

PILOT STUDY #15

On The Semibreve Scholar

Between Voices and Echoes: Sound, Pedagogy, and Emergent
Communities in Experimental Sound Art Festivals and Networks

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Re ———
Imagine
Europe

————— New
Perspectives
for Action



INTRODUCTION

This essay examines the annual Semibreve Festival and its Edigma Semibreve Scholar programme as a situated example of how sound art institutions collaborate with public communities to create spaces for collective experience, knowledge exchange, and emergent thoughts and practices. Developed within the framework of *Re-Imagine Europe: New Perspectives for Action (2023–2027)* project, it presents curatorial, and production processes centred on listening, experimentation, and technological innovation as forms of action to redistribute attention and visibility, without pretending to fully resolve systemic tensions. Within the European ecosystem of experimental festivals, Semibreve occupies a distinctive position as an intimate laboratory rooted in the local context of Braga, Portugal, while staying connected to a rich international network.

The Edigma Semibreve Scholar programme extends the logic into a pedagogical dimension by integrating academic works from higher-education students into the festival programme. In doing so, they

↑ Cover photo: *com tacto* | *contacto* by Eva Barbosa, Semibreve Festival 2024.
Photo courtesy of organisation

reaffirm learning as a crucial aspect of experimental arts, while also exposing the tension between openness and selection in the curatorial process. An analysis of artworks and ideas presented in the programme between 2021 and 2025 shows recurring concerns with sonic ecology, differences in perception, ironies of technological mediation, bodily and post-human subjectivities, with artists operating on sensory and affective levels in the face of saturation, rather than explicit narratives. The relevance of programmes like Semibreve Scholar lies not in intending to create a full democracy, but in inhabiting the tensions between creative freedom and institutionalisation in order to create space for productive encounters.



Introduction

Artistic creation is always a political act.¹ Not only because it articulates explicit positions, but because the very redistribution of sensibilities, of ways of listening and seeing, is already an intervention into how reality is organised. Each work encounters forces that exceed it, such as the political context in which it emerges, the economic conditions that make it possible, the structures that legitimise it, and even the silences that accompany it. Art, whether sonic, visual, or digital, does not hover above the world; it is the world speaking of itself.

However, the political dimension does not depend on programming activist content. The simple act of creating, of occupying a space, of listening and visibility, is already political: it demands resources, challenges priorities, and claims collective time. Even when apparently ‘empty’ of ideological discourse, artistic action opens a space for alternative forms of knowledge, affirming the legitimacy of its presence, claiming to be heard, and inscribing itself within the social fabric. Thus, every artistic gesture, even when subtle, already carries a political force because it contests the definition of who can be heard, what can be considered art, and which sensibilities have the right to exist publicly.

In sound art, in new media art and in exploratory electronic music, such as the Semibreve Festival and Re-Imagine Europe network², this political dimension acquires particular contours. These practices have been asserting themselves, especially since the end of the twentieth century, as hybrid territories

1 as critical authors from Jacques Rancière (Rancière, 2000) to Brandon LaBelle (LaBelle, 2010) have reminded us.

2 Re-Imagine Europe is a four-year transnational co-creation and circulation project, of which Semibreve is a partner along with 13 other European cultural organisations. re-imagine-europe.eu/about-new-perspectives-for-action

where aesthetics, technology and social experience intersect. They place emphasis not only on artistic production, but also on the creation of spaces for encounter, listening, and the sharing of knowledge.

Sound, for example, possesses a singular social agency, capable of engendering emergent forms of resistance and shaping new communities. Collective listening functions as a political act capable of suspending social atomisation³. By shifting the primacy of visual media, listening destabilises hierarchies of the sensible and opens space for other forms of experience, both individual and collective. As sound researcher Salomé Voegelin reminds us, listening is not a neutral gesture⁴. It is also a political practice that decides who is included and who is silenced.

These dynamics are intensified in the contemporary information era. Digital media expand circulation and collaboration yet raise questions about whether this is true democratisation or another layer of mediation and control. While access and voices multiply, algorithmic and economic logics filter, hierarchise, and silence. Artistic creation operates within this ambiguity as a sensitive laboratory, exposing both the promise of democratisation and the mechanisms of exclusion. Identitarian by nature, it creates fragile communities of recognition and belonging. Its role is not to resolve tensions, but to expose them.

Art, Critical Pedagogy and Emancipation

Art has been conceived, in multiple philosophical and pedagogical traditions, as a space of liberation. From the emancipatory pedagogies of Paulo Freire⁵, which understand learning as a

3 (Pezzack, 2024)

4 (Voegelin, 2001)

5 (Freire, 1970)

practice of freedom, to bell hooks, who conceives of teaching as an act of resistance⁶, runs the idea that knowledge is not mere transmission, but the creation of conditions for critical consciousness. Transposed to the artistic field, this perspective highlights creation as a transformative experience, both individual and collective, particularly in experimental and collective languages. Pauline Oliveros⁷ already demonstrated how listening can function as a pedagogy of attention and care, a collective exercise in openness, while Nicolas Bourriaud⁸ described contemporary art as a space of encounter, where the work operates as a social relation rather than an object.

Practices linked to sound art, new media art, and exploratory electronic music exemplify this horizon. The emergence of new media art⁹ revealed how digital media operate simultaneously as aesthetic languages and ways of thinking the world. Today, this has expanded into an ecosystem in which platforms and social networks function as cultural infrastructures shaping the possibilities of creation and sharing¹⁰. Interactivity, remixing, and appropriation act not only as technical resources, but as pedagogical and political gestures that challenge the division between creators and receivers, demanding active participation. Aesthetic circulation on networks thus becomes a communal process of appropriation, transformation, and reaction, where the common is built through both continuity and conflict.

This community extends beyond the immediate present through generational dynamics of sharing and reaction. Artists in

6 (hooks, 1994)

7 with Deep Listening practice (Oliveros, 2005)

8 through his *relational aesthetics* theory (Bourriaud, 1998)

9 as observed by Lev Manovich in *The Language of New Media* (2001)

10 which José van Dijck called the *culture of connectivity* (2013)

formation appropriate, reconfigure, reject, or reinvent inherited languages, producing a living palimpsest in which each generation writes upon the traces of the previous one. These gestures are not only aesthetic, but social, and it is through the tension between continuity and rupture that a common horizon emerges, allowing art to imagine collective futures.

Within this realm, exploratory and digital art can be understood as an experiment in emancipation. By opening space for error, noise, and uncertainty, it challenges normative knowledge and promotes a pedagogy of uncertainty. In academic contexts, students in sound creation or multimedia experimentation engage as co-authors rather than passive receivers, participating in the collective construction of meaning. Here, art operates as an identitarian and communal catalyst, enabling fragmented experiences to resonate collectively. As Jacques Rancière¹¹ argues, emancipation arises not from hierarchical transmission, but from the verification of the equality of intelligences. Transposed to artistic practice, each act of collective listening or exploration may thus function as a provisional affirmation of the common.

Art as a Space of Exclusion

However, the promise of artistic creation is not free from risks and ambiguities. The dominant narrative presents experimental and digital art as a territory of freedom, where imagination escapes convention and opens itself to new communities. This vision is inspiring but demands a critical gaze. The history of contemporary art has shown that behind promises of openness lie mechanisms of exclusion. Even movements that claimed to be radical and accessible often reproduced hierarchies of gender, class, or cultural and social capital¹². Historical communities

11 in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991)

12 This analysis of subtle exclusion is reinforced by critical research within the

such as Fluxus, Free Improvisation, and Deep Listening also require demystification. Fluxus proclaimed accessibility yet circulated mainly among those with the cultural capital to grasp its codes. Free improvisation, despite its rhetoric of freedom, remained dominated by white men for decades. Deep Listening, pioneered by Oliveros as a communal practice, was rapidly absorbed by academia and formalised. These cases reveal that exploratory art can both open breaches and reinforce hierarchies.

In the digital art and new media context, this contradiction is also very visible. Net art and glitch music emerged as practices of rupture, grounded in the idea that anyone with a computer could create and share. Yet this democratisation is mediated by corporate platforms, visibility algorithms, and infrastructures that reproduce global inequalities. The promise of online community often dissolves into ephemeral interaction, while supposedly horizontal networks function as new forms of gatekeeping.

University environments, often seen as privileged spaces of experimentation, also expose tensions. While sonic and digital practices can act as identitarian catalysts for students, academic communities remain partial, composed of those who have already crossed barriers of class, gender, and accessibility. Academia is not only fertile, but selective and hierarchising, forcing a distinction between a restricted 'we' and a universal one.

Thus, to frame exploratory art as empowerment and community-building requires caution. Alongside the redistribution of sensibilities it enables, there persist invisible exclusions and institutional appropriations. Rather than purely liberating, art must be understood as a field of tension between

cultural sector, as in the study *The Right to Beauty as an Element of Social Justice*, which argues for aesthetic experience as a matter of social equity (Brombin, 2024).



Symbiophone, Jéssica Pereira Gaspar, Semibreve Festival 2024.
Photo courtesy of organisation



openness and closure, emancipation and hierarchy, community and isolation.

Festivals as Spaces of Knowledge

Festivals dedicated to exploratory electronic music and new media art constitute temporary spaces of knowledge and experimentation, where the ephemeral gains critical density. More than showcases, they function as moments of encounter in which artists, audiences, academics, students, and local communities intersect, operating within tensions between institutional legitimacy, local rootedness, and global visibility.

The case of Ars Electronica is paradigmatic. Founded in 1979 in Linz, Austria, it pioneered the articulation of art, science, and technology, evolving into a permanent cultural infrastructure with academic authority. This contrasts with CTM Festival in Germany, which embeds itself in Berlin's club culture, placing seminars and conferences alongside nocturnal performances in a more rhizomatic model of knowledge production. Mutek, founded in 2000 in Montreal, Canada, positioned itself as a platform for emerging artists and live audiovisual practices, consolidating an aesthetic that combines sonic exploration with visual immersion. By contrast, Unsound Festival in Poland distinguished itself through a politicised curatorial approach, linking experimental sound with debates on identity, censorship, and environmental crisis.

Within this ecosystem of festivals, Sonic Acts¹³ Biennial, in The Netherlands, occupies a distinctive position. Operating as a site of artistic research and critical reflection, it has explored

13 Founded in the 1994 as a collaboration between The Hague's ArtScience Interfaculty and experimental cultural venue Paradiso in Amsterdam. Sonic Acts has developed a model in which festivals function as nodes within a distributed system of artistic and intellectual production.

planetary transformation and perceptual infrastructures through editions such as *The Geologic Imagination*, *The Noise of Being*, and *Hereafter*. Producing residencies, commissions, and transnational collaborations, the organisation consolidated a model of the festival as an epistemic platform where artistic presentation merges with knowledge production and ecological awareness.

The impact of these festivals is evident in how they have reshaped electronic music and broader visual and performative arts. Ars Electronica legitimised interactive and digital installation practices; CTM hosted early hybrid performances combining artificial intelligence, voice, and critique; while Mutek established live audiovisual performance as a recognised genre. Yet alongside circulation and trend creation, tensions persist. Despite strong local engagements, global ambition can produce aesthetic homogenisation. These festivals promote openness and dialogue, but they also function as structures of selection and exclusion, deciding what counts as innovation and inevitably leaving voices at the margins.

Elitisation emerges through ticket prices, specialised discourse, stable decision-making circles, and audiences often drawn from urban, educated strata. The promise of full community and universal access thus remains unfulfilled. These festivals belong to the 'art world'¹⁴, itself shaped by hierarchies and validation regimes that limit genuine democratisation. Recognising this does not negate their value, but situates them realistically: as partial, provisional spaces where new forms

14 This includes artists, but also extends to other key players like dealers, curators, critics, collectors, museum staff, and art historians. It is a collaborative system with its own conventions and evaluative standards for determining what constitutes art and who is considered an artist.

of community and knowledge are sketched, always crossed by fissures.

Festivals function as condensation points for artistic knowledge, where trends are affirmed and generations intersect. It is precisely within the tension between experimentation and legitimation that their singularity lies, and paradoxically, where critical, divergent voices capable of renewing the artistic field may emerge.

Semibreve – Exploratory Electronic Music and Digital Art Festival

Within the broader landscape of experimental electronic music festivals, Semibreve offers a particularly rich case for analysis. Since its foundation in 2011, it has established itself as a consistent and distinctive presence within the international field of exploratory electronic music. The festival favours an intimate curatorial scale, attentive to the specific context of Braga, Portugal, notably through the use of heritage spaces that foster dialogue with the local cultural landscape. Its public image rests on three axes: curatorial rigour, attentive listening, and community. Semibreve presents itself as a space of contemplation and experimentation, where concerts, installations, and international collaborations unfold within a logic of continuity and care, expressed through original commissions and partnerships with European networks that place the city within a transnational circuit.

This singularity has been recognised by the international press. *The Wire*¹⁵ has highlighted the festival's curatorial consistency

15 Here the festival is described as "meticulously curated" and praised for its contained scale and artistic cohesion.

and its articulation of sound and visual practices, while *Resident Advisor*¹⁶ has emphasised its distinct identity in contrast to large-scale festivals. In Braga, the experimental is not peripheral but central to the programme. Commitment to novelty and risk is combined with an ethos of inclusivity and accessibility, reflected in moderately priced tickets, diverse programming that brings together established, emerging, and local artists, and parallel initiatives such as workshops, talks, and open calls.

Evolution, Transformation and International Networks

Since its first edition, Semibreve has distinguished itself through an intimate and rigorous curatorial approach. In its early years, it hosted artists such as Alva Noto, Fennesz, and Ben Frost, figures with cult status in experimental electronic music who rarely performed in Portugal. Their presence helped define the festival's focus on attentive listening and immersive experience. From the outset, emblematic performances, such as Murcof with the visual collective AntiVJ, revealed Semibreve's capacity to create a hybrid territory between exploratory music and live visuals. This dialogue between sound and image became a defining curatorial thread, reinforced by performances from artists including Ryoji Ikeda, Hans-Joachim Roedelius, and Ryoichi Kurokawa. Later appearances by Mika Vainio, Laurel Halo, Suzanne Ciani, Morton Subotnick and Kali Malone confirmed Semibreve as a key stage for multiple generations of creators.

More recently, the festival has evolved along two fronts: format and international cooperation. It expanded beyond concerts, strengthening its relationship with film and visual arts, as seen in collaborations such as Eiko Ishibashi with filmmaker Ryusuke

¹⁶ In this review, Finlayson highlights how the festival maintains a distinct identity from other electronic events: less about massive collective immersion and more about attentive listening and sonic experimentation.

Hamaguchi, or Maya Shenfeld with visual artist Pedro Maia. This trajectory was further reinforced by the Edigma Semibreve Award, an international competition promoting sound and image installations using digital technologies.

On an international level, Semibreve joined Re-Imagine Europe's *New Perspectives for Action* collaboration (2023–2027), co-funded by the Creative Europe programme. Bringing together festivals, research platforms, and cultural organisations, the network addresses social, political, and technological transformations in Europe, with a strong emphasis on interdisciplinarity, inclusivity, and transnational exchange. Sound, listening, and the politics of attention occupy a central role, from works on ecological urgency to explorations of machine learning and distributed perception.

Beyond artistic production, Re-Imagine Europe functions as a platform for critical inquiry and institutional reflection, producing pilot studies, essays, and practical tools aimed at rethinking diversity, accessibility, and environmental responsibility. Its hybrid structure, combining artistic experimentation with epistemic production, bridges the immediacy of the arts and longer-term institutional research, translating sensorial experience into frameworks for critical thinking and organisational change¹⁷ ¹⁸. Through this network, Semibreve reinforces its position within a transnational ecosystem of artistic and epistemic experimentation.

At the same time, the festival maintains a strong dialogue with the national scene, consistently supporting Portuguese artists

¹⁷ *Re-Imagine Europe Publications & Resources Archive*. Retrieved from re-imagine-europe.eu/publications

¹⁸ It is within this broader framework that the present essay was conceived: as part of Semibreve's contribution to *Re-Imagine Europe*, resonating with the network's desire to imagine new modes of collaboration, listening and shared knowledge across artistic and social frontiers

and fostering exchanges between established and emerging voices through initiatives such as Semibreve Scholar. By integrating local production alongside internationally recognised figures, Semibreve contributes to the internationalisation of Portuguese artists and affirms Braga as a relevant hub for contemporary creation. Its trajectory thus unfolds in a productive tension between continuity and expansion, balancing an intimate ethos of attentive listening with openness to new collaborations and formats.

The Edigma Semibreve Scholar Programme: Knowledge Emerging in Practice

Semibreve's commitment to listening as a collective practice extends into an explicit relationship with audiences and academic communities. Alongside its artistic programme, the festival has consistently developed workshops, masterclasses, and public talks that form a core part of its identity. Mostly free of charge and led by artists, curators, and cultural agents, these moments foster proximity between creators and audiences, challenging the separation between stage and public. They function as informal laboratories of shared knowledge, where technical and conceptual questions around sound art, digital aesthetics, and technological ecology are collectively explored. Through open access and participation, Semibreve creates the conditions for temporary communities grounded in aesthetic affinities and critical curiosity, deconstructing individualised notions of knowledge and creation.

This formative vocation includes the Edigma Semibreve Scholar. Since 2015, the programme has acted as a bridge between university art education and the professional ecosystem of digital art and exploratory electronic music, offering students a





platform for visibility, experimentation, and dialogue. Through an annual open call, higher education students present works developed in academic contexts, later exhibited during the festival alongside concerts, installations, and workshops. Supported by the Portuguese company Edigma, the Scholar strengthens the connection between technological innovation, education, and artistic practice, functioning not merely as a showcase but as a pedagogical device aligned with the festival's conceptual logic¹⁹.

What distinguishes the Semibreve Scholar is its organic integration into the festival. Rather than occupying a peripheral educational space, it shares the same symbolic territory as established artists, affirming experimentation and technical curiosity as legitimate sources of knowledge. By opening visibility to emerging voices, the programme questions who has access to recognition and which forms of knowledge are validated, proposing a model of partial democratisation where learning occurs through exposure as much as celebration.

In doing so, Edigma Semibreve Scholar reinforces Semibreve's identity as a festival-laboratory, where sound, art, and learning coexist, and where artistic practice becomes not only an object of contemplation, but a tool for research and for the future.

Sound and Material Ecologies: Themes and Trajectories (2021–2025)

Focusing on the editions from 2021 to 2025, the Scholar programme emerged as a privileged observatory of contemporary mutations in sound and digital art. The works presented reveal a constellation of themes reflecting a generation that

¹⁹ This focus on active, transformative public engagement aligns with the pilot study, *Re-Imagining Audiences: Culture as a Catalyst for Change* (Spasovska, 2025) by Kontrapunkt, published as part of Re-Imagine Europe.

approaches sound and new media not only as aesthetic material, but as tools for research, critique, and relation. Between the ecological and the technological, the intimate and the collective, the human and the post-human, these projects propose alternative modes of listening and observation, opening new ways of thinking about presence, communication, and creation.

One of the most evident axes of the works produced by Semibreve Scholars is sound ecology, visible in works such as *Forest Waves*²⁰, *Micro Mining Ecologies*²¹, and *Cantus Discantus*²². Here, sound operates as a medium of sensitive relation with the environment, where landscape and machine intermingle, and noise becomes a language of coexistence. *Micro Mining Ecologies* confronts technological extractivism through digital aesthetics, while *Cantus Discantus* proposes an expanded, choral listening of nature. These works echo the intuition, shared by authors such as Steven Feld and Salomé Voegelin, that listening is also a way of inhabiting and transforming the world.

Another set of works explores cognitive and perceptual dimensions of sound, aligning with the festival's axis relating art and cognition. Pieces such as *Insensored*²³, *(A)Tension*²⁴, *SIFIE:*

²⁰ A sound installation by Luís Luzia that uses field-recorded soundscapes and data sonification to narrate the progressive degradation of Portugal's native forests in contrast with eucalyptus plantations.

²¹ An immersive installation by Isidora Correa and Guy Fleisher combining sculpture, video, and sound. It explores microbial ecologies and sustainable mining, linking biotechnology and sound in a critique of lithium extraction and environmental impact.

²² A visual sound installation by Tomás Quintais that combines water, plastic waste, and microphones to create an unpredictable sonic painting, evoking ocean pollution and threatened ecosystems.

²³ A conceptual installation by Gonçalo Cunha that questions the limits of visual perception and the way consciousness reconstructs hidden space. An exercise on error and perceptual illusion.

²⁴ An artwork by Bruno Mesquita that uses the line as a structural element and sound as a transformative force to reflect on borders, identity, and power, inviting audiences to question established narratives.

*Dark Matter*²⁵, and *Caixa Postal*²⁶ question the boundaries between perception and interpretation, often operating between the auditory and the tactile. Through sensors, bio-feedback, and generative algorithms, sound becomes vibration and bodily presence, activating attention and challenging spectator passivity.

Simultaneously, reflections on technological mediation and digital memory emerge in works such as *Artificial Traces*²⁷, *What's This?*²⁸, *Código Concreto*²⁹, and *TR (Table-React)*³⁰. Treating technology as an aesthetic and political agent, these projects transform code into poetic language and interfaces into dramaturgical elements. By exposing processes, faults, and discontinuities, they shift attention from technological products to their modes of mediation.

A further group of works centres on body, identity, and subjectivity, reinforcing the affective and political dimensions of listening. Projects such as *com tacto | contacto*³¹, *espelho*

²⁵ A sound installation by Rafael Maia that transforms vocal timbres and dark matter into abstract acoustic landscapes. It explores auditory perception, resistance, and ambiguity as both political and sensorial gestures.

²⁶ A generative sound archive by Lea Taragona built from voice messages. It explores the voice as presence and absence, echoing Brandon LaBelle's reflections on listening and subjectivity.

²⁷ An audiovisual installation by Diana Romero and Daniel Martins that reveals the intensity, and environmental impact of artificial intelligence and data infrastructures into real-time luminous pulses.

²⁸ An audiovisual data art installation by Vasco Santos that sonifies and visualises real-time big data flows, exploring Baudrillard's concepts of simulation and control. It questions the relationship between the virtual and the real.

²⁹ A work of digital concrete poetry by Tobias Gaede that fuses programming code and poetic language. To reflect on human-machine co-authorship.

³⁰ A reflection by Martim Novais on the 'table' as a symbolic and technological interface. It reinterprets the everyday object as a mediator between human, machine, and network.

³¹ An audiovisual work by Eva Barbosa inspired by cinematic immersion, it explores haptic experience and the relationship between memory and image within a sensory environment.

*meu espelho teu*³², and *Underwomb*³³ articulate a post-humanist aesthetic in which the body functions as an interface and field of resonance. Here, art becomes a means of relation, vulnerability, and ethical exposure, opening possibilities for community.

Works like *Untitled – Borders and Transmissions*³⁴ address communication, borders, and displacement, using sound as a metaphor for flows and interferences. These pieces underline both cohesion and failure, revealing tensions that traverse contemporary experience.

Viewed together, the works form an ambiguous portrait of an emerging generation driven by aesthetic motivation and a desire for relevance. Responding to dominant discourses, ecology, post-humanism, sound as critical practice, they reveal a productive tension between questioning and belonging. Within the festival context, a spontaneous adherence to recognised languages of innovation becomes visible, exposing how institutional and academic discourses infiltrate creation. The risk of a “mediated autonomy”³⁵ emerges, yet it is precisely within this zone of immaturity and risk that the Scholar’s critical potential lies. The works function as small essays of a thought still in formation. This experimental dimension resonates as a mode of resistance to normalisation, a gesture affirming difference within the very structures that seek to neutralise it.³⁶

32 A multimedia installation by Joana Araújo and Rute Costa reflecting on identity and control in a world mediated by technology; visitors’ facial expressions are digitally merged, creating a ‘collective face’.

33 An immersive audiovisual installation by Clara Santos, Emília Simão and Maria Ferreira that invites a sensory return to depth, transformation, and the primal, liquid nature of human existence.

34 An installation by Adriana Matos that contrasts the rigidity of geopolitical borders with the fluidity of radio waves, using fabric maps, copper coils, and real-time signal transmission.

35 as noted by Boris (2008)

36 *becoming-minor* by Rosi Braidotti (2013)

Read against their sociopolitical backdrop, post-lockdown conditions, hyperconnectivity, climate crisis, and automation, the works reflect a tension between fascination and critique. Technology appears simultaneously as mediator and threat³⁷. Some works approach the post-human as an ethical question of what remains human in mediated experience, with digital art as a key site for contemporary consciousness³⁸. Notably, key themes of this historical era, such as post-democracy³⁹ and post-truth, do not appear explicitly. Instead, these artists operate on an affective plane, rendering tensions sensorially and rehearsing alternative forms of presence and attention through small politics of listening, resisting the noise of media saturation.

Relevance and Significance: Between Collective Experience and The Knowledge Community

Within the European landscape of digital and sound arts, the Edigma Semibreve Scholar programme occupies a singular position. Situated between festival, academia, and experimental laboratory, it shares affinities with international initiatives that bridge higher education and contemporary artistic creation, such as Ars Electronica’s U19 Create Your World, CTM Discourse, Sónar+D, or residencies promoted by Rewire Festival. All recognise that artistic education benefits from open, hybrid spaces beyond the university. Semibreve Scholar, however, distinguishes itself through the organic integration of this formative dimension into the living body of the festival.

Similar approaches are evident among partners of the Re-Imagine Europe network. Sonic Acts, linked to Paradiso and the Art Science Interfaculty in The Hague, has long cultivated dialogue between arts and academia. Elevate Festival in Graz

37 (Haraway, 2016) and (Hui, 2019)

38 (Hayles, 1999) and (Bratton, 2016)

39 as described by Colin Crouch (2004)

has collaborated with INA grm and the Institute of Electronic Music and Acoustics, while Borealis Festival in Bergen supports emerging composers through mentorship and inclusive practices. Together, these examples outline a paradigm in which artistic, pedagogical, and research dimensions become inseparable, even if their emphases differ. While programmes such as U19 Create Your World or Sónar+D focus on technological innovation and creative industries, Re-Imagine Europe initiatives privilege critical reflection, ecological awareness, and the politics of listening.

Within this constellation, Semibreve Scholar finds its own voice. Like Sonic Acts or Elevate, it insists on continuity between learning and creation, but it remains rooted in a specific local and academic context. Anchored in universities and art schools of northern Portugal, it embeds learning within the shared rhythms of the festival, transforming it into a space of proximity and collective experience.

The guiding ideas of art and sound as collective growth and knowledge exchange frame an ambitious challenge. In terms of collective experience, the Scholar shows particular vitality: students present their works alongside internationally recognised artists enabling intergenerational learning and public legitimisation. Workshops and talks further extend this shared space, where listening and experimentation become practices of coexistence and co-authorship.

Regarding knowledge exchange and community building, the programme affirms art as a form of knowledge⁴⁰. By welcoming works developed in academic contexts, Semibreve Scholar legitimises the academy as a site of artistic knowledge

40 an idea aligned with contemporary thought on artistic research (Borgdorff, 2012) and (Barrett, 2007)

production and positions the festival as a space of translation between practice-based knowledge and academic discourse, an especially relevant gesture within the Portuguese context.

Between Emancipation and Institutionalisation: The Challenges of Mediation

Even amid this diversity of approaches, it is important to consider what remains unspoken. Every festival that creates visibility also institutes exclusion, and this constitutes an inevitable contradiction of the Semibreve Scholar programme. Conceived to open the festival to academic communities and new creators, it nonetheless operates through selection, criteria, and boundaries. The key question is therefore not whether the programme succeeds, but what the responsibility of a festival should be as a mediator of knowledge and artistic creation, and where that responsibility ends.

In sound art and new media, where experimentation is both aesthetic and epistemological, the festival occupies a paradoxical position. It seeks to be a space of freedom while simultaneously functioning as a mechanism of legitimisation. By selecting works, it defines what is considered relevant or critical. This symbolic power⁴¹ is unavoidable and must be continually problematised, as the programme mirrors the codes and exclusions of the art world itself.

41 which Pierre Bourdieu would identify as a form of cultural capital (1984)

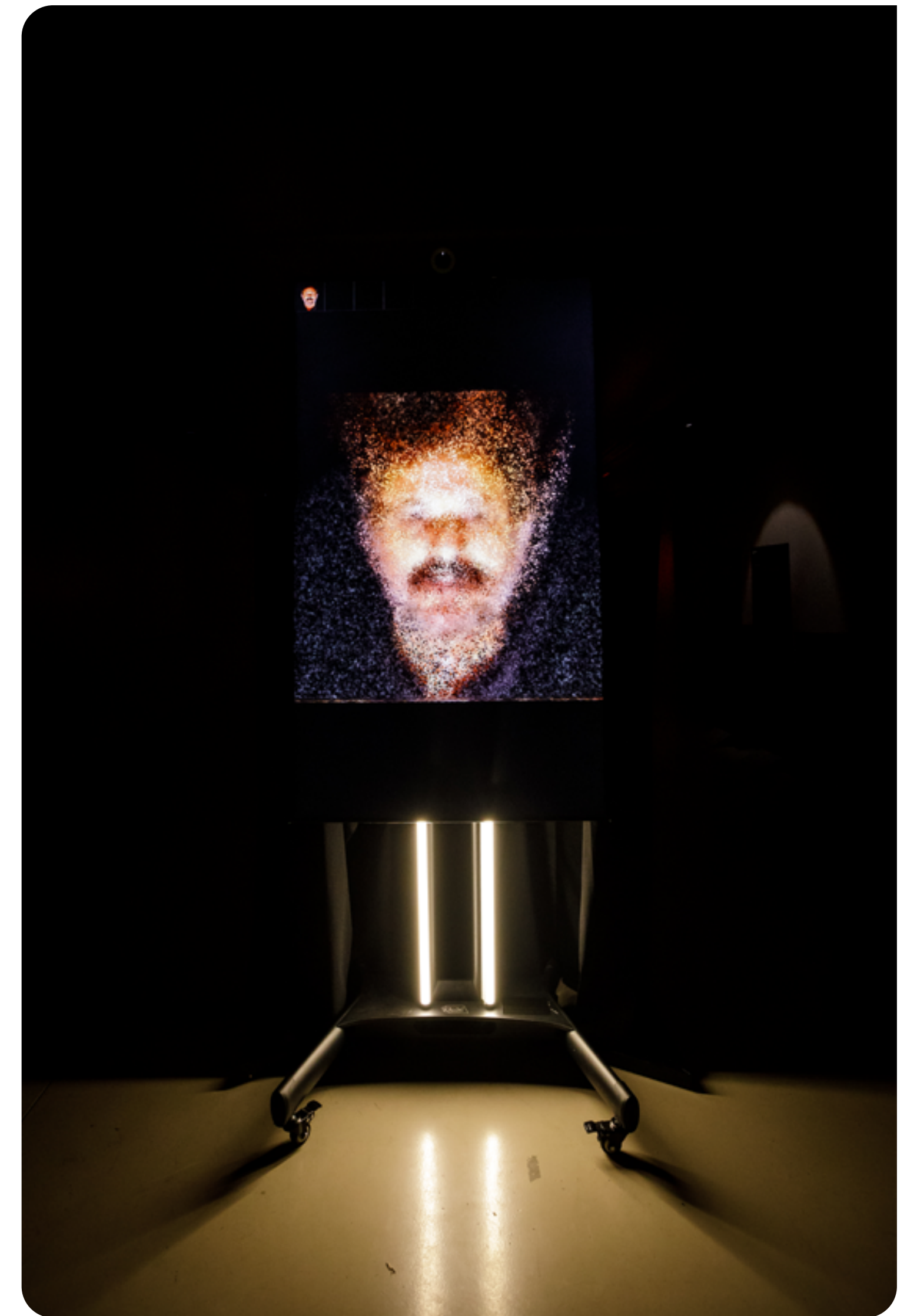
As bell hooks has argued, pedagogical spaces must remain attentive to how privilege shapes not only access but the very language of legitimacy⁴². Creative fields often conceal structural inequalities beneath narratives of merit⁴³. For initiatives committed to knowledge-sharing and collective growth, a central challenge lies in acknowledging and reflecting on these conditions.

The Semibreve Scholar shows awareness of this tension. By placing students alongside established artists and legitimising academic work, it assumes a pedagogical rather than purely institutional role. Yet the ambiguity remains: can a festival be both school and stage? This productive tension demands shared responsibility. A festival cannot resolve structural inequalities or sustain communities alone; its role is to catalyse encounters, provoke questions, and open processes rather than fix canons.

The vitality of the Semibreve Scholar lies in inhabiting this tension: transforming institutional privilege into a motor for inclusion while recognising its natural limits and functions. The *Semibreve Scholar* does not need to resolve this tension. Its relevance perhaps resides precisely in inhabiting it. The festival is not a space of absolute truth, but a situated field of experimentation. Its future strength for the future will lie in striving for equality and, inevitably, failing. In continuing to open cracks within the status quo, offering each new generation the possibility to listen and to be heard.

42 (hooks, 1994)

43 as highlighted Angela McRobbie (McRobbie, 2016).



espelho meu espelho meu, Joana Araújo & Rute Costa, Semibreve Festival 2024.
Photo courtesy of organisation



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NOTES

The information presented about Semibreve, Ars Electronica, CTM, Unsound, Sónar, and other exploratory electronic music and digital art festivals was collected from official institutional sources (websites, catalogues, programmes, and publicly available press releases).

This research was supported by two artificial intelligence systems: ScholarGPT (OpenAI GPT-5, 2025) and Gemini (Google, 2025). Both were used as assistants for research, verification, and critical writing. The AI was integrated in a controlled and transparent manner, serving as a support tool for bibliographic organisation, comparative analysis of sources, translation assistance, and text verification and revision.

The system did not replace intellectual judgement or the authorial gesture of research. Interaction with the AI was understood as an extension of the very practice of researching and writing, a methodological dialogue inscribed within the continuity between human thought and technological mediation.

All conceptual and interpretative decisions result exclusively from human authorship, in accordance with the principles of academic integrity and ethical responsibility in artistic research.

CONTEXT

This text is one of the pilot studies of Re-Imagine Europe: New Perspectives for Action. In these contributions we explore and reflect on artistic practices and experimental approaches in the cultural field that can engage and activate audiences and communities to address ecological, social, and political challenges. The pilot studies provide an overview of practices of cultural organisations that can serve as models, recipes, or tools for transformation for current and future generations of cultural workers and artists.

Re-Imagine Europe: New Perspectives for Action (2023–2027) is a four-year transnational co-creation and circulation project of fourteen interdisciplinary art organisations across Europe. The project aims to equip and empower young Europeans through artistic practices to better withstand societal challenges triggered by rapid climate change.

The Re-Imagine Europe partnership is a collaboration of: Paradiso (NL), Sonic Acts (NL), Elevate Festival (AT), INA grm (FR), A4 (SK), Borealis (NO), KONTEJNER (HR), BEK (NO), RUPERT (LT), Disruption Network Lab (DE), Semibreve (PT), Parco Arte Vivente (IT), Kontrapunkt (MK) and Radio Web MACBA (ES).

BIOGRAPHY

José Alberto Gomes is a musician, sound artist and curator from Porto, Portugal. A graduate in Music Composition, he creates strong bonds between new technological possibilities and the role of music in music theatre, film, installations and electronic improvisation, with a particular interest in new ways and new musical “places”.

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He is the creative co-director of the Supernova Ensemble, an artistic collective with a residency at the Circular Cultural Association, performing regularly in solo and collective projects. He is a music and sound creator for plays and cinema, producing sound interactivity in installations, as well as electronic and instrumental compositions.

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