

GENDERING THE [PIANO] PERFORMING BODY¹

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The piano crossed various career paths of the Portuguese composer Constança Capdeville (1937–92): as a young music student, piano playing and composition were her main subjects at the National Conservatory in Lisbon, and some of her early works featured the piano as a solo instrument. As her compositional style shifted towards more experimental perspectives, and as she became, from the 1970s until her death, an icon of the Portuguese avant-garde, her approach to the piano also changed. Thus, analysing how the piano is used in her solo, chamber and ensemble works provides significant information about her development as a composer, as well as concerning her creative processes involving multimedia, and dramatic contents and methods.

This essay pursues a specific perspective regarding the piano in Capdeville’s artistic output, through analysing her musical texts, composition methods, staging instructions and related contextual contents, in order to propose a gendered outlook associated with this instrument. This outlook is informed by the authors’ previous artistic-research projects focused on some of her experimental works, and an ensuing “collective thinking-through-practice”² that grounded the recreation and analysis of musical theatre or staged works such as *Double* (1982) and *Don’t, Juan* (1985) in 2018, and *Avec Picasso, ce matin...* (1984) in 2019. These former research projects

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² Kent Olofsson, “Composing the Performance: An Exploration of Musical Composition as a Dramaturgical Strategy in Contemporary Intermedial Theatre” (Lund University, 2018), 245.

explored the relationship between archival contents and performance,³ and the role of ethnography in the recreation of experimental productions.⁴ The piano emerges as a focal point in several of Capdeville's works, and her scores and scripts are intertwined with instructions and contexts that dispute and challenge a perception of the piano as a mere musical instrument amongst other musical resources. This article will thus examine the representations and roles of the piano in selected examples from the composer's output, through the discussion of contextual, musical, and dramatic issues. We will begin by mapping Capdeville's two main phases of piano composition, and then discuss specific usages of the instrument in paradigmatic staged works that include the piano. The analysis of these cases is grounded on previous archival and performative research, as well as ethnographic methods, such as interviews undertaken with pianists who collaborated with Constança Capdeville. These elements will form our basis for the identification of common perspectives in piano composition and performance throughout her career, which, we believe, suggest the relevance of gendered-marked traits associated with the instrument.

Constança Capdeville and the piano

Capdeville's early compositions, as mentioned above, highlighted the piano as a solo instrument. Her Op. 1, *Música de Brincar (Music for Playing)*, from 1956, is a collection of four short piano pieces that includes one piece originally composed around 1950–52, “Caixinha de Música” (“Music Box”). The piano is also featured in other works from this period, and is thus prominently represented in most of her output until 1962. These works, which present programmatic titles or conventional designations (such as the use of opus numbers, or standard formats such as variations or suite), reflect her first attempts at developing a craftsmanship marked by the imaginary of childhood, and by the evocation of landscapes or sonic contexts. The works display tonal styles allied to an apparent simplicity and ingenuity, expressed through a limited range of dynamics and technical instrumental resources.

³. Alfonso Benetti, Mónica Chambel, and Helena Marinho, “Experimentando com Arquivos: A Recriação de ‘Double’ e ‘Don’t, Juan’ de Constança Capdeville”, *Acervo - Revista do Arquivo Nacional* 32, no. 3 (2019): 90–107.

⁴. Helena Marinho et al., “Experimental Recreation Practices: Restaging Constança Capdeville's Musical Theatre Work *Don't, Juan*”, *Studies in Musical Theatre* 14, no. 1 (2020): 77–94, https://doi.org/10.1386/smt_00020_1.

From 1962 until the end of the 1980s, Constança did not compose for solo piano, even though the instrument remained a significant element in several works composed during that period. Notably, her last work for the piano as a solo instrument is a four-hand piano piece, *Pequena Dança de Corte* (*Little Court Dance*, 1991), which returns to the simplicity that characterises the composing styles of her early years. After 1962, the piano is overwhelmingly integrated in various ensemble combinations, namely in staged productions, and the tonal / Romantic-inspired styles associated with the early pieces are replaced by the experimental perspectives that characterise Capdeville's last phase of production. Thus, considering the works for / with piano, Capdeville's output presents two phases, distinguishable by their compositional styles, and by the fact that the second phase features the piano almost exclusively as an ensemble instrument.

The piano in Capdeville's early works

Capdeville's early works emphasise their adherence to a seemingly conventional manner of approaching the instrument, considering their composition style and external references. Ingenuity, national allusions, and standard formats predominate, suggested by the titles as well: *Music for Playing* and *Portuguesas* (1956), *Danse Extatique* (1957), *Variations on the popular Portuguese theme "O meu menino"* (1958), *Small Sonata in B minor* (1960), and *10 Variations on a Brazilian Theme* (1961–62).⁵

This apparent simplicity can be observed in works such as the *Portuguesas*,⁶ Op. 4, a homage to the Portuguese composer António Fragoso (1897–1918). This cycle of three slow pieces (they all present *andante* movements) displays features found in Capdeville's other early piano works, combining a late Romantic style with the influence of the solo piano repertoire by French composers such as Debussy. The connection to Fragoso suggests that Capdeville may also have been influenced by one of the most distinct characteristics of that composer, namely the duality of

⁵The music collector João Pedro Mendes dos Santos owns a copy of an undated short piano piece, *João que chora, João que ri* (*John who cries, John who laughs*), which he attributes to Constança Capdeville. This information has not been confirmed yet, as additional cross-references to this piece are missing in other listings and descriptions of the composer's output.

⁶The title could be literally translated as *Portuguese* [plural] but employs a seldom-used designation (*Portuguesas* would be the standard term).

nationalism and cosmopolitanism,⁷ expressed through a seemingly simple structure and sonic world. Nevertheless, as pointed out above, this simplicity is deceptive, as the intricate combination of melodic layers in these pieces requires the skills of an expert pianist, in order to retain the illusion of effortlessness in spite of the high level of implied technical control.

This “hidden” balance between restraint and skill reiterates the pieces’ affiliation with a non-virtuosic Romantic approach to the instrument, contrasting with standard virtuosic styles. Thus, these works express the poise and control that some representations and social uses of the instrument have assumed since the mid-eighteenth century, namely those that present the piano as a domestic focal point.⁸ The early piano works of Capdeville, demure and coy, apparently anachronic and outdated, embody a field of social restraints and restrictions associated with the piano, the instrument that some social European milieus, until the twentieth century, chose as the instrument for regulating women’s activities, especially young women’s, through an enforced occupation of their leisure time. Period representations and depictions of the piano, its (female) performers, and its pedagogical approaches highlight an instrument that had to prevail and determine over the action and the anatomy of the human body. This stance led, for instance, to the making and marketing of several uncommendable contraptions and training devices during the nineteenth century, designed to “domesticate” the body of the pianist,⁹ promoting a negation of the Bakhtinian “grotesque body”,¹⁰ and imposing a contrived body, forced to submit to the instrument and its overpowering and over-human requirements.

Nonetheless, some of Capdeville’s early piano works also announce her later incursions into the experimental realm, and her interest in theatrical and gestural elements. *Visions d’enfant* (1958/59), a short suite composed when the composer was between 21 and 22 years of age, foreshadows the importance that the composer would later attribute to both elements in her experimental works of the 1980s. The pianist has to declaim the title of the fourth piece, “Maman, j’ai vu dans la lune”, throughout the movement, and

⁷ Paulo Ferreira de Castro, ed., *António Fragoso e o seu Tempo* (Lisbon: CESEM / Associação António Fragoso, 2010).

⁸ Richard Leppert, *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation and the History of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁹ Walter Ponce, *The Tyranny of Tradition in Piano Teaching: A Critical History from Clementi to the Present* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2019).

¹⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

the composer added several character indications in the score: “implorez attention” (“beg for attention”), “timide” (“shy”), “sous le poids du rêve” (“under the weight of the dream”). These instructions, since they are not meant to be read, require some sort of expressive action, not necessarily limited to the literal action of playing, bridging the gap between performance and scenic guidelines.

The piano was also used by the composer in ensembles, and it is possible to see the evolution of the composer’s creative style in these works. Her early chamber pieces, such as *Chant et air gai*, Op. 6 (1957) for violin and piano, or the *Sonatina a quatro* (1959/60) for flute, oboe, clarinet and piano, follow approaches developed in the solo piano works, and resort to traditional forms and style. The *Sonata Concertante* (1963) for trombone and piano, on the other hand, displays polytonal/atonal techniques, departing from her early compositions and marking the transition to a new phase. After the 1970s, Capdeville focused on composing for larger ensembles, which often included piano, voice and percussion. As the pianist Olga Prats, friend and collaborator of Capdeville, recalled, “the piano was still one of the most important musical components for Constança, but she could no longer set aside the voice and, above all, the percussion.”¹¹

Experimenting with the piano

Although Constança Capdeville started composing from an early age, after the 1970s she began to dedicate herself to this activity in a distinct manner, affirming her interest in dramatic musical representation, i.e. the theatricalisation of music.¹² The composer thought that music should be “presented to the public differently, as well as theatre and poetry, and movement and dance, so the moment has arrived in which we are all working for the same goal.”¹³ This idea allowed for the integration of novel artistic possibilities, “privileging temporal emancipation, timbre research and the

¹¹ Olga Prats, “Recordando...”, *Glosas* 6 (2012): 26. All the Portuguese quotes were translated by the authors of this chapter.

¹² Matthias Rebstock and David Roesner, *Composed Theatre: Aesthetics, Practices, Processes* (Bristol: Intellect, 2012).

¹³ Constança Capdeville, interview in Jorge Matta, “Percursos da Música Portuguesa - Constança Capdeville” (Portugal: RTP Arquivos, 2008), <https://arquivos.rtp.pt/conteudos/constanca-capdeville/#sthash.u8aKGqj7.jBHugLny.dpbs>.

integration of movement in the musical work”,¹⁴ and leading to the creation of works such as *Mise-en-Requiem* (1979), *Memoriae (quasi una fantasia) I* (1980), *Double* (1982), *Don't, Juan* (1985), *Amen para uma ausência* (1987), and *...Para um Stabat Mater* (1989).¹⁵ The growing focus on scenic and gestural components would motivate her to found the musical theatre group ColecViva, dedicated to the creation of music-theatre projects that involved musicians, dancers, actors, and light design. These productions became a paradigmatic mark of her style and creative vision, combining music with other performing arts such as dance or theatre, with the use of technology. As we mentioned in a former publication, “the in-betweenness of Capdeville’s materials—bridging conventional musical notation, spoken text, performance and scenic scripts, multimedia resources – emerges in performance as a multivalent *locus* of creative affordances.”¹⁶ Capdeville labelled these performance events as “theatre-music”, a designation that she preferred to the standard terminology “musical theatre”.

What became of the piano in this new context?

Don't, Juan, a paradigmatic example, provides significant information in its score: the second of its eleven short sections, “Alma mater”, includes a “dialogue between the phallic object [the piano] and the light projector soloist.”¹⁷ The composer, in this work, envisaged the piano (and other instruments) as a character, as reported by the composer to Maria João Serrão,¹⁸ and the musician playing this instrument had necessarily to be a woman (in the première, the pianist Olga Prats), as the pianist had to embody several female characters. Capdeville’s *Don't, Juan* was premiered in Lisbon in 1985 by the group ColecViva, and performance materials include notated musical and spoken contents for an ensemble of musicians (voice, piano, double bass and percussion), choreographic instructions for two stage performers (mime artist and dancer), light design, and objects and props (including the musical instruments that are used as characters

¹⁴ Manuel Pedro Ferreira, “Constança Capdeville - Ficha Biográfica”, in *Dez Compositores Portugueses*, ed. Manuel Pedro Ferreira (Lisbon: Publicações Dom Quixote, 2007), 305.

¹⁵ Maria João Serrão, *Constança Capdeville: Entre o Teatro e a Música* (Lisbon: Edições Colibri, 2006).

¹⁶ Marinho et al., “Experimental Recreation Practices: Restaging Constança Capdeville’s Musical Theatre Work *Don't, Juan*”, 87.

¹⁷ Composer’s autograph of *Don't, Juan* – piano part; archives of Constança Capdeville at the National Library of Portugal.

¹⁸ Serrão, *Constança Capdeville: Entre o Teatro e a Música*, 113.

and scenic elements). It also includes pre-recorded vocal and instrumental music (on magnetic tape) by Capdeville and other composers, and relies extensively on quotes from texts by Salvador Dalí, Albert Camus, Kurt Schwitters, and Lorenzo da Ponte's libretto for Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.

There are several dramatic and musical affinities between *Don't, Juan* and other works that closely preceded the foundation of Colecviva, such as *Double* (1982). This latter, notwithstanding the relevance of its dramatic components, was notated in a more conventional score format, whereas the materials for the performance of *Don't, Juan* are constituted by a collection of parts, scripts and schemes. Nonetheless, *Double* introduces certain perspectives that are reflected in the performative concepts that would underlie *Don't, Juan*: the interdependency between sound and gesture, with the frequent use of techniques and effects that require scenic movement by the pianist during the performance. In *Double*, the theme of duality and opposites is addressed as a "concentration of contradictory elements, both visual and sonic, and their coexistence, the main starting point for achieving musical theatricality."¹⁹ This perspective (found in several works by Capdeville) takes on a prominent role in *Double* through the opposition between dramatic and musical/sonic elements, the horizontal and vertical exploration of time (through the overlapping of interventions), and the duality attributed to each performer, in permanent dialogue with a scenic "double" and interacting with scenic elements and objects denotative of this connection (e.g. mirrors, chairs, and fictional characters). The double of the piano, in this work, is materialised through mirrors (not used by the other performers): one placed behind the piano and the pianist, and another one suggested by a flexatone (used in a narcissistic moment during Intervention 5). In the first case, the mirror creates a representation of a second pianist and of a second piano, and the sounds of a pre-recorded "double" tape simulate their performance. The interaction between the "pianists" is continuous and takes place through musical and scenic dialogues (the pianist even acts as a musical conductor of the "mirrored" pianist in a duet performance at the beginning of the third Intervention). The significance of the pianist's interaction with the mirror suggests that both pianist/piano and their reflections act as characters in this work. Although Constança Capdeville never mentioned such a connection, *Double* seems to foresee

¹⁹. This quote is part of a manuscript text, by an unidentified author, found in the archives of Constança Capdeville in the National Library of Portugal. This manuscript has three pages (the quote is included in the last page), and mentions that its information was based on notes provided by the composer.

a similar approach in *Don't, Juan*, and, in fact, both works share various content. The use of similar resources can be found in some scenic actions (e.g. alternating between moving and static positions), or even the literal replication of musical materials, as in the third section of *Don't, Juan*, when the pianist performs the same excerpt from *Double's* eighth Intervention, which involves striking the piano strings with drumsticks.

The piano, in these theatre-music works, presents a wide range of materials and performative approaches. On the one hand, the “traditional” use of the piano, namely in *Double*, which presents sections requiring the keyboard to be played in a standard manner. On the other hand, the frequent use of extended techniques, which require playing directly on the strings, for instance, using various objects (a metal can, screws, glass cup, marbles). These actions imply theatrical gestures, as pointed out above, and the use of the piano as the focal point for a scenic performance by the pianist.

In *Don't, Juan*, the piano overpowers the scene, as it plays the role of a character acting side by side with the pianist. Moreover, the pianist assumes multiples roles in this work: she is Gala Dalí (Salvador Dalí's wife), she is the Roman figure Gradiva (the figure of a walking woman represented in an antique Roman bas-relief²⁰), and, most significantly, she is Donna Anna from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. This scorned and forlorn woman is the body who caresses and fondles the piano, whispers into its case, reaches into its innards and hits its strings and frame with her hands or with drumsticks, strikes clusters on its keyboard and case with the hands, forcefully removes screws from its strings, vigorously rubs those strings and, at some point, even plays a violent *glissando* on the keys with her behind. The actions required by Capdeville are physically intense, and openly deviate from standard piano playing, nearly embodying sadomasochistic lovemaking.

A similar outlook, marked by gender issues, can be found in two other works composed during the same period, *Avec Picasso ce matin...* (1984), and the solo piano version of *Valse, Valsa, Vals, Keuschheits Waltz (Chastity Waltz)* (1987), dedicated to the pianist Olga Prats. The piano version of this waltz presents an atonal style, and integrates elements that are characteristic of Capdeville's experimental phase (e.g. the use of clusters and the exploration of sounds through the percussion of the instrument), as well as theatrical elements, such as the declamation of text fragments by the pianist throughout the performance. The piece alludes satirically to

²⁰ Gradiva is also the central focus of a novel (1902) by Wilhelm Jensen, an essay by Sigmund Freud, and one of the representations attributed by Salvador Dalí to his wife Gala.

Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales* (1911) by including the indication "Tempo de Valsa (Nobre e não Sentimental)" ("Waltz Time, Noble and not Sentimental"), and suggests chastity as a sensual element alluding to the relationship between the pianist (since the piece was dedicated to a woman) and the piano (previously referred to as a phallic object in *Don't, Juan*).

Avec Picasso ce matin..., for solo piano, recorded tape, and light design, cites two men often reported as notorious Spanish womanisers: Picasso (explicitly, in the title and as author of the pre-recorded texts) and Don Juan (implicitly, by reusing some of the materials of *Don't, Juan*, as described below). This could suggest that a similar outlook on the piano might be shared by *Avec Picasso ce matin...* and *Don't, Juan*: the piano as the overpowering beast, and the pianist as the character who tries to seduce, punish or calm it, like the "torero" mentioned in the text of the pre-recorded tape of *Avec Picasso, ce matin...* In the première of this piece, as in *Don't, Juan*, the pianists were women, respectively Madalena Soveral and Olga Prats. However, regardless of gender, the frequent use of extended or non-standard techniques demands a high degree of gestural involvement that evidences the nonconformity of the pianist's actions, and her/his bodily presence.

Première by Madalena Soveral in Paris in 1984, *Avec Picasso, ce matin...* presents various performing challenges because of the multiplicity of available sources: two different autograph scores (one belonging to Madalena Soveral, the other at the composer's archives in the National Library of Portugal); one recorded tape for performance (kindly shared by Madalena Soveral), one set of recorded excerpts labelled as "Picasso's leftovers" and one recorded performance (probably featuring the Portuguese composer and pianist Jorge Peixinho, both from the archives of the private collector João Pedro Mendes dos Santos); sets of instructions for percussion (to be played by the pianist) and lights (in the composer's archives at the National Library of Portugal). According to the information gathered during an interview with Madalena Soveral (Porto, August 2019), the work was commissioned by her for presentation at the Festival Femmes et Musique at the Théâtre du Rond-Point in Paris, in 1984. Jorge Peixinho also performed the work (probably again in 1984, according to the date on the respective autograph), but *Avec Picasso, ce matin...* was not restaged until 2019,²¹ since the materials were scattered among different persons and archives, and required complex archival and performative investigation. In the

²¹ The work was presented in December 2019 by Helena Marinho (piano) and Luís Bittencourt (percussion), at the 4th International Encounters of Contemporary Piano, Helena Sá e Costa Theatre, in Porto (Portugal).

context of this research, the recorded contents, in a cassette tape support,²² were digitised and the background noise removed after the digitalisation. This tape included pre-recorded excerpts played by percussion instruments, which engaged in a dialogue with the percussion instruments played by the pianist, and an introductory spoken presentation of a poetic text written by Pablo Picasso, recorded by the singer António Wagner Diniz, one of Capdeville's collaborators. The text, which displays writing techniques associated with the surrealist movement (namely its emphasis on automatic writing, dream descriptions, collage and juxtaposition) and suggests the influence of the poetry of Gertrude Stein,²³ is an excerpt from a poem written by Picasso on December 5th, 1935.²⁴

The recreation of *Avec Picasso, ce matin...* was undertaken by the authors after their previous projects involving *Double* and *Don't, Juan*. Thus, the interrelation between the works became evident from the

²² Madalena Soveral owns the original tape, which we did not use, as the cassette-tape copy was in good condition, and there were no resources available to restore the magnetic tape.

²³ Androula Michael, "Picasso ou le plaisir de l'écriture et quelques résonances Steiniennes", in *Actes du colloque Revoir Picasso* (Paris: Musée Picasso, 2015), 1-5, http://revoirpicasso.fr/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/RevoirPicasso-2015_J4_A.Michael.pdf.

²⁴ "[] met son chapeau et cherche son parapluie et compte les cartes du jeu de 2 à 4 et de 50 à 28 s'il assassine et serre de toute sa méchanceté contre les lèvres du citron du miroir flambant comme un fou et se brûle la bouche la cruche fifre et demande à l'aveugle de lui indiquer le chemin le plus court qui fendille sa couleur dans la cape la corne torse tu sais déjà par qui la lumière qui tombe et vole en éclats dans sa figure sonne la cloche qui effraye de ses gestes d'adieu la cathédrale que l'air qui poursuit à coups de fouet le lion qui se déguise en torero défaille entre ses bras sans un bravo et maintenant si éclatant et dans son regard la radio éveillée par l'aube avec tant de comptes arriérés sur le dos retenant son haleine et portant dans le plat en équilibre la tranche de lune l'ombre que le silence éboule fait que l'accent continue à photographier dans le baiser une punaise de soleil si la fa ré si mi fa do si la do fa mange l'arôme de l'heure qui tombe et traverse la page qui vole et si après avoir fait son baluchon défait le bouquet qu'emporte fourré entre l'aile dont je sais déjà pourquoi elle soupire et la peur que lui fait son image vue dans le lac si la pointe du poème sourit tire le rideau et le couteau qui bondit de plaisir n'a pas d'autre ressource que mourir de plaisir quand le sang même aujourd'hui flottant à sa guise et n'importe comment au moment précis et nécessaire seulement pour moi voit passer comme un éclair en haut du puits le cri du rose que la main lui jette comme une petite aumône." In Jean-Louis Bédouin, ed., *La poésie surréaliste: Anthologie* (Paris: Seghers, 1964), n.p.

beginning of the research process and grounded the performative tasks, and information collected from the interviews with Capdeville's collaborators about her work methods was likewise taken into consideration. One of the major problems regarding the recreation of Capdeville's theatre-music works lies in the ambiguity of the extant scores and scripts, and the composer's reliance on event-specific methods, which depend on the memory of the participants and not on a systematic recordkeeping of artistic tasks and results. Collaborating with a limited core of artists also affected how Capdeville registered and preserved her records. As mentioned by João Paulo Santos, the pianist who participated in the première of *Double*, Capdeville (as well as her composer and pianist colleague Jorge Peixinho) looked upon composing in a particular manner:

They wanted to write with a lot of freedom, especially because they wrote for people that they were used to working with, so they were not the type of people who thought: 'I'm writing my works for publication in the States, to be played by some Americans.' That did not happen [...]. This could have led them to pay a certain attention to notation, but, because of all these reasons, that never happened. (Interview with João Paulo Santos, Lisbon, October 2019)

Thus, Capdeville's works present multiple paths for performance, departing not only from extant sources, but also from the information provided by the materials associated with other works from the same period, such as *Don't*, *Juan*. The interviews, whilst offering a glimpse into Capdeville's creative processes, also presented some inconsistencies: having interviewed four of the pianists who worked with her, Olga Prats, Nuno Vieira de Almeida, João Paulo Santos, and Madalena Soveral, and having questioned them about Capdeville's demand for exactness, we noted that their opinions were not unanimous. A possible clue to this ambiguity was suggested by João Paulo Santos: "she asked people to do what she knew they would naturally do []. She would not have worked with somebody who she did not know well." This suggested that her work methods might have been dependent on her personal and professional relationship with the performers, as well as her knowledge of their abilities.

Thus, we were aware, on the one hand, of the unrepeatability of her works, tightly bound with the contexts and the artists involved. On the other hand, the interrelation that we identified between the archive materials, as well as the information collected during the interviews about Capdeville's work methods, warranted an experimental stance, akin to the composer's own procedures for developing her theatre-music creations. In fact, these works are permeated by an experimental thought, which transcends the

work and its materials. This experimental thought affects actions and work methods, and “contaminates” the performative/creative process, generating experimental performance practices.²⁵

Thus, we chose to infuse our performative exploration of *Avec Picasso, ce matin...* with the procedure of “infection”, combining the original materials (score, tape recordings, scenic and light instructions), gathered through archival research, with correlated materials from *Don't, Juan*. This involved, for instance, enhancing the dialogue between the percussion and the piano parts – both played by the pianist in the première – through the participation, in this version, of a percussionist, evidencing thus the link between *Avec Picasso, ce matin...* and *Don't, Juan*. We also included materials borrowed from *Don't, Juan*: visual contents, like the images collected by the composer as inspiration for the creation of this work, which became the basis for a new video background designed by Luís Bittencourt that accompanied the live performance of *Avec Picasso, ce matin...* We also added spoken and musical contents from *Don't, Juan*, in order to reinforce and unveil these hidden connections between the two pieces. Thus, some of the texts presented by the performers in *Don't, Juan* were inserted into analogous sections of *Avec Picasso, ce matin...*, as well as some scenic gestures required by Capdeville in the former work. The characters associated with *Don't, Juan* were also integrated, as we reused a video introduction created by the video artist João Valentim for our 2018 performance of *Don't, Juan*. The video was strongly focused on the gender issues raised by this work, and the fact that both *Don't, Juan* and *Avec Picasso, ce matin...* were composed for two women pianists was an issue that we tried to highlight, deliberately exposing an aspect that we believe to be latent and implied in both works.

²⁵ According to Mauceri (1997), experimental music is related to “conventional” contemporary music, although the term is used for a more daring, individualistic and eccentric type of musical expression. Since there is often no clear distinction between experimental music and Western contemporary art-music, perhaps this is one of the reasons why musical works that use experimental resources (whether related to aesthetics, notation, composition or performance techniques) do not always result in experimental performance practices; see Frank X. Mauceri, “From Experimental Music to Musical Experiment”, *Perspectives of New Music* 35, no. 1 (1997): 187–204.

Final remarks

Philip Thomas, seeking to discuss the interpretative approach of an experimental musician/pianist, based on a reflection by the pianist David Tudor, argues that experimental works are “prescriptions for actions”, and that it is crucial that the performers move away from a generalised interpretation towards a more investigative work, seeking to find in the works their implicit and often unique performance practices. In addition, Thomas explains:

Tudor’s use of the word “actions” is revealing as it goes to the core of what it is to play an instrument. It is a word that is not generally encountered within literature relating to instrumental and performance practices, which are generally concerned with the development of “technique” and “interpretation”. There is a refreshing honesty about the term “make actions” to describe what one does when playing music; it shrugs off centuries of tradition, schools of technique (here schools of pianism) and dismisses the mystique of “interpretation”. Tudor’s description seems to approach how a “performing tradition” of experimental music might be expressed.²⁶

The association with experimentalism, in the case of Capdeville’s works, is not only related to the characteristics and the possibilities of manipulating their materials – e.g. the scores, which include standard, graphic and textual notation with indeterminate elements, in addition to scenic and improvised contents; or the musical instruments used and, consequently, their techniques, which explore unusual affordances regarding their sonic palette. Although these materials contribute to producing performative results that may be indeterminate in relation to the composition itself, the idea of experimentation associated with Capdeville’s works surpasses the characteristics of their technical objects.²⁷ Experimental works, such as Capdeville’s theatre-music productions, are packed with instructions for action, which compel their performers to raise questions, and rationally or intuitively make decisions during the process of developing the performance. This inquisitive mind-set and the resulting decisions substantially affect the

²⁶ Philip Thomas, “A Prescription for Action”, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Experimental Music*, ed. James Saunders (London and New York: Ashgate, 2016), 77–78.

²⁷ Regarding the concept of technical objects, see Paulo de Assis, *Logic of Experimentation: Rethinking Music Performance through Artistic Research* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2018), 13–14.

performative dimension of the work and, ultimately, question the concept of work itself. Moreover, since decision making inevitably involves reflection, the performance of experimental works is more a space for problematisation and investigation than an opportunity for representation. Due to the experimental nature of these works, as well as the practical issues of working with scarce or missing materials (e.g. some contents of the score and of the magnetic tape of some works had deteriorated, were incomplete or missing), when preparing the performance of Capdeville's works our tangible and intangible materials were constantly reconsidered and reconfigured, and therefore our approach would be better represented through the expression "composition of performance".

In this context, the piano, for Constança Capdeville, emerged as an essential element, and, as we suggest in this chapter, a conveyor of meanings that transcended its strictly musical function and pointed to significant perspectives of engagement with Capdeville's materials. Even though there is a marked difference between the instrumental approaches of her first phase (mostly focused on solo repertoire) and the experimental styles explored during the second phase (predominantly presenting the piano as an ensemble instrument), the bodily experience(s) of playing and developing a dramatic *persona* follows a path that relies noticeably on a performative experience of gender.²⁸ The traits that evoke this type of performativity are noticeable at several levels. On the one hand, the context and the materials, through the reference to fictional and extant characters whose sexual and bodily presence, in connection with the piano, is unescapable; on the other hand, the instructions for action and gesture, which link music, representation and gendered bodies in implicit but also, oftentimes, rather explicit manners. The piano, in *Don't, Juan*, is designated to embody a phallic symbol, but it might also act, in this and other works created by Capdeville, as a surrogate for Don Juan himself, the absent protagonist who never appears during the performance, but bursts away at the end of the performance as a cloaked faceless character, fluttering his cape, leaving the pianist, just like the Commendatore from *Don Giovanni*, frozen as a powerless female stone statue on stage.

²⁸. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

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