

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Creating from the Body: Gendered Agency in Contemporary Music Performance

Iracema de Andrade Almeida 

Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información Musical “Carlos Chávez” | Mexico

Abstract: This article explores how practices led by female performers can offer a situated model for challenging two deeply entrenched conventions in Western concert music: *Werktreue* (the ideal of fidelity to the composer’s score) and the paradigm of the disciplined yet ostensibly “neutral” performer’s body. Grounded in my artistic practice as a Brazilian-Mexican *performer-creator*, I present four electroacoustic audiovisual works for five-string electric cello—developed in collaboration with visual artists Adela Marín (Costa Rica) and Jessica Rodríguez (Mexico) as part of the collective *Féminas Sonoras*. Drawing on feminist theory, decolonial thought, and a practice-as-research methodology, I explore how aesthetic choices can function as critical tools for reclaiming artistic agency. I introduce the concept of the *female sonic body* as a situated, culturally inscribed site of authorship and knowledge production. Rather than reproducing dominant paradigms of concert music, the *performer-creator* practice seeks to re-signify the act of performance as both a feminist and epistemological intervention.

Keywords: Music performance, contemporary music, gender studies, electroacoustic and audiovisual practices.

Over the past few decades, music scholarship has demonstrated through multiple perspectives how male centered canons have historically disciplined female performers into bodily and artistic compliance (e.g., Bull, 2019; Citron, 1993; Cumming, 2000; Cusick, 1994, 1999; Green, 2003; McClary, 2002; Yoshihara, 2007; Koskoff, 2014; McCormick, 2015; McMullen, 2006; Ramos, 2013). Simone de Beauvoir marked a turning point in feminist thought by offering a new perspective on the female condition, challenging the assumption of biological determinism and framing it instead as a socio-cultural construction (de Beauvoir, [1949] 2016). In the context of women performers in concert music, I would venture a paraphrase of the French philosopher’s premise: we are not born “female performers”; rather, we become one. This understanding calls attention to the fact that becoming a female performer is a gradual process shaped through extensive professional training, and that this condition is constructed from the cultural meanings historically inscribed onto the female body within the Western art music (Bull, 2019; Citron, 1993; Cusick, 1994; Green, 2003; Yoshihara, 2007; McCormick, 2015; McMullen, 2006). The development of an instrumental performer has been shaped by methods, habits, routines, rules, and historically established practices within concert music conventions, which, among other factors, have led to the disciplining of their corporeality.

As Marcela Lagarde asserts, “the body is the most precious object of power” (Lagarde, 1996, p. 56), suggesting that it is institutions that control and recreate bodies through various processes of reiteration for specific social purposes. As Lucy Green observes, the classical music discourse systematically denies the relevance of bodily exhibition in musical meaning (Green, 2003)— a denial that effectively erases the performer’s embodied presence from critical discourse. These patterns of erasure are reinforced by pedagogical models that continue to dominate classical music training today—models grounded in nineteenth-century ideals and sustained by the enduring authority of two canonical categories: the composer and the musical work (Bull, 2019; Goehr, 2002; Green, 2003). Among the relationships that arise from this referential duality is the figure of the disciplined performer as a compliant labor force, upon whom the responsibility falls to faithfully realize the composer’s intentions as encoded in the musical text (i.e., the score). As Lydia Goehr notes, this relationship entails control over the performer’s body through the authority of the text, legitimized by the paradigm of *Werktreue*— the notion that fidelity to the musical work equates to fidelity to its

score (Goehr, 2002). In this configuration, the performer's body becomes a vessel for transmission rather than a site of agency, subjectivity, or meaning-making.

One of the most recalcitrant examples of the irreconcilably subordinate position of the performer in relation to the composer's text is that of Igor Stravinsky, who asserts that "The secret of perfection lies above all in *his* awareness of the law imposed on *him* by the work *he* is performing"¹ (Stravinsky, [1947] 2003, p. 127)². Within the context of canonical repertoires, this supremacy of the notated work enforces a model of sound realization that demands fidelity above interpretation—a paradigm that negates the performer's subjectivity and treats any expressive agency as an unwelcome deviation. This ideal of strict fidelity to the composer's will—where the performer submits entirely to the authority of the written score—is not an isolated aesthetic stance, but part of a broader historical logic that privileges textual transcendence over embodied expression. Anna Bull situates such moral and aesthetic disciplining of the performer within a broader historical trajectory that began with the Reformation, which shifted the experience of the sacred away from the sensuous body and toward a disembodied, sublime domain. This transformation, she argues, led to the regulation of emotional and sensory expression through religious texts and the internalization of cognitive control: "This idea of the sacred as located outside the body in a transcendent realm, mediated by a written text ... [means that] the body must be both disciplined and at the same time effaced or transcended" (Bull, 2019, p. 51). In both cases, the performer's body becomes a disciplined site—present and necessary for the realization of the work, yet stripped of agency, affect, and visibility—required to function as a neutral conduit for meanings that originate elsewhere and are authorized by external texts.

This regime of bodily control, rooted in both religious and aesthetic traditions, becomes even more prescriptive when applied to performers whose bodies are gendered as female. Bull points out that classical music, especially its education in the Victorian period, became a means for young women to perform "respectable" or "proper femininity". Music was seen as having a contested moral

¹ Italics mine.

² Composers belonging to the musical avant-garde movement of the second half of the 20th century sought ways to open up the score and grant performers a degree of creative agency. Techniques such as graphic notation and controlled probability allowed for some interpretive freedom; nevertheless, it could be argued that the hierarchical tension between composer and performer largely remained intact. On the role of performers and open scores see Pierre Boulez, *Relevés d'apprenti*. Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1966.

status as its sensuality was linked to “degeneracy,” but if controlled, it could cultivate religious faith and character. This led to the disciplining of the female body in ways that sought to erase any association with sexuality or emotional excess. For instance, the seated position at the instrument was expected to align with ideals of female modesty: no awkward movements, altered facial expressions, or suggestive gestures were permitted that might disrupt the image of respectable femininity (Bull, 2019, pp. 73–74)³. While institutions historically promoted gendered ideals of respectability, the realities of professional life as performers in the public sphere often contradicted these expectations. According to Susan McClary, “Women on the stage are viewed as sexual commodities regardless of their appearance or seriousness” (McClary, 2002, p. 151). For McClary, when a woman enters a performance space, her body often speaks for itself, becoming the center of attention or an object of desire.

This perception of the female body on stage—shaped by intersectional categories and the dynamics of the objectifying male gaze⁴—has repeatedly functioned as a factor influencing the scrutiny and judgment of women’s adherence to the ideal of *Werktreue* and, by extension, their professional competence. Along similar lines, Green argues that male performers are granted a kind of gender transparency during the performance of concert music, whereas female performers are not afforded the same neutrality. Although the discourse surrounding classical music is centered on the ideal of its autonomy, she emphasizes that the gender of a music professional plays an important and often unrecognized role in the discourse about music and musical meaning:

When we listen to a woman sing or play, and when we listen to music which she has composed or improvised, we do not just listen to the inherent meanings of the music, but we are also aware of her discursive position in a nexus of gender and sexuality. From this position, her femininity becomes a part of the music’s delineations. Clearly, by my definition of inherent musical meaning as a virtual category which is purely to do with musical materials, inherent meaning itself can have nothing to do with gender. But the gendered delineation of music does in fact not stop at delineation: it continues from its delineated position to become a part of the discourse on music, and from that position to affect listeners’ responses to and perceptions of inherent meaning, and thus our very musical experiences themselves. When music delineates femininity through a female

³ Regarding the social control of female bodies and its effects, see Iris Marion Young, Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality. *Human Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, April, pp. 137-156, 1980. In this article, the author discusses common modalities of female bodily behavior, motility, and spatiality that arise from patriarchal culture, through which women are physically inhibited, confined, positioned, and objectified in contemporary society.

⁴ See the foundational works of Laura Mulvey, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, *Screen*, Volume 16, Issue 3 (Autumn 1975), pp. 6–18; and bell hooks, The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), pp. 115-131 for further discussion on the concept of the male gaze.

performer or composer, we are liable to also judge the handling of inherent meanings by that performer or composer, in terms of our idea of her femininity. In a relationship of circularity, gendered musical practice, musical meaning and musical experience are entwined (Green, 2003, p. 16).

When women perform, listeners inevitably filter a work's intrinsic meanings through gendered constructs forged by musical culture. Because live performance places the performer's body in plain view, intersecting markers such as gender, age, and race become inescapable, and the social dynamics and power structures behind those markers decisively shape the listening experience (Bull, 2019; Yoshihara, 2007; McMullen, 2006). As Green observes, mitigating the "disruptive" aspect of feminized corporeality would demand a concerted effort from both the female performer and the audience—an attempt to neutralize her gender so that the music's sonic substance can be apprehended in its ideal form. Yet even if such an effort were made, the performer's body would still remain under visual scrutiny throughout the performance. This tension illustrates what I understand as a dual disciplinary mandate imposed on women: one that requires fidelity to both the composer and the work in order to legitimize their musical competence. To be recognized as "music professionals" rather than merely "female musicians", they would need to exceed the standard definition of excellence (Green, 2003). Beyond technical proficiency, a female performer would be expected to demonstrate bodily sobriety and restraint in order to be regarded as a serious artist (Citron, 1993; Green, 2003; McClary, 2002; McCormick, 2015; Scharff, 2018; Yoshihara, 2007). This tensional structure exemplifies the biopolitical regulation of the female performer's body, where artistic legitimacy is contingent on conformity to gendered norms of bodily conduct.

This imperative to discipline the female body in performance—to minimize its visibility and neutralize its perceived "excess"—is symptomatic of a deeper structural bias within Western art music. It reflects not only gendered expectations of bodily restraint, but also a broader ideological framework that devalues embodiment itself as a site of artistic knowledge and authority. Furthermore, this regime does not exist in isolation; rather, it reflects and reinforces a broader ideological division working within Western musical culture—one that privileges disembodied, abstract creation over embodied, performative practice. As scholars such as Suzanne Cusick (1994) and Lucy Green (2003) have identified, the patriarchal canon constructs composition and music analysis as elevated intellectual endeavors aligned with rationality, autonomy, and technological mastery, while

performance is relegated to the realm of the body—framed as ephemeral, sensuous, and subordinate. This dichotomy not only devalues performative labor but also sustains a gendered epistemological hierarchy in which the bodily presence of female performers is rendered suspect or excessive, while artistic authority remains tethered to masculinized ideals of abstraction and control.

1. Disciplinary Discourses and Disruptive Practices

While Cusick and Green's critique remains foundational, it is important to expand this analysis to account for the intersection of gender and geopolitics within the frameworks of Eurocentrism, coloniality, and institutional musical norms—even if such an expansion lies beyond the scope of this article. In many regions of the Global South, classical music institutions continue to reproduce Eurocentric and patriarchal values. Here, the legacy of colonialism compounds gendered hierarchies, sustaining performer-composer binaries and reinforcing Western aesthetic paradigms as universal standards. Although contemporary shifts in some global contexts have begun to challenge the absolute authority of the score, the composer, and the disciplinary control of the performer's body, such transformations remain uneven. In many conservatories, festivals, and concert spaces outside the Euro-American sphere, fidelity to the canon continues to function as a dominant legitimizing force. Yet despite these constraints, the question is not only how female performers have been restricted by canonical ideologies, but also how their artistic practices can actively intervene in and reshape these structures—enabling new models of musical creation to emerge as powerful sites of transformation and expansion. In performance contexts informed by feminist, queer, and decolonial aesthetics, female artists reclaim visual and sonic self- definition.

By foregrounding their bodies as expressive sites of meaning rather than passive objects of display, they disrupt the logic of spectatorship embedded in male-centered traditions. In this light, female performers who center corporeality not only challenge dominant aural and visual regimes, but also invite audiences into new ethical and interpretive relationships—where body, subjectivity, and identity co-produce musical meaning beyond the limits imposed by traditional hierarchies of production and reception. Within the specific field of Latin American audiovisual and electroacoustic music detailed case studies exploring how female performers assume compositional

or authorial agency—without abandoning the concert stage and within institutional frameworks—remain rare. From my vantage point as a Brazilian-Mexican cellist who identifies as a woman and specializes in contemporary music performance, I seek to address this gap by articulating an alternative model grounded in embodied and situated knowledge.⁵ Throughout my career, I have commissioned, premiered, and recorded numerous new works for my instrument. Even though I have participated in collaborative processes with (mostly male) composers,⁶ my role has almost always been confined to the traditional one-way composer-to-performer paradigm (de Andrade, 2023; 2013). Alongside this work, I never stopped experimenting with generating my own electroacoustic sounds and music. For various reasons, these explorations remained invisible until recent years, when I first had the opportunity to present my own creations publicly. During my academic training in Brazil women had limited access to composition; the role historically assigned to most of us was that of performers in service to “the composer and *his* work.” I never received formal training in composition, and my entry into music creation has been gradual, self-directed, and motivated by a desire to redefine that inherited role while expanding my artistic practice. As I began sharing these creations publicly, I developed a self-understanding as a *performer-creator*—an artist who generates her own sonic and musical materials and performs them herself in concert—while consciously distancing myself from the uncritical adoption of the term “composer”, with its Eurocentric and patriarchal associations. While I remain cautious about fully embracing the label of composer, I also

⁵ This article adopts a gender-focused lens to examine performer subjectivity and identity within Western art music traditions. However, it does not presume a homogeneous experience of womanhood. The reflections and analyses offered emerge from a specific standpoint—that of a Latin American female performer working in audiovisual and mixed electroacoustic music. Other intersecting axes such as race, class, sexuality, ability, and geopolitical context are acknowledged as crucial, though not explored in depth here. These dimensions merit further inquiry in future work committed to intersectional perspectives.

⁶ For further analysis and discussion on participatory composition and the creative labor of performers in shaping contemporary sonic practices, see Jessa Aslan and Emma Lloyd, “Breaking Boundaries of Role and Hierarchy in Collaborative Music-Making,” *Contemporary Music Review* 35, no. 6 (2016): 630–647; Margaret S. Barrett, *Collaborative Creative Thought and Practice in Music* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Nicole Canham and Carlos Charles, “An Evolving Collaboration: Performer and Composer Approaches to Creating Visual Music,” in *El intérprete de música mixta: Perspectiva histórica, aportaciones y desafíos*, *Sonic Ideas/Ideas Sónicas* 9, no. 17 (2016): 19–28, ed. Iracema de Andrade; David Gorton and Stefan Östersjö, “Choose Your Own Adventure Music: On the Emergence of Voice in Musical Collaboration,” *Contemporary Music Review* 35, no. 6 (2016): 579–598; Sam Hayden and Luke Windsor, “Collaboration and the Composer: Case Studies from the End of the 20th Century,” *Tempo* 61, no. 240 (2007): 28–39; Jillian Torrence, “Rethinking the Performer: Towards a Devising Performance Practice,” *VIS – Nordic Journal for Artistic Research* (2018); Vera John-Steiner, *Creative Collaboration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Iracema de Andrade, *El intérprete y la praxis musical en el siglo XXI: Desafíos en la consolidación de una tradición interpretativa en obras electroacústicas mixtas con sistemas computacionales interactivos*, in *Heterofonía, Revista de Investigación Musical*, INBAL-CENIDIM, ed. Aurelio Tello (2023); Eric F. Clarke and Mark Doffman, eds., *Distributed Creativity: Collaboration and Improvisation in Contemporary Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Isabel Nogueira and Linda O’Keefe, eds., *The Body in Sound, Music and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2023).

seek to question and expand the category from within. In my practice, composing involves improvisation, technological mediation, centrality of corporeality and shared authorship—modes of creation often deemed peripheral within canonical frameworks. My refusal to conform to the normative image of the composer is not a rejection of creative authority, but a deliberate repositioning. The *performer-creator* paradigm aims to subvert the historical division between composition and performance, challenge the authority of the score (Goehr, 2002), and unsettle the Cartesian dualism between mind and body that underpins the disciplinary performer model (Green, 2003; Cusick, 1994).

2. From the *Female Sonic Body* Outward: Centering the *Performer-Creator*

My participation in *Féminas Sonoras*—a Mexico City–based collective project (2020–2021) led by Latin American women artists and sponsored by the Ibermúsicas Program⁷— was instrumental in deepening my artistic engagement with questions of gender, embodiment, and creative agency. At the core of my work is the re-signification of corporeality—understood as lived experience, subjectivity, and the social, cultural, and symbolic dimensions of the body— not only as an expressive element of performance, but as a generative site of aesthetic meaning. By rejecting the authority of the fixed score and reclaiming corporeality, I began to challenge the symbolic economy of Western concert music and the gendered biases embedded within it. Drawing on Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity (1999), I frame identity not as a fixed attribute but as something constituted through embodied enactment. From this perspective, the *performer-creator* practice recognizes the body’s historical inscription as a site of disciplinary constraint, while actively re-signifying it as a space for agency and transformation. This framework supports my broader argument: that body-centered creative practices led by women performers in Latin America can articulate counter-hegemonic models—ones that resist patriarchal and Eurocentric value systems still entrenched in twenty-first-century concert music, especially in postcolonial contexts.

⁷ *Ibermúsicas* is a multilateral cooperation program established in 2011 to enhance the presence, exchange, and mobility of music and musicians across the Ibero-American region. It supports artistic creation, circulation, and professional growth for artists from participating countries, which include Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Spain, and others. The program places a strong emphasis on cultural exchange, inclusion, and promoting gender equity within musical practices.

The four works I present here—*Céu da Boca*, *Ronín*, *Espectros de Água* and *Rabeca*⁸—emerged from the *Féminas Sonoras* project. Our collective goal was to create a new repertoire for five-string electric cello, synthesizer, electroacoustic sounds, and visual media—one that explores themes of life, death, memory, and identity through embodied female imaginaries shaped by affect and cultural inscription⁹, while embracing shared authorship and collective reflection. Although this article primarily focuses on gendered agency in contemporary music performance, the broader *Féminas Sonoras* project is also deeply informed by decolonial thought. In particular, it resonates with Pedro Pablo Gómez Moreno's concept of decolonial aesthetics (2019) which emphasizes the liberation of *aisthesis* from the epistemic control of Western philosophical aesthetics. According to Gómez Moreno, decolonial aesthetics does not propose a style or method, but rather a situated, critical intervention grounded in the lived experiences, memories, and sensibilities of peoples historically marginalized by colonial systems of power. It aims to dismantle aesthetic hierarchies imposed by modernity and, instead, affirms plural ways of sensing, knowing, and creating. In this sense, *Féminas Sonoras* can be understood as a feminist and embodied response to the legacies of coloniality embedded in Western concert music practices in the Global South. These four pieces were not conceived merely to expand the cello repertoire; rather, they function as performative and discursive acts that interrogate who holds the authority to create—and under what conditions.

Central to this inquiry is the concept I propose of the *female sonic body*: not merely a physical entity, but a gendered, situated, and culturally inscribed corporeality—through which musical meaning is not simply conveyed but actively produced. This notion challenges the traditional view of performance as mere execution, reframing the performer as an epistemic agent. Paul Craenen's typology of the *performing body* (2014) and my articulation of the *female sonic body* share a fundamental aim: both confront the historical invisibility and presumed neutrality of the body in

⁸ After their premiere, these works were selected through public calls to be presented at the following events: Festival Synchronis / Spanish Association for Electroacoustic Music and Sound Art, Musikene – Higher Center of Music of the Basque Country, San Sebastián, Spain (November 29, 2023); Festival Synchronis / Spanish Association for Electroacoustic Music and Sound Art, ATENEA 2023 – International Congress of Women in Arts, Sciences, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, Valencia, Spain (November 24, 2023); 6th International Symposium of New Music – SiMN 2023, Curitiba, Brazil (November 8, 2023); International Festival of Electroacoustic Music, Buenos Aires, Argentina (August 22, 2023); IV International Symposium "Women in Music", University of Costa Rica (March 25, 2022); 44th International Forum of New Music "Manuel Enríquez", MUAC (October 20, 2022); and the exhibition "Eco-Feminist Perspectives", Cultural Center of Spain in Costa Rica (March 8 – June 5, 2022).

⁹ While the *Féminas Sonoras* project was a collective endeavor, the works presented here are centered on my own practice as *performer-creator*. Therefore, I use "we" when referring to the shared conceptual premises and collaborative dynamics of the collective, and "I" when describing my individual contributions and specific inquiries.

Western musical discourse. However, while Craenen presents the body as a multifaceted compositional material from a composer-centric epistemological perspective, his model remains grounded in a relatively neutral ontology—one that risks overlooking the political, gendered, and cultural inscriptions embedded in bodily performance. In contrast, I foreground the situatedness of the performer’s body—specifically the female body—as a site of sonic resistance and visual interference. The *female sonic body* I propose is not a universal figure but a politicized, affective presence that disturbs patriarchal norms and disrupts the illusion of universality in music-making. This body is neither passive nor transparent. It is shaped by and responding to its historical, material, and cultural conditions. In my case, the *female sonic body* is also inseparable from the instrument I inhabit: the cello. My musical creativity emerges through a sonorous imagination that is fundamentally mediated by the tactile, acoustic, and technological affordances of the instrument. My body—both carnal and virtual—and the cello form a deeply entangled expressive system: an embodied sound apparatus through which meaning is generated, performed, and perceived.

Foregrounding the *female sonic body* as a source of creation and knowledge constitutes a powerful feminist gesture, but one that demands critical care to avoid essentialist assumptions. Embodied knowledge is not universal or biologically predetermined; it is shaped by historical, social, and cultural contexts that mediate how bodies are seen, heard, and interpreted. Drawing on Butler’s theory of gender performativity (1988, 1999) and Elizabeth Grosz proposition of the body as the primary framework for understanding subjectivity (1994), we approached embodiment not as a fixed female truth, but as a locus of subjectivity, affect, and power—constantly negotiated through performance. In this sense, the body becomes a site of inscription and resistance: what it does, how it moves, what it expresses, and how it is framed all participate in resignifying dominant gendered codes.

From this perspective, I acknowledge that I, too, perform gender onstage, and that my artistic choices are always socially inscribed. However, rather than denying gender codes, my practice engages them critically: sometimes by amplifying them to make their construction visible, other times by subverting or reconfiguring them through sonic and visual fragmentation. This reflexive approach aligns with Butler’s notion of “subversive repetition” (1999), in which normative structures are not negated but exposed and unsettled from within. If institutions discipline and define the roles that gendered bodies are expected to play in concert settings, then it is precisely through embodied artistic

acts—musical, visual, affective—that we may challenge this order. Within *Féminas Sonoras*, we sought to reposition embodiment not only as representational, but as a performative method of producing meaning and claiming authorship. Female agency, in this framework, does not arise solely from the visibility of the body in performance, but from the ways performers consciously manipulate and re-inscribe meaning onto that body and its representations. When framed as performative, situated, and critically informed, embodiment can function as a space of artistic resistance—opening the field to diverse, non-normative, and multiply gendered bodies to assert creative authority through presence and practice.

FIGURE 1 – Collective *Féminas Sonoras* (2021). Interdisciplinary group of artists Iracema de Andrade, Adela Marín and Jessica A. Rodríguez.



Source: Iracema de Andrade, personal archive.

2.1 *Céu da Boca* and *Ronín*

Céu da Boca and *Ronín* were conceived in collaboration with Mexican visual artist Jessica Rodríguez. Our aim was to explore how representations of the body—both fleshly and virtual—could amplify the performer’s subjectivity and identity. On both pieces, Rodríguez uses fragments of videos of zoomed parts of my body in order to create dynamic collages. Their independent

movements are position against images of natural landscapes. In the electroacoustic domain, I decompose the spectral structures of recorded sounds from my acoustic cello and my own voice, combining them with synthesized sounds. The instrumental part is improvisatory and seeks to establish gestural relationships of fusion and/or contrast with the electroacoustic material, both in its spectral and textural dimensions. To that end, I also apply various filters to the electric cello sounds using a synthesizer, which I control with my feet during the performance. *Céu da Boca*—a Portuguese title that translates as *Firmament of the Mouth*—refers both to the anatomical palate and to a symbolic space of emergence. In the sonic realm, the piece explores the idea of primordial sound as a creative force. According to the *Popol Vuh*, the world was not built through physical labor but brought into being through sound—through the act of speaking. The Mayan gods created existence by naming it aloud. In this cosmology, sound is not merely representational; it is generative. I transpose this concept to a more intimate scale, focusing on the subtle and procreant power of the sounds that emerge from the mouth—beyond articulated language. *Céu da Boca* reclaims the mouth as a site of emergence, a firmament from which new meanings and sonic worlds unfold. I pronounce invented words within melodic gestures, altering them through digital processing, producing trembling sounds and extended breaths. This spectral voice merges with the sound of the live cello and electroacoustic layer, creating evolving textures that unfold throughout the performance.

The second piece, *Ronín*, draws on Indigenous Amazonian healing chants, especially those linked to Shipibo-Konibo healer Olivia Arévalo, whose voice and memory are evoked in the final section. The title refers to the guardian serpent of Amazonian sacred plants—a spiritual protector of the vegetation believed to hold profound healing powers. The electric cello and electroacoustic elements evoke Ronín's movements and contortions, suggesting its presence within the spiritual realm. In my own imaginaries, the phantasmagorical voice that emerges in both pieces—anchored in Latin American cultural references—serves as a symbolic bridge between past and present. It evokes a genealogical thread inscribed in my mitochondrial DNA, reaching back to my ancestor, that first Indigenous woman—whose name has been lost in time—and her fateful encounter with the colonizer. This once-silenced voice becomes audible again, instantiated through my embodiment in performance.

In *Céu da Boca* and *Ronín*, the spectromorphological design is central, unfolding along a continuum from source-bonded materials—most notably the voice—to increasingly abstract sonic morphologies. Even as these sounds become more spectral and decontextualized, they retain an affective charge. The voice, in particular, functions as a fluid acousmatic entity, shifting between moments of personal address and abstract sonic texture while preserving a residual link to its source—my body. As Cusick observes, “voice is the body, its very breath and interior shapes projected outward into the world as a way others might know us [...]” (Cusick, 1999, p. 29). In this sense, my sung, whispered, and spoken voice—processed through electroacoustic resources—performs a virtual rendering of the body’s interior space, expressing subjectivity as inner life. The voice thus enacts the body, making embodiment audible, and, in my case, inscribing that embodiment specifically as a woman. Through processes of spectral transformation, the voice traverses into metaphorical and emotionally resonant space, inhabiting the tension between embodied and disembodied sonic identities. This dynamic aligns with Denis Smalley’s notion of the voice as both referential and abstract (2007) and with Michel Chion’s concept of the *acousmatic persona* (1994), wherein the dislocated voice hovers between presence and absence.

Rodríguez combines videos and photographs of vegetation with edited images of my body to construct a kaleidoscopic narrative that evokes dreamlike shifts in perception and altered sensory awareness. These visual materials interact with the electroacoustic layer, generating shifting geometric patterns that deconstruct my projected figure and contrast it with the organic quality of my live, physical gestures on the stage. The result is a dynamic interplay between the mediated and the embodied self: the virtual body—refracted, fragmented, and autonomous—both departs from and continuously refers back to the incarnate body present in the performance space. This mirror-like tension creates a kinetic field in which corporeal intensities are concentrated and expanded. The visual rhythm—how the mediated body appears and disappears—guides the audience’s gaze, returning it again and again to the fleshly matrix of the live performer. These layered visual and sonic narratives become embedded in the performance, generating a sensorial dissonance that unsettles fixed boundaries between physical presence and digital projection. Close framings of specific parts of my body and of my cello transform mimetic and figurative elements into magnified, mobile fragments. These visuals, in dialogue with the ghostly presence of my voice in the electroacoustic

space and my instrumental gestures onstage, produce a kind of moving fractal. This dual presence—live and mediated—generates a type of expanded corporeality, in which the body and the instrument become inseparably linked, forming a unified entity.

In both pieces, my corporeality is presented as dual: at once mediated—through video and projection—and materially grounded in my live presence. It becomes the central site and sign of the music, oscillating between virtual trace and physical reality. In the performance space, these multiple representations interact dialogically with the sonic elements, giving rise to a structure irreducible to the sum of its parts—a coherent, indivisible whole. Consequently, these creations are inseparably tied to my subjectivity and identity as *performer-creator*—much like a custom-tailored suit. Their significance derives not only from my body as a biological entity, but also from the cultural and symbolic inscriptions it carries: my name, artistic trajectory, physical traits, gendered playing style, and embodied presence. As an extension of the *female sonic body*, these works are shaped to my particular artistic and physical imprint—like a garment tailored precisely to my form. Performing them without me would strip away much of their embodied meaning, rendering interpretation by other musicians largely irrelevant. Paradoxically, what might appear as a limitation—the singularity of my body—becomes a generative condition, opening new imaginaries for how female performers' identities and modes of representation can be articulated within concert music.

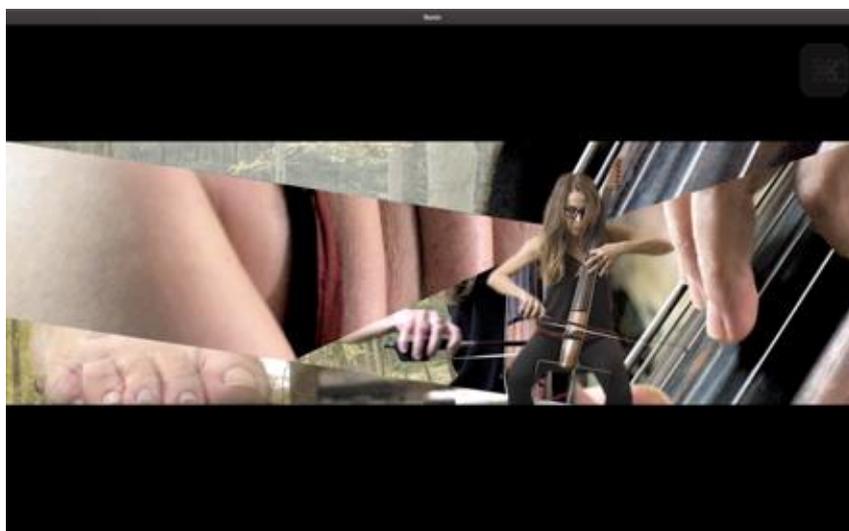
FIGURE 2 – *Céu da Boca* (2021). The performer's facial expressions and mouth movements are detached from the body, interacting with both the pre-recorded voice and live instrumental sounds.



Still frame of *Céu da Boca* (2021). Source: Iracema de Andrade, personal archive.

VIDEO 1 – *Céu da Boca* (2021), for electroacoustic sounds, 5-string eCello, synthesizer, and video. Iracema de Andrade, musical and electroacoustic creation, 5-string electric cello, voice, and audio design. Jessica Rodríguez, visual composition, photography, editing, and image post-production. <https://youtu.be/VFemGoYkKmk>

FIGURE 3 – *Ronín* (2021). Kaleidoscopic fragments of the performer's body intertwine with live instrumental sounds and gestures.



Still frame of *Ronín* (2021). Source: Iracema de Andrade, personal archive.

VIDEO 2 – *Ronín* (2021), for electroacoustic sounds, 5-string eCello, synthesizer, and video. Iracema de Andrade, musical and electroacoustic creation, 5-string electric cello, voice, and audio design. Jessica Rodríguez, visual composition, photography, editing, and image post-production. <https://youtu.be/vvyhCMbVddg>

2.2 *Espectros de Água* and *Rabeca*

Espectros de Água and *Rabeca* were created in collaboration with Costa Rican visual artist and photographer Adela Marín. Our shared aim was to explore feminine archetypes rooted in my genealogical history and affective memory. Throughout this creative process, we sought ways to evoke my ancestry—particularly the women in my lineage—and my Brazilian identity through sonic and visual elements. Drawing from personal archives such as photographs, newspaper clippings, a family tree, books, and memorabilia, we developed the visual language for both works. The material presence of my foremothers—their faces, feet, postures, hairstyles, shoes, and garments—was re-contextualized in dialogue with my own gendered identity in the twenty-first century. Family lines on both maternal and paternal sides serve as symbolic threads linking my female sonic body to those who came before me, weaving their histories into the intermedial fabric of the performance. On stage, my corporeality becomes a vessel for these ancestral presences—spectral yet embodied—transforming each piece into a symbolic space of remembrance and healing ritual, honoring the resilience of the women in my family who endured abuse and survived trauma across generations.

Espectros de Água—Spectres of Water—unfolds through old photographs of my great-grandmother surrounded by her granddaughters, childhood portraits of my uncles and aunts, my grandmother holding me as a baby, and my mother lying in a hospital bed with me on the day I was born. The work draws on symbolic elements—water, blood, threads, veins, rivers—that serve as metaphors for an imaginary umbilical cord uniting their bodies with mine in the present. This interplay produced temporal dislocations in which female bodies from the past are superimposed onto my contemporary corporeality. Its sonic landscape is built from recorded and processed instrumental sounds whose electroacoustic spectra and textures underpin my live improvisations on the electric cello. *Rabeca* likewise unfolds improvisatorially, referencing the sound world of the traditional bowed string instrument of the same name from Brazil's Northeast. Long associated with the *baião* genre, the *rabeca* employs the *resfulengo* bowing technique to produce its characteristic syncopated rhythm. By combining the soundscape of a field recording of church bells with corresponding instrumental gestures, I appropriate the *resfulengo* technique, translating it into a spectral sweep that gradually shifts from tone to noise. I was first exposed to this traditional music in

childhood, within a family environment where clapping and dancing to it reflected a long-standing tradition rooted in my ancestors' hometown origins. The live cello dialogues with projected imagery in which the element of earth converses with stories from regions where the struggle to survive drought was ever-present. Land is portrayed as a site of migration, while textures of trees and skin evoke strength and resilience. Photographs of my grandfather and his diasporic sons and daughters reunited on the day of my grandmother's funeral, along with his elderly sisters, capture the Brazilian Northeast countryside in a time of hardship.

Espectros de Água and *Rabeca* engage distinct yet interrelated approaches to memory, here understood as a category transformed into artistic artifact. Following Ute Seydel (2014, 2018), the survival of images plays a decisive role in shaping both individual and collective memory; when appropriated in artistic production, such images become "cultural images" that move beyond private recollection, crystallizing into symbolic forms that circulate in the public sphere as part of cultural memory. In these two works, motifs and forms of imagistic representation—combined with sonic and musical materials—are intentionally mobilized to situate them within feminine cultures of remembrance. For me, these pieces function as repositories that condense personal and collective histories. Drawing on Pierre Nora's notion of *lieux de mémoire* (1989)—sites where memory gathers and resists forgetting—they become spaces through which I, as a migrant, attempt to reassemble a disrupted sense of belonging. Here, memorabilia, family photographs, and childhood melodies do not simply evoke the past; they interrupt the present with traces that "stop time, to block the work of forgetting" (Nora, 1989, p. 19).

This process also resonates with Marianne Hirsch's concept of *post-memory* (1992–93), in which memories of previous generations are inherited not through direct experience but through mediated narratives and images. By working with these inherited fragments, I construct a personal narrative that is simultaneously an act of self-representation and self-reconstitution. Within this framework, the *female sonic body* emerges as the performative site where these layers of memory—cultural, genealogical, and affective—are translated into sound. My gendered and culturally situated corporeality becomes the expressive apparatus through which meaning is generated, allowing the visual traces of my foremothers to be re-inscribed as sonic presence. In this way, the works do not merely depict memory—they embody it, rendering remembrance as a living, performative act.

FIGURE 4 – *Espectros de Água* (2021). Use of family archival materials to construct and integrate identity into contemporary intermedial repertoires.



Still frame of *Espectros de Água* (2021). Source: Iracema de Andrade, personal archive.

VIDEO 3 – *Espectros de Água* (2021), for electroacoustic sounds, 5-string eCello, synthesizer, and video. Iracema de Andrade, electroacoustic and musical creation, 5-string electric cello, and audio design. Adela Marín, visual creation, photography, editing, and image post-production. <https://youtu.be/UBPafh5IVd0>

FIGURE 5 – *Rabeca* (2021). Family archives employed as a creative resource within intermedial performance practices.



Still frame of *Rabeca* (2021). Source: Iracema de Andrade, personal archive.

VIDEO 4 – *Rabeca* (2021), for electroacoustic sounds, 5-string eCello, synthesizer, and video. Iracema de Andrade, electroacoustic and musical creation, 5-string electric cello, and audio design. Adela Marín, visual creation, photography, editing, and image post-production. <https://youtu.be/mkj-lhVHWMQ>

In *Céu da Boca*, *Ronín*, *Espectros de Água*, and *Rabeca*, my identity as a Latin American woman and *performer-creator* is not merely referenced—it constitutes the structural and expressive foundation of each piece. In my live realization on the instrument during the concerts, I engage with narratives captured not only through photography and archival references, but also through traditional musical motifs and ancestral myths. These materials function as affective and symbolic resources that allow me to reference broader historical legacies (Hirsch, 1999), particularly the gendered and (racialized) dimensions of Latin American cultural identity frameworks. I activate them as performative tools—devices for remembering, reimagining, and repositioning female agency. In this context, I situate my *female sonic body* as a dynamic site of meaning, where subjectivity and identity are not only represented but enacted. The performance becomes a space in which personal experience and collective memory converge, offering the audience an imaginative encounter with layered temporalities and shifting fields of signification. By engaging popular, mestiza, and feminist imaginaries, it intervenes critically and reclaims expressive forms previously devalued or invisibilized by the logic of (race and) gender hierarchies. Rather than merely critiquing existing structures, it actively generates new epistemological grounds—sites from which marginalized bodies and voices can create, speak, be seen, and be heard on their own terms.

3. Disrupting the Score, Reclaiming the Body

To translate the conceptual concerns discussed above into performance, I have developed a set of technical and improvisational strategies that are integral to the works' structure and meaning. In *Céu da Boca*, *Ronín*, *Espectros de Água*, and *Rabeca*, the electroacoustic components and the moving images serve as catalysts for my improvisational processes on the instrument during live performance. As I follow the video projection on a stage-side monitor, I treat each sonic and visual cue—such as frame transitions, motion rhythms, chromatic shifts, and spectral or textural changes—as guidelines for real-time creation on the electric cello. Rather than following a written score, I respond to these sensory stimuli by translating them into sound, exploring the instrument's expressive range through extended left-hand and bowing techniques. I also employ a specially prepared scordatura, adding a fifth lower string tuned to either F or E, depending on the specific moment in the performance. Additionally, I apply various synthesizer filters in real time to enable nuanced sonic transformations

of the cello's output. The intended result is a perceptual feedback loop, in which the fixed visual and electroacoustic elements shape my live instrumental response, while the improvised performance, in turn, influences the audience's perception of the visual and sonic environment.

Improvisation—particularly in the absence of a fixed score—offers a potent means of reclaiming performer agency by disrupting hierarchical models rooted in fidelity to the composer's intentions. Wade Matthews (2012) observes that, while composition has historically been associated with writing, improvisation emerges from oral and embodied traditions. According to him, improvised musical performances cannot be fixed in time; they vanish once completed, leaving behind only traces—such as recordings that document a specific, unrepeatable temporal experience.

Matthews emphasizes that the improviser is not composing in the traditional sense, but rather creating in real time. He draws a key distinction: “the composer directs his perception towards the product, while the improviser perceives the process” (p. 26). From another perspective, Nicholas Cook (2001) offers a more nuanced understanding of musical experience as “a continuum between process and product”—two dimensions that are always simultaneously present. In his later work, Cook (2013) further argues that musical meaning is not confined to written texts, but rather emerges dynamically through the act of performance itself. He notes that even when “scores and works as traditionally defined may not be involved,” so-called “free” improvisation is nonetheless structured and shaped by the patterns of interaction that unfold during performance (p. 226). Even though I perform solo—without interacting with other musicians on stage—my practice does not reject structure but redefines it as fluid and responsive: a mode of creation arising through sensory interaction with sound, image, and environment. Rather than framing elements such as score and performance, or improvisation and composition, as binary oppositions, I aim to position my performance practice within a continuum of creative musical flux. I move fluidly between generative processes that unfold in deferred time—such as the creation of electroacoustic and audiovisual materials—and those that emerge in real time, including instrumental improvisation. As I engage responsively with the electroacoustic and visual layers, treating them as open-form media scripts, these inputs serve as non-prescriptive prompts—guiding the performance without dictating its exact content. They activate transient, situational instrumental gestures that are unique to each musical event, while remaining embedded within a pre-structured ecosystem.

These technical configurations thus become inseparable from the conceptual resistance they embody—merging theoretical frameworks and practice into a single, continuous performance logic. Through this process, I cultivate a mode of real-time creation that is not only adaptive and dialogic, but also deeply intuitive and personal—what may be conceptualized as *situated improvisation*. As I improvise, my *female sonic body* fuses sound and image, enacting what Nicholas Cook describes as “the musicalisation of the body”—its incorporation as a parameter of the music itself (2013, p. 294). This approach transforms the body from an interpretive vehicle into a generative source of musical meaning, a space where subjectivity, corporeality, joy, sadness, and the affective complexities of my identity converge. Foregrounding this embodied, context-specific form of creation directly contests the ideal of musical autonomy and the view of performance as mere replication. By displacing the centrality of the score, my practice resists the archival logic and permanence prioritized by Western art music, embracing instead ephemerality, variability, and contextual responsiveness as valid forms of authorship. This immediacy privileges affective and situated dimensions of performance—qualities long marginalized by score-based paradigms—and resists commodification by asserting the uniqueness of each performance as an aesthetic statement. From this position, the *performer-creator* paradigm—integrating functions historically assigned to the (male) composer into the agency of the (female) performer—not only offers an alternative methodology but also proposes a fundamentally different ontology of music-making: one in which creation and performance are inseparable, the body is central, and artistic legitimacy emerges from lived experience rather than adherence to inherited norms. In this framework, improvisation is not merely a method of artistic generation; it is a political and epistemological gesture that affirms the performer’s embodied knowledge, subjectivity, and identity as integral to the work.

4. Ongoing Thoughts on Performing the Self

A departure from the assigned role of the instrumental performer, understood as the result of a patriarchal structure founded on power relations shaped by the logic of (race and) gender division, maintained over time and reiterated through practices rooted in Eurocentric tradition, will inevitably require a critical review of these very practices. Being an instrumental performer is not a given;

however, women have become instrumental performers through the forced “adjustment” of their bodies to a deeply entrenched idea of “performer”, becoming a cultural sign materialized in obedience to a historically delimited possibility, as part of a sustained and repeated bodily project. In this sense, Haraway’s concept of situated knowledge (1988) becomes particularly relevant: it reminds us that knowledge is never universal or neutral, but always marked by the knower’s embodied and historical position. For artist-researchers like myself, this framework not only legitimizes personal and experiential insights but also demands accountability for how knowledge is created and shared. Drawing on Stuart Hall, one can infer that this kind of practice reinforces identity formation “not outside, but from within representation” [...] “which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover who we are” (hooks, 1992, p. 131, citing Hall). In this sense, representation becomes not a mirror of fixed identities but a site of transformation and becoming.

Amelia Jones notes that “The practices of body art do not distance the viewer; rather, they demand engagement and involve them in the artwork through intersubjective exchange” [...] (Jones, 2023, p. 112). Transposing Jones’s critique to concert music, this new repertoire distances itself from the fetishizing frameworks of the male gaze and gendered listening. Instead, it initiates dialectical interactions between performer and audience, grounded in embodied presence and situated subjectivity. By foregrounding the performer’s corporeality and lived experience—rather than concealing them behind the veneer of interpretive neutrality—these works challenge the presumed objectivity of musical meaning and expose the ideological structures underlying traditional concert performance. Much like body art, they do not offer a passive object for contemplation but rather summon the audience into a charged space of relationality, where meaning emerges through affective, embodied, and historically contingent encounters.

Green (2003) describes how listeners inevitably perceive music performed or created by women through a lens of gender and sexuality, even though these are not part of the so-called “inherent” musical materials. She frames this phenomenon as a circular process in which performer identity, musical meaning, and audience perception are inseparably entwined. Instead of attempting to neutralize this entwinement, my musical practice exposes and mobilizes it. By centering my body in the creation and performance of each piece, I break the illusion of genderless musical experience that classical music ideology sustains. I do not attempt to isolate inherent meaning from gendered

embodiment. Rather, I produce music through and with my subjectivity, treating it not as an interpretive hindrance but as a site of artistic and epistemological agency. Rather than allowing the listener's unconscious associations with femininity to color their perception, I make femininity—and its inscription through gesture, sound, and image—a deliberate creative parameter. The subjective and gendered are no longer peripheral to meaning; they are the ground from which meaning emerges. Thus, the “circularity” Green outlines is not only acknowledged, but strategically activated in my practice to question, stretch, and reconfigure the terms through which music is created, experienced, and performed. In this sense, my work resists the phenomenon described by Green only insofar as it reframes its implications, transforming it into a mode of agency.

By refusing the binary logics that have historically underpinned Western concert music, the *performer-creator* reclaims artistic agency on her own terms. This reclamation not only challenges the conventions of *Werktreue*, but also dismantles the Cartesian separation of mind and body that has long marginalized female and non-normative bodies in the sphere of “high art music.” Rather than functioning as a vessel for the composer's intentions, the *performer-creator* becomes the originator of her own sonic-musical language, generated through and with her embodied presence. As Green notes, this “metaphorical exhibition of the power of the mind” can subvert patriarchal constructions of femininity, such that, when harnessed by women, it “produces a threat to the sexual order” (Green, 2003, pp. 88–89). In practice, this agency emerges not only through the conscious deployment of technical-musical control, but also through manifest corporeality, bridging the connotations of femininity in instrumental performance and the cerebral associations of composition (Cusick, 1994; Green, 2003). In this context, I advance a situated, intuitive, and critical mode of sonic production, drawing on McClary's proposal that women can create music that “foregrounds their sexual identities”—here understood as encompassing both gendered and sexual subjectivity—without falling prey to essentialist traps and consciously deviating from the assumptions of standard musical procedures (McClary, 2002, p. 33). I do not merely perform these works—I inhabit them, reshape them, and allow them to reshape me. My actions on stage are both affirmation and disruption, articulations of selfhood.

In every new concert, my role as *performer-creator* and the presence of my *female sonic body* may become a site of embodied negotiation. I understand my artistic practice as potentially functioning as a form of performative resistance, one that aims to suggest a feminist intervention within the structures of concert music. By blurring disciplinary boundaries between composition and performance, body and instrument, sound and image, score and improvisation, my work seeks to gesture toward a mode of sonic and visual subversion. In this context, performance might function as a generative act—one that could influence how the epistemic foundations of music-making are perceived, and how musical subjectivity and identity are constructed, interpreted, and valued.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Iracema de Andrade is a musician and researcher specializing in Performance Practice and Artistic Research, with a particular focus on electroacoustic music. She holds a Ph.D. in Music (*Cum Laude*) from the National Autonomous University of Mexico, where she was awarded the “Alfonso Caso” Academic Merit Medal for her doctoral research on cello repertoires and new technologies. In England, she earned a Master’s degree from West London University, along with a Fellowship Diploma and a Certificate of Advanced Studies from the London College of Music. De Andrade completed her Bachelor’s degree in Music at the University of São Paulo, Brazil. Since 2015, she has served as an Associate Researcher at the “Carlos Chávez” National Center for Music Research, Documentation, and Information. She is also the recipient of the 2024 First Prize for Academic Performance in Research from the National Institute of Fine Arts and Literature and a member of the National System of Art Creators under the Mexican Ministry of Culture. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-7012-8248>. Email: cenidim.ideandrade@inba.edu.mx

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