

Editorial: Out of Phase

By Fernando Iazzetta, Lilian Campesato and Rui Chaves



Figure 1

Contra Quem? / Against Whom? by André Damião (2017) (GiF)

This special edition (6th issue) of *Interference: A Journal of Audio Cultures*, edited by Fernando Iazzetta, Lilian Campesato and Rui Chaves, comprises of a peer-reviewed¹ selection of papers that were previously presented at the *Sonologia 2016: Out of Phase* conference². This sound studies focused event took place in São Paulo, between the 22nd to the 25th of November (2016). The conference garnered a positive interest from a diverse set of researchers. In total, we had over 160 submissions in which we ended up selecting 40 presentations from 14 different countries that covered a wide array of areas and disciplines.

The ‘Out of Phase’ theme was extended as the title for this issue. This cheeky metaphor was a humble attempt at promoting the emergence of other points of view that focused on particular, localised forms of knowledge that entailed material, political and cultural specificities. ‘Out of Phase’ was also an attempt to deal with the issues of authority and representation in regards to the ‘sonic’. Who says what? Whom are you speaking to? And why? Have you decided to speak in the name of? Have you left someone or somewhat behind? What has been left unspoken? These questions are targeted at us, both readers and tentative producers of knowledge in an academic setting (although these issues certainly extend to other remits). To be more precise, the above inquiry is focused, or if you prefer ‘close miked’, at the body of work that has emerged in the past few years under the name of sound studies. The field has attracted an eclectic set of actors and disciplines, ranging from musicology to cultural studies, while connecting

threads with different practices.

Although prone to criticism, in lieu of its at times revisionist accounts of visibility and subjectivity, it has been part of a larger positive movement that has folded other senses into critical discussion. The questions laid down beforehand lend an ear to other 'voices'. This stance is fuelled by the emergence of feminist and postcolonial epistemologies that have criticised the process by which History, Literature, Sociology, Anthropology, Philosophy, Art or Music (to name a few) deal with women, non-white, disabled, non normative human existences or other geographies. It is beyond the scope of this editorial to purview an in-depth report on these new epistemologies. We hope that the articles presented here in this issue will enable the reader to eavesdrop on these types of theoretical and practical approaches.

Rodolfo Caesar's *Technographic listening: an experiment in feedback* tries to outline how technology (through his experience as a composer) brings upon a change in one's perception and critical awareness. Thokozani Mhlambi's *African Orientations to Listening: The Case of Loudspeaker Broadcasting to Zulu-speaking Audiences in the 1940s*, tracks the development of loudspeakers broadcasting systems in South Africa during the Second World War and how (although unintended) these systems ended promoting or demonstrating specific listening techniques to Bantu-speaking cultures. José Henrique Padovani's *The solfège of technical objects: notes on the potential contribution to sound studies and arts* tries to revitalise the idea of "solfège" in Pierre Schaeffer's work, by framing it within Gilbert Simondon's philosophical ideas (regarding the relationship between humans and technology) – with the intent of forwarding the need for a political and ethical stance in music technology research. Henrique Rocha's *The sound beyond hylomorphism: sonic philosophy towards aural specificity* argues for a change in how we philosophically engage with sound. His argument is rooted on the idea that the discussion that critically surrounds the 'sound itself' paradigm is predicated on a binarism between subject and matter. Thus, this model prevents a more specific or localised discussion of sound, one that avoids the pitfalls of discussing the sonic phenomena in generalizing terms.

Sindhu Thirumalasaimy's *Composition for temple speakers: some notes on devotional music and noise* describes the social, cultural and political milieu that frames her site-specific sound artwork – made for the Shiva-Sai Baba temple in the Sir Mirza Ismail Nagar neighbourhood in Bangalore. More precisely, she addresses the current secular/religious tensions that encompass everyday life in India. Katrin Köppert's *The Sound of ACT UP! AIDS Activism as Sound(e)scape and Sound-Escapade* tends to the neglected dimension of sound within the visual culture of HIV/AIDS activism. By starting from the work of ACT UP! and their initial political stance, the article shows how different artists have engaged with the notion of noise and/or silence when dealing with remembrance and mourning.

Valéria Bonafé's *The experience of sonority: the dangers of a journey into the unknown* describes the compositional process of *A menina que virou chuva*, in order to expand the idea of *sonority* (a musical theoretical framework) into a multi-sensorial, affective, imaginative and experiential concept. André Damião's *Some considerations towards a more critical practice in Mobile Music* presents an alternative praxis to what he sees as a form of corporate entrapment (that accompanied the rise of smartphones) in the research and artwork being developed in Mobile Music. Jason Van Eyk's *From Control to the Non-Cochlear – Evolving Strategies of Sound Art Curation* through an extensive historical

analysis, attempts to outline a possible methodology for curating sound art – one that explicitly entails a conceptual overture. Finally, Igor Reyner's *Fictional narratives of listening: crossovers between literature and sound studies* offers an account on how sound studies has incorporated literary narratives as a way to further specific theoretical purposes (i.e., in thinking about sound and listening).

The above sequence of articles was thought as way to reinforce the connections, conversations that exist between the different works. We believe that carefully re thinking some procedures in academia can potentiate the delivery of new epistemic challenges. In this sense, and in order to convey a multi-vocal account of how this issue came to be, the editors of this issue decided to present the core discussion through a transcribed and edited dialogue that was conducted throughout a series of meetings. The resulting conversation focuses on offering a connecting thread between all the 10 papers that comprise this issue. We also offer a glimpse of 'sonologia' in Brazil and briefly discuss the notion of 'Out of Phase' and its influence on our editorial approach.

The following dialogue was conducted throughout December 2017 in São Paulo, Brazil. (FI is for Fernando Iazzetta, LC is for Lílían Campesato and RC for Rui Chaves)

LC: Where do we start? I am sure our introductory text will have covered the basics regarding the backdrop for this 6th issue, namely the organisation of *Sonologia 2016: Out of Phase*. The 10 selected and peer-reviewed papers published in this issue, were previously presented at this event.

RC: I think that is important to state that *Sonologia 2016: Out of Phase* aligns itself with a series of previously organised events by NuSom³.

FI: Yes...we had already organised a series of conferences called *Seminários música, ciência e tecnologia (Seminar Music Science Technology)*⁴. Although they did not focus on 'sound studies' per se, they more or less promoted discussions, methodologies and research where sound was the main critical protagonist. This of course had a relationship with the work that we have been developing here in the past fifteen years (from 2000 onwards): a gathering of like-minded people that has had different designations throughout the years⁵. NuSom – Research Centre on Sonology was officially created in 2012.

RC: Fernando, can you talk a bit about what 'sonologia' means in Brazil? And maybe why we decided to use this terminology for our conference?

FI: Sonologia has a particular use in Brazil. I mean, the idea of sonology exists in different academic settings in Europe, but here it comes from a history – starting maybe in the '90s – of practitioners and researchers that were working with musical composition, performance and acoustics...but where seeing their work generically grouped and described as a technologically focused endeavour. Although there was certainly an historical and practical backdrop for this, in particular for those working with electroacoustic music, some of us started to feel that our research transcended technological issues. In 2006, I and other colleagues decided to rethink what we were doing and how we could strategically re-align ourselves within different institutional settings. Sonologia was chosen as terminology that could encompass different approaches and disciplines working with sound, from technically focused initiatives – such as room acoustics measurement (initially my case) – to electroacoustic music, cinema, anthropology, design, visual arts (...) This means that when events, such as the

previously mentioned seminars, started to happen, there were always a dialogue between the different affiliated researchers in the field of sonologia. And this is seen as a positive thing, this connection between disparate approaches and disciplines.

RC: I think that this backdrop clearly influenced how we organised the event and ended using the terminology sonologia: the need to bring a different set of ears to one's research and artwork. In the end, the idea of 'Out of Phase' was not only a metaphor, but also a political and ethical stance on how to create a place where interdisciplinarity is geared towards promoting critical insights into canonical discussions in and around sound: body; gender; ecology and nature; technology; history; power...

LC: Yep. This idea of dialogue is also important for the field of sonologia. Although there is that diversity that Fernando mentioned, I still think that there was a need to expand the type of discussion that was being done locally. Thus, the event was an important opportunity to create networks between local researchers with other like-minded people outside a Euro-American axis or point of view...to bring in contact other 'voices' in terms of methodologies and approaches. This might be a good time to talk about the curatorial process that we undertook for *Sonologia 2016*.

FI: Yes, we should also add that this is not the process most academic events go for. I think that the peer review process is certainly valid, but it can enforce a series of problems in terms of knowledge production (...) Intellectual labour tends to, as Edward Said describes, to insert itself in a specific historical sequence "filiation" and/or theoretical background "affiliation" without really questioning what are the processes that lead to such epistemic cul-de-sac⁶. Although there are risks to a personalization of the curatorial process, the process of reading over 160 submitted extended abstracts enabled us to obtain a general overview on how to establish fruitful connections, and if possible, a healthy critical oppositions between submissions.

RC: This idea of "opposition" is another way to understand the 'Out of Phase' metaphor. This idea is also mentioned in Said's discussion as a way to not only unravel the processes behind the "filiation/affiliation" framework, but also to foreground how exclusionary are these very processes...

LC: Yes, it leads to the creation of an 'other' that is unrecognised or invisible. If we look at the different histories of contemporary sonic practices, how many women or non-Europeans you have? The problem is compounded when this partial historical account is taken as the 'whole' from which to build upon critical accounts and comparisons to other milieus (...) Curatorship brings about the possibility of enacting a politics of representation and representativity in terms of gender, geography, methodologies and disciplines. In the end, I think that the burgeoning field of 'sound studies' should be weary of the aforementioned 'cul-de-sac'. This could come from a critical awareness and will to think about representation and representativity. Also, in promoting other 'voices' that bring about the 'opposition' needed to counter the problems we are discussing. As a side note, it is important to point out that this issue underwent a rigorous peer-review process that looked at a smaller selection of papers presented at the conference. Nonetheless, we are having this discussion in order to outline a continuum between our Call for Papers⁷, the curatorial process and then the organization and edition of this special issue.

RC: To complement what you said... Another important thing to us is the idea of the 'particular' as discussed by Lila Abhu-Lughod in her ethnographic work. One can summarize this approach, in the context of our discussion, as a more close-knitted relation between the idea of a 'case study' – communities, place, artwork, theoretical framework – and doing, writing and speaking about such things. It is a methodological

approach that tends to avoid cramming up generalizations, or a-priori critical stances into a said 'thing'. It is about letting the 'thing' emerge with its particularities and its own set of questions – even if it only brings about a contextual, fragmented and worldly form of knowledge⁸.

FI: Absolutely...and this is another way to strategically construct counter-narratives that avoid the aforementioned exclusionary framework, in particular when such processes were predicated upon forwarding Europe as the centre of the world...And for so long, we have done so without really questioning why was this happening⁹.

RC: I think there are some pretty interesting examples in this issue, that forward an idea of the 'particular' (methodologically speaking). In the case of Rodolfo Caesar (*Technographic listening: an experiment in feedback*), his reflection is based upon an account of how technology changed his perspective and mediated his listening experience.

LC: He brings the idea that the a-critical use of technology in general – and in music in particular – would mask what he calls the 'strong action' of technology, one that would leave marks and traces of its materiality. Thus, technology is not taken as a totally objective entity, as something we use, control and employ, but as something that enacts a form of subjectification. Caesar starts out by pointing to a previous experience, where he identified the existence of a feedback between one's perception, audio recording devices and morphological analysis in listening to a specific South American bird (Swainson's flycatchers). By feedback I mean the discovery of sonic phenomena that wasn't perceivable to him at the time of recording the aforementioned bird species. He goes on to describe other 'technologies' that enable this type of discovery process, such as drugs or the rocking movement of trains.

RC: His discussion resonates with what has been written about in a material culture remit. The fact is, different technologies in audio are not simply 'input' or 'output' devices, they actually change us in different ways¹⁰. This process is underlied in Jonathan Sterne's discussion of the effects of mp3 encoding in our everyday listening habits¹¹ (...) The work of Thokozani Mhlambi (*African Orientations to Listening: The Case of Loudspeaker Broadcasting to Zulu-speaking Audiences in the 1940s*) deals with this idea of mediation but within a strong political and historical backdrop. In this case, during the Second World War, the still governing apartheid regime in South Africa decided to install a series of loudspeakers in Durban. These were installed in order to control the black population, but also to support the on-going recruitment effort...While these system were thought as a form of sonic panopticon, the author claims that they were also (unintendedly) useful in reinforcing a sense of Zulu identity, based on a long history of oral and sonic practices, such as *Inkomo*.

FI: Some key texts in sound studies have pointed out an idea of listening as culturally mediated by the arrival of audio technologies: phonograph, telephone, radio and loudspeaker. In my opinion, perhaps through a discursive slippage, they forget to mention the context that supports this discussion: a white middle-class culture located in Europe and North America. This slippage inadvertently reinforces a long history of cultural and epistemic hegemony that gave no visibility or audibility to other parts of the world. Mhlambi's work reminds us that there are other possible histories to be heard and told.

LC: Indeed! Moving along the discussion, there are also some interesting connections between Caesar's work and José Henrique Padovani's (*The solfège of technical objects: notes on the potential contribution to sound studies and arts*) discussion of Gilbert Simondon....

FI: For sure... Padovani is trying to reflect about the often complicated relationship between 'music' and 'technology'. This is done while summarizing Simondon's ideas on technology and its effects on human agency. He effectively lays out how this discussion can be transitioned from a binary opposition between humans and machines, towards one where there are differential transfers of potential between technology and users. During this exposition, Padovani recovers Pierre Schaeffer's idea of "*Solfège*" (...) This type of discussion in the past few decades has been forcefully deterministic or enlaced with a certain techno-positivism...The NIME paradigm is an example of this¹². But for whom are these new instruments made for? Can they build a sustained community of practitioners?

The fact is, technology fails in its often-intended objectives or in most cases reflects corporate ideation – particularly when you are using consumer electronics. As a counterpoint, Padovani is trying to forward a stance that entails a more careful attention to both listening and praxis.

LC: Some of Padovani's readers, particularly those that do not know Gilbert Simondon writing, will be amazed on how his writing on 'agency' precedes the work of post-structuralists authors such as Gilles Deleuze, or in the case of the social sciences, Bruno Latour *ANT* (Actor Network Theory) framework...

RC: Another mention of Simondon's work is found in Henrique Rocha's philosophical reasoning, which calls for a more empirical and experimental approach when discussing sound. His work (*The sound beyond hylomorphism: sonic philosophy towards aural specificity*) suggests an overall epistemic change in terms of practicing a sonic philosophy. For Rocha, this practice frequently oscillates between a reductionist view focusing on discussing 'sound-in-itself' and one opposing this. For Rocha, these two points of view, although with its differences, still work within the same ontological paradigm – the hylomorphic model, which is also referred to in Padovani's text. To move away from this model, and the way it purviews matter and subject, one needs to take into the fold the local and particular connections that sound establishes.

FI: He argues for this in order to move away from a form of 'panaurality', where one tends to speak about the experience of sound in universal terms, to something in process, in transformation, in relation to. In a way, this specificity can be found in the next set of articles in the issue.

LC: Yes, for example in Sindhu Thirumalaisamy description (*Composition for temple speakers: some notes on devotional music and noise*) of her sonic intervention *Composition for Temple Speakers* – a sound work or a form of 'devotional song' made for the Shiva/Sai Baba temple in Bangalore. Through her artwork, and in connection with political and religious events in India, she pushes for a discussion of how noise should be perceived as a relational phenomenon. In the case of an ever increasing tension between secular and religious quadrants of Indian society, the sound of the temple can be seen by some as noise and by others as a sacred expression. In fact, everyday noisiness can translate to a sense of togetherness or intimacy. In contrast, there is a lack of relational awareness in how acoustic ecology describes what noisy is.

RC: There is another side to her discussion that expresses the way contemporary Indian art deals with religion, often replicating a European stance that comes from the so called 'Age of Enlightenment'. But continuing your train of thought, there is a strong relational ethos that resonates with Katrin Köppert's intricate discussion.

FI: Yes...Katrin outlines a history of art and audio-visual practices dealing with mourning and loss in regards to the AIDS epidemics (*The Sound of ACT UP! AIDS Activism as Sound(e)scape*). Her analysis focuses particularly on the issues of silence,

sound and noise and the often complicated relationship that these sonic expressions have in personal politics and aesthetics. Köppert argues that the opposition between silence and/or noise needs to be evaded when discussing forms of expressing loss and issues of visibility. In fact, this dualism can paradoxically promote conservative politics. A queer critique can offer an insight on the heteronormativity of mainstream ecological discourses, in particular when it entails the romantic binarism in the nature versus city opposition – in particular when we tend to negatively associate cities with impurity, poverty or queerness. She argues that this binarism is at the heart of acoustic ecology overall discussion of sonic phenomena.

RC: She also talks about the idea of "sound-escapade", one that avoids the normativity of urban noises or the romanticism involved with the quietness of rural life, as there is a way of thinking about silence that is specific to a political milieu.

FI: There is a sense of 'worldliness' that connects with Valéria Bonafé's discussion of her compositional work (*The experience of sonority: the dangers of a journey into the unknown*). This is done by moving away from the 'sound-in-itself' idea that is attached to the concept of 'sonority' that she discusses to a sound out in the world, in connection with other senses. It is worth stressing out that this idea of 'sonority' has been paramount to an understanding of concert music, at least since Debussy. Bonafé is trying to expand this concept, by connecting what we perceive in terms of sounds in counterpoint, to important domains of musical composition: on one side, the structural relations that support the discursive apparatus of music itself; on the other, the referential aspects, such as images, memories, ideas and concepts that we associate to sound. In this sense, the idea of sonority encompasses both the perceptive and sensorial aspects of sound.

LC: We have not mentioned yet, but the discussion that you are describing is done in relation to the creation of her orchestral piece called *A Menina que virou Chuva...*

RC: I also want to add that in her text there is a consistent description of the visual metaphors that ended up influencing her work...

LC: Sure, Bonafé explores those metaphors in order to create a friction between the acoustic qualities of a specific sound and the connections that we establish in listening to the work (...) Bonafé's contribution brings about the possible idea of sound as an image and that the compositional process can be influenced by imagetic references (such as rain or crying) (...) Valéria Bonafé's work is a good example of how praxis can be of service in terms of forwarding a critical account. Another good example of this is André Damião's practice-based research in Mobile Music (*Some considerations towards a more critical practice in Mobile Music*). In his paper, he demonstrates how artwork and research that explored the technological capabilities of mobile devices (GPS, wearable sensors, cellular phones), not only became entrapped by what large corporations had to offer in this domain, but started to reproduce the same transformative marketing discourse.

RC: Yes, he links this with a decrease in manufacture of custom-made devices and an ever reliance on smartphones and their associated closed ecologies. A funny example of this is the emergence of *i-Ensembles*. Basically, people playing virtuoso redemptions of let us say, Beethoven sonatas on their iPads. In counterpoint, he advocates for the construction or recycling of consumer electronics that are out of use (...) Linking back to Padovani's discussion, there is for me a clear idea on how this process is informed by the need of, not only sustaining a creative practice (in the political and ethical sense), but also building a community.

FI: Just to clarify what you said about the idea of closed ecologies...Damião is talking

about issues such as planned obsolescence, software compatibility and the terms of service restrictions in what can be done in regards to tinkering/modifying the equipment...

RC: Indeed! Moving on to the two final articles in our issue...I think they provide more of an overview.

LC: Yes, Jason van Eyk describes three possible perspectives through his text in terms of curating sound art works (*From Control to the Non-Cochlear – Evolving Strategies of Sound Art Curation*): the first is guided towards how sounds react in space; the second, on how sounds coming from different sources (including the sound of the exhibition place itself) can blend or react with each other; the third (and the most interesting for the author) is how to outline the curatorial work, based not only on a sonic concern, but on how the acoustic phenomena interacts (through a conceptual approach) with other elements.

RC: He exemplifies what you are saying through his own endeavours. In this case, an exhibit he developed collaboratively – with his *September Collective* – called *Symphony of Hunger: Digesting Fluxus in Four Movements*, where they fully embraced sound, but also the somatic aspects and socio-political milieu that threaded all of the artworks shown.

LC: I think it is safe to say that a lot of the contributions exhibited the potential in crossing sound with other media and Igor Reyner work (*Fictional narratives of listening: crossovers between literature and sound studies*) is no exception – demonstrating how literature and different works of fiction have been used as conceptual tools towards writing about sound in different remits. This is done through four examples: the first one, is an observation on how Pierre Schaeffer – in the *Traité des objets musicaux* – referenced *Homofaber* by Max Frisch in order to clarify his listening theories; the second one, is Douglas Kahn's use of literature, not as a way to exemplify a theory, as Schaeffer did, but as a way to build a possible narrative in regards to the history of sound in the arts; the third, refers to how literary descriptions can be used to build a form of aural history, as in the case of John M. Picker's *Victorian Soundscapes*; in the fourth and final example, Igor Reyner takes a Brian Kane's (in *Sound Unseen*) analysis of Kafka's *The Burrow* – a tale that brings about a notion of acousmatic that is similar (although with its specificities) to Schaeffer's – in order to exemplify how literature can by itself, be seen as a self-sustaining theory and theoretical model from which to discuss sound.

RC: Generally speaking, Igor's work points out that an approximation between literature and sound studies can aid in overcoming music's hegemony when we want to discuss sound.

LC: I just want to note that there is a conceptual loop in terms of how these articles were sequenced, as there is an obvious link between Igor Reyner's discussion and Rodolfo Caesar's text as he uses an example extracted from literature (in this case Paul Valery's experiential description of a train voyage to Amsterdam) in order to further his assertions on how technology changes our perception of things...

RC: Yes, I think that we've sequenced things in order for those connections to be obvious for our readers...At least we hope! (Laughs)

FI: Just to round off things, we thank to thank the Interference editorial board for this amazing opportunity! Also, we want to thank all of the participating peer-reviewers that put in a tremendous amount of work.

Bio

Fernando Iazzetta is a Brazilian composer and performer. He teaches music technology and electroacoustic composition at the University of São Paulo and is the director of NuSom – Research Centre on Sonology at the same university. His works have been presented in concerts and music festivals in Brazil and abroad. As a researcher he has been interested in the investigation of experimental forms of music and sound art. He also runs a record label and studio – the LAMI – at the University of São Paulo. He currently is a research fellow at CNPq, the Brazilian National Council of Scientific and Technological Development. Since 2010 he is the consultant for the Arts Committee at FAPESP – the São Paulo Research Foundation.

Lilian Campesato is a Brazilian performer, researcher and curator interested in investigating experimental forms of music and sound art. Her works explore the use of voice and gesture in combination with interactive electronics and audio-visual resources. She regularly presents performances in festivals and alternative venues in Brazil and abroad, such as Portugal, Spain, UK, France, Denmark, Argentina, and Colombia. She holds a PhD in musicology from the University of São Paulo (USP) with a thesis on the process of aestheticisation of noise in music. She currently is a research associate at the NuSom – Research Centre on Sonology at USP. Her main research interests are the use of noise in music and experimental forms of artistic production. She was one of the founders of Sonora, a collective dedicated to the discussion of women in music in Brazil.

Rui Chaves is a Portuguese sound artist, performer and researcher. His research and work foregrounds a discussion of presence — both physical and authorial — in the process of making sound art: an endeavour that is informed by a contemporary critical inquiry and exploration of the thematics of body, place, text and technology. He has presented his work in several institutions and events throughout the United Kingdom, Brazil, France, Canada, Portugal and Germany. He holds a PhD in music from Queen’s University Belfast. He is currently a postdoctoral researcher at NuSom with a research project focusing on creating an online ‘archive’ of Brazilian sound art.

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Footnotes

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² <http://www2.eca.usp.br/sonologia/>

³ <http://www2.eca.usp.br/nusom/node/23>

⁴ <http://www2.eca.usp.br/mobile/smct2012/>

⁵ Mobile (<http://www2.eca.usp.br/mobile/portal/>); Lami (Laboratório de Acústica Musical e Informática, <http://www2.eca.usp.br/lami/portal/>)

⁶ See Edward Said's discussion of these ideas in *The World, The Text and The Critic* (1993, pp. 31-54)

⁷ <http://www2.eca.usp.br/sonologia/call-for-papers/>

⁸ See Lila Abu-Lughod's discussion in *Writing Against Culture* (1996)

⁹ See Boaventura Sousa Santos' essential discussion on these thematics in *Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges* (2016)

¹⁰ For an introductory overview, see *Stuff* by Daniel Miller (2010)

¹¹ In *MP3: The Meaning of a Format (Sign, Storage, Transmission)* (2012)

¹² <http://www.nime.org/>