

Article received on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2009

Article accepted on October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009

UDK 7.037.3:78] Varèse E.

*Dragana Stojanović-Novičić*<sup>1</sup>

University of Arts in Belgrade

Faculty of Music – Department of Musicology

## WORK OF EDGARD VARÈSE AND 'FUTURIST MUSIC': AFFINITIES (AND DIFFERENCES)<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** The author discusses a relation between Edgard Varèse and Futurism in music. Varèse rejected to be treated as a part of the Futurist movement. He was rather sure that Futurist musicians just wanted to imitate nature; but we have to have in mind that his approach to musical Futurism was much more based on what he read in press than on his live contact(s) with projects of Futurist composers. Anyway, he was a close friend of Luigi Russolo who, although an amateur in music, should be regarded as the most prominent Futurist musician. Varèse gave a talk at the presentation of some of Russolo's instruments at a concert in Paris in 1929.

**Key words:** Edgard Varèse, Futurism, Luigi Russolo, *intonarumori*, *rumorarmonio*, *Arte dei rumori*, Ferruccio Busoni, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Henry Cowell, Umberto Boccioni, machine.

---

In order to understand the kinship between the Futurist movement, especially Futurist music production, and the opus of Edgard Varèse (1883–1965), as well as discrepancies in their artistic preoccupations, we need to outline some of the manifest postulates of Futurism. What was the meaning of being a Futurist com-

---

<sup>1</sup> Author contact information: drasnovi@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> The research for this article was carried out as a part of the project *World Chronotopes of Serbian Music*, No. 147045D (2006-2010), supported by the Serbian Ministry of Science and Technological Development.

poser, i.e. an exponent of Futurist music? Besides the implied adherence to the movement, which is to say display and realization of an intention to participate in group activities,<sup>3</sup> it meant primarily to write music which will incarnate the appointed (musical) principles (atonal music, microtonal music, aggressively charged music with sharp rhythmic curves, 'machine' music, fast tempo music etc.)<sup>4</sup> and/or to compose works using the new musical instruments which were, under the general term *intonarumori*, invented by the proponents of Futurist aes-

---

<sup>3</sup> The book *Arte dei rumori* by Luigi Russolo (1885–1947) contains a detailed list of the movement members, sorted in several artistic (poetry, painting, architecture, music, art of noises, *intonarumori*, synthetic theatre) and organizational groups (politics, propaganda, etc.). Interestingly enough, the only representative of music was Francesco Balilla Pratella (1880–1953), while Russolo was put in charge of the art of noises and, together with Ugo Piatti (1885–1953), of the instruments from the *intonarumori* group. The gesture almost suggests that the traditional music is clearly divided from the art of noises and the set of new instruments, as well as the exponents of the new art, the art of future. (Cf. Luigi Russolo, *L'arte dei rumori*, Milano, Edizione Futuriste di 'Poesia', 1916). Russolo presented Varèse with his book on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1929; the copy is kept in Edgard Varèse Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, marked EV B 1006. The gift is accompanied by an inscription: 'To my dear and great friend Edgard Varèse, my soul still filled with the passionate enthusiasm aroused in me by his magnificent *Amériques*.' The text of the inscription, written in Italian in the book itself, is quoted after the translation in: Olivia Mattis, 'Futurism', in: Olivia Mattis, *Edgard Varèse and the Visual Arts*, Ann Arbor, MI, UMI Dissertation Services, 1992, 62.

<sup>4</sup> This music could be diverse in terms of genre classification. For example, Pratella's composition *La Guerra* op. 32 (1912) was written for piano solo, but regarding the treatment of the music material, it strives towards the Futurist ideal. The opera *L'aviatore Dro* (op. 33, 1912–1914) by the same author, however, includes a range of Futurist instruments (*rombatori* [roarers], *sibilatore* [low whistler], *scoppiatori* [busters], *ululatori* [howlers]); the music material of the opera, at least in those short segments available today (provided, of course, the segments are correctly interpreted), also reflects the Futurist endeavours. Also, if we disregard that manifest adherence of certain authors to the Futurist movement, we would have little reason not to include Bartók's *Allegro barbaro* (1911) – written one year after Pratella created *Manifesto dei musicisti futuristi* his first manifesto of musical Futurism – among Futurist works. Regarding that, we should note the exceptional affinity of the composition *Danza meccanica* (1933) by Francesco Balilla Pratella and the foregoing Bartók's work. Daniele Lombardi, one of the most prominent researchers of Futurist music is inclined to connect a very great deal of compositions with the Futurist ideas. For example, he puts Igor Stravinsky in a similar context: 'Igor Stravinsky, whom the poet Francesco Cangiullo described as the most Futurist musician of all, in whom the Futurist theories seem to have been realized in brilliant fashion. And in this sense, *Piano rag Music* has lost none of its energy.' (Daniele Lombardi, the booklet of *futurisMUSIC*, Piano Anthology 1 – Daniele Lombardi, col legno, 2000, WWE 1CD, 20076, LC 07989). It turns out that the works of Edgard Varèse belong to that wide circle of Futurism-coloured works as well. Sergei Diaghilev was very impressed by the *intonarumori* instruments. It is known that he spoke with Maurice Ravel and Stravinsky about whether they could include this set of instruments in their works. Although both of them showed considerable enthusiasm, the idea of using the new instruments in their opuses was not realized. Stravinsky could hear Russolo's instruments at the Futurist concert in London in 1914. Ravel heard these instruments in 1921, at a concert in Paris.

thetics,<sup>5</sup> be the foregoing structural characteristics prominent in those works or, on the contrary, completely absent. However, we must keep in mind that the so-called Futurist composers also wrote pieces that had no common ground with the aesthetics they belonged to.<sup>6</sup>

It is typical that Luigi Russolo,<sup>7</sup> one of the most distinguished members of Futurism, wrote all his works for the *intonarumori* instruments;<sup>8</sup> adaptations of Russolo's works for conventional ensembles combined with the *intonarumori* instruments were made by his brother Antonio Russolo.<sup>9</sup> Although he did not dis-

---

<sup>5</sup> This family of instruments was constructed, built and, to an extent, patented by Luigi Russolo and his assistant Ugo Piatti.

<sup>6</sup> Among those works, we should mention the major part of the opus of Francesco Balilla Pratella, the composer whose works directly inspired Russolo to write his manifesto of Futurist music. One of Pratella's best-known compositions, which practically shows no intention to considerably evoke the postulates of Futurist music (apart from an occasional atonal oasis in the musical tissue), is the string quartet *Giallo pallido* op. 39 (1920 or 1923). This music is in some elements reminiscent of applied music, which is not at all unusual in Pratella's case; during his career, he dealt with film music, among other things.

<sup>7</sup> At the beginning of his career, Russolo was known as a painter. After the period of composing for *intonarumori* instruments, Russolo went on to writing philosophical books, and later on he turned back to painting.

<sup>8</sup> *Combattimento nell'oasi* (*Skirmish at the Oasis*, 1913), *Risveglio di una città* (*The Awakening of a City*, 1913/14), *Convegno di automobile e aeroplani* (*Meeting of Automobiles and Airplanes*, 1913/14) and others.

<sup>9</sup> Antonio Russolo, to a certain degree, also belonged to the movement and wrote several compositions which are considered a reflection of Futurist ideals. In his opus we can note a 'bifurcation', and the separate streams, under scrutiny, show no convincing unrelatedness: in *Gavotta* for piano, violin and violoncello (1914), a work of a (Middle European) Romantic concept, written during the 'fiery' phase of the Futurist movement, nothing suggests that the author is interested in Futurist principles. Quite another matter is his *Serenata* for orchestra and *intonarumori* instruments (1921); this work leaves the impression that the author is basically a Neo-classicist with a tinge of world-music, but wants to reach some pretty uncertain degree of 'modernity', hence finds the solution in incorporating the Futurist instruments. With their cumbersome and gigantic bursts in this work, it is as if they come from another musical environment, disturbing almost provincial serenity of the instrumental tissue. The original recording (i.e. the one dating back from the time of the work's conception - 1921) is preserved; it is available on the CD edition *Luigi Russolo - Francesco B. Pratella, Pionieri del Nuovo Suono in Musica, Musica Futurista & Futuro*, © Fondazione Russolo Pratella, ef. er. P'97. An analogous situation we find in Varèse's case: there were opinions (which could surely be vehemently disputed) that the coexistence of acoustical and electronic part in Varèse's work *Déserts* was done in an utterly unsatisfactory manner, that what was merged was unrelated and incompatible. Considering that some electronic implementations of the work's recorded component were produced in Pierre Schaeffer's studio for *musique concrète*, this composer emphasized that the complete fiasco of the premiere performance of Varèse's work endangered the existence of Schaeffer's studio: 'I was much more prudent, much more cautious, than Varèse, who seemed completely taken by an enthusiasm that was a bit forced, a bit crazed, and a taste for electron-

miss the possibility of creating works where the instruments of the classical and the new orchestra would stand side by side,<sup>10</sup> Russolo thought that in the future there should be a tendency towards using the 'pure' orchestra, composed exclusively from the newly invented noise instruments: 'I look forward, nevertheless, and have always looked forward to completing and enlarging an orchestra composed entirely and uniquely of noise instruments. The stimulus to do so is the more than satisfactory result obtained so far. The orchestra of noise instruments is and must remain a thing apart, complete in itself.'<sup>11</sup> During the years, he had also been constructing new instruments, so that the new orchestra, the orchestra of noise, would indeed acquire enough acoustic qualities to be used entirely on its own.

It is evident that one of the most strongly expressed Futurist tendencies was the search for the new instruments. That is also very characteristic of the creative efforts and the artistic career of Edgard Varèse. Both Futurists and Varèse had in mind the realization of the new instruments, new sound reproduction means, which would be a necessary premise of a work realization within new sonic galaxies. Neither Futurists nor Varèse dismissed (completely) the possibility of the coexistence of classic instrument set and new instrumental means. Regarding electronics, Varèse pointed out that, by including electronic medium, it was not his intention to exclude the classical set of instruments from his works: 'Our new liberating medium - the electronic - is not meant to replace the old musical instruments which composers, including myself, will continue to use. Electronics is an additive, not a destructive factor in the art and science of music. It is because new instruments have been constantly added to the old ones that Western mu-

---

ics that often comes in people who are non-scientists. The problem that *Déserts* posed was the dialogue between a Western orchestra and noises on a tape. That is an impossible dialogue. I was ashamed to provoke an "aesthetic event" in Paris for something that I considered to be extremely inept collage between an orchestra - never mind what they were playing, but they had traditional instruments - and a tape of noises, equally inept, made from recordings that were nothing special. After the scandal, the funding for our research was almost cut off, and I had a lot of trouble re-establishing the situation. Varèse's concert threatened to completely halt our research, shut our studio, etc.' (Olivia Mattis, 'Interview of Pierre Schaeffer', Paris, 6 March 1989, in: Olivia Mattis, op. cit., 268).

<sup>10</sup> 'I have added to my orchestra (and found the addition very useful) two tympani, a sistrum, and a xylophone, whose clear dry timbres make an interesting contrast to the complex timbres of the noise instruments. This is the opportunity to touch on the question of the possibility of adding the noise instruments to the conventional orchestra. Since the musicality of the noise instruments is incontestable and their intonation perfect, it is logical and natural that they be joined to the conventional orchestra.' (Luigi Russolo, 'The Orchestra of Noise Instruments', in: *The Art of Noises*, New York, Pendragon Press, 1986, 82).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

sic has such a rich and varied patrimony.<sup>12</sup> Varèse's work *Déserts* is a creative confirmation of this theoretical principle of his. Also, the Futurist instruments – the instruments of noise – could realize, among other things, non-interrupted sounds. Continuous tone that Varèse, by his own testimony, experienced physically – that is, not in his signature daydreaming, characteristic especially of his youth – for the first time by hearing a piercing, howling and rending New-York *C sharp*,<sup>13</sup> was the *idée fixe* of his artistic path. As a temporary replacement for such type of sound matter, Varèse in some of his works (*Amériques*, *Hyperprism*) exploited the sound of a siren. Therefore, the siren in some of his works should be understood as a stepping-stone towards realization of a satisfactory electronic solution (as Varèse thought it at first) for the creation of a controllable continuous sound.<sup>14</sup> A significant difference in the approach to the instruments and their potentials can be noted: the Futurists (regarding the noise instruments) made new instruments as an emanation of the environmental sounds, and by means of those instruments they strived to get new sound and 'noise' possibilities; Varèse – before he started using new electronic instruments (but not Russolo's *intonarumori*) and then electronics too – tried to use the existing instruments to produce sounds and noises that had not been produced yet. For example, he wanted to enrich sound producing techniques in wind instruments (*Density 21.5*) and percussion (*Ionization*).

There are two key moments which are invariably stressed when it comes to Varèse's refusal to be rated among the Futurists. One point is related to a period during the First World War: first, Varèse's negative evaluation of the Futurist aesthetics was published in 1916 in America, within the first Varèse's interview:

'Our musical alphabet must be enriched. We also need new instruments very badly. In this respect, Futurists (Marinetti and his *bruiteurs*) have made a serious mistake. New instruments must be able to lend varied combinations and must not simply remind us of things heard time and time again. Instruments, after all, must only be temporary

---

<sup>12</sup> Edgard Varèse, 'The Liberation of Sound', in: Benjamin Boretz and Edward T. Cone (eds.), *Perspectives on American Composers: A symposium by leading musicians*, New York, W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1971, 29.

<sup>13</sup> That was, of course, an impression of a European who came to the New World for the first time towards the end of 1915, and to New York of all the places. However, the sound universe of the downtown zone of a huge American metropolis such as New York significantly surpasses the 'noise' of every big European city even today.

<sup>14</sup> Dragana Stojanović-Novičić, 'O čemu je i kako sanjao Varese?' ['What Did Varèse Dream of and in What Way?'], in: Dragana Stojanović-Novičić, *Oblaci i zvuci savremene muzike* [Clouds and Sounds of Contemporary Music], Belgrade, Fakultet muzičke umetnosti u Beogradu and Signature, 2007, 15–16.

means of expression. Musicians should take up this question in deep earnest with the help of machinery specialist. In my own work I have always felt the need of new mediums of expression. I refuse to limit myself to sounds that have already been heard. What I am looking for is new mechanical mediums which will lend themselves to every expression of thought and keep up with thought.<sup>15</sup>

Then next year, an article by Varèse appeared in Francis Picabia's magazine 391, where he posed a rhetorical question to the Italian Futurists: 'Why, Italian Futurists, do you reproduce only what is most superficial and boring in our daily lives? I dream of instruments obedient to thought – and which, supported by a flowering of undreamed-of timbres, will lend themselves to any combination I choose to impose and will submit to the exigencies of my inner rhythm.'<sup>16</sup>

The other significant moment is placed in 1955, when Varèse reacted to Cowell's review of a concert where *Déserts* were performed: 'In his sympathetic review of my recent work, *Déserts*, which appears in the July issue of your magazine, Mr. Cowell inaccurately associates me with the Futurist manifesto written in Milan in 1913. I have never been connected in any way with the Futurist movement, and, though I admired the animating spirit of Marinetti and Boccioni's talent, I was at complete variance with their views and totally uninterested in their *intona-rumori*... Having always avoided all aesthetic cliques and their directives, I shall be particularly grateful if you will kindly print this rectification.'<sup>17</sup> Cowell namely characterized Varèse as 'the only composer connected with the Futurist manifesto written at Milan in 1913 who has achieved a position of importance in modern music.'<sup>18</sup> However, that was not the first time Cowell discussed Varèse as a Futurist-oriented author. In his essay on Varèse, published as early as 1933, Cowell presented the opinion that Varèse's language was formed 'in Europe under the influence of his teacher, Busoni, and was also affected by the Italian "Futurist" school of percussionists.'<sup>19</sup>

Why Varèse engaged so much in rejecting to be declared as a member of the Futurist movement? It seems that, above all, he did not want to be treated as

---

<sup>15</sup> Edgard Varèse, 'Composer Varèse to Give New York Abundance of Futurist Music', *New York Review*, March 1916. Quoted after: Olivia Mattis, op. cit., 57.

<sup>16</sup> Edgard Varèse, 'Que la Musique Sonne', 391, 5, June 1917, 2; quoted after: Louise Varèse, *Varèse: A Looking-Glass Diary*, London, Eulenburg Books, 1975<sup>2</sup>, 132.

<sup>17</sup> Edgard Varèse, 'A Communication', *The Musical Quarterly*, 41/4, October 1955, 574.

<sup>18</sup> Henry Cowell, 'Current Chronicle', *The Musical Quarterly*, 41/3, July 1955, 370–73, esp. 371.

<sup>19</sup> Henry Cowell, 'Edgard Varèse', in: Henry Cowell (ed.), *American Composers on American Music: Symposium*, Stanford University, California, Stanford University Press, 1933, 43.

a part of a group. Varèse often, sometimes even exaggeratedly, emphasized his originality and individuality, hence agreeing to affiliation with any artistic group would be some kind of retreat from that strongly expressed personal principle and Varèse's obstinately maintained public 'face'. Likewise, the Futurist group did not include a single composer with any measurable talent, so the alignment with that circle would create an image of a second-class author. The creative weakness of the Futurist composers certainly did not impress Varèse, and therefore he unabashedly refused to be theoretically 'put' in the same group with mediocre composers: 'He evidently felt it necessary to dissociate himself from those who hardly even deserved to be called composers.'<sup>20</sup> At any rate, Varèse had incomparably stronger creative power than any member of Futurist (musical) movement; hence his works 'outlived' the music of the Futurists.<sup>21</sup>

Varèse based his dismissal of the Futurist music concept largely on the wrong assumptions. The first and crucial one is that the Futurists only tried to imitate the sounds of the modern age. It is true that all the Futurist instruments constructed by Russolo were based on some particular sound connected with real manifestations in the everyday surrounding (sirens, automobiles, storm, machines, etc.). However, according to Russolo's concept, that was only a starting point for constructing a composition, where those sounds would combine in the same way as the timbres of classical orchestra; in his book on the art of noises, Russolo decidedly pointed out that it is necessary to reach the artistic superstructure by composing for new instruments and transcending a mere imitation of existing sounds.<sup>22</sup> To understand these instruments only as means of emulation of the real sound world would be just the same as to accuse anyone who uses a

---

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan W. Bernard, *The Music of Edgard Varèse*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1987, 24.

<sup>21</sup> We should keep in mind that there were impressive and strong creative individuals in the other fields of Futurist art; Umberto Boccioni (1882-1916) earned his reputation on the power and richness of his works, regardless of whether he belonged to the Futurist movement or not. Therefore, Futurist orientation in itself certainly could not increase or decrease qualitative levels of its 'champions'.

<sup>22</sup> 'But it is necessary that these noise timbres become *abstract material* for works of art to be formed from them. *As it comes to us from life*, in fact, noise immediately reminds us of life itself, making us think of the things that produce the noises we are hearing. This reminder of life has the character of an impressionistic and fragmentary episode of life itself. And as I conceive it, *The Art of Noises* would certainly not limit itself to an impressionistic and fragmentary reproduction of the noises of life. Thus, the ear must hear these noises mastered, servile, completely controlled, conquered and constrained to become elements of art. (This is the continual battle of the artist with his materials.) Noise must become a prime element to mould into the work of art. That is, it has to lose its accidental character in order to become an element sufficiently abstract to achieve the necessary transformation of any prime element into abstract element of art.' Luigi Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, op. cit., 86-87.

horn in their symphonic work that they are trying to imitate pastoral setting or a realistic situation in an Alpine milieu.

Based on the reconstruction of the order of 'Futurist' musical events and the corresponding phases in Varèse's biography, it is clear that in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century he made many of his conclusions on the Futurist music after pretty abstract observations, without deeper insight into the Futurist music. It is positively established that prior to his fierce attacks on the Futurist music at the beginning of his sojourn in America, Varèse had not heard even one Futurist composition. He based his criticisms solely on what he could read in the newspapers, i.e. largely on the comments of various observers and 'witnesses'. On the other hand, it is undisputable that Varèse liked the concept of an instrument popularly named *russolofono*<sup>23</sup> (originally: *rumorarmonio* [noise harmonium]), after its constructor; this instrument was actually only an extension of the possibilities of various *intonarumori* instruments, i.e. it was a sort of simple electronic medium where the different kinds (12 in total) of 'noise instrument' sounds were combined. Therefore, in multitude they did not bother Varèse, whereas while they were realized individually (each on its own instrument), he considered them artistically unworthy imitations of sonic everyday life. We can accept that Varèse could not relate to instruments being constructed after the environmental sounds/ noises, but we cannot accept his attempts to reduce Futurist's endeavours to mere imitation of real sonorities. Varèse expressed his appreciation of the *russolofono* qualities and his inclination for Russolo's efforts by agreeing to give a speech after the address of the movement leader, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944), on 27 December 1929, during the presentation of this instrument and the *arco enarmonico* (enharmonic bow) at, as it turned out, the last concert of the Futurists. When in the later years he stressed that he was never a member of the Futurist movement and that nothing connects him to it, Varèse never mentioned this act which directly supported the ideas of the movement.

In his criticisms of Futurist intentions, Varèse was mentioning the names of Marinetti and other members of the group, but never Russolo. It is possible that he did not want to do anything to jeopardize their apparently quite solid friendship.<sup>24</sup> Preserved Russolo's letters to Varèse attest to great Russolo's devotion to

---

<sup>23</sup> In his letter to Russolo, Varèse noted: 'It is with the greatest interest that I have heard and studied the "Russolofone". I am certain that the possibilities that it offers and the facility of its handling will assure it within a short period of time its place in the Orchestra.' Letter from Varèse to Russolo, Paris, 4 July 1930, [Russolo]. The letter is originally written in French, and the excerpt is quoted after the translation in: Olivia Mattis, op. cit., 56. The impression stated in the letter is the result of a Varèse's direct and 'live' encounter with the Futurist instrument set.

<sup>24</sup> Varèse, however, was acquainted with Marinetti and the other 'activists' of the movement. He first met Marinetti in Paris, approximately between 1905 and 1907, through a mutual friend,



Varèse<sup>25</sup> and to his attempts to stimulate Varèse to be more productive, to keep creating and to carry out his artistic mission completely.<sup>26</sup> Obviously knowing about Varèse's long creative standstills, Russolo encouraged him to finish the initiated projects: 'It gives me a great pleasure and satisfaction to hear that you work a great deal and that you have two works in progress. My most sincere and fraternal endorsements follow you in these projects and in the sure progress you are making in overcoming even yourself.'<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, it is possible that Varèse intimately felt that there were many meeting points between his and Russolo's concepts and that, in fact – although Russolo was an exponent of an aesthetics Varèse strived to dispute in various periods of his life (1916, 1917, 1955) – the differences in the defined goals were not that great. Varèse sensed that by implicating Russolo's name in the debates on Futurism he could make their real affinities in the approach to the sound matter more apparent.

Though we could say, according to the chronology of events and the organizational structure of Futurist artists, that Varèse indeed did not belong to the

---

Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918). Varèse's first encounter with the Futurist art occurred when he, together with Busoni, visited the first Futurist exhibition organized outside of Italy: it was in Berlin in 1912. Busoni, on that occasion, purchased Boccioni's painting *La città che sale* (*The City Rises*, 1910) for 8,000 marks, which was a fantastic price at the time. Boccioni later, in 1916, made portraits of Busoni and his wife; he worked on those portraits during the leaves from the war field. Only a few months later, the painter died tragically, after falling down from a horse during a military exercise.

<sup>25</sup> From one of Russolo's letters to Varèse we find out that Russolo left some instruments at Varèse's place: 'Fanny [Russolo's wife] will come to see you as soon as she arrives, that is, about the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> of June, and she will indicate where the instruments I have left with you should go.' (Letter from Russolo to Varèse, Tarragona, 21 May 1933, Edgard Varèse Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation). Knowing how carefully he attended all of his instruments, we realize that Russolo had an enormous confidence in Varèse.

<sup>26</sup> 'It is necessary for this Varèse to destroy the cloud and to push through his objectives, and for this I'm not sure whether it would be better to enlarge the windows or to destroy the cloud in order to realize that interior world which he permits us to see through the window. And I am sure if he could succeed in doing this, then, oh then, he would go shake hands, as a peer, with Mr. Bach, Mr. Beethoven, and Mr. Mozart! And it is this which I wish him with all my heart!' (Letter from Russolo to Varèse, Tarragona, 21 May 1933, Edgard Varèse Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation). A notable difference between Russolo and Varèse is conspicuous: while Varèse often could appear a dreamer who was not able, or in the given framework did not succeed, to realize his ideas, Russolo carried his ideas through very precisely. Let us take only the most striking example: only a few months after he wrote and published the manifesto of Futurist music (1913), Russolo, cooperating with Ugo Piatti, constructed the first specimens of *intonarumori* instruments. Therefore, he immediately set to work and apparently brought about quite an abstract idea! Then he worked systematically on constructing new instruments of the same family, in order to realize the idea of a whole orchestra assembled of the new-type instruments.

<sup>27</sup> Letter from Russolo to Varèse, Laveno, 14 January 1934, Edgard Varèse Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation.

Futurist movement, we may not by any means dispute a great kinship between his creative intentions and those of proclaimed Futurist authors. By denying his adherence to the movement, Varèse also denied his creative affinity to any of the Futurist aesthetic postulates; however, in his works he realized many procedures that were a groundwork for Futurist understanding of art and music: 'Indeed many elements of the Futurist approach – especially in visual arts – provide suggestive parallels with the later evolution of Varèse's musical ideas. If they did not directly influence him they must be counted among part of the fermenting culture of nascent artistic modernism within which he moved, and which his own work came to realize in such a decisive and individual fashion.'<sup>28</sup> We can note direct analogies between Varèse's efforts and those distinguished painter and sculptor Umberto Boccioni wrote about. While Boccioni thought that 'objects never end; they intersect with innumerable combinations of attraction and innumerable shocks of aversion,'<sup>29</sup> Varèse, discussing the sound masses in his works, noted that 'when these sound masses collide, the phenomena of penetration or repulsion will seem to occur.'<sup>30</sup> Futurism generally, as an artistic movement, dismissed all kinds of sentimentality, which was succinctly expressed by Marinetti's call: 'Let's murder the moonshine.'<sup>31</sup> Varèse avoided that same sentimentality by omitting the strings from certain of his scores. The two of them also shared exceptional inclination towards the industrialized, mechanic aspect of modern life. Varèse made a note on that: 'Whole symphonies of new sounds have come from the new industrial world, and all through our lives form a part of our daily consciousness. It would appear impossible that a man who occupies himself exclusively with sound could remain unchanged by this.'<sup>32</sup> Some of that zest is recognized in using the new instruments or, in Varèse's case, the percussion. The affiliation is also established in the enthusiastic approach to the throng of city streets, the noise which, by the very technological development, became incessant and inseparable from life; both of them maintained that music must find a

---

<sup>28</sup> Malcolm Macdonald, *Varèse: Astronomer in Sound*, London, Kahn & Averill, 2003, 74.

<sup>29</sup> Umberto Boccioni, 'Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture', quoted after: Jonathan W. Bernard, op. cit., 28. Cf. also Malcolm Macdonald, op. cit., 75.

<sup>30</sup> Edgard Varèse, 'Liberation of Sound', op. cit.

<sup>31</sup> Jonathan W. Bernard, op. cit., 25. They also advocated death of tango, love, Venice, Richard Wagner, *Parsifal*...; briefly, everything that could have a connotation of pathos. Cf. Jürg Stenzl, "'Daily Life, Slavishly Imitated": Edgard Varèse and Italian Futurism', in: Felix Meyer and Heidy Zimmermann (eds.), *Edgard Varèse: Composer, Sound Sculptor, Visionary*, A Publication of the Paul Sacher Foundation, Woodbridge, Suffolk, The Boydell Press, 2006, 145.

<sup>32</sup> Edgard Varèse, 'Musik auf neuen Wegen', *Stimmen*, 15, 1949, 401, 403. Quoted after: Jonathan W. Bernard, op. cit., 26.

manner to fit in those new circumstances and the new way of life. Forcefulness and power of the musical expression should have been an important aspect of both Futurist and Varèse's works.<sup>33</sup> They shared a view that a work of music can no longer be created after the traditional formal, harmonic, thematic patterns. They dismissed the tempered system, where the sound galaxy was reduced to the twelve chromatic tones; regarding this, Russolo wrote about a new, enharmonic system,<sup>34</sup> and Varèse used sirens, then the Theremin, in order to create a continuous sound departing from the tonal oligarchy. As the base for their views, both of them referred to Helmholtz's researches.<sup>35</sup> Varèse noted: 'I studied Helmholtz, and was fascinated by his experiments with sirens described in his *Physiology of Sound*.'<sup>36</sup> In that sense, they strived to transcend the tone universe and to step out into the realm of integration of sound and noise. Varèse said something that could completely – both by the artistic intention and the actual words used – stand along the Futurists' manifest proclaims: 'I became a sort of diabolic Parsifal, searching not for the Holy Grail but for the bomb that would make the musical world explode and thereby let in all sounds, sounds which up to now – and even today – have been called noises.'<sup>37</sup> They advocated powerful and strong sound blocks, which would make all the 'previous' music calm and 'weak' in comparison. They strived for endless freedom of the new sound worlds which would not be bounded by prefabricated moulds and preset limitations. And both parties expressed their ideas through texts of a manifesto character.<sup>38</sup>

Varèse did not accept the imitative aspect of the Futurist art, but he was wrong in reducing the Futurist music to that element alone. 'The Futurists imi-

---

<sup>33</sup> Regarding this, we should pay attention to Cowell's interpretation of that elemental power of Varèse's works: 'There is a dramatic and incisive element about Varèse's music which causes it to stand out on a program, and to "kill" any work standing next to it by brute force.' Henry Cowell, 'Edgard Varèse', op. cit., 48.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Luigi Russolo, 'The Conquest of Enharmonicism', in: *Art of Noises*, op. cit., 61–66.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Luigi Russolo, 'Physical Principles and Practical Possibilities', in: *Art of Noises*, ibid., 37.

<sup>36</sup> Edgard Varèse, 'The Liberation of Sound', op. cit.

<sup>37</sup> Winthrop P. Tryon, 'New Instruments in Orchestra are Needed, Says Mr. Varèse', *Christian Science Monitor*, 8 July 1922, 18. Quoted after: Olivia Mattis, op. cit., 60.

<sup>38</sup> We should note how many times Varèse pronounced the same resolute sentences over and over again in various interviews, as well as how many times in different published lectures he emphasized the same imperative principles (by his own conviction) of the contemporary music. Futurists, of course, marked every step of theirs by an article of a manifesto character, but also by public speeches, preferred especially by Marinetti. Marinetti maintained that a manifesto must contain *de la violence et de la precision*. (Olivia Mattis, op. cit., 66). Varèse's open letter on the goals of the International Composers' Guild contains phrases such as 'the atmosphere of combat' and 'battle call'. (Mattis, ibid.).

tate, an artist transmutes.'<sup>39</sup> However, one could also claim that the sound of sirens in *Amériques* is a reproduction of the sound/noise of a metropolis (New York).<sup>40</sup> We could debate whether this is a correct view. Varèse, however, must be criticized for interpreting Futurist music partially and putting it almost always in the negative context.

Translated by Goran Kapetanović

Драгана Стојановић-Новичић

ДЕЛО ЕДГАРА ВАРЕЗА И 'ФУТУРИСТИЧКА МУЗИКА':  
БЛИСКОСТИ (И РАЗЛИКЕ)

САЖЕТАК

У овом прегледу Варезовог односа према футуристичком покрету у музици, аутор разматра композиторову тенденцију да докаже да није био део футуристичког покрета. На почетку чланка објашњени су неки од основних принципа на којима је заснована футуристичка музика. Посебан акценат стављен је на футуристичке инструменте – *intonarumori* – које су конструисали Луиђи Русоло (Luigi Russolo) и Уго Пјати (Ugo Piatti). И Варез и Русоло били су свесни да ће нова музика о којој су сањали захтевати нова средства реализације. Док је Варез трагао за новом врстом звучног квалитета који до тада није био познат, Русоло је заступао мишљење да би звук нових инструмената требало да буде конструисан као имитација свакодневног живота (бука машина, кола итд). Без обзира на ту чињеницу, Русоло је сматрао да би композиција, будући уметничко дело, морала да буде више од пуке збирке имитативних звукова. Постоје многе сличне тенденције у Варезовом и приступу футуриста музичкој креацији: тежили су томе да ослободе музику, да се отисну изван дванаесттонског система, да раскину са стандардним (традиционалним) обрасцима итд.

**Кључне речи:** Едгар Варез, футуризам, Луиђи Русоло, *intonarumori*, *rumorarmonio*, *Arte dei rumori*, Феручо Бузони, Филипо Томазо Маринети, Хенри Кауел, Умберто Боћони, машина.

---

<sup>39</sup> Louise Varèse, op. cit., 105.

<sup>40</sup> Interpretations are possible, even regardless of Varèse's statement: '[T]he siren was used because it gave a quality of tone I desired.' In: 'Varèse Defies Hissers; Says He Won't Change Note of *Amériques*', *The Public Ledger*, 12 April 1926, 3. Quoted after: Jürg Stenzl, op. cit., 145.