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Disquieting Presences in the Concert Hall:
A Tale of Wheelbarrows, Digger Buckets and Other Unusual Objects in Recent Orchestral and Chamber Music from Northern England

Abstract. The social ritual of the concert hall always already implies the presence of some special objects that, signified by the nomenclature of "musical instruments", are intended as almost exclusive producers of sonic events. The expectations associated with orchestras and medium to large ensembles have historically excluded many categories of objects from their structures. In this paper, upon a dislocation to West Yorkshire and Manchester, I aim to discuss various experiences of writing for orchestra and medium to large ensembles that contemplate the insertion of unusual objects and sound sources within more or less conventional line-ups. In particular, considering the music by composers such as Michael Spencer, Caroline Lucas, and myself, I am able to identify the use of wheelbarrows, digger buckets and other "foreign" objects. With reference to this material, rather than focusing on discourses of supposed originality and innovativeness, I want to consider the positionality of these objects as disquieting presences within a social environment that, otherwise, continues to follow a set of strict and coercive norms. Drawing upon a heterogeneous corpus of theoretical and aesthetic references, I seek to qualify the disruptive value of these unusual insertions. I analyse scores and performance recordings, interviews with the composers and other textual material connected to the pieces.

Keywords: instruments, ensembles, unusual objects, social environments, coercive norms.

1. Introduction

The social ritual of the concert hall always already implies the presence of some special objects that, signified by the nomenclature of "musical instruments", are intended as almost exclusive producers of sonic events. Kevin Dawe observes that

> as sites of meaning construction, musical instruments are embodiments of culturally based belief and value systems, an artistic and scientific legacy, a part of the political economy attuned by, or the outcome of, a range of associated ideas, concepts and practical skills: they are one way in which cultural and social identity (a sense of self in relation to others, making sense of one's place in the order of things) is constructed and maintained (Dawe 2003: 195).

Likewise, the expectations associated with orchestras and medium to large ensembles have historically excluded many categories of objects from their structures. In proposing an "expanded definition of musical instruments", Bruno Ruviaro comes up with the three categories of "presence, movement and history", and invites us to take into account the whole set of "cultural icons and associations attached to the instrument and its community of users" (Ruviaro 2012: 24). Surely, the exclusivity of some specific "musical instruments" within orchestral contexts might have a lot to do with cultural icons and associations. As Dawe puts it,

> I am not suggesting we lose the term "musical instrument" altogether … however, the *boundaries* that have traditionally separated or demarcated musical instruments from other objects and technologies, as well as academic disciplines, must surely be questioned (Dawe 2003: 197).

Material and discursive transgression of these boundaries abundantly exist, from Luigi Russolo to Karlheinz Stockhausen, etc. As is widely known, Russolo's *intonarumori* were basically homemade sound boxes which replicated everyday noises, such as "a burster (*scoppiatore*), [which] reproduced the noise of an automobile engine and could vary the pitch of the noise within the limits of two octaves" (Russolo 1986: 32). Other *intonarumori* included "a crackler (*crepitatore*), a hummer (*ronzatore*), and a rubber (*stropicciatore*)" (Russolo 1986: 32). Russolo, with his collaborator Ugo Piatti, put together "an orchestra made up entirely of noise instruments" (Russolo 1986: 32–33). In the pieces *Corale* and *Serenata* (1924), co-written by Luigi Russolo with his brother Antonio, the *intonarumori* were mixed with traditional orchestral instruments.

Stockhausen's visionary *Helikopter-Streichquartett* (helicopter string quartet) may be even better known than Russolo's groundbreaking work:

> I had a dream: I heard and saw the four string players playing in four helicopters flying in the air. At the same time I saw people on the ground seated in an audio-visual hall; others were standing outdoors on a large public plaza. In front of them, four towers of television screens and loudspeakers had been set up: one on the left, one on the right, and two evenly spaced in between. At each of the four positions, one of the four sting players

could be heard and seen in close-up. The string players played tremoli most of the time, which blended so well with the timbres and rhythms of the rotor blades that the helicopters sounded like musical instruments (Stockhausen 1996: 214).

Stockhausen's oneiric vision of helicopters sounding "like musical instruments" verbalises precisely the desire of transcending the boundaries between instruments and other objects. In this paper, upon a dislocation to West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester and neighbouring areas in the North of England, I aim to discuss various experiences of writing for orchestra and medium to large ensembles, that contemplate the insertion of unusual objects and sound sources within more or less conventional line-ups. With reference to this material, rather than focusing on discourses of supposed originality and innovativeness, I want to consider the positionality of these objects as disquieting presences within a social environment that, otherwise, continues to follow a set of strict and coercive norms. In other words, my hypothesis here is that, by inserting these unusual objects in orchestras and smaller ensembles, we are in a way reinforcing a set of normative assumptions that eventually sustain themselves precisely on the basis of this unusuality.

2. Disquieting presences in the concert hall

2.1. Michael Spencer's *Toxic Knuckle Bones*

In his piece *Toxic Knuckle Bones,* Michael Spencer calls for the use of a JCB digger bucket by the percussionist. The piece was premiered by the BBC Philharmonic conducted by James MacMillan on the BBC Radio 3 programme *Hear and Now* in 2001. One thing I find striking in *Toxic Knuckle Bones* is that, in the performance notes at the beginning of the score, the digger bucket is never mentioned. In the line-up at the beginning of the score, Spencer just calls for two players on generic percussion: "Percussion (two players)" (Spencer 2002; Fig. 1).

Instrumentation

Piccolo
2 Oboes
Bass Clarinet
2 Horns
2 Trumpets (doubling Piccolo Trumpets)
2 Trombones
Percussion (two players)
2 Violins
Double Bass

Figure 1. Instrumentation instructions from the performance notes
of Michael Spencer's score *Toxic Knuckle Bones*

Similarly, in the performance notes related to the percussion part, there is no mention of a digger bucket (Fig. 2).

Percussion

Move triangle beater in one sweep around tam-tam or cymbal

Move in alternate directions around tam-tam or cymbal

Figure 2. Percussion instructions from the performance notes
of Michael Spencer's score *Toxic Knuckle Bones*

For someone who has a first look at the score, the bucket suddenly appears out of nowhere, surrounded by instrument change indications that call for musical objects that are much more familiar to the orchestra and concert hall. Suddenly, at bar 76, the score warns the percussionist to prepare the digger bucket for their next intervention (Fig. 3).

Figure 3. Excerpt from Michael Spencer's score
Toxic Knuckle Bones (b. 76)

Then, at bar 78, the digger bucket debuts in the piece, playing loud quavers in *fffff*, which, as David Ward puts it in his 2001 Guardian article about the piece, "is just about as loud as sound can go" (Ward 2001). The Guardian article about Spencer's piece also mentions that "Spencer's 12-minute piece is based on a text on lunacy by the poet, essayist, playwright, actor and director, Antonin Artaud" (Ward 2001). A fragment by Artaud's eponymous writing *Toxic Knuckle Bones* is in fact quoted as an epigraph at the beginning of Spencer's score:

> …thus, at the basis of this poisoning verbalism there lies the floating paroxysm of a free body returning to its origins, the wall of death being transparent, cut down, thrown down. For death behaves in this way, by a thread of anguish the body cannot avoid going through. The boiling wall of anguish first provokes terrible contractions, aboriginal, organic release such as a disconsolate child might dream about. At this parental meeting place, dreamy memories emerge-forgotten ancestral faces. A whole rendezvous of human races to which so-and-so belongs. The first enlightenment of toxic fury (Artaud 1968: 191, cit. Spencer 2002).

Artaud's evident essentialism has been abundantly criticised by Spencer himself in our recent conversations, but what is extremely interesting in this fragment is the spontaneous connection between pain and violence and the sudden appearance of Otherness, embodied by the "forgotten ancestral faces" that trigger a "whole rendezvous of human races", in line with the most traditional association of racial Others with past, primordial, even pre-historic times. As the alleged subject of current history demarcates temporal distance from their ancestors, a racial distance is also automatically established, the same distance that is imagined as separating the settlers from the Indigenous, the conquerors from the colonised, and so forth. As Anne McClintock puts it,

> in colonial discourse, … movement through space becomes analogous to movement through time. History becomes shaped around two opposing directions: the progress forward of humanity from slouching deprivation to erect, enlightened reason. The other movement presents the reverse: regression backward to what I call anachronistic space (a trope I discuss in more detail below) from white, male adulthood to a primordial, black degeneracy usually incarnated in women (McClintock 1995: 9).

To some extent, I see the digger bucket in *Toxic Knuckle Bones* as occupying precisely this "anachronistic space", that, while is not projected in the past, still stages a temporal/spatial dislocation from the objects that are normally understood as being more entitled to populate the orchestra. As discussed above, the digger bucket seems to appear out of nowhere: it is announced at the very last second to powerfully voice the resurgence of an eternally silenced Otherness.

2.2. Caroline Lucas's *stick, sand, stones*

Caroline Lucas's piece *stick, sand, stones* was conducted by Adam Ferguson and performed by the LSTwo ensemble as part of the Leeds University Contemporary Music Festival, on 1 March 2009. The piece calls for the use of a wheelbarrow. Contrarily to what happens in Spencer's *Toxic Knuckle Bones*, in Lucas's piece the wheelbarrow is listed as part of the line-up and presented in the first pages of the performance notes, with a quite detailed diagram that specifies the position of each instrument around the barrow and the various part of the wheelbarrow that have to be struck (Fig. 4).
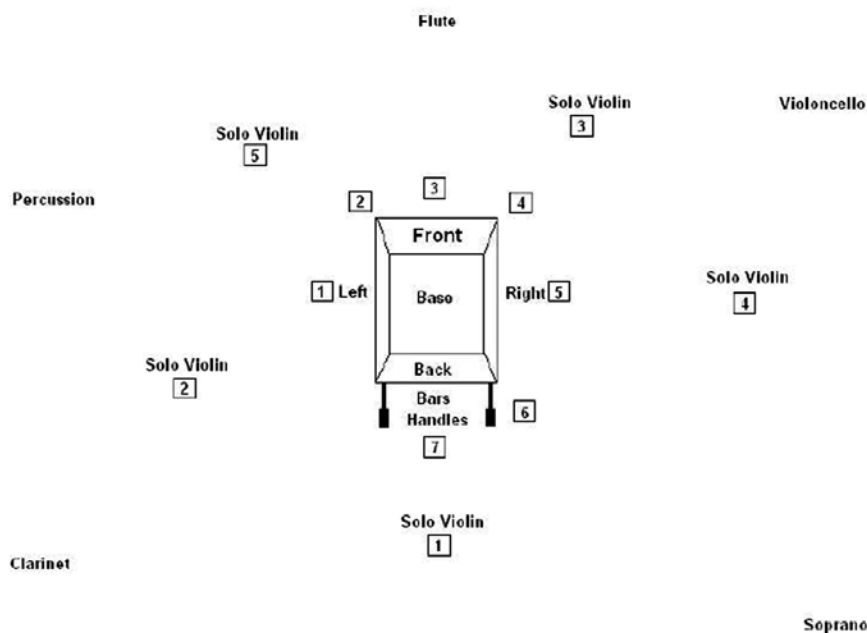
Figure 4. Stage diagram in the performance notes
of Caroline Lucas's score *stick, sand, stones*

A note in the previous page invites the performers to "navigate through the space constructing your own psychogeographic map of the performance" (Lucas 2009: n.p.). The reference to psychogeography, defined in a further footnote by the composer as "the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment (whether consciously organised or not) on the emotions and behaviour of individuals" (Lucas 2009: n.p.) seems to confirm the operativity of Ruviaro's aforementioned categories of presence, movement and history. Elsewhere, drawing upon the work of Merlin Coverley (2006), Lucas further explains that

> in contesting received depictions of place, psychogeography negates mapping as "accurate" representation, instead fragmenting existing maps to construct the *potential* for new experiences of place, rather than delineating the boundaries of that experience. The inherent ambiguity of these representations disrupts the authorised "reality" of dominant images of place and, once appropriated, presents the possibility for uncovering the new and the unseen (Lucas 2012: 53).

The "new and the unseen" emerge precisely with the noticeable presence of the wheelbarrow, which, according to other information provided in the performance notes, needs to occupy a prominent position over the performance area:

> The wheelbarrow should be placed on a slightly raised platform to create a comfortable position for the performer, in order to get optimum access to the different aspects of the barrow. The area should also be covered with cloth or tarpaulin (Lucas 2009: I).

Additional instructions are given as to the particular notation, that associates a particular position on the staff with a particular point to be struck on the wheelbarrow. Furthermore, the score calls for a whole set of other objects to be used in conjunction with the wheelbarrow: marbles, bottles and buckets of water, gravel (Fig. 5). The wheelbarrow also appears straight away at the beginning of the piece itself.

In terms of Lucas's above-quoted remark on the "inherent ambiguity" of psychogeographic mapping, it is important to note how the liberating disruption of imposed spatial narratives and the positive attention for "the new and the unseen", ideally advocated in *stick, sand, stones*, may eventually give way to opposite, negative visions of Otherness. For example, as Ang (2005) and Jansson (2010) suggest, specific psychogeographies may produce racialised images and xenophobic fears of the Other. Again, the wheelbarrow in *stick, sand, stones* might be understood as incarnating precisely this ambiguity: a fresh, "new and unseen" object, literally at the centre (as per stage diagram) of an ensemble of traditional instruments; at the same time, an irreducible Other, always passible of being identified as an intruder.
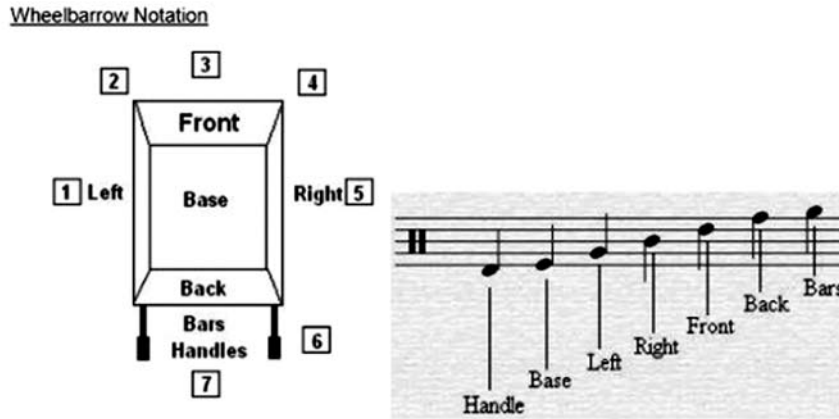
The wheelbarrow part also requires the following items to be placed within the barrow as dictated by the score:
7 Marbles, 2 x 2 litre bottles of water, 2 x 14 litre buckets of water and 1 x container of gravel

	Arrows instruct the percussionist to place the items in the barrow. The marbles are released one by one. The gravel should be dropped into the barrow in measures of handfuls. The water should be poured from approx. 0.5m above the rim of the barrow, over a specified duration. Accents indicate that the items are placed with some force. When rolling the marbles into the barrow, the word 'rim' instructs the performer to release the marble from the rim of the barrow.

Figure 5. Wheelbarrow notation and instructions in the performance notes
of Caroline Lucas's score *stick, sand, stones*

2.3. A short note on my own piece *I supikkjarìi*

In my piece *I supikkjarìi* (Messina 2012), premiered by the Icarus Ensemble conducted by Franco Fusi during the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival on 23 November 2011, my deployment of unusual performance objects contemplated an additional microphone to pick up the percussive sound produced by the pedal of the loop station every time it was depressed by the performer (Fig. 6).

The loop station, operated on the occasion by guitarist Giacomo Baldelli, ceases to function solely as a source/manipulator of electrically amplified sound, and is also utilised in virtue of the acoustic potential of its mechanical parts. This effect, clearly distinguishable throughout the whole duration of the piece, had the function, especially in the initial sections of the piece, of announcing a clear cut between ordinary balanced moments and moments when the electric and electronic saturations take over.

The title *I supikkjarìi* means "the abuses of power" in Sicilian and is not exclusively referred to violent abuses, but also to more subtle violations, that have to do with the saturation of information in the contemporary world, which has the double results of obstructing the space for alternative discourses on one hand, while on the other hand incorporating potentially revolutionary instances, belonging to said alternative discourses, into the ruling politico-economic system. All forms of dissident consciousness are thus likely to be, as Fredric Jameson puts it, "disarmed and reabsorbed by a system of which they themselves might well be considered a part, since they can achieve no distance from it" (Jameson 1984: 87).

Electric guitar

The sound should be very fuzzy. In order to obtain this, the overdrive should be preferred over the distortion.

A loopstation and a volume pedal are required.

Apart from being used for the playback of the loops, the loopstation needs to be microphoned, so that the clicks produced by the pedal can be heard in the piece.

〜〜〜〜〜 = vibrato

Interferenza: This indication means that the performer needs to unplug the jack from the instrument and touch it with the thumb or put it in contact with the metal parts of the instrument. This technique might prove to be more effective if performed using the overdrive or the distortion.

Throughout the piece, feedback and bending are also called for.

Figure 6. Electric guitar instructions
in the performance notes
of my score *I supikkjarìi*

2.4. Some additional sources

What appears clear to me is that these attempts to insert in orchestral and chamber music things, technologies and functionalities that "do not belong there" have to do with social and philosophical commentary. Obviously, I could consider the general philosophical/critical influences of the composers discussed here, and also find some substantial common points with them.

Part of Michael Spencer's production is inspired by German mystic philosophy and in particular by the work of Jakob Böhme and the concept of *ungrund*, the ground without a ground that is basically God with his/her paradoxical condition. Some of Spencer's late production reflects his interest in this philosophical concept, and in particular a whole series of pieces exists, by the title of *Ungrund (after Boehme)*[1], that overtly reacts to these topics. My personal approach to Böhme's *ungrund* passes from Dostoevsky's fiction and Nikolai Berdyaev's philosophical speculations that take Dostoevsky's work as a starting point. Berdyaev came up with the concept of "Divine Nothing" [in Russian, "*Божественное Ничто*", transliterated "*Božestvennoe Ničto*"], which is, again, the primordial freedom that precedes the existence of God. Berdyaev's reflection is, in turn, rooted in the rebellion of Dostoevsky's character Ivan Karamazov in the novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. In a nutshell, Ivan's rebellion has to do with the refusal to accept divine redemption in the context of a collective worldly existence from which evil, and the sufferings connected to it, cannot be expunged. To this rebellion, Berdyaev responds with the theorisation of a Divine Nothing that precedes God's creation of the universe, and that explains God's substantial impotence in front of evil: "freedom is not created by God; it is rooted in the Nothing, in the *Ungrund* from all eternity. Freedom is not determined by God; it is part of the nothing out of which God created the world" (Berdyaev 1960: 25). In other passages, Berdyaev connects Böhme and Dostoevsky:

> It is characteristic of the philosophy of Boehme that he hated the idea of predestination. In this matter, he lacked the Protestant spirit (as Koyre in particular has stressed). He wished to defend the goodness of God and the freedom of man, both of which were sapped by the doctrine of predestination. He was ready to sacrifice the omnipotence and the omniscience of God, and to admit that God had not foreseen the consequences of freedom. He said that God had not foreseen the fall of the angels. This problem tormented him greatly, and his torment constitutes the moral importance of his creative way. But on this point Boehme is not always in agreement with himself, his thought is antinomical, at times even contradictory. His originality lies in his antinomical attitude toward Evil. From this point of view, he shows a certain similarity to Dostoevsky (Berdyaev 1957: 258).

This fundamental paradox of freedom, that certainly tormented Boehme, but definitely tormented Berdyaev, Dostoevsky, and Dostoevsky's fictional characters as well, represents a fundamental ethical and poietic premise for my compositional work, and I believe this could be the case for Spencer's work, too.

With Caroline Lucas, we discussed a lot about cultural studies and cultural history (cf. Messina 2015), and in particular we share interests in the critical work of Antonio Gramsci (2005)[2] and Michel De Certeau (1988a; 1988b). Another fundamental theoretical line, certainly not unrelated to Dostoevsky[3] and Berdyaev,[4] is existentialism, and in particular the articulation of the Other made by Jean Paul Sartre (1956) and, in more problematic ways, by Albert Camus.[5] Then one necessary needs to mention the uncanny, as theorised by Sigmund Freud (2004) based on the novels of E. T. A. Hoffmann, and then abundantly used in Expressionist art. Finally, a crucial work in terms of the cultural representation of Otherness is certainly Edward Said's *Orientalism* (2003).

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[1]   Recordings of four pieces of the cycle are available at <https://soundcloud.com/mic-spencer/tracks>

[2]   Gramsci's important distinction between "organic" and "traditional" intellectuals, which is fundamental in Lucas's work (2012), is rooted in a particular analysis of the colonial domination exerted by the North of Italy over the South of the country, which is one of the main preoccupations of my own production (Messina 2013).

[3]   On Dostoevsky as existentialist, cf. Kaufmann (1956).

[4]   On Berdyaev's existentialism, cf. McLachlan (1992).

[5]   I refer particularly to *The Stranger* (1954), and to the problematic (or even omitted) representation of the Algerian Arab murdered by the protagonist Mersault (cf. Ally 2018).

2.5. Fanon and Otherness

However, the social and philosophical commentary that in my modest opinion resonates best with the Otherness that we codify in our pieces is Frantz Fanon's work, and in particular the book *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008). Before proceeding any further, it is fundamental to say that Fanon's work dialogues with all the various lines of thought illustrated in the previous subsection, with existentialism, psychoanalysis, cultural studies and even with Dostoevsky's work and Ivan Karamazov's rebellion (cf. Lackey 2002).

I want to illustrate one of Fanon's best articulations of what Otherness is as follows. A renowned passage from *Black Skin, White Masks* explains how the young Antilleans self-represent themselves. They identify "with the explorer, the bringer of civilization, the white man who carries truth to savages – an all-white truth" (Fanon 2008: 114). This confidence in their own whiteness lasts up to the point when they go to Europe, and understand they are seen as the savage in the comics. Most commonly, the young Antilleans then immediately feel that "in the collective unconscious, black = ugliness, sin, darkness, immorality" (Fanon 2008: 114). They therefore start feeling immoral and ashamed.

2.6. The Fanonian discovery of my own Otherness

Now, I want to dislocate the discussion for one minute from musicology to visual culture, and show how my experience as a Sicilian, for example, can be compared with Fanon's description, even with the fundamental disclaimer that I consciously am a privileged European subject and do not want to appropriate Black histories of global sufferings and oppression.

The movie scene I refer to articulates the Fanonian discovery of at least my own Otherness. In the film *Volcano* by William Dieterle (1950), upon landing in the Aeolian island of Vulcano, the Italian actress Anna Magnani meets the racialised stares of the Sicilian women (Fig. 7).

Figure 7. Stills from the landing scene in William Dieterle's *Volcano*.
Source: <https://youtu.be/4XqP6IvEb4s>

This kind of scene reappears cyclically in films about Sicily, the clichéd landing in front of the angry, racialised islanders: most notably, it appears in the film *Stromboli* by Roberto Rossellini (1950), with Ingrid Bergman playing the Nordic character disgusted by the local women. As in Fanon, here the Otherness of these women is my own Otherness as a Sicilian: although the images encourage me to identify with the white Italian or Nordic protagonist, I am secretly conscious that the representation of these Sicilian women is actually the representation of me, too.

In other words, I argue here that the real disquieting experience is represented by one's own realisation of being the disquieting element within a social environment that otherwise narrates itself as harmonic.[6] Our unusual objects in the middle of medium-to-large ensembles and orchestras reflect our Otherness within a social environment in which, all things considered, we do not really belong. As Caroline Lucas confessed to me in a recent interview, "this is why I have preferred working within the spheres of metal, folk and electronic/ noise as they present opportunities for working in different environmental and sonic spaces. I actually feel more at home in these environments" (cit. Messina 2015: 221).

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[6]   Here I am trying to establish a dialogue with the contribution by Dina Lentsner in this same volume, but also with the socio-economic issues related to the orchestra, mentioned in this volume by Roger Redgate.

3. Some (not quite final) remarks

Now, going back to the pieces, what I am proposing here is based on a vision of the orchestra (or its smaller counterparts) as an obviously bourgeois, but also as a racio-gendered environment, whereby a certain type of subject with a specific raced and gendered identity is always already imagined as the most appropriate player of a determinate role – e.g., the conductor as a man, the harpist [where applicable] as a woman, everybody is white, etc. (cf. Green 2002; Davidson & Edgar 2012). Importantly, this Eurocentric and patriarchal legacy inevitably remains, even when the individual subjects of a single orchestra are not European subjects.

Based on this premise, the deployment of "foreign" objects in orchestral and chamber music setting, as discussed in this paper, cannot just be seen as a search for originality, also given the fact that this has been abundantly done before. I do not think it has to do with any pretence of a possible renovation. Nobody wants to destroy the orchestra here, and even if we wanted to, the orchestra will not fall because of our efforts.

Rather, I argue that the significance of these objects and presences in orchestras and ensembles has to do with exposing a situation – not even necessarily criticising it openly, but precisely exposing it. If this might be related to class and gender for my colleagues, I certainly want to add race and ethnicity to the equation.

Fundamentally, the Otherness is our own Otherness, in the face of a medium, a social environment, or an institution, that conceals its own elitist gendered, raced premises behind a narrative of supposed universality, and that, even when doing so, enjoys a seemingly irresistible longevity.

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Nejauką koncertų salėje keliantys reiškiniai:
karučių, ekskavatorių kaušų ir kitų neįprastų objektų istorijos
naujojoje Šiaurės Anglijos orkestrinėje ir kamerinėje muzikoje

Santrauka

Koncertų salei būdingas socialinis ritualas iš karto implikuoja tam tikrų objektų buvimą. Jie, nomenklatūriškai paženklinti kaip „muzikos instrumentai", laikomi beveik išskirtiniais garsinių įvykių generatoriais. Lūkesčiai, siejami su orkestrais ar ansambliais (nuo vidutinių iki didelių), istoriškai iš savo struktūrų išstūmė daugybę objektų kategorijų. Medžiaginė ar diskursyvi šių ribų transgresija vis dėlto egzistuoja – nuo Luigi Russolo iki Karlheinzo Stockhauseno (pvz., Russolo *intonarumori* buvo savadarbės garso dėžutės, replikuojančios kasdienius triukšmus). Stockhauseno *Helikopter-Streichquartett* (sraigtasparnių-styginių kvartetas) sujungė styginių instrumentų garsus su sraigtasparnių. Šiame straipsnyje, persikėlus į Vakarų Jorkšyrą ir Mančesterį, siekiama aptarti įvairias rašymo orkestrui ar ansambliams patirtis, kurios susijusios su neįprastų objektų ir garso šaltinių įtraukimu į daugiau ar mažiau konvencionalias sudėtis. Daugiausia dėmesio skiriama šiems kūriniams: Michaelo Spencerio *Toxic Knuckle Bones*, Caroline Lucas *stick, sand, stones* ir straipsnio autoriaus *I supikkjarì*. Šiuose opusuose aptinkamas karučių, ekskavatorių kaušų ir kitų „svetimų" objektų naudojimas.

Šį diskursą laikydamas atspirties tašku (o ne originalumo ir inovatyvumo problema), autorius tokių objektų pozicionavimą būtų linkęs traktuoti kaip sociumui nejauką keliančias manifestacijas, nors, kita vertus, jis palaiko griežtų ir primestų normų sistemą. Remiantis įvairialypiu teorinių ir estetinių referencijų kompleksu siekiama nusakyti ardomąją šių neįprastų įterpinių vertę. Šiam tikslui įgyvendinti analizuojamos partitūros ir atlikimų įrašai, interviu su kompozitoriais ir kita su kūriniais susijusi tekstinė medžiaga. Frantzo Fanono artikuliuojama „kito" sąvoka tampa esminiu šaltiniu įprasminant kūrinius.

Autorius laikosi požiūrio, kad orkestras (ar mažesni instrumentiniai dariniai) yra akivaizdžiai buržuazinio tipo, kartu ir rasistinio-seksistinio pobūdžio socialinė aplinka, kurioje tam tikro tipo subjektas su specifiniu rasiniu ar lytiniu identitetu iš anksto yra traktuojamas kaip tinkamiausias atlikti apibrėžtą vaidmenį. Svarbu pažymėti, kad šis eurocentristinis patriarchalinis palikimas neišvengiamas net ir tada, kai individualūs tam tikro orkestro dalyviai nėra europiečiai.

Remiantis šia prielaida, „svetimų" objektų įtraukimas į orkestrinę ar kamerinę muziką negali būti traktuojamas kaip originalumo paieškos, ypač atsižvelgiant į faktą, kad šitaip jau daug kartų daryta. Autorius teigia, kad minėtų objektų įtraukimo į orkestrus ir ansamblius reikšmė veikiau susijusi su šališkumo (jis gali būti klasinio, lyties, rasės ar tautinio pobūdžio) demaskavimu.