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Sound as a medium, the performer as a medium

Abstract: This article intends to cross the vast and fascinating panorama of the graphic notation. The evolution of electronic music requires a new system of notation where, among other things, we seek to understand the new phenomena, such as the relationship between sonority and plastic manipulation in performance; the unpredictability and the error as ways of generating non-linear readings and/or new graphical forms of notation.

In this article we intend to discuss the possibility of experiences' systematization and concepts of ephemeral time, as well as freedom in the improvisation methodology and in real time composition, which has revolutionized the traditional system of musical graphic register.

Usually, graphic notation as a musical representation aims to be interpreted by the musician/performer, whose reading can be linear or non-linear, even when is a result of concrete composition techniques. Otherwise, graphical notation arises as a result of the fusion between sound and graphic matter during the performance; a fusion that creates a close object - the score – that even so remains open, to the possibility of a new interpretation (possibly by another performer).

Methodologically, we will analyze the contemporary artistic object from the performative practice, considering the reflexive approach of understanding sound as a material providing services to the performer himself and, simultaneously, the performer as a medium fused with the drawing - an object that creates crosses between form, body and duration.

We propose the analysis of a case study, where the artistic object is assumed as a score, i.e., as a result of the sound register and the drawing as a visual entity, as an object of change, a game that provides new sound readings.

Keywords: graphical notation, sound, performance, wandering

Introduction

It is with this quote made by Stockhausen "Music is to perceive vibrations of sound, it's a mental activity, but also a sensitive physical performance of pleasure order. Making music goes far beyond intellectual talent, though always requires it; in music we think with the body." (Barreto, 2000, p. 218).¹ That I begin by presenting the

¹ Original text: "A música consiste em perceber as vibrações do som, é uma actividade mental, mas também uma actuação física sensível, da ordem do prazer. Fazer música está muito para além do talento intelectual, embora sempre o exija; em música pensa-se com o corpo."

project *Partidura*. This project is part of another drawing project, and arises with the need to unite the visual arts and music, and start working with a live musician in performance. This is how I start working in collaboration with Bruno Gonçalves (aka 'agendas obscuras').

Partidura results from the meeting between a performer and a musician.

The project is a proposal of real-time composition, in which the notion of graphic notation within its conventional design structure is called into question. In part the process destabilizes the static definition and restricted to the reading of a graphic notation.

It is within this context that I propose some questions:

What procedural composition can give rise to the drawing and graphic notation in which these are taken as extensions of the body?

How can graphic notations open to the free exploration of other unconventional interpreters or composers?

How is generated the dynamic that inserts performance into a composition in real time that we define by graphic notation?

I propose a new look into the non-linear reading that circumscribes the graphic notation system and the drawing.

Graphic Notation

We can point out some concepts thought like forms where relations are settled in the connection of the punctuation or graphical notation and the sound. The world of graphic notation is still quite unknown, and graphic notation is a way of representation and expression that reflects its own evolution / revolution, in relation to the traditional musical notation and the processes of translation and musical-visual presentation.

We must consider graphic notation as a renewed form of expression and approach within the twentieth century. It began to stimulate a new expression based on flexibility and greater subjectivity and freedom of interpretation or creation and expression on the side of the composer as well as the interpreter.

It is a more open and not so codified and limited interpretation, as in traditional notation from the baroque period. Graphic notation begins to use abstract symbols, text, images and drawing as a form of expression.

As an example of the use of abstract symbols, we take as reference the graphic compositions of Morton Feldman, composer of an impressive capacity of containment.

Around the fifties in twentieth century he wrote the plays *Projections* and *Intersections* (Fig.1). Paul Griffiths describes these pieces as:

"Time is represented by space, and in which the spaced boxes specify only instrument, register, number of simultaneous sounds, mode of production, and duration. The two series differ in that the Projections are to be consistently quiet, while in the Intersections' the player is free to choose any dynamic at any entrance but must maintain sameness of volume ' - though' what is desired in both ... is a pure (non-vibrating) tone". Citation (Griffiths, 1995, p. 303)

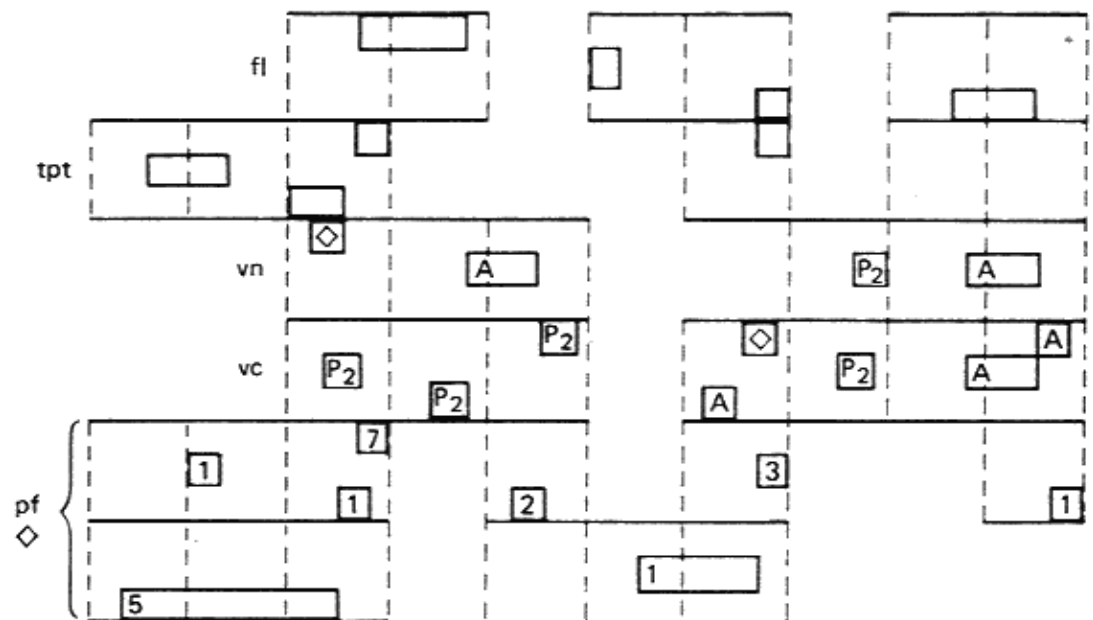


Figure 1. Morton Feldman, *Projection II* (opening), 1950

Another reference exploring the boundaries of graphic notation, which displays an open structure to incite greater freedom in creativity and interpretation on the part of the artist, is the piece *Treatise* - composition of Cornelius Cardew (Fig.2), during the sixties. *Treatise* is a dense piece of one hundred and ninety-three (193) pages, and consists of a score of abstract figures, numbers, and some musical symbols. In the interpretation, few instructions are given, allowing a great freedom of execution to the interpreter, and it can be interpreted by any instrument. The interpretation is decided at the beginning. On each performance and between each interpreter, a subjective reading, alterable, is a new possibility and combination in the next performance to be executed.

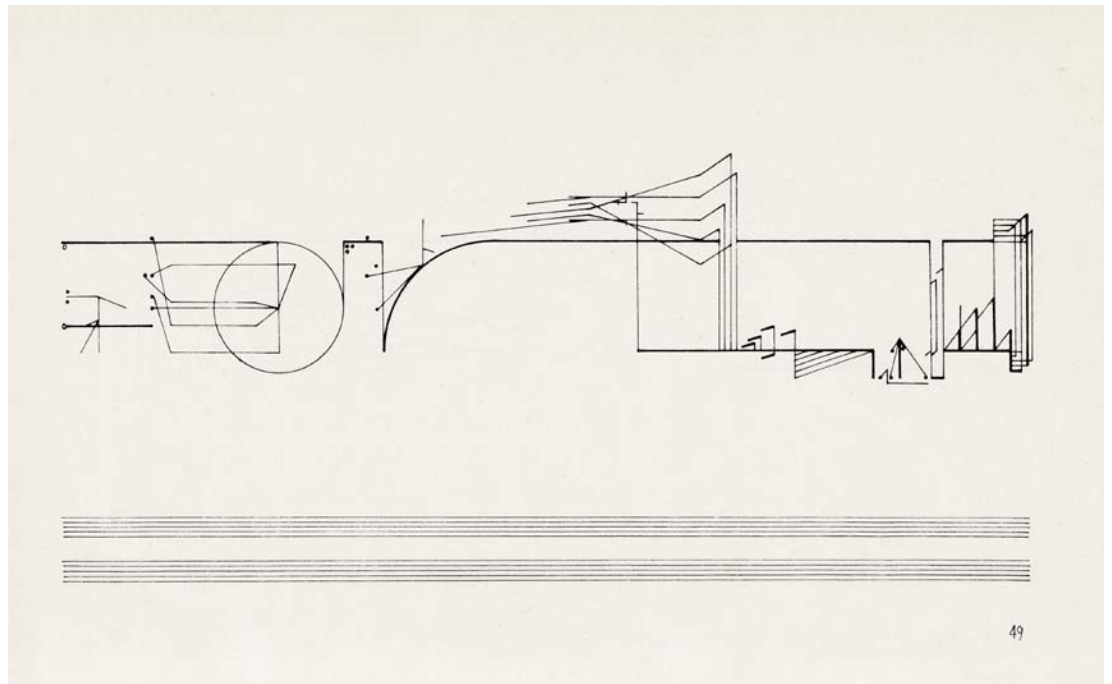


Figure 2. Cornelius Cardew, *Treatise*, 1963-1967

We observe that there has been a growing appeal in some composers to this kind of notation. An interest founded on the inability and limitation they felt in relation to traditional musical notations, which they described as being inadequate to express their ideas and feelings.

There is an extraordinary variety of graphic notations, which open up new possibilities, and points to a free exploration that makes possible to cover other unconventional interpreters or composers. That has transformed the way we think of drawing, the image within the graphic notation. In the sense of freeing up ways of thinking, execution, interpretation and even composition in real time, taking on truly transformative forms.

But not only in music graphic notation happens: in dance this kind of score also occurs. There is a plastic dimension in the choreographies of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker (Fig. 3 and 4), - here plastic and spatial possibilities are constructed as they are drawn by the gesture of each dancer in movement. A game between two and three-dimensional space that refers to a score that is generated and evolved with dance, and becomes the object. This is very clear in *Cesena*, a circular choreography, a circle that is redrawn on the stage floor, a cross of silences, repetition and difference.



Figure 3 and 4. Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker, *Cesena*, 2012

Performance *Partidura*

What happens when we are matter?

In real-time, the drawing happens as recognition of a drawing that is lived, its process, and during the transformation in that time. The body is involved with all the possibilities and plastic powers that surround the same space, and the becoming is constant, unpredictable and uninterrupted presence.

During the performance *Partidura* (Fig.5), several times are present: time-performance, the time-sound, the time-matter, the time-body, the time-process. Are these times a kind of adaptations that coexist in order to locate and integrate us?

When direct experience is established between all these times, an anticipation is managed, and it is always under this anticipation, under the becoming, managing decisions that happen as propositions of affection. There is an integration of the

mediator information as an operative mode, the unpredictability and the error occupy the space of this encounter and only the encounter takes place while it exists, in the impossibility of not creating drawing. Be a matter.



Figure 5. Eunice Artur, *Partidura*, 2016, musician: agendas obscuras, performance, paper, coal and sound system, Music Academy of Coimbra

Sound as a medium, the performer as a medium, begins with magic, for us getting used to the echo. The chant that is scream. This almost silent sound, the uselessness and temerity of creation, the return of this creation, the scream, the depth of a force, a power, a double time, a time that is affected by mediation, and a relationship with the time of it itself, when generated. The echo.

The echo, in the sense that Le Clézio would say: "One, goes from the inside to the outside, the other, makes penetrate the external forces in the internal sense." (Le Clézio, 1987, p. 73).²

The fusion, transfusion, are flows of pulses that happen in the performance *Partidura* (Fig.6 and 7), like a relation in which the sound and the performer are manipulated and manipulators as medium. In this sense actions are generated by the unpredictability and error in the behavior of both actors. A synesthetic condition of movement echoes in both directions and is in both reciprocal.

² Original text: "Um vai do interior para o exterior, o outro faz penetrar as forças exteriores no sentido interno"

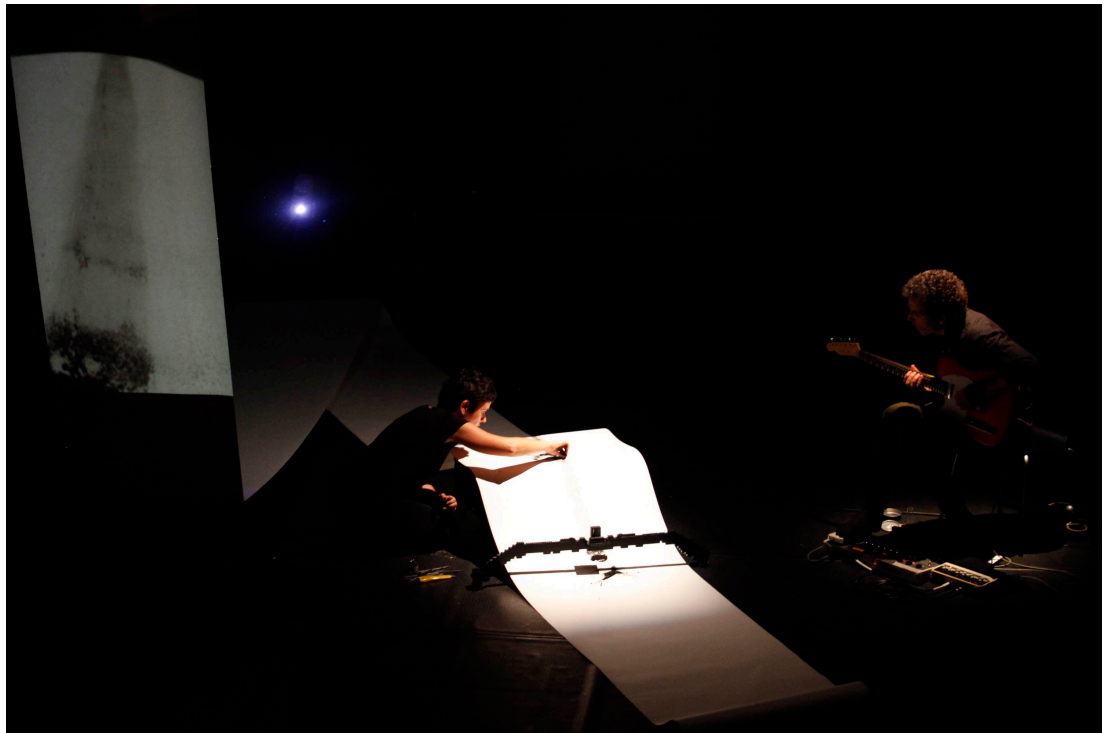


Figure 6 and 7. Eunice Artur, *Partidura*, 2015, musician: agendas obscuras, performance, paper, coal and sound system, Theater Esther de Carvalho, Montemor-o-Velho

The embodiment as an end enclosed in itself is very present in the composition in real time. In *Partidura* it is a phenomenological time, an abstract time present in the process. A time itself, which is present, which is not the same time as sound-time, nor is it the same as time-performer, being this indeterminate time, transcendent in its subtlety and stillness. Here sound and performance are grounded on the context

of contemporary art as a practice and object-process, making a proposal of translate sound and body (I add the performer) as a state of spatial modulation, addressed here in a plastic and material category. In this sense, we consider the performance *Partidura* (Fig.8), as a modulation that is due to the derivation of the sound that comes out of the amplifier, and to the expansion of the body-performer in the drawing.



Figure 8. Eunice Artur, *Partidura* (detail), 2016, musician: agendas obscuras, performance, paper, coal and sound system, Music Accademy of Coimbra

Sound and performer as medium, that takes shape a set of phenomenological elements that structure a proper time, that is present during the performance and generate a nonlinear dynamic that inserts all this operative mode in a composition in real time, that we define it by graphic notation. However, as a consequence of this same dynamic, the drawing is not defined as an end in itself. Being considered graphical notation, itself generates an open and non-linear interpretation by the interpreter.

Conclusion

This graphical presentation it's an almost anti-score, in the sense that it's the opposite of regular scores; but mainly because it is, at the same time, generating sound/music, and, vice-versa, and being generated by sound/music vibrations - in real time.

The direct printing of graphic notation (the drawing) is defined as object-result. However, it is not just a matter of closing that impression: from there new interpretations may emerge. The action of the medium (or simply the medium)

constitutes as space-drawing-sound where dual collaboration is lived in time, in which is read and triggered the score.

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