ORGANOLOGY AND THE OTHERS: CROSS-DISCIPLINARY METHODS APPLIED TO THE STUDY OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Introduction

Methodological discussions in the field of organology have been rare and discontinuous. An attempt to present a snapshot of current and new approaches was undertaken by Ardal Powell in Vermillion (SD) in 2006 as part of a previous joint meeting of AMIS and Galpin. On that occasion, the opening paper highlighted how ‘new practices in musical instrument studies broadly parallel recent developments in other disciplines, and underlying them is a shift that other disciplines have made far more consciously and with fuller discussion’. Ten years later, some of the approaches discussed then have been tested and specifically developed in our field and are beginning to show increasingly convincing results. Among them are approaches inspired by Science and Technology Studies (STS: the multi-disciplinary approach to the study of science and technology as socially embedded enterprises), Actor Network Theory (an approach first proposed by Michel Callon and Bruno Latour in the 1980s), Material Culture Studies (as the study of the relationship between people and objects), and the broader world of non-musical museums and object interpretation. However, most of the scholarship developed in these contexts has been published outside the typical organological venues and might have escaped the attention of a large number of colleagues.

The adoption of approaches drawn from disciplines outside the study of musical instruments is in fact one of the most relevant trends within organology that has developed over the past decade. Its growth is already increasing the impact of studies on musical instruments beyond the domain of organology and musicology thanks to the adoption of vocabularies, research questions, and methodologies that are relevant and understandable to a broader audience.

The proposed panel provides a critical overview of these fields and research methods. It is envisioned as a 90-minute session (5’ intro, 10-15’ per speaker without slides, 20’ discussion, 5’ closing remarks and thanks) that brings together colleagues who have been particularly active in developing the above described approaches in the specific domain of organology. Papers will be pre-circulated, in order to facilitate discussion and debate. Each will offer an overview of a particular methodological perspective and will reflect on the questions, challenges, and possibilities it raises for organology.

The following speakers have confirmed their availability to participate:

- Eliot Bates (Birmingham University)
- Eric De Visscher (V&A Museum)
- Flora Dennis (University of Sussex)
- Emily Dolan (Harvard University)
- Gabriele Rossi Rognoni (Royal College of Music, moderator)