

The Negation of a Negation Fixed in a Form

Luigi Nono and the Italian Counter-culture 1964–1979

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At the outset of this discussion I would like to propose a definition or two that will hold throughout it. First, I would like to define the term ‘counter-culture’, which appears in my title, as the organised and self-conscious articulation of an alternative to hegemonic capitalist culture—alternative in terms of values, institutions and sign systems. Second, I would like to define the date ‘1968’ as the historical moment at which various nationally specific counter-cultures actually coalesced, despite the fact that these counter-cultures were often composed of individual elements that predate 1968. Thus I am defining the two terms reciprocally: a counter-culture is that alternative framework that emerges when a confluence of quantitative changes (in labour conditions, educational access or values, tolerance of ethnic/gender/cultural differences, and so on) crosses a threshold and produces a qualitative shift in consciousness, critique and creativity, and 1968 marks the various ways that threshold was crossed in the USA, Europe and elsewhere. From this viewpoint, for example, the American ‘68 marked the emergence of a counter-culture defined by a relatively fleeting politicisation of students and a temporary cultural alliance between students and people of colour, while the French ‘68 gave rise to a counter-culture characterised by a similarly fleeting political alliance of students and factory workers. The Italian ‘68, which I propose we call the ‘Long ‘68’, created a much more robust and long-lived counter-culture than either of the better known ones, a counter-culture

that was based upon a long-term (though highly unstable) political alliance of workers and students, which later expanded—not without difficulty—to include feminists and other activist groups.¹

As I have argued elsewhere, all of these versions of '68 and their ensuing counter-cultures functioned as much through the creation and circulation of art, literature and music as through political theory, historical critique and militancy,² and my goal in what follows is to trace the role of avant-garde music in the rise and development of the Italian counter-culture from the early 1960s until its destruction at the end of the 1970s. Instead of approaching this issue along quantitative, sociological lines, I will focus on one figure whose simultaneous engagement with musical innovation and sociopolitical revolution was exemplary in its intent (though exceptional in its extent): the avant-garde composer Luigi Nono, whose career parallels the rise of the Italian counter-culture during the 1960s and early 1970s. I will also briefly examine how the forcible destruction of the Italian counter-culture in 1979 is reflected in the last phase of Nono's musical career.

In conversation with Anne Dufourmantelle, Antonio Negri recently reminisced about his early days as a political activist in Venice, where he lived from 1963 to 1971. His fondness for Venice arises, he says, not only from the great beauty of the place, but also from the fact that it was there he experienced 1968. Now the French '68, particularly the Parisian events of May, is well known in the Anglophone world, but the Italian '68 is not, despite its importance locally and globally. Venice was one of its key sites, as Negri explains:

In 1968 students from Venice and Padua joined forces with the workers at Porto Marghera. This worked out quite smoothly because they had been in constant contact for a decade: the school of architecture was a gathering place for the working class. And the intellectuals of Venice—led by the musician Luigi Nono and the painter Emilio Vedova—gave their whole-hearted support to the movement. In June 1968 we blocked the opening of the famous art exhibition, the Biennale—it finally took place three months later after being moved to another location!³

As Cesco Chinello notes, the disruption of the 1968 Venice Biennale made front-page headlines and television newscasts around the world, and some of the images from it are among the most famous of the era.⁴ As a leading theorist and activist both then and now, Negri's participation in these events is certainly important, but my purpose here is not to trace his role but rather that of one of the people he describes as an ally: composer Luigi Nono. Nono is largely unknown and unstudied in the Anglophone world, though recordings of his work have proliferated since his death in 1990. A native of Venice, Nono was one of the most prominent avant-garde composers of the postwar period, generally considered the equal of figures like Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz

Stockhausen. Unlike them, however, Nono was a communist all his life, and an active though somewhat unorthodox member of the Italian Communist Party (PCI).⁵ His involvement in the Long '68 and the years leading up to it, as both an activist and a musician, offers a key for understanding the role of music in the Italian counter-culture.

Although he earned a degree in jurisprudence at the University of Padua, in the same department where Negri would later be a student, professor and leader of the rising counter-culture, Nono apparently never practised law but instead switched to the study of music shortly after graduation, upon meeting the young composer and conductor Bruno Maderna. Nono's politics merge with his music from his earliest works, even those composed prior to his formal membership in the PCI. His first orchestral composition, *Variazioni canoniche sulla serie dell'op. 41 di Arnold Schönberg* [*Canonical Variations on the Series from Arnold Schönberg's op. 41*] (1949–50), is a set of variations on the 12-note series underlying Schönberg's setting of Lord Byron's *Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte*, one of the Viennese composer's most political works that was intended as an indictment of Adolf Hitler. Admittedly this is aesthetic politics at its most mediated and discreet: unlike a set of tonal variations, a set of serial variations does not have to 'quote' its source music in recognisable form as a theme, and Nono's does not present Schönberg's series in unaltered form until its conclusion. This means that the only clear and accessible indication of his polemical intention for the piece lies in its title, which itself presupposes a precise knowledge of Schönberg's oeuvre since only the source work's opus number is given, not its title.⁶ Nono's compositional 'discretion' here is not surprising, given the rigid ideological polarities of Cold War Europe, particularly in Germany, where many of his early works were premiered.⁷

Subsequent vocal works composed after Nono joined the PCI in 1952 made his politics somewhat more accessible by making use of texts from well-known leftist writers, such as Federico García Lorca (the three-part *Epitaffio* [*Epitaph*], 1951–53) and Paul Éluard (*La Victoire de Guernica* [*The Victory of Guernica*], 1954), and from executed European resistance fighters (*Il Canto Sospeso* [*The Suspended Song*], 1955–56). His first, most traditional stage work, *Intolleranza 1960* [*Intolerance 1960*], drew its language from Bertolt Brecht, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Vladimir Mayakovsky as well as Éluard to tell the story of a persecuted refugee who experiences or witnesses many of the twentieth century's atrocities. However, in many of these cases Nono treated the words as well as the music in quasi-serial fashion, decomposing his source texts into syllables or even phonemes for choral permutation and thus obscuring their revolutionary valence once again.⁸ These avant-garde techniques clashed not only with common-practice tonality and Italian operatic tradition but also with the doctrines of socialist realism and popular accessibility promulgated by Soviet artistic doctrine and loosely followed

by the PCI, so Nono often found himself at odds with his fellow party members as well as the conservative listening public.⁹

In the early 1960s, however, Nono's aesthetic shifted in musical form, textual content, and performance practice. The contradiction between his political commitments to communism and the working class on the one hand and on the other his musical vocation, which constrained him to work within bourgeois organisations and institutions such as state-run symphony orchestras and private commissioning bodies, became increasingly acute. The innovations of the postwar musical avant-garde began to appear less radical to him insofar as they remained trapped within those institutions. In 1958 Nono had begun to separate himself from the apolitical avant-garde by means of a critique of American John Cage's aleatory or chance-based music. Cage was interesting, Nono claimed, because he demystified 'bourgeois musical myths and rites' (such as the rigid distinction between 'music' and 'noise' and the cult of the solitary genius), but his work was 'blocked by the lack of a functional new social perspective for music, the lack of a historical-scientific analysis of both his material and his compositional principles, the irresponsible lack of a conscious artist-society relationship'.¹⁰ Shortly thereafter Nono came to the conclusion that, as Paul Griffiths put it,

Revolutionary thought demanded revolutionary means, and the way to avoid assimilation was to move entirely out of the official arena, by rejecting the network of institutions—concert halls, festivals, modern music ensembles, recording companies—through which capitalist culture had domesticated the avant-garde. Accordingly Nono began to present his music in factories ...¹¹

This shift from a 'superstructural' perspective to one centered in the 'base', if one can call it that, seems to parallel in some ways the move many radical intellectuals, such as Negri and his Paduan colleagues, were making from the university and the laboratory to the factories during the same period. Nono also began to establish working relationships with politically like-minded artists, such as the pianist Maurizio Pollini, the conductor Claudio Abbado and the painter Emilio Vedova (who had designed the sets for *Intolleranza 1960*).

With regard to musical form and text setting, Nono's experiments with tape composition led him to incorporate 'non-musical' sounds, the sounds of everyday life and labour, into his work, and this new mode of producing music transformed his entire compositional practice. His use of 'noise' was unlike Cage's mystical ahistoricism, however, as Paul Griffiths explains:

Studio composition made the composer himself into a worker: using his hands, having responsibilities to colleagues, dealing with actual material rather than with mental figments. Also, the use of recorded factory noises ... helped place the music within the experience of workers and estranged

it from the experience of bourgeois concert-goers. Finally, through tape it was possible to bring into the music direct signals of political involvement

...¹²

The first major piece to manifest this transformed aesthetic was *La fabbrica illuminata* [*The Illuminated Factory*] for soprano and tape (1964), which set words drawn from metalworkers' union meetings and contract negotiations (as well as a more upbeat finale drawn from Cesare Pavese's poetry) to a musical score assembled from concrete sounds recorded in their factory, the Italsider foundry in Genoa-Cornigliano.¹³ Nono gathered these materials in the course of a series of investigative visits to what he called the 'tumultuous and incandescent reality' of the foundry and to meetings of its workers. Initially conceived as a 'fragment-study for *Un diario italiano* [*An Italian Diary*]' which was to be Nono's second composition for the stage, it became an independent piece when he abandoned work on the larger structure.¹⁴

Nono was initially inspired to pursue this project by his reading of Giovanni Carocci's book *Inchiesta sulla FIAT* [*Inquiry into FIAT*], which was in some ways a precursor to Romano Alquati's famous studies of class composition at FIAT.¹⁵ Although I have found no evidence to indicate that Nono was immediately familiar with the work of the *Quaderni rossi* [*Red Notebooks*] group around Raniero Panzieri, which published Alquati's early writings, his move from the concert hall and recording studio into the factory resonates with the new analytical and organisational methods of *operaismo*, particularly its emphasis on a new form of working-class subjectivity and its new forms of (political and linguistic) expression. In his notes to *La fabbrica illuminata*, Nono describes the Italsider foundry he visited as 'a history, a situation of struggle, a moment in the immense passion and life of the workers' movement, the negation of the negation in action ...' To this intense moment the composer cannot respond with traditional forms, modes or clichés:

No mimesis, no reflection. No industrial arcadia. No populist or *popular* naturalism. Only a semantically precise music-idea about the man of today at the site of his servitude-liberation; the negation of a negation fixed in a form, committed to overcoming the partiality, whether subjective or objective, that is dominant today not only in music.¹⁶

The composition must invent a singular aesthetic form that is adequate to this singular historical moment of the workers' struggle to negate their subjection to the negation that is capitalist industrial labour; it must fix the active movement of that struggle in an audible form that can bridge the gap between the subjective experiences of the workers and the objective conditions of their servitude. The musical work must reproduce the work of struggle not mimetically but structurally and dialectically. Such would be the 'negation of a negation fixed in a form'. But how does it do so?

In the live performance of the piece, the workers' words that complain of their exposure to unsafe conditions and that liken the factory to a 'concentration camp' are folded into the machinery sounds of the factory on the four-track tape, and also sung live by a soprano standing amid the loudspeakers. This auditory dialectic of human words and machine noise becomes visible in the spatial relationship between the singer's disciplined but mobile body and the featureless, fixed loudspeakers. The superimposition of these two non-identical dialectical axes serves to specify the historical situation of the factory and the subjection of its workers to the fixed capital of machinery. When Nono staged a performance of the piece for a workers' cultural collective, their reactions confirmed his expectations: 'The sound-noise relationship, that is the particular sonic structure of the acoustic phenomenon, did not pose a problem, whether real or artificial, for them as it would for a bourgeois public' because 'life and labour compelled them to be technically in the vanguard: new technical means of production and labour'. He reports that the workers told him that,

Listening to this music, composed with our sounds-noises, with our words, we notice our alienated state in the factory. We work like mechanised robots, almost without realising the violence of the human sonic situation. Now we are rediscovering and becoming conscious of it again through the music.¹⁷

Nono's politics were no longer concealed behind avant-garde formalism, but were made expressive and effective by the uncompromising avant-garde forms of *musique concrète*, and they resonated with the concerns of the workers he met.

The 'precise music-idea' of *La fabbrica illuminata* offered Nono a new compositional method that Mário Vieira de Carvalho calls 'nonlinear dramaturgy', in which 'situations from different times and contexts take place simultaneously on stage'.¹⁸ In Nono's previous works like *Intolleranza 1960*, the collage of different textual sources was formally subordinated to an abstract but decidedly linear Aristotelian narrative—the story of the modern refugee—but the new nonlinear dramaturgy of *La fabbrica illuminata* allowed him to free his material from such constraints and create immediate juxtapositions of sound and signification that would characterise his major theatrical works for the remainder of his life. In this piece, the conditions to which the workers are exposed and their rational and affective reactions to those conditions are not presented through mimetic narrative exposition but through immediate juxtaposition, resulting not so much in an Aristotelian catharsis that drains away dramatic negativity but in a Brechtian standing contradiction that demands action, what Nono called 'the negation of a negation fixed in a form'. As he himself recognised, 'The experience of *La fabbrica illuminata* was in this regard fundamental for me; it provokes and liberates me to new developments'.¹⁹

The works that followed *La fabbrica illuminata* extended its methods to the international framework of the workers' struggle, particularly in its anti-imperialist or anti-colonialist manifestations. In this his career parallels the internationalisation of the Italian workers' movement and the PCI's accompanying rhetoric in those years. For example, *A floresta é jovem e cheia de vida* [*The Forest is Young and Full of Life*] for soprano, clarinet, three reciters, copper plates and tape (1966) was widely denounced by mainstream music critics as 'anti-American' because of its use of texts by Fidel Castro, Frantz Fanon, Patrice Lumumba and Vietnamese FLN fighters (to whom the piece is dedicated) as well as tape material that included US Defense Department consultant Hermann Kahn's conflict escalation checklist as performed by the Living Theater.²⁰ More directly relevant to the present inquiry is *Contrappunto dialettico alla mente* [*Dialectical Counterpoint for the Mind*] for tape (1968), on which Nono collaborated with novelist and poet Nanni Balestrini, who was to become a founding member of Potere Operaio in 1969. In this work the experimentalist Balestrini appropriates and transforms Nono's early method of syllabic or phonetic permutation, which had tended to obscure his political message, into a 'phonetic treatment of texts' out of which emerge 'the names of political personalities ([US President Lyndon] Johnson, [Italian Socialist leader Pietro] Nenni) and institutions (the White House, the Pentagon)' responsible for defending global imperialism.²¹ In addition to Balestrini's experimental strategies, the piece also sets directly polemical texts: Sonia Sanchez's poem on the assassination of Malcolm X and the Harlem Progressive Labor Club's pamphlet 'Uncle Sam Wants You, Nigger'.

Perhaps the most personally significant of the new developments provoked by Nono's experience of *La fabbrica illuminata* was a critical attitude toward the institutions of artistic and musical commerce and their relationship to national and international capital, and this is what led to Nono's active leadership of the 'boycott' (his word) of the 1968 Venice Biennale cultural exhibition mentioned earlier. A contemporary account of the event's opening day (22 June 1968) in *L'Espresso*, for example, describes the arrival at the exhibition hall of

a small group of demonstrators led by maestro Luigi Nono (splendid in stylish clothes, tall and imposing, his voice thundering and yet melodious) who, clapping their hands, singing, and chanting slogans, urged the police to go away and the Americans to go home and leave Vietnam alone.²²

This was not a spontaneous demonstration, but the result of careful analysis of the Biennale's position in the international art market and extensive planning for contact with other radical artists and expected clashes with police. As Nono wrote in his subsequent account of the situation,

the analysis of the Biennale was carried out in the Venetian socio-economic context: Venice as historic center ... of economic development in

Mestre-Marghera, a relationship strictly correlated therefore with the interests of Venetian monopoly capital (Ciga, Cini, the Volpi group) combined with national and international capital.²³

The centrality of the Porto Marghera petrochemical complex adjacent to Venice in this analysis parallels the focus on that factory in the early organisational work of Potere Operaio.²⁴ The result of Nono's analysis, however, and the starting point for the boycott, was a denunciation of the exhibition as the 'Biennale of the masters', a demonstration of the complicity of the art market with capital and therefore with imperialism. This denunciation was followed by an account of the boycott's practical organisation, and then by a series of pointed theoretical questions that Nono's subsequent works would try to answer: 'Where is culture? Whose is it? How is it related to the current class struggle? What is it?' However, these questions are not posed only to cultural workers and consumers or to corporate investors in the art market, but also to

the political leadership of the European left parties, [including] the leadership of the PCI and the PSIUP [Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity], not in order to fix a new official line but to overcome ... the equivocal gap that exists between culture and politics ... to find a response to those who affirm that every artistic expression or product can now be integrated or absorbed by the system ...²⁵

For Nono and his fellow demonstrators, including not only Negri and Vedova but also the young architecture student Francesco Dal Co and the young philosophy student Massimo Cacciari, the Venice Biennale was a clear example of such integration, and while their disruption served to reveal this, it did not yet constitute a negation of the art market or an alternative to culture's role as a functional element of capital. And the socialist-realist 'official line' of the existing left parties, particularly the PCI, offered no good answers to Nono's questions.

Despite its limitations, the 1968 Biennale boycott was unquestionably one of the key events marking the larger transition to a self-conscious counter-culture in Italy, and as such it opened up a whole new set of possibilities. Nono pursued this line of inquiry further in his 1969 tape work *Musica-Manifesto n.1: Un volto, e del mare—Non consumiamo Marx* [*Music-Manifesto no.1: A Face, and from the Sea—We Don't Consume Marx*], into which he incorporated 'documentary material' including sounds 'from the street: Venice, June 1968[,] boycott and struggle of the students-workers-intellectuals against the Biennale[,] cultural trafficking entity [*ente culturale mercificante*] that supports monopolistic economic interests (Montedison-Ciga) and governmental power'.²⁶ These sounds were drawn from tape recordings of the demonstrations in which he had participated, and served to bring some element of that important political act into the music. The piece also includes slogans from the Parisian events of May '68 as markers of

international revolutionary solidarity and another Pavese poem ('Morning') as a sign of hope. What I want to emphasise here is the claim Nono makes in the title of part 2 of this work: 'we don't consume Marx'. Although Marx's books, like the clichéd Che Guevara posters of the late 1960s, are bought and sold as commodities, there remains something called 'Marx' that is not for consumption, not a commodity whose circulation reinforces the system that it ostensibly resists. If this is true, then it is possible to conceive of an art or music that would similarly defy consumption as a commodity of the right (tonality) or left (folklore)—and that is the music that Nono, along with other counter-cultural musicians, sought to produce.

This is a point he took up again in his notes to a later work, *Ein Gespenst geht um in der Welt* [*A Spectre is Haunting the World*] for solo soprano, chorus and orchestra (1971):

The possibility of a purely 'aesthetic consumption' of this music—a particular moment from which one can easily deduce a global principle—is based on the social and ideological position of the listener, just as in the case of those who can 'enjoy' the extraordinary 'beauty' of the German language in Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* by detaching it from its meaning, function and perspective in history and the class struggle. An emasculating attempt at recuperation on the part of the other class? Or rather a politically and culturally hegemonic force, to speak like Gramsci, that goes 'from the organic intellectual to the working class' ... and historically penetrates, transforms and conditions even the 'habits' of the other?

The reference to Antonio Gramsci is important here, for Nono admits in a contemporary interview that he

starts from an organic concept of culture that was worked out in Italy by Antonio Gramsci, culture really in the sense of a conception of the totality of life, hence in every problem it is not only a matter of music, painting and poetry as particular moments, but as arising, as being realised, as being consumed, that is to say the *function* ... In what context is this possible and how? Who determines this, which social class expresses what, which social class consumes and organises?²⁷

This more clearly situates the dialectic he had identified in the relationship between the Venice Biennale and capital, as well as his even earlier critique of Cage: on the one hand the insidious reduction of even oppositional art to a consumer good, or rather its production as a commodity immediately in circulation on the market, and on the other hand the standing possibility of an effective opposition in art considered not as a niche in the division of labour and the market but as an element of the totality of life. At the beginning of the 1970s he felt confident enough to

claim that ‘continuous experience with actively politicised Italian workers and students makes me rule out ... “aesthetic consumption” among them’ simply because of which class they were, their function in the totality of the capitalist system and their access to an antagonistic historical consciousness.²⁸ But such confidence would not outlast the decade, as we will soon see.

Ein Gespenst is interesting for another reason as well: it marks a further phase in the formal evolution of Nono’s musical aesthetic. In this work, as in many earlier ones, Nono constructs his musical framework from politically charged sources, among them labour songs and folk rhythms associated with oppressed ethnic groups. One of his most often used sources of musical material is the *Internationale*, a song celebrating the Paris Commune that became the anthem of the international communist movement. In earlier works such as the *Epitaffio per García Lorca* or *La Victoire de Guernica*, Vieira de Carvalho notes,

all this quoted material plays ... a decisive role on a structural level. It does not work as an ‘Other’ which remains untouched. On the contrary, each quoted ‘identity’—for instance, the *Internationale*—is decomposed into its constitutive parameters, namely pitch and duration, which are then treated independently from one another as reservoirs of intervals and rhythmic patterns.²⁹

This means that, as in the case of the Schönberg series and the syllabically disjointed texts of the early works, the citation or allusion to what Nono calls the ‘international class sign’ of the anthem is virtually impossible to recognise in the performance of those pieces.³⁰ It is more difficult to recognise than even the electronically transformed national anthems utilised by Stockhausen in his piece *Hymnen* (1966–67), which seeks to break down and combine national anthems, and by implication their respective nations, into a utopian international music and/of community.³¹ In *Ein Gespenst*, however,

the fragments of the songs include the respective text and are quoted in a recognizable way. They belong as such (and not only as reservoirs of intervals and rhythmic patterns which permeate the whole musical substance) to the material juxtaposed, superimposed and spatialized by means of montage.³²

Not only is the melody of the *Internationale* audible in *Ein Gespenst*, but some of its lyrics are also: ‘Forward, comrades! We are/the Great Party of the Labourers.’ It is allowed to function as a clearly recognisable ‘class sign’ and carry some of its historical associations into the present music, in the process acting as a lyrical and musical critique of Stockhausen’s formal and mystical effort to transcend the conflict between nation states via ‘pure’ music.

This phase of Nono’s career culminates in his second completed stage work, *Al gran sole carico d’amore* [*In the Bright Sunshine Heavy with Love*] (1972–74), which draws upon the

writings of Marx, Lenin, Gramsci, Arthur Rimbaud, Maxim Gorky, Brecht, Pavese, Castro and Che Guevara to constitute the vocal backdrop against which to set the words of four radical women: Communard Louise Michel, Argentine revolutionary Tania Bunke, and Cuban revolutionaries Celia Sánchez and Haydée Santamaría. The music again makes use of the *Internationale* and other audible 'class signs', while the technique of nonlinear dramaturgy permits Nono to telescope a century of revolutionary struggle, and particularly women's experience of it, into an intense (and once again Brechtian rather than Aristotelian) ninety-minute spectacle.³³ The range of historical and theoretical reference attests to Nono's continuing study of both the tradition and the contemporaneity of revolutionary thought, while the newfound sensitivity to issues of gender within revolutionary movements acknowledges the substantive critiques being launched by the growing Italian (and international) feminist movement. In both regards Nono's compositional practice mirrored the overall development of the Italian counter-culture, which sought to incorporate the lessons of Cuba and Vietnam even as it struggled to come to terms with the pernicious sexism that it inherited from anti-Fascist militancy and the traditional factory workers' movement. Never had Nono's music been more closely attuned to the possibilities and dangers the counter-culture faced in the present moment.

Not long thereafter, though, Nono's aesthetic began to turn away from directly politicised music and toward a more meditative, philosophical practice of composition.³⁴ In place of the automomist Balestrini, he began to collaborate with fellow PCI member (and future mayor of Venice) Massimo Cacciari on discontinuous settings of lyric poetry (Friedrich Hölderlin, Rainer Maria Rilke) and critical philosophy (Friedrich Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin) rather than political economy and committed poetry.³⁵ Why did this happen? His political commitment remained undiminished, at least for the rest of the 1970s, but it no longer expressed itself in works of immediate political engagement and spontaneous international alliance. Instead, it expressed itself through his work within the bureaucratic structure of the PCI, to whose central committee he was elected in 1975.

My thesis that Nono's career parallels and participates in the development of the Italian counter-culture breaks down at this point. His empirical work in factories, his interest in the sociology of labour, and his passionate involvement with the student movements and international anti-imperialist movements of the late 1960s all point to a decidedly anti-bureaucratic approach to revolutionary commitment that was diametrically opposed to the electoral and reformist policies of the PCI throughout the period. Once Nono began to work with the party's inner circle, he must have found his tactical autonomy and flexibility constrained by the demands of orthodoxy. The same constraint confronted those former members of *Quaderni rossi* and the student movements, like Mario Tronti and Cacciari, who chose to join the PCI for strategic reasons after 1968. Their program may have been to 'Accept organisation and refuse

institutionalisation', as Tronti put it, but those terms generally proved inseparable in practice, and party loyalty usually overcame subversive intent.³⁶ In Nono's case, the reversal would have been even sharper, for he joined the central committee in the midst of general secretary Enrico Berlinguer's push for the 'Historic Compromise' that would ally the PCI not with radical students or anti-imperialist guerillas, but with its parliamentary opposite, the right-wing Christian Democrats, in governing Italy.³⁷ This push, which culminated symbolically in Berlinguer calling the members of the radical counter-culture 'untorelli' or 'plague carriers' and substantively in PCI acquiescence to repressive anti-terrorism legislation and fiscal austerity measures that severely punished its working-class constituency and drove many of them from the party, led ultimately to the forcible suppression of the counter-culture by the parliamentary left in its efforts to appease the right. Consequently, the PCI managed to defeat its left-wing challengers, but only by irreparably damaging its own legitimacy as the command structure of working-class militancy and thus undermining its own bargaining power for the Historic Compromise. If 1968 was the year that gave birth to the Italian counter-culture, then 1979 was the year of its assassination. We can even specify a date: 7 April, the day Antonio Negri and many other leaders of the counter-culture were arrested on terrorism charges that were listed on warrants issued by a PCI-affiliated magistrate.³⁸

Although Nono never explicitly attributed the shift in his work that is evident after *Al gran sole* to the demands of party orthodoxy, the coincidence is too striking to be dismissed. Along the same line, it is also tempting to speculate that the almost simultaneous defeat of both the Historic Compromise and the counter-culture at the end of the 1970s played an important part in the evolution of the last phase of his work prior to his death in 1990, a meditative and philosophical phase that can be summed up in the words Nono found carved into a wall of a twelfth-century monastery in Toledo: '*Caminantes, No hay caminos, hay que caminar* [Pilgrims, there are no paths, there is only walking]'. The simultaneous failure of the paths of party orthodoxy and counter-cultural heterodoxy left him with no sure way forward from that disastrous 'negation of a negation fixed in a form'. The interminable, quasi-deconstructive self-reflexivity of Benjamin's 'weak messianic power' (and the 'weak thought' of '*Krisis*' that Cacciari and others developed from it in Italy) replaced the partisan initiative of Gramsci's conception of culture as the totality of life just as the elegiac but static notion of a 'tragedy of listening' replaced the dynamic 'nonlinear dramaturgy' of his earlier stage compositions.³⁹

Nono's overall body of work remains exemplary, nevertheless, in the concerted effort to put avant-garde musical technique in the service of political activism that it displays. In both the extent and the intensity of its participation in its national counter-culture, however, it is quite exceptional; no comparable figure emerged from either the American or French counter-cultures, unless one counts certain popular musicians—but that is another story altogether.

Nono demonstrated that avant-garde techniques such as musique concrète, electronic sound synthesis, serialism, textual collage and dramatic estrangement were not necessarily the tactics of a bourgeois formalist hegemony in music passing itself off as apolitical art for art's sake. They could also be critical tools for the demystification of aesthetic institutions as well as economic and political ones. More than that, he showed that formally complex music could be a generator and intensifier of mass action instead of a consumable substitute for it or pacifier of it. Thus he was right to insist that, in some almost impossible yet crucially necessary way, we don't consume Marx—and we must not consume Nono either.

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—NOTES

¹ In these definitions as in the arguments that follow, my debt to the work of others is too profound and extensive to be acknowledged in individual footnotes. Let me simply state at the outset that I consider my work here to be an elaboration on the fundamental theoretical categories and historical narratives provided by the following: Robert Lumley, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978*, Verso, New York, 1990; Guido Borio, Francesca Pozzi and Gigi Roggero, *Futuro anteriore, Dai 'Quaderni Rossi' ai movimenti globali: ricchezze e limiti dell'operismo italiano*, DeriveApprodi, Rome, 2002; and Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism*, Pluto, London, 2002. In the following notes, all unattributed translations are mine.

² See Timothy S Murphy and Daniel W Smith, 'What I Hear is Thinking Too: Deleuze and Guattari Go Pop', *ECHO: A Music-Centered Journal*, vol. 3, no. 1, available online at <www.echo.ucla.edu/Volume3-Issue1/smithmurphy/index.html>, especially section II.

³ Antonio Negri, *Negri on Negri: Conversations with Anne Dufourmantelle*, trans. MB Debevoise, Routledge, New York, 2004, p. 168.

⁴ Cesco Chinello, 'Il Sessantotto operaio e studentesco a Porto Marghera' in *Sindacato e lotte dei lavoratori a Padova e nel Veneto 1945-1969*, Centri Studi Ettore Luccini, Annale no. 2, Padova, 1998, pp. 202-3. Some of Gianni Berengo Gardin's photographs of the demonstration can be found in Tano D'Amico, *Gli anni ribelli: 1968-1980*, Riuniti, Roma, 1998, pp. 42-7. For a more dismissive account of the disruption, see Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl*, New York Graphic Society, Greenwich, CT, 1968, pp. 24-8.

⁵ See, for example, 'Luigi Nono candidato del PCI con i lavoratori', in Luigi Nono, *Scritti e colloqui*, vol. 1, LIM/Ricordi, Lucca, 2001, pp. 141-3, a text originally published in *L'Unità* on 23 April 1963 during Nono's unsuccessful campaign for one of Venice's seats in the Chamber of Deputies, and in the same volume 'Una città e la cultura militante' (pp. 320-5), a text originally published in *L'Unità* on 6 June 1975 on the occasion of his campaign for a seat on the Venice communal council.

⁶ Nono's familiarity with Schönberg's work and politics no doubt became even more precise when he married Schönberg's daughter Nuria in 1955.

⁷ This is not to suggest that Nono actively concealed his politics during this period; indeed, as we will see below, a few years later during the Darmstadt summer courses he made a number of overtly polemical interventions to denounce what he perceived to be the bourgeois attitude of many of the other young musicians of that era, particularly Cage and Stockhausen. My point is rather that those denunciations were made in the relatively closed context of compositional

seminars, while his works for the public concert hall were marked by a high level of serial formalism that obscured their political import.

⁸ See Paul Griffiths, *Modern Music and After: Directions Since 1945*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995, p. 87–8.

⁹ For example, Nono ran afoul of the doctrine when preparing a performance of *Intolleranza 1960* for Prague, and again in the early 1970s when preparing *Al gran sole carico d'amore* for the stage in Milan; see 'Un'autobiografia dell'autore raccontata da Enzo Restagno' in Luigi Nono, *Scritti e colloqui*, vol. 2, LIM/Ricordi, Lucca, 2001, pp. 517–18, 538–40.

¹⁰ Luigi Nono, 'Il potere musicale' (1969), in *Scritti e colloqui*, vol. 1, p. 262, which summarises his more detailed 1958 critique of Cage, 'Presenze storica nella musica d'oggi', pp. 47–52 in the same volume.

¹¹ Griffiths, p. 189.

¹² Griffiths, p. 189.

¹³ Luigi Nono, score to *La fabbrica illuminata*, Ricordi, Milano, 1964.

¹⁴ Luigi Nono, 'La fabbrica illuminata', in *Scritti e colloqui*, vol. 1, p. 446.

¹⁵ Giovanni Carocci, *Inchiesta alla FIAT: Indagine su taluni aspetti della lotta di classe nel complesso FIAT*, Parenti, Florence, 1960, with a preface by Alberto Moravia. This book uses a wide variety of methods—'political analysis, sociology, narrative and journalism' (pp. 6–7)—to examine the productive and organisational conditions at FIAT during the second half of the 1950s. While Carocci does not quite develop a concept of class composition like that worked out in *Quaderni rossi* and later *Classe Operaia*, he does assemble most of the analytical sources and elements that are preconditions of such a concept, including objective data on factory restructuring, worker qualification and discipline, and the organisation of unions and 'internal commissions', as well as subjective material in the form of workers' diaries and autobiographical narratives.

¹⁶ Nono, 'La fabbrica illuminata', p. 448.

¹⁷ Luigi Nono, 'Il musicista nella fabbrica', in *Scritti e colloqui*, vol. 1, pp. 207–8. See also the invitation Nono sent to the workers regarding the performance, 'Lettera di Luigi Nono agli operai dell'Italsider di Genova-Cornigliano', pp.186–8. Admittedly Nono's 'quotation' of the workers' enthusiastic reaction to his piece must be taken with some degree of scepticism, but nevertheless it registers the openness to new cultural and political alliances that defined that stage in the emergence of the Italian counter-culture.

¹⁸ Mário Vieira de Carvalho, 'Towards Dialectical Listening: Quotation and Montage in the Work of Luigi Nono', *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 18, part 2, 1999, *Luigi Nono: Fragments and Silence (1924–1990)*, pp. 53–4.

¹⁹ Nono, 'La fabbrica illuminata', p. 447.

²⁰ See Nono, score to *A floresta é jovem e cheja de vida*, Ricordi, Milano, 1998, p. L, as well as his notes on the piece in *Scritti e colloqui* vol. 1, pp. 454–7.

²¹ Luigi Nono, 'Contrappunto dialettico alla mente', in *Scritti e colloqui* vol. 1, p. 464.

²² C Cederna, 'Disertata dai pittori, fischiata dagli studenti, circondata da migliaia di poliziotti: così è fallita la XXXIV Biennale. All'assedio di Venezia', in *L'Espresso*, 30 June 1968, cited in Chinello, 'Il Sessantotto operaio e studentesco a Porto Marghera', p. 203. Gianni Berengo Gardin's photograph of Nono leading the demonstration can be found in D'Amico, *Gli anni ribelli*, p. 45.

²³ Luigi Nono, 'Sulla protesta contro il Biennale', in *Scritti e colloqui* vol. 1, p. 235. For additional information on the protest, see Rossana Rossanda's interview with Nono and Marcello Cini, 'Dopo la contestazione', originally published in *Il Manifesto*, vol. 1, no. 2–3, Luglio–Agosto 1969, now in *Scritti e colloqui* vol. 2, pp. 34–46. There is undoubtedly some irony in the fact that Nono's grandfather, a painter for whom he was named, was one of the organisers of the earliest Biennales, starting in 1895; see Alloway, *The Venice Biennale*, p. 33.

²⁴ On this organisational activity, see the pamphlet assembled by the members of Potere Operaio Veneto-Emiliano, *Porto Marghera/Montedison/Estate '68*, Centro G Francovich, Florence, 1968.

²⁵ Nono, 'Sulla protesta contro il Biennale', p. 238.

²⁶ Luigi Nono, 'Musica-Manifesto n.1: Un volto, e del mare—Non consumiamo Marx', in *Scritti e colloqui*, vol. 1, p. 468. A recording of this piece was issued in the early 1970s by the leftist Dischi del Sole in Italy and by Philips elsewhere in Europe, but it has never been reissued on CD and is extremely rare today.

²⁷ Luigi Nono, 'La funzione della musica oggi (stralci da tre incontri)', in *Scritti e colloqui* vol. 2, pp. 115–16.

²⁸ Luigi Nono, 'Ein Gespenst geht um in der Welt', in *Scritti e colloqui* vol. 1, p. 478.

²⁹ Mário Vieira de Carvalho, p. 42.

³⁰ Nono, 'Ein Gespenst geht um in der Welt', p. 476. This piece actually quotes four such musical 'class signs': the *Internationale*, the Italian song *Bandiera rossa*, the Cuban song *26 July* and the Chinese song *The East is Red*.

³¹ See Stockhausen's notes included in Karl H Wörner, *Stockhausen: Life and Work*, University of California Press, 1973, pp. 58–60, and Wörner's analysis on pp. 144–7, as well as the documentary material included in the definitive recording: Stockhausen, *Hymnen*, Stockhausen-Verlag, Kürten, 1995, especially pp. 119–39.

³² Mário Vieira de Carvalho, p. 59.

³³ On this work, see 'Luigi Nono e Luigi Pestalozza a proposito di *Al gran sole carico d'amore*', in *Scritti e colloqui* vol. 2, pp. 201–16.

³⁴ He acknowledges this in a brief text on his final stage work, the 'tragedy of listening' *Prometeo* (1984–85); see *Scritti e colloqui*, vol. 1, pp. 493–4.

³⁵ On this collaboration, see Jonathan Impett, 'Nono, Cacciari, Critical Thought and Compositional Practice', in *Radical Philosophy*, May–June 2004, pp. 29–36.

³⁶ Mario Tronti, 'Il partito come problema', in *Contropiano* 2, 1968, p. 305. He spells out what this imperative is supposed to mean:

Succeed in building a functioning structure that expresses the mass demands and direction of the new spontaneity without letting ourselves be inscribed in the list of those who officially gather up the impulses of the base and peacefully divert them into the troubled waters of the bourgeois state.

³⁷ For a brief overview of the Historic Compromise and its consequences, see Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943–1988*, Penguin, New York, 1990, pp. 354–8, 401–3. In an interview prior to his election to the central committee, Nono offers a weak and abstract defence of the Historic Compromise against 'falsifying interpretations' that describe it as a 'simplistic top-down encounter' between the reigning DC and the perennially opposed PCI (such as the rather more sophisticated critique levelled by Antonio Negri in *Proletari e stato: Per una discussione su autonomia operaia e compromesso storico*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1974). See Luigi Nono, 'Musica progressista in Italia', in *Scritti e colloqui*, vol. 2, especially pp. 183–4. During his tenure on the central committee, Nono was active in debates over Berlinguer's electoral proposals, though publications related to these debates (which generally took the form of heavily edited reports in the PCI newspaper *L'Unità*) remain uncollected. See pp. 614–15 in *Scritti e colloqui* vol. 1 for references. Much of his enthusiasm for party work and policies during the 1970s seems to have stemmed from his personal regard for Berlinguer, whom he later eulogised by stressing the secretary's 'ability to listen, something rare today in an era of "pyramidal" assertive redundancy'. (Luigi Nono, 'Le sue parole e le sue grandi drammatiche solitudine', in *Scritti e colloqui*, vol. 1, p. 397)

³⁸ On this suppression, see the Red Notes volumes *Working-Class Autonomy and the Crisis*, London, 1979, and *Italy 1980–1981: After Marx, Jail! The Attempted Destruction of a Communist Movement*, London, 1981, as well as Nanni Balestrini's novel *The Unseen*, trans. Liz Heron, Verso, London, 1989. The Paduan magistrate who oversaw the criminalisation of the counter-culture, Pietro Calogero, was an active PCI member.

³⁹ See Luigi Nono, 'Non sono un maestro ma ...' (1988), in *Scritti e colloqui* vol. 2, p. 468 and elsewhere in that volume; see also Massimo Cacciari, *Krisis: Saggio sulla crisi del pensiero negativo da Nietzsche a Wittgenstein*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1976.