

# The tragedy of listening

## Nono, Cacciari, critical thought and compositional practice

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Music and philosophy follow the same principle of working, that of construction and deconstruction. They are both systems for arriving at a poetical structure.

Massimo Cacciari<sup>1</sup>

Luigi Nono (1924–1990) occupies a key place in the development of contemporary music. Conventional accounts identify him as the composer who in the 1950s most coherently confronted the implications of serialism – an approach to structuring every aspect of musical composition developed from Schoenberg's ideas of order, structure and completeness in the use of the chromatic scale (the *series*). Through its evolution of the very nature of both composition and composed, Nono's work also directly addresses many of the major issues that music has subsequently had to acknowledge: the relationship of composition with social reality and with the performer, the nature of musical material, of representation and of listening, of musical time and space, and the uniqueness of the musical event. Richly grounded in music- and critical-theoretical concerns, his work transcends formalism precisely because of the depth of his historical-theoretical awareness and sense of place.

This article attempts an initial and necessarily broad survey of the role of critical theory – in this case, philosophical thought which has material implications for artistic activity – in the later work of Nono. In particular it considers the role of Italian philosopher and left-wing politician Massimo Cacciari. Nono first met Cacciari, twenty years his junior, in 1965, when the latter was a student and member of a very active group of cultural thinkers who came to dominate the intellectual and political life of Venice: Francesco Dal Co, Manfredo Tafuri and Marco De Michelis. Cacciari himself became mayor in 1993; the writings of Dal Co and Tafuri include a standard work on modern architecture; and De Michelis, brother of an ex-minister, now heads a new architecture faculty at

the university. When Cacciari was eighteen, this group founded a journal of critical theory, *Angelus Novus*, the title of which acknowledges their roots in the thought of Benjamin. Through this period Cacciari developed his early work on 'negative thought' from Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, which in his hands becomes effectively a tool for deconstruction, for seeking out fissures and contradictions. In a series of works, he presents negative thought as a *resistance*, presaging Nono's own conceptions of 'un-everything' and continuous questioning, which would lead him eventually to the writings of Edmond Jabès. There is also a sense of frustration apparent here: that Benjamin had described a post-dialectical work of art that neither the Adornians nor the espousers of political engagement had fully understood.<sup>2</sup>

The political trajectories of Nono and Cacciari are contiguous. A communism of social, intellectual and artistic responsibility informed all Nono's activity from early on: he joined the PCI (Italian Communist Party) in 1952, despite the ramifications of such actions for his international career, and was elected to the Central Committee in 1975, during the period of crisis and the 'historic compromise'. Much of Cacciari's early political writing concerns the *structural* issues of communism,<sup>3</sup> and of thought and institutions in general.<sup>4</sup> By the time of his full participation in politics he vociferously refused to engage with major parties and their dynamics.

Three lines of inquiry thus present themselves: the observable influence of critical thought on Nono's music itself, the wider role of such ideas in his development and practice as an artist, and the extent to which these conceptual tools might be instrumental in reaching an understanding, not only of Nono's music, but more widely of the dynamics of modernist cultural production and its relation to social reality. Such a wider understanding is afforded by Nono's own insistence on the nature of musical *thought* as a particular mode

of human activity and its essential relevance to the individual, culture, society and their transformation. These strands will intersect in the present narrative. The article will not, however, attempt an exegesis of Nono's own thought on these questions but rather trace some of the dynamics of their interaction through the development of his work. I shall try to show that the very depth of engagement with critical thought which underpins Nono's entire oeuvre is what allowed him to renegotiate radically and uniquely the relationship between text, representation, act and phenomenon in his later work.

## Un-everything

From the outset, Nono's engagement with critical thought and text in general distinguished itself from that of his peers in two respects: the breadth of his humanistic education and his sense of cultural and political responsibility. Both emerge in a talk he gave in 1960 at the Darmstadt Ferienkurse, at its apogee as the locus of the New Music debate. It is an impassioned and articulate response to Stockhausen's suggestion of the previous year that in the work *Il Canto Sospeso* (1956) Nono had succeeded in removing all trace of meaning from the most emotionally charged of texts – words of the victims of fascism – and revealing them as pure compositional material.<sup>5</sup> Before arriving at his refutation, Nono takes his Darmstadt listeners – presumably anticipating a rather different subject matter – through a rigorous analysis of the role and use of text in music from Lassus to Beethoven. He then demonstrates with legal precision the superficiality of the contemporary compositional discourse surrounding semiotics and the designification of text. He cites Merleau-Ponty: *no construct is without meaning. Text is a phonetic–semantic structure from which musical expression can emerge; its semantic properties are transposed into the musical language of the composer.*

If the role of critical thought is at issue here, why begin with Nono's views on the use of text? The relationship was to become explicit in his later work, but in his practice Nono's engagement with his chosen texts was such that subject matter and conscious reflection on his own activity are indivisible from the start. Both are rooted in a profound sense of historical continuity that allows his revolutions to be more radical than those of his ground-zero Darmstadt peers; Nono's strategy was quite the opposite of Boulez's or Stockhausen's desire to reimagine music *ab initio*. In all of the poetry set by Nono through the 1950s – Lorca, Pavese, Ungaretti, Machado – the semantic and sonic

properties of the words embody views of the role of the artist and the nature of his work: political struggle, the difficulty of post-Holocaust poetry, translation and the crossing of cultures, the origins of music and poetry and the fragility of individual expression. These are writers for whom aesthetic, philosophical and political engagement cannot be considered separately. In Nono's milieu of the time, the debate surrounding a communist aesthetics was informed by Gramsci rather than Adorno or Marcuse. As a student of law before composition, he had already absorbed from his mentor, political philosopher Norberto Bobbio, the social responsibility of the intellectual to be constantly questioning in a form of continuous cultural revolution.<sup>6</sup> Significant for Nono's later work also is an article by Pavese he must surely have known, written shortly before the latter's suicide in 1950 and the source of much debate in the left-wing literary world.<sup>7</sup> It might appear superficially that nothing could be farther from the specificity of the epic, socially engaged works of Nono's initial trajectory than the timelessness of Greek myth. However, Pavese seeks to rehabilitate myth at the centre of art, and suggests that the redefinition of myth is the foundation for each new epoch of artistic practice, the seed of every poem. The creation of a new work is therefore the construction of both a new aesthetic and a new ethos; in their absence, the work is simply a re-expression of something we already know and will lead *away* from the questioning that is the responsibility of the artist. The reinterpretation of myth and the process of continuous questioning frame all of Nono's late work.

The phonetic polyphony of *Il Canto Sospeso* and the evocation of Ungaretti's own voice in *Cori di Didone* (1958), for mixed choir and percussion, illustrate this indivisibility of sound, aesthetic and meaning. Nono's involvement with the earliest performances of Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* in 1954 is significant in many respects. In dealing with the inherent impossibility of a human being realizing its own self-vision, the opera provides an analogue for the task of the composer himself. While contemporary debate perceived this as reflecting a twentieth-century crisis in musical language, Nono's subsequent work demonstrates his understanding of its wider significance in terms of the very nature of music. This moment marks the start of his explicit concern with music as the activity of listening to the unsayable, and of composition as the mediation of this activity. As such it cannot be static or dogmatic but must be 'un-everything', as he liked to say. The dramaturgy, the unfinishedness and the *Sprechgesang* (speech-singing) of Schoenberg's

opera continued to fascinate him; he pointed out on several occasions, to Webern-centred (serialist) readerships, that Schoenberg presents a more complex set of questions than they imagined. This also marks the beginning of his involvement with Jewish thought in particular, and with thought on the philosophical and geographical fringes of Europe in general.<sup>8</sup> Several strands feed this line of development: an understanding of composition as a hermeneutic activity, the figure of Schoenberg himself, communism as non-Catholicism, and Venice itself as an interface with non-European cultures, indifferent to the power of the Church and home to the first ghetto.

In an interview while working on *A Floresta* (1966) – a piece combining three voices, soprano, clarinet, copper plates and tape – Nono spoke of his increasing use of documentary texts:

I choose documentary texts ... because I believe they have a greater relationship to reality than pure poetry. We still live in the time that Brecht described: it was indeed beautiful to speak of flowers, roses and love, but unfortunately social conditions do not permit it. I am also convinced that as a musician I have a social duty to fulfil. I am convinced that as a musician one lives within a historical situation.<sup>9</sup>

‘Documentary’ itself conceals many levels of mediation and aesthetic complexity. The artifice in the work of politically engaged writers such as Lorca and Pavese is clear, but even in the case of *Il Canto Sospeso* the texts are drawn from an influential collection with its own art and agenda. Documentary, then, might refer rather to the signified – the truth of injustice, of political struggle – than to the signifying words themselves. This might be a valid argument in the terms of the 1960s, but too simplistic and counter to Nono’s stated position. The crucial authenticity seems to be that of the *voce*, the directness of communication whether from artist, hero or victim. *Sara dolce tacere* (‘it will be sweet to keep quiet’), lines from Pavese set by Nono in 1958, proved to be prescient. The inextricable interpenetration of music, text, aesthetic/philosophical thought and social engagement came to a head in the ‘azione scenica’, *Al gran sole carico d’amore* (1975). ‘Azione scenica’ (action on stage) is a term Nono adopted for his vision of music-theatre developed from *Il Canto Sospeso* onwards, and the irony that Venice should have given rise to both modern opera and its metamorphosis in a new aesthetic and social reality would not have been lost on him. Networks of multiplicity and simultaneity of text, material and identity are focused on a timeless point in the here and now of the work and its audience.

Pavese himself wrote of the depression of the artist following the birth of the manifestation of a myth.<sup>10</sup> And, indeed, *Al gran sole carico d’amore* initiated a protracted period of intense difficulty in which, apart from a few occasional works, Nono produced only the textless work, ...*sofferte onde serene...* (1976), for piano and tape; itself a study in the very act of the production of music. Rather than polemical multimedia, ...*sofferte onde serene...* is a work of unique unitary immanence in Nono’s output, sculpting fragments of Pollini’s piano-playing into a modulated stillness that transcends the personal suffering which is at its origin and reflects his own Venetian physical environment. In the string quartet of 1979, *Fragmente – Stille, an Diotima*, a work which challenges and extends the activity of listening through its ‘suspended moments’ of long sustained chords and protracted silences, Nono printed short passages from Hölderlin for the players alone, and in rehearsals insisted on the observance of this inner reciting for the music to ‘sound’. The absence of the text itself from the sound of the work is one logical conclusion of his desire to extend their meaning into music. One is reminded of Nono’s account of Scherchen’s rehearsing of romantic orchestral works, when he would add words to a phrase to convey its sense to the performers. Here the textual multiplicity of works like *Al gran sole* is replaced by a new multiplicity: that of the constructive interpretation brought to bear by performer and listener. The model is not Hölderlin’s finished poems but his sketchbooks, in which alternative words, lines of development, and even languages, exist side by side with no apparent selection.

## Musical thought

In talking of his discovery of a new productiveness and establishment of a new compositional practice, Nono most frequently referred to two factors: his work with live electronics at the SWF Experimental Studio at Freiburg, and his collaboration with philosopher Massimo Cacciari. The techniques of live electronics offered Nono a means of realizing new relationships with time, space, structure and text – both verbal and musical – which had seemed to have reached the limits of practicability in the works of the early 1970s, particularly since the *Al gran sole carico d’amore*. He could now apply these emergent ideas directly in his own practice. At the same time the formulation of these ideas and thus their subsequent development found a new catalyst in his relationship with Cacciari, who provided the text for several works over the next decade, particularly their *tragedia dell’ascolto* (tragedy

of listening), *Prometeo*, an ‘opera’ first premiered in 1984.

Writing of the piece *Das atemde Klarsein* (1981), for bass flute, tape and live electronics, Nono refers to the multiple nature of the instant,<sup>11</sup> which according to Cacciari had become something of an obsession for the composer.<sup>12</sup> Following Musil, Nono observed often that a sense of reality must imply a sense of possibility. *The Man without Qualities*, he suggested, is itself an ideal manual for composition. Indeed it affords a metaphor for Nono’s process in this period of eliminating not only the superfluous but everything that detracts or points away from the present; a ‘process of emptying,

Nono was thus presented with a very specific compositional challenge: how to bring the performer and listener to engage with the musical/poetical reality of the immanent present within the sequential context of musical times, structures and actions. The simultaneous doing and comprehending of a musical act in a multiple present, in which none of its possibilities is denied, becomes the central concern of *Prometeo*. For Cacciari, this concern with the moment of revelation is precisely what makes it a *tragedy*. The present moment becomes a node in structural and – in the multiple musical references of *La lontananza* (1988), for violin, live electronics and tape – historical networks:

Massimo Cacciari and Luigi Nono  
(photo Graziano Arici, courtesy Archivio Luigi Nono, Venice)



At the opposite of a sole *movimentum*, common to all, an arhythmic succession of points, arbitrary, naked of their own sounds, is that of *Prometeo* which flattens paths, creates vast ‘free’ equal spaces, destroys presuppositions. In its laws, the past is simply has-been ... and the present is a plane from which we stretch ‘everything together’ out into the future ... Instead the time [of *Prometeo*] ... is polyphonic: its dimensions are presented simultaneously; the past of this line, of this idea, of this thought, of this single word can be the future of another. The present is not a plane common to all, but the unrepeatable instant, clear and alive, of this singularity.

Like the *Angelo Nuovo*, it sings a moment, but this moment is unique and unrepeatable, and for this uniqueness and unrepeatability it is necessary.<sup>16</sup>

erasing, purification’, in Cacciari’s words.<sup>13</sup> Wittgenstein also figured, for both Nono and Cacciari, in this need ‘to break with schematism, with formulas, with mannerisms, with givens and the taken for granted, with repetition’.<sup>14</sup> Characteristically, this was accompanied by a political repositioning; not an abandoning of principle, but a leaving-behind of dogma and orthodoxy as Nono ceased his active engagement with the PCI. *Prometeo* is mentioned in the letter in which Cacciari proposes extracts from Rilke and Orphic hymns for *Das atemde Klarsein*, and in which he summarizes his view of Nono’s relationship with text and thought:

What they [certain musicologists] understand is the dissolution (really: dis-solve – and, therefore, critical – no sudden illumination) of the relationship of the metaphysical with the signified – what they will never understand (as good ‘avant garde’...) is how *everything* is still given in the ‘sign’ – and thus certainly *also Fabbrica*, *also Floresta*. The ‘revolutionary’ side of what you’re doing today seems to me to be precisely in the non-resolving (still peacefully and...) of the metaphysics of the signified in her ‘sister’, the sign.... That it should be difficult, and painful, I can understand.<sup>15</sup>

The acrostic miracle of sixteenth-century polyphony – the relationship between the vertical and horizontal dimensions of musical space – had informed Nono’s work since his first studies in composition with Gian Francesco Malipiero and Bruno Maderna, particularly in his interpretation of serialism. It provides a plane on which events and thought can be simultaneous without being temporally identical, and vice-versa. In *Prometeo* and its related works, Nono thinks through the ‘disappearance of unique, unitary, unifying time’ in terms of an earlier *ars combinatoria*.<sup>17</sup> He thus finds a logically consistent solution to the technical issues proposed in *Al gran sole*. In their very identification, he draws a line between the theorists of sixteenth-century polyphony – who by no coincidence mostly breathed the same Venetian air – and contemporary philosophy. At the same time, he ensures that our engagement can only be with the immanent – the underlying formal structures are unretrievable to the ear; moments are suspended, separated by silences of such density that listening removes itself from chronological time to deal with the contents of echoic memory; and repre-

sentation as a mnemonic for performance is separated from its affording a mode of analysis. Hence Nono's frequent later references to the centrality of *listening* in Jewish thought, as opposed to the representations and misrepresentations of Christianity.

The 'peacefully' of the letter above seems to refer to the 'weak Messianic power', 'which alone can transform'; 'the strength of the absence of violence which is at the heart of the assemblage of texts Cacciari presented to Nono on Christmas Day, 1982.<sup>18</sup> 'Do not waste it ... this weak Messianic power ... to put into silence in the moment the empty duration.'<sup>19</sup> Fragments from Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, from Hölderlin and Hesiod are paraphrased and rearranged into what are termed *islands*; static areas between which composer and listener construct multiple trajectories and perspectives. The texts are spoken, sung, fragmented, counterpointed and layered, and absent, hidden in the score; *a cantar e a sonar* as Nono indicates on several occasions, in reference to earlier Venetian music. Their comprehensibility is constantly shifting. Multiplicity and the active engagement of the imagination of the listener are inseparable themes that run through Nono's writing in this period and Cacciari's later work *Dell'Inizio* ('Of Origins'). The very possibility of action in the present is opened to Nono's exploration by the new theoretical and technological tools at his disposal. This is the search for the Rilkean *Augenblick* (instant); the word that may not be anticipated or recalled.

Multiplicity and trajectory, rather than narrative line, also inform Nono's use of space; in this case the wooden ark constructed inside the Church of San Lorenzo by Renzo Piano. The physical space is not a canvas for narrative or drama but an ever-present analogue of the simultaneity of the sequentially presented music. With the suspension of chronological time, space or rather *place* becomes crucial.<sup>20</sup> Spatiality and movement are central to this use of sound. The real-time sound transformations of live electronics allowed Nono to explore the present in terms of parameters – space, resonance, time, frequency – which were already inherent in his own cultural past. The time-frequency domain relationship at the technological core of such operations literally abstracts sounds from their chronological context; an inevitable quantum trade-off between frequency and time constrains all knowledge about sound. There is a cognitive contiguity between the architectural movement of performers in *Prometeo*, the formal use of acoustic and virtual space as a compositional device in *Omaggio a György Kurtág* (1983), in the 'sound in continuous move-

ment' which he worked so intensively with particular performers throughout this period to achieve, and in the re-formation of each of the late chamber works in every different acoustic.

Cacciari dates discussion of *Prometeo* to a trip to Sardinia in 1976, and their collaboration is mentioned by Nono as early as 1977. An understanding of a common approach to *Prometeo* appears to have emerged soon, as well as a sense of the way in which contact with Cacciari had begun to influence his own practice:

above all in the relationship between laws and their transgression towards a new formulation ... I am interested in the struggle between the foundation of the principles of life and the continuous dynamic which leads to their transcending, even if in a continually conflictual relationship.... With Cacciari, through long conversations, I have managed to expand my methods of analysis, I manage to perceive new ways of thinking, to increasingly embrace the multiple, to overcome certain schematizations, certain habits, certain common categories.<sup>21</sup>

Nono adds: 'From Massimo I have learned very much. To begin with, to look at the text rather than the context, which becomes a banal sociology in one branch of the soviet school.'<sup>22</sup>

This capacity to assimilate new and evolving modes of thought in the fabric of his work was rooted in Nono's early and thorough acquaintance with early Venetian music theory, which understands music as embodied philosophy – whether the conservative Zarlino,<sup>23</sup> the humanist Galiliei<sup>24</sup> or the pragmatic Zacconi<sup>25</sup> – as well as in an unceasing engagement with the issues that had brought music to its present state:

Composing musically isn't just a technical matter, it is not handcraft, it is *thought* ... Schoenberg taught to think, not to compose.... This is also demonstrated in the renaissance – from Zarlino, Zacconi and Artusi to Padre Martini – when one always spoke of differences of musical thought.<sup>26</sup>

Cacciari describes Nono as 'always a composer, in the strictly artisanal sense of the word, in the classical understanding of the term'.<sup>27</sup> The mutual nature of their collaboration is acknowledged in Cacciari's own work, although he is careful to note that in neither case should such influence be read too literally onto the surface.<sup>28</sup> In the book *Icone della Legge* ('Icon of the Law') (1985, and hence contemporary with the revisions of *Prometeo*), the chapter 'The Mouth of Moses' is a meditation on the Moses of Freud and of Schoenberg; Cacciari thanks Nono for his hand 'in this chapter, the book and all the rest'. The silence

he describes in his conclusion is that of Nono (quite different to that of Cage, as Nono had observed):

The word which is missing is the name, that sound – missing is the word capable of expressing the silence without betraying it, to express the silence as silence, to hear the inaudible, to hear it truly in as much as it is truly inaudible.<sup>29</sup>

*L'Angelo Necessario* ('The Necessary Angel') of the following year also addresses issues central to *Prometeo*: if pure representation refers to pure idea as a pre-given, how is immanence possible? Angels become 'gods of the instant'.

Cacciari's major work of the decade was *Dell'Inizio* ('Of Origins'), the importance of which was anticipated by Nono some years previously, and the first copy of which he survived to receive. Cacciari dedicated a chapter on hearing to Nono: 'until the absent God makes himself heard'.<sup>30</sup> And, as Röller has pointed out, the dialogues through which Cacciari's ideas develop could virtually be transcriptions of their conversations.<sup>31</sup> Cacciari takes from Benjamin the notion that in representation, word and idea are one.<sup>32</sup> The relationship between this dual unity and song is, according to Cacciari, what underlies all Nono's work, especially in his last fifteen years.<sup>33</sup> The death of listening is therefore inevitable when we no longer need to hear to understand; that we *write* music is symptomatic. That they describe *Prometeo* as *tragedia dell'ascolto*, 'tragedy of listening', has historic significance for both of them: it refers to Nietzsche's declaration of the inseparability of music and tragic myth, but also to Monteverdi's 'Tragedia in musica', *Orfeo*, a prime candidate for a starting point of modern Western music.

Cacciari was also instrumental in introducing the Egyptian–French–Jewish poet-philosopher Edmond Jabès to Italian readers, and to Nono. Jabès' short, dry questioning style offers no answers and affords no reduction; as poetic form it is descended directly from radical philosophy. To transcend or escape self and yet be able to act is at the ethical heart of aesthetic behaviour, and was Nono's abiding concern. Jabès suggested a certain model here. Cacciari writes that, in his *Book of Margins*, for example, 'Jabès breaks the "pact" of Levinas between the other and the face. The absolute other is also that which is other to every face.'<sup>34</sup> Nono meanwhile searched for open textual structures which could be organized like the textual 'islands' of *Prometeo*. In Jabès' *Little Book of Unsuspected Subversion* Nono found him theorizing 'continuous interrogation, continuous questions, continuous doubts, continuous research ... ancient memory, discoveries

of ancient memory'. It is in light of this that Nono claims the 'technology of today allows us to rediscover our past in a new way, to study it'.<sup>35</sup> Jabès' book also extends the biblical interdiction of representation to writing in general; and Nono's musical response was immediate.<sup>36</sup> *Découvrir la subversion: Hommage à Edmond Jabès*, the resultant work, persists only in its sketches and the fact of its performance. Perhaps we should likewise see Nono's use of material generated in the course of the research process in interaction with certain musicians as a process of structural self-effacement. The book, the text, as Jabès points out, is always too late:

To go into the silence is to measure oneself against the unknown, the unknowable. In no way to learn what one doesn't know, but on the contrary to unlearn, to be ultimately nothing but an antenna for the infinity into which we sink.<sup>37</sup>

### Transforming time

Which of the theoretical paths pursued by Nono could, then, help us to understand the later works, those in which conscious 'schematicization' has been explicitly banished, in which are heard the emergent product of a deep historical and theoretical awareness and a rigorous action-in-the-present? Cacciari's work would seem an obvious starting point, but analytical understanding arises from the friction, the difference generated between analytical model and object. The complexity of intellectual exchange is such that Cacciari's work is to an extent a product of the same common activity. Nono's library – every new volume identified by date and place – provides a map of the evolution of his intellectual environment. Levinas and Derrida are present, as Nono described, because he understood their work as a hermeneutical activity which demonstrates the passing of systematic thought, of the Enlightenment.<sup>38</sup> Derrida's *Speech and Phenomena*, the work dealing most directly with Nono's crucial relationship of speech, text and act, he bought in the French original and later in its Italian translation. Strikingly absent from Nono's library and discussion is Deleuze. Perhaps this is for circumstantial reasons, or perhaps precisely because Deleuze's work is *not* hermeneutic; like Nono's it proposes new *constructs*, the experience of which transforms our relationship with the others that surround us. 'Only by legwork' is Deleuze's formulation of Nono's *Hay che caminar* ('traveller – there is no path, only walking'; Nono's motto for his last series of works). 'Of the refrain', and 'Concrete rules and abstract machines', in *A Thousand Plateaus*, also provide parallels with Nono's own des-

stratified space which could constructively be enumerated. Nono's work is likewise the product of a search for 'pure immanence', a kind of new empiricism. In both cases this is founded on an intimate acquaintance with the gods which Nono tells us after Hölderlin and Nietzsche are dead and not yet reborn. However, to return to Pavese's article, this might reinforce an aesthetic appreciation of both artists rather than initiating the active, creative, personal response which Nono describes and affords.

Some articles by Cacciari published together in 1980 as *Dallo Steinhof* (translated as *Posthumous People*) – some of which had appeared in *Laboratorio Musicale*, edited by Nono – may appear at first sight to have little relevance.<sup>39</sup> In their reflection on Viennese thought at the beginning of the twentieth century – the cultural moment which is the subject of Musil's great book – Cacciari's essays point to the crucial role of a difference between language games, or rather between multiple language games and subject. Perhaps this is the difference that opens up new spaces wherein the 'moment of revelation', later referred to by Nono, becomes possible. He explores the commensurability of formal or logical, phenomenological and natural language spaces for the development of understanding. Language, he notes, brings to bear the power of *intentio*. He looks at the ambivalent relationship of text and music as described by Schoenberg and sees a strength in their non-coincidence. Nono uses text to keep this space open, to avoid any possibility of reduction. A space is kept open within which an *emergent* immanence is possible. It is not described or formally implied, and conceptual models will not adhere to the musical text. Exceptions to this strategy are few; *...sofferte onde serene...*, with its particular circumstances, may perhaps be one.

Finally, he considers the *violence of preaching/predication* identified by Nietzsche and which he sees Musil's book as attempting to eradicate at one point; a critique of the category of 'being', of the verb 'to be', the elimination of which Derrida says would leave us a language of pure invocation, of pure adoration. The utopia of language dispossessed of all 'being' can only be called from afar, says Cacciari, because it would ultimately become a form of listening. This 'divine' state, he says of Musil, is necessarily denied. He describes the essay in question as 'an attempt to give voice to the silence that embraces all preaching'.<sup>40</sup> In this analysis we find a mode of understanding, not just of the last period of Nono's work, the period of collaboration with Cacciari which this phrase describes beautifully, but of the historical trajectory that he

confronts in these works – the increasing hegemony of the musical predicate to the point where we *must* be freed from it. The musical predicate is how Schoenberg describes tonal music – comprehensibility, the decoding of 'is a' – and it is what he leaves behind in his vision of 'the unity of musical space [which] demands an absolute and unitary perception'.<sup>41</sup> A more accelerated growth of predicational violence can be seen through the Darmstadt years, culminating in Nono's debate with Stockhausen.

The concerns of Nono's late work – the relationship of speech, text and act, space and the perpetual movement of sound, the suspension of time and action in the present moment, simultaneity, representation, the leaving behind of schemas – are all ultimately functions of *time*. They all address the same technical issue: how to mediate and transform the time of human experience and culture without denying or negating the power of its continuity and directionality? Perhaps the most useful key, finally, lies in Benjamin's famous evocation of a 'weak Messianic force', in the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*:

The present ... as a model of Messianic time, comprises the entire history of mankind in an enormous abridgement ... For every second of time [is] the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter.<sup>42</sup>

A postscript for any who may be tempted to regard real-world controversy surrounding the political actions of major thinkers as a thing of the past. Fifty metres from the Archivio Luigi Nono on Giudecca is the most visible trace of Cacciari's impact on the cityscape of Venice: the Molino Stucky, a vast nineteenth-century warehouse being restored as a congress centre over a decade, at great expense to the city. During the research for this article in the Archivio, the Molino burned down in an afternoon. Nobody has suggested this was an accident.

## Notes

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1. Massimo Cacciari, in Nils Röller, *Migranten: Edmond Jabès, Luigi Nono, Massimo Cacciari*, Merve, Berlin, 1995, p. 13.
2. Massimo Cacciari, 'Note sulla dialettica del negativo nell'epoca della Metropoli', *Angelus Novus* 21, 1971, p. 37.
3. Massimo Cacciari, 'Sul problema dell'organizzazione. Germania 1917–1921', in György Lukács, *Kommunismus 1920–1921*, Marsilio, Padua, 1972, pp. 7–66.
4. Massimo Cacciari, *Krisis*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 1976.
5. Luigi Nono, *Scritti e colloqui*, 2 vols, ed. Angela Ida Benedictis and Veniero Rizzardi, Ricordi, Milano, 2001, Vol. 1, pp. 57–83.

6. See Norberto Bobbio, *A Political Life*, Polity, Cambridge, 2002, p. 42.
7. Cesare Pavese, *La letteratura americana e altri saggi*, Einaudi, Turin, 1951, pp. 315–22.
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# Marx & Philosophy Society

## INAUGURAL CONFERENCE

**Saturday 29 May 2004**  
10.30 am – 6.00 pm

**University of London**  
Room 728 Institute of Education  
20 Bedford Way  
London WC1H 0AL

**Registration**  
£8 waged / £5 unwaged  
(includes society membership)

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**Organisers**  
Chris Arthur Andrew Chitty  
Joseph McCarney Sean Sayers

### Speakers

**Andrew Collier** University of Southampton  
**David Harvey** City University of New York  
**Martin McIvor** London School of Economics

### Respondents

**David McLellan** Goldsmiths College  
**Lawrence Wilde** Nottingham Trent University

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