

## EDITORIAL

### The Ubimus Symposium in 2022, peeking into the musical past

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Twelve years, twelve events. Despite the well-established tradition of our community to get together, share results and challenge partners with unexpected new threads, this year opens a new stage. After much discussion, the Ubiquitous Music Group decided to take up Teresa Connor's proposal and coined a new name for our event, The Ubiquitous Music Symposium. Why symposium? Greeks got together to drink, eat and make music together. Meanwhile, they talked about politics, art, philosophy and some other trivia. They called this activity a symposium (or *symposion*). While we do not take up ancient Greek traditions literally (in particular, we firmly disavow exclusive, aristocratic and androcentric practices),<sup>1</sup> we still think of our yearly gatherings as opportunities to eat, drink and have fun while making music and talking about interesting stuff. Habits die hard.

Following the nice experiences of hybrid and remote events held in Porto Seguro, Bahia, Brazil in 2020 and Porto, Portugal, in 2021, this year our community decided to fully embrace the remote modality. The event was hosted by our partners at the State University of Paraná (Unespar), located in Curitiba, Brazil, under the able coordination of Felipe de Almeida Ribeiro.

So, what's new in ubimus in 2022? Not long ago, we were talking about an implosion of the way we have been experiencing and making music caused by the sudden and pervasive restrictions on face-to-face activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic [Keller, Costalonga and Messina 2020]. Back in April of 2020, we were asking:

Until today, music making has predominantly been done through face-to-face, synchronous interactions. While it is true that some forms of music making – for instance, studio post-production or karaoké – rely on resources that are prepared offline, the implicit target of musical activity is to make sound together, if possible in person and at the same time. The current pandemic has turned the traditional forms of music making into high-risk and in some cases potentially deadly activities. So is music making becoming an activity for a select elite, secluded from the mundane buzz and divorced from community exchanges, again? [Keller, Costalonga and Messina 2020: 3].

Interestingly, the answer to this question is both no and yes. The first answer is no, because the multiplicity of musical practices and the creative strategies adopted by grassroots initiatives put

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<sup>1</sup> On the misogynistic, slavocratic and elitarian character of the *symposion* in ancient Athens, cf. Reeder (1995).

pressure on the ongoing attempts to concentrate digital resources and services in the hands of a few corporate conglomerates. This struggle between center and periphery predates the COVID-19 pandemic [Santos 2011], but has entered a stage with potential consequences to everyday contexts that were previously not impacted by information technology. Domestic settings are a case in point. They have become a privileged venue for music making, impacting both the creative methods and the strategies for sharing [Keller et al. 2022]. An interesting byproduct is discussed by Maciel and coauthors (2022), who argue that the social-network formats adopted by artists such as Jacob Collier are gaining traction because of the incorporation of ubimus techniques. These practices treat the limitations of online music making as opportunities for creative action, rather than as a forced straitjacket tailored for in-person instrumental performance.

The second answer is yes, because the increased reliance on network-based resources of multiple practitioners has spiked the voracity of the corporate conglomerates. As Santos (2011) predicted, globalization does not only imply a concentration of assets in a small number of financial centers. It also involves the deployment of information infrastructure to take hold of digital resources. A recent development of this strategy is exemplified by the marketing of non-fungible tokens (NFTs). Non-fungible tokens are used as unique identifiers of digital resources. They apply the same logic and technology used in cryptocurrency, namely, blockchain. Blockchain algorithms demand huge energetic resources and can be maintained using a fairly low number of staff. Since blockchain ‘farms’ do not need to be located close to the urban centers, low-income economies with state-funded electricity services in fairly cold regions are sought by the conglomerates. Kazakhstan and Central Asia, Argentina, Chile, South Africa and New Zealand are the most likely targets. Which government will give in to the pressures of the lobbyist is anybody’s guess. In any case, the potential impact of the widespread monetization of digital resources can be disastrous for community initiatives such as ubimus. An alternative conceptual and methodological path is presented by Messina et al. (2022) and the recent advances in the applications of the musical internet as an infrastructure for sonification are discussed by Sarmiento et al. (2022).

Ubimus frameworks have established promising dialogues between diverse practices, including emergent areas, such as software archaeology [Lazzarini and Keller 2021b], and well-established fields, such as auditory display [Lazzarini and Keller 2021a]. Surprisingly, ubimus musicological initiatives have been rare. This symposium features several musicological proposals that point to a potential specificity of musicological studies within the realm of ubimus. Consider, for instance, gastrosonics [Freitas et al. 2019; Keller et al. 2022]. Mesz et al. (2022), Menezes and Lopes (2022), Rosales (2022) and Clímaco (2022) apply ubimus frameworks to address the complex relationship between food-related resources and music making. Gastrosonic applications include sonic and computational support for commensality, repurposing of food-related semantic tokens for timbral descriptions and the use of textures as visual triggers for creative action. The flexible qualities of ubimus frameworks are exemplified by the close connections between these techniques and the range of creative-action metaphors featured in the ubimus literature, such as graphic-procedural tagging, semantic tagging and the use of visual poetry as a resource for creative action [Leal and Costalonga 2022].

Two papers feature advances in the emerging field of ubimus archaeology. Keller, Radivojević

and Lazzarini (2022) provide a survey of methods and concepts of the transition between analogue and digital technologies that took place between the decades of 1950 and 1960. They focus on the archaeological study of a replica of Jean-Claude Risset's (1968) *Little Boy*, using the recently reconstructed compiler of the MUSIC V programming language, documented by Lazzarini and Keller (2021b). Complementarily, Azzigotti and Radivojevic (2022) present their browser-based prototype *M5live*, a tool constructed around the same MUSIC V compiler, that enables its usage as an online live-coding environment. These proposals also highlight the versatility of the ubimus frameworks as enablers for investigations of the musical past with potential developments for the future of musicking.

A renewed dialogue between soundscape composition and ubimus is featured in the musical performance and theoretical discussion developed by Mackay and coauthors (2022). Their project *Networking the Flight of the Monarchs* adds weight to the concept of ecological performativity laid out by Connors (2015). Previous work on soundscape techniques had indicated a potential incompatibility between ubimus and soundscape-oriented concepts [Villena 2014].<sup>2</sup> Villena proposed a comparison between the performative installations touch'n'go [Keller 1999] and Urbana A2 [Ferretti and Paim 2010]. In his conclusions, he argues that ubimus research opens new doors to technology-based music composition and social interactions. Contrastingly, soundscape approaches would focus on the relationships between humans and environment aiming to unveil the evocative aspects of recorded sound. As exemplified in Mackay and coauthors' work, one problem of Villena's analysis is that he does not consider the distributed factors of creative endeavors. Multiple ubimus initiatives have targeted local resources as material for creativity (including but not limited to sounds). Koszolko (2022) and Byrne's (2022) artworks are two recent examples. Soundscape methods entail a studio-centric perspective that most often than not involves a single composer's engagement with sonic resources removed from their original settings. Whether this technique is truer to its origins than the ubimus metaphor of time tagging (which involves mixing in place) is probably less relevant than the fact that soundscape composition does not target support for collaborative music making or casual participation. Mackay's, Koszolko's and Byrne's projects provide complementary techniques for usage of local resources that hint that ubimus may be reaching beyond the realm of soundscape composition: DIY techniques, usage of transitional settings for creative purposes and a strong reliance on collaboration are well represented in these works.

Kramann (2022) continues with his passionate attempts to excogitate tools that conjugate everyday musical creation and little-c creativity with game theory and computational thinking (CT). While CT has had a strong impact on twentieth-century music making, it has nevertheless not been widely adopted as a strategy to ground alternative music-educational activities [Keller, Costalonga and Messina 2020]. Given this gap, ubimus furnishes an opportunity to apply the lessons learned in CT-based professional creativity to the realms of little-c music making and informal education. In this context, Kramann's proposal consists of a hybrid format between a

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<sup>2</sup> “Os autores que trabalham sob o conceito de paisagem sonora pretendem continuar, aparentemente, a basear suas criações pela intencionalidade “evocativa” dos entornos, pretendem trazer à tona, de diferentes maneiras, a relação do ser humano com o meioambiente. Os autores que tratam da computação ubíqua aplicada a criação musical dedicam-se a mostrar como a tecnologia abre novas portas à metodologia de composição musical e instigam novas interações sociais. Pretender englobar as pesquisas de uma área no âmbito da outra não contribui ao desenvolvimento do conhecimento, é uma tentativa estéril de esmagar as divergências” [Villena 2014: 12-13].

lecture and a performance, involving, among other things, a chess game, an augmentation canon and a composition generated from brainwaves. Kramann offers us a series of meaningful interrogatives for future ubimus endeavors, mainly related to the establishment of continuative traditions in terms of everyday creativity.

Apropos of interrogatives, are the questions raised by Keller, Costalonga and Messina in 2020 still valid?

The expanded notions of music making encouraged by the ubimus conceptual frameworks seem to acquire a special relevance during these times of scarcity. Reduced physical mobility, lack of face-to-face, physical interaction, avoidance of crowds are all detrimental factors for the acoustic-instrumental ways of music making. Will musical robots, musical algorithms or refined methods of data analysis replace music making as it was done during the twentieth century? [...]. Will the new areas of ubimus application, highlighting the usage of domestic settings, the asynchronous strategies of group support and the incorporation of multiple modalities of exchange help to foster well-being, musical diversity and meaningful interaction? [Keller, Costalonga and Messina 2020: 3].

We can answer that part of the proposals presented at previous ubimus gatherings are now starting to flourish. Gastrosonics, ubimus archaeology and the applications of computational thinking form part of this package. Unexpected developments, such as the musicological usage of ubimus frameworks are slowly taking shape. Furthermore, domestic settings have acquired special relevance after 2020.

An open research issue in ubimus is how to approach diverse musical traditions and cultural contexts without subscribing to the prescriptive or culture-cleansing tendencies that plagued music theory during the 20th century. An interesting path is suggested by Kramann's piece *In X* (2022). Kramann incorporates constraints in his generative processes that emulate the techniques applied by Terry Riley's *In C*. But this is not yet another stylistic study. The objective is to create a new musical process with its own internal logic that establishes an open dialogue with the extant repertoire. In a sense, Kramann's perspective is similar to the adoption of archaeological methods in current creative practices (as exemplified in the live-coding examples enabled by *M5live*). There is an unsolved tension between supporting established genres and expanding creative practices. We believe this conflict of aims will worsen as new research threads that engage with past music-making increase their presence in ubimus. Hence, a potential limit for ubimus expansion is slowly emerging: How innovative can our methods become before they lose relevance and relatedness to the extant musical knowledge? Hopefully, our community will find answers and solutions for this conundrum within the next few years... or maybe decades.

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