At the moment of commencing the introduction to this special issue, more than three years have passed since the outbreak of a new, atypical pneumonia in Wuhan caught the attention of worldwide media, followed shortly by the detection of the first Italian cases, which consecrated Coronavirus as a planetary issue. What ensued has been described in different ways according to diverse disciplinary gazes, and in more or less strict relation to twentieth-century epistemic paradigms: a “rivutura” (namely, a radical overturning of customary order and time [Teti 2020]), a “breathing catastrophe” suspending the “inevitable of the ever-even” (Di Cesare 2021), or the triumph of the “state of exception” (Agamben 2021) and of digital surveillance (Han 2020). The sociocultural effects of Coronavirus have been further framed as a “disruption of the senses … that situates us in the world” (Cachopo 2022: 57), a “cultural trauma” (Alexander 2012), and a “tragedy” (Simko and Olick 2020).1 Whichever perspective we decide to adopt, we can all agree upon one fact: that the pandemic has been the most severe and truly global crisis since

1. By adopting this term, the two authors seek an alternative path to engage and discuss suffering in social science, not exclusively in reference to the Coronavirus pandemic. In particular, they propose that “embracing a tragic sensibility can, perhaps, help us to live better lives in … a world where medicine, science, and technology—for all their benefits—cannot heal all suffering or overcome the fact of mortality and the pain it inevitably brings” (Simko and Olick 2020: 661).
the turn of the millennium, one that was able (at least in the Global North) to shake the very foundations of contemporary life and society and bring to the fore their intrinsic contradictions, and not only by simultaneously engendering apocalyptic fears and hopes in overcoming the uncontrolled growth of neo-liberal capitalism.

As years passed and vaccination campaigns effectively “flattened the curve”, the most immediate signs of pandemic exceptionality—such as governmental lockdowns and embodied practices of social distancing and hygiene—faded away. In parallel, and against the backdrop of individual suffering and more-or-less shared coping strategies, the promise of “a planetary consciousness and sensibility … felt in the wake of the pandemic shock, has faded away under the weight of routine and exhaustion” (Cachopo 2022: 6–7), to the point of completely disappearing now that we have entered the post-pandemic era.

For the purposes of this introduction, it is worth noting how this last statement is far from being unproblematic. For what time is this, when the readers of this special issue are confronted with snapshots of a past so close and yet seemingly so remote? And how can we describe it, in order to position these snapshots within both academic discourse and the individual and collective processes of elaborating on the pandemic experience?

Indeed, the post-pandemic time seems to be a sort of terra nullius (nobody’s land). While we are back to our “normal” lives, the close-yet-distant past of lockdowns, face masks, and daily death tolls appears as a phenomenological territory under dispute between two different (yet intertwined) processes. Regarding the first process, the quick evolution of the public health emergency and of its cultural reception, coupled with the huge amount of scholarly reflection produced and data collected by a large spectrum of agents (from individuals to institutions), has made possible an early historicization of the overall phenomenon.\(^2\)

As for musicking (Small 1998), and sound domains in general, scholars were quick to draw a cartography of events by mobilizing perspectives and hermeneutic keys from ethnography, musicology, popular music studies, sound studies, sociology, and media studies to catch these phenomena in their making, to trace back their relationships with long-lasting processes prior to the pandemic, and to understand what might have been left or lost after the

\(^2\) The process might come to completion once research is published dealing with the period between the last lockdowns and the end of the emergency declarations by governments around the world. Of course, this path might be less linear than described here, depending on both regional features and the relative unpredictability of the virus—as demonstrated by the resurgence of contagions in China in late 2022, and the sudden yet tired response of media and governments in the Global North.
crisis. Particular attention was given to the sudden acoustic void due to the suspension of anthropic activities during the first lockdowns; this unprecedented condition led to peculiar activities of soundscaping and resulted in an ambivalent reception of the pandemic silence, in-between competing ideas of loss/gain, disruption/well-being, absence/amplification of presence, and in light of debates on ecology and climate change (Sideris 2020; Herrmann-Fertig 2022; Dicuonzo, Giomi and Peroni 2022). Further research was devoted to tracing the strategies implemented by live music industries to confront the cultural and economic crisis triggered by government imposed limitations (Bottoni, Trimarchi and Delbono 2021; Carr 2022).

Another, and perhaps the most prolific, line of inquiry regards the complex compensatory dynamics underlying sound and music in times of crisis: whether or not aimed at re-occupying and reconfiguring otherwise precluded spaces, pandemic musicking—such as balcony singing and flash mobs, from “Clap for Carers” in the UK to “taali bajao” (clapping hands) in India—and corona-themed repertoires fulfilled more general functions of mood regulation and well-being, thus representing a powerful mean to cope with the emergency (Hansen, Wald-Fuhrmann and Davidson 2022; see also the contributions by Wald-Fuhrmann, Buch and Hansen in Agamennone, Palma and Sarno 2023: 193–212, 226–36, 272–84).

Back to our terra nullius. As the historicization process is moving forward, it is still unclear whether and how the pandemic will become part of a collective memory, especially in the case of European and North American communities (Erll 2020; Simko 2021). Memory played a pivotal role in the sociocultural construction of the pandemic experience. Especially during the first lockdowns, the sudden interruption and silencing of practices with a strong social and ritual character, such as pilgrimages, traditional festivals and historical re-enactments, gave rise to peculiar processes of reactivating community memories out of individual, group, or institutional impulses—for instance, through the sharing via online platforms and social networks of audiovisual materials from the past, preserved in public and private archives. In these processes, the sonic dimension contributed to the affective recovery and projection of the self in the absent ritual (Caruso 2020), in line with modalities

3. See also the six chapters devoted to accounts of the pandemic soundscapes collected in Part 1 of Agamennone, Palma and Sarno 2023, with case studies coming from India, East Europe, Italy and France.

4. The issue has recently been under the scrutiny of scholars working in the field of memory studies. See also the fourth part of Olick and Teichler 2021, which is devoted to memory-building processes in times of COVID-19, with case studies coming from both the Global South and Global North.
highlighted in recent debates over ethnomusicology and the affective turn (Hofman 2015; Graber and Sumera 2020).

In a significantly short span of time, however, the overall collective experience of Coronavirus (at least, that of citizens in the Global North) has become mostly transparent, somehow erased as quickly as possible to make room for new events and crises—the Russo-Ukrainian War at the fore. In the words of sociologist Jeffrey Alexander, we might be living the last instances of a “period of ‘calming down’”, in which “the spiral of signification flattens out, affect and emotion become less inflamed, preoccupation with sacrality and pollution fades. Charisma becomes routinized, effervescence evaporates, and liminality gives way to reaggregation” (2012: 26). However, we seem to be still far from a time when “the ‘lessons’ of the [pandemic] trauma become objectified in monuments, museums, and collections of historical artifacts” (ibid.). Indeed, several commentators have registered the absence of concrete, top-down institutional investments in memory-building processes. To offer but one example, in 2021 the Italian Parliament established a “Giornata nazionale in memoria delle vittime dell’epidemia da Coronavirus” (National day in memory of the victims of the Coronavirus epidemic, law n. 35/2021), setting the anniversary on 18 March—the date on which, a year earlier, international media had spread pictures of military trucks transporting victims out from the city of Bergamo. However, a quick online survey shows that very few commemorative events took place in 2022, and none at all are scheduled for 18 March 2023, even in the rich programme of theatrical, musical and cinematic festivals that Bergamo and Brescia—among the cities that covid hit first and hardest—designed in the wake of the Capitale Italiana della Cultura initiative (Italian Capital of Culture). “People may live with the consequences”, psychologist William Hirst affirms, “but that does not mean that they [will] remember the cause” (2020: 252).

In light of the complex web of mourning, remembering and understanding processes that we have briefly sketched, it is possible to recognize how the five essays gathered within this special issue belong precisely to our *terra nullius*. They partake in the process of historicizing the pandemic, insofar as their first and foremost aim is to produce knowledge about discrete phenomena


6. The title lasts for one year, and is conferred by a commission of the Ministero della Cultura (MiC) after evaluation of several application dossiers. Bergamo and Brescia, instead, were selected ex lege in light of the heavy local death toll from the pandemic. For the complete programme of the 2023 Capitale Italiana della Cultura, see [https://bergamobrescia2023.it/](https://bergamobrescia2023.it/) (accessed 24 February 2023).
regarding musicking as a complex expressive practice in times of crisis. At the same time, a specific value as testimony emerges: in fact, each of these essays can work in diverse ways as an act of memory. The authors undertook their tasks more or less on the wave of that “writing to the moment” which characterized the early stages of scholarly reflection on the pandemic. Thus, the inevitable openness of the fields of inquiry, due to the continuous transformation of objects and processes, gives back an aura of ongoing discovery and adaptation that confronts the readers of these essays with difficulties and hindrances that they might have personally experienced, both as researchers and as human beings in the middle of the pandemic storm.

The contents of this special issue can be situated at the intersection of two main issues: the reconfiguration of already existing forms of musicking in relation to social distancing and digital transfer; and, consequently, the adaptation of approaches and adoption of methodologies suitable for analysing the “new fields” that these forms of musicking inhabited. Indeed, one of the most formidable effects of the pandemic-related restrictions has been to prompt almost every kind of social interaction to “go virtual”, to the point that, although the phenomenon was grafted onto longer-term processes, it purported “a radical shift in how we imagine ourselves as close to or distant from all that surrounds us” (Cachopo 2022: 2). At least for the portion of the world’s population that has access to ICTs, it may be said that the logics of (re)mediation and its intrinsic transformative consequences on social behaviours emerged and were experienced in unprecedented ways. Thus, dyadic oppositions emerged between technology as empowerment or loss of immediacy and “naturalness”, in line with the debate on the so-called nonhuman turn (Grusin 2015) and the cyclical resurfacing of the very same discursive mechanisms that take place with every shift in overall technological conditions (Gitelman 2006). Musicking, of course, did not and could not escape these processes, also in light of its long-standing entanglement with digitization and digital politics (Hesmondhalgh and Meier 2018). Here, the shift to social networks and digital platforms implied specific forms of compensation and reconfiguration, simultaneously concerning the conditions of performativity—namely, the contents, modalities and outlines of musical performance—and the politics of participation. By adopting the theoretical framework developed by Thomas

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7. Statistical data about the current percentage of the world’s population accessing ICTs are published annually by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the specialized UN agency for information and communication technologies. The ITU’s 2020 bulletin Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures is available online at https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/FactsFigures2020.pdf (accessed 24 February 2023). As for 2019, ITU estimates that 3.7 billion people were offline, with lowest levels of access in rural areas and the Global South.
Turino (2008), we can state that the impact of mediatization processes frequently (but not exclusively) tended to refashion traditionally participatory practices to fit more presentational settings, thus soliciting new forms of participation via format-specific or platform-specific tools and behaviours.

The articles collected within this special issue focus on these issues by identifying and analysing three different ecologies of musical practice and consumption during the pandemic, which we can describe as “born-digital” (Bermúdez), “going-virtual” (Meloni and Orcarus Allasso; Dattilo; Cireddu), and “virtual-resistant” (Bottà).

Juan Bermúdez takes into account TikTok’s forms of musicking before and during COVID-19, to propose the idea of a *musical geography through practice*. By recognizing how “born-digital” ecologies work at the intersection of multiple spaces, the author identifies different forms of presence among both participants and observer(s) based on synchronous versus asynchronous interactions, in online, offline, and hybrid settings. He posits these forms of presence as a hermeneutic tool to understand how TikTok’s musicking works as a multidimensional practice inhabiting a phantasmagorical multimedia reality, rather than a representation (or projection) of a physical place into a digital environment.

Ilaria Meloni and Elisha Orcarus Allasso discuss the case of *wayang kulit*, traditional Javenese shadow puppet theatre, whose customary performances consist of the coordinated actions of a puppeteer (*dalang*), several female singers (*sindhen*), and the accompaniment of a *gamelan* orchestra of up to forty elements. As the pandemic hit Java, new formats were invented and spread with more or less success (*wayang elektrik, wayang climen*). Notwithstanding these formats drew on existing processes of adaptation to digital environments, new marketing strategies and forms of virtual participation cast light on a consistent shift towards entertainment and show-business, in line with overall processes of musicalization, discursivization, and popularization.

Moving from Southeast Asia back to the Global North, Delia Dattilo discusses how the transcultural community of Sacred Harp Singers attempted to preserve their multipart a cappella practices, and their particular spaces of participation, by negotiating their way into the domains of digital interaction. This involved, for example, the reactivation of existing audiovisual archives by various Sacred Harp communities; the development of specific forms of

8. In Turino’s words, “participatory performance is a special type of artistic practice in which there are no artist-audience distinctions ... and the primary goal is to involve the maximum number of people in some performance role. *Presentational performance*, in contrast, refers to situations where one group of people, the artists, prepare and provide music for another group, the audience, who do not participate in making the music or dancing” (2008: 26; original emphasis).
storytelling by singers during online meetings; and the exploitation of digital devices that had already been developed for training before the pandemic, all aimed at refashioning the missing sound environment and interpersonal exchanges quintessential to this practice.

Francesca Cireddu’s article deals with livestreamed music events during the first lockdown, by accounting for the cases of Italian punk-rock singer-songwriter Giancane and British indie-folk singer-songwriter Laura Marling. Cireddu specifically questions how the impossibility of physical co-presence between performer(s) and public can result in diverse ways to experience liveness. In the cases of Giancane and Marling, she highlights how the greater (or lesser) effectiveness of livestreamed performances depended upon factors such as the tendency of some performing styles towards a participatory setting and their applicability to an online context; the rendition of the affective dimension of a live event in an online setting; and the reception and perception of the live environment in an online music event.

The last article by Giacomo Bottà brings us to Helsinki, Finland, where, during the summer of 2020, underground outdoor parties were organized illegally as a form of political resistance to both pandemic restrictions and to the dynamics of cultural extraction prompted by mainstream techno clubs, the municipality, and the real-estate sector. The inalienability of physical co-presence between performers and audiences situated the underground party scene as an extreme form of “virtual resistance”. Nevertheless, some interesting “medial” transformations emerged as socio-spatial settings shifted from indoor clubs to outdoor wastelands, shorelines, and forests, thus allowing DJs more freedom to distance themselves from the professional habitus and customary repertoires of the indoor clubbing experience.

All five of the case studies gathered here clearly show that the transformation of research objects in light of mediatization processes and media-specific logics was closely mirrored by drastic changes in the “fields” themselves. For this reason, the contributors were encouraged to reflect on how their own methodologies were impacted, in addition to investigating how the pandemic affected music making and participation in selected areas. In fact, the sudden interruption of fieldwork activity forced ethnomusicologists—as well as other scholars working in the humanities or social sciences—to “think outside the box”. And we indeed witnessed a flourishing of individual approaches designed specifically to cope with a series of variables: one’s own prior skills and familiarity with digital environments; the availability of research tools, and of knowledge about how different platforms and social media in

9. On this issue, we signal two early initiatives by the University of Chicago and the National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) in the UK, both of which published online
general might work, including regional customs of users; the instability of the virtual strategies implemented, including the phenomenological variability of outputs and artifacts related to the ongoing remediation of musical practices; and finally, specific pandemic-related hindrances, spanning from the differential availability of telematics and the severe forms of digital divide that emerged even within the Global North, to the potential overabundance of empirical data collected and the ethics of online participant observation (Góralska 2020; Saxena and Johnson 2020; Rossmann 2021).

As for the contributors to this issue—most of them primarily accustomed to physical fieldwork—their approaches draw on a consolidated set of concepts and methodologies, from virtual to digital to hybrid ethnography (Hine 2000; Pink et al. 2016; Przybylski 2021), thereby confirming somehow a “canonization” of certain theoretical approaches and methodological proposals, which the pandemic itself triggered. Nevertheless, each of them felt the necessity to adapt tools and their gazes according to the specifics of their mediatized fields. This resulted, for example, in the mixing of online participant observation with offline, in-presence interviews (Cireddu) or strolling (Bottà)—insofar as the public health restrictions would allow for them. Some authors had to deal with the diffraction of collective practices into forms of individual musicking embedded into online group events, thus shifting their observation from communities to individuals (Dattilo). Others, finally, adopted a two-sided perspective, merging local-foreign inquiries driven by practice-led methodologies with digital-in-presence approaches (Meloni and Orcarus Allasso).

Of course, a collection of five essays cannot be intended to provide a comprehensive survey of how ethnomusicology reacted to the constraints forced by the pandemic, also considering the tremendous extent to which ethnomusicological and ethnographic gazes were adopted worldwide. To wit, as anthropologist Monica DeHart highlighted, in the middle of the public health emergency:

> Ethnography and its ability to know through embedded, embodied experience in particular localities [proved] more valuable than ever. Nonetheless, the global pandemic has exploded the illusion that we can rely upon our global research mobility as a fundamental prerequisite for research, asking us to imagine a world in which immersive, intersubjective research is not the first or only research tool deployed to understand a given social phenomenon. (DeHart 2020)

At the same time, as Georgina Born recently highlighted, scholars are increasingly confronted with “fast-receding ethnographic presents as well as histories pressing on them and futures emanating from them—futures with no perceptible telos”, in their everyday research experiences across the most diverse topics and fields, which requires them to develop an “anthropology in the middle” (2022: 5–6). In this light, we believe that comparing different ways of conducting ethnomusicological research during times of crisis represents a useful contribution to a field that seems destined to flourish well beyond the pandemic. In the end, this might be one of those “pandemic lessons” that we are looking for while traversing our terra nullius.

References
