

# On The Semibreve Scholar

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

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## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 network<sup>2</sup>, this political dimension acquires particular contours. These practices have been asserting themselves, especially since the end of the twentieth century, as hybrid territories where aesthetics, technology and social experience intersect. They place emphasis not only on artistic production, but also on

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. <https://re-imagine-europe.eu/about-new-perspectives-for-action/>

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 atomisation<sup>3</sup>. 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 the artist and writer, who works from the relational logic of sound, Salomé Voegelin reminds us, listening is not a neutral gesture<sup>4</sup>. It is also a political practice that decides who is included and who is silenced.

All the practices of action/creation/listening/exploration/community/exclusion are exacerbated in a new era of information. Digital media and social networks expand possibility, allowing new forms of circulation and collaboration while at the same time raising the question of whether such expansion constitutes a true democratisation or merely a new layer of mediation and control. While they broaden access and multiply voices, these platforms inscribe artistic practices within algorithmic and economic logics that filter, hierarchise and, often, silence.

It is in this ambiguous terrain that artistic creation is inscribed. Exploratory by nature, it acts as a sensitive laboratory that problematises both the promise of democratisation and the mechanisms of exclusion. Creation is not limited to being liberating in an abstract sense. It is identitarian because it creates communities of recognition and belonging, even if they may be temporary and fragile. By forcing the listening and perception of unfamiliar forms, creative networks like Semibreve and Re-Imagine Europe operate simultaneously political and

3 (Pezzack, 2024)

4 (Voegelin, 2001)

pedagogical gesture, combining a practice of aesthetic production with the construction of community. Their 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 for liberation. From the emancipatory pedagogies of philosopher Paulo Freire<sup>5</sup>, which understand learning as a practice of freedom, to the proposals of author bell hooks, who conceives of teaching as an act of resistance<sup>6</sup>, we find the idea that knowledge is not reduced to the transmission of content, but to the creation of conditions for critical consciousness. When transposed to the artistic field, this perspective illuminates the potential of creation as a transformative experience, both individual and collective, especially in experimental and collective languages. Composer Pauline Oliveros<sup>7</sup> had already shown how listening can be a pedagogy of attention and care, a collective exercise in openness, where the act of listening becomes a practice of expanded consciousness. Art critic Nicolas Bourriaud<sup>8</sup> likewise presented contemporary art as a space of encounter in which the work is not an object, but a social relation.

Practices linked to sound art, new media art, and exploratory electronic music offer clear examples of this horizon. The emergence of new media art<sup>9</sup> has shown how digital media create forms of expression that are simultaneously aesthetic languages

5 (Freire,1970)

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)

and ways of thinking the world. Today, this reality has grown into an ecosystem in which digital platforms and social networks are not only tools, but cultural infrastructures that shape the very possibilities of creation and sharing<sup>10</sup>. Interactivity, remixing and appropriation are not only technical resources, but pedagogical and political gestures that challenge the division between creators and receivers, demanding the community's active participation. Aesthetic circulation on networks is not a mere passive consumption, but a communal process of appropriation, transformation and reaction in a true dance between generations and communities, where the common is built both in continuity and in conflict.

This community network is not limited to those who participate in the immediate present. There is also a generational dynamic with a continuous play of sharing and reaction. Artists in formation appropriate inherited languages, reconfiguring, rejecting, or reinventing them. Aesthetic-conceptual material circulates between epochs and bodies, in a kind of living palimpsest in which each generation writes upon the traces of the previous one. Such acts of appropriation and refusal are not only aesthetic; they are profoundly social. It is in the relation between continuity and rupture that a common horizon is built, and through this gesture, art reveals its emancipatory power by making it possible to imagine collective futures.

Within this horizon, exploratory and digital art can be understood as an experiment in emancipation. By opening space for the unexpected, for error, and for noise, it challenges the logic of normative knowledge and promotes a pedagogy of uncertainty. In academic contexts, students attending workshops in sound creation, multimedia experimentation, or creative programming, engage not merely as receivers of content, but as co-authors

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

of processes, experimenting with the collective construction of meaning. In these moments, art functions as an identitarian and communal catalyst; enabling individual voices to recognise themselves in a shared space, where fragmented experiences can gain shared resonance. It is this dimension that many theorists of art and pedagogy recognise as emancipatory: the capacity to create conditions for new ways of seeing, listening and existing. Philosopher Jacques Rancière<sup>11</sup> emphasises that emancipation does not result from knowledge descending from master to student, but from the verification of the equality of intelligences in the shared act of learning. Transposed to artistic creation, this logic suggests that each practice of listening or collective exploration may also be a practice of emancipation, because it affirms, even if only provisionally, the possibility of a common.

### Art as a Space of Exclusion

The promise of artistic creation is not free from risks and ambiguities. Its dominant narrative tends to present art, especially in its experimental and digital forms, as a territory of freedom, where imagination can escape social conventions and open itself to new communities. This vision is true and inspiring but still must be confronted with a critical gaze. The trajectory of contemporary art shows that behind the promises of openness, lie subtle (and not always subtle) mechanisms of exclusion. Even experimental movements that proclaimed themselves to be radical and accessible ended up reproducing hierarchies of gender, class, or cultural and social capital<sup>12</sup>. The historical communities commonly invoked, such as Fluxus, Free Improvisation and Deep Listening, also deserve to be read without romanticisation.

11 in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991)

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

Fluxus proclaimed radical accessibility, yet it circulated only among those who already possessed the cultural capital to understand its operations. Free improvisation, although it spoke of 'freedom', remained for decades a space dominated by white men, with few doors open to other voices. Oliveros was a pioneer in proposing deep listening as a communal practice, but it was quickly assimilated by academia and transformed into a discipline. These cases show that exploratory art can be both open and closed. It can create breaches as well as reinforce hierarchies.

In the digital art and new media context, the contradiction becomes even more evident. Net art and glitch music emerged as practices of rupture, pointing out that anyone with a computer could experiment with and disseminate art. But such 'democratisation' does not occur in a vacuum: it is often mediated by corporate platforms, algorithms that filter visibility, and infrastructures that reinforce global inequalities of access. The promise of an online community often dissolves into an aggregate of ephemeral interactions. What is presented as a horizontal network can function as a new form of gatekeeping, just as effective as traditional institutions.

University environments, generally regarded as privileged spaces for communal experimentation, also reveal fissures. It is true that sonic and digital practice can function as an identitarian catalyst for students, who are in a place where futures are rehearsed. But it is also true that the academic community is partial, composed of those who have already managed to cross class, gender and accessibility barriers. Academia, far from being just a free and fertile, is also an institution that selects, filters, and hierarchises. The challenge of this dynamic is to distinguish a restricted "we" from a universal "we".

Thus, to speak of exploratory art as a space of empowerment and community building requires caution. Yes, there is power in the redistribution of sensibilities that it cultivates. But there are also invisible exclusions, institutional appropriations, and promises of democratisation that become hollow when confronted with the material realities of accessibility. Beyond celebrating art as liberating, it must be seen as a field of tension between openness and closure, emancipation and hierarchy, community and isolation.

### **Festivals as Spaces of Knowledge**

Festivals celebrating exploratory electronic music and new media art constitute temporary spaces of knowledge and experimentation, places where the ephemeral gains critical density. More than mere showcases of works, they are moments of encounter where artists, music lovers, academics, students and local communities intersect. Although each festival has its own identity, they share common ground in that they all operate in the tensions between institutional legitimacy, local rootedness and global visibility.

The case of Ars Electronica institute and festival (founded in Linz, Austria, in 1979) is paradigmatic. A pioneer in the articulation of art, science and technology together, it has become a global reference for interdisciplinary experimentation. Over the decades, it has not just turned into a festival but also a permanent cultural infrastructure, with a centre that operates throughout the year and integrates scientific and technological research. This academic grounding has given it weight and authority, in contrast for example with festivals like CTM in Berlin (since 1999), which instead inscribes itself in the urban fabric of club culture. At CTM, academia appears in direct dialogue with nocturnal experiences. Seminars and conferences take place alongside club performances, dissolving boundaries

between culturally critical and hedonistic spaces. It is a logic of knowledge production that is more rhizomatic than hierarchical. In comparison, Mutek festival (founded in Montreal, Canada, in 2000) positioned itself as a platform for emerging artists and real-time audiovisual practices. Its global network has since enabled the circulation of major names at decisive moments in their careers, consolidating an aesthetic that combines electronic musical exploration and visual immersion. This capacity to launch trends contrasts with the profile of Unsound Festival (founded in Kraków, Poland, in 2003), which has distinguished itself with the politicised dimension of its curatorial approach, programming concerts that combined experimental soundscapes with debates on identity, censorship, or environmental crisis.

In this ecosystem, Sonic Acts (founded in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, in 1994) occupies a distinctive position. More than a platform for performance, it operates as a site of practical research and critical reflection at the intersection of sound, image, ecology and philosophy. Across its biennial editions, *The Geologic Imagination* (2015), *The Noise of Being* (2017) and *Hereafter* (2022) for example, Sonic Acts has explored how artistic practice can interrogate planetary transformation and the infrastructures of perception themselves. They have created a transnational framework for residencies, commissions and artistic research across European cultural organisations, fostering collaborations that link sound art, environmental theory and new media practices, partly supported by EU funding or through working with national and private funding sources. In doing so, Sonic Acts consolidated a model of the festival as an epistemic platform that merges artistic presentation with production of knowledge and ecological awareness.

The artistic impact of these festivals is visible in the way they have reconfigured not just electronic music, but also the broader

field of visual and performative arts. It was at Ars Electronica that many languages of interactive art and digital installation, intersecting with Bio Art, first found a stage of legitimacy. It was at CTM that artists such as Holly Herndon and Amnesia Scanner tested hybrid forms of performance combining artificial intelligence, the human voice, and social critique before entering the world of museums and biennials. It was at Mutek that the aesthetic of the “live audiovisual” (projections, manipulation of sound and image in real time) was consolidated as a recognised artistic genre, surpassing its niche status to become today a replicable model in other contexts.

But if international circulation and trend creation are evident, it is also important to underline the tensions that run through these platforms. The desire for local rootedness is real. Unsound occupies unconventional spaces in Kraków, Mutek engages with universities and creative communities in Montreal, and CTM mobilises Berlin’s clubs and collectives. Yet the global ambition can generate a certain aesthetic homogenisation, creating a common landscape that does not always reflect the cultural diversity these events claim to promote. And despite their vocation to create communities based on knowledge and experimentation, they are not free of challenges. If, on the one hand, they proclaim openness and interdisciplinary dialogue, on the other, they inevitably operate as structures of selection and exclusion. The international prestige of such events grants them the authority to decide what is ‘innovative’ or ‘valid’ within the field of arts. While they offer visibility to emerging artists, they also function as gatekeepers. They filter proposals, legitimise specific aesthetics, and inevitably leave peripheral voices outside.

Elitisation may also manifest itself in other forms, such as ticket

prices for events and activities, specialised language in curatorial discourse, perpetuation of decision-makers, or simply because audiences tend to be composed of urban, educated and cosmopolitan strata. It is precisely here that the fundamental contradiction of these events or institutions is exposed. The promise of full community and universal access is never truly fulfilled. Even though they present themselves as laboratories of knowledge, these festivals belong to the ‘art world’<sup>13</sup>, a space traversed by hierarchies, symbolic disputes and validation criteria that hinders genuine democratisation. Yet perhaps it is naive to expect any different. If in wider society there is no place of absolute and equitable access either, then we are hardly going to find it in cultural institutions that, by definition, operate as mediators and regulators of the sensible. To recognise this impossibility is not to deny the value of these encounters, but to situate them within their real scope: as instances where new forms of community and knowledge are sketched, even if always partial, provisional, and crossed by fissures.

Festivals function condensation points for artistic knowledge, where trends are affirmed, collective identities are rehearsed, and different generations of emerging artists meet with established references. It is in this movement between the local and the global, between academia and the nocturnal space, between radical experimentation and institutional legitimation, that the singularity of these events resides. And paradoxically, it is also when these agents of art become gatekeepers that opportunity emerges. It is in the critical and subterranean voices, in divergent and confrontational gestures, that the languages and agents capable of renewing the artistic field potentially arise.

13 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.

## Semibreve – Exploratory Electronic Music and Digital Art Festival

Within this 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 one of the most consistent and distinctive festivals in the international landscape of exploratory electronic music. The festival has always favoured a more intimate curatorial scale, marked by attention to the specific contexts of the city of Braga in Portugal, such as the use of heritage spaces to create dialogue with the local cultural landscape. Its public image, reinforced over the years, centres on three axes: curatorial rigour, attentive listening, and community. It has presented itself as a space for contemplation and experimentation, where concerts, installations, and international collaborations unfold within a logic of continuity and care. This orientation has translated both into original commissions from artists such as Jim O’Rourke and collaborations with European networks that situate the city within a transnational map of artistic circulation.

Semibreve’s singularity has been recognised by international press. *The Wire*<sup>14</sup> magazine, a key reference in experimental music, has highlighted the festival’s curatorial consistency and coherence, emphasising its ability to articulate sound and visual practices. *Resident Advisor*<sup>15</sup>, a source closer to the universe of club-based electronic music, has also acknowledged Semibreve’s distinct identity, noting its contrast with large summer music festivals. In Braga, the notion of experimental is not an appendix but the very core of the Semibreve programme. The commitment to novelty and risk, reiterated in several of

14 The festival is described as “meticulously curated” and praised for its contained scale and artistic cohesion.

15 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.

the festival’s presentation texts, is combined with an ethos of inclusivity and accessibility, expressed through moderately priced tickets and programming that brings together established, emerging, and local artists, as well as parallel initiatives such as workshops, talks, and open calls.

## Evolution, Transformation and International Networks

Since its first edition, Semibreve has distinguished itself through its commitment to an intimate and rigorous curatorial approach. In its early years, it hosted artists such as Alva Noto, Fennesz or Ben Frost, figures who already held a cult status within experimental electronic music but rarely performed in Portugal. Their presence helped define the festival’s matrix in a focus on attentive listening and immersive aesthetic experience. From the outset, Semibreve presented a performance that would become emblematic of its identity: electronic musician Murcof with the visual collective AntiVJ, producing an audiovisual show of great impact that revealed how the festival could create a hybrid territory between exploratory music and live visuals. This dialogue between sound and image became a defining curatorial thread through several editions, attracting an audience eager to experience listening and seeing as an immersive and shared event. Performances by artists such as Ryoji Ikeda, Hans-Joachim Roedelius and Ryoichi Kurokawa further established Braga on the international map of advanced sound practices. Later appearances by artists Mika Vainio, Laurel Halo, Suzanne Ciani, Morton Subotnick, and Kali Malone brought not only remarkable performances but also confirmed Semibreve as an essential stage for different generations of creators.

Recent evolution has unfolded along two main fronts: its format and networks of cooperation. The festival expanded beyond

concerts, strengthening its connection to film and other visual arts. In 2023, for instance, festival highlights included a collaboration between musician Eiko Ishibashi and filmmaker Ryusuke Hamaguchi, and an encounter between composer Maya Shenfeld and visual artist Pedro Maia, strong examples of how music merges with cinematic and visual languages. At the same time, the festival significantly deepened its dialogue with the visual arts through the Edigma Semibreve Award, an international competition created to celebrate and promote the production of art installations that explore sound and image using digital technologies.

On the international level, Semibreve became part of Re-Imagine Europe's *New Perspectives for Action* four-year collaboration project (2023–2027), co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union. Bringing together festivals, research platforms, cultural and activist organisations, Re-Imagine Europe sought to respond to the profound social, political and technological transformations that have reshaped the European public sphere in recent years.

Rooted in diverse local contexts yet strongly connected internationally, the project partners share a commitment to supporting innovative artistic practices and fostering critical debate. Re-Imagine Europe has a strong focus on interdisciplinarity, inclusivity, and transnational exchange. Through exhibitions, festivals, commissions, publications, broadcasts, and educational programmes, the organisations create spaces for collaboration between artists, researchers, and audiences, explores how digital infrastructures, ecological urgency and new forms of collectivity redefine both artistic practice and civic imagination in the light of climate change.

Beyond artistic production, Re-Imagine Europe has also become a platform for critical inquiry and institutional transformation.

Alongside its public programme, the network produces a wide range of pilot studies, essays like this one, interviews and reflective articles, all exploring how art and technology can respond to the crises of the present. It also develops manuals, guidelines and practical tools designed to help cultural organisations rethink their internal policies concerning diversity, inclusion, environmental responsibility and accessibility.

What makes Re-Imagine Europe particularly distinctive within the landscape of European cultural cooperation is precisely this hybrid structure, capable of generating both artistic experiences and epistemic outputs. It operates simultaneously as a constellation of festivals and a distributed research institution, producing performances and installations, but also methodologies, frameworks and forms of shared knowledge that circulate beyond the artistic sphere. In doing so, the network bridges two often separate domains: the immediacy of artistic experimentation and the long-term reflection characteristic of academic and institutional research. Its uniqueness lies in this effort to translate the affective and sensorial intensity of the arts into tools for critical thinking and organisational change.<sup>16 17</sup>

Through this network and collaborations, Semibreve reinforces itself within a transnational cartography of contemporary creation, projecting its local identity into a shared ecosystem of artistic and epistemic experimentation, and expanding its role so that the festival becomes an active space for experiencing, thinking and exploring the world.

While projecting itself internationally, Semibreve has always

<sup>16</sup> *Re-Imagine Europe Publications & Resources Archive*. Retrieved from <https://re-imagine-europe.eu/publications/>

<sup>17</sup> 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

maintained a close dialogue with the national scene. From early on, it created space for Portuguese artists exploring innovative languages in electronic music and digital arts, fostering dialogue between established figures and emerging voices such as Jonathan Uliel Saldanha, Gustavo Costa or Inês Malheiro, as well as through several editions of the Semibreve Scholar initiative. By integrating national production on an equal footing with globally recognised names, the festival contributes not only to the internationalisation of Portuguese artists but also to affirming Braga and northern Portugal as a relevant hub for contemporary creation.

Thus, the festival's trajectory can be seen as a productive tension between continuity and expansion. On one hand, fidelity to an intimate scale and an ethos of attentive listening, on the other, openness to new collaborations and formats that consolidate its role as a bridge between the local and the international.

### **The Edigma Semibreve Scholar Programme: Knowledge Emerging in Practice**

Semibreve's ongoing commitment to listening as a collective practice has also extended into a more explicit relationship with the audience and academic communities. Throughout its editions, the festival has cultivated a parallel programme of workshops, masterclasses, and public talks that have become an essential part of its identity. Mostly free of charge, these moments are led by artists, curators, and other cultural agents. They function as informal spaces for sharing knowledge and fostering proximity between creators and audiences, challenging the traditional separation between stage and audience. This flow of information acts as a collective knowledge laboratory, where everything from technical issues to more conceptual

reflections on sound art, digital aesthetics, and technological ecology are explored and shared. By privileging open access and direct participation, Semibreve not only disseminates specialised knowledge but also creates the conditions for the emergence of temporary communities formed around aesthetic affinities, technical curiosities, and critical motivations deconstructing the sacred, individual spaces of knowledge that underpin creation and performance.

This formative and community-oriented vocation includes the Edigma Semibreve Scholar. Since its creation in 2015, the programme has established itself as a meeting point between the contexts of university art education and the professional ecosystem of digital art and exploratory electronic music, offering university students a platform for visibility, experimentation, and dialogue with an international artistic community.

The Scholar operates in a simple and direct way. Through an annual open call, it invites higher education students from artistic and technological fields to present works developed within their academic training. The selected proposals are then showcased to the public during Semibreve festival, in exhibitions that coexist with the concerts, installations, and workshops of the general programme. Sponsored by the Portuguese company Edigma, the award reinforces the link between technological innovation, university education, and artistic practice. In this sense, the Scholar is not merely a showcase of emerging talent but a pedagogical device that extends the conceptual logic of the festival<sup>18</sup>. The dialogue between art, sound, technology, and knowledge finds here its practical expression. What distinguishes the Semibreve Scholar from similar initiatives is precisely this organic integration within the fabric of the

18 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.

festival. Far from being a peripheral or conventionally pedagogical space, the Scholar shares the same symbolic territory as established artists. Their presence in the official programme is not merely didactic but epistemological, reaffirming the idea that knowledge also arises from experimentation, practice, and technical curiosity.

The importance of the Edigma Semibreve Scholar programme goes beyond simply supporting education. By opening the stage to unestablished voices, the festival implicitly questions the role of art and educational institutions, addressing the broader issue of who should have access to visibility and which forms of knowledge are legitimised. The Scholar thus offers a possible model of partial democratisation, where youth and experimentation are both welcome and confronted with the reality of public exposure, an act that teaches as much as it celebrates.

Edigma Semibreve Scholar brings an integrated vision of art as a form of knowledge and sharing. It connects the space of academia with creation, promotes the circulation of ideas and experiences and situates the festival within a broader network of reflection on the educational and social role of digital art.

In doing so, it reinforces Semibreve's identity as a festival-laboratory, where music, sound, thought, and learning coexist in a territory where art, rather than being an object of contemplation, becomes 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 established itself as a privileged observatory of contemporary mutations in sound and digital art. Through the works presented, a constellation of themes emerges, reflecting

the concerns of a generation of emerging artists who approach 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 works propose alternative modes of listening and observation and, through them, new ways of thinking about presence, communication, and the act of creation.

One of the most evident axes of the works produced within Semibreve has been sound ecology, which runs through *Forest Waves*<sup>19</sup>, *Micro Mining Ecologies*<sup>20</sup> and *Cantus Discantus*<sup>21</sup> for instance. In these, sound appears as a medium of sensitive relation with the environment, where natural landscape and machine intermingle, and noise becomes a language of coexistence. This tendency echoes one of the conceptual axes of the festival, suggesting that sound has always been a form of adaptation and cohesion among species and systems. In *Micro Mining Ecologies*, for instance, digital aesthetics confront technological extractivism, exposing the contradictions of an ecology mediated by data and devices. *Cantus Discantus*, in turn, proposes a choral and expanded listening of nature, a kind of acoustic archaeology of terrestrial life. These works reiterate the intuition, shared by authors such as Steven Feld and Salomé Voegelin, that listening is also a way of inhabiting and transforming the world.

19 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.

20 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.

21 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.

In another direction, several works explore the cognitive and perceptual dimensions of sound, aligning with another of the festival's thematic axes, which relates art and cognition. Pieces such as *Insensored*<sup>22</sup>, *(A)Tension*<sup>23</sup>, *SIFIE: Dark Matter*<sup>24</sup>, and *Caixa Postal*<sup>25</sup> question the boundaries between perception and interpretation, between the stimulus and the body that receives it. Many of these proposals operate at the threshold between the auditory and the tactile, transforming sound into vibration and physical presence. They are works that do not merely represent the world but rehearse it, making perception itself mediated through art. By employing sensors, biofeedback, or generative algorithms, these pieces convert perception into a bodily and cognitive experience, challenging the passivity of the spectator and underlining the active role of attention.

Simultaneously, a reflection on technological mediation and digital memory emerges. Works such as *Artificial Traces*<sup>26</sup>, *What's This?*<sup>27</sup>, *Código Concreto*<sup>28</sup>, and *TR (Table-React)*<sup>29</sup>

22 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.

23 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.

24 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.

25 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.

26 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.

27 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.

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

29 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.

treat technology not as a neutral tool but as an aesthetic and political agent. These pieces inhabit the space where code becomes poetic language and the interface a part of the dramaturgy. Through data manipulation, simulation, and sonic visualisation, these projects discuss humanity's dependency on and fascination with the machine. A theme that resonates with the festival's ontological concerns. As in the ontology of sound, these works shift attention from the technological 'product' to its own processes of mediation – exposing their faults, noises, and discontinuities.

There is also a significant group of works centred on the body, identity, and subjectivity, which reinforce the affective and political dimension of listening. Projects such as *com tacto | contacto*<sup>30</sup>, *espelho meu espelho teu*<sup>31</sup>, and *Underwomb*<sup>32</sup> approach a post-humanist aesthetic in which the body is understood as an interface and field of resonance. In these works, art is not an end but a means of relation with the other, an attempt to translate experiences of touch, gender, intimacy, and belonging. Art becomes an ethical space, a form of exposure and vulnerability that opens possibilities for community.

Finally, works such as *Untitled – Borders and Transmissions*<sup>33</sup> explicitly address the themes of communication, border, and displacement, projecting sound as a metaphor for flows, interferences, and cultural translations. These pieces directly

30 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.

31 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."

32 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.

33 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.

engage with the idea of the festival as a phenomenon of cohesion and interdependence, yet they do so critically, also underlining the failures and noises of such communication. In them, sound interrupts, abrades and displaces, revealing the zones of tension that traverse the contemporary condition.

Viewed together, these works draw a complex and ambiguous portrait of the artistic generation emerging between 2021 and 2025. They are works driven by aesthetic and technical motivation, but also by a natural anxiety for relevance, responding rapidly to the dominant discourses of contemporary art: ecology, post-humanism, sound as critical practice. This discursive pressure, which crosses academia and artistic institutions, produces a productive tension. In this sense, these works mirror a time at which young art oscillates between the impulse to question and the fear of not belonging.

The works, by virtue of the Semibreve festival context, reveal a spontaneous adherence to the language of the 'new', the digital as emancipation, sound as ecology, and the body as interface. Here, the Scholar initiative becomes interesting not necessarily for the maturity of the works, but for the way it exposes the mechanisms shaping contemporary artistic sensibility. Through them, we witness in real time how institutional, academic and curatorial discourses infiltrate creation. The risk is that we fall into a "mediated autonomy"<sup>34</sup>, when experimentation is validated only insofar as it can be translated into recognised codes of innovation. Yet it is precisely within this zone of immaturity and risk that the Scholar's critical potential resides. 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

34 as noted by Boris (2008)

structures that seek to neutralise it<sup>35</sup>.

The Scholar works must also be read considering their socio-political context: the post-lockdown era, hyperconnectivity, the climate crisis and the growing automation of life. They emerge in a world where technology is both a mediator and a threat<sup>36</sup>. Many of the pieces reflect, albeit intuitively, this tension between fascination and critique. The use of sensors and algorithms, beyond a formal gesture, is also a commentary on the increasing permeability between body, machine, and environment.

Some works touch on the question of the post-human as an ethical inquiry into what remains of the human within mediated experience, exploring how digital art has become a privileged field for thinking the hybrid and shared condition of contemporary consciousness<sup>37</sup>. However, most of the proposals do not point towards the resolution of these contradictions, but rather to their sensory display (which may, perhaps, be their most authentic gesture). In this time-period also emerges the post-democratic<sup>38</sup> world and the affirmation of post-truth as an argumentation paradigm, terms that have ceased to belong solely to political theory and have become everyday experiences. It is therefore curious, and perhaps symptomatic, that these themes do not appear explicitly in the set of works presented. This cohort of artists seems to act more on a sensory and affective plane. Instead of representing democratic crisis or the collapse of truth, they rehearse alternative forms of presence and attention through small politics of listening and perception that resist the noise of media saturation.

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

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

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

38 as described by Colin Crouch (2004)

### Relevance and Significance: Between Collective Experience and The Knowledge Community

In the European landscape of digital and sound arts, the Edigma Semibreve Scholar occupies a singular position. Situated at the intersection of a festival, academic institution, and experimental laboratory, the programme shares affinities with several international initiatives that seek to bring higher education closer to contemporary artistic creation, but it distinguishes itself by the way it integrates this formative dimension into the living body of the festival. Models such as Ars Electronica's U19 Create Your World programme, CTM Discourse, Sónar+D in Barcelona, or young artist residencies promoted by Rewire Festival in The Hague all share the same impulse to create intermediate platforms between the student and the professional artist, between laboratory experimentation and public exhibition. They all recognise that contemporary artistic education need not be confined to the university, benefiting instead from open, hybrid spaces.

Similar concerns have animated several partners of the Re-Imagine Europe network. Sonic Acts is an initiative of the Paradiso venue in Amsterdam collaborating with the Art Science Interfaculty of The Hague's Royal Conservatory. For over decades it has cultivated a close dialogue between arts and academia as a legacy of its founders. Elevate Festival in Graz, Austria, also facilitated a collaboration with INA grm musical research group in France and the Institute of Electronic Music and Acoustics (IEM) at the University of Graz. These exemplify more porous exchanges, offering sound art students opportunities to develop and present work alongside internationally recognised composers, thereby blurring the line between educational training and professional performance. Meanwhile, Borealis Festival in Bergen, Norway, has a similar approach through its Ung Komponist mentorship programme, which

pairs emerging composers with established practitioners while simultaneously re-imagining what inclusion and accessibility can mean for a festival.

Taken together, these examples outline a new paradigm for contemporary festivals in which the artistic, pedagogical and research dimensions of the event format become inseparable. However, there are still differences. While programmes such as U19 Create Your World and Sónar+D are oriented towards technological innovation and the intersection between art and creative industries, the research initiatives developed within Re-Imagine Europe have followed a trajectory, rooted specifically in critical reflection, ecological awareness and the politics of listening.

Within this European constellation, the Semibreve Scholar finds its own distinct voice. Like Sonic Acts or Elevate, it insists on the continuity between learning and creation, but unlike these large-scale international platforms, it remains anchored in a specific local and academic context. Its scope is intimate, rooted in the universities and art schools of northern Portugal, where it sustains an organic dialogue between artistic education and public presentation. Here, the process of learning is not abstract or institutionalised but embedded in the shared rhythms of the festival itself as a model of proximity that transforms the festival into a living classroom of collective experience.

The two main guiding ideas of this essay, *sound and art as a collective growing experience* and *knowledge exchange as community building*, outline an ambitious and at the same time challenging framework. They summon art and sound not only as expressive media but as processes of formation, sharing, and mutual transformation. Assessing the relevance and success of

the Scholar programme therefore involves understanding the extent to which it has been able to translate these principles into reality.

In the dimension of collective experience and growth, the Scholar demonstrates a particular vitality. The way students are invited to present their works in the same context as internationally renowned artists, constitutes a gesture of recognition. This coexistence creates real opportunities for intergenerational learning and public legitimisation, which, in a small country with a fragile art ecosystem, is of enormous importance. Moreover, together with workshops and artist talks, it expands collective experience. Listening and experimentation cease to be merely aesthetic and become practices of coexistence and co-authorship with a local academic community that merges with the public audience. In this respect, the Semibreve Scholar fulfils its promise of promoting art as a process of shared growth, where the public, the artists, and the students share a common space of attention.

As for the idea of knowledge exchange and community building, the programme succeeds in recognising art as a form of knowledge<sup>39</sup>. By welcoming works developed within an academic context, the Semibreve Scholar legitimises the role of the academy in the arts as a valid mode of knowledge production. The festival thus becomes a platform for translation between the tacit knowledge of artistic practice and the structured discourse of academia. This gesture is particularly relevant in a country like Portugal where the integration between art and scientific research is still incipient.

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

### **Between Emancipation and Institutionalisation: The Challenges of Mediation**

Even amidst this diversity of approaches and speculative energies, it is worth reflecting on what remains unspoken or unexplored. Every festival, by instituting a space of visibility, naturally also institutes a regime of exclusion. This is perhaps the structural, yet inevitable, contradiction of the Semibreve Scholar programme. It is born from the desire to open the festival to the academic community and to give visibility to new creators, but inevitably it also becomes a mechanism of selection, with criteria, filters, and boundaries. The central question, therefore, is not whether the programme fulfils its role well, but what the role of a festival should be as a mediator of knowledge and artistic creation, and where its responsibility ends.

In a field such as sound art and new media, where experimentation is both an aesthetic and an epistemological practice, the festival occupies a paradoxical position. It wishes to be a space of freedom, yet it is simultaneously a device of legitimisation. By selecting artists and works, it implicitly defines itself as a decision-maker of what is relevant, innovative, or critical. This symbolic power<sup>40</sup> is inevitable but must still be constantly problematised. The programme becomes a microcosm of the art world itself, with codes, alliances, and zones of shadow.

As bell hooks has written, genuine pedagogical spaces must begin with a deep awareness of how privilege operates not only to exclude people, but to shape the very language of what is considered legitimate expression<sup>41</sup>. Creative fields often sustain structural inequalities beneath the surface of apparent merit<sup>42</sup>. For programmes committed to the values of knowledge-sharing

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

41 (hooks, 1994)

42 as highlighted Angela McRobbie (McRobbie, 2016).

and collective growth, one possible challenge for the future may be to reflect actively on these conditions of privilege.

The Semibreve Scholar programme, however, demonstrates an awareness of these circumstances. By integrating students in dialogue with established artists and by welcoming works born in academic contexts, it asserts a pedagogical and experimental role rather than an institutional one. The question remains: can a festival be both school and stage at the same time? This ambiguity is productive, but it also demands collective awareness and responsibility. A festival cannot and should not act beyond the boundaries of its own space and function in a collective network. Nor to single-handedly ensure the continuity of the communities it generates or resolve structural issues of inequality. Its power must be recognised as that of catalysing processes, provoking encounters, and stimulating questions rather than fixing dogmas and canons.

The true vitality of the Semibreve Scholar lies in transforming institutional privilege into a motor for inclusion, and in our collective recognition (as public, artistic, and academic communities) of its natural limits and functions. The programme does not need to resolve this tension. Its relevance perhaps resides precisely in inhabiting it. The festival is not, nor should it be, a space of absolute truth, but a situated field of experimentation that recognises and critically explores its own context. Its strength for the future lies 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.

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## NOTES

The information presented about the 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.

## LIST OF WORKS

### 2021

**Title:** *Cantus Discantus*

**Author:** Tomás Quintais

Master's in Arts and Technologies of Sound. Escola Superior de Música e Artes do Espectáculo – Instituto Politécnico do Porto

This sound installation seeks to establish parallels between the visual arts and sound art. In *Cantus Discantus*, a white circular canvas is covered with plastic waste and transduction devices. The suspension of eight IV drips above the prepared object progressively transforms the set into a sound-pictorial representation, through the coloured water that falls onto the canvas. The drops, as they fall, stimulate the microphones scattered through the space, converting those signals into a data chain associated with a set of soundscapes. The resulting sonic painting is shaped by the water flow and spatialised by a system of eight loudspeakers surrounding the installation. The outcome is always variable and unpredictable.

Marked by the harmful consequences of climate change and faced with the massive destruction of ecosystems, the project evokes a set of marine species from the starting point of ocean pollution. The colours that symbolise planet Earth (green, blue, and brown) contrast with the multiple disposable objects, apparently silent in their inanimate condition. The sound recordings correspond to field recordings of different natural environments, from the beach to the most hidden rocky formations.

**Title:** *Untitled – An Anthropogenic Installation*

**Authors:** Andreia Martins, Gonçalo Bernardo, Luís Costa and Martim Chaves

Faculty of Engineering – University of Porto

Interactive installation intended to raise awareness of sound pollution and its different manifestations. The installation is composed of several elements representing each of the environments where sound pollution occurs: water, earth, and air.

Sound pollution is a product of human activity that can negatively affect the lives of many species. To raise public awareness of this issue, this interactive installation immerses the audience in an environment that confronts them with this reality. The concept is based on a study of anthropogenic noise and the pollution of nature through auditory perception.

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**Title:** *What's This?*

**Authors:** João Guimarães and Vasco Santos

Bachelor's in Music Production and Technology. Escola Superior de Música e Artes do Espectáculo – Instituto Politécnico do Porto

*What's This?* is an audiovisual installation of the data art type that explores the concepts of visualisation and sonification of big data in real time, extrapolating Baudrillard's ideas of simulation and simulacrum as mechanisms of control in the modern world. The simulacrum is real.

The installation consists of a data interface built in Max/MSP software, which transforms real-time data streams from financial and meteorological APIs into MIDI data (notes and control). These signals communicate through a virtual MIDI driver with

a DAW (Reaper), which transforms them into audio through different sound synthesis and effects processing techniques, exploring real-time parameter control in these tools. The same data streams feed a visual interface that implements several successive interpretations of the data streams (developed with Max/Jitter software).

### 2022

**Title:** *Insensored*

**Author:** Gonçalo Cunha

Bachelor's in Sound and Image. School of Arts – Universidade Católica Portuguesa

Accustomed to a standardised reality, consciousness creates a reflection of the architecture of the visible in its hidden continuation. It sketches a symmetrical continuity within the omitted fields of vision. Through the conceptual installation *Insensored* (2022), artist Gonçalo Cunha tests this spatial reconstruction, attempting to prove that consciousness sometimes reflects, erroneously, what lies beyond our visual perception.

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**Title:** *Forest Waves*

**Author:** Luís Luzia

Faculty of Engineering – University of Porto

*Forest Waves* is a sound installation that aims to communicate the story of the degradation of the Portuguese forest over the past decades. This unique ecosystem is in a state of decline and degradation due to human impact, particularly the favouring of introduced species such as eucalyptus.

The installation employs two techniques to convey information: soundscapes and data sonification. The soundscapes were recorded in two distinct areas of the Peneda-Gerês National Park: in the Mata da Albergaria (a native forest) and in a eucalyptus plantation. The data sonification corresponds to a musical composition created from data on the areas occupied by certain species in the national territory, translating their evolution over time. Eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*), maritime pine (*Pinus pinaster*), and different species of oak (*Quercus* genus) were selected for their abundance and/or ecological importance in mainland Portugal's native ecosystems.

*Forest Waves* thus seeks to explore new ways of communicating science, harnessing the great potential of the artistic medium as a means of providing qualitative information appealing to sensitivity and emotion.

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**Title:** *Espelho Meu Espelho Teu*

**Authors:** Joana Araújo and Rute Costa

Master's in Media Arts. Institute of Social Sciences – University of Minho

The general disconnection of humanity and, consequently, the external control felt over one's own life form the concept in which this work is grounded. Addressed from the individual's point of view, the piece conveys the sense of control experienced in our communities. In the presence of technology and the constant flow of ideas, conversations, and actions, it questions whether our singularity is self-authored or shaped by external forces.

In the piece, the spectators' expressions are transfigured, with their facial features digitally superimposed to form a singular

person, familiar yet unknown.

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**Title:** *Caixa Postal*

**Author:** Lea Taragona

Master's in Arts and Technologies of Sound. Escola Superior de Música e Artes do Espectáculo – Instituto Politécnico do Porto

On the telephone sound voices, an ephemeral choir that sings and speaks about the voice in search of a recipient. A generative sound documentary born in a time of absences, when voicemail messages, often heard through earphones, became a way of inhabiting others and being inhabited. Brandon LaBelle writes that the voice "excites or haunts a listener to recognise in the voice 'someone' (...) someone I wait for, or fear, or even someone I may not understand. (...) The voice announces the subject, whether illusory or invisible, fragmented or fictional." This technology of presence, these oral letters, raised the initial questions for this installation: where and when does the voice begin? To what or to whom does it refer? *Caixa Postal* is a living archive of messages after the tone, folds and eardrums vibrating towards the voice and its affects.

## 2023

**Title:** *Artificial Traces*

**Authors:** Diana Romero and Daniel Martins

Master's in Interactive Media Systems. School of Media Arts and Design – Instituto Politécnico do Porto

With the intention of revealing the trace of artificial intelligence systems and data processing centres, the work questions

how these agents threaten the integrity of the socio-ecological structure. The influence and impact of these systems, not always perceptible due to their scale, pose disorienting challenges such as the incessant production of data, electronic waste, voracious energy consumption, and the accelerated obsolescence of information and equipment. The overload of content, processed at a frantic pace, weakens our capacity for assimilation and repositioning in the face of resulting events.

*Artificial Traces* emerges as an interpretation of the content produced by artificial intelligence, providing a sensory experience that transposes into the exhibition space its massified and uninterrupted use, as well as the surrounding media noise. Digital traces such as news and text-to-image systems are collected in real time and translated into a timeline of luminous and sonic pulses. In this context, the sensory tension of audiovisual overstimulation fosters critical dialogue on the duality of the benefits and harms of these agents.

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**Title:** *Untitled (Borders and Transmissions)*

**Author:** Adriana Matos

Master's in Sound and Image – New Media Art. School of Arts – Universidade Católica Portuguesa

Borders and radio waves can be thought of as opposing forces. One, grounded in the nominal marking of lines on maps, from which logistical and architectural devices emerge, is based on the abstract construction of stable forms (time zones, currency, states); the other, devoted to verbal action and thought, flows untamed through the materiality of air.

While geographic and visual space may operate through dynamics of division, delineation, restriction, and order, radiophonic

space excludes them from the outset, operating through itinerant logics that prioritise fluctuations, interferences, external disturbances, and overlaps between signals, tracing territories that are not limited to the static outline of a border but are constantly being redrawn, transgressed, and reformulated.

*Untitled (Borders and Transmissions)* consists of two objects in dialogue: a diagrammatic map composed of raw fabric flags containing copper coils – similar to those used in radios – and a real-time projection of images being encoded, transmitted, and thus recreated as radio signals. Upon reception, they translate not only the information that constitutes them but also incorporate the modifications inherent to the very space that propagates them.

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**Title:** *Underwomb*

**Authors:** Clara Santos, Emília Simão and Maria Ferreira

Master's in Media Arts. Institute of Social Sciences – University of Minho

Everyday life, frenetic and restless, increasingly invites us to live on the surface and at a distance from nature. We live through an era of profound transformations – personal, structural, climatic – in which everything seems superficial. This living on the surface functions as a raft of survival, preventing depth and immersion. The piece seeks to offer the viewer an immersive experience, submerging them in a visual and sonic ocean, transporting them into a submerged and immersive space, calm, pure, and uncontaminated. Water – a fundamental element for life on Earth – is the alpha element, in all its ambiguity: sometimes calm, sometimes aggressive; sometimes lucid, sometimes obscure; sometimes clear, sometimes polluted. On its surface float all kinds of possibilities, as in its depths. The same applies

to us – we are liquid like water and, like it, we freeze, evaporate, and dry. Sometimes calm, sometimes aggressive; sometimes lucid, sometimes sombre; sometimes pure, sometimes tainted. In this liquid and increasingly polluted world, we drown, rise again, float, glide, and drift, sometimes devoured, sometimes predators. Such is the nature of species today – liquid and inconstant like water, where everything changes rapidly.

The core idea of this piece is to create and represent an immersive place, combining diverse visual and sonic stimuli in a completely dark room filled with white tulle screens stretched from wall to wall, stirred by a fan. The spectator is invited to immerse themselves in the piece, moving among the waves and screens, generating visual effects with their own shadow. This allusion to the aquatic environment also aims to create a sensation of return, of reconnection with the intimate moment of the first second of existence, to the primal self, to the uterine cradle. From water we are born, and within it we rediscover ourselves.

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**Title:** *Deep Dive*

**Author:** Pedro Cunha

Master's in Sound and Image – Animation. School of Arts – Universidade Católica Portuguesa

*Deep Dive* is a Virtual Reality experience where the spectator becomes a fish trapped in an aquarium, where the goal is not to escape but to swim and witness the stories unfolding around. Developed by Pedro Cunha, a Brazilian immigrant artist, the viewer circles inside an aquarium tank, observing the fish around or the lives of the people (cats) visiting the aquarium. The viewer chooses what to focus on among the simultaneous stories, making each experience different depending on which stories are heard.

At the same time, the player's lack of control over movement reflects the themes of the characters' stories, as many of them speak of how they lack control over their own lives. *Deep Dive* was entirely created in the 3D program Blender. Its duration is 12 minutes, looping endlessly back to the beginning. It is presented as a single VR headset placed on a table, accompanied by an instruction leaflet.

A critique of the hypocrisy of the art world, this work attempts to create something that cannot be easily exhibited or sold, without reaching the ephemerality of performance. Based on Ailton Krenak's book *Life is Not Useful*, the characters' stories hold no significance for the viewer, for regardless of what happens, they remain trapped in their aquarium, eternally.

## 2024

**Title:** *tree-dimensional*

**Author:** Ema Ferreira

Master's in Composition. Escola Superior de Música e Artes do Espectáculo – Instituto Politécnico do Porto

Born from the observation and regular photographic documentation of a tree over the course of a year, “tree-dimensional” is an interactive installation that functions like a barrel organ, allowing one to either stop at a specific moment and slowly feel each change, or constantly oscillate between accelerations — we experience a process of listening and contemplation. *tree-dimensional* does not aim to establish a relationship with the tree itself, but rather with the memory of it, which, although explicitly captured in a photograph, is also distorted and exaggerated by the time and context in which we find ourselves.

**Title:** *com tacto | contacto*

**Author:** Eva Barbosa

Master's in Media Arts. Institute of Social Sciences – University of Minho

Inspired by the world of cinema, *com tacto | contacto* expands the concept of cinematic immersion into a more encompassing environment. Influenced by the idea of haptic experience, the work invites the visitor to take an active role: the subject is challenged to feel the images seen and to search within them for memories already present within themselves.

This audiovisual narrative blurs the boundary between where the film ends and memory begins, exploring the semiotic relativity of images, challenging the limits of audiovisual representation, and encouraging reflections on meaning and the narratives that arise from it. In a world saturated with information, where technology shapes our relationship with others and with space, and configures how we live, think, and act upon the world itself, this gallery of memories appears as a place where we may simply exist.

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**Title:** *Symbiophone*

**Author:** Jéssica Pereira Gaspar

PhD in Science and Technology of the Arts. School of Arts – Universidade Católica Portuguesa

Beneath the tracks we tread in the forest there are ghostly beings formulating silent dialogues in misunderstood languages. Just as neurons enable communication between different parts of the brain, the mycorrhizal network, formed by the symbiosis between fungal mycelium and tree roots, allows interspecies

interaction, connecting the forest. Based on reflections on what it means to exist in symbiosis and on different interfaces for communication, this installation arises from research centred around three questions: How do human sounds affect mycelium? How does noise from highways or busy areas affect mycelium growth? Is it possible, through sound frequencies, to create a sonic maze that influences mycelium growth patterns?

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**Title:** *Greenwasher*

**Authors:** Susana Brochado and Ana Medeiros

Master's in Interactive Digital Media. School of Media Arts and Design – Instituto Politécnico do Porto

Exploring the practice of greenwashing and the concept of green capitalism, *Greenwasher* is an interactive audiovisual installation that combines sounds generated by touch-sensitive plants, motor-activated bells, and digitally processed corporate speeches, creating a soundscape that exposes the superficiality of ecological promises made by profit-driven companies. Against a backlit aquarium (exposing its shadow) are projected images inspired by the pop-glitch aesthetic associated with capitalist iconography. *Greenwasher* invites participants to reflect on the contradictions between appearance and reality in environmental practices within the capitalist context, promoting critical thought on the need for genuine and sustainable change.

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**Title:** *Código Concreto*

**Author:** Tobias Gaede

PhD in Fine Arts. Faculty of Fine Arts – University of Porto

Inspired by Concrete Poetry, the poems in *Código Concreto*

are formed by programming codes that incorporate poetic elements within their structure. Despite the interference the code has undergone, it remains functional, respecting the syntactic and semantic rules of programming language and generating a visual result through its processing. The codes were created through cybernetic interaction between a human (the artist) and a machine (AI tool).

The installation consists of six printed panels displaying the poems that compose the book *Código Concreto*. Arranged as diptychs, the left side shows the programming code/poems, while the right side presents the visual result of their processing. In the centre of the room, headphones allow visitors to listen to readings of the poems. The book that originated the work is also available for consultation.

## 2025

**Title:** *(A)TENSION*

**Author:** Bruno Mesquita

Master's in Media Arts. Institute of Social Sciences – University of Minho

Borders have long been a central theme in history, constantly present in political, social, and economic discussions. This topic extends beyond spatiality, playing a crucial role in issues of identity and power, shaping and being shaped by human dynamics.

*(A)TENSION* explores the line as an essential element and sound as a transformative one, reflecting on social dynamics and struggles for renewal.

Spectators are invited to question established narratives and to reflect on alternative perspectives, creating a space capable of redefining these lines.

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**Title:** *Micro Mining Ecologies*

**Authors:** Isidora Correa and Guy Fleisher

PhD in Science and Technology of the Arts. School of Arts –  
Universidade Católica Portuguesa

*Micro Mining Ecologies* combines sculpture, video, and sound art to explore the environmental implications of sustainable energy. The immersive installation displays the growth of extremophile bacteria from the Atacama Salt Flats – organisms that survive in saline and arid conditions through cooperation. Among the planet’s oldest life forms, they symbolise resilience to environmental change, now threatened by lithium extraction. Glass sculptures replicate the morphologies of salt crusts and contain bioleaching with extremophiles to recover lithium from discarded batteries. An interactive system sonifies microbial colour changes, translating living processes into a generative sonic ecology of mineral recirculation.

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**Title:** *TR (Table-React)*

**Author:** Martim Novais

Master’s in Fine Arts. Faculty of Fine Arts – University of Porto

In the digital age, *TR (Table-React)* by Martim Novais rethinks the table as an “ultra-machine”, inspired by Hermínio Martins. More than a banal object, the table emerges as a symbolic and functional mediator, a meeting point between data, devices, and humans. Drawing on concepts such as smart objects, social

objects, and the Internet of Things (IoT), the table is no longer merely a physical support. Influenced by artists such as Julia Scher and the collective Quadrature, Novais creates a table that reveals and reinscribes itself, maintaining its familiar form while acquiring new layers of meaning.

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**Title:** *Sonic Iterations for Intangible Existences: Dark Matter*

**Author:** Rafael Maia

PhD in Science and Technology of the Arts. School of Arts –  
Universidade Católica Portuguesa

*SIFIE: Dark Matter* is a sound installation that investigates our timbral relationship with sound and how it shapes the auditory reality we choose to inhabit. By extracting possible timbral alterations of a voice within dark matter, an environment of auditory ambiguity is created around the sculpture, provoking the listener to assign, consciously or unconsciously, a form to these sonic objects. These cognitive responses reveal our auditory biases – what we replace or ignore to cope with an uncertain everyday life. Once an acoustic convergence point is found, all possibilities generated by visitors collapse into one, revealing the unaltered content of the voice. By confronting these two dimensions, the installation asserts itself as an act of resistance against imposed narratives.

## 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”.

Gomes holds a PhD in Computer Music, with the thesis *Composing with Soundscapes - Capturing and Analysing Urban Audio for a Raw Musical Interpretation*. He is a researcher at CITAR (Research Centre for Science and Technology of the Arts) and a professor at the School of the Arts (UCP), where he teaches New Media Art, Sound and Computer Music, and is also coordinator of the PhD programme Science and Technology of the Arts.

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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This essay is also available as an abridged pilot study here:  
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