A sensory study of "*A Sonic Adaptation*" [working title]
as a means of camouflage

WHY. (motivation / reason of being / goal)

Over the years, I've developed a chameleonic strategy to fit in through pronunciation. Coming from Guatemala, a small country in Central America heavily influenced by our big neighbor up North, the United States of America, being bilingual is a *must* for widening future prospects in life – career and personal wise. My english-speaking accent is dictated by the people I'm surrounded with, the place (country, city, even a room!), the setting, the context. As a native Spanish speaker, I grew up encouraged by my parents to watch TV in English to enhance a more "correct" pronunciation. By correct, I mean closer to what certain Native speakers sound like. Then studying at a conservatory in the US that prioritized its Voice and Speech curriculum, I was determined to perfect ways of tweaking and eliminating the very last remnants of my Spanish speaking tendencies within English. And successfully so: having a *neutral American* accent was a trait I've ALWAYS gotten praise for – in school, as a teen, as a tourist and later on as an immigrant.

Since moving to NYC to study (2016 - 2019) and now living in Berlin (2020 - 2022), my English pronunciation paired with my background and birthplace has been a trait that causes confusion. It provokes a constant passive questioning of my identity. *"Guatemalan? But why do you sound like this? You don't sound Guatemalan!"* Is there any one way I should be sounding? Are we all ingrained in this chameleonic speech strategy? >> Fitting in through sound. Identity and belonging through speech.

I'm currently making a more intentional decision to let my English sound however my body wants it to. Letting emotion, musculature and context shapeshift the waveforms I produce. Communication after all is not only about the message… the way we make sounds also tells a story. The way others perceive our frequencies helps build a narrative around us.

I'm interested in finding the connection between bodily adaptations – including the tension / release in facial muscles / breath – and what generates them. Consequently, looking for patterns that might come up, especially in immigrants living in an intercultural hub such as Berlin. Using those findings as a foundation, I want to create visual representations of sound through materiality – a way of "seeing" in someone's voice how comfortable they are with the person they are talking to (how to see "I LOVE YOU', e.g.) and creating a symbolic portrayal of how comfortable you are in the space / place you are producing speech (how to see 'I AM HOME', e.g.).

WHAT. (research theme / accessibility)

This project is a performative, visual and tactile study of how different accents sound when saying particular phrases (3 to 5) related to identity and belonging, under certain prompted circumstances (3 to 5) like physicality, emotion, stakes, location or relationship to receiver. Based on my nomad-like lifestyle during my first few years as a young adult, I recognize a yearning for settling, finding my ground and taking roots that can give form to an internal voice which will eventually externalize. I would like to prove through this artistic research that the way I produce frequencies when I speak about things that matter might differ from casual expression – and that these differences can be detectable through various tactics. Just as Marcel Duchamp contemplated while working on his sound art piece *Erratum Musical* (1913) – "One can look at seeing; one can not hear hearing" – this investigative project was born out of a fascination for the potential to visualize sound.

Visualizing sound in a broader sense, however, can also mean a visual within the mind's eye, so this representation should not be limited to people with visual or hearing abilities. It should also give way to interpretation through touch and vibration (tactile accessibility). I find it important to differentiate sonic from auditory: as **adjectives the difference between them** is that **sonic** is of or relating to sound while **auditory** is of, or relating to hearing, or to the sense or organs of hearing. This probation process focuses on the first term: sonic.

WHO. (subject study)

Ideally, the research will be conducted within a pool of people from all over the world who speak English as their second language. More specifically, it would involve EXPATS living in Berlin that are using English as their main way of communicating, although it's not their mother tongue. There can be

two types of participants – the ones that contribute to the waveform bank that would be used to compare patterns and the ones who interpret without actively contributing a recording. However, anybody, no matter their native language or visual and hearing abilities, could admire and experience the tangible representations of these sonic variations through accent. And there would be a more meticulous exploration of my own speech tendencies in order to formulate theories that I want to test with other people in similar or dissimilar situations.

HOW. (performative importance / tools and methods)
As previously implied, the findings might lead to a performative installation. But even during this experimentation phase, participants can both perceive others and be perceived through sound, waveforms (their imprint) and vibration. It's important to bring awareness to this subconscious decision that everyone who communicates through spoken language makes. And its materialization can bring people together by creating space for empathy.
Some tools that I'd need to look into are: a. Recording device to capture the frequencies of spoken sound, b. Digital (screen) or Analogue (needle, ink) formats to portray the recordings as a visual aid (some could end up hanging one in front of the other in a sculpture-like manner to make the differences or similarities more apparent), c. Texture for accessibility through touch – carved or 3D materiality highlighting the waveform.

TEST RUN (recollection of material for further analysis)
1. Participants identify themselves as non-native English speakers or not. Participants are then asked to record a specific phrase in English without any context, as a "control" recording. 2. Then the same phrase is said within different circumstances triggered by imagination (prompted by a set of descriptive instructions) in order to capture the melodic and rhythmic nuances influenced by background, physical state (tired vs. energized), receiver of the message, the message, meaning – emotional connection, indifference, etc. 3. A bank of waveforms would be created >> recordings to compare how we subconsciously make ourselves sound to fit in – a social survival skill. 4. Analysis of this exercise based on publications by Macquire Univeristy professor of linguistics, Robert Mannell.

RESEARCH TIMELINE (monthly / weekly)
FIRST MONTH
Week 1 Contextualize the research (other relevant speech related studies and sound art pieces).
Week 2 Construct short but meaningful and intentional phrases that can carry emotional or sentimental weight when spoken out loud. Establish the circumstantial prompts to pair the phrases with – understand triggers.
Week 3 and 4 Record myself onto a Digital Audio Workstation to start recognizing patterns and process how different elements of speech can be depicted in a waveform (TEST RUN). Exploration of software that renders more interesting portrayals.
SECOND MONTH
Week 1 Actively record myself in real life situations / conversations and discover what settings are more efficient in differentiating themselves from one another: a multiple scenario sonic diary.
Week 2 and Week 3 Record five other people that speak English as a second language with the prompts and phrases previously established (TEST RUN).
Week 4 Analyze these waveforms and compare them to each other. Find similarities and differences.
THIRD MONTH
Week 1 Continue task from the prior week: organizing the recollected material and data.
Week 2 Based on discoveries, assign different textures or colors to recurring patterns in order to portray sonic nuance more deeply and accurately.
Week 3 and Week 4 Investigate visual imprint possibilities also perceivable through touch using materiality that either vibrates or can guide mechanoreceptors to help put together a wavelength shape (look for adequate material for visual aid and a technique to create carved imprints or textures for tactile aid).