena Butoescu  <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-4750-9217>

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### Notes on Contributor(s)

**Elena Butoescu** is associate professor in English Literature at the Department of British, American, and German Studies, University of Craiova, Romania. She earned her Master's degree in colonial and postcolonial Studies at the University of Leeds. She defended her PhD thesis in the field of eighteenth-century British literary imposture at the University of Bucharest. Her research interests include literary studies, print culture and modernity, intellectual and cultural history, literary imposture, the history of emotions, and sound studies. Her most recent book is *Literary Imposture and Eighteenth-Century Knowledge. The Tradition of the Literary Faker in England from Marana to Goldsmith* (2019).

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