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CARTRIDGE MUSIC IN THE QUARANTINE: PRESENCE, ABSENCE, CONTINGENCY SETUPS AND (DE-)TERRITORIALISED PERFORMANCES

Abstract: Between the end of May and the beginning of June, 2020, we performed individually, filmed, synced together, edited and presented a quarantine version of John Cage's *Cartridge Music*. Uploaded on YouTube, the performance was broadcast on 1 June, as part of the 4th Research Colloquium of the Postgraduate Programme in Music of the Federal University of Paraíba. Stranded at home since March, unable to reach our respective faculty offices/studios, and mostly left with domestic gear, kitchenware, sound-producing car equipment and our children's toys, we put together an emergency version of the piece, characterised by three dramatically different setups, each with its own spatialities and soundworlds. Importantly, our use of the signifier "emergency" here is meant to refer much more to the concrete condition of our existences in this particular situation, than to the contingential circumstances of this specific musical activity. In this paper, we discuss the piece by considering its preparation, performance, presentation

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and audience reception. In particular, furthering our previous studies on the (de-)territorialisation of performance and on the territorial metaphors embedded in collaborative artistic interaction, we question the notions of "place" and "venue" in the context of a collective performance that happened in three different locations and of a subsequent première that did not happen in any tangible physical place at all. However, and in spite of the substantial de-territorialisation of our gig, we also consider a set of persisting spatial narratives that inscribe the performance in terms of both visually and aurally perceptible power relations. Finally, considering the inherent criticalities of the field(s) of "experimental", "avant-garde" or simply "contemporary" music, we assess the gains and losses of such a dematerialised and yet ubiquitous performance in terms of audience participation and appreciation.

Introduction

In mid-March, 2020, public universities in Brazil started shutting down their physical premises due to the rising Covid-19 emergency. Almost overnight, academic communities – and especially those affiliated to postgraduate programmes – found themselves facing an urgent conversion from presence-based tuition into remote, online-based learning and teaching. At the time of writing this article, we are still observing physical distancing and social isolation, while national guidelines have postponed the recommended return to presence-based teaching to 2021. When not cancelled, conferences, symposia and other academic events have also been relocated to live streaming services.

Between the end of May and the beginning of June, 2020, we performed individually, filmed, synced together, edited and presented a quarantine version of John Cage's *Cartridge Music* (1960). Uploaded on YouTube, the performance was broadcast on 1 June, as part of the *IV Colóquio de Pesquisa* (4th Research Colloquium) of the Postgraduate Programme in Music (PPGM) of the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB). The video appears as a three-way split screen on our separate working spaces. Each of us had basically filmed himself with a fixed cell phone camera while performing the piece: notably, the three films were shot from substantially different angles, each of them highlighting the performer and the instruments in crucially different ways (Fig 1).

As a matter of fact, right in the days when we were preparing and performing the piece, the city of João Pessoa (where two of us are based) was hitting a peak in terms of daily deaths and infections. In this paper, after an introduction on John Cage's discussion of the "experimental", we situate our collaborative work within the conceptual framework of the (de)territorialisation of performance. Subsequently, we discuss our performance of the piece by considering its (multiple) preparation(s), its performance, presentation and audience reception.

Figure 1. A snapshot of the video of John Cage's *Cartridge Music*. On the top left: Valério Fiel da Costa. On the bottom left: Marco Scarassatti. On the right: Marcello Messina.

Experimental/experiment

In 1957, John Cage declared his coming to terms with the signifier "experimental". He proposed a shift from the notion of "experiment", as an act of truth-production through trial and error, to the notion of "experimental", understood as a way to detach oneself from their composer prerogatives, not only letting "sounds be themselves" (Cage 1973, 10), but also allowing the author to participate in the musical phenomenon from a relatively passive point of view, as a casual listener. The distinction between experiment and experimental was proposed during the lecture *Experimental Music* (Cage 1973, 7-12) in terms of a misunderstanding that had been finally overcome. According to the composer, when someone called his music "experimental", he objected:

> It seemed to me that composers knew what they were doing, and that the experiments that had been made had taken place prior to the finished works, just as sketches are made before paintings and rehearsals precede performances (Cage 1973, 7).

In opposition to this, and as a form of disambiguation, the composer categorically rejected any predetermination inherent to this understanding of the "experimental", and sought a diametrically opposite definition of the term: "what has happened is that I have become a listener and the music has become something to hear" (Cage 1973, 7). In other words, Cagean experimentalism proposed a break between compositional design and sound result, in a way that the author would not know what their own work sounded like. The radical refusal of preparation, measurement,

forecasting, testing, laboratory work, and so forth, in favor of inadvertence, chance, risk, and the connection between art and life, is at the basis of all Cagean rhetoric from the early 1950s until his death in 1992.

According to the philosopher and musicologist Lydia Goehr (2015), such a dichotomy could be reworked by considering the experimental attitude consolidated by Francis Bacon's scientific method as not being incompatible with Cage's proposition, in that the two authors share, in their modes of experimentation, a relationship of respect and reverence in relation to nature (Goehr 2015, 16) as well as an active criticism of hegemonic conservatism; there is therefore a positive experimental attitude to be considered in Bacon. Goehr, in proposing such an approach, makes an effort to rehabilitate the English philosopher, in view of the fact that, according to Horkheimer and Adorno's perspective, the scientific revolution associated with Bacon was also considered responsible for the predatory use of science as a way of controlling nature (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 2). Contrary to the promising expectations associated to the term "experimental", and advancing their critique of experimentalism as a form of control, Horkheimer and Adorno conflate both forms of experimentation in a single, catastrophic formula: "in dialectical terms, what the experimental shows about the experiment is the latter's tendency, despite itself, to control and thus eventually to kill nature through tortures performed in enlightenment laboratories of science and art " (Goehr 2015, 18). In other words, despite the possible differences between an experimental scientific and an artistic attitude, both would result in predatory ways of exploring nature. Goehr rehabilitates Cage and Bacon, relativising both the predatory character of the Baconian experiment and the nihilism of Cagean experimentalism, and seeking to highlight the strengths of both projects.

Beyond the warning issued by Horkheimer and Adorno, it is also necessary to discuss Cage's dichotomy, insofar as it suggests to identify the term "experiment" as something negative (control, repetition), while it associates positive features (creativity, risk) with the term "experimental". In other words, the first term allegedly seeks to promote a harmful control over nature, while the second term attempts to return to harmony with the very same nature through, for example, the idea of a conflation between life and art (Cage 1973, 12). The idea of risk being linked to a purposeful experimentalist attitude is also problematised by Goehr, as it implies that novelty comes with risks (which seems to be a general rule in the arts), or work in the opposite direction, taking systematic testing and logistics as preliminary steps before applying conclusions to the real world (Goehr 2015, 20). But how could we consider Cage's experimental attitude in this context, while taking into account the way in which the composer elaborated his utterances, his notational strategies and his relationship with the performer?

Contradictions of Cage's model

In this section, we propose some notes on the apparently simple premise that the experimental Cagean attitude is predicated on a desire for total freedom in relation to the canonical formulas of European concert music (rejecting an experimental scientistic attitude and taking up a libertarian stance). The first aspect to be considered requires a reexamination of the aforementioned idea of a shift from author into listener. When Cage declares to have become a listener, it would be reasonable to assume that the hierarchically determined (and naturalised) roles of composer and listener would have undergone a reorientation: the mode of fruition of both allegedly becomes equal, as it were, since both would be surprised with the sound result, contrary to what happens in the traditional paradigm in which the composer pre-determines the form. However, Cage's prerogative to decide the existential status of what will sound is reaffirmed, based on his own fruitive experience, considered as an irrenunciable condition for the work to exist, that is, for what was programmed (by himself) to establish a more or less direct connection with what will sound. In Cagean terms, the evaluation of the difference between what was planned and what happened, from the composer's point of view, is what defines whether the work is "determinate" or "indeterminate" (Cage 1973, 35). We emphasise here the positionality from which the work's existential status is managed, preserving the composer's prerogative as an active and necessary agent in its process of delimitation. If the composer is aware of what will happen, the work is *determinate*; if they cannot tell, the work is *indeterminate*.

Another aspect of such an arrangement is Cage's indeterminate music score, narrated as something to be unraveled, not resolvable and ultimately incapable of communicating objectively to the reader what it should properly sound like. A thorough examination of how the notations proposed by the composer, despite their apparent openness, end up facilitating the emergence of certain results, would not fit here. It is important to note that the radical openness expressed in these scores did not prevent them from being understood as scores *stricto sensu* and even as "works" in the classic sense of the term. According to Goehr's model, we understand the concept of work here as "the use of musical material resulting in complete and discrete, original and fixed, personally owned units" (Goehr 1992, 206). Cage's scores, from the 1950s onwards, are not proposed merely as approximate guides for making music freely, but as true units of belonging, being distributed in the market as such and, in the same way, delimiting a clear territory in terms of notational models, creative propositions and conceptual approaches.[2] It is from the contradiction between the idea of a "work" *stricto sensu* and its impossible correlation with an invariable result,

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2 Emblematic in this sense is the case of Mike Batt who was sentenced to pay copyright to Edition Peters for using a 1-minute section of silence, which was understood as plagiarism of Cage's *4'33"* (cf. Kurzon 2007).

that it is imperative to speak of indeterminacy.

Returning to the fundamental premises of Cage's indeterminacy, one would assume that once the composer stopped operating actively towards the definition of musical form, this would become the performer's prerogative. Such a rearrangement would make the exchange of roles in the hierarchical game even more radical, since a traditional subordinate agent (the performer) would become a protagonist and, ultimately, decide the final form of the work. However, in Cage, there is no widespread recognition of this prerogative: quite the opposite, there is a constant criticism directed at interpreters who are allegedly unable to handle such a demand at a high level. In fact, the composer plays, on several occasions (Cage 1969, 136; Kostelanetz 2003, 72, 108), the role of a censor with the interpreters of his works; either by complaining about the way they perform, or by defining emblematic figures (such as pianist David Tudor) as unrivaled examples of how to proceed.

For Cage, the formula for a good use of the freedom left to the interpreter would be their ability to get rid of personal tastes, neutralizing any authorial impetus, in order to allow "the sounds to be themselves": "one may give up the desire to control sound, clear his mind of music, and set about discovering means to let sounds be themselves rather than vehicles for man-made theories or expressions of human sentiments" (Cage 1973, 10). Thus, there is no need to consider Cage's indeterminate music as a real device of liberation of the interpreter: rather, it is a form of control over the interpreter's attitudes meant to ensure that, in a disciplined way, they be able to bring out sound results compatible with an ideal of non-authorship or even "freedom", not of the interpreter, but of the "sounds". It is sounds that are free (or that sound as if they were) and not human beings.

The composer, listening to their own work "inadvertently", can admire the naturalistic or re-naturalized character of their own compositional decisions, concealing them behind an iconoclastic statement that seems to declare the divorce between an archaic and authoritarian tradition (the scientific experiment's desire to control nature) and an attitude of communion between life and art.

This conclusion is not intended to discredit the Cagean project, but to highlight what actually gives it consistency in poetic, aesthetic and operational terms. So, instead of assuming that the author has no control over the context, which could give rise to an arbitrary attitude in the performance action, it would be more convenient to discuss how the items presented in a given proposal end up inducing certain attitudes and conclusions and interdicting others. Such a route would serve as an indication of how to proceed, avoiding out-of-context solutions; no longer taken as a vehicle for sound release, due to its "indeterministic" character, the score is considered as a strategy of invariance that imposes obstacles to individual expression, indirectly guiding the performer's action to follow a certain protocol; and, finally, instead of considering the absence of a strict score as a means to allow the performer to interfere freely, it is important to understand that we are facing a very specific artistic project, based on sound models imbued with invariance, whose direct in-

dication has become indispensable through a diffuse but incisive orality, endorsed by Cage himself and by his followers, and by mimetic models that were validated during his career.

The (de-)territorialisation of performance

The critical approach that we propose when analyzing Cage's work can be expanded and applied to several other cases, helping reinsert as a problem, in the examination of the musical phenomenon, the notions of authorship, work, score and interpretation. We are interested in highlighting the problem of performance as an active and creative instance, considering it the main determiner of what is heard, regardless of the notational strategies involved in the process. Since the sound form we hear has a direct relationship with the performance action that shapes it, in other words, as what we hear is a direct product of the decisions taken in the process of assembly and execution, and as it is not always possible to establish a direct connection between the sound result and the score, it would be convenient to invest in an approach to the musical phenomenon based on the performatic action. This is especially relevant in the repertoire of so-called indeterminate music, for improvisational proposals and ideas transmitted orally, but it could also be expressed in the environment of a music based on Goehr's concept of work, considering that, despite its formal closure, nothing prevents it from being the object of a shift towards morphological investigation.

In this way, the performance itself might cease to serve an *a priori* objective, i.e., responding in a disciplined way to what the work requires, but would manifest itself as an active decision-making body capable of creating its own responses to any stimuli, regardless of their open or closed nature. In this context, *ad ho*c criteria are activated to deal with concrete situations such as: who will perform the piece, in what physical (or virtual) space, what are the sound bodies available for the performance, what is the technical level of the performers in dealing with such sound bodies, what is the duration of the performance, etc. We call this a work of (de-)territorialisation of performance, because nothing is known about what the best attitude to take is before the start of the process; no model of performance behavior can be defined a priori, because the real performance conditions are yet unknown (Fiel da Costa 2016). We are used to consider the symbolic field of social relations in music as a territory whose norm would require a disciplinary commitment to performance in relation to the expressed demands, both for the musical text and for the social context in which its action takes place. Such an arrangement tends to ignore the concrete subjects and the real context in which the performance actually occurs. (De-)territorialising performance means demobilising the standard expectation in terms of performers' behavior, and aiming at a (re-)territorialisation that takes into account, as structuring factors, their bodies, aptitudes, desires and effective and affective relationships with the place and time in which the musical event will take

place. Incidentally, we may identify a further (de-)territorialisation of our specific performance of *Cartridge Music* during the quarantine, in that it happened in three different locations while, at the same time, its premiere did not happen in any tangible physical place at all.

Obviously, in the context of the (de-)territorialisation of performance, the original work is not disregarded: it is rather used as the basis of the performance act and its indications are strictly observed. What we seek in it, through a detailed examination of the score and of the context in which it was elaborated, is traces of invariance, stylistic determinations, strategies to block certain results and encourage others (Fiel da Costa 2016). Such an examination allows us to extract, from a specific musical proposal, elements that make it unique in the context of a broader set of proposals, and to work towards highlighting these elements. A work guideline is established and a series of specific decisions, directly linked to the performance action to be carried out (even if in relative disagreement with some particular indications), orientate the final result.

Recreating John Cage's *Cartridge Music*

In order to illustrate our process of re-creation of *Cartridge Music*, we need to focus primarily on our re-listening of the video recording of our performance. Re-listening implies the re-invention or reconstruction of a living memory. Our recorded performance, in turn, recalls another memory, namely, that of each of us acting as a "cartridge", that is, a "phonograph pick-up" (Cage 1960) to capture and amplify the music resulting from John Cage's compositional project, available to us in the form of instructions and maps. Re-listening in itself works as a cartridge replacement, in that it modifies the perception of this experience and sheds light to the whole context of performance preparation.

Re-watching the video, on the other hand, highlights a series of spatial narratives that have to do with the three-way split screen, somewhat a cliché of remote interaction that is nevertheless capable of suggesting both a virtual approximation between three physically distant performers and a rigid territorial separation between their setups and their domestic workspaces – each with its own political negotiations and with its own overlapping of working and family roles.

The unstable nature of these domestic adjustments – aggravated by the Covid-19 crisis which made these spaces the only possible *loci* of creative work – has certainly influenced our setups: stranded at home since March, unable to reach our respective faculty offices/studios, and mostly left with domestic gear, kitchenware, sound-producing car equipment and our children's toys, we put together an emergency version of the piece, characterised by three dramatically different setups, each with its own spatialities and soundworlds. Despite the contingencies, however, nothing in our setups was the mere consequence of a life of precariousness and isolation.

We especially need to clarify this in light of a recent episode involving Caetano

Veloso and his son Moreno, who played the traditional plate and knife from the Bahian *samba de roda* tradition during a quarantine live concert from home. On that occasion, the Brazilian edition of the music review *Rolling Stone* commented that "one of the most unusual and comical moments happened during [the song] *Pardo*, when Moreno Veloso, in the absence of instruments, used a plate and a piece of cutlery to make the sound" (Rolling Stone 2020).[3] Caetano Veloso responded by voicing his indignation against the ignorance of the reviewers, and highlighting the "lack of care and respect" that emerges from such a comment, while other observers on social media pointed out the effacement of local traditions operated by centralised national and global narratives (Veloso 2020).

Despite the illusionary anti-identitarian stereotypes that might be associated with experimental music practice (Ciacchi 2020; Messina 2019), we claim that our work is profoundly inscribed in a series of different traditions and personal or collective histories that have to do with our varied social identities, articulated in turn around important demarcations of ethnicity, gender, class, race, age, etc. In this context, far from claiming that the emergency-driven "absence of instruments" mentioned by *Rolling Stone* has not affected us, we nevertheless maintain that our choices in terms of setup and instrument choice were not merely random or comical effects – they are categorically part of our identities and traditions as experimental musicians.

In fact, our use of the signifier "emergency" is meant to refer much more to the concrete condition of our existences (and of the lives and deaths of millions of people around us) in the particular situation of the pandemic, than to the contingential circumstances of this specific musical activity.

Cage, in the cage

Each cartridge of phonographic pick-ups extracts and reads the sound information while groping the surface of an object, to amplify and make audible the apparently inaudible; in *Cartridge Music*, based on the contact with these objects, these electronic artifacts capture and modify their performance. Faced with the multiple challenges of interpreting the instructions proposed by Cage; of choosing the objects and cartridges to be used; and of mounting a performance in which these elements all interacted, not only did we perceive a systemic process in which the electro/electronic artifacts were sensitive extensions of our choices, we also perceived a situation in which the performer is one of the cartridges, and that other cartridges influence their decisions and interactions, while also bringing up socially experienced situations as they amplify and alter the constitution of this Cagean game. Furthermore, objects are also artifacts and, following the logic of the piece, they are cartridges that alter the existential performance of each of the elements in play. While putting together the piece, many cartridges interacted, operating at

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3 "Um dos momentos mais inusitados e cômicos aconteceu em 'Pardo', quando Moreno Veloso, na falta de instrumentos, usou um prato e um talher para fazer o som".

different levels, all subjected, in one way or another, to the quarantine, due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The cage in the cage

In Brazil, on top of the pandemic, we are coping with the daily attacks of the current Government, whose political project of control made life disposable (Jesus 2019). This project made a big experiment and won the elections – since then, it subverts all the principles of what is humanly acceptable: it attacks life. In his famous formulation of "necropolitics", Achille Mbembe looks at "those figures of sovereignty whose central project is not the struggle for autonomy but the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations" (2003: 14). In this big necropolitical game, the Government literally seems to extract pleasure from the sustained tragedy that has been accompanying our lives in the last six months.

At the same time, in this phenomenological contingency, confinement and social isolation made us familiarise with the use of recording devices, such as our computers, tablets or smartphones, that, connected to the Internet, resume our access to existence in social networks (De', Pandey and Pal, 2020), literally in exchange for our capitulation by giving away information, data, habits, cultures, etc., enforcing a domination over human existence reduced to reified relationships, work and life, and transformed in an undistinguished mass (Chan 2020).

Thinking about *Cartridge Music* in this context is referring to a world transformed into a massive social network, to a digital reality that allows the infinite multiplication of existence at work; it is a permanent state of work, whereby life has become just one aspect of its precariousness. This state of permanent work means that we are producing all the time, producing data and content for the network, even with the illusion of procrastination, when it occurs within the network itself, we work on the production of the data required in this new order of the Capital:

> as mined data and information become the most valuable commodity for a planet already depleted of natural resources, digital Pandemic temporalities lifeworlds become new extractive frontiers rife with the temporal dissonances and unequal futures that already structure capitalist modernity (Chan 2020, 13.4-13.5).

This introductory reflection serves to think about Cartridge Music, exactly 60 years after its composition, at the time of this writing, from a perspective in which the electronic circuit (the needle capsule) creates an extension of the human nervous system to the outside world (McLuhan 1964), until this present historical moment when digital platforms capture existence in a systematic way. Cage's proposition, in this specific context, brought to the fore modes of displacement and resistance, in daily life through craftsmanship – or what Lévi-Strauss referred to as "bricolage"

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in the Amerindian context – tactile relationships, beyond digital interaction with artifacts and devices.

Cage in Cage

Marco Scarassatti chose to map the piece onto the surface where the interaction between objects, auxiliary sounds and cartridges would take place. For that, he organised a board from an instrument case, whose clear and smooth surface would allow him to arrange performance maps as well as objects/cartridges. The performance map was then posed on this working board, and the choice of objects and cartridges followed as a procedure of getting by with a limited range of instruments – fundamentally, what he had at home – even with a need to decontextualise them to perform the function he stipulated in the operation of bringing Cage to the surface. In this sense, the procedure was closer to what Claude Lévi-Strauss considers as the bricoleur's modus operandi.

> His [or her] universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his [or her] game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand', that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous construction or destruction (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 17).

Scarassatti replaced the transparent sheets with tracing papers drawn upon with India ink, which helped visualize superimposed figures. These papers overlaid on the instrument case called for a setup in which the objects to be touched would be part of the cartography of the piece placed on the surface. He disassembled an 18-inch car speaker (part of his old sound sculpture) and positioned it between the wall and the cartographic surface. In front of this main speaker, he put a pair of smaller speakers and a tweeter, all disassembled from an old hi-fi system. This quartet of speakers diffused the audio captured in the performance, while it also functioned as an object/cartridge, in that, when approached by the piezo, it fed the system back as part of a reciprocal game between two electromagnetic fields. Scarassatti used a threaded bar from a previously disassembled instrument invented by him, and put it on the overlaid maps of the piece. He then completed the topographic setup by adding a metal pulley, a spring, two guitar pedals, two clip-on contact mics (movable from an object to another), a fixed condenser microphone stuck to the instrument case, an already drawn sheet, a graphite pencil and a wooden bowl with 16 cowrie shells inside (Fig. 2) – this last object has important implications in light of Scarassatti's connection with Yoruba culture and the study of *Ifá*.[4] The presence of

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4 On *Ifá* as a philosophical system within Yoruba episteme, cf. Adegbindin (2014).

the shells somewhat changed the relationship between the cartridges and the objects that were meant to produce auxiliary sounds. At different levels, such as that of overlapping papers and that of the created assemblages, these artifacts sometimes operated as objects, sometimes as cartridges.
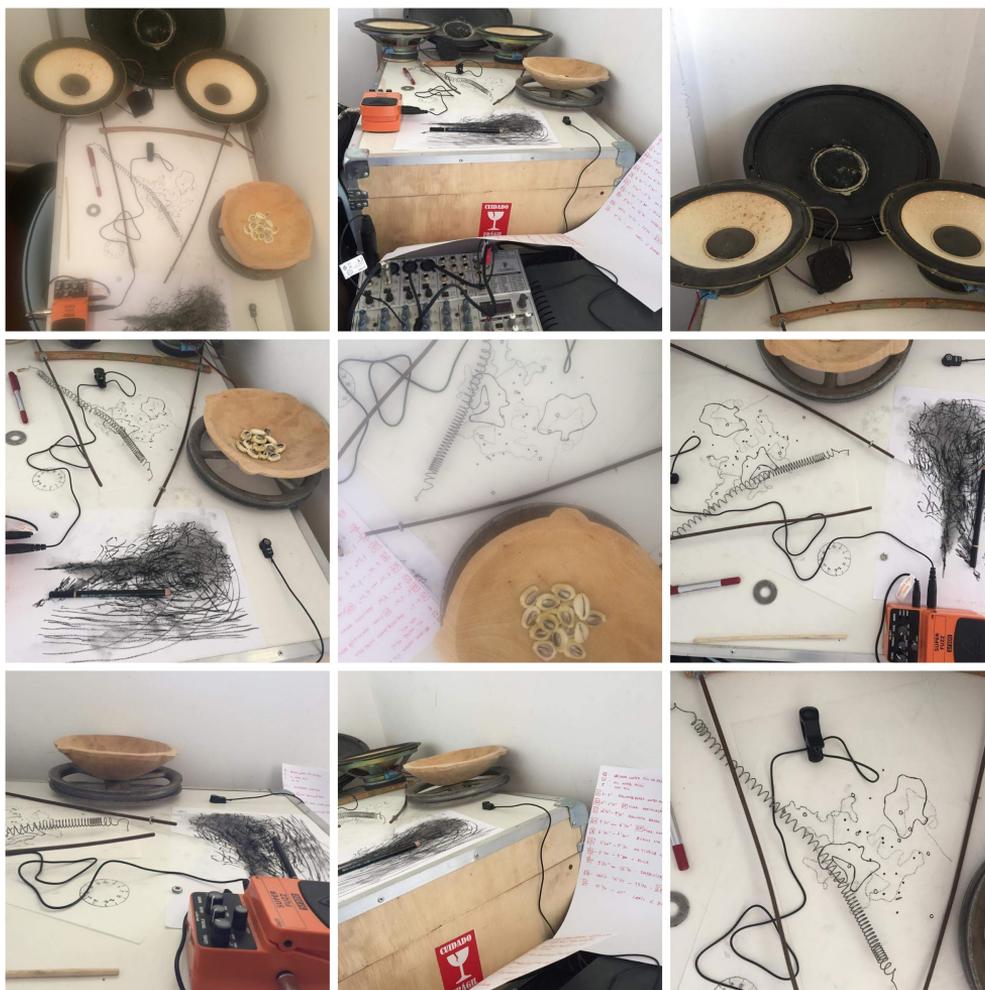

Figure 2. A series of different angles on Scarassatti's setup.

Scarassatti's sound sculpture approach somewhat diverged from Valério Fiel da Costa's pragmatic use of different objects meant to produce specific sound-types. Fiel da Costa used eight objects, namely: (1) a metal bottle rack, meant to produce metallic sound, friction textures, clicks and light resonances; (2) a key chain, producing high and bright sounds, clicks and tremolos; (3) a marble rotating inside a metal bowl, indicated in order to emit a tonal sound with varying speed loopings; (4) a knife, producing impetuous gestural sounds and frequency modulation with a

declamatory quality; (5) a crackling microphone; (6) a pencil on paper, providing an impetuous high-pitched gesture, with low looping dynamics; (7) a metal platter used as a percussion, whose resonance produces feedback; (8) a metal chair, meant to produce percussive sounds alongside the squeaky metallic effect produced when dragging the chair on the floor (Fig. 3). In relation to Fiel da Costa's setup, the loudspeaker provided two possible operations: increased intensity (resonance) and echo (texture).
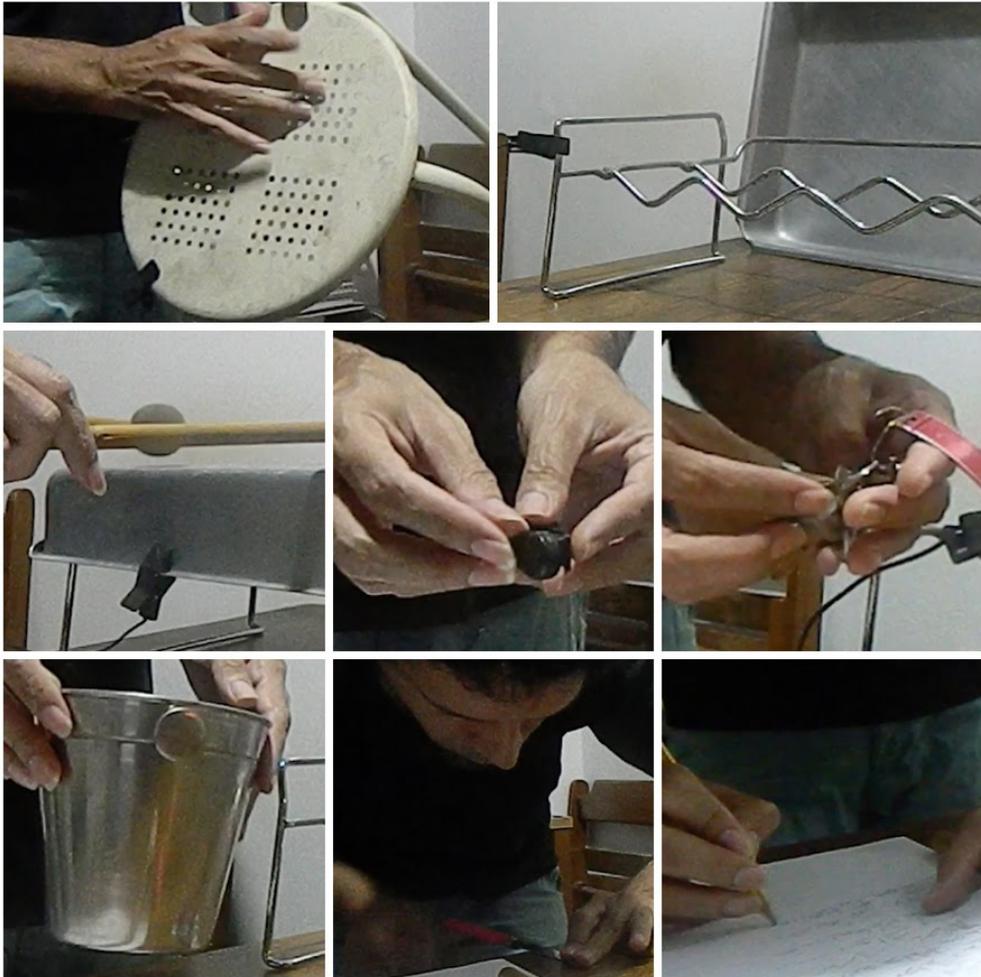

Figure 3. A panoramic view on the objects used by Fiel da Costa in his setup.

Marcello Messina's setup focused on the use of everyday objects from his continued domestic experience, with a specific (but not exclusive) attention to his son's toys. In this context, a creative renegotiation of these very same objects had already taken place in a pre-pandemic piece titled *Dott.ssa*, where a series of

asynchronous encounters between the toys and voices calling Messina's deceased mother is meant to reflect on a meeting – that between grandson and grandmother – that never happened because they did not make it in time.[5] In this sense, Messina's setup of Cage's *Cartridge Music* exists primarily in its intertextual relationship with the piece *Dott.ssa*, with an added layer regarding the pandemic, the precariousness of domestic spaces and equipment, the limited amount of time at disposal between family duties, etc. Locked in an office at the university, most of Messina's equipment was not reachable in a quarantine situation, therefore, while both Fiel da Costa and Scarassatti used clip-on contact mics, he had to use a cheap USB desktop microphone. The sound picked-up by the USB mic was then fed to a simple Pd patch where it was amplified, distorted, and played back by built-in laptop speakers (Fig 4) – this allowed for a decently loud recording despite the lack of proper mics and loudspeakers. On top of the toys, Messina also played Baoding balls, an electric toothbrush, a kitchen roll cardboard tube, etc.
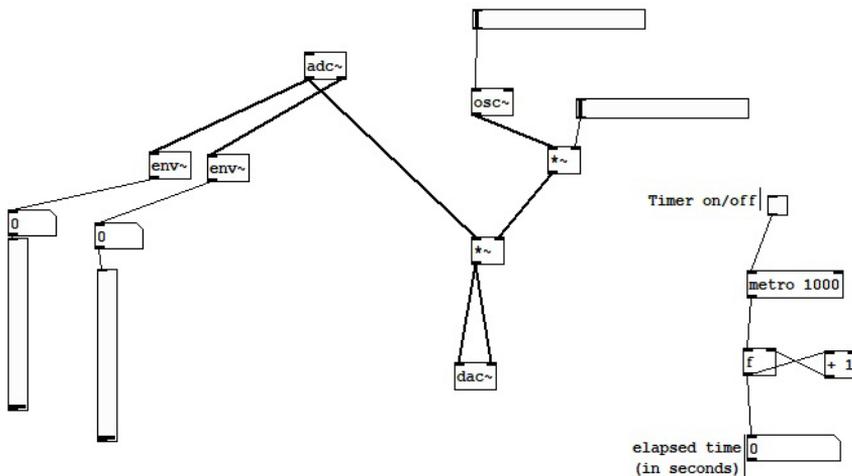

Figure 4. A snapshot of the Pd patch used by Messina in order to amplify and distort the picked-up sounds.

Putting the video together

As *Cartridge Music* is a modular piece, the overlapping of the three separately recorded layers ends up generating a random result. Our first idea in this sense contemplated the use of fingersnaps as cues at the beginning of each individual performance, in order to lock a specific synchronisation of the vertical encounters

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5 Audio available on https://youtu.be/4MGNXHet9mE.

between our respective actions and sounds. When editing the final video of the piece, however, we realised that syncing these initial cues was not the only way in which the piece could work vertically. Eventually, we found out that ignoring/cutting out the cues and allowing for a slightly different syncing of the three performances would produce a more dramatic effect in correspondence of crucial moments of the piece. Most notably, in our slightly de-synced setup, the piece ends with the three performers finishing their material and disappearing from the screen, one after each other in the following order: Fiel da Costa, Scarassatti, Messina. Arguably, this progressive exit from the video reproduces a sort of orchestral effect of progressive reduction to silence, as it were, from *tutti* to a collective *tacet*.

Final remarks

As mentioned above, our collective performance of John Cage's *Cartridge Music* took place in three different times and places, literally, in our own domestic spaces and in our own time. This asynchronous interaction was then collaged together with the help of video editing software, and, as noted above, the discrete quality of the three different performances allowed us to choose between multiple options in terms of vertical encounters between the events. Once we agreed on a final version of the three-way split-screen video, we packed it up as a collective performance, as a single "work", and sent it to the organisers of the Research Colloquium, for them to schedule a broadcast of the video, to be located within the temporal arrangements of the conference. When the video was broadcast on 1 June 2020, between 5.00 and 5.30 pm (UTC -3), a premiere of our performance took place, literally in no place, or at least in no physical space.

A combination of three separate performances, capable of being incorporated as a single artistic item, and to "happen" at a specific time as much as any other collective performance, our version of *Cartridge Music* – together with a plethora of other works produced remotely during these times of physical distancing – defies the implicit association between musical activity and synchronic/syntopic interaction. In this context, the "venue" as an apparently irrenunciable part of the live presentation of a musical work, dissolves as one of the "social paraphernalia" (Keller et al., 2010), whose regulatory function with respect to musical activities urgently needs questioning. At the same time, we need to ask ourselves whether simultaneous interaction is always the safest, more reasonable, and, especially, the only existing option for collective creative activities in music (Messina et al., 2019).

Finally, we want to consider the inherent criticalities of the field(s) of "experimental", "avant-garde" or simply "contemporary" music, both in terms of the discursive and programmatic limits of these rubrics (Rebhahn 2012; Fiel da Costa 2017; Messina 2019; Ciacchi 2020) and in terms of lack of social impact with audiences and followers (Foucault and Boulez 1985). In the context of such

a dematerialised and yet ubiquitous performance,[6] we were able to paradoxically appreciate an unprecedented participation on the part of the audience – part of this may be due to the fact that, even during live streaming performances of "erudite European music", listeners are allowed to interact discreetly with the rest of the audience through written comments, something that would be impossible within the rigid social rules of the concert hall, aimed at the literal cancellation of the listener in terms of its physiological and communicative functions.

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CARTRIDGE MUSIC IN THE QUARANTINE:
PRESENCE, ABSENCE, CONTINGENCY SETUPS
AND (DE-)TERRITORIALISED PERFORMANCES
(summary)

Between the end of May and the beginning of June, 2020, we performed individually, filmed, synced together, edited and presented a quarantine version of John Cage's *Cartridge Music*. Uploaded on YouTube, the performance was broadcast on 1 June, as part of the 4th Research Colloquium of the Postgraduate Programme in Music of the Federal University of Paraíba. Stranded at home since March, unable to reach our respective faculty offices/studios, and mostly left with domestic gear, kitchenware, sound-producing car equipment and our children's toys, we put together an emergency version of the piece, characterised by three dramatically different setups, each with its own spatialities and soundworlds. Importantly, our use of the signifier "emergency" here is meant to refer much more to the concrete condition of our existences in this particular situation, than to the contingential circumstances of this specific musical activity. In this paper, we discuss the piece by considering its preparation, performance, presentation and audience reception. We start off with a critical discussion of the Cagean dichotomy *experiment vs. experimental*, and proceed by identifying a set of crucial contradictions in Cage's model, mainly boiling down to the idea that indeterminacy is far from being a device for the liberation of the interpreter, but is rather a form of control over the interpreter's attitudes meant to ensure that, in a disciplined way, they be able to bring out sound results compatible with an ideal of non-authorship or even "freedom", not of the interpreter, but of the "sounds". Furthering our previous studies on the (de-)territorialisation of performance and on the territorial metaphors embedded in collaborative artistic interaction, we question the notions of "place" and "venue" in the context of a collective performance that happened in three different locations and of a subsequent première that did not happen in any tangible physical place at all. However, and in spite of the substantial de-territorialisation of our gig, we also consider a set of persisting spatial narratives that inscribe the performance in terms of both visually and aurally perceptible power relations. After all, (de-)territorialising performance means demobilising the standard expectation in terms of performers' behavior, and aiming at a (re-)territorialisation that takes into account, as structuring factors, their bodies, aptitudes, desires and effective and affective relationships with the place and time in which the musical event will take place. In the central section of the paper, we discuss in detail each individual setup, its particularities and contingencies. Importantly, we reflect on the slightly de-synced montage of the video, that allows the piece to end with the three performers finishing their material and disappearing from the screen, arguably, producing a dramatic orchestral effect of progressive reduction to silence. Finally, considering the inherent criticalities of the field(s) of "experimental", "avant-garde" or simply "contemporary" music, we assess the gains and losses of such a dematerialised and yet ubiquitous performance in terms of audience participation and appreciation.