

## Title: Where is that Batallón de San Patricio Groove?

PAUL STAPLETON, SARC, Queen's University Belfast

RICKI O'RAWE, SARC and Modern Languages, Queen's University Belfast

### 1. PROGRAM NOTES

Our duo *-ence* improvises live remixes of augmented 7" vinyl records combined with performance on, and sequenced sampling of, custom-made electroacoustic instruments. Our collaboration draws on O'Rawe's experience in art installation contexts and with electronic dance music group *Not Squares*, and Stapleton's work as an instrument inventor, sound designer and improviser in groups such as *Ens Ekt* and *3BP*. Our performance for NIME 2023 begins by asking, what kind of strange rhythmic futures will continue to be built at the intersection of Mexican and Irish cultures? To aid this endeavour, we invoke the mythology of Batallón de San Patricio, a group of disenfranchised European (largely Irish) immigrants and African slaves who defected from the United States Army to fight on the side of the Mexican Army during the Mexican–American War of 1846–48. The battalion has been memorialised by a broad range of musicians, novelists and filmmakers. These accounts provide stories of cultural resonances in the lives of diverse peoples, unlikely collectives who formed allegiances through their shared oppression at the hands of dominant imperialist powers. Our storytelling here is similar, but also different. While we are interested in resonances, allegiances, and points of connection that form moments of tense but productive co-existences between different communities, we are likewise drawn towards the precarious, noisy and uncertain material processes enacted in such meetings. Thus, we seek a kind of *dissensual groove*, an oscillation between distance and relation, remixing fragments from Irish and Mexican music traditions into fragile and ever-collapsing rhythmic architectures, creating spaces in which to move.



Fig. 1. an -ence archive, three versions.

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## 2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed performance is a continuation of a collaborative artistic research project that goes under the name of *-ence*. The project is concerned with both *making ecologies of improvisation* (Bowers [1], Waters [2][3], Rodger et al. [4]) and *the estrangement of cultural practices* (Shklovsky [5], Fisher [6]). The former is perhaps most obviously of direct relevance to the NIME community, with a particular focus on the creation of musical instruments that intertwine different material domains (e.g. acoustic, mechanical, electronic, digital). The latter focuses in part on the relationship between *free improvisation* and *electronic dance music*, which we have discussed elsewhere:

The improvised performance seeks to engage with the specific social arrangement of sounds and bodies that circulate at different ends of the art music – popular music spectrum. Improvised music can easily be classified and dismissed as an oddity consigned to esoteric experimental music establishments. Electronic music can just as quickly be labelled inane and left on the dancefloor. With this project, we wanted to exist in a liminal space, where those we encountered were neither alienated nor passive. We wanted to make the club strange, or the gallery festive [...] Our conceit is that the vacillation between the uncertainty and openness of improvisation and the stability of the familiar palate of sounds and structures associated with dance music might create a dissensual groove. A *dis*-sensual groove, we suggest, is one that appeals to a dancefloor's desire for rhythm and movement while simultaneously disrupting its expectations, defamiliarising our engagement and slowing down our perceptions. [7]

In the introduction to his unpublished book project, *Acid Communism*, Fisher takes hauntology beyond the negativity of 'the slow cancellation of the future' [8]. Rather than the 'anachronism and inertia' [9] he saw in the retromania of contemporary culture in the early 2000s, Fisher looks to the potential for futures that can still be actualised in material from the past. In the ruptures of work that is weird and eerie, he sees an opening to the new that he identifies elsewhere with 'the collective capacity to produce, care and enjoy' [9].

In the proposed performance we will call forth the ghosts of the Batallón de San Patricio and invite glimpses of the border-crossings – literal and figurative – that haunt their mythology. Ghosts are most unsettling when they are partially obscured. Let's not forget that the generative power of Freud's *unheimlich* resides not just in the way it captures the productive tension between the strange and familiar, but also in the affective weight of 'what is concealed and kept out of sight' [10]. The impasses, allusions, and inferences of our performance invite the audience to probe the experience for gaps and traces. We propose that the combining and re-combining of the artifacts of musical history as part of a live improvised performance can be incantatory, resisting enclosure in time, and opening onto novel and unexpected futures.



Fig. 2. -ence – a reduced setup version.



Fig. 3. -ence – an extended setup version.

Stapleton's *VOLA* (volatile assemblage) typically comprises upcycled materials (scrap metal, an old repurposed hard drive, hacked electronic circuits, a used turntable and abused vinyl records) in combination with relatively low-cost embedded computers (Arduino, LattePanda Alpha), transducers, amplifiers, contact microphones, rechargeable batteries, beaters, pics, slides, strings, a bow, pingpong balls, capacino whisks and other found objects, all fitting into a case that is compliant with current airline restrictions on hand luggage size and weight. O'Rawe's setup general includes a selection of hardware and software samplers and effects units compiled to capture and recycle sonic artefacts emerging in the improvised performance of Stapleton. During the piece, this sampled material is

brought into dialogue with recordings from previous iterations of the performance and played live. The synthesis of sonic elements often leads to an eerie dispersal of the agency of performers, as it becomes difficult to identify the provenance of each sound.

### *Waste is the Place*

The NIME 2023 theme of *frugality* is present in our work through the *recycling of materials* in the construction of our performance system (pictured and described above), as well as in the *recycling of sound recordings* through our improvised performances. Both of these material-sonic practices will be shaped in this instance by our selection of 7" vinyl records of Mexican and Irish traditional musics. In sounding such objects haunted by the past, we invite the voices of remixed ghosts to join us on the dancefloor. In this cyclical movement nothing is wasted, as the past remains the condition for infinite possible futures [11].

Ultimately, we hope our performance will speak to a growing body of NIME practioners who share an interest in the messy, chaotic and open-ended entanglements that co-constitute musical life. Likewise, we wish to address a broader group of curious listeners who are open to *sentipensar* (think/feel) with us the uncertain rhythms of Irish-Mexican futures yet untold.

### 3. PERFORMANCE NOTES

This will be an improvised duo performance lasting approximately 15 minutes. Our performance would be ideally located in a dance club or club-like venue, although we are flexible (e.g. we could perform in an art gallery or concert hall, and have previously performed in a library). We will require a large table or similar flat surface to set up our performance system. Stapleton's part is battery powered. O'Rawe's part requires mains power and a 4-way power extention. The organisers/venue would also ideally supply one dynamic microphone (e.g. SM57) and mic stand, along with a small submixer positioned arms-reach of both performers from which a stereo signal can be sent to the main front-of-house mix. At least one monitor speaker duplicating the main mix is required (ideally two). A one-hour setup and soundcheck timeslot would be most appreciated.

### 4. MEDIA LINK(S)

- Documentation of past work available at:  
<http://www.paulstapleton.net/portfolio/with-ricki-orawe>  
<https://resistbelfast.bandcamp.com/album/dissensual-grooves>

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## ETHICAL STANDARDS

We have no conflicts of interest in carrying out this work (financial nor non-financial). Our sampling of existing music recordings for this proposed performance falls under 'fair use' (i.e. short extracts, significantly transformed, used to comment on works being sampled). More fundamentally, our approach to ethical practice is rooted in what Maria Lugones calls 'curdling', a form of 'festive resistance' that transforms the 'logic of control' and the 'logic of purity' through: 'Bi- and multilingual experimentation; code-switching; categorial blurring and confusion; [...] withdrawing our services from the pure or their agents whenever possible and with panache; [...] playful reinvention of our names for things and people, multiple naming; [...] revealing the chaotic in production; [...] marking our cultural mixtures as we move; [...]' [12].

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