

Extended Presence in *Cuerpo Cardinal*

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the notion of spatial presence among three distant performers. The article introduces concepts and describes the creative process in line with discussions on artistic and technical challenges of that collaboration from distance.

1. Introduction

Cuerpo Cardinal, performed by three percussionists physically separated from each other, is presented here. The composer, Jônatas, lives in Brazil, and the three percussionists, Fernanda and Isadora live in Brazil, and Daniela, in Argentina. The new composition, recreated during the pandemic, is part of Manzolli's series of compositions to break with social isolation called *Cartas@todoCanto* (Portuguese for letters to everywhere or to every chant).

The article describes how the composer and performers worked together with the notion of extended spatial presence to create a bodily expressed percussive

Abstract

Three percussionists and a composer located in Brazil and Argentina broke with social isolation to recreate a novel music piece. Starting upon an original graphic score written by Manzolli in 2007, the new work was performed with a bit of humor, featuring three women living the pandemic crisis. Using video montage techniques, *Cuerpo Cardinal* disrupted the bodily absence extending therefore

work. In the next sections there is a discussion on three theoretical aspects connecting the musical and aesthetic perspectives of *Cuerpo Cardinal* followed by elucidations of the creative process and artistic research.

2. Background & Concepts

The first concept connected to *Cuerpo Cardinal* aesthetic proposal is the notion of multimodal performance which can be understood as an artwork articulating music, sounds, visuals, and movement in a coherent discourse, and interweaving different senses to immerse the spectator in a multisensory dialogue. This artistic viewpoint has already been introduced and presented in the Generative Arts conferences, previously.

Descobertas (2016), a multimodal opera, integrated dance¹, interactive video and dance in a stage with choir and soloists, and four instrumental ensembles was presented in 2016 [1]. Inspired by the Salvador Dalí's master piece we created the *Ode to Christus Hypercubus*² (2018) where the medieval organum was reconstructed with computer music techniques [2]. Recently, in *Viento y Mar* (2020)³, an orchestral work with multimodal elements interweaved music, soloist percussion, and Flamenco dance was described in the special edition of the GASATHJ journal [3].

¹ A trailer of *Descobertas* (2016) is available at <https://youtu.be/zCRq9zVPLew> and the full work at <https://youtu.be/bTqh313DI-0>.

² An electronic studio preview of the *Ode* is available at <https://youtu.be/Ks3X80TZkMs>.

³ A full version of *Viento y Mar* is available at <https://youtu.be/Q-647Gp0yi4>. The compositional process is presented at <https://youtu.be/8FNDHKkdmOo>.

The second concept dialoguing with *Cuerpo Cardinal* is the notion of music theater. Also called experimental music theater is a 20th century music genre created in opposition to more conventional genres such as opera and musical theater; an avant-garde perspective within the instrumental and vocal music realm introducing gestures and movements with sound, costumes and other visual and theatric elements [4].

Finally, the notion of *Presence*, that has been studied in virtual reality research, also encompasses *Cuerpo Cardinal* conceptual views. Briefly, the VR literature defines *Presence* as the effect felt by someone when interact with and immerse in VR environments. Recently, [5] discussed how the notion of spatial *Presence* that can be defined as the feedback from unconscious cognitive processes that inform conscious thought.

Since the performers are separated and isolated from each other, we appropriated that notion of spatial presence to deal with the spatial isolation during the COVID19 pandemic. We creatively explored the virtual notion of virtual shared space among the three performers mindsets creating new paths for their movements, imaginative thoughts and music skills.

3. Creative Process

Manzoli's original graphic score was written in 2007 for body interaction among percussionists (figure 1). The score described how percussive musical gestures should be played in specific body locations: *north (head)*, *south (waist and legs)*, *east (right side of the body)*,

and west (left side), as the work's title *Cuerpo Cardinal* (Spanish for Cardinal Points on the Body) suggests. But in the 2020 we are confronting with a new performance situation: interpreters are living in different countries or separated by geographical locations and cannot interact physically with each other. Therefore, in our project three musicians and the composer adapted the original score creating a new music theatre work to deal with that situation.

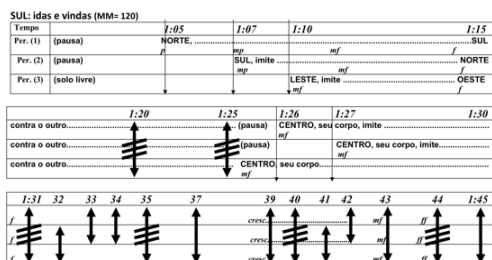


Figure 1: Manzólli's original graphic score indicating specific body locations.

In order to collaborate and work together, the process was divided into three stages as described below and in figure 2.

- macro structural ideas: collective discussions on general concepts and ideas using online video calls;
- micro structural details: individual interpretations of three characters living social isolation;
- audiovisual montage: integration of the performer's previous recordings in a final audiovisual work.

The project has begun with the challenge to overcome the concept of the original piece. Therefore, the sound production without physical contact was of great concern. Since later the videos should be recorded individually and independently, a second aspect to be studied was to find the right movement to indicate how each performer was interacting with her personal space in order to indicate the bided virtual presence of the other two.

In order to afford the final video montage of *Cuerpo Cardinal* (see figure 3), we created a video-score with graphic cues to be played in a computer screen or mobile phone during the individual recordings; there was a colored timeline to indicate metronomic marks in seconds. The video cues were very helpful to create the individual performances because they avoided to pay attention to the time pulse excessively, increasing freedom for their self-expression.

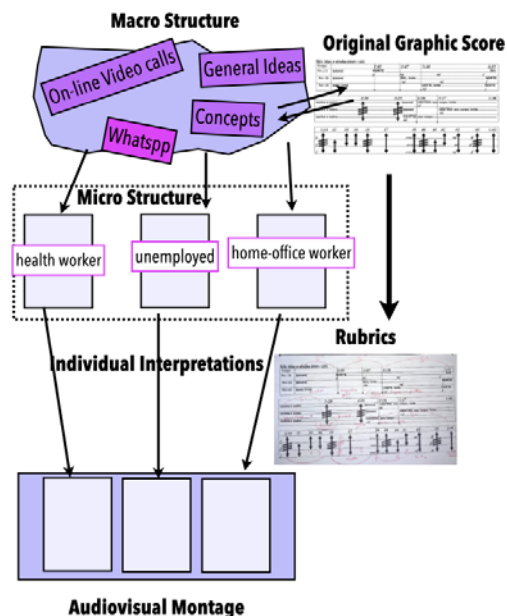


Figure 2: Diagram showing the three stages of the process to recreate *Cuerpo Cardinal*.

4. Video Montage

Firstly, the symbology assigned to the three characters and scenes were built during online video meetings. Secondly, individual interpretations were detailed by rubrics in the original score. Facing the pandemic moment, the new version of *Cuerpo Cardinal* was finally assembled in a video montage featuring three screens in parallel (see figure 3). The individual performances were recorded separately by each performer and the video metronomic guide acted as a kind of musical conductor therefore, the synchronization was done with the same time references.



Figure 3: Video montage of *Cuerpo Cardinal* showing the performers' visual integration and the three characters.

The original sound of percussion on each other bodies might have been replaced by percussion instruments, but we decided to emphasize the impossibility of touching each other bodies with scenic gestures. Under this perspective, we

have decided to perform the same movements specified in the original score but within a scenic approach. Further, we have also decided to perform three women characters: *health worker*, *home-office worker*, *an unemployed one* (see figure 3, from left to right)

The individual narratives were therefore passed during a full day with synchronous time periods. With a bit of humor, we portrayed these three women living within the pandemic crisis. Each one performs their own daily activities and sometimes they feel themselves body drumming. When the day is finishing, a video call invites them to a percussion jam section: a possible Equinox of bodies and minds, revealing these women's dream along with other people whom also aim similar encounters in such difficult situation.

5. Discussion

The poetic concepts related to the *Cuerpo Cardinal* recreation was prior to the technical study of the score. Since we have made the first reading of the piece we already developed new ideas for body percussion and scenic gestures. These points interlaced with performance concepts have given space to many new elements emerging throughout the process, from macro ideas towards micro details (see figure 2).

As demonstrated in figure 3, we have inserted summarized rubrics on the original score reminding movements and scene cues, in addition to guidelines for body percussion. This approach followed the previous methodology discussed in [3] where we described the creative process of Manzolli's *Viento y Mar*.

Since the *Cuerpo Cardinal* recreation let us to perform with musical and theatrical

elements, a reflection was necessary to integrate those aspects in the whole composition. We have discussed about the three characters' short narratives and their personal contexts to integrate them in a multimodal discourse.

Figure 3: Notation on the original score describing cues for anticipating gestural and sound interaction.

It was necessary to imagine and project the whole piece, define movements, moreover to think about the individual and collective scene. Therefore, camera positioning was a very important issue. We worked this aspect together in order to achieve the desired interweave of movements when the three individual video recordings come together in the final audio-visual montage.

We were confronting a new experience since we haven't performed similar ones before. Traditionally, it is a bit difficult to work with body expression during musical performances, even for percussionists. Isadora said: "So, for me, the connection of music with those very peculiar visual aspects, to unify body expression with scenic creation, was something very challenging, but also charming".

Second important aspect was the composition of the three characters. Fernanda described her character

creation as follow: "I tried to imagine what would be a health professional during the pandemic crisis: her insecurities, anguish, fears, and longing of distant relatives". Other aspects to be explored was the daily activities aiming to achieve the equilibrium, such as a simple morning stretch or a music practice that the character would like the most.

Daniela performed a home-office worker woman, isolated at home, living different daily situations during 2020, and so far from her true reality. In the first section of the piece, Daniela's character arrives from the street tired with a mask and coat. Then she had a moment of peace connecting herself with the inner world through meditation. Thus, music helped her to reach that state of mind incredibly well. During the afternoon, her character decided to exercise freely. Daniela described that "almost as if she was following an internal choreography and feeling better and better".

The day goes by, the work continues, and psychical exercises helped Daniela's character to release endorphins and increase happiness. When the night came, that woman managed to connect with the other two other women, using technology. Daniela said about that moment: "then music returns and finally the character found a way to feel good, happy and happy in a very unlike year but full of reflections and an incomparable growth of the soul".

6. Discussion & Conclusion

The recreation of *Cuerpo Cardinal* was anchored in a collective and individual artistic research process. General concepts, artistic contextualization and

ideas on musical unit and performance were jointly created during virtual meetings involving the composer and the percussionists. Nevertheless, specific features on musical interpretation were created by each percussionist, individually.

Moreover, the recreation of *Cuerpo Cardinal*, happened in a very peculiar situation, we are already under a social crisis that fulfilled ourselves with reflections, intense feelings, doubts, what could be almost described as a "tidal wave of thoughts".

Therefore, in the same manner as other artists we have sought different ways of expressing ourselves under confinement and social isolation. Thus, the interpersonal creativity of our group has transformed its course dynamically, grew, and became stronger even in the pandemic context.

A composer and three percussionists together, recreated this interesting piece that was originally based on physical close contact, which then became a beautiful and great challenge since each of us have been isolated in our homes. Since *Cuerpo Cardinal* recreation will not be performed on a stage, we decided to integrate the three videos recorded individually in a whole piece and that generated new needs and directions, and wonderful things emerged.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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