

Game of Encounters: the Personne experience

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1. Beginning

This paper reflects on Personne, a group of artists who are bound together by the personal and musical affinities of its members. Their performances operate on unsettled ground which involves experiments with the repertoire of contemporary music and especially in articulating the music with other arts. Although each performance uses a new configuration, they share certain poetic aspects even without delimiting any specific field. The group's creations demonstrate a certain informality that reveals an air that is both, unpretentious and critical.

Personne began from an ambitious project to perform an instrumental version of the *Symphonie pour un homme seul* [Symphony for One Man Alone] (1950) by Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry. The transcription of such a paradigmatic acousmatic piece for an instrumental performance group could raise--and in fact, raised--a series of questions about the nature of this version. However, performing *Symphonie* served to express the desire to perform a music project that focused on its musicality and potential to reach people who would watch it, while leaving to a secondary plane all concerns that are often seen in engaging to conform a music composition to its proper places (concert hall, musicological analysis, affiliation to styles and schools, etc.).

The text exposed below is fruit of an intensive exchange on and off stage that occurred between five artists of the *Personne* group. There is no musicological or academic pretense. Rather, from individual impressions of some of its members, it seeks to expose what appears to be that which is most significant in the group's musical practice, its poetics. Choosing an essayistic approach and a personal tone of writing is not per chance. On the contrary, it reinforces an ethical and political position which clearly contaminates the poetics of the group. *Personne's* proposition is fruit of the disbelief in a number of values that provide a foundation for producing so-called contemporary music and the construction of a discourse that legitimates these values. This scenario which is tightly aligned with the modernist objective to create a tradition of the new and a mania to "theorize" art (Compagnon, 2010, p. 12) has become so exhausting that it has become necessary to seek new alternatives. First, we must find an escape route to avoid the major roads laid out by the institutionalization and academicism of contemporary music. Ever since Milton Babbitt publicly assumed that avant-garde music would go beyond the means of common man and that the university would be required to house this music by experts and for experts (Babbitt, 1958), there seems to be a growing accommodation of musical production within the safe haven of institutions. This is not to shallowly criticize Institutions in general, since the positive aspects of the association between artistic practice and the formal sectors of society--like the university, grant programs or the creative industry--appear to be obvious. The criticism is related to the imbalance that occurs when art must blindly meet the demands of these institutions, becoming in itself institutional. It seems that only until recently has this scenario begun to be openly questioned by academia, like in Georgina Born's seminal analysis on the institutionalization of the musical avant-garde in her ethnography of IRCAM, an institution whose "attempt to institutionalize creativity represents a new departure in the institutionalization of music" (Born, 1995, p. 2).

But how to stop being institutional, even while being part of academia? How to deal with the complexity of thought and the instability of artistic creation, not to mention the connection between art and people? How to make music without the obligation of meeting socio-cultural and market requirements that usually legitimates it? How to take artistic work seriously while having fun with it? How to freely transition between territories of sounds, images and gestures that have

familiar names--music, electro-acoustic, film, improvisation—but perhaps no longer have the same meaning. Finally, how to ignore precepts like authorship, virtuosity and mastery, so dear to the production of concert music, and still believe in the poetic and aesthetic power of what we do?

The writing that follows does not respond to these issues. Neither does the work of *Personne* position itself as any type of answer. Instead, both the writings, in its reflective and personal nature, as well as the very work of the group, propose a shift in our habits in regards to producing music. This is not to discredit the ways we are used to expressing ourselves, like the music concert in the case of artistic production, or the scholarly article, in the case of reflecting on this production. The writings here seek to demonstrate that it is possible to make and think of music without the burden of theories and without committing to forms that, perhaps for a long time now, no longer have much to say to us.

2. Who are we, where have we come from, where are we going? (Rodolfo Caesar)

The invitation to write a few lines about the group's activities, having participated in several, rather recent performances, is something that gives me profound gratitude—while at the same time ramming down the expression “What a thankless job!” What do I have to say about what was intended to be created within the realm of the unspeakable? (No, it's not that 'ineffable' damper we like to attribute to music to inhibit discussion). The unspeakable of our work is not deliberate; it comes as a side effect, simply because it was not classified beforehand: and I believe we don't even commit ourselves to it. The latest activities of our group demonstrated, in my opinion, greater commitment to making than to classifying or preparing a legitimizing discourse for what we do or have done. This fluidity explains my reluctance to speak.

Starting with its “name”, which is not to be considered a brand name, it is meant only to be a facilitator, so that the producers, organizers and promoters of the activities involving the group have something to refer to. Everything about it can change; it has already changed its members where eight musicians performed at the first performance, then six, then one time with three musicians and two performances with four musicians. The choice of name is not definite and has

brought some uneasiness since it doesn't enjoy the use of our language [Portuguese]. It falls on the double-sense of the word meaning person—from the Latin *persona*--those masks that, as the sounds of the actors on the stages of amphitheatres were amplified, all visible traces of individuality were removed. In French, in a sense, it is even more interesting because an emptiness endures, *Personne* is no one, it is the masked "porta voz" [spokesman] without someone to "port" it. (And here I am, facing the thankless task of porting the voice of *Personne*!) However, since there are no expectations to use a brand name to establish our place in the mind of the "public", or market, we can change everything at any time. Therefore we are more than just a group of contemporary music, we are an encounter.

Our encounter, then, is of musicians who love to play together. Since our most common idiom is not samba-de-raiz, choro, jazz, funk, rock, we play things more aligned to our instrumental and electro-acoustical experiences, in a somewhat improvised way. Unpretentiousness is so fundamental that it doesn't even serve as a basis, so that even pure improvisation cannot be our goal. We rehearse too, because we like it.

The origin of this movement took place in 2010 when the first group came together (Alexandre Fenerich, Doriana Mendes, Fernando Iazzetta, Janete El Haouli, Jose Augusto Mannis, Lilian Campesato, Michelle Agnes and I) to carry out an old project: to recreate, live, the *Symphonie pour un homme seul* by Pierre Henry and Pierre Schaeffer¹. Caique Bellaver was added to this group who helped Mannis in the almost insane "reduction" work of the *Symphonie*: to produce in written notation that which had been done electro-acoustically, i.e., a theoretical transcription contrary to the acousmatic music this piece proposed when debuted in 1950.

Since the 1990's we dreamed about this opportunity—my friend Laura di Pietro and I--kicking up gravel during walks through the *Paineiras*, complaining of the conditioned isolation of composing and performing an electro-acoustic concert. I think then, that the most appropriate idea that has taken shape since the beginning of this writing is mainly the following: an encounter of affinities, a desire to share.

¹ A recording of the performance of the *Symphonie* transcreation at Parque Lage, Rio de Janeiro can be seen at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQOPHVTtio0>



Figure 01: Image of the rehearsal to perform the transcription of *Symphonie pour un homme seul* at Parque Lage in 2010.

After the event at Parque Lage we met the following year at the EIMAS conference [International Conference of Music and Sound Art] in Juiz de Fora [Minas Gerais] without Caíque and Doriana for a presentation that accompanied the projection of an excerpt from the film *Limite* by Mário Peixoto in a session

fulfilled by more individualized works of duos that, as such, were developed separately. I had the feeling that it was a great encounter, even though this time we were before a speculating audience: academics and 'experts'. After this encounter, there was period of almost two years of no activity.

At the end of 2013, invited by the Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage [School for the Visual Arts of Parque Lage] to curate its traditional Cine Lage session, three of the original seven musicians played together without even remembering—because of the absolute lack of necessity--that they could bring back "persona". We composed (Alexandre Fenerich, Lilian Campesato and I)--a live new soundtrack for *Dreams that Money Can Buy* (1947), a film by Hans Richter. In 2014, another encounter took place: again at the *Cine Lage* at Parque Lage and the next day, at "Encontros Carbônicos" at Largo das Artes in Rio de Janeiro: both events with the three members from the prior year, plus Fernando Iazzetta. The first program was the same as the previous year, while the second was more varied: a 1926 short film by Hans Richter, a section of *Twin Peaks* (1991) by David Lynch and individual contributions by group members.

Once we are clear that our encounters unite different expectations, it all reflects, relative to "stardom", in less anxiety. Even so, I need to explain my personal motivations that probably do not echo those of all the other participants of the group.

I was recently asked if the performance of *Symphonie* in 2010 had a hidden agenda "against" something; if there had been any critical or aesthetic objective. I said no, that it was for the joy of making a collective work with cherished and above all admired people for a musically nonspecific, but artistically cultivated public of Parque Lage. But to an expert on the subject the question ensues, because the event could have contained a deliberate intention to disturb a purist's hornet's nest because, as it has been said, we de-acousmatized a fundamental acousmatic icon. For my part, I had no such "reactionary" intention.

In the first place, I prefer--nothing more than a personal liking--this way of listening to music in the dark. I like less mixed music that awakens me from imaginary multidimensional spaces to a tridimensional stage, and removes the mystery of invisible sound sources for "concretion" by the performer. "To like more" does not mean "professed faith in", because, in regards to music and the arts in general, it has been a long time since there has been a cause that justifies

my combating for or against. And, this preference does not hold me back from being able to enjoy participating in these encounters that, when the presentation cannot be effectively visualized on the projector screen, it is precisely the “mixed music” mode that prevails.

In the second place, I knew that the public at Parque Lage, though cultured, does not participate in the discussion of the minutia that swells the milieu of our self-attributed importance. It is quite true that I find myself without great motivation to carry on interlocutions within the composing environment of contemporary music, which I attribute to what I consider to be its exhaustion by isolation, because it has become a collectivity of “lonely men”. The representation of the *Symphonie* was the opposite of *un homme seul*, only without any resentment or militant objectives.

The revision of the *Symphonie*, like everything done at the Arte Sonora event, (curated by me), does not manifest a look into the past nor the future, but to the present. Can we do something now without necessarily denying the past? I think so, since Orpheus gave up seeing Eurydice again. Asked another way: is it possible to make something from zero? Surely zero does not exist, but if some knots are well undone, why not? What we mainly avoided at Parque Lage in 2010 was a dialogic Gordian knot through the expertise of our milieu.

I have the impression of always being hounded by the most villains of knots, the institutional loop. I am disturbingly aware that the protection we built in the academy to support our compositional work increasingly bars us from the inside out. We created a vicious system where the same institution produces, performs, applauds, analyzes, historicizes, celebrates anniversaries, writes obituaries and buries the same making, work or author. There are cases where--without recourse to actions among friends, for lack of these friends—all but the obituary and burial can be sponsored by the same person. My problem is not so much the ethically dubious nature of the system, but by the side effects at the socio-political level, specifically by the reinforcement of the status quo. Another well-oiled loop “in our circle”, is seen in the eclecticism of celebratory registers of their production. We are all different in this circle of composer-experts, each with his/her distinct social and political aspirations. But, having recourse to eclecticism—late by some, being confused with post-modernity—we level

ourselves in the desire for survival. Therefore, an uncomfortable dialogue remains among our fellow expert-composers.

Maybe this will clarify why the occasional, mutant musical encounter of *Personne* embraces a more lush and vigorous, yet less accommodated attitude, and explain the delight in being part of it.

3. Hearing like a “persoa” (Jose Augusto Mannis)

I would like to propose another meaning be added to the name given to the group; the sense of making sound—*persoar* [person-orous]—since *Personne* originated from the project of sonorously transforming *Symphonie pour un homme seul* composed by Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry. Premiered in France in 1950, the work was originally designed as a phonograph disc recording having been entirely produced by manipulating recorded, reproduced and mixed sounds on disc. The use of a magnetic tape recorder, being in course of invention at that very moment, was soon put into operation, but not before this composition. Therefore, the *Symphonie pour un homme seul*, SPUHS as we call it, had, until 2010, only been sonified by turntables, cassette players, CD players and other playback resources. The *Personne* group was the first to transmit it to our ears through instruments, voices and other sound sources during a live performance. For this reason I suggest this meaning for the title: that of a group that makes things sound.

The extraordinary idea for this work comes from the sound artist Rodolfo Caesar, a person capable of finding major gaps in common places; who looks at angles no one else usually looks at and therefore ends up seeing things as a child: everything that turns up to the eye can be (re)discovered. Obviously, this provokes changes in relation to the status quo. And, especially in this particular case, when we take something from the place where it's been for over 60 years! Could a piece that was created from a plastic process of a successive agglomeration of sounds, like a sound sculpture, where its elements were recorded on record grooves or pieces of spliced, superimposed tape, be characterized only by its workmanship to the total neglect of its poetic content? Can concrete music--in itself rebellious and innovative and contravening established norms, and having been conceived and consolidated as traditional

music-- be now so sanctified that its transgression would never again be possible without being accused of an act of profanity?

Even GRM--*Groupe de Recherches Musicales*, led by François Bayle at the time – invested resources and people to design and create the Acousmograph, a device designed to support spectral analyses on which one can apply original graphic elements that represent sound materials, processes, situations and movements. This leads to abstract representations of music recorded on electronic media, which is built from another, objective and neutral representation obtained by numerical frequency analysis. According to François Bayle, in a personal remark to this author in the 1990s, the future of electro-acoustic music is conditioned on the possibility of being able to observe the content of the music in deferred, discontinuous time and manner in relation to its time of reproduction. Until then, electro-acoustic music used auditory memory analysis. Composers have even prepared listening scores, which have proven to be a means of being able to evaluate the music, comparing and contrasting distinct moments, regardless of the time of its reproduction.

The Acousmograph was designed to improve the representation resources applied to electro-acoustic music by incorporating auxiliary tools for sound analysis and for inserting graphical elements. These scores, though bringing a variety of creative and original graphic solutions, maintain the basic general structure associated with traditional scores for instrumental and vocal music, at least in regards to the representation of time on the horizontal axis and pitch on the vertical axis. Therefore, these new graphic solutions are somewhat compatible to traditional notation allowing them to coexist with one another.

The transcription of the *Symphony* for live performance done by Personne took the path of a traditional musical representation since its execution of pitch, duration, tempo and moments of synchronization between musicians had to be performed with precision.

This author was in charge of the transcription with Carlos Henrique Bellaver (Londrina, Paraná) and Guilherme Lunhani (Campinas, São Paulo as collaborators. Soon the work took on the character of an analysis, given that the emphasis and accents resulting from directing ones listening attention reveal only one of the possible interpretations of the original work (see Fig. 02). One of the first findings while transcribing the piece was concerned with the temporal

movement of sound objects. There are clear tempos that jump to our ears when we fix some of the referential sound objects. The logical coherence that appeared while the writing progressed gave the impression that Pierre Henry's hand, fresh out of Messiaen's class, had been employing creative processes learned and developed during his studies, but applied in this case to studio sound processes, notably the operation on record players. Organizing the sound objects of the transcription reveals possible traces of traditional music composing underlying sound manipulations. However, one cannot expect the transcription to represent what was going on in Henry's head, because it is no more than a picture of what the ears of the transcribers interpreted from listening to the work in those days in 2010.

Versão de estudo em desenvolvimento
N.B.: A partitura final será simplificada em relação a esta: Rítmicos menos complexos, andamentos mais flexíveis. Esta versão soa sincronizada quase que perfeitamente com o tape original e, portanto, é uma partitura para estudo.

SPUHS
01 Prosopopée

Pierres
Schaeffer & Henry
adaptação inventada
JAM
idealização
DUDA

Score

♩ = 60 ♩ = 50 ♩ = 40 ♩ = 60 ♩ = 36 ♩ = 43 ♩ = 53 ♩ = 60 ♩ = 83 ♩ = 90 ♩ = 60

Wood Blocks

Bass Drum

Flute

Voz fem

Voz masc

Hoy dá Ahoy *PPP* Teñte Sépt

Un Homme?

W. Bl.

B. Dr.

Fl.

V. masc

Cluquin - te Ah-Hoy Di - Ah

Pno.

Figure 02: Instrumental "transcreation" of the beginning of the first movement of *Symphonie, Prosopopée*.

If reworked now, the transcription would certainly change; other events would affix themselves while we focused our attention on listening. *SPUHS* could indeed be revisited, and re-transcribed again, and reborn in various ways. This is the

idea of a transcription, it is not a gesture intended to achieve absolute representational equivalence and accuracy, but an interpretation of the original, where ideas, insights and problems are solved by invention and resolution at a particular moment in time. As the transcription progressed, deepened and expanded, the more the process tended towards a “trans-creation” as Haroldo de Campos put it. Finally, it was completed definitively during its performance, which took place in 2010, where each participant composed his personal line of performance by selecting the elements to be played, sung, and spoken from the transcribed score. That is, each member of the group defined their own musical part by combining elements of the transcribed parts, sometimes from more than one of the transcribed music parts (see Fig. 03). Consequently, the performance held on Friday, October 15, 2010 at Parque Lage did not feature a simple direct re-synthesis of the original, but a “transcreation” of *SPUHS* for 18 hands.



Figure 03: Work rehearsals to develop the “transcreation” of *Symphonie* (LAMI - USP, 2010).

4. Encounters: Exchanges and the remains (Lílian Campesato)

Introduction

Harder than bringing together in an article our reflections on various aspects of Personne's activities, is building a foundation that would help situate the reader on such shaky ground. A merger of ways of thinking and writing has been presented here as an opportunity to share the energies that have set in motion the ideas, sounds and practices that are manifest during Personne encounters. Of course, a text is very different from an encounter, or a performance, but perhaps this set of remarks can help each one of us to externalize our concerns, desires and ideas. There is not only diversity in our purpose, but also diversity in our areas of expertise. Different generations and individual trajectories intersect and the way they relate is what gives the group's particular character. Encounters between *personas* guide the shared desire to produce and exchange. If our paths are different, our affinities are what maintain cohesion. In some way, I credit the astonishment caused by the experience of acoustically performing *Symphonie pour un homme seul* to Personne's desire to continue creating new works. What happened that night in 2010 established a permanent desire to build a path that would lead us to maintain a few ideals: exchange, experience and meet. It is in regards to these ideas that I intend to speak about here.

Experimentation: experience

If there is a common thread in Personne's work—from SPUHS to its most recent performances--it's experimentation. Experimenting has always been a means to develop our expertise. Experimenting means to test through action that which is within our reach. In my view, the way we relate to music, its production and reproduction, is clearly affected by a dynamics focused on experimentation. The adjective "experimental" can be unrewarding, because it carries with it various functions, meanings and even ideologies, especially as a qualifying term for music. This is not the moment to apply labels to define Personne's work as belonging to this or that practice. But the interest in this connection comes from that which most closely approaches experimenting with experience. And this experience happens collectively, through coexistence where one can experiment

with each other, sharing. So our music happens through experiencing, not efficiency. This encourages openness to exchanging gestures, sounds, activities, because the bodies are not rigid, but open to dialog. Apparently, there is no expectation to achieve a previously defined idea or ideal, but a willingness to exchange and, thus, be affected by the other.

Encounters

When someone faces another, it doesn't matter whether they moved in various directions or towards the same point. What matters is that the encounter took place and that it is not necessarily a convergence. Not needing convergence is, in my view, one of the most interesting aspects of an encounter. It is open to influence. To influence and be influenced, to mold and be molded. The outcome is uncertain; we don't know what it is. Taking risk is to be open to interference and acknowledging essential ambiguities.

Personne encounters took place in various ways: conversations, rehearsals, and performances. The initial challenges created by performing *SPUHS* occurred at several levels. First, there was the ethical issue of converting an acousmatic work into its opposite: an instrumental, performance version. Second, there was a question of poetics, since instrumental and electro-acoustic domains, although intersecting, often maintain well-defined peculiarities. And finally, there was an issue of the music itself, since there was a long and laborious journey between the project as an idea to its realization on stage.

The first rehearsal in October 2010, which we call the theoretical rehearsal (see Figs. 3 and 4), focused on presenting the transcription made by Mannis of some of the movements of the *Symphonie* and the first attempt to play it. I will never forget the general feeling of amazement when we began to tackle this difficult job. From that first meeting, everyone knew that the task would not be to precisely perform the transcription, but to create from it. After all, it was the only thing we could do.

This work required much more than creating an acoustic re-work of an important example of *musique concrète*. The methods and tools had to be constantly invented and tested, since issues appeared as each new mimesis of the original work was performed, or tensions occurred between the idiosyncrasies of notation

and its performance. Whether the result of this process more closely resembles a parody on the original work or not is a topic for another paper. What matters here is how we have been affected by the process.

Stimulated by this first meeting in respect to the *Symphonie* project, other works were being created by several smaller configurations, such as trios and quartets. The group, in different configurations, returned to meet with some regularity over the following years. In these other projects, *Personne* interacted with other art forms, especially experimental film, at times producing film interventions, creating live soundtracks and at other times producing original pieces that extrapolate the musical context and incorporate other languages. Some pieces convey day-to-day stress, revisiting this mundaneness sometimes with irony, sometimes critically.



Figure 04: Scores of the performance of *Symphonie*.

Practice

Most presentations are steered by irreverence. They become a kind of externalization of encounters, the desire to share with others the affections shared within the group. While there is an interest in communicating with the

public, there is a deliberate action to avoid that the work should take on a hermetic character or accentuated feature of academia. Rather, we seek closeness with the audience which is facilitated by narratives and references that are part of the materials we use.



Figure 05: Performance based on the film *Dreams That Money Can Buy* (1947), by Hans Richter at Parque Lage, Rio de Janeiro.

The work carried out after the first experience with the *Symphonie* created a strong relationship to imagery, mainly cinema. This way, the music began to share its territory with images and the sounds began to be affected by them. In some way, the films became a motto for the construction of the performances, and the process of treating the images as a starting point can be considered a type of method adopted by Personne ever since.

Gradually we became film musicians, like in the early days of silent film, trying to turn into sound what we saw on the screen. In films like *Dreams That Money Can*

Buy (1947) or *Ghosts Before Breakfast* (1928), both by Hans Richter (see Fig. 05), the moods, *climate* or *pathos* of the scenes were freely translated into musical gestures. "Freely" has a special meaning here: it does not follow a sound primer belonging to this or that style--even when it comes to "free improvisation" typical of certain contemporary practices. Each member of the group brought a very personal contribution to something that might be called improvisation guided by the *affects* emanating from the films that touched each musician differently.

Sound materials may come from the most diverse sources. Sometimes they result from a curious object (a piece of decoration, a broken appliance, a piece of junk) brought by one of the musicians, an *objet trouvé* carefully transformed into an instrument. Other times they could even be music pieces previously composed by one of the group members, which are offered to the others to play "on" them, creating a cycle where the works are transformed back into sound material to generate a new piece. These pre-composed materials do not function as an invitation for interaction, but for "esculhambação"² [screwing up + action].

Sambado is part of one of the four *Peças para 'lounge'* (2005) by Rodolfo Caesar that we used as a background and theme for "esculhambação". I remember it was Rodolfo himself who suggested we use one of these pieces composed in another context. What we did was have fun with the piece, playing without being worried about any implications with respect to formal dynamics or texture, but with careful attention to the tension our performance provided.

However, if the method is uncompromising, the work is not. What guides performance is attention and collective listening. The apparent lack of control is actually guided by constant tension, an effort to keep possibilities open: enough control to give space to the uncontrolled. All the while, the performance stands as a provocation. Sometimes, some of those damned, undesirable, strange sounds unexpectedly appear. But again, they add tension to practice. They demand articulation or even a diversion.

Producing these sounds also does not obey any logic in regards to instrumental performance. We raised to a category of instrument anything we could mobilize to produce sounds. Therefore, the "instruments" are different in nature and do

² The Portuguese word "esculhambação" [screwing up] contains the suffix "ação" [action].

not complement each other in any traditional musical sense. For example, there is no low pitch instrument complementing a high pitch, or a "melodic" instrument complementing another "rhythmic" or "harmonic" instrument. Each member of the group brings a different, heterogeneous set up. For example, Rodolfo Caesar works with a sampler activated by electronic drum pads where he has stored pre-recorded sounds put into loop. The control of the speed of each sample used by Caesar imposes its own rhythm. A simple dialog runs among the participants, since the samples released lead to an interaction in a particular rhythm.

But it's the microphoning of my voice that I take as the main source of my participation. The use of electronic devices like the ring modulator, granulators, flangers or delays, alters the relationship between the direct and processed voice. At the same time, almost as an extension of the vocal cords, various metal percussion instruments are played. Similarly, Alexandre Fenerich plays a number of small objects, many purchased at an antique fair: whistles, a metal cup used as a bell, a foot of a china doll, music boxes, toy flutes. Their sounds are also processed, looped, and granulated. In one of the performances, Fenerich plays an *afoxé*³ in almost the same tempo as a percussive instrument from a pre-recorded track. "Almost" means here the clash between error and the unintentional. The *afoxé* played "live" is the poorly made representation of the recorded percussion. It's a counterpoint, not an accompaniment: it is the representation of the memory of the act of the recorded percussion. What the musician does during the live performance is transformed, in this case, into a representation of the recording.

Remainders, exchange and barter

Some of Pesonne's musical practices include exchanging the materials created by each other among ourselves, disregarding any intrinsic musical value and releasing any individual authorship of each created material. The work--if there is any--is born of the encounter between the musicians and their work with the shared materials.

³ *Afoxé* is a musical instrument used in traditional Afro-Brazilian rhythms. It is made of a gourd covered in a net of small beads made of plastic or seeds.

Personal affinities clearly add many other elements to exchange in addition to the sound materials. For example, during one of the scenes of the performance based on the film *Dreams That Money Can Buy*, the musicians mimicked the action of the actors who placed their hand in front of their forehead and indicated, by leaning the body, that they observed something in a certain direction (see Fig. 06). When "reproducing" the scene—rising in the chair like the actors—imitating their gestures and moving away from the sound creation for a moment, is a connection of a different order between the performers, the film and the audience.



Figure 06: Scene from the performance of *Dreams that money can buy* where the musicians imitated in scene the gestures of the movie actors.

Not only material exchanges add layers of interaction and can especially leave traces of what remains from any exchange. They are remnants of encounters, products of exchanges, differences that always appear. In an encounter between a gesture and a sound proposition created by a musician and worked by another, a result materializes, which has in it the memory of the two. Would the difference of this new material in relation to the original be the remainder? Apparently so.

In every exchange there is a part that is left over, the "remainder" of the difference between the values of exchange. Not that the difference is the reinforcement of values, since I don't believe it's important to us, but it is the maxim we use as a poetic challenge. Perhaps it is precisely the existence of this "remainder", this difference, which is the key tool for producing change and articulating between individual proposals, film materials or interactions with each

other. Once again, I emphasize that there is no need for convergence, because it is precisely the differences that make the encounters so interesting.

5. Celebration and game: music performance while exchanging sound images (Alexandre Fenerich)

False musicology

Writing about one's own creative work, in most cases, is an unrewarding or dishonest act. It incurs inevitable distortions of a neutral narrative voice which hides, through the artifice of objectivity, a position of partiality that tends to praise oneself—where a voice in the third-person describing and analyzing an object, its exemption will never be found.

Nevertheless, as if on the edge of a razor, this section discusses the *Personne* group's ethical and aesthetic positions within the context of its most recent performances. I try to think of them as a musical device to synthesize some of the frequently-used procedures in the drive to create.

Although there are other formations of the group and other musical approaches, I would like here to discuss the work where the constant was creation based on and with film images—working on film clips and recreating them through scenic and sound intervention. For, much of what *Personne* has done is not music in the strict sense defined by the field, but live sound effects. This is no demerit: the reaction to impulses, images and environments suggested by the films we work with is a gesture of sound creation, both for us, performers/composers--for whom the act of recreation in response to the visual images is a delightful game--and for those watching us, who delight with our (in)ability of representation and prompt response.

I usually fall back on Jacques Tati to make, think and have fun with music and film. His films are precise musical creations, light, and full of nuances. The *foley* work in *Playtime* (1967), for example, brings something intangible in the contrast between the opaque photography and the clearest sounds--or something comic and dreamy in the sound and rhythmic characterization of some characters. The pinpoint accuracy of the temporal collage of sounds on the images on the one hand, and on the other, the gap between the dimensions of

objects seen on the screen with its corresponding seen-heard by the live sound gesture, are perhaps technical aspects of film recreation of the group with influences from Tati.

However, these are not the elements I would like to highlight here. I prefer, instead, to point to *Personne's* aesthetic and ethical positions of these film recreation practices I deem most significant. The creative motivation of the group is unique in the current musical context and deserves discussion. I begin, therefore, by commenting on the main engine of its initiative—an encounter between friends—discussing the implications that this has for the work itself and its place in middle-class Brazilian music circuits—that I believe to be linked to concert music, to which, by its formation and adherence of its members, *Personne* is included.

Celebration, game

The strongest element of the *Personne* group's latest works does not relate to features of an autonomous work of art, which is an object to be apprehended in itself. It is not in the isolated listening of performances where its quality is retained: at the same time rigorous and floating and, especially for spectators and musicians, light. A cursory listening to its performances could indicate that the musicians are not committed to the musical material; that they are not serious, and that a little confusion in the sound is a result of their inability. At the same time, they do not build the tension that is typical of a traditional musical performance, linked to a respect for tradition or an author connected to a religious cult. With values linked to spontaneity, the performances are above all an ethical affirmation, connected by a sense of celebration of an encounter between friends. Because the group is composed of people whose bond of friendship prevails over others and reside far from each other, so the preparation of every show is a pretext for a meeting. They have, therefore, in its pleasure of meeting, its strongest motivation, and the presentation performed is the fulfillment of this ritual: the construction of a dialogue around a common axis—a film and its narrative.

These celebrations, however, are of a different order with respect to conventional meetings between friends: governed by sound and, therefore, not strictly verbal,

i.e., not solely regulated by verbal language. I would say that the performances operate with interpretations of each musician of the film images translated into sound images which are put on the table in nonverbal dialogue allowing for the exchange of sound images. And with objects of greater semantic openness, these exchanges are done at another scale and complexity: they may occur simultaneously, not just chronologically. And they are short of (or beyond) the concept, semantically constituting dense images, i.e., where minimum nuances are significant. They operate, therefore, at a more subtle and less precise register than in strictly verbal dialogue, being more volatile and prone to higher density of events, by superimposing and "feedbacking" each other in minimal nuances.

Exchanging these objects conveyed by film images involves a game that decants on two levels: one is constructing the trade between sound images; the other is the group's immersion while listening to the dialogue in an attempt to shape the overall sound from an individual sound gesture which will be heard and assimilated by the others. A whirling process due to its time intensity, when, in the case of film recreations, looking-listening to the original film, we take action and listen to the others in order to shape the outcome. It's an activity requiring extreme concentration, but at the same time, freedom, because there is no aim to achieve a fixed result.

Here's the game: what instrument best fits a certain scene, and then, which of its sounds should be illustrated? What gesture? I make my choice, but my companions select other instruments and other sounds. We put ourselves to listen; we dose our gestures, silencing or playing them. The game of fitting, for example, between a sound of a music box and the image of a gallant bandit: a junction between two images that form, by collision, a third. But the amalgam is broken instantly by another solution, given at the same time by a second member of the group, who engages another sound with that visual image. Let's say he plays over the music box with an accordion and a fourth meaning is formed. And, so it goes on: an "open game that modifies its own rules at every move" (Flusser, 2008, p. 129). But an uncompromising game in terms of fixed or ideal results, that becomes an incessant construction of meanings--sometimes at the limit of entropy – through a dialogue between sound images. These, in turn, are given meaning and incessantly mean the film context explicit on the screen.

"Movement during movement, meaning a phenomenon of redundancy, of self-representation, of being alive" (Gadamer, 1985, p. 38) – but movements ruled by the contexts to which the dialogues overlap.

If working at the entropic limit prevails as the driving force of a performance, unrestrained individual freedom of each member is never lost, in terms of choice of sounds and objects, as well as the manner of playing. Flusser's words on games and its action seem to fit perfectly to the group's practices, "musicians are lost to each other", being "both senders and receivers, individually and collectively, of the message being delivered (Flusser, 2008, p. 195). We have, therefore, confirmation of a practice that is not part of any type of pragmatism – an end that goes beyond the simple pleasure of playing. A confirmation of a game that is sound dialogue where participants share among themselves and with the audience a type of logic – the relationship with a movie – without, however, necessarily building anything fixed – that would lose the fluid nature of the dialogue, which characterizes its activity.

Even their rehearsals illustrate the exceedingly informal nature of a group of friends, but at the same time, a ritual of its practice of music dialogue. There is little in them that is conventional or pragmatic in the sense of preparing for a successful performance. There is, of course, a configuration of an infrastructure from which we will work: a selection of films and their excerpts, as well as preparing the matrices to be played. The preparation of individual sets⁴, set up always for a specific piece; finally, the choice of gestures and sounds that can stay between performances, consensually found by collective or individual insight.

⁴ That is, of the tangible and intangible instruments with which each person would work.



Figure 07: Personne presentation in April 2014 during the event *Encontros Carbônicos* at Largo das Artes, Rio de Janeiro.

But even the design of the set is an event regimented by the pleasure of meeting, for example, the exchange of tangible or intangible objects (tools, "sounds" or "patches"⁵) or search rituals. I remember that during the preparation of one of the concerts Liliza Mendes, Lilian Campesato and I went hunting for sound junk at the flea market on Praça XV in Rio de Janeiro. We started the hunt after we watched *Dreams that Money Can Buy* – a film we were working on – and became imbued in its surrealistic tone. Some of the objects we found became part of the performances, and so had a pragmatic purpose. But their choice, by the absurdness they represented while musical instruments, were collectively delightful for creating possible uses. There was an old Cuban maraca, a broken communion goblet that served as a bell, dental instruments used as irritating drumsticks, a foot of a porcelain doll (also a galling drumstick), old telephone bells, old, charming cookie or tea tins used as percussion instruments, among others. These objects also comprised the musical instruments or sound effects and scene elements in contrast to the images seen/heard on the screen.

⁵ For "sounds" I want to say sound files. Patches are what text files are called that store software programming structures for music creation, like Max/MSP, Pure Data or Open Music.

The search at the flea market was marked by a random glance among the many pieces exhibited—a walk, by the threesome, like in an exhibition, who selected the pieces based on their visual or sound resonance with what we wanted.

Professionalism

Another aspect correlated to those already discussed above is the nature of the group's work with respect to its status of working with music and its professional activity in music. The group's most recent performances were not professional because they were not remunerated as they would be in the music business. They were obviously paid but at below market values. Therefore, this says much about the society in which we work--the group played in events organized by art schools, or by art collectives and in universities--that is, by institutions that, in theory, should properly remunerate artists who work for them. But by accepting these terms of performance, the group accepted the sacrifice in favor of maintaining the ritual of meeting—a will to perform with an expectation much more for pleasure than payment for work performed. This text, in fact, emphasizes this characteristic, though I fear it may become an object of academic measurement, and therefore in contradiction with the spirit of the meeting.

And yet, I believe it was no accident that the presentations took place in institutional places connected to the visual arts and cinema: it seems to me that, in these types of environments, the community is more receptive to non-standard “musical” performance practices--little accepted in places connected to concert music or even institutionalized locations for popular music. These are opinions based on my experience of working in both areas. I then learned that in the music institutions, a proposal like *Personne's* would have little resonance. Its open nature, far from a concept in the Western sense, is not totally suitable to what is expected of a traditional music performance.

But I suspect that its irreverent aspect--arising from unpretentiousness in face of a performance of a musical work, besides not pretending to associate with current concert or popular music--is what least fits the musical setting intended or realized by the Brazilian middle class (who are, after all, the audience and *Personne's* performers). A social class that is traditionally tied to values such as

stylistic and historical connections, technical rigor, the appearance of dedication and hard work, specialness and/or erudition, authorship and formal finishing-- which, taken by themselves, do not articulate with the broader context of Brazilian society (Flusser 1998, p. 53, 79;. Cocco, 2014, p. 114). They are values this class built to separate itself as much from the lower classes, through exalting erudition and specialness achieved by dedication in terms of time, as much as the upper class, by valuing work as an individual effort.

It's not that we don't share, even inadvertently, some of these values. But the group is not committed to them. This reflects in the uncontrolled performances from a technical point of view, unrepeatable, comic, untied to any specific musical style, no authorship in the sense of not being governed by a composer/performer type hierarchy, by not relying on direction or conducting.

Musical device

In this text, I had the intention to discuss how the *Personne* group's latest performances encouraged the exchange of sounds produced or "found" on a film theme, rather than on a certain fixed sound result. Therefore, what the group emphasizes is the nature of an activity, not a work or an object to be fixed in memory. What remains for the group's members and the public is a dizzying game of sound images related to objects extrinsic to those created there (the films). Its performances are a "doing" that favors the immaterial over the material, being another device to create an object: they are not works, since it is not possible to statically capture them. The device is a pretext for meeting and consists of exchanging sound images inspired by visual, narrative, contextual or gestural images. And the entire ritual to prepare for the performance is an aesthetic fact by bringing elements to this get-together between friends that would not be present in a normal meeting: the currency of trade based on sound and film images, besides the game of choosing the elements put on the table. Finally, the fact that the group does not fit within the scope of professional music gives the group's presentations and preparation a ritual characteristic of celebrating friendship through music. As a pretext for meeting, the musical activity that follows takes on another form marked by the ethics of friendship, where freedom – not repetition, correction or the search for an ideal as an extrinsic beauty to the act itself – is the highest value. The very non-virtuosic

character of the musicians reaffirms the idea that listeners could also do what they perform on stage, decreasing its intrinsic separation.

I would like to emphasize, therefore, the aspect of the musical device that carries an ethics and a procedure, which differ from the usual musical practices and conveys the values and characteristics highlighted here. It's a device in the sense that puts Benjamin in "The author as a producer" – that is, of creative procedures of new procedures of creation, instead of products. Personne devices value a game that reshapes its rules during the actual act of playing, thereby merging listening and gestures of film images into dialogue, where the result tends to be volatile and elusive. And if there are any messages left, it is the significance of the game itself--the sound of a spiral dialogue whose image of freedom between its players and the joy of the meeting is the strongest celebration of friendship among the various aspects of the device proposed.

6. Playing without commitment (Fernando Iazzetta)

One day, a composer colleague said that the function of art was to pose good questions. Like any aphorism, its use can reveal profound truths or superficial platitudes: it all depends on how we use the phrase. If (fortunately) we cannot use this aphorism as a rule, I must recognize that it is revealing of a certain attitude towards musical creation that seems interesting to me. Consider: making music involves a number of contexts and conditions which, if they do not define the music, they establish its contours, albeit in a diffused way. Concert hall, stage/audience, score, string quartet, avant-garde, serialism are not just expressions that refer to musical questions, but are also symbolic, social and cultural constructions that make up this scenario. If it is not possible to think about music totally outside of this type of question, any set of terms like these will always be insufficient to define what music is.

Take for example the term contemporary music, which lends itself to designate a number of things created on behalf of the music of the last 100 years. The term reveals at least a lazy attitude of those who prefer not to confront the many different visions of where the music of the period converges. This contemporary music relies on a sense of community to exist, and each community--serialists, rockers, acousmatics, neo-romantics—strive to constitute a circle as particular as

it is delimited to create and disseminate its art. Though generic and general, the term contemporary music takes advantage of the fact that it says little to serve as an emblem used by everyone who aspires to say something with music. If there is still something to extract from the idea of contemporary music, perhaps it is to understand how these communities articulate, compete, and mirror each other and how they distinguish themselves.

When schools, styles and techniques are more or less well defined, the work of composition is to make itself recognizable within this repertoire. Composing becomes an attempt to dialogue with something that has already been designed (serialism, spectralism, new complexity, minimalism). If on the one hand, we have fertile ground for artistic creation, on the other, a short circuit appears, almost autophagic, of those who make music feeding itself on the search of its own musical solutions. When we can't get out of this circle--looking for new answers to the same questions--we run the risk of believing too much in solutions we find and think less about why we make music, or why anyone would be interested in our music.

It is not easy, and for many, nor necessary, to be free of it. But there are other ways out of the unrest that move that which we call music. Returning to the initial aphorism, we can, for example, invent new questions instead of feeling responsible for finding good answers. A good question is above all an opportunity to share something--a good answer may be just a moment to end an argument--not only to be open to what is not yet consolidated, but also to the vulnerability and instability of not knowing where things will go.

What is called experimentalism in art brings a bit of that spirit. Although the term is as inaccurate as diffuse, it is usually associated with a disruption of attitude toward the circle of questions already raised. Experimentalism would be a kind of adventure on a land that is not yet formed. There is nothing daydreamy about it, only the possibility of a taking a walk where we cannot yet clearly see a path.

I think that, to some extent, a group like *Personne* proposes something like this. The non-responsibility for presenting the right answers and "not belonging" to any already-established community opens the way to (re)present things that have long been separated from "serious" contemporary music. One of those things is exactly fun. Not necessarily the lack of seriousness, but the lack of

commitment to meet standards and good practices. Of course they exist, and are possibly impregnated in the background of each of the group's musicians. No wonder that in different languages the term music appears connected to adjectives like "classical", "savant" or "serious" to indicate a circumspect and contained practice. It's possible to be fun without losing seriousness, since there is an ethic that underlies the work of *Personne*. This ethic guides the aesthetics that, in turn, is dominated by an approach that favors the desires and the intuitions and not the law and order of music. First of all, the processes are driven by what is collective, even when the actions and decisions are not consensual. I call it generosity.

Generosity opens the way for this aspect that dominates the group's work: a collective creation. It is not simply to break the condition of the creator and the creature, composer and work, but especially to generate strategies of mutual understanding. Acting collectively is not just dividing up composing tasks, but rather to be an accomplice of what is done by the other. A relationship of trust between members becomes necessary, allowing them to take risks, which are shared by all. Therefore, there is no such thing as error in the performances. There is only a healthy tension brought about by the process of transforming the unexpected into music. This is a distinction in relation to musical practices based on a written and individual thought that takes place in an extended and different time from that of the performance. Writing ensures the existence of a regulated, composing process, ensures the permanence of ideas and ensures, above all, the establishment of a structural and structuralizing thinking of music.

By giving up the compositional process, a different type of problem arises: how to give shape to something that apparently does not depart from a preconceived form? The first wish is to resort to the idea of improvisation, a kind of umbrella-term where the time of composition is attached to the time of playing. But the word improvisation alone says little about the multiple possibilities of musical expression that are established outside the scope of the composition. In many cases, improvisation is supported by the prospect of sound events that will be generated over the next few moments in relationship to its very recent past. Thus, an improvised performance can be built within a sort of time frame, very narrow and slippery, where musicians seek to create relationships between what has just been played and what will be produced immediately in terms of sound.

This spirit of mind highly focused on the present and the interactive aspect of action and immediate reaction among musicians is what guides, for example, much of what we call free improvisation. But in *Personne*, this relationship is often put aside. What is being produced by one musician does not need to be related, in any specific or necessary manner, to what other musicians are playing. Instead of the dual aspect, that often sustains improvisational practices – question and answer, contrasting actions, relations between cuts and continuities – we provoke instability by the superimposing of musical elements that can be quite disconnected. If there is not necessarily a question and answer situation, the possibility arises for incorporating what is merely accidental. Of course, there is a game between control and lack of control, but to force the possibility of creating something musically interesting from an unintentional clash of different sound figures creates a healthy tension between the musicians, a state of permanent attention, since at any given moment a breach can be open in the sounds where anyone can intervene during the performance.



Figure 08: *Personne* presentation in April 2014 during the event *Encontros Carbônicos* at Largo das Artes, Rio de Janeiro.

The development of a game like this always ends up depending on two aforementioned intentions that need to be shared among the musicians: generosity and trust. On the one hand, every musician knows that his/her partner may at any time propose something unexpected and everyone should make room for that to happen. On the other hand, this openness is founded on the trust that each member will know, in their own way, how to deal with the unexpected. Often, the contribution of each musician is to offer a provocation that can stimulate other musicians to reprogram. What gives coherence to the performance is listening, since the actions – or what we could call gestures – can be quite diverse. A machine loop may be confronted with the erratic behavior of amplified objects that produce uncontrollable sounds. Or a vocal construction accompanied by bodily noises can provide a counterpoint to pre-recorded and invariable sonorous materials. In a traditional instrumental ensemble there is certain synchronization between the types of articulation, sonority and mode of operation of the instruments involved; in *Personne* this is completely discarded. Each musician builds his idea of an instrument and thereby establishes his/her vocabulary of possible sonic gestures. No sound is incompatible, but each of us must learn to constantly reconfigure him/herself so that the performance does not stagnate.

Although sound is the core of group's work, the scenic projection is also fundamental, therein, the importance of gestures. This here is not about an explicit theatricality, that is, to have an intentional narrative in gestures and actions. This concerns only the awareness of the presence on stage and the fact that every gesture is made up with every sound that stems from it. I refer to a dramaturgy that is constituted by the performance, by the presence and action of each one of the musicians. In the case of recreating of the *Symphonie pour un homme seul*, for example, what counted was not always the sound mimesis, in the acoustic sense, of the original work by Schaeffer and Henry. Generally, the re-creation of each of the movements of the work rested more on gestures that provoked sound in its intensity, density, and distribution in time.

In a more recent performance held at Largo das Artes in Rio de Janeiro⁶ (see Fig. 08), four musicians followed in line with the general sound framework, but also

⁶ A presentation performed on April 26, 2014 by *Personne* at Largo das Artes, Rio de Janeiro as part of the event "Encontros Carbônicos" with the participation of Alexandre Fenerich, Fernando

maintaining clear independence in relation to their particular ways of performing. I mean, everyone provided their own individual gestures. Some played small objects, as if creating a catalog of possibilities for sonifying what usually remains silent: tins, toys, and utensils. These objects, like a small musical band, imposed by their physicality, that which is possible to play. Each requires a gesture, a specific energy, effort and a technique of handling themselves. At the same time, pre-recorded sounds were used that could be triggered by electronic interfaces. Being pre-recorded, these sounds are irremediably bound by their inherent structures, their acoustic morphology. The electronic device normalizes and flattens the modes of sound production, since the same gesture can trigger the most varied types of sound. At the same time, it brings agility, diversity and a regularity that can barely be reached with the sounds produced with mechanical instruments, voice or objects that were triggered by percussion or friction. For this reason, the perception of sounds is reprogrammed every time they are inserted into the polyphony created by the group. The different gestures of each of the musicians complement each other and collide at the same time.

The marked differences in the modes of articulation of the sounds produced are an essential element in ensuring the individuality of the performance of each musician, but also function as a fundamental element of tension in order to create the game of sonic development during the performances.

There is in our performances a process that differs from other similar practices, such as free improvisation, when produced by groups of traditional instruments where control takes place at the note level, that is to say, at the level of sounds individually and sequentially articulated by the musician on his/her instrument. In *Personne*, the construction process is mostly based on the production of sounds, images and gestures of very different characteristics.

Iazzetta, Lílian Campesato and Rodolfo Caesar. A recording of the performance can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUveD-vKnO4>

7. Closing the text

If there is any intention in the texts presented here, it is dialogue, the sharing of the creative experience of the group. Contrary to what is often found in texts written by artists who comment on their own works, no one intends to demonstrate that the group's artistic creation stems from an initial formal plan, a pre-established method or any affiliation strategy or counter position to this or that school. Rather, the texts describe how a rich web of meanings can be woven from the gathering of artists willing to share their musical experiences. That is, the production of *Personne* matches what the musicians can exchange among themselves. But it also reflects a desire to move away from the closed and crystallized environment in which concert music has been fixed--concert halls, music festivals, and events promoted by (and for) academia.

The consequences of such a stimulating work like the transcreation of the *Symphonie* is not a result of what was wanted beforehand, but only the urge for discovery, curiosity and commitment of the musicians. Transcribing the sounds of *Symphonie* is not just a musical task, it is a work of invention that begins with understanding the work of Schaeffer and Henry and goes further by exposing the work to the understanding that each one of the participants of *Personne* has in regards to music in general. It is important to emphasize the strength of this process, because it was from it that the work performed by colleagues became a collective project.

Projects that followed the *Symphonie* may seem a little vague in their objectives, but maintained the same spirit of experimentation from the individual contributions of the participants. The works, strongly linked with images, clearly reflect the desire to transpose the low walls that nicely represent what is (or is generally understood as) music and to broaden the possibilities of the use of sound materials and stimuli within a performance environment. It is not, therefore, attaching music to an image, but to 'sonically' work with the references we have about art in general. If this sometimes results in some trace of formal precariousness or a lack of performance ability, it is because, for some time, we discredited the belief that technical rigor and formalization actually serve as applicable valuation parameters to any or all artistic production. These traits, coupled with the ephemerality of the work, gives us a lightness that has

long since abandoned in other niches of music (especially concert music) and allows us to take seriously everything that we're discovering.

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9. Links

Presentation of *Symphonie pour un homme seul* by Pierre Schaeffer & Pierre Henry, Parque Lage, Rio de Janeiro, on 16 October 2015:

- performance:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQOPHVTtio0>

- rehearsal:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Omv4_oeG1IY

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5D7_tQ42M8s

Presentation of *Personne* at the event Encontros Carbônicos at Largo das Artes, Rio de Janeiro, 26 April 2014:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUveD-vKnO4>