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Overview of the relationship among the United States, Spain and Hispanic America in the field of Sound Art

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Topic: Analysis of the relationship among the United States and Spanish-speaking countries in the field of sound art and experimental music.

Abstract: This reports discusses the presence of Hispanic experimental musicians and sound artists in the United States, as well as the treatment of sound art from this country in the Spanish-speaking cultural context. This is a comparative analysis that examines the situation of this multifaceted aesthetic manifestation in various fields, such as academic, non-institutional spaces, galleries and contemporary art centers, festivals and other broadcast networks.

Keywords: sound art, contemporary art, experimental music

Introduction

The aesthetic crossroads that the expressions *sound art* and *experimental music* try in vain to delimit cannot easily be determined. It would be easier to do so either by alluding to that which makes them different or even to that which they are opposed to, than to its positive multiform content. The term *sound art* was first used in the United States in the 1960s to refer to artistic creations that used sound and were not signed by musicians, but rather by authors connected to visual arts, conceptual arts, or experimentation with what was then new media.

Nowadays, many sound artists –including a great deal of those mentioned in pages below– have a mixed artistic background (academic or otherwise) where sound and visual arts coexist, and sometimes even performing, theatrical and poetic arts do, too. However, since this differentiation with regards to other approaches to musical creation remains, we deem necessary to explain it in these introductory paragraphs.

The artistic domain that this paper addresses is defined by its contrast with other artistic practices, like the commonly-called *contemporary music*. This expression, which can be considered as a particular type of sound art, remains connected to a tradition with deep historic roots with which it shares elements it cannot nor wants to be free of, despite daring attempts made by the avant-garde in the last century and which are now buried under a notable aesthetically conservative academicism. The social ritual of the bourgeois concert, the hierarchy between the figure of the composer and the performer, the use of standard musical notation are characteristic aspects of this *contemporary music*, which in the artistic practices herein mentioned either disappear or at least are subject to deep, critical inquiry. Likewise, the most conservative aesthetic trends within the

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so-called *electro-acoustic music* –which take part in the aforementioned throwbacks– are left outside the purview of analysis proposed herein.

On the other hand, although sound art and experimental music have always showed considerable sympathy toward pop music and its artists –an attitude which is not always that of the artists from the land of *contemporary music*– the work of the artists discussed in this study cannot be included within that creative scope of massive calling. The appropriation of materials –not only sound materials, but also performative, symbolic, conceptual materials– specific to pop, rock or techno music is relatively frequent in sound art and experimental music. However, the perspectives on these elements –and no less importantly– the attitude taken toward society and the market, vary greatly between sound and pop artists.

The other aspect delimiting the subject matter of this study: its linguistic-cultural scope is easier to define than the aforementioned. However, it also obviously contains an enormous diversity of types and characters among its representatives. The contrast of the multiple cultural realities specific to the Spanish-speaking world and those found in the U.S. –core of the analysis proposed in this paper– offers a very rich perspective on both elements, and by extension, on certain phenomena that characterize our globalized time in history. The observation of a small part of the immense field of current artistic creation may shed some light on much greater cultural processes, which could otherwise go unnoticed.

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Sound Art and Academia

Music and visual arts curricula in Spanish-speaking countries are by and large remarkably similar to one another. However, they differ in many points from those in place in the United States –some of which will be explained below–. The appeal of American courses produces an initial result worth mentioning: in the field of sound art and experimental music the flow of students from Spain and Hispanic America to the United States is by no means matched in the opposite direction. A brief review of the asymmetric evolution of the academic life of these disciplines in the different regions considered herein may explain the most determining causes of this phenomenon.

The main place for musical training both in Hispanic America and Spain is the conservatory, an institution with a strong tradition inherited from the 19th century and created in its day as an imitation of the Parisian model. Sound art and experimental music do not usually fit into their lesson plans, nor in universities of those areas. In Spain, we find a rather valuable and timely exception in the now-defunct *Aula de Música* (Music Classroom) at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. This initiative was directed by Llorenç Barber (1948) between 1979 and 1984 and fostered workshops –in many cases for the first time in Spain– by renowned American artists such as Charlie Morrow (1942), Tom Johnson (1939) and Alvin Curran (1938), among others.

On the other hand, since the 1990s, certain Spanish colleges of fine arts have begun incorporating sound art in their curricula, such is the case of Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, and Universidad del País Vasco. This was made possible thanks to the efforts of professors José Antonio Sarmiento, Miguel Molina and Mikel Arce, respectively. However, these are not full degree programs but rather courses in which the use of sound is

encouraged for artistic purposes, though not connected to any musical genealogy. Likewise, and still in Spain, some postgraduate studies having to do with sound art training have recently begun programs. Although this incipient phenomenon is related to the new European academic paradigm proposed by the “Bologna Process” and many universities have had these initiatives endorsed by the Ministry of Education, other proposals –usually from private music academies– still lack official recognition.

Likewise in Hispanic America there is no tradition of teaching sound art at conservatories or universities, although some short courses, independent studies and diplomas dedicated to this subject –like that at the School of Arts of the Universidad de Chile, directed by Francisco Sanfuentes– are currently being offered. Beyond rare exceptions such as this, and as in the case of Spain, academic recognition of practices related to sound art is rather infrequent in Spanish-speaking countries.

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On the contrary, sound art in the United States, –understood as a derivation of experimental music– has been part of the university setting since the 1950s. John Cage (1912-1992), one of the most influential figures of the American avant-garde, perfectly illustrates the relationships established between universities and the field of sound experimentation. His aesthetic conception and the expansion of his ideas benefited greatly from his work in places like Black Mountain College (North Carolina), the Cornish School of Arts in Seattle (Washington), the University of California at Santa Cruz, Columbia University (New York), and also in this city, the New School of Social Research, where many artists who years later would take part in the *Fluxus* movement met. These roots enabled sound art to flourish for decades within the American academic environment.

One of the most distinguishing aspects of music departments at American universities is their greater aesthetic and disciplinary openness, reflected in current academic programs. For example, the Music Department at New York University (NYU) –which enables the interrelated study of subjects such as musicology, ethnomusicology, musical pedagogy, composition, interpretation or production, among others– also allows graduate students to delve deeper and investigate a broader spectrum of aesthetic registers in postgraduate studies such as ancient and classical music, electronic music, music for cinema, theater, advertising, jazz, urban music, improvisation, sound art, experimental music, etc. This more open attitude translates into greater opportunities for professional development –including an academic career– which in turn contributes to balance artistic creation, teaching and research while creating an active positive feedback among them. NYU is not an isolated case. There are similar offerings at multiple American universities, such as Columbia, University of California (San Diego), Wesleyan University (Middletown, Connecticut), Harvard University (Cambridge, Massachusetts) or Yale University (New Haven, Connecticut), among many others.

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Another characteristic of the American academic system worth noting is the interrelationship among different artistic disciplines within university training, either through a close collaborative effort among departments or by designing integrated study programs. For example, the aforementioned Black Mountain College is a pioneering model founded in 1933 with the intention of offering an interdisciplinary art education. Later on, this collaborative spirit among the arts was reflected in the creation of genuinely interdisciplinary departments. At various universities, like Columbia College Chicago (Illinois), University of Alabama (Tuscaloosa, Alabama), Arizona State University (Phoenix, Arizona), California College of Arts (San Francisco, California), Bloomfield College (New Jersey) or Goddard College (Plainfield, Vermont), we can find departments with names such

as *Interdisciplinary Arts*, *Interdisciplinary Studies* or *Media Arts*. Their training programs include classes like dance, visual arts, design, architecture, new technologies, literature, performing arts, photography, action art, music and sound art. Neither Spain nor Hispanic America currently offer educational proposals with a similar degree of interaction.

We find ourselves facing very different educational systems, which correspondingly offer contrasting future opportunities. Since there are no specific academic programs for sound art in Hispanic America and Spain, no university framework can welcome these creators and support the development of their artistic endeavors. The existence of such possibilities, together with the appeal of specific training –which at the same time is integrated within a broad aesthetic and disciplinary framework–, goes a long way to explaining the generally one-way flow of students to the United States referred to at the beginning of this section.

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Migratory flows to and from the United States

The Spanish and Hispanic American students interested in sound art who attend American universities are part of the tide of people from around the world who have been taken in by this country since its foundation. Among them, Spanish speakers represent one of the largest groups, already over 50 million. In the field of sound art, this is also reflected in the presence of Spanish and Hispanic-American authors –or from such origin– throughout the entire United States. Below we shall see the trajectory followed by some of them (selected both for the importance of their work, as well as the paradigmatic nature of their path), representing four examples clearly differentiated. First, we shall talk about artists who have carried out the whole of their studies in the U.S. and are established in this country's academic system. Then we shall analyze the case of authors who

also teach in the U.S., but received training in their countries of origin. After that we shall review examples of those who, after studying in the U.S., returned to their country to work at university level. The last case studied is that of artists who were trained in the United States, and after returning to their country of origin, work professionally outside of academia. This section concludes by providing a contrast, using some examples of American authors who left their country of origin in order to set up shop in Spanish-speaking areas.

Going back to the beginning of the 1960s, we find the multifaceted figure of the experimental music composer, visual artist and writer, Ramón Sender (1934), who moved to the United States as a young child with his father, the celebrated writer Ramón J. Sender (1901-1982), an exile of the Spanish Civil War. After completing his musical training in composition at Columbia University (with professors such as Elliot Carter and Henry Cowell), he and Morton Subotnik (1933) founded the San Francisco Tape Music Center in 1962, perhaps the most important center of experimental music on the American west coast, and one of the most important in the entire country.

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Nicolas Collins (1954) belongs to the next generation. Born in New York to a Chilean mother, he was a pupil and assistant to Alvin Lucier (1931) at Wesleyan University. His artistic career is now balanced with an active teaching schedule in the United States – where he teaches students in the Sound Department at the School of the Arts Institute of Chicago (SAIC)– and in Spain and Hispanic America, through workshops and courses on experimental music, electronic luthiers and performance. He is currently the editor-in-chief of one of the top academic journals in the field, *Leonardo Music Journal* (MIT Press). In 2006 he released his successful book *Handmade Electronic Music: The Art of Hardware Hacking*. Although all these publications are in English, part of his website contents are in Spanish, and his connections with the Spanish-speaking world have been

strengthened after receiving the “VII Premio Cura Castillejo” in 2014, a prestigious award given in Valencia (Spain) during the “Nits d’Aielo i Art” festival.

Like Nicolas Collins, Andrew Raffo Dewar (1975), a sound artist born in Argentina, was a student of Alvin Lucier’s at Wesleyan University, where he completed his doctorate in musical composition, ethnomusicology and musical technology. He is currently an associate professor in the Department of Interdisciplinary Arts at the University of Alabama. In addition to his artistic work, which focuses on experimentation, improvisation, musical technology and intermedia practice, his extensive work as a researcher stands out. His work has been published in various prestigious outlets like the aforementioned *Leonardo Music Journal*, *The Journal of the Society for American Music*, *Jazz Perspectives*, *Critical Studies in Improvisation*, *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, and *Musicians and Composers of the 20th Century*, among others. One of his main research focuses is the avant-garde scene in Buenos Aires in the 1960s and 1970s.

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Among sound artists with ties to academia who have settled in the U.S. after earning their Ph.D. we find Jaime E. Oliver La Rosa (1979), a native of Lima, who after completing his musical studies in his country of origin, moved to the United States in 2006 to undertake his graduate work. In 2011 he completed his Ph.D. with a dissertation on computer generated music at the University of California, San Diego, and then began post-doctoral work in composition at Columbia. Oliver now teaches composition at NYU and is co-director of the NYU Waverly Labs for Computing and Music.

In 1979, Venezuelan Gustavo Matamoros (1957) moved to Florida, where he teaches at Miami International University of Art and Design, and whose artistic production includes electro-acoustic pieces –at times combined with traditional instruments, video installations and radio works–. In 1985, Matamoros took part

in the founding of the South Florida Composers Alliance, and later on co-founded and directed the “Subtropics Experimental Music and Sound Arts Festival,” created “with the intention of exposing Miami to the new music and the art of sound.” As a member of the *Frozen Music* collective, he develops strategies for the sonic activation of specific spaces and participates in interventions that often last several hours. Along with Cuban composer Armando Rodríguez Ruidíaz (1951), he is a founding member of the experimental music group *Punto*, which among other activities, has reproduced works from the group *Fluxus*.

Guillermo Galindo (1962), a Mexican who studied at the Berklee College of Music (Boston, Massachusetts) and Mills College (California), works in the department of Diversity Studies and Design at the California College of Arts, where he teaches subjects such as sound art, electronic music, applied composition, performance art, musicology, etc. In his work, he strives to redefine the boundaries of music through the creation of new instruments, the interaction of computer generated music and video, improvisation, installation, etc. Galindo blends the American experimental tradition with his Mexican roots, as can be seen in his recent premiere of a mariachi version of 4’33”, John Cage’s “silent” work.

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Other authors -after completing part of their training at American universities- end up teaching in their own country. Such is the case of the Mexican Manuel Rocha Iturbide (1963), who earned his Ph.D. in Electronic Music at Mills College in 1989 (where he coincided with Guillermo Galindo), supplementing the education received in Mexico and France. Rocha has spent a great part of his professional career in American circuits of sound art and experimental music and is considered to be one of the most important figures in Mexican sound art. He has authored several publications of note about experimental music in Mexico and aesthetics in sound art. He is now a professor in the graduate music program at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM).

Among many other artists who have returned to their countries of origin after studying in the United States, and do not have ties to academia, we find Emiliano del Cerro (1951). The Spaniard Del Cerro trained at the Conservatorio de Madrid and the Alea laboratory (first electronic music studio in Spain) and earned his undergraduate degree in technical telecommunications engineering and teaching degree before traveling in 1983 to the United States, where he lived for nearly two decades. After earning a Master's degree at City University in New York and a Doctorate in Computer Generated Music at State University of Buffalo (where he met Morton Feldman), Del Cerro taught at this university, combining this work with his compositions. Following his return to Spain, he has continued composing, while working simultaneously at Radio Nacional de España, but has not taught music continuously.

Rafael Liñán (1960), also a Spaniard, after studying composition and various instruments at the Conservatorio de Madrid, lived in San Diego from 1989 to 1993. He finished a Master's degree at the University of California, while teaching and collaborating with some of the most renowned artists in experimental music, like Pauline Oliveros (1932). In 1996 he received a Ph.D. in Music from UCSD with a dissertation entitled "Cultivating the Ludic." Back in Spain, he has dedicated his time to composing, teaching and organizing cultural events, and has briefly ventured into politics as a cultural councilman in Quéntar, the town in Granada where he lives.

Ricardo Arias (1965), a Colombian, studied at Fundación Phonos in Barcelona with Chilean composer Gabriel Brncic, at The Hague Conservatory Institute of Sonology, and at Hunter College (New York), where he earned a Master in Integrated Media Arts. He travels between Bogotá –where he lives and works as a professor in the Art Department at the Universidad de Los Andes– and New York

–where he has collaborated with the leading sound artists in the United States–. One of his most widely recognized contributions is the *batería global*, an instrument based upon rubber balloons with which he has performed in many places of the Americas, Europe and Asia.

Fewer in number, some American artists have also left their country moving to Spanish-speaking territories. For example, in Madrid is the distinguished Wade Matthews (1955), who after earning a Doctorate at Columbia University on free improvisation with electronic sounds, moved to the Spanish capital in 1989 to continue his professional career as an improviser, theorist and coordinator of musical activities at the Sala Cruce. In 2012, Turner Publishers launched his book, *Improvisando. La libre creación musical*, which was written in Spanish and has enjoyed notable popularity.

The work carried out by American composer, sound artist, flautist and curator Barbara Held is equally relevant in the Spanish sound art scene. Barbara settled in Barcelona in the 1970s, and has acted as a bridge between sound artists and experimental musicians from the U.S. and Spain. As a curator, she created and produced “Música a Metrònom,” an experimental music festival dedicated to fostering collaborations between musicians and visual artists. Her cycles of concerts and events brought to Spain important figures from the American sound art community, such are the cases of Robert Ashley (1930-2014), David Behrman (1937), Nicolas Collins, Paul DeMarinis (1948), Brenda Hutchinson (1954), Alvin Lucier, Christian Marclay (1955), Phill Niblock (1933) and Pauline Oliveros, among others. This space where musicians from both countries could meet and interact was especially significant to local artists, for it provided ample contact with sound practices hardly explored in Spain until then.

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This necessarily partial and synthetic review of the migratory flows in the area of sound-art shows us, especially in the latter cases, the importance of those initiatives that many of the aforementioned authors –beyond their own artistic activity– have engaged in in order to promote sound art. Contexts like *Sala Cruce*, in Madrid, or the “Música a Metrònom” festival in Barcelona, have been essential bridges for the artistic exchange between the different musical and cultural realities studied herein. Many of the Hispanic artists living in the United States have also worked to create similar platforms (and assumed the corresponding scheduling responsibilities) in that country, helping to promote Spanish and Hispanic American sound art.

Non-institutional spaces

The collaborative will among creators from different fields has a notable historic precedent in the so-called *New York School*, which arose outside of any academic or institutional ties. Even though this tradition has been welcomed –as noted– by various music and interdisciplinary arts programs at a number of American universities, it is equally true that its vitality continues to be manifested through the existence and vigor of countless non-academic spaces for sound art and experimental music. These independent institutions give a voice to certain artistic practices that in turn have been legitimized by university spaces. These centers are an irreplaceable means for the development, research and promotion of experimental music and sound art.

New York City is home to many of these non-institutional spaces, which are relatively common in the United States. Their activities, normally quite open in form and content, usually consist of scheduling sound-art events, free improvisation concerts, free jazz, electro-acoustic music, noise music, etc., as

well as organizing cycles or festivals. Many of them are open to other artistic disciplines, like video art, sound installation or sculptures, dance, performance, etc. Thus, for instance, *Experimental Intermedia* (New York), a center founded and directed by Phill Niblock, has been organizing experimental and intermedia art concerts since 1973, as well as special events throughout the year. Among the artists who have exhibited their work at this center are Hispanic authors such as María de Alvear, Ricardo Arias, Llorenç Barber, María Chávez, Isaac Diego, Ferrer-Molina, Gustavo Matamoros, Sonia Megías, Fátima Miranda, Jaime Oliver, Manuel Rocha and Carles Santos. It is significant that this list is much shorter than the one containing names of artists from countries like the United Kingdom, Germany, Portugal or Belgium.

In the same vein as *Experimental Intermedia*, there are other similar spaces in New York with a long, fruitful track-record, like *The Kitchen*, *Roulette*, *The Stone*, *Spectrum* or the former *Diapason Gallery*, among others. Certain experimental music centers also have residency programs. This is the case, for example, of *Issue Project Room*, which has offered assistance to musical groups, composers and sound artists since 2005.

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These residency programs for musicians and sound artists in the United States are a very attractive platform for foreign artists, since in other countries these models of research, development and promotion are traditionally linked to the visual arts only. Spaces dedicated to interdisciplinary arts, technology and science –like *Eyebeam* (New York), the *Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center* (Troy, Alabama), the *San Francisco Tape Music Center* (San Francisco) or the *Deep Listening Institute* (Kingston, New York) – offer scholarships and residencies for musicians and sound artists. Spanish and Hispanic American creators like Bogotá native Ximena Alarcón Díaz (1972), Madrid native Francisco

López (1964), or Malaga native Miguel Ángel Melgares (1980), among others, have enjoyed them over the last few years.

Without a doubt, these independent centers help to establish and endow intergenerational continuity to the traditions and practices associated with experimental music and multidisciplinary creation, while providing spaces for collaboration, exploration, development and promotion. This all fosters a sense of community among artists from different places and creative fields. As such, the United States –and especially New York– has had the privilege of hosting musicians and artists from all over the world for decades, although it is true that other countries have employed similar models (like Germany, or to a lesser extent, France, United Kingdom or Japan). Hispanic creators stand out as a special group within its rich underground scene.

Art centers, museums and galleries

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Other American spaces –which are closer to the institutional context– have also welcomed work and projects of an interdisciplinary nature for decades, including manifestations of sound art (mainly sound installations): art centers, museums and galleries have progressively incorporated this creative sphere into their halls, and especially, into their discussions.

Many of these centers are affiliated with universities, such as the *List Visual Art Center* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge), the *Harn Museum of Art* (University of Florida), the *Beall Center for Arts + Technology* (University of California, Irvine), *Gallery 400* (University of Illinois, Chicago) or the *University Art Gallery* (Sonoma State University, California). In similar manner, great museums, like the *San Jose Museum of Arts* (San José, California), the *Museum of Modern Art* (MoMA) (New York), the *San Francisco Museum of Modern Art* (SFMOMA) (San

Francisco), and the *Museum of Contemporary Art* (San Diego), have incorporated sound installation as a rightful discipline among the arts.

Equally relevant is the work done at galleries and art centers, such as the *LMAK Projects* (New York), *Portland Center for the Arts* (Portland), *Tilton Gallery* (New York), *Mattress Factory* (Pittsburgh), *23five Incorporated* (San Francisco), *White Box Art Center* (New York) and *Galapagos Art Space* (Brooklyn, New York), among others.

The intense artistic activity of New York City and its international renown have made it especially attractive to those Spanish and Hispanic-American sound artists who have not found training or development options in their countries of origin. That is why –since the 1980s– people like Llorenç Barber, Fátima Miranda, Carles Santos (1940) or María de Alvear (1960), have sought to show their work there. This tradition continues with sound artists from later generations, like the Venezuelan Argenis Salazar (1966) –who has lived in this city in various periods of his career–; the Uruguayan Richard Garet (1972), who studied visual arts at Empire State College/SUNY, then earned a Master’s degree from Bard College and still lives in New York; the Lima native, Maria Chavez (1980) who studied at Houston Community College, in Texas, before moving to New York; or more intermittently, Spaniards Francisco López and Sonia Megías (1982), in addition to those mentioned above.

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Despite this evident attraction, looking over the schedules at the aforementioned centers and galleries, one finds that the presence of Spanish and Hispanic-American artists is still not very common at these institutions. Two exceptions to this general rule would obviously be Richard Garet’s participation in *Soundings. A Contemporary Score*, held at MoMA in 2013, or Maria Chavez, who –in addition

to DJ-ing at MoMA– participated in the *Whitney Museum of American Art Festival* show, dedicated to Christian Marclay in 2010.

Again a certain asymmetry is perceptible when considering that it is much more common to find American sound artists on Spanish or Hispanic-American calendars. The work of Christian Marclay, for example, has been the subject of exhibits at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao in 2014, at CA2M (Móstoles, Madrid) in 2012, at DA2 –“Domus Artium” (Salamanca)– in 2007, at Torre Muntadas (El Prat de Llobregat, Barcelona) also in 2007, etc. Although Marclay ought to be considered an artist with the highest level of international prestige (and to that extent, not representative of the overall situation of sound art produced in the United States), his case is relevant in that it still is not possible to find –even as an exception– a Spanish or Hispanic-American sound artist who has been able to enjoy a similar trajectory to that of Marclay’s.

In order to explain, at least in part, how an American sound artist is able to reach the levels of recognition that Christian Marclay enjoys, we need to reflect on those intermediating elements that, within the art system, can play a determining role in the dissemination of a sound artist’s work. The importance of a gallery dedicated to sound art has already been mentioned –like *Diapason* was– in New York. Yet, it might be even more revealing the fact that an American gallery with highly acclaimed international prestige, like *Paula Cooper* (also in New York), welcomes a sound artist like the aforementioned Marclay to be represented by them.

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Institutional Curation in Spain

Another of these fundamental intermediary agents is without a doubt the curator, or *comisario*, whose importance has continued to grow since the final decade of last century in every art scene of our globalized world. Looking at the presence of sound art at Spanish and Hispanic-American art centers, one does not see the asymmetry that we are accustomed to finding in comparisons with the United States. We believe that this responds not only to the exhibition policies of the centers that have accepted these artistic manifestations, but rather –and mainly– owing to the stubborn and dedicated work of certain curators, who have defended the relevance of sound art and successfully introduced it to important museums and art centers.

This phenomenon is very clear in Spain, where some of the most important centers have incorporated sound art to institutions before their American counterparts. One key figure in this process has been José Iges, who in 1999 commissioned the exhibition: *El espacio del sonido. El tiempo de la mirada*, presented in the *Koldo Mitxelena* de San Sebastián. Out of the thirteen sound artists involved, four were American: Laurie Anderson (1947), Philip Corner (1933), Joe Jones (1934-1993) and Max Neuhaus (1939-2009). *Iges also curated Dimensión Sonora* in this same space, but in 2007, again with thirteen artists, three of whom were from the United States: Gary Hill (1951), Tom Johnson and Alvin Lucier.

Lucier had visited Madrid in 2003 for the “12th Festival Punto de Encuentro,” organized by the *Asociación de Música Electroacústica de España* in Madrid and Albacete, with Miguel Álvarez-Fernández as the producer and assistant to the American author. Álvarez-Fernández also acted as curator, together with María Bella, on another pioneering public sound art project in Madrid, *Itinerarios del*

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sonido, which invited fourteen artists to produce new sound creations, including Americans Vito Acconci (1940), Bill Fontana (1947), Susan Hiller (1942), Kristin Oppenheim (1959) and Adrian Piper (1948).

José Antonio Sarmiento is another essential researcher and curator in the history of sound art in Spain, and has contributed enormously to the spreading of the work of American sound creators within the Spanish-speaking world. In his last great exhibit: *Música y Acción* –presented at the Centro José Guerrero de Granada between 2012 and 2013– we encounter the work of George Brecht (1926-2008), John Cage, Henry Cowell (1897-1965), Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), Al Hansen (1927-1995), Alvin Lucier, Charlotte Moorman (1933-1991), Steve Reich (1936), La Monte Young (1935), Andy Warhol (1928- 1987), Robert Watts (1923-1988) and The Velvet Underground.

In order to close out this reference on the presence of American sound art in Spanish exhibition spaces, we need to mention the work of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, especially in its current incarnation. Now –under the direction of Manuel Borja Vilel– a broader comprehension of recent art is advocated, where sound art certainly stands side by side with other experimental manifestations. Hence, with José Días Cuyás acting as the main curator (and Carmen Pardo coordinating the music section), between 2009 and 2010 he presented at MNCARS *Encuentros de Pamplona 1972: Fin de fiesta del arte experimental*. Mentioning this historic exhibition brings to mind another pioneering experience that took place while still under Franco’s dictatorship and which brought to Spain American authors like John Cage, Alvin Curran, Terry Fox (1943-2008), Al Hansen, Dick Higgins (1938-1998), Richard Kostelanetz (1940), Joan La Barbara (1947), Robert Morris (1931), Steve Reich, David Tudor (1926-1996) or Emmett Williams (1925-2007), along with many others.

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Even more recently, in 2013, MNCARS presented + - 1961. *La expansión de las artes*, an exhibit commissioned by Julia Robinson and Christian Xatrec. By exploring the creative environment characteristic of the time period noted in the title, it made use of the work –along with that of many others– of American artists who have worked with sound, like George Brecht, Earle Brown (1926-2002), Joseph Byrd (1937), Henry Flynt (1940), Dick Higgins, Terry Jennings (1940-1981), Jackson Mac Low (1922-2004), George Maciunas (1931-1978), Richard Maxfield (1927-1969), Robert Morris, Terry Riley (1935), Emmett Williams, Christian Wolff (1934) and La Monte Young.

Festivals

If we mentioned *Encuentros de Pamplona* as an inaugural milestone –rather than a finale– for experimental art in Spain, crossing to the other side of the Atlantic, in Mexico, we can only find a comparable phenomenon more towards the end of last century: “In 1999 the first edition of the International Sound Art Festival was held in Mexico City. It was an unmissable event conceived by the author of this article [Manuel Rocha Iturbide] and by curator and now-director of the museum Ex-Teresa Arte Actual, Guillermo Santamarina. Our goal was the creation of a space where fine arts and contemporary music could interact, using the element of sound as a unifying agent.” (Rocha Iturbide, 2000).

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This experience –which the same article classifies as “unique and unprecedented in this country”– brought to Mexico for the first time, according to Rocha Iturbide, pioneering Americans like Alvin Curran, Phill Niblock or Pauline Oliveros, together with other younger American artists, like Paul DeMarinis or Krystyna Bobrowski.

Also in Mexico, more specifically in Morelia (Michoacán), home to the *Centro Mexicano para la Música y las Artes Sonoras*, composer Rodrigo Sigal (1971) has directed the annual “Visiones Sonoras” festival since 2005. Although its schedule focuses primarily on more academic electro-acoustic music, sound art and experimental music have also received attention, for they have presented works by American artists like Larry Polansky (1954), Steve Reich and Christian Wolff, along with that by younger artists, like Phillip Hermans or Tristan Perich (1982), among others.

The connections between the United States and the rest of the Americas are weaker than those with Mexico. Lima native curator, poet and researcher, Luis Alvarado (1980), describes it thusly: “In terms of sound art, relations with the United States have never been very fluid for the Peruvian scene, where the arrival of an artist usually depends on the support of an embassy or cultural center. To that extent, the support of the Fundación Mondrian or Alliance Française has always been much more favorable for this type of projects. For that reason, I think that many more European artists than American artists have come to Lima. However, although lots of American musicians have come, they have not done so for a sound art event, but rather on their own account, because of the touristic interest aroused by Machu Pichu. When they come here, they usually contact me and we organize a concert. Dave Dove and Nautical Almanac would be a few examples.”

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Among many other activities, Alvarado commissioned a show in 2012 called *Dejar actuar al tiempo: Artistas peruanos a 100 años de John Cage* at the Centro Fundación Telefónica, in Lima.

Other American sound artists have visited Peru, like Charlemagne Palestine (1947), at the invitation of the “Vibra” festival, or Randy Yau, who participated in

the “Festival Internacional de Video/Arte/Electrónica.” Apart from these specific occasions, the situation described by Luis Alvarado also applies to other Hispanic-American countries. An additional exception would be Nicolas Collins’s presence at the “Inaudito” festival in Bogotá in 2007, or the Chilean festival “Cielos del infinito” in 2013.

In terms of American sound artists in Spain, beyond the museum scene and in addition to the contexts propitiated by Barbara Held and Wade Matthews, a few initiatives more towards the end of last century stand out. In 1979, the already mentioned *Aula de Música* at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid started a parallel journey to the one which –from that date on– the “ENSEMS” festival in Valencia would develop. This festival –first coordinated by Barber– included on successive billings artists like Phillip Corner, Barbara Held or Alison Knowles (1933), among others. In 1992, Barber started a new festival in the Spanish capital: “Paralelo Madrid-Otras Músicas,” which led Christian Marclay –who at that time had not yet achieved his current recognition– to the Sala Pradillo. The last organizational adventure for Barber, still ongoing today, is the aforementioned “Nits d’Aielo i Art festival,” started in 1997, which in 1999 presented the work of Phil Niblock in Valencia, and in 2010 the work of Charlemagne Palestine. After this brief summary, it is important to point out that the scheduling conceived and materialized by Barber –with very limited support– always differed significantly from those of the managers of Spain’s leading public institutions. That is why, for many years, they have been in practical terms the only possibility for the citizens of Valencia and Madrid to view these experimental aesthetics of American origin, still barely served by official concert halls and other official centers.

Record releases

This paper has focused on face-to-face exchanges where the paths and biographies of American sound artists –on the one hand– and Spanish and Hispanic-American artists –on the other– have crossed. However, at the very least, this brief epigraph must be dedicated to a different type of traffic: one that has taken experimental sound from one side to the other, not through concerts, performances or installations, but rather through produced recordings, book publishing, radio programs, etc.

One of the most characteristic aesthetic and conceptual features of sound art and experimental music is undoubtedly the claim that sound has a physical materiality and the radicalism of its perceptual experience tends to take place before the imposition of any pre-established linguistic codes. However, although much of this phenomenological richness is either transformed or lost by adhering to the formats like those evoked at the end of the last paragraph, there is no doubt that they have been and are fundamental to the intercultural flow of knowledge between the geographic areas covered herein. The acceleration of these flows aided by the Internet and new communication networks have facilitated, accentuated and redefined the importance of this type of exchange. All of which comes to explain why –even though the physical and personal experience of sound art and sound artists are almost always inescapable– certain calling cards often end up being essential as the first contact with this new poetic approach.

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As such, album releases –although often deemed superseded by other digital media– continues to represent an important physical and economic manifestation of the support towards a given artist or trend from a publishing platform. However, in the realm of sound art, this promotional work invariably takes place

within a context completely removed from the oligopoly of multinational record labels, and it is better defined by its total independence regarding these labels and their interests.

The most significant case on the American scene, in terms of the attention paid to Hispanic-American and Spanish artists might be the Pogus label, run by Al Margolis, an artist from Chester, New York. This label has released work essential for the access to certain creations –mainly from South America– not just in the United States, but all over the world (including, paradoxically, the countries where these creations themselves are made). This is the case of the double CD *Tensions At The Vanguard. New Music From Peru (1948-1979)*, created and produced by Luis Alvarado, who brought together the pioneering works of Edgar Valcárcel, César Bolaños, Enrique Pinilla, Alejandro Núñez Allauca or Arturo Ruiz del Pozo, among others. This effort is connected to the one that, with Alvarado's assistance, made possible a CD called: *César Bolaños. Peruvian Electroacoustic and Experimental Music (1964-1970)*. Prior to that, Pogus had put out *Travels of the Spider. Electro-Acoustic Music from Argentina*, an anthology less focused on experimental music, with a more academic electro-acoustic orientation, as the title suggests. Beyond these connections with South America, the Pogus catalog also contains work by Madrid native Francisco López, with two compilations including his works: *Quartet for the End of Space, and Montreal Sound Matter / Montréal matières sonore*.

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This review of the laudable efforts by Al Margolis through Pogus must also include another special-edition CD, called *Tape Works*, by Anla Courtis (the nom de plume of Alan Courtis). Mentioning this Argentinian musician is a nice segue for recalling the group Reynols, which from 1993 to 2004 included Courtis, Roberto Conlazo, Christian Dergarabedian, and drummer (and the group's leader) Miguel Tomásín, a musician with Down's syndrome. The structure of Reynols –much like a

conventional rock band, despite how far their approach and their sound result were from that paradigm– enabled them to tour repeatedly in the United States, giving shows in places often removed from the experimental music circuit. This, along with Tomásín’s unstoppable creative fecundity and scant self-censorship, led to a multitude of recordings produced on a motley group of independent American labels, including “American Tapes,” “Beta-Lactam Ring Records,” “Carbon Records,” “Childish Tapes,” “Family Vineyard,” “Freedom From,” “Gameboy Records,” “Last Visible Dog,” “Locust Music,” “Lonely Whistle Music,” “Mandragora Records,” “Nihilist Records,” “Roaratorio,” “Sedimental,” “Tedium House,” and “White Tapes,” among many others.

Publications

Unfortunately, the obligatory note about publications of written works originating from the various cultural contexts analyzed herein –and the essential work of translation that some of them necessarily involve– can only be brief. In particular, we do contemplate the bibliography of Americans dedicated to sound art, since the references to Hispanic-Americans and Spaniards artists are rather scarce. Once again, Francisco López’s international renown has led to his appearance in important recent works like *In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art* (2009), by Seth Kim-Cohen, *MicroBionic* (2009) and *Unofficial Release: Self-Released And Handmade Audio In Post-Industrial Society* (2012), both by Thomas Bey William Bailey, or *Sonic Possible Worlds: Hearing the Continuum of Sound* (2014), by Salome Voegelin.

With regard to how American work is received in Hispanic America and Spain, the first reference –because of its broad promotion on both sides of the Atlantic– has to be the work of the Venezuelan publishing house, Monte Ávila, which in 1981

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published the Spanish translation of *For the Birds (Para los pájaros)*, a compilation of conversations between Daniel Charles and John Cage, originally published in France. This book, out of print for some time, received a facsimile republication in 2007 by Mexican publishing house ALIAS. In this country, always closer to the American culture, Era publishers had already launched in 1974 *A Year from Monday (Del lunes en un año)*, another seminal work by Cage.

There was an even longer delay in the arrival of Cage's work to Spain, which was essential for understanding the aesthetic –and even epistemological– approach implied in sound art; to put it simply: shifting the main axis of musical activity from producing sound to listening to it. After a pamphlet published in 1985 by Llorenç Barber (in cooperation with the Círculo de Bellas Artes de Madrid) titled *John Cage*, Spain had to wait until 1999 for Carmen Pardo to publish *Escritos al oído*, a curated compilation of Cage's work (published not by a musicology department or a conservatory, but by the Official Board of Surveyors and Technical Architects from the Murcia Region). Later still, in 2002, another publisher, Árdora, released a Spanish version of Cage's Book *Silence*, which had originally been published in 1961. And in 2006, the momentous work of Michael Nyman, *Música experimental: De John Cage en adelante*, originally published in 1974, finally appeared in Spanish.

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Although the dates above testify to the remarkable delay in the arrival of seminal writing on sound art in Spanish, they also demonstrate the sudden increase in the publications and translations of these works since the beginning of this century. As part of this push, a few books with even broader intentions and written originally in Spanish need to be mentioned, including –without a doubt– the most important one: *La mosca tras la oreja: de la música experimental al arte sonoro en España* (2009), in which once again the indispensable name of Llorenç Barber appears, accompanied in this research by Montserrat Palacios.

Radio and Internet

The Fundación Autor, responsible for publishing *La mosca tras la oreja*, also published as part of the same collection –*Exploraciones*– a book called *Ars Sonora, 25 años. Una experiencia de arte sonoro en radio* (2012), edited by José Iges, who founded the radio show “Ars Sonora” in 1985, on Radio Clásica (formerly Radio 2) at Radio Nacional de España. The book reviews this program’s activities, which for three decades now has played on a weekly basis in Spain – along with a great deal of other works– both current and historical American sound art and experimental music. This work continues in the program’s current incarnation (started in 2008, with Miguel Álvarez-Fernández acting as the director and presenter). It promotes experimental creations –not just in Spain, but to the entire world over the Internet and on podcasts– from practically every American artist mentioned elsewhere in this paper and many others. For example, the current incarnation of “Ars Sonora” has dedicated entire programs to Kenneth Gaburo (1926-1993), Frank Zappa (1940-1993), Morton Subotnick (1933), Jim Shaw (1952), or Gordon Mumma (1935). Also American artists from other disciplines, like painter Mark Rothko (1903-1970), dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham (1919-2009), for example, have been singled out on other shows.

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Podcasting has changed radio into a genuinely global means of communication: nearly half of the weekly downloads of the Ars Sonora show –between 15,000 and 20,000 downloads, all told– are from outside Spain. Mexico is first, followed by Argentina and other Latin American countries such as Chile, Colombia, Peru or Venezuela, which periodically alternate rankings –and the United States normally holds sixth or seventh place on the list, far beyond the next countries: Germany, Brazil, France, and the United Kingdom–.

By dissociating listening from the fixed time frame typical of traditional broadcasts, and enabling one to listen to pre-recordings repeatedly, this new radio paradigm has put these productions –and in particular the websites that host these podcasts– on the same footing with online databases and repositories that gather information often inaccessible on other formats and media. Thus, it is now extremely easy to have constant, global access to podcasts like those on Radio Clásica/RNE, Radio Web MACBA (affiliated with the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo of Barcelona), RRS (part of the Museo Reina Sofía of Madrid), the Fonoteca Nacional de México (directed by Lida Camacho), or programs like *Cazar Truenos* (produced in Lima by Luis Alvarado), *El silencio no existe* or *Una chica hablando de sonido* (both produced by Buenos Aires resident, Sol Rezza), among many other examples. All of these broadcasts have made efforts to a greater or lesser extent to introduce their listeners to the work of American sound artists.

As an offshoot of this argument, we should also note the importance of certain platforms –emerging directly on and for the Internet– dedicated to compiling recordings and other documents related to sound art. *UbuWeb* –a pioneering project founded in 1996 by New Yorker and experimental poet Kenneth Goldsmith– is an international benchmark for experimental art in general, but especially with respect to sound art as it houses a huge amount of audio files in a relatively orderly and systematic fashion. As such, only taking into consideration this strictly acoustic section –since the areas dedicated to experimental poetry are often manifestations close to sound art– one finds documents related to Mexican authors like pioneering composer Silvestre Revueltas (1899-1940), poet Ulises Carrión (1941–1989) or conceptual artist Pablo Helguera (1971). Also available at *UbuWeb* is the voice of Uruguayan poet Julio Campal (1934-1968) or Argentinian musicians like Mauricio Kagel (1931-2008) or Mario Davidovsky (1934). Spain enjoys a somewhat broader representation, although nothing

comparable to other European countries like Germany, the UK, France, Italy or Austria. There are sections with recorded sounds by the group ZAJ, comprised of José Luis Castillejo, Walter Marchetti, Juan Hidalgo and Esther Ferrer. *UbuWeb* also has incorporated a series of programs produced by Roc Jiménez de Cisneros for Radio Web MACBA called AVANT, which dedicates shows to a single artist, such as Esplendor Geométrico, Llorenç Barber, Francisco López, José Manuel Berenguer, Josep Maria Mestres Quadreny, Eduardo Polonio, José Iges, Vagina Dentata Organ, Victor Nubla, Pelayo Fernández Arrizabalaga, Juan Hidalgo and Carles Santos. Finally, as a reflection of the project's aesthetic openness, one can also find sound works by creators who are largely visual artists, such as Barcelona native Antoni Muntadas (1942), Rioja native Alejandra Salinas (1977) or Madrid native Santiago Sierra (1966), or the work of choreographer La Ribot (1962), also born in Madrid.

Conclusions

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The point made a few lines above about the more frequent presence of German, French, Italian or Austrian artists compared to Spanish or Hispanic-American authors on a project such as *UbuWeb*, is significant and represents a more general phenomenon which has been covered in other sections in this article. Spanish-speaking experimental sound creators do not enjoy sufficient representation on American cultural platforms, whether they are institutional, academic or independent.

Even though only quantitatively demographic arguments were made, without even touching on geographic proximity –with respect to Latin America– or issues related to the strong presence of the Spanish language in the United States, a much broader presence would be justified. Thus, we need to ask ourselves the

reason for such disparity in order to come up with three possible causes of this phenomenon.

First, it is easy to perceive a tremendous difference in the cultural policies of some of the countries mentioned above (in particular Germany, France or Austria) with regard to fomenting, disseminating and promoting work by sound artists in those regions. Institutions like the *Goethe Institut*, the *Alliance Française* or the *Instituto Italiano di Cultura*, among others, which support sound art with a notable intensity, have adapted their administrative frameworks to ensure that these manifestations do not end up relegated to a desolate no-man's land that falls somewhere between music (understood perhaps in a far too traditional way) and the visual arts (where the contextual terminology itself does not help to incorporate sound art). This fact is a bureaucratic malfunction still too frequent in Spanish and Hispanic-American administrations.

As a symmetrical projection of this situation –and a secondary cause– we should point out that not much effort is being made from the United States in order to provide sound art originating in Spain or Hispanic America with artistic representation. So far, this has not been much of a concern to schedulers, curators and other cultural agents, and cases such as that of record label Pogus –with its valuable releases dedicated to Peruvian artists for example– are still in this respect exceptional.

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The above mentioned aspect can well be considered a third (and fundamental) possible cause for said disparity: the lack of sense of community among artists (and other cultural promoters) tied to sound art from Spain and Hispanic America who work –or aspire to work– in the United States. Although this lack of sense of identity has been listed third, it is a phenomenon that clearly helps to understand the scarce attention paid to artistic manifestations not only in their respective

places of origin, but also in their potential places of reception, for example the United States.

These three causes converge in various situations that are hard to explain, but because of that are very descriptive. However, from the perspective of this study they are as lamentable as they are relatively easy to fix. First, there is the scarcity of publications and curating projects that can bring together, systematize, order and place value on sound art productions made in Hispanic America and Spain, and that can find (this is fundamental) a correct dissemination in the United States. Second –but closely related to the first item–, there is a lack of attention paid to translations into English that would allow receivers to gain a more holistic idea of the current outlook and history of sound art in Spanish-speaking nations. In the third and final place, there is a lack of opportunities for artists, theorists, curators, etc., from Spain and Hispanic America that would enable them to travel and contact major places of cultural irradiation in the United States, in order to convey by themselves the creative practices undertaken in their countries of origin. In this sense, the model based upon one-time participation at festivals and exhibits has proven to be much less effective than the model of artistic residencies, which allow visitors and receptors a more leisurely, reflexive and critical permeation. This last observation, of course, could apply to the United States as a country of destination, but also one of origin for schedulers, curators, theorists, etc. who might know first-hand the artistic scene in Spanish-language countries.

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In general what we try to explain here –the limited presence of Spanish and Hispanic-American sound art in the American cultural context– takes on particular importance when placed alongside another important aspect: the international relevance of contemporary artistic manifestations realized in the United States. This country continues to play a role –for the purposes of this

study– as a privileged showcase for artists and the works that they present there. One could argue that it offers a somewhat distorted or magnified reflection of the artistic reality its institutions take on (especially regarding specific contexts, like New York City). But it undoubtedly explains the attraction that numerous creators feel towards the United States, even at times presumably global and ‘post-modernly’ decentralized like these.

Beyond the strictly symbolic and the efficient global dissemination of the appeal for the American imaginary, if we look closely to this country’s academic system, we find rather clear incentives for sound artists that have not yet found anything comparable in the Spanish-speaking world. The opportunity to earn a Ph.D. in sound art or experimental music at certain American universities as well as combining creation with education and research, act as indisputable motivators that have undoubtedly compelled countless Spanish and Hispanic-American sound artists to pursue their education and professional career in the United States. Unlike what happens in other countries, in American academic circles, one’s own creative career is considered to have the academic merit to guarantee an artist’s trajectory, regardless of the specific aesthetic practices he or she cultivates.

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However, an examination of the information gathered in this study reveals that this attraction to the United States is not quite equally intense among all Spanish-speaking nations. Thus, the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico is notably stronger than the one found in any other Hispanic-American territory, and one could argue that this phenomenon transcends what any geographical aspect would appear to explain. The schedules of festivals and exhibition spaces, just like the interviews carried out over the course of this research, confirm that for most South American artists, Europe is a far more attractive artistic destination than the United States. One could even state that in this context, cities like Paris,

Berlin, London or Madrid, are closer –from a cultural imagination standpoint– than New York or Los Angeles, since South Americans seem to pay much more attention to the artistic activities developed in major European cities than they do to those in America’s various cultural scenes.

Spain’s position in the triangulation examined herein is therefore unique and demonstrates this country’s schizoid Janus nature, which on the one hand looks to Europe (from the perspective bestowed by its peripheral nature), and on the other to the Americas –dividing its gaze, in turn, between those countries that speak the same language and the always-magnetic cultural and economic powerhouse that is the United States. Hence, it is paradoxical that many Hispanic-American sound artists from different places get to know each other in Spain (again, challenging the geography reflected on maps), as well as the fact that many Spaniards learn about certain Hispanic-American sound artists only if and when they have spent any amount of time in the United States.

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In any case, one should also conclude –in light of the contemplations posed herein– that this state of things is undergoing a radical transformation. Multiple, closely-woven networks have grown among Spanish-speaking countries in recent years, without necessarily having passed through the United States. Sound-art publications, either written in or translated into Spanish, have greatly increased in number since the beginning of this century. Clearly there is still no reciprocal movement that demonstrates any interest on the part of English-speaking scholars, however the penetration of Hispanic culture –as a whole– is unanimously seen as an unstoppable force on the rise, and both sound art and experimental music are not oblivious to this fact.

Perhaps, if we are allowed to conclude with a self-referential reflection, the pioneering character of a study such as this –which, as far as we can tell, has no

precedent–, reflects both the situation described critically in the preceding paragraphs and this exciting state of transformation just mentioned. A study that shared the intention of this article, but were written a few years from now, would undoubtedly reflect a much different set of circumstances than those analyzed herein. At this point, all that remains to be expressed is the desire and the hope that these words might contribute –however minimally– to that evolution, whilst sound art continues to stretch its reverberations wherever it finds listeners simply willing to listen.

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