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# *VISIBLE MUSIC: COMPOSITION APPROACHES*

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## ABSTRACT

My research is about *visible music* and explores the potential of my own musical materials in dialogue with visual disciplines. It is based on a series of collaborations between myself, as the composer, and different practitioners – videographer, lighting designer, stage director, librettist, and choreographer.

The main research questions are: What approaches can a composer use to make *visible music* with other artists? Can a shared principle between the sonic and the visual guide the creative process? What types of relationships are developed by combining aural and visual fields? The goal is to find a connective element between the music and the visual or performative dimension, while simultaneously leaving space for a variety of relationships between them to occur.

These questions were explored through the practical work realised as part of my research, in the light of concepts such as *tone* (Sianne Ngai 2005) and *vitality forms* (Daniel Stern 2010), which were chosen for their potential to interconnect different art forms. For Stern, the sharing of *vitality forms* is what enables conversation and collaboration between time-based arts; while Ngai defines *tone* as the organising affect of any artwork. Besides forging a connection between sound and visual dimensions, these concepts were used to fuel the creative processes of *visible music*.

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1. LOCATING MY WORK

## LOCATING MY WORK

At the beginning of my practice as a composer, I tended to focus only on the acoustic dimension of the music. However, in my later years, I have been increasingly noticing how the visual and physical aspects of performance impact upon the reception of a piece. Even in concerts where these aspects tend to be mainly accidental and not part of the work itself, we might be attracted or repelled by a performer's attitude or expressiveness, influenced by the type of room we are in, or our ear could be drawn towards the tiniest sound because of a physical gesture. Everything happening visually and physically is read, and can both enhance or impoverish the way we receive the music. Besides this awareness as audience, I had a few collaborative experiences with theatre makers and choreographers before starting my doctorate. On the one hand, these collaborations made me realise the tremendous potential of giving attention to the visual and performative dimensions of music, and, on the other hand, they led me to realise that there is a need for tools for creating *visible music* with different people.

Chapter 1.1 describes how a similar trajectory to the one described above – moving from focusing only on sound, to broadening the focus to a holistic conception of musical performance – happened in music studies in the last decades. Chapters 1.2 and 1.3 introduce two practical fields concerned with the physical, visual, and performative aspects of music – music theatre and The New Discipline – and locate my work in relation to their contributions.<sup>1</sup> Chapters 1.4 – 1.7 outline *visible music* and the tools used for its creation during the research, alongside the research methodology, and a timeline of the practical outputs.

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<sup>1</sup> Besides music theatre and The New Discipline, “Composed Theatre” is another term associated with works combining visual/theatrical and musical elements. “Composed Theatre” has been established by Matthias Rebstock and David Roesner, and it does not describe a genre but a field of practices: “Composed Theatre, we argued and agreed, is the implementation of (musical) compositional thinking to all or most aspects of the process of creating a music-theatrical performance.” (Rebstock and Roesner 2012, 326). Although the book “Composed Theatre: Aesthetics, Practices, Processes” (Rebstock and Roesner 2012) has been a very useful resource through my research, there is an overlap of “Composed Theatre” with the broader field of new music theatre, and therefore I do not talk separately about “Composed Theatre”.

## 1.1 FROM SCORE TO PERFORMANCE

“The experience of the work of art begins from the moment of entering the building.”

(Small 1998, 75)

Western classical music has been dominated by the idea that a piece of music is defined by its score, and that musical performance is the equivalent of performing from ideally self-sufficient notation (Heile 2006, 72). The result of this idea for composers is that they have historically been trained to focus only on the sonic aspect of music performance and to communicate it through musical notation. The result of this paradigm for performers, as Stravinsky says, is that “The secret of perfection lies above all in [the performer’s] consciousness of the law imposed on him by the work he is performing,” so that music should be not interpreted but merely executed” (Cook 2001, 1). In this view, the performer is simply an intermediary between the composition and the audience, without contributing anything to it (Cook 2001, 2). Nicholas Cook adds that the imperative of music as reproduction is also related to the music industry and based upon the private and passive consumption of music recordings or concerts intended to emulate those recordings as faithfully as possible.<sup>2</sup>

In opposition to the tendency where score and sound are all that matters, the last decades have witnessed a growing attention to performative actions and physicality in music production. This attention occurred in different fields, from theory - ethnomusicology, new musicology, and performance studies - to practice, in manifestations broadly described as music theatre. Authors such as Christopher Small (Small 1998), Nicholas Cook (Cook 2001), and Philip Auslander (Auslander 2008) talk about the shift of importance from the product (score) to the process, where process means all the context involved in music making – performers, technicians, audience, conditions of space, organisation of the event, and so on. From this perspective, “works massively underdetermine their performances” (Godlovitch in Cook 2001, 4), given the abundance of aspects absent from the score. Some of these aspects concern the interpretative choices of performers (timbre, dynamics, timing), and their physical presence on the stage. For example, when musicians follow the conventional codes of dress and behaviour, these are not neutral, but might be expressive of the formality, professionalism, respectability of the event, and type of relations expected with the public. From this performative angle, everything happening in a concert contributes to meaning and is read by the audience.<sup>3</sup> This idea, which might sound quite simple, has huge implications. It has been the driving force for the music theatre experiments described next<sup>4</sup> and has personally constituted the core motivation for pursuing my research.

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Auslander develops this idea in the book “Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture” (2008).

<sup>3</sup> The meaning of codes of behaviour in classical music concerts is acutely explored by Christopher Small in his description of the entrance of a symphony orchestra on the stage (Small 1998, 64), and by Philip Auslander in his book “In concert: Performing Musical Persona” (2021), among others.

<sup>4</sup> Regarding the connection between music theatre and the focus on performance on theory, Björn Heile says that “Experimental music theatre therefore perfectly illustrates the kind of holistic understanding of music for which music studies on the whole seem to be striving.” (Heile 2006, 73).

## 1.2 MUSIC THEATRE

“There is always something to see in musical performances.” (Stockhausen in Lohner 1988)

Salzman and Desi suggest a very broad definition of music theatre, saying that it is “most easily defined by what it is not: not-opera and not-musical.” (Salzman and Desi 2008, 5). Or, in a more positive formulation, music theatre is music driven, and combines elements such as music, language, vocalization, and physical movement, but in different ways and contexts than operas and musicals (Salzman and Desi 2008, 5). When mentioning ‘new music theatre’, I will be referring to recent or contemporary examples of this broad practice.

Music theatre can also have a more specific meaning, referring to a tradition of work initiated in the 1950s<sup>5</sup> by composers like John Cage, Dieter Schnebel, Kagel, Berio, Ligeti, Crumb, and Stockhausen, who took a new interest in the physicality of musical performance. Elements that were earlier left to chance or convention, or simply deemed unimportant – such as how to enter and leave the stage, costume, light, interactions between musicians, gaze, gestuality, relations with audience, the spatiality of sound, disposition on stage, how to approach the instrument – became the focus, and were included in the composition (Pittenger 2010). From now on, I will be referring to this tradition by the term ‘historical music theatre’.

Some of historical music theatre’s first efforts were rooted in problematising or ridiculing the conventional concert rituals (as in Kagel’s work<sup>6</sup>), or modifying them to charge them with meaning and intention.<sup>7</sup> Some works brought the physical action to the foreground (as Cage’s “Water Walk”, 1959), and, in others, sound can even become absent (as Schnebel’s “Nostalgie” for solo conductor, 1962). In any case, in historical music theatre, the composer envisions all aspects of the performance – the musical

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<sup>5</sup> This tradition can also be called “Instrumental Theatre”, especially when associated with Kagel’s work.

<sup>6</sup> As Robert Adlington explains in the article “Music Theatre since the 1960s”, “No composer has undertaken a more concerted examination of the business of musical performance than Mauricio Kagel: indeed, classical-music practice constitutes the principal subject of his music theatre. Kagel has been described as setting out to ‘demystify the ritual’ of the classical concert (Perrin 1981, 11), and this he does especially by highlighting the absurdities of virtuoso performance.” (Adlington 2005, 232).

<sup>7</sup> Stockhausen says in an interview that “And right from the start, in all the performances I was responsible for, I made sure that the way the musicians entered and left the stage, and the way they sat down once they were on the stage, was all shaped artistically, in a particular way. So I’ve always been interested that everything one sees is art too, and one always sees something during the performance. Of course I developed that to an increasing degree, and later costumes were introduced, different for each piece, and I have ensured that more and more, the ritual aspect of performance is consciously shaped.” (Stockhausen in “Lichtwerke”, a documentary by Henning Lohner, 1988).

and the visual. This same tendency is expressed in exponents of new music theatre, such as Heiner Goebbels, George Aperghis, Michel van der Aa, Simon Steen-Andersen, Johannes Kreidler, Alexander Schubert, and Wotjtek Blecharz.

Despite exceptions, the idea of “the charismatic individual genius who controls everything” (Tsangaris in Roesner 2017, 95) is prevalent in new music theatre<sup>8</sup>. Matthias Rebstock confirms the propensity for the composers to direct their own work, saying that:

“Be that as it may, a sizeable amount of new music theatre composers take on responsibility for direction themselves, or rather comprehend the entirety of theatrical elements as the field of their composition. The very separation of composition and staging just mentioned above is subverted by such methods. Counted amongst practitioners who deploy this type of understanding are Heiner Goebbels, Georges Aperghis, Manos Tsangaris, Daniel Ott, Michel van der Aa, Julian Klein, Leo Dick, Jennifer Walsh, François Sarhan or Simon Sten-Andersen.” (Rebstock 2017, 539)

In my practice, I usually provide a concept and other materials as a starting point to work closely with other artists - videographer, stage director, choreographer – but I am not the director. The ultimate responsibility and authorship for the visual dimension remain with the practitioner I am collaborating with. Since this process is distinct from the tendency of new music theatre identified above, I do not consider my practice as belonging to new music theatre.

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<sup>8</sup> As an exception to the trend of clustering all aspects of the performance in the composer, one of the world’s leading festivals for new music theatre - Munich Biennale – has been organising platforms that function like laboratories for scenic-musical projects, which later integrate the program of the Biennale. Manos Tsangaris, one of the artistic directors, says that “At our platforms, the different disciplines and crafts meet, and it is entirely possible that a project is not initiated by a composer, but someone with a different background – a writer, scenographer or video artist, for example”. He adds that the intention of these platforms is to promote a culture of sharing ideas, and to put into question the idea of “the charismatic individual genius who controls everything” (Tsangaris in Roesner 2017, 95).

### 1.3 THE NEW DISCIPLINE

“That it’s not too late  
for us to have bodies.”  
(Walshe 2016)

In her influential manifesto about The New Discipline, Walshe describes a practice “... rooted in the physical, theatrical and visual, as well as musical”, incorporating the initial impulses of historical music theatre together with all that happened in the meantime: Dada, Fluxus, Situationism, MTV, the Internet, and so on (Walshe 2016). Besides conceiving and notating the musical and visual dimensions of a piece, the composer can also perform on the stage, as expressed in Jennifer Walshe’s manifesto: “...the New Discipline is located in the fact of composers being interested and willing to perform, to get their hands dirty, to do it themselves, do it immediately.”<sup>9</sup> (Walshe 2016) Thus, the composer can compose, perform, and direct, controlling all aspects of the performance: “In the rehearsal room the composer functions as a director or choreographer, perhaps most completely as an auteur.” (Walshe 2016).

It is important to note that while the manifesto of The New Discipline places the composer as auteur, it cannot be inferred that collaboration is absent from its practices. Jennifer Walshe has long-term collaborations with other artists, such as Panos Ghikas, Tony Conrad, and Tomomi Adachi<sup>10</sup>. Josh Spear, a composer and part of the collective “Bastard Assignments” (UK), who locates his practice in The New Discipline, talks in his critical reflection about his use of collaboration as a compositional tool, and the role of intimacy in collaboration<sup>11</sup>.

With the eventual exception of Steven Takasugi<sup>12</sup>, all the composers listed in the manifesto as working in the way of The New Discipline - Object Collection<sup>13</sup>, James Saunders, Matthew Shlomowitz, Neele Hülcker, François Sarhan, Jessie Marino, Steven Takasugi, Natacha Diels, and Jennifer Walshe – are also performers.<sup>14</sup> Since the “fact of composers being interested and willing to perform” (Walshe 2016) seems core to the practice of The New Discipline as expressed in its manifesto, and I do not perform, I do not consider my work part of this practice, though I have been inspired by many of the pieces produced by The New Discipline.

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<sup>9</sup> Some composers-performers in music theatre from the UK besides Jennifer Walshe are Neil Luck, Laura Bowler, Claudia Molitor, Elaine Mitchener, and Alwynne Pritchard.

<sup>10</sup> Further information about these collaborations can be found at Jennifer Walshe’s website: <http://milker.org/collaborations>.

<sup>11</sup> “Composing Together and Not Together - Intimacy as a Condition for Collaboration”, by Josh Spear, 2022, accessed at <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1377266/1377267>.

<sup>12</sup> I did not find information on his work as performer.

<sup>13</sup> “Object collection” is the name of a performance-based group based in Brooklyn, founded by writer/director Kara Feely and composer/musician Travis Just. Travis Just performs not only in “Object Collection” performances, but also in other projects.

<sup>14</sup> Josh Spear, who locates his work in The New Discipline, defines himself as a composer-performer. Andy Ingamells is also a composer-performer who talks about his connection with The New Discipline both in his doctoral thesis (“Grandchildren of Experimental Music - performing the compositional act by creating intriguing situations in which musical sound may occur”, 2017) and in his article “Stop inhaling Oxygen and exhaling Carbon Dioxide, because ‘we did that in the 60s’” (2016).

## 1.4 VISIBLE MUSIC

Although more than sixty years have passed since the first impulses of historical music theatre, this research project follows the same thread of fascination and curiosity around the possibilities offered by a more holistic conception of a concert. In contrast with standard 19th century concert formats, this holistic conception means an understanding that “... music is an embodied art involving human action, and that it cannot be reduced to its acoustic dimension.” (Heile 2006, 72). *Visible Music* acknowledges that the audience is present with all their senses in any concert – as Cage said, “an ear alone is not a being”<sup>15</sup>– and desires to explore the potential of a multisensory approach.

I define my work as *visible music*<sup>16</sup>: this term immediately connects the visual and the aural, without the implications of music theatre or The New Discipline. Not having the weight of a body of work behind it, the term *visible music* is free from the preconceptions of who does what. Aside from including dialogue between different disciplines, *visible music* is also not prescriptive regarding processes. The composer does not conceive the visual-performative aspects alone, nor delegates them entirely to stage directors (as in opera) or choreographers (as in dance). Instead, the composer works closely with these and other practitioners, moved by a desire to enrich the concert or musical experience, making it “something which engages both the eye and the ear.”<sup>17</sup>

*Visible music* is, therefore, distinct from The New Discipline since it does not imply that the composer performs. It also differs from historical and new music theatre because the composer does not necessarily integrate the visual dimension into the score, nor is the composer the director. The responsibility for the final product is shared, and no one member of the collaborative team has ultimate authorial control.

Despite these differences, works from new music theatre and The New Discipline will be referred to throughout the commentary, since we share the same “concern of being rooted in the physical, theatrical and visual, as well as musical.” (Walshe 2016).

As mentioned above, *visible music* implies a visual and aural relationship. In the next section, we will look at the different ways that these two fields can relate to each other.

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<sup>15</sup> “An ear alone is not a being. I have noticed listening to a record that my attention moves to a moving object or a play of light, and at a rehearsal of the Williams Mix last May when all eight machines were in operation the attention of those present was engaged by a sixty-year-old piano tuner who was busy tuning the instrument for the evening’s concert.” (Cage 1961, 149).

<sup>16</sup> The use of this term traces back to the piece *Visible Music* (1960-1962) by Dieter Schnebel. He has also written an article describing six main forms of *Visible Music*: music in space, music in motion, gestic play, musicalised theatre, musically structured film, and graphically symbolized notation (Schnebel 1969).

<sup>17</sup> Cage defining his music theatre pieces (Cage in Fetterman 1996, 21).

## 1.5 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MUSIC AND VISUAL DIMENSION

“Images and sounds, like strangers who make acquaintance on a journey and afterwards cannot separate.”

(Bresson in Chion 1994, XVI'l).

Several authors identify three main categories of the relationship between sound and the visual dimension, as succinctly described by Berio: “The music may express, even describe, the scene; or it may be indifferent to it; it may even conflict with the scene.” (Berio 2006, 100). The first category referred to by Berio is the most immediate, and we can call it **duplication**. Here, sound and sight follow the same direction, reinforcing each other. Although this connection between the two mediums might be very satisfying, there is also the danger of illustration. Heiner Goebbels, one of the most active music theatre makers of our time, criticises this tendency, saying, “When a tree is already being mentioned, you don’t also have to show it.”<sup>18</sup> He added that these duplications can easily become boring (Goebbels 2015). In the same vein, Nicholas Till comments on the tendency of duplication in opera:

“We are bored by the principle of redundancy that underlies most opera – the way in which a dramatic ‘idea’ has to be illustrated by narrative and character, and then re-stated by the spoken or sung text. These are then further underlined through musical representation and expression, and finally, in case we’ve still missed the point, illustrated through the stage image and dramatic presentation.” (Till 2004, 22)

At the opposite end of the spectrum, we have a **chance** relationship, where sight and sound are combined without a preconceived link between the two. For example, in the work of Cage and Cunningham, music and choreography were created independently and only combined in the moment of the public performance<sup>19</sup>.

The last category is called **counterpoint** by some authors, including Goebbels, who explains that it refers to the polyphonic and contrapuntal tensions between “the thing seen and the thing heard” (Goebbels in Kendrick and Roesner 2011, xxvi). These tensions make for various separations, collisions, and interferences of meanings.

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<sup>18</sup> Title of the preface to the book “Aesthetics of Absence” (2015) by Heiner Goebbels.

<sup>19</sup> John Cage says that “In our collaborations Merce Cunningham's choreographies are not supported by my musical accompaniments. Music and dance are independent but coexistent.” At “John Cage: An Autobiographical Statement” (1990), found at [https://johncage.org/beta/autobiographical\\_statement.html](https://johncage.org/beta/autobiographical_statement.html). At the Barbican website, one reads that “Through relentless innovation, Merce Cunningham revolutionised modern dance. He and composer John Cage – his partner and frequent collaborator – developed the method of creating choreography independent of music and design, by bringing the three together only at the time of the performance. They also used chance in their work, throwing dice to determine a sequence of movements.” Accessed at <https://sites.barbican.org.uk/mercecentennial/>

This separation between a sound and its source can happen for example when a sound expected from the onstage comes from the offstage; musicians play muted instruments; or there is an interval between action and sound, de-synchronizing seeing and hearing. Another way to create counterpoint is by separating each element – lighting, space, text, and sound – preserving their individual integrity and contribution to the whole performance event (Kendrick and Roesner 2011). Instead of feeling a need to explain what happens in one element duplicating it in another, Goebbels recalls the famous quote by the writer Cannetti: “Explain nothing. Put it there. Say it. Leave.” (Goebbels 2015, 4). For Goebbels, this approach reveals trust in the audience's intelligence, opening a space for the workings of their imagination. By playing with expectations and tensions between what is seen and heard, our senses remain aware and curious, and our desire for matching and meaning is aroused. This idea is backed by Landau and Bogart, saying that in theatre, “If the tracks all do the same thing, they cancel each other out.”<sup>20</sup> (Landau and Bogart 2005, 188). They quote the Swiss playwright Friedrich Durrenmatt: “The Theatre begins with a disagreement between what you see and what you hear.” (Durrenmatt in Landau and Bogart 2005, 187).

Michel Chion conceives three basic types of relationships between music and scene similar to the ones already described by Berio<sup>21</sup>. Contrary to the usual praise of counterpoint that he observes in film aestheticians (and that is also present in Goebbels and other music theatre makers), Chion challenges its supremacy:

“There exist hundreds of possible ways to add sound to any given image. Of this vast array of choices some are wholly conventional. Others, without formally contradicting or “negating” the image, carry the perception of the image to another level. And audiovisual dissonance is merely the inverse of convention, and thus pays homage to it, imprisoning us in a binary logic that has only remotely to do with how cinema works.” (Chion 1994, 38)

He explains that we only notice counterpoint (“audiovisual dissonance”) if there is an opposition between sound and image in terms of the precise meaning of each. This opposition expresses a linear interpretation of meaning, which “reduces the audio and visual elements to abstractions at the expense of their multiple concrete particularities, which are much richer and full a ambiguity.” (Chion 1994, 38). In this way, one gets

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<sup>20</sup> The authors consider that in theatre there is a movement track, a text track, a lighting track, a sound track, and so on, happening simultaneously (Bogart and Landau 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Chion uses the terms *empathetic* effect for the moments when the music participates in the feeling of a scene (duplication), *anempathetic* effect when the music seems indifferent to the scene but with the result of intensifying emotion (which might be one instance of counterpoint), and *neither empathetic nor anempathetic* when music has an abstract presence, without a precise emotional resonance (chance) (Chion 1994, 8-9).

locked in abstract opposing categories characteristic of language; the binary logic of *yes-no, redundant-contradictory* (Chion 1994, 38)<sup>22</sup>.

Contrary to the position defended by Goebbels and others, considering that an *empathetic* relationship between sound and image easily gets boring, I think that what lacks interest is not an *empathetic* relationship; but rather the conventional ways that sound and image might be put together or that this might manifest, as Chion mentions above. In my view, conventional *empathetic* relationships and conventional counterpoint can be boring – yet there are also subtler possibilities.

Landau and Bogart describe an exercise with music for actors, saying that

“The ultimate goal is neither to work exclusively *to* or *against*, but *with*, in concert with. As the music work continues, think of music as a scene partner, as another member of the group. Its task is to affect and move you. Your task is to be open to it. Think of it as you would the architecture, that is there to play with, dance with, to embrace in one moment, ignore in the next. You can illustrate the music, yes, certainly, but you can also fight it, comment on it, flirt with it, hail it.” (Bogart and Landau 2005, 98-99)

This points to relationships between music and scene where one can not only reinforce or contradict the other, but also *comment on, inflect, tease, or flirt* with each other. It is this complex and multi-faceted potential that I want to explore.

In the creative processes of the practical work, there was no choice of a specific type of relationship between the music and visuals in advance. However, I have subsequently realised that I tend to find more interest when there is variation and more subtle or nuanced types of relationships between the visual and sonic domains. Mainly, I look for a connective element between the sonic and the visual, a feeling that the musical and visual materials belong to the same work, despite a variety of relationships between them. The concepts outlined next were discovered and explored as tools to facilitate this interconnection, with room for complex interplay.

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<sup>22</sup> Handel’s oratorio “Theodora” (1750) was staged at Royal Opera House in 2022, with the direction of Katie Mitchell. One scene of this performance can be used as an example of a delusive counterpoint. In this scene, beautiful and ethereal instrumental music is played simultaneously with the movements of two pole dancers at a brothel. At first impression, this combination could be considered as a counterpoint: the context of the music (the ethereal quality, plus the religious associations of an oratorio) seemed in conflict with the context of the dance. However, the slow movement of the pole dance was exquisitely matching the movement of the music, with a few moments of detailed synchronisation. Thus, the social context of one dimension can seem at odds with the other, but considering only this would reduce the scene to a linear interpretation, instead of contemplating its various layers and ambiguities. When these are considered, defining something as redundant or contradictory gets much more difficult.

## 1.6 TOOLS FOR VISIBLE MUSIC

This research looks at various ways of creating *visible music* with different practitioners, using two main tools: the concept of *tone* by Sianne Ngai and *vitality forms* by Daniel Stern. *Tone* synthesizes the general affective disposition of an artwork (Ngai 2005), while *vitality forms* are the dynamics of movement, the flow pattern of any event (Stern 2010). The practical work of the research, consisting of seven *visible music* pieces, explores how *tone* and *vitality forms* can be used to link the musical and visual dimensions, and as a tool for communication with other practitioners.

Chapter 2 looks at the theoretical frameworks of the research: *tone* (2.1) and *vitality forms* (2.2), and in 2.3, there is a summary of these frameworks. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 analyse how these concepts were used as tools to create the pieces in the portfolio, and Chapter 6 presents the key findings of the research. The alternation between action and critical reflection throughout the research was developed through the adoption of the Action-Research methodology, which will be outlined next.

## 1.7 METHODOLOGY

In Action-Research methodology, which consists of a series of cycles, the researcher participates in the events, simultaneously having an active and reflective role (Castro 2010). Lewin and Kemmis identify four phases within each cycle: planning, action, observation (evaluation), and reflection (theorising). This set of procedures gives birth to a new cycle, forming a spiral of reflective action experiences (Coutinho et al. 2009). My practical projects consist of seven *visible music* pieces, each corresponding to an Action-Research cycle:

- *Bagatelas*, for solo harp. This piece has two different versions: one is for harp and video, and the other is for harp and light.
- *Cartas Portuguesas*, for soprano, piano, and video.
- *Som Sem Saída*, for orchestra and speaker.
- *Concílio Celeste*, a chamber operetta for two singers and six instruments.
- *The Age of Self-Improvement*, for percussion, piano, actor and light.
- *The Sleep Collector*, for cello, flute, and percussion.
- *Descalça*, for soprano, flute, piano, and video.

The phases of each cycle are described below:

### **Planning**

At this stage, the literature and practice review were developed. The practice review includes the researcher's relevant prior artistic experiences and the practitioners who engage in similar work to establish a dynamic and contemporary context for research (Spatz 2017). There are also decisions about the artistic team and the organization of the collaborative work.

### **Action**

This phase consists of composition and collaborative work, where the visual dimension is developed, plus the presentation and recording of the performances.

### **Observation**

During each project, different types of observation occur: continuous observation by myself, conversations with collaborators, and the analysis of rehearsals and final performance recordings.

### **Reflection**

In this phase, there is a reflection based on the collected observations on the project, concerning the collaboration process and the final performance. The outcomes of reflection impact the next cycle.

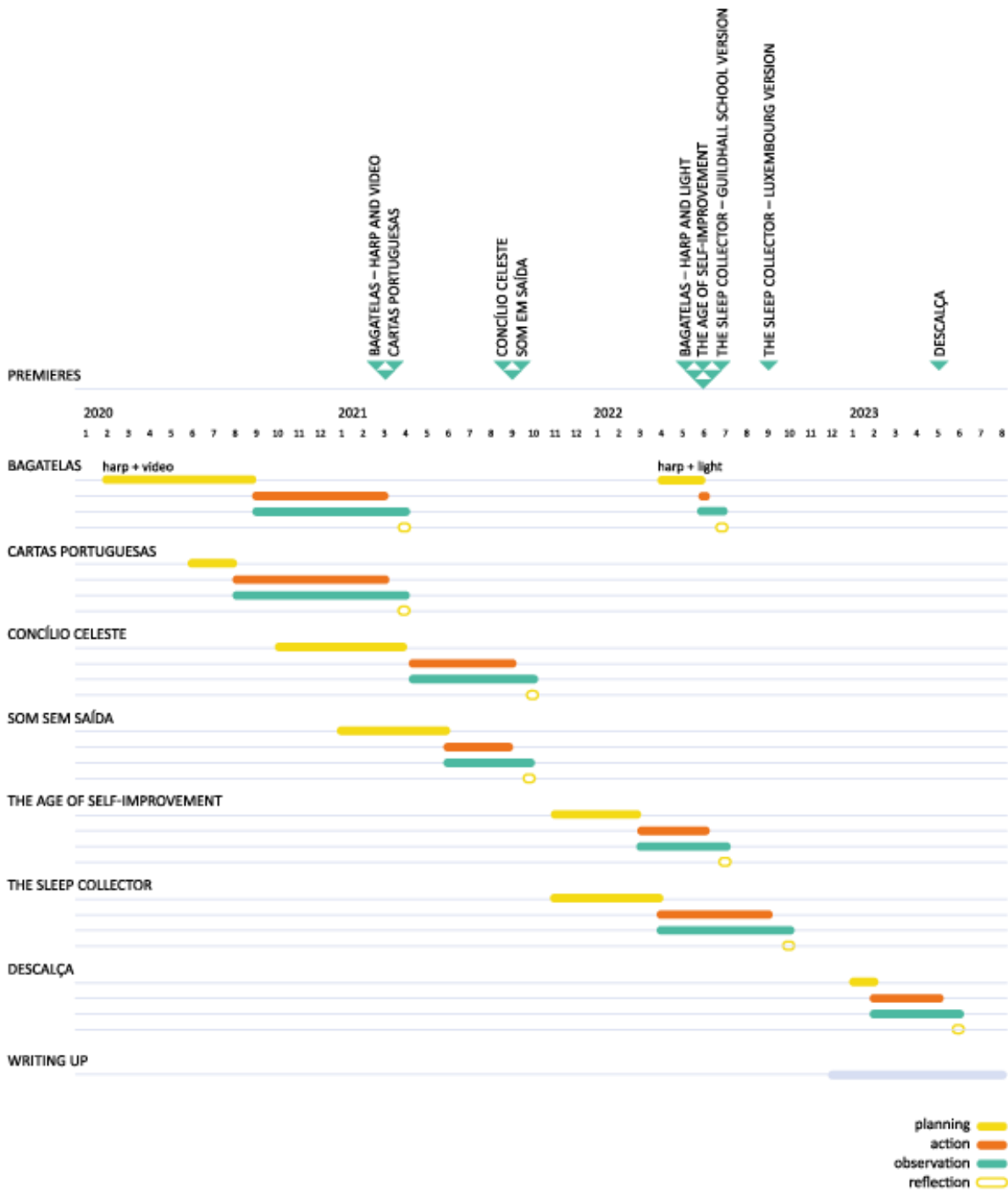
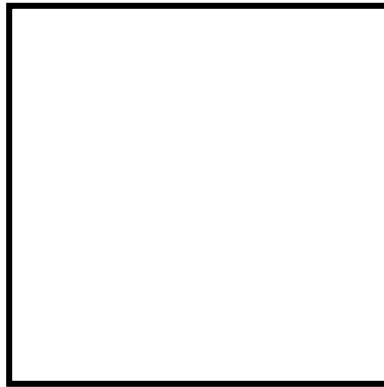


Fig. 1: Research Timeline.



## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

## 2.1 THE CONCEPT OF TONE

Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* examines the aesthetics of negative affects, such as irritation, envy, paranoia, anxiety, and disgust, and their social and political resonances. Considered as non-cathartic states of feeling associated with "obstructed agency" (situations where the action is blocked or suspended), these affects are approached through the analysis of literary works. In each of these literary works, Ngai identifies a 'tone' as the global affect of the text:

"By 'tone' I mean a literary or cultural artifact's feeling tone: its global or organizing affect, its general disposition or orientation toward its audience and the world." (Ngai 2005, 28)

A challenging aspect of the concept of tone is that it exists in the dynamic movement between the object (artwork) and the subject (viewer). The tone of an artwork "(...) cannot be reduced to representations of feeling within the artwork, or to the emotional responses the artwork solicits from its viewers." (Ngai 2005, 28). To focus solely on the subjective or personal experience of the viewer would turn artworks into containers for the psychology of the spectator. In addition, a feeling can also be perceived by the viewer, but not felt. On the other hand, it doesn't mean, in the case of literature, that the tone is reduced to the representations of feelings within the story: "For we can speak of a literary text whose global or organizing affect is disgust, without this necessarily disgusting the reader (though in certain cases it may also do so)" (Ngai 2005, 30). Referring to the novel *The Confidence-Man* (Melville, 1857), Ngai explains that while its stories and characters are full of ugly feelings such as envy, greed, and hate, these represented feelings are not equivalent to the novel's tone, which remains uncomfortably neutral.

Tone is a generalisation, an abstraction of the world of the literary object, a description of its affective quality; it doesn't imply an explicit correlation with all the elements of that work. It has a holistic nature, which is captured by Baensch's description of the "objective feeling" of an artwork: "Whereas sensory qualities "are combined and composed, so as to produce, jointly, the appearance of the object," the nonsensory quality called "feeling" is said to "surround and permeate this whole structure in fluid omnipresence"" (Ngai 2005, 45).

Unlike other writers concerned with affect<sup>23</sup>, Ngai doesn't engage extensively with the difference between "affect" and "emotion", and the terms are used more or less interchangeably. She explains that "the affect/emotion split originated in psychoanalysis for the practical purpose of distinguishing third person from first-person representations of feeling, with "affect" designating feeling described from an observer's (analyst's) perspective, and "emotion" designating feeling that "belongs" to the speaker or analysand's 'I'" (Ngai 2005, 25). Interestingly, the problem expressed in this split – feeling contained by a subject (the first person's "emotion") and uncontained feeling (the third person's "affect") – are part of the ambiguity present in the concept of tone. For Ngai, the concept's power resides precisely in its ambiguity or "amorphousness", and also in its diffused, but immanent character: "Tone is the dialectic of objective and subjective feeling that our aesthetic encounters inevitably produce." (Ngai 2005, 30). It doesn't define how the viewer will react or "feel" an artwork, but provides the material foundation of an affective encounter, and the movement between subject and object.

#### MIX OF FEELINGS

Tone, then, has a holistic nature and is the sum of the affective elements contained in the work. Besides defining and communicating the tone of a piece, I also found it useful to identify the affective ingredients making up the tone, which I call *mix of feelings*. For example, the tone of one of the pieces – *The Age of Self-Improvement* - is 'pressure to achieve', related to the imperative to do more and more. The mix of feelings, combined with 'pressure to achieve', are anxiety, exhaustion, and cliché mindfulness. Although they might seem contradictory, they are all part of the same experience (as will be developed in Chapter 4.1). Having a mix of different feelings helps to structure the piece. Instead of having only one general quality, different ingredients can shape the piece, allowing more possibilities for layering and interaction between the different domains of visual and sound. While sharing the tone might be conducive to an *empathetic* relationship between sound and visual dimensions, the mix of feelings helps to bring nuance and complexity to this relationship.

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<sup>23</sup> Some authors clearly distinguish between "affect" and "emotion". For Shouse, "affect" can't be fully described in language since it is a non-conscious and unstructured bodily experience of intensity: "At any moment hundreds, perhaps thousands of stimuli impinge upon the human body and the body responds by infolding them all at once and registering them as an intensity. Affect is this intensity." (Shouse 2005) On the other hand, emotion is already processed into structured meaning and involves interpreting and labelling sensations through language and social codes.

## SUMMARY

Upon discovering Ngai's tone, I realised it resonated strongly with my compositional approach, which usually involves thinking about atmosphere, and decided to investigate using it as a tool for *visible music*. Each portfolio piece has a distinct tone, helping to connect the music with the other elements - text, video, and staging. Following the view outlined in this chapter, the word chosen for tone should be able to synthesise the multiplicity of elements present in the piece over time; its general disposition or affect, that may or may not generate a similar disposition in the receiver; its organizing principle. Finally, it should be more evocative than descriptive, welcoming ambiguity, and poetic possibilities.

Together with tone, in some pieces it was also useful to identify its affective ingredients - the mix of feelings – to create the type of complex *empathetic* resonance that I desired between the different visual and sonic elements. While applying this framework to the practical projects, I noticed that some resisted having tone (and mix of feelings) as the focus of the composition and collaboration. Some pieces have a more abstract background, making identifying and communicating affect in advance difficult. When I encountered the concept of vitality forms, I understood that it was precisely the alternative that I needed for the projects where using tone was less productive. At the same time, I recognised that I was already trying to communicate modes and qualities of movement, even before being aware of the concept.

## 2.2 VITALITY FORMS

### What are vitality forms?

Coined by Stern, vitality forms are the dynamics of an event, meaning how an event is manifested. Vitality forms are pervasive in everyday life and expressed in examples such as “the force, speed and flow of a gesture; the timing and stress of a spoken phrase or even a word; the way one breaks into a smile or the time course of decomposing the smile; the manner of shifting position in a chair; the time course of lifting the eyebrows when interested and the duration of their lift; the shift and flight of a gaze; and the rush or tumble of thoughts”<sup>24</sup> (Stern 2010, 6). As can be seen from these examples, vitality forms are implicated in a multiplicity of contents, such as physical movements, emotions, and thoughts. These correspond to the *what* of an event, while the vitality forms correspond to the *how* - the manner in which that event is animated and brought to life. It is a flow pattern (e.g., *accelerating, exploding, and fading*), a temporal and intensity contour, giving form to emotion, a train of thoughts, physical or mental movements, a sequence of dance steps, or a shot in a film (Stern 2010).

Although there is a felt component in vitality forms, it is important to distinguish them from emotion, since emotion is only one of the possible contents enacted by a form of vitality. For example, anger can *explode, sneak up, and build up gradually*, but so can happiness or a thought in our mind (Stern 2010, 28).

The contents of vitality forms have some type of movement in common, and are, therefore, associated with the dynamics of experience. According to Stern, we move all the time, both physically and mentally, and this constant movement gives us a sense of being alive and animate. Just as the body moves in big or small ways (breathing, altering facial expressions, changing the direction of the gaze...), there is also continuous inner movement: “As we think of something or feel emotion or sensation, the mental experience is not static. Subjectively, a thought can rush onto the mental stage and swell, or it can quietly just appear and then fade. It has a beginning, middle, and ending. The experience of movement (physical or mental) traces a small journey. It takes time. Mental movement, while it is

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<sup>24</sup> Stern sees vitality forms as fundamental for human communication, since they allow people to express their own internal states and intentions, and to recognise those of others. By the way that an action is performed, one can understand for example if the person is calm or angry, or if the action is performed with decision or hesitancy.

happening, traces a profile of its rising and falling strength as it is contoured in time. This is its dynamic form of vitality.” (Stern 2010, 21). In summary, vitality forms are attached to physical movement (bodily gestures), and the metaphorical movement of the mind (thoughts) and felt states (sensations and emotions).

The notion of vitality forms has been inspired by Susanne Langer’s “forms of feeling”, including feelings such as “fading, exulting, easiness, rushing” that don’t fall into the usual categories of emotion, but are nevertheless evoked by art and life (Stern 2010, 37)<sup>25</sup>. The list of words conjuring dynamic forms of vitality can be seen as an extension of the “forms of feeling” referred to:

“exploding	surging	accelerating
swelling	bursting	fading
drawn out	disappearing	fleeting
forceful	powerful	weak
cresting	pulsing	tentative
rushing	pulling	pushing
relaxing	languorous	floating
fluttering	effortful	easy
tense	gentle	halting
gliding	swinging	tightly
holding still	loosely	bounding”

(Stern 2010, 7)

There are many more words for vitality forms, such as *excitement*, *dragging*, *stability*, and *instability*.

### How do vitality forms manifest in the arts?

According to Stern, the time-based arts are mainly about the dynamics of experience and, therefore, constitute a privileged space for vitality forms. These are amplified, refined, and repeatedly rehearsed as part of the arts’ striving to express the vitality of human movement and sound. In the performative arts, tensions, forces, and excitement are constantly rising and falling, playing with our arousal level. Even outside traditional forms such as linear structures and narratives, any gesture or musical line creates expectations of how it will resolve itself, implicating arousal shifts and specific vitality forms. Stern claims that all time-based arts share the same repertoire of vitality forms; however, each art form has found codes to express and notate them.

In the case of music, vitality forms include dynamics, both at the level of intensity (*pp*, *mf*) and changes in intensity (*crescendo* and *decrescendo*); articulation, such as accents, *legato* or *staccato*;

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<sup>25</sup> Stern has previously used other terms for vitality forms such as “vitality affects”, “temporal feeling shapes”, “temporal feeling contours”, “proto-narrative envelopes”, and “vitality contours”. While there are not significant differences in the meaning of these terms, Stern prefers “dynamic forms of vitality” since this term updates the concept, including a sense of movement, force, time, space, and directionality.

phrasing; tempo marks, which indicate not only the speed, but also “the spirit of the speed”, such as *allegro*, *andante*; changes in tempo such as *accelerando* and *ritardando*, as well as changes in rhythm. I would add that changes in texture, with its influence on the perception of activity (sparse, dense, increase or decrease of activity), also contribute to the contour and intensity of vitality forms.

Regarding dance, Stern thinks modern and improvisational dance has developed in the sense of privileging a play of vitality forces instead of telling a story. In his efforts to notate dance, Laban wanted to capture not only bodily postures and movements, but also the quality and flow of movement - its vitality forms. One of the ways to express this quality was to classify each movement along three stress dimensions: strong-light, direct-flexible, and sustained-quick. For example, “«punching» would be a strong/direct/quick movement, whereas «floating» would be light/flexible/sustained.” (Stern 2010, 84).

Concerning theatre, Stern analyses a play by Robert Wilson, which “consists of cycles of contraction and relaxation, crisis and resolution, tension and release, and shifts in vitality forms, in particular, variations of tension build-up and release, as in modern dance.” (Stern 2010, 92)

As for cinema, there are multiple tools to create vitality forms, such as the subject's distance to the camera, where the distance implies intensity: “Close-ups have an intrinsic force because they violate our established body boundaries and comfortable distances. They create a burst of arousal that prepares the body for some kind of action (e.g. to touch, kiss, hit, pull back). In addition, the camera can alter the distance without altering the subject by progressively moving from far to close. This is the equivalent of a crescendo in music (...). The reverse is true for the decrescendo of moving from close to far, leading to the sense of a step back, a relaxation of tension, and a psychological «distancing» - a distinct vitality form.” (Stern 2010, 95) One other tool is the montage and editing work, where an equivalent of a musical *accelerando* can be created by speeding up the change of shots.

For Stern, vitality forms create correspondences between art forms because they are meta-modal, that is, not associated with a specific sense (touch, sight, smell). In neurological terms, they are related to the arousal system and located in several parts of the brain<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Stern explains the meaning of arousal: “What is arousal? Dictionaries and scientists agree. To be aroused is «to be put into motion» or «stirred up» or «excited into activity», physically, mentally, or emotionally. It is synonymous with «to animate». In more scientific terms, it is the force behind the initiation, the strength, and the duration of almost everything we do. Arousal also includes, by implication, turning off or turning down the arousal, calming the excitement, or deactivating the motion or emotion. Arousal determines when we do what we do, and the dynamic manner of doing it. It is well suited to direct vitality forms.” (Stern 2010, 58)

The ubiquity of vitality forms allows their easy transference from one medium (or art form) to another.<sup>27</sup> Regarding collaboration between the arts, Stern leaves two interesting questions: “Can the same vitality forms be triggered by two or more art forms? Will their effects be complementary or additive, or more than the sum of the parts?” (Stern 2010, 76). He advances a possible answer to this last question saying that the magic of the correspondence between art forms lies in their capacity to produce similar, but not the same, dynamic experiences. These experiences, which are similar but not identical, point to my search for non-binary relationships<sup>28</sup> between sound and visual dimensions, favouring subtler ways of connecting with each other.

**What are the benefits of looking at the collaboration between the arts from the perspective of vitality forms?**

This perspective offers a basis for the communication between time-based arts rooted in the belief that they all speak the language of vitality forms. Although this language relates to Langer’s “forms of feeling”, as we have seen above, these feelings are outside what we usually call emotion (fear, anger, joy, and so on). Vitality forms can also be combined with emotion, but not necessarily. This opens a space for a collaboration between the arts not necessarily shaped by emotions or other elements such as narrative and formal structure, relying instead on the moment-to-moment dynamic experience of a given event. The benefit of this space is that it adds further basis for collaboration between the arts beyond those that already exist, by offering a vocabulary that is easily transferred across different artistic disciplines. The vocabulary of vitality forms discloses a realm of felt experiences, which are not always easy to put into words, helping to describe how we resonate with art and how one art form resonates with the other when combined.

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<sup>27</sup> In an example of correspondence of vitality forms across different dimensions, Stern describes how a mental experience of Robert Wilson at breakfast was realised on stage in his theatre piece “Bob’s breakfast”: “During the real breakfast experience, Wilson felt that his thoughts were not quite getting anywhere. They were moving along, but without arriving. This feel of the thought process at breakfast is «translated» into the actor running in circles that do not arrive for a while, and only then at an unstable resolution. Wilson progresses from the vitality dynamics of mental motions in his mind at breakfast to the vitality dynamics of bodily movement on stage.” (Stern 2010, 93) Here, the resonance doesn’t happen between two art forms, but between thoughts and their realisation on stage. However, this example might be useful to demonstrate that vitality forms can be creatively transferable between domains as distinct as thoughts and theatre action.

<sup>28</sup> I am referring to the abstract binary categories redundant-contradictory referred to by Chion (Chion 1994, 38) in Chapter 1.5.

## 2.3 SUMMARY OF THE TOOLS FOR *VISIBLE MUSIC*

In general, the tools of tone and vitality forms have been combined in my research, although one might be predominant depending on each piece. Together, they have been used as a shared principle between the sonic and the visual, guiding the creative process of each piece. In some pieces, the tone may lead to vitality forms; in others, this direction is reversed. Although the words used for tone and vitality forms might seem broad or generic if isolated, when combined they begin to craft the specific space of the piece, as can be seen in the diagram (Fig. 2):

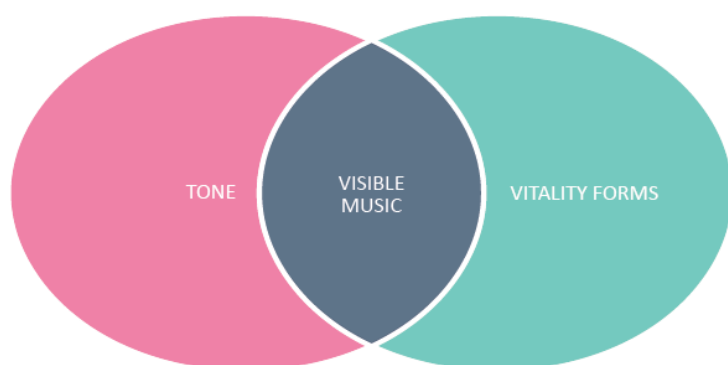


Fig. 2: Diagram showing the two tools for creating *visible music* used in the research.

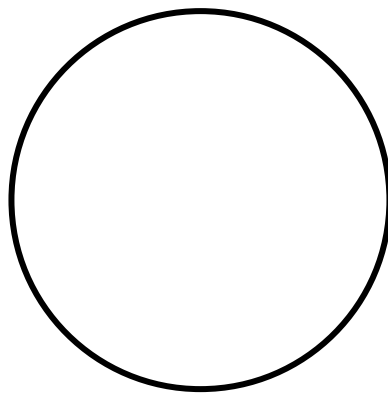
The following commentary (Chapters 3, 4 and 5) on the practical work is organised according to the main tool used in the creative process. Chapter 3 groups the pieces mainly guided by tone: *Cartas Portuguesas* and *Concílio Celeste*. Chapter 4 includes the pieces where tone and vitality forms seem to have an equivalent weight: *The Sleep Collector* and *The Age of Self-Improvement*. Finally,

Chapter 5 approaches the pieces focussed on vitality forms - *Bagatelas*, *Som Sem Saída*, and *Descalça*.

Each piece has different artistic teams and starting points, intending to generate the largest possible variety in artistic and creative contexts. For navigating the commentary on the pieces, each piece is preceded by a diagram like the one above (Fig. 2). *Concílio Celeste* is an exception because the commentary on this piece is shorter and focuses on just one aspect of the work.

Although tone and vitality forms have been the main resource for verbal communication with the collaborators, there was also sharing of aesthetic references – artistic works such as texts, images, and sound – either explicit (such as the text of a song) or implicit (such as a text or image used only as inspiration), as commonly happens in collaborative contexts. While not consisting of a tool, these aesthetic references were part of the process, contributing to building the world of the piece, and sometimes became the source for the tone and vitality forms. Since they are part of the context of all projects, they are referred to throughout the commentary.

The various dimensions of a piece – sound, visuals, text - are united by tone and vitality forms as a shared principle; however, the types of relationships resulting from the combination of these dimensions are different for each project. Thus, the commentary on each piece includes a reference to these types of relationships.



### 3. WORKS WHERE TONE IS PREDOMINANT

### 3.1 CARTAS PORTUGUESAS

Soprano:  
**Alexandra Pouta**  
Piano:  
**Ivelina Krasteva**  
Video:  
**Adriana Romero**  
Audio recording:  
**Mixed Feelings**  
Concert:  
**24-06-2022**

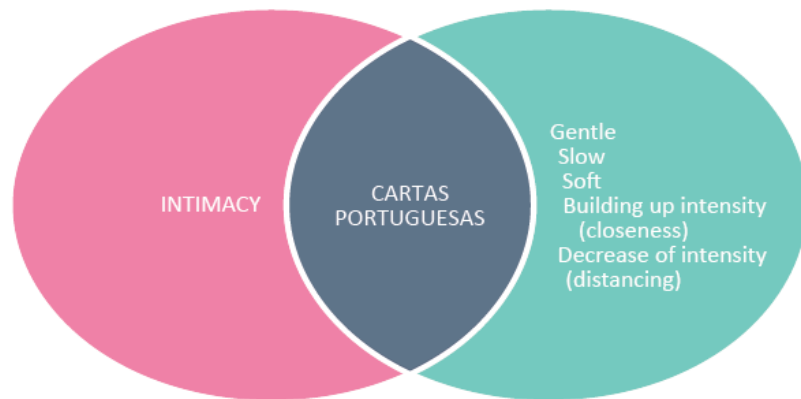


Fig. 3: Diagram showing the tone and vitality forms used as a link between the music and video of *Cartas Portuguesas*.

#### **‘INTIMACY’ IN THE TEXT AND MUSIC**

When the collaboration with the video maker Adriana Romero started, the music was already composed and had ‘intimacy’ as its tone. The main elements contributing to intimacy in the composition are the text (confessions of a nun, enclosed in her monastery, writing letters to a lover), the instrumentation (duet, unamplified voice), the choice of an Indian raag (Basant) with two sensitive notes, which increase their effect through repetition, and the circularity of the musical gestures. While circularity does not have a direct relationship with intimacy, it is related to the circumscribed space of domesticity of a nun enclosed, and also to the iterative nature of her confessions, revolving around her lover.

#### **TEXT**

The text of this song is made of fragments from a collection of letters with the same name, *Cartas Portuguesas* (“Portuguese letters”), written by a Portuguese nun (Mariana Alcoforado) in the 17th century. Following a short love affair with a French official and his departure to various missions at the service of the French king, Mariana wrote five passionate and confessional love letters. Starting with unconditional surrender to love and sensuality, the lack of mutuality inspires an increasingly bitter and hopeless tone. The fragments I chose to set revolve around the act of writing as release - “I write more for myself than for you; I seek nothing but relief.” - and the frustration with his confession of indifference – “I abhor your candour. Why did you not leave me with my passion?”<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> The full text of the song, in the original Portuguese version and translated to English, can be found on the first page of the score.

INSTRUMENTATION

The instrumentation is limited to a duet – piano and voice - which already suggests possibilities of dialogue and “togetherness”<sup>30</sup>. One example of dialogue is in the section from bars 31 to 73. While initially, the voice leads, accompanied by the piano, in bars 52-53, the piano increases in intensity, taking the motive from the voice (as shown in Fig. 4) and developing this motive into a new solo section (57 - 73), converging again with the voice for the refrain in bar 73.

48 *mf*

V. E - ra pre - ci - so não lhe po -

Pno. *mf*

\* Ped.

52

V. der per-do ar?

Pno. *p* *mf* *8<sup>va</sup>* *8<sup>va</sup>* *8<sup>va</sup>*

\*

Fig. 4: The piano takes and develops two motives highlighted in the voice.

<sup>30</sup> I don't mean here that other instrumentations, such as an ensemble or orchestra, are not suited to intimate music. However, bigger instrumentations may suggest “group dynamics” or opposition between an individual and a group (as happens in a concerto) possibly less conducive to evoke intimacy.

In the refrain (16 – 23 and again 73 – 80), more than just accompanying the voice, the piano and voice are together, and most of the melody is shared, but each has its own space and intensity. An excerpt of the refrain can be seen in Fig. 5 below.

**Intense, with energy**  
♩ = 74  
*f*

V. 71

Ten - ci - o - na - va es -

**Intense, with energy**  
♩ = 74  
*f*

Pno. 8<sup>va</sup>

\* Red.

V. 74

- cre - vê - la de for - ma a \_\_\_\_\_ não te a - bo - rre - cer,

Pno.

V. 77

mas \_\_\_\_\_ é \_\_\_\_\_ tão in - co - e - ren - te \_\_\_\_\_ que o me -

Pno.

Fig. 5: The solo piano's last two measures are followed by the refrain's beginning (from bar 73 onwards).

The fact that both instruments are unamplified, particularly the voice, also helps to create a sense of proximity. There is a self-revealing dimension in the “naked” voice, emphasised by the changes in timbre (as the humming in bar 1), dynamics (more intense in the refrain starting in the bar 73, for example), and the audibility of the singer’s breaths.

RAAG AND MUSICAL GESTURES

The piece uses the notes of a mode taken from an Indian raag called Basant, in the same transposition, during the whole song. The ascending and descending contours of the raag are shown below:

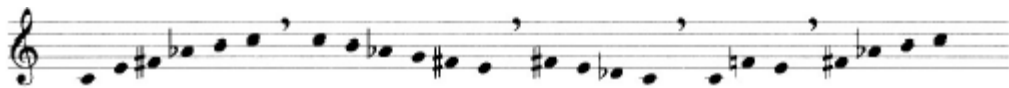


Fig. 6: Raag Basant, from the book “The Raga Guide: A survey of 74 Hindustani Ragas” (1999), edited by Joep Bor.

I came across raag Basant during a six months’ period spent in India (Pune) learning Hindustani music with the teacher Aparna Gurav, in the years 2009-2010. Having been impressed by this raag’s ambiguous sonority, combining four halftones with two augmented seconds, I had intended since long to explore its sonority in my own work. The repetition involved in raag-based music increases the listener’s sensitivity to specific notes and intervals; their effect builds up in time as the particularity of those notes or intervals becomes gradually revealed throughout the piece. In the case of this raag, there are two notes, C and G, both surrounded by semitones, which have a particular “sensitive” effect; not exactly dissonant, but also not stable; these are used to propel the movement. Both notes C and G become more present in the section from bar 31 to 72. The text, here, adopts a more passionate and confessional expression, and musically there is an agitation leading to a fast solo on the piano. An excerpt of this section is presented below in Figure 7.

The image shows a musical score for voice (V.) and piano (Pno.) for bars 40 to 43. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The voice part starts at bar 40 with the lyrics: "a mi-nha pai-xão? Não me che-ga-va a des-gra-ça de não ter". The piano part features chords and arpeggios. Notes C and G are highlighted in light blue in both parts. Dynamics include *f* (forte) for the voice and *mf* (mezzo-forte) for the piano. A fermata is placed over the first measure of the voice part. A triplets sign (3) is over the first three notes of the voice part. The piano part includes markings for *15<sup>ma</sup>* and *8<sup>va</sup>* (octaves).

\* Ped.

Fig. 7: Bars 40 to 43, with notes C and G highlighted.

Another feature related to the raag is that while the tempo and rhythm of the piece accelerate, the general feeling is of circularity. The music is circumscribed to the same notes and moves but doesn't really lead anywhere. It is a small-scale action, limited to the same space, returning to itself – like domestic action – going from one room to another, as opposed to expansive and transformative actions associated with being out in the world. Besides using the same notes, the melodic contours are made of small variations. Apart from the refrain, which repeats itself (appearing firstly in bars 16 – 23 and again in 73 – 80), the remaining melodies are variations, mostly from the phrases presented in the first section, going from bar 1 to 7. An example is shown below (Fig. 8), in which the first melody (voice, bar 1) is followed by a variation (voice, bar 8).

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system, labeled 'Voice' and 'Piano', shows a melodic line in the voice part starting with a dynamic marking of *p, gently* and a performance instruction: 'Depress keys before silently and hold until bar 8. Gliss inside the piano in the area of the notes'. The piano part is marked *mp, gently, with as much resonance as possible*. The second system, labeled 'V.' and 'Pno.', shows a variation of the melody in the voice part starting with a dynamic marking of *dolce p* and a performance instruction of *mp*. The piano part is marked *mf*. The lyrics 'Escre - vo mais para mim do que' are written below the voice line.

Fig. 8: Melody in the voice at bar 1 above, followed by its variation in the voice at bar 8.

The first two sections (bars 1 - 13) are written with proportional rather than specific rhythms, meaning the notes are defined but the rhythmic notation only distinguishes between long (white) and short (black) durations. The intention was to give the singer the opportunity for a more personal interpretation of the melodies in those sections and to be free to change timbre, inflections, and intensity. The dynamics are mostly gentle since the atmosphere is of someone speaking to herself,

correlating with the text, which begins by saying, “I write more for myself than for you”. Particularly, the first section (bars 1 – 7) was conceived as a dreamy, gentle, and flowing murmuring. A result of the proportional rhythmic notation is that the duration of the rests between each phrase is decided by the singer and related to the time needed for breathing. In my view, the fact that the phrases flow according to the singer’s breath and expressive intention of the moment helps to craft a personal or intimate space.

**TONE OF INTIMACY AS A  
LINK BETWEEN SOUND AND  
VISUALS: THE VIDEO FOR  
*CARTAS PORTUGUESAS***

Having agreed on the video's tone, the next step in the collaboration with Adriana Romero was to discover verbs, that is, visible actions and movements. Here, I distinguish between “macro-actions”, forming the main situations shown in the film, and the “micro-actions”, small gestures and events happening in each moment<sup>31</sup>. Both will be developed below, highlighting their relationship with intimacy. While the editing was realised by the video maker, only with a few suggestions by myself, all the previous decisions (both before and during the filming) were shared.

**MACRO-ACTIONS**

Inspired by the text, we decided that the video would be based on a woman alone in a room, by the window, with the light moving from daylight to darkness. The room has a high ceiling and big windows towards a vast, green, and luxuriant outside, made inaccessible by the closed windows.

As mentioned, tone relates to the atmosphere; it is pervasive, but not necessarily explicit. While the images where only the garden is shown are not an obvious allusion to intimacy, they may still indirectly contribute to intimacy. For example, in 3’15, we see the garden through a slight distortion given by the glass of the window, indicating that someone is *inside* looking to the outside (fig. 12). From 4’10 to 4’17 and 4’39 to 4’52, there are unfocussed (and more or less focused) images from the garden showing agitation, corresponding to an intensification in the music and text. Just as we can associate the music with the inner world of the video’s female character, the agitated images from the garden may suggest an inner intensity made visible. Instead of abstract or merely depicting the outside view, those images receive the status of a confession or confidence. Lastly, the garden images establish a dynamic between *inside* and *outside*. The room is made more domestic and interior by contrasting with an open external space.

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<sup>31</sup> Used in a variety of fields (from marketing and economy to psychology), the terminology of macro-actions and micro-actions was adopted here to facilitate the analysis of the video.

Having the tone and the macro-action, we collected imagery (mainly paintings, photos, and video excerpts) and shared these in a folder. Below are a few paintings taken from that folder, followed by some stills from the video for *Cartas Portuguesas*:



Fig. 9: Untitled photo (2007) by Meadows.<sup>32</sup>



Fig. 10: "Hvile" (1905) by Vilhelm Hammershoi.<sup>33</sup>



Fig. 11: Painting by Gabe Fernandez.<sup>34</sup>



Fig. 12: "Girl in Hyacinth Blue" (2002) by Jonathan Janson.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Image found at

[https://www.flickr.com/photos/meadows/472399956/?fbclid=IwAR2xK3Vg0S1WKINFjvyHBcdB5sd\\_1pefs0FhpT9HQjNct772pK6tOwFsbN4](https://www.flickr.com/photos/meadows/472399956/?fbclid=IwAR2xK3Vg0S1WKINFjvyHBcdB5sd_1pefs0FhpT9HQjNct772pK6tOwFsbN4)

<sup>33</sup> Image found at <https://www.musee-orsay.fr/fr/oeuvres/hvile-85460?fbclid=IwAR3TgdtX77QRxCuIQqu5P69TBWV6uTUwMERE8fJAOq7-DXHqWWgvMukfZGU>

<sup>34</sup> Image found at <https://www.pinterest.pt/pin/828451293923244086/>

<sup>35</sup> Image found at

[http://www.essentialvermeer.com/misc/girl\\_in\\_hyacinth\\_blue.html?fbclid=IwAR0dZl5U-lwHGis3E1izOn5XWGXdMswO6ktKSxqrnkDdi-7ASqRrpSuR8](http://www.essentialvermeer.com/misc/girl_in_hyacinth_blue.html?fbclid=IwAR0dZl5U-lwHGis3E1izOn5XWGXdMswO6ktKSxqrnkDdi-7ASqRrpSuR8)

Stills from the video for *Cartas Portuguesas*:

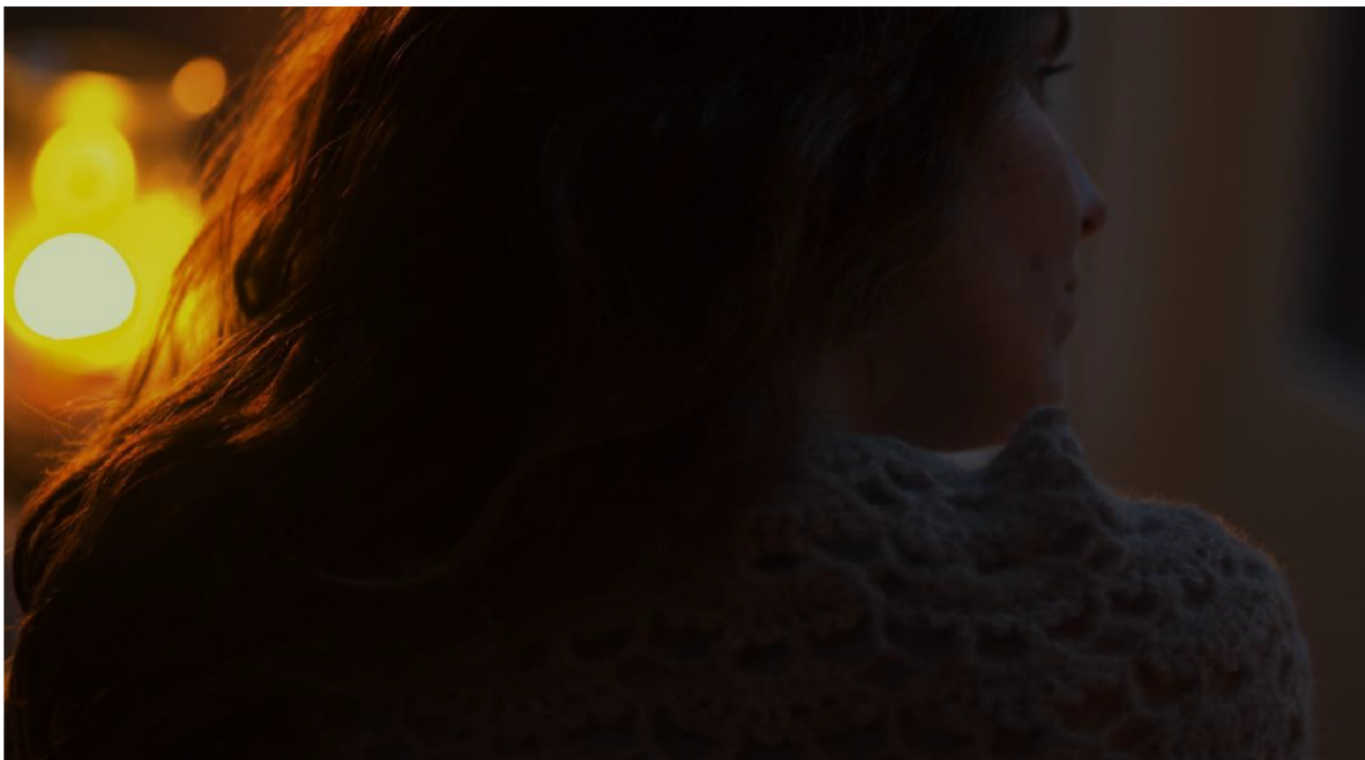












Fig. 13: Stills from the video of *Cartas Portuguesas*.

## **MICRO-ACTIONS**

The woman is mainly still, but there are a few small gestures and movements, like walking towards the window (1'19 to 1'27), adjusting the shawl (1'43 to 1'58), or loosening the hair (5'05 to 5'31, Fig. 13). In these actions, the quality of the movement is predominantly slow and soft. The camera's proximity brings the texture of the skin and clothes to the foreground, as would only be possible from a very close vantage point.

Besides the gestures and movements performed by the woman, we can also consider micro-actions performed by the camera. For example, in 1'59 – 2'05, we see a close-up of the neck, and from 2'37 to 3'07, the camera moves slowly towards the woman, and then suddenly focuses on the front of her neck in 3'08. From 5'58 onwards, there is a close-up of her hair in the dark, coloured by the lamp's light. In all the micro-actions described, intimacy is present through the combination of the camera's proximity (close-ups) with bodily gestures, creating various sensations of touch: softness, roughness, warmth, and cold.

## **TONE IN THE RECEPTION OF CARTAS PORTUGUESAS**

A few aspects of *Cartas Portuguesas* suggest that the tone – intimacy – which frames both the music and the video, also plays a particular role in the contemporary context of its viewers.

This project began during the lockdown, and from the outset, it was planned for the piece to be premiered online. The text, of a confessional nature, comes from a situation of chosen confinement (a nun enclosed in her monastery), while we were all living in an involuntary confinement. Even if viewing the video doesn't happen during the lockdown, we all have a shared experience of confinement and domesticity that might contribute to establishing a connection with the piece. Furthermore, since the premiere and access to the video were meant to be online, this set the place of reception as domestic and interior, as opposed to a public place such as a concert hall. Intimacy may be suggested through the context where the video is received (private computer or mobile phone) at a time when being confined to the intimacy of our homes was either a reality or a fresh memory.

## **TYPES OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MUSIC AND VIDEO**

I consider that the relationship between music and video in this project is mainly parallel. There is a fundamental connection in the sense that in the song a female voice sings the confessions of a woman, and in the video, we see a woman alone. There are also some subtler aspects emphasizing connection – for example, during the slow musical introduction (where only a vowel, not text, is sung) the camera moves in slow motion gradually revealing the whole window; when the text starts in the song we see the female character for the first time; from

## COMPOSITION AND COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

4'10 onwards the music gets more intense, and the image gets darker, making the transition to the night. Otherwise, music and video are mostly independent of each other – and in the live performance of the song, the video was projected without a concern for exact synchrony.

During the composition of the piece, I improvised and sang at the piano, starting with short phrases typical of the raag Basant<sup>36</sup>, and then extended and varied them, adding new phrases.

The first musical idea is at the beginning of the song (bars 1 – 7), which was inspired by the *alap* – an opening section in Hindustani vocal music displaying melodic improvisation, gradually establishing each note of the raag, without text, using only the vowel 'a'. Perhaps due to its slow and free tempo, and absence of text, this section has always given me an impression of 'inner talk'; it's not yet communicating words to the public, seeming to have more the spirit of an introspection, or reverie. Besides enjoying the musical aspect of *alap*, I thought about it as a preparation for the confessional nature of the song's initial text - "I write more for myself than for you; I seek nothing but relief."

This piece explored the tone of 'intimacy' as the shared link between music and video, and it was my first experience of making *visible music* using tone as a tool. Although the tone is very broad, it was a combined focus from the beginning in the music (already composed) and the text, and this was enough to create a shared vision. As described in Appendix 7, in Adriana's and my first phone calls about this project we talked about intimacy, and about showing subtle allusions to the sensuous world of the female character. This defined our approach to intimacy – as an access to the character's personal world -, which shaped most of the following decisions. Having made this approach clear, all of the subsequent choices (where to film, costume, character's movements) were easily discussed and identified.

In retrospect, I identify that Adriana and I also thought about and communicated in terms of vitality forms, especially at the level of the micro-actions, despite not being aware of the concept when the video was made. The main vitality forms are *stillness, gentle, slow, and soft, building up intensity (closeness), and decreasing intensity (distancing)*. The last two vitality forms can be observed in the video as the camera gets closer to the woman and further away. As Stern explains (Chapter 2.2, page 28), close-ups create a burst of arousal (as result of transcending comfortable body distances), while the distancing of the camera relaxes tension. These vitality forms are connected to the

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<sup>36</sup> Examples of transcriptions of these phrases can be found at the book "The Raga Guide: A Survey of 74 Hindustani Ragas" (1999), edited by Joep Bor.

interplay between proximity and distance intrinsic to the tone of intimacy. This experience raised some questions for future collaborations, such as: should I only communicate the tone to a collaborator, or add more detail? In *Cartas Portuguesas*, the music was ready when I approached the video maker - how can a collaboration centred on tone be established from the start of the creative process, before music and visuals are created?

The next project – *Concílio Celeste* - will investigate these questions.

## 3.2 CONCÍLIO CELESTE

Libretto:  
**Patrícia Portela**  
Staging:  
**Sónia Baptista**  
Soprano:  
**Ana Maria Pinto**  
Baritone:  
**Miguel Maduro-Dias**  
Actor:  
**Maria Mata**  
Conductor:  
**Jan Wierzba**  
Ensemble:  
**6 Musicians from**  
**Sinfonietta de Braga**  
Video recording:  
**Museu Nogueira da Silva,**  
**Braga (Portugal),**  
**18-09-2021**

*Concílio Celeste* is a site-specific chamber operetta lasting approximately half an hour<sup>37</sup>. The main collaborative work happened with the librettist Patrícia Portela. The first idea was to adapt the book “Candide”, by Voltaire (1759), but that turned out to be too daunting a project. However, “Candide” became the aesthetic reference for the project; we interpreted it as a simultaneously humorous and profound account of the human condition and reversals of fortune. Based on this book, we outlined the tone for the opera: ‘bittersweet fate’. With tone as a global principle, we have also taken other elements from “Candide”: a naïve approach to life, a sentimental view of human sufferings, and a satire of human contradictions and weaknesses. At this time, I had not yet devised the concept of mix of feelings, but these elements were moving in the direction of its formulation.

In the first part<sup>38</sup> of the piece, which sets up a heavenly council presided by a Goddess, two birds argue different positions regarding the future of humans: the dove is the naïve optimist, while the peacock relentlessly attacks humanity and claims its extinction. The music alternates between the two characters: the dove’s naïveté and sentimentality, and the peacock’s populist and satirical attitude. The excerpt from the Operetta included in the portfolio<sup>39</sup> consists of part of this argument.

As can be seen in pages 7 and 8 of the libretto (Appendix 1), the dove and peacock’s dialogue is a continuous alternation of short lines for each; I wanted to have continuity in the music, as it didn’t make sense to create a new section for each line, but also to create contrast, according to the different characters. I decide to use the same time signature to create some continuity (the whole section, from bar 215 to 296 is in 3/4), while other parameters change: the texture of the dove always includes arpeggios, and uses just a few, simple notes,

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<sup>37</sup> It was conceived for the museum Nogueira da Silva, in Braga (north of Portugal). The audience is received in the staircase of the museum by a master of ceremonies (the actor Maria Mata), who introduces the operetta and guides the public to the hall where the first part happens. The elements belonging to this hall – tapestries on the wall, ornamented chairs, grandiose lamps, and an old harp – are the scenario of the heavenly council. The second part, corresponding to the goddess and devil’s visit to Earth, happens in the garden. *Concílio Celeste* was presented as part of *FIO – informal festival of opera*, mainly consisting of the premier of four site-specific operas in the centre of Braga. The festival was created and directed by a collective that I am part of.

<sup>38</sup> The full libretto can be found in the Appendix 1.

<sup>39</sup> The video excerpt included in the portfolio corresponds in the score to the part between letter G on page 9 until bar 296 on page 19. The full video of *Concílio Celeste* can be found in the Appendix 1.

mostly based on the whole tone scale. On the other hand, the texture of the peacock is based on chords in blocks with sharper attacks, and more chromaticism. His texture resembles a harsh, repetitive valse, with the typical 5<sup>th</sup> in the bass (as in bars 216, 250, 279), which I thought of as representing an annoying, and all too familiar, discourse of complaints.

We will look in more detail at one section of this dialogue, corresponding to the dove's expression of sentimentality.

In this section (bars 191 – 214, 2'04 – 3'03 in the video), the dove becomes moved, recalling humans' affective reactions, such as interjections and crying. One of the musical elements contributing to the dove's sentimentality is the arpeggio in the piano: the harmony consists mainly of whole tones, and the sustained pedal and repetition assure continuity of the same pattern. I chose piano arpeggios as I associate this texture with Romantic piano music and its grand, emotive musical gestures; the whole tones have a sweet resonance, as opposed to a clash of notes, which might sound sharper, and help to create a naive, almost child-like character. As the passage continues some notes are replaced by rests, giving a slight irregularity to the pattern, which, combined with the soft dynamics, might point to the suspensions and hesitations of a discourse full of sentiment. These interruptions in the piano's pattern connect with the pattern in the temple blocks, also permeated by rests, contributing to the same affect:

Fig. 14: Bars 191 – 198 from *Concilio Celeste*.

The association of these elements with sentimentality is reinforced by the contrast with the peacock’s musical discourse – instead of arpeggios he has harsh chords in blocks (such as in bars 251 – 260), instead of whole tones there is more chromaticism (such as the chord with the notes C, C#, D, F# and G# in bar 251), and his patterns don’t have breaks, moving relentlessly forward<sup>40</sup>.

The timbre in the instruments and voice was also used as a contrasting element between the two characters. While the peacock has harsher and drier sounds, such as the slap (the flute and clarinet in bar 222), and jet whistle (bar 295), this section of the dove starts with the flute and clarinet playing long, high, and soft notes, supporting the voice’s delicacy (bars 196 – 199). Between bars 199 and 204, they play the interval of a semitone, while the cello and violin play an octave plus a semitone in harmonics (bars 201 – 204). The bittersweet effect of these intervals, along with the increase and decrease in the dynamics, help to build up tension for the voice’s climax in bars 209 – 211. Here, the instruments contribute to the overall intensity by going up in register (piano and flute) and increasing in dynamics:

<sup>40</sup> There is an exception to this in bars 221 – 228; however, the rests in the instrumental music is meant as a rhetoric emphasis in a moment of accusation, as he is blaming the birds in the room of becoming domesticated.

afectuosamente 13

199

Sop. fal - - ta que nos fa - ri - am se de-sa-pa-re - ces - sem! To - das a - que las... pe - que - nas re - a - ções uuuuuuuii, fu fu,

Fl.

Cl.

Perc.

Pno.

Vno.

Vc.

arco

208

Sop. uuuuuuii, fu fu, tão de - sar - man - tes! Lembras-te quando descobrimos que choravam? Os seres humanos nascem a chorar, não é incrível?

Bar. com desdém f  
É chorar a vida inteira! É só la -

Fl.

Cl.

Perc. Trocar para Crótalos

Pno.

Vno.

Vc.

pizz. f  
arco pizz. f

Fig. 15: Bars 199 – 216 from *Concílio Celeste*.

The voice's timbre starts in bar 197 with softness and naïveté, resembling a child's voice, becoming increasingly intense and infused with emotion.

**TYPES OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MUSIC AND TEXT** Throughout the opera the relationship between music and text is mostly empathetic, although the music exaggerates some features of the libretto, and has a few moments of double meaning. For example, in the second part of the opera, the devil shows concern about the humans (bars 76 – 89). It is not clear from the text if this concern is genuine; however, the music uses grand Romantic gestures (such as the arpeggios in bars 78, 81 and 88) exaggerating the sentimentality of his line, making it more theatrical, and therefore suggesting his lack of sincerity.

**COMPOSITION AND COLLABORATIVE PROCESS** The composition of this opera was affected by two aspects: very little time, and the dialogical nature of the libretto. Having the general tone of ‘bittersweet fate’, and clear-cut characters embodying the various components of tone, helped me to compose, especially given the time constraints. I thought about each character and looked for musical gestures exaggerating his/her traits; although there was the danger of the characters becoming too stereotypical, this feature seemed to match the context of a light-hearted operetta.

The shared link between music and text explored in this piece was the tone of ‘bittersweet fate’ and the various elements inside the tone - *naïve optimism on the human nature, furious attack on human’s weaknesses and misery, ambiguity of the Providence’s role, humorous approach to human condition* -, derived from Voltaire’s *Candide*.

There were several moments when the writing of the libretto got stuck, and relying on the tone and mix of feelings helped us to make decisions and progress with the work. There was significant time pressure during the process, and it was therefore very useful to have a clear direction from the start. This also helped me to participate, making specific suggestions to develop the libretto according to the tone and mix of feelings. On the other hand, it concentrated attention in the narrative, and not in the literary dimension, which might have benefited from more freedom. If there had been more time, I would have preferred to leave more space open. I felt in various moments the danger of having decided the tone and mix of feelings from the start: an approach to the writing of the libretto based on filling the gaps of the story according to these tools, with less concern about the writing style and the unexpected ideas that might arise more directly from literary materials.

This experience represented an important step in the application of tone: on the one hand, it was the first time it was used at the start of the process, before music and text, and on the other hand, it contributed to the later conceptualization of *mix of feelings*. The emergence of the mix of feelings was propitiated by two reasons: firstly, although the tone has been used in the communication with the librettist from the start, it was not ‘pure’, but coloured by a lot of background information coming from the book *Candide* from where had been derived. Secondly, while the duration of *Cartas Portuguesas* is around six minutes, the duration of the opera is half an hour. As described in Appendix 7, the longer duration and the need to create different characters and a plot motivated a different way of thinking about the tone: we had to develop various elements or perspectives inside it. As mentioned above, these elements are *naïve optimism on the human nature, furious attack on human’s weaknesses and misery, ambiguity of the Providence’s role, humorous approach to human condition*. While pointing to affect, these elements still include a narrative dimension. The next piece – *The Age of Self-Improvement* – will distil and consolidate the concept of mix of feelings and use it in close interrelation with vitality forms.



FI  
FESTIVAL INFORMAL DE ÓPERA











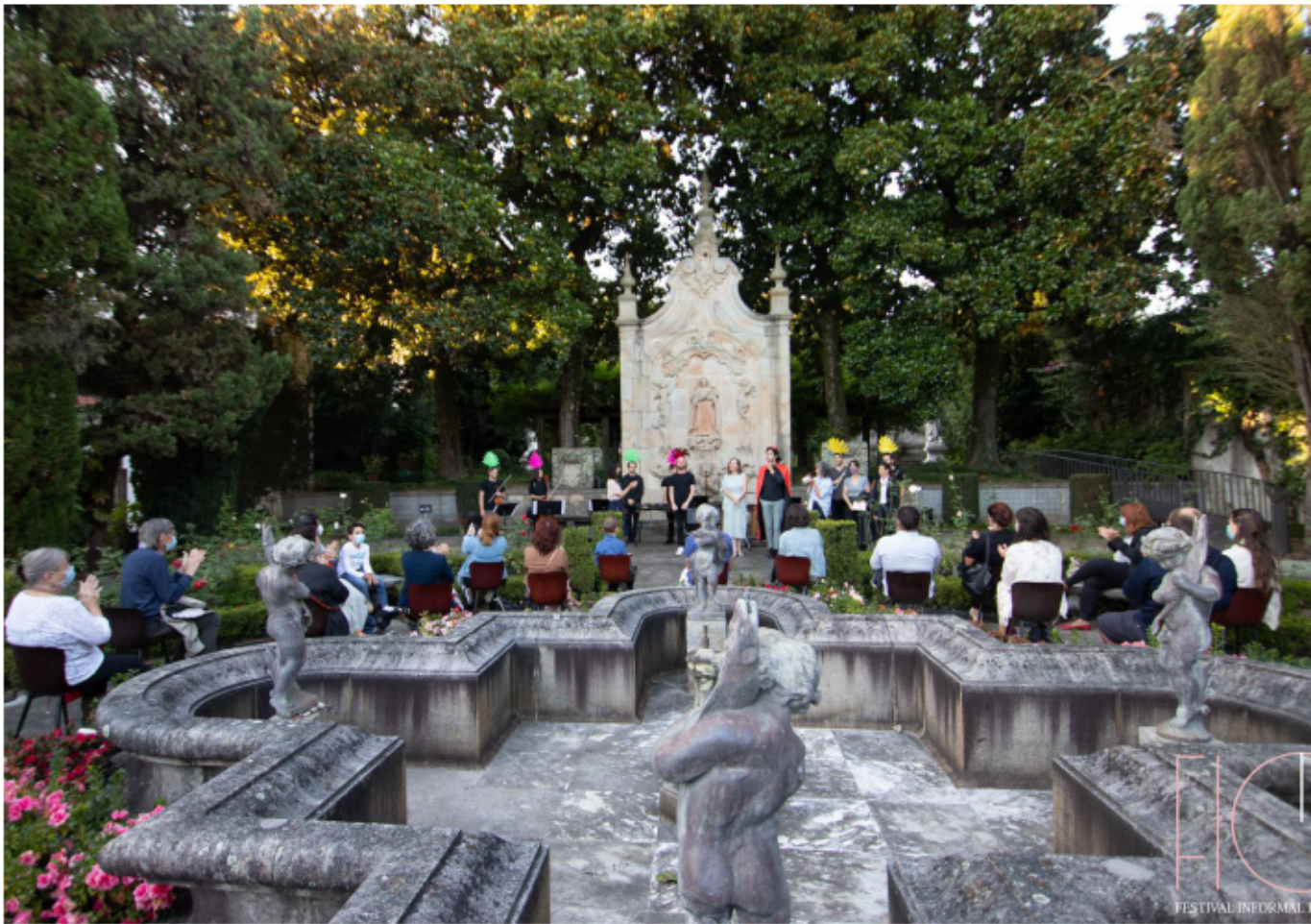


Fig. 16: Photos from the presentation of *Concilio Celeste*.



4. WORKS WHERE TONE AND VITALITY FORMS HAVE SIMILAR WEIGHT

## 4.1 THE AGE OF SELF-IMPROVEMENT

Actor:

**Mayra Stergiou**

Piano:

**Ivelina Krasteva**

Percussion:

**Engin Eskici**

Librettist and Stage

Consultant:

**Sam Redway Wells**

Video recording:

**“Mixed Feelings” concert,**

**Milton Court Theatre,**

**24-06-2022**

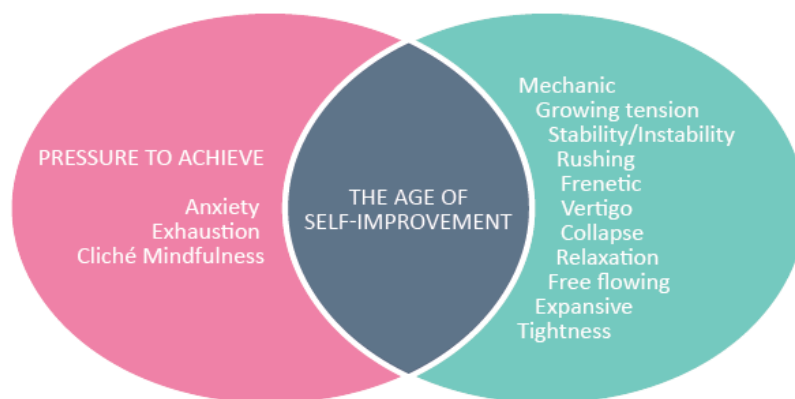


Fig. 17: Diagram showing the tone, mix of feelings, and vitality forms used as a link between the libretto, music and staging of *The Age of Self-Improvement*.

### CONTEXT

The main collaborator in this project was Sam Redway Wells, a librettist whom I met whilst he was studying on the Opera Makers Master’s programme at Guildhall School. Since this piece had a totally different context from the opera *Concilio Celeste*, I wanted to make a new attempt at communicating only the tone – ‘vitality’ – to start the collaboration. While in the opera, the tone was mixed with the book “Candide” by Voltaire, here, the tone was communicated without any other reference or detail. The intention was to give a broad starting point for the libretto without limiting Sam’s creativity.

However, it turned out differently. Sam told me he needed more limitations around the writing, such as a question or aesthetical direction. The next step was to get more specific. I was at the time very enthusiastic about the book “The Burnout Society” by Byung-Chul Han (2010), and it became the main resource for my next communication with Sam.

“The Burnout Society” is based on the idea that the new ‘commandment’ of late-modern labour society is the imperative to achieve<sup>41</sup>. Following this imperative, we become entrepreneurs of ourselves and produce more and more, without a limit, misunderstanding self-exploitation for freedom: “Achievement

<sup>41</sup> “Today’s society is no longer Foucault’s disciplinary world of hospitals, madhouses, prisons, barracks, and factories. It has long been replaced by another regime, namely a society of fitness studios, office towers, banks, airports, shopping malls, and genetic laboratories. Twenty-first-century society is no longer a disciplinary society, but rather an achievement society. Also, its inhabitants are no longer ‘obedience-subjects’ but ‘achievement-subjects’. They are entrepreneurs of themselves.” (Han 2010, 8).

society is the society of self-exploitation. The achievement subject exploits itself until it burns out. In the process, it develops auto-aggression that often enough escalates into the violence of self-destruction.” (Han 2010, 47).

The flip side of this pressure to achieve, where everything is possible, is exhaustion and depression. The abrupt change of focus between different tasks and sources of information leads to hyper-attention and hyperactivity, which causes hyper-passivity as its flipside.

active is that hyperactive intensification leads to an abrupt switch into hyperpassivity; now one obeys every impulse or stimulus without resistance. Instead of freedom, it produces new constraints. It is an illusion to believe that being more active means being freer.” (page 21)

“As its flipside, the society of achievement and activeness is generating excessive tiredness and exhaustion. These psychic conditions characterize a world that is poor in negativity and in turn dominated by excess positivity. (...) The excessiveness of performance enhancement leads to psychic infarctions.” (page 31)

“Starting at a certain level of production, auto-exploitation is significantly more efficient and brings much greater returns than allo-exploitation, because the feeling of freedom attends it. Achievement society is the society of self-exploitation. The achievement-subject exploits itself until it burns out. In the process, it develops auto-aggression that often enough escalates into the violence of self-destruction. The project turns out to be a *projectile* that the achievement-subject is aiming at itself.” (page 47)

### **Form**

TEXT: One option: To-Do list. Rhythmic repetitions of words, eventually cut by sudden silences. Some of the words might be scattered, without a clear connecting sense.

TEXT DELIVERY: There might be an atmosphere of excessive energy/obsession/anxiety/speed, alternated with moments of emptiness, lack of direction.

MOVEMENT: For the hyperactive moments there came the image of an exaggerated fitness workout, with its excess of will and motivation, and especially the energetic repetition of movements.<sup>1</sup>

### **Aesthetic references**

*Table Music* by Thierry de Mey (for physical gesture combined with rhythm and percussion)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J91emaxq0iY&t=48s&ab\\_channel=EvanChapman](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J91emaxq0iY&t=48s&ab_channel=EvanChapman)

Fig. 18: Page 2 of the document given to Sam Redway Wells as context for the libretto.

Having the book as an anchor, I produced a text document for Sam where the tone had been refined, becoming 'pressure to achieve'. In this document, I added the mix of feelings, some key quotations from the book, and a few suggestions regarding the form of the libretto, the mode of speaking the text, and the actor's movement on the stage. For the latter, I thought about an exaggerated fitness workout, with obsessive repetition of movements, probably suggested by Han's image of a society made of "fitness studios, office towers, banks, airports, shopping malls, and genetic laboratories." (Han 2010, 8).

Besides the idea of a fitness workout, this early document included other suggestions of vitality forms, for example, when it mentions "rhythmic repetitions of words, eventually cut by sudden silences", as can be seen in Fig. 18.

**'PRESSURE TO ACHIEVE'** The text document referred to above gave enough information to Sam, who replied with an outline of the libretto to be written, together with a shape for the structure and guidelines for the stage and performance. My whole document, Sam's outline, and the final libretto, follow in the Appendix 2.

The tone of 'pressure to achieve', together with vitality forms, was therefore used in my collaboration with Sam, and I will now describe how these are present in the music, libretto, and staging. The main vitality forms are in emboldened words to facilitate their path through the text and understanding how they permeate mine and Sam's thinking.

The libretto is divided into five parts. The three initial parts express 'pressure to achieve' as a frenetic pursuit of goals, splitting attention between becoming successful while getting physically fit, following online training courses, and reading books. Once this anxiety becomes too much and reaches a collapse (by the end of the third part), the will to achieve worldly success shifts radically to the will to attain instantaneous peace (fourth part). Breathing and being calm becomes another task for a successful life, which adds to the overall pressure instead of relieving it (fifth part).

The actor is Mayra Stergiou - a colleague in the Guildhall School of Music doctoral programme - and the stage consultant is Sam Redway Wells, who also wrote the libretto. Mayra is dressed in a black suit and white shirt, as an allusion to a corporate uniform. The stage light is dark blue in the beginning, contributing to a cold atmosphere.

The music starts with a continuously repeated short motive (in green at Fig. 19), passed back and forth between piano and vibraphone, corresponding to the text's emphasis on "focus" and "stop at nothing". Just as the actor parrots coach lines, with an assertive and authoritative voice, one instrument repeats exactly what the other is playing. This is interrupted by an "alarm motive" in bar 12 (in orange at Fig. 19), anticipating the text that follows on bar 14 - "Set alarm / Hours early" - and as an allusion to the multiplicity of alarms and reminders of a day full of different activities.

# The Age of Self-Improvement

Sam Redway Wells

Fátima Fonte

**1**  
♩=112

Actress Life coach says Identify your objective Realise full potential Ignore potential failure

Piano *mf*

Vibraphone *mf*

6 Full of potential energy Where focus goes, energy flows Stop at nothing

Pno. *f*

Vib. *f*

10 Stop at nothing to achieve your goal Thanks coach

Pno. *p*

Vib. *p*

Fig. 19: First page of *The Age of Self-Improvement*.

Afterwards, the initial motive comes back, but is now more unstable due to irregularities in the rhythm, while the text changes from coach advice to workout exercises:

1. 2. 3. Press ups. 1. 2. 3.                      Breathe and stretch    Alarm    Sit up Sit ups 1. 2. 3.

\* Ped.                      \* Ped.                      \* Ped.\*

\* Ped.

Fig. 20: Bars 23 - 25 of *The Age of Self-Improvement*.

Throughout the first section (bars 1 – 92), there is an alternation between **stable** movement (such as in bars 1 – 11 and 48 – 77), characterized by expectable and continuous rhythm, and more **unstable** moments (such as in bars 22 - 31, and 78 – 90). The instability is created by small changes in the pattern, whether in the rhythm – as variation 1 of the initial motive – or rhythm and pitch, as variation 2 (Fig. 20). In the case of the section between bars 78 – 90, instability is created by rests of different durations, creating hesitant halts. While the stability corresponds to ideas of “focus”, “fulfilment”, “objective”, and “purpose” expressed by the libretto – the instability points to the other side of the coin – losing the ground, overwhelm by the multiplicity of tasks, and the confusion expressed by the line “I don’t get it”.

The rhythm from bars 48 to 77 consists of continuous semiquavers, creating a **frenetic** movement. Each pattern is like a wheel in a **mechanism**; some wheels are wider, like the pattern in bars 48 – 50, and others are smaller, such as the pattern in bars 62 – 65. Between bars 62 and 77, the text delivery becomes faster, correlating to the libretto with trying to follow different masterclasses online. The musical time for this section of the libretto is purposely short, so the actor must rush from the French text to the “Masterclass” lines:

Oui, Le sourri      manges le Le sourri      manges le fromage      Oui, Je m'appelle

Masterclass Masterclass Three      Online training course  
hundred pound masterclass      Four hundred pound training  
course Oui, Le sourri

Fig. 21: Bars 61 - 70 of *The Age of Self-Improvement*.

The idea of a mechanism (given by the circular and never stopping patterns) is thus joined by a sense of **rush**, of always being late for the next activity. This effect is sharpened by the previous workout moment of the actor: when she comes back to the chair to speak the text starting in bar 61 (1'28 in the video), she is still catching her breath, with a sense of urgency.

A reference piece also dealing with physical routines on stage is "Training is the opposite"<sup>42</sup> (2014), a chamber opera for soprano, string quartet, electronics, and film by Jennifer Walshe, performed by Laura Bowler and Quatuor Bozzini. This short opera was commissioned to mark the inclusion of women's boxing at the 2014 Commonwealth Games. Jennifer Walshe and Laura Bowler had boxing training in advance: "Bowler has been in training—proper boxing training—with Cathy "The Bitch" Brown, a former world number three boxer, in preparation: the work essentially consists of her doing a boxing

<sup>42</sup> A video with an extract of the opera can be found at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lq5gnjdYJGI&ab\\_channel=LauraBowler](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lq5gnjdYJGI&ab_channel=LauraBowler)


training routine, and singing, accompanied by a string quartet.” (Kilbey 2014<sup>43</sup>). The opera alternates fierce physicality with meditative stillness: “Bowler jabbed, yelled, threatened; she goaded herself on through watching videos, doing sit-ups, shouting insults into the crowd. And, just as importantly, she meditated, from time to time, holding a pose still for a while and singing long, pure tones.” (Kilbey 2014) In this piece, I really like the intensity and reality of Laura Bowler’s physical performance, and it was also inspiring to see the contrast to the stillness moments. *The Age of Self-Improvement* also deals with contrasting physical movements – energetic and mechanic workout routines and slow, flowing gestures.


In section three (bars 184 – 237), the libretto gets increasingly bewildering, mixing bits of all the previous references (coaching lines, French, fitness instructions, and literature) in an apparently random order. While in previous sections, the piano and vibraphone played alternately, now they play together at a low register. Contrasting with the clarity of the first two sections, the patterns sound more blurred and undefined due to the low register in the piano with sustain pedal throughout, and through the constant introduction of small changes, especially in the piano:

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<sup>43</sup> The review of the opera’s premiere, by Paul Kilbey, can be found at <http://icareifyoulisten.com/2014/08/size-zero-opera-women-box-london/>


202 Alarm L'oiseau en avance

Pno. 


Vib. 


204 attrape le vers Eighty. Ninety. One hundred Early bird early bird

Pno. 


Vib. 

206 Sit up press up sit up press up Squats now squats and

Pno. 

Vib. 

208 plank Identify Establish Dowload Break down Ditch Limiting Beliefs

Pno. 


Vib. 

Fig. 22: Bars 202 - 209 of *The Age of Self-Improvement*.

There is then, a muddled quality in the libretto and the music, creating instability, which paves the way to the final part of the third section, containing the climax (bars 214 – 237). This part is further announced by the **growing tension** of a crescendo in a variation of the “alarm motive”; while before it only lasted for a quarter note, now it is extended to two 4/4 bars:

Mother died today. Or maybe

yesterday; I can't be sure.

Fig. 23: Bars 212 - 213 of *The Age of Self-Improvement*.

In the climax (bars 226 – 237), the combination of fast tempo, incessant going up and down to extreme registers (piano), and the never-stopping movement made of semiquavers is meant to create a **vertigo** sensation. Mayra speaks quickly and anxiously, finishing with the line “I don’t get it” while the music **collapses** abruptly (bar 237).

The fourth section (starting at 7’19) creates a cliché of a mindfulness environment on stage. Mayra’s white shirt irradiates light, her gestures are wide and **free-flowing**, and her facial expressions are full of positivity. Her voice is no longer directive, instead acquiring something of the typical timbre of a yoga instructor.

The music of this section (bars 239-274) starts in a **relaxed** atmosphere, with a low Tibetan Bowl in the percussion, followed by bell tree and glockenspiel, and the pianist playing directly on the strings. These percussion instruments and the piano’s timbre were chosen for their popular association with relaxation and meditation practices. The tempo is slow, and the previous hammering of semiquavers gives way to short and resonant musical gestures separated by rests.

Following the libretto’s instructions to breathe, the music “breathes” through these rests and resonance:

**4**

**Dreamy**  $\text{♩} = 64$

Ca. 0'20 Play inside the piano Breathe Breathe Be

238

Pno. Ca. 0'20 Silently depress and secure with Pedal II until bar 265

Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped.

T.B. Ca. 0'20 Low Tibetan Bowl with water

*p*

Fig. 24: Bars 238 - 245 of *The Age of Self-Improvement*.

After establishing this open and **expansive** atmosphere with new material, a disguised “alarm motive” is introduced:

266  $\frac{4}{4}$

Pno. *ppp*

\* Ped.

Vib. *ppp*

Ped.

Glock. *ppp* *mp* *ppp*

Fig. 25: Bars 266 - 268 of *The Age of Self-Improvement*.

The recovery of the “alarm motive” initiates a gradual return to earlier motives in the fifth section (bars 275-317). Although slower and more fragmented, the recovery of these motives points to the underlying similarity of the libretto.

The previous commandments for productiveness become commandments for positivity and spiritual fulfilment. Figures 26 and 27 show an example of a motive from the third section (bar 200) brought back in the fifth section (bar 281):

Fig. 26: Bars 199 - 200 of *The Age of Self-Improvement*.

Fig. 27: Bars 279 - 281 of *The Age of Self-Improvement*.

The similarity with the third section becomes obvious from bar 289 onwards. Corresponding to the libretto's "Hurry up and enlighten will you", the tempo gets back to  $\text{♩}=112$ , together with a crescendo in the "alarm motive", which now extends to three bars (289-291). The following music is similar to the climax of the third part but with added chromatic and irregular accents, as can be seen in the piano in bar 301:

Fig. 28: Bars 300 - 301 of *The Age of Self-Improvement*.

While the third part of the piece ended in the low register, the last three bars of the piece repeat the same figures in the top high registers of both instruments. This limitation to the high register in *fff* dynamics points to a sense of claustrophobia and **tightness**, happening when Mayra gasps for air through obsessive repetition of the word “Breathe”.

#### TYPES OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MUSIC, TEXT AND STAGING

I consider that music, text, and staging mostly follow the same direction, in what can be called an *empathetic* relationship (following Chion’s terminology in Chion 1994, 8-9). However, in the breaks before sections 2 (2’10-2’25) and 3 (4’28-4’44), Mayra runs in the same spot in silence and darkness. In these moments, one dimension ignores the other, strengthening the following moments, where they meet each other again.

The text of the last parts of the third (bars 214 – 237) and fifth (bars 292 – 317) sections point to a breakdown. It is here where words spin chaotically without regard for syntax and, in the case of the end of the fifth section, without even being able to breathe. The music follows this intensity regarding movement and dynamics; however, it might appear more energetic in expression than the darkness and seriousness that the libretto might suggest. In this sense, the relationship between music, libretto, and staging is more nuanced than simply *empathetic*. This occurs for two reasons: on the one hand, the intention was to approach the piece’s subject with a mixture of seriousness and lightness. On the other hand, the book “The Burnout Society” (Han 2010) relies on the idea that self-exploitation and self-destruction are advertised as positive entrepreneurship. These can be expressed by enveloping breakdown words in an active and vigorous musical atmosphere.

#### COMPOSITION AND COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

The initial musical material for this piece was inspired by John Adams’ piece *Hallelujah Junction* for two pianos (1998), which I appreciated for the way it uses repetition, and for its energetic character. I thought of the coaching lines of the libretto as an overused slogan – short, loud, and generic. I started composing by looking for short patterns that could be repeated (or echoed), and for harmony without much personality. The stacked 5ths of the beginning remain for a long time without pitch development; for me, this creates a generic, matter-of-fact type of sound.

While the first part is tendentially concrete and objective, in the cliché Mindfulness section (bar 239 onwards) I was looking for a more otherworldly sound. Besides the obvious connections of Tibetan Bowl and Bell Tree to yoga and meditation practices, I thought about the sound world of George Crumb, particularly from the piece *Apparitions* for piano and soprano (1979). There are also stacked 5ths here, but now they become about the long resonance of playing inside the piano, and the ambiguity created by combining the 5ths with more chromatic intervals (such as minor 9ths and major 7ths).

This piece explored the tone ‘pressure to achieve’, unfolded in the mix of feelings ‘anxiety, exhaustion and cliché mindfulness’, together with the vitality forms ‘mechanic’, ‘growing tension’, ‘stability/instability’, ‘rushing’, ‘frenetic’, ‘vertigo’, ‘collapse’, ‘relaxation’, ‘free flowing’, ‘expansive’, and ‘tightness’ as the shared link between music, text and staging.

In the beginning of the collaborative process, I experimented to communicate only the tone to the librettist, but this was insufficient for him as a starting point. Responding to the need to add more detail, a mix of feelings was then established as a tool associated with tone. Perhaps due to the immediate connection between the specific affects of the piece with modes of movement (tense for anxiety, collapsed for exhaustion, and so on), this was the first piece where the two main resources of the research were consciously used together, and with similar importance, from the beginning.

The development of the mix of feelings and vitality forms helped to initiate the writing process, and allowed me to start composing before the libretto was finished<sup>44</sup>. The initial ideas were modulated – the tone ‘vitality’ became ‘pressure to achieve’, and the mix of feelings ‘alternation of hyperactivity and exhaustion’, became ‘anxiety, exhaustion, cliché mindfulness’. The vitality forms that I used in my initial document (Appendix 2) remained present with small alterations - ‘rhythmic repetitions’ became ‘mechanic’, ‘moments of emptiness’ became ‘collapse’, ‘hyperactivity’ became ‘frenetic’ -, and more were added.

The collaborative process for this piece showed that having a broad starting point – in this case, only the tone ‘vitality’ – might hamper creativity, instead of stimulating it. However, I think that it was still a good decision to start communicating with a little information, and only adding more when requested by the librettist. This approach seems especially useful when working with new collaborators, since it is difficult to predict how broad or detailed one should be with the communication.

The next piece – *The Sleep Collector* – was composed immediately after *The Age of Self-Improvement*, and follows similar processes, where tone, aesthetic references, and vitality forms were present from the beginning. However, there is a fundamental difference: the collaboration for the staging did not happen as planned, so I ended up including theatrical elements in the composition. We will therefore examine how these tools can be used in a context closer to music theatre.

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<sup>44</sup> For a detailed description of the exchange between myself and the librettist, leading to the definition of the tone and vitality forms, please see Appendix 7.









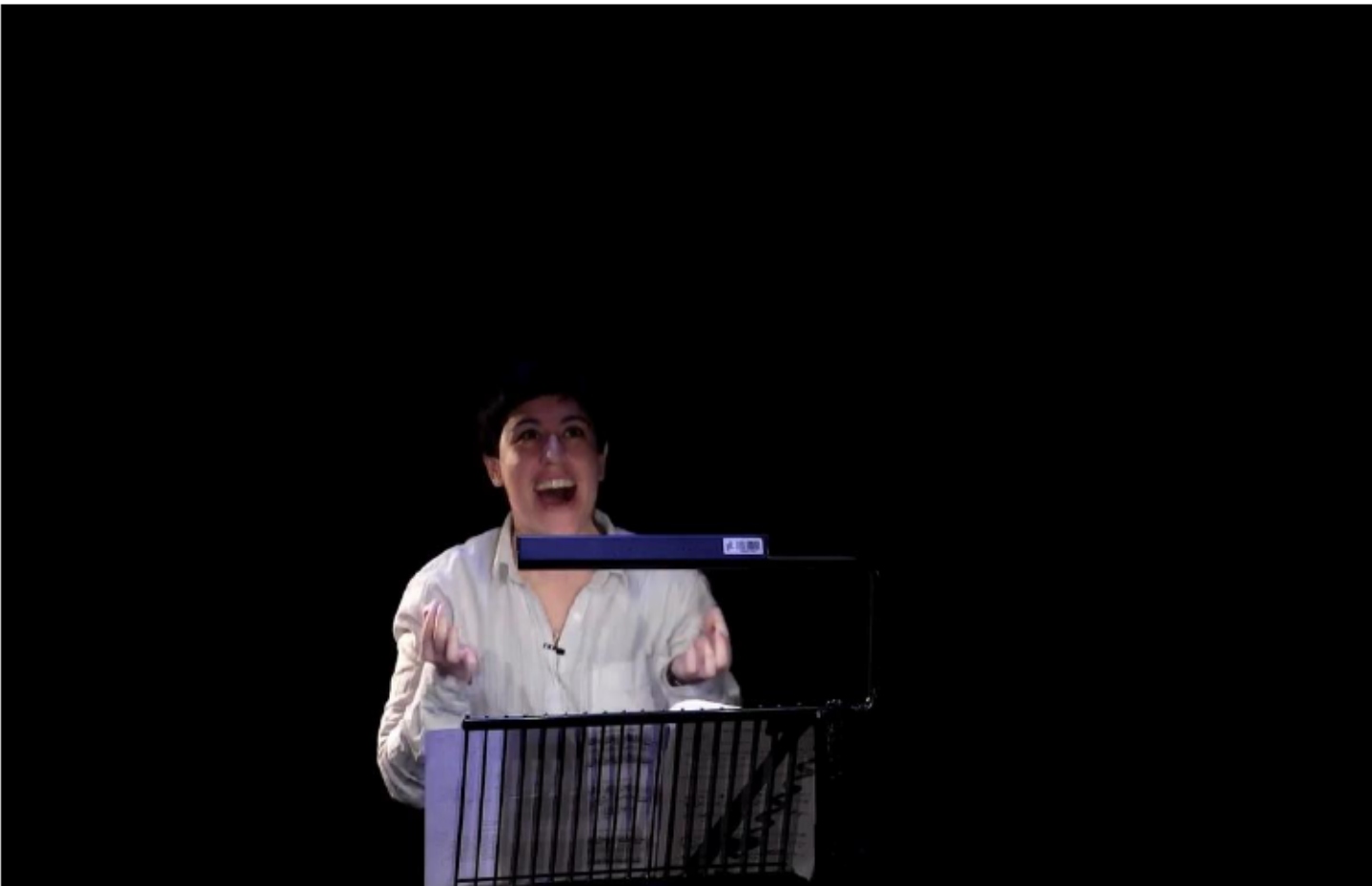


Fig. 29: Stills of the video of *The Age of Self-Improvement*, from the "Mixed Feelings" Concert.

## 4.2 THE SLEEP COLLECTOR

LUXEMBOURG VERSION,  
included in the portfolio:

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Ensemble:  
**United Instruments of Lucilin**  
Flute:  
**Päivi Kaufmann**  
Percussion:  
**Louisa Marxen**  
Cello:  
**Ingrid Schoenlaub**  
Video recording: **Festival 33,7 Luxembourg, 17-09-2022**

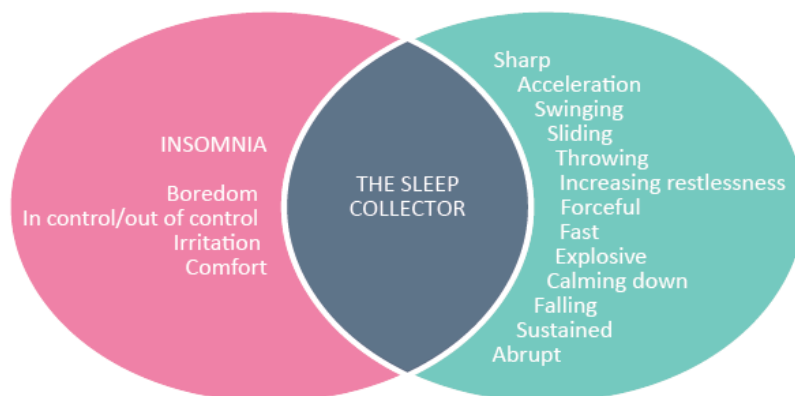


Fig. 30: Diagram showing the tone, mix of feelings, and vitality forms used as a link between music and staging in *The Sleep Collector*.

GUILDHALL SCHOOL  
VERSION,  
in the Appendix 4:

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Flute:  
**Justyna Szykarczyk**  
Violin:  
**Tiago Costa**  
Percussion:  
**Engin Eskici**  
Movement:  
**Rachel Wise and Monica Nikolaidis**  
Recording:  
**"Mixed Feelings" concert, Milton Court Theatre, 24-06-2022**

### CONTEXT

The portfolio recording of this piece is from its premiere in Luxembourg. However, the piece had an earlier version developed with performer colleagues at the Guildhall School for flute, percussion, and violin. This earlier version was developed during Spring 2022 and presented at the "Mixed Feelings" concert at the Milton Court Theatre (24-06-2022). This concert was organised by myself as a showcase of pieces developed through the research; the poster and booklet of this concert follow in the Appendix 3. The recording of this presentation is included in the Appendix 4 because I will mention both versions in the commentary.

*"Sleep is like a cat: It only comes to you if you ignore it."*

(Flynn 2012)

The starting point of the piece was *insomnia*. Since it does not directly mean an affect or emotion, the word 'insomnia' might seem inadequate to be used as tone. However, the word conjures an affective atmosphere – an amalgam of long waiting, restlessness, and the haziness of the moments between sleep and vigil.

In the first meeting with the musicians, before starting composing, I asked them what they associated insomnia with, and their answers went in a similar direction, or at least, all had a negative charge. Still, one can make a wide range of associations with it, and to start specifying our approach to insomnia, I shared two texts about insomnia by the Portuguese writer Patrícia Portela. This is the beginning of one of the texts from the book "O Banquete":

“The night quickly became infinite.  
I went through all the national and international television channels,  
all the radio stations.  
Opened the window.  
Changed my nightshirt.  
Ordered a chamomile tea, which, they say, helps to calm down, and  
a lettuce salad, which, they say, induces sleep.” (Portela 2012,  
CXLIII)<sup>45</sup>

The text continues listing rituals to help people fall asleep, in a crescendo of nervousness, until giving up and leaving for a walk in the city. A passage in the other text from “Dias Úteis” describes the process of falling asleep:

“Lying there wide awake, I waited anxiously for that daily loss of consciousness, that gradual process of becoming less and less aware of one’s surroundings. The mild delirium which precedes the at once uncertain and routine journey back into darkness.” (Portela 2017, 104)<sup>46</sup>

These two text fragments became crucial in developing *The Sleep-Collector*: the choreography of rituals allegedly helping induce sleep, which stubbornly keeps failing, and the gradual abandon leading to sleep.

The intention was to collaborate with two movement directors – Rachel Wise and Monica Nicolaidis, Junior Fellow Opera Directors at the Guildhall School in 2021- 2022 - to develop a theatrical dimension for the piece. However, due to Rachel and Monica having professional engagements, there were only a few Zoom conversations between myself and the movement directors, and one rehearsal with the musicians and Rachel.

When I realised that there would be less presence of the movement directors than planned, I started to incorporate the sleep-inducing rituals into the composition and arrived at the following structure for the piece:

A – Instrumental music. The idea behind the music: a person goes to bed and realises, with increasing restlessness, that they cannot sleep.

B – Table music. The person gets up and sits at a kitchen table, performing "sleep rituals" such as reading a book and drinking tea.

These rituals start with ordinary gestures, which become more rhythmic, repetitive, and audible over time. Although the rituals are meant to lead to sleep, they instead create more anxiety and irritation.

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<sup>45</sup> Free translation.

<sup>46</sup> Translation by Rahul Béry.

C – Instrumental music. A new attempt to fall asleep does not work, leading to frustration.

D – Table music. The person gets up again and sits at the table; irritation and nervousness melt gradually.

E – Instrumental music. Finally, at a late hour, restlessness gives in to the sweet abandon of sleep, quickly interrupted by the alarm clock.

This ordering of events was thought of as a reflection of the busy processes of insomnia, alternating between trying to fall asleep in bed (instrumental sections) to getting up and searching for the help of sleep rituals (table sections).

Having ‘insomnia’ as tone, the mix of feelings associated with this was ‘boredom, in control/out of control, irritation, comfort’. The main vitality forms are increasing restlessness, sharp, acceleration, swinging, sliding, throwing, forceful, explosive, fast, calming down, falling, sustained, and abrupt. In this and the next pieces, vitality forms will be indicated in bold during the text. The piece was thought of as a light-hearted approach to the small irritations, frustrations, and annoyances accompanying the restless process of trying to rest.

**TABLE MUSIC** In sections B and D, all musicians sit at a table, facing the audience, without instruments.

From the rich tradition of table music written by composers, three pieces were especially influential: “Table Music” (1987) by Thierry de Mey, “Rot Blau” (2009) by Jessie Marino<sup>47</sup>, and “Any Table Any Room” (2017) by Burrows & Fargion<sup>48</sup>. In all these pieces, the performers sit at a table turned to the audience. While only the hands are used in the first two pieces, the last includes objects. Each piece is very different visually. In “Table Music”, only the percussionists’ hands, wooden blocks, and scores are lit, so we do not see their bodies or faces<sup>49</sup>. In “Rot Blau”, the two musicians (Jessie Marino and Natacha Diels, two composer-performers already referred to as part of The New Discipline in Chapter 1.3) are visible, and the piece plays with colour. Each wears a pair of gloves, half white half blue (Diels), and half white, half red (Marino).

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<sup>47</sup> This piece can be found at

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3U9cuxwLVNo&ab\\_channel=ScoreFollower](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3U9cuxwLVNo&ab_channel=ScoreFollower).

<sup>48</sup> This piece can be found at <https://vimeo.com/showcase/6691019/video/371838346>.

<sup>49</sup> The reference that I am using for the performance of the piece can be found at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J91emaxq0iY&ab\\_channel=EvanChapman](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J91emaxq0iY&ab_channel=EvanChapman).

Both pieces are compelling to watch and listen to, creating a wonderful balance between sound and visual dimensions. At “Any Table Any Room”, six performers sit at a long table, each having a small collection of objects. Here, the physical gestures are equally precise, but with intriguing passages between musical gestures (such as claps, or picking up and putting down objects with the associated sound) and more choreographed gestures without sound (as happens in the video between 3’50 and 4’10). The latter creates an impression of almost hearing the sound, which is suggested by the expressive and rhythmic movements when no sound is being made in reality.

The table music sections in *The Sleep Collector* were the closest experience I had during the research to composing music theatre, in the sense of incorporating the sonic and the visual into the score. As already mentioned, this was not planned. The staging was meant to be developed by movement directors, but these elements were integrated into the composition because this proved impossible. This implied a change in my role since I usually leave the visual dimension to a collaborator. However, the fact that the table sections are grounded on rhythm made them approachable from a compositional point of view. I experimented with gestures for sleep rituals that seemed more prone to be treated rhythmically and made videos at home; two videos follow in the Appendix 4.

Each table section can be watched separately in two videos realised during a rehearsal at Guildhall School, with the musicians Engin Eskici (percussionist) and Justyna Szykarczyk (flutist). Since they were filmed at a closer distance, and the table used is quite resonant, these sections can be understood more clearly. The videos can be found in the Appendix 4.

#### **‘INSOMNIA’**

The piece starts with INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC SECTION A. The main motive of this section is based on the sound of drumming fingers on a table or other surface, as may happen when one is bored. The literal physical gesture of drumming fingers will happen later in section B, but is previously developed as a musical motive in section A. It appears as an arpeggio of key clicks in the flute (bar 1), fingers on the wood in the cello (bar 3), and fingers on the temple block (bar 8):

**A Restless** (♩=68)

The musical score for Section A, 'Restless', is presented in three systems. The first system shows the Flute, Violoncello, and Percussion parts. The Flute part begins with a series of sixteenth notes marked with 'f' and 'key clicks', followed by a sustained note with 'exhale'. The Violoncello part features a similar rhythmic pattern with 'fingers on the wood' and 'fingers' markings, also marked with 'f'. The Percussion part includes 'SANDPAPER' and 'To T. Bl. Low' markings, with a dynamic marking of 'mf'. A double bar line separates the first system from the second. The second system starts at bar 8 and continues the Flute, Violoncello, and Percussion parts. The Flute part has 'key clicks' and 'exhale' markings. The Violoncello part includes 'fingers', 'slap on the wood', and 'slap' markings. The Percussion part features 'fingers on wood with both hands' and 'SANDPAPER' markings, with a dynamic marking of 'mf'.

Fig. 31: Bars 1-14 from *The Sleep Collector*.

Section A combines this “drumming fingers motive” with vocal exhalations, friction sounds, and sharp, percussive sounds. There were two main influences for the texture of this section: “Liminal Studies” for string quartet, Part 4, by Wojtek Blecharz<sup>50</sup> (2014), and “Oh I See” by Carola Bauckholt<sup>51</sup> (2016) for Clarinet, Cello, Piano, 2 large Balloons and Video. In the first piece, four musicians play two cellos lying on a table. Besides the unconventional disposition of the cellos, creating visual interest by itself, I found the friction-related sounds very appealing, especially the ones using a sponge in the strings, tuning pegs, and other parts of the cellos. The idea of including sounds of friction in *The Sleep Collector* emerged from the image of a person lying down in bed, unable to fall asleep, such as the small noises of turning in bed, changing position, adjusting the pillow. This was realized through a tremolo in the sandpaper and in the cello, with the bow against the cello’s body, as can be observed in bars 15-18:

<sup>50</sup> This piece can be found at

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DVDIXcjSdHY&ab\\_channel=WojtekBlecharz](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DVDIXcjSdHY&ab_channel=WojtekBlecharz).

<sup>51</sup> This piece can be found at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Vx7Fbh4-kQ&ab\\_channel=ScoreFollower](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Vx7Fbh4-kQ&ab_channel=ScoreFollower).

Fig. 32: Beginning of page 2 of *The Sleep Collector*, with friction sounds in the sandpaper (percussion) and in the cello.

The first section of Bauckholt’s “Oh I See” explores short sounds intercalated by rests, emphasising rhythm and timbre over pitch. This texture inspired me because it created a universe of small, rhythmic “noises” and silence that seemed related to the atmosphere I wanted to create. More specifically, I took the idea of using the “pizzicato fingerhit” on the cello from this piece. It is a left-hand pizzicato, where the first note (signalled by the symbol “+”) is played with the finger hitting the string, and the second note is played with the movement of the finger releasing the string. The two figures below show this pizzicato in Bauckholt’s piece and then in “The Sleep Collector:

Fig. 33: Image from the video of “Oh I See” by Carola Bauckholt, from bar 6 to 10, found at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Vx7Fbh4-kQ&ab\\_channel=ScoreFollower](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Vx7Fbh4-kQ&ab_channel=ScoreFollower).

28 key clicks 6 6 slap (voice) key clicks 6 6  
 Fl. sh *f*

pizz. fingerhit hit the strings fingers slap --- (voice) pizz. fingerhit hit the strings  
 Vc. 6 6 sh

To T. Bl. High (voice)  
 Perc. sh

Fig. 34: Bars 28-31 from the *The Sleep Collector*. Add colour

The “drumming fingers motive”, first presented as an arpeggio (Fig. 31), is afterwards unrolled as a sextuplet, as seen in the flute and cello in bar 28 in the figure above (Fig. 34).

This section gets **increasingly restless** and loud towards the end, especially due to the shakuhachi attack on the flute, slap in the cello, and **sharp** vocal sounds, indicating that the slight restlessness of the beginning is now a declared impossibility to falling asleep:

38 only air slap only air slap only air  
 Fl. *f*

slap --- slap arco air sound  
 Vc. *f*

fingers on wood SANDPAPER  
 Perc. *f*

43 --- (voice) shakuhachi attack exhale  
 Fl. sh

--- slap --- (voice) (voice) exhale  
 Vc. sh sh

(voice) (voice) exhale  
 Perc. sh sh

Fig. 35: End of section A (bars 38 – 46) of *The Sleep Collector*.

The TABLE SECTION B starts with a slow tempo and bored gestures: drumming fingers at a table, a long exhalation, lazily resting the head in the hand, and a book is opened and closed disinterestedly (bars 48 – 58). Afterwards, the metronome is turned on as a reminder that time is passing. There are successive rhythmic attempts to read the book, punctuated by an exhalation, which now is shorter and more nervous (bars 59 – 82).

The failure of the book ritual **accelerates** the tempo for around double speed, indicating that boredom is being replaced by nervous awareness of the time. The second part of section B (bars 84 – 116) corresponds to a new ritual: a tea to help sleep. It begins with a slight **swing** of the teacup on the table (bar 88), as a kind of automatic gesture done by distraction, followed by picking and dropping the tea box (bars 89 - 90), again as if casually reading the labels (without actually reading them). These two gestures make up a pattern which will be repeated several times. While the first time, the pattern lasts three 4/4 bars (88 – 90), it gets increasingly shorter until lasting only one 3/3 bar (109 – 112). This increase in the pattern’s speed, together with the insistent repetition, signals being stuck at performing a ritual which only escalates anxiety instead of bringing tranquillity. The pattern collapses in the irritated gesture of **throwing** the tea box and the teacup, which **slide** away to the end of the table. Throughout the section, several friction sounds – sliding the book, swinging the teacup, sliding the tea box and teacup in the end – connect with the instrumental friction sounds of section A.

The INSTRUMENTAL SECTION C brings back the sextuplets introduced in section A, but now in a faster tempo, stronger dynamics, and rougher sound:

**C Irritated** (♩=86)

117 *making noise moving on the chair*  
Fl. *f* tu ku tu ku tu ku tu tu ku tu ku tu ku tu

*arco frog always*  
Vc. *f* ugly sound always

SANDPAPER  
Perc. *f*

120 *making noise*  
Fl. tu tu ku tu ku tu ku tu tu ku tu ku tu ku tu

*making noise*  
Vc. *making noise* *making noise*

Perc.

Fig. 36: Beginning of section C from *The Sleep Collector*.

The previous sections show an attempt to be in control: section A is restless but in a generally quiet and contained atmosphere, and section B insistently repeats rituals, as if forcing them to work. On the contrary, Section C is generally more out of control, openly displaying irritation, despite a few restrained moments (such as between bars 126 – 132). This is expressed in the improvisation moment at bar 125 and in the following elements: the **forceful** and dirty sound of the cello's motive (shown above in bar 117), the tremolo in the sandpaper (also in bar 117), and the “train race” at the flute (bars 133 – 135), with its **explosive** and somewhat unpredictable high harmonics. These elements are repeated throughout the section, peaking at the end with the top high registers in the flute and cello:

The musical score for the end of section C (bars 160-163) features three staves: Flute (Fl.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Percussion (Perc.).

- Flute (Fl.):** Starts at bar 160 with a series of sixteenth-note quintuplets, each marked with a '6' and a breath mark (v). The pattern repeats six times. At the end of the section (bars 162-163), the flute plays a final note with an 'exhale' mark and a *ff* dynamic.
- Violoncello (Vc.):** Mirrors the flute's pattern with sixteenth-note quintuplets, each marked with a '6' and an upward-pointing arrow (v). It also concludes with an 'exhale' mark and a *ff* dynamic.
- Percussion (Perc.):** Features a box labeled "TEMPLE BLOCKS HIGH AND LOW" with the instruction "two sticks on each hand". The percussion part is mostly silent, with a final *f ff* dynamic and an 'exhale' mark at the end of the section.

Fig. 37: End of section C from *The Sleep Collector*.

The exhalation closes the section in *ff* (bars 162 – 163). This element is present from the beginning of the piece and has been modulated according to the atmosphere of each moment. While in the beginning, it was slow and soft (such as in bars 6 – 7), it then gets faster and stronger (such as in bars 70 – 79), and by the end of section C (Fig. 37), is definitely irritated, as expressed in the video (7'58 – 8'03).

The TABLE SECTION D recovers the “drumming fingers motive”, but now at a **fast** speed and on the sides of the tea box. Instead of a sign of boredom as earlier, it now links with the irritation and charged energy of the previous section. Next, the rallentando of the metronome (from  $\text{♩}=149$  to  $\text{♩}=40$ ), together with the rallentando of the rhythm between bars 168 and 172 (going from quintuplets to quarter notes), suggests **calming down**. In my view, this apparent drop of tension intensifies the effect of the next gesture, where the musicians

energetically **crush** the tea box, as a sort of catharsis. Finally, they swing a tea bag above the teacup, **letting it fall** in slow movements as if hypnotising themselves. This section aims to move from previous irritation and attempts of control to gradual self-abandoning, which will be continued in the next section.

The INSTRUMENTAL SECTION E retains the sextuplets motive, but only as a distant echo, firstly with pizzicato septuplets in the cello (bars 174-176) and then as sextuplets of key clicks in the flute (185-186). Now, the tempo is slower, dynamics are softer, and there are mainly long notes and **sustained** tremolos instead of short and percussive sounds. The vibraphone is introduced for a scintillating timbre and open intervals, becoming sweeter as the section ends. The idea for this section is a gradual calming of previous agitation, some sense of comfort finally arriving, and a rustle of sound softly emerging and disappearing, as “The mild delirium which precedes the at once uncertain and routine journey back into darkness.” (Portela 2017, 104). However, as soon as this atmosphere settles in, the alarm clock **abruptly** interrupts, ringing loudly.

## **‘INSOMNIA’ IN THE STAGING**

### GUILDHALL SCHOOL VERSION

As explained at the beginning of Chapter 4.2, the in-person collaboration with the movement directors became limited to a first meeting with Monica Nikolaidis at the beginning of the process, and one rehearsal with Rachel Wise, for about one hour and a half, one week before the performance. The main stage elements introduced by Rachel were the movement of Justyna (flutist) after section D and the beginning of E (from 11’45 to 13’42), and the end of the piece, when all musicians get up following the alarm clock sound (15’28 until the end).

There were several problems in the staging of this piece, both logistical and artistic. The first issue was the lack of rehearsal time with movement direction. Rachel was well prepared and tried to do as much as possible, but there was only enough rehearsal time to sketch a few movements without a proper acquaintance with the piece or follow-up. Also, one of the musicians had less availability for the project (Tiago), so he could not rehearse the table moments or the movements suggested by Rachel, and we had to simplify his part.

The score does not give any details about the transitions between sections. I indicate that the musicians walk to the table and then back to the instruments without further instructions about the duration or mode of these transitions. The intention was to leave these parts open to the work with a movement director or the musicians’ choice. In the performance at Milton Court Theatre, the transitions between sections take too much time and seem somewhat disconnected from the rest.

This brought an important issue to consideration: the difference between aesthetics of movement. Sections B and D come from a tradition of table music written by composers, where the movements are precise and rhythmically notated, as mentioned on pages 81-82. The remaining movement of the piece comes from a different tradition, more related to theatre than music. In my view, this difference in the aesthetics of movement weakened the piece, worsened by the lack of time to polish and sharpen the more theatrical parts. Besides differences in the quality of movements (precise/imprecise, sober/expressive, and so on), the main issue was the timing. While in the table music, each gesture is rhythmically notated, making it a musical time, in the transitions, the time is free, becoming a theatrical time.

LUXEMBOURG  
VERSION

The version of *The Sleep Collector* played by United Instruments of Lucilin in Festival 33,7 in Luxembourg is scored for cello instead of violin. It has small differences in the instrumental sections, but the table music is the same. The elements of movement added by Rachel Wise referred earlier are not part of this performance. I just sent the score and asked, in a Zoom conversation, for the transitions to be as fast and sharp as possible. This version is about two minutes shorter than the Guildhall School version, and I think the piece works better in this more compact form. I was happy to see how the performers appropriated and made the piece better through their enthusiasm and creativity<sup>52</sup>.

#### **TYPES OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MUSIC AND SCENE**

Although the relationship between music and scene is mainly empathetic in the instrumental sections in this piece, it is more difficult to characterize in the table sections, since there is a unity between the physical gestures and the resulting sound; there are no separate layers of scene and music. The facial expressions of the musicians are mostly neutral, so it is all about their gestures, which directly impact the sound – for example, if the gestures are relaxed, forceful or anxious, this will be noticeable in the resulting sound.

#### **COMPOSITION AND COLLABORATIVE PROCESS**

The key to starting this composition was the idea of sleep rituals, taken from the reference texts by Patrícia Portela. I spent a few days experimenting with objects at a table – books, tea related items such as cups, tea bags, spoons, sugar -, looking for their various sounds, and making short videos (Appendix 4). The table sections of the piece were therefore composed first, and were derived from these experiments.

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<sup>52</sup> In the Guildhall School version, there was confusion in the narrative structure. This is because we did not make it clear that the instrumental music sections corresponded to attempts to fall asleep in the bedroom, while the table music corresponded to getting up and performing sleep rituals in the kitchen. I talked with the United Instruments of Lucilin musicians about this issue, and they suggested this clarification. They start the piece yawning, wrapped up in a blanket, and reclining in the chair (flutist and cellist). After section A, before walking to the table, they take off the blanket, wear a robe over the pyjamas, and put on slippers. They follow this code throughout the piece: blanket in A, C and E to indicate that they are in bed, and robe + slippers in B and D to indicate that they got up and left the bedroom.

Afterwards, I started translating some of these sounds onto the instruments: for example, section A (instrumental music) uses the sound of drumming fingers at a table (bars 1 – 3); friction sounds, derived of an object sliding on the table (bars 15 – 17); vocal exhalation, also present in the table section (bars 46, and 51); and slap, related with sound of the book or tea box falling at the table (bars 18-19). The next instrumental section develops these elements in a more obsessive and explosive way. I had a few sessions with the musicians asking them to translate some of these ideas onto their instruments: drumming fingers, friction, explosive/uncontrolled or coarse sounds. The material resulting from these sessions was then selected and organized rhythmically. The last instrumental section is meant to evoke a lullaby; it is much more pitch oriented than the previous sections, and harmonically it is based on the overlap of the intervals of a minor 3<sup>rd</sup> plus a major 2<sup>nd</sup> (bars 180, 195). These intervals, together with the timbre (vibraphone, *flautando* in the cello, air in the flute) and soft dynamics give me a sensation of comfort, of being enveloped by sound as by a blanket.

For the reasons explained at page 80, this piece did not involve a collaboration. However, this experience raised questions for future projects including movement direction. If the composer notates physical gestures, how is this articulated alongside other moments of the piece where movement is present but not scored? This question is valid whether I am the only person responsible for the movement direction (as common in music theatre) or collaborating with a movement director. And, in the specific case of *The Sleep Collector*, would it be possible to work with a movement director to bring the same movement quality of the table music to the transitions from the table to the chairs?

This concern with the qualities of movement, and modes of collaborating with a movement director, were addressed in *Descalça* (Chapter 5.3), the last piece realised as part of my research.









Fig. 38: Photos of the dress rehearsal of *The Sleep Collector* for the “Mixed Feelings” concert.



## 5. WORKS WHERE VITALITY FORMS ARE PREDOMINANT

## 5.1 BAGATELAS

Solo Harp  
and Video

Harp:  
**Angélica Salvi**  
Video:  
**Paulo Meira**

Solo Harp  
and Light

Harp:  
**Arwen Withey-Harrison**  
Lighting Designer:  
**Hazuki Mogan**  
Recording:  
“Mixed Feelings” concert,  
Milton Court Theatre,  
24-06-2022

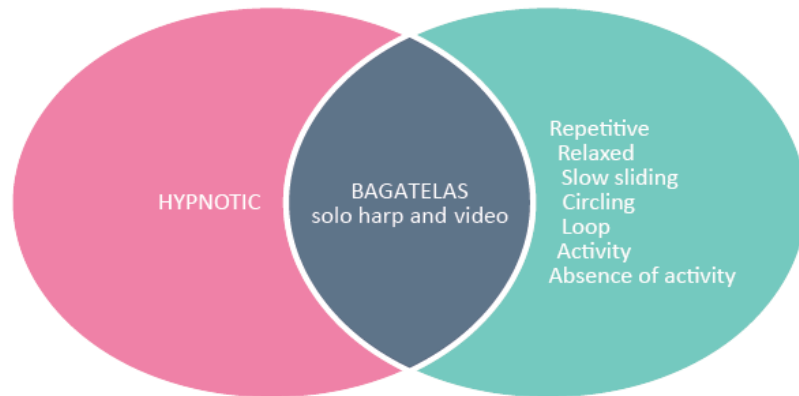


Fig. 39: Diagram showing the tone and vitality forms used as a link between the music and video in *BagateLAS*.

### CONTEXT

*BagateLAS* was the first piece written as part of my research project, and the one which underwent more changes due to the pandemic. It began in the Spring of 2020, with the intention of setting up a close collaboration with a harpist and a lighting designer. However, due to postponements related to the pandemic, that collaboration was only realised for the “Mixed Feelings” Concert in June 2022. In 2020, I wrote the music, and at the beginning of 2021, a video was made for the piece by Paulo Meira. There are then two versions of the visual dimension for *BagateLAS*: the first combines the music with video, and the second combines the music with light. The score is the same for both versions, although the video version does not use the whole piece (only pages 4 – 6). I will discuss both versions below.

### SOLO HARP AND VIDEO

When this version was realised, I had not yet encountered the theoretical formulation of tone and vitality forms<sup>53</sup>. Not being able to work with a lighting designer while composing, the intention was to create music open to a later articulation with light. I did not set a tone in advance, but instead, I followed a compositional task and experimented with the ‘gamut technique’ by John Cage.

<sup>53</sup> At the beginning of my research, I was focusing on how the visual and sonic materials are organised in music theatre, and the relationships arising from their combination. The question underlying this piece was - *how to use sound and light together while keeping each independent and expressive in its own right?* The intention was to facilitate the emergence of a “counterpoint”, a kind of relationship between the sonic and the visual as theorised by Heiner Goebbels in the book “Aesthetics of Absence” (2015).

The 'gamut technique' consists of simplifying the use of harmonies through limitation to a specific collection of sounds chosen at the outset: "A gamut in this context is not simply a collection of pitches, themes, motives, or scales, but a collection of sounds of varying character and complexity." (Pritchett 1993, 40). Having selected the gamut, the next question was how to use the sounds; in each piece, Cage tried a different approach with different degrees of freedom. I initially tried using the sounds of the gamut in a predefined rhythmic grid, which led to square, rigid music; therefore, I chose instead to improvise with the gamut at the piano.

## Gamut

The musical score for 'Gamut' is presented in three systems of piano notation. The first system features three measures of music, each with the instruction 'bisbigl.' above it, and a final measure with the instruction 'Play between 6 and 12 articulations of the note'. The second system includes a sequence of notes with '8va' above, followed by 'transposition' and 'xyl.' above, and 'transposition xyl. xyl....' above. The third system shows a sequence of notes with 'transposition' above and a fermata symbol above the final note. The score is written in a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature.

Fig. 40: Gamut for the piece *Bagatelas*.

*Bagatelas* comprises nine short movements or bagatelles, each separated by a silence of undetermined duration. The harpist can choose the movements' number, order, and eventual repetition. This form allows flexibility when the piece is combined with other elements. For example, only the last five bagatelles are used in the video accompanying the piece.

I shared the recording of the piece with Paulo Meira without a previous idea of what the video could be. I did not mention the tone or atmosphere of the piece. We experimented together combining the

music with several stock videos, noticing which types of movement seemed to work better. Although the concept of vitality forms had not yet been consciously adopted as part of the research, considerations of timing and modes of movement were at the basis of the communication with the video maker. Paulo Meira realised the final video's direction and concept, which is based on moving escalators filmed from different angles in empty spaces.

Given that this piece has a more abstract context – it is the only piece in the portfolio without a text<sup>54</sup> – the focus was the mode of movement suggested by the music: *slow, relaxed, repetitive, and continuous*. From the combination of these, Paulo derived the atmosphere of 'hypnotic' expressed in the **repetitive and circular** movement of the escalators. This movement has been slowed down, giving a sense of **relaxation**. Just as the music alternates between sound and silence, the video **alternates between activity and absence of activity** (image/blackout). Since these moments do not happen simultaneously, they contribute to variety in the types of relationship between sound and image: one dimension goes to the background while the other comes to the foreground.

There is a connection between the general **slow sliding** movement of the stairs and the slow slide in the music, happening several times in bagatelles E and F (using a tuning fork on the string):

Always play G# tremolo as indicated below  
Between 6 and 12 articulations of the note

The image shows a musical score for Bagatelle E. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 6/8. The score begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. There are two sections of tremolo, each marked with a 'T' in a box above the staff. The first tremolo section is marked *pp* and is indicated by a double-headed vertical arrow. Above the first tremolo section, there is a small diagram of a guitar string with a G# note and a tremolo symbol. The score includes various notes, rests, and articulation marks.

Fig. 41: Beginning of movement E of *Bagatelas*.

The arpeggio of a chord (also in Fig. 41) is a salient point in the texture of the music, which usually employs single notes and intervals, and is also used as a salient point in the video. The first three video segments, coming from the previous blackout, start with an arpeggio of a chord (0'07, 0'48, 1'40), and two later video segments go to blackout also with an arpeggio of a chord (3'58 and 4'37). This sudden alternation between image and blackout contrasts with the general repetition and continuity of the movements.

<sup>54</sup> *The Sleep Collector* does not use a text explicitly, but two texts by Patrícia Portela were part of the creation of the piece, as described in Chapter 4.2.

## SOLO HARP AND LIGHT

The lighting designer was Hazuki Mogan, a Guildhall School colleague, who was studying for a MA in Collaborative Theatre Production and Design<sup>55</sup>. Our collaboration was adapted to two conditions. One was limited access time to Milton Court Theatre, where the performance

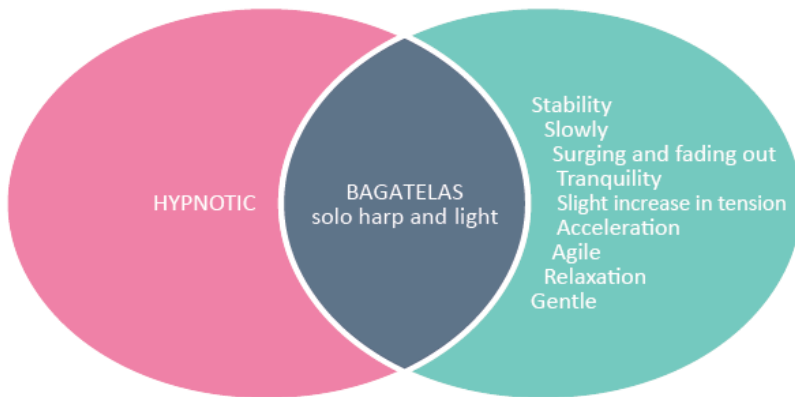


Fig. 42: Diagram showing the tone and vitality forms used as a link between music and light in *Bagatelas*.

of the piece happened, and the other had to do with Hazuki's experience. It was the first time that she was programming light. She had lighting design experience but no experience in programming light and operating the type of equipment available at Milton Court Theatre<sup>56</sup>. There were two rehearsals of the piece in

the space; during the first one, Hazuki showed the main possibilities available, and from there, we drafted the lighting design.

There are two main elements in the lighting design of *Bagatelas*: yellow, warm lights slowly surging and fading out in the empty space of the stage, and linear shapes projected on the sides of the stage, echoing the shape of the harp. The harpist, Arwen Withey-Harrison, also a colleague at Guildhall School, remains on the right side of the stage, lit only by the music stand's light. Inspired by the 'gamut technique' used in the music, the intention was to find a small number of elements and then use them rhythmically in different combinations. However, as will be discussed in page 107, the result was not as sober as expected.

"Luminance" - the first movement of "In the Light of Air", a chamber work with a light installation<sup>57</sup> by Anna Thorvaldsdottir (2015) is a reference piece using minimal light elements. A constellation of lights hangs at different heights, increasing and decreasing intensity throughout the piece. The intensification can be subtle or more pronounced; sometimes, there is a clear connection with musical events, while the connection is not evident at other times. In Thorvaldsdottir's words, "The performers directly contribute to the performance of the lighting figures through their breath as well as through their instrumental performance"<sup>58</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> Besides *Bagatelas*, Hazuki very generously made the lighting design and operation of the other pieces of the "Mixed Feelings" concert.

<sup>56</sup> During rehearsals and at the "Mixed Feelings" concert, we were helped by Staff technicians at Milton Court Theatre, to whom I am very grateful.

<sup>57</sup> The light installation was designed in collaboration with "ICE", and the video of the piece can be found at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pid-bOD1ux0&ab\\_channel=AnnaThorvaldsdottir](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pid-bOD1ux0&ab_channel=AnnaThorvaldsdottir).

<sup>58</sup> In Anna Thorvaldsdottir website: <https://www.annathorvalds.com/-inthelightofair>.

In my view, this light installation is a very effective and simultaneously minimal way of enhancing the piece's atmosphere. The light elements remain the same, only with changes in the rhythm and level of intensification.

The specific vitality forms for the FIRST and SECOND BAGATELLES – designated by ‘A’ and ‘B’ in the score – are stability, tranquillity, and gentle fade-ins and fade-outs. A **stable** and **tranquil** quality is conveyed by the repetition of the same note – D $\flat$  – in a soft bisbigliando; the motive of a major fourth, played simultaneously and successively<sup>59</sup>; and an open and spacious chord (based on the same notes of the previous motives). From my perspective the interval of a perfect 4<sup>th</sup> produces a sensation of stability/tranquillity due to its openness – while the 2<sup>nds</sup> have the tightness associated with a small interval, and the 3rds and 6ths have a dichotomy between minor and major - for me the 4ths have a crystalline sound, especially in the register and dynamics used in the piece.

**A** **Slow, Quiet**

Always play D $\flat$  tremulo as indicated below  
bisbigl.

C $\sharp$  D $\flat$  E $\flat$  G $\sharp$  A $\flat$  B $\flat$  xyl. \_\_\_\_\_

B $\flat$  A $\sharp$

Fig. 43: First bagatelle.

The fade-in and fade-out are present whenever the bisbigliando is played, either complete (as in the first two bisbigliandos) or incomplete (when there is only a crescendo or a diminuendo). Connecting with this, during these two bagatelles (0'30 – 2'16), a yellow light fades in and out, very **slowly emerging and disappearing** into darkness, just as the bisbigliando emerges and disappears into silence.

<sup>59</sup> The major fourth motive uses the notes D $\flat$  and A $\flat$  in the first bagatelle, joined by another fourth – with B and E – in the second bagatelle.

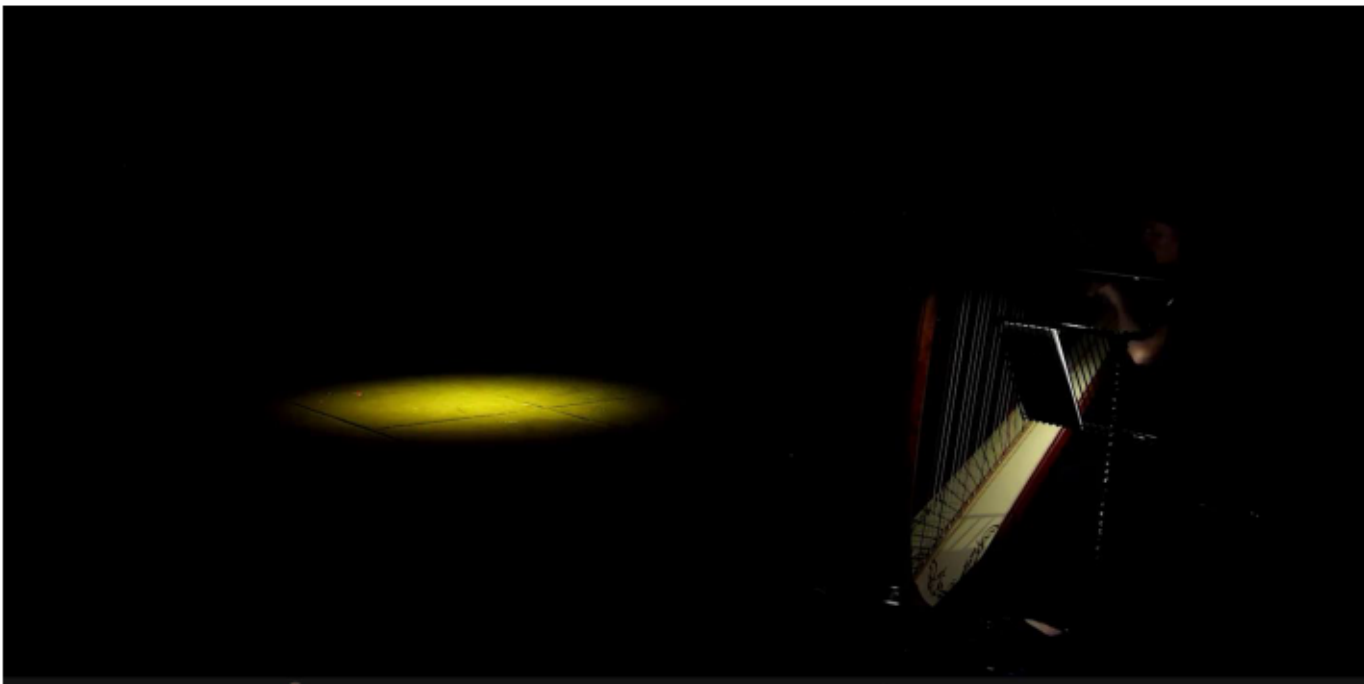


Fig. 44: Still of the beginning of the video of *Bagatelas*.



While previously the dynamics ranged from *pp* to *p*, now they got extended to *mf* and *f*. Linking with the overall intensification and mixture of musical elements, now the two lights pulsate faster and together and are joined by a third light (3'33 – 5'20).

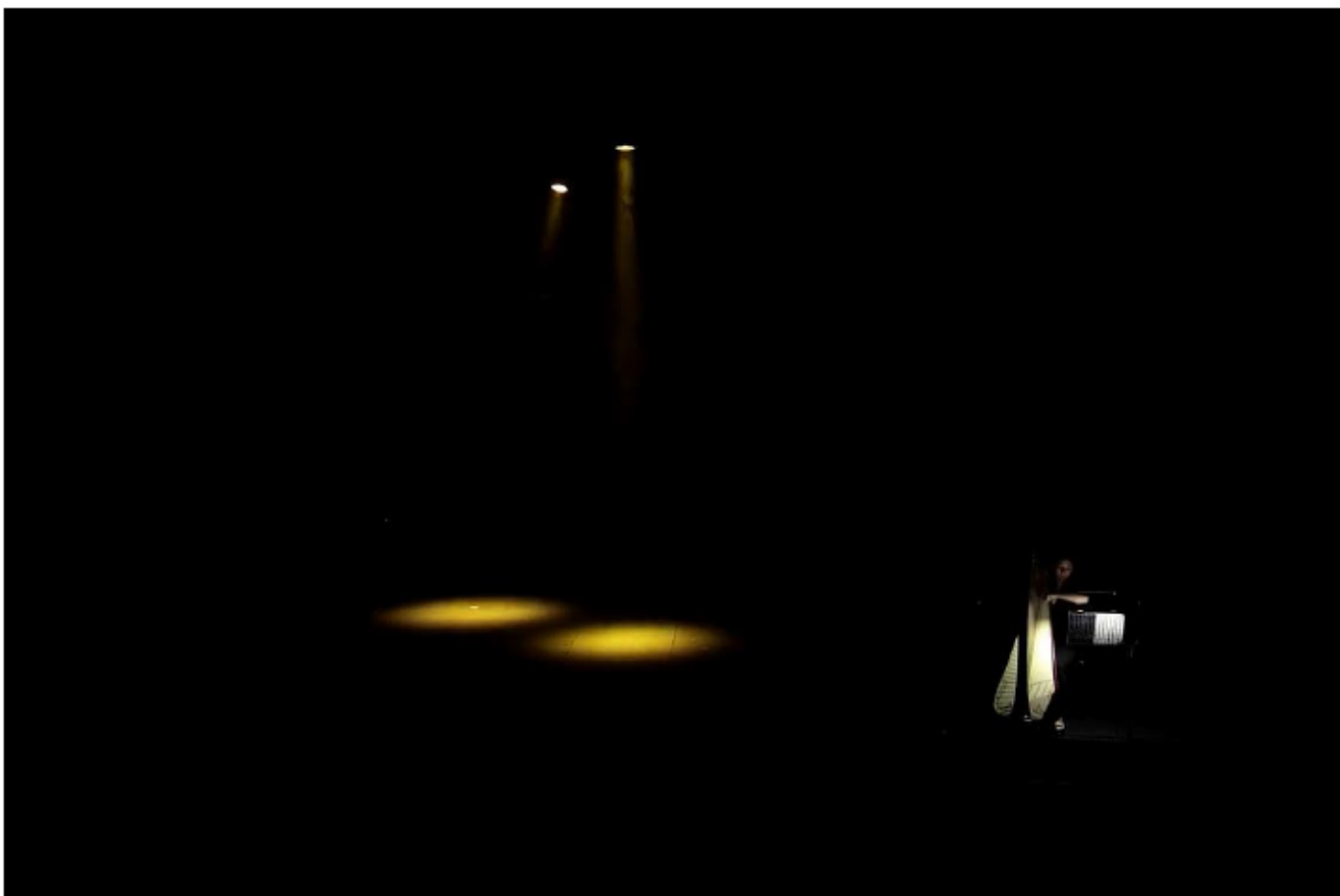


Fig. 47: Still of the video of *Bagatelas*.

The FIFTH BAGATELLE returns to a relaxed and **gentle** vitality form, as the first, although with new musical materials and in a dreamier character. A slow slide of a major second ( $D\flat$  to  $E\flat$ ) is introduced, and the bisbigliando transforms into the repeated articulation of a note getting slower and softer, as a kind of bouncing or pendular movement. The buzzing activity of the bisbigliando becomes then more spacious and **relaxed**. The motive of the major fourth, played at the top high register in the previous movement, is now at the central register (transposed to  $E\flat - B\flat$ ). There is an overall reduction of elements and activity; more rests between them, and a slower tempo:

Always play G# tremolo as indicated below  
Between 6 and 12 articulations of the note

The musical score consists of three systems of piano and bisbigliando notation. The first system begins with a piano (*p*) section in the right hand, marked with a 'T' above the staff, and a  $D\flat$  in the bass line. This is followed by a bisbigliando section marked *pp*, featuring a tremolo on G# in the right hand and a sustained note in the bass line. The second system continues with piano (*p*) and bisbigliando (*pp*) sections, with a *mp* (mezzo-piano) section in between. The third system shows a final piano (*p*) section. Vertical dashed lines with upward-pointing arrows indicate the tremolo articulations. The score is written in a key signature of one flat and a 3/4 time signature.

Fig. 48: Fifth bagatelle.

Correlating with the new musical material, there are also new visual elements. The yellow and round lights were replaced by linear shapes projected onto the sides of the stage, slightly focusing and unfocusing (5'32 – 6'29). These shapes evoke the lines of the strings from the harp, and together with the cyclical movement of focusing and unfocusing, they help create a dreamy atmosphere.

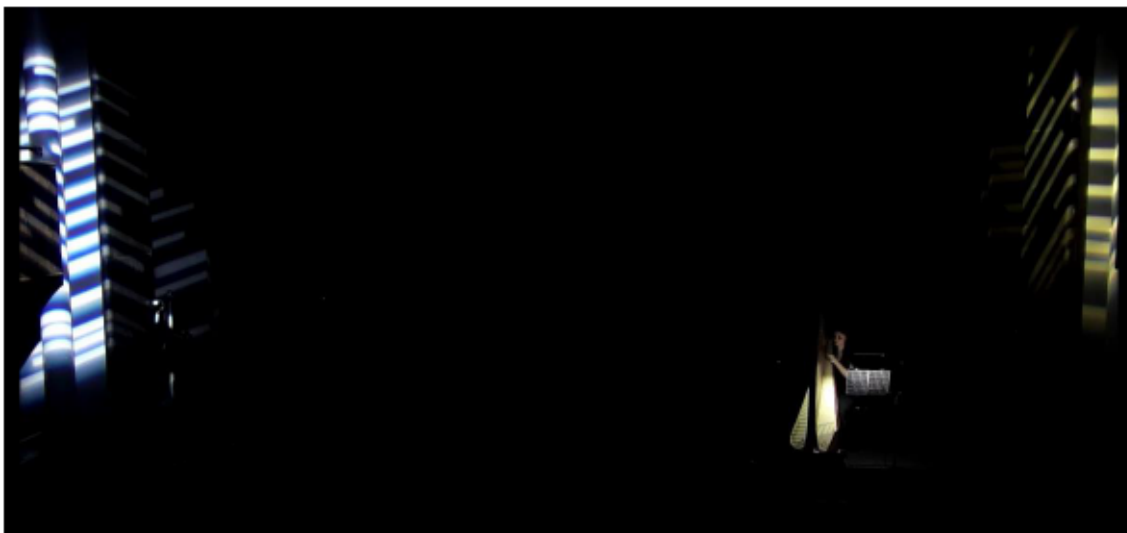


Fig. 49: Still of the video of *Bagatelas*.

The SIXTH BAGATELLE (6'30 – 7'36) is musically very close to the previous one, keeping the same vitality forms and atmosphere. The slow rotating movement of the linear shapes at the sides (visible in the video from 6'47 to 7'04) adds a hypnotic quality, underlined by the repetition of the bouncing motive in the music.

**TYPES OF RELATIONSHIPS  
BETWEEN MUSIC AND VIDEO**

I consider that the relationship between music and video is one half of empathy and half of independence. While there are connective aspects between the music and the video, especially the slow movement, some of these are subtle allusions – such as the sliding of the stairs and the sliding in the music, and the lines of the stairs resembling the strings of a harp – and are not synchronous. The alternation between sound and silence, and between image and blackout, also doesn't happen simultaneously, playing with expectations regarding what we see and hear.

**TYPES OF RELATIONSHIPS  
BETWEEN MUSIC AND LIGHTS**

From my perspective there are fewer connective aspects between the music and lights than between music and video, so the relationship is mostly independent. The lights pulsate slowly, but in their own rhythm, independently of the music; with each bagatelle comes a small change in the lights, but they seem to follow their own structure, without a clear association with the music.

**COMPOSITION AND  
COLLABORATIVE PROCESS**

The starting point of the composition was the concept of the gamut, presented in the book *The music of John Cage* by James Pritchett (1993). I wanted to leave aside the harmonic processes that I had been using before (based on choosing a set of chords in advance), trying instead to find a collection of sounds from which I could create different combinations. The choice of sounds was greatly helped by a few sessions with the harpist Angélica Salvi, who showed me the variety of timbral possibilities of the harp. The gamut of sounds was

selected from these sessions, but the choice of pitch was derived from improvisations on the piano.

Although I didn't think in terms of tone in this project, I was attracted to the static quality of Cage's pieces where he uses the gamut, especially in *Six Melodies for Violin and Keyboard* (1950). Since the gamut employs "the same sonorities in different permutations and contexts" (Pritchett 1993, 41), it might lend a quality of stillness to the music. Pritchett refers to the fact that Cage admired Satie as an example of "static expression", and in his piece *The Seasons* (1947), based on the gamut technique, he probably strived for that same quality (Pritchett 1993, 44).

While improvising at the piano with the sounds of the gamut, I was looking for a broad sense of stillness with inner movement inside. The sound of the slow glissando, used in Bagatelles E and F, inspired a dreamier character; responding to this, I transformed the initial bisbigliando in a sort of distant echo, with slowing articulations of the note. In retrospect I see that this atmosphere was best described as hypnotic, although this word didn't occur to me at the time. Especially in the last two bagatelles, I was thinking about stillness, gentleness, and a sense of suspended time - there is a freedom in the rhythm which is absent in the previous bagatelles.

This piece explored the tone of 'hypnotic', and the vitality forms 'repetitive', 'relaxed', 'slow sliding', 'circling', 'loop', and 'activity / absence of activity' as the shared link between music and video. In the version with lights the tone was the same, while the vitality forms changed to 'stability, slowly surging and fading out, tranquillity, slight increase in tension, acceleration, agile, relaxation, gentle'.

In contrast with *Cartas Portuguesas*, the absence of a theme or text in this piece made it more difficult to choose the object of the video. As explained in Appendix 7, there was a first version of the video in 2021, where different scenes from stock videos – people walking, a bus passing, a pouring drink –, were united by a slowed movement. However, because there was a lot more variety and action, it didn't evoke the tone hypnotic, and it was aesthetically less interesting. Later, in 2023, we came back to the videographer's first idea, of focussing in one element – moving escalators -, which produced a movement that is not only slow, but also repetitive and looped, contributing to the tone 'hypnotic'. The *bagatelles* chosen for this final video are slow and calm, helping to create a single atmosphere throughout, while the complete piece has more contrasts in intensity.

Based on the experience of this collaboration with the videographer, it seems that when the music is already composed it is a good option to share the music with the collaborator without further information. This allows the collaborator to identify qualities that we might not have thought before, as happened with 'hypnotic', that speak directly to their imagination. However, during the collaboration, it becomes necessary to choose a vocabulary to communicate; although our communication was based on the vocabulary of vitality forms, I think that it is very important to have an idea of tone, or general quality, guiding the choices and conversations. A type of movement alone, such as 'slow', might be too generic; if it is coupled with tone, it gives a direction to the imagination, and may help one to make more daring or personal choices. For example, the first version of the video, featuring different scenes (people, streets, and so on), was mainly guided by 'slow movement', and looked for variety to avoid boredom in a more conventional way. The final version was truer to the quality 'hypnotic', and therefore risked remaining only with one object, despite the danger of being too repetitive.

In the version with lights, there was the intention from the outset, of creating a hypnotic atmosphere using a reduced number of elements; however, in the end it seemed to me that there were too many chosen elements. A lack of rehearsal time didn't allow for proper testing of the initial idea, and my impression is that under time pressure we are more likely to use more elements than to refine and explore the potential of reduced elements. For me, having a big empty stage with the harpist to one side in the darkness, and the slow and intermittent movement of the lights, created more of a sensation of 'aloneness' than of the tone 'hypnotic'. While in the video we look at one single element – the moving escalators -, in the live version we see the lights together with the harpist playing, creating new and unpredictable combinations of movement. Although the gestures of the harpist are more present in the recorded version of the concert due to the proximity of the camera, they are still a constant source of activity – for example, the *bisbigliando* is a soft sound, but it involves a fast movement of the hands, whose speed has no parallel in the video. In summary, I think that the tone 'hypnotic' is better realised in the video, since it allows total curation of the movement and elements involved, whereas the live version with lights is more disperse and multiple. This aspect was reinforced by the usage of the whole score in the concert version, which includes more active and intense *bagatelles* such as C and D. In a future live performance of the piece with lights I think that a new tone could be explored – such as 'aloneness' – or that there could be new thinking about how to evoke the tone 'hypnotic' that explores the adoption of less lighting elements.

*Bagatelas* was very important in my research because it clarified that I needed a tool for collaboration other than affect<sup>60</sup>. Perhaps because the starting point was a compositional task, and there were no texts or images as reference, this tool had to relate more immediately with the music. The conversation with the video maker – based on timings and types of movement – was the first step of an inquiry leading to the later discovery of vitality forms.

The next pieces investigate vitality forms from different angles: *Som Sem Saída* is the only piece of my research whose starting point was a visual element, influencing both the choice of texts and the music. *Descalça* involves collaboration with a choreographer (who directed the staging) and a video maker. Following the experience with *The Sleep Collector*, vitality forms were used as a tool to provide a coherent thread throughout the piece, avoiding conflicts between aesthetics of movement.

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<sup>60</sup> Although the tone of 'hypnotic' has been identified in the piece, it resulted from the dynamics of movement, which remained the guiding thread of the video and lighting design.

## 5.2 SOM SEM SAÍDA

Orchestra:  
Orquestra  
Filarmónica Portuguesa  
Conductor:  
Osvaldo Ferreira  
Speaker:  
Igor Gandra  
Recording:  
CCB in Lisbon (Portugal),  
1-05-2022

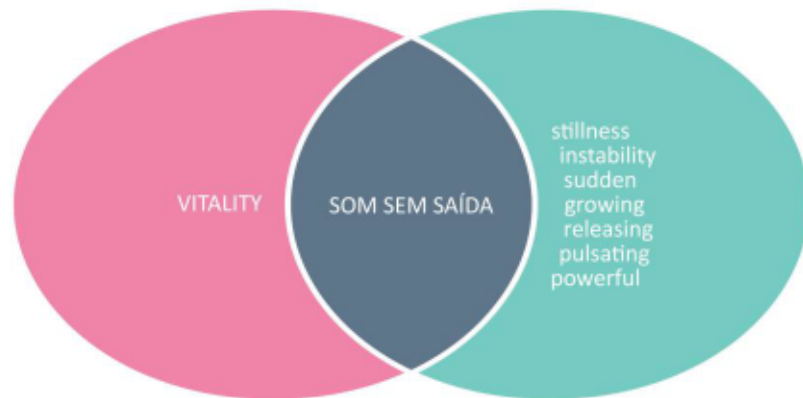


Fig. 50: Diagram showing the tone and vitality forms used as a link between landscape, text and music in *Som Sem Saída*.



Fig. 51: Marialva Castle (Portugal)<sup>61</sup>.

<sup>61</sup> Image retrieved from <https://www.e-konomista.pt/aldeia-historica-marialva/>.

The audio recording in the portfolio was made in a concert hall. However, this piece was originally conceived to be played in the open air, in remote places of Portugal's interior. Unfortunately, I do not have video recordings of these open-air presentations, but on the previous page and below are some photos from where they happened. The first two places – Marialva and Vilar Maior – are ruins of castles, and the third is a riverbank in a mountain:



Fig. 52: Vilar Maior Castle (Portugal)<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> Image retrieved from <https://www.cm-sabugal.pt/concelho-do-sabugal/turismo-cultura-lazer/o-que-fazer/patrimonio/rota-dos-5-castelos/vilar-maior/>.







Fig. 53: Two photos of Loriga, Seia (Portugal), taken during the rehearsals for the concert; the audience sat at the opposite riverbank from the orchestra. The last image was found online<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> Image retrieved from <https://www.vortexmag.net/roteiro-pela-serra-da-estrela-o-que-ver-o-que-fazer-onde-comer-e-onde-dormir/>.

The visual dimension of this piece was brought by the places where the piece was performed - which I visited before starting the composition – and the physicality of the actor-speaker.

The creation of *Som Sem Saída* didn't involve a collaboration with another practitioner, exploring instead the tone of 'vitality' and the vitality forms 'stillness', 'instability', 'sudden', 'growing', 'releasing', 'pulsating', and 'powerful' as the shared link between music, text, and landscape. I will firstly comment on how the tone and vitality forms connected the texts and the landscape, and afterwards how they link all of the elements – landscape, text and music.

#### RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE TEXT AND THE LANDSCAPE

The texts used are from Américo Rodrigues<sup>64</sup>, and can be found (together with its English translation) in the Appendix 5. The choice of the texts happened after visiting the performance locations, and was influenced by two aspects of the landscape. The first relates with the utter silence and **stillness** of a remote rocky landscape, which can evoke serenity but also aridity. We can observe a connection with this for example in the first poem of the piece, *Dying me*: "(...) here I am / before you all / still / silent / dying / with no gestures to start / and no future to create"; and also in the poem *You do not believe*: "(...) you do not believe / in the stillness of trees / nor in the silence of / beloved birds / the disturbing stillness / and the urgent need / to say / so much".

The second aspect of the landscape informing my text selection was the sensation of a **powerful** and **pulsating** nature brought about by the direct contact with its elements – wind in the trees<sup>65</sup>, the running water of the river, massive mountains. Wandering in the landscape, there was absolute stillness at times, but also a sense of unbridled vitality, especially through the sound of wind and water. I saw a link between the vitality of nature sounds and the vitality of our speaking sounds as expressed in the texts: "(...) what I am asked: / silence / silence / what I offer: / noise / noise: / I walk the streets / while improvising / while voicing / creating / new words / new languages / and a strange way / to refuse / the condemnation / to silence / to the cruelty / that silence brings<sup>66</sup>." The last text of the piece is sound poetry, permutating and freely repeating words of the phrase "no, no one has ever heard my secret voice", which I transcribed from a live performance by the author Américo Rodrigues. Beyond the meaning of the words, what attracted me to this text was the sheer vitality and the feeling of **release** created by his performance<sup>67</sup>, which I tried to bring to the music.

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<sup>64</sup> Américo Rodrigues is a poet, actor, and performer from the region of the concerts' presentations (Guarda).

<sup>65</sup> The poem *I face ('Aboio' / Cattle Call)* is based on variations of the line "I face the wind".

<sup>66</sup> From the poem *kaodsoa jakpdk*, at Appendix 5.

<sup>67</sup> The video of Américo Rodrigues' performance of this poem can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPTM6Mti9as>.

In summary, the main vitality forms used as a shared link between the text and the landscape are 'stillness', 'powerful', 'pulsating', and 'release'.

## RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE MUSIC, TEXT AND LANDSCAPE

In my view, the types of relationships between the sound and visual dimensions in this piece are a bit different from the ones explored in the other pieces of the portfolio, which involved music and video, scene, text, or lights. Instead of a relatively fixed entity, such as a video, in this case the 'landscape' includes the various places of the concerts, and their multiplicities. For example, it is completely different to be in these places during the day or the night, or in different seasons. When I talk about the relationship between the music and the landscape, I am referring to my personal response to these places when I visited them, at the beginning of the creation process. This experience will necessarily be different for the audience of each concert, not only because each response is personal, but also because the conditions vary widely. For example, although all the concerts happened in the Summer, for one of them (at Vilar Maior Castle, at a top of a hill) the night was cold and noisy due to strong winds, while for the next concert (at Loriga riverbanks) it was warm and quiet.

Having in mind this specific context, I consider that instead of an empathetic relationship between music, text and the landscape, there is mostly a relationship of resonance in this project. There are aspects of the landscape that resonate between the text and in the music, and sometimes this relationship is indirect - firstly the landscape influenced the choice of texts, which afterwards influenced the composition of the music.

The piece starts with a sort of a lullaby (bars 1 – 32) in 6/8, while the text is whispered by the speaker; my intention here, was to create a soft murmuring, a **stillness** where nothing much happens, connecting to the soothing aspects of the landscape. The next texture (bars 33 – 66) arrives suddenly and is permeated by silences; the text revolves around facing the wind. I thought about the textures with silences as moments where one can listen to the space: if there are sounds happening in the landscape - such as water, wind, birds, people - they become more noticeable, as well as the acoustics, since we listen more acutely to the sounds' decay.

The following section (bars 84 – 100) is more **unstable**, with **sudden** silences interrupting the small melodies and gestures. The text formulates a suspicion of stillness, finishing with "(...) the urgent need / to say / so much". The texture is more irregular, the melodies half-formed. This instability connects with the desolate and irregular aspects of the landscape, and especially with the tentative character of something which is trying to burst out.

Some of these fragments of melodies (such as in bar 70) are recovered in the next texture (bars 84 – 100), but are now developed into two ornamented melodies, intertwined with each other. While the continuous texture has a more stable feel, the melody sounds diffused as one echoes and slightly varies the other; I thought about this section as another tentative expression of something which isn't yet fully formed or clear.

I understand the text of the next section (bars 101 – 126) as a eulogy of vocal expression in its raw form: after “(...) what I am asked: / silence / silence / what I offer: / noise / noise:” comes a series of made-up words, with various intonations and sounds. This moment already has something of **release**; although the section starts with long silences and contained voice, it gets progressively thicker, with a freer and more expansive voice. This section is followed by another instrumental interlude (bars 127 – 138), whose intertwined and out of phase melodies **grow** in intensity, preparing the ground for the next texture.

From bar 139 onwards comes the most intense part of the piece, now more directly realising the tone of ‘vitality’. We will look with more detail at the vitality forms present in the last section (letter ‘J’, from bar 177 to the end, and 9’15 – end of the audio recording).

The **pulsating** quality in the music is expressed by a regular articulation of the beat (such as the eighth notes in the oboe and sixteenth notes in the flutes) and by the different beat subdivisions (such as in the bassoon and clarinet 1). The pulse is further assured by the percussion, accentuating the downbeat of each bar:

The image shows a page of a musical score for wind instruments and percussion, starting at bar 177. A large letter 'J' is placed at the beginning of the first staff. The score is arranged in a system with 12 staves. The instruments are: Fl. I, Fl. II / Piccolo, Ob., Cl. I, Cl. II, Bn., Hn., Tpt., Tbn., Perc. I (Cymbal), and Perc. II (Bass Drum). The music is written in 4/4 time. The dynamics are marked as *mf* (mezzo-forte) for most instruments, with some *f* (forte) and *mp* (mezzo-piano) markings in the Trombone and Percussion parts. The percussion parts are marked with 'Cymbal' and 'Bass Drum' and show a consistent rhythmic pattern of accents on the downbeat.

Fig. 54: Wind instruments and percussion from bars 177 – 182 of *Som Sem Saída*.

The orchestra is playing in tutti, with strong dynamics, filling a wide range of registers – the double bass plays near the lowest register, the flute near its top register, with the other instruments in between. Before ‘J’, the texture had disintegrated, becoming sparse, limited to the central register, and finishing with a chord in *ppp* and silence (page 29). The contrast to the tutti reinforces a sense of expansion and **release** of energy. The score indicates the sequence of words and phrases, but to allow more power and freedom to the voice, these can be repeated at will. Synchrony is only needed when the full phrase is revealed (“no, no one has ever heard my secret voice”) by the end (bar 196). In the orchestra, a **powerful** quality is brought by the bass drum, the lowest string and woodwind instruments, and especially by placing the melody in the brass instruments. The trombone keeps a low pedal note while the melody is interweaved between the horn and trumpet. In a strong pedal note, the latter joins the trombone in bars 192 and 194.

In summary, *Som Sem Saída* progresses from **stillness** (in the form of a lullaby) to moments of **instability**, with **sudden** interruptions and abundant silences, **growing** intensity in instrumental sections, and finally **releasing** vitality, through a **pulsating** and **powerful** texture. These vitality forms are present in the landscape as the double aspect of stillness – soothing and unsettling -, and as the raw aliveness of almost untouched nature. In retrospect, I see that there is also something fundamentally organic in this structural form as well: an initial dormant state (as a seed) is pulled towards several growing or expanding processes, until it reaches a fully awake and alive state.

## COMPOSITION AND COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

The pitch material used in the composition was the mode taken from the raag Basant, adopted previously in *Cartas Portuguesas*. I really enjoyed the sonority of this mode and wanted to use it in a different context; the whole piece uses exclusively the notes of raag Basant, as showed at Fig. 6, page 35, in the same transposition. Having the available notes decided, I composed the piece chronologically, creating a new texture for each poem, with an additional texture for the instrumental interludes. Since the texts problematize speaking and silence, I thought about using textures based on continuity (such as the ones starting on bars 1, 84, 139, 160) and others intercalated by silences (starting on bars 33, 54, 67, 101). For the textures with silences, I was inspired by David Lang’s pieces *Just (After Song of Songs)* (2014) and *Mountain* (2014).

The main challenge was to compose the last section (from bar 139 onwards), more directly embodying the tone of ‘vitality’. In my experience as a listener, it happens often that the musical moments of high energy and intensity are coloured by an element of conflict, tension or darker moods; in this case, I was looking for an expression of raw vitality, release, energy. One source of inspiration was the piece

*Short Ride in a Fast Machine* (1986) by John Adams - a vibrant, joyful burst of energy, which I enjoy immensely. While composing this last section of the piece, it was surprising to see that exactly the same scale used for *Cartas Portuguesas* could also produce music with such a different atmosphere.

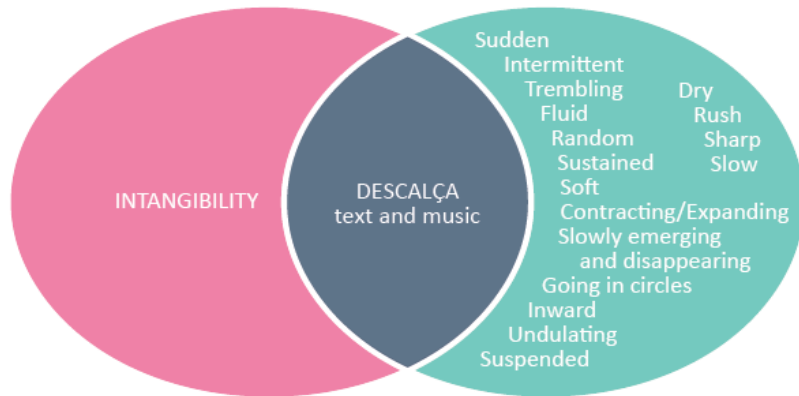
As I explained earlier, there was not a collaborative dynamic in the making of *Som Sem Saída*. The tone of 'vitality' and the vitality forms 'stillness', 'instability', 'sudden', 'growing', 'releasing', 'pulsating', and 'powerful' were explored as the shared link between music, text, and landscape. After previous experiences of dialogue between music and video, and music and scene, *Som Sem Saída* opened new possibilities for *visible music* – a dialogue between music and space. Just as in *The Age of Self-Improvement* and *The Sleep Collector* vitality forms were steered by texts and tone, in *Som Sem Saída* a specific landscape was suggestive of movement dynamics. This was a new interaction with space for me. While the space of the performance had also influenced *Concílio Celeste*, the influence of this happened more at a narrative level and did not directly affect the music. We conceived the libretto of *Concílio Celeste* with two parts happening in different places – the first setting up a council, and the second in a garden - because the performance place had these possibilities. The council happened in a big hall, and afterwards the public followed the musicians towards a beautiful garden. The configuration of the performance space therefore had an impact on the structure and placement of the libretto; however, unlike *Som Sem Saída*, the features of the space (or my reaction to them) didn't directly affect the music.

Regarding the timeline of the creation process, in the other projects, the music was created simultaneously or before the visual dimension. Here, however, both the music and the choice of texts were influenced by the visual/physical field.

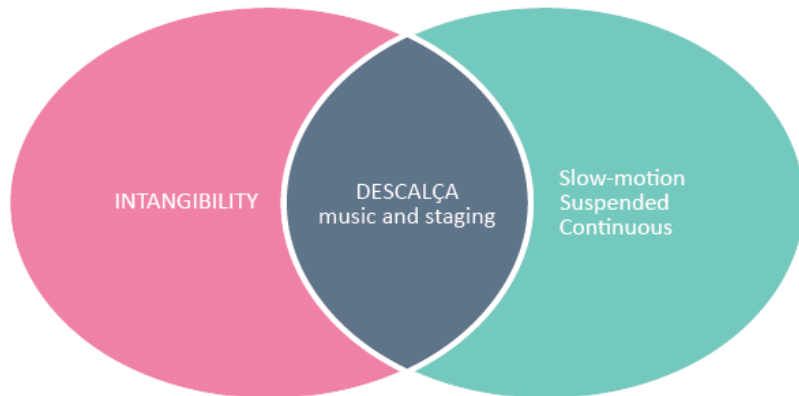
### 5.3 DESCALÇA

Voice:  
**Camila Mandillo**  
 Ensemble:  
**Sond'Ar-te Electric Ensemble**  
 Flute:  
**Sílvia Cancela**  
 Piano:  
**João Casimiro Almeida**  
 Viola:  
**Jorge Alves**  
 Stage direction:  
**Joana Providência**  
 Video:  
**Unloop Creative Agency**  
 (Concept:  
 Arina Zhumasheva  
 and Helder da Rocha;  
 Motion Design:  
 Adrian Soto)  
 Video recording:  
**Festival Música Viva,**  
**O'culto da Ajuda,**  
**Lisbon,**  
**05-05-2023**

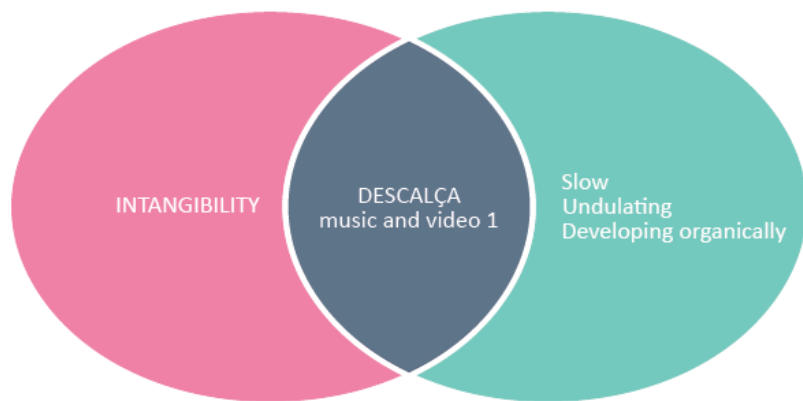
#### TEXT AND MUSIC (WHOLE PIECE)



#### MUSIC AND STAGING (SECOND MOVEMENT)



### MUSIC AND VIDEO 1 (SECOND MOVEMENT)



### MUSIC AND VIDEO 2 (FOURTH MOVEMENT)

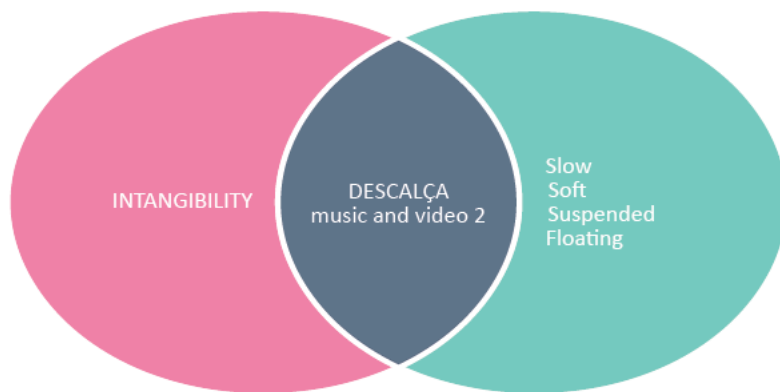


Fig. 55: Diagrams showing the tone and vitality forms used as a link between music, text, videos, and staging in *Descalça*.

The videos and the main intervention of staging were not present during the entire piece, but only at specific movements, and therefore each has its own diagram.

**CONTEXT** The texts of this piece are taken from the cycle “Leonorana” (1965-1970) written by the Portuguese poet Ana Hatherly. This cycle consists of thirty-one variations on the following theme of a poem by Luís Vaz de Camões, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century:

*Barefoot to the fountain she goes*

*Leonor through the greenery*

*Fair and not safe she goes.*

Camões’ poem describes a girl – Leonor - walking to a fountain, more beautiful than beauty itself: “Such grace is poured upon her, / That beauty itself becomes more gracious;”<sup>68</sup>. Ana Hatherly’s variations on the theme above take very different forms. Some use the same words from the theme but in different order and spacing, such as Variation VI:

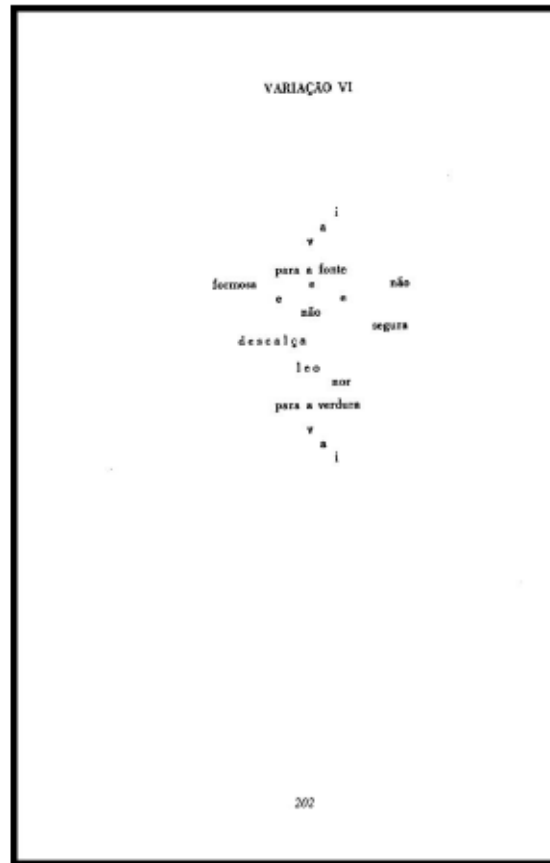


Fig. 56: Variation VI from “Leonorana” by Ana Hatherly.

Other variations explore aspects of the theme in continuous text (resembling prose), while others are purely visual:

<sup>68</sup> The whole poem by Luís de Camões in the original version and English translation can be found in the Appendix 6, together with the texts by Ana Hatherly.

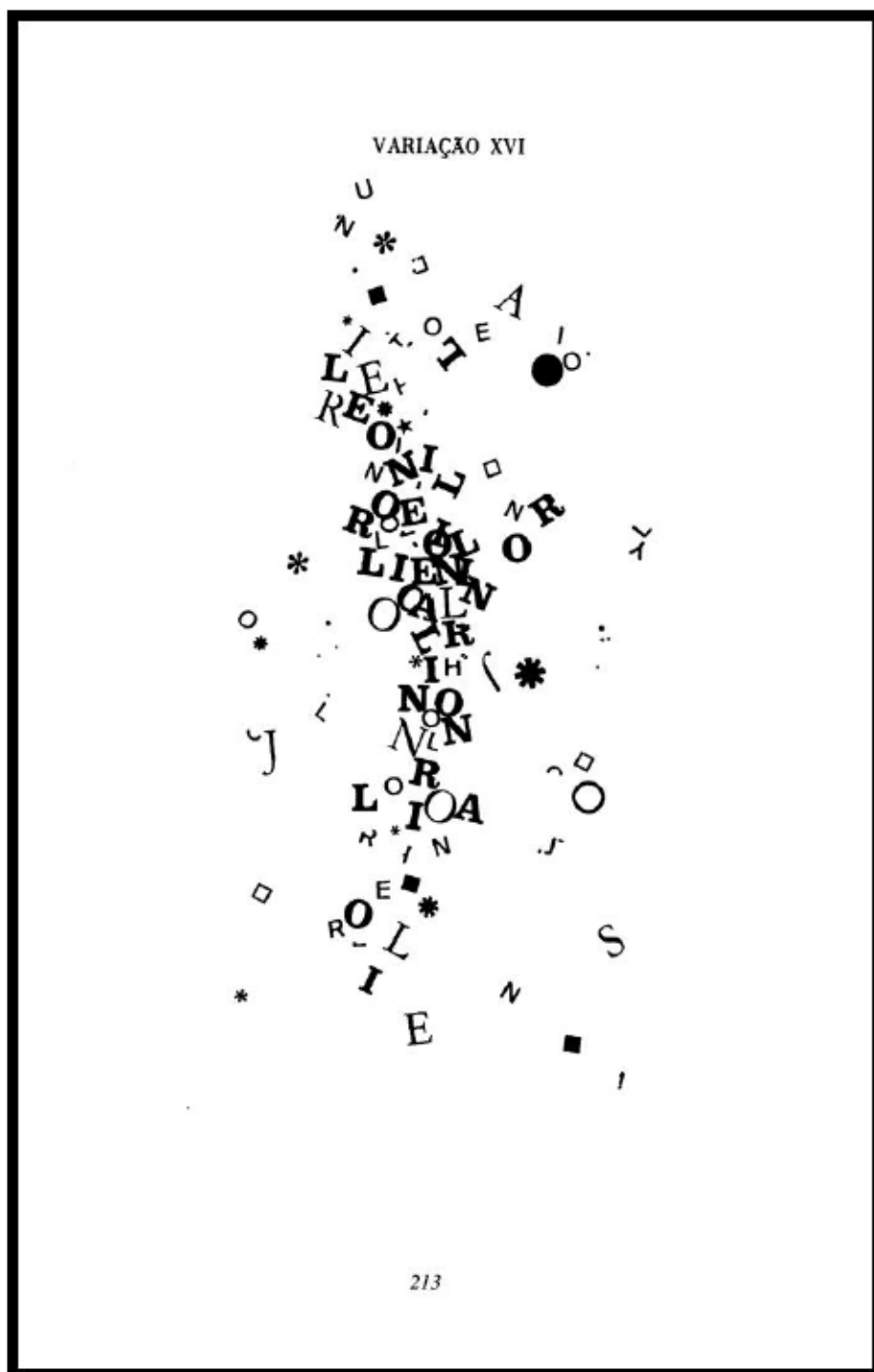
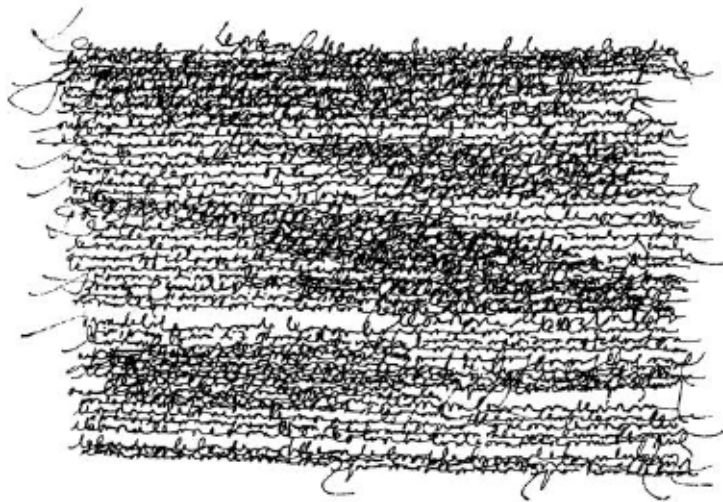


Fig. 57: Variation XVI from "Leonorana" by Ana Hatherly.

VARIAÇÃO XIX



219

Fig. 58: Variation XIX from "Leonorana" by Ana Hatherly.

VARIAÇÃO XX

Leonora Leonora  
Leonora Leonora  
Leonora Leonora  
Leonora Leonora  
Leonora Leonora  
Leonora Leonora  
Leonora Leonora  
Leonora Leonora  
Leonora Leonora  
Leonora Leonora

Fig. 59: Variation XX from "Leonorana" by Ana Hatherly.

Descalça uses Variation VI, shown in Fig. 56, plus Variation I and Variation XXIII below<sup>69</sup>:

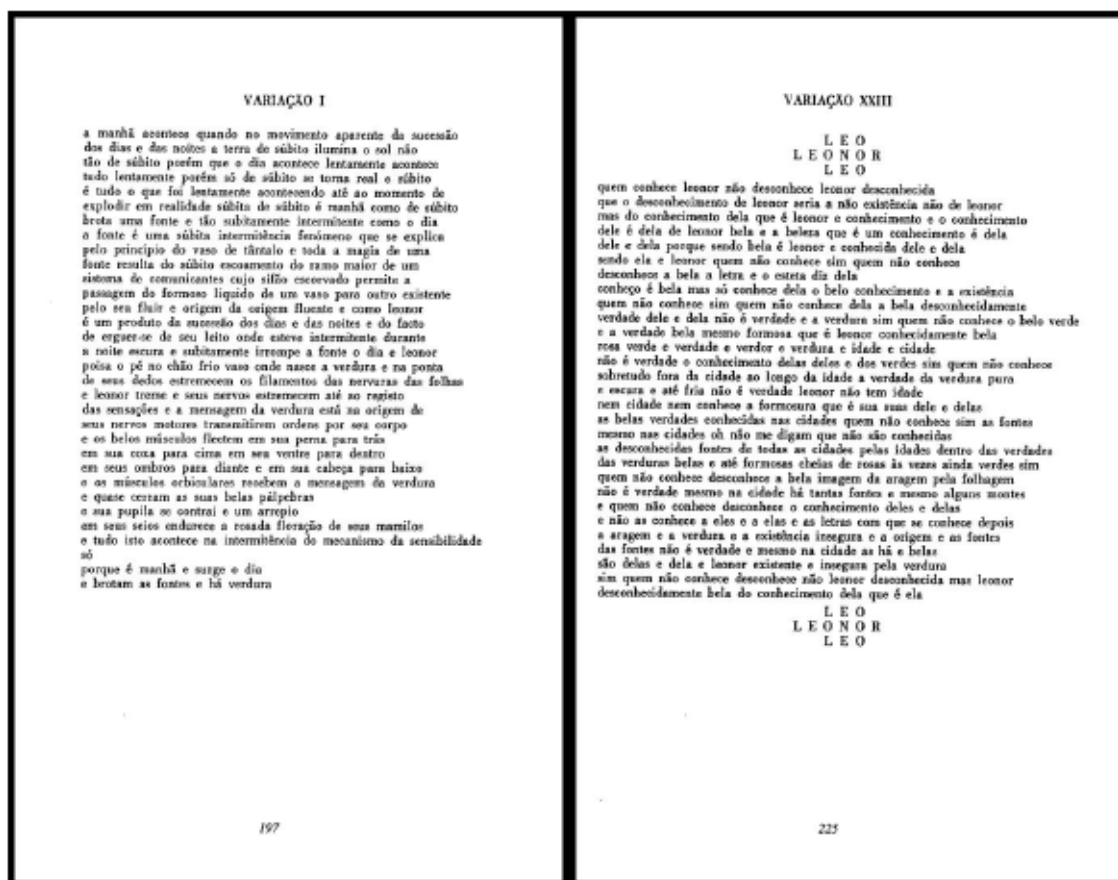


Fig. 60: Variations I and XXIII from "Leonorana" by Ana Hatherly.

Based on the text, the tone chosen for this piece was 'intangibility'. I interpreted Ana Hatherly's variations as a search for the almost mythical figure of Leonor, who, like beauty itself, already seemed impossible to reach in Camões' poem. In this reading, Variation I believes that it has found the scientific formulae of Leonor, while Variation XXIII circles in discursive ("philosophic") thought, obsessively

<sup>69</sup> Variation I (first movement) is a kind of "scientific" account of the emergence of morning, the mechanisms that enable a fountain to spring water, and the way that Leonor's body processes sensations. From her bare feet touching the grass to her motor nerves, the rising sun contracting her orbicular muscles, all is intertwined in a continuous text, that is simultaneously sensuous and "scientific".

Variation XXIII (third movement) is about an elusive knowledge of Leonor, playing with paradox and the apparent lack of meaning, with lines such as "those who know leonor are unaware of the unknown leonor". Like Variation I, this text suggests quick reading without stops. There are no clear-cut sentences, but a continuous stream of ideas and images.

On the contrary, Variation VI (fig. 3, used in the second and fourth movements) is very short, and retains the lyricism of Camões' theme, although through totally different spatial and visual configuration. The words seem to float on the page, weightless.

(and somewhat humorously) trying to grasp the knowledge of who Leonor is, without getting anywhere. Variation VI embodies intangibility differently. The floating words and letters seem to point to the realm of imagination, of things sensed but not clearly seen.

Although the piece's tone is 'intangibility', the most useful resource for composing the music and collaborating with the video maker and choreographer were vitality forms. 'Intangibility' describes the general disposition of the piece, and it was at the heart of the choice of texts; however, during the collaboration, especially with the videographer, it seemed too abstract an idea to serve as inspiration (please see Appendix 7). To compose and communicate in terms of modes of movement proved to be much more helpful and productive. These are the general vitality forms for each movement:

First Movement: sudden, intermittent, trembling, alternating between contraction and expansion, fluid.

Second and Fourth Movement: slow, suspended, sustained, inward, slowly emerging and disappearing, undulating.

Third Movement: random, rush, sharp, dry, going in circles.

#### **VITALITY FORMS IN THE MUSIC**

In the FIRST MOVEMENT, music punctuates the continuous spoken discourse with a sequence of chords. There are two different parts: the first goes from the beginning until bar 44, and the second from bar 45 to the end. The text begins with a "scientific" account of the elements surrounding Leonor - the morning sun, fountain, and greenery - while the second part focuses on the bodily sensations of Leonor.

In the first part, there are several references to modes of movement, such as "everything happens slowly however only suddenly does it become real"; "just as suddenly intermittent as daylight the fountain is a sudden intermittence"; "she rose from her bed where she had been lying intermittently"; "suddenly the fountain gushes up daylight emerges"; and "the filaments of the veins of the leaves quiver and Leonor trembles".

The main words I identified are "sudden", "intermittent", "trembling", and the idea of something that happens unnoticeably and suddenly gets revealed. The combination of these makes up the vitality forms profile in the first part. The chords are always articulated separated by silences and, therefore, '**intermittent**'. The texture of each articulation has small differences but often consists of fast movement concentrated in the duration of a quarter note, pointing to the idea of '**sudden**'. As can be observed below in bars 7 and 8, the movement inside each articulation usually involves an oscillation between alternating or near notes, which might be suggestive of '**trembling**':

V. acontece tudo lentamente porém só de súbito se torna real e súbito é tudo o que  
 Fl. **5** **4** **3** **4** **4**  
 Vla. *p* *p*  
 Pno. *p*

Fig. 61: Bars 7 – 9 of *Descalça*.

The flute and viola remain in the central register throughout this first part. However, the piano alternates between the central register and opening to the low register, according to each chord's more open or closed sonority. The alternation between contracted sound in the middle register, in soft dynamics, with more expansive sound, including the low register, in stronger dynamics, suggests an inward–outward movement. This is related to the sudden emergence of something that had been happening unnoticeably.

In Fig. 62, the bars 10 – 12 correspond to a moment of **contracted** sound (with *p* dynamics), **expanded** in bars 13 – 16, and then contracted again in bar 17:

V. foi lentamente acontecendo até ao momento de explodir em realidade súbita de súbito

10 **4/4** **5/4** **3/4**

Fl.

Vla.

Pno.

V. é manhã como de súbito brota uma fonte e tão subitamente intermitente como o dia

13 **3/4** **4/4** **5/4**

Fl. *mf*

Vla. *mf*

Pno. *mf*

*sf*.....| *sf*.....|

V. a fonte é uma súbita intermitência fenómeno que se explica pelo princípio do vaso de tântalo

16 **5/4** **3/4** **4/4**

Fl. *mp* *p*

Vla. *mp* *p*

Pno. *mp* *p*

*sf*.....| *p*

Fig. 62: Bars 10 – 18 of the First Movement of *Desalça*.

The second part arrives after some cycles of contracted–expanded movement, and it is marked by the inclusion of the piano’s sustain pedal in bar 45. While earlier the articulation of the chords was dry, matching the matter-of-fact or scientific tone of the text, now the resonance and the choice of notes (except ‘A’, all notes from the chord of bars 45 – 48 come from the whole-tone scale) give a more **fluid** and expansive atmosphere. From bar 57 to the end, the register of flute and viola gets higher, the piano plays ascendant melodies, and the harmony is based on two dominant chords (despite adding other notes). This corresponds to the text “because it is morning and daylight has come and fountains gush up and the greenery is all around”, and creates a rise in the level of arousal, as if something is about to happen. However, the movement is suddenly cut (in bar 64), and we are left with a long note in the piano (bars 65 – 68), which makes the transition to the Second Movement.

The text of the SECOND MOVEMENT is short and lyrical, playing with a different order and spatial organisation of Camões’ theme, which describes Leonor going to the fountain. Hatherly’s poem repeats “she goes”, making two diagonals with lots of spacing. I imagined this movement of Leonor in slow motion, and seen at a long distance, sometimes more focused, other times more unfocused. This long distance can be the distance of time, as someone half remembering, half imagining something seen long ago.

The vitality forms of this movement start with a **fade-in** – as if evoking the image referred to above – from bars 1 to 7. The tempo is **slow** ( $\text{♩}=64$ ), and the dynamics are **soft**. A diffused or unfocused quality is created by air sounds in the voice and flute and a white noise effect in the viola (bars 1 – 3). From bars 4 to 7, there are no more air sounds, but the unfocused quality is kept by the interweave of voice and flute (both distort the sound around B $\flat$ ) in conjunction with the same white noise effect in the viola. Contrasting with the texture of the first movement, which consisted of short articulations separated by rests, in the second movement, there are long phrases in the voice, flute, and viola, **sustained** by continuous sound in the piano. The long resonances in the piano, plus its articulations of a note or interval at the beginning of each phrase, hold the music together and give it a **suspended** quality.

The humming in the voice in bars 8 and 10, combined with the glissandi in the viola in the same bars, points to **inwardness** – someone being lost in his/her own imagination.

## II

♩=64  
Very soft and dreamy

**4/4**

**Voice**  
*mf* *p* *f* *mp*  
 only air voiced distort the sound  
 vv vai

**Alto Flute**  
*mf* *p* *mf* *pp* *mp*  
 only air half air sussurrato (voice follows the flute's pitch) *molto vib.* delicate alternate between normal and distorted sound  
 vv vv

**Viola**  
*pp* *mp* *pp* *pp* *mp*  
*molto S.T., very light bow, fluctuating contact with the string creating a white noise effect*

**Piano**  
*mf*  
 play inside the piano with as much resonance as possible  
*♩* *♩* *♩* *♩*

7 .....| humming .....| humming .....| **2/4** **4/4**

**V.**  
 pa - ra a fon - te

**Fl.**  
*pp* *mp* *mf* *p*  
 half air sussurrato (voice follows the flute's pitch) *molto vib.*  
 vv

**Vla.**  
*pp* *p* *mp* *p*  
*molto S.T., very light bow*  
*gliss.*

**Pno.**

Fig. 63: Bars 1 – 11 of the Second Movement of *Descaça*.

The same effect happens between bars 16 and 18: the voice, flute, and viola have oscillating and soft glissandi, creating an inward, dreamy atmosphere.

The ‘**trembling**’ gesture from the previous movement comes again but in a new form. It is now related to the words “not safe” from the text and is present in the voice’s repetition of the syllable “ra” (from the word “segura”, meaning “safe”) in accel. and rit., and in the flute (bars 20 – 22):

The musical score for bars 20-23 of the Second Movement of *Descaça* features four staves: Voice (V.), Flute (Fl.), Viola (Vla.), and Piano (Pno.). The voice part begins at bar 20 with the syllable 'gu' followed by a series of 'ra' syllables. The dynamics range from *ppp* to *mp*. Above the voice staff, performance directions include 'accel.' (indicated by a dashed line), 'rit.' (indicated by a dashed line), and 'A tempo'. Time signatures of 3/4 and 4/4 are shown above the voice staff. The flute part consists of triplets of eighth notes with dynamic markings of *pp*, *mp*, and *ppp*. The viola part features glissandi and sustained notes with dynamic markings of *pp*, *mp*, and *ppp*. The piano part includes sustained chords and glissandi with dynamic markings of *mp* and *ppp*. A 'Ped.' (pedal) marking is present at the end of the piano part.

Fig. 64: Bars 20 – 23 of the Second Movement of *Descaça*.

From bar 27 to the end, there is a **long fade out**, suggesting the gradual evanishing of Leonor’s evoked image. The voice uses only the second syllable of the word “Leonor”, and ends with a whisper; both the flute and viola (with high harmonics) echo the voice.

As mentioned earlier, the text of the THIRD MOVEMENT is a cryptic and circular stream of ideas about the elusive knowledge of Leonor, which does not lead to any resolution. I interpreted it as the frenetic and enthusiastic talk of someone who thinks that it is making perfect sense while, in fact, not being able to deliver an understandable or coherent message.

The music returns to the articulation of a sequence of chords. However, instead of the orderly rhythmic pattern of the first movement, the rhythm is now more random and chaotic as the instruments react to specific moments of the text. The **randomness** in the rhythm connects with the confused and convoluted meaning of the text. This need to react to the text creates a sense of ongoing tension and **rush**, reinforced by the piano’s **sharp** and **dry** articulation of the chords and the frenetic delivery of the text. Both music and text remain in a sort of loop until the end, as if **going in circles** without arriving anywhere.

### III

Voice quem conhece leonor não desconhece leonor desconhecida que o desconhecimento de

Articulate the note 1, 2, 3 or 4 times immediately after the piano, as if creating a delay effect from the piano's chord; the note changes when the piano's chord changes. Dynamics: responsive to the piano's dynamics; if articulating a note more than once, use a decrescendo to reinforce the delay effect.

Flute

Articulate the note 1, 2, 3 or 4 times immediately after the piano, as if creating a delay effect from the piano's chord; the note changes when the piano's chord changes. Dynamics: responsive to the piano's dynamics; if articulating a note more than once, use a decrescendo to reinforce the delay effect.

Viola pizz.

Very sharp, percussive and dry, always. Dynamics: free choice, preferably with some contrast.

Piano

V. leonor seria a não existência não de leonor mas do conhecimento dela que é leonor e conhecimento

Fl.

Vla.

Piano

Fig. 65: First page of the Third Movement of *Descalça*.

The FOURTH MOVEMENT returns to the second's text, atmosphere, and musical motives. It also starts with a **fade-in** (bars 1 – 4) and ends with a **long fade-out** (bars 219 – 225). In the fade-out, air sounds in the flute and voice connect with the beginning of the second movement. Most singing phrases are long, **undulating**, and follow the same dynamic curve – starting very **soft**, crescendo, and decrescendo to almost silence. Since the voice is closely interlaced with the instruments, this creates an impression of the voice **slowly emerging** from a texture where it is indistinguishable from the instruments, and then **submerging** again, as can be observed in bars 209 – 213:

The image displays a musical score for four instruments: Voice (V.), Alto Flute (A. Fl.), Viola (Vla.), and Piano (Pno.). The score is divided into two systems, covering bars 209 to 214. The first system (bars 209-211) features a 9/8 time signature. The second system (bars 212-214) features a 6/8 time signature. The Voice part includes lyrics: "nor", "vai", "half air", and "não se - gu - ra ra ra ra ra ra ra". The score includes various dynamic markings such as *mp*, *pp*, *p*, and *ppp*, as well as performance instructions like "fade-in" and "fade-out". The Alto Flute part includes triplets in bar 214. The Viola and Piano parts provide harmonic support with sustained notes and rhythmic patterns.

Fig.66: Bars 209 – 214 of the Fourth Movement of *Descalça*.

**VITALITY FORMS  
IN THE STAGING**

When I began composing the piece, I contacted the choreographer Joana Providência to direct the staging. We live in the same city (Porto), and although we have never worked together, I have admired her work for a long time. The initial idea was to create a simple performative or theatrical dimension for the piece; however, encountering the visual poetry of Ana Hatherly, Joana had a strong feeling that it had to be part of the piece. To simply project or print the images of Hatherly's visual poetry didn't seem interesting, as it would lack movement and connection with the music. The option was to create a digital animation based on those images to project during the concert. The video was made by Helder da Rocha together with other members of the agency Unloop, which he founded.

In the first meeting with the team - Joana Providência, Helder Rocha, Arina Zhumasheva (designer at Unloop agency), and I - we shared the text for the piece, some examples of Hatherly's visual poetry, and talked about the tone and the vitality forms for each movement.

Following the first video proposal by Helder, which did not connect clearly with Hatherly's poetry, Joana shared reference images of Hatherly's visual poetry specifically for each movement. We decided that there would be no video for the spoken movements (I and III) due to the probable overload of information in the scene - we wanted the audience to really listen to the text, which is long and quickly spoken.

The group of images for movement II was about undulating black lines of undecipherable writing (some images are part of "Leonorana", and others were found online), and the group for movement IV was about letters in space.

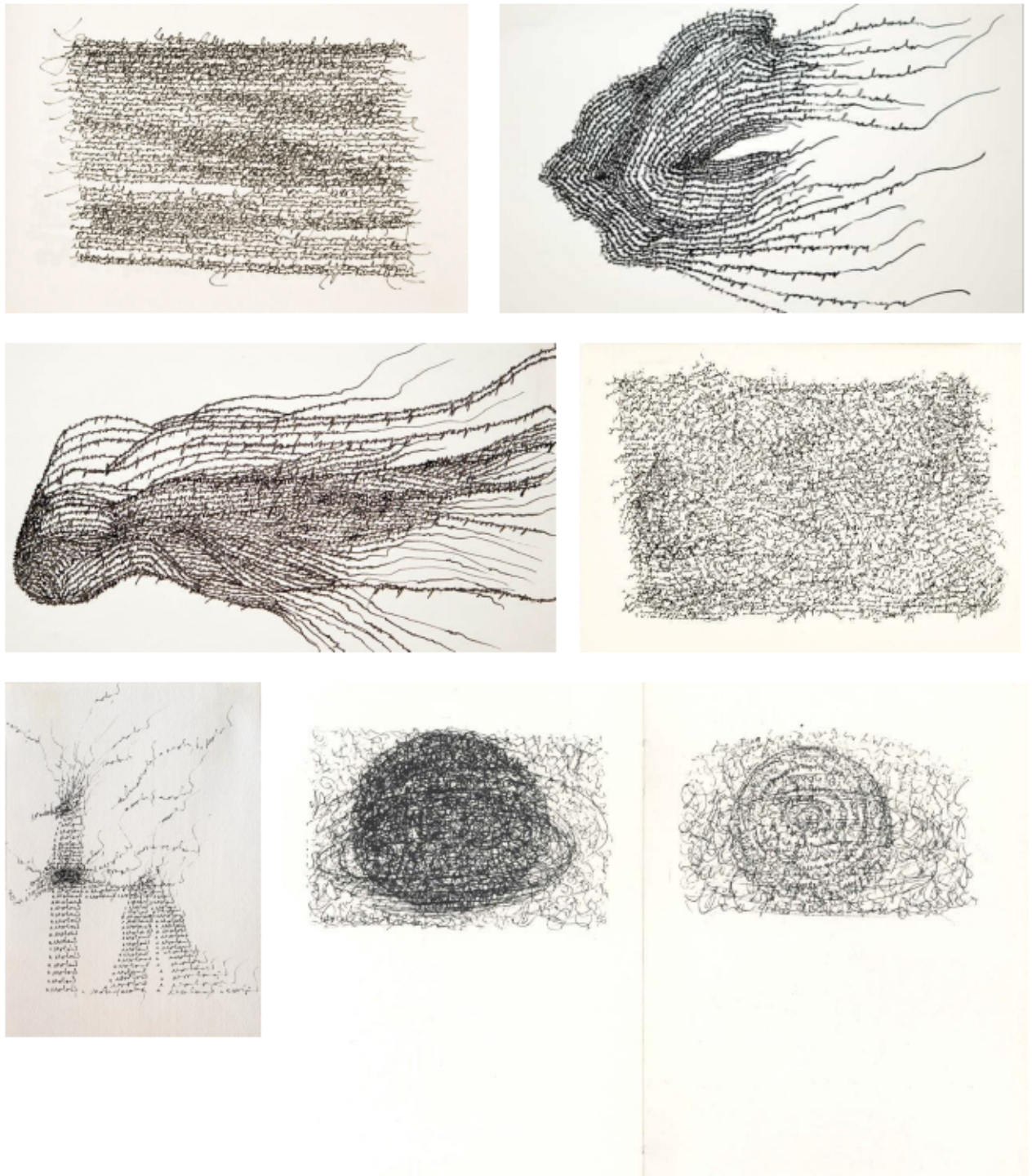


Fig. 67: Group of images of visual poetry by Ana Hatherly shared by Joana Providência as reference for the video for movement II.

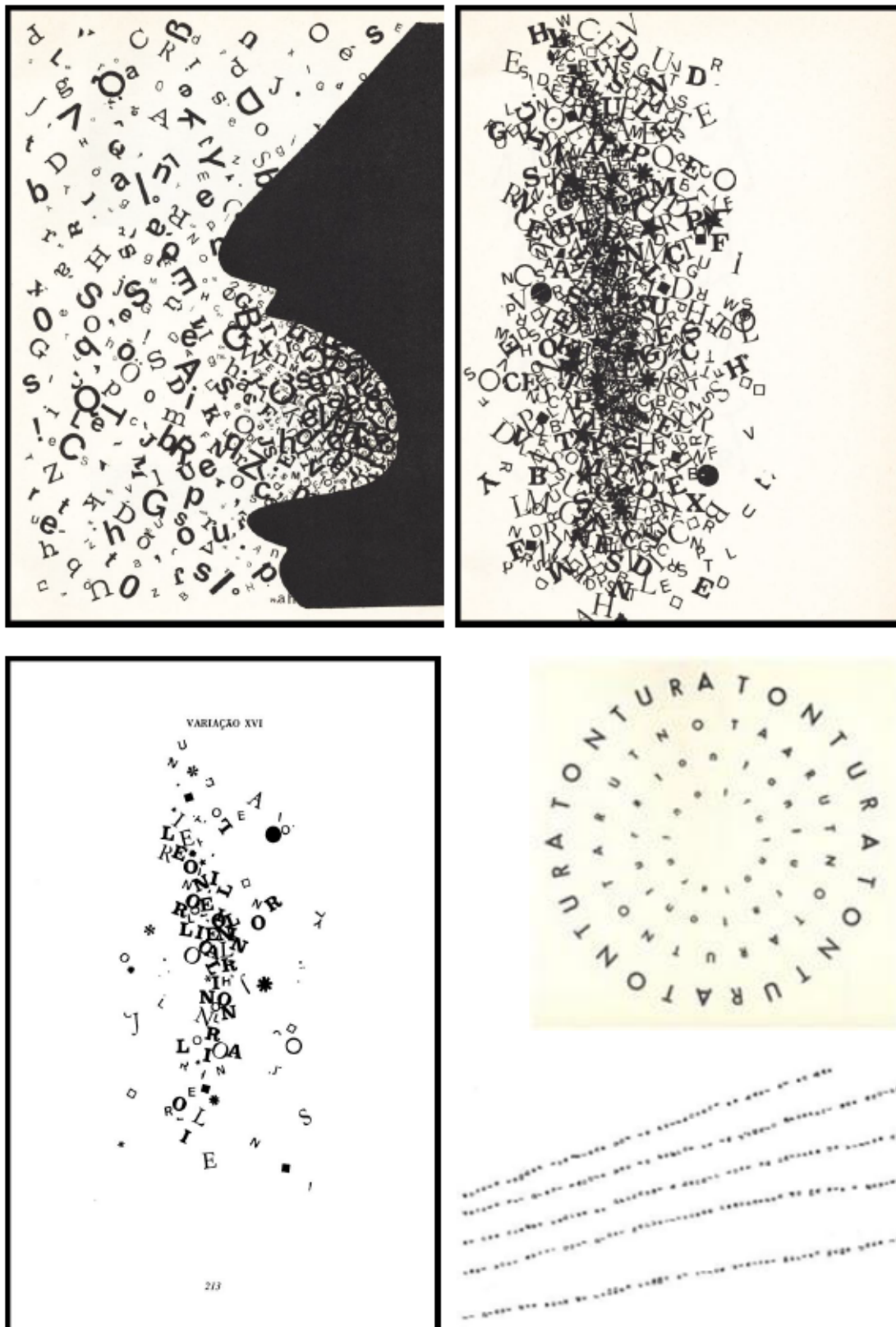


Fig. 68: Group of images of visual poetry by Ana Hatherly shared by Joana Providência as reference for the video for movement IV.

A reference piece involving the projection of digital animation made with letters is “Itinerário do Sal” (“Salt Itinerary”), a multimedia opera by the Portuguese composer Miguel Azguime. The opera involves live electronics and live video; Miguel Azguime is its solo performer. In the section using letters animation - from 34’15 to 39’25<sup>70</sup> – Miguel Azguime is very close to the projection screen and dressed in white, so the letters are also projected in himself, creating a slight distortion. The letters create mainly vertical lines, moving from top to bottom, with an occasional shaking movement. I especially appreciate the moment the letters’ shapes become more abstract, and combine with vertical lines made up of small squares, moving up and down (38’34 to 39’25). Although in different aesthetics, this connects with the ambiguity of some of Ana Hatherly’s works, where handwriting becomes moving lines.

While in “Itinerário do Sal”, there are two big screens, both with white backgrounds, in *Descalça* the screen’s background is black. In the first meeting with the team, Joana showed concern about the danger of the video engulfing the performers, since projections usually concentrate all the audience’s attention. Given that the projection area of the concert room is quite big (7x4 metres), the performers could look small and lose importance instead of remaining the focus. To avoid that, we decided that the background of the video would be black, so the light would be limited to the lines and letters.

The long, **slow**, and **undulating** lines of the FIRST VIDEO of *Descalça* (projected during the second movement, from 2’54 to 5’37) connect with the voice’s long and undulating phrases and the general idea of slow-motion movement. The lines start in the left inferior corner of the screen, **progressing organically** towards the right side, as if in the direction of Camila Mandillo (the singer).

Following the idea of someone half remembering, half imagining the movement of Leonor going to the fountain, the gestures of Camila allude to Camões’ description of Leonor. Each singing phrase is associated with a different body part – beginning with the hands going up as an allusion to holding a pitcher above the head, coming down to the braid in the left side of the neck and chest, to the waist, above to the hands protecting the eyes from the sun to a slightly raised barefoot. Finally, the hand passes over the arm suggesting the skin’s sensitivity. In all these gestures, there is no actual touch, and the hands and arms never fall completely; they are always **suspended**, and when not moving, they rest hanging around the waist’s level. The movement is sober, **slow**, and as **continuous** as possible. Although we had specific images in mind for the gestures, a level of abstraction connects with the video’s graphic pattern.

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<sup>70</sup> In the video [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQ9ZutqgkHQ&t=1806s&ab\\_channel=MiguelAzguime](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQ9ZutqgkHQ&t=1806s&ab_channel=MiguelAzguime).

The movement of the letters in the SECOND VIDEO (projected during the fourth movement, from 8'08 to the end of the piece) beautifully embodies the vitality forms **slow, floating, soft, and suspended**. There are two key points of synchronicity with the music: the first at 10'08, when the last musical motive is introduced and the letters invert direction, and the second at the end (10'38 – 10'58), with air sound in the voice while Camões' theme is formed and vanishes gradually. The theme ("Barefoot to the fountain she goes...") provides the key to contextualising all that happened before. While in Hatherly's "Leonorana" the theme comes on the first page (before the thirty-one variations), in *Descalça*, it finishes the piece.

For the movements without video - I and III – Joana thought about falling score sheets. The white of the paper increases the white light around Camila, and the continuously falling pages embody the dynamism of the text incessantly passing from one image or idea to the next. Each page of the score is multiplied by three, four or five, and drops randomly on the stage. The choice of a white dress has to do with the same idea of having Camila as a white point on the stage – distinct from the surrounding darkness, as the white lines and letters in the videos are distinct from the black background.

#### **TYPES OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MUSIC, TEXT, STAGING, AND VIDEO**

Of the four movements of the piece only two have video projection, II and IV; and from these, II has a more active staging, so I will focus on this movement. I consider all of the dimensions of this piece to have an empathetic relationship, although this is more abstract in nature. The text describes Leonor going to the fountain, and the singer's gestures subtly allude to different body parts and senses of Leonor; there's already abstraction on these gestures, but this is accentuated further in the video, with lines undulating across the space. Since the video is not figurative, nor follows a specific synchrony with the music, the connection between all of the elements rests on movement quality – slow, continuous, suspended, undulating.

#### **COMPOSITION AND COLLABORATIVE PROCESS**

I composed this piece essentially through improvising and singing at the piano. Based on the text, I began by imagining two main atmospheres for the piece: one more concrete, based on spoken text punctuated by sharp chords in blocks (movements I and III), and another more diffuse, based on the sung voice, more melodic, soft and slow (movements II and IV). Having this alternation of atmosphere in mind – concrete/diffused - helped me to compose and guided the selection of material.

For the first movement I chose a set of chords suggesting waves of contraction and expansion, following the text, which speaks about the gradual emergence of the morning and of Leonor's body sensations. The dry articulation of the chords is reinforced in the third movement, with a sharp and percussive articulation, underlining a more obsessive text.

For the second and fourth movements I thought about very simple and transparent notes, but a diffused timbre; although the image evoked by the text is clear – Leonor walking barefoot to the fountain – the memory is opaque, the image is intangible. Instead of the direct sound of the first and third movements, I used more “oblique” ways of producing sound, such as playing on the piano strings, ‘sussurrato’, air in the flute and voice, glissandi, harmonics, noise effects. I was searching for a soft, velvety sensation, contrasting with the sharpness of the chords in the first and third movements.

This piece explored the tone ‘intangibility’ and the vitality forms ‘sudden’, ‘intermittent’, ‘trembling’, ‘fluid’, ‘contracting/expanding’ (first movement); ‘slow’, ‘sustained’, ‘soft’, ‘inward’ (second movement); ‘dry’, ‘random’, ‘rush’, ‘sharp’, and ‘going in circles’ (third movement); and ‘undulating’, ‘suspended’, ‘slowly emerging and disappearing’ (fourth movement), as the [shared link between music, text, staging, and video.](#)

The main challenge in the collaborative process for this piece was to articulate the work and ideas of practitioners with very different backgrounds – I was familiar with the choreographer’s work, but not with the videographer’s, who came from a more commercial agency. While communicating the tone ‘intangibility’ made sense for Joana (choreographer), it seemed too abstract for the videographer, who was more used to working with storytelling. The initial confusion was amended through the sharing of specific visual references and vitality forms for each video. As explained in Appendix 7, a similar process happened with the singer – being very clear with the vitality forms for the movement made a huge difference, allowing us to achieve a coherence in the aesthetics of movement of the whole piece, as well as in the articulation of the videos.



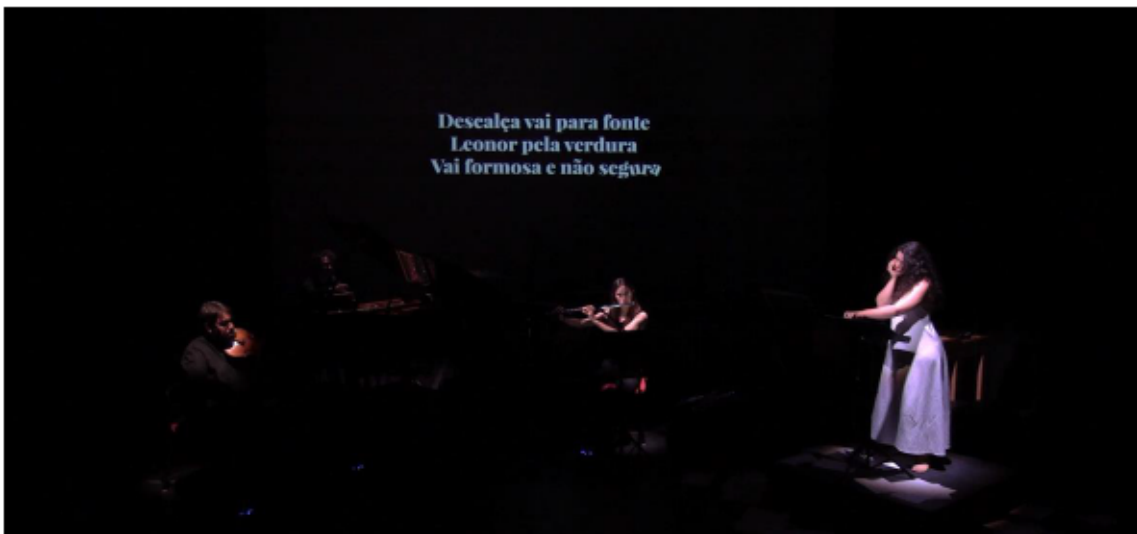
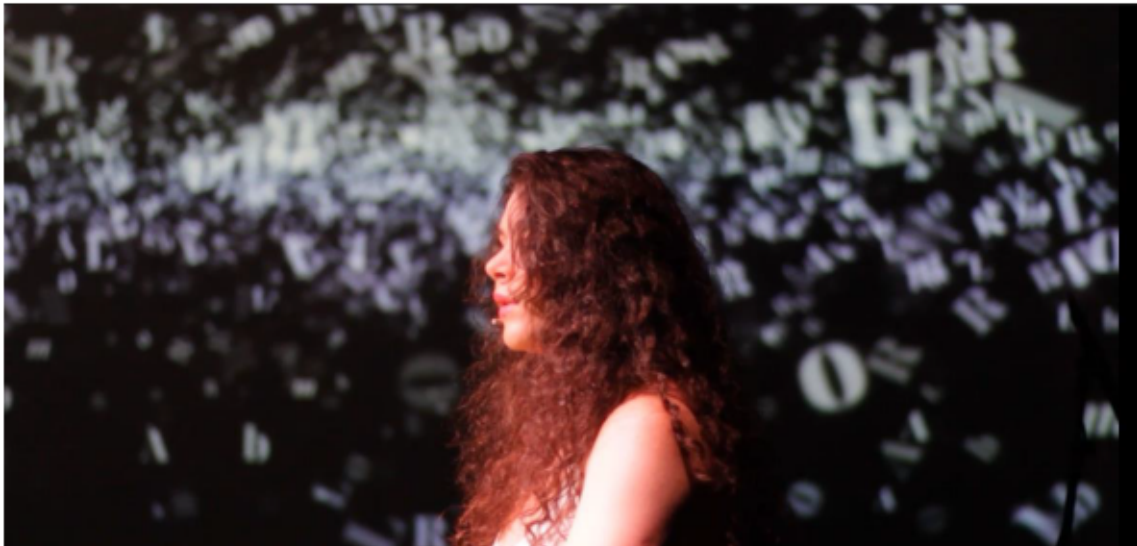


Fig. 69: Stills from the video of *Desalça*.

## 6. FINAL OBSERVATIONS

## 6. FINAL OBSERVATIONS

This thesis has been looking at various ways of making *visible music* with other practitioners using Ngai's concept of *tone* and Stern's *vitality forms*.

Regarding the **composition processes** of the practical work, tone and vitality forms have been used in different ways. I compose mainly intuitively, and often need something to ignite the process and awaken musical memories and imagination. While I appreciate that each composer's ways and methods are different, in my case, sounds seem to be associated with affective and bodily sensations; although many of these sensations are difficult to verbalise, the vocabulary of tone and vitality forms provides at least an approximation.

In most of the initial phases of the composition processes of this research, both tools have been a key to **access my inner archive of sounds**, helping me to identify reference music and sonic clues which will inspire the composition. These references may consist of specific pieces, such as John Adams' *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* (1986)<sup>71</sup> or George Crumb's *Apparitions* (1979)<sup>72</sup>, or more general musical forms, such as the alap of Hindustani music<sup>73</sup>.

During the composition, and while improvising at the piano to generate materials for a piece, one of the difficulties I often encounter has to do with the criterion through which to choose what should become part of the piece, and what is to be left out. In her book *Feeling and Form* (1953), Susanne Langer talks about the 'commanding form', a kind of 'gestalt' or 'fundamental form of the piece', which might be revealed to the composer's mind in different ways - more or less suddenly, while playing an instrument, or without recurring to any physical sound. In any case, this revelation entails an idea of the whole, an identity, a recognition of a matrix encapsulating all the tendencies of a piece:

"But however the total Gestalt presents itself to him [composer], he recognizes it as the fundamental form of the piece; and henceforth his mind is no longer free to wander irresponsibly from theme to theme, key to key, and mood to mood. This form is the "composition" which he feels called upon to develop." (Langer 1953, 121)

This doesn't mean, of course, that the piece is already composed in the composer's mind; however, the commanding form serves as a guide for the choices happening during the process of composing:

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<sup>71</sup> Reference piece for *Som Sem Saída*, as mentioned in Chapter 5.2.

<sup>72</sup> Reference piece for *The Age of Self Improvement*, as mentioned in Chapter 4.1.

<sup>73</sup> The alap was referenced for Cartas Portuguesas, in Chapter 3.1.

“Once the essential musical form is found, a piece of music exists in embryo; it is implicit there, although its final, completely articulate character is not determined yet, because there are many possible ways of developing the composition. Yet in the whole process of subsequent invention and elaboration, the general Gestalt serves as a measure of right and wrong, too much and too little, strong and weak. One might call that original conception the commanding form of the work.” (Langer 1953, 121)

As discussed in the Summary of the Tools for *Visible Music* (Chapter 2.3), and as visualized in the diagrams, the combination of tone and vitality forms crafts the specific space of a piece which, for me, acts as a kind of commanding form. It doesn't define how a piece will sound, because it can be developed in many ways, but it provides a **principle through which to decide what materials should or should not be included.**

One possible criticism is that having so established the space of the piece limits its scope, and composing becomes simply the manifestation of something that had been previously decided, without much room for surprises or the unexpected. Although I can imagine situations where this may happen, during the practical work of the research I experienced these limitations as highly productive. My experience is aligned with Langer's views on the commanding form, which

“...is born of the composer's thought and feeling, but as soon as he recognizes it as an individual symbol and sets forth its outline it becomes the expression of an impersonal Idea, and opens, to him and others, a deep mine of musical resource. For the commanding form is not essentially restrictive, but fecund. A perfectly free imagination suffers from very lack of pressure; it is in the vague and groping state that precedes the conception of the total form.” (Langer 1953, 123)

It is also important to note that although most composition processes started with an idea of tone and/or vitality forms, these have been refined during the development of the work. For example, in the piece *The Age of Self-Improvement*, initially the tone was 'vitality' and became 'pressure to achieve', and 'cliché mindfulness' was added in the middle of writing the libretto (Appendix 7). In the case of *Descałça*, I started to compose thinking of two basic atmospheres, one more sharp and concrete, and another more diffused, soft and slow, as described on page 137. During the process of composing and incorporating the song's text, new vitality forms were added, such as 'intermittent', 'trembling', 'rush', and so on. The diagrams accompanying each piece of the portfolio show the tone and vitality forms used as a shared link between the various dimensions of a piece in its final result; in most cases, there were additions and changes throughout the process of creation<sup>74</sup>.

Another important aspect to understand the application of tone and vitality forms in composition has to do with the role of verbal language. I will again refer to Susanne Langer – although she has not been directly present in the commentary, her influence is implicit in this research, in the sense that both Stern and Ngai identify her writings as an important reference for the concepts of vitality forms and tone respectively<sup>75</sup>. For Langer, music is the logical expression of feelings, which ordinary

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<sup>74</sup> The timeline of the piece *The Age of Self-Improvement*, in Appendix 7, describes several adjustments of tone and vitality forms happening in the collaboration with the librettist.

<sup>75</sup> In the book *Ugly Feelings*, Ngai relates the concept of tone with Langer's concept of 'significant form', saying that "... the aesthetic notion of tone we will be working with bears less resemblance to any of its New Critical formulations than it does to Susanne Langer's notion of a "significant form" whose import is "the feeling of the whole work", or Mikel Dufrenne's concept of the "affective quality" that constitutes the

language is unable to articulate; music formulates the inner life of human beings and presents this inner life to conscious awareness: “Because the forms of human feeling are much more congruent with musical forms than with the forms of language, music can reveal the nature of feelings with a detail and truth that language cannot approach.” (Langer 1948, 191)<sup>76</sup>. When I identify specific words for the tone and vitality forms of a piece, they are used as an inspiration for the composition, but not in the sense that the music becomes reduced to their realisation. Usually the words chosen are simple (such as ‘boredom’, ‘vitality’, ‘anxiety’, ‘soft’) because they are meant to be communicated to the collaborators with ease and clarity; while they help to guide the process and to provide a shared link between the different dimensions of a project, I believe that the main interest of a piece will lie in its specific musical and visual or movement expression, which doesn’t have an equivalent in verbal language<sup>77</sup>.

In summary, during the process of composing, tone and vitality forms have helped me to identify reference music and sounds for each piece, and guided the selection of sound materials – timbre, chords, rhythms, musical gestures, and so on –, based on the atmosphere, affect, and movement dynamics suggested by these materials.

Reflecting on the various **collaborative experiences** of the research, I think that the tools of tone and vitality forms work best in combination, because together they open a more individual and distinct space for a piece. For example, in *Cartas Portuguesas*, I started by sharing the tone of ‘intimacy’ with the videographer, but afterwards, through conversation and observation of the collected imagery, we arrived at various vitality forms – alternation between distance and close-ups (of skin and clothes’ texture), gentle and slow bodily gestures, quietly staring outside - which are at the core of the video’s specific approach to intimacy. Thus, from a broad word, which may be realised in endlessly different ways, was carved a perspective centred on the personal, sensuous

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artwork’s “expressed world”, or even Roman Ingarden’s notion of the “polyphonic harmony” that holds together all of the values and perspectives generated by a literary text’s multiple “stratifications”. (Ngai 2005, 44) Daniel Stern acknowledges Susanne Langer’s influence on the concept of vitality forms through her concept of ‘forms of feeling’: “In a different vein, the philosopher Susanne Langer (1953, 1969-1972) described what she called “forms of feeling”. She coined this term to capture the many feelings evoked by music (and life), such as “fading, exulting, easiness, rushing,” that do not fall into the usual categories of emotions, nor belong to any particular act or action. The basic notion of vitality dynamics has long been inspired by her work.” (Stern 2010, 37)

<sup>76</sup> When Langer talks about feelings, she is not referring to emotions such as joy or sadness, but to the morphology of feelings, or forms of feelings, which are at the basis of the concept of vitality forms: “The tonal structures we call “music” bear a close logical similarity to the forms of human feeling—forms of growth and of attenuation, flowing and stowing, conflict and resolution, speed, arrest, terrific excitement, calm, or subtle activation and dreamy lapses—not joy and sorrow perhaps, but the poignancy of either and both—the greatness and brevity and eternal passing of everything vitally felt. Such is the pattern, or logical form, of sentience; and the pattern of music is that same form worked out in pure, measured sound and silence. Music is a tonal analogue of emotive life.” (Langer 1953, 27)

<sup>77</sup> Discussing if music is able to convey messages (semantic theory), Susanne Langer responds to the critique that music cannot symbolize emotion because of its inability to manifest ordinary feelings such as love or anger unmistakably: “What is here criticized as a weakness, is really the strength of musical expressiveness: that music articulates forms which language cannot set forth. The classifications which language makes automatically preclude many relations, and many of those resting-points of thought which we call “terms.” It is just because music has not the same terminology and pattern, that it lends itself to the revelation of non-scientific concepts. To render “the most ordinary feelings, such as love, loyalty or anger, unambiguously and distinctly,” would be merely to duplicate what verbal appellations do well enough.” (Langer 1948, 189)

world of the female character. The video of *Bagatelas* provides another example for this: as explained on page 98 and in Appendix 7, the first version of the video was focussed on the vitality form 'slow'; although this type of movement was enough to provide some connection with the music, the video was more conventional and generic. The combination of various vitality forms ('slow', 'repetitive', 'relaxed', 'activity/absence of activity') inspired by the tone 'hypnotic', led to a more daring and singular realisation in the final video.

Despite my preference of using the tools in combination, I found it very difficult to decide the amount of information to be shared with a collaborator in advance, especially considering that all projects happened with new collaborators who I didn't know before. The success of a collaboration seems to be connected to the balance between constraints and creative freedom, and is dependent on various factors. Some of these factors are logistical, such as time and geographical proximity; if there is less time, I have observed that the tendency is to communicate more information, as there is less opportunity to experiment or make different versions of the work. Other factors are contextual to each project, such as having the music already composed or a clearly defined idea from the start; and, finally, others are personal, having to do with a collaborator's mode of work. This last one can not be predicted, since we only learn through the interaction how a collaborator responds to the information that has been shared. In my experience, the most productive approach is to offer a small amount of initial information, adding more as requested, as happened in the piece *the Age of Self-Improvement*, or if necessary to achieve coherence in the work, as in the videos of *Descalça*.

In the case that the music is already composed, one thing that I have learned for the future from the video of *Bagatelas* is to wait for the collaborator's response to the music, before communicating tone and/or vitality forms. In this way the collaborator might identify qualities that could have gone unnoticed by myself, thereby enriching the process.

Following this line of thought, I think that it is a good option to start the communication with a collaborator with tone, because of its openness, and eventually progress to adding vitality forms for a more detailed approach to the visual or physical dimensions of the piece.

Regarding the **individual uses of each tool**, the benefit of using **tone** is its simplicity: it provides a principle<sup>78</sup> to guide the collaboration through minimal use of words. Although in Ngai's "Ugly Feelings", tone was approached as something we receive or identify through contact with an artwork, in the practical work of my research, tone was used as a tool for composition and collaboration. Describing a general affective quality or atmosphere, tone invites creativity because it is ambiguous and broad, while at the same time establishing a place of connection between music<sup>79</sup> and the other elements.

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<sup>78</sup> Talking about collaboration between music and dance, Jonathan Burrows suggests that "Sharing principles is a way to give space for each other's differences whilst still inhabiting the same project." (Burrows 2010, 182). He adds that "A principle is not a rule, it's just a way to take care of some of the decisions, leaving you free to do what you do best, which is to be intuitive. It's hard sometimes to be intuitive when you're overwhelmed by choice." (Burrows 2010, 2)

<sup>79</sup> The main problem encountered in the realisation of musical analysis under the concept of tone is that tone requires that the work be grasped holistically, in totality; it is an "affective quality" or "atmosphere" that may resist deconstruction: "We cannot reduce to their elements the melancholy grace of Ravel's Pavane pour une enfante défunte, the glory of Franck's chorales, or the tender sensitivity of Debussy's La Fille aux cheveux de lin" (Dufrenne in Ngai 2005, 48).

*Descalça* (Chapter 5.3) shows a representative use of **vitality forms**. While the selected visual poetry by Ana Hatherly became the basis for the choice of visual elements for the videos, the communication of vitality forms shaped the way these elements were used, in connection with the music. The modes of movement of the lines in the first video (slow, undulating) and the letters in the second video (suspended, slow, floating) were part of the verbal communication; they could not be inferred from Hatherly's images alone. As seen in Chapter 2.2, vitality forms are implicated in a multiplicity of contents; these contents correspond to the *what* of an event, while vitality forms correspond to the *how* – the flow and intensity pattern of that event. In the case of these videos, the visual elements are the *what* (lines and letters with specific graphic configurations), and the vitality forms are the *how*. Together they form a distinctive visual language for the piece.

Precisely because vitality forms concern the *how* of a movement or event, they can be an effective resource to approach a piece's visual/physical vocabulary. As observed in Chapter 4.2, there was confusion in the aesthetics of movement in *The Sleep Collector*, between the table music and the performers' transitions from the chairs to the table. The movement qualities in the table music – precise, rhythmic, and direct – are not present in the transitions. The transitions are not musically notated; therefore, they would need to be approached not only in terms of the *what* – moving from one place to another, performing this or other action – but also regarding the *how*. Considerations of timing, speed, intensity, and other qualities of movement, e.g., vitality forms, need to be addressed to create a specific physical vocabulary, which did not happen regarding these transitions.

As a result of the experience with *The Sleep Collector*, in the next piece – *Descalça* – I worked closely with the choreographer Joana Providência, to create a clear physical language. There was only one rehearsal with Joana, the singer, and I, but there were also several conversations with Joana and I about the *what* and especially the *how* of the movements, using the vocabulary of vitality forms.

I consider that the main contribution of the tools explored is to **help with approximating the vocabulary of the different disciplines**. Affect and vitality forms have been used as a shared principle between music and other elements because they do not belong to a specific discipline; instead, they are pervasive in our daily human experience. Vitality forms seemed particularly apt to be communicated easily and clearly, corresponding to Stern's claim that all time-based arts share the same repertoire of vitality forms. During the practical work, I have used many of the terms for vitality forms present in the list on page 27, and added some more; a task for my future work is to keep expanding my catalogue of terms for describing the dynamics of movement.

The artistic team for each research project was different, and I had never worked with any of the collaborators before. Heiner Goebbels says about his long-term collaborations, "And the biggest advantage of working with a team since ten, fifteen, twenty years ago is: you don't have to speak." (Goebbels in Rebstock and Roesner 2012, 118). There is no doubt that this kind of collaboration, with so much tacit understanding built over the years that talking becomes unnecessary, is desirable. However, if, as composers, we are willing to experiment with working with new artistic teams, communication is inevitable, unless there is no collaboration. For example, if a composer simply hands in the music to a choreographer who will create a choreography on his/her own, the need to talk is almost absent. If we articulate our work with others instead of working independently, as tendentially happens in *visible music*, we might need tools to enable this articulation and communication. The outlined interplay between tone, vitality forms, and aesthetic

references, explored in this research, aims to add one possibility to the already existing tools that composers can use to work with visual practitioners. In my experience, having a common vocabulary to make a bridge between music and other disciplines can make communication easier and more effective, which contributes both to the longevity of existing collaborations and emboldens us to work with practitioners we have never worked with before.

It should be noted, though, that these tools focus on providing a connective element between the aural and visual fields. *Visible music* favours collaboration for creating the visual dimension, but it is not prescriptive regarding processes. For example, in *The Sleep Collector*, most physical and visual aspects were included in the score, and in *Som Sem Saída*, the visual/physical dimension was brought mainly by the performance spaces. Approximating the different disciplines is a goal regardless of the context or collaborative dynamics.

Tone and vitality forms serve as a **map for creating visible music**. They show possibilities, places to visit, without predefining which places will be visited, the chronological order, and the route to get there. If there is a strong concept from the beginning asking to be clearly manifested in the result, we might want to use all of these resources to communicate it clearly. In other circumstances, we might prefer to leave more space open for the unexpected, and to be surprised by a collaborator. In any case, these resources are not meant to limit creativity, but to provide a principle with which to work – something against which to push our imagination free<sup>80</sup>.

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<sup>80</sup> Jonathan Burrows describes the role of form in choreography in this same way – “Form is something against which to push your imagination free.” (Burrows 2010, 28)

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