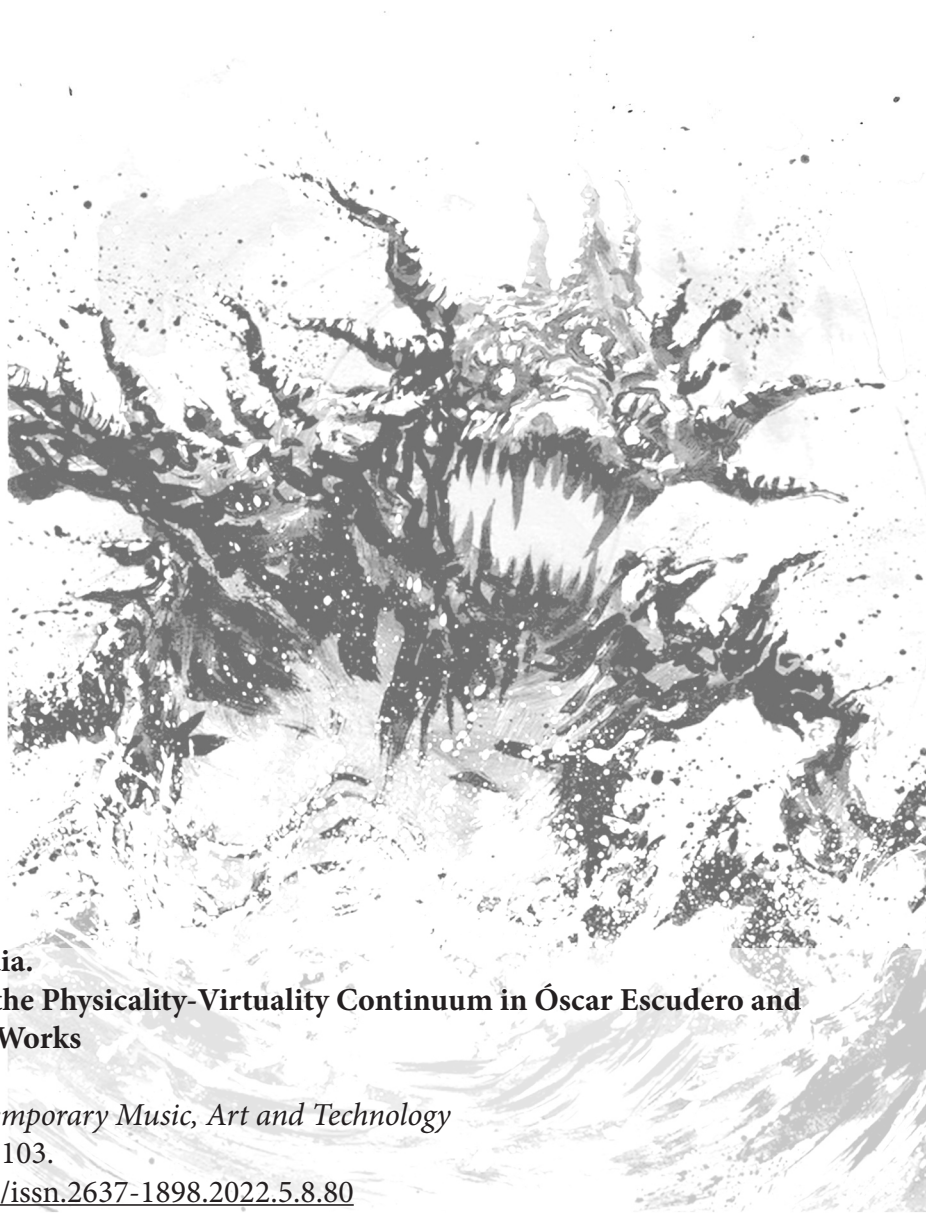


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**Composing Social Media.**

**The Representation of the Physicality-Virtuality Continuum in Óscar Escudero and Belenish Moreno-Gil's Works**

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# **COMPOSING SOCIAL MEDIA. THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PHYSICALITY-VIRTUALITY CONTINUUM IN ÓSCAR ESCUDERO AND BELENISH MORENO-GIL'S WORKS<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** Óscar Escudero and Belenish Moreno-Gil, as artists of the millennial generation, proposed an approach to musical composition that takes into account the new ways of being and relating to the world, which has been modified by the irruption of social networks. Their work represents an understanding of the mediatised and globalised world in which we live, making it clear that the philosophical and aesthetic paradigm has changed and must adapt to these new ways of communication. In order to understand their works, it is necessary to understand how social media and the physicality-virtuality continuum work and the effects they have on us. In this article I try to outline this with the help of literature in this respect and to relate it to the different forms of artistic presentation that make up their works. This article is to

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<sup>1</sup> This article would not be possible without the collaboration of the post-composers Óscar Escudero and Belenish Moreno-Gil, who provided me with all the necessary materials for the analysis and whom I was able to interview as part of this research. I would also like to thank the flautist and performer Clara Giner Franco for providing me with the materials for her performance of the work [OST] and information about its preparation.

be understood as an attempt to conceptualise Moreno-Gil and Escudero's aesthetics through specific examples of the works *Custom #X Series* and *Flat Time Trilogy*. The concepts of 'simultaneity', 'hyperreality' and 'flat time' or the 'struggle for visibility' and 'profile subject' help us to understand the new forms of communication through social media and are the philosophical basis for the works of Escudero and Moreno-Gil.

**Keywords:** contemporary music, contemporary music-theatre, social composing, music performance, post-composition, performance analysis, social media.

## Introduction

Since the past decade, several contemporary composers have been addressing the new forms of communication offered by the physicality-virtuality continuum that characterises today's hyper-connected society with a focus on the use of social media. The term 'social composing' coined by Brigitta Muntendorf can be understood as the foundational concept of this new way of composing, which is characterised either by the use of "social media as compositional material" with a "composition strategy" that "incorporates social media into intrinsic communication models" (Muntendorf 2019 [2015], 56) or by a "composition process" that "takes place directly on the social platforms" (57). In addition to Muntendorf, other composers such as Jagoda Szmytka, Michael Beil, Alexander Schubert or Sergej Maingardt put 'social composing' into practice from very different aesthetic perspectives.

Belenish Moreno-Gil and Óscar Escudero stand out as leading figures in this compositional movement, putting into practice the first of the meanings proposed by Muntendorf through music-theatre works that combine different forms of artistic presentation (music, text, video, choreography, etc.). In their works *Custom #X Series* (2016) and *Flat Time Trilogy* (2017–2018), one can perceive both the problems of the blurring between the physical and the virtual of the contemporary mediatised subject and the social and psychological problems of the struggle for visibility derived from informational capitalism and the democratisation of culture through social media. These works, moreover, are a reflection of the singularisation of subjects as hybrid beings operating simultaneously in the physicality and the virtuality, insofar as part of the performance is centred on the social media profiles of the performers, which makes each performance unique and singular. This decentring of the concept of art work and the shift towards the concept of performance together with the de-hierarchisation of the different media and artistic forms in their works, as well as the distancing of the figure of the composer as genius, lead Escudero and Moreno-Gil to call

themselves post-composers. Treating “voice, gesture, movement, light, sound, image, design and other features of theatrical production according to musical principles and compositional techniques and [applying] musical thinking to performance as a whole” (Roesner 2012, 9), their works can be classified with the term ‘composed theatre’, understanding music not as an end, but as a means.

In this sense, Escudero and Moreno-Gil’s works should not only be understood as artistic representations, but also as essays or manifestos, as they entail a reflection on the ways of understanding our experience in social media on the basis of a very solid philosophical and sociological discourse. The incorporation of quotations and references to scientific texts is a common resource in their works and demonstrates the social commitment and role of the post-composers as political actors.

In this article I will analyse what these philosophical and sociological bases are and how they are materialised in the works of Escudero and Moreno-Gil. The first part of the article deals with the ways of experiencing time and space in the physicality-virtuality continuum, understanding social media not as an external device to which we can resort at certain times but as a space with the capacity to configure our way of being in and relating to the world. In the second part, the focus of the analysis falls on the specific problems of the incorporation of social media as an inseparable element of our life experience and its social, psychological and economic consequences.

## **Experiencing Time and Space Between the Physical and the Virtual**

The moment social media become part of our daily lives, they also become part of our environment and we interact with them on the same level as we do with the physical environment. The relationship that is established between both environments and the ways of experiencing time and space in each of them is the subject of Moreno-Gil and Escudero’s work and can be explained through the concepts of simultaneity, hyperreality, flat time and narcotisation and absorption.

### **Simultaneity**

The simultaneity between different elements and media as a metaphor for the simultaneity of the physical and the virtual, typical of today’s mediatised subject, is one of the main characteristics of the work of Escudero and Moreno-Gil. This simultaneity entails a dissolution of the boundaries between the physical and the virtual. This is explained through the concept of ‘X-Reality’ paraphrased in the work [OST] of the *Flat Time Trilogy*, which “describes a world that is no

longer distinctly virtual or real but, instead, representative of a diversity of network combination”. The term ‘X-Reality’ marks “a turn toward an engagement of networked media integrated into daily life, perceived as part of a continuum of actual events” and must be understood as “a movement away from computer-generated spaces, places and worlds that are notably outside of what we might call real life and a transition into a mobile, realtime, and pervasively networked landscape”. With X-Reality, Coleman sees “an end of the binary logic of virtual and real” (Coleman 2011, 19–20).

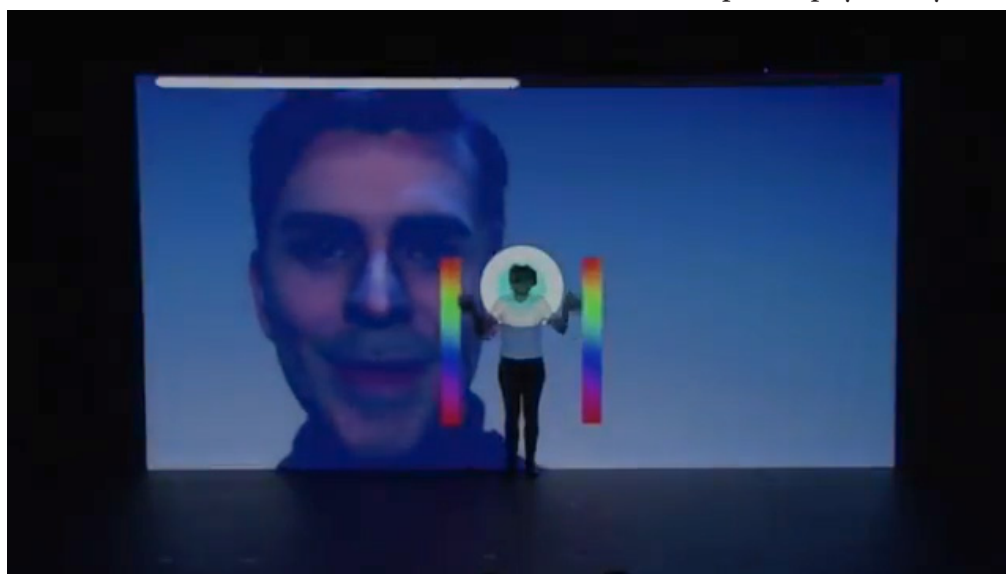
Andreas Reckwitz’s understanding of the digital world as an ‘environment’ explains also the intertwining of the subject and social media, as well as the implications of this intertwining in the physical world. According to the German sociologist, technology is “less and less a tool” as it was in the industrial world and “has increasingly become a technological environment in which subjects operate. At its core, this environment is a *cultural environment* that affects subjects on an ongoing basis” (Reckwitz 2020, 172). Therefore, the digital world does not belong to a parallel virtual and intangible reality, but is present in our daily lives and has become an ‘environment’ in which we operate and communicate with the world and with other subjects. This vision of social media and the virtual world also means, therefore, a blurring between physicality and virtuality, insofar as the latter is tangible and plays a key role in the processes of subjectivation and individualisation in the same way as the former.

In Moreno-Gil and Escudero’s works, the videos that are projected at the moment of the performance are starred by the performers on the stage. They are shown as a representation of the virtual subject that, combined with the physical subject present on the stage, forms a mediatised subject that is real in both strata. This becomes the subject of the work, for example, in [Custom #2]. In this work for three instrumentalists *ad libitum*, the performers have to personalise the sound material, “assigning different sounds/actions to each of the proposed gestures” (Escudero n.d.). These sounds correspond to the movements that are projected on the screen in the form of a video, which combines a record of the busts of the different performers, their profiles on social media and images of the geolocation of the performance venue. With an absolute correspondence between sound and movement on the screen, Escudero uses these sounds produced in real time by the instrumentalists as a link between the physical and the virtual, thus manifesting the simultaneity between the two dimensions. These sounds can be understood as the actions necessary in the physical world to move in the virtual world (clicks, mouse movements, etc.), but also as a reflection of the actions of the virtual world in the physical world. It is interesting to observe the score in this sense, as Escudero notes the movements and actions perceptible in the video in the same way as the rhythms and sounds of the different performers (Figure 1).

The figure shows a musical score for performer 1. It consists of two staves. The top staff contains video-related actions: 'Google I AM SORRY', 'LIST', and 'V'. The bottom staff contains physical actions: 'LOWER head' and 'LIFT head'. The score is divided into four measures. Above the staves, there are tempo markings:  $\text{♩} = 96$  and  $\text{♩} = 56$ . The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

**Figure 1.** Fragment of the score of [Custom #2]. Above, notation of performer 1's video; below, notation of performer 1's actions.

This blurring of boundaries between the physical and the virtual caused by simultaneity is accentuated in the works of the *Flat Time Trilogy*. While in the *Custom #X Series* the difference between the performers of the physical world and their representations in the virtual world are clearly distinguishable, the scenography of *Flat Time Trilogy* suggests a total integration of the physical subject in the virtual world: the screen behind them also forms part of their environment and their bodies are integrated into the digitality through monitoring, mapping and interaction with the medium, as can be perceived in Figure 2. As Moreno-Gil rightly points out, it is interesting here to distinguish between the concepts of 'virtuality' and 'digitality', which serves to differentiate the conceptions of the two cycles. While the virtual refers to an intangible, possible, but in many cases unreal or imaginary, the digital is tangible and measurable and enters into a horizontal and non-hierarchical relationship with physicality.



**Figure 2.** Image from [OST] performed by Óscar Escudero.

The clearest example of this is the staging of [OST] by the performer Clara Giner Franco. In this work, inspired by ASMR videos, a performer is confronted with the task of posting a video on social media. During the performance, we see how the performer records, edits and shares the video on Instagram. The documentation of this process is projected onto the screen behind the performer. While other interpretations of the work present a representation of the subject in the digital world as an alter ego with a clearly differentiated personality with respect to the subject in the physical world, Giner Franco's proposal consists of breaking with this duality, showing herself as natural as possible: naked and with a natural interpretation that is very close to the physical performance (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Image from the video of [OST] performed by Clara Giner Franco.

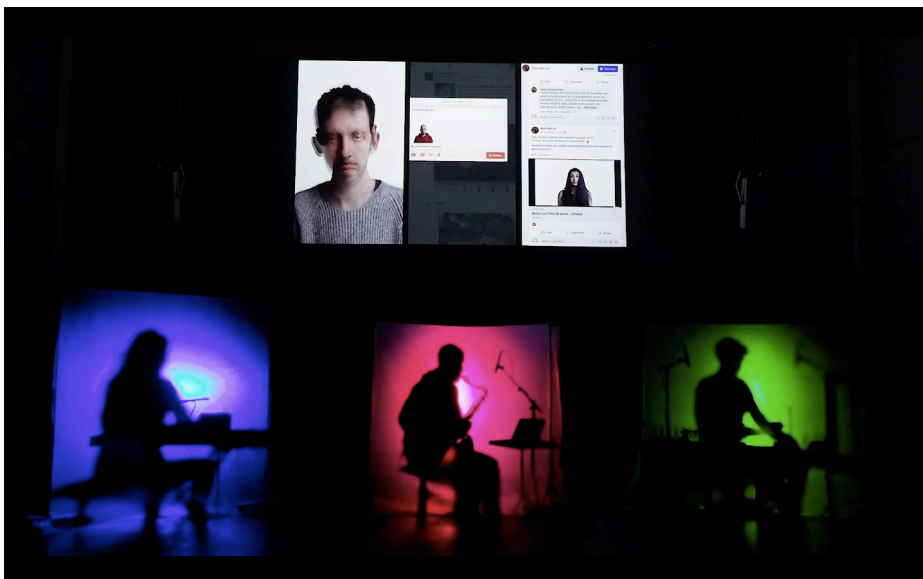
In this way, Giner Franco blurs the relationship between the physical and the virtual or digital, thus also blurring the hierarchy between original and copy, and places the two strata on the same level. This interpretative proposal demonstrates the reality of the two strata and the experience and interaction of the use of platforms in the post-digital era.

### **Hyperreality**

The simultaneity between the physical and the virtual is, in fact, a materialisation of what Jean Baudrillard calls 'hyperreality'. Óscar Escudero refers to the French sociologist and philosopher and his concept of hyperreality to explain the work [POV]: "an illusion, which cannot be combated with truth due to its

impossibility of being understood as any other thing but a representation of itself” (Escudero n.d.). 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 themselves 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. The simulacrum of which Baudrillard speaks, therefore, “is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (Baudrillard 1995, 1).

This is, in fact, what the scenic proposal of [Custom #2] by the ensemble Soundtrieb shows. In the recording, we can see how the performers on stage are illuminated with coloured lights that only show their silhouettes, while their faces projected on the screens above them are completely clear (Figure 4). 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. The shadows through which the performers’ bodies are presented demonstrate that these bodies are also a representation of the supposed primary reference, which is omitted throughout the performance.



**Figure 4.** Image from [Custom #2] performed by the Soundtrieb Ensemble.



The concept of hyperreality is also central to [HOC], the third work in the *Flat Time Trilogy*. This work is based on the representation of an action that is omitted in the performance. This action is referenced both by the voice-over that accompanies the video almost in its entirety and by the performer with the phrase “I’d do it again” (and also “I’ll do it again” or “I did it again”). The fact that this action is never performed but is referred to repeatedly is what really constitutes it, so that the idea of the simulacrum as a constituent of the hyper-real is taken to the extreme. After eight minutes of performance, this action has not been carried out, although, almost at the end, we hear a stroke on the snare drum and then frightened voices of a rescue in the Mediterranean Sea. In this case, the action has not been performed either, but a simulacrum that is presented as real within the framework of the performance.

The performance takes place in front of a large screen, which remains black for most of the time. This screen alternately includes a diagram of a snare drum with different parts that light up according to what the percussionist is playing, instructions for the percussionist and other indications and digital artefacts. From a certain moment, the screen goes from being black to being a capture of the performer’s Instagram timeline. This new scenery combines very fast scrolls of the timeline with the static capture of a completely black picture apparently published by the performer on their Instagram feed (Figure 5). This picture becomes the stage where the performer carries out their actions. What this change of scenery demonstrates is that the actions performed on social media or on the virtual/digital world are just as valid and have the same consequences as actions performed in the physical world. This moment of the performance focused on the Instagram interface is accompanied by the following phrases from the voice-over:

Therefore, the individual would do it again, conscious about the impossibility of grabbing a second and printing it on the skin on the flex of its own biography. It could well be linearly done, intermittently, by stopping, going back to the beginning and focusing, impulsing and attacking again, silently or nominating those focuses, impulses and attacks.

This text demonstrates, on the other hand, that although what we do on social media is just as real as what we do in the physical world, the way we experience time and the control we have over it in each of the realities is different. These acts become cultural products on social media and are repeatable and editable and subject to manipulation of all kinds. Later, as the stage becomes the Instagram timeline again, the text is a repetition of what we heard at the beginning. This reinforces the idea that what is performed on social media is a simulacrum that, in this case, has a reference in the physical world. In its return, however, this ref-

erence is also a simulacrum without prior reference. This is evident at the end of the work, when the performer takes off his virtual reality glasses, approaches the audience and recites a text about what they had supposedly done that ends with the question “Does it really matter?” This question raises the question of the difference between what is real and what is hyperreal, giving the same importance to the representation of an action as to the real action in the physical world.



**Figure 5.** Image from [HOC] performed by Wim Pelgrims. Instagram interface.

From a more general point of view, it is interesting to see the representation of the interfaces of social media and everything that represents the physical or digital world in the different works. Especially in the *Flat Time Trilogy*, the actions performed in the digital sphere are very simple in design and are shown in a fluid way. Escudero and Moreno-Gil move away from traditional representations of the digital world by escaping the glitch effect. This effect, which is the result of a technological error that becomes perceptible but does not affect the functioning of the software, is frequently used in the representation of digital interfaces in order to highlight the hypermediation that characterises them in a paradigm in which the digital and the physical are in a dichotomous and hierarchical relationship. This hypermediation must be understood as a logic that “acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them visible” and “in every manifestation ..., makes us aware of the medium or media” (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 33–34). The elimination of the glitch in their works also represents the softening of this hypermediation to become a more homogeneous space closer to immediacy, typical of the post-digital paradigm, in which “digital technologies have become smoother, more immersive, less obtrusive” (Bayne et al. in Jandrić 2021, 21).

Thus, “the described shift towards blurring borders between physical and digital social contact, or postdigital human contact, is one of many important steps in development of postdigital humans” (Jandrić 2021, 21). Escudero and Moreno-Gil represent with the simplicity and clearness of their sound and graphic representations, therefore, the ‘smoothness’ and ‘immersivity’ inherent to the experience of social media in the post-digital era, thus eliminating any element that could be reminiscent of hypermediation.

### **Flat Time**

The spatio-temporal conception in social media that differs from that of the physical world presented in [HOC] and in all the works analysed in this article can be explained through the conception of dreams of the Spanish philosopher María Zambrano, to whom Escudero and Moreno-Gil refer in the description of their works. Zambrano considers the dream as a space in which “man’s life appears in the deprivation of time, as an intermediate stage between non-being ... and life in consciousness, in the flow of time. In this intermediate situation one does not yet have time” (Zambrano 2004, 15).

This conception of the dream as a space not governed by time, in which time occurs simultaneously and not successively, is what led Moreno-Gil and Escudero to title the second cycle *Flat Time Trilogy*. Flat time – a concept already present in the *Custom #X Series* – is to be understood here in contrast to time in the physical world. In interaction with social media, as well as in dreams, the past and the future do not condition the understanding of time. On the contrary, the subject is absorbed by the present, which “expands and widens, seeming to absorb past and future” (Zambrano 2004, 85); an absolute present in which everything happens simultaneously and in which an insensitivity develops in the subject that is analogous to the timelessness of dreams. This timelessness is accentuated or even perpetrated by the interface of social media: it can be understood as an archive that breaks down the time barriers between present and past, allowing immediate access to past events without the need for linearity. In this sense, the Facebook timeline is an example of this understanding of the interface of social media platforms, as it “explicitly organizes a person’s content around a linear timeline that supports browsing far into the past, including links directly to activity that happened years ago” (Zhao et al. 2013, 2). Thus, this way of understanding the interface of social media reinforces Zambrano’s idea of the absolute present, since access to the past occurs simultaneously with the intense experience of the present.

This idea is represented in [Custom #3] for cello and piano. In this work we see a screen split in two, each of the parts corresponding to the two performers respectively (Figure 6). These screens are capped by a chronometer that covers

the time span of one minute and moves forwards and backwards in time at different speeds. The chronometer is synchronised with the video that is shown, which combines a close-up of the two performers with some images of their profiles on social media and other texts and graphics. This minute is not a real minute, but rather a smaller space of time. The subjection to the aforementioned chronometers and the dilation and constriction of time in the reproduction of the video make it credible that it is a real minute. This already demonstrates that spatio-temporal perception is not objective but relative and subjective and can be altered by external artefacts. Escudero's idea is that the simultaneity of events at the moment of interaction between the virtual and the physical, as well as the possibility to access different temporal moments by understanding social media as a digital archive, alters temporal perception. This is why there is a large number of simultaneous events during that minute and, moreover, they do not respond to a linear temporal perception.

This becomes noticeable at a very specific moment in the performance. A little further on in the middle of the performance, the chronometer stops at the second 6:16. This moment corresponds to the projection of the social media profiles of the two performers. From the moment when the chronometer stops at 6:16 seconds until it reaches 6:47 seconds, which is the time span in which the social media profiles are shown, 45 seconds pass. Time has slowed down here more than a hundred times. During this period, we see a frenetic browsing through the Facebook and Spotify profiles that are already frenetic in themselves. In fact, when these images appear in real time, we can distinguish that it is a Facebook profile, but the contents are presented in a totally confusing way. Thus, the moment when the spectator sees the social media interface is the moment when time is most dilated and the chronometer, advancing very slowly, reinforces this sensation of dilation.



**Figure 6.** Image from [Custom #3] performed by Lluïsa Espigolé (piano) and Erica Wise (cello). Instagram interface.

## Narcotization and Absorption

On the other hand, María Zambrano's conception of dreams as a space where "the subject [is] deprived of time" also understands dreams as a space in which the subject's freedom is annulled, so that their actions become uncontrollable and unconscious and are automatic. In social media this freedom is also nullified, but the reasons for this nullification are largely due to the large amount of information that characterises social media and which therefore provokes an experience of great affective intensity. This type of experience often results in a narcotization and automatization of the acts performed on the platforms, as novelty and immediacy take control of the subject. This narcotizing effect of social media, intensified by the abandonment to an inertia of actions, is, in fact, already foreseen by Zambrano in her writing on dreams when she refers to the automated actions in physical life as a result of intense experiences:

The excess of speed in the flow of the river of experiences produces a state similar to that of a dream: on the one hand, a duration that attracts towards itself, that buries in itself what has just been born. On the other hand, delirium. We call delirium the automatism of expression without any intervention by the subject; the alienation of certain of the most intensely lived experiences of consciousness ... However, if attention retains in the space of the present, widening it, one of these privileged experiences, then time is lengthened, dilated. And the present instant no longer alludes to the future, since the widening of the present depends precisely on this: on a kind of isolation from the influence of the future, from that pressure that the future exerts on the present, which is thus pushed to open up to another, equally present instant (Zambrano 2004, 82-83).

From the point of view of communication theory, this narcotization can also be explained through the concept of 'narcotizing dysfunction' raised by Lazarsfeld and Merton back in 1948 in reference to the mass media – a concept which "suggests that the vast supply of communications may elicit a lethargic feeling, as informational flood induces a numb, drowsy sensation in citizens ... The constant flux of information overwhelms the individuals' capacity to be sensitive. It puts to sleep their critical competences in order to follow the frantic rhythm of news" (Mateus 2020, 1159). This narcotizing effect is increased by the use of social media, since beyond informing, they also allow the users to express their opinions and feelings immediately and without filters, which multiplies the sensation of having acted without having really done it (Esitti 2016). Narcotization, therefore, is not only to be understood as an impairment of the subject that does not move on to action due to overexposure to information, but also as an absorption of social media that distances it from physical reality due to its

timeless nature. This phenomenon is explained by psychology with the concept of ‘cognitive absorption’ (Agarwal/Karahanna 2000), which consists of a “state of deep involvement with software” characterised by ‘temporal dissociation’, ‘focused immersion’, ‘heightened enjoyment’, the feeling of ‘control’ and ‘cognitive curiosity’ (673). More recently, it has been empirically demonstrated that ‘cognitive absorption’ also has implications for the use of social media (Tourinho/Oliveira 2019) and that it can cause other psychological disorders.

This problem is addressed in the works of Escudero and Moreno-Gil with a great freneticism, a consequence of the large amount of information and the multimediality of the performance. This is present in Moreno-Gil and Escudero’s works almost in their totality and is perceived by the spectator at a pre-symbolic level. Although all the actions that take place on the stage are thought out down to the last detail and maintain a coherent relationship with the other elements of the performance, what the spectator perceives here are not the meanings of each of the elements that intervene in the performance or their simultaneous relationship with each other, but rather the overload of information they contain, which has an almost physical effect and which is presented to the spectator’s consciousness without a specific meaning but with a strong emotionality. The large number of images, expressions and sounds that make up these works succeed each other in a vertiginous way and in a frenetic and confusing atmosphere. The stimuli that the spectator receives in the few minutes of performance are almost impossible to assimilate, not only because of the speed and simultaneity with which they occur, but also because of their multimedia nature. This is not to say, however, that their intention is to provoke this sensation of overpassing or confusion, but rather that this sensation arises from the fact that they represent the experience of the mediatised subjects on social media, who also receive a large amount of information that they are sometimes unable to assimilate. The coherence of the different elements intensifies, in fact, this type of experience and can lead the audience to frustration.

Specifically, as an example of the automatization caused by cognitive absorption or narcotizing dysfunction, it is also interesting to analyse the work [Custom #1], in which the performer gives a tutorial on how to be successful on social media, accompanied by a percussionist.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the piece, we see the performer’s Facebook and Twitter profiles interspersed with different videos performed by the performer themselves. The performer navigates through these profiles and performs actions on them while explaining their strategies. These actions are often repeated, such as, for example, the act of stopping to follow different profiles, scrolling, etc. The role of the percussionist, in this case, is to make

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2 This work has been adapted by Óscar Escudero for different ensembles. In these adaptations, the instrumentalists play the same role as the percussionist in the original version.

explicit the different movements of the mouse and other actions of the performer on the platforms, as explained above. Although this use of percussion may be reminiscent of the technique of mickeymousing, in this case, far from being a redundancy between image and sound, it plays a different role here: as well as representing the link between the physical and the virtual, it highlights the automatization and mechanicity of the actions on the platforms, in such a way that its rhythmic and repetitive nature reveals the inertia that dominates them.

### **Social Media as an Arena for the Production of Cultural Goods**

Social media play a fundamental role in the way people relate to each other and to institutions. These relationships occur in the highly competitive environment of advanced capitalism and have certain psychological consequences. This centrality, on the other hand, favours companies to benefit from the parameterisation of users' actions and interactions on the different platforms, facilitated by the way they (re)present themselves, which can be conceptualised with the terms 'compositional subject' or 'profile subject'. These problems are also present more or less explicitly in the work of Escudero and Moreno-Gil.

### **Struggle for Visibility and its Psychological Consequences**

The paradigm shift that Reckwitz points out in the understanding of technology as a 'culture machine' and as an 'environment' also means a blurring of boundaries between creator and audience. That implies a democratisation of culture, since digital platforms and social media have become arenas of creation in which all users have the capacity (or the need) to create and share cultural products. This also means, however, a "structural asymmetry" between the "extreme overproduction of goods" and the "scarcity of recipients' attention". This asymmetry, in turn, leads to a "struggle for visibility", which often results in a "winner-takes-all" situation (172–173).

In this fierce environment of cultural production on social media, the subject is in a highly competitive space compared to cultural spaces outside digitality, as cultural production has gone from being a privilege to a necessity. Whereas in the industrial capitalism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the subject sought to adapt to the norm and be unnoticed, in today's digital society subjects need to show themselves as unique individuals in order to obtain a certain social status (178–179). This causes, at the same time, novelty and immediacy to become two fundamental characteristics of the cultural material produced on social media (174), since it rewards those publications that have a great affectivity (170–172). In this sense, visual and sound products, as well as short texts with a great emotional impact,

make up the majority of cultural products on the media. It is not surprising, therefore, that Escudero and Moreno-Gil's works have as their subject matter this primacy of affectivity with the incorporation of videos, sounds and fleeting quotations that have a direct emotional impact on the spectator.

The freneticism already explained in the previous chapter, prevailing in [Custom #1], corresponds in this case to the subject of the text, which can be understood as a critique of this need to capture attention, essential to survive as a mediated subject in an advanced capitalism. The fact that the video is customised by the performers themselves and incorporates fragments of their social media profiles means that the subject of the work revolves around their personae and that, therefore, this struggle for visibility, already marked by the artistic nature of the different forms of representation, takes place in an environment where artistic production is much more important. In this case, therefore, although the social media profile can be oriented more or less towards a professional profile without a marked private charge, the distinction between public and private continues to be blurred. So much so that Escudero (Clammy 2021) confesses that some artists have asked him to alter or remove some fragments of the video because they are too private, even though they have given their written consent to use all the content of their social media profiles.

The profiles of the freelance artists – most of the performers in Escudero and Moreno-Gil's work are freelance artists – strike a balance between showing themselves as both professional and personal in order to reach as wide an audience as possible but one that has a real interest in their content and their work. The precariousness and instability that characterises this type of artist and the struggle for visibility that this entails is central to understanding this use of social media, which is a professional practice that at the same time becomes part of private life (see Scolere et al. 2018). It is at this point where the so-called self-branding comes into play, which is based on the dissolution of boundaries between public and private, but also between user and consumer. The subjects must not only be interesting, authentic and unique, but they must also be perceived as such, since they are in a competitive environment in which these values, characterised by a great affectivity, are rewarded.

Thus, the subject has to accumulate what Reckwitz (2020) calls 'singularity capital' (120-122). Analogous to Bourdieu's (2002 [1979]) concept of distinction, the mediated subject uses the tools of social media to accumulate a certain cultural capital, which in this case contributes to the accumulation of singularity capital. However, it is interesting to differentiate here between these two forms of capital accumulation: while the first is based on an expression of taste, as Bourdieu suggests, the second is based on 'taste making'. Thus, as Paßmann and Schubert (2021) point out, "activities, such as liking, sharing, following, retweeting, tagging, bookmarking, replying, commenting, and last but not least posting



and replying on social media are not only ways of taste expression, but always also practices of taste making” (2948).

This is clear in [Custom #1] in the explanation of the different strategies for self-branding and attracting visibility. It is not surprising that this tutorial on how to be successful on social media places special emphasis on the people you follow from your profile, what content you share or what posts you like. Although the text places the main emphasis on the contentment of other users of the social media, with the phrase “masses need to perceive you as a faultless, dapper image, almost unreal” the performer makes it clear that this contentment, framed in a prevailing positive affectivity, is also a strategy for gaining visibility. In this sense, as Reckwitz (2020) states and Escudero ratifies in the third point of the tutorial, the subject has to show ‘culturally uncontroversial’ (182): “From time to time, write a post expressing a clear idea, but not enough to annoy those people you liked in two and didn’t remove in one”.

This struggle for visibility and this novelty and immediacy prevailing in cultural production on social media can lead to different cognitive and psychological dysfunctions and disorders that are also the subject of Escudero and Moreno-Gil’s works. Beyond the ‘narcotizing dysfunction’ and ‘cognitive absorption’, anxiety, depression and emotional fatigue, among others, are some of these dysfunctions and disorders (Dhir et al. 2018). Several empirical sociological and psychological studies have demonstrated this correlation between compulsive use of social media and different psychological disorders (see for example Roberts/David 2020; Keles/McCrae 2020). This problem consists, in many cases, in feedback of this behaviour through the different disorders. Not only does the compulsive use of social media cause them, but people who suffer from these psychological disorders find in the compulsive use of social media a refuge and a point of escape. In this case, therefore, the simultaneous, narcotizing and absorbing nature of social networks explained in the previous chapter plays a fundamental role.

Once again, [OST] serves as an example. The dramaturgy of this work revolves around the obsession of the performer when posting a video on social media. The need to be liked and to appear unique in a compressed format such as the 10 seconds of an Instagram story leads the performer to repeat the recording of the video almost compulsively in order to achieve a satisfactory result. In this journey, also characterised by the idea of flat time explained in the previous chapter, we can see the psychological evolution of the performer, who begins with a gentle and calm mood and ends up in a nervous and desperate state, characteristic of a crisis of anxiety.

On the other hand, [Custom #1] shows how the need to share one’s personal opinion on a specific event and the need to be on social media in order to obtain attention from those people who are a priori necessary for success leads

the performer to exhaustion. This is due to a need for attention and valuation typical of the advanced capitalism prevailing in social media. These reactions of attention and valuation, which are obtained through interaction with likes, links and other practices, provide users with a 'singularity status' (Reckwitz 2020, 183) which, in addition to contributing to the visibility of their profile and therefore having an economic purpose, provide them with immediate personal satisfaction. This need for attention and appreciation, conveyed through the compulsive sharing of personal experiences, is central to the end of the work. When the performance seems to have ended with the performer leaving the stage and the title 'THE END' appearing on the screen, this title disappears in reverse and the interface of YouTube appears, where the recording of the performance that has just taken place is uploaded. Thus, the performance is not finished and, therefore, does not become completely real until it is shared on social media and all the followers can experience it.

### **The Profile Subject and its Commodification**

This need for authenticity and uniqueness is satisfied on social media by a modular composition of the subject. The profile of the subject is presented as a 'modularized tableau', a 'two-dimensional space' that allows "to represent their personalities as a collage of material elements" and which is composed of "individual components that are visible as such and functions on the basis of prescribed formats" (Reckwitz 2020, 180). The singularity of the subject is therefore governed by a logic of collage or assemblage similar to the logics of musical recycling such as remix or mashup, in which a "selective appropriation of dominant cultural elements of diverse provenance ... is carried out in order to construct a discourse of its own, with coherent and exclusive meanings completely different from those of its components in their original context" (López Cano 2017, 244).

On the other hand, in the paradigm of the modular subject, the discourses of authenticity and singularity go from being complex and difficult to access to being comprehensible and palpable in a simple glance and, therefore, characterised by a surprising and highly affective component. Moreover, this way of showing singularity is also determined by temporality: the assembly of the different elements that make up the singularity of the subject in the form of a profile is in a process of constant change characterised by the primacy of novelty and immediacy. Evidently, the interface of each platform also conditions this modular presentation of the subject. The clearest example is Instagram, with a profile in the form of a grid, but Facebook and Twitter also promote this modularity.

The idea of the interface as a conditioning factor in the way of presenting oneself on social media is thematized in the works of the *Custom #X Series*, with

special emphasis on [Custom #2], in which the performers have to personalise the sounds in the same way as they personalise their profiles. The personalisation, therefore, is determined by a series of rules and conditions, which are translated into rhythms and a series of symbols that correspond to the different sounds that the interpreter has to personalise and that refer to the actions on the screen. Thus, the score acts here as an interface that does not determine the contents to be interpreted, but rather its composition, i.e. its rhythm and order.

From a legal point of view, it is possible to speak of a conditioning of the platform when it comes to using the material shared on it. This is also part of Escudero's approach to *Custom* works. The performer has to sign a contract annexed to the contract for the processing of personal data when creating a profile on any digital platform in order to be able to use all the public material shared on their profiles. This use of user's material shared on social media translates in the real life into the sale of information to third companies in order to plan personalised marketing strategies. This is possible, at the same time, thanks to the modularisation of the subject and the creation of singularities from the logic of assembly. The fragmentary and modular nature of the mediatised subjects allows the 'monitoring' of the 'subjects' activities' and the 'automated observation' of the 'discrete elements' that make up the different singularities through algorithms that allow "to observe the uniqueness of individual profile subjects" (Reckwitz 2020, 183–185).

In this sense, the saxophonist's actions in [POV] are digitally monitored and parameterised, converting the apparently complex information into discrete data that can be indexed and commodified. In this work, which is based on the logic of the assemblage, we see how the saxophonist performs four actions with his or her instrument, which are classified with the letters a, b, c and d, corresponding to a tremolo, a long high note, a breathing sound and a glissando respectively. These actions can be understood as actions in the digital world that are susceptible to being *softwareized* through algorithms. In this sense, the work can be divided into different parts that are analogous to some different steps of big data analysis.

In the first phase, the different actions are presented separately and their results are analysed in detail with the appearance of graphs corresponding to the computer tools for analysing and processing sound data (figure 7). In the second phase, the different actions are combined and the results of these combinations are analysed in the same way as in the previous phase (figure 8). The comparison between the different actions is what makes up the third phase, which consists of determining the similarities and differences between them (figure 9). Finally, there is a conceptualisation of the different actions that is presented in the form of a tutorial (Figure 10). Through the information obtained in the previous phases, the analysis leads to a deep and detailed understanding of the different

actions similar to that which can be obtained through data analysis. The different apparently continuous actions are discretised by means of a digital conversion that allows a high degree of accuracy, which makes this digitisation not perceptible. The most evident case is that of the glissando of George Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue quoted in this work: the glissando, understood as a musical effect characterised by the continuity in a change from one note to another, is fragmented into different sections that allow its digital comprehension and computer indexing. On the other hand, what this conceptualisation demonstrates is that the different actions can be defined through smaller actions that form part of a finite series of actions. This also demonstrates the modularity of the resulting actions, as they are formed by the combination of the smaller ones.

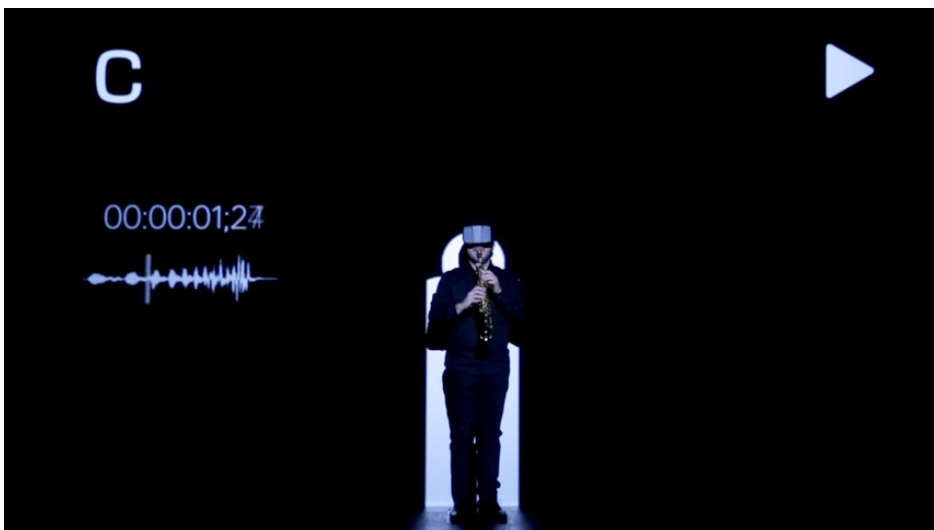
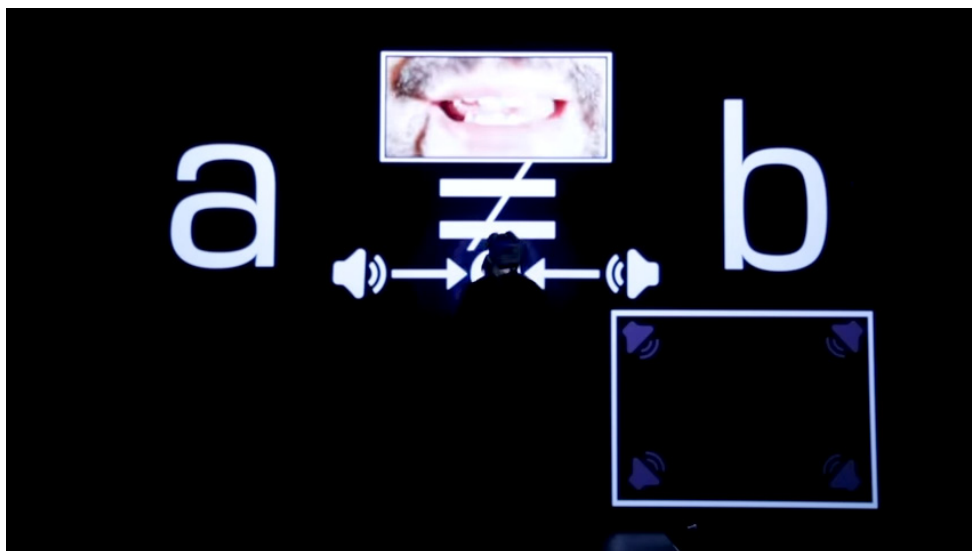


Figure 7. Image from [POV] performed by Pedro Pablo Cámara. Analysis of the action c.



Figure 8. Image from [POV] performed by Pedro Pablo Cámara. Combination and analysis of actions b, c and d.



**Figure 9.** Image from [POV] performed by Pedro Pablo Cámara. Comparison between actions a and b.



**Figure 10.** Image from [POV] performed by Pedro Pablo Cámara. Conceptualisation and description of the action a (tremolo).

## Conclusion

The works of Moreno-Gil and Escudero should be understood as essays that attempt to explain the current mediated subject within advanced global capitalism and the ways in which this subject behaves and relates in the space that arises from the intersection between the physical and the virtual or digital. The

evolution in their work also demonstrates an evolution in the way of understanding this intersection, starting from a clear hierarchy between the physical and the virtual in the *Custom #X Series* to transform into a horizontality between the two strata typical of the post-digital era in the *Flat Time Trilogy*. Moreno-Gil and Escudero have understood and accepted Muntendorf's premises and have expanded them, making 'social composing' the core of most of their works. The two post-composers stand not only as witnesses and reporters of the paradigm shift perpetrated by social media, but also act as researchers and thinkers, as their artistic proposal helps to understand this paradigm shift.

Moreno-Gil and Escudero's message is one of a certain pessimism with regard to social media, as in their works, they report on the ethical, social and psychological problems they entail. At the same time, they accept this change as something unavoidable, framing the subject as a victim of the prevailing capitalism of social media but with a capacity for action which, although limited, presents some possibilities of escape. Their works can also be read as a tool that helps us to understand social media better, explaining their mechanisms and intricacies, so that abandoning oneself to them, even if unavoidable, becomes a more conscious act.

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## COMPOSING SOCIAL MEDIA.

### THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PHYSICALITY-VIRTUALITY CONTINUUM IN ÓSCAR ESCUDERO AND BELENISH MORENO-GIL'S WORKS

#### (summary)

In this article I contextualise and analyse the aesthetics of the works *Custom #X Series* and *Flat Time Trilogy* by Belenish Moreno-Gil and Óscar Escudero. These works can be framed within the movement of 'social composing' as they adopt strategies that incorporate the ways of communication of social media.

The first part of the article explores the theoretical and aesthetic foundations of Escudero and Moreno-Gil through the concepts of simultaneity, hyperreality, flat time, narcotization and absorption – theoretical concepts that serve to explain the experience of subjects on social media and that can be applied to the ideas of the post-composers. The concept of simultaneity takes into account Coleman's approach to the so-called X-Reality or Rickwitz's approach to the understanding of technology as a 'cultural environment'. This concept is materialised in the works of Escudero and Moreno-Gil



through the interaction between the different media, as well as through the interaction between the physical and the virtual or digital. Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality is central to understanding how the boundaries between the physical and the virtual or digital are blurred, insofar as both strata can be understood as a simulacrum without a clear reference. This is put into practice through different strategies related to staging. The concept of 'flat time' is borrowed from the Spanish philosopher María Zambrano, quoted by the post-composers themselves, and serves to explain the way in which time is experienced on social media: the platforms make it possible to break down the hierarchies between past, present and future. In this sense, the post-composers distort the perception of time through the incorporation of actions inherent to social media: the subject is able to rewind, advance, stop, dilate or contract time freely. The concepts of absorption and narcotization explain the psychological effects of this way of experiencing time, leading subjects to an automatization of actions or to a mental state of abstraction. The freneticism or the correspondence between images and sounds can be understood as a materialisation of these psychological effects.

The second part of the article deals with the effects of understanding social media as arenas of cultural production. In this part, emphasis is placed on the struggle for visibility that this understanding entails and the psychological effects that derive from it. The subject matter of the text and the actions of some of the works analysed focus on this problem. On the other hand, the focus is on the presentation of the subjects through the logic of the profile – that is, in a compositional and modular way, where the important thing is the combination of different heterogeneous elements. This has consequences in the commodification of the data of social media users and becomes the subject of some works by Escudero and Moreno-Gil through the parameterisation and fragmentation of the performers' actions.

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