ECOCENE

CAPPADOCIA JOURNAL OF ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES

Volume 7/Issue 1/June 2026

Ecocene Arts

Sound as a Memory of a Performer's Presence

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Crowe, Gemma. 2026. "Sound as a Memory of a Performer's Presence." *Ecocene: Cappadocia Journal of Environmental Humanities* 7, no. 1 (June): 39–49. https://doi.org/10.46863/ecocene.152.

Artwork/ Received: 26.05.2026 /Accepted: 23.06.2026

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by Gemma Crowe

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About the Artist

Gemma Crowe is an interdisciplinary artist working across sound, movement, and installation. Her practice explores sound as a full-body experience, using vibration, resonance, and tactile listening to invite new forms of perception. With a background in contemporary dance and a sound art practice, she creates architectures of resonance that bridge the sensory and the somatic. Her recent work, Resonant Sculptures + Sub-Spaces for Sound, reimagines wood, technology, and the body as collaborators in the act of listening. She lives and works on the unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh, and səlilwətaɬ Nations.

Sound as a Memory of a Performer's Presence

Gemma Crowe

Sound is an extension of the body, created through movement and perceived as vibration. My installation presents sound as a memory of the performer's presence in the absence of the moving body. By removing the body's visual representation, space is created for listeners' embodied experience, inviting them to feel as though they inhabit the movement itself. In my work, auditory and tactile senses are engaged in favor of an internal, imagined visuality.

My work prioritizes diverse ways of knowing by fostering self-awareness through aesthetic affect. In this project, I consider how imagined and actual physical sensations can produce the same impact on the body (Tversky 2019). The body senses sound not only through listening but also through its movement, which activates kinesthetic empathy (Wood 2015). I call this *Kinesthetic Projection*. This project features multisensory stimulation to engage the body as a whole and encourage an embodied experience. I do this by cultivating awareness of the body in space through proprioception initiated by the movement of sound and the sensation of vibration. By focusing on these affective responses, I support somatic understanding and critique dominant modes of perception. I compose sound through the movement of my body using a process I term *Embodied Sonic Design*. Spatialized through wooden structures, this sound reanimates movement and extends corporeal expression. Below, I describe how these ideas materialize in my most recent sound installation, *Remembering Movement in Spaces for Sound* (2025), an environment designed for immersive, tactile, and full-body listening that offers visitors a novel sense of movement.

Material Collaboration

Remembering Movement in Spaces for Sound (2025) is an immersive sound installation composed of eight sonic-tactile wooden structures embedded with multichannel spatial sound. Each piece frames a sonic movement performance, spatialized through audio transducers to create a localized, vibratory, full-body listening experience.

Transducers turn the surface of the wood into a speaker, drawing the audience into a physical relationship with sound rather than projecting it outward as a traditional loudspeaker does (see Fig. 1).

Figure 1. *If these Walls Could Talk*, 2025. Duplex Artist's Society, Vancouver BC.

In living organisms, the connective tissues within wood fibres make it especially resonant. Wood is usually used to create boundaries, but these sound structures instead augment and extend the perceptual environment. Each structure is designed to respond to the ways a body might encounter it in a gallery setting. They are positioned for intimate participation and embodied listening. *Sub-Space 1* (2023) encircles the head and upper body as the sound of light fingertips traces shapes and pathways that move continuously around the structure's exterior (see Fig. 2). Over twenty minutes, these looping gestures form a gentle, rhythmic orbit, creating a steady presence that invites the listener to follow and attune to its motion.

Figure 2. *Sub-Space 1*, 2025. Duplex Artist's Society, Vancouver, BC.

For some pieces, I use rhythm to create continuity, allowing shifts in the location of sound to engage the audience's proprioceptive sense of movement and spatial orientation (Tversky 2019). For example, in *Box Talks*, I synchronize rhythmic taps across three boxes. Regardless of their proximity, the haptic call-and-response unifies their individual sound performances (see Fig. 3). *The Feeling's Inside* (2025) also relies on the audience's sense of exteriority but plays with the shifting location of a gentle knock on different sides of a single box to illustrate the movement of the sound source (see Fig. 4). These structures frame action, allowing sound to be realized by the bodies that engage with them.

Figure 3. *The Feeling's Inside*, 2025. Alternator Centre, Kelowna, BC.

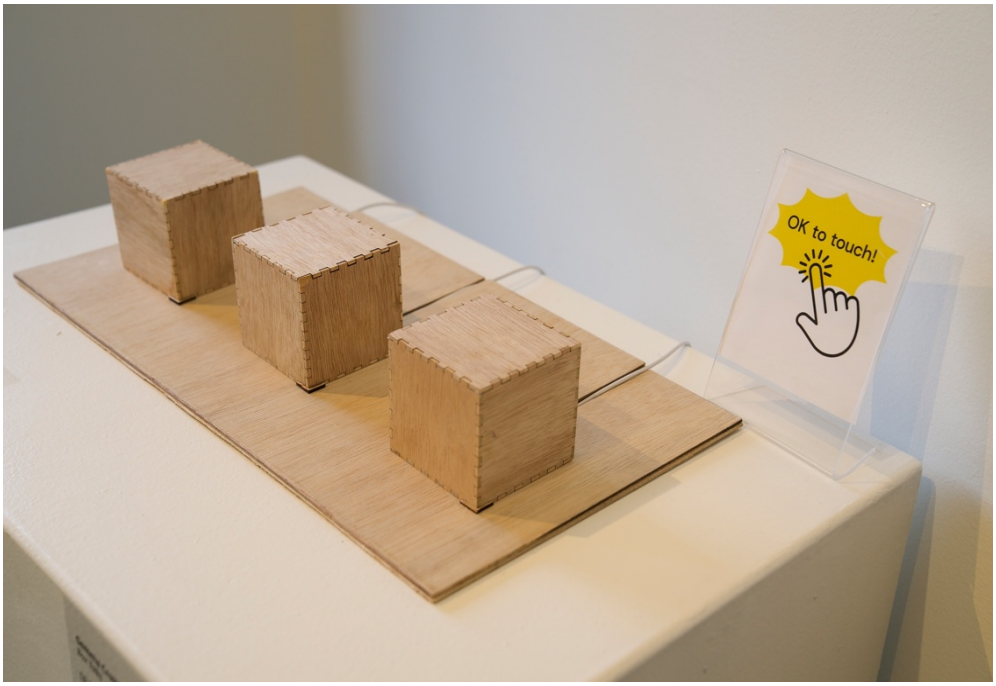

Figure 4. *Box Talks*, 2025. POMO Arts, Port Moody, BC.

Technology as Extension

Embodied sonic design, informed by embodied composition (Herndon 2022), represents the lived experience of the body because it is centered in the production of sound. In my research, I found that the speed, force, pathway, and position of movement act as performance parameters that shape pitch perception, amplitude, reverb, and decay within the sound (Godøy et al. 2016). These acoustic effects, produced through my body's contact with the surface of the wood, translate the quality of movement into sound. My process for generating and recording sound for sculptures in *Remembering Movement in Spaces for Sound* (2025) modulates sound with movement quality and approach rather than through instrumentation or audio post-production. I use recording equipment to capture the sound of my moving body as I interact with each structure. This audio is then integrated into the structures and sequenced between the transducers to reconstruct the original sonic and vibrational choreography. As the sound moves through space, it traces invisible pathways that depict action.

Line Study (2022) is a wooden panel mounted on the wall as a work of visual art (see Fig. 5). The sound of my fingers skimming the surface pans left and right, shifting in pitch and rhythm in response to my speed, pressure, and proximity to the microphones. Although the effect is musical, the recording contains information about the movement that produced it (Jensenius and Godøy 2013).

Embodied sonic design honors the body's intelligence and produces a kinesthetic specificity in the performance of sound. In practice, this involves setting up the

microphone to record movement on the surface where the work will be presented. The work functions through embodied, material acoustics, positioning perception as the primary technology at play. Here, technology serves as a means of sharing a memory of the performer's presence, enabling communication from one body to another through asynchronous performance and reception.

Figure 5. *Line Study*, 2022. Duplex Artist's Society, Vancouver, BC.

Relational Listening

At the core of this project is a question of how listening might enact a sense of movement, one that can be shared. *Box Talks* (2023) invites two people to hold three boxes, creating a shared rhythm that is complete only when all are in play. The unpredictability of the site and tempo of the knocking in *The Feeling's Inside* (2025) provokes a desire to catch the source of sound and vibration as it moves, requiring a single audience member to keep moving their hands across different sides of the box.

Figure 6. *Box Talks*, 2023. MakerLabs, Vancouver, BC.

My research seeks new and collaborative ways to witness the moving body. In these works, sound reanimates movement through our tendencies to integrate and understand sensory information as a system of relationships (Dahl 2022). I invite audiences into the movement process itself, offering a moment of shared presence through bodily traces in sound and touch.

In *If These Walls Could Talk* (2024), finger traces and full-body contact activate the wood's surface, occasionally striking harder to send visible tremors through the panels (see Fig. 7). Vibrations from the floor travel upward to meet the listener's feet, mimicking footsteps or gestures that can be felt as one's own. This piece recorded the multiple points of contact of a movement performance in the corner of a room. The sound emanates from the listener's position, at scale.

Figure 7. *If These Walls Could Talk*, 2024. Vancouver, BC.

Throughout the installation, palpable performances of an unseen body are evident. The presence of weight and friction plays out across the wooden structures in playful, rhythmic displays. Should audiences choose to participate, they assume the perspective of the original performer. Beyond conveying the experience of movement, this new sensory engagement and heightened awareness opens our perceptual worlds, even if only for a moment, by inviting audiences to listen with their bodies.

My body of work is grounded in sensory multiplicity: tactile sound, low-light environments, and invitations to slow, nonlinear engagement. Accessibility, in this sense, is understood as an aesthetic and ethical commitment rather than an accommodation. By creating multiple points of entry through touch, vibration, sound, and spatial awareness, the work invites diverse ways of perceiving and participating. This approach treats sensory variation not as an exception to be designed around but as a generative condition that expands perception.

Guided by principles of reuse, modularity, and material care, the wooden structures are built using joinery rather than mechanical fasteners (such as nails or

screws), allowing them to be reinstalled multiple times without generating waste or compromising the material's vibratory integrity. Where possible, I source reclaimed wood and do not use any surface treatments, instead allowing the accumulation of touch over time to leave a mark on the material.

Working with wood carries its own ecological and historical weight, given histories of extraction and land entitlement. I acknowledge the material not as inert or neutral, but as once-living, responsive, resonant, and shaped by its own history. I choose wood for its vibratory qualities and because it can stand in for a body that facilitates a shared experience. This work softens dominant cultural rhythms shaped by capitalism, patriarchy, and ableism through slowness, intimacy, and attunement. These are small acts of resistance that reject spectacle in favour of embodied awareness and presence. I approach sound and movement as relational and site-aware, offering *Remembering Movement in Spaces for Sound* (2025) as an invitation to listen with and through the body. This project approaches ecology as a way of being attuned to materials, bodies, and environments as interdependent systems.

Together, these practices position co-presence as an ethical way of creating art: to be with, rather than to act upon, dominate, or control; to listen, rather than impose; to acknowledge how every mark is shaped by ecological, domestic, and interspecies forces beyond each artist. In more-than-human contexts, co-presence opens space for ethical relations. Working with animals, plants, or ecological systems is not about representing them from a distance but about recognizing them as co-inhabitants. Creative acts such as tracing, stitching, imprinting, or recording become ways of staying with another being—honoring its specificity without claiming ownership. Collectively, the artworks carry traces of encounter rather than claims of knowledge. By embracing this shared perspective, the pieces in this issue create a space where humans collaborate with the world, fostering an ongoing dialogue grounded in reciprocal presence.

Figure 8. *Sub-Space 1*, 2023. MakerLabs, Vancouver, BC.

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