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Edgard Varèse's Amériques: A Next-Level Transcription for Organ, Percussion, and Assistant

by

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ABSTRACT

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The musical world of the 1920’s gave rise to wildly opposing aesthetic views. Composers were, at one extreme pushing forth a modernist ideal indifferent to audience tastes, and at the other extreme, producing historically inspired, tuneful music. Composers such as Edgard Varèse marched boldly forward into the abyss always searching for the new, whereas, following his Russian period, Igor Stravinsky and the neoclassical camp focused their attention rearward, mining proven composition techniques of olden times and creating new versions of them.

As it turns out, the world of organ building in the 1920’s was embroiled in a similar debate of whether to push forward with new technology, or return to past models. In the 19th century, symphonic organ builders in England developed new technologies allowing for the storing of memory, and greater means of expression through electric action and multiple swell shades. This allowed the genre of symphonic transcriptions to soar in popularity. Neoclassicism’s parallel movement in organ building was called orgelbewegung (or, organ reform movement) which sought to recreate the mastery of centuries old European schools of organ building. Orgelbewegung came on the footsteps of the huge boom in large symphonic organ installations. With an eye towards tradition, these earlier
symphonic organs were altered or dismantled altogether, in order to reflect the ideals of clarity and counterpoint.

The transcription of Varèse’s *Amériques* presented here is inspired directly from the golden age of symphonic organ building, the popular genre of symphonic transcriptions, and the unapologetic modernist aesthetic of the early 1920’s. It also begins to fill an enormous gap in the organ’s repertoire; there aren’t any standard pieces from the period which exemplify the characteristics of primitivism, urbanization, or extreme modernism. The most famous composers associated with these styles (Stravinsky, Bartók, and Prokofiev) unfortunately composed no music for organ. In recent years, organ transcriptions, and the symphonic instruments they were composed for have experienced a revival of sorts, making *Amériques* fertile ground for a next-level transcription project.
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Chapter 1

Massive Pipeworks

1.1. Introduction

Organists today are the inheritors of a unique and substantial body of music - orchestral transcriptions. The custom of reclaiming and repurposing orchestral music for the organ can be found in such far reaching places as Bach’s transcriptions of Vivaldi violin concerti, Johann Walther’s transcription of Telemann and Albinoni, Liszt’s relatively novice arrangements of orchestral works, or William T. Best’s impressive reproductions of Mozart, Beethoven, and Mendelssohn: a tradition which continued to blossom well into the early 20th century. The earlier transcriptions were comparatively simple and were used for teaching, to expand the organ repertory, or for use in church. With the rise of the town-hall organs in the late 19th century, these pieces became much

1 Novice when compared to his opera transcriptions for piano.
4 A type of organ built in a secular, public venue, emphasizing grandiose orchestral expression, flexible and intuitive design, and a huge stop selection.
more elaborate. For the first time, organists would perform as other concert artists; in secular settings in front of audiences, rather than in a sacred institution out of view from the congregation. As Martin Haselböck wrote in *The American Organist* July, 1986, “…the Romantic era no longer viewed the organ as merely representing past traditions and church performance. A new class of touring virtuosi was discovering the organ as an instrument free of ideology…”

Following this tradition from its roots in England through its peak in the United States (roughly 1850-1920) will provide an essential backdrop to the presentation of a new transcription of Varèse’s *Amériques* for organ, percussion and assistant. *Amériques* was composed at a time when the popularity of organ transcriptions and large symphonic tone-poems were both in their twilight - this dissertation is the outcome of an intertwining of these two movements.

### 1.2. English Ingenuity

As can be seen in the first generation of town-hall organists, represented almost exclusively by the aforementioned William T. Best (1826-1897), this movement from the church to the concert hall dramatically affected the organist’s repertoire. Best, hired in 1855 as the first organist of St. George’s Hall, Liverpool, was the foremost organ virtuoso of his generation.⁶ He gave recitals throughout Europe and gained the admiration of

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Franz Liszt and Hans von Bülow, who wrote after hearing Best in recital: “I had no idea that the organ could be played as Mr. Best played it.”

Although Best had made a name for himself playing traditional organ repertoire such as Bach and Mendelssohn, it was his performance of orchestral transcriptions on the Henry Willis organ during the 1851 Great Exhibition in London that secured his later appointment at St. George’s Hall. Willis, the organ builder in both institutions, designed St. George’s Hall specifically for the performance of orchestral repertoire. During his appointment, Best transcribed hundreds of works, from Mendelssohn string quartets, to Meyerbeer overtures, and even piano duets by Carl Maria von Weber. Best would remain organist at St. George’s Hall for close to forty years, giving three recitals weekly, and setting the standard for town hall organists’ repertoire for generations.

It is important to mention that, during the 19th century, there were several concurrent organ-building trends all aimed at improving the organ’s flexibility and likeness to the orchestra. Organ builders Friedrich Ladegast of Germany, Aristide Cavaillé-Coll of France, and Henry Willis of England, were all at the forefront of this movement. The contributions of Ladegast and Cavaillé-Coll are well documented and their respective champions, Liszt and Franck, took advantage of these new capabilities by writing large scale, virtuosic works. However, because Ladegast and Cavaillé-Coll organs did not inspire a wealth of orchestral transcriptions (although they did inspire the rise of sym-

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10 Ladegast introduced a novel device called a crescendo-zug, which automatically and continuously added stops (later developed into the rollschweller). Cavaillé-Coll, meanwhile, refined the voicing of symphonic imitation stops such as the english horn, bassoon, oboe, and harmonic flute.
phonic organ repertoire), Henry Willis will instead be the focus for this brief history of
the town-hall style organs and their players.

Henry Willis, who was equally gifted as an engineer and artist, was the greatest
English organ builder of the 19th century. His contributions to the organ are most appar-
ent when considering the state of the English organ at the turn of the 19th century. At
1800, the organ in England was quite small. A large cathedral instrument on the conti-
nent would usually have upwards of 60 ranks, but, in England, the largest organs were
less than half that size.\textsuperscript{11} Additionally, the English organ ca. 1800, was far less capable of
maneuvering through these already limited tonal resources. These organs used an archaic
form of mechanical stop manipulation via composition pedals.\textsuperscript{12} Composition pedals
were operated by the feet and worked to mechanically draw various stops on or off, as
opposed to thumb pistons which were buttons allowing for the saving and instantaneous
retrieval of a predetermined selections of stops and were not in common usage until the
mid 19th century.\textsuperscript{13} The manuals of the early 1800’s English organ typically had a limit-
ed compass, and were extremely heavy when coupled to one another. The idea of a full
size pedal board was only just being considered and occasionally implemented.\textsuperscript{14} In
short, the English organ at the turn of the 19th century was but a fragment of what it
would become over the course of Willis’ organ building career.

Henry Willis was a great innovator, and was able to transform many elements of
the organ’s capabilities. He was especially influenced by the larger instruments he saw

\textsuperscript{11} Charles W. Pearce, "The English Organ of a Hundred Years Ago," Proceedings of the Musical Associa-
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 122.
\textsuperscript{13} Peter Williams, "Composition pedal," Grove Music Online, ed. Deane Root, accessed 24 November,
\textsuperscript{14} Pearce, "The English Organ," 118-123.
on the continent. Willis travelled to Paris in 1848 where he met with C. S. Barker, inventor of the pneumatic lever,\textsuperscript{15} and the most distinguished organ builder in Europe, Cavaillé-Coll. His introduction to Barker and Cavaillé-Coll’s pneumatics inspired many of his future patents including pneumatic thumb pistons, crescendo pedal, and pneumatic tubing for the operation of the swell shade.\textsuperscript{16} Willis organs built in the 1860’s show increasingly eclectic stop specifications with orchestral imitative ranks making up a larger portion, more fundamental tone and less upper work, an enclosed accompanimental division, and a general tonal makeup that allows for a smooth crescendo from the softest to the loudest stops on the organ. These developments all worked together to give the player more flexibility when controlling these larger organs, which, increasingly were becoming mechanical imitations of the orchestra.\textsuperscript{17}

By the end of the 19th century, completely pneumatic organs were dominating, but soon, with the advent of electricity, electro-pneumatic organs would correct some of the clumsiness and lag caused by the slower speed at which wind had to travel through the pneumatic tubes. The short-lived Hope-Jones Electric Organ Company was responsible for the first feasible design for an electro-pneumatic key action. This significant innovation was hailed as “the greatest step in the history of organ building.”\textsuperscript{18} Hope-Jones, originally an electrical engineer for a telephone company, was a key figure in bringing the

\textsuperscript{15}“The motion of the player was transmitted not by way of wooden rods but by air under pressure traveling through lead tubes and inflating motors connected to the pallet pull-downs... By freeing the builder to arrange chests, console and mechanism in hitherto unconventional ways, this form of action was of the greatest use to a builder such as the Englishman Henry Willis.” Nicholas Thistlethwaite, \textit{The Cambridge Companion to the Organ} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 14.


\textsuperscript{17}Pearce, “The English Organ,” 105.

town-hall symphonic organ to the United States. His electro-pneumatic organs were praised for their quick response from key to pallet, and for their ability to detach the console from the pipework (which was not possible with mechanical tracker organs, or tubular pneumatic action organs). The overall tonal design was meant to emphasize, even more, the possibilities of orchestral imitation with a great reduction in upper work, a robust 8’ tone, and myriad solo stops from flutes, trumpets, and clarinets, to the newly invented Viol d’Orchestre.

1.3. Edwin Lemare: The King of the Transcription

The transition from the tubular-pneumatic organs of Willis to the electro-pneumatic organs of Hope-Jones, Austin, and Skinner, can be observed in the famed career of Edwin Lemare (1865-1934). Born in England, his pedigree followed the usual plan for a superbly talented musician; he studied at the Royal Academy of Music, earned prestigious church posts (such as Holy Trinity, Sloane Street, London), and returned as professor and examiner for the Royal College of Music. His unique gifts made him the highest paid organist in the world, and had organ-building companies offering him contracts to perform on their instruments in order to showcase new innovations or technologies.

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20. Ibid.

Lemare launched his career in 1885 while playing 100 concerts at the International Inventions Exhibition at South Kensington. The instrument he played, an organ built by Brindley and Foster, displayed the new tubular-pneumatic action, and was quite small (only one manual). While this was not a suitable organ for performing transcriptions due to its small size, it nevertheless established Lemare as one of the great interpreters of the organ repertory.22

After moving to the United States in 1905, he held municipal organist posts all over the country, including: Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Portland (Maine), and Chattanooga. Many of Lemare’s most popular transcriptions, such as, Wagner’s Tristan und Isolde (1909), Saint-Saëns’ Danse Macabre (1919), Tchaikovsky’s Romeo and Juliet (1909) and Symphony no. 5 (1910), come from this period. After working with the organ-building firms of Brindley and Foster, and Walker in England, Lemare became closely associated with the Austin organ-building firm in the United States.23 Lemare was highly influential and was often hired as a consultant, or sometimes was asked to help design an organ, as he did for two of Austin’s most important organs in Oregon and Chattanooga.24

The new organs being built in the first decade of the 20th century, with their electro-pneumatic action, couplers at various pitch levels, and swell boxes for more than one division, allowed for a much more comprehensive rendering of the orchestral score. Lemare wanted to capture everything in the score, even if it required unprecedented technical mastery. His transcriptions of Wagner in particular, pose extraordinary challenges.

22 Ibid.
23 Joyce, Transcription, 40.
24 Ibid.
such as manipulating the swell shades in the midst of an active pedal line, achieving dramatic orchestral shadings through nuanced registration changes, or thumbing a shared melody between the hands across two or three manuals.

Figure 1.1 - *Die Walküre* (trans. Lemare)

Figure 1.1 shows a passage from *Die Walküre* requiring difficult pedal substitutions to ensure a legato line, while at the same time, executing a smooth diminuendo from *ff* to *pp*. Reducing stops in a passage such as this is a three-step process; first closing the swell shades, then cancelling most of the stops in that division, then reopening the shades. This is repeated with every enclosed division from the loudest to the softest.
Figure 1.2 - *Vorspiel und Isoldens Liebestod* (trans. Lemare)

Figure 1.2 is from Wagner’s *Vorspiel und Isoldens Liebestod* and shows a counter-melody which is played by the thumb of the right hand (marked by an “x” above the note) on manual I, while the rest of the fingers on the right hand remain on manual II. This shows the extent to which Lemare sought to cover every note of the orchestral score, even if it is especially awkward in performance.

These examples reveal Lemare’s technical advancements over the transcriptions of his predecessor W. T. Best. The source material for Best’s transcriptions are typically works that lie well on the keyboard, have sections of homophony mixed with counterpoint, and don’t require a huge symphonic organ to perform adequately. Best’s large catalogue of transcriptions includes mostly works by Bach, Handel and Mendelssohn, and tends to focus on clarity of voice leading rather than the layering of orchestral timbres. A generation later, Lemare sought to set in relief as many solos as possible, while disbanding traditional technique. Thus, Best’s transcriptions generally sound more like native organ pieces, whereas Lemare’s retain more faithfully the textures of the original orchestral score.
Figure 1.3 from Best’s transcription of Mendelssohn’s overture to *St. Paul*, is idiomatic to the organ, and typifies the textural clarity he prefers. This passage is indistinguishable from a genuine organ work, whereas the above examples from Lemare make no concessions towards ease, comfort or simplicity. In this sense, Lemare’s symphonic vision extends beyond the organ’s traditional use, while Best conforms symphonic scores to fit neatly within the bounds of organ technique. The difference is clearly seen in figure 1.4 below, showing Lemare’s willingness to bring dense symphonic textures to the organ without attempting to condense it in any way.
Figure 1.4 - *Vorspiel und Isoldens Liebestod* (trans. Lemare)

Lemare had the great fortune of reaching the prime of his capabilities as a performer at exactly the same time that organs were being built seemingly with his transcription prowess in mind, and audience desire for these transcriptions was peaking. Organists and organ-builders were working together to meet the demand for orchestral transcriptions. Particularly, for communities without a professional orchestra, and before the advent of radio broadcast, the organ transcription was the favored alternative vehicle for the performance of orchestral music. Lemare and other town-hall organists, seized on the opportunity to offer public concerts of symphonic masterworks for a much cheaper ticket than the symphony.25

1.4. The English Town Hall Organ in the U.S.

Lemare brought to the US not only the English town-hall organ tradition, but also the drive for organ-builders to build larger symphonic-style instruments. As America was

rapidly industrializing in the decades leading up to WWI, so too were organs expanding in all directions and complexities.\textsuperscript{26} The industrial revolution was directly responsible for the increasing size of the organ, and their soaring production in the 1910’s and 1920’s.\textsuperscript{27} Urban centers were growing, and factories were being constructed to invent new technologies and send American-made goods across the globe.

Large exhibitions and world fairs, which displayed these new technological advances, were popular attractions to large swaths of the American public. Some of the most popular attractions were the enormous organs built by American firms. These were the largest the world had ever seen, and were, more than any other previous organ, an attempt to imitate the entirety of the symphony orchestra. A Murray Harris organ built for the 1904 St. Louis world’s fair, for instance, contained 138 stops and over 10,000 pipes. This organ was purported by the builder to be “capable of producing musical effects never before heard outside the Grand Orchestra.”\textsuperscript{28} In addition to an enormous collection of stops, these organs also displayed many advancements in registration aids and mechanics such as double touch, combination pistons, swell shades, and all manner of keyboard and pedalboard couplers.

\textsuperscript{26} "Bigger, better, and louder was the motto as the United States began to transform itself from an agrarian to an industrial colossus in the decades before World War I." Whitney, \textit{Stops}, 21.


\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 23.
1.5. E. M. Skinner and the American Symphonic Organ

The pinnacle of American symphonic organ design was reached by Ernest Martin Skinner (1866-1960). During two trips to Europe in 1898 and 1924, Skinner studied romantic organ design in Germany, England and France. These trips, along with Skinner’s desire for an organ which is capable of playing all repertoire, not only symphonic in nature, led to a new style of American organ building. In England, on the first trip, Skinner took a tour of the Hope-Jones organ factory. Although Skinner was initially unimpressed, he later employed many of Hope-Jone’s tonal and mechanical innovations (i.e. electro-pneumatic action, and a plethora of 8’ stops) and invited him to join his own organ-building team in 1905.29 Skinner was also influenced by Cavaillé-Coll and Walcker (Germany), as evidenced by his preference for the French harmonic flute over rohrlöte, and the adaptation of the crescendo pedal.30

Skinner recognized that, although American organs were heavily indebted to their European ancestors, the new builders in America contributed most originally in the area of string tone. In particular, the violin had been least successfully imitated in Skinner’s view.31 The problem with imitating the orchestral string section is the natural vibrato which can’t be reproduced through mechanical means, and the “kaleidoscopic” interplay between string instruments in regard to their “change in intensity, quality, and attack…

30 Ibid., 54, 56.
forbids approach to a real parallel.”  Everett E. Truette, a founder of the American Guild of Organists, in his comprehensive registration treatise from 1919, concedes as well, saying “a column of air within a pipe cannot successfully be made to imitate the tone produced by the vibrations of the strings in the Viol family.”

However, not to discredit the string section of an American symphonic organ, Skinner suggests its importance lies not in its likeness to the orchestra, but in its additive “sparkle” and “richness in harmonies.”  Skinner worked on the string sound extensively, creating a complete family of stops. From the 32’ Violone, a “voice of profound depth”, to the flute celeste which creates the effect of muted strings, or the pungent solo Gamba, the 4’ violette and unda maris, these stops together, with their purposely detuned ranks and beating wavelengths, form an important piece of the Skinner organ. For the first time, strings had risen to the same level of significance as the diapason and the reed family. This is an important factor when evaluating an organ’s capacity to manage a complex orchestral transcription.

Though much of Skinner’s work survives in various religious institutions, he was still influenced by the town-hall organ movement. His first large-scale instrument was erected in 1916, in Portland, Oregon. Although relatively meek compared to the monstrous organs then being built in similar venues, at 51 ranks and 3,511 pipes, it still shares many traits of its far larger brethren. For instance, it includes harp, celesta, cathedral

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32 Ibid., 29-30.
33 Everett Ellsworth Truette, Organ Registration: A Comprehensive Treatise on the Distinctive Quality of Tone of Organ Stops, the Acoustical and Musical Effect of Combining Individual Stops, and the Selection of Stops and Combinations for the Various Phrases of Organ Compositions; Together with Suggested Registration for One Hundred Organ Compositions, Hymns, and Anthems Intended to Be Played on Specific Organs (Boston: C.W. Thompson, 1919), 45.
34 Ibid.
chimes, only two mixtures, and a smattering of Skinner’s newly invented, or altered/improved solo ranks, such as the English horn, cornopean, flügel horn, French horn, and orchestral oboe.  

Skinner would go on to build seven more organs in municipal auditoriums across the country. The popularity of the organ during the 1910’s and 1920’s is hard to comprehend today. Audiences would flock to inaugural recitals by the thousands and the organ became a private form of home entertainment for the rich and famous. Hundreds of residential organs were built for light entertainment purposes for upper class patrons such as Charles Schwab, John D. Rockefeller Jr., and W. K. Kellogg. Some would hire an organist at a yearly salary of $1,000-$2,000, or make use of the newly invented self-playing mechanism found in Aeolian organs.

1.6. The Grand Extinguishment and Revival

Gradually over the course of the 1920’s, trends shifted away from the romantic symphonic organ, and towards the various historic schools of European organ building. Organists and organ builders began traveling to Europe in order to hear these instruments for themselves. A resurgence in the popularity of Bach, promulgated by Albert Schweitzer, rendered E. M. Skinner’s instruments out of date with current trends. The symphonic organ, with its multitude of 8’ foundation tone, was wholly inept at providing clarity in contrapuntal music. A new “baroque” organ with less fundamental 8’ tone, and

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containing many more stops at 4’ and higher was rising in popularity. The pursuit of perform-ance practice and historic sounds brought the era of town-hall organs to an end.

Another movement, concerning music as a whole, was becoming standard practice at exactly the same time. Just as organists and organ builders were emboldened to seek out new methods to allow the old masters to speak through their performances and their instruments, composers were looking at new ways to connect with audiences who increasingly came to expect that the majority of a given program be devoted to the classics. Both movements, orgelbewegung (organ reform) as it came to be known and its compositional counterpart, neoclassicism, were highly influential, and those figures who chose not to affiliate risked being forgotten by history. E. M. Skinner, who watched many of his instruments fall out of style and subsequently altered in the name of orgel-
bewegung, didn’t live to see his organs once again revered.\textsuperscript{37} Another contemporary figure on the composition side, Edgard Varèse, didn’t align himself with any movements, especially one as historically motivated as neoclassicism. However, like Skinner, his work has now come to be recognized as some of the most important of the 20th century.

Beginning in the 1980’s and 90’s, led by players such as Thomas Murray and Pe-
ter Conte, a revival took shape, both for these large symphonic instruments from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and for the body of transcriptions written for them. In-
spired young organists and the academic institutions in which they are trained have in subsequent years slowly accepted a large number of these works as worthy of study and performance. Former organist of Yale University, Charles Krigbaum, observed that by the 2000’s, many students were attending the school because of the Newberry Memorial

\textsuperscript{37} James Gerber, “Skinner,” 69.
Organ in Woosley Hall, rather than avoiding it altogether as was the case when he was hired in the 1950’s. The organ was almost heavily altered in the 1970’s to better reflect the organ reform movement’s neo-baroque bent, but, due to financial difficulties the school was unable to follow through with the plans. It is now recognized as one of the finest romantic organs in the world. This new wave of organ building recognizes the importance of these early American instruments. Rather than altering these relics to conform to current aesthetic trends, an effort to restore predominates.

1.7. *Amériques* for Three Players

My transcription of Edgard Varèse’s *Amériques*, presented here in the appendices, is very much a furtherance of this revival. Just as Lemare sought to reach new heights of textural complexity and likeness to the original symphonic timbre through innovative techniques and registral ingenuity, the following transcription pushes the organ and the organist to the extremes of possibilities in these parameters. Every effort was made to retain the original figurations, instrumentation, register, tempo and rhythm, regardless of how difficult, awkward and impractical the transcription became. In this regard, I feel that this project is especially in keeping with the seldom-performed original *Amériques* precisely for its difficulty, awkwardness and impracticality.

Rice University’s 84 rank, Fisk-Rosales Op. 109, was the organ that informed the registral possibilities behind this transcription. It has a French-symphonic stoplist spread

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39 Ibid.
out over three manuals, two enclosed divisions, and is capable of ear-splitting fortissimos. As can be expected from any Cavaillé-Coll inspired organ, the Fisk-Rosales includes a selection of harmonic flutes, a large scaled violoncelle 8’, several color reeds including clarinet and English horn, and a very loud clarion 4’ in the pedal division.40

These are but a few of the stops needed for a performance of this transcription. However, an American symphonic stoplist adding French horn, harp, celesta, and a string division would allow for an even better rendering of the score.

The organ will, in almost all cases, need a sequencer. A sequencer allows the organist to cycle through a series of preset sounds sequentially with the press of a button. Because Varèse doesn’t repeat timbres and instead constantly varies the instrumentation throughout Amériques, in order to register the work on the organ, a sequencer will prove invaluable. This greatly increases the amount of time needed for the organist to set up registrations, but allows for as much variety in tone color as Varèse calls for in his score.

In addition to the organ having 80+ ranks, three or more manuals, and a sequencer, helpful additional aids41 would no doubt include pedal divide, double enclosures, variable tremulant, and sostenuto. Although the transcription was conceived without these aids, there are moments when each would prove useful. There are times when an important pedal tone is occurring along with two or more solos peeking through the texture. In this situation a pedal divide would allow the organist to play the pedal tone with the left foot, and play one of the solos with the right foot, providing more textural interest.

40 The clarion may also be drawn from the great manual.
41 These aids are not included on the Fisk-Rosales op. 109, but would have enabled the performer to add more layers to the transcription, albeit at the cost of even greater complexity.
Varèse often instructs the orchestra to crescendo from the extremes of the dynamic range in a very short amount of time, and the best way to do this on an organ is with a double enclosure. A double enclosure is a swell box within a swell box, and allows the organist to add an entire division and close it down to an almost inaudible dynamic level and quickly open it up to a roar when the need arises. This is preferable to the more common crescendo pedal, which gradually adds stops, because doing so changes the timbre and usually results in a more jagged crescendo.

Variable tremulants are unfortunately not common on all new instruments either, but they add an element of realism by giving the organist greater control over the speed of the vibrato of a given stop. The opening flute solo would be a prime candidate for manipulating tremulant speed. With this device, the organ becomes more like a living, breathing musical instrument than a machine-like recreation of the orchestra.

Lastly, the sostenuto would allow for “three-hand effects”. As the name suggests, when activated, the sostenuto allows the player to strike a chord on one manual, whereby the chord is sustained without the use of the hands, until another chord or single note is played again on that manual. To the listener, it sounds as if a third hand is depressing the chord while the organist uses his now free hands to play the rest of the notes. Because sostenuto capabilities are so rare on organs, its appearance in the repertoire is just short of never. In these rare cases (the current one included) an assistant providing a third or fourth hand, is instead called upon. The use of an assistant for sustain affects not only creates a new layer of sound, but greatly increases the number of organs the work may be performed on.
Finally, although this transcription of *Amériques* was initially planned as an organ solo, I decided to include as much of the percussion as possible. This was due to the unprecedented weight Varèse gave the percussion in the original 1922 version. It seems indecorous to remove that element because the percussion at times dominates the entire soundscape and there is no organ equivalent to that. Here, the various whistles, sirens, and bells are to be played by the assistant, while the percussionist sets up bass drum, kick drum, castanets, triangle, snare, cymbal, lion’s roar and gong in a semi-circle, quasi-drum set setup. The colors of the organ and the plentiful smattering of percussion instruments and noise makers found in this transcription, fills an important gap between the arrangement of *Amériques* for four pianists by the composer himself, and the original version requiring 140 players.
Chapter 2

Amériques: New Worlds, New Sounds

2.1 A New America

During the first two decades of the 20th century, there was a momentous shift occurring in the world of music. Many artists, seeking refuge from war or revolution in their homeland, or to further their career, increasingly chose the United States as their preferred haven. Conductors Leopold Stokowski, Karl Muck, Sergei Koussevitzky and Arturo Toscanini, as well as composer-pianist, Sergei Rachmaninoff all made their journey to the US at this time. A generation later, and with the onset of a second world war, Stravinsky, Korngold, Schoenberg and others would arrive. The New York avant-garde, and its equally important west coast counterpart, were beginning to rise in importance and compete with the well-established European music centers of Berlin and Paris.42 Although composers such as Aaron Copland and George Gershwin still sought out a European education in order to legitimize their career, the institution of the symphony or-

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orchestra was beginning to recognize and showcase works from this generation of American composers.

A review of concert programs from the New York Philharmonic archives, for instance, will still show a strong clinging to the traditional symphonic canon, but there increasingly are contemporary composers sharing the spotlight along with earlier masters. In 1916, and 1919 respectively, Bartók and Stravinsky made their NY Philharmonic debuts. One concert program on March 10, 1921 featured music almost entirely from living composers. Although the musical offerings from McDowell, Carpenter, Powell and others were decidedly conservative, it represented a departure from the idea that every concert must feature Brahms or Beethoven.

### 2.2 Varèse’s Student Years

In Europe, orchestras were less likely to showcase the music of contemporary composers. In 1904, a young Edgard Varèse had just entered the Schola Cantorum in Paris. He learned quickly that his vision for new music was at odds with his ultra conservative composition teacher and co-founder of the school, Vincent d’Indy. The two developed a mutual enmity resulting in Varèse’s departure for the Paris Conservatoire the following year. While at the conservatory, Varèse was free to explore new ideas through his composition instructor, Charles-Marie Widor’s, free approach. However, Varèse, after

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“a rather nasty exchange of unpleasantries with Fauré” left yet another conservatory. In all, Varèse’s experiences studying with the Parisian old-guard convinced him it was no place for an individual with radical artistic ideas.

Seeing no future in Paris, Varèse set out for Berlin in 1907. Here, through the tutelage of Richard Strauss, Karl Muck, and Ferruccio Busoni, Varèse finally received attention as a composer. Although most of Varèse’s works from Paris and Berlin were eventually destroyed in a warehouse fire in 1918, there is evidence that his growing reputation as a composer rested on a somewhat limited, but mature output of large-scale symphonic works. The destruction of nearly all of Varèse’s early works creates a unique problem when determining the trajectory of his artistic development. What we can know from the scraps of evidence is that he favored the orchestral medium, composing 15 large scale works for symphony. These include his *Rhapsodie Romane*, the *Le Délire de Clytemnestre ‘Tragèdie symphonique’* for voices and orchestra, *Bourgogne*, *Gargantua*, and *Mehr Licht*. All of these were composed before 1911, and all are now lost.

However, one piece in particular, *Bourgogne*, was praised by some of the most important musicians and writers in Europe. *Bourgogne* may be the one work from Berlin that we have the most information about as it was one of the only works which received a proper premiere. The premiere was conducted by Joseph Stransky and the Blüthner Orchestra at the persuasion of Richard Strauss. The work was held in high esteem by con-

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46 Vivian Perlis and Libby Van Cleve, *Composers Voices from Ives to Ellington: An Oral History of American Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 105. Varèse, in a much later interview, had the following to say about the music scene in Paris: “France is not a country really for music. Paris is finished. Why look, even [Pierre] Boulez doesn’t stay in France. He could stay there and do whatever he wants because he’s from, I think, a well-to-do family.”
ductor Karl Muck as well, who mentioned it as evidence of Varèse's “personal inventive-
ness” in a grant proposal on his behalf.49 The score was also sent to Hugo von Hof-
mannsthal and Romain Rolland, both highly regarded writers.50 Both approved of the
work, with the latter praising its orchestral colors, compositional integrity, and its like-
ness to both Debussy and Strauss. This work miraculously was not lost in the warehouse
fire. Nevertheless, it was destroyed in a fit of rage by Varèse himself around 1961, effec-
tively erasing any musical ties he may have had with Europe.

Varèse left Berlin to return to Paris in 1913 in hopes of finding more work. Un-
fortunately, aside from meeting Luigi Russolo and conducting the premiere of Debussy’s
Le Martyre de Saint Sebastian in 1914, nothing came of it.51 In March 1915, he was
drafted into the French army where he served as a bicycle messenger. Fortuitously for
Varèse, he contracted double pneumonia and nearly died, relieving him of active duty.
But, because of the war, he was unable to re-enter Berlin to retrieve his soon-to-be de-
stroyed scores. Instead, he boarded a container ship headed for the United States in
search of a new start.52

2.3 Settlement in New York

Edgard Varèse arrived in New York in December of 1915, with little money and
few connections. He rented a dingy apartment on West 88th street with a painter and his

49 Ibid., 18.
50 Varèse, Looking-glass, 247.
52 Ibid.
wife for $1 a day. There was no plumbing, no central heating, and the zinc bath tub had to be carried in from the outdoors. It would be two years before any meaningful work began as a conductor. In the mean time, Varèse worked as a copyist, orchestrator, tutor, and at one point, even a piano salesman. Through letters of introduction, Varèse became associated with the Dadaist circle very early on, as well as the cubist painters, whom he met in the area of Greenwich Village. Louise McCutheon, wife of writer Allen Norton (and eventually Varèse’s wife), photographer Alfred Stieglitz and painter Marcel Duchamp were some of the most important acquaintances Varèse made in his first weeks settling in New York.

The struggles Varèse coped with during his early years in New York would be occasionally interrupted by brief triumphs. However, his unapologetically modernist vision would ensure that his recognition as one of the most influential composers of the 20th century would come later in his career, if at all. As early as 1916, Varèse was admonishing the current state of music and the need for the research and development of new instruments. He told the New York Telegraph, “Musicians should take up this question in deep earnest with the help of machinery specialists. I refuse to limit myself to sounds that have already been heard. What I am looking for are new technical mediums which can lend themselves to every expression of thought and can keep up with thought.”

This quest for technology that would allow the sounds in Varèse’s creative mind to travel

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53 Ibid., 76. Not to mention film industry jobs including silent film actor, and silent film conductor.
54 Clayson, Edgard Varèse, 72-74.
55 Ibid., 76.
unfiltered to the listener’s ear, would take up much of his later career and unfortunately lead him into vast artistic deserts and emotional despair.\(^5^6\)

### 2.4 Links to the Visual Arts

To explore more fully the creative world that gave rise to *Amèriques*, it is necessary to discuss Varèse’s close relationship with art. Thanks to the work of musicologists such as Francis Routh, David Bloch, Jonathan Bernard, and perhaps most importantly, philosopher Olivia Mattis’ 1991 dissertation, Varèse’s unique aesthetic approach is becoming more clear. This is especially true in regard to his boundless adaptation of the visual arts. It is also important to note that, while Varèse was reticent to draw connections between his music and other concurrent movements in music, he was usually more willing to make associations with the visual arts. He also generally disliked theoretical study of his music. Composer Roger Reynolds retells the story of when he was brave enough to approach Varèse with analyses of his work. This type of encounter did not usually end well for theorists as Reynolds reports:

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\text{I went to him as a young music student who had worked very hard at trying to understand his music... I worked very, very hard at analyzing \textit{Intégrales} and attempting to develop some theory of chordal structure and succession... I think that I was allowed to spend perhaps up to thirty or forty seconds on that before it was thrown on the floor, discarded, and he just would not hear of the idea that his music could be reduced to consistency of method... And Varèse, of course, completely rejected that point of view- it was preposterous and even outrageous for somebody to be spending time attempting to show that there was any order.}^{5^7}\]

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\(^{5^6}\) Varèse has no published works from 1936-1954. These years were spent searching for new technology, and working on various projects left unfinished at the time of his death.  

However, he never denied the strong and apparent link between his music and the visual arts:

> Although in my youth I had the extraordinary good fortune to be sponsored and aided by such musicians as Debussy, Strauss, Muck, Mahler--even Massenet--and . . . Busoni, most of my life I have been rather more closely associated with painters, poets, architects, and scientists than musicians.\(^{58}\)

Because he was the only musician in the first wave of French modernists coming to the United States during World War I, he was heavily influenced by the artists he was surrounded by.\(^{59}\) Few musicians of importance valued the visual arts as much as Varèse. Many of his acquaintances in the 1920’s were artists, such as Picabia and Duchamp; he attended their exhibitions, mingled and shared ideas, and was an amateur artist himself. Even earlier in Paris, Varèse was associated with the cubists Albert Gleizes and Fernand Léger.\(^{60}\) He had a great deal of respect for artists, noting that they were always one step ahead of musicians. Varèse told his friend, painter and scientist Alcopley (Alfred Lewin Copley) in a 1963 interview:

> It is many years now since painting freed itself from the constraints of pure representation and description and from academic rules. Painters responded to the world—the completely different world—in which they found themselves, while music was still fitting itself into the arbitrary patterns, called forms, and following obsolete rules.\(^{61}\)

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\(^{59}\) Ibid., 94.

\(^{60}\) MacDonald, *Varèse, Astronomer in Sound*, 84.

2.5 Architecture

This fascination with both the visual and aural aspects of art can be traced back even to his youthful works. Varèse composed *Rhapsodie Romaine* with the exacting technique of the stonecutter’s work he had observed in St. Philibert de Tournus in mind. The 11th-century structure is a fine example of Romanesque architecture, and is preserved in excellent condition. Varése himself later credited the stonework as the reason why any beauty exists in his music.\(^{62}\) It was, in his eyes, unadorned, distinctly utilitarian architecture - every element existed to counterbalance adjacent stones, meanwhile giving support to the entire structure as a whole.\(^{63}\) Varése reflected:

> As a child, I was tremendously impressed by the qualities and character of the granite I found in Burgundy, where I often visited my grandfather. And I used to watch the old stone cutters, marveling at the precision with which they worked. They didn’t use cement, and every stone had to fit and balance with every other.\(^{64}\)

St. Philibert left a lasting impression on Varése. It was not the age of the church, or the materials used, but the method of its construction that inspired many of his subsequent works. The stoneworkers who built St. Philibert were not precutting a predetermined number of rocks and simply stacking them into the shape of a pillar. Instead, each stone was cut and shaped individually, so that as new stones were set in place, they needed to be manipulated in order to fit. The final structure reveals itself only after the last

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stone is placed. Varèse described his compositions in similar fashion, stating that he begins a piece without knowing its exact form. Through the process of composition, a form suggests itself and eventually materializes.65 This explains why Varèse made no attempt to fit his music into the traditional molds still embraced by most of his contemporaries.

In Amériques, this influence can be observed in the work’s unorthodox form. Block by block the work is constructed, each new section of music carefully balancing the others mitigating the need for transitional material between the blocks. When the blocks are not immediately juxtaposed, short fragments of previously heard material are used to fill in the gap. This lends itself to direct comparison to the stonecutters, who worked diligently to ensure each stone would fit neatly with the others with as little space between as possible. The listener will have no comprehension of Amériques’s form until the last block is placed.

2.6 Sculpture

Varèse’s foray into the world of sculpture was brief, but further supports his claim that his associations were most often with visual artists. Significantly, he was the only known composer to have been a protégé of the French sculptor, Auguste Rodin.66 The two met in a marble quarry in 1905, which at first glance appears to be a strange place for a young composer to be exploring. However, Varèse later inadvertently explains why he

66 Olivia Mattis, "Edgard Varese and the Visual Arts," PhD diss., Stanford University, abstract in 1992, 21. The nature of his relationship is not known, but his duties have been described as either secretarial or posing as model.
might be seen in such a locale through a description of the concept behind all of his lost works from the period:

*I was thinking of Romanesque architecture... I wanted to find a way to project in music the concept of calculated or controlled gravitation, how one element pushing on the other stabilizes the total structure, thus using the material elements at the same time in opposition to and in support of one another. I think I would characterize my early music as granitic!*

This unusual relationship between sculptor and musician was not to last. As a sort of foreshadowing to his explosive exit from the Schola Cantorum, Varèse and Rodin got into a heated discussion about music. Not one to bite his tongue, especially when dealing with figures of authority, Varèse angrily lashed out at Rodin, calling him "un con." Recalling the argument (but not the reason for the argument) Varèse callously explained, Rodin “didn’t know a thing about music.”

### 2.7 Cubists

More influential than architecture or sculpture was Varèse’s fascination with painting. He had a studio set up in house, where he spent a good deal of time working with various mediums from oils to crayons. Many paintings from Varèse’s estate have been made public through the Paul Sacher Stiftung, and reveal a talented amateur artist. It shows an artist familiar with the trends and techniques popularized by the various abstract art movements occurring in the first decades of the 20th century. Of particular in-

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69 Ibid.
interest to Varèse was cubism, which developed around 1907-8. Varèse drew many ideas from the cubists’ concept of space and movement, perspective, multiple view-points/simultaneity and their use of color and shadow, all of which will be discussed below.\textsuperscript{70}

2.7.1 Mechanization and Movement

As mentioned before in regards to the organ building boom, urbanization and mechanization (two of the defining characteristics of New York City life in the 1920’s), were also central to the cubists residing there. Duchamp’s oft referenced 1912 painting, “Nude Descending a Staircase,” is an example of this cultivation of the factory line. It is composed of repetitive geometric shapes and lines, only vaguely resembling the titular figure. The movement and rigid form of the character are both inspired by the mechanization of culture and life. This work caused a rift in the cubists’ circles, some questioning if Duchamp was out to ridicule their aesthetic through this painting.\textsuperscript{71} What most infuriated a portion of the cubists was the depiction of movement. Cubism, and its contemporaneous artistic movement, futurism, both sought to capture movement in their work, albeit in completely different ways. Movement for cubists meant the capturing and layering of still objects in time, but the futurists depicted the actual objects themselves moving.\textsuperscript{72} Surprisingly, conflating the two artistic movements was a grave enough of-

fense that the entire cubist community united in opposition towards Duchamp, who not only withdrew his painting from the Salon des Indépendents show, but withdrew from cubism altogether.

Clearly in *Amériques*, with its block construction and inclusion of urban sound effects, Varèse was influenced by elements of mechanization and urbanization as well. *Amériques* is often compared to Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* in terms of its orchestration, melodic structure, and primitivisms. However, one of the more striking characteristics they both share is block construction. Although, related to the aforementioned architecture of St. Philibert, block construction and geometric interruption may be found in cubism as well. Just like the cubists who were using two-dimensional shapes to disrupt perspective, Stravinsky, and later Varèse, were using block construction as a way to juxtapose short sections of acutely divergent musical material. In *Amériques*, this technique is used to great affect in the opening to give structure through the reiteration and rearranging of musical blocks. At the closing of the work, these blocks are stacked one on the other to create a rich tapestry of opposing orchestral timbres.

2.7.2 Simultaneity

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73 Nancy Berman, "Primitivism and the Parisian Avant-Garde, 1910-1925," PhD diss., McGill University, 2001, 37. Primitivisms in this case, refer to music which engages and identifies with tribal rituals or culture as a means of reflecting on, commenting on, or even criticizing the society in which it is performed in. It can be heard in Varèse’s exploration of pure sound, and the enormous weight given to the percussion section; T. S. Eliot, ‘London Letter’, *The Dial Magazine* 71/4 (October 1921), p. 452. Interestingly T. S. Eliot described *The Rite* as a marrying of both primitivism and mechanization, saying: “it did seem to transform the rhythm of the steppes into the scream of the motor horn, the rattle of machinery, the grind of wheels, the beating of iron and steel, the roar of the underground railway, and the barbaric cries of modern life; and to transform these despairing noises into music.
Related to the projection of movement through a juxtaposition of viewpoints is simultaneity, another cornerstone of cubist thought. Varèse was fascinated by this concept throughout his career. Simultaneity, an effect reconciling multiple and simultaneous viewpoints from our 3-dimensional world on a 2-dimensional canvas or other media, was widespread and much-debated in artistic circles at the beginning of the 20th century.\textsuperscript{74} The cubists used the term in reference to the shifting points of view, which are a hallmark of the movement. This enables the viewer to see a representation of a three-dimensional object from different points of view at once. For instance, an artist may choose to merge opposing perspectives within the same object by painting en face for a portion and profile for the rest, resulting in a highly distorted visual representation. Louise Varèse described the impact cubist simultaneity had on Edgard Varèse’s works:

\begin{quote}
While poets were juggling words on a page and painters were producing curious juxtapositions of noses, ears, eyes, and breasts in the name of simultaneism, Varèse was beginning to wonder how it might be obtained musically. He believed that, given the means, simultaneism was literally possible in music.\textsuperscript{75}
\end{quote}

The poets Louise refers to may include Henri Barzun, whose “orchestral poetry” Varèse likely knew. It was a spatial form of poetry meant to be performed by a group, which may be spread apart to speak in different parts of the room, and could have been minimally staged. The performers would read the poetry, which was on occasion macaronic, and line up certain words with one another based on their vertical/horizontal rela-

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{74 Olivia Mattis, “Edgard Varese and the Visual Arts,” PhD diss., Stanford University, 56.}
\footnote{75 Ibid., 42.}
\end{footnotes}
tionship on the page. At times this would lead to total cacophony, resembling an angry mob or other crowd scene.76

Varèse interpreted simultaneity in music as a relationship between independent and unrelated sound masses.77 Just as the cubists abruptly changed perspective within a painting, Varèse could layer or juxtapose various sound masses. Jonathan Bernard explains that opposing sound masses employ a “...high degree of timbral differentiation” and “...rhythmic patterns... that resisted the listener’s attempt to mesh them.”78 In regard to rhythmic patterns, at various times in Amériques, quintuplets can be heard fighting against sextuplets, or four against three at the dotted half-note perspective and the quarter note perspective simultaneously, not to mention all manner of twos against threes against fives against sevens. At times the rhythms are so disparate that a separate time signature was required just to de-clutter the score. These complex rhythms and contrasting timbres are stacked on top of one another, allowing the attuned listener the chance to hear the independent musical materials occurring at the same time. The expanded percussion section in Amériques helps the listener to separate the sound masses. The orchestra and percussion sections are now equal entities vying for attention. Simultaneism relies on the listener’s ability to first recognize, and then separate aurally, the musical textures.79

In performance this type of polyrhythmic execution is problematic at best, and impossible at worst, a fact Varèse acknowledged. In an interview with the artist Alcopley, Varèse admits to feeling jealous of artists who don't require an intermediary for direct

76 Later, Varèse would use the concept of “orchestral poetry” in an unfinished work entitled, Espace, where voices from around the world would be broadcast simultaneously into a performance of this work.
77 Sound masses may loosely be defined as vertical sonorities comprised of linear, melodic pitch material. Thus, they are melodies of simultaneity.
communication with the public.\textsuperscript{80} The visual artist completes their work, and simply hangs it in a gallery, upon which the viewer has a direct path to the artist's intentions. In music, however, the art is filtered through an interpreter, who may or may not prioritize the composer's directions ahead of their own desire to show off. Search for a possible solution to musical simultaneity would have to wait until 1953 when Varèse was anonymously gifted an Ampex tape recorder. The electronic music he eventually composed was equivalent, in Varèse's mind, to the visual arts, in that he finally had an unadulterated aural link to the listener's ear.\textsuperscript{81}

2.7.3 Illusionist perspective dropped

Another new development found in cubist art is the disbandment of traditional illusionist perspective. Prior to the cubist movement, artists were still using the illusionist technique found in paintings from the baroque and renaissance.\textsuperscript{82} In order to break free from this literal representation of reality, where paintings attempted to exist in our own three-dimensional world, cubists broke their art up into many conflicting prisms of perspective.\textsuperscript{83} They were using geometric shapes and converging planes to give the illu-


\textsuperscript{81} David Bernstein, ed., \textit{The San Francisco Tape Music Center: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-Garde} (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 117. This is exactly what Morton Subotnick would later term "music as studio art." It is the idea that every parameter of music could be prefabricated in a studio, and released in perfect form to the listener without the drama of live performance.


sion of depth. This is similar to the language Varèse used to describe spatial aspects of *Intégrales* in a radio interview, saying:

Visualize the changing projection of a geometrical figure on a plane, with both plane and figure moving in space, but each with its own arbitrary and varying speeds of translation and rotation. The instantaneous form of the projection is determined by the relative orientation between the figure and the plane at the moment… In addition, these qualities can be further enhanced by letting the form of the geometrical figure vary as well as its speeds.84

Jonathan Bernard suggests that the moving away from illusionist perspective inspired Varèse in the general anti-establishment/anti-movement sense, but also as a metaphor for the liberation of pitch in atonal music.85 This is an interesting comparison since both illusionist perspective and tonality were pervasive ideologies in their respective institutions of the day. The idea of breaking free from the dogma of tonality would have been especially forbidden while studying with Vincent d’Indy at the ultra conservative Schola Cantorum. In this sense, Varèse was not only inspired to find a literal translation of the abandonment of illusionist perspective in music, but learned to question all rules and assumptions espoused by the musical establishment.

2.7.4 Color

On the topic of color and shading, the cubists ran counter to traditional illusionist art where a single light source cast shadows on objects in the direction of a predictable and uniform vanishing point. The painter Ferdinand Léger described the new cubist art

85 Ibid., 10.
as utilizing multiple light sources, and using different shades of color to represent the
proximity of related objects.\textsuperscript{86} Picasso’s artwork ascribed to this notion to a degree
which, in 1908, the art critic Julio Gonzales proposed that one could slice his paintings
into pieces, and assemble it by color, resulting in an equally attractive sculpture. The cub-
lists were reacting against the use of color by the impressionists, their immediate prede-
cessors. The cubists chastised the impressionist paintings, calling their aesthetic “nota-
tion of the instant” and containing “insidious anecdotalism.”\textsuperscript{87}

Again, parallels may be drawn between the cubist’s use of color and Varèse’s.
He detested what he called the “heavy, viscous sound” of the late-Romantic orchestral
writing. At first glance this statement may seem odd, considering his indebtedness to this
music early on in his career. However, to Varèse, the weight and density apparent in the
music of late-German romanticism arose due to the treatment of orchestral color, not
simply the mass of sound created by their oversized orchestra. Specifically, it was the
goal of these composers to blend colors as the impressionist artists did, rather than to jux-
tapose and contrast. Varèse said:

\begin{quote}
\textit{In the matter of timbre, my attitude is precisely the reverse of the}
\textit{symphonic. The symphony orchestra strives for the utmost blen-
ding of colours. I strive to make the listener aware of the utmost}
\textit{differenciations of colours and densities.}\textsuperscript{88}
\end{quote}

Varèse’s notion may be a bit of an exaggeration, and somewhat vague, but what
may be parsed out is that he wanted his orchestral sound to be more prism-like. Just as
light passes through a prism in myriad directions and quantities, the plethora of instru-
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{87} Insidious anecdotalism in this sense, is critiquing the impressionists’ arrangement of representational
objects or figures in a way that emphasizes their narrative, to the detriment of the artwork itself. Ibid.
ments, lack of doublings, and the layering of musical textures in *Amériques* work as musical adaptations of this effect. In general, Varèse saw that the romantic orchestra worked in harmony; instrumental sections were homo-rhythmic, formed supporting harmonies when parts split, didn’t undermine the predominance of the principal melody, and all sections agreed to work towards a common and accepted texture. Varèse sought to vary and delineate the timbres of the orchestra, just as cubists used color and shade, by layering opposing musical material with vastly incongruent articulation, contour, rhythmic and dynamic qualities.

In *Amériques*, timbres and textures are often not meant to blend. The largest section of the piece, marked Grandioso (m. 469), demonstrates his use of color and how he uses it to delineate rather than combine. This section features many ostinati beginning with a primitivist eighth-note figure in the low winds and strings, a distinctive triplet rhythm rising cluster in the upper strings and winds, and the most distinctive melodic material in the low register of the trombones and French horns. Rather than conceiving bass trombones and string basses as supporting the usually more dominant upper winds and violins, the two battle for primacy, never coalescing into a single musical idea. When listening to the Grandioso section, it is possible to track the appearances of each ostinato largely due to their distinctive timbre.

The comparison of cubist thought and the music of Edgard Varèse is fertile ground for musicology, but it is worth noting that to him, cubism was just another system. It was no different than serialism, exoticism, or expressionism - to Varèse, all movements were institutions that limited creativity and freedom. Each would disband rules and over-
turn eternal verities, only to create new ones.\textsuperscript{89} However Varèse felt about his own music, and its overall place in the music of the 20th century, it was not composed in a vacuum. It is helpful for those who wish to study or perform his music, to contextualize it within the various contemporaneous artistic revolutions.

The connections between Varèse’s music and the surrounding artistic movements are too strong to ignore. Any type of abstract analysis of the work is somehow incomplete without considering these apparent links. As a performer, while it isn’t absolutely necessary to delve into such matters, there are benefits to doing so, as it does illuminate some of the work’s unique difficulties. The performers are, in a sense, constructing hundreds of shards of disparate musical material in front of an audience that has no idea what shape the piece will take until the very last chord sounds. The goal of the performers must be to communicate a cohesive structure, rather than something that is fragmentary in nature. Additionally, Varèse’s distillation of simultaneity between organ and percussion appears throughout the work, but is particularly burdensome in two arduous presto sections (mm. 65-89 and mm. 339-332). These two sections have polyrhythms in both the organ and percussion with the added complexity of performing in two different meters simultaneously. Navigating these sections without a conductor is tremendously challenging as the only way to ensure both parts stay together is through aural cues.

Most importantly, knowing Varèse’s unconventional use of color aids tremendously in registration choice. Terraced, plenum-based registrations are useful in tutti sections, but for most others it’s best to follow Varèse’s score indications and use each manual to sep-

\textsuperscript{89} Olivia Mattis, "Edgard Varese and the Visual Arts," PhD diss., Stanford University, 42.
rate the unique timbres rather than augment or blend similar sounds. The resulting sounds will no doubt be unlike anything the audience has ever heard on the organ before.
Chapter 3

The Premiere and Subsequent Revisions

3.1 Lying in Wait

If there was ever a place for Varèse to express his cutting-edge modernist ideals in the 1920’s, it was New York City. European artists were escaping the devastation of war, and looked to the city as a promised land for their artistic radicalism.\(^\text{90}\) It was in this world of financial uncertainty, and unfulfilling employment that Edgard Varèse composed his massive tone poem *Amériques* between the years 1919 and 1921. With a larger than life cast of 142 musicians, and an unprecedented use of sirens and whistles, it was completed by 1922 and sent to the famous conductor of the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra, Leopold Stokowski.\(^\text{91}\) Varèse was a trailblazer from the outset, and although none of his future works would exceed the monumental scope of *Amériques*, this work helped to

\(^{90}\) Ibid., 126.
\(^{91}\) Varèse also sent a copy to Wilhelm Furtwängler, conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic. In a letter to his wife, Varèse bewails that he was “waiting for a letter from him—that is to say—a polite and cordial refusal.” Furtwängler did refuse later that same year. Varèse, *Looking-glass*, 245.
garner his reputation as a leader in the New York avant-garde music scene for the remainder of his career. Over the next four years Stokowski showed interest in premiering the work but for reasons including budget, personnel, and programming, delayed its performance. Stokowski wrote to Varèse: "The committee is not able to give me a free hand in this matter for financial reasons." Varèse, who was known for his abrupt mood swings and low boiling point, wrote many letters to his wife, Louise, during these years. At times, Varèse appeared hopeful, and other times doubtful that the performance would ever take place.

*I wish Stokowski would do it—but it's funny. I have never really had any hope. For me it's a work doomed to sleep forever at the bottom of a drawer. If after a few years it's brought out—it will be too late. It will have lost all significance and importance. Anyway, I think that's the fate of my music. Experience has taught me not to give a damn-and if I had to play politics to be performed—it would disgust me with writing music."

It is important to note that Varèse was not simply waiting around for Stokowski to premiere *Amériques* in the years following its completion. To the contrary, he was composing at a rapid pace he would only maintain for about a decade. When he began work on *Amériques* in 1918, through to the premier of *Arcana* in 1927, six major works were premiered. The works from the 1920’s represent roughly half of Varèse’s surviving output. Before *Amériques* was performed, New York audiences were already aware of his music through the premiers of *Offrandes* (1922), *Hyperprism* (1923), *Octandre* (1924), and *Intégrales* (1925).

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92 Perlis and Cleve, *Voices*, 16.
94 Ibid., 245.
3.2 Premieres of Smaller Works

Varèse’s works were becoming known in New York and beyond, but perhaps not for the reasons he had hoped. Audiences would boldly disrupt performances of his music with hissing, fighting, or by sarcastically and loudly applauding before the musicians had finished playing. The premiere of *Hyperprism* in particular caused quite a stir at the Klaw Theater in New York. While it took just under five minutes to perform, Fernand Oullette claims it was the “first great scandal in New York musical life.” The audience quickly and ferociously showed their displeasure by attempting to storm the stage, or joining in the booing, hissing, or other rude behaviors exhibited by a large portion of the audience. At one point in the performance, the composer’s friend Carlos Salzedo stood up on stage and told the hecklers to leave, saying “this is a serious work! Those who don’t like it, please go!” The musicians began the work from the top hoping for a better outcome; instead they received more of the same ridicule and the first performance was a complete disaster. Although *Hyperprism* may have caused the most frenzied reaction from the audience among his premieres in the mid-1920’s, it was by no means unique in its stirring of controversy.

*Octandre*, premiered in 1924, was a bit more conservative and contained a traditional three-movement structure. It was mostly spared from the vicious criticism endured by *Hyperprism*. However, with the 1925 premier of *Intégrales*, in Aeolian Hall, New York City, a heated debate ensued. The critics were divided, either describing Varèse as

95 Clayson, *Varèse*, 101.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
an orchestral “genius”, or detailing their experience as “being in a shunting yard, a
menagerie near the din of passing trains, a thunderbolt striking a tinplate factory and the
hammering of a drunken woodpecker.” Varèse’s bold use of percussion (giving equal
weight to the instrumental ensemble) seems to have played a role in the critical reception
of his works, at least in his first several premiers. It was novel in the early 1920’s to write
for a small ensemble of 15-20 players, made up half by percussionists and half winds and
brass, excluding strings altogether. Hyperprism, Octandre, and Amériques all contained
expanded percussion sections and were the most controversial. Offrandes contained a
diverse percussion section, but it never competed for dominance, and Octandre had no
percussion at all. Therefore these two works were not described as overtly noisy or ca-
cophonous, and tended to cause less of a stir in the concert hall.

3.3 The Premiere and Reception of Amériques

Finally, in 1926, Amériques was premiered by Stokowski and the Philadelphia
Orchestra. Stokowski devoted an unprecedented sixteen full rehearsals to the virtuosic
work. As is often the case with music so groundbreaking, it was jeered by critics and met
with boos and hisses from the audience at the first performance. During the first Friday
performance on April 9th, Varèse didn’t even approach the stage to receive the acknowl-
edgement of the crowd. The next night, it was observed by one reporter that although the
normally well-behaved listeners at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia were in some
instances hurling insults and disrupting the concert, there was a certain contingent of the

98 Quotes from Paul Rosenfeld and The Evening Post respectively. Ibid., 107.
audience equally and boisterously supporting the work. Many left in anger, one woman exclaiming: "And he dared call it America!" The disruptions were described in detail in *The Sun* which reported that "the outbreak, moderate at first, swelled gradually to an indescribable furore. Some men wildly waved their arms, and one was seen to raise both hands high above his head with both thumbs turned down, the death sign of the Roman amphitheater. The demonstration lasted more than five minutes." By the end of the night, another critic claimed that "in the end, the favorable section won out."

Other critics were less enthusiastic. The *Herald Tribune* announced after the New York premiere that *Amériques* "is not so original, so daringly self-sprung, so independent as his *Hyperprism*." Paul Rosenfeld’s dismantling of *Amériques* in the June edition of *The Dial*, was particularly cutting. He attended the April 13th performance in New York City, and attempted to make sense of Varèse’s mindset and/or influences behind the work. Was it the “impotence of privileged America, incapable of creating an environment favorable to the superior being..?” Was it a caricature of “the illimitable burlesque-show the United States?” As Rosenfeld searches for the reasons behind the apparent mayhem, he describes the work in such terms as “monumentally inert” and “unamusingly destructive and dull.” Rosenfeld, clearly favoring the shorter works of Varèse, finds fault in the structure of the work too, suggesting that “its inner coherency is weaker than that

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99 Ibid., 246.
100 Clayson, *Varèse*, 112.
102 Clayson, *Varèse*, 112.
103 Paul Rosenfeld, "*Amériques*," *The Dial*, June 1926, 528.
104 Ibid., 529.
105 Ibid., 528.
of the cooler successors, and a somewhat arbitrary opposition of volumes of sonority, a somewhat too regular alternation of monstrous \textit{tutti} with thinner passages results.\textsuperscript{106}

Varèse didn’t go into a period of self doubt (although manic depression was his constant companion) as other past composers have when faced with such biting criticism.\textsuperscript{107} In fact, he stood by his piece, exclaiming in an April 12th newspaper interview, “It stands as it is! I don't want to change a single note!”\textsuperscript{108} Louise Varèse, Edgard's wife, notes that he was surrounded by a contingent of supporters after the concert and that "he heard his music and it was good.”\textsuperscript{109}

As John Anderson notes in his article, \textit{Varèse and the Lyricism of the New Physics}, the ridicule he faced following the premiere of \textit{Amériques} would follow him throughout his career. At the time that \textit{Amériques} was premiered, Debussy, Strauss, and Stravinsky were considered modernist. The audience of the 1920's much preferred works from the previous century, especially Brahms and Wagner.\textsuperscript{110} Varèse was well aware of these audience preferences, because his first job upon arriving in New York was as guest conductor. After a successful New York debut in 1917 conducting Berlioz's Requiem, he had struggles with two subsequent conducting posts. He was fired after one concert as conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra due to his scandalous relationship with Louise,\textsuperscript{111} who at the time, was still separated from her first husband.\textsuperscript{112} Later, Varèse was

\begin{footnotes}
\item[106] Ibid., 529.
\item[107] Varèse, \textit{Looking-glass}, 165.
\item[108] MacDonald, \textit{Astronomer}, 105.
\item[109] Varèse, \textit{Looking-glass}, 165.
\item[111] Louise believed Edgard was dismissed because the two, unwed, stayed in the same hotel (although in different rooms). Perlis and Cleve, \textit{Voices}, 95.
\item[112] Edgard and Louise were eventually wed in a civil ceremony on May 3rd, 1921. Clayson, \textit{Varèse}, 83.
\end{footnotes}
again dismissed from a group he formed, the New Symphony Orchestra, for program-
m ming exclusively contemporary repertoire.\textsuperscript{113} Nevertheless, Varèse continued on in radi-
cal fashion, boldly asking conservative ears to question their definition of music with
each of his premieres. His quest "to blow wide open the musical world, and let in sound
—all sound"\textsuperscript{114} no doubt has contributed to his relative obscurity when compared to his
peers who generally worked with traditional mediums of sound.

\subsection*{3.4 Revisions of \textit{Amériques}}

A year after the premiere, in 1927, and in direct contradiction to his previous
statements expressing satisfaction with the work, Varèse indeed changed and altered
many of the notes of the original 1922 \textit{Amériques}. Varèse never addressed this choice to
revise on record, but it is a fascinating study nonetheless, given the magnitude of change
between the two versions of the work. Because there is no written record from Varèse’s
pen, most research on the different versions of \textit{Amériques} assume that the changes were,
without exception, intentional artistic choices aimed at modernizing the work. Some pre-
fer the \textit{Amériques} of 1927, stating that the revisions, which trimmed more than five min-
utes of music, result in a work that is tighter in construction and more consistent in
style.\textsuperscript{115} Although this is the well-trodden argument, it may be an oversimplification.

There is a case to be made that the 1927 revised edition of \textit{Amériques} arose not only be-
cause Varèse sought to update and assimilate a more modern style (thereby also preserv-

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{113} Perlis and Cleve, \textit{Voices}, 95.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 96
\textsuperscript{115} MacDonald, \textit{Astronomer}, 133.
\end{flushleft}
ing his artistic legacy), but also for practical purposes such as mitigating costs, rehearsal
time, and the prohibitive orchestral forces required.

Varèse thought of himself as a vanguard composer, and it was important to him
that the music world viewed him in like manner. Louise Varèse notes that while his de-
spondent letters often were laced with exclamations that his work was too important to
worry about whether or not it was ever performed,116 he had never truly learned to “s’en
foutre.”117 He spent nearly a decade tweaking Amériques, which was a necessity for
someone who wanted it to be received as new and fresh at each performance. As quoted
above (pg. 41), Varèse was concerned that the passage of time would render his score ir-
relevant when he said "For me, it's a work doomed to sleep forever at the bottom of a
drawer. If after a few years it's brought out—it will be too late. It will have lost all sig-
nificance and importance." As evidenced by this letter, Varèse knew he had composed a
groundbreaking work in Amériques, and also understood that works of art are living
commentaries on contemporary culture. If left unrealized only to be brought out years
later, the commentary becomes distorted, or at the very least altered from the original in-
tent. Due to the unusual delay from the date of composition of Amériques to the work’s
premiere four years later, Varèse could see sections of the work that perhaps worked in
1922, but not in 1926.

Varèse has only two surviving, complete orchestral works: Amériques, and Ar-
cana (1927). Between the two, musicologists usually claim that Arcana is the superior
work because it is a more consistent representation of Varèse’s late 1920’s modernist

116 Regarding the performance of a later work, Arcanes, Varèse complains: “Unfortunately Arcanes will be
for large orchestra-not as large as Amériques but large… so I won’t be played at the Guild-and I don’t care.
What counts is that I work for myself.” Varèse, Looking-glass, 239.
117 Or, to not give a damn [what others think]. Ibid., 245.
In many senses, *Arcana* is a reduction and a backing away from the explosive, extravagant sound-world of *Amériques*. *Arcana* is written for far fewer players, is roughly 7-8 minutes shorter than the original *Amériques*, and, where *Amériques* contained an extraordinary array of musical ideas and their permutations, *Arcana* is built on a single *idée fixe*. In general, *Amériques* is often regarded as the brash, unwieldy, resistant-to-analysis tone-poem representing the remnants of Varèse’s “youthful” style, leaving *Arcana* as the stand-alone mature orchestral work. These differences are important to note because the revisions to *Amériques* and the composition of *Arcana* occur almost simultaneously. Therefore, it is tempting to view the 1927 revisions to *Amériques* as a modernization of the original.

### 3.5 New York Modernism

What did it mean to be modernist in the 1920’s? To be modern meant, in general, a rejection of tonality, a preference for absolute over programmatic music, abstract over representational, and composing for chamber groups rather than massive orchestras.

Most serious composers in the 1920’s fell into at least one of these three categories: serialist, neoclassic, or modernist. Varèse very much disliked the former two labels. Of serialism, Varèse described Schoenberg’s twelve tone system as having “almost the same sound as the dominoes falling down.”

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119 Ibid.

120 Perlis and Cleve. *Voices*, 113.
lier work, after *Pierrot Lunaire*, he says “…it’s to vomit, you go to sleep.”

The neo-classic movement fared no better in Varèse’s eyes. In other words, Varèse disliked any compositional system, whether it be borrowing from old material, or a new formula for relating tones to one another. On modernism, Varèse said in 1965: “To be modern is to be natural, an interpreter of the spirit of your own time. I can assure you that I am not straining after the unusual.”

Modernist in the Varèse sense meant a pervasive eye towards experimentation and discovery, not composing in known forms, or obeying long held rules of composition.

One way that *Amériques* becomes more modern through the 1927 revision is the removal of material that could be viewed as derived from music of the past. Theorist Malcolm MacDonald, in his thorough analysis of *Amériques*, has suggested that a distancing from Debussy in particular, may have been one of the driving forces behind the revision. Debussy’s trademark impressionist sounds, including the use of two harps, delicate string harmonics, and flute solos with French horn accompaniment in whole-tone clusters, all make sporadic appearances throughout the work. It can also be argued that the series of tableau that form the structure of *Amériques*, may be credited to Debussy as well.

It is well known that Varèse and Debussy were on friendly terms since Varèse’s student years in Paris, and that Debussy approved of the his work, saying: “you have a right to compose what you want to, the way you want to if the music comes out and is your own. Your music comes out and is yours.”

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121 Ibid.
as one of the most important musical idols of his youth. His earliest surviving work (once thought to have been lost), *Un Grand Sommeil Noir* (1906), is a fine example of Debussy’s influence on the young Varèse. Based on a text by Paul Verlaine, this simple melodie contains all the trappings of a song by Debussy, including parallel open voiced chords, and use of non-western scales such as pentatonic and whole-tone. Therefore, it should be no surprise that Debussyan elements have found their way into *Amériques* which already contains a multitude of styles and musical ideas.

### 3.6 Breaking from Tradition

There may be some credence to MacDonald’s analysis, as Varèse severed certain passages that had a stronger link to Debussy and impressionism. For instance, in the original 1922 version, the music from bars 264 through the 2/8 presto in bar 352, takes on a decidedly impressionistic flavor. The colors are mostly delicate save for a short section of *ff* clusters from the entire orchestra in bars 312-316. This central section mostly consists of muted brass, whole-tone harp glissandi, flute solos accompanied by string tremolos, and various solos for oboe, viola, and French horn - all quintessential sounds from the Belle Époque. The overall texture is thinned out and the music is more subtle. MacDonald suggests this section of the piece is the most backward-looking, which is why it was completely altered in the 1927 version.125 This large section of music (almost 5 minutes in performance) is changed to better reflect Varèse’s new musical tastes, so the

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Debussy-isms are largely removed. Instead of whole-tone pitch collections, there are clusters which are much more severe. The harp glissandi are removed, as well as the extended viola and alto flute duet. The new music takes on a more or less angular, harshly dissonant character found throughout the opening of the work.

Not only was Varèse concerned with distancing himself from Debussy and other earlier composers, he wanted to reclaim the extra-musical narrative that journalists and theorists had been using to explain the work. His first description of the inspiration behind *Amériques* contained evocative imagery, and seemed to paint a vivid picture of New York City in the early 1920’s. In 1922, Varèse said:

> I was still under the spell of my first impressions of New York, not only New York seen but more especially heard... As I worked in my Westside apartment... I could hear all the river sounds—the lonely foghorns, the shrill peremptory whistles—the whole wonderful river symphony which moved me more than anything ever had before. Besides, as a boy, the mere word 'America' meant all discoveries, all adventures. It meant the unknown... new worlds on this planet, in outer space, and in the minds of man.\(^{126}\)

Later however, in an interview the day after the premiere, Varèse, seemingly perplexed that reviewers had listened to the piece as a tableaux of New York sights and sounds, reversed that statement. Instead, he said:

> This composition is the interpretation of a mood, a piece of pure music absolutely unrelated to the noises of modern life which some critics have read into the composition. If anything, the theme is a meditative one, the impression of a foreigner as he interrogates the tremendous possibilities of this new civilization of yours. The use of strong musical effects is simply my rather vivid reaction to life as I see it, but it is the portrayal of a mood in music and not a sound picture...\(^{127}\)

\(^{126}\) Ibid., 104.
\(^{127}\) Oullette, *Varèse*, 57.
He explained that the sirens were not literally representative of New York City emergency vehicles (even though the score requests they need be the "same as used by the NYC fire dept.") but instead were inspired by Hermann von Helmholtz's experiments with sirens as explained in the latter’s treatise, *On the Sensations of Tone*. Varèse explains: "Later I made some modest experiments of my own and found that I could obtain beautiful parabolic and hyperbolic curves of sound." Further distancing himself from these urban representational readings of *Amériques*, Varèse later stated that he could have just as easily titled the piece *Himalayas*.

Another way Varèse breaks from the past in the 1927 revision is by a great reduction of required performers. During Beethoven's symphonic reign, the orchestra grew substantially, and again the number of performers swelled with ever more massive late romantic works, such as Mahler’s 8th Symphony (1907) and Schoenberg’s *Gurre-lieder* (1911). These works called for huge orchestras, augmented in some cases with equally large choruses, and the herculean construction of *Amériques* (which could be said to replace chorus with an extensive percussion battery) was a direct link to this older style. The overall trend during the course of the 1920’s and, in fact, all of the years between the world wars, was that of reduced forces. In this light, and when considering Varèse's compositions contemporaneous to the 1927 revision, *Amériques* may be considered

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130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
132 *Arcana* (1926), Varèse’s only orchestral work comparable to *Amériques*, while still quite large, was composed for far fewer players altogether.
more of a bookend to the era of symphonic growth and the programmatic tone poem, than a groundbreaking declaration of modernity.

3.7 Trends of Lightness

An examination of the works published by other major composers before or during WWI until after WWII exposes this trend of reduction. Béla Bartók composed the *Miraculous Mandarin* in 1916 for large orchestra, piano, organ, and choir. However, during the period between the wars, he composed mostly string quartets, or works for expanded chamber ensembles such as *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* (1937). In England, Benjamin Britten traces a parallel trajectory with larger works such as the *War Requiem* (1961) occurring after the wars, and smaller works like the *Simple Symphony* (1931) and *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* (1937) for string orchestra, composed between the wars.

Factors such as the formation of a symphonic canon of audience-approved masterworks, a shortage of performers and funding during and after the war, and the rise of neoclassicism as a rejection of academic modernism, all resulted in smaller works being written. Neoclassicism in particular was one of the most influential trends in the music world between the wars. Composers such as Stravinsky and Copland were at the forefront of the movement and were writing works more immediately appealing to the public. In an effort to sound more classic, composers wrote for a reduced, pre-Strauss size orchestra, sometimes even to the size of Mozart or Haydn’s ensemble, as in Prokofiev's "Classical" Symphony.
Varèse, in reaction to neoclassicism, cautioned that "music written in the manner of another century is the result of culture. And as desirable and comfortable as culture may be, an artist should not lie down in it." This is not to say Varèse had no appreciation for older music. Varèse had a great deal of respect for the music of the Renaissance, Baroque and also more recent epochs. He studied early music in depth while a student at the Schola Cantorum in Paris, and later even founded the Greater New York Chorus (1943-7) that specialized in the performance of Renaissance music. While lecturing at the Arsuna School of Fine Arts in Santa Fe, Varèse spent most of the six-week course, entitled “Music As Living Matter”, studying common practice period works from Bach to Ravel. But Varèse wanted no part in a movement so historically oriented. The reduction in forces in Varèse’s revision, therefore, was not due to the neoclassic trend.

3.8 Practical Concerns

What is often left out of the discussion in regard to Varèse's 1927 revision is his desire to simply have Amériques performed. As mentioned above, Varèse was satisfied with the work after its premiere. Stokowski admired the piece as well, and Varèse, perhaps naively, thought that many conductors would come to the same conclusion and program the work for their next season. Unfortunately, this did not happen, and Varèse would not hear the work again (except for French premiere in 1929, which replaced the

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133 Perlis and Cleve, Voices, 103.
135 Clayson, Varèse, 143.
siren with *ondes martenot*) until near the end of his life in 1965. The size of the work made it very expensive to produce, both through the hiring of extra musicians to play rare instruments and the technical challenges which require much more rehearsal time than most orchestras are willing to offer. Varèse, likely more as an attempt to get his piece performed than for purely artistic reasons, carried out the dramatic 1927 revision and reduction of *Amériques*.

Further evidence that his more practical concern of getting new works performed was a galvanizing force of the 1927 revisions comes in 1921, when Varèse founded the International Composer’s Guild. The Guild was devoted strictly to the performance of new music (Varèse even went so far as to ban second performances of works from previous concerts), specifically new music of the type that would push the artistic envelope, rather than the type of historically motivated neoclassic music that was rising in popularity. In July of 1921, the ICG published a manifesto. In it, Varèse bemoans the fact that “official organizations occasionally place on their programs a new work surrounded by established names. But such a work is carefully chosen from the most timid and anaemic of contemporary production, leaving absolutely unheard the composers who represent the true spirit of our time.” The International Composer’s Guild’s main purpose was to seek out the cutting edge works of the day, and have them performed on well-thought-out programs.

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137 In fact, Varèse later founded another organization, the Pan-American Association of Composers, because he saw Europe falling under the spell of neoclassicism. Varèse explained: “I realized that Europe was drifting back to neoclassicism, or rather what is so-called, there really being no such possible thing. You can’t make a classic; it has to become one with age.” Joan Peyser, *To Boulez and Beyond* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 114.

Perhaps the strongest argument that the 1927 revision was a performance driven resolution is his own arrangement of *Amériques* for four pianists.\(^{139}\) It is not known when or under what circumstances Varèse decided to transcribe his work, but several conclusions may be drawn from this act. Firstly, this was a performance transcription. Stravinsky’s transcription of his own ballet, *The Rite of Spring*, is similar, but was originally copied for rehearsal purposes in order to prepare the dancers. This soon became the most often performed version of *The Rite of Spring* due in large part because with only two performers, it was easier to produce. There were relatively few performances of the work with full orchestra in the years following its premiere.\(^ {140}\) Because *Amériques* has no choreography, there would have been no occasion for four pianists to aid in any way the preparation of this work.

The transcription of *Amériques* for four pianos was based mostly on the original 1922 score, and would have been no small task. The 546 bars of dense orchestral scoring would have occupied weeks or months of copying and experimenting to find the best layout and distribution of the parts between four players. A project such as this is a deliberate one and shouldn’t be cast aside by Varèse scholars as simply experimental. Much like the orchestral version, the piano transcription was later amended to include the revisions from 1927. This puts the time frame for the piano transcription of *Amériques* between 1922 and 1927, with the addendum, of course, being added sometime after 1927. It was never published or performed in Varèse’s lifetime and has only recently come to

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\(^{139}\) Given the rarity of works for four pianists in the repertory, there may be a possible link to Stravinsky’s *Les Noces*, which was given it’s American premier by the ICG in 1929.

\(^{140}\) Igor Stravinsky, *The Rite of Spring*, (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2005), back cover.
light since his student Chou Wen-chung released all of Varèse's documents to the Paul-Sacher Stiftung in Switzerland, in 2003.

Perhaps at the same time Varèse was lamenting the work’s bleak outlook in the years prior to the 1926 premiere of *Amériques*, and contemplating the possibility that it would never be performed, he saw the possibility of new life through this transcription. In the letter quoted above, he appears impatient. He knew he had an important work, and that music trends shift regularly. Music, like any other literary or artistic offering, is a mirror of its time, a commentary on contemporary culture. Certain periods in music have unmistakable sonic archetypes—the result of an musical idea being admired, copied, and popularized by many artists over a given period of time. When the work is removed from its own time, and placed in a later one, these sonic archetypes quickly have a way of dating the work. For Varèse, when he says that his music will lose “all relevance” if not premiered in a timely manner, it is because he feels his music is speaking to the future, not the past. In other words, he wanted the listener to hear his ideas as novel rather than archaic.

As a student in Paris, and also later in Berlin, Varèse was accustomed to either transcribing his orchestral scores for public performance on piano, or at least roughly playing through from open score for review by colleagues or teachers. His piano recitals in Paris of his own music surely included such transcriptions as Varèse’s oeuvre contains no extant solo piano works.\(^{141}\) In Berlin, his opera *Oedipus Und Die Sphinx* was performed on piano by the composer for Ferruccio Busoni, an important mentor for the

\(^{141}\) MacDonald, *Astronomer*, 37. These favorable reviews were published in a Parisian publication called *La Rénovation*, which typically held contemporary artistic trends in high esteem.
young Varèse.\textsuperscript{142} Although Varèse received negligible musical guidance from Busoni, the incident typifies the way in which much of his pre-American music was heard.\textsuperscript{143} Because almost all of his European works were for large orchestra, he struggled, as any virtually unknown composer would have, to attain proper performances of these works. Therefore, hearing his orchestral works played on piano, would have been nothing new for the composer, and perhaps would have been his preferred route for quick public performance.

In the early 20th century, transcriptions such as this one would have been considered normal concert programming. Famous pianists such as Alfred Cortot, who performed Wagner and Saint-Saëns transcriptions, and Arthur Rubinstein who programmed Sousa and de Falla transcriptions, had no reservations about bringing orchestral works to the piano. These early decades of the 20th century predate the considerations of the historical performance practice movement, a debate which consumed the latter half of the century.

The four-pianist transcription of *Amériques*, of course, represents a substantially greater reduction in forces than the 1927 orchestral revisions. Now, only four performers are needed, making a performance of the work much simpler. Notably, Varèse didn’t attempt to include any percussion in this reworking. No sirens, bass drums or crow calls remain. The pianists mimic the un-pitched percussion by articulating the designated rhythms in the bass register of the piano, which resulted in a quite unusual sound (in the 1920’s at least). It was not at all pianistic, and produced a cluster of bass register henpecking. This is not at all the same effect when compared to the bass drum and tim-

\textsuperscript{142} Alan Clayson, *Edgard Varèse* (London: Sanctuary, 2002), 59.

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
pani passing pointillist rhythms back and forth as occurs in the orchestral version. Because of the importance of percussion throughout the work, some of these sections are quite extended in the transcription. Through this technique, many bars of music are (due to the piano’s lack of color) lost in translation.

The four-piano transcription, above all else, illustrates Varèse’s willingness to cut, alter, and sacrifice the pitches, timber, dynamics, and numerous orchestral effects of the original Amériques in order to have it performed. Evidently, the fear of having the work lose “all significance” was greater than the fear of not having the work performed with his ideal ensemble. Because this transcription only surfaced in 2004, much research remains. Many details were left in an unfinished state - dynamics, articulation, phrasing, tempi changes, etc. - as if abandoned. These have thankfully been added and/or corrected in Helena Bugallo’s performance score of the transcription. With little hard evidence, and only considering Varèse’s desire for a performance of Amériques, it’s plausible the transcription had been a work in progress that was cast aside after Stokowski confirmed a date for the 1926 premiere. Then, perhaps work on the transcription resumed after the 1927 revisions were completed, but before the 1929 Paris premiere. The fact that Varèse desired to reflect the 1927 revisions in his transcription as well proves he was still open to performances of this greatly altered version even after the orchestral premiere. This is admittedly speculative as so few people who might have known the answers to the mysteries surrounding this piano transcription are still alive. Still yet, it is an intriguing plot line in the narrative of Amériques.

3.9 Conclusion

Tracing the history of the orchestral transcription for organ and contextualizing the creation of *Amériques* with the relative artistic movements and contemporaneous organ-building trends allows us to better understand where my transcription of this work fits into the grand narrative of organ music in the town hall tradition. It is the outcome of following Varèse's various reductions and revisions of the work to their logical end. Given that, today, the organist has many more new or restored instruments in the symphonic style than a generation ago, it is timely for a project such as this to come about. As is the case with any symphonic work of this size and complexity, not every orchestra is equipped to perform it. Resources are stretched thin through the hiring of extra and specialized performance forces, rental of exotic instruments, as well as the scheduling of extended rehearsals all in the name of presenting this work. The rarity of circumstances in which the original work would meet the financial criteria as dictated by the orchestra’s management did not go unnoticed by the composer. In this regard, the three performers of *Amériques* in this new transcription will be following in the footsteps of W.T. Best, when he presented concerts of orchestral repertoire for a fraction of the cost of the symphony.

The scarcity of orchestral performances is precisely what makes this version of *Amériques* imperative. The argument against transcriptions is often "why would I listen to you play a Mahler symphony on organ, when I can go to an orchestra concert and hear it performed the way it was intended?" Perhaps this argument holds up today when considering the frequent opportunities to hear the music of Mahler, Beethoven, or Liszt, live.
However, it is not applicable in the case of *Amériques*, because in most situations the listener will have no chance of hearing a live performance of the original work which employs the necessary 140 musicians. It is slowly gaining recognition as an orchestral showpiece, but it will be a good many years before it is comparable by frequency of performance, to the symphonies of Varèse’s contemporaries, such as Shostakovich or Ives. *Amériques* deserves to be heard, and a production involving fewer performers is more likely to accomplish this.

Lemare, in all his technical prowess, brought new sounds and ideas to the art of organ transcriptions. He drew inspiration from a much wider body of orchestral repertoire than his predecessor Best and pushed the developing symphonic organ to its limits. My transcription is emboldened by Lemare's vanguard approach. Contained in this transcription of *Amériques* are extended techniques for both performer (thumbing across multiple manuals, pedal glissandi, and poly-rhythms between the hands and feet), and instrument (requirement of sequencer, a plethora of colors, and the ability to quickly and smoothly achieve *pp* to *ff* crescendi). It also reaches further by requiring the services of percussion and assistant. Additionally, the three performers must know each other's parts intimately in order to ensure a successful performance without a conductor.

Finally, Varèse's relationship with the organ was extremely limited. His only piece which includes the instrument, *Ecuatorial*, shows that he was not interested in fully exploring its tonal resources and capabilities. How would he have reacted to György Ligeti’s wild experiments in those parameters a generation later? During Varèse's mature career, the notion that the organ was a flexible musical instrument, apt for such a recreation of an orchestral work, was no longer accepted. It makes sense that Varèse was dis-
interested in the organ since the most famous American performers and organ builders from the 1930's to the 1960's venerated the instrument's long history, not its future. Whether it be Ginastera's *Toccata, Villancico, and Fugue*, Frank Martin's *Passacaglia*, or Schoenberg's *Variations on a Recitative*, neo-baroque forms and contrapuntal textures were the gold standard. The idea that the organ was an instrument of profundity rather than playfulness was clearly widespread based on the types of pieces being written for it.

Because Varèse had such limited exposure to the organ, it is difficult to determine what he may have thought about this new transcription of *Amériques*. Yet, given his propensity for altering the pitch material and instrumentation of this work in large swaths, and reforming it to meet his needs, this new transcription follows a practice that is similar to what Varèse employed in *Amériques* and in his other works. With the sounds of the orchestra at the organist’s fingertips, a large percussion battery, and an assistant to augment both, this transcription fills an essential gap in the different versions of *Amériques*, fitting neatly between the original from 1922, and Varèse’s own transcription for four pianists.
References


Appendix A

The following score has been transcribed by kind permission of Hal Leonard MGB, Italy, from Dr. Chou Wen-Chung’s 2001 performance edition of *Amériques*. I have provided the full transcription score with two options for performance. In one scenario, the organist may be joined by organist’s assistant and the full forces of a 10-player percussion ensemble. Or, in another setup, a performance may follow a simplified path utilizing only organist, assistant, and a single percussionist. The former would follow the full organ and percussion score, while the latter would be performed using the percussion reduction prepared by Brady Spitz in appendix C. The organist’s assistant in the latter performance setup would play the designated cue-sized notes in the organ reduction score (almost exclusively by simply sustaining pitches, although there are a few instances where independent lines are played), as well as play the auxiliary percussion parts including the cyclone whistle, steamboat whistle, siren, crow call, sleigh bells, and big rattle.

Below is the percussion key used:

![Figure 1.5 - Percussion Key](image-url)
Subito molto mosso

\( j = 92 \)

Vivo - quasi cadenza \( j = 120 \)

Più moderato

A tempo
Non troppo presto \( \dot{z} = 69 \)

Poco più lento - Lontanissimo
quasi improvvisando

Lento non troppo
(tempo du début) \( \dot{z} = 60 \)
Modérément lent, sans trainer $\nu = 66$
Appendix B

*Amériques* organ reduction with full percussion parts.
Amériques (1922)

Edgard Varèse
(Trans. Yuri McCoy and Brady Spitz)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Score Notation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sleigh Bells</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyclone Whistle</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Steamboat Whistle</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Siren</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>String Drum</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Crow Call</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Big Rattle</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Suka Drum</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bass Drum</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Cymbals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crash Cymbals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangle</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Castanets</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tambourine</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Slop Stick</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Twig Breath</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tam-tam</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

Percussion reduction by Brady Spitz from the full score.
Amériques (1922)

Edgard Varèse
(Trans. Yuri McCoy and Brady Spitz)

Moderato - Poco lento
\[ \frac{\text{d}}{=60} \text{ rall. A tempo} \]

\[ \frac{\text{d}}{\text{accel. A tempo}} \]

LH stick; RH 2 mallets
Subito à Tempo I -
Moderato poco Lento
\[ \frac{\text{d}}{=112} \]

Più vivo
\[ \frac{\text{d}}{=80} \]

Subitement au
Mouvement primitif
to 2 sticks

A tempo
- dim. ancora
dolce
dolce esitante
Mouvement initial
Percussion
Percussion

A tempo - Mod. animé

Mod. animé

Vif (très nerveux) \( \bar{=} 96 \)

Moderato \( \bar{=} 92 \) Mosso \( \bar{=} 104 \)

Animé \( \bar{=} 112 \)

Plus Animé - Trépidant

Plus retenu \( \bar{=} 108 \)
Appendix D


MUSICAL CHRONICLE

AMERIQUES by Edgar Varèse affords a delicate glimpse of American life. Brontosaurus wallows in a prehistoric swamp, sluggish, eating, and filthy, lethargically drawing an occasional hoof up from the ooze. Fafner was a fairy in comparison, all gauze and wings. This reptile gem is monumentally inert, belches softcoal smoke, and is unamusingly destructive and dull. A Swiftian caricature for the swollen orchestra; a travesty in tone by the prophet Jeremiah; a musical parody outdistancing the mockeries of Till Eulenspiegel. Yet since the illimitable burlesque-show the United States, itself a caricature, renders all absurd exaggeration of its characteristics ineffectual, all ridiculous incongruities in its depictions inadequate, Amériques holds an excellent likeness of a general aspect.

Was it the inertia of a continent, all guts and no mind, unable to sing, to dance, to move, that the composer had in mind in 1921, or merely the look of that assemblage of unmusical gargoyles, the New York audience of the Philadelphia Orchestra, who heard his work April 13th? Was he thinking of the impotence of privileged America, incapable of creating an environment favourable to the superior being, or did he anticipate the musical criticism of Messrs Chotzinoff and Downes? We do not know; it is possible all the items contributed an impetus, though any one alone might easily have produced it. Wildly alarming fire sirens, smothered trip-hammer thuds, clattering honkey-tonk, the ground-bass of the street with its whipping, mocking, crushing sounds, probably made the sense-connexion. With the aural sensations, the feel of the sodden downpull of America doubtless asserted itself, the feel of the living principle never coming to self-assurance, invariably ruthlessly interrupted and dissipated, finally resolved into the movement of the headless herd and through it released in viciousness. Years of maladjustment, the immigrant's disillusionment with America and apprehension of a vast, cruelly indifferent reality too alien to comprehend must have become clairvoyant and objective while the raucous, sluggish symphony with its immense metallic sonorities, sharply appreciated vulgarities, outcries, and wild mockery found its form.
Travesty in the Menckenese spirit, Amériques never is. Varèse has his song to sing. The music is not an external copy but an interior, transcendental matter. Its objectivity is achieved through the legitimate exploitation of a material. As a partial portrait, it is, necessarily, no major form. You cannot make a silk purse out of inferior feelings, and caricature, even of a subject itself caricatural, partakes of the incompletude of the devil its parent. Rhythms as oafish and hideously mechanical as those of the "apotheosis" of Amériques must ever address themselves to the feelings largely through the analytical faculty. Compared merely as a thing of its class to Hyperprism, Intégrales, and the other experiments in the simpler, directer, more positive forms made later by Varèse, Amériques takes a secondary place. The inner coherency is weaker than that of the cooler successors, and a somewhat arbitrary opposition of volumes of sonority, a somewhat too regular alternation of monstrous tutti with thinner passages results. Echoes of the Sacre momentarily obtrude, in the initial theme for low flute and bassoon, and in certain elephantine rhythms. Amériques is perhaps the transition between the series of tone poems produced by the young Varèse in Europe before the war, and those born of the experience of the new world.

It is in its extraordinarily novel sonority that Amériques most closely approaches its younger, formally and spiritually more complete and lovely brethren. The title, eternal symbol of new worlds to discover, is justified of the orchestral language: it is strangely both metallic and strident, and aerial and lyric, like the reflection of a prairie sunset on steel rails. Amériques contains Varèse's first realization of percussive music; the battery, daringly augmented, forms a choir in itself and in several passages plays alone. The bars with the triangle pianissimo amid the full percussion are particularly bewitching. So too are the effects gotten from the suspended cymbal struck with the triangle's metal rod. Perhaps the most original writing appears half-way through the piece, where the violins die away in very high minor ninths over the pedal of the horns and basses. It is probable that in Edgar Varèse we have another virtuosic genius with the orchestra in his veins.

Because of its independence of the significance of music, the dancing of Angna Enters compels mention among musical events.
MUSICAL CHRONICLE

A deal of her miming is done before no musical backdrop at all. Some of it is executed to piano pieces by Frescobaldi, Beethoven, and Debussy, and a few of the dance-forms are accompanied by voice and piano in folk-songs and songs by Bruneau. The two sorts of settings are indistinguishable. The first involves the servitude of music no less than the second. Miss Enters' mimetic creates a form, leaning on that of no composer and taking up into itself and reissuing again the musical accompaniment. This is not interpretative, but creative work.

It is "music," what most dancing is not. Save in her moments of preparation and repose, Isidora Duncan never fused with her composers to set them and herself free. The personal isolated her movements; there was no real form. A great friend of ours accurately observed that while Walter Damrosch conducted the Seventh Symphony for her it was evident neither of the two was interested in Beethoven. The unlucky Titan strained at the load. Several mimes, technically accomplished, more recently have shown a greater sensitiveness to the music and a greater desire to unify the elements of their art. Several have danced as effectively to the piano as to no accompaniment at all. No one has created moments especially vital or otherwise worthy of note. But Angna Enters, uniting in herself the woman and the artist, assembles and forms experience with an inclusiveness, distinction, and freshness in her dancing, that reconciles the musician with her use of musical art, little different from the conductor or pianist's creative one. The spirit of the music receives an extension through a medium other than tone, none the less closely related to the musical through the common bourne of motor activity.

Miss Enters' waltz creates toward Johann Strauss whose Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald accompanies it. She experiences life through his voluptuous measures and creates an authentic and delicious counterpoint to it in bodily rhythm, facial play, and ultra-Viennese costuming. One almost hears the words whispered to the Fraulein impersonated as she dips and swings. That is the Gothic cathedral, in the Moyen Age danced to Frescobaldi; architecture measuring the infinite in yawning vasty reaches. Or a progress of sculpturesque volumes through a stately draped body. Not only the bodily pose, the facial play, the costume, and the music are made part of this artist's idea: the play of light upon
the body and the stuffs is carefully considered and exquisitely sub-
servient. The unaccompanied Dance of Death—dead black dress,
dead white face, crown of ghastly flowers, hectic trapped move-
ments—perfectly exploits a medium.

A juxtaposition of Angna Enters to Yvette Guilbert is inevi-
table. The young Dutch-American dancer is possessed by a
penetrative sympathy for life closely resembling that of the “singer
of the pity of unpitied human things.” The frivolous, the simple,
become poignant objects beneath her mind. Only, the integrity of
this young artist is a little greater; for Angna Enters spreads
over the whole of the programme which sets her dances her feeling
for art. It has no personal limits.

Paul Rosenfeld