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SPAM (AN)ARCHIVE: PERFORMING UNDER SURVEILLANCE

Abstract: Inspired by the attempt to disrupt data gathering and asking ourselves about "spam" digital practices as forms of resistance, the project *SPAM (An)Archive* brought together the work of the (post)composer and media artist Óscar Escudero and the collective SoundTrieb, whose collaboration took place digitally via Zoom and physically in Switzerland in 2021. Escudero's collaborative work in the last few years with the (post)composer and musicologist Belenish Moreno-Gil has been fruitful at a sociological and cultural level of analysis, beyond music aesthetics, as they both deal with social networks and digital behavior in their music theater compositions. Using Facebook as a digital stage, SoundTrieb's version of *[Custom #2] (a digital melodrama)* allowed performers to develop a double personalization of the piece, intervening their own social media profiles. This paper does not intend to discuss a theoretical approach to these artworks, but their subversive capability. Through a cultural analysis approach, this article recognizes the critical potential against the architecture of digital surveillance that they can achieve, while drawing attention to our complacency to ubiquitous technologies. For this purpose, I introduce notions such as DIY music and coded representation, but I also borrow concepts such as Brigitta Muntendorf's social composing and Escudero's spam art. This paper explores, through work examples by all the above-mentioned artists, recent models of compositional work that blur the line between the digital and the physical, the virtual and the real, the private and the public.

Keywords: Digital surveillance, dataveillance, spam art, contemporary music, digital performance, performance analysis.

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On July 5, 1937, a new product was introduced to the market. It was during the Great Depression in Austin that Jay Hormel repacked and vacuum-sealed unwanted pork meat in a can: "spiced ham", aka "spam". Although the target population in the advertising campaign were housewives, freeing them of spending time in the kitchen with a recipe book on how to use it, Spam became a global product thanks to or because of World War II: it fed the US army and was sent in aid packages to other countries and soon became a dependable food in the postwar period. The ubiquity of the product is what Monty Python's sketch of 1970 refers to: in a British cafe a woman bursts as the waitress recites a menu mainly based on Spam. This unwanted presence gave name to the unsolicited mail that fills our junkboxes. Ironically, Hormel recognized in a 1945 interview for *The New Yorker* that he had a "scurrilous file" in which he collected hate letters by soldiers complaining about eating spam for all their meals (Gill 1945, 15).

The history of spam resonates as the backstory in this paper, which documents the artistic research project *SPAM (An)Archive* funded by the University of Bern and the Burgergemeinde Bern and hosted by the Hochschule Luzern – Musik, of which the composer and media artist Óscar Escudero and the musician collective SoundTrieb were part. It mainly consisted in the production of three audiovisual works from Escudero's *[Custom #]* series and *Flat Time Trilogy*, combining live interpretation and video projection. Its title is undoubtedly inspired by Escudero's motto "Spam Art for a Spam Society", which plays with its edible and digital meaning, as constant irrelevant information mashed as Kebab's meat is consumed every minute. *SPAM (An)Archive* engaged with the topic of digital surveillance and the use of social media in the new music practice, questioning the subversive and resistant character of Escudero's DIY pieces and involving musicians as more than mere interpreters in the making of a multimedia artwork. Therefore, the project could be described as politically driven, as the topic of surveillance cannot be approached without discussing its social consequences. Surveillance artworks try to unveil and help to discern vigilant systems, especially in a moment in which technological determinism is seen with optimism and new technologies appear to be harmless, just as appropriate tools to solve everyday problems, such as urban mobility or the shopping basket. The artistic approach to digital surveillance is widely varied, with some displaying the user's complicity in a critical or playful manner and others attempting to interrupt data collection, as in hacking arts. This paper does not intend to discuss a theoretical approach to digital surveillance, but to reflect on the subversive capability of artistic works, discussing their critical potential against the architecture of digital surveillance and drawing attention to our complacency to ubiquitous technologies. Geolocation and data mining shape a new cosmology in which these mining algorithms try to anticipate, if not generate, any consumer's need. Like the actual spam, communication technologies, and therefore

digital surveillance, were also originally used for military purposes. However, it became a participative model, in which digital users are monitoring each other as our lives are voluntarily being published. That is to say, we are our own spam. All this content creation struggles to transcend ordinary life, to matter. But eventually, these unstructured and large datasets, the so-called big data, differ from the traditional understanding of the archive, as its size surpasses common software tools to manage it and requires analytics and relational technologies. These methods extract value from user behavior to enable predictive analytics and other forms of business intelligence. Unlike the traditional archive, a storage of information at some point considered valuable for its eventual reading and interpretation, the Web 2.0 allows anyone to tag what they just published, assigning it a place in the virtual storage room. Of course, errors and biases affect the gathering in both cases, but the lack of a figure of authority and its replacement by algorithms might permit us to talk about a customized storage room with million bytes of spam content, an *anarchive* where trivial censorship does not allow to show female nipples but fake news is commonplace. This undefined notion of "anarchive" that also entitled the project responds to its experimental frame, here interpreted as the documentation of surplus information, ultimately stimulating new modes of creation, production, and codification.

In this study I examine the creative strategies within the *SPAM (An)Archive* project and discuss some ideas that were present during the whole process, while addressing key aspects from a socio-cultural perspective. I will briefly introduce here Paulo de Assis' notion of "musical strata", since all musical material is an assemblage of different layers or *strata:* "*substrata* (socio-historical and technological contexts), *parastrata* (documentary sources produced by the composer or close collaborators), *epistrata* (editions, writings, theoretical discourses), *metastrata* (future performances), and *allostrata* (extra-disciplinary or not-directly-related materials)" (De Assis 2018, 196; 2018, 39–40). All these layers of analysis contribute to the understanding of a musical work. In this paper I am specifically addressing *substrata*, *epistrata* and *allostrata,* while trying to illustrate political features in the relationship between new music and social networks. Therefore, I introduce notions such as DIY music and coded representation, but I also borrow concepts such as social composing and spam art. My own role within the project went beyond the research observer, as I also contributed to the online performance with situationally created posts with the intention to spread what we were doing. I avoided positioning myself as lead artist but created a thematic framework by giving inputs to trigger individual contributions in a respectful manner. As the project organizer, I was invited to present the results in a concert-talk together with Óscar Escudero within the *[e]motion* Graduate Conference on Science and Technology of the Arts held by the Escola das Artes of the Universidade Católica Portuguesa in December 2021. Unfortunately,

pandemic measures made it impossible for SoundTrieb to perform live, but we were able to make a complete presentation later in May 2022 at the Conservatorio Superior de Música in Saragossa, where SoundTrieb also presented *#AsPresentAsPossible* by Brigitta Muntendorf, thus expanding the project. I would not claim that the anxiety of being watched is what moves all the artists involved in the project, but they certainly express the need to understand its logic and how it materializes in a concert stage situation.

Visual Music: DIY

Besides the overriding question behind the project about how to resist automated surveillance, a more pragmatic issue was: how to achieve the involvement of interpreters in the creative process? Much more discussed on the field of popular music, new technologies have challenged the making, distributing, and experiencing of music, presenting it as a DIY business. It sounds democratic, but it nevertheless hides a complex system based on allowed surveillance in which internet users are merely customers whose choices are processed to give them back what they should listen to. This is called platform capitalism.[2] Within the abundance of music artists trying to get more likes and views to better their metrics and reach popular recognition in order to overcome the lack of institutional support, self-promotion posts have a sad counterpart. In his essay *Sad by design*, Geert Lovink reminds us what Herbert Marshall McLuhan explored as "extensions of man". In the online context, emotions and self-esteem are subject to the dopamine effect of the pleasure of scrolling or swiping, leaving us the feeling of being insignificant.

> Sadness expresses the growing gap between the self-image of a perceived social status and the actual precarious reality. The temporary dip, described here under the code name 'sadness', can best be understood as a mirror phenomenon of the self-promotion machine that constructs the links for us (Lovink 2019).

It is hard to deny that platform capitalism has worsen human communication and social interaction. A quick click on "interested" or "like" in an overloaded events calendar might be the most common reaction to self-promoting campaigns. More specifically within the new music creation, we are witnessing how composers and music collectives struggle for visibility on social media. They are doing so by combining private and professional information as the result of the

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2   Nick Srnicek defines platforms as an infrastructure in which "customers, advertisers, service providers, producers, suppliers, and even physical objects" can interact, but also offering "a series of tools that enable to build their own products, services, and marketplaces" (2017, 43).

so-called self-branding strategy, which is in fact the topic of the first piece of the *[Custom #] series* from Escudero. However, even if I do not address this interesting sociological feature of the cultural field related to marketing and networking on this occasion, I believe there is a connection between this exposure and the creative process.

Following the Frankfurt School idea that choice is an illusion within the culture industry (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002),[3] the reactions we get on social media are politically driven actions as our network of friends and followers reacts to our (re)actions. In that sense, one might like an upcoming event organized by a Facebook-friend just to appear connected to a certain social group. This structurally overdetermined activity undermines any democratic discourse and feeds a more gremial interest that in the end only benefits the succeeding platform. All our reactions, likes, interests expressed via clicks have economic value as they enlarge big data's sets of information. Indeed, self-control and visual self-disciplining of internet users play an important role. Hito Steyerl elaborates on this new regime of representation, as she analyzes the shift in modes of self-production and adverts how "hegemony is increasingly internalized, along with the pressure to conform and perform, as is the pressure to represent and be represented" (2012, 167).

More and more composers are taking advantage of new technologies to explore our hybrid present, in which both virtuality and physicality are part of the same continuum. The usage of video recordings, online material from platforms like YouTube, field recordings or other audiovisual inputs in new music is increasingly acknowledged as an obvious choice for composers. As Nicolas Nova and Jöel Vacheron remind us, hybridization or remixing practices became a popular tendency in music in the 2000s (2018).[4] The same happened in the realm of the Web 2.0, as those new applications reproduced the same combining logic, resulting in the era of mashups. It is gradually becoming possible to observe how composition is shifting towards communities of practice (Wenger 1998), combining reflexive interpretation that goes beyond the standards of just

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3   "Industry is interested in human beings only as its customers and employees and has in fact reduced humanity as a whole, like each of its elements, to this exhaustive formula. Depending on which aspect happens to be paramount at the time, ideology stresses plan or chance, technology or life, civilization or nature. As employees people are reminded of the rational organization and must fit into it as common sense requires. As customers they are regaled, whether on the screen or in the press, with human interest stories demonstrating freedom of choice and the charm of not belonging to the system. In both cases they remain objects" (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002, 118).

4   They wrote about algorithmic culture as a current phenomenon consisted in "automate research, assembly, and creation of content" and explore what might be called "bot art": algorithmic procedures and automated combinations of artistic content. On remixing practices see also Cano 2018.

rehearsing and performing live, and requires a much more complicated logistic work and online gatherings.[5]

In this paper I mainly focus on Escudero's *[Custom #2]*, an original DIY proposal that accepts the current logic of our mediatized world and challenges its signification. However, as SoundTrieb performed Brigitta Muntendorf's *#AsPresentAsPossible* last may in Saragossa and I borrow her notion of "social composing", it is worth introducing here the nature of this piece in contrast to Escudero and Belenish Moreno-Gil's pieces. Acknowledging the above-mentioned perversity of broadcasting through social media "self-branding" publications and being ourselves the objects and subjects of freelance marketing campaigns, Muntendorf, whose piece does not necessarily foresee a personalization of the video material, works in line with Steyerl's observation about the Internet's walkout. More and more people avoid representation and try to keep their offline lives far from the online exhibitionism:

> In our digital-real continuum the existence and "raison d'être" is constituted by visibility – while invisibility is equivalent to non-existence. In #AsPresentAsPossible the musicians define their presence by a vanishing self, entering the stage without instruments and exploring the space between defining and being defined between projecting and being projection. 'I'm a white page, in a soundscape, on a wide stage, I'm a white page' (Muntendorf 2017).

In Saragossa, SoundTrieb's member Juan José Faccio went on stage all dressed in white and his body was mapped with Carola Schaal's digital representation. Her body in his body played with strangeness and even stressed the idea of being voluntarily a "white page", completely in consonance with the statements the performer reproduces live:

> I wish WE could breathe like someone who never breathed before
> I wish WE could breathe like someone who never breathed before
> I wish WE COULD SEE like someone who never SAW before
> I wish WE COULD BE like someone WHO HAS never BEEN before
> (Muntendorf 2017).

On the contrary and following the Internet's logic, Escudero and Moreno-Gil's DIY pieces require the personalization of the video material, inserting close-ups provided by the performers, as well as their Facebook public records. This process assures the artists, as long as they are co-editors of their own publishing house, the revenues not just for the purchase of the score, but of each new

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5   Etienne Wenger specifies which characteristics define "communities of practice": mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire.

video editing. But this new composer's role must be understood from its aesthetical and political implications: the interpreter obtains a more participative and creative space which ultimately permits his or her self-realization and subversion, but this model also identifies the interpreter as a "user of the piece" (Óscar Escudero, n.d.). Indeed, BELOS Editions was created as the result of mimicking the formal processes of any social platform, which includes customization in a broader sense: personalized as non-transferable product but also to be treated as customer.[6] According to Muntendorf's definition of social composing, this model replicates the logic of platform capitalism. It is not just about reproducing visually the "user-friendly" and attractive interface these technologies provide, but to mirror all features of "usership" like tracking personal data after previously signing an agreement form, being consonant with the financial, legal and ideological behavior of those corporations.

SPAM is not DADA

> Every product of disgust capable of becoming a negation of the family is DADA; protest with the fists of one's whole being in destructive action: DADA; acquaintance with all the means hitherto rejected by sexual prudishness of essay compromise and good manners: DADA; abolition of logic, dance of those who are incapable of creation: DADA; every hierarchy and social equation established for valued by our valets: DADA; every object, all objects, feelings and obscurities, every apparition and the precise shock of parallel lines, are means for the battle of: DADA; the abolition of memory: DADA; the abolition of archaeology: DADA; the abolition of prophets: DADA; the abolition of the future: DADA; the absolute and indisputable belief in every god that is an immediate product of spontaneity: DADA […]. Liberty: DADA DADA DADA; the roar of contorted pains, the interweaving of contraries and of all contradictions, freaks and irrelevancies: LIFE ("Dada Manifesto 1918" 2013, 13).

The word "DADA" in the 1918 Manifesto could be easily replaced by Escudero's notion of "spam": "product of disgust", "abolition of logic", and "the interweaving of contraries and of all contradictions, freaks and irrelevancies", also define how spam is perceived by internet users. But there are also other shared resonances with Escudero's artistic statement. As already approached in the previous section, there is a social and economic equation that permeates the realm of the aesthetic. Furthermore, the "abolition of archaeology", "abolition of memory", and "abolition of the future" work in line with the project's

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6   This play on words is borrowed from Óscar Escudero.

anarchival perspective, as it stands up for the presentism that characterizes our times. And finally, the vanguard movement and Escudero's artistic practice are both traversed by affective features. I will address these two key aspects later. For now, it is not the purpose of this section to draw a comparison between an artistic movement like Dadaism and an artistic statement like "Spam Art for a Spam Society". However, the underlined features might help to understand the core idea of "spam art" and suggest a genealogy in which DADA became spam in our present times.

Escudero and Moreno-Gil are concerned with the augmented reality or virtual/physical dichotomy critique and take a digital and physical concept such as "spam" to point out how the Internet has altered our interactions outside the Web. In this sense, the subjects of the digital archive are at the center of their critical and aesthetic approach. As previously explained, Escudero and Moreno-Gil's pieces require the customization of its visual material by inserting portrait shots by the performers and some of their Facebook data. With SoundTrieb's *[Custom #2]* version we wanted to involve interpreters in a more active manner promoting the *spamization* of the Web: they were able to create visual content and intervene within the frame of a common topic that would be finally edited by the composer. The aim did not consist of dynamiting the field of art, but rather it tried to reflect through artistic creation the absence of a clear border between the real and the virtual, and the understanding of our present life as perpetual spam.

> I can't think of a more genuine way of our time than knowing, sharing, modeling our physical appearance, choosing our vote, eating or fucking based on the entropic logic of *spam*, nor probably a profession that generates it in huge quantities more than an artist. How to activate eroticism and strangeness through that stimulus turned into kebab meat, food for Saturday nights – where the *productive nihil* still reigns among mortals for a few hours, is a different matter. But how not to see in that reheated pasta, in its irresistible indefinition, which is neither 100% everything nor 100% anything, an opportunity? Just as the structure of *post-flesh* proteins changes with each twist of the skewer, the material that makes up the *spamundo* remains erodible, but in a relaxed society like ours, is not precisely that the gateway for change, as it is what understands it better without provoking an immunological reaction? More *spam*? (Escudero 2021).[7]

Not differently, Hito Steyerl writes about our spam culture:

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7   My translation. Original document shared by the artist.

> In a few hundred thousand years, extraterrestrial forms of intelligence may incredulously sift through our wireless communications. But imagine the perplexity of those creatures when they actually look at the material. Because a huge percentage of the pictures inadvertently sent off into deep space is actually spam. Any archaeologist, forensic, or historian – in this world or another – will look at it as our legacy and our likeness, a true portrait of our times and ourselves (Steyerl 2012, 161).

Spam art goes beyond the simplistic idea of remixing or relocating data as the subversive strategy in Dadaism and tries to replicate the logic of social platforms to create content. The selected material is transformed and reorganized to produce newer contributions, even if sometimes they have unforeseeable consequences that escape the artist's will. According to this, *spamizing* something that is already spam, in the sense of contributing to a mash-up of apparently disorganized content only navigable through biased algorithms, would become an inadvertently action and an intelligent tactical move. The claim that we need more spam is the logical consequence to Elise Morrison's reminder that we are benefiting from "user-friendly personal gadgets and software systems" that are "the fruits and spoils of war" (2013, 12). This narrow line between commercial and martial logic is what permit artists to rethink tactically how to intervene these sophisticated technologies. Reflecting on these topics, Brigitta Muntendorf wrote:

> Affect through participation, communication through sharing in mixed, permeable realities – these are the social platforms of the now real-digital spaces and their communication models within which interaction processes between information and social resonance are explored, discarded, lived, perceived as controlling or liberating, and used or abused. Out of these models important social and artistic questions have to be re-imagined such as the construction of identities and communities, or the definition of presence and attendance, the private and the public, and the possibilities of sensual experiences within digital artificiality (Muntendorf 2015).

Within this frame, she locates her concept of "social composing", a "perceptive unit that searches for strategies of articulation in order to reflect" our contemporary real-digital balance, suggesting even the possibility of contesting and acknowledging the controversial nature of the interplay between artist and user. Muntendorf also differentiates two approaches to the relationship between social media and composing: the use of social media as compositional material out of the platform are works *about* social media, insofar as they operate without its communication model; and the user-generated content as part of the composition process. She recognizes that this second model has prominent examples in

the commercial realm, as it also happened with the DIY music. Nevertheless, Escudero and Moreno-Gil's works definitely fit in this category and question the traditional role between composer-interpreter, as it also does their artistic partnership within the new music world, blurring notions such as authorship and agency.

Coded Representation

There is some sort of "database aesthetics" in the work of Escudero and Moreno-Gil. Lev Manovich already addressed this topic in his essay *The Language of New Media*, in which he discusses that new media objects organize content and form without any specific narrative purpose (2001, 218–221). This does not mean that there is no narrative at all, but the traditional linear concept has been redefined. According to this, the video projection in the *[Custom #] series* reproduces the navigation through Facebook's feeds, including the interactive multiple trajectories each link provides. This could be considered a *hypernarrative* example, as long as it results in "a series of connected events caused or experienced by actors" (Manovich 2001, 227).[8] Escudero and Moreno-Gil are interested in the principle of presence in digital representation while performing live. Who, when and where are essential information inputs and work as coordinates in their work, especially in the *Flat Time Trilogy*, a set of solo pieces with video and electronics.

Facebook consists of a website potentially to-be-updated by its users on a daily basis: photos, videos, texts, clicking on ads, all of them carrying metadata like geolocation, date and even the device model from which we accessed the platform. Despite the possibility to modify this content, the user's real presence vanishes in his/her virtual alter ego, being this any differentiating attitude at all. The binomic "physicality-virtuality", on which Ferran Planas Pla focuses on in his paper "Composing Social Media. The Representation of the Physicality-Virtuality Continuum in Óscar Escudero and Belenish Moreno-Gil's Works" (2022), must be perceived as the tension and inconsistency of the actual. This author analyzes how concepts such as "simultaneity, hyperreality, flat time and narcotisation and absorption" are used by the artistic duo to address the relationship between the digital and the physical environment of each performance. Paraphrasing Escudero about the *[Custom #] series*, sound works as the axiom between all elements to grant the simultaneity during the live performance, in which the screen and the musicians are clearly separated on stage. Differently, the *Flat Time Trilogy* integrates the performers' bodies by mapping them and

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8   Manovich is in fact quoting Mieke Bal's *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

requiring the bodily interaction with what is happening in the screen. Although Planas' essay is an overwhelming analysis with which one could not disagree, and as this paper exposes how SoundTrieb's *[Custom #2]* version was developed, it is necessary to punctuate an important feature about their staging proposal. Planas introduces Jean Baudrillard's notion of "hyperreality", as Escudero himself refers to the French author, and states:

> The representation of the subject through the profile on social media or through their digital identity is, therefore, a simulacrum of the subject that is as real as their own body. In its turn, the physical subject can also be understood as a simulacrum, since it is through its forms of representation that it is perceived and therefore exists. In this way, the subject himself is constituted of simulacra, since the reference to an original does not exist, but has an autopoietic nature through the representation that permeates the totality of its forms of being in the world, both physically and digitally (Planas Pla 2022, 86).

He later comments on the lighting setup:

> […] we can see how the performers on stage are illuminated with coloured lights that only show their silhouettes, while their faces projected on the screen above them are completely clear. This scenography places the physical subject on a different layer. While the idea of the work is to show the body of the performers and their video representations with the same clarity to demonstrate the simultaneity between the two dimensions, in this case, physical bodies are relegated to the background and are presented more as the shadows of the subjects than as bodies, thus demonstrating the equally (un)real and (un)tangible nature of the physical and the virtual (Planas Pla 2022, 86).

Indeed, the shadows also converts the performers in two dimensional figures, exactly as their *alter egos* on the screen, emphasizing the ambiguity of presence. However, this appropriate analysis deserves contextualization. Given that the entire project was carried out during the most restrictive months of the Covid-19 pandemic, the scenic solution sought to make explicit the isolation that the historical context offered. This separation of the bodies by means of improvised plastic booths was enhanced by the lighting setup designed by Corentin Marillier, who devised the luminous signal in relation to the sound interventions of each performer. Likewise, and in the same way that the dark and dry sound color of the performance was chosen, the scenography proposed by the collective aimed to enter into dialogue with the theme of the piece – *(a digital melodrama)* – as well as with the gestural interventions of the video projection.
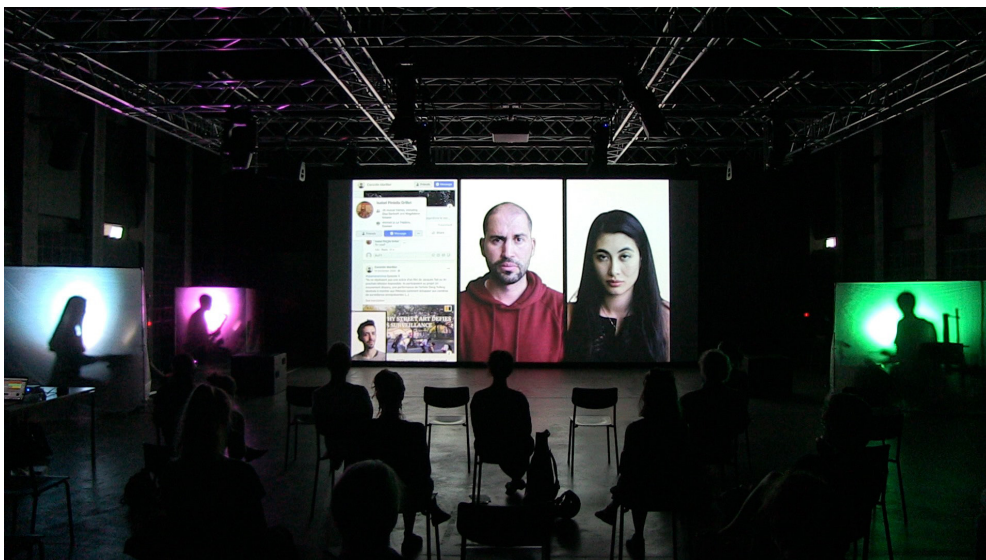
Figure 1. *[Custom #2] (a digital melodrama)* performed by SoundTrieb on June, 27th 2021 at the Hochschule Luzern – Musik within the *New Music Days*.

Figure 2. *[Custom #2] (a digital melodrama)* performed by SoundTrieb on May, 11th 2022 at the Conservatorio Superior de Música in Saragossa within the *GLITCHERS Transmedia Music Day*.

Considering this thematic approach, I would like to discuss further the melodramatic hypernarrative of the piece. Michael Brailey interviewed Escudero and Moreno-Gil within the frame of the performance series "The New Anxiety", in which Darren Gallacher performed *[HOC]* 14 days before SoundTrieb in 2021 in Manchester. They explained that their works reflect on not just FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) but FONBS (Fear of Not Becoming Spam), which is, as they say, the "new state of play". Both the *Flat Time Trilogy* and the *[Custom #] series* represent these fears through the time-killing behavior produced by social platforms. Acknowledging that we continuously generate "(ir)relevant products" and contribute to the progressive "algorithmization of life", both artists claim that anyone's sadness is always individual (Virtuallyreality, n.d.).

By melodrama I understand a pathetic and emotionally driven (hyper)narrative, even overacted. Philosopher Olivier Marchart has argued why melodrama is the political theatrical genre *par excellence*, concluding that, as in the revolutionary speech, the focus of the emotions that are put into motion are not those of the individual subject but of the collective (Marchart 2004). That is to say that melodrama is not about the inner drama but social relationships. As I interpret in the resulting version of *[Custom #2]*, the performance ends up creating a conflictual relationship built upon digital voyeurism, guilt, tension and isolation. We have been warned about the mental health consequences of spending time on screen activities. Geert Lovink begins his reflection by quoting Jean M. Twenge's observation on the field, as she saw a decrease in social skills and happiness in teenagers to whom having their phones close while they are sleeping gives them comfort (Twenge 2017).[9] But Lovink gives us a better clue to approach Escudero's work by bringing Audrey Wollen's *Sad Girl Theory* into discussion. Wollen claims that sadness is a feminist strategy as sorrow can also disrupt systems of domination (Watson 2015).[10] Thus, paraphrasing Wollen, melodrama should be recognized as an act of resistance, and we have the right to be as "goddamn" melodramatic as we want.[11]

What this melodramatic piece reminds us of is also the "exhausted self" the augmented reality results in.

> Omnipresent social media places a claim on our elapsed time, our fractured lives. We're all sad in our very own way. As there are no lulls or quiet moments anymore, the result is fatigue, depletion and loss of energy. We're becoming obsessed with waiting. How long have you been

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9   I am paraphrasing Jean M. Twenge's quote from research.

10   Wollen contextualizes sadness within affect and gender theories, turning it into a political strategy. However, she is aware that social media uses emotions as coded data for economic profit.

11   Original quote is a paraphrase by Tracy Watson: "be as goddamn miserable as we want."

forgotten by your love ones? Time, meticulously measured on every app, tells us right to our face. Chronos hurts. Should I post something to attract attention and show I'm still here? Nobody likes me anymore. As the random messages keep relentlessly piling in, there's no way to halt them, to take a moment and think it all through (Lovink 2019).

The video projection displays often the question "are you there?" and we are able to listen to a fragment of John Lennon's "Jealous Guy" mixed with the electronics channel. Lovink's essay continues analyzing behavioral patterns and the anxiety caused by different social platforms. Even if Escudero's piece is mainly focused on Facebook, Lovink's analysis is in line with it. As we can infer from the video, we log in every day waiting for something, a message, a tag, better metrics, but also someone else's post that fits our expectations to be able to react. The same expectation that somebody may answer (or at least like or react) generates "online despair" and "incites jealousy, anxiety and suspicion", which ultimately will have an influence in the offline relationship (Lovink 2019).
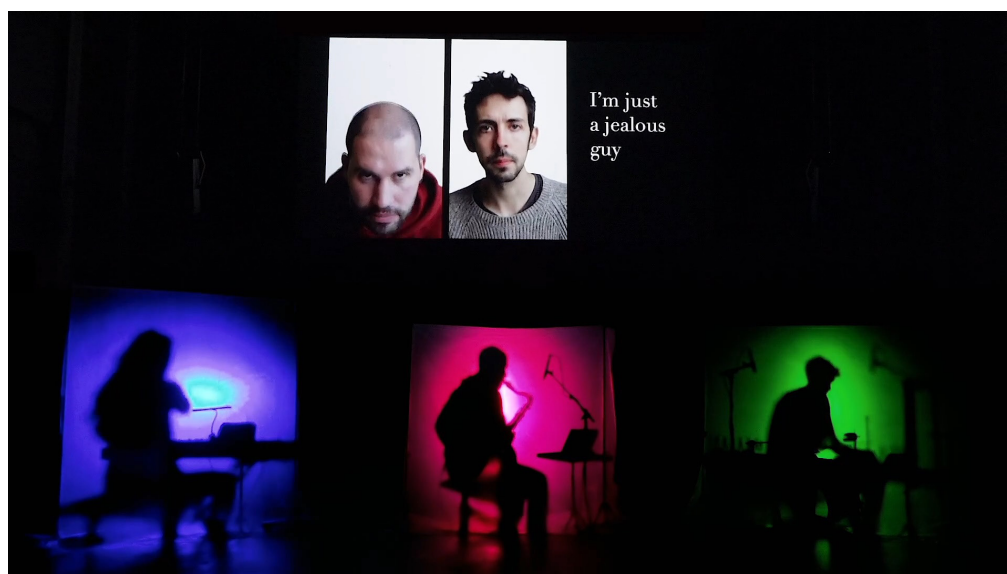

Figure 3. *[Custom #2] (a digital melodrama)* video recording by SoundTrieb filmed in December 2022.

Another example of social media anxiety occurs in *[HOC],* one of the *Flat Time Trilogy* solo pieces, in which the percussionist is confronted with an ever-present situation of an omitted action alluded constantly by the voice-over in different verb tenses. When we finally hear the stroke on the snare drum, it triggers an audio recording of frightened voices during a rescue of migrants in

the Mediterranean Sea. The same simulacrum and simultaneity as in *[Custom #2]* operate in this piece: digital or physical, reality keeps on going and fatalities occur while we keep posting repeatedly in our social media platforms. More in connection with the "anarchival" nature of the project, referred to by Escudero and Moreno-Gil with their own notion of "flat time", the ever-present floating information in the Internet is to be understood as an eternal (an)archive, which nobody organizes, but in which everything can be located by the coordinates "where", "when", and "who". We can find and read any past publication on any social media feed (with the exception of ephemeral stories on Instagram) with the intensity of a present action.[12] There is an ongoing scholarly discussion about "presentism" among historians, being François Hartog noted due to his notion of "regimes of historicity", that is to say how we relate to the past, present, and future; although his historical genealogy and when our contemporary society became "presentist" is open to discussion. Avoiding a controversial detour, the Internet and especially the Web 2.0., with its social networks at its peak in the last twenty years, surely contributed to the shift in our perception of time. Following Wolfang Ernst's essay *Das Rumoren der Archive*, Rudi Laermans and Pascal Gielen talked about "mesh-works" instead of "networks" to stress the idea of Ernst's "digital an-archive" (Laermans and Gielen 2007). They summarize it as follows:

> […] the digital an-archive is synonymous with an ever expanding and constantly renewed mass of information of which no representation at all can be made. This "sublime" reality – or, rather: this "virtuality" – can not be ordered or catalogued: it is a non-archived archive, and therefore an an-archive, a literally metaphorical archive (Laermans and Gielen 2007).

Furthermore, both authors also highlight the performative nature of this concept, no matter if "linked with the exercise of power" or related to "tactical navigating practices", as it means that the very exercise of use and re-use information generates immediately new data (Laermans and Gielen 2007).

Gilles Deleuze published a short essay in 1990 in which he described how society moved from a "disciplinary society", as unveiled by Michel Foucault, towards a "society of control" (Deleuze 1992, 3–7). According to Deleuze, this societal model operates in open networks in which people participate freely and forms of control are ubiquitous: data gathering and predictive analytics is where power lies on. Social media companies sustain gigantic databases in which the

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12   Also, Ferran Planas Pla alludes to flat time "as an archive that breaks down the time barriers between present and past, allowing immediate access to past events without the need for linearity" (2022, 89).

private and the public are no longer separated. New technologies increasingly require geolocation data and we voluntarily grant it by accepting their terms of use. Somehow this perpetual "logged-in" status transforms our physical context into a mere input for our digital parallel world (Vehlo Diogo 2016, 7). By inserting Google Earth captures of each venue in their videos, Escudero and Moreno-Gil play with drone aesthetics to stress our digital reality during the performance. The decision of including aerial images instead of Google Maps provides the chance to play with its three-dimensional and high-resolution representation and the zoom-in perspective, enabling the artists to create a drone-like portrayal for a concrete event that illustrates the ongoing process, which will ultimately become just a code in the database. Ironically, the artists play with this constant reminder of real spatial coordinates while individuals' interactions occur in a progressively digital, and therefore *deterritorialized,* world. Indeed, cartographic applications not only became the "fundamental matrix" of any other platform, but "ended up creating a comprehensive map of where we are in relation to the network" (Vehlo Diogo 2016, 64). If taking into consideration Michel Foucault's concepts of biopolitics and the *panopticon*, our current world would determinate that both power tools are deeply entangled, as nothing escapes the capabilities of the Internet, leaving no room left for the incommensurability of life, where every atom has been replaced by a bit in the digital landscape (Negroponte 1995).

I already comment on DIY music and how the interpreters are being more and more integrated in the compositional process. *[Custom #2]* differs from other pieces by the Spanish artistic duo, as it has an open instrumental trio setup. The score consists of several signs placed rhythmically, being partially a graphic score, and leaving the performers the sound choice: "[it] is understood as a frame in which they are completely indexed, following certain 'game rules' and finding a scenic and sonorous solution" (Óscar Escudero, n.d.). Following this, sound could be understood as the result of self-given rules by the performers, but still identifiable within the whole structure of the musical work. The composer acts not as the sovereign power, as in a master-pupil relationship. On the contrary, he creates the space that aims to potentiate innovative performance practices. Clearly referencing Jacques Rancière's "empancipated spectator", de Assis concludes there must be first an "emancipated performer".[13] If reading Rancière, this agency was implicit:

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13   This notion has become very popular in the last few years. Probably with mutual unawareness, Juan José Faccio Peláez, one of SoundTrieb's members, discussed it in his master's thesis. Although de Assis focuses on past musical works, Faccio was only concerned about new music: "El intérprete emancipado: Hacia una estética del concierto de música contemporánea" (MA Thesis, Universidad de Barcelona, 2014).

> What there is are simply scenes of *dissensus*, capable of surfacing in any place and at any time. [...] It means that every situation can be cracked open from the inside, reconfigured in a different regime of perception and signification. To reconfigure the landscape of what can be seen and what can be thought is to alter the field of the possible and the distribution of capacities and incapacities. […] This is what a process of political subjectivation consists in: in the action of uncounted capacities that crack open the unity of the given and the obviousness of the visible, in order to sketch a new topography of the possible (Rancière 2009, 48–49).

It is the interpreter's role to join the discussion about the composer-performer's relationship and struggle for a place of enunciation not just on stage, but within the production process:

> The fundamental step, then, is the passage from a passive reproduction of scores to an adventurous experimentation with all the available materials, taking real decisions, redistributing relations, changing how a given work is perceived, distributed, communicated. […] It is crucial to have performers who think, who intellectually engage with the problems and delusions of their own time, who creatively suggest new modes of organising knowledge, and that effectively operate transformations in society (De Assis 2018, 199).

SoundTrieb's *[Custom #2]* version worked in this direction and required a double personalization of the video material according to the project's overarching question on how to perform resistance, instead of leaving this task solely to the composer. The collective had to post on a regular basis anything they wanted related to the main topic of automated surveillance or dataveillance with a melodramatic tone. This was one the greatest challenges of the whole project, as creating subversive participation and behaving disciplined but disobedient was understood more as a troll-like activity than a *Trojan* horse, by no means a virus but a tactical move. What I witnessed during this posting activity by the interpreters showed a lack of general artistic and aesthetic education within the classical music field: during the process some musicians hesitated and showed reluctance to this requirement as they felt under pressure and did not want to pollute their own social media feeds, be tagged as political artists, or be misunderstood by their Facebook friends. In fact, one of the musicians abandoned the project arguing she only used Facebook for promotional reasons. But are not often ads digressive, provoking, and innovative, but also reflective and emotionally touching? In fact, the problem was the understanding of the word "political" itself, so they were not sure about what the content of their posts should be and instead of triggering creativity, this requirement played against inspiration.

While the original idea of *spamizing* Facebook was to create an emancipatory space, in which random statements against surveillance capitalism serve to the hypernarrative of the video, in the end musicians withdrew to their position as interpreters waiting for step-by-step instructions that they should execute without compromising their own digital profiles. Hence, Muntendorf stresses the artistic confrontation and fragile corpus of social compositions, as the most important instrument is also "the most historically and socially influenced", the performer (Muntendorf 2015). She discusses how composers are confronted with interpreters concerned about performing according to their trained skills and pursuit of perfection. However, social composing is interested in the person behind the instrument, focusing on amplifying his/her own experience. Similarly, de Assis calls for an emancipated performer even in relation to traditional classical music, as the image of musical works is an established entity understood as completely closed artistic material.

We surpassed this issue with a tactical set: we discussed the topic via online meeting, shared readings and prepared strategies, a calendar scheduling all posts and even a draft, as posts had to include at least five hashtags. Interesting and dissimilar reactions can still be tracked online: the *#artprostitution* hashtag as internal protest, the *alter ego* picturing to present a virtual persona detached from the real musician, or the straight warning message about posting for a specific project, which somehow canceled the spam purpose. There was also a genuine experience by one of the musicians: after posting randomly distorted pictures, Google Earth captures, lyric fragments illustrated with GIFs, all of them with the hashtag #spamanarchive, he received a warning message by Facebook in case his profile had been hacked. All these artistic and political positions end up constituting a small but diverse sample of the classical music education on creativity and self-confidence, but also and mainly of the general use by the customers of platform capitalism. In all fairness, not all the activity was extrinsically motivated through the calendar, as some of the musicians engaged in the activity without thinking in the final video, as it was enjoyable. Therefore, I can state that despite the attempt to create a framework for emancipated interpreters, the project failed in creating the needed "relatedness" for intrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan 2000, 64).[14] Facebook metrics also played a role in the project. Despite SoundTrieb's members having dissimilar interactions with this platform, the most liked and reacted posts were those that always included a picture in which the physical person was recognizable. However, according to the self-branding feature within social media, the composer's participation contributed to spread the activity, although little could be done in some cases, as some profiles had restricted access for viewers.

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14   Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are key terms in the Self-Determination Theory.

As previously stated, there were some interesting resistance examples. A basic example against facial recognition in pictures was the series of photographs covering the face with a snare drum. At the beginning of the project, we discussed the idea of creating new Facebook profiles just for it. However, after doing some research on fake profiles, it would have been difficult to pursue it within the research's short time frame: the need of new e-mail accounts and the lack of Facebook friends were an important handicap. But most importantly, it would work against the "usership" model of Escudero and Moreno Gil's works. That is why the performer created a character named after the snare drum brand, P.E.A.R.L., accompanying the pictures with quotes from Jean Baudrillard or posing as reading George Orwell's *1984*. Differently, a second member decided to create random posts contributing to some sort of chaosmosis within his own feed, resulting in private family messages asking what he was doing at all. The common sense of normality and Facebook users' own censorship seem to be threatened in front of alternative uses of the platform. Another member of the collective who, despite having an account was not active on Facebook, decided to share critical articles on digital surveillance and geopolitics without any personal comment. Instead, this member added the hashtag *#artprostitution* to vindicate the unwillingness to be posting anything at all. Those shared articles were an attempt to maximize the anxiety of being watched, but also to expose the negative impact of information technologies in our access to information and, ultimately, in our political choices. On the other hand, the hashtag emphasized the anxiety in the face of social pressure and the trackable void created by the gigantic database of this social network. Even if Facebook is not designed for matching people, there is, as in Tinder and similar apps, the fear of rejection: better avoiding to show our ideologies than being tagged as a real person with passions, political outrages, ethical commitments and any other limitation to please the majority. We are afraid of falling into a stereotype: it is more dangerous to have your political thoughts caught on the Web as they will not disprove whatever you are denouncing but you, than to state you are participating in an artistic project.

Concluding thoughts

Disillusionment with the idea of revolution and any utopian justice has contributed to a general retreat and the acceptance of our post-political order. Furthermore, digital surveillance and dataveillance is, borrowing Morrison's terms, "by design, participatory" (2013, 5). Our participation in surveillance systems and platforms have become ambivalent, triggering imagination and resistant methods of usership within the art practice. Responses that are not radical, but

rather denouncing and defensive in a creative way. Disciplined disobedience has then become a form of resistance enacted within a specific field of knowledge. Indeed, as Michael Walzer reminds us, disobedience "does not require the total renunciation of the established social order", which means resistance must be practiced within the frame of a given system and given rules (Walzer 1960, 370).[15] Artists like Escudero, Moreno-Gil and Muntendorf turn to their advantage this participatory feature as it is the crack from which a critical and subversive discourse can slip through.

New music's interdisciplinary approach is the vehicle with which composers, interpreters, and media artists contribute to our understanding and perception of the world by (re)interpreting existing power relations. This political facet is constantly being negotiated and that is why art might provide critical and emancipatory potentialities. As seen in the previous analysis, composers' engagement with digital prints and therefore dataveillance critique may contribute to political change without supporting any explicit political movement. Following Chantal Mouffe's definition of critical art, artistic creation should bring "to the fore the existing of alternatives to the current post-political order" (Mouffe 2013, 912–913). Within this scope, Escudero and Moreno-Gil's pieces, as well as Muntendorf's, could not be defined as critical compositions, as they only reproduce the Internet's logic. However, it is impossible to deny that their work is a political act in itself. Their contributions to the awareness of the digital order and its implications in our present augmented reality may also have achieved political change. That is, appropriating the logic of platform capitalism to create models of usership that escape their original purpose. In fact, one could ask why should artists be tagged as critical or political at all? As Frank Möller states, "there is no reason to assume […] that artists and artworks can achieve what other social agents fail to achieve" (Möller 2015). Thus, exonerating SoundTrieb's initial reluctance, musicians who wish to perform this kind of repertoire are also confronted to their own participation in the medium. However, there must be the willingness to be moved, as already emphasized by Jacques Rancière in his seminal essay and therefore, hesitation, controversy, self-critique, and openness to dialogue are more than welcome steps.

This ongoing content creation that mashes up all sort of information about our lives is what can be recognized as our "spam society". Escudero and Moreno-Gil, as well as Muntendorf, never intended to resist against this societal system by confronting its medium. On the contrary, they engaged with its logic and

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15   See also what the artist-activist group Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) calls "digital resistance" in *Digital Resistance and Electronic Civil Disobedience* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1996): "[to] challenge the existing semiotic regime by replicating and redeploying it in a manner that offers participants in the projects a new way of seeing, understanding, and… interacting with a given system" (cited in Morrison 2013, 7).

create audiovisual works that "share the same quality of seduction that [those] interfaces possess". However, I would still recognize in their work a "resistance" facet as they produce a resignification of the space playing with digital trash aesthetics, not at all unreal. As Jennifer Walshe would say: "To dismiss the internet as trashy, fluffy and unreal is to dismiss life as trashy, fluffy and unreal" (Virtuallyreality, n.d.).

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SPAM (AN)ARCHIVE: PERFORMING UNDER SURVEILLANCE
(summary)

This paper offers an analysis of SoundTrieb's version of *[Custom #2] (a digital melodrama)*, written by the (post)composer and media artist Óscar Escudero in 2016. The particularity of this version, that took place within the project *SPAM (An)Archive* funded by the University of Bern and hosted by the Hochschule Luzern – Musik during the New Music Days, lies on a special requirement to both the composer and the performers: the usage of Facebook as a digital stage. Escudero, who currently works in team with the musicologist, dramatist and also (post)composer Belenish Moreno-Gil, always accompanies new productions of former pieces through BELOS Editions, a sort of editorial platform that mimics social media logic. Noticing that geolocation and data mining shape a new cosmology, to which social networks contribute as they are participative surveillance tools, this paper interrogates the political implications in social composing. Thus, the overarching question that resonated through the whole process was: is resistance possible at all? In order to answer this question, this paper discusses the process and aesthetical perspective behind social composing. First, it offers a brief introduction to DIY music and self-branding to understand the immediate digital context of both composers and interpreters. Second, it introduces the notion of "SPAM art" coined by Escudero himself, an aesthetical frame that enables critical thinking. A third section titled "Coded Representation" constitutes an analysis of SoundTrieb's production in the light of key concepts such as hypernarrative and melodrama. Anxiety and sadness are here central emotional features with emancipatory potential. The aim of the project was to create a space of critical dialogue and to fully exploit the sense of "usership" of Escudero and Moreno-Gil's works, involving musicians as more than mere interpreters in the making of a multimedia artwork. However, the most important outcome of this artistic experiment could be summarized as the need for more emancipated interpreters with intrinsic motivation and engagement in social debates. It is certain that the paper lacks an in-depth analysis of sound elements, as it is not the area of expertise by the author, but instead it reflects on different strata as important as the sonorous level in new interdisciplinary creation. As a conclusion, this article celebrates the disciplined disobedience in the artwork of Escudero and Moreno-Gil, as their model of usership reinterprets the existing power relations in platform capitalism while slipping in a subversive discourse.