School: Bath School of Music & Performing Arts

Researcher: Dr Matthew Sergeant

Project Title: bête gabriel-rufael (composition for tenor saxophone, percussion, and computer-controlled click track)

UOA: 33 - Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies

300-Word Statement

bête gabriel-rufael was commissioned by Scapegoat (France/Canada), with funds generously provided by the Royal Northern College of Music. The piece was premiered at La Vitrola (Montreal) on the 14th May 2015. Subsequent performances of the piece have included the Canadaian Music Centre (Toronto), Spread Art (Detroit), Constellation Chicago (Chicago), Sprectrum (New York), and the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (UK).

The research draws its wider referential frame from the so-called 'new materalism'. Here, '[m]atter is differentiating, and which differences come to matter, matter in the iterative production of their different differences' (Barad 2007: 137). The work explores this notion of material differentiation via the consideration of particular instrumental contexts. Palettes of sounds were derived for each instrument that were particular sensitive to the speed with which they are employed. For the saxophone, this comprised particular combinations of embouchure, multiphonic fingerings, volume, and trill configurations that glitch in different ways in different tempos. The percussionist scrapes a thundersheet with small hand-held plastic boxes. The overtones and multiphones resulting in the metal are particularly sensitive to the tempo of the scraping action and the rate in change in downward pressure applied. This palette of materials is presented as a loop of loops (see score), which perpetually repeat throughout the piece's duration. Whilst following the score, the players follow an in-ear click-track, controlled by a computer, which independently adjusts the tempo of each player in a constant series of ralls/accels. The tempo of the music is therefore in constant flux and, given the conditions described above, nuances the sonic content of the action's output, foregrounding the differentiation described above, where it is the differences in each repetition that come to matter.