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Mnemo-Acoustmatic and Techno-Aesthetic Affect-between Dwelling and Sound art Works

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ABSTRACT

Departing from artistic research into everyday acoustic experience in the Athenian apartment building, polykatoikia, conducted as a PhD at the Department of Theory and Art History, Athens School of Fine Arts, Greece (2011–2021), this article adopts an intertextual approach. The aim is to open space between seemingly diverse subchapters to reflect on techno-aesthetic affects in acoustic perception and artistic creation. It focuses on how technology mediates sensory experience and creative practice. Concurrently, it proposes a tactile framework of connectivity and accessibility by rethinking the polykatoikia's doorbell system. These subchapters offer positioned insight into memory, imagination, and the situated perception of sound, drawing from sound art works and accounts from inhabitants of the case study. Examining the first tapping machine and its soundproofing standardisation as performative technology, the article traces the creative process of perception. It analyses Alvin Lucier's *Nothing is Real*, using the metaphors of the 'sound vessel' and 'vibrational architecture' to discuss the sonic properties of place. It incorporates the notion of the 'sonic body' regarding acousmatic sounds—where a sound's source remains indeterminant—linking them to memory's capacity to reconstruct auditory experiences in the present.

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Introduction

The question 'How do you perceive sound and listening in your apartment' was the situated opening to sensorially invite the inhabitants into the process for my PhD that was an artistic research conducted in the Department of Theory and Art History in the Athens School of Fine Arts entitled 'Sound and Listening as Artistic Practice in the Athenian Apartment Building'. I paid attention and analysed these articulations for several years until 2021. This research though, had started in 2011. The objective was to examine how sound is perceived in Athenian apartments and to research how acoustic experiences are articulated in everyday language and speech, how orality, phonesis and enunciation can embody sound affects.

Moreover the research focused into what do we come to know when we listen and pay attention to these articulations as a phenomenology of listening¹ and sensing vibrations

and at times it fluctuated between theology of listening and silence as well as acoustemology² (Feld 2015) of noise and noise affects. An acoustemology of vibrational dwelling, of vibrational architecture (Goodman 2010; Ouzounian and Werner 2025) through the voices that try to describe how sound feels like and is perceived in the everyday. At the same time the research had to branch on the specificity of the 'how' behind the Athenian apartment building, incorporating analyses of the unique phenomenon of the *polykatoikia* exploring its birth and formation between the after effects of modernism and local desires. In this context it examined comparatively Richard Woditsch's approach of the polyatoikia as 'a boundary setting exercise' (Woditsch 2015)—due to the fact that the ground floor stores extend the public space towards the upper spaces of the building thus allowing underlining the lucid tactile boundaries between the private and the public- and Ioanna Theocharopoulou's approach (Theocharopoulou 2017) of the polykatoikia 'as an oral agreement' between the housewives' desires of modern homes and the contractors who materialised their wishes usually implementing both labour men and the housewives' labour. The dissertation incorporated an in depth analysis on methodologies of artistic research as art making to ground ways of listening as artistic practice. This multimodal research utilised deep hang outs, short and long interactions with my neighbours and people from other suburbs. This PhD (2011–2021) grew in discussions with philosopher, my supervisor Fay Zika, social scientists, anthropologists, cultural theorists, the member of the supervising committee anthropologist and sound artist Panos Panopoulos, architects Sofia Donna, George Farazis, Dimitris Theodoropoulos, an artist—sound proofer—at that time based in New York—Ariel Abrahams as well as acousticians, artists, composers and other sound artists, the third member of my supervision committee Zafos Xagoraris as well as Christina Phoebe and Michalis Paraskakis. Some of these discussions were formal interviews, utilising semi structured questionnaires and voice recordings. Some were formulated within our relating to one another and the discussion grew in chats, like with Ariel Abrahams. His contribution from the spectrum of the sound proofer in New York offered points to analyse regarding the ownership of sound and insight on acoustic experiences that were similar to Athens or diverse. Outside the realm of the PhD I was at the same time engaged in the Voices/Fonés team in which I was part of between 2011 and 2016 researching the notion of the voice as matter for thought and art making. The discussions in Voices/Fonés group were long meetings that took the form of group exhibitions and panels, energising different urban spaces. Although the research for this group was not formally incorporated in the PhD, the knowledge gained from these interactions informed my understating of the notion of the voice, parts of this insight was incorporated in a chapter about artistic research. Furthermore, for the aforementioned PhD, I conducted lengthy research in sound studies practices and academic papers,³ related poetry and literature. Together with my neighbours and informants we explored ways of translating experiences of listening to words, through field work and field work documentation—recording and transcribing inhabitants' narratives about *polykatoikia* sounds, exchanging observations and analysing them.

The PhD incorporated field recordings along with analyses of transcripts of personal audio narrations from inhabitants, taking under consideration my own sound diary which documented my listening experiences. These formed an extensive ethnographic component. I came to know more than 20 situated stories from inhabitants of the

polykatoikias. The majority of them were working class, elder, mid life and younger women, men between 35 and 50, other between 20 and 67, from the steadily and gradually gentrified area of Metaxourgeio, down town Athens and other suburbs. This core fieldwork involved prolonged engagement through deep hangouts with participants, repeated in-depth discussions, and voice recordings. Gradually, the focus shifted to the transcriptions of their recorded articulations where they analysed how they perceived sounds in their living spaces, accompanied by my interpretations of these accounts. Both their and my expressions—including vocal sound mimicry—provided a rich context, revealing of specific acoustic situations.

This artistic research aimed at forming a work of art in text, in the written word on the ‘how’ of listening in the athenian apartment building but also as a process in the field work. The use of the internet, the mobile phone messaging and emailing were key tools for making it happen, video calls to organise and discuss, group chats and the implementation of digital recordings so as to share and analyse them better with long distance experts. This technology implementation functioned as an invisible infrastructure to the textual outlet of the work, its growth as well as the ways it enabled understanding and changes of perspective about our neighbours. This research makes apparent through multiple methodologies how ways of listening can be perceived as artistic practice. These methodologies included participatory fieldwork, sound diaries, collective analysis of recordings, performative actions—silence as action: one month observational silence to document altered acoustic attention/responses, situated mimicry (vocal re-enactments of apartment sound with neighbours as part of narrating the sonic everyday). Other methodological tools implemented were multimodal documentation—field recordings of ambient/incidental sonic events stressing the indoors and outdoors atmospheres, the acousmatic sounds—these are sounds whose origin is uncertain—and transcripts of inhabitants’ narratives and researcher’s annotations. Digital ethnography was implemented as well, in the form of remote expert consultations to analyse specific acoustic experiences and spatio-temporal aspects of psychoacoustics, along with consistently keeping my own sound diary, both written and on recorders, on my own noises as method and artistic output while also conducting embodied experiments in *polykatoikias*, testing doorbell systems’ acoustic boundaries. These experiments included constructing DIY hydrophones to sense the vibratory propagation of sound through fluids and examining different door bells functions in different apartments. These methodologies were deliberately hybrid—blending artistic, ethnographic, and digital practices—to reveal how listening operates as both research tool and aesthetic material.

This article proposes an intertextual articulation to create space for attending to how contemporary technologies shape our perception of sound, vibration, and the situated, embodied knowledge that emerges from acoustic experience. By weaving together texts, artworks, and architectural insights, the article gathers elements of auditory memory, imagination, and spatial listening, drawing on sound artworks to trace the creative processes of perception. Thus, it traces the affective contours of everyday sonic life—from the subtle tensions of neighbouring walls to the dislocated intimacy of acousmatic sound, underlying the importance of these acousmatic sounds—whose sources cannot be determined—in techno-aesthetic affectivities and in the process of forming an understanding of the sense of being in a place and response-ability.

Contemporary Technologies, Affect and the Sonic Experience of Place in the Intimacy of Dwelling

‘As I’m getting off the bus and walking up to the house, my phone buzzes- it’s picking up our home wi-fi’. A text message arrives, following a discussion with H. about how domestic space expands through new technologies. I suppose they sent it to share this other way of feeling at home. I had requested them, and other Athenian residents of apartment buildings to share with me how they perceive sound and listening from their apartments. That was quite a very different observation to what the other neighbours share. It stroke me because it made clear, in one sentence, how the perception of space and self feels constantly recalibrated by the flows of invisible connectivity. Experiencing another sense of home on the move. And how the sonic traces of networked communication—buzzes, pings, alerts—dissolve the boundary between inside and outside, local and global and immediate presence. The tactile rhythm of technology and flesh probably folded them back into the porous boundary of home. Sound and vibrations, both expected and ambient, structure the transition as I return home too: the air tucked out of the door while closing, the rattle of the keys as they get hanged, the hum of the dvd still spinning in the player, the Chinese fighting through the walls. These vibrations, signals, and ephemeral noises are no longer peripheral; they constitute a living fabric that sets intimacy, presence and, possibly, at times, a sense of belonging. These articulations are not neutral. Just as technology is not neutral. It redefines space, time, intimacy, and listening. Both acoustic and acousmatic texture of contemporary life seems deeply influenced by internet-connected technologies and aesthetics. Take, for instance, the smartphone buzz announcing Wi-Fi proximity: it’s not just a signal but a mnemo-acousmatic trigger—where is this sound coming from? Is it my phone? The neighbour’s?—compels one to construct meaning from layers of prior experience. Does it recall the urgency of unanswered messages, or the comfort of nearing private space? Similarly, the voice of a navigation app bleeding through walls might conjure a neighbour’s late-night commute, or the disembodied presence of global labour—a driver’s directions, a delivery worker’s GPS. Even a streaming playlist, overheard from another apartment, becomes an acousmatic archive—its muffled bass-line inviting guesses about one’s mood or identity. These sounds are charged; they act as sonic agents of presence, absence, labour, and longing, structuring the sense of place, timing, and intimacy in the dwelling. In this context, sounds and vibrations bring to mind situations, reminiscence of voices in orality, ‘to do lists’ and ‘future plans’. The mnemo-acousmatic experience becomes modulated, forming a new techno-aesthetic interface between home and network. By mnemo-acousmatic experience, I refer to a mode of situated listening where sound whose origin is uncertain, is interpreted both through immediate auditory perception and through the layered filters of memory, imagination, and prior sonic exposure and knowledge. This term is coined here to articulate a process intensified when sound’s source remains acousmatic—unseen or undefined—prompting the listener to navigate between sensory input and mnemonic construction.

Inhabitants of the polykatoikia have been consistently referring to techno-aesthetic affects or spatial acoustic traits technologically mediated while narrating specific acoustic experiences from their everyday life. Within this context, while thoroughly analysing specific situated articulations, the issue of the affects of new technologies in sound

perception is approached, in the verbal reconfiguring based on the technological mediums' affects and the social dimension. In the inhabitants' articulations, like for example in this observation about the mobile phone buzz when approaching home's wi-fi, layers of knowledge are inscribed that are related to the resident and the social context of the polykatoikia in Athens.

The term affect holds different meanings in my research and is translated in Greek as *ηχητική επίδραση* even though it refers to multiplicities of sonic effects and bundles of situations unfolding within the everyday, of emotions and tribulations in the specificity of these living conditions. The term affect is utilised referring to the acoustic experiences while taking under consideration both Augoyard's and Torgue's approach in *Sonic Experience, A Guide to Everyday Sounds* (2006) by exploring the social, psychological and cognitive context of specific sonic effects in a broader sense, while tracing affinities with Marie Thompson's exploration of the term in *Beyond Unwanted Sound: Noise, Affect and Aesthetic Moralism* (2017). Thompson disrupts the 'aesthetic moralism' regarding noise as 'unwanted' or 'bad', proceeding to explore the spectrum of noise's ways. This is achieved through an 'ethico-affective' approach to noise. She draws from Michel Serres' figure of the parasite and handles noise as a 'transformative force-relation and a necessary component of material relations' (Thompson 2017, 3). Furthermore she draws from Ben Anderson to build upon affect and affective life 'being intimately connected to various modes and practices of mediation'.

My use of *επίδραση* for affect, emerged in 2011, through an attempt to primarily discuss about the conditions within the specific sound field and secondly to think through the modes of listening in the specific context. In this sense, the term *επίδραση* functions not as a literal translation, but as a broad functional concept that captures the material, vibrational, and social life of sound within domestic and public space. At the same time this term was organically incorporated to facilitate discussion about the way sound was described by research participants: not only as an emotional impression, but as something that acts through the built, matter, technological, beyond the body and different species, modulates spatial perception, and activates memory.

Furthermore, the term affect in my research is subject to each different situated story and the way each resident talks about sonic experiences and their perception of the notion of 'noise' and 'silence' in their everyday processes of dwelling. For example the affectivities in the case of the one hundred building apartments in Patision str., above the legendary 'Chara Pastry Shop' where Argyris, a director, had to be sure of the origin of each noise in order to intervene or feel at ease, were significantly different to the affectivities within the case of Eva who lived with her parents and had to endure the sounds of her neighbour in her living room or the sounds of her family within her home. And the residents say 'I can hear them as if in Dolby Surround', or 'The balcony door walls become the hi-fi speaker' and 'their sounds reach me in stereo'. In Thompson's terms who builds upon Michel Serres' 'middle/medium/milieu' wordplay, there is an aspect of mediation which is inherent in the noise affect which allows a set of sonic relational circumstances to unfold: 'the parasitic noises of both the technological medium and the environmental milieu are brought to the fore, influencing the improvisatory process and its outcomes' (Thompson 2017, 148) and to 'recognize noise as a perturbing force-relation that, for better or for worse, induces a change' (42). Each inhabitants' position on noise in my research points to a new way of perceiving on

one hand the specifics of each relation and, on the other hand, a very unique understanding of the notion of noise. Each of these understandings is specific, situated and can be expandable for knowledge and art making. There are also common threads between these different positionalities, such as the aspect of the techno-aesthetic affectivity in dwelling.

The concept of the ‘sonic body’ (Kane 2014) is substantial to the discussion regarding mnemo-acousmatic affectivities because it rejects the traditional acousmatic question —‘What made that sound?’—by arguing that sounds don’t simply point to absent sources—they create virtual sonic bodies in perception. For example, when footsteps are felt in a hallway, we don’t think ‘a person is walking’. Our imagination animates a presence, a body-in-motion, from the sound’s texture, rhythm, and spatial cues. Kane’s ‘sonic body’ reveals how acousmatic sound compels us to populate space with imagined presences—an idea that resonates in the polykatoikia where Wi-Fi buzzes and muffled voices materialise neighbours we might never see. Next, the idea of constructed auditory memory (Bartsch in Campen 2014) allows for a rethinking of how vibrational knowledge moves through and with us, entangled in time, material, and relation.

The Tapping Machine as a Performative Technology: From Acoustic Standardisation to Vibrational Architecture

In the Acoustic Design Department of the National Technical University of Athens, there are specially designed rooms for conducting noise propagation measurements. One such room features a tapping machine on the floor, which simulates noises transmitted through the floor. According to Von Fischer (Managh 2017), this machine is used for the acoustic planning of buildings, replicating sounds such as footsteps, moving furniture, and machinery impacts on high-rise building floors to facilitate necessary sound measurements for floor construction. The tapping machine was first published in the *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* in 1930. The publication noted that similar tests for structure-borne sounds might have been conducted as early as 1923 or 1926. Before these tests, all preceding tests were conducted implementing women wearing high heels. In the framework of my PhD, in a discussion with Alexandra Sotir-opoulou, head of the *Acoustic Design Department* of NTUA, about sound propagation modes, acoustic design of buildings and this specific machine, she provided the following insights:

The impact noise generator is used to measure impact noise. It consists of a source that produces a consistent sound using mallets- hammers that fall on the floor. We place it on the floor above and then measure the noise levels underneath. This technique has been employed here since the mid-20th century and is a very old method. Here’s the chapter on impact noise, illustrating the footstep, the one who sleeps underneath and is disturbed, the little children playing, and showing all three structural ways to protect ourselves from this kind of noise. Carpeting is the first, hollow flooring is the second, and the use of a special suspended ceiling is the third. It is a standard source of impact noise, a referential source so that we all know and can say that this floor can insulate such impact noise in reference to this universally recognized source that produces a certain number of decibels. That is what it is used for. It is a way of standardizing the measurement.

The hammers attached to the machine strike the floor with a specific ‘standardized’ force and speed, providing a constant sound reference value to measure how much sound each

floor can insulate. It produces a constant noise that is quite loud and penetrating. ‘This one has hammers of this diameter, which, when the machine is turned on, start to tumble like this’—her fingers knock the surface of the desk quickly and successively as if trying to press down hard on the keys of an imaginary piano. ‘It’s the standardization method of measurement. We know they all use the same source, so what we came up with refers to the same source’, said Sotiropoulou.

In this way, the machine provides a constant value according to which different floors are ‘typified’. Of interest is the fact that the machine ultimately determines how sound-permeable the floors are, since it ‘essentially simulates reality’, as Alexandra Sotiropoulou points out. She concludes that this ‘construction’ does not ‘fail’ or ‘succeed’ in its purpose because it solely measures the response of the floor. This machine intermediates so that we know how sound-permeable, sound-reflective, or sound-absorbent the floor is, allowing it to be evaluated. What this machine actually does is simulate possible beats and substitute human presence and action, acting as a mechanical, oversimplified other for the sole purpose of measuring how much sound the material can insulate. The unit of measurement here is this literal construction of the other. In a way, the tapping machine is a clearly predetermined other, an other-constant. The tapping machine is not merely a tool for acoustic measurement—it is a symbol of technical regulation, of how human presence is abstracted and codified into mechanical standards for buildings. There’s poetic and political potential here. In its historicity, a tool that got devised in the middle of the twentieth century it can be considered as a contemporary example of how sound technologies ‘model’ the body, much like biometric systems model behaviour. The tapping machine, a relic of acoustic standardisation, embodies the mechanical abstraction of human presence. It simulates footsteps, ignores individuality, and produces measurable impact. Yet in its repetition and regularity lies a strange poetics, a vibrational trace inscribed into the fabric of habitation. Reimagined as an event or just a trigger enables thinking though a relocated live sonic installation or participatory performance piece. As a prototype but also as a twixed device, the tapping machine could contribute as a conduit between embodied memory, and as shared sonic knowledge with different literal floors.

In *On Listening* (2007), Jean Luc Nancy rethinks the body and sound not as static things but as events, where the body resonates with what it listens to. For Nancy, listening is not just hearing; it is participating in the vibration and openness of being. While focusing in the vibrational life of the dwelling the interest lies in the tactility of listening. In Gascia Ouzounian’s approach [Ouzounian, Werner (images), 2025] there can be found a subversive way of thinking through not only sonic perspectives in architecture but ways of reconsidering the notion of artificial immersive environments in art, as well as rethinking the seeming inescapability of crowdsourcing practices of networks and their possible contributing to generalised surveillance. Towards a vibrational architecture, Ouzounian offers a radically helpful epistemological tool in this approach of coupled bodies with acoustic and vibro-acoustic energy as mediators of sound and vibration. This framing offers a shift away from passive immersion and toward a more reciprocal, relational engagement with architectural space, which is vital for rethinking how vibrational and acoustic experiences shape collective dwelling:

Indeed, the idea of immersion has haunted not only the notion of soundscape but also the domain of architectural acoustics, which principally considers acoustical environments as ones in which subjects are emplaced, with sounds and acoustical reflections taking place all around them. By contrast, in a vibrational architecture the listening subject is not immersed in sound so much as their body is coupled with acoustic and vibro-acoustic energy, mediating sound and vibration, ‘connect[ing] the occupier to that which is occupied’. (Ouzounian and Werner 2025)

Ouzounian incorporates another subversive epistemological tool, the idea of a decentralised approach to positionality within the listening practice. Her approach provides critical tools for decentering traditional spatial hierarchies in acoustics and reframing the architectural environment as an active, relational participant in sonic experience. Through the words of Salomé Voegelin observing based on Toshiya Tsunoda’s *Scenery of Decalcomania* (Voegelin 2019 in Ouzounian 2025):

Vibration makes the world appear as an invisible field of connections within which my body *oscillates as a thing amid other things*. Vibration is the inexhaustible condition of this world that ... binds me into its texture, not at its center, but in its weave.

And as part of these vibrational architectures incorporations of the tapping machine can be reconsidered as not merely static enclosures but dynamic matrices where auditory energies, corporeal, and technological, interact. In this sense, the artifact-tapping machine performs not just a technical measurement, but an inscription of presence that can be re-worked while troubleshooting different frictions of collective dwelling. Ouzounian’s tools are thus particularly useful for articulating how architectural and acoustic standards—like those embodied in the tapping machine, might be reconfigured to support more inclusive, responsive, and affectively attuned modes of cohabitation. In this context, vibrational architecture becomes not only an aesthetic or theoretical construct but a framework for rethinking how embodied sonic technologies—such as the tapping machine, participate in the cultural, political, and collaborative reconfiguration of space, access, and affect within technologically mediated environments.

Vibration here is considered not simply as a physical force, but as an affective and relational field through which technologies, bodies, and architectures co-compose the experience of dwelling. It considers how digital infrastructures, mobile devices, and soundproofing norms inscribe certain modes of connectivity, attention, and control into the intimate space of the home. These technologies are active agents in shaping how we relate to one another and to space—acoustically, emotionally, and socially. By attending to the politics and poetics of vibrational life, the article invites a more situated and collective approach to integrating technologies in ways that foreground accessibility, interdependence, and the resonant potential of shared sonic practices.

Memory and Sound Interpretation—Techno-Aesthetic Affects in Sound Dwelling

It is necessary to include in the understanding of the experience of sound waves a creative process that seems to be rooted in the way imagination is activated when a sound is interpreted, as it is filtered through memory and thus synthesises aspects of auditory

perception. Memory plays an important role in the interpretation of sounds, as it is through it that a present event is related to an event in the past.

How each person acts towards the perceived sound may have to do with the way in which they have been exposed to similar sounds in the past. It may also have to do with the circumstances in which they hear them and imagine or construct their source. Campen, building on Proust's views that memory is a creative action because it cooperates in the creation of joyful moments in which past and present coexist, reasons in favour of the creative aspect of the 'Proust Effect' (Campen 2014, 55). As Campen states, he does not reach answers to where this creative function is grounded when he explores the field of neurophysiology for this purpose. Therefore, he considers a psychological-philosophical perspective (Epstein 2004 in Campen 2014), a linguistic perspective (R. Bartsch 2005 in Campen 2014), and a position from the aspect of memory researchers (Gottfried 2004 in Campen 2014). The linguist Renate Bartsch, from the University of Amsterdam, observed that Proust in 'Searching for Lost Time' (Proust 1917–1922 in Campen 2014) does not conceive of memory as an archival index for retrieving data. Instead, she says that Proust suggests that 'memory reconstitutes the past by connecting different memories and constructing something new in the present, a totality full of new meaning in which each individual primary element of the past loses its meaning'. She then concludes that memory is more of a construction than a reconstruction because it never exactly reconstructs the past but adds elements from the past and present, creating a new experience with elements from different moments in life (Bartsch 2005).

It can be noted here that the way in which imagination and memory are activated upon hearing a sound, especially an acousmatic sound, can possibly be a creative process. This is because we often construct potentialities (of what might be going on) and thus create a possible version or situation, entity, thing that might cause the particular sound. Memory seems to function analogously to adaptive processing system, not as static storage, but as an active, recursive mechanism that continuously reconfigures itself through present experience. Like real-time signal processing that transforms input through dynamic filters, memory mediates sonic perception by layering past impressions with immediate sensory input. Sometimes, we find ourselves, without really knowing what may be happening, in the situation of imagining, speculating, and constructing possible stories and explanations, creating possible versions of the source of a sound whose cause we may not know, always through our personal position which lies, among other things, in our past experiences. For instance, from the sounds of erotic clinchings of which only the woman's pleasure soundings are audible and whose source a straight female inhabitant of an apartment building does not know exactly, she concludes that 'in the building must reside a male that is an aficionado'.

Steven Connor argues that:

[...] human beings in many different cultural settings find the experience of a sourceless sound uncomfortable, and the experience of a sourceless voice *intolerable* [...] the disembodied voice must be habited in a *plausible body*.

The autonomous sound or voice is supplemented with an imaginary body. Connor refers to this phenomenon as the *vocalic body*, the idea of 'a surrogate or secondary body, a projection of a new way of having or being a body, formed and sustained out of the

autonomous operations of the voice' (Kane 2014, 32). For example, we could say that the Wangunks gave a *vocalic body* to the Moodus⁴ noises by imagining them to be the voices of Kiehtan or Hobbamock. Furthermore, we can move away from the voice and generalise Connor's term by referring to the production of a *sonic body* elicited by acousmatic sound. A third proposition: Acousmatic sounds encourage the imaginative projection of a *sonic body* (Connor 2000 in Kane 2014, 35). Let us note here Connor's terminology as it is of particular conceptual, semantic, philosophical, ethnographic, praxeological and theological interest regarding how it articulates that need to attribute sound a real, valid source; that need for this specific kind of certainty.

Here lies a prosperous ground for further development, not only to dwell on the reason why there is this sense of needing sound source attributes but to think creatively with acousmatic sounds in different contexts, and, at the same time, perhaps, try to get a grip of specific contemporary social and political areas of concern regarding response abilities within the ethics of listening and witnessing. In the artistic research conducted in the Athenian apartment building (Raftopoulou 2021), inhabitants stressed that knowing the sound source makes one capable of tolerating even unwanted sounds because, as they said, 'they could sort out the noise somehow in their minds'. They said that 'it drives them crazy' when they do not know what part of the neighbour's house makes specific sounds. On the occasion of not being able to figure out where certain sounds were coming from, took the chance to directly ask their neighbours, some even inviting themselves into their apartments to locate the source. Even though they were pretty certain of what they were hearing, they would not believe it entirely unless the producer of the sound would verbally admit it. At certain cases there was the issue of domestic violence and its sound traces, that led the neighbours to stall calling the police or intervening for different reasons. This raises the aforementioned contemporary issue, that of response-ability and matters regarding the ability of confrontation, of getting involved or not. In the space between listening, acting upon the audible or sensed through vibration, performative action and interpreting, exist a wide spectrum of behaviours, intentions, desires, fears and bundles of needs and feelings, predetermined routines and habits, that are situated in the specific conditions and situations. Tracing audible-sensed traces and their possible sources in this wide spectrum is a process of knowing a little bit more about the personal and social imaginary as it is also quite telling of the ways of listening and being in the world.

Among these testimonies, as it was mentioned briefly before, one inhabitant mentioned that listening to the sounds of lovemaking from a neighbouring apartment felt like 'Dolby Surround'—not just due to the volume, duration, or repetition, but because of the inescapable intimacy the experience induced. She described a sensation of being positioned inside the act, as if acoustically centred, unable to retreat. This remark is not isolated; it resonates with other inhabitants' expressions regarding the directionality, clarity, and spatial precision of their neighbours' sounds. Another noted that the walls near the glass windows had structural gaps—common in buildings constructed before the 1980s, before soundproofing was systematically integrated into domestic architecture. These gaps, he explained, rendered the walls resonators, turning them into amplifying agents, like unintended architectural speakers channelling sound from the street or adjacent rooms. One inhabitant reflected that listening to his family from the exterior ground floor while they were inside on the first floor gave him the sensation

of being in the Ancient Epidaurus Theatre—a sonic experience reminiscent of designed public acoustics, but re-encountered unexpectedly in everyday life. Importantly, in ancient amphitheatres, acoustics were not merely technical phenomena but integral to psychagogy, the art of guiding the soul through performance, resonance, and emotional clarity. Unlike entertainment that simply distracts, psychagogy—nourishes, positions, and transforms the listener. And yet, paradoxically, another inhabitant described the walls as ‘made of paper’, both dismissing and acknowledging their vibrational permeability. Across these articulations, despite frequent dissatisfaction with unwanted or intrusive sound, there was a thread of ambivalence: the same walls that let sound leak in also allowed for a feeling of companionship, a togetherness in the fractured intimacy of urban life.

What emerges from these narratives is not merely a projection of a ‘sonic body’ in the acousmatic sense, but a more situated and technologically entangled acoustic memory in a tech affected body. What might be called a techno-aesthetic affectivity. This affectivity is already inscribed in the language and metaphors the inhabitants use: surround sound, amphitheatres, speakers, in stereo, like a megaphone. Their dwelling is experienced not just architecturally, but vibrationally, mediated by infrastructures—both material and communicative—that shape how they listen, feel, and relate. These are not passive sonic impressions but activated perceptual matrices, shaped by the temporal density of repetition, the intimacy of spatial proximity, and the ambiguity of aural borders. In this sense, listening is neither passive nor objective; it is relational, affective, and responsively situated.

As Blesser and Shalter (2007) observe: ‘technology has produced high-quality private acoustic arenas, making public acoustic arenas less relevant, whether these are quiet or noisy’. In this new acoustic paradigm, dwellings become hybrid zones: private architectures laced with public resonances. The aural life of the home is no longer bounded by its walls; rather, it pulses with ambiguous traces, carrying what Paul Carter identifies as the erotic and political tension of mishearing (Carter 2004). In Brandon LaBelle’s words:

Paul Carter in his insightful article ‘Ambiguous Traces, Mishearing and Auditory Space’, gives a compelling examination of the auditory and acts of listening through the theme of ambiguity. Carter stakes out a productive territory in which mishearing and listening become opening into a rich process of sharing. For Carter the ambiguous carries a rich sense of the erotic, as it grants degrees of sensibility and surprise, to semantic meaning. (Carter 2004; in LaBelle 2009)

What is worth noting here is LaBelle’s note on Carter, underlining the importance of ‘taking sound in its own terms, which may generate something not resembling much of architecture as we see it’ (LaBelle 2009). This approach finds affinities with the discussion on vibrational architecture—spaces not simply built, but sensed; not merely acoustically measured, but affectively inhabited. The testimonies gathered in the Athenian apartment building suggest that architectural structures are not static enclosures, but dynamic bundles—they filter, amplify, and distort sound in ways that transform the very notion of dwelling in ways of interaction while the inhabitants reinterpret the space based on their accumulated tech-aesthetic exposure. Together with the techno-social and the potentialities of the sonic affectivities in technologically mediated practices, listening emerges as embodied ethical practice situated within overlapping contexts—

intimate, spatial, gendered and political. Thus, home, hybrid and networked, appears to be experienced as a space where bodies, technologies, memories, and affects interface continuously with sound while memory and proximity unfold in vibrational time. The mnemo-acousmatic framework can be mobilised to critique the uneven sonic conditions of modern dwelling—from the chatter of gentrified condos to the sounds of overcrowded working class apartment buildings, raising questions about the right to auditory space and the techno-political infrastructures that shape it.

‘Everything is Real’, ‘We’ve Loved Before’ and the Buzzer System as Sonic Commons Participatory Interface

Alvin Lucier’s work *Nothing is Real* (1990) is a composition—a conceived action for piano, amplified teapot, tape recorder, and miniature sound system. The pianist Aki Takahashi was commissioned to create a collection of Beatles covers for a record company. For this purpose, she asked Lucier to compose a cover of *Strawberry Fields Forever* for her. He would then ask her why she chose that song, and she would reply:

Because the lyric ‘nothing is real’ reminds me of your music.

Hence, Lucier thought of titling one of his lectures ‘Everything is Real’, because, as he points out, ‘these are real resonances in the piano; they are not poetic, they are natural’. In this particular piece by Lucier, the melody of the song is first played on the piano, simultaneously recorded by a tape recorder, and then played back again, but this time heard through the small sound system inside the teapot. The performer is instructed, while the melody is being played through the teapot, to raise and lower the lid twice at a certain pace so that the sound changes as it is let out. This teapot has very specific resonant qualities. Through these, the song is covered. However, as Lucier reports, he cannot understand why this particular teapot can resonate in such a way. In his interview, he points to the teapot and says, ‘This is a small room, a small house’. He then lifts the lid and says:

This is the roof. When you lift the roof, the sound changes. I once went to an architect and asked him how much money it would cost to build a concert hall whose roof you could lift up and down. He said, ‘thousands of dollars’. (Lucier 2013)

The work *Nothing is Real* seems to encapsulate a certain situation. The teapot, which ‘is a small room’ that can be opened and closed, brings to mind the sound of the street or the sound of a house that resonates differently depending on how closed or open a balcony door is. Lucier’s teapot ceased at some point to resonate in the same way. He never found another teapot, he points out, with the same resonant quality as that first one from Chinatown, and it took him a long time to find a ‘good one’ again. The teapot creates, for Lucier, a desirable aesthetic experience. Through the metaphor of the teapot, one can think about how built things, structures, and objects contain or carry some of the qualities and attributes that affect how we listen in space and time—how we perceive the outside or what from the inside we allow out and what of the outside, in. Lucier talks about the specificity of each space and the effects it can create:

Each space, furthermore, has its own personality that tends to modify, position and move sounds by means of absorptions, reflections, attenuations and other structurally related

phenomena. Conventional acoustic engineering practice has historically defied these phenomena in an attempt to deliver the same product to everybody in the same space. Accepted as natural occurrences to be enjoyed and used, however, they open up a whole new field of musical composition. (Lucier 1995)

In Lucier's work, as he describes it, space functions as a filter. We discover that each room has its own set of resonant frequencies, just as musical sounds have their harmonics (Lucier 1995). Lucier expressively distorts sound by filtering it to achieve the sonic qualities for his works, which constitute new spaces. Ultimately, as he asserts, sound can create space.

I often dream of performance spaces specially designed for works based on the three-dimensional characteristics of sound. Paraboloids, spheroids and other similarly shaped rooms with movable walls could be constructed to position, move and modulate sounds. Walls, floors and ceilings could be thought of as acoustic lenses whose focal points are determined by reflective time. It is also possible to create imaginary spaces by means of computer simulation. [...] Given enough delay lines and loudspeakers, any real or imagined rooms can be simulated. (Lucier 1995)

The action required for the performers to open the lid perhaps emphasises the teapot's intrinsic properties as something that has the potential to resonate in a particular way. This reveals the capacity of the teapot to act through itself. It is also as if the performers take on the role of those who want to remind, in a mechanical way, that the resonances within the piano and the teapot are natural. While the Beatles' lyric 'nothing is real' reminded Aki Takahashi of Lucier's music, the composer set out to remind her that what might be reminiscent of the lyric comes from real conditions. As described earlier twice in almost other words, Lucier's work is performed by a piano, from which the melody of 'Strawberry Fields Forever' is played slowly and nostalgically, as if to recollect it. After this first part, the lid of a teapot on top of the piano is flicked open, from which the same melody is sounding, filtered in another way. The listeners, if they don't know the technical side of the piece, might be surprised when they hear the sound through the teapot because it comes out as if something magical is happening. It is as if the teapot becomes the resonator from which the sound of the piano drifts out, altered, after it has absorbed what it has heard and repeats it in its own voice. The work possibly refers to an interaction: the melody played first from the piano could correspond to an initial sound stimulus, a call, or the beginning of a conversation. Whatever is heard through the vessel, it is as if it responds to the first melody with the very same melody, but altered as the physiology of the vessel acts upon it. Thus, it sounds as if it becomes the affirmative yet dizzy echo of the first. Or as if the teapot responds to the piano by repeating what it perceived.

On a level of inhaling life to metaphors derived from the field of acoustics for their creative use and application in sound art works, sound art installations, artistic research, or in thinking, each acoustic phenomenon has a particular value and interest distinctively. It is stressed that it is not resonance in particular that is being favoured, but rather the extent to which it is possible to explore and utilise these phenomena based on a very specific locality yet by being able to grasp broader connections, taking into account its distinct traits and very special problems.

Notably, in a vibrational ecology, space is not treated as an empty container but rather as possessing materiality itself. Empty space—or more precisely, air—is a vibrational medium,

one that transmits airborne sounds in the form of ‘waves of pressure that radiate outwards’, compressing, dispersing, and displacing air molecules. (Yong 2022, 2025)

Ouzounian’s notion of vibrational architecture which differs from LaBelles approach, enables a reorientation from architecture as container to architecture as participant—a shift that opens up the possibility of hearing, feeling, and designing space differently.

A room is not only the setting of a work but an active participant in it, its material elements, volume, form, and connection to other architectural structures all actively shaping the transmission and transformation of energies in and through it. (Ouzounian and Werner 2025)

Works such as Alvin Lucier’s *Nothing is Real* offer the metaphor of the ‘sound vessel’. The ‘sound vessel’ is attempted to provide a basic metaphor for the space in which cohabitation may be thought through the experience of sound in an apartment, for example. For the architect Aris Konstantinidis, architecture owes to building ‘life vessels’ and the importance of the appropriate contextual positioning of the action of building is emphasised in his research. That is, the relevance of taking into account the particular characteristics of the place, climate and life, which means the ways of living and above all the needs for common spaces; hence his extensive case study of the inner courtyards in old Athenian houses (Konstantinidis 1987).

In the case of the Athenian *polykatoikia*, the electric system that is incorporated on the main entrances is the doorbell system which functions as an electromechanical audio signalling network, connecting an external push-button panel at the building entrance to each apartment. When pressed, it emits a distinct chime or buzzer sound within the selected apartment, alerting inhabitants to a visitor and enabling selective auditory access to the communal entry point. If I press the listening button, I can hear what is going on in the pedestrian street right outside the entrance of the *polykatoikia*. And if I speak to my apartment’s door bell unit, I could be heard there. If all the inhabitants pressed their listening buttons from their apartments at the same time they could discuss through the system—something that has happens several times in the *polykatoikia* where I reside and it is common in other *polykatoikias* as well. It is something that might occur twice a month. For example, when a visitor does not know which button to push in the entrance door, sometimes they press all the buttons having as a result the simultaneous reply from the majority of the inhabitants present in their apartments at the time. The feeling of listening to the people who ask at the same time ‘who is it?’, entails a sense of secret power, that of being able to confer there, without it actually being ‘Intercom’. The interactions there are brief yet helpful, the voices sound in a hurry—caught up in their daily grip, however, sometimes, people have shared their news, even tried to solve their personal issues, yet with a rather fistful manner. These internal doorbell receivers, installed across the *polykatoikia*’s units, operate not merely as signalling devices but as micro-sites of sonic encounter, mediating between private interior and communal exterior space, and host potential.

In the dense sonic ecology of the Athenian *polykatoikia*, the humble apartment buzzer—often overlooked as a mere signalling device—can be reimagined as a distributed, real-time auditory interface: a localised infrastructure of shared vibrations, micro-communications, and ephemeral co-presence. Rather than treating these internal doorbell receivers as passive endpoints, they may be considered participatory thresholds where private dwelling and communal interaction momentarily blur. When multiple

inhabitants press the 'listening' button simultaneously, the system inadvertently enables a form of collective eavesdropping or decentralised conferencing, revealing its latent potential for horizontal acoustic exchange. Though designed for point-to-point alerts, these devices foster auditory interactions embedded in daily life, shaped by architectural acoustics and social rhythms. This potentiality is traced in the PhD research and is brought fourth by documenting these incidents of door bell communal assembly.

From an artistic perspective, this opens up space for in-situ participatory sound art works, where the buzzer system, augmented through internet connectivity, becomes a hybrid node linking physical dwelling and digital sharing. Residents might coordinate actions such as sharing meals, left over portions, activating common spaces, or creating moments of sonic co-presence across floors, not unlike Lucier's piano speaking through the teapot—transformed by the material and architectural characteristics of the space itself. A curated series of micro-climatic soundscapes could be broadcast—subtle acoustic textures that transform the experience of the corridor, stairwell, or even individual apartments. These could include field recordings, anything the inhabitants would actually like to share in audio, localised sonic ecologies, or archival urban sounds or anything they would need to broadcast to the public space of the ground floor.

While the door bell system is handled as a medium for interactive sound art work as well as an interface for connectivity its function is enhanced, challenging the notion of domesticity towards new ways of interconnectedness through creating a digital commons platform. This system can be perceived as an interactive interface for real time access, that could work as a medium for collaborative participatory situated sound art work functioning both for internal broadcasts and live sessions and for public in situ and online transmissions. Altering or remodelling the device by enhancement, a device which in contemporary 'smart' houses has already online interface through private well guarded software—such as the 'Doorbird' system. Such technology targets the upper class or large constructions to be hotels, airports or institutions and are widespread only in large cost projects. It is a smart Wi-Fi doorbell that enables remote video/audio monitoring and door unlocking via smartphone, privatising domestic access through cloud-based surveillance. By taking advantage of the niche space between the buttons, that is the needs of low to middle class inhabitants door bell systems, there can flourish initiatives for various ways of art making and-or connecting collectively.

Such actions would reframe the apartment building as a responsive vibrational habitat, where architecture, technology, connectivity and collectivity are sensed together. The buzzer unit becomes less a tool of interruption, and more an interface for gestures of relation, carefully embedded within the patterns of daily life—like a well tempered and embraced parasite. Here, the buzzer's performative role shifts from signalling presence to sounding proximity—staging vibrational encounters across thresholds that normally divide. Like LaBelle's concept of the sound space as an event, and Ouzounian's framing of vibrational architecture, this artistic re appropriation stages the *polykatoikia* not as an assemblage of private boxes but as a lived acoustic network—a cohabited vessel that amplifies affective exchanges, constrained by its infrastructural and socio-political specificity.

Michał Libera and Katarzyna Krakowiak's installation 'Making the Walls Quake as if They Were Dilated with the Secret Knowledge of Great Powers' (Polish Pavilion, Venice

Biennale, 2012) transformed the building into a real-time vibrational listening instrument by amplifying its structural micro-sounds, enhancing the sounds in the found ventilation system that connected all pavilions, amplifying wall vibrations—through a complex system of microphones, sensors, and signal processing technologies. The work revealed the acoustic memory and material resonance of the architectural shell, turning its infrastructure and most importantly, hidden network of ventilation into a live, affective field flooding the main pavilion room with the sounds of all neighbouring pavilions. This resonates closely with the concept of *mnemo-acousmatic* affect in this research, where unseen or source-ambiguous sounds activate memory and sensation within shared domestic architectures like the *polykatoikia*. By treating architecture as a responsive and vibrational medium, Libera and Krakowiak provide a methodological precedent for exploring the notion of ‘Common Ground’ that was the theme of that year’s Biennale of Architecture, through stripping the ventilation system and utilising technologically mediated sound.

Another participatory situated art project took place in Athens in 2011 called ‘FOR RENT’ by an interdisciplinary team of Greek artists, architects, a photographer and a psychologist, hijacking an apartment that was for rent to make a group show (Sofia Dona, Katerina Saratsioti, Alexia Sarantopoulou, architects, Theodora Provopoulou, Afroditi Festa, Stella Chronopoulou, Thalia Raftopoulou). Without previous notice, any interested renter had to go through the exhibitions’ tour while checking out the apartment. The space between inhabiting and being vacant until rented was taken advantage to create another economy of art distribution. The works varied from site specific installations to drawings and photographs, while the psychologist had taken the role of the exhibitions’ guide for the possible renters. In that kitchen I performed a small gesture—by installing my sound art work, a stereo system. Every morning, at nine o’clock, the sound of Henry Mancini’s song *We’ve Loved Before* was exiting from the half open kitchen window and was heard through the skylight to the rest of the kitchen windows of the *polykatoikia*. Like the doorbell system reimagined as participatory interface, this broadcast exposed how architectural thresholds (the staircase, the *akalyptos*, the roof, windows, skylights, balconies and buzzers), are never neutral borders but membranes for negotiating sonic commons. The project’s temporal hijacking of a vacant apartment mirrors this article’s reclaiming of domestic technologies—both reveal how in-between spaces, physical, social, or technological, can become sites for redistributing auditory agency.

This rethinking of the doorbell system speaks to broader concerns: who gets to hear, express, and participate in sound-based creation? The politics of housing, architectural precarity, and variable access to digital tools shape the auditory conditions of life and creativity. Acknowledging the aesthetic delusion here, one can feel how all this may not be urgent at all to residents already overwhelmed by the very real textures of living—how curating sonic atmospheres in a *polykatoikia* might sound redundant, where the central heating moans—if the *polykatoikia* can afford its operating—or attempting to facilitate in the name of art diverse cultures in daily struggles. Its repurposing in artistic practice—whether through DIY sound interventions, localised live coding experiments, or collective sonic performances—can incorporate technological media as situated, ethical, and socially embedded. To say ‘everything is real’, then, as Lucier suggests, is not merely to affirm the material basis of sound, but to acknowledge the

tactile, political, and emotional actuality of mediated life, where the digital and the analogue, the poetic and the infrastructural, continuously shape how we dwell, sense, and connect.

Conclusion

The mnemo-acousmatic experience, a term I coined to capture the interplay of auditory memory and source-ambiguous sound, reframes everyday listening as artistic practice. When neighbours interpret elevator hums as ‘the old motor straining’ or Wi-Fi buzzes as ‘the student upstairs gaming’, they are not guessing sources but constructing sonic bodies (Kane 2014)—projecting imagined presences into vibrational space. These acts of acoustic imagination are relational, political, aesthetic and mnemonic. They are relational because they condition how one perceives their neighbour. The doorbells become social signals, not just alerts. They are also political because technologies like DoorBird literalise sonic bodies into surveillant images, privatising auditory agency. In contrast, the *polykatoikia*’s buzzer system—when hijacked for collective eavesdropping—reveals a *sonic commons* where ambiguity fosters solidarity. The aspect of memory, the mnemonic addresses the recurring buzz that becomes ‘Yannis’s router’ or the muffled fight that evokes ‘the couple next door’. These articulations show how memory modulates sound perception, layering past onto present and constructing a new situated sonic experience.

Vibrational architecture thought through the lens of Ouzounian, Thompson and through the projects of Libera and Krakowiak’s ventilation-system sonifications, to ‘FOR RENT’’s skylight waking-up-to-music habit, demonstrate how artistic methodologies can derive from dwelling while paying attention to sound propagation and the relationality of its affects. Architecture therefore can be perceived itself as a participatory sound medium and its technologies the mediators for collective situated practices.

The tapping machine in the Acoustic Design Department serves as a powerful metaphor for the tension between standardised measurement and lived sonic experience. Designed to simulate human activity through mechanical repetition, it represents an attempt to abstract the messy, unpredictable nature of dwelling into a controllable constant. Yet the *polykatoikia* daily rhythms cannot be so easily deciphered, measured or silenced. Its sounds—the footsteps, the buzzers, the muffled music—are the proof of a communal life within constantly evolving personal spaces. To try to decipher these leaks and resonances can be extended to try to build a more responsive ethics of cohabitation, in a mediative manner.

Like Lucier’s teapot, the *polykatoikia*’s walls, doorbells and skylights are filters, structuring what sound enters or is allowed out, for whom and when. They are amplifiers turning private noise lovers’ sounds, Mancini’s melody, into collective events. Interfaces, the doorbell’s ‘listen’ button, when pressed *en masse*, briefly transforms the building into a live acoustic network—a prototype for situated sound art. The sounds of a lover’s quarrel, a neighbour’s key in the lock, or a familiar melody drifting through the skylight—these are not ephemeral sonic events but formative vibrations that accumulate, layer and comprise our sonic bodies. Just as the prepared teapot absorbs and transforms a melody, releasing it as an affirmative yet dizzy echo, our dwellings absorb the acoustic traces of daily life, becoming resonant bundles of personal and collective memory. To listen and feel the vibrations is to attend to this ongoing process of diffractions and

resonances. Every wall hums with the stories it has absorbed and let loose. To listen attentively means to cultivate an ethics of listening that honours this mnemosonic density.

Even though the phrase ‘everything is real’ gestures toward a flattening of reality, it challenges the ideal of neutrality in technology, insisting instead on technologies as affective, situated, and relational—operating through the becomings of both building and body. Mediated sound, bodily resonance, technological signal, and social meaning are all understood as intra-active ascribing its agencies (Barad 2007) and response-abilities. Following thinkers like Haraway’s cyborg ontology (Haraway 1991), there is no clear ontological hierarchy between the digital and the acoustic, the recorded and the live, the structural and the ephemeral. All are real presences that participate in shaping experience. Thus, to assert that ‘everything is real’ is to reject both romantic mystification and technological fetishism—to locate meaning and transmutation precisely within the embedded infrastructures of everyday life.

Notes

1. Phenomenology of listening is suggested as a way of talking about the lived experience of auditory perception, how we encounter, interpret, and embody sound as a dynamic, situated practice. Rooted in phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, Jean Luc Nancy) but adopted to shift focus from sound as an object to listening as a process shaped by bodies, entities, spaces and orality. It is also incorporated to allow me to exercise my right to doubt my articulations, my own senses and any possible interpretative attempt within the research process.
2. An acoustemological approach could be considered to be complementary to a phenomenology of listening, to the extent that it examines the processes of the auditory experience in their cultural context—Nancy argues listening is always shared—already intersubjective and thus culturally inflected. Feld’s acoustemology in bird calls as kinship in Papua New Guinea, could be considered to be a situated phenomenology.
3. Therefore this article takes under consideration specific quotations of voices of individuals and thus it is necessary these quotations are included as parts of the spoken word of the lived experience within these situated sound affectivities. At the same time the article aims at remaining close to orality both the orality encountered in the field but also the orality of the voice of the artist and researcher as she recalls the research process.
4. Moodus means ‘place of noises’ and it is the name of a small village in New England where geological activity produces explosive noises, attributed in the past cosmologically to the good spirit of Kiehtan or Hobbamock (Kane 2014, 2).

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