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# European Music After 1945 as a Restricted Space of Enunciation

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## Abstract

In this article, starting from the contributions of Pierre-Michel Menger and some sociological concepts of Boaventura de Sousa Santos and other postcolonial authors, the author proposes an analysis of the new musical structures created after 1945 in the new music field in Europe as a construction regulated and dominated by the core countries, critically seen from the vantage point of observation of a peripheral and subaltern country of Europe.

## Keywords

geoculture, geopolitics, new music after 1945, power, location of culture

At the very beginning, I would like to clarify the theme of my address, because its title may not be self-explanatory. The theme is to affirm the fact that there is a place where contemporary music, composed from 1945 to the present, is produced, divulged, and disseminated to other places and countries in Europe and outside. The group of agents and institutions that is active in this particular field of music creation represents a power device capable of pronouncing inclusions and exclusions in a way close to the concept of power theorized by Foucault (1998), especially in respect of not having a subject: There is no one individual responsible for the exercise of such power. There is not only a vast network of agents, teaching institutions, and systems that is important in putting in place the acts of power but also a type of internalized functioning grounded in types of discourse that mold, produce, and reproduce the reality they describe. The topic of my article reads thus.

## The Space of Enunciation of New Music

My central claim is that since 1945, a new subfield of cultural production of restricted circulation has been coming into being and that its space of enunciation is as reduced, or even more reduced, in geographical terms than ever before.

The concept of *space of enunciation* has been proposed by postcolonial theories, mainly by scholars of non-European origin, such as Gayatri Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Arjun Appadurai, and the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, among others. Reputed to be intellectuals in their areas of third-world countries and relocated as teachers at American universities, that is, having their space of enunciation in the core countries of the world system, made them question the consequences of their own

relocation. One of the most resonant topics is the title of an article by Spivak: “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2006, pp. 28–37).

Undeniably, Portuguese music is, and always has been, a subaltern musical expression in the European context that is, to quote two Portuguese composers who have written on this matter, “ignored, neglected, invisible, despised and discarded” (Delgado, 2001; Lopes-Graça, 1989); this makes the problem of the location of culture a crucial issue.<sup>1</sup>

From an analysis of the location in which contemporary music can exist—in the true sense of the word—it is probably much easier to notice the musical expressions from peripheral countries of Europe, such as Portugal, than those from the core European countries where the absence of such musical expressions usually goes unnoticed as if they were truly nonexistent.

## Others

In my opinion, this is one aspect that makes this process of subalternity invisible to almost everybody, including the scholars who write about otherness, alterity, and so on. From the viewpoint of a Western scholar of the core countries, the “Other” is the African, the Asian, and the Arab. These concerns of the musicologists for Western music and its others have mainly two reasons. First, musicology has recently found out that “classical music,” in spite of its traditional

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claims to universality, is the product of musicians mainly of Germany, Italy, and France.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it is a specific cultural tradition and a specific musical tradition. That is why the titles of traditional “Histories of Music” have been replaced more recently by the new title, “History of Western Music” (Grout, 1983; Taruskin, 2001).

The second reason is more important. Many articles and journals are now dedicated to musical expressions other than classical music. Music such as jazz, pop, rock, and world music have recently entered the curricula of academia, especially in the English-speaking countries. This is largely an outcome of the many changes that swept the musical world and, to some extent, of the presence of the Other on the horizon nearby. After the massive displacement of millions of people coming from outside Europe, the space of enunciation of many kinds of so-called ethnic musical expressions has become the European metropolis. Suddenly, the music of those very distant Others has become quite visible to European musicologists on their local horizon in London, Paris, and Berlin.

Earlier, it was not like this. Only those who traveled long distances could carry descriptions of the musical expressions. Now, they are there wherever the Other is present. Although present, the Other is still Black, Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist, and all the theories of multiculturalism are an attempt to deal with this new situation and new presence. That said, I think the most conspicuous Other by being absent in the contemporary music field is the composer from the European peripheral countries.

## The New Music Space: Menger

I shall now present my main argument, which is broadly similar to that in the article by Menger (2003) published in Jean-Jacques Nattiez’s encyclopedia *Musiques* titled “Le Public de la Musique Contemporaine.” Menger begins his argument pointing to the separation between classical music and what he calls the “creation field.” His separation refers to the one “in concert life, between concerts with a body of works from the historical repertoire and concerts of creation of new works.” He argues that “this historic evolution is that of a progressive dissociation, during the course of the 20th century, between the function of interpretation of historical works and the creation of new works, including their respective public spheres” (Menger, 2003, p. 1168). For him, this separation has

a substance—that of the schism that opposed multiple languages of high contemporary music to the language in which classical repertoire was written, that is, tonality in its various aspects and stages. It has its actors, its audience, but also its cultural administration functionaries and a network of public radios, which support and commission the production and the diffusion of works that do not have a direct or immediate market. It has its patrons, more active and present in the Anglo-American world. (Menger, 2003, p. 1169)

In continental Europe, however, this role is assumed mainly by the state. Menger continues to state, “It has its institutional chronology, that of specialized ensembles, festivals, research and production centers.” Finally, he writes,

that, progressively, music creation coming from the postwar avant-garde currents has produced the first and most successful of the models of a *market widely supported, controlled and administered by professionals of creation*, fed by public organizations or musical institutions in public or private partnerships. (Menger, 2003, 1176-1177; italics added)

These are the main features of what I call the *subfield of contemporary music*. Menger considers that

the character of the “population” of small organizations promoting contemporary music is very heterogeneous; specialized associations of musicians and composers—also subsidized—ensembles working within universities or conservatories—which happen frequently in the United States—but also more informal initiatives related to other avant-garde artistic *milieux*, as is the case in Downtown New York.

Considering the specific demand that exists in the new music field, Menger contends that within “the traditional market, demand comes from ordinary consumers, while in the specialized sphere of new music, there is an intermediate demand”; this demand, according to Menger, “is formed by composers, critics, cultural administrators, editors, musicians, teachers, *animateurs culturels*, students, etc.” Menger advances the hypothesis of a possible synchronization between the specialization of these circles of diffusion and the conditions of creative work, “that is, the specialized character of these circles has direct implications for the way composers compose.” (Willson, 2001, pp. 45-46).

For Menger, “the pieces are written *according to the norms of permanent aesthetic research*, which is the priority, in their value judgment, for the public not in the main comprising informed or traditional consumers, but professionals and experts of the art,” who are finally referred to by Bourdieu as “other producers” (Bourdieu, 1993).

I would like to cite here the example of Emmanuel Nunes, the only Portuguese composer who can claim a presence in the subfield. In an interview in 2000, regarding his living in Paris, he reacted, “to do what I want to do, I have to live where I live.”<sup>3</sup>

When I read his statement, I thought that it could very well be the other way around; that is, the fact of living in Paris, as an active member of the field, recognized by his peers, could, in a certain way, force him or lead him (consciously or unconsciously) to compose the way he composes. At least, it indeed creates objective conditions, concerning expectations, ideas of style, and aesthetic assumptions that are commonly

shared by most agents of that Parisian field, which create certain social constraints that would be quite different had he lived somewhere else, say, England, China, or Portugal.

## Emigrants After 1945

Where is the place of enunciation of contemporary music between 1945 and now? From that time on, a new figure, the emigrant composer, has emerged with the passage of time to achieve great visibility in the countries of the European center, and this allows us to identify the location of that space.<sup>4</sup>

Confining to the most relevant cases, I cite the following examples: Mauricio Kagel, an Argentinian who emigrated to Germany in 1957, where he died this year; Iannis Xenakis, a Greek (Romanian-born) who emigrated to France in 1947, and later died there; György Ligeti, who left Hungary for Germany in 1956 (through Austria), having died in Vienna in 2006; Isang Yun, who arrived in Germany from South Korea in 1955, where he died in 1995; the Hungarian Peter Eotvos, a resident of Germany since 1966; the Romanian Horațiu Rădulescu, residing in France since 1969; the Bulgarian André Boucourechliev, residing in France since 1949; and many others (Sadie, 2001).<sup>5</sup>

All these composers definitively put down roots in the central countries, which in fact possessed the structures associated with the new music: the music editors with whom they signed contracts, the radio stations that lent support and publicized their music, the cultural institutions that are in a position to commission new works, the orchestras, the festivals, the publications, and so on.

This wave of composers' emigration from peripheral areas to the countries of the center can no doubt be explained as due to the concentration of resources in those countries, the very specialized nature of the musical currents dominating the period, and the political-cultural context of the Cold War, which, in the West, gave large-scale support to artists of the avant-garde against Soviet art in its "socialist realism" and antiformalist modes. Another reason could be that, as George Steiner told us, remaining on the periphery means being doomed to the fatality of "minor languages," that is, to a certain form of nonexistence. Two other aspects are worth noting here (Steiner, 1996).

First, the end of Cold War made this process even more acute with the emigration of composers, such as Arvo Pärt (1980), Victor Suslin (1981), Alfred Schnittke (1990), Sofia Gubaidulina (1991), Giya Kancheli (1992), and György Kurtág (1993), originally from the former Soviet Union and its satellite countries, to Germany, and Elena Firsova (1991) and Dimitri Smirnov (1991) to the United Kingdom.<sup>6</sup>

Second, the centrality attained by Institut de Recherche Acoustique Musique (IRCAM), the institution founded and directed by Pierre Boulez in 1978, deemed as "the most overwhelming rescue operation of a contemporary art which a State has ever placed at the disposal of a composer," (Nattiez, 1984, pp. 353-354) promoted a regular, and at times definitive, flow of composers from other countries to Paris, for example,

the Finnish Magnus Lindberg and Kaija Saariaho (1982 in Paris), the South Korean Unsuk Chin (in Germany since 1985), the Portuguese Emmanuel Nunes (in Paris since 1964 and at IRCAM in the 1990s), the Argentinian Martin Matalon, the Italian Marco Stroppa, and many others. Even when considering composers from countries, which would otherwise be viewed as central, such as the United Kingdom, it is important to note that the following composers spent repeated and important spells of time at IRCAM: Jonathan Harvey, Brian Ferneyhough, Harrison Birtwistle, George Benjamin, and the American Tod Machover. This trend underscores the fact that tenure at IRCAM became almost compulsory to legitimize a position of distinction in the contemporary subfield.<sup>7</sup>

Emigration to the center amounted, from a musical point of view, to adopting the underlying principles of dominant currents, with particular emphasis on postserialism, a process that was considered very important in the field even in our time. Bhabha's postcolonial theory designates this process as "mimicry" (see Bhabha, 1994); the fascination that the metropolis exerts on the emigrant plays out on the desire to be the same, and thus, in this musical field, there is barely a glimpse of otherness. This process, ongoing among artists and intellectuals, has, as its literal opposite, the mass process of emigration from former colonies to the West. Unlike the individual, cultured emigrant, motivated by the aesthetic and experiential attraction exerted by the space of enunciation of the musical center, the waves of population heading from former colonies of the European powers, bring with them their language and culture, which, rooted as they almost always are in oral traditions, allow the processes of miscegenation and hybridism with Anglo-American pop-rock, endowed with overwhelming global hegemony. Differently, multicultural issues are barely voiced in the contemporary subfield.

The concern of the "travelling composer"—to use Edward Said's expression (Said, 2002)—is not to affirm difference, but rather to maximize the possibility of his or her being inserted in the field, absorbing its techniques, cultivating its ways, and becoming part of the preexisting mode of expression. Despite the major political mutations between 1945 and 2000, the *travelling composer's* destination remained circumscribed, in Europe, almost exclusively, to two of the central countries, France and Germany.

Based on empirical analysis of these facts, it is possible to describe the subfield of contemporary music as a given space of enunciation, outside which any artistic expression appears doomed to its local character and, consequently, to silence and then to absence in transnational space.

The importance of identifying this specific space of enunciation in contemporary music and its subfield can be viewed in other aspects. Between 1950 and 2000, inclusion in a European festival of a work by a travelling composer was never meant to be of any interest to music, coming as it did from an "external" place; instead, it was considered simply as the inclusion of an active agent, proximate and integrated in the field, delocalized with regard to his origin, and relocalized in the center. More specifically, from the viewpoint of the

center's institutions and specialist programmers, presenting a work by Xenakis, Kagel, Ysang Yun, or Nunes did not mean any programmatic interest on the part of the organizers of Greek, Argentinian, South Korean, or Portuguese music. What it did mean was that the field, in setting itself up as *universal*, considering the works as *works-in-themselves* and the composers as individual *authors*, with no links to any particular context—thus, universal—included in the subfield's hard core the works by these authors as authors who were proximate to them, and who inhabited and shared the same space of enunciation, and the prevailing ideology preventing the works from being considered as anything but “universal.”

It is with regard to the space thus constituted, its working criteria, and its capacity to irradiate that we must analyze the absence of Portuguese music, as much as music from other peripheral European countries.

### Kurtág's Example

By way of an example, I would like to add that in 1968, a piece by György Kurtág—“The Sayings of Peter Bornemisza” (1963-1968)—was premiered in Darmstadt. According to Rachel Beckles Willson, that year “an unprecedented number of ensembles from eastern Europe were in residence.” And, she adds that “the vocabulary of almost all nine reviewers reveals the difficulty they had with responding to premières from those peripheral regions of Europe.” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, the Hungarian concert, was interesting from the viewpoint of “cultural history,” and the Eastern bloc orchestral works from the viewpoint of “information” (Willson, 2001).

Kurtág's piece, in spite of “a good word or two” for it, produced “major reservations.” Rachel W. Willson quotes, thus, “the material exhausted itself,” “the *Spring* (one section of the piece) was unconvincing,” and “the piano part sounded like a bad imitation of Stockhausen.” Another critic writes that “the piece could not disguise its roots in the nineteenth century.” For Rachel Willson, Kurtág evidently drew on the 19th century the wrong way, and for the students of the course, ““The Sayings’ was *too* nineteenth century” (Willson, 2004, pp. 131-132).

Let's see what Willson writes in the New Grove 2000 edition entry: “The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza (1963-1968) op.7, a 40-min song cycle for soprano and piano which was Kurtág's first vocal work since before 1956, crowned this first mature compositional phase.” And she adds,

*The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza* made no impact on Darmstadt at its world premiere there in 1968, and for the next five years Kurtág was unable to make significant progress, despite a year of study in West Berlin (1971) supported by the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst. (Willson, n.d.)

It can be said that, during this period, the pieces composed outside the core countries of Europe found it very difficult to convince the members of the field (critics, students, and so on) who were unable to understand their musical

language for ideological and aesthetic reasons. In this sense, the reception of Kurtág's piece says more about the field than about the piece.

But 13 years later, in 1981, another piece was presented in the West. According to Willson,

[“Messages of the Late R. V. Trousova”] op.17 was his most substantial work since op.7, and its success triggered the wider dissemination of Kurtág's music outside Hungary. It was commissioned by the French state and the Ensemble InterContemporain. The latter, with Adrienne Csengery, gave the première in Paris in 1981, conducted by Sylvain Cambreling. (Willson, n.d.)

My claim is that this new piece by Kurtág was presented under three new conditions not at all related to a global presentation of Hungarian music: First, it was performed by a prestigious Western ensemble; second, it was commissioned by the French State; third, it therefore had the powerful blessing of Boulez because of which, even before the concert, it was legitimized, accepted, and recognized by the structural functioning of the field.

### My Criticism

What are the most negative consequences of this centralized subfield, with its extreme concentration of structures, institutions, experts, and instruments (ensembles and musicians) and having a particular ideology?

1. Once you are not accepted, or recognized by these agents (who are, in any case, few in number), you are excluded from the *space of enunciation* and from that specific public sphere. As a secondary consequence, local composers are also neglected and subalternized in their own local space of enunciation and in their own countries because in each country, outside the center, there are many who, acting as local agents of the power of the center, share the same values that organize and regulate the subfield.
2. The recognized restricted area, the restricted number of agents, and the restricted number of ensembles, festivals, and so on can function as a *closed world* divorced from the rest of the world. But the institutions, being heavily subsidized or supported by the State, cannot see their own insulation.

They are blind to the smallness of their world, blind to the irrelevance of the social impact of their music, and blind even to their own blindness.

In 1999, a new European institution—*The Réseaux Varèse*—was created by programmers of cultural institutions and directors of new music festivals in several European countries. This includes four institutions from French-speaking countries, one of which is IRCAM, and another four from German-speaking countries, which together impart a position of dominance to



the French–German axis. It has the objective of coordinating resources among the members and enabling them to articulate the circulation of projects. In a way, this new institution institutionalizes the previously described functioning.

## Conclusion

It seems certain that the way the contemporary subfield functions, it would ultimately lead to wasting artistic and aesthetic experiences. The restriction that presides over its inclusion criteria, both at aesthetic and geographical levels, implies forcefully a wide range of exclusions.

Not long ago, António Jorge Pacheco, the artistic director of Porto Concert Hall, Casa da Música, and also a new member of the *Réseaux Varèse*, announced that his programming criterion was based on *relevance*, which incidentally was repeated by the majority of those responsible for cultural institutions.<sup>8</sup> The issue to be addressed is that of knowing the procedures, which, within the subfield, produce the authority that permits the exercise of declaring who is relevant. It is precisely on some of these procedures that this text has sought to cast light on.

## Author's Note

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## Notes

1. This paper was read in the International Conference of Music Sociology held in Lisbon in 2008, and it partially derives from a PhD research investigation, now concluded, on the absence of Portuguese music in the European context. There are of course other peripheral countries where the same issues certainly apply.
2. It is obvious that, especially since the 18th century, the European musical life has been very much centralized around the most important cities of the central countries.
3. In *Espresso*, 2000, Catarina Carvalho e Luciana Leiderfarb, Lisbon, December 16.
4. I stress here that this process is quite different from what happened before and during the Second World War, when many artists, intellectuals, and composers went to the United States *escaping* first from the Nazi regime and later from the war.
5. These elements are spread through the several entries referring to these composers.
6. These dates are collected in Sadie (2001).
7. Of course there were other centers that had identical symbolic importance, especially Darmstadt during the first decades after

the war. However, the subtitle of Celèstin Deliege's book in 2000 *de Darmstadt à l'IRCAM* attests the real importance of the two locations but, more, draws the symbolic geocultural line that defines the borders of the subfield.

8. In newspaper, *Público*, Lisbon, December 1, 2009.

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## Bio

**António Pinho Vargas** is a composer, musician, and teacher at Escola Superior de Música de Lisboa and a researcher at Social Studies Centre (CES) at the University of Coimbra. He is an author of 5 operas, 10 works for Symphony orchestra, and more than 25 chamber music and solo pieces, and has also edited 10 records as a pianist/composer. He was awarded with several prizes, including the prestigious prize of the University of Coimbra in 2012 and was decorated by the President of the Portuguese Republic in 1995.