

## Introduction

This paper analyzes how contemporary South American artists (multiple disciplines) engage water as a medium for sound transmission, foregrounding its acoustic behavior, cultural resonance, and ecological implications.

The selected works deploy water through multiple strategies: as resonant body, as site for hydrophone recording, as a source of rhythmic and textural modeling, as a reflective surface and others. These approaches extend into metaphorical domains, where water articulates temporal flow and environmental fragility. The discussion situates these practices within broader concerns of scarcity, pollution, and cultural memory.

### 1- Julieta Aranda -> *The Organ, as the ground becomes exposed 2016*

[this is an installation]

The subject matter for this body of work is Aranda's research on the melting of the polar ice-caps and the rewilding that can result from it through the resurfacing of life forms that have been frozen in time.

Her focus is on the logic that she follows to understand and parse this information, and to separate herself and the work from the research. A series of steps that she uses to create autonomous space for the works to breathe, away from the text. Words alone are not enough to produce meaning and to describe a situation.

The gaps in the text become opportunities for the reader to enter and start to act. Those gaps and voids become appreciable in Julieta Aranda's crossword puzzles. She collects words like literary souvenirs—from science fiction, art theory books and popular culture—and combines them in thematic and geometrical patterns. The meaning of the new text arises in the tension of the words and the unfilled squares.

*This being the second iteration of this work (the first one was commissioned by the Art Institute in Basel, and presented at Der Tank in 2016 as part of The Organ exhibition series curated by Chus Martínez), it is possible to already see organic sculptural elements breaking through Aranda's presentation, which is both a formal and playful exploration of her relationship to language, grids, and research.*

### Conceptual framework with brief elaboration

**Water as archive:** polar ice function as reservoirs of latent life.

**Medium of suspension:** water delays transformation (freezing, thawing); analogous to durational processes in installation and sound art, where material unfolds temporally.

**Circulation and flow:** hydrological cycles mirror circulation of information and exchange in contemporary practice (central to Julieta Aranda's work).

**Opacity and depth:** (frozen) water obscures and reveals; aligns with cryptic structures (crosswords, encoded systems) and perceptual ambiguity in installation.

## 2- Tania Candiani (México) – two pieces by Tania

Tania Candiani is a Mexican multimedia artist who creates research-driven installations and performances exploring water as a carrier of memory, sound, and ecological history. Her work frequently links local waterways with, sound, migration, and indigenous technology to examine environmental and social issues, often featuring collaborations with local communities.

### Key Water-Focused Works (two recent choices)

- [Waterbirds: Migratory Sound Flow](#) (2022-2023): An installation, featured at the 23rd Biennale of Sydney and Locust Projects, featuring a "hanging river" made from tree branches, accompanied by sound recordings of water birds and, pre-Hispanic aerophones, mapping water networks through sound and migration.
- [Tidal Choreography](#) (2024): A video installation that captures how tidal rhythms affect human behavior and social life in specific locations.

Other works:

[Lifeblood](#) (2023): A project at the Blaffer Art Museum, Houston, focusing on the history, voices, and ecology of Houston's bayous, looking at water as a witness to environmental change, industrialization, and urban development.

[Pulso \(Pulse\)](#) (2016-2018): A multi-channel video installation exploring the underground rivers and hidden water systems of Mexico City, connecting these to the city's Aztec history and modern water management.

Waterbirds: Migratory Sound Flow, originally commissioned for the 23rd Biennale of Sydney and curated by José Roca, is a hanging "river" made with tree branches collected from a riverbank in Mexico many of which are also native to South Florida.

Referred to by the artist as a “great blood system,” **the path of these birds connects hundreds of bodies of water mapped in an installation that consists of a network of sound, air, and water.** The system uses handmade reproductions of traditional pre-hispanic aerophones (clay ocarinas, shells, wooden flutes) and, at Locust Projects, includes field recordings of water birds in South Florida to create a continuous and changing chant.

"Candiani's Waterbirds installation poetically combines nature and technology to reflect on migration, language and intertwined ecosystems through birdsong," said Lorie Mertes, Executive Director of Locust Projects. "With South Florida, particularly the Everglades, serving as a major stopover on the Atlantic Flyway for migratory birds, Tania's work is poignantly relevant here and provides a massive visual of the birds' path." **The project explores the idea of traveling territories through sound and crossing living bodies of water linked by the movement of birds: watercourses that resemble a blood or neuronal system to metaphorically reflect on migration, bird language and ecosystems.**

Tidal Choreography is a new film by Tania Candiani, made during and following a residency in the coastal village of Glin, on the south shore of the Shannon Estuary (Ireland). During her stay, **the artist observed the interconnected rhythm of the village and the tidal river. In particular, she spent time with local swimmers as they made their way daily to the water at high tide.** Tidal Choreography brings together footage above and below the waterline, at high tide and low tide, field recordings and local tunes, Irish words relating to water. Through this combination of sources, patterns are created, gravity shifts, and ecological worlds revealed. Local artists have contributed traditional and contemporary airs, voiceovers, and physical performance. On her final day in Glin, over fifty local swimmers joined the artist to feature in the film.

### Core Themes in Candiani's Water Work

- **Acoustic Ecology:** She uses sound to bring attention to water scarcity, flow, and the "voices" of water bodies.
- **Mapping Networks:** She often maps interconnected waterways, viewing them as living systems or, "bloodstreams" of the land.
- **Environmental Memory:** Her work often involves analyzing historical and environmental data to reflect on the impact of, human activity (e.g., damming or draining, wetlands) on water bodies.

### 3- Mark Contreras Weiss – (Perú)

Quilla Mama means “Mother Moon.” Within Andean cosmology, she is the one who provides water through rain. She also reflects the essence of womanhood: the capacity to give life and to create nourishment from her own body.

Quilla Mama (Mother Moon) structures hydric cycles as a temporal and symbolic regulator. Within Andean cosmology, the moon does not merely “provide” rain; it modulates the circulation of water across atmosphere, surface, and subsurface, establishing correspondences between lunar phases and stages of the hydrological cycle (evaporation, condensation, precipitation, infiltration).

Rain is conceived as return: water ascends (evaporation) and descends (precipitation) under a periodic lunar pulse. This pulse aligns agricultural time (sowing/harvest) with bodily processes (menstrual cycles, gestation, lactation). Thus, Quilla Mama links hydric flow and fertility through cyclical recurrence.

*Quilla mama significa madre luna, dentro de la cosmovisión andina, es quien provee el agua a través de la lluvia. Refleja a su vez, la esencia de la mujer, el don de dar vida y crear alimento de su propio cuerpo. Texto recopilado del libro Literatura Quechua, traducido por Edmundo Bendezú, 1978.*

*Reina madre luna:  
el agua que creas,  
el líquido que das.  
¡Ayayay qué llanto!  
¡Ayayay cómo corre!  
Tu criatura tierna como las yerbas, por alimento te llora, por agua te llora.*

*Texto recopilado del libro Literatura Quechua,  
traducido por Edmundo Bendezú, 1978.*

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Structural principles and conceptual frameworks:

Cycle: repetition with variation (phase shifts).  
Flow: material continuity (water as carrier).

Transformation: change of state (vapor–cloud–rain–soil).

Translation to sonic practice:

Periodicity → cyclic rhythms (ostinati with micro-variation).

Precipitation → discrete attacks (pointillistic events).

Infiltration → long decays, low-register resonance.

#### **4- ATL. Lumínico (México).** Rodrigo Sigal (electronica) – Alejandro Escuer (flauta)

In the context of Aztec (Nahuatl) language and mythology, Atl is the foundational word for "water". It is deeply symbolic and carries both literal and spiritual significance

From the ensemble notes: "The piece ATL frames water as a sonic medium and ecological agent, structuring an immersive concert-installation where resonance, spatial diffusion, and site-specific acoustics shape perception and environmental awareness. Conceived by Alejandro Escuer, the project integrates live performance and installation within open or semi-open hydro-acoustic environments.

Indigenous cosmovisions position **water as relational and life-sustaining**, in contrast with extractive urban models.

The work employs **immersion and intermediality—multichannel sound, audience spatialization, and projection on water surfaces—to produce an embodied, durational experience that extends from live event to sound installation.**"

#### Conceptual framework with brief elaboration

##### **Water as sonic medium**

Sound transmission, resonance, and diffusion shape an immersive field; the concert-installation operates as a spatialized acoustic system.

##### **Water as ecological agent**

Resource and subject of awareness; the work frames listening as environmental ethics and perceptual attunement.

##### **Hydro-architecture and spatial acoustics**

Lakes, semi-open sites, and speaker arrays function as compositional parameters; space acts as resonator and distributor of sound.

##### **Immersion and embodiment**

Multichannel diffusion and audience placement (boats, surrounding speakers) produce a corporeal listening condition.

##### **Cosmovision and epistemology**

Indigenous frameworks position water as life-bearing and relational, contrasted with modern extractive urbanism.

## Hydrological transformation and memory

The shift from lake system to urban land becomes a model of ecological rupture and cultural displacement.

## Intermedial surface

“Water screen” projections articulate a fluid interface between image, sound, and matter.

## 5- Ricardo Dal Farra (Argentina)

Between My Sky and Your Water proposes a reflection on the contrast between regions of the high Andean mountains in Latin America—where sunlight is abundant but water is scarce—and the situation in Nordic countries, surrounded by water yet with limited sunlight.

Rodeado de agua o en busca de ella,  
viendo un cielo claro y brillante  
o bajo nubladas y largas noches.

Hay puentes por doquier, de los reales... de los otros.  
Conexiones improbables (pero posibles), sentimientos,  
pensamientos y sensaciones, fluyen, entre mi cielo y tu agua.

## Conceptual frameworks:

### 1. **Complementary scarcity** (light–water inversion)

A relational model in which solar abundance / hydric deficit (Andes) is inverted into hydric abundance / solar deficit (Nordic regions). Water is framed as a distributed resource whose availability emerges from climatic coupling rather than absolute presence. This supports a compositional mapping of contrast pairs (brightness vs. saturation; dryness vs. liquidity) organized as counterpoint between environmental parameters.

### 2. **Cyclical mediation** (atmosphere–surface exchange)

Water operates as a circulatory medium linking atmosphere and terrain (evaporation–condensation–precipitation). The contrast becomes a question of phase and timing: when and how water appears relative to light. In sonic terms, this suggests phase-shifted cycles—desynchronized periodicities between luminous energy and hydric events (e.g., offset rhythmic layers, staggered envelopes).

## 6- Juan Vitulli (Argentina)

*Mis piletas alemanas* is a book.

[short note about the book]

An Argentine professor arrives in Berlin in the middle of a pandemic winter without speaking a word of German. **Lost in language, he finds in water his only secure territory: he sets out to cross the city by swimming in its public pools, tracing an imaginary channel that connects these artificial bodies scattered across the urban geography.**

*Mis Piletas alemanas* is a book about the foreigner and his relation to what he does not understand. Each pool—from the functionalism of Lankwitz to the Art Nouveau splendor of Charlottenburg, from melancholic Mariendorf to the Olympic pool where Jeanette Campbell won her silver medal in 1936—becomes an exercise in impossible translation: swimming is the only way to fully inhabit a place where language expels him. It is also a book about repetition as method, about how the body's regular motion in water can organize days and perhaps writing itself.

With humor and precision, and a perspective oscillating between urban chronicle and personal drift, Juan Vitulli constructs a liquid map of Berlin where ghosts of the past coexist with slow swimmers, hostile lifeguards, threatening swans, and the constant promise of a summer that never quite arrives. A reflection on displacement, translation, and that universal language spoken only underwater.

### Frameworks / concepts about water

- **Water as non-verbal medium:** bypasses linguistic failure; akin to pre-symbolic communication.
- Immersion as embodiment: cognition relocated from discourse to sensorimotor flow.
- **Hydro-topography:** pools as nodes; water constructs an alternative urban cartography.
- Fluid identity: subjectivity reshaped through displacement and buoyancy.
- **Acoustic analogy:** underwater listening suggests filtered perception; a low-pass perceptual field.
- **Ritual practice:** swimming as iterative score; disciplined yet open form.

## 7- Cecilia Vicuña (Chile)

**\*Dreaming Water\*** by Cecilia Vicuña is an intermedial work that articulates poetry, performance, and textile art within her practice of **\*precario\*** and **\*quipu\***. The work links water, memory, and language through ephemeral materials—threads, fibers, and remnants—activating an expanded mode of listening to the environment. The reference to the **\*quipu\***—an Andean system of knots—functions as a form of non-verbal notation: rhythm, suspension, tension. In musical terms, it can be read as an open structure, characterized by non-linear temporality and an emphasis on resonance and silence.

**Water appears not as an object, but as a process: flow, evaporation, return. The work proposes a perceptual ecology in which the sonic emerges from the material.**

*Dreaming Water. A Retrospective of the Future (1964–...)* is the most encompassing anthological exhibition ever held of the work of poet, visual artist, and feminist activist Cecilia Vicuña (Santiago, 1948). Curated by Miguel A. López, the show reads Vicuña's work from a South American perspective. The **exhibition revisits sixty years of Vicuña's art, that is, her work from 1964 to the present.** Emphasis is placed on her work's ties to Chile, Argentina, the Andes, the living memory of pre-Columbian textiles, feminist struggles and eroticism, and Indigenous communities' demands for self-determination. The over two hundred works on exhibit include paintings, drawings, silkscreens, collages, textiles, videos, photographs, installations, book-objects, documents, and sound performances produced throughout the Americas and Europe. *Dreaming Water* reminds us of Vicuña's commitment to the struggles of the working class, human rights, and opposition to devastation, whatever shape it may take.

Since the nineteen-sixties, Vicuña's visionary work has honored the balance and reciprocity of the natural world rather than violently meddle with or harm it. Her work values art's ritual dimension, its medicinal quality and ability to heal. Her cyclical understanding of the creative act is evident in works that take the form of future-looking actions: they incite further creative acts, most of them collective in nature. **The exhibition's title invites us to change our relationship with the earth. "Without humidity there is no humanity," Vicuña reminds us. Her creations attest not only to the past but also—indeed mostly—to an open and living future in the making.**

Frameworks / concepts about water

1. **Ecofeminist materialism** (water as life-force)

Water functions as a biopolitical substrate linking body, climate, and extractivism. Works such as *Quipu menstrual (The Blood of the Glaciers)* align hydrological cycles with bodily flows, collapsing macro/micro scales. The exhibition foregrounds ecological crisis—glacier loss, desertification—as aesthetic material.

Quote: “Without humidity, there is no humanity.”

**Music analogy: a continuous drone field—water as sustained resonance underpinning all events.**

## 2. Andean cosmology and non-linear temporality

Water articulates a cyclical temporality (past–present–future co-present). The “retrospective of the future” rejects linear historicism; instead, it invokes ancestral memory as forward projection. *Quipu* structures operate as non-Western notation systems, where knots = rhythmic nodes, tension = duration.

Music analogy: modular form or loop-based structures; time as recursion rather than teleology.

## 3. Decolonial poetics and precariousness

Through *Arte Precario*, water becomes a site of disappearance and contingency—materials erode, drift, dissolve. Assemblages made from shoreline debris function as ephemeral scores, activated by environment and performer.

This aligns with Indigenous epistemologies: water as relation, not resource; listening rather than extraction.

Music analogy: improvisation with unstable timbre (noise, breath, residue), resisting fixed form.

## 4. Ritual-performance and collective activation

Water is enacted through ritual gestures (e.g., immersing fibers into rivers), transforming exhibition space into a participatory score. The artwork is not object but event-field.

Music analogy: site-specific performance; audience as co-performers within a distributed ensemble.