The Weak Power of Listening

A Conversation between Ayreen Anastas, Rene Gabri and Rolando Vázquez

Anastas, A.; Gabri, R.; Vázquez, R.

DOI
10.4324/9781003348528-8

Publication date
2025

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
Situated Listening

5

THE WEAK POWER OF LISTENING

A Conversation between Ayreen Anastas, Rene Gabri and Rolando Vázquez

Ayreen Anastas, Rene Gabri and Rolando Vázquez

Rene: A good way to begin is from where we are. For us one of the things that has been very enriching about our relation to you is this foregrounding of the question of positionality. Where is one situated and speaking from? In this moment, there's an invasion in Artsakh, not many kilometers from where we are situated, by a regime in Azerbaijan, historically linked to a genocide which took place a 100 years ago against Armenians and other communities. Not only does the Azeri state deny this history, but today it continues to erase the presence of Armenians in the territories it controls and now threatens to kill or displace the Armenians of Artsakh, who have lived continuously in these nearby mountains since the earliest recorded history. It seems to us very urgent to think about questions that are in the centre of your work, as well as ours, in very different conditions/circumstances, and also in a way, different positions, geographically as well as historically.

I think it was actually in and around questions of time that we first met. So maybe we can begin by asking – in what time are we listening in a decolonial listening? What is the temporality of a decolonial listening?

Rolando: The transformation of temporality is at the core of listening. Because listening happens in time. What I mean when I say "time" is that it implies the relational, it implies memory. Whereas the logic of representation and appropriation that are so central to modern civilization don't happen in that deep time of relation and memory. They happen in the space of presence, the space of owning. Appropriating is about owning in the present, and representation

DOI: 10.4324/9781003348528-8

is about what appears in the present. Whereas listening requires that relation that is *in time*, that cannot be reduced to the present.

I think that is what is fundamental about the temporality of listening, and why what we call *decolonial aesthesis* moves away from the paradigm of representation to the logic of reception.[1] To be able to receive, you need to be able to hold the time of others. And to be more than that single self of ownership that is sovereign in the present but has no memory, no time, no plurality. In that sense, what we may call relational listening is only possible through a positionality that enables us to be more than a "single being," using this term from Fred Moten by way of Édouard Glissant (Harney & Moten, 2013; Moten, 2010, 2017, 2018a, 2018b). But the way we use positionality recognizes that we are always made by others, that we all carry forms of ancestrality that we do not own. Positionality in time is what enables you to listen because you have a consciousness that you are always already relational before becoming a single self, and that listening connects you back to that possibility of the plural. And by listening you become capable of carrying and caring for the story of others, the voice of others, and you carry it in memory, not in ownership. You become witness. You become more than yourself through the work of listening.

That's why I thought this question of the temporality of listening is really at the core of the horizon of transformation, of exiting the logic of property, of appropriation, of representation, and moving towards an aesthesis, an experience of life: of relationality, of togetherness, of mourning, of remembrance.

I'm thinking of the work of Rana Hamadeh and the idea of the testimonial subject that comes through Islamic traditions (Mullié et al., 2018). It is this subject that becomes witness and that carries the memories. The carriers of communal memories, like the storytellers from other traditions, are the bearers of hope. Because the violence of erasure is only fully achieved when things are forgotten; the testimonial subject that is capable of listening is what sustains the hope that justice can come someday, that healing can come someday. The testimonial subject is like the last resistance against oblivion and total erasure. When a genocide is forgotten there is nothing left to do, there is no more hope. But when a genocide is still remembered, when there's still the possibility of mourning, then there's some hope that there will be healing.

Ayreen: Do we need different kinds of ears or sensors to listen to what has been silenced? What is the nature of what has been silenced? It is obviously not reducible to audibility nor to language.

Rolando: Yes. It is a question that connects to what we have been asking with decolonial aesthesis: With whose bodies have we been made to dance? With whose eyes have we been made to see? With whose ears have we been made to hear? The way we are taught to hear makes us incapable of listening. How are our ears trained to primarily recognize what is audible for the dominant structures, for the dominant subject.

We might need to distinguish this hearing-as-consumption from the listening that requires that one has different ears, so that one recovers that capacity of relating to others through listening. Can we think of listening as relation, as receiving the other? And what does that imply? I think in some spiritual traditions that implies the possibility of becoming capacious, being able to put aside the single self in order to receive the difference of others. In this way, the notion of listening is not about the appropriation of knowledge, but rather the capacity of reception of other worlds.

The second part of your question has to do with which worlds have been silenced. Decolonial listening is a listening capable of receiving the silences. What has been silenced? What has been under erasure, is under erasure? How can we listen across the colonial difference, and across the colonial wound?

We understand coloniality as a system that erases, that is, that produces oblivion. It holds under erasure other worlds, other worlds of meaning, other Earth-worlds, other Earth histories, other ways of being in the world. We cannot forget that the Zapatistas have signed many of their communiques, with the motto "the war against oblivion." In a way it is that erasure of other worlds – of other alternatives of being with Earth and becoming human otherwise – which calls for decoloniality. What has been silenced, what is under erasure, is what calls for decoloniality.

One of the things that is necessary for us to understand better is, what does this task imply? The disposition towards listening, in order to listen to those silences, is very different from the attitude of hearing to consume, to appropriate or just to be immersed in the endless noise projected around us. What does it mean to listen to silences? And how can we orient ourselves towards reception, how can we develop the disposition of listening? How can we develop that capacious capacity, as an "aesthesic" capacity.

Sometimes in art schools, I ask, "Well, you've been trained for enunciation. What would it mean to be trained for listening, for reception? To develop that capacity?"

Rene: If we say that decolonial listening is connected to the ethical practice of listening to what has been silenced, certainly Earth is at

the centre of that, and all the suffering, all the different forms of life, that are continually under threat or being destroyed in this very moment. And I was thinking that this silence that you were alluding to just now, which is not listening to what has been silenced in the sense of bringing it to enunciation necessarily, but actually listening to the silence, in that sense of silence being the very condition of any listening otherwise. Without that silence, you're listening to what is being channelled towards you. And so I was thinking that this question of silence could be interesting to remain a little longer with. Because it seems that it could be too quick a solution to try to give voice to those things that we think are silenced, as if bringing them to some audibility would be the resolution, whereas maybe it's an attunement that we're interested in, to whatever has been called silence, which is full of a multiplicity of other possibilities for hearing or listening.

So, we had actually written something to ask you in relation to this question of what has been silenced. And then you already anticipated that in what you were just describing as "listening to the silence." At the time of the pandemic, we wanted to think about those pre-existing conditions beyond the biological and physical health of individuals; we wanted to think about those asymmetric vulnerabilities in terms of communities and a more expanded geographic and historic sense of "pre-existing conditions." And so we were trying to create a space where we could listen to each other and think through that experience of having been collectively brought to halt, often locked down in homes. To talk from different places, experiences, political intuitions and histories in an open way was critical for us to make another sense of what we were undergoing together – to listen in and through that silence which was momentarily created and at the same time fragile, vulnerable, needing care to defend and maintain.

Rolando: Given what is taking place not far from you today, I thought to also think together about your film *Black Bach Artsakh*.[2] Would you think of the film as a work that carries the hope of being heard? I see it as a story, a testimony, that doesn't have many words as a narrative, but that needs to be poetically heard. And then what in this hearing – as in this listening as reception – what does this being heard mean as a movement of hope, as a movement of healing, of holding each other, of the possibility of coalition, of learning each-other's struggles?

Because, as you know, I have been worried that struggles tend to be separated from each other in their one-directional challenge to power, and as Maria Lugones used to say, we spend very little time

knowing each other's struggles (2020). The call to listen to each other's struggles is fundamental to create coalitions, but also to sustain some hope and find some healing among us that bypasses the enclosure of that dichotomic bond to oppression and violence. What happens when one is heard and by whom?

I find that the notion of listening as a work of memory is connected to what you were saying on silence, and with it the understanding that the silence that is required for listening is not an empty silence, but is a silence that is capable of weaving memory, of weaving memory together. There's a generative silence – not exactly generative – but more like a dark, deep and fertile soil, a place for cultivation where memory can be held together. It goes against the grain of coloniality, erasure, against the grain of coloniality's silencing. The silencing of coloniality does not hold memory, it produces erasure, oblivion. Where it is more like the expansion of nothingness, of a lifeless nothingness, a nothingness without memory. So I would like to distinguish this silence that holds memory, and that is necessary for the weaving of togetherness, of relationality, of time, from that silencing that produces erasure, that is vacating what has been lived out of time, expelling the lived out of time.

In a conversation in Rotterdam, Cecilia Vicuña said, "The problem with plastic is not that it is dead. The problem of plastic is that it cannot die" (Vicuña, 2019). That is the point of a system that produces artifice, an artifice that has no death and no life. It's a form of emptiness, empty time, where there is no relationality anymore. Whereas when things die, they return, become ancestral and can re-emerge in other presents. They become precedents. But when things are just extracted to produce waste or pollution, there is no life, there is no return. It's just the expansion of that void that produces violence. I think that is the oblivion that Zapatistas are fighting against, and that decolonial listening is moving against. And that requires a silence, but a silence that is like a soul, like the darkness inside the soul, that is generative, that holds together time. It's very unlike the erasure that is an empty darkness, where there is nothing, where there is the dissolution of temporality.

Ayreen: This is interesting in relation to silencing and forcing speech. Which is more oppressive, the silencing or forcing of speech? In a liberal paradigm there is a certain idea of freedom of speech that can be fascistic. It is often forcing speech. That forcing of speech is not only making people speak, but also making them say things and speak in ways that are not their own, on matters which they have no relation to or idea about. So both the silencing and the

forcing of speech can be decisive instruments of control. This is a note that we could come back to in relation to language and the forcing of speech and more specifically certain kinds of speech.

Rolando: I think we can speak about discourse as erasure, or the dominant speech as erasure, such as Gloria Anzaldúa (2012). And so this forcing of one tongue, of one language, like for example through the news, like what you were saying with the pandemic, this forcing of speaking of one grammar as one way of thematizing the problems we're facing... That dominant speech becomes a way of silencing. It is not listening. And it is erasing the tongues, the storytellings, the experiences that are happening. I think in the case of the pandemic we were also talking about this, about the ratio of death, like the deathless death, the death without mourning, the death that became death in numbers for the dominant discourse. There is a speech that is silencing, and that we begin speaking through our mouths. With which tongue are we being made to speak, with whose eyes to see, with whose ears to hear? With whose speech are we speaking? And is that just a cacophony, an echo of the dominant discourse? Or are we speaking through what we have heard? Are we listening? Is our speech the flourishing weave of what we have received or is it just a repetition?

Ayreen: Yes, I had written this question, and it relates to two things that you are mentioning, apropos of radical response to the age of enunciation and representation, that is, as a transformation of experience. What are the sites of the transformation of the experience? Where would it take place? What would help bring it about, prepare the ground, unfold the way to such an experience? And, in a way, the conversations we had in our assemblies during the time of the virus, or that space-time we create in the film-world *Black Bach Artsakh*, could be such places, maybe to open the way for such a transformation, creating a place to be able to find each other and understand the different experiences we each carry with us. However, it's still an open question, because it's a very important aspect, this question of the transformation of the experience.

Rene: Which you connect to decolonial listening in the brief notes you had shared with us. **Rolando:** Positionality is the key of first understanding one's ground wherever we are, a ground that has time. So, our grounding in time. We are not just an identity, we are also from whence we come, and where we are, connected to ancestrality. This "whence" brings about the question of our provenance, from places in time. And that is, I think, what allows the possibility of transformation, of entering that relation that leaves us transformed. Something that, for example, we deeply need to remember

is that we are Earth-bodies. What has made us forget that we are sustained by Earth, and that we are made of Earth? So that deep memory that connects us back is the site of the grounding that you are asking about, which is in contrast with the nowhere of abstract thinking, or even phenomenology, like this flight to reduction, to abstraction, to find forms of concrete experience, but that have no memory, no time. And to an extreme, the artifice manifests itself materially in spaces like the white cube, the black box, the classroom, the shopping mall, the airport. These "no places" that are "no where," that have "no whence." Similarly to how universities train to write 'scientifically' from nowhere coupled with the arrogance of thinking that one can be everywhere (Haraway, 1988).

Being everywhere and nowhere at the same time is to be with no grounding and no memory. Positionality in time requires memory; it grounds us in a plural sense, because we know we come from a plurality beyond the individual self, from plural trajectories that include Earth. Once we position ourselves in time and remember, we cannot escape from an Earth-consciousness, from realizing that we are made of Earth and sustained by the life of Earth. This is part of what we might think of as the work for listening, to be able to listen – that grounding, that positionality, that deep remembrance of who we are collectively or plurally.

And, in our view, it's only from that place that we can construct relations with others, and receive the difference of the other, and be received as well. That construction of the relation comes from also understanding that we are relations, from the beginning, we are always already relations. We are much more than that individual single self.

Rene: Yes, so many different threads. I think one of the threads I would like to stay with, without knowing where it will go, is this question of testimony because you asked a question around that. And it's interesting, because when we made this film-world *Black Bach Artsakh*, it came out of actually a desire to be in conversation and organize some thinking together around this moment in the Fall of 2020, when Azerbaijan invaded Artsakh, which they're invading again, on this very day we speak. As we were organizing what we imagined as a "conference in shards," we were asked to give a historical account from some of the people we were inviting, or tell them more about the conjuncture, to help orient their contribution. And every time we were oriented towards writing something, it seemed so insufficient. It was like being forced into a kind of language that is journalistic or historical. So the film emerged more out of an exigency to share something like a testimony, give

testimony to something. But through a very transubjective, let's say, set of experiences, of encounters that I had recorded in 2007, 13 years after the independence of that self-recognized republic and 13 years before the 2020 invasion. So we were interested in this question of testimony, as opposed to documentation. And we were thinking maybe we should call it a testamentary, not a documentary. It is interesting that you brought up testimony in relation to listening. I don't want to say, "Can you say more about that?" But I want to ask or attend to that question of hope and its relation to testament that you brought up. We live in very challenging times, in relation to that hope of testimony, as I see it, and as we see it, probably all of us together.

Another thread is what we've been thinking about as "white noise," especially since the time of the virus was also the context of the George Floyd uprisings. In that time, to follow all that was going on during lockdown, on the streets, we often had to rely on and enter virtual realms, using so-called social media platforms, where one often finds what could be the most anti-social kinds of sociality. So, that time made us sensitive to the levels of noise around us, especially in such virtual spheres which seem to deny any possibility for a reception of some other kind of testimony, let's say, some other possibility for making sense. So at the same time that we're thinking about listening and testimony, and hope and healing, it seems to me we have a challenge to create the spaces where that kind of transmission and reception can occur. Because in that time, you felt the keen sense, especially being deprived of our capacities to assemble in person, that what we have are these enclosures, the platforms, composed of information bubbles, virtual echo chambers, soap boxes, produced and prescripted by large corporations delivering custom tailored "news products" via individuals, their profiles and the algorithms that attend to what people are interested in, hearing and finding only what they want to hear or will trigger them to respond. And on the user side, you have this kind of overall effect of the generation of noise. This is what we are calling "white noise." Because it has everything to do with the modelling of social behaviours and relations which seem very bounded to whiteness and the type of social repertoire of the suburban white men who own, control and design the majority of these spaces. It has something to do with the wider infrastructures of modernity/coloniality where things are created, instituted, in this case, to privilege, model and moderate the form of relations, the form of speech which pre-empt and smother the possibilities for sharing, relating, receiving and listening otherwise.

So we could ask, how do we struggle against these generators of "white noise" that seem to overwhelm any possibility for attuning to the silence, and the silenced?

We would come back closer to the heart of the decolonial questions that you and all the friends raise, thinking about what modernity displaces and silences.

Whatever we are calling "white noise" is connected to the proliferating sites whereby what is transmitted is less important than where and how that transmitting and receiving occurs. This is what we see in these anti-social media spaces, factories or generators of sounds, of speech, of texts, of images, of noise, that more than what we may share within them – even sometimes very necessary counter-information, images, voices which we are drawn to, because we seek news, ideas, questions from the ground, from comrades, from struggles, like during the uprisings – still have the effect of silencing the possibilities of reception … and relationality.

Rolando: I think that it's important to notice the noise you are talking about. In a way, it is connected to the artifice of the empty present; it's like the propagation of the empty present, or the temporality of the empty present. It's a noise with no memory. Musicians understand readily that there is no music without deep temporality. If you pause a film you find a still image on the screen that you can see, but if you press pause in a cassette or if you pause the music, there is no music, there is no music reducible to the present. The temporality of music, of listening, cannot be reduced to the empty presence. What this noise does is precisely that expansion of empty time, of the time with no memory, with no possibility of weaving, of relationality. It's just like an expanding cacophony.

It has the effect of silencing, of making impossible the time of listening, the time of reception, the time of memory. This noise doesn't have any of those temporalities. It is the empty time of the empty present of modernity. This noise makes reception impossible and, thus, listening as reception. What does it mean to receive? What are the conditions for receiving something that is beyond our understanding or our horizon of understanding? Can listening bridge that enclosure of our horizon of understanding? When we witness something, can we overcome the horizon of understanding that encircles us, can we breach the enclosure in which we are? I want to think listening as that power of weaving worlds and world travelling (Lugones, 2003) as that possibility of going beyond the enclosure of modernity as well as beyond our worlds of sense and receiving other words. And in that way becoming more than oneself (Moten, 2010).

What does it mean to receive, to be capable of hosting the difference of the other, like the Zapatistas would say? As a condition for decolonial listening, and as a sign of that move away from the logic of property, of *owning*, which is the logic of the documentary, to owing, to a logic of gratitude, of the reception of the other, the reception of what makes "me" more than myself. Owing and the relinquishing of the self is the countermove to the notion of property that makes "me" more of myself.

And what does it mean also to *be* received? Here we come close to deep spiritual worlds, and words, like compassion. What does it mean to be moved by the suffering of others? The condition of this noise, or the enclosure of the individual, is a condition of indolence, of indifference, of not being touched by the difference of the other; of owning, and not owing, of having, but not receiving. It is important to spell out these differences, find this vocabulary and value these practices.

Coming back to the question about the film *Black Bach Artsakh*, what does it mean to be received, if you want, as a weak hope in the face of violence? You may not be able to stop an army, but you may be able to sustain yourself because you have been heard, because others carry your stories, because others carry your pain as well. Here we find the work of mourning, the work of compassion, that is with and among people, and not necessarily in relation to power.

In the work of healing and mourning, there is the work of reception, there is the tending to and the gratitude for the life of others. There is the becoming more than ourselves.

We could locate the distinction between the documentary and the testimony in the way the documentary function is more related to ways of capturing, of appropriation and representation, whereas the testimony would be more in the mode of reception, the gathering of what should not be forgotten and the giving to others. They have different functions, a difference that might be similar to that between archiving and storytelling. Where the archive is this appropriation and classification of historical things and owning them, and storytelling is that transmission without authorship, without ownership. Storytelling needs reception, and it needs transmission again. It needs to be cared for, cultivated.

Rene: There's this beautiful passage in Walter Benjamin's *The Storyteller* where he weaves together that intimate relation between storyteller and listener. And he connects the death of storytelling to the loss of the space and the time of experience, thus of storytelling and of listening.

Rolando: That is a transformation between being a single person or becoming relational. A single person in the face of violence has no hope, and is powerless, and is pushed towards indolence or cynicism, whereas the relational person, and this we have learned from 'First Nations' and 'Indigenous peoples,' that even when they're under the harshest of oppressions, they nonetheless carry on having hope, because their relationality is still alive, they are not over-defined by the condition of oppression. Their memories are still alive, they can know who they are beyond the logic of oppression.

Rene: Something that was striking in a text of yours we were reading is where you write that "coming to voice" is actually deeply connected to the "we" (Vázquez, 2020). And so, what you were saying prompts us to consider that within the modernity coloniality matrix, coming to voice and the we are posed as antithetical to one another. Everything about coming to voice, in the sense you mean it, is deeply connected to a we, to ancestrality, to relationality. Whereas in modernity, having a voice is all about I, possession and property, owning and propriety. Whatever would be a voice or a coming to voice in this decolonial ethics praxis horizon would be completely connected to an attuning through/with silences and processes of listening.

Rolando: Yes! You are anticipating these notes I have here for the conversation: "the coming to voice is what is confronting 'the tradition of silence'" (Anzaldúa, 2012). The coming to voice is that emergence that crosses that silence, and, in that sense, what undoes the silencing. So, we could think of the passage from silencing to the coming to voice, that crossing, as a task of listening. Listening to what has been silenced is what will come to voice, where coming to voice becomes a listening. So, a listening that speaks, that speaks again, what has been silenced, a listening that re-members, restitutes, repairs. That is in this disposition of reception of what this silence is threatening with erasure. Coming to voice would be the accomplishment of the task of listening to what has been silenced. Then, coming to voice is not just gaining the power of speaking, but traversing the silence through listening. It is what can bring about a voice that is not out of my volition, or my authorship. It is about the capacity to receive what is threatened with oblivion, and bring it to voice, through the body, embodying it, giving breath again to what has been consigned to death, to erasure.

The coming to voice is then not this volition of representation, but is that struggle against erasure. It needs the task of listening to what has been silenced in order to embody it again and bring it back to the experience of life.

Ayreen: Let's think of the lifespan of any of us. We are born into oblivion. Everything around us, the language that we learn, the schools that we go to, all the institutions around us, are forming us. Let's set aside the word "form," until we can better name what we are talking about. It is a question of temporality on different scales. At the scale of an entire ecology, of life on earth, of a life span, in which this listening and coming to voice is a transmission of what we carry through our experiences. Parallel to the structures attempting to form us, we live and are affected by these different temporalities which materialize in specific ecologies, in our surroundings, places, gestures, dialects, vernacular forms. It is through these parallel, longer processes of becoming and our attunements to them that hope can transmit. So in a life cycle there can come the occasions, the encounters which allow one to understand certain feelings that one has been constantly feeling that something is wrong in everything that one is living. And when one feels that, and one feels how wrong everything is … I feel it profoundly, that this listening and coming to voice – speaking a certain truth, that one has *lived*, not a truth that is abstract, but a truth that comes from that "we" that you are also speaking about, that transmits over the generations past, and to come, in my body – this is the living experience. It is what it means to be alive, to live.

Rene: Recently we went to a conference organized by friends involved in the Kurdish struggle, and there was a workshop organized by a collective of mostly Armenians living in Germany and Austria. The workshop was around Armenian Kurdish solidarity, trying to think through some of the challenges. Many of the places that Kurds live today were also central to Armenian life, historically, inhabited by Armenians. And so, whenever Armenians see Kurdistan as a name, projected over certain areas, it's very hard because those were ancestral lands as well for Armenians and are places they were erased from, and effaced, and killed, sometimes also with the collaboration of some Kurdish tribes or groups. And so these are moments of real challenge to building a decolonial politics.

In that conversation, there emerged at some point the thinking about democratic Confederalism as a political horizon. And I said, "Well, you'd have to think about how to form a kind of democratic confederalism with ghosts." Because we have a lot of ancestors there, embedded in those rocks and stones and crumbling edifices and churches, and sacred sites. Even in the most radical kind of political processes that we can imagine, this question of being able to listen to the absence, or of giving presence to the

absence, attuning to that absenting, making it part of our disposition or sense practice … It's very difficult to do, right? But it seems to us whatever would be called a decolonial listening calls for something like that because of all these states that we are forced to live under the rule of, that are often founded on genocide, colonialism, subjugation, oblivion and continual processes of erasure, denial, destruction and extraction.

So I'm also thinking about what you refer to as the "colonial wound" (Mignolo & Vazquez, 2013) and its relation to listening, not only as a kind of attunement to the ancestral and the memory, but also as a way of traversing or relating to the processes of violence that have been perpetrated and instituted, to the destruction and the harm.

Rolando: When it comes to what has been lost, healing is precisely about not forgetting. Healing has to do with mourning and the possibility of remembering what has happened. And sometimes the loss is irretrievable, like in the face of genocide.

Mourning relates to ancestral memories that don't have any more the possibility of becoming worlds, that are irretrievably lost, like some languages, like some earth-worlds, like some, ecosystems and life-worlds. And still, mourning is there to avoid complete oblivion by remembering the erasure. This healing needs a memory that can receive, and that can host that absence, that heavy absence. When you mention ancestrality and sacredness, this is not about mystical beliefs and the transcendental. It has to do with the sacredness of what has been made absent, and that requires not to be forgotten. The sacredness of what is beyond our selves and beyond the present of oppression. Justice needs a deeper temporality, needs not forgetting, like that testimonial subject we were talking about. Mourning is a form of standing witness, of listening to what has happened, of not forgetting. And that is oftentimes what needs to be done, or what can be done, when the loss is irretrievable.

When we speak about decoloniality there are very concrete demands, like the recovery of lands, the recovery of autonomous education systems. There are very concrete things that can be done in many places. But in other places, for example, in the case of genocide, I think mourning is part of the work of justice that needs to be done. It requires attuning, it requires time and a deep understanding of what listening is capable of doing. I don't find an exact way of saying it; but it is a weak power, the weakest power. It is the weak power that remains in the liminal space against total erasure. Mourning, honouring, not forgetting, are elements of that weak power against extreme forms of violence. And there,

listening might be fundamental to keep that very weak space of justice and hope, that cannot undo what has happened, but that can sustain us – a memory and a dignity that otherwise would be totally erased.

But that is kind of a limit, of where injustice can become total erasure, can become total. And where the last resistance is mourning, is that sacredness, of not forgetting what has been destroyed.

When we address the colonial wound, and here I'm thinking of the angel of history of Walter Benjamin that is gazing towards the past where he sees catastrophe (Benjamin, 1942). We need to be able to stand in the face of that horrible sight of erasure and destruction. We need to be able to stand witness to it as a form of weak justice. Weak in the sense that it cannot undo what has happened, yet it is capable of keeping hope.

Going back to the idea of the testimonial subject, of the subject that can receive. To sustain the task of the decolonial, we need to stand witness in the face of violence. You, Ayreen and Rene, have witnessed so much war and unnecessary violence in Armenia, in Iran, in Palestine, in the United States and in Mexico, the relentless everyday violence, of femicides, against the communities, against the defenders of the land, against indigenous peoples. It is very difficult to sustain that awareness. As individuals, I think it is an unbearable task to sustain the sight, to remember, to stand witness.

We can only sustain the sight of the horror, through the "we," this togetherness, this hope that comes through testimony, through listening and knowing that we are not alone. That's what gives us a grounding in time, to remain standing in the face of violence. As self-standing individuals in networks, the sight of violence moves us into despair or cynicism or indolence.

We can stand witness and listen through a deeper temporality. The horizon of the modern/colonial wound brings us into the awareness that comes from 500 years of people standing witness and fighting against oblivion. Fighting for the coming to voice. Not only the keeping testimony of the violence, but also the coming to voice of the worlds that have been silenced. For me, our most important guides are the "Indigenous" peoples that while having suffered enormous violence, being under erasure and repression, teach us that it is possible to remain hopeful and not only that, they teach us how fundamental it is to safeguard the joy for life.

Rene: I think that there's a lot more to listen, relate to. We are very grateful, thank you. Let's see what happens now tonight, with this brutal campaign, I don't know what to call it.[3]

Notes

1 Decolonial aesthesis is the response to the dominant order of aesthetics that regulates the world of culture and, crucially, that regulates our senses and thus our everyday experience of reality (Mignolo & Vazquez, 2013).
2 Black Bach Artsakh, Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri, 2021. For more please see http://centreparrhesia.org/shards/
3 In the ensuing days after the invasion of the 19th, the Azeri military realized their genocidal aims to terrorize and ethnically "cleanse" the more than 100,000 remaining inhabitants of Artsakh from their ancestral lands.

References

Anzaldúa, G. (2012). *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Fourth Edition edition). Aunt Lute Books.

Benjamin, W. (1942). *On the Concept of History*. Classic House Books.

Haraway, D. J. (1988). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies*, *14*(3), 575–599. https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066

Harney, S., & Moten, F. (2013). *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. Minor Compositions.

Lugones, M. (2003). *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions*. Rowman and Littlefield. https://rowman.com/isbn/9780742514591/pilgrimages-peregrinajes-theorizing-coalition-against-multiple-oppressions

Lugones, M. (2020, June 29). *The 11th Edition of the Middelburg Decolonial Summer School: the Communal, the Museum and the End of the Contemporary* [Zoom Talk]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7O7Sg7fTltE

Mignolo, W., & Vazquez, R. (2013). Decolonial Aesthesis: Colonial Wounds/Decolonial Healings. *Social Text*. https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/decolonial-aesthesis-colonial-woundsdecolonial-healings/

Moten, F. (2010). *To Consent Not to Be a Single Being* (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/) [Text/html]. Poetry Foundation; Poetry Foundation. https://doi.org/10/02/to-consent-not-to-be-a-single-being

Moten, F. (2017). Black and Blur. Duke University Press.

Moten, F. (2018a). *Stolen Life*. Duke University Press.

Moten, F. (2018b). The Universal Machine. Duke University Press.

Mullié, J. et al. (eds) (2018). Prix de Rome 2017, Visual Arts Winner, Rana Hamadeh, Amsterdam, nai010 publishers, Mondiaan Fonds.

Vázquez, R. (2020). *Vistas of Modernity | Anagram Books*. Jap Sam Books. https://anagrambooks.com/vistas-of-modernity

Vicuña, C. (2019, September 20). *TALK with Catherine de Zegher: Cecilia Vicuna* [Public talk], Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam.