

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Trailhead

A collection of documents submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts in Media Arts

by

Ariel Uzal

2024

Gracias a Julieta, sobre todo. Te amo.

Chandler, gracias compañero.

Gracias a lxs amigxs y mi familia por guardar el fuego bajo la helada.

Thank you to my thesis committee for your patience and support.

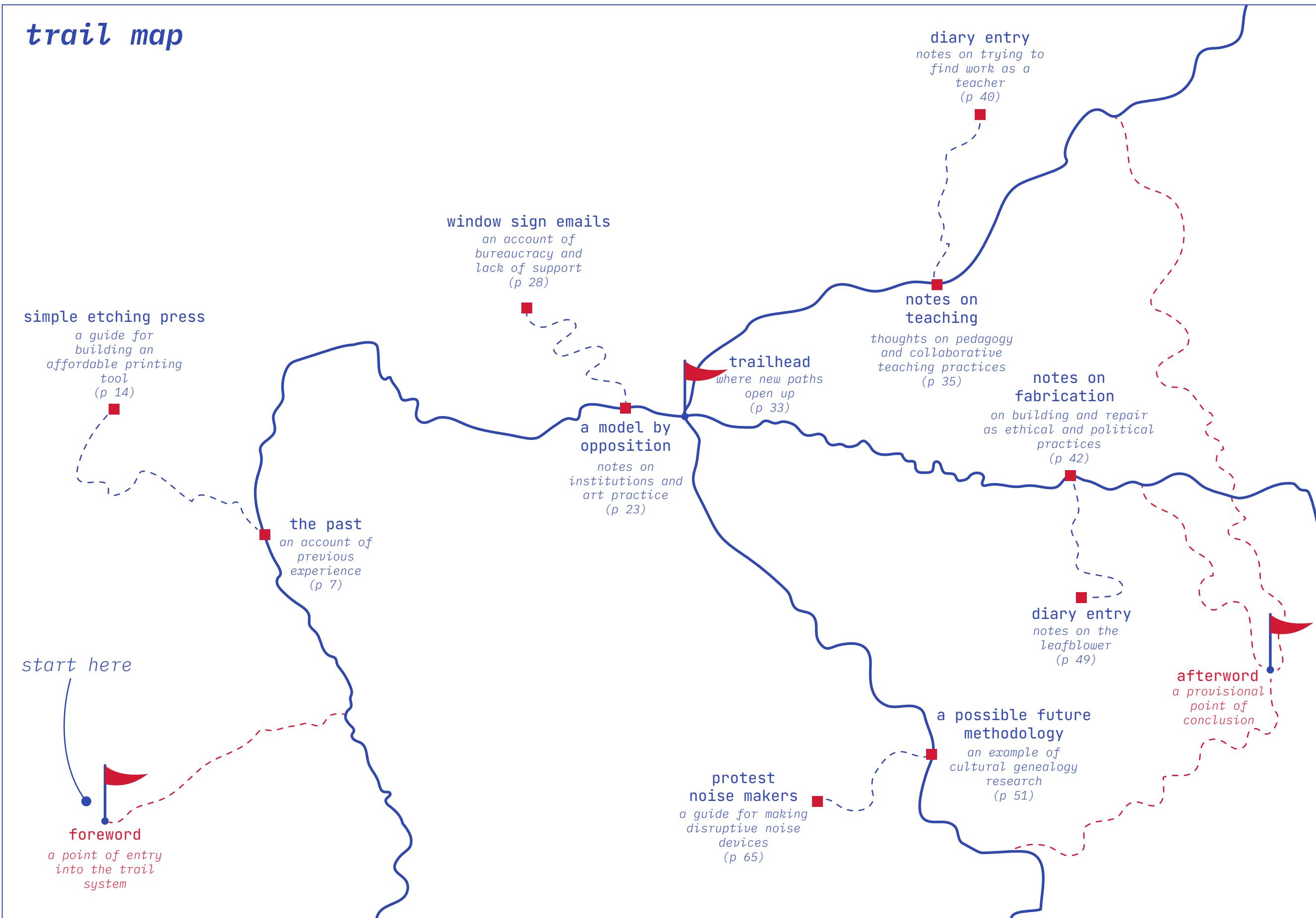
Thank you to Jonathan, Israel and Laurie for your generosity and friendship.

Thank you Danny for the long conversations and encouragement.

Thank you Lauren for your encouragement and willingness to help.

Very special thanks to my DMA friends: Eunice, Wiley, Michael, Sam, Chong and Vinny.

trail map



Foreword

Antes que nada

Before starting this collection of writings and documents, it is important to state the absurdity and impossibility of completing a thesis project at the current moment.

By current moment I am referring to several circumstances.

To begin on a personal note, in the past year I have witnessed from afar how my home country of Argentina descends into the most destructive forms of neoliberalism, at the hands of a group of self-described anarcho-capitalists, bent on advancing an agenda of hate, greed, injustice and hunger. It is important to mention that the rise to power of this group has been explicitly supported by the United States, both from a public standpoint as well as by private companies and individuals who amass great power and influence (media conglomerates, CEOs of gigantic corporations, and so on). This marks a new order of magnitude for the neoliberal experiments that the U.S. began carrying out in South America in the second half of the twentieth century (more often than not in the shape of murderous coups and military dictatorships). That is to say, the arrival to power of this new extreme right is not a coincidence, it is the result of decades of exploitation, marginalization, planned destruction and incommensurable greed and cruelty inflicted on the South American continent by the government (and private interests) of the United States. The current path of

self-destruction that my country is in comes with both immediate consequences as well as long-term catastrophic results. We are already seeing mass layoffs, unimaginable costs of living, and in consequence, hunger. On a bigger timescale, long standing state institutions are being dismantled, public education and healthcare are being heavily underfunded, and massive amounts of national debt are being created. These acts of systematic destruction would take decades to be undone. On a very personal level, the focused targeting of cultural and educational institutions means that returning to Argentina and securing employment would be an unlikely endeavor (many of our friends who work in the arts are either being laid off or forced to resign through wage stagnation and insufferable work conditions). Given how much my partner and I deeply love and miss our home¹, this circumstance is heartbreaking. This makes it impossible to focus on finishing a thesis project.

More generally speaking, we are all witnessing (though many prefer to look elsewhere) multiple ongoing genocides and wars. Perhaps most visible or accessible through media is the genocide of the Palestinian people at the hands of the Israeli government. This massacre is heavily funded (as well as politically backed at all costs) by the United States. It is the first time in my life that taxes charged on my labor are used directly to fund a genocide. I wake up every morning and see images of children who have been murdered with weapons whose purchase I have directly contributed to. This makes it impossible to focus on finishing a thesis project.

The United States' role in the Gaza genocide has sparked protests all over the country. Notably, anti-genocide encampments were set up at more than 130

¹ "Yo de todas maneras viajo todos los días al Uruguay, al menos con mi corazón". Alfredo Zitarrosa, *Ausencia de Mi*, 2018.

education institutions². On April 25, UCLA students started their own encampment. Needless to say, the ethos of the encampment was of peaceful protest, communal living, and solidarity. After several days of counter protests by Zionist groups, including an extremely violent attack on the encampment in the middle of the night (during which the police refused to intervene), UCLA decided to take action. On the first of May no less, the university administration orchestrated a police operation in which the encampment was swept, and protestors were arrested. Hundreds of police officers violently stormed the camp and its supporters, assaulting and arresting over two hundred students. I feel like this needs to be mentioned again in more detail. UCLA, a public university that charges its students tens of thousands of dollars in tuition, unleashed a police force on said students. The police were armed with rubber bullets and flashbangs. Snipers were stationed on the roofs of campus buildings. They destroyed the encampment. They attacked my fellow students and the faculty. This makes it impossible to focus on finishing a thesis project.

After the police raid of the encampment, we were asked to return to classes normally, while the campus was subject to permanent police presence, and while the private security force hired to patrol the grounds harassed students constantly. Many of our students have been traumatized by these experiences. Many more are angry, frustrated, and have lost all confidence in the institution they have called their home for the past years. As students and teachers, we are expected to carry on, while the institution itself (on all levels: UCLA, the School of the Arts and Architecture, the Design | Media Arts Department) offers only superficial and performative support. While the strength, honesty, and commitment of our students, as well as the solidarity and support of some of our faculty are the only driving force that allows me to write these lines, we are still left to

² Crowd Counting Consortium: An Empirical Overview of Recent Pro-Palestine Protests at U.S. Schools – Harvard Ash Center for Democratic Governance. <https://ash.harvard.edu/articles/crowd-counting-blog-an-empirical-overview-of-recent-pro-palestine-protests-at-u-s-schools/>

reconcile the fact that the very institution where we work and learn, a supposed beacon of justice, knowledge and freedom, sent an armed police force to attack us. This makes it impossible to focus on finishing a thesis project.

While it has never been my intention to author a conclusive thesis paper, the circumstances described above accentuate the unfinished nature of these writings. It is not my desire to carry on, to deny the events which continue to unfold before our eyes, but rather to present this series of documents as an ongoing process of organizing, arranging, and understanding. I suspect that given some time and distance, many of the ideas described in the following pages will continue to grow and change.

About this collection of texts

I find great difficulty in navigating most of the art worlds that I have encountered up to this point. I am often discouraged by the artists, practices and institutions that I come across (and consequently by the relations between them and structures of power at play). This generally leads me to a feeling of distrust in relation to art making, as well as to a sense of general lack of direction. With this discomfort in mind, this collection of writings is meant to serve as both a scaffolding and a trailhead. A scaffolding that can support me as I attempt to build an art practice that can sustain itself throughout time, and a trailhead from which different paths of exploration can branch out into a future in which this art practice can continue to exist.

The documents that comprise this thesis submission can be thought of as moments or points on a trail that later diverges into three separate paths. The organization of these documents can be better understood by consulting the trail map at the start of the binder.

The first text, *The past, an account of previous experience*, is a recollection of a project I collaborated on with two coworkers in 2020. This retrospective exercise is intended to help me identify some core values and ideas that are important to my practice and that I would like to continue developing.

The second text, *A model by opposition*, is a collection of notes on my time spent at UCLA, considered both from an institutional perspective as well as from a teaching and art practice point of view. In it, I gather some thoughts on institutional characteristics and ways of being in the art world that I would like to move away from. This text positions us at the trailhead itself, from which three main paths stem.

These paths are related to teaching, fabrication and tool making, and a methodology for building frameworks of thought based on personal cultural context and lived experience. They are trails that I have been traveling on for some time, and that I would like to continue exploring in the years to come. They represent three distinct (but also overlapping and interlocking) ways of being in connection to my art practice.

The main writings in this thesis are supported by diary entries, emails, guides on how to build specific tools, and other supplementary materials.

These additional documents provide counterpoints to some of the ideas explored in the texts, and in the case of the two guides, they help make ideas more tangible and actionable.

This thesis is not intended to present a definitive guide, a collection of truths, or a rigid structure. I am not setting out to lay out a plan or develop formulas for my art practice. Instead, the texts are meant to constitute a loose and open-ended network or weave of ideas and people, that may grow and change with time. Lastly, it is not meant to be read as universal: this exploration is highly personal and born out of an urgent need for support and at least some clarity.

Ultimately, I intend for this writing to serve as a tool that will help me understand the present, as well as guide me into the future. If I imagine art practice as a possible network of paths along which to navigate life, I hope that these writings provide a point of entry into this trail system, as well as some possible directions for paths that I have only begun to travel. I expect this work to bring me new ideas and support to my practice in the present, but above all I hope to return to it when I have lost my way.

1. The past

An account of previous experience

In order to arrive at the trailhead, from which several future paths may spread, I believe it is important to consider some of the experiences that have brought me here. As an example, I would like to begin this series of writings with an account of a project I shared with two colleagues during 2020, in the hope that this experience can help me pinpoint some important values and ideas that can be expanded upon in other texts in this collection.

After finishing my undergraduate program in 2015 I moved back to Bariloche (my hometown in the northwest of the Argentine Patagonia) without much sense of what to do, but with a strong desire to be in the mountains again, close to my friends and dogs. Soon after arriving I got a part time job at a small high school as a design teacher despite being grossly unprepared. I learned a great deal at this job, and I am forever thankful to the students and staff for their patience and generosity. Some months later I was hired into a technical position at a newly created data visualization laboratory at the National University of Río Negro. This would turn into the absolute worst work experience I have ever had, with violent managers and supervisors constantly leveraging hierarchical institutional structures and personal connections in order to threaten and subdue employees. If anything, it helped me to understand what kind of work environment should be avoided at all costs, and to deconstruct a somewhat idealized conception of academic institutions. I also made some good friends through solidarity and common political grounding.

Desperate to escape that position, in 2017 I was able to secure a job as a teacher in a small community art school run by the city council. The school is a small institution, with around twenty teachers, and offers a non-formal model for arts education, with the intention of serving the city's working-class population. Classes typically last a year, and there is no admission process or tuition fee, access is open to anyone that enrolls. The courses offered vary in topics, including music, visual arts, dance, and creative writing, among others. The school also serves students of all ages. I was hired to start something akin to a media arts department within the school, for which I would be the sole instructor. Thankfully, I was ultimately able to collaborate with other teachers to create multidisciplinary courses.

After working at the school for some time, I met Andrea Juarez, the printmaking teacher. As we shared several artistic interests and ideas about teaching, she generously offered me to co-teach an experimental printmaking class with her. After a year of collaborating together, I was invited to join her and Sebastián Di Silvestro, the school's creative writing teacher, in a multidisciplinary class they were teaching for students between the ages of ten and fourteen. This class combined printmaking and writing practices, producing collective publications of etched images and poetry. I took on the task of assisting the printing processes (with my limited etching and printmaking experience), as well as introducing simple digital tools that could help the students to prototype their ideas and expand beyond printed mediums.

The atmosphere inside the classroom was of constant communalit. The projects that the students worked on were group publications, often with collaboratively created images (as opposed to individual art pieces). The etching tools and supplies (which were carefully collected and maintained by Andrea over the years, often paying out of pocket for them) were exchanged, shared, and cared for by everyone. The classroom had only one etching press,

which made all the students conscious of the time spent using this shared resource. Importantly, printmaking usually requires the assistance of others to produce prints (particularly at larger scales). In addition to the multiple mats being passed around constantly, students would bring food, and Andrea would organize a break during which we served tea, and the food was shared, while the work of the afternoon was discussed. This way of experiencing the classroom, as a space with and for others (instead of a room in which individual projects are carried out regardless of the presence of others) resulted in one of the most rewarding teaching and learning experiences I have ever had.

We taught this class for three months, until the COVID-19 pandemic struck, and we were forced to isolate at our homes. After some weeks of severe disorientation and uncertainty, we started to form a plan for remote classes. There were many challenges involved with switching to an online format. The first and most obvious was the fact that many of our students did not have access to phones or computers, let alone a stable internet connection. After some trial and error, we were able to have regular meetings with our students. They joined our classes through borrowed cellphones or tablets, using neighbors' or relatives' internet services. Bariloche is a small city, away from the country's capital, so there was a delay of a few weeks between the moment when the first waves of the virus hit the large cities until it finally arrived at our town. Sebastián, Andrea and I did our best to accompany our students through this, while attempting to make sense of what was happening around us.

After a few weeks of teaching and making do with whatever drawing and writing materials our students had in their homes, it became obvious that there was an unavoidable problem: printmaking requires specialized and expensive equipment, namely our etching press which was in our classroom (as well as inks, rollers, linoleum, cutters, etc.). Andrea (whose resolve to overcome challenges in order to teach her classes is unmatched) was

convinced that we could come up with a way to circumvent this obstacle. Encouraged by her enthusiasm, we began working on a project to create small, simple, and economical etching presses that we could distribute to our students for free.

The following are some notes about this project, based on moments and insights that feel particularly important:

An initial idea for the design of the press was provided by Andrea. Manuel, an industrial designer, friend, and student from the adult printmaking class, offered to help. We worked together on some preliminary designs, and I built a prototype for the press in his woodshop, which he granted me access to (as well as providing the necessary materials). In this sense, this project was possible due to collaboration and generosity. It ultimately required the combined efforts of artists, teachers, designers, and craftspeople.



Working on a prototype press at Manu's shop



Finished prototypes and first test prints

This simple press design, along with dimensional plans, an assembly guide and editable 3D files can be found online at <https://github.com/auzal/simple-etching-press>. A copy of this repository is included at the end of this text.

Once we had a good prototype, we started budgeting to produce enough presses for all our students. We quickly realized they would cost more than what the school's administration would want to spend, as the city council's budget for art and culture is always diminishing, despite constant protest by teachers and cultural workers. With this in mind, we purposefully under budgeted the project, and got our supervisors to agree to it. Once the project was greenlit, the city council decided to spin our work as a press story for their advantage. At this point we knew that we had some leverage in the form of public image, which meant that they would need to commit to the project, even if we spent more than was previously agreed. We revealed that the actual cost of building the presses would be higher, arguing (falsely) that we had initially miscalculated. The administration grudgingly agreed to fund the project (not without giving us a slap on the wrist for our lack of budgeting ability). This was a good opportunity for us to learn more about the political intricacies of the school's administration and the

city government, to engage with their intrinsic rigidity and to force them into uncomfortable positions. In this sense, the project became a platform for developing strategies to pressure the political power into serving its public, and a good reason to practice tactical disobedience.

With a design in our hands and an approved budget (and after touring local lumber yards and hardware stores with Andrea to ask for donations of materials), we hired a community-run woodshop that functions as a cooperative within a high school to produce thirty presses. This is another important aspect of the project: it allowed us to divert government funds into community-oriented spaces such as this carpentry shop.

Once the presses were built and assembled, we (Andrea, Sebastián and me) worked to add more items to the kits we would distribute to the students. Many of these items were utilitarian: each kit had an ink roller, a lino cutter, ink, paper, and a couple sheets of linoleum. However, the most important items were of an emotional character: Andrea included some of the snacks and teas we would usually share in class, and Sebastián added a writing and poetry activity guide that he created with the context of the pandemic in mind. The three of us co-wrote a letter to our students, explaining our motivations and expectations for the project, along with our desire to begin working with them again, which we signed and placed in the box that we handed them with everything else. We tried to create kits that would not only allow our students to continue making the work we did in the classroom, but most importantly we tried to provide them with the communal atmosphere of the classroom, through shared activities and rituals.

The presses (and the entire kits for that matter) are tools that we designed to allow our students to have access to the technical means of production of printmaking in the peak of the pandemic, from their homes. Moreover, they are also tools that allowed us to wield and apply political power as public

cultural workers, as well as tools that helped us to remain emotionally close to our students through difficult times, while providing access for them to public resources. I am interested in this multi-dimensionality of tool making as an extension of artistic practice, where tools and objects extend well beyond their utilitarian function.

Developing this project at a time when leaving our homes safely was a complication proved challenging to say the least. There were many roadblocks along the way, from unsupportive government officials, to changing public health regulations, to budget constraints, to name only a few. It would have been impossible to carry out this endeavor without the support of both my colleagues (as well as friends who provided work, materials, and knowledge). The only reason we were able to complete the project was due to its collaborative nature, which allowed us to carry each other with support and solidarity.

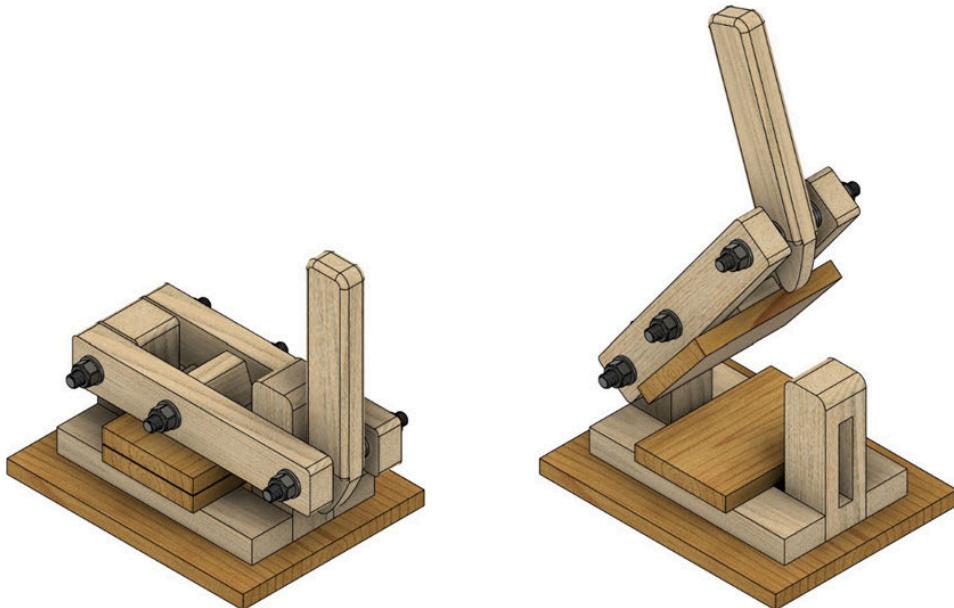
Working with other teachers on this project (and in classes for that matter) allowed me to learn a great deal. I hold great admiration for Andrea's unwavering determination and immense tenderness, as well as for Sebastián's political and ethical integrity, and ability to create space for difficult conversations within the classroom. It is my hope that collaborative efforts in tool making, teaching and art making allow me to continue to learn from and with others.

These are some of the ideas and themes that I have identified and hope to continue expanding and thinking about: tools and their multiple dimensions, collaborative work, institutional frameworks, political action through teaching, and strategies and considerations for providing access to arts and cultural spaces.

1a. Simple etching press

This is a static copy of the following online repository:

<https://github.com/auzal/simple-etching-press>



A low cost small format etching press that can be made out of lumber and threaded rods.

Developed with Andrea Juarez and Manuel Rapoport in 2020.

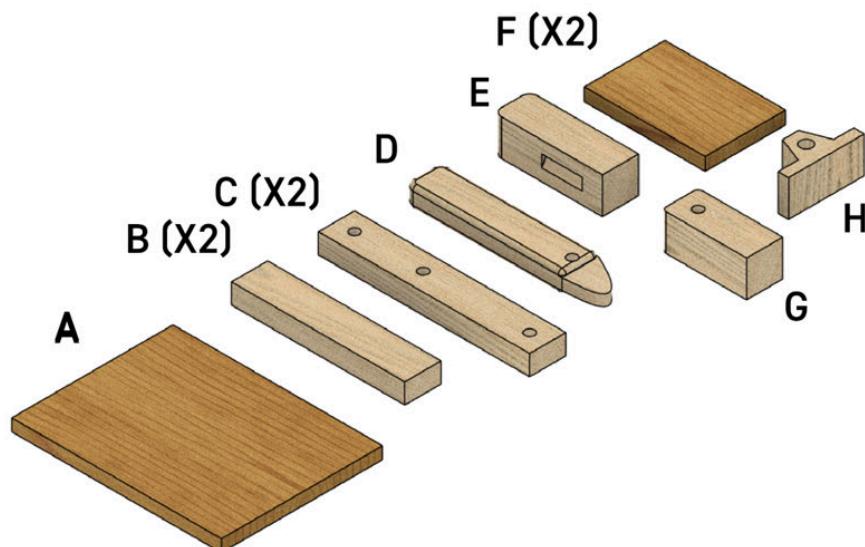
3D files (Autodesk fusion and .STEP) can be found in the 3D files directory (<https://github.com/auzal/simple-etching-press/tree/main/3dFiles>).

Assembly guide

Bill of materials

All dimensions expressed in millimeters. Any part marked "(x2)" means that two copies of it are needed.

Many of these dimensions are approximate. The first prototype for this press was made without measuring dimensions, only keeping in mind the size relationship between parts.



Plywood or MDF Parts:

- A - 200 mm x 260 mm x 15 mm
- F (x2) - 100 mm x 150 mm x 16 mm

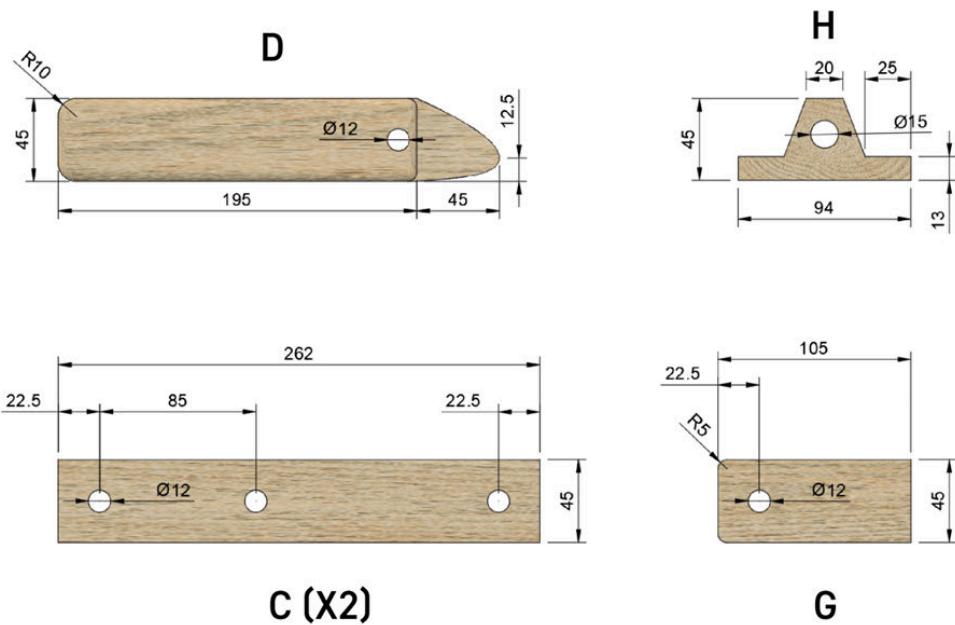
Hardwood parts (pine or eucalyptus were used for these):

- B (x2) - 45 mm x 215 mm x 25 mm
- C (x2) - 45 mm x 262 mm x 25 mm (see detailed plan)
- D - 45 mm x 240 mm x 25 mm (see detailed plan)
- E - 45 mm X 135 mm x 45 mm (see detailed plan)
- G - 45 mm x 105 mm x 45 mm (see detailed plan)
- H - 94 mm x 45 mm x 45 mm (see detailed plan)

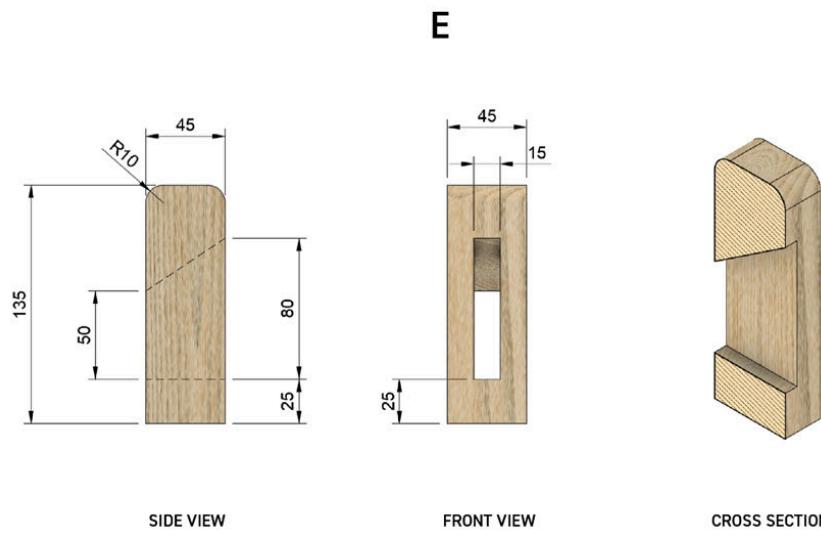
Hardware and others

- 3 x Steel threaded rod M12 - 150 mm long
(<https://www.mcmaster.com/93805A647/>)
- 6 x Steel Nylon-Insert Locknut M12 (<https://www.mcmaster.com/93625A400/>)
- 18 x Steel Washer M12 (<https://www.mcmaster.com/98687A114/>)
- Wood glue
- Sandpaper

Detailed part plans



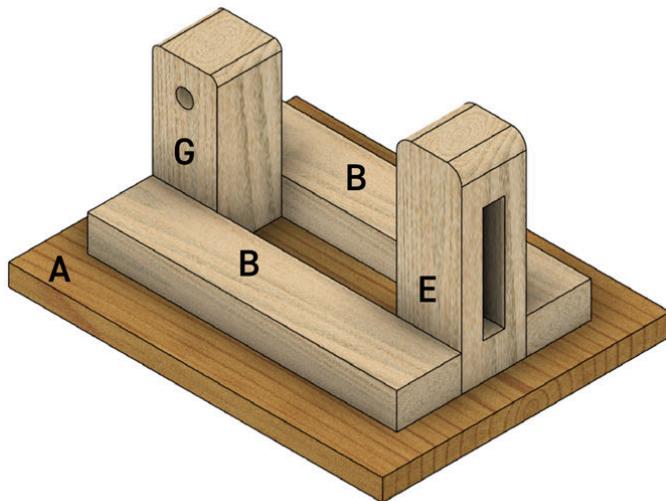
Detail of handle (D), plate pivot (H), arms (C) and arm pivot (G)



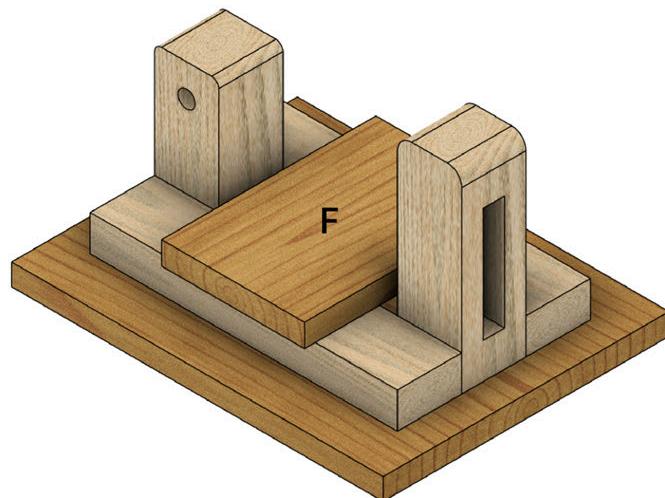
Detail of front lever lock (E)

Assembly steps

1 - Take base (A) and glue parts B, E and G as shown. These parts can also be secured with flat head wood screws from below. Make sure they are flush to the bottom of the base so that the press can have a level and stable surface to sit on.

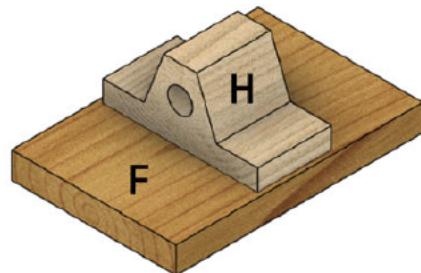


2 - Glue bottom plate (F) to the previous assembly, centered in the space left between parts E and G.

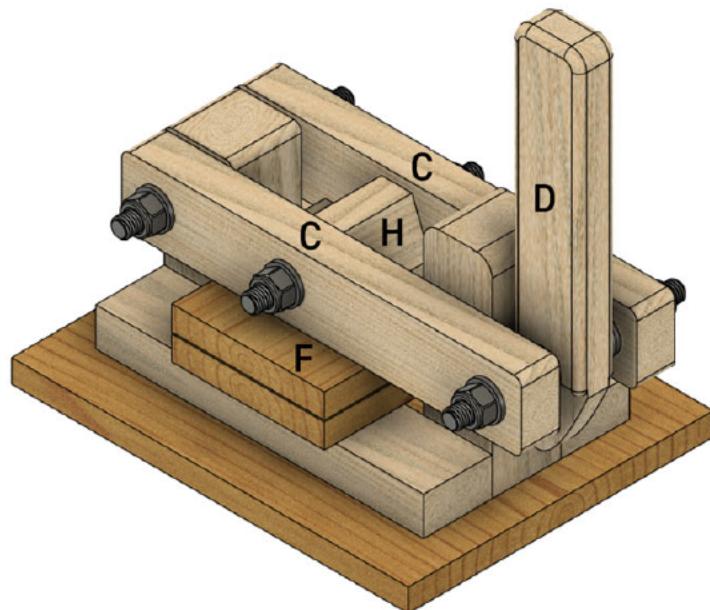


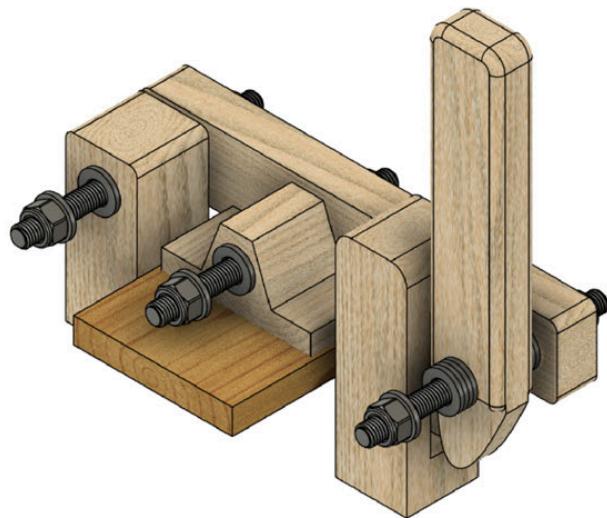
Simple etching press

3 - Glue the other plate (F) to the pivot piece (H), keeping both parts centered to each other.



4 - Assemble all parts with the threaded rods, nuts and washers. See detailed view.





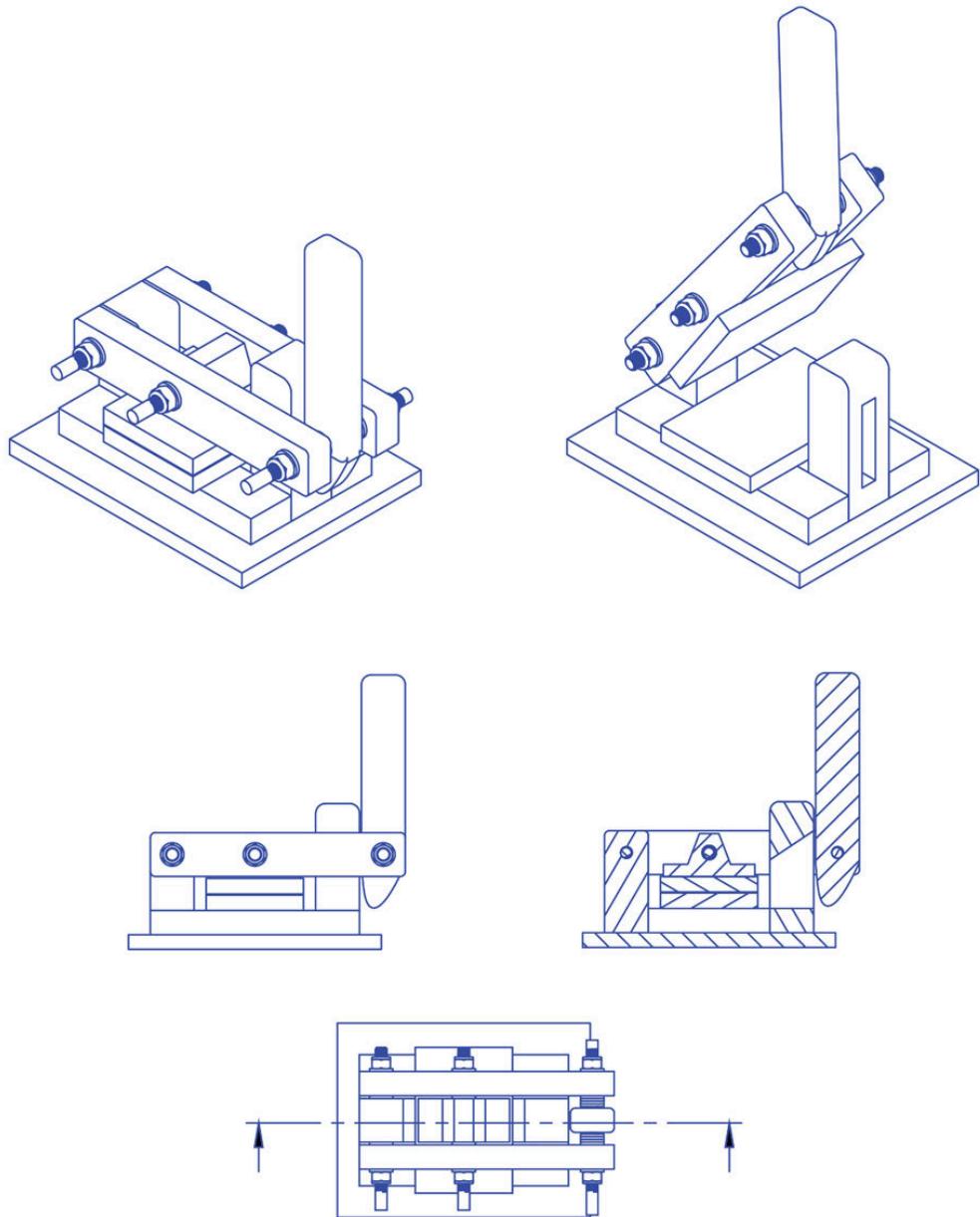
Detailed view of hardware distribution

Notes:

- The internal faces of the plates (F) need to be as flat as possible. If using plywood, make sure you sand them down before assembling. This will help achieve an even pressure across the plate.
- The washers used as padding against the handle (D) can be replaced with sections of hose or copper pipe.

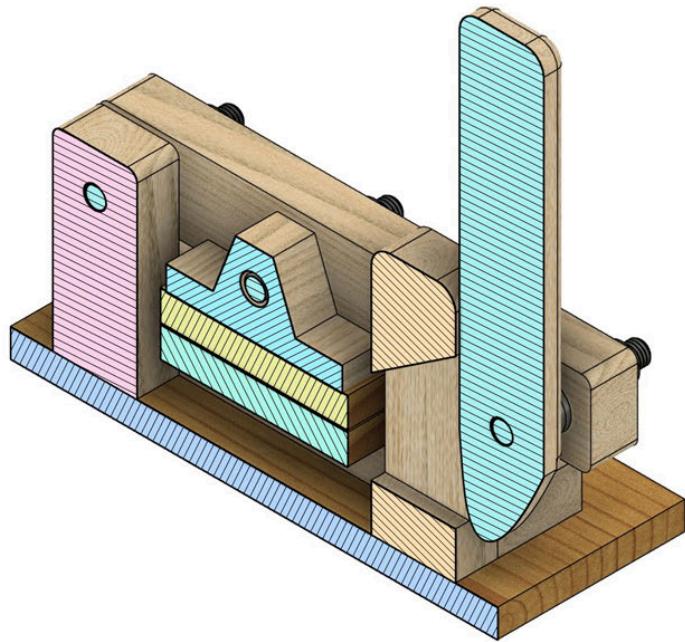
Simple etching press

[Additional images](#)



Technical drawing

Simple etching press



Cross-section of the press

2. A model by opposition

A few brief notes on my time spent here.

After three years at the DMA MFA program, I leave UCLA with some clarity regarding what type of institutions I would like to participate in, and what might be some possible paths to take regarding my teaching and art practice. This insight comes mostly from finding myself at odds with much of what surrounds me. I do not believe that it would be particularly productive to spend too much time dissecting this sense of rejection or discomfort, but I do feel that there are a few key ideas that can help in building an oppositional model of the kind of involvement with art and education that I would like to have in the future.

There are two main areas that I am interested in: the institutional framework, and art practice and its relationship to teaching. In this brief section, I would like to identify some of the main points of contention that characterize my discomfort.

UCLA, the UC, and colossal institutions.

A great deal of my time here has been spent attempting to understand the organizational structure and power divisions within UCLA and the greater UC system. Having never participated in such a complex and large institution, it took a lot of time and work to be able to understand how the university works. At the end of this period of studying, working, and protesting at UCLA, there are three important ideas that stand out to me.

Firstly, it seems clear that the interest of the UC administration is not education at all, but rather the accumulation and preservation of political and financial power. This manifests in public figures using the UC and its hierarchical structure as a trampoline towards other (and more desirable) positions of power (both in private organizations and public institutions), as well as in the administration's great efforts towards the accumulation of capital (in the form of research and production contracts, large land acquisitions, donations, and a gigantic investment portfolio). The university also holds the symbolic and potential capital of student labor and maintains an iron grip on this workforce through the capacity to control housing, health care, wages, immigration status, as well as access to tools and working spaces, among others.

This leads to the second idea: as a graduate student, the UC (and in consequence, UCLA) is an institution that is simultaneously my employer, my landlord, my health provider, my police force¹ (or rather, the police force that is deployed against me), my immigration officer, and my educator (additionally, it also acts as a loan shark in many cases). It is important to mention that the university enforces all these roles exactly as a corporation would: with a keen eye for greed, with great effort put into protecting and expanding existing structures of power, and with no hesitation to employ coercive methods whenever deemed necessary. This form of monopolizing institutional framework is eerily reminiscent of company towns, a model developed by extractive capitalism in which all the infrastructure of a town or small city (stores, housing, healthcare facilities, schools) is owned by a single entity (frequently a mining company, which would develop these towns around extraction sites). The resulting monopoly (particularly centered around company stores, often the

¹ Coming from a country in which armed forces are forbidden to enter public university grounds, the fact that the UC has its own police force (with an on-campus police station complete with its own holding cell) is still difficult to believe for me. For more context, see the Argentine Upper Education Law (Nº 24.521), 31st article.

only available location to purchase essential supplies from) created forms of bonded labor, in which an individual would receive credit to buy (overpriced) essential goods from their employer, which would in turn place them in labor debt with said employer. The basic system by which students are indebted (in the form of student loans) to the university, and thus perform undercompensated labor to repay this debt is strikingly similar. I would be remiss if I did not mention that this model of company towns has been repeatedly attempted in South America, with spectacularly negative consequences².

The third important concept to understand the UC as a structure is that there is a clear-cut division between the administration of the university and the faculty. This notion is entirely new to me. The universities that I have participated in (both are public universities in Argentina) are led by the faculty and have education and students at the forefront of their interests. The division of power that exists at UCLA creates friction that is exerted mostly on the students. The result of this situation is that students rarely count with full institutional support, but rather the support of the faculty only (and oftentimes, the support of only a subset of the faculty). My time at UCLA has been marked by the sensation that the “the eighth floor” (as the administration is referred to, a name that encapsulates literal vertical hierarchies) is the common enemy of both the faculty and the students (and the recent deployment by UCLA of riot police to violently confront the latter only seems to confirm this feeling). It has also been my experience that under pressure from the administration, the faculty (particularly those who hold power within the department) will remove or limit support to the students, particularly with regards to political

² Such was the case with Fordlândia, an attempt by Henry Ford to both create a rubber tree plantation in Brazil, as well as to exert colonizing cultural hegemony. A laughably myopic account of this story can be read on the Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation’s website: <https://www.thehenryford.org/collections-and-research/digital-resources/popular-topics/brazilian-rubber-plantations/>

For a series of photographs that illustrate the absurdity of this project, see: <https://scottchandler.ca/projects/fordlandia/>

situations that implicate the university. For a clear example of this, see the email exchange attached at the end of this section.

Art practice, individualism, teaching, and perceived success.

The past three years spent in Los Angeles and the DMA MFA program represent the closest I have ever been to the art world that orbits galleries, museums, and collectors.

My exposure to this hellscape has come through faculty who participate in (and encourage) a market of exorbitant commissions and private art purchases, through other students who desire to belong in such a market, and through the work experience of Julieta, my partner, who has been employed at three large museums during our time in this city.

I want to be clear that what I am referring to is the specific type of art practice that commodifies work, turning into an instrument of financial wealth and speculation. I have received numerous pieces of advice during my time here, suggesting that I make work that is more "desirable", that is, that is easier to promote, and in turn to sell and consequently to own, to hold as property.

Some specific traits that stem from this particular manifestation of art (and at this specific geographical focal point for speculative capitalism) are: an extreme level of individualism and worship of self, which in turns leads to a lack of awareness of others, and a complete disregard for the communal; a cutthroat mentality that places individual advantage as an absolute priority; a cult of "celebrity", or recognition (or attention); the

appropriation and commodification of identity markers³ in order to serve the desires of the market.

This art world focus on commodities, success, and individuality seeps into the academic landscape, affecting the way in which faculty carry out their work. At the University of California this is accentuated by the categorization of research university as opposed to teaching university, which privileges knowledge production over teaching practice. In the case of the arts, the UC system understands research and knowledge production as participation in high-profile art activities (such as shows, grants, residencies, and fellowships). This puts a disproportionate emphasis on participation in an institutionalized and quantifiable mode of art practice, as these are the activities that weigh more heavily to attain promotion (and tenure) as a professor, rather than pedagogical practice. This shifts the focus of faculty from teaching to achieving success in their individual art careers, which in turn reduces the amount of time available for their students. This is not the case for all faculty of course, but it does seem that the promotion system will inevitably punish those who favor time spent teaching as opposed to time spent developing their own body of work or research.

These are some characteristics of a teaching practice that is the antithesis of one I would like to continue to develop. I understand teaching positions as public service jobs, not as opportunities to access exclusive resources to secure private success. I hope for a teaching practice in which the actual act of pedagogy would take the centermost position, with administrative tasks and the development of personal work as less prominent activities.

³ I witnessed a very clear example of this at a high-profile gallery opening where an artist claimed a Latin American identity in order to create "Latin American" work that denies any specificity and plays into the stereotypes that the U.S. has cemented through decades of discrimination and cultural appropriation.

2a. Window sign emails

On May 31 of 2024, thirty days after the raid of the Palestine solidarity encampment by the California Highway Patrol, I received the following email:

Dear Ariel, [REDACTED],

[REDACTED] and I have received a message from the Dean's Office requiring the removal of the signs in the window that is your grad studio space, as it's come to campus attention (see attached photo). They shared that "While UCLA strongly supports our community members' First Amendment rights to free expression", "UCLA has strict policies about the locations where flyers and posters are permitted." They shared the wording of the policies with me.

While it's often the nature of working within a bureaucracy, I don't particularly like combing through and quoting policies. So I'm including screenshots of the sections of the policies they pointed us to, more as a reference of what was shared with us.

We'd appreciate it if you could promptly help remove the signs from the window at your earliest convenience possible. I'm copying Israel and Jonathan as well as they support coordination of grad studio spaces.

Thank you for your understanding and cooperation. Please let us know if you have any questions.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]



Sections of policies copied in the email:

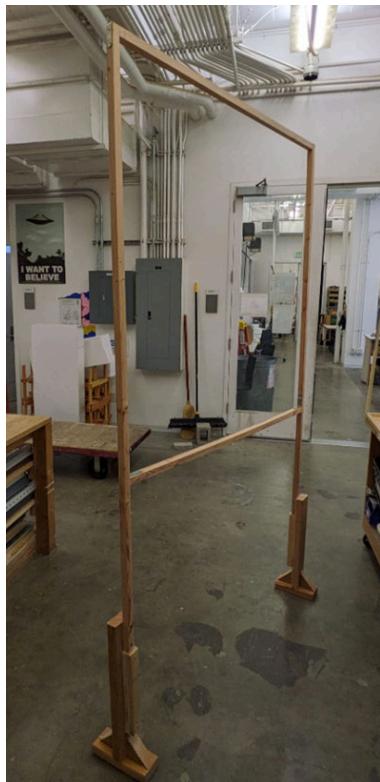
12. No sign, poster, paint, chalk or ink messages may be placed, affixed or applied to the walls, windows, floors or other surfaces of campus buildings or structures, streets, walkways, utility poles, construction fences, trees or shrubbery, except as provided for in Section IV, D. and Appendix 1-A.

D. POSTING OF LITERATURE, SIGNS OR BANNERS

1. Individuals may not post literature, signs or personal announcements on University bulletin boards, buildings or elsewhere on campus, except that individuals may post individual announcements on departmental boards with the prior consent of the departmental office.

7. Posting of literature and materials within the areas of individual departmental offices or on departmental bulletin boards must be in accord with the specific regulations applicable to these areas and boards. Information regarding the specific procedures may be obtained from the individual departments. Such procedures shall ensure that all materials conform to the general provisions governing distribution and posting.
-

Following this, I built the following structure and hung my sign from it, placing it approximately one meter away from the window.



Below is the email I sent in reply.

Hi [REDACTED],

Thank you for your email. I was not aware that I was in infringement of any UCLA regulations.

I have made sure that the windows on my studio do not have anything affixed or placed on them, as per the regulations you shared.

However, I would be remiss if I did not mention that the Broad building (and all of campus, for that matter) has plenty of signs and posters on its windows. Just as an example, here is an image taken from our building:



I also do not want to create more work for you by having to deal with these matters. I would be more than happy to discuss further with someone from the Dean's office, if you could share their contact information with me.

Best,

Ariel

I am still waiting for a response.

3. Trailhead

This leaves us (or rather, me) at the trailhead.

At this point, it is time to lay down some possible paths for the future, picking up and continuing three (winding and oftentimes intersecting) trails that I began to explore during my time at UCLA (and in a more limited capacity before coming here). These trails are:

- + Teaching: which began when I was completing my undergraduate degree in La Plata, Argentina. I have chosen to teach as my main occupation since then and hope to continue to do so. I understand teaching as inherently linked to my art practice.
- + Toolmaking and fabrication: understanding tools as multidimensional (beyond their utilitarian function), and fabrication as a lens to study social and political systems of power that are embedded in objects and materials.
- + A genealogical methodology for research: an idea on how to combine one's lived experience and contextual cultural knowledge into new theories, or at least a way to organize thoughts in order to guide research and work.

It is important to mention that these paths or trails are not independent from each other, nor do they lead to different destinations. The idea of a mountain trail is simply being used as a way to group interests, methodologies, and thoughts. These trails are not necessarily linear, and they can themselves spawn many other trails. Trails can also be used as an analogy of time, or rather, a path that must be traveled, which in turn requires time (all this to say, trails also represent time spent within an art practice). Walking or traversing a trail does not equate to moving further away from something, trails can form a loop, and they can also be traveled backwards¹. More importantly, trails are communal by nature, and they should be considered public infrastructure. This suggests that they should be used by many, not by one, which in turn means that collective considerations should be taken into account when building new ones. While one may travel alone, there is much to be said for trail friends and companions. Lastly, to carve a new trail is a collective endeavor, as is the maintenance of an existing one.

¹ "Y si sentís tristeza
cuando mires para atrás
no te olvides que el camino
es pa'l que viene y pa'l que va"

- Alfredo Zitarrosa - P'al que se va - 1967, Montevideo, Uruguay

4. Notes on teaching

Pedagogical statement

Teaching is an essential component of my artistic and activist practice. My pedagogical work emerges from my experience teaching at a wide variety of institutions across a range of academic levels, including public universities, communal art schools, social organizations and high schools. In both critical production and creative work, I sustain my practice with the act of teaching. I find this work to be an incredibly rewarding (as well as challenging) means of engaging with the communities that surround me. I strongly believe that any educational process is a two-way exchange of knowledge and experiences that should be equally enriching and fulfilling to both students and teachers.

From my own experiences of public and free education, I advocate for the value of accessible education and its role as a fundamental human right. Public and free education has granted me a career I could never afford privately, but more importantly it has allowed me to participate in collectives based around diversity, criticality and social commitment. In addition to my teaching practice, I hope to work towards better access to education for the communities that surround me.

However, not all my educational experiences have been positive. As a student I also experienced oppressive learning environments, in which certain voices

were silenced, and damaging power structures were put in action. As a consequence of these negative experiences, I strongly believe in the importance of generating a space of safety, empathy, and care within my classrooms. I find it is crucial to be receptive to situations and obstacles students may be dealing with, and to meet these circumstances with empathy, in order to create a learning experience that is liberating for all. This can range from providing opportunities for students to express their opinions and concerns through their work and creating space within the classroom to discuss topics that are important to them, to adjusting work and assignments on an individual basis to generate achievable and enjoyable goals. I strongly believe that the worst possible learning experience is one of oppression and burden, where teaching is exercised as a form of control, and testing is used to measure and quantify students.

I understand and honor the fact that my students come from diverse backgrounds and have unique life experiences. Furthermore, as an interdisciplinary artist with a hybrid education, I know from my own experience that rigid formats and guidelines are counterproductive and exclusive by nature. Thus, I believe it is important to be flexible and responsive to students' needs, backgrounds, expressions of identity, and emotions when it comes to designing coursework and methods of assessment. When assigning work, I do my best to set clear expectations while at the same time providing as much room as possible for students to choose their methods and approaches to respond to an assignment. I also consider it of great importance to learn about my students' particular interests, to tailor my lesson plans towards generating an engaging and enriching experience.

An important consideration is the power imbalance present in classrooms (particularly in formal educational institutions). The power that comes with a teaching position should never be leveraged against students, nor should

it be guarded or protected. I believe that as a teacher, this power can be applied against institutional structures and obstacles to provide access to resources and better learning conditions for students.

Finally, I want to emphasize the idea of a classroom as a horizontal space. I desire to be challenged and questioned by students as much as they are challenged through the act of learning. For this to be possible, I strive to empower students to develop a critical conscience towards their contexts, including the classroom itself, and to foster an environment that is open for honest discussions. In this way, I hope to provide the building blocks of an educational community that is centered around mutual respect, care, and communication.

Notes on teaching with others:

Some of the most rewarding experiences I have had as a teacher have been while being part of a teaching team. A clear example of this is the printing press project described in the first text of this collection.

What follows are some brief notes on teaching with others, expanding on a diary entry from late 2023.

Teaching with others alleviates the emotional labor that is undertaken by teachers. It reduces one's need to be completely available in the emotional sense, as co-teachers will be able to supplement your presence. This creates

a system of solidarity and cooperation among teachers that allows for a more honest classroom experience: if I (as a teacher) do not need to perform the emotional labor of pretending that I am feeling fine, then my time in the classroom can be spent in a more honest and transparent manner.

While this may be obvious, a larger range of skills, knowledge and life experiences can be offered to students by a group of teachers than by a single instructor. This is one of the pillars of interdisciplinary arts education. It also allows one to not only learn from students but also learn from other instructors, while simultaneously improving the teacher to student ratio.

Most importantly, co-teaching a class normalizes plurality. A first way in which this happens is that teachers bring different skill sets to their classroom. In the case of the arts, this can be extrapolated into each teacher having their own art practice, which in turn implies that there are multiple ways to exist within art making and to think about art. There is no longer a singular point of reference for the students, but rather a network of coexisting positions. This plurality can also manifest in the form of multiple pedagogical approaches that complement each other. Co-teaching also inevitably introduces the possibility of disagreement among instructors, which in turn legitimizes dissent as a way of co-existing within a classroom space.

Teaching collaboratively can also help address and diminish the implicit power imbalance present in the classroom, distributing this perceived power among multiple individuals. In this way, I believe co-teaching can be an important step towards creating a more horizontal and decentralized classroom.

Regarding learning from other instructors, some of the most important lessons I have received on pedagogy and navigating complex institutions have been through co-teaching. In a 2018 article, Argentinian novelist and poet Pablo Ramos attempts to explain his involvement in the Peronist political movement¹. He concludes that the main reason he committed to a life of political activism was to “not be as alone” (“para no estar tan solo”) as he previously had been. In his article, Ramos also tells a story about his deceased sister, and how through her political activism, she was forced to become overbearing in her ways when negotiating. He refers to this as an “overbearingness of love” (“una prepotencia del amor”), an attitude that arises from necessity, and that stems from a deep love of what is being fought for. The ideas put forward by Ramos crystalize some important experiences I have had while co-teaching, both before coming to the United States as well as during my time at UCLA. Through shared classrooms I have learned that teaching can function as a framework for political organizing and activism, as well as a tool against loneliness. The same can be said for finding strength in a shared love of teaching and students, in order to survive institutional struggles and negotiations.

¹ Ramos, Pablo. *Para No Estar Tan Solo*. Página12, 29 Jan. 2018, <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/91860-para-no-estar-tan-solo>.

4a. Diary entry

What follows is a short diary entry, reflecting on my desire to continue teaching in juxtaposition with a refusal of the idea of paid work, and the cruelty of the process required to obtain a position.

2024-01-22

I've been working hard, applying for multiple teaching positions. As many as I can find. With hopes of getting a permanent job.

A job I don't really want and that I don't really feel qualified to do. A job that will grant me stability and safety that I can't have otherwise. An exclusive job that will put me in an even more privileged position than I already am in.

To apply I subtly modify how I present myself to best fit the particular application I'm sending out that day. Like a piece of clay, I slowly change my shape to comply to whatever opening exists. Sometimes I change under my own actions, sometimes it's other's fingers that mold me. There's also a certain amount of ambient pressure that slowly compresses me, making me more defined and specific than I want to be.

This slow transformation is easy to see when reading the more than thirty cover letters I've written in the past month. There's a subtle slippage in the way I speak about myself, in the things I claim to be sure of.

I lose track of my original intentions, it's hard to remember why I wanted a teaching job in the first place, why I think this might be important. At this point it feels like the only way forward, which makes me immediately resent the idea of actually landing one of these jobs.

If I keep lying, bending and complying to match some sort of shape that I'm expected to fit into, then how do I return to my original form? It seems impossible to keep this process of constant adaptations and farce from permanently affecting how I perceive myself and how I act in the world.

5. Notes on fabrication

I have a deep fascination with physical materials and objects, as well as with hand tools. In consequence, and as a direct result of gaining access to the DMA Fab Lab (a facility the likes of which I had not been able to use previously), my practice has become rooted in fabrication over the past three years.

There are several reasons why I believe that working with tangible materials and fabrication techniques has become central to my practice. In this text, I will do my best to outline some of them.

Digital technologies are exhausting

When I arrived in the US, I was not prepared by the level of blind techno-optimism that is prevalent. This manifests as a strong dependency on digital technologies for everyday life, the consequence of which is a series of social problems. To begin with, it promotes exclusivity, since one must have the economic means as well as the digital literacy necessary for the possession and operation of computational devices to access basic services. Something as simple as taking public transportation requires access to a cell phone, an internet connection and a digital wallet or payment system. There is also a strong shift of labor from government institutions and private companies towards individuals, often under the guise of freedom or empowerment: "Now employees do their own payroll! With Beti, you are in

control of your work hours!"¹. Another consequence of digitalization of the quotidian is the abstraction and dehumanization of systems and processes, which makes troubleshooting impossible when they inevitably fail (never mind the deep loneliness they inspire). I'm told by my doctor to manage my prescription through the online system. When this doesn't work, I discover that I have no way to message him. The series of automated messages I navigate when I call the pharmacy lead nowhere. When I give up and go to the pharmacy in person, I'm told that the online portal is buggy and that the phone system is broken, and that nobody knows how to fix it.²

UCLA exhibits similar characteristics: multiple online systems you must keep track of (several of them broken), digital access cards (for locks that often malfunction), a multitude of mandatory online trainings, and an infinite number of forms that need to be filled and refilled periodically³. All of this worsens if you are an international student and even more so if you are a student who also requires employment to survive.

On a more specific level, the proliferation of the instrumentalization of digital art as a tool for financial speculation and private wealth accretion was experiencing a large boom at the time when I started the DMA MFA program.

¹ From an advertisement for Beti, a self-reporting payroll software marketed by Paycom.

² Excerpt from diary entry from early 2022.

³ UCLA's BBWG (Busting Bureaucracy Working Group) is a committee sponsored by the UCLA Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost. Part of the work they have done is generating online forms where UCLA students and workers could report excessively bureaucratic processes. These forms were later analyzed by the committee and compiled into annual reports.

All these manifestations of information technologies create an overwhelming digital "pressure". This pressure is characterized by a sense of dependence and ubiquity. I believe that fabrication and the use of physical materials in my work provides me with an alternative to (or at least some relief from) this constant digitalization of existence. In this sense, my initial gravitation towards working in the department's fabrication laboratory was a very visceral one, emerging from a sense of unwellness and discomfort.

The immediacy with which a hammer strikes an aluminum plate to shape it or the soft gentleness with which clay deforms under the slightest pressure serve as antidotes to the monotony of standardized user interfaces and the abstraction of data.

Fabrication is a window but also a lens

In his essay "Rethinking repair" writer and scholar Steven Jackson proposes that breakdown and repair have "world-disclosing properties" and asks:

Can the fixer know and see different things – indeed, different worlds – than the better-known figures of "designer" or "user"?⁴

In a related article where they discuss the work of Ursula Franklin, Everest Pipkin points out that in Franklin's point of view tools and technologies hold "the social systems of labor, control, faith, philosophy, politics, reason and science" that made them possible⁵.

⁴ Steven J. Jackson, 2014. "Rethinking Repair", *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society*, Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo J. Boczkowski, Kirsten A. Foot

⁵ Pipkin, Everest. "The House That Technology Built." *Software for Artists Book: Untethering the Web*, Pioneer Works Press, 2022, pp. 50-61.

I would expand these two points relating to repair and tools to propose that physical fabrication also has world-revealing potential, as through it one becomes forcibly exposed to the systems of extraction, manufacture and commercialization of materials and parts, and their reliance on colonial capitalism and globalization. This happens in several ways. Studying objects and building methods reveals mass manufacturing techniques and labor practices. Researching materials puts one in contact with extractivist policies, geopolitical conflicts, and distribution networks (all of which run on injustice and carry severe environmental and social consequences). Learning how to use tools allows one to understand how different technologies relate to one's body, expanding or hindering its capacity for creative work. This framework for thinking about tools is present in Ursula Franklin's notion of the work-oriented tool versus the control-related tool⁶, or the holistic technology vs the prescriptive technology. Building objects provides a (relative) bodily understanding of labor and effort. Here I must be careful and remember that I am building art projects in a climate-controlled university laboratory, which does not compare to the vast majority of physical labor conditions that exist in the world.

All this is not to say that fabrication and repair are inherently ethical. For this to happen, there must be a political position towards these practices. For example, repairing a fighter jet only perpetuates models of oppression and violence. The same goes for indiscriminate fabrication, the kind we see frequently on social media, where people build elaborate projects with no regard to material and energy use, in an effort to capitalize on media exposure. For fabrication and repair to turn into radical and critical practices aimed at social and environmental justice, one must take a political stance that focuses on accountability towards what kinds of objects are built or repaired, what materials are used, and what labor practices are in place.

⁶ See Ursula Franklin's lecture series "The real world of technology", delivered in 1989 at the University of Toronto

In this way, fabrication, tool usage (as well as tool making), and repair can converge to create a critical lens that considers the political, social, economic, and ecological conditions under which these processes exist.

Fabrication as autonomy and accountability

It is also my belief that fabrication has emancipatory potential, providing at least partial alternatives to participation in the continuous cycle of consumption and waste proposed by capitalist markets. This is true for the creation of art projects as well as everyday objects (hand built tools, furniture and toys come to mind).

Building one's own projects (both artistic and otherwise) constitutes a means to be accountable both to labor practices as well as to materials and methods used. When one builds an object, one exercises agency over (and consequently must take responsibility for) how that object is built, what materials are used and who participates in its creation. This stands in contrast to strategies such as hiring manufacturers in other locations to build one's work or employing fabricators and claiming their work as one's own without being actively involved in these processes.

Through an ethical practice of fabrication, one can become less complicit with free market structures that rely on exploitative labor and the proliferation of waste, as well as more aware of (and hence alert to) these systems.

Building with others

There is a clear individualistic undertone to the DIY ethos, particularly in the way we see it portrayed in the media in the United States. Big chain home improvement stores like Home Depot come to mind, you can do it on your own as long as you buy all your supplies and tools from us. I am not interested at all in this standpoint. It is important to state that I do not propose fabrication as a path to building autonomy from others, but from markets and capitalist ways of being. On the contrary, the only reason I am able to make any project is due to others' help and generosity. I am not a craftsman, nor do I have any formal training in fabrication. Everything that I make is supported by people who teach me new techniques or provide insight that leads to solutions I could not arrive at on my own. On a very pragmatic note, building objects generally requires the physical help of others. In this way, fabrication acts as a tool for togetherness.

To this I could add that fabrication (at least as it manifests in my work) fosters a physical communal (as opposed to digital or long-distance collaborative processes), one that requires the cohabitation of space and the sharing of materials and tools. At the same time, this allows for the bodily presence of many friends to persist in my artwork, through the physical product of their work and support.

A note on happiness

Going back to the beginning of this text, physical materials are a source of fascination for me. I am captivated by the infinite variety of forms, colors, textures, smells and flavors, densities, and complexities that

exist. The combinatory possibilities of materials (both natural and manufactured), as well as their interactions with the physical world (how does a material catch light? how does it erode when exposed to water?) and the resulting affective and expressive potentialities fill me with wonder. I am far less interested in scrutinizing and understanding this visceral connection, as I am eager to nurture it as a source of (at least temporary) joy.

This sense of happiness also comes to me from the act of building in itself and is a sensation that is felt through my entire body (particularly as my recent work has grown in scale), as opposed to the purely visual stimuli provided by a display device.

I wish to continue to pursue this mode of art making, both for its intellectual and critical affordances, as well as for its communal and joyous faculties.

5a. Diary entry

What follows is a short diary entry, thinking about a particular tool that I encountered here for the first time.

2024-01-14

Leaf Blower

The leaf blower is the tool that aligns the most with the United States. Of all the unique tools I've seen here, it's the one that fits the country's idiosyncrasy the best.

Some of its characteristics that make it an unquestionably United-Statesian machine:

+ it's loud, it makes itself noticed. This also makes for a perfect social shield. Even if you try to talk to me, I won't hear you, I'm shielded from others by my highly pitched monstrosity.

+ it's large (and cumbersome). It requires space. Better get a huge fucking pick-up truck with an absurd engine that will quadruple your carbon emissions to carry it.

+ it's specialized, it only serves a highly specific purpose. It's the opposite of a versatile tool that can be used for multiple jobs. Buy all the tools, buy every single little tool and gadget for every single special little task.

+ it achieves its intended purpose with a minimum of effort from the user (this minimum effort is offset by its loudness, by the volume it occupies and by the power it uses). You wouldn't want to actually have to pick up the leaves.

+ it's as inelegant as it could possibly be. It's a fucking turbine you use to blow leaves out of the way.

+ its purpose is to control (and even deny) the natural world. Get rid of those leaves, we must be able to see the concrete underneath, we need the ground to be clear and level!

+ it's not about solving a problem, it's about making it somebody else's, or about hiding it. The machine can't actually pick up the leaves or dispose of them, it can only move them someplace else. Blow the leaves away from your yard, blow them onto someone else's yard. It's their problem now. You've taken care of yourself. That's all that matters. If they get a leaf blower and blow the leaves back you can just buy a bigger, better one. There's always a better one to buy.

6. A possible future methodology

Notes on sound

In early 2022 I made an installation piece for a show that I was required to carry out during the first year of the MFA program at DMA. The installation consisted of a protest banner with text projected onto it and a pair of megaphones that played my mother's and my own voice¹. These objects were held by life castings of hands made in plaster. In conjunction with the voices coming from the megaphones, there was a loud background track of protest drums that looped continuously. This track was an edited percussion-only mix of a song played at a protest inside a Walmart center in La Matanza, Argentina², where workers were demanding better working conditions.

While showing this work, I received comments expressing confusion at the presence of the drums. Some people did not understand their purpose, or they felt there was a militaristic tone to the song that seemed out of place. These comments led me to ponder the close relationship between sound (more specifically, sound producing devices) and protest, particularly in my own experience in my home country of Argentina.

¹ More details can be found at <https://auzal.net/manifestacion.html>

² Original source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWiN7xFzBew>

In this text, I will attempt to trace some common threads through a loose genealogy of sound and political dissent as they have existed throughout my life.

The Rioplatense sound

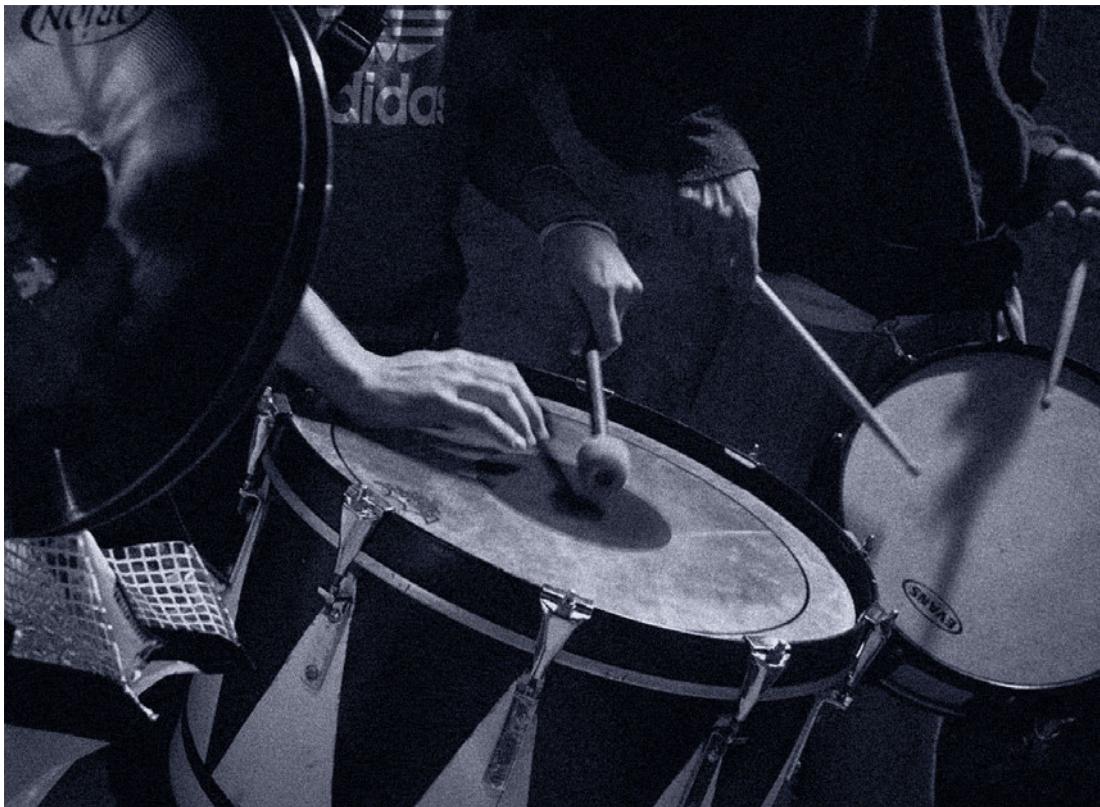
The comments about the drums in my installation coming through as militaristic are dead on. The music being played features a combination of percussive instruments appropriated from European military bands: bass drums, cymbals (oftentimes mounted onto the bass drums) and snare drums. In the original version of the song (before I edited it), there are a few brass instruments, which regularly appear on this type of ensemble (typically trumpets and trombones, for economy as well as portability).

These instruments became intertwined with the Música Rioplatense (Music of the Río de La Plata, a region comprised of the Argentinian provinces of Buenos Aires and Entre Ríos together with the country of Uruguay) through “Murga”, a genre of street musical theater typically performed during carnival. Murga derives much of its musical structure from “Candombe³”, a style of music and dance originated amongst African enslaved people in Uruguay (during the times of the Spanish Colony, the Río de La Plata constituted the biggest point of entry of enslaved people into South America⁴). Candombe is traditionally played on three drums (known as “Chico”, “Piano” y “Repique”). However, murga began to incorporate European military

³ The complexities and overlaps of Música Rioplatense go beyond the scope of this text, but the correlation between its three main genres was famously drawn by Uruguayan poet and singer Alfredo Zitarrosa: “La Milonga es hija del Candombe, así como el Tango es hijo de la Milonga” (The Milonga is the daughter of Candombe, just as the Tango is the son of the Milonga). <https://open.spotify.com/track/6b2xT7NbjsxeiegVCrQuEf?si=3d60ad390da04387>

⁴ See <https://ojs.fhce.edu.uy/index.php/claves/article/download/834/1440/4324>

drums in what is known as "Marcha Camión" (Truck March, taking its name from the large trucks used by the musical groups to transport themselves), its base rhythmic structure. These military instruments were introduced by enslaved populations who first encountered them when forced to join the armies of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay⁵.



Murga lyrics typically involve some form of political commentary or social demand. The genre constitutes a form of protest that takes place exclusively in the streets and is often camouflaged under complex dances and costumes. This characteristic of murga as protest became particularly important during times when other forms of protest were outlawed, such as during the military dictatorship periods of the 70's and 80's⁶. In this way, murga constitutes a form of musical protest (with celebratory undertones),

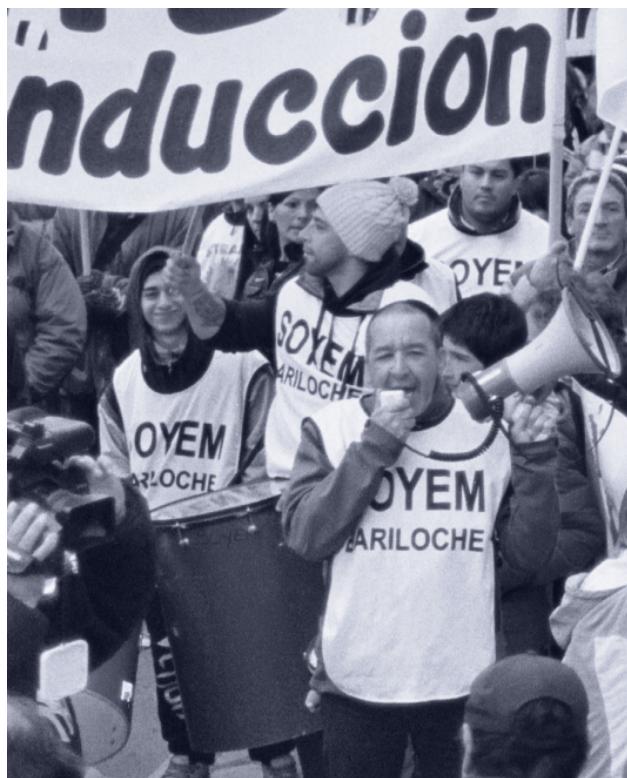
⁵ The most notorious of these instances being the "Guerra de la triple alianza" (War of the triple alliance), from 1864 to 1870.

⁶ After the return of democracy to Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, murga songs have played an active role in the maintenance of active political memory. See

https://www.cultura.gob.ar/murgas-una-practica-que-cuida-la-memoria_5532/

born in working class neighborhoods, structured by African rhythms, that takes military instruments used to advance invasion and colonization and subverts them into tools for political dissent and communality.

From the beginning of the 20th century until now, this ensemble of drums and its use as a tool to express the “popular” will (here I am using “popular” in Spanish, meaning “of the people”) has permeated the Río de la Plata region beyond murga and carnival. These instruments and rhythms can be found in political rallies (particularly for socialist movements), football stadiums and street protests. These events and locations oftentimes overlap and melt into one another. It should come as no surprise then that the track from my installation was being played by a murga group⁷, in solidarity with exploited Walmart employees.

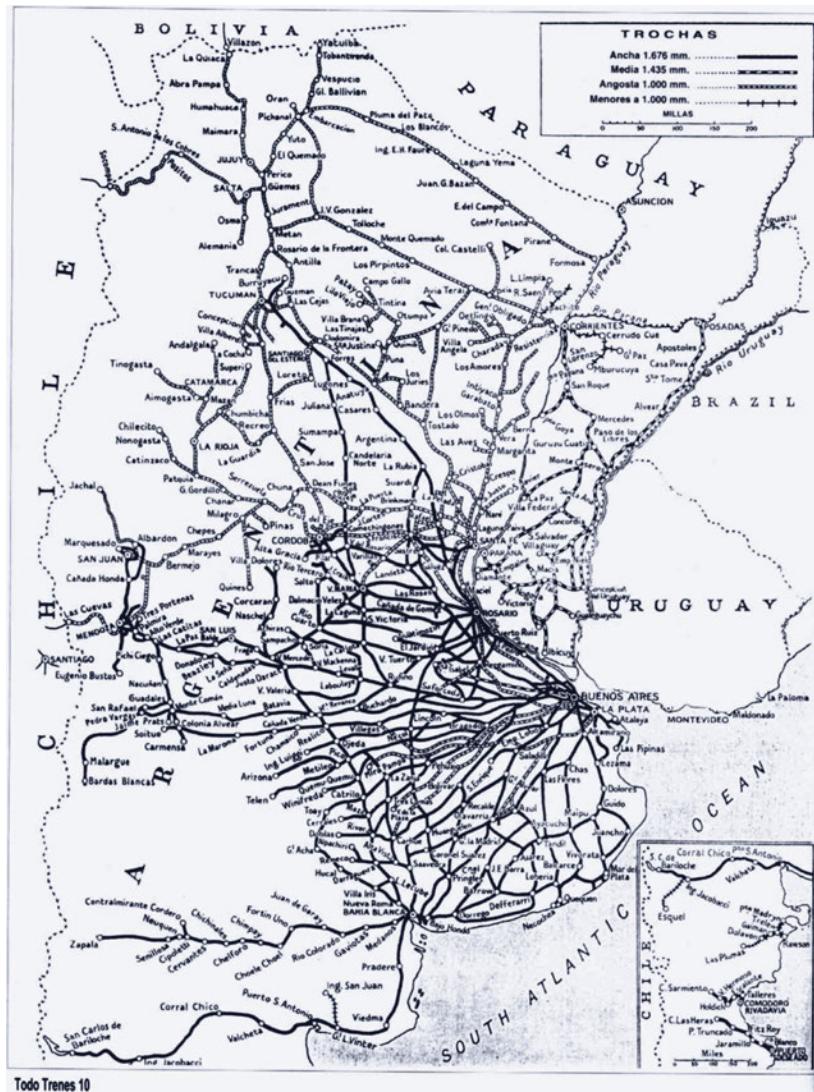


⁷ "Los fantásticos del oeste": https://www.instagram.com/fantasticos_de_loeste

In this way, drums constitute one of the most recognizable symbols and tools of South American protest, together with megaphones and large communal banners.

A note on geography and distribution

Argentina is a highly centralized country, with a strong cultural influence emanating from Buenos Aires towards the rest of the country. Although some efforts have been made to revert this situation, it is a direct result of the colonial structure created by the Spanish crown (in an attempt to control both the traffic of goods as well as the dissemination of ideas and news) and is thus deeply ingrained in the country's organization and idiosyncrasy. This explains why cultural practices such as the use of military drums in protests have radiated from Buenos Aires to all corners of Argentina (this is certainly true of my home city in the south of the country). The same can be said about access to the arts, with the provinces being highly exposed to cultural production from the Rio de La Plata, but not the other way around. This led to my childhood home being filled with music from this region, particularly folk singers who combined Candombe influences and leftist political positions (such as Alfredo Zitarrosa or Los Olimareños).



Map of the Argentinian railway system at the peak of its extent.

Notice the fan pattern that converges in Buenos Aires

It is important to note that the history of percussion instruments in South America is much more complex and nuanced than stated here. There are

countless other variations both in the technology⁸ of drums as well as in the types of music produced with them. This complexity is the result of a process of "mestizaje"⁹ and has spawned many genres and artists who have kept percussion instruments in intimate dialogue with themes of protest, left wing politics, ancestral native knowledge, and humanism¹⁰. In some areas of the continent, this process has created entire social-musical movements, such as the "Nueva canción chilena" (New Chilean song), which played a crucial role in Chile's turn towards socialism in the 1960's.

Sound and public architecture

My home city is, as many other South American cities, modeled on European urban models. Colonization has cursed us with cities that feature a central town square around which government buildings (and many times churches) are laid out, and from which a perfectly rectangular grid of streets spread out¹¹. This logic has been consistently applied, even when the local topography makes it highly impractical. Moreover, my town suffers from strong architectural influences from Swiss and Austrian settlers, which

⁸ One notable example is the "Bombo legüero" (league bass drum), a large drum with pre-Columbian origins, which was later technologically influenced by European military drums. Its name comes from the fact that this drum's dark sound could be heard from a league away. It provides the basis for several folk music genres, such as Zamba, and was also used as a means to communicate across large distances in sparsely populated areas.

⁹ This translates to "miscegenation" in English. I use the Spanish term as it carries very different implications and much more nuance. For a wonderful discussion of this word, see Camila Marambio's "Mestiza," entry for "An Incomplete Glossary of Latin America," in United States of Latin America, ed. Jens Hoffmann (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016). p.100-101. <https://camilamarambio.com/docs/Mestiza.pdf>

¹⁰ Mercedes Sosa, Atahualpa Yupanqui, José Larralde, Violeta Parra and Víctor Jara come to mind.

¹¹ This is known as a "damero" (checkerboard) layout.
See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cercado_de_Lima

means that there is a doubling of the colonizing effect: the city layout is traditionally Spanish, whereas its architecture is unmistakably Tyrolean.

The entrance to the city square is guarded by two stone archways, designed to control the flow of traffic into the public space. Protests tend to cross the city through its busiest streets and end in the central town square. When crossing these archways, the section of the protest that carries the drums stops and plays there for several minutes.



Archways at the entrance of the town square

The cavity resulting from the arches constitutes a chamber that amplifies and reverberates the drumbeats, creating a vibrating texture of continuous cavernous sound that takes over the surrounding space. This sound can be felt on the entire bodies of those occupying the space: you can feel the ground shaking underneath your feet, you can feel the air vibrating in every hair on your body, you can feel your stomach pulsating, you can feel your

hands trembling to the rhythmic structure. When you are in this space, you are compelled to contribute to this great sound by any means available: feet are stomped, hands are clapped, shouts are offered. This embodied experience connects those who are present in a very physical way, creating a tangible sense of amalgamation with others, a unification of solidarity through sound.

In this way, sound provides a medium through which to inhabit and subvert the negative spaces of colonial public architecture, becoming a powerful vibratory force that appropriates existing infrastructure to unite and synchronize bodies in an act of political dissent.

El sonido rajado

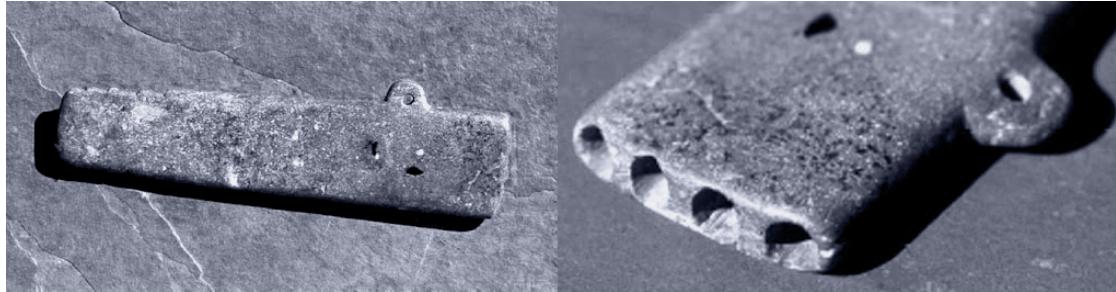
In her film project “Kon Kon¹²”, Chilean artist Cecilia Vicuña touches upon the notion of “El sonido rajado” or the “torn sound”. This sound comes from the dissonant flutes of the “Bailes Chinos¹³”, a type of dance that is performed across the north and the center of Chile and that has pre-Columbian origins in the Quechua and Paracas cultures. In another related film, she refers to this flute sound and the resulting movement of air as “es como el bombeo de un corazón, es como un corazón colectivo¹⁴” (“it’s like the pumping of a heart, it’s like a collective heart”). This stems from the fact that each flute produces multiple frequencies (hence this polytonal sound could be thought as collective), but most importantly this dance is performed by a group of performers, producing a unified body

¹² See Cecilia's website for the project: <https://konkon.cl/>

¹³ See <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/baile-chino-00988>

¹⁴ Cecilia Vicuña, “Sonido Rajado”, 02:53. <https://vimeo.com/562569286>

of sound that cannot be traced to a single point of origin, but rather becomes a communal manifestation.



Stone flute or "Tubo Complejo" (complex tube)¹⁵

This idea of the dissonant torn sound, that appears as a tear or a crack, and that forces one to stop and pay attention is linked to the Spanish word "parar", which literally means "to stop". However, to parar(se) is also to stand up, and more importantly, parar is also to perform a labor strike. This plural relationship between parar as stopping to become aware of something, as well as to putting a stop to one's labor as a sign of protest, while simultaneously meaning to stand up, to stand on our own being, is mentioned by Cecilia Vicuña and Camila Marambio in their book "Slow down fast, a toda raja". Cecilia reflects on parar as:

"[...] it is as simple as coming to a stop and in doing so, letting the continued inertia of adoring property, excess and accumulation move without you.¹⁶"

I would also add the important difference that exists between parar as a peaceful protest action of simply stopping, as opposed to the English term "to strike" which carries an inherent violence.

¹⁵ This piece dates to 1000 – 1470 a.d.

<https://museo.precolombino.cl/2020/10/10/la-flauta-y-los-chinos/>

¹⁶ Marambio, Camila, and Cecilia Vicuña. *Slow down Fast, a Toda Raja*. Errant Bodies Press, 2019.

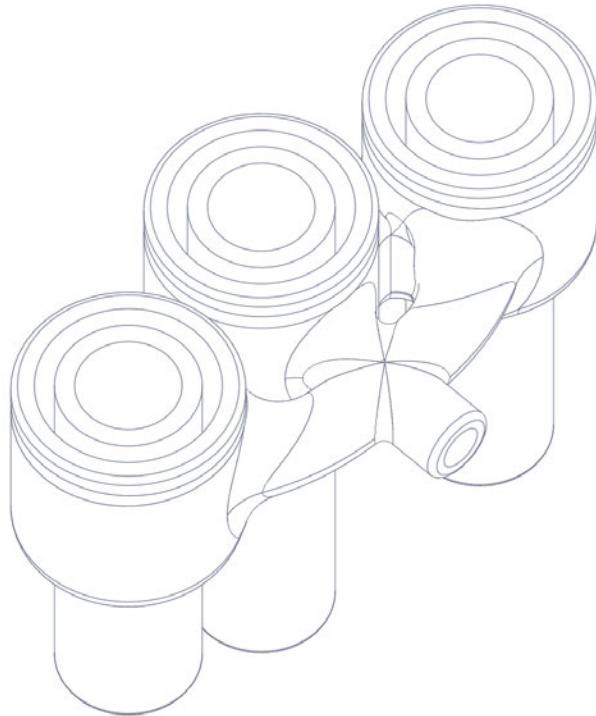
The torn sound and its relationship to strike practices is present in a series of noise making devices that I developed together with other DMA students during the graduate student strike of 2022. The initial version of these devices was bagpipe-like, made from discarded cardboard tubes and rubber gloves.



DMA graduate students protesting with early versions of the noise makers

These devices were made exclusively out of scrap materials available in the DMA fabrication lab. We were able to build them at zero cost for ourselves. It felt important to turn the UC's waste product into tools to fight the UC itself. We iterated through many versions of the devices, trying out new ideas and materials on the fly. We tested different strategies, such as large and visually striking devices and small ones that could fit into a pocket. This versatility is important, as the conditions of protest changed daily (it was necessary to quickly shift from large public demonstrations to the more stealthy occupation of buildings, for example).

As the strike developed, I kept working through iterations of these noise makers, eventually arriving at a design that shares several characteristics with the flute from the Bailes Chinos, such as its compact size, the striking volume produced by such a small device, and its multiple chambers that create a polytonal dissonant sound. The final design is meant to be easy to conceal, small enough to be used with one hand, and simple and cheap to reproduce (it can be created out of PVC pipes, or 3D printed as a single part). It is publicly available at: https://github.com/auzal/noise_makers. A copy of this repository has been included following this text. Along with this original 3D print file, the repository contains documentations of many variations that have been used at different protests, even at different campuses throughout the US.



Polytonal noise maker design

These noise making objects serve several purposes. In terms of sound and its relation to protest, they allow us to be heard (by us -those who are protesting- and by them -those who we stand against-), they are political in

their design and creation, they serve to unite through their sound (they act as beacons of togetherness and safety), and they allow for disruption. Additionally, they are tools for communal play and experimentation. They can be gifted, shared freely, and played with others. Their compact size and portability also grant them an amulet-like quality, an object one may hold closely in difficult times. Cecilia Vicuña speaks of the multidimensionality of objects in her 1973 book "Saborami":

"Los objetos tratan de matar tres pájaros de un solo tiro: hacer un trabajo mágico, uno revolucionario y uno estético.¹⁷" ("Objects try to kill three birds with one stone: they do magical work, revolutionary work, and aesthetic work.")

She refers to "un golpe mágico que es ayudar a la liberación" ("a magical strike that helps liberation"), "un golpe político" ("a political strike") that is revolutionary, and "un golpe estético: tienen que ser bellos para darle fuerza al alma" ("an aesthetic strike: they -objects- must be beautiful to give strength to the soul").

These notes on sound technologies, cultural sound practices, and their relationship to protest stem from the need to develop a framework of thought that is particular to my South American experience. It is both a search to reveal, connect and build a network of references as much as it is an effort to resist the overwhelming pressures of the hegemonic cultural histories of the global north.

¹⁷ Vicuña, Cecilia, and Felipe Ehrenberg. *Saborami*. Beau Geste Press, 1973.

This process of creating one's own genealogies¹⁸ is one that I wish to expand into other areas of my practice, as a means to put my work into conversation with relevant historical, cultural, political and artistic processes and figures.

¹⁸ This is an idea that was suggested to me by artist Carolina Caycedo, through conversations about the exclusion of Latin American identities from the mainstream canon of art theory and history.

6a. Protest noise makers

This is a static copy of the following online repository:

https://github.com/auzal/noise_makers/



Simple 3D printable noise makers. Use for fighting colonialism, fascism and unfair labor practices.

Developed during the UCLA Graduate strike of 2022.

3D printable files

Ready to print .stl files are located in the 3DprintFiles directory (https://github.com/auzal/noise_makers/tree/main/3DprintFiles).

There are several files that ready to print:

- + `NoiseMakerSimpleV2.stl` is a single chamber model. Easiest and quickest to print. This is a slightly improved version that uses less material and prints faster.
- + `NoiseMakerTriple.stl` is a triple chamber model. Much louder and creates a poly tonal sound. Uses much more material to print.
- + `NoiseMakerSimpleV2Large.stl` is a larger version of the single chamber model.
- + `NoiseMakerSimpleV1_olderVersion.stl` is an older version of the single chamber model (the one referenced in the guide photos below). It's a little less efficient than the V2 files.

It's better if the files are printed with support material for the mouthpiece only. This can be done by using support painting or a similar tool (dependent on your 3D printing software)

Assembly guide

A video of the assembly process can be found at <https://youtu.be/jMzxndv2078>

Step 1 - Print a noise maker body

These devices are printed as a single piece.

Some notes on the printing process:

- + all tests have been made with PLA
- + prints have been tested up to .28 mm layer height. They should work up to .4 mm
- + the mouthpiece will need supports. Make sure to not include support inside the chambers or it may be difficult to remove
- + an infill of about 15% is more than enough

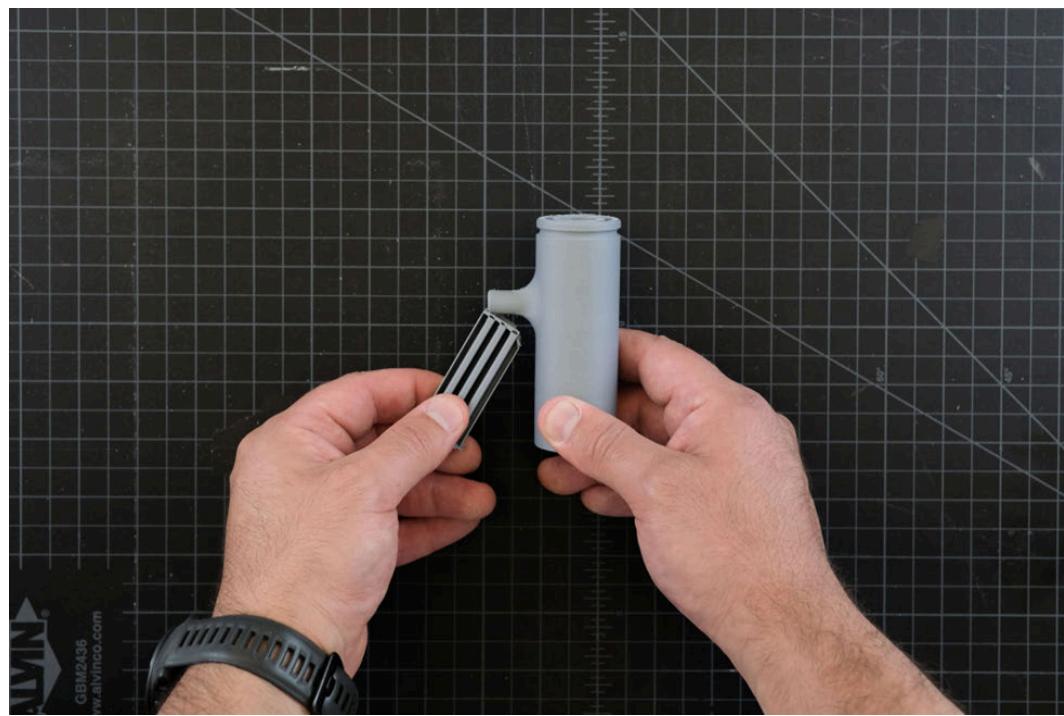
Step 2 - Gather materials

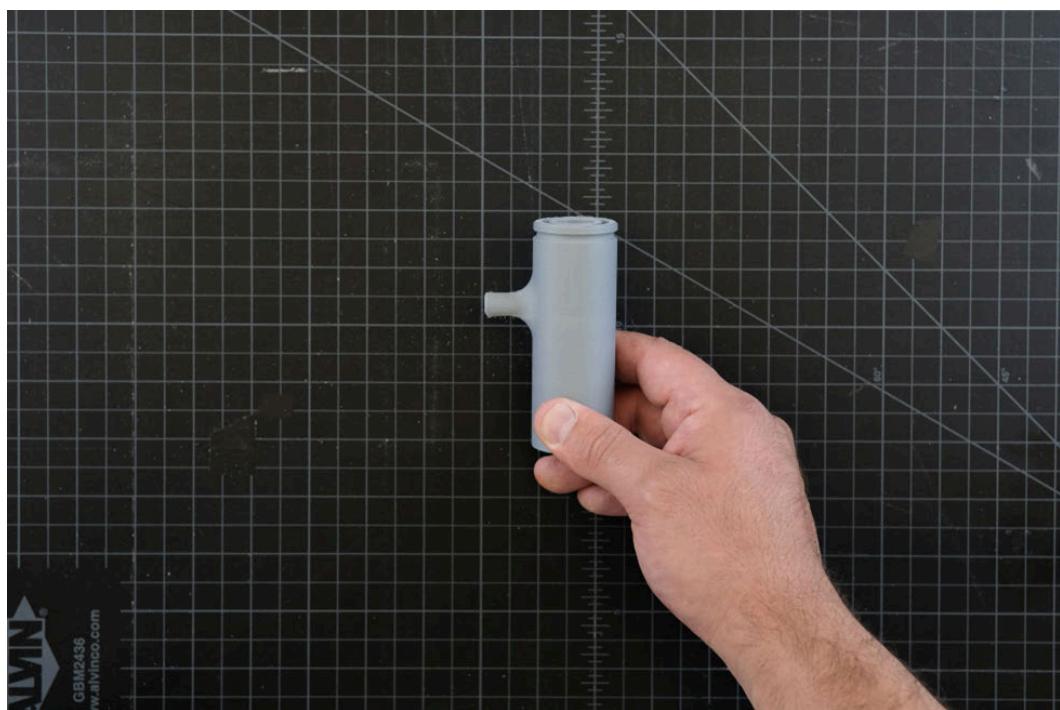
To build a noise maker, you will need:

- + a 3D printed noise maker body (using the single chamber model for this guide)
- + some sandpaper (something like 150 grit works well)
- + a pair of scissors
- + a rubber band
- + a nitrile glove. Latex gloves, balloons, or plastic bags can also be used. Different materials will produce different timbres

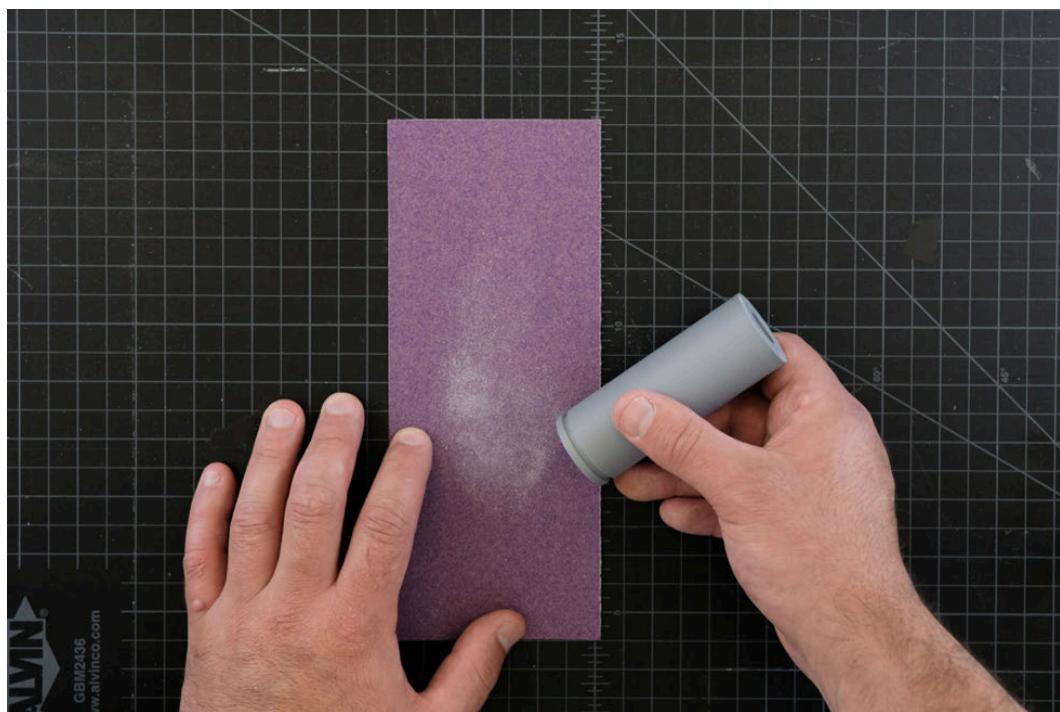


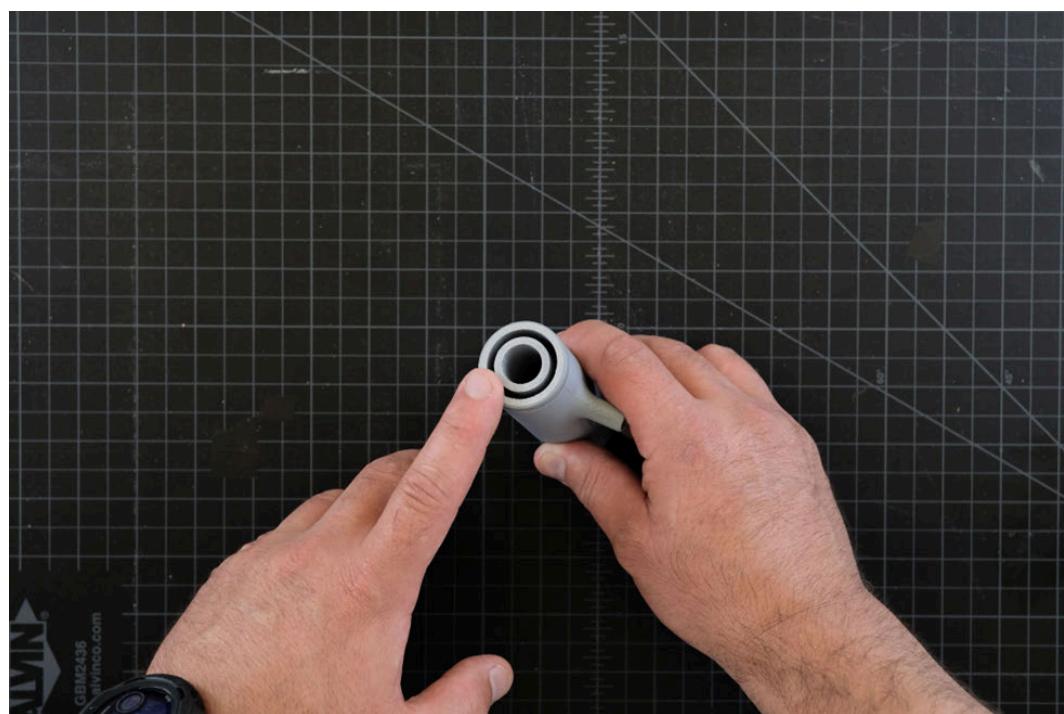
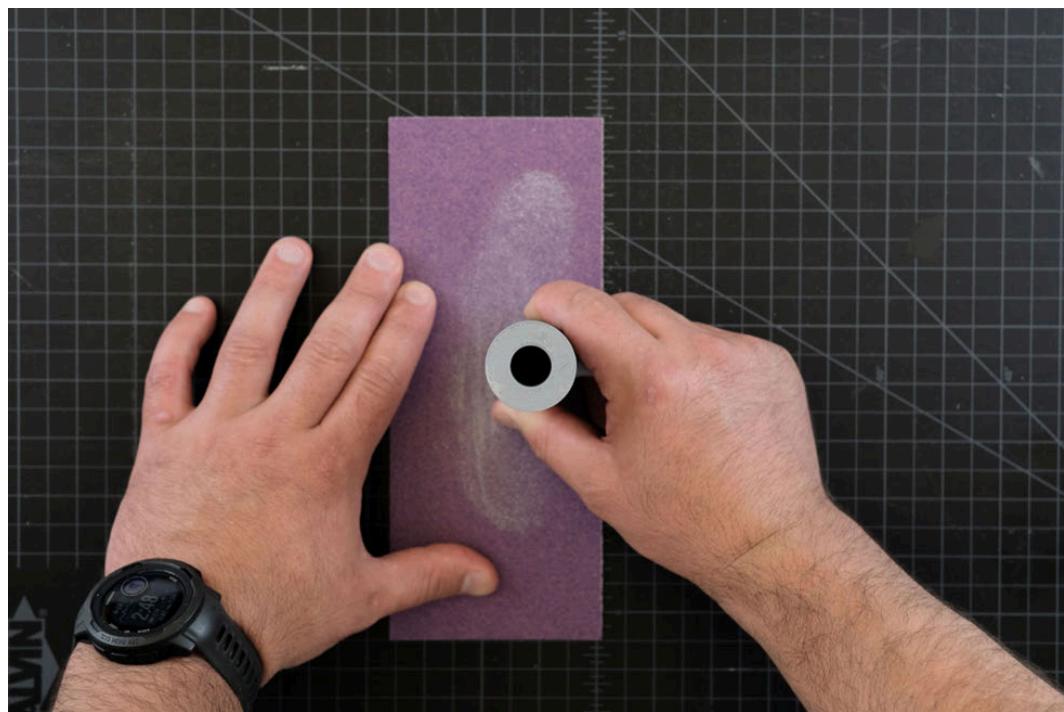
Step 3 - Remove supports from 3D printed body



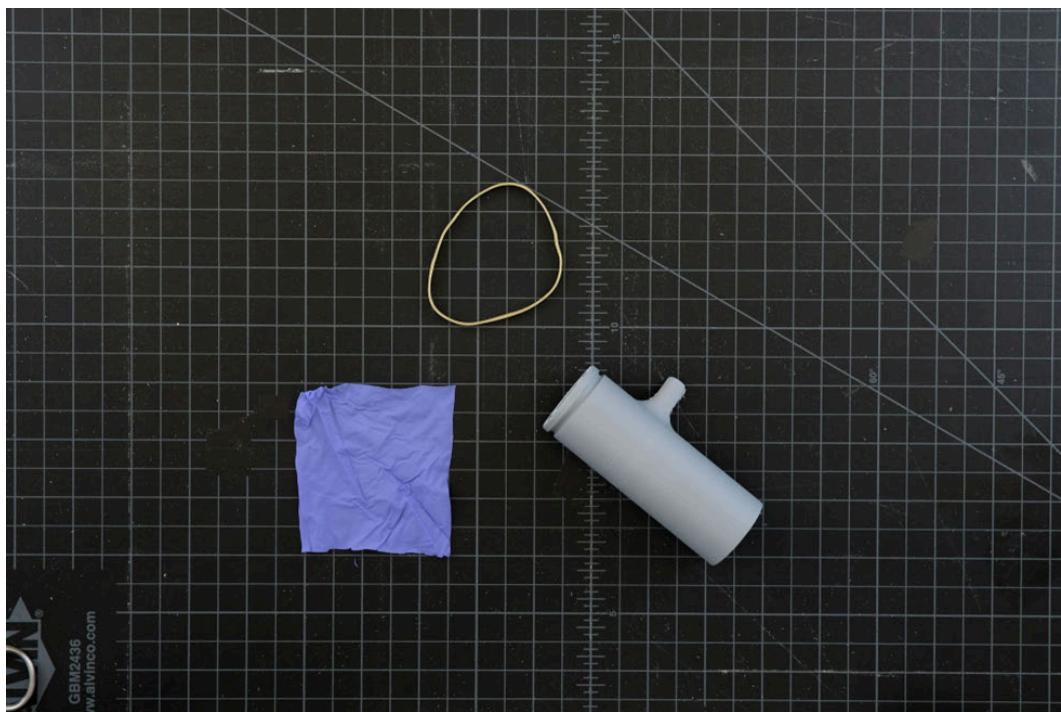


Step 4 - Sand the upper end of the body, until there are no sharp irregularities

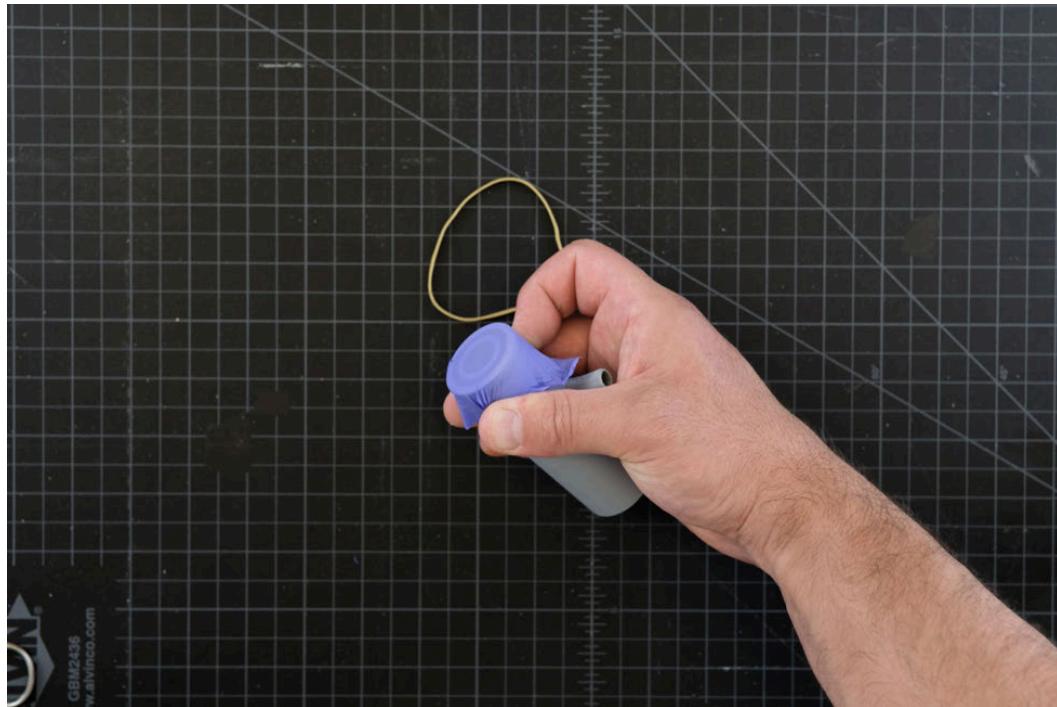




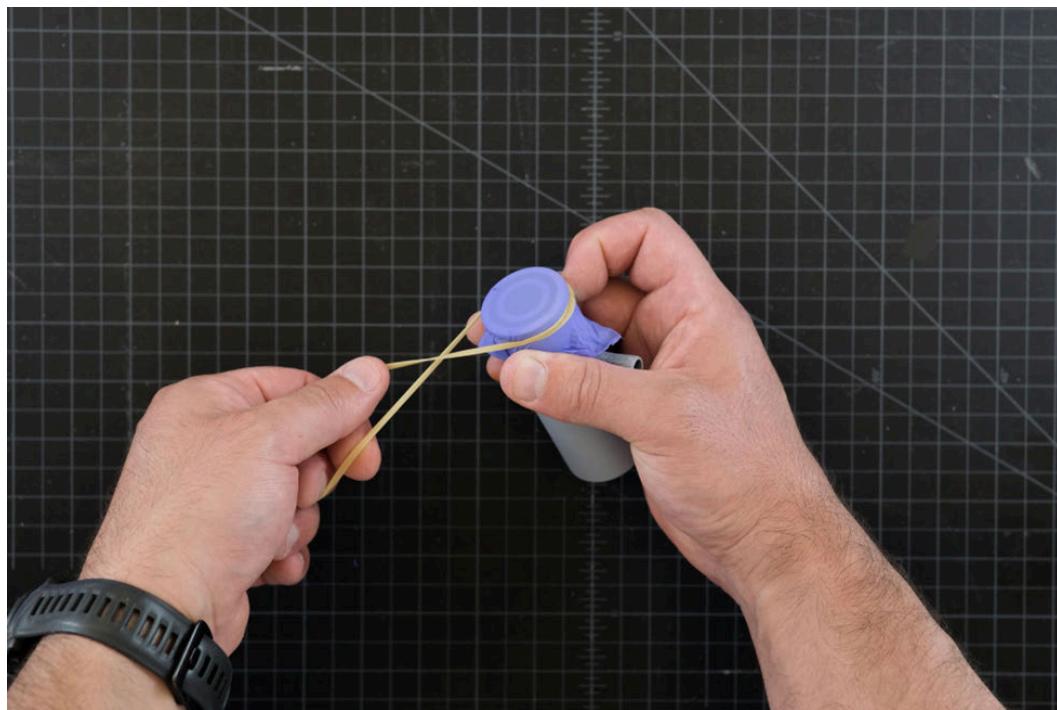
Step 5 - Cut a square of material from the glove. It needs to be bigger than the diameter of the body. This will act as the vibrating membrane.

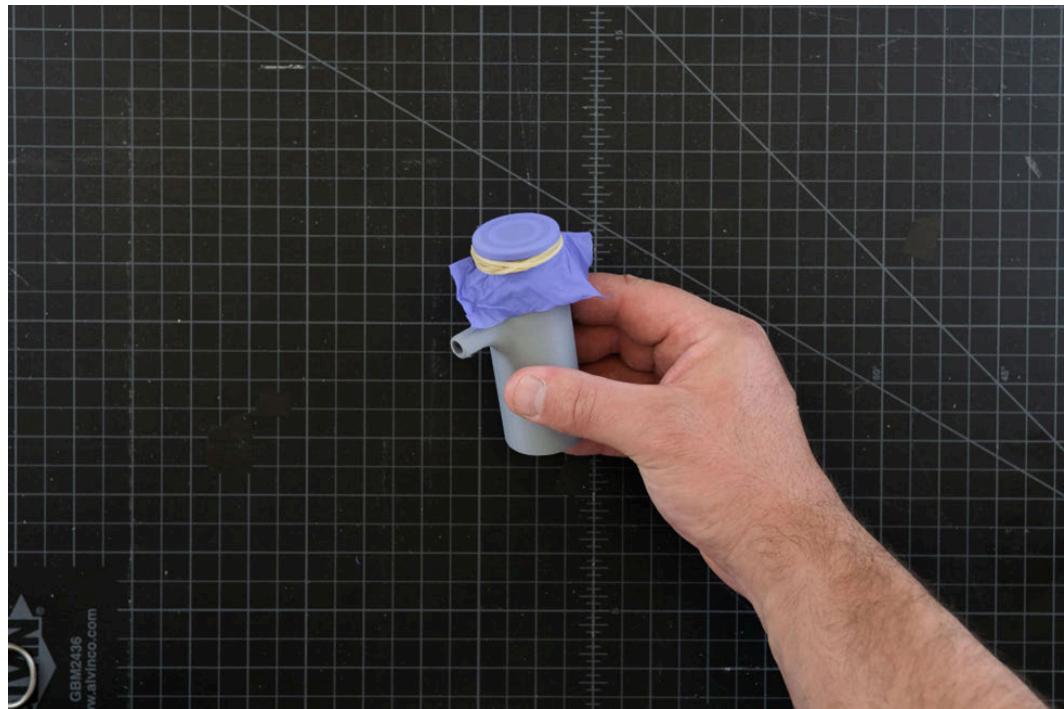


Step 6 - Stretch the membrane over the sanded end



Step 7 - Secure the membrane with the rubber band. Make sure it's tight and that there are no creases.





Done!

Test videos

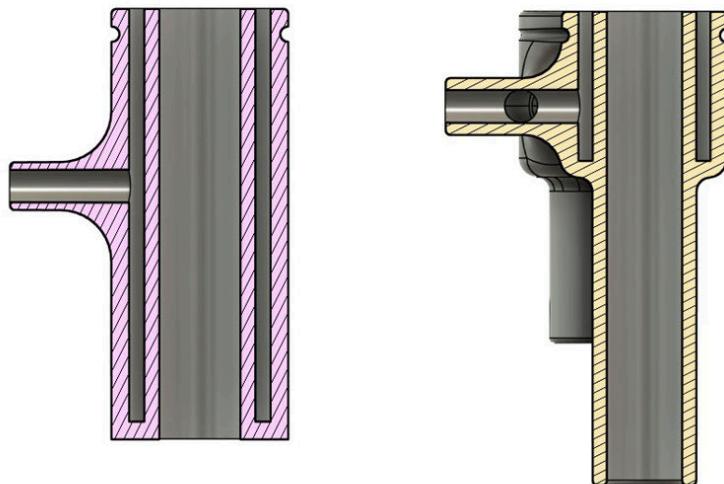
Test videos can be found at:

https://github.com/auzal/noise_makers/tree/main/videos

Design



These devices work by blowing air through the mouthpiece. The air is then forced through an elastic membrane, which vibrates and pushes the air out of the inner tube, creating a loud sound.



Cross section view of both devices

These devices were modeled in Fusion 360. The design files can be found in the fusionFiles directory (https://github.com/auzal/noise_makers/tree/main/fusionFiles).

Some notes on the Fusion files

- + changing the diameter of the chambers will affect the amplitude of the sound
- + changing the length of the inner tube will affect the pitch (shorter tube means higher pitch)
- + on the triple chamber design, the length of each inner tube can be adjusted individually
- + the design is parametric, so dimensions are easy to change:
 - + in the `Solid` tab, go to `Modify > Change parameters`
 - + from here you can adjust the diameter and overall length of the noise maker

Variations

The single chamber noise maker can be printed to fit directly on different cylindrical objects. This will allow you to achieve lower frequencies and louder volumes. Experiment with what you have around! Make sure you seal the joint so no air can escape.

Bass version



Single chamber design sized to fit into a 2 inch PVC pipe.



Fitted into a section of pipe and sealed in place with duct tape.

Sliding bass version



Same as above, but with a section of narrower pipe (fitted with a handle), that can slide to alter the pitch as it is being played (the longer the pipe, the lower the pitch).

Water jug version



Single chamber design sized to fit into a plastic 5 gallon water jug.



Sealed with duct tape and several rubber bands.

Earlier versions

Initial versions of the noise makers, made with nitrile gloves, different cylinders, sections of think plastic hose, and plastic bushings. They are played by stretching the glove over the cylinder to create a tense membrane and blowing into one of the glove fingers.

These designs are a little bulkier and the gloves tend to break easily.

Simplest glove noise maker



Simple design with a short section of 2 inch PVC pipe.



Double glove noise maker



*Two noise makers taped together create different tones
(and offer more visual impact!).*



Background

While at a rally during the 2022 University of California academic workers' strike, my friend (and fellow UCLA DMA graduate student) Wiley Wiggins and I saw some other students with noise makers made from paper towel tubes. We took note of the design and began experimenting in our department's fabrication laboratory to make similar devices. The initial version of these devices was bagpipe-like, made from discarded cardboard tubes and rubber gloves (as featured above). Wiley and I hosted a couple of sessions in the lab to show other students how to build the noise makers.



DMA marching band during the 2022 strike

As the strike continued, I kept working through iterations of these noise makers, eventually arriving at a version that is compact, easy to make and produces very loud sounds. The final design is meant to be easy to conceal, small enough to be used with one hand, and simple and cheap to reproduce (it can be created out of PVC pipes, or 3D printed as a single part).

These noise making objects serve several purposes. In terms of sound and its relation to protest, they allow us to be heard (by us -those who are protesting- and by them -those who we stand against-), they are political in their design and creation, they serve to unite through their sound (they act as beacons of togetherness and safety), and they allow for disruption. Additionally, they are tools for communal play and experimentation. They can be gifted, shared freely, and played with others.

Their compact size and portability also grant them an amulet-like quality, an object one may hold closely in difficult times. Cecilia Vicuña speaks of the multidimensionality of objects in her 1973 book "Saborami"¹:

"Los objetos tratan de matar tres pájaros de un solo tiro: hacer un trabajo mágico, uno revolucionario y uno estético." ("Objects try to kill three birds with one stone: they do magical work, revolutionary work, and aesthetic work.")

She refers to "un golpe mágico que es ayudar a la liberación" ("a magical strike that helps liberation"), "un golpe político" ("a political strike") that is revolutionary, and "un golpe estético: tienen que ser bellos para darle fuerza al alma" ("an aesthetic strike: they -objects- must be beautiful to give strength to the soul").

¹ Vicuña, Cecilia, and Felipe Ehrenberg. *Saborami*. Beau Geste Press, 1973.

Afterword

As mentioned previously, these writings constitute an effort to organize, arrange and understand different ways of being and doing in relation to my art practice.

The texts presented here touch on some key topics and ways of working that are central to me, but there are also other practices that I wish to make more space for in the future. These include political and social organizing, working on curriculum design, and continuing to develop public arts programming.

As I expect this network of paths to continue to grow and become more intricate and interconnected, it feels out of place to write a conclusion or closing statement to this thesis work. Instead, this afterword represents a provisional point at which to step out of the trail system for a moment.

This stopping point for this collection of documents marks the end of a period of three years of learning, working, teaching, questioning and attempting to understand. This time has been as challenging as it has been rewarding, and I leave with valuable insights and clarity, but most importantly invaluable friends.

After some much needed rest, I hope to continue developing this trail system, maintaining existing paths and building new ones across a multidisciplinary art and pedagogy landscape. Despite the violence of capitalism and the current rise in right wing ideologies across the world, it is my sincere hope to contribute with what I can.

"Los cantores populares, cuando tenemos el privilegio de llegar a la gente, lo menos que hemos de hacer, es cantar, a pesar de todo, porque sirve".

-Alfredo Zitarrosa

A brief note on style and language

These texts are written in a straightforward manner, with attention placed on avoiding ornamental or overly technical language. This choice was made from a desire to align myself with the tradition of South American labor organizing, in which a simplicity of form in speech and text allow for clarity and transparency.

I am also indebted to several forms of poetry and music that have their roots in the native peoples of the southernmost region of my continent. Folklore musical forms like the Lonkomeo¹, and the poets of the south of Argentina and Chile in general (Violeta Parra quickly comes to mind) have had a great influence in my understanding of written language, with their austere but nonetheless profound style.

This forthright manner of using language also comes to me through the voices of popular singer and poet Alfredo Zitarrosa (cited many times throughout these texts), singer and godmother of South American folklore Mercedes Sosa², and poets of the Spanish civil war like Miguel Hernandez and León Felipe.

Countless other journalists, musicians, poets, artists and political activists from the South American continent and beyond have also influenced the way I think and write, and I am forever indebted to them for their guidance and commitment.

¹ Cuando yo muera. https://youtu.be/jAU_AVdLzs?t=61

² Como pájaros en el aire. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YEmqn0tiX1Q>