

framing the framer

4 interventions against art music Exoticism

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Statement

The assertion that a person, people, Land, or other entity “is” Exotic constitutes a uniquely pernicious power move. This move disavows the active process through which the targeted human or nonhuman entity comes to be Exoticized, while also enshrining the end result of that process as self-evident. Writing about the Orientalist mode of Exoticization, Palestinian intellectual Edward Saïd writes that “figures of speech associated with the Orient... are all declarative and self-evident; the tense they employ is the timeless eternal, they convey an impression of repetition and strength... for all these functions it is frequently enough to use the simple copula *is*.” As a result, Orientalism and other kinds of Exoticizations fix racializing binaries between those written as Western/white and those inscribed as Exotic, naturalizing a white supremacist ontology. At the same time, the act of Exoticizing also enacts an ontological cut between Exoticizer and Exoticized, rendering the former invisible while rendering the latter hypervisible; in particular, this move makes it difficult to name and hold accountable the Exoticizer, as well as to map and dismantle the process of Exoticization.

The present piece offers protocols for intervention around art music’s Exoticizations in concert music, opera, ballet, and/or incidental music for theatre. These protocols offer ways to mark and refuse the above power dynamics in Exoticizing works, through redactions of Exoticizing content and annotations (in a broad sense) of the position of the perpetrating Exoticizer. As I am read as white and aim to avoid unwittingly re-enacting racializing relations, I deliberately limit the scope of this piece to the practices of white perpetrators of Exoticization.

During the 2023-2024 attacks on Palestine by Israel and its Western allies, most well-funded and “prestigious” art music institutions have refrained from criticizing the attacks. These institutions have also refrained from even considering the active role that centuries of Euro-American art music Exoticism has played in rationalizing the attacks. These pieces are a response to this situation.

The title alludes to Trinh T. Minh-ha’s publication *Framer Framed*, whose critical analysis of the production of racializing Otherness formed an important starting point for the present project.

General Guidelines

Realizations of any of these scores are framed with a content note about the epistemic violence of the sampled material.

In the scores, “Exoticizing” is meant as short-hand for Exoticist, Primitivist, minstrel, and related (art) musics.

In sampling Exoticizing material, material appropriated from known sources (as opposed to Exoticizing material concocted by Westerners) is avoided, particularly:

- Indigenous material not meant for circulation in non-Indigenous and Public contexts. On this point, see Dylan Robinson (Stó:lō/Skwah), *Hungry Listening*.
- religious material not meant for use in Secular settings.

Musical and dramatic material that depicts overt violence is avoided, as is material deemed to be acutely offensive.

Only well-known Exoticizing pieces, pieces that continue to be performed and recorded, are sampled. If no Exoticizing pieces continue to be performed, the present piece will no longer be necessary. I sincerely hope that that occurs soon.

Permission to perform/realize these pieces is granted on the condition that the composer is notified: ColinLTucker@gmail.com.

1. protocol for framing consumption

for listeners in a concert hall

One or more well-known Exoticizing pieces or excerpts attributed to a composer historically read as white are selected.

A pair of stereo speakers is positioned on one side of a stage, facing the opposite side of the stage.

Listeners are seated, facing the speakers.

Listeners listen, in an aggressively immobile way, to an unmarked recording of the pieces or excerpts through earbuds invisible to the audience. The recording occasionally becomes audible through the speakers, with occasional fragments sounding, including the recording's beginning. Fragments are short: for instance, in a piece with an ostinato, fragments are no longer than a complete iteration of ostinato. The speakers play at a low volume, in audio fidelity that is low but not low enough to impair recognizability of the material.

2. protocol for framing ventriloquism

for puppeteer and audio

A well-known, dance-based Exoticizing piece or excerpt attributed to a composer historically read as white is selected.

An unmarked recording of the selected piece or excerpt is played, at 2/3 of its original tempo. The puppeteer listens to the recording through headphones or earbuds. The recording occasionally becomes audible through speakers, with occasional fragments sounding, including the recording's beginning. Fragments are short: for instance, in a piece with an ostinato, fragments are no longer than a complete iteration of ostinato. The speakers play at a low volume, in audio fidelity that is low but not low enough to impair recognizability of the material.

A bust of the composer of the selected work/excerpt (ideally close to life-size) is positioned on a small puppetry-sized stage, in the center of that stage, facing stage right or left. On the audience side of the bust, a puppeteer's arm, dressed in a long-sleeved military camouflage shirt, comes out of a hole in the bust's pedestal, as if part of the same body. The puppeteer manipulates a small, completely bleached fabric sock puppet to dance to the chosen piece. The puppet enacts the following sequence of movements:

- the puppet begins the piece by entering the stage through the hole in the bust
- the puppet moves to the edge of the stage
- the puppet dances to the selected piece or excerpt, with its body mostly or entirely offstage and out of view of the audience.

If it is difficult to source the bust in question, a bust might be 3d-printed; in this instance, the resulting product looks like an unmarked bust.

For a live version in a large venue, video projection might be used.

Variation: a listener sits on a small stage, facing across the stage and holding a similar puppet.

- the listener walks on stage, with the puppet hidden to the audience
- the listener reveals the puppet and moves the puppet to the edge of the stage
- the puppet dances to the selected work or excerpt, facing the listener but with its body mostly or entirely offstage; the listener's torso stays aggressively immobile throughout

3. protocol for framing regulation

for live concert music ensemble and performers

A well-known concert music piece attributed to a composer historically read as white, in which both explicitly Exoticizing and non-Exoticizing styles are featured, is selected.

1. From a non-Exoticizing section of the piece, the following passage is sampled: beginning during its last phrase and ending at its end (i.e. a moment immediately followed by Exoticizing music).
2. A pause (either a silence or a prolongation of a particular notated event) is observed, with all non-performing musicians staying still. Simultaneously, performers dressed in costumes that reference the military and other entities historically responsible for the colonization of the Land(s) referenced by the piece's Exoticizing music walk into the hall or theatre, at a significantly slower-than-normal speed, and surround the stage on all sides, with each performer facing the stage.

Variation: the audience picks up and looks aggressively at the stage through military-coded (i.e. light brown, green, or camouflage) binoculars.

3. The Exoticizing passage, beginning immediately after the passage sampled in #1 and ending at least one minute later, is played. This passage is played by alternating two "playing modes:" 1) "normal" playing as indicated in the score, and 2) the score is realized as notated, except with voices and wind instruments using air sounds, with piano playing with so little finger pressure that there is a low risk of hammers striking strings, and with string instruments drawing the wood of the bow (no hair) across the strings, all as silently as possible. Mode 1 is adopted only for short durations, including at the passage's beginning. Durations are much shorter than a phrase: for instance, in a piece with an ostinato, durations are no longer than a complete iteration of ostinato. Mode 2 is adopted for the rest of the passage.

4. protocol for framing enclosure

for live performance (concert music, opera, ballet, theatre with music, etc.)

A well-known piece attributed to a composer historically read as white, in which both explicitly Exoticizing and non-Exoticizing styles are featured, is selected.

1. From an Exoticizing section of the piece, the following passage is sampled: beginning during its last phrase and ending at its end (i.e. a moment immediately followed by non-Exoticizing music).
2. A pause (either a silence or a prolongation of a particular notated event) is observed, slightly longer than would be idiomatic in the piece in question. All performers freeze in playing position.
3. The two (non-Exoticizing) phrases immediately after the passage sampled in #1 are played. Each phrase is played as written at its beginning, with the remainder of the phrase realized as silence (with active performers frozen in playing position). The silence takes up at least 50% of the phrase's duration. The first phrase is played at a louder-than-indicated and forced volume level, and the second is played even louder.
4. Silence is held for a long time. All performers who perform in #3 freeze in playing position. All other performers freeze.

List of possible pieces to sample with protocols 3 and 4

Examples of pieces that feature Exoticizing style alongside non-Exoticizing styles include:

Ludwig van Beethoven, *Symphony no. 3*, movement 4

for context on the reference to the style hongrois, see: Bellman, Jonathan. "Toward a Lexicon for the Style Hongrois"

Ludwig van Beethoven, *Symphony no. 9*, movement 4

for detail, see: Al-Tae, Nasser, *Representations of the Orient in Western music: Violence and Sensuality* and Kramer, Lawrence, "The Harem Threshold: Turkish Music and Greek Love in Beethoven's Ode to Joy"

Johannes Brahms, *Symphony no. 3*, movement 1

see: McClary, Susan, "Narrative agendas in 'absolute' music: identity and difference in Brahms's third symphony"

FJ Haydn, *Symphony no. 100*, particularly movement 2

see: Al-Tae, *Representations of the Orient in Western music*

WA Mozart, *Violin Concerto no. 5*, movement 3

see: Al-Tae, *Representations of the Orient in Western music*

PI Tchaikovsky, *Symphony no. 4*, movement 1

see: McClary, Susan, "Sexual politics in classical music" in *Feminine endings: Music, gender, and sexuality*

... and many canonical operas and ballets, many of them discussed in Al-Tae, *Representations of the Orient in Western music* and Ralph Locke, *Musical Exoticism*