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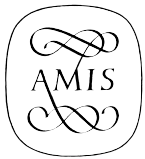

Organology and the Others: A Political Perspective

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Over the past decade, an unprecedented number of proposals have called for a renovation of the aims, perspectives, and methods of organology. In a mostly uncoordinated methodological debate, several sought a break, or at least a marked shift from "traditional organology." Authors proposed different perspectives to the study of musical instruments through the adoption of new names: "new organology" (a term used by a 2001 conference on Japanese instruments, and also by Roda), "lived organology" (Hoosmanrad), "general organology" (Stiegler), "new critical organology" (Sonevytsky), "cultural organology" (Johnston), "critical organology" (Dolan), and "biographical organology" (Hoosmanrad) just to mention a few.[2]

Who Are the Others?

This process paralleled debates long under way in disciplines closely related to organology. Proposals to revise the goal and aims of musicology, for example, had been put forward under the titles "critical" (Kerman), "empirical" (Clarke and Cook) and "relational" (Born).[3] Anthropology, which relies on a longer history and larger forces, had already started this process in the nineteenth century with the division

2. Tokyo National Research Institute of Cultural Properties, *Japanese Musical Instruments: Toward a New Organology* (Tokyo: Tokyo National Research Institute of Cultural Properties, 2003); P. Allen Roda, "Toward a New Organology: Material Culture and the Study of Musical Instruments," *Material World Blog* (blog), November 21, 2007, http://www.materialworldblog.com/2007/11/toward-a-new-organology-material-culture-and-the-study-of-musical-instruments/; Partow Hooshmanrad, "Performing the Belief: Sacred Musical Practice of the Kurdish Ahl-i Haqq of Guran" (University of California, Berkeley, 2004), 42; Bernard Stiegler, *La Technique et Le Temps 1* (Paris: Galilée, 1994); Maria Sonevytsky, "The Accordion and Ethnic Whiteness: Toward a New Critical Organology," *The World of Music* 3 (2008): 101–18; Partow Hooshmanrad, "Contemplating the Tanbur of the Kurdish Ahl-i Haqq of Guran: A Biographical Organology," *Journal of the American Musical Instrument Society* 61 (2016): 218–59.

3. Kerman deploys the phrase throughout: Joseph Kerman, *Musicology* (London: Fontana Press, 1985); Eric Clarke and Nicholas Cook, eds., *Empirical Musicology: Aims, Methods, Prospects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Georgina Born, "For a Relational Musicology: Music and Interdisciplinarity, Beyond the Practice Turn," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 135, no. 2 (2010): 205–43.

between cultural and social anthropology, and continued over the twentieth century to produce several more branches and subdisciplines. This inclination towards conscious self-assessment and refinement has occurred only recently in organology. Such discussions raised instinctive scepticism from scholars who had identified with the respective fields for a long time, but they invariably highlighted an intensified debate on the role and identity of disciplines, on the way disciplinary boundaries impact on the relationship with the object—or subject—of study, and on how this affects the position of the discipline's outputs, in respect to other disciplines and in any attempt to build a transdisciplinary model.

This is a sign of maturity that disciplines undergo when they have reached a state of complexity sufficient to stimulate criticism, in the best sense of the word, and to trigger a reassessment of their primary goals, research questions, and methods—in other words, a revision, and eventually a shift, of their paradigm.[4] Such a desire emerged within organology since the last decade of the twentieth century, but lacked a permanent platform where methodological debate could be developed consistently. A number of independent contributions were scattered along an extended period: Sue Carol De Vale's proposed in 1990 to "organize organology"; a round table on organology, organized by the Historical Brass Society in Paris in 1999, generated five position papers over the following years; John Koster organized a panel discussion in 2006 as part of the AMIS/Galpin/CIMCIM joint meeting in Vermillion, South Dakota.[5] It now seems time to bring together these perspectives,

4. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962). For a summary of Kuhn's concept of 'paradigm', see Emily Dolan's contribution to the present volume.

5. Sue Carol De Vale, "Organizing Organology," in *Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology*, ed. Sue Carol De Vale, vol. 8: *Issues in Organology* (Los Angeles: UCLA Ethnomusicology Publications, 1990), 1–34; Renato Meucci, "On Organology: A Position Paper," *Historic Brass Society Journal* 11 (1999): viii–x; Arnold Myers, "On Organology: A Position Paper," *Historic Brass Society Journal* 12 (2000): vii–xi; Herbert Heyde, "Methods of Organology and Proportions in Brass Wind Instrument Making," *Historic Brass Society Journal* 13 (2001): 1–51; Sabine Klaus, "More Thoughts on the Discipline of Organology," *Historic Brass Society Journal* 14 (2002): 1–10; Jeremy Montagu, "Organology Again: This Time, Ethno-Organology," *Historic Brass Society Journal* 15 (2003): 1–5; the 2006 panel discussion, entitled "The Study of Musical Instruments in the Present and Future," was conceived by John Koster. Remarks by the panelists were not recorded, with the exception of one position paper: Ardal Powell, "Change Lays Not Her Hand: Organology and the Museum" (35th Annual Meeting AMIS, Galpin Society, CIMCIM Conference, National Music Museum, Vermillion, South Dakota, 2006), https://www .academia.edu/6461804/Change_lays_not_her_hand_Organology_and_the_museum.

and others that emerged since, with the aim of fostering a more regular debate on the identity and purpose of organology and on how it relates to its many "others": other disciplines in a rapidly changing and increasingly competitive academic world; the expansion of perspectives in scholarship, as the number of colleagues and institutions dealing with this field expands beyond its traditional Western borders; and the "extradisciplinary" world outside the academic debate. These dimensions are changing shape irrespective of our intentions, and the way we interact with them, in a proactive or reflective way, will fundamentally alter the appearance of organology in the near future.

Who Are We?

This debate is gaining momentum at a time when most of organology's related disciplines have developed similar discussions for years—historical musicology, ethnomusicology, museology, object-based studies in general, just to list a few examples. We might save considerable time and effort, and reduce a gap in methodological discussion that has been often lamented, by noting the experiences already undertaken, while focussing on the specificity of our case. Organology is one of the earliest theoretical disciplines related to music to be recognised with a name and definition, and to develop its own separate identity, at least since the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Between then and the 1930s, its potential developed in a number of directions which were eagerly awaited by non-organologists. When Guido Adler published the first discussion of the scope, method and aims of musicology in 1885, he specifically described "the history of musical instruments" as one of the four pillars required for the understanding of the music of the past. Eric von Hornbostel, a psychologist by training, introduced the word "organology" in English in 1933 as "the comprehensive study of instruments, including their mental aspect," an endeavor which he identified with the work of Curt Sachs.[6] At the same time, increasing interest in the revival of early music fostered a growing number of (often historically oriented) technical studies, aimed at refining critical tools for the dating and attribution of instruments, the understanding of their construction materials

6. Guido Adler, "Umfang, Methode Und Ziel Der Musikwissenschaf," *Vierteljahrsschrift Für Musikwissenschaft* 1 (1885): 10; Eric M. von Hornbostel, "The Ethnology of African Sound Instruments: Comments on 'Geist Und Werden Der Musikinstrumente' by C. Sachs," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 6, no. 2 (1933): 131.

and techniques, and their relationship with performance contexts and practices.

After the divisions of the Second World War, both the interest in musical instruments and the need to congregate in extra-political contexts were reflected by the formation of three specialised associations: the Galpin Society (1946), the International Committee for Musical Instrument Museums and Collections of the International Council of Museums (1961), and the American Musical Instrument Society (1971). The provision of an identifiable public, dedicated journals, and conferences had the almost immediate outcome of stimulating an extraordinary increase in the quality and consistency of research on musical instruments, and of strengthening the identity of this field in its academic and museum-related dimensions. At the same time, it offered the ground for a hyper-specialization which characterized most disciplines in the second half of the twentieth century; its detrimental effects on the circulation of knowledge have been widely discussed over the past four decades.

As Sabine Klaus convincingly argued, the refinements and techniques developed over those years allowed organology to focus on matters that went well beyond the immediate requirements of musicology, to the point of questioning now whether the relationship between the two is still beneficial, or rather hindering the development of our field in richer, livelier and more complex directions.[7] Organology has developed such a strong identity, vocabulary, and even social interaction among its members that it can—and possibly does—operate as an independent discipline. At the same time, this independence has arguably alienated other communities, which now struggle to understand organological language and don't see a sufficient impact on their respective interests, lives, or needs to engage with it.

The Price of Independence

The speed at which specific knowledge in our field has developed over the past decades, submissions that exceed available space in our journals, and better attended conferences than those of many other disciplines of comparable size, might all be encouraging signs that organology can develop further as a fully fledged independent discipline. (Any half-hearted claim to be a sub-discipline of something else begs the recurrent question: of what?) A claim for independence might also be

7. Klaus, "More Thoughts on the Discipline of Organology," 1.

reinforced by the number of independent music museums opened over the past decade, some of them proving very successful in terms of visitor numbers and sustainability.

However, a closer look into each of these contexts offers a rather different scenario. Although a general map of university teachings in organology does not exist, the number of courses dedicated to musical instruments that I am aware of has drastically shrunk over the past decade, with professorships being closed and dedicated courses—never overabundant—being cut. This applies to all branches of education focussed on musical instruments, except performing: courses focusing on research, making, and conservation are all disappearing at the same rate. It also applies to the world of museums, which for almost a century and a half have been the main seat of empirical research on musical instruments. Through the work of curators, museums are ideally placed to coordinate the skills of researchers, scientists, conservators, and practical musicians and to work as hinges between research and dissemination to society. However, curatorial positions in our field are being closed every year, sometimes replaced by more tightly knitted profiles that focus exclusively on dissemination, but that do not include research in their job descriptions.

At the same time, the general trend in museum displays, particularly those which focus on intangible culture (such as music, dance, and theatre, among many others), is to abandon object-intensive displays toward more diversified presentations that show a smaller number of objects in a broader cultural context. Current interpretation practices focus less on providing extensive information about their objects, and more on developing intense personal experiences that can relate to the visitors' personal interests and elicit their reaction at an emotional rather than intellectual level.[8] While this approach is proving successful in attracting larger numbers of more diversified visitors to music museums and making our collections relevant to them, it also leads to an increasing number of instruments being moved to storage, which is a cost for museums that is only justified if non-displayed collections are used for research or teaching. But if the role of research, as discussed above, diminishes, then the justification for these costs becomes harder and harder in a context where "value engineering" has become a driving force.

8. Kathleen Wiens, "Popular Music as an Interpretive Device for Creating Meaningful Visitor Experience in Music Museums," *Ethnologies* 37, no. 1 (2015): 133–49; see Eric De Visscher's essay below.

A natural reaction to this is to close ranks and assume that organology and musical instrument collections are under attack and need to be defended. To this I object: while there isn't any evidence of particular antipathy towards musical instruments, decision-makers often fail to see why or how these can be relevant when having to compete against fashion and design, local history, or simply the need for operational space, just to refer to a selection of recent examples. This is striking if we compare it with the excitement that seems to have surrounded organology at its origins: musical instruments appear to be the tool that has pervaded the widest range of social contexts and strata for the longest time in the history of humankind. How can they not be interesting?

An answer to this question might lie in the way we focus our research and communicate its outcomes, and specifically in the way we engage with other fields of research.

How Are We Perceived?

Based on discussions over the past twenty years with many colleagues and friends working in other disciplines, I have often felt that organology is acknowledged as authoritative repository of technical information about musical instruments, but regarded as unconcerned with the interpretation of this information in relation to the broader context—music, culture, society—which is rather seen as the domain of other disciplines: musicology, anthropology, or sociology. Organology is perceived as the discipline that focuses on physical aspects of its sources, leaving to others the eventual correlation of its results with relevant aspects of the human experience. This view has been critically reflected in literature without major variations over the past thirty years. In 1990, Sue De Vale described organology as a discipline [generally assumed to attend] "only or primarily to the classification of instruments"; five years later, Henry M. Johnson lamented that it "mainly examines musical instruments in terms of their physical dimensions."[9] If we move the focus to the past ten years, the views on the identity of organology have not radically changed, identifying it with the study of "instrument design, classification, and the use of instruments in 'traditional' settings" (Roda); a discipline still inspired by "the Berlin School's comparativist

9. De Vale, "Organizing Organology," 1; Henry Johnson, "An Ethnomusicology of Musical Instruments," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 26, no. 3 (1995): 261.

project to classify the world's musical instruments according to the physical characteristics of sound production" (Sonevytsky); "museums, the Hornbostel-Sachs classification system, and perhaps . . . a seemingly outdated class on measuring and documenting physical objects" (Bates); "the history and classification of instruments and the exploration of their construction" or [the inventory of] "the forms and functions of musical instruments" (Dolan).[10]

Before taking a stand on these criticisms, I'd like to compare them with some definitions that have become part of organology's history. In the first attempt to articulate the scope of the discipline, Victor Charles Mahillon suggested in 1880 that organology "demonstrates, by analysis of the constituent parts of instruments, the physical laws which govern the production of the sound in each of them."[11] Sixty years, later, but not very differently, Nicholas Bessaraboff —himself an engineer by training—maintained that organology should focus on "the scientific and engineering aspect of musical instruments," separating it from musicology, which should deal with "the creative, artistic, and scientific aspect of music."[12] Still in 2006, in the opening of the already mentioned roundtable on the current state of organology, Powell highlighted an existing split between "material and cultural approaches to the study of musical instruments," or between an "essentialist" and a "constructivist" view of musical instruments, inviting us to take inspiration from other disciplines to facilitate a shift from one to the other.[13]

While I am sure many organologists don't recognize this as the current identity of our discipline, I wonder if each of us cannot also think on the spot of a few examples where these comments are not too off the mark, if not in the narrow focus on classification and measurement, at least in identifying a perspective that takes the object as goal in itself,

10. Roda, "Toward a New Organology: Material Culture and the Study of Musical Instruments"; Sonevytsky, "The Accordion and Ethnic Whiteness: Toward a New Critical Organology," 103; Eliot Bates, "The Social Life of Musical Instruments," *Ethnomusicology* 56, no. 3 (2012): 365; Emily Dolan, "Introductory Text: Round Table on Critical Organology" (23rd Meeting of the Americal Musicological Society, Pittsburgh, 2013), https://sites.sas.upenn.edu/ams2013-criticalorganology/.

11. "L'organologie . . . démontre, par l'analyse des parties constitutives des instruments, les lois physiques qui régissent dans chacun d'eux la production du son." Victor Charles Mahillon, *Catalogue Descriptif & Analytique Du Musée Instrumental Du Conservatoire Royal de Musique de Bruxelles* (Gand: Anoot-Braekman, 1880): vii.

12. Nicholas Bessaraboff, *Ancient European Musical Instruments* (Boston: Harvard University Press for the Museum of Fine Arts, 1941): xxvi.

13. Powell, "Change Lays Not Her Hand: Organology and the Museum," 1.

with the risk of separating it from its context. I know, for example, that this is a criticism that can be easily directed at some of my own publications, which aimed at experimenting with methods for the documentation, comparison, and attribution of stringed instruments.[14] As much as each has been the result of a fascinating (for me) process of discovery, intellectual development, and often intense collaboration with other disciplines, I am aware that the outputs generated are likely to be of interest exclusively to the limited number of organologists who deal with stringed instruments, and probably not all of them. Is it bad organology? I hope not, but while this focus possibly helped to populate our organological world, I am aware that it relied on an institutional context where the value and interest of musical instruments were taken for granted; this context, as discussed above, is no longer to be assumed.

Even more importantly, many disciplines towards the end of the twentieth century have managed to break shells developed over the previous decades, and have realized that they could have a direct relationship with the surrounding world, and a tangible social impact. In 1993 Philip Bohlman described musicology as a discipline in a state of "moral panic," with a tendency to "remain oblivious to intellectual ferment . . . immunised from the crises affecting other disciplines within and without the academy."[15] At that point, musicology had already undergone its "critical" revolution, which advocated for a shift of disciplinary focus from its material sources to the subjective experience of music. Bohlman's essay, though, went beyond the concern with what was happening within the discipline, and opened a series of questions that concerned how it interacted with the real world outside it. Music, he argued, "exists out there," but it was essentialized in an apolitical entity when it became the object of musicological study.[16] As a consequence, musicology renounced the possibility of active roles in interpreting the real world and human interaction, from its own point of view. I am convinced that the same series of considerations could be applied to organology, from

14. Gabriele Rossi Rognoni, *Bartolomeo Cristofori: The 1690 Oval Spinet* (Leghorn: Sillabe, 2002); Gabriele Rossi Rognoni, *Galleria Dell'Accademia: The Conservatorio "Luigi Cherubini" Collections, Bowed Stringed Instruments and Bows* (Leghorn: Sillabe, 2009); Gabriele Rossi Rognoni, "The Virginals of Benedetto Floriani (Venice, Fl. 1568-1572) and a Proposal for a New Attribution," *The Galpin Society Journal* 48 (2014): 5–20, 178–83.

15. Philip Bohlmann, "Musicology as a Political Act," *The Journal of Musicology* 11, no. 4 (1993): 414.

16. Bohlmann, 419.

the need to reconsider the focus of some of our studies—or simply to demonstrate their broader relevance more transparently—to the interaction that we might have with the real world "out there." This might help to bring organology back onto the broader agenda, and show that the discipline can have an impact and relevance based on musical instruments as complex interpreters of a reality that lies well beyond our primary focus.

Conclusions

From this necessarily sketchy and personal overview, a few considerations emerge that might be worthy of further discussion. Organology is today a discipline with a strong and recognized identity with a number of historical and potential ties with other disciplines and with the real world; this identity and these ties increase its odds of survival. However, this identity can also become a barrier; it is at least partially misrepresented in the critical debate, and organologists are not strongly engaged in the methodological discussion that might lead to updating its configuration and relationship with "others" both within and outside the academy.

Most of this discussion has developed outside the main organological journals, by scholars who do not identify themselves as organologists, but rather as musicologists, ethnomusicologists, sociologists, biologists, and philosophers. While this is a positive confirmation of the interdisciplinary interest towards the study of musical instruments, it is surprising that the number of organologists involved in the discussion is not much larger. I take this as a further sign that our discipline is at risk of marginalizing itself, by focusing entirely on its objects, and delegating to others the discussion on its subject and objective. As organologists, we could play a much stronger role in advocating for our field, collaborating in shaping it and helping it to undergo the transformations necessary to be aligned and integrated with the cultural context that surrounds us. This process suffers from a certain inertia, particularly compared to the rapid changes undertaken elsewhere. Some of the causes might be that we are limited in number, we can't rely on a sufficiently pervasive institutional network to foster debate and produce new forces, and our field relies on a multitude of professional profiles—academics, curators, scientists, makers, conservators, musicians, and many more—which brings diversity and richness of approaches, but also leads to a high degree of

fragmentation within the discipline where almost every organologist has a different idea of what the discipline is. This fragmentation, for example, emerged very clearly in the five position papers published between 1999 and 2003 discussed above, although the five authors all came from a comparable context (academic or curatorial).

Conversely, the proposals that emerged over the past decade for a renovation of organology have been remarkably coherent and consistent. Allen Roda's proposal for a new organology proposed a focus on "the relationship between humans and instruments," which resonated with those advanced in the 1990s to "explain society and culture" through musical instruments (De Vale) and to create "an anthropology of sound-producing objects" (Johnson).[17] It the following years, Maria Sonevytsky highlighted the need to consider "the musical instrument as an actor in the making of musical meaning"; Eliot Bates proposed "the study of the social life of musical instruments"; and Emily Dolan "the impact and implications of technology" and "an analysis of instruments' material configurations, social and institutional locations, degrees of freedom, and teleologies."[18] All these broadly align with trends that have appeared in other and much more influential disciplines, such as material culture studies, and science and technology studies. Other authors try to bring the broader debate happening in museology into the specific discussion about music (or musical instrument?) museums, such as the work of Eric de Visscher and Kathleen Wiens, both also advocating, along similar lines, for a more human museum that focuses on the visitor's experience rather than on the object.[19]

This sense of cohesion and consistency, which I don't think organology has had for a long time, is only one of the many outcomes that might derive from a more conscious integration between organology and

17. Roda, "Toward a New Organology: Material Culture and the Study of Musical Instruments"; De Vale, "Organizing Organology," 22; Johnson, "An Ethnomusicology of Musical Instruments," 258.

18. Sonevytsky, "The Accordion and Ethnic Whiteness: Toward a New Critical Organology," 101; Bates, "The Social Life of Musical Instruments," 364; Dolan, "Introductory Text: Round Table on Critical Organology"; John Tresch and Emily I. Dolan, "Toward a New Organology: Instruments of Music and Science," *Osiris* 28, no. 1 (2013): 278.

19. De Visscher, "Museums as Theatre: What about Musical Instruments?"; Wiens, "Popular Music as an Interpretive Device for Creating Meaningful Visitor Experience in Music Museums."

broader disciplines concerned with the interpretation of human culture through objects. The adoption of shared vocabularies and methods will also make our discipline more accessible and encourage readership from those broader worlds. At the moment, neither the standard methodological publications in the field of material culture studies, nor recent methodological discussion on the articulation of musicology include any mention of musical instrument studies.[20] I believe that, if we manage to include musical instruments on these agendas, organology's (and organologists') options for the future might look brighter than they do at the moment.

20. Dan Hicks and Mary Beaudry, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Chris Tilley et al, ed., *Handbook of Material Culture* (London: SAGE, 2006).