



## a rumble from the core of the earth

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This video essay engages with Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Memoria* (2021) to pose questions about de-anthropocentric and decolonial ways of listening which would be attuned to the agency of the more-than-human world.

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### Creators' Statement

In one of the early scenes in Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Memoria* (2021), Jessica, a Scottish botanist living in Colombia, is trying to describe to Hernán, a sound engineer, a mysterious *bang* that repeatedly punctuates her consciousness. While she cannot locate the origin of that rumble, Jessica attempts to frame the sound under qualities that are known to her, sometimes describing it as "a rumble from the core of the earth." Although Hernán manages to sound design tones and textures that come close to what she hears, their acts of listening and making sound are still mounted by practices that orient the ear toward fixed patterns of identification and recognition (Robinson 2020).<sup>1</sup>

In a self-referential gesture, the film (as our video essay) reflects on fixed attempts at listening: ways in which humans—or, to be more precise, Euro-Western modernity—strive to contain, understand or reduce the ("natural") world to what is objective and knowable.<sup>2</sup> Jessica, an expatriate from a colonizing country, manages to move "beyond settler listening fixations" (Robinson 2020, 38) and attune herself to the *bang*. Indeed, like other sounds in the film, the noise can only be listened to when one becomes "disoriented from antirelational and nonsituated settler colonial positions of certainty" (Robinson 2020, 53). The question is, then, not *what* ears can notice, but *how* attentiveness to sound takes place.

Made as a response to Dylan Robinson—a xwélmexw (Stó:lō/Skwah) scholar and artist—and his call for moving beyond the normative ways of "hungry" listening, the video essay is a creative proposal (and invitation) to listen otherwise. Through our exploration of sound design and narrative focus on listening in *Memoria*, we pose questions about how attention to sound in videographic criticism can contribute to decolonial and de-anthropocentric ways of thinking, attuned to the agency of the

more-than-human world.<sup>3</sup> The ecocritical potential of the video essay format resides in the possibility of playing with the boundaries of what is audible or thinkable, thus contributing to the “redistribution of the sensible”—as Catherine Grant has recently put it, drawing on Rancière, in reference to videographic criticism (2025).<sup>4</sup> In her reflection on “spectral acoustemology,”<sup>5</sup> Laura Rascaroli pays attention to how the hauntological quality of sound in essay films can produce knowledge “with and through the audible,” for instance, through the spectral human “voice(over)” (18). In tune with these remarks, our analysis is attentive to the ways in which the specter of the Anthropocene, inseparable from the specter of settler colonialism, is aroused (or unearthed) in *Memoria*, while opening up knowledge of the more-than-human audibility, beyond the frontiers of the spectral human voice or human produced sounds. Our intention is to contribute to “the effort of advancing epistemic decolonization” (Rascaroli 2024, 18), while acknowledging our position from the outset: as researchers born in Brazil and Poland, respectively, and now based at a European university, in a country that has played a central role in settler colonialism, we set out to undo our own normative listening habits. As William Brown and Mila Zuo have recently observed—also building on Robinson’s *Hungry Listening*— “decolonization must be both difficult and uncomfortable, both unsettling and troublesome. Indeed [...] it might even be on some levels *inaccessible*” (2025, 306; italics in original).<sup>6</sup> Like these authors, we have decided to “work with rather than against” the “slipperiness” (306) of the concept of “decolonial.” Further, instead of guiding the viewers through our argument by means of a voiceover or captions, the video essay prioritizes “the affective feel, timbre, touch, and texture” of the human and more-than-human sounds heard in the film, as per Robinson’s decolonial approach (2020, 38).

The video essay sheds light on how *Memoria* weaves together different temporalities: the history of multifaceted conflicts and political violence in Colombia, the country’s colonial past and its ongoing implications in the present, as well as the anthropocentric violence that has led to environmental destruction and the displacement of Indigenous communities across the Global South. Yet, in so doing, the video also fosters an attunement with the more-than-human world. The first part opens from within the dark silhouette of a window. While humans are hardly noticeable, more-than-human lifeforms are active agents interacting with sonic inputs: a thunder (which resonates with the bang) ripples through the air, making a bird fly away abruptly. The video essay then moves to a diffracted scene mirroring Jessica’s different approaches to listening with two (supposedly different) characters bearing the same name, Hernán. Together, the matching scenes are placed in dialogue with the nondiegetic sound collage, generating zones of contact interwoven by sonic and social spaces (Kun 1997). While

in the image on the left Jessica intends to organize the haunting *bang* by objectivizing, through descriptive words, “the nonmaterial and apparently subjective phenomenon that is sound” (Chion 2003), on the right she embraces the “sonic encounter as a space of subject-subject relation” (Robinson 2020, 15). Both the bird reacting to the thunder and the diffracted experiences of listening to the earth’s rumble point to a reorientation in the act of acknowledging the agency of others.

In the second section we have amplified the textured layers of human and more-than-human stories that are heard throughout the film. Centuries-old audible traces of state violence and colonization, which overlap with dreams and experiences of the characters, co-exist non-hierarchically with the sounds of rain, thunder, river and birds. Like the multiscreen format, such videographic aural multilayering magnifies the “affective kinship” between different images and sounds (Grant 2013). At the center of the screen, a tunnel drilled through the earth that uncovers skeletal remains evokes the colonial and the anthropocentric violence exerted on the land and its inhabitants. As suggested by Van Dyke (2019), archaeological artifacts can become a means to uncover stories that would remain untold if not suppressed by the passing of time. On these terms, sound in *Memoria* “serves as a medium for storing memory” (Lu 2023, 12), as if the *bang* metaphorically stood for fossils that have long been concealed, calling into attention the ethics of listening to what have been otherwise silenced.

The last part seeks to attune to the agency of the land, de-centering the human even further. If, in the first part the meeting between listener and listened-to opens up space for understanding sound through more-than-human relationality, here we have given the centrality to the earth, which not only rumbles but also listens to, even though what exactly the earth is listening to remains unknown. Like *Memoria*’s constant “diffraction” (Barad 2017) of the motifs and stories in the film (the encounters with Hernán or Jessica leaning towards the window to listen to the *bang*), the video essay diffracts the sound, redirecting it as it passes through one medium to another (the film, our editing software, our ears), modifying its speed, timbre, texture, or intensity. The sound collage combines the radio waves and interferences with field recordings from rainstorms featured in the film, emphasizing the mediated nature of listening. Through such aesthetics of interference, the video essay does not pretend to fully register or clarify the sounds in the film. Mindful of the limit—and trying not to reproduce the logics of grasping and producing certainties—we often opted for the opacity of what can be heard.<sup>7</sup>

What is at stake in such videographic ways of listening? As Lisabeth Lipari observes in her reflection on the ethics of attunement, the notion of “response” (derived from the Latin *spondere*, “to pledge”), is central to ethics, yet it often obscures or renders

invisible the act of listening itself. To challenge this view, she writes: “To say that ethics arises from listening is thus to subordinate speaking to a kind of listening that speaks—a listening that is awakened and attuned to the sounds of difference rather than to the sounds of sameness.”<sup>8</sup> In this sense, one could argue that videographic research opens up space for a technical production of such listening, less to capture what we hear, but to creatively respond to and engage with it.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Dylan Robinson’s (2020) *Hungry Listening* reflects on the colonial tendency to extract, assimilate, and distort Indigenous sound practices through Western listening frameworks, imposing settler-centric sound productions. In contrast to this tendency, the author seeks to explore Indigenous epistemologies through critical, decolonial listening practices by acknowledging the agency and subjectivity of marginalized voices, resisting assimilation. Even though he focuses on settler colonialism in Canada, his study can be expanded to other contexts, as it reveals how settler colonialism might shape listening. In our proposal to “listen otherwise” (Lipari 2009), we respond to Robinson’s endeavor to analyze ethical and relational dimensions of listening critically.

<sup>2</sup> As Wesley Stenzel (2022) observes in his review of *Memoria*, the film is packed with such attempts to condense “natural phenomena into comprehensible human terms”: “characters try to sum up the science behind fungi in academic lectures, uncover early human history by studying fossils, freeze flowers in industrial-grade refrigerators, replicate primordial sounds using technology, and stare into massive glass encasements of grass and dirt” (n.p.). Yet, Stenzel’s remarks are driven by the binary opposition of nature/culture, an opposition which our video essay tries to dismantle (see also Haraway’s notion of *naturecultures*).

<sup>3</sup> See Del Vecchio (2024) on the concept of *buzzying*, which refers to a relational storytelling practice that furthers multispecies communications and challenges human exceptionalism, and Paszkiewicz’s reflection on de-anthropocentric visualities (forthcoming 2026).

<sup>4</sup> In tune with ecocinema scholarship (MacDonald 2013), we understand the video essay format as a vehicle for reorienting our perception, where our editing software acts as “an amplifier” or “sensitizer” (Neimanis 2017) to increase attunement to the more-than-human world.

<sup>5</sup> Following Laura Rascaroli (who draws on Steven Feld), we adopt the term “acoustemology,” rather than “soundscape”, that is, “an acoustic epistemology [...], a way of knowing with and through the audible” (2024, 18). The term “spectral acoustemology” is particularly fitting in the case of *Memoria*, given the film’s

hauntological dimension. Jessica is continually haunted by the sound of *bang*. Ghosts appear everywhere: Hernán, the uncontacted “invisible people” in the Amazonia, the dog. See also Mello (2023).

<sup>6</sup> Robinson argues for allowing certain parts of his book’s argument to escape the “hungry” appetites of settler colonialism, asking all non-Indigenous readers to refrain from reading an introductory section in his book, “Writing Indigenous Space.”

<sup>7</sup> On epistemological uncertainty and opacity in videographic scholarship, see O’Leary (2021).

<sup>8</sup> See also Donna Haraway’s (2016) notion of response-ability, which she extends beyond the human.

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## Biographies

**Laura Del Vecchio** is a multidisciplinary researcher, artist, musician, editor and translator whose work lies at the intersection of culture, the politics and ethics of care, decolonial thought and the analysis of the links between human and more-than-human worlds. Del Vecchio has developed methodologies, coordinated research groups and published articles, collaborating with UNESCO, the Austrian Chamber of Commerce (WKO), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Centre d'Arts Santa Mònica, La Directa, Konvent Zero and many others. With a Master's degree in Construction and Representation of Cultural Identities from the

University of Barcelona, Del Vecchio continues to explore the ever-changing planetary landscapes as a predoctoral fellow at the University of the Balearic Islands as part of the project “Cinema and Environment 2: Ways of Seeing beyond the Anthropocene” (2024–2027), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, and the European Union.

**Katarzyna Paszkiewicz** is Associate Professor in English and Film Studies at the University of the Balearic Islands. Her current research explores environmentally oriented film theory and videographic criticism. Her articles on ecocinema, affect theory and eco-aesthetics, as well as the aesthetics of petroleum appeared in journals such as *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, *Journal of Film and Video*, *Studies in European Cinema*, *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, and *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, among others. She has recently co-edited, with Andrea Ruthven, *Cinema of/for the Anthropocene: Affect, Ecology and More-than-human Kinship* (2025) for Routledge Advances in Film Studies and is completing her book on de-anthropocentric visualities (under contract with Routledge). Her video essays appeared in *Feminist Encounters* and *Teknokultura*. She is currently a Principal Investigator on the project “Cinema and Environment 2: Ways of Seeing beyond the Anthropocene” (2024–2027), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, and the European Union.

### **Review by Missy Molloy, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand**

“a rumble from the core of the earth” redeploys the sonic boom of Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s *Memoria*—the film’s inciting incident—to direct attention to the ways listening, perception, and storytelling are shaped by the interpretive frameworks that make them intelligible. Transplanting *Memoria*’s sonic boom from its original context and embedding it in a lively and purposefully “unsettling” soundscape, the video essay also juxtaposes lush landscapes of the Columbia-shot film and the drawn expression that characterises its protagonist, Jessica (played by Tilda Swinton), who is haunted not only by her inability to determine the source of the sound, but also by her failure to articulate its singularity and intensity.

A thought-provoking conversation between *Memoria* and Dylan Robinson’s *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*, Laura Del Vecchio and Katarzyna Paszkiewicz’s video and creative statement illuminate aspects of each source text while also functioning as a distinctive call for closer attention to phenomena in and beyond cinematic experience—with special emphasis on the tactile dimensions of sound. As such, “a rumble from the core of the earth” enacts Robinson’s decolonial listening



practice using the materials of *Memoria* and film analysis. Elegantly orchestrating the film's striking cinematography and sound design, Del Vecchio and Paszkiewicz inspire thoughtful meditation on the roles of sound and listening in constructing the environments we inhabit and, in the process, productively underscore the affective density of video essay form.

### **Review by Stephen Rust, Oregon State University**

Overall, this remarkable video essay provides a meaningful scholarly experience for viewers by sonically and visually highlighting important aspects of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's auteur event-film *Memoria* (2021). The accompanying article is well-written, thoroughly researched, and makes a significant contribution to the fields of sound studies, decolonial theory, and ecocinema. The innovative methodology and insightful analysis make it a valuable addition to scholarly literature in film and media studies. I recommend it for publication without reservation.

The essay abstract is clear and concise, highlighting the key concepts and the aim of the study. The introduction provides a solid background on *Memoria* and sets the stage for the discussion on de-anthropocentric and decolonial listening practices. It references relevant literature, such as Dylan Robinson's *Hungry Listening*, and situates the study within broader theoretical frameworks. The methodology of this dual screening/reading experience is superbly creative and innovative, utilizing a video essay format to explore the auditory and visual elements of the film and accompanying the video with a concise written essay. I particularly appreciated the non-linear approach used to create the video and the use of split-screen and isolated audio tracks to draw viewer's attention to subtle thematic aspects of *Memoria* and the phenomenological experience of screening the film. The authors employ concepts like "spectral acoustemology" and "buzzing" to analyze the film's soundscape and its implications for de-colonial listening. The approach is well-justified and aligns with the study's objectives. I expect this work to open up exciting new trajectories in ecomedia scholarship in the years ahead.

The analysis is thorough and insightful, connecting the findings to broader theoretical and ethical considerations. The authors critically engage with existing literature and propose new ways of thinking about listening and sound. They also reflect on their own positionality and the implications of their research for decolonial practices. The stakes of this work feel clearly evident throughout the screening/reading experience and are stated directly in the essay's conclusion. The goals of this approach are integrated into the video essay and analysis of the film, which are coexpressive in highlighting how the sound design and narrative elements of *Memoria* contribute to a de-anthropocentric listening experience. The authors effectively demonstrate how

*Memoria* itself challenges traditional listening practices and opens up new ways of understanding sound and its relation to the more-than-human world.

**Ethos:** The authors address ethical considerations by acknowledging their positionality and the potential biases in their listening practices. They emphasize the importance of ethical and relational dimensions of listening, aligning their study with decolonial and de-anthropocentric principles. The references are comprehensive and up-to-date, including key works in the fields of sound studies, decolonial theory, and ecocinema. The authors cite relevant sources to support their arguments and provide a solid foundation for their analysis.

**Strengths:** Innovative methodology using a video essay format accompanied by a written self-analysis. Thorough and insightful analysis of the film *Memoria*. Strong engagement with relevant literature and theoretical frameworks. Complex yet concise writing style. Clearly-organized essay paralleling the structure of the video essay.

**Conclusion:** The video essay offers a sublime audio-visual analysis and reinterpretation of *Memoria*. While a video-essay made by and for human viewers is an inherently anthropocentric endeavor, the juxtapositions of video (including split screen) and enhanced audio centering nonhuman soundscape invites viewers to further consider how Weerasethakul's masterful film *Memoria* (2021) invites de-colonial and de-anthropocentric considerations. The accompanying written essay provides a detailed analysis of the video essay that effectively demonstrates the author's self-awareness and reflection upon the video. Very impressive work!

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