

IDIOSYNCRATIC WAYS OF PRESERVING PERFORMING ARTS CREATION IN AN (DIGITAL) ARCHIVE

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ABSTRACT

Most collections conceived in artistic domains, whether in dance, music or theatre, as they are performances and involve heterogeneous sources such as text, image, audio-video recordings, music, scenarios, gesture, movement, among others, are difficult to describe or document in archival contexts (e.g., music theatre). Archiving these works challenges musicologists, as it requires an in-depth knowledge of their collaborative practices, in addition to a study considering an archaeological musicology, being necessary to gather the pieces of the puzzle, since the different elements/materials of the works are dispersed by various sources. Post-custodial forms of archive present some solutions, however it would be important to seek for a common core language and combine archival standards in order to allow the interoperability of information to understand these works from a holistic perspective. In this paper, I seek to broaden discussions about the issues around preserving creations in the field of performing arts in the (digital) archive, giving specific examples in different artistic spheres.

1. INTRODUCTION

The performative genre music theatre associated with such names as Luciano Berio, Luigi Nono, John Cage, Mauricio Kagel, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Heiner Goebbels, Georges Aperghis, Sylvano Bussotti, György Ligeti, Constança Capdeville, Carlos Alberto Augusto and António Sousa Dias, amongst others, has not been yet properly addressed from the archival perspective. Often composers produced documentation in close collaboration with performers, with specific notes for them, and many documents are in

own their custodies. Part of music theatre documentation remains dispersed over many sources or lost, obscuring the performance of improvised hypothetical components, as well as issues of idiosyncratic or non-standard notations, coupled with obsolescence and deterioration of carriers (e.g., tapes) and a continued lack of systematisation. All this hinders study and dissemination. The importance of reflecting on the key constraints encountered in recovering music theatre works incorporating different means represents an enduring challenge for archival studies. Music theatre preservation strategies go beyond the act of active listening as proposed by Alain Bonardi from a set of interactions between listeners and musical documents, or acts of closed listening (focused listening without recourse to any other source of information) or multimodal (characterized by the use of various music-related documents, e.g., recording information and musical representations (e.g., scores, sonogram visualizations) while proceeding listening [1]. Authors Mathieu Barthes and Simon Dixon argue that the creation of software for musicologists should facilitate switching between closed and multimodal listening modes, as well as interaction with scores and lyrics serving as a reference in performance analysis, using content based on MIR techniques [2]. Preserving works in the field of performing arts requires combining conceptual practices and methodologies between musicology and archival science to preserve works holistically, being achieved through: 1) researching theoretically the works specificities and analysing their documentation considering musicological and archival science methodologies to developing a new theoretical framework; and 2) investigating practice: documenting productions as part of the notion of the post-custodial archive. Thus, re-performing music theatre implies making an archaeology of works gathering scattered documents and understanding mutual interactions [3]. Performance studies on collaborative practices [4] or performance documentation [5, 6, 7] are useful, since systematising works of a performative nature covers several methodological steps based on pre-existing documentation or interviews with composers, performers, directors, producers, studio musical assistants or other contributors of performances.

The terminology relating to artworks that include performance is varied, so some researchers are dedicated to creating documentation tools to safeguard performance-based artworks. The assessment of the existing documentation relating to performing artworks within the Tate collection led to the development of the 2018 *Strategy for the Documentation and Conservation of Performance* [8]. This strategy involved the drafting of a glossary of terms in order to standardise the information and facilitate the identification, by the Tate team, of the different types of performance that appear in each activated and/or installed collection. According to these authors, the Tate concept of performance is described as “works of art created through actions taken by the artist or by other participants, which can be live or recorded, spontaneous or with a script” [8]. This problem related to terminology affects the performing arts in general, especially dance and music from the 1950s onwards. In that sense, it seems essential to me to deepen archival theory to face challenges in representing performance, aiming to find the appropriate sustainable archival standards and/or well-defined ontologies (exploring the conceptual model RIC), which allow for information interoperability facilitating users’ research.

2. POST-CUSTODIAL FORMS OF ARCHIVE

Recent experiences concerning dance and (digital) archives may also motivate the searching for alternatives to document music theatre works or other in the context of performing arts. In “Dance and the (Digital) Archive: A Survey of the Field”, the authors made a kind of survey of the various online resources available for the documentation and/or archiving of dance in different manners, proposing a division into four categories of resources which they called ‘online dance archives’ [9]. With that survey, they intended to feed future projects and experiences of the TKB - Transmedia Knowledge-Base for the Performing Arts. They sought to understand how online dances were formed and maintained at an archival level: whether by collecting (dance collections), by accumulation (social media), by storage (personal websites), or by assemblage (research projects), having outlined four categories to encompass such “archival” practices. As previously mentioned, the TKB platform allows the construction of personal collections by the artists themselves, as well as the curation of various materials, which together create a network of relationships between the participating artists. The artists are able to import their materials and tag them according to their own idiosyncratic taxonomies, establishing ontologies and an interconnection between the various artists, thus expanding the network of connections between them [9]. In this sense, a parallel can be made with participatory archives, insofar as the participants themselves are considered as co-creators, as the archives are created based on collaborations with and for the community [10]. Members of a given community are responsible for much of the archival work itself, from their contribution to the

record through assessment, archival organization, description and access, having a greater voice in the construction of the archive and creating their own metadata, while following advice from professional archivists [10]. Archives more directly engaged with the community fit into the notion of the post-custodial archive. As stated by Fernandes et al., “post-custodial forms of the archive, which often, if not always, include and depend upon digital forms of internet archival architectures, therefore represent a major challenge to the institutions whose primary mission has to do with what we call ‘to collect’” [9]. TKB reflects a post-custodial approach while working as a participatory archive, as the artists decide either to upload or remove their own materials and choreographic resources, as well as deciding when and what should be archived and published. However, this approach can be problematic, not only because archiving is not regulated by archival standards for the description of metadata allowing the interoperability of information, but also because it does not facilitate the consistency of a uniform taxonomy, because each artist has their own language and decides which words to use and tag, thus also contributing to the dispersion of information. The same occurs with the various musical languages that emerged in the different forms of art that arose mainly after the 1950s, both in dance, music, and other creations in the field of performing arts, changing the way in which this variety of languages can be represented, especially in an (digital) archive. Eric Ketelaar refers to the performative turn in archival science, highlighting Diana Taylor’s notion that “[P]erformances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated, or... twice-behaved behaviour” [11]. Archival documents only work when they are used, and there is the possibility that they can be reinvented as new performance events [12]. For example, the performance artist Marina Abramović “has long since started on a process of recovering her performances, photographing, and recording them on video, thus believing that she keeps her work alive. The artist prepares the performers for the re-performances on the grounds that her indications help them to enter her language and philosophy more easily” [13]. Abramović in the directions she conveys to the performers, passes on her own testimony believing that she contributes to the authenticity of her performances.

Methods for ensuring the authenticity and reliability of various works of art can serve as a model for how these qualities can be preserved in digital recording systems outside the arts. Ketelaar refers to the experiments undertaken by the research team InterPARES 2, which include case studies in the creative and performing arts to understand how these disciplines conceptualise authenticity, reliability and accuracy in interactive and dynamic systems in music, dance, theatre, moving images, and interactive media installation [11].

A collection supposes a random organisation of the documentation. According to Ketelaar, there are archival artists who use the category of collection, varying their

materials according to what the art critic Hal Foster calls a quasi-archival logic, and presenting their documents as a quasi-archival architecture [11]. Ketelaar is referring, among others, to the archival organisation of composer Arnold Dreyblatt. Ketelaar tackles Dreyblatt's "T Projects", in which the composer tracks the movement of records and their meaning within and outside organisations, using a duplicate archive of over 4.000 documents he created from state archives in Europe and North America. Ketelaar states that these "T documents" are also used in Dreyblatt's reading projects and simulate the living environment in which records are created, stored and used. People are invited to participate in a functional but temporal "archival installation system". Thus, for Ketelaar, in installations and immersive performances such as those created by Dreyblatt and others, people and documents become an "immersive archive", demonstrating that records are created and used by people who are component and controlled by people. record keeping systems [11]. Yet according to Ketelaar, performance scholars examine archival theory to address the challenge of representing performance. Regardless of being a form of post-custodial archive, artists involved with dance, music or theatre should benefit from institutional aid, in order to systematize their collections according to the proper archival standards/models.

3. THE REPRESENTATION / NOTATION OF PERFORMING ARTS CREATION: TWO CASE STUDIES

Digital humanities research applied to the performing arts contributes to our understanding of the complex nature of works involving performances in dance, music, or theatre, as well as their collaborative creation processes. Discussing issues related to the archiving and re-performing of electroacoustic music, computer music and digitized music, as well as sharing approaches and knowledge on preserving digital media [14]. Hence, music archiving through recourse to digital technologies is significant in the preservation of musical works comprising technological means (e.g., tape) playing key roles within the works with corresponding implications for performance archival practices. Digital Annotation allows experimentation with digital technology in documenting, analysing and disseminating dance/performance. The annotation of movements or gestures from videos in an archival context requires very detailed work that ranges from annotation of the look to the raising of the arm, among many other aspects of the performance. Aiming to document a brief performance corresponding to the movements/gestures of the dancer in the music theatre work *FE...DE...RI...CO...* (1987) by the composer Constança Capdeville, I carried out an experiment resorting to the video annotator MotionNotes [13]. I was able to annotate movements and mark place notes, images, drawings, etc., writing a kind of notation for the movement part. Initially, I started taking notes from the only video recording that exists, which belongs to the Gulbenkian

Archive, but after talking with the dancer João Natividade, he stated that he was crawling with his eyes closed along the edge of a grand piano and, according to him, to annotate this performative piece, one should consider the main intention, which was the feeling that he was in the middle of the abyss while moving over the edge of the grand piano. The dancer's testimony altered all of the performance documentation initially made for this sequence demonstrating how the contributions from former performers are essential for more precise annotation, while the study of video recordings fall short especially when the footage is in poor condition.

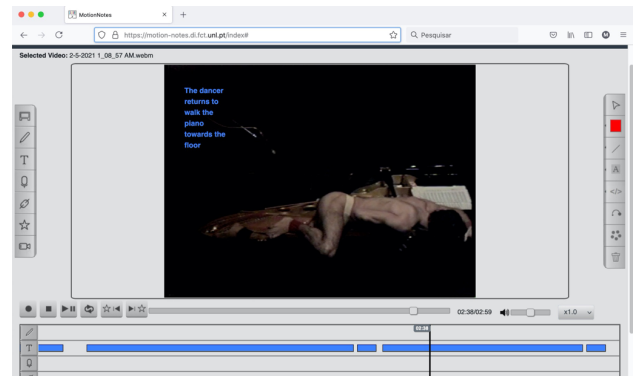


Figure 1. João Natividade's performance/gestures noted using MotionNotes.

Another tool used to aid music analysis or graphic annotations is *iAnalyse* software [15], developed by Pierre Couprie, allowing the musicologist to access a set of different files (images, sound, markers, etc.), permitting the synchronisation of the pages of a score on an audio or video file or the creation of representations from the audio signal, amongst other possibilities, helping to understand visually the collaborative creation process and serving also as a guide to listening. The result of the analysis can be exported and visualized in video format. *iAnalyse* was particularly useful for the analysis of *Double* (1982) also by composer Constança Capdeville, as it allowed the identification of elements not indicated in the score or other documents [13]. The recording of the live performance of this music theatre work from 1982, the only documentary trace that exists of the complete performance, was crucial in this process, as was the additional documentation (scripts, graphic and prescriptive score, recorded sounds on tape, images, composer's notes, and so forth). One cannot follow a score of this type in a conventional way, as we do with Mozart's scores for example, because the idea of overlapping elements permeates almost all of Capdeville's music theatre work, see Figure 2 [13]. It is a verticality created from the overlap of the various elements involved in the work that are arranged horizontally, such as a heterogeneous counterpoint, so I tried to represent such an idea in the video, therefore overlaying the scores.

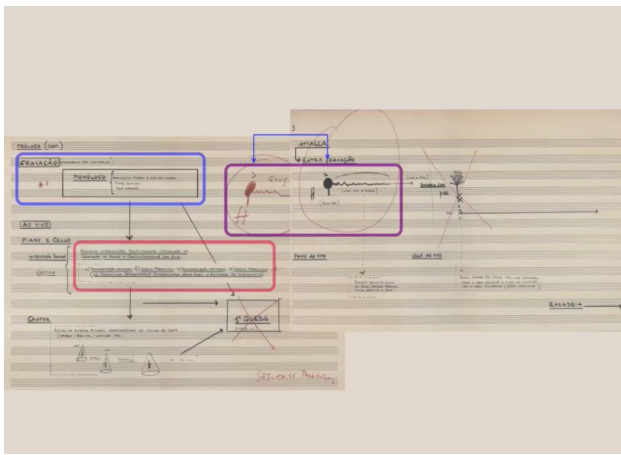


Figure 2. The Prologue section in which the monologue starts with the scores superimposed to facilitate the listening guide.

Borrowing some of the ideas from Serge Lemouton, with regard to electroacoustic, the question begs to be asked, who is responsible for ensuring the preservation of these works? Is it the composer, the performers, the musicologist or the archivist? And how do we systematically transpose this set of elements into the archive? [16]. Answering this question inevitably incorporates the development of innovative methods and tools that assist and autonomise the work of musicologists. This response still remains open and ongoing and can only ever be effective through interdisciplinary approaches from the different fields of study such as computer science, (digital) philology, performance art preservation and archival research, and with designers even making use of computer-aided design and collaborative e-platforms to document performance composition as hitherto referenced for dance or the performing arts, to assist in the creation of documentation strategies for preserving works of this type.

4. WAYS OF ARCHIVING: INSTITUTIONS VS. PERSONAL ARCHIVES

Even when institutions support artists, communication strategies may be well established, proliferating the dissemination of artists' works. However, it remains difficult to ensure sustainability without proper archival standards and/or well-defined ontologies allowing the interoperability of the information. As a representative example of the above-mentioned problems, the archive Internationales Musikinstitut Darmstadt (IMD) essentially houses materials about the history of the International Summer Courses for New Music (Darmstadt Summer Courses), whose various editions began to be held in Darmstadt from 1946 onwards. This archive is one of the main European musical collections of Post-World War II.

¹ Source: the IMD archive available at <https://internationales-musikinstitut.de/en/imd/ueber/profil/> (accessed on January 7, 2022).

² Source: Database of IMD Archive available at <https://www.imd-archiv.de/search> (accessed on January 8, 2022).

In the IMD archive several documents exist, from correspondence to photographs, audio and video supports, sources that document more than 70 years of history and performative practice in music. The digital archive comprises around 89,000 records, including 7,400 audio titles, 27,500 photos and contact prints, 38,000 letters, telegrams, and postcards, 13,000 administrative documents and 1,700 other text documents.¹

The organisation of the database² of the IMD archive does not provide a “research path for the reconstruction of the production, documentation and conservation of pre-modern organizational information”,³ as it seeks to “confer to this documentation an organisational and organic character”, that is, “the sources are treated”, but not “the sources are thought of” [17]. Still regarding the IMD archive database, in Figure 3 it is shown a search by composer, in the particular case John Cage (1912-92).

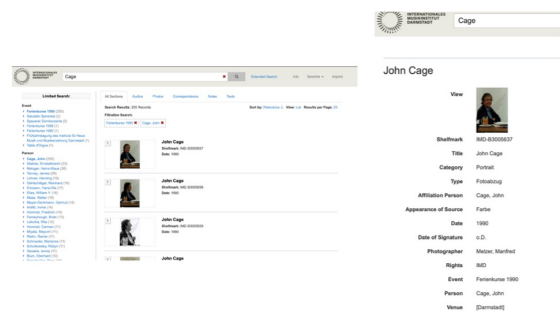


Figure 3. Search by Cage at the IMD archive database. Images extracted from it.

Although the information is indexed, or arranged in the form of an index, as an example, in the 1990 Darmstadt Summer Course, there are 255 records associated with Cage, an enormous number of images, but when clicking to access, only basic features appear such as the title, the date, the name of the photographer, and so on, without any references to a custodial history or explanations about the appearance of the documentation. Consequently, the historical context of this documentation production is not taken into account, nor are historiographical questions posed from an in-depth and scientific treatment. On the contrary, a “technical” treatment of the materials / “sources” [17] is made, which does not reflect on these sources. Hence Schmidt refers above to a notion of a vast archive, that is, almost free by the random nature of the organisation of the documentation [18].

Regarding artists who think, create, and preserve their own archives, they should be guided. Although there are exceptions in the ways of thinking and preserving personal archives, as is the case of the renowned Portuguese

³ “Percurso de investigação para a reconstrução da produção, documentalização e conservação da informação organizacional pré-moderna.” (p. 574); “Visa conferir a esta documentação um carácter organizacional e orgânico” (p. 576); “Tratam-se as fontes”, não se “pensam as fontes” (p. 552). Author’s translation.

photographer Duarte Belo, the treatment of these archives should be regulated by archival standards to avoid the dispersion of information. In 2021, Manaíra Aires Athayde published an interview in which she sought to understand the methodologies used by Duarte Belo to think and rethink his vast and complex archive consisting of about 1.8 million photographs, printed and digital, in addition to notebooks, drawings and maps. Of course, this is an extraordinary case, since Duarte Belo is both the creator of a very rare archive, but also its constant interpreter, conceiving his own methodology from which he thinks and rethinks the archive. According to him, it is an exercise in constantly redesigning the archive [19]. But what about Portuguese composers? How do they deal with the archiving of their own works? In the case of music, a score is a document that includes musical notation functioning as a language or a written representation of music, which intends to be understood in a general context, but also serves to preserve music ensuring the endurance of musical works. Not every musical work includes sheet music or graphic scores, however. Mainly, from the 1950s onwards, the works start to include other resources, non-conventional media, ranging from analogue to digital formats, such as for example, magnetic tapes, electric or musical instruments, computers, etc., and this constitutes a risk to their preservation, given the obsolescence of such means. These musical works require new preservation methods, which include the production of proper complementary documentation on the musical text, encompassing information about software and hardware along with the respective composer's intentions [20]. Researcher Andreia Nogueira carried out a study that aimed to understand the preservation practices of Portuguese composers, culminating in a survey, in which, the researcher asked whether Portuguese composers took the necessary measures to safeguard their personal archives; what kind of documents did they produce and archive; if they had already been prevented from presenting any work due to technological obsolescence; and if Portuguese composers thought they were adequately documenting their creations, especially those produced in the analogue/digital era. The survey was sent to 113 composers, receiving 53 replies (45 men and 8 women). From the data obtained, Nogueira concluded that most Portuguese composers are not particularly interested in preserving their works by themselves, possibly preferring to use an archival service to perform the task. The researcher mentions that the same is the case with visual artists. The majority share this position, although they often benefit from institutional support for the preservation of their works, which cannot be said for composers. In this regard, Nogueira believes that new networks and documentation repositories should be created to help

composers in this delegation of responsibilities. The researcher also argues that composers, musicians, musicologists, archivists, and conservators should work together in the preservation of the Portuguese musical legacy, especially the more experimental productions [20] involving technological resources such as those above-mentioned, but of course expanding the preservation practices applied to contemporary productions of this type in general.

5. FUTURE REFLECTIONS ON THE PRESERVATION OF PERFORMING ARTS CREATION IN AN (DIGITAL) ARCHIVE

Fundamentally, the main objective is long-term preservation and to process information it is necessary to obey the FAIR principles so that the (meta)data is easily located, accessible, interoperable and reusable in the future. Data interoperability allows information to travel from one system to another without losing its original characteristics. The central characteristic of these languages is to define which attributes of the information will be the object of that information and how they are described, in terms of vocabulary, semantics and syntax. In an organisational context formed by regulations, entities and functions, it is necessary to document/record the actions; documents, when they are integrated into a record system according to certain requirements, become records. In order to ensure the authenticity of archival documents, it is necessary to control the transmission, evaluation, custody and preservation of documents and implement and document policies and procedures, using technologies and standards. Moreover, to represent information, standards are needed and sometimes there is a need to group these standards together (e.g., ISAD (G)⁴ conjugated with RISM⁵ being applied to musical documents). When, in an institution, a document management system, which serves to manage the documentation between the various organisational subgroups, proves to be insufficient, the description model must be adapted to the needs. For example, the RIC⁶ (Records in Context) is a conceptual model that describes relationships between entities and also the type of relationships they have with each other. RIC creates the intellectual framework to link archive resources to other cultural information, allows us to represent ontologies and also describes classes, instances, relationships, attributes, and constraints. An ontology working as a coding language adequate to each field of performing arts so that the information is indexed by subject, based on the various elements of the work, allowing a holistic view of it in archival contexts. A conceptual model based on an ontology associates' relationships (record/archive document and context). In

⁴ See the link available at: <https://www.ica.org/en/isadg-general-international-standard-archival-description-second-edition> (accessed on January 27, 2022).

⁵ Répertoire International des Sources Musicales — available at <http://www.rism.org.uk> (accessed on January 26, 2022).

⁶ See the link available at: <https://www.ica.org/sites/default/files/session-7.8-ica-egad-ric-congress2016.pdf> (accessed on January 27, 2022).

order to create a meta-information language model suitable for musical documents and which also serves musical creation in a more contemporary context, it is essential to create an application profile suitable for all kinds of users (musicologists, musicians, researchers, archivists, librarians and others) and understand their research needs more comprehensively. This model requires a broader and more complex interdisciplinary work, which understands and combines the methods of musicology, archival, digital libraries and computer science so that it is possible to understand and respond to the various research needs of these users.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I attempted to discuss the different ways of thinking and organising the (digital) archive, giving some concrete examples. The archiving of artistic works or creations in the context of the performing arts from a holistic point of view requires close engagement between the practices of the various disciplines in the field of performing arts and the methods, standards or models instituted within archives, digital libraries or documentation centres to allow the interoperability of the information in a standardised way making sense for artists, archivists and users.

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