

Nono and Marxist Aesthetics

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## ABSTRACT

### *Nono and Marxist Aesthetics*

Joshua Cody

This essay discusses the work of the Venetian composer Luigi Nono (29 January 1924 – 8 May 1990) in the context of Marxist aesthetics. Nono is the most explicitly political member of the Darmstadt generation. A card-carrying member of the Communist party whose titles and texts often directly refer to political personages and events, Nono bids the listener or critic to confront the problematic of political expression in instrumental music, a subject of inquiry at least as old as Plato (to whom Nono explicitly refers in *Fragmente*, his late string quartet that is the subject of examination here) and of crucial relevance since World War II, the cold war, and the rise of mass media. Yet the majority of literature devoted to his work has largely ignored the question of where his work and philosophical attitude locate themselves within the four major strands of Marxist aesthetics. The relationship between Nono's his work and his political perspective is either treated in an imprecise, undisciplined fashion, relying on cliches of existentialism, mysticism, or vaguely defined alternative modes of perception to stand in for the notion of opposition (Nono's fascination with Hölderlin is often invoked); or the element of ideology is ignored altogether, and

the works are submitted to traditional post-serial analysis of compositional technique. Whereas both of these approaches do shed light on a challenging body of work, a brief examination of the four major models of a Marxist approach to art – the Marx/Engels, the Benjaminian, the Adorno, and the Bloch/Jameson – and the attempt to contextualize Nono's work within or against them situates this complex personality within the universe of the political *talis qualis*. A narratological take on Nono's late string quartet *Fragmente* provides a demonstration of invoking literary theory to create a productive analogy between political readings of instrumental music and that of other artforms. Various analytic techniques employed by critical theory – techniques examining communication, culture, and political consciousness which themselves are drawn from linguistic and analytic philosophy, symbolic interactionism, structural linguistics, hermeneutics, semiology, poststructural psychoanalysis, and deconstruction – may not simply be borrowed by the musicologist. These strategies can be fruitfully *transposed*, in the mathematical sense, wherein a limited number of elements within the critical structure are exchanged provided that others are fixed. The essays explore one example of such an exchanged element: Nono's use of polyvalent quotations. Other elements are available to the musicologist via the classic Husserlian move of *Einklammerung*, the “phenomenological reduction.” Jameson had no particular personal or professional association with Nono, and Jameson has no important writings on music. Nevertheless, Jameson was Nono's historical contemporary; Jameson was born only ten years after Nono; and Nono's work is much closer to the Bloch / Jameson model than that of Adorno, the passionate anti-bourgeois devotee of the Second Viennese School; or that of Benjamin, the passionate anti-bourgeois proponent of the “fragment,” the thinker who plays the most superficially salient role in Nono's work. Jameson's 1981 book *The Political Unconscious*, written at the same time Nono wrote *Fragmente*, describes three non-dialectical analytical approaches, or

“horizons,” shared by the critic, the spectator, and the artist: the political, the social, and the historical. They form concentric circles. By situating Nono's work within Jameson's theory, Nono is revealed, far from the mystical/naive poet in the style of a Rothko or a Tarkovsky, as a wily, canny dramatist whose technique is conservative and neoromantic, if never regressive, always consciously bent against the postmodernity, properly speaking, of Cage.

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## Dedication

The author would like to dedicate this essay about music to the many musicians who have provided personal inspiration, time, and conversation: the late trombonist Frank Crisafulli of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra; composers Alan Stout and Jay Alan Yim, at Northwestern University; composer Craig First, Chair of Composition and Theory at the University of Alabama; composer Mikalis Lapidakis, Professor of Composition at the Αριστοτέλειο Πανεπιστήμιο Θεσσαλονίκης, Salonica, Greece; composer Pierre Boulez, Paris, France; composer Louis Andriessen, Amsterdam, the Netherlands; composer Tristan Murail, Paris; composer Simon Bainbridge, head of composition at the Royal Academy of Music, London; composer Brian Ferneyhough, Stanford, California; violinist Irvine Arditti, London; composer Elliott Carter, New York; composer Helmut Lachenman, Leonberg, Germany; director Pierre Audi, De Nederlandse Opera, DNO; composer Wolfgang Rihm, Karlsruhe; conductor David Robertson, Paris and Sydney; conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen, Los Angeles; artist Yoko Ono Lennon, New York, whose generosity made my pursuit of composition and concert production possible in a practical sense; pianist Yvar Mikhashoff; composer James Boros, New York; composer Paul Lansky, Princeton; flutist Pierre-Yves Artaud, Paris; composer Luciano Berio, in Munich; conductor Jeffrey Milarsky, Juilliard and Columbia; guitarist Elliott Sharp, New York; composer Julia Wolfe; the faculty at Columbia, including Fred Lerdahl, Tristan Murail,

Joseph Dubiel, Brad Garton, Thanassis Rikakis, and Jonathan Kramer; and my manifold collaborators at Sospeso, the modern music collective composer Kirk Noreen and I launched in New York in 1999, among whom I will single out our Parisian flutist Cécile Daroux, whose sudden death on January 6, 2011, will never be comprehensible.

These are just the names that come to mind in forty minutes. I do regret not having spent more time – or, rather, I wish I had spent more time – with Jonathan Kramer (December 7, 1942, to June 3, 2004, New York) when I was on the Columbia campus more or less daily. We approached composition differently in terms of style. One afternoon, on a whim, I showed him the score to a neglected Wolfgang Rihm orchestral song I was about to premiere with my ensemble, Sospeso. Professor Kramer didn't know the piece and was absolutely fascinated. I had interrupted him, but he didn't mind. It was then that I confessed I had never truly understood Schoenberg's music. The ensuing two minutes – a rhapsodic encapsulation of what Schoenberg was, aided by gesticulations – brought my private 22-year odyssey to an abrupt end.

So I think I should dedicate this essay to Professor Kramer. The talks we would have had about this thing would have been wonderful to me; for him, I can hope they would have been at least a little more than routine. His book on musical time must be reprinted, and we are still waiting for the publication of his book on postmodernism.

## Nono and Marxist Aesthetics

Joshua Cody

Venetian composer Luigi Nono (29 January 1924 – 8 May 1990) was the most explicitly political member of the Darmstadt generation: he became a member of the Italian Communist Party in 1952, and it was after this point that “the political engagement embodied in his works, which had been until then, in a sense, dissimulated by the neutrality of self-referential titles, becomes more evident.”<sup>1</sup> Despite this unique status among his peers, commentators have largely ignored the question of where his works and his political stance are positioned within the three major strands of Marxist aesthetic theory after Engels, preferring instead to submit his works to traditional post-serial analysis of compositional technique, ignoring the element of ideology altogether; or, however well-meaning, to treat the relationship between his work and his political perspectives in an imprecise and undisciplined fashion, relying on clichés of a vaguely-defined left-wing humanism, alternative or heightened modes of perception, or even a quasi-mysticism. An example of the latter is the following passage written about the work that will serve as the focus of this brief discussion, Nono's string quartet *Fragmetne – Stille, An Diotima*, which inaugurated his last period of composition. Michael Gorodecki's article, entitled “Luigi

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1 Mário Vieira de Carvalho, “Towards Dialectic Listening: Quotation and *Montage* in the Work of Luigi Nono,” *Contemporary Music Review*, 1999, Vol. 18, Part 2, p. 37.

Nono: A History of Belief,” was published in *The Musical Times* two years after the composer's 1990 death.

In *Fragmente – Stille, An Diotima* [...] Nono reached not the start but the realization of musical and philosophical preoccupations that were in embryo six years earlier. The pause, in which sound or silence could be listened into anew, uncertainly, sometimes painfully, was an essential constituent of Nono's sound vision. And concomitant with that, the inverted world of pianissimo whisperings on the edge of audibility, the heightened shock of each rare fortissimo outburst, the often enormous silences between fragments, the consistently long note values, the preference for very slow tempi, often crotchet = 30, above all the constant flux involving duration, tempo and the diverse range of bowing and pizzicato techniques to strive toward the ideal of a “suono mobile,” or movement in sound. In the course of the quartet there are half-recurrences of half-heard sounds. Everything is incomplete. But this is part of Nono's aesthetic and philosophy; and the fundamental quality of fragility is reflected in the elusive poetic quotations from Hölderlin sprinkled across the score for players to intone silently to themselves. The most frequent phrase, “Aber das weiss es nicht” (*but that you cannot know*), might be considered a motto, not only for this work but for the rest of Nono's output. At its root is an attitude filled with uncertainty, but also a boundless quest in the search for the unknown; musically-speaking a faith and openness to all the possible discoveries of listening and imagination made along the path.<sup>2</sup>

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2 Michael Gorodecki, “Strands in 20th-Century Italian Music: 1. Luigi Nono: A History of Belief,” *The*

That's poetic writing, but what does it mean? What serious composer isn't "uncertain?" What great works don't "search for the unknown?" What great twentieth-century composition doesn't confront the question of the "incomplete?" (What great work of art from any period doesn't confront the basic question, which Dewey – to take one example – described in *Art as Experience* as the "sense of wholeness?") Which composer worthy of our admiration – regardless of the historical period – rejects "openness to all the possible discoveries of listening and imagination?"

In a sense, a composer who will, on the surface level, employ names of celebrated anti-Fascists in titles of his works – Lorca, Cesare Pavese, Emilio Vedova, Antonio Machado (disregarding the exception of Ungaretti, an irridentist) – does little service to himself if the issue at hand is the dissuasion of critical responses on the surface level. Other Nono titles speak for themselves: *La victoire de Guernica* (1954), *Sul ponte di Hiroshima* (1962), *Ricorda cosa ti hanno fatto in Auschwitz* (1966), *Musica-Manifesto n. 1: Un volto, del mare – Non consumiamo Marx* (1969), *Risonanze errante, Liederzyklus a Massimo Cacciari* (1986), *Découvrir la subversion: hommage à Edmond Jabès* (1987), *No hay caminos, hay que caminar... Andrej Tarkowsky* (1987), and *Post-prae-ludium No.1, "per Donau"* (1987). For *Il Canto Sospeso*, Nono famously employed as text letters written by Allied prisoners of war during World War II. The title of the late quartet *Fragmente-Stille, an Diotima* is an allusion to German poet Friedrich Hölderlin and is refreshingly less direct, as Carola Nielinger-Vakil notes.

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*Musical Times*, January 1992, Vol. 133, No. 1787, p. 14.

For the listener, Hölderlin is evoked only by the past component of the piece's title: *An Diotima*. Originally employed in Plato's *Symposium* [as an instructor of Socrates], the name Diotima is perhaps best known to German readers from various Hölderlin poems, among them one of the poet's most famous odes. Diotima is also the name of the female character of his novel *Hyperion*. Furthermore, it is the name he gave to Susette Gontard, his own “immortal beloved.” (The first volume of Hölderlin's *Hyperion* was written between 1792 and 1795 [published 1797]. Hölderlin met Susette Gontard in 1796. Thereafter the name Diotima occurs in Hölderlin's poetic work: five of his early poems carry the title *Diotima*; two are entitled *An Diotima*.) The name Diotima has since come to epitomize love. “Let us invent our life, our expression, our love,” Nono once exclaimed in reference to the following remark by “Che” Guevara: “It may seem ridiculous, but I would like to tell you that the true revolutionary is always supported by a great feeling of love.”<sup>3</sup> That Nono's revolutionary string quartet should thus be dedicated to Hölderlin's fictional ideal of love, Diotima, does not come as much of a surprise.<sup>4</sup>

But Nono's reference to Hölderlin is not only a less direct political allusion than those found in the aforementioned works: it's also a more elaborate and ambiguous one. Nielinger-Vakil writes of the irony of the love held for Hölderlin (and Beethoven, for that

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3 Luigi Nono, “Gesprach mit der Zeitschrift Rocitante” (1969) in *Luigi Nono: Texte, Studien zu seiner Musik*, ed. Jurg Stenzl, Atlantis Press, Zurich, 1975, p. 215.

4 Nielinger-Vakil, Carola. “Quiet Revolutions: Holderlin Fragments by Luigi Nono and Wolfgang Rihm.” *Music & Letters*, Vol. 81, No. 2. May, 2000, Oxford University Press, p. 248.

matter) by the Third Reich as an “idol of Germanism;”<sup>5</sup> and that it “was only during the 1960s that German left-wing intellectuals reappropriated the poet's legacy, taking an interest particularly in the revolutionary aspects of his output: Germany was swept up by a kind of Hölderlinmania to which neither pronounced left-wing musicians such as the singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann and the *Sogenanntes linksradikales Blasorchester* (the “So-called Wind Band of the Radical Left”) nor the Darmstadt elite could remain immune.<sup>6</sup> Far from it: between 1964 and 1982, Maderna, Pousseur, Holliger, Rihm, Zender, and, finally, Ligeti (1982's *Drei Phantasien nach Friedrich Hölderlin*, for sixteen voices) all wrote pieces in honor of or inspired by the poet. Meanwhile, in the world of theater, Peter Weiss's 1971 play *Hölderlin* created a minor scandal in associating the character of the poet with Che Guevara, fabricating a meeting between Hölderlin and an ardent young admirer of the poet named Karl Marx. Goethe and Schiller are positioned as arrogant, cavalier, self-assured members of the bourgeoisie clearly groomed by the playwright as eventual victims to the inevitable Revolution.

In approaching Nono's work, the classic question – whether instrumental music can express political content, and if so, to what extent – inescapably arises. And further than this, what type of semiological apparatus is best employed for discerning ascription? The question is as old as Plato, and it has turned crucially relevant in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the era of World War II, Stanlist Russia, and mass media: the era of Shostakovich and Mahler, Pete Seeger and Joan Baez, Leni Riefenstahl and Michael Moore, Bob Dylan and the Beatles,

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5 Nielinger-Vakil, p. 245.

6 Ibid.

the Sex Pistols and Niggaz Wit Attitudes. Regarding Nono, Nielinger-Vakil, for example, sidesteps this question entirely by relying on the familiar Nono caricatures of the esoteric, vaguely subversive *homme politiquement engagé*. Nono, in his guise as the master of the fragment, is the spiritual son of Hölderlin, the master of the aphorism. Or Nono is the artist of silence, a confederate of Cage, the Zen master who wowed European musicians and thinkers at Darmstadt in 1958. Or Nono is the fabricator of crystalline enigmas, the heir to Webern, another laconic temperament fond of “leaving things unsaid” (and, far more interestingly, another composer profoundly influenced by Renaissance polyphony: an attribute that set him apart from Berg and Schoenberg as much as it did Nono from Boulez or Stockhausen). On one level, all of these portrayals are valid. But exactly *how* these approaches are revolutionary, in the political sense of the word, is (indeed!) left unsaid. For instance, Nielinger-Vakil considers the string quartet as a historical genre: the “epitome of bourgeois elitism.” *Fragmente* thus “confounded all expectations of a composer whose reputation had hitherto been based on works for larger forces which almost always incorporated politically motivated texts and sought to denounce both former and current totalitarian regimes in public.”<sup>7</sup> This may be true, but how does this fact differentiate Nono from Carter, Ligeti, Rihm, Xenakis, Ferneyhough, Dutilleux, Lutoslawski, Schnittke, Mayuzumi, Nancarrow, Dusapin, and Lachenmann – to name but twelve composers recognized for having composed for a wide variety of instrumental combinations, even “bourgeois” genres (i.e. the orchestra, the solo piano), and who also are acclaimed for highly personal works for string quartet, the medium that stands for the

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<sup>7</sup> Nielinger-Vakil, p. 247.



“epitome of bourgeois elitism?” Do these composers “confound less” because their quartet scores lack prefaces similar to the following?

Each fermata should always sound different  
from the others, with free fancy

- of dreaming spaces
- of sudden ecstasies
- of unutterable thoughts
- of tranquil breaths
- of silences “intemporally” sung<sup>8</sup>

Dreamy stuff. How, exactly, can the critic deduce from such earnestly “poetic” images a political attitude?

Perhaps – as Nielinger-Vakil suggests – one *can't*. Or at least shouldn't. She suggests that the quartet was an about-face on Nono's part, a reversal to a political apathy. “Nono's *Fragmente–Still, an Diotima* contains no overt proclamation of the composer's views.”<sup>9</sup> It's difficult to know whether she means Nono, uncharacteristically, is veiling a political subtext; or, as was more widely thought at the time of the quartet's premiere, if the composer has retreated from confronting the problematic relationship between art and political activism altogether. Maybe Nono, following one of his (literal) reference points in the quartet, Beethoven, withdrew himself into the nonpolitical upon sensing the imminent collapse of Soviet Communism that would signal the ultimate failure of Marxist idealism,<sup>10</sup>

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8 Translation in Nielinger-Vakil, p. 257.

9 Nielinger-Vakil, p. 248.

10 At least this is what Helmut Lachenmann, Nono's close friend, suggested during a conversation with the author in Leonberg in 2003. However, Nono composed the quartet in 1979; Gorbachev didn't take

in a kind of radically subjective surrender to what Jameson, as we shall see, refers to as the “last horizon” of the political unconscious: the historical, which he defines variously as “necessity,” “that which happens,” or, most memorably, “that which hurts.” For Jameson, this would have amounted to Nono's resignation – a double resignation, one within the subjective field, in the face of his own mortality; and another within the worldly one, in the face of the ruination of his leftist ideals – to his status as a member of the social, economic, and intellectual elite. One might be reminded of the hero of Bertolucci's 1964 film *Prima della rivoluzione*, who – in a shrewd inversion of the classic trope of the hero's journey, the political protagonist's overcoming of reluctance and inertia to fight the good fight and take the tough path of social idealism – has the revelation, at a performance of Verdi's *Macbeth* performance at the Teatro Regio di Parma, that he'll never amount to anything more than a bourgeois materialist.<sup>11</sup> “In 1822,” as Charles Rosen begins his chapter on Beethoven in

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office as General Secretary until 1985, and first introduced *glasnost* in 1986. On the other hand, in spite of the fact that Reagan didn't win the 49<sup>th</sup> U.S. Presidential election until November 4, 1980, he was well ahead of Carter immediately after the July primaries, if not before (see Condoleezza Rice, Kiron Skinner, Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, and Serhiy Kudelia, *The Strategy of Campaigning: Lessons from Ronald Reagan and Boris Yeltsin*, University of Michigan Press, 2008, among many other sources). Meanwhile, Carter's own campaign was hindered by inflation, high unemployment, and high interest rates, as well as the Iran hostage crisis – besides being weakened by a bitter primary fight with Edward Kennedy, the attacks brought on by independent candidates, and Jerry Falwell's success in turning the Evangelical white vote from Carter to Reagan. In the U.K., Thatcher beat Callaghan on May 3, 1979. And in Poland, the “Solidarity” trade union federation – the first real challenge to Communism in any country in the Warsaw Pact – officially emerged at the Gdańsk Shipyard on August 31, 1980, when the Polish government officially acknowledged its existence in a written agreement; but the history of that dissent dates back at least to June 1976 (see Jan Józef Lipski, *KOR: A History of the Workers' Defense Committee in Poland, 1976–1981*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1985). So it's certainly not inconceivable that in 1979, the middle-aged Nono saw the proverbial writing on the wall – while he, to paraphrase Adrian Del Caro (see the following), continued to believe, after, as it were, the revolution.

11 Bertolucci's set-piece reads as a commentary on the famous opening scene of Visconti's 1954 melodrama *Senso*. That film, set in the spring of 1866, begins in the middle of a performance of *Il Trovatore* at

*The Classical Style*, “five years before his death, Beethoven felt himself completely isolated from the musical life in Vienna;”<sup>12</sup> and Adorno's description of Beethoven's late works includes keywords uncannily evocative of Nono's own quartet, the first work, again, of his own late period. “The power of subjectivity in the late works of art is the irascible gesture with which it takes leave of the works themselves. It breaks their bond, not in order to

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Venice's La Fenice, lovingly recreated by the director. (In a curious turn of fate, the 2003 restoration of La Fenice was itself designed from stills from Visconti's film.) The tenor's vigorous rendition of “Di quella pira” prompts the Italian nationalists in the balconies to pelt occupying Austrian soldiers on the orchestra floor with green-white-red tricolor bouquets of flowers and flood the house with colored slips of paper that waft like flower petals from the firmament, all amid fervent cries of “Viva Italia!” and the like. In terms of cinematic grammar, the film begins with a head-on, squared shot of La Fenice's stage: the frame of the camera exactly matches the frame of the theater, binding film to opera by arguing that the former medium's status is a continuous historical development of the latter. The camera draws in slowly, and it isn't until a slow pan right discloses a figure standing just offstage, a full 75 seconds into the shot, that the film announces itself as such – a narrative feature utilizing cinematic grammar, rather than an audiovisual recording of an opera performance in the style of, say, the PBS Met broadcasts (which began in the 1970s, although prior analogous recordings abound). (Slow tracking shots into an opera stage are reminiscent of Giovanni Pastrone's silent Italian epic *Cabiria* of 1914, which may have introduced the use of a mobile camera, and whose melodramatic epic plot line, taking place during the Second Punic War, employed production tropes of monumentalist grand opera, a genre unintentionally preserved by Pastrone's camera.) When the tenor begins the cabaletta, he strides to the front of the stage and unsheathes his fake sword, and Visconti's camera, in a thrilling gesture, draws toward him with newfound speed, and then past him, into the audience, which we see for the first time. The front rows are occupied (pun intended) by Austrian troops. (Visconti's careful period reconstruction and reframing device may owe a debt to the beginning of Olivier's 1944 *Henry V*.) The film then cuts to a (reverse) long shot of the house, a roving, rising pan, first left, then right, covering the boxes housing the aristocrats, aflutter with growing consternation, and finally the top balcony's proletariat, eagerly leaning over the edges of the balconies: Prévert's *Enfants du Paradis*. Bertolucci, in his film, replicates Visconti's camera movements unveiling the layout of the social strata of the audience, but mocks Visconti's romanticism and political ardor with his flat black-and-white cinematography and with the purposeful stylistic carelessness inherited from the French *nouvelle vague*, a grammar only about six years old at the time (if we date the movement from Claude Chabrol's *Le Beau Serge*, released in 1958). Bertolucci was only 23 when he made the film, his second. The opening of Martin Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* plays on both Visconti and Bertolucci with an onstage tracking shot during the middle of a 1870s New York City Academy of Music production of Gounod's 1859 *Faust*. Martin and his tremendous director of photography, Michael Ballhaus, also employ subsequent

express itself, but in order, expressionless, to cast off the appearance of art. Of the works themselves it leaves only fragments behind, and communicates itself, like a cipher, only through the blank spaces from which it has disengaged itself.”<sup>13</sup> Filling in the portrait, Nielinger-Vakil notes that *Fragmente's* “premiere was a kind of *success du scandale*, not because of its political message but because the apparent lack of one... Nono did indeed

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camera sweeps of the house – right out of both films. Scorsese underlines the artificiality of the genre plastically, by emphasizing the starkly-lit, caked-on facial makeup of the soprano (itself a visual illusion to the character of Susan Alexander in *Citizen Kane*); intratextually, by reminding the audience, via Daniel Day Lewis's pathetically enraptured expression (an echo of the horrifically enthralled gangsters listening to Bobby Vinton in his previous film, 1990's *Goodfellas*), sitting in his box seat, of the notion of the American importation (capitalization) of European art; and extratextually, by choosing as opera a relatively lightweight French adaptation of the most important work of art of nineteenth-century Germany (although, conveniently, *Faust* did open the inaugural season, in 1883, of the Academy's replacement, the Metropolitan Opera). The triangulated (plastic vs intra/extratextuality – plasticism, I would argue, cannot be dovetailed into a binary opposition because it occupies a “higher,” i.e. non-dialogic, plane in the hierarchical organization of aesthetic categories) motif of immobility pessimistically comments on the political idealism in Visconti as well as Berolucci's spoiled dyspepsia – which at least *postulates* the presence of political idealism, in order to negate it; and it also neatly introduces the main subject of the *story* of Scorsese's film: social, economic, and political paralysis. This theme is what drove Scorsese to the material in the first place, and it probably is the driving force of all of his films, which may, in turn, account for his unique esteem among his American peers – it is more “passionate” than the, say, comparatively yielding left-wing cynicism of De Palma, whose foregrounding of technique relates him more closely to Scorsese than to the other “movie brats” of the 1970s (Altman, importantly). But Scorsese's political critique was disclosed as the driving force of his aesthetic only in 2013, with *The Wolf of Wall Street*, a three-hour-plus depiction of the socially tragic results of American financial deregulation, including the securitization of loan obligations, the gradual undoing of the Glass-Steagall Act (formally repealed in 1999's Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act). The film, based on a true story, remains at the time of writing confusing to audiences and critics since its content contradicts its method: it is the first American blatantly radical film (part dramatic narrative, part essay, part documentary) with a wide theatrical opening, exceptionally high craft and “bourgeois” production values, and Hollywood movie stars. The 70s masterpieces were either mainstream and allegorical: *The Godfather*, *Chinatown*, Pakula, Kubrick, *Taxi Driver*, Cimino, some of Schrader and Altman, etc.; or transgressive and not mainstream: Nick Zedd, Kembra Pfähler, Tessa Hughes-Freeland, Casandra Stark, Beth B, Tommy Turner, Richard Kern, and Lydia Lunch, the documentaries of Fredrick Wiseman, Richard Leacock, D.A. Pennebaker, Terence Macartney-Filgate, and Albert and David Maysles, and the less commercial films of Schrader and

begin to explore the more intimate sound-world of chamber music in the late 1970s. But to assume that this move signaled a conscious turning away from politically motivated art seems a rash and unjustifiable conclusion – one which was all too readily drawn at the time, especially in German music criticism.”<sup>14</sup>

Nielinger-Vakil goes on to write that “representative of this kind of criticism is an article by Gerhard Müller who considers Nono's quartet as a departure not only from the concept of political art but from reality in general, and also as a deliberate attempt to undermine the synthesizing character of art.”<sup>15</sup>

Claudio Abbado has been quoted as saying that “Gigi [Nono] and I often spoke about literature, and again and again it was Hölderlin who dominated our talks, maybe as a sort of antidote to the political writers in whom Gigi was always very interested.”<sup>16</sup> Here Abbado – like Nono, an Italian left-wing intellectual – references the poet as an apolitical figure. This persona of Hölderlin is the incurably insane poet locked up in the tower in the old city wall of Tübingen: the aged self-imposed exile within his own country, the genius slash madman, gazing through a stone window at the pastoral banks of the Neckar, a figure as impenetrable and pathetic as the elderly Ezra Pound must have appeared to Allen Ginsberg in Rapallo.

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Altman.

12 Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven*, W. W. Norton & Company, 1998, p. 379.

13 Theodor Adorno, “Late Style in Beethoven,” in *Essays on Music*, University of California Press, 2002, p. 566.

14 Nielinger-Vakil, p. 247.

15 Nielinger-Vakil, p. 247, footnote.

16 Claudio Abbado, “My Silent Friend: Remembering Luigi Nono,” *Contemporary Music Review*, xviii (1999), p. 3.

On the other hand, Nono (and Abbado, for that matter) could hardly have been unaware of the withdrawn poet as, at the same time, one of the powerful, emboldening icons of the European Left – indeed, an icon rescued from the Right, like Beethoven and unlike Wagner. The artistic act of embedding Hölderlin fragments in the quartet immediately positions it as a successor to a series of consciously political works.

Which interpretation is valid? Perhaps both. Perhaps a Janus-faced Hölderlin represents a valid contradiction. Hölderlin scholar Adrian Del Caro, in a chapter of his book *Hölderlin: The Poetics of Being* entitled “Politics, Utopia?,” suggests that the two sides of the poet aren't necessarily contradictory.

As isolated as Hölderlin perceived himself to be, in the context of his peers and the “servitude” (*Knechtschaft*) of his times, still he argued more strenuously than most for the necessity of living together peacefully, in a society animated by the communal spirit and therefore a society awakened to its gods and nature, both manifestations of the divine. Hölderlin could not divorce his thoughts and hopes from the events of the age any more than his peers could; in fact, he held onto the ideals of the French Revolution long after his peers had given up, long after the political failure evoked its political resignation. In short, Hölderlin continued to believe.<sup>17</sup>

It's easy to imagine Nono in 1979 identifying with such an antipodal persona. Del Caro goes on to write “a prominent commentator on Hölderlin's work, Pierre Bertaux, points to

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<sup>17</sup> Adrian Del Caro, *Holderlin: The Poetics of Being*, Wayne State University Press, 1991, p. 53.

the political significance of the poet, even claiming that 'Hölderlin's entire work can be seen as a metaphor of the Revolution and its problematic.'"<sup>18</sup> And Nono, in a 1988 interview, speaks of having read Bertaux's book *Hölderlin und die Französische Revolution*. Bertaux was not only a Hölderlin scholar but a noted member of the French Resistance.

Another politically explicit face of Hölderlin of which Nono was surely aware would have been that of Peter Weiss. Nono's 1965 tape piece *Ricorda cosa ti hanno fatto in Auschwitz* (*Remember What They Did to You in Auschwitz*) was originally written as background music for Erwin Piscator's 1964 production of Weiss's *Die Ermittlung*, a play formed from material drawn from the first Frankfurt Auschwitz trial.<sup>19</sup> Nono and Weiss struck up a friendship based on their mutual admiration of Che Guevara, their stance against the Vietnam War, and a shared artistic aesthetic: the vocally-produced material in *Ricorda cosa ti hanno fatto in Auschwitz* is highly distorted, gnarled, wordless. Nono, perhaps consciously paraphrasing Adorno, wrote that "neither word nor production could express and represent... the millions of dead in Nazi concentration camps."<sup>20</sup> Given the closeness of their relationship, it's practically inconceivable that Nono would have missed Weiss's controversial *Hölderlin* of 1971. It is indeed interesting to consider the written and never spoken fragments of Hölderlin's poetry in the score to *Fragmente* within the context of the concept of "wordlessness" – the unarticulated text of silenced victims.

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18 Ibid.

19 Peter Weiss, *Peter Weiss im Gespräch*. Rainer Gerlach and Matthias Richter, eds., Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp, 1986, p. 55.

20 Luigi Nono, "Ricorda cosa ti hanno fatto in Auschwitz – Chore aus *Die Ermittlung* von Peter Weiss" (1966), *Luigi Nono, Text-Studien zu seiner Musik*, ed. Jurg Stenzl, Zurich, 1975, p. 129.

But the composer's stylistic approach, even when set against a backdrop of political ambiguity, is hardly enough to specify what breed of Marxist aesthetic is at work within Nono's works, and it does little to link to the political realm the musical material itself – the “stuff” of the composition – besides simply stating that Nono was, say, on the side of the victims of Fascism; or that he was a self-consciously political artist; or that the meaning of the piece's silences, and the powerful signification generated by the figure of Hölderlin, was not lost to the composer of a work that nevertheless held “no overt proclamation of the composer's views.” Many other composers – Feldman, Stockhausen, Cage, Babbitt, to cite just four examples – distort voice, manipulate saliently “fragmentary” textures, and exploit silence, but one would hardly group these figures together under a single political rubric.

The other main critical approach to Nono's work is the formal one, and the often puzzling intricacies of Nono's postserial multiparametric compositional processes prove rich terrain for the analyst. However, it has proven difficult to connect such analyses to broader conclusions that would contextualize Nono within the major Marxist approaches of his generation, or to wider hypotheses on the semantic rather than the syntactic scale. In this sub-genre of Nonoiana, graphs and tables abound. Stephen Davismoon's map of dynamic fluctuations over the course of the live piano part of *...sofferte onde serene...*, unveils a wonderful example of Nono's supremely elegant craftsmanship.



periods of dynamic fluctuation and stability can be viewed on a global level with reference to figure 2. This charts dynamic changes (plotted on the vertical axis, where 1 = *pppp*; 2 = *ppp*; 3 = *pp*; 4 = *p*; 5 = *mp*; 6 = *mf*; 7 = *f*; 8 = *ff*; 9 = *fff* and 10 = *ffff*) against a durational segmentation of one crotchet (this measurement, because of the occurrence of complex local dynamic fluctuations (i.e. those occurring within the duration of one crotchet), must be seen as approximate — it is felt by the author, that this approximation, has no significant bearing on the overall outcome of this analysis).

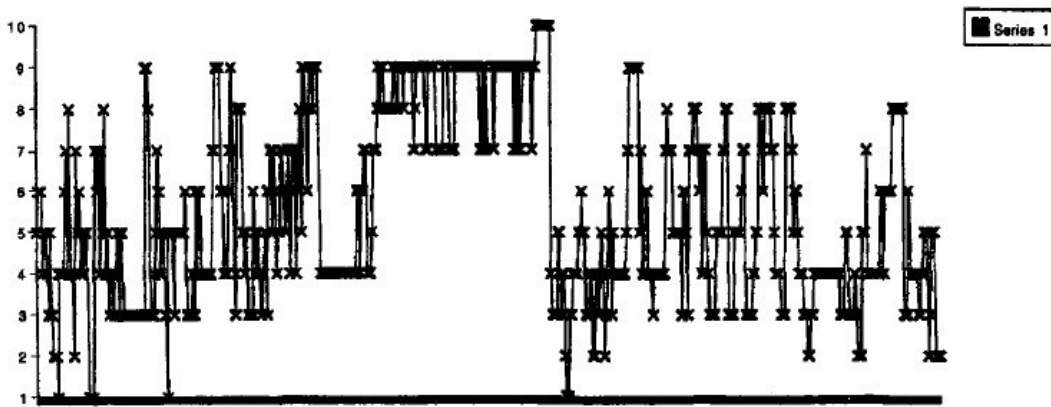


Figure 2

With reference to the above graph it can be clearly seen that the most frequently used dynamic region is that between 3–5 (*pp*, *p* and *mp* respectively). One notices also a general increase in overall dynamic level towards the

The piece for the most part resides in the dynamic region *pp*–*p*–*mp*. The approach toward the unique *fff* at the work's climax is both jagged and inexorable. The sudden dropoff immediately after that height is a thrilling one. This dramatic structure is counterpointed with a curiously neutral, palindromic envelope whose duration approximately equals half the entire length of the piece.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Stephen Davismoon, "Marking Time," *Contemporary Music Review*, Volume 18, Issue 1, 1999, p. 84.

Davismoon goes on to show that the dynamic envelope of the tape part is isomorphic with the shape of the dynamic envelope of the live piano part. Furthermore, the work's midpoint is the climax not just of the dynamic parameter but of others: temporal stability, register, and density of texture. It is to Davismoon's credit that he extends a diagrammatic record of a single parameter to wider aspects of the work. In other words, his argument that this example of Nono's design is intelligible is a convincing one. But Davismoon then disappoints by segueing into a discussion of Jonathan Kramer's concept of musical "vertical time," which is not only not a logical consequence of the preceding discussion, but hijacks Kramer's theory to support the familiar, unfounded picture of the cult of Nono painting the musician as a recondite, oracular magician whose artistic essence somehow resists conventional analytic approaches: either you get it, or you don't. (Such aloofness should not be compared to Louis Armstrong's oft-quoted "If you have to ask what jazz is, you'll never know," since Armstrong's statement must be interpreted within the context of his own highly complex relationship to political activism – in his case, obviously, desegregation – and is thus not casual or haughty, but slyly provocative.) "Many qualities of this piece would be very much in keeping with Jonathan Kramer's definition of 'vertical' time," Davismoon states without warning. He goes on to quote Kramer at length.

When the moment becomes the piece, discontinuity disappears in favour of total, possibly unchanging, consistency. Compositions have been written that are temporally undifferentiated in their entirety. They lack

phrases (just as they lack progression, goal direction, movement, and contrasting rates of motion) because phrase endings break the temporal continuum... phrases are the final remnant of linearity. The result is a single present stretched out into an enormous duration, a potentially infinite “now” that nonetheless feels like an instant. In music without phrases, without temporal articulation, with total consistency, whatever structure is in the music exists between simultaneous layers of sound, not between successive gestures. Thus, I call the time sense invoked by such music “vertical.”<sup>22</sup>

Davismoon's analytic “move” from a description of formal compositional technique to hazy “poetics” is unfortunately analogous to the kind of critical programs described above that maneuver from academic, technical breakdowns to sketches of fuzzy politics. Davismoon uncovers and transliterates one aspect of the work's compositional design (here, dynamics rendered into a graphic table) but then leaps into musings on “vertical time” without argument. His use of Kramer's text is particularly regrettable in light of the fact that Kramer's very goal in his lengthy volume was to articulate and intellectually contextualize the ecstatic, hypnotic, even intoxicated effects of music on the listener which, after all, are very real. And it must be said that the passionate intensity and obsessiveness of Nono's style do stand in stark contrast to the relatively measured temperament of his Darmstadt colleagues Stockhausen, Boulez, Berio, Maderna, and even Ligeti, in whose work the horrors of twentieth-century Europe – experienced by Ligeti in a wholly more

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<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music: New Meanings, New Temporalities, New Listening Strategies*, New York, Schirmer, 1988, p. 42.

direct way than by Nono – are shrouded (consequently, of course) in a profoundly oblique, unsentimental stately elegance (it is due to this quality, and not to the cinematic appropriation of his music, that one is tempted to call it “Kubrickian”) which only heightens the subject matter he describes.<sup>23</sup>

This is to say that Kramer's descriptions and categorizations of the elasticity of musical perception are entirely applicable to the experience of listening to Nono, to the extent that they form a pitfall into which highly perceptive critics like Davismoon are prone to fall. For example – in a personal note – when I entered the hospital about five years ago for a bone marrow transplant, radiation, and high-dose chemotherapy to treat a cancer with which I'd been diagnosed (and which interrupted my studies at Columbia of which this essay forms a part), the composers to whom I had been listening most frequently were Debussy and Mozart: but when expectation for my survival dropped, I turned to late Beethoven and Nono. I listened to *Fragmente* many times. Of course I'd admired both composers before my illness, but their work did take on a new meaning in this context: a meaning that I was irresistibly tempted to describe as “transcendental.” I resolved to explore why. During the medical treatments, I was placed on a variety of heavy medications, including morphine, which affected neurotransmitters in various ways. States of mind to which I was unaccustomed provided unexpected and often fascinating listening experiences, and by far, the most tensile musical variable proved to be the temporal. On one occasion, after a particularly powerful infusion of morphine, I decided to listen to

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23 Needless to say, I'm thinking of the Ligeti of *Lontano*, the *Requiem*, or the *Second String Quartet* – not the impish composer of *Le grande macabre*, etc.

*Fragmente*. I pressed “play” on the i-Pod, and I had the bewildering sense that the very next moment the entire piece was over. I had no memory of actually hearing it, but I was left with a startlingly clear representation (a quasi-visual one, if I were forced to describe it) of the form, the shape of the work: a diagram of the work's architecture. I thought of Furtwangler's recollection of “seeing,” only once in his life, the entire *Ring* cycle in an instantaneous flash; the *gestalt* effect also came to mind. (Alternatively, there were listening experiences where the quartet seemed to last for eight, ten, twelve hours.) Previous to these experiences I had, of course, been aware of the cliché that the art of music is, fundamentally, the manipulation of time; but the extent of time's ductility, the difference between clock-time and musical time, and the difference between the graphic layout of symbols on the horizontal axis of the musical score and the experience of “moving through” a performance of the work, were drastically underlined.

During another listening to *Fragmente*, I believed I was listening not to Nono but to a recently discovered late Beethoven quartet. (This would surely flatter Nono!) I heard the piece as written in a kind of post-classical sonata form. It clearly began with an exposition, in which “positive” musical material was introduced and then confronted with secondary material that played the role of *antagonist*. There followed a development section in which these two voices were played against each other in an agon, the secondary material attempting to negate the first in a variety of tableaux, of scenaria (which turned out, on later inspection, to be Nono's clear-cut “fragments”). The distinctive (post-classical) aspect of this development section, however, was that a *third* voice was introduced: one that negated the negation. I attributed this to the far-reaching, radical

intellect of the very late Beethoven, and I figured that I was listening to a newly discovered seventeenth quartet. The obvious connection to Hegel (negation of the negation) eluded me at the time. The piece ended not with a recapitulation *per se*, but with a resolution to the conflict, and finally a coda marked by an indubitable recognition of the transcendent.

In essence, I had stumbled on a reading of the work strongly redolent not just of sonata form *per se*, but of the rhetorical content expressed by sonata form that, as I shall shortly suggest, is suggestive of narrative – not, say, in the naïve (but extraordinarily specific) contemporary interpretations of the *Eroica* as program music for *The Iliad* by figures such as A. B. Marx and M. Miel,<sup>24 25</sup> but within the wider context of the relatively recent subfield of literary theory and semiology called narratology. The reading is not

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24 Thomas Sipe, *Beethoven: Eroica Symphony*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 59.

25 Amanda Lynne Scott, in her highly engaging MA thesis, writes that “Miel gave a lecture in Paris on the performance of Beethoven's symphonies in France; part of this lecture was translated by Heinrich Panofka and printed in three installments in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* [M. Miel, “Ueber die Symphonie, uber die Symphonien Beethoven's, und uber ihre Ausfuhrung in Paris,” trans. Heirnrich Panofka, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* I {30 June, 3 July, 7 July 1834}: 101–102, 105–107, 109–110]. Miel, while disagreeing with those who said 'admiration of Napoleon first gave [Beethoven] the idea' for the *Eroica*, argued that 'the design points toward the Homeric period, which seems in fact to have pertained to the hero of our day. To paint the heroic courage of a soldier, to let the unfailing leader be lamented by an entire people, whose saviour he was and who came to his death through his courage, to lead his mortal remains to the place of burial, to celebrate him with games in his honor, and so forth, – this is the skeleton upon which this poetic work seems to be built; a work comparable to the song of the *Iliad* [M. Miel, “Ueber die Symphonie, uber die Symphonien Beethoven's, und uber ihre Ausfuhrung in Paris, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* I {3 July 1834}: 105–107, trans. Sipe, 212–13: Sipe notes that Miel's article was originally a part of a French treatise on musical performances].” Miel concluded the section of the article on the *Eroica* by stating, “once more, Beethoven is Homer [Miel, 216].” In addition to being one of the first to see a classical subject in the *Eroica*, Miel's lecture is also the first published account to refer to Napoleon, even if he was contradicting the connection to Napoleon.” (Amanda Lynne Scott, *Beethoven's Grand Uomo: Heroic Identifications and the "Eroica" Symphony*, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, ProQuest, 2007, p. 13.)

unlike that conveyed, in not altogether different context, by musician-turned writer Mark Salzman, as quoted by the creative nonfiction author Lawrence Weschler in his recent volume *Uncanny Valley*. Salzman is speaking to Weschler about the Bach cello suites.

“Because, you see,” he said, “I believe these pieces function as stories – not specific stories. I don't mean, for instance, that the Second Suite is about the birth of Bach's twenty-third son, or anything like that. No, I think that when we play them our emotions take a journey that so closely resembles a narrative journey that I believe there's got to be a relationship between the two. And I want to illustrate this point by taking you on two parallel journeys – the musical one, of course, but then another as well, the narrative of the genesis of my most recent novel, from its original conception to the final version.” He'd be performing Bach's Third Suite, he explained, which, like the others, consisted of six movements; similarly, the story of his novel's evolution could be broken into six segments.<sup>26</sup>

I intuited, as I've already suggested, that the link that connected these two types of experiences – the first characterized by the tactility, particularly the compression, of the temporal parameter, in which time was replaced by a synchronic, instantaneous visual diagram; the second characterized by a diachronic, rhetorical model which expressed the literary/poetic trope of transcendence – was *narrative*. Meanwhile, I was, during my more lucid states at the hospital, busy writing not music but words, so a preoccupation with

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26 Lawrence Weschler, *Uncanny Valley and Other Adventures in the Narrative*, Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2011, pp. 263-264.

narrative was not unincidental. I wrote a book-length, non-academic essay on illness and recovery that was eventually published. I also wrote a few film screenplays, literature's most strictly formulaic genre in terms of narrative structure. Both of my listening journeys through the *Fragmente* – the synchronic and the diachronic – invoked an understanding of the piece as a discursive, narrative structure, in the sense of literary theory's narratology; for these two opposing ways of listening are nothing more than the classic binary opposition *fabula/syuzhet* introduced by the Russian formalists Vladimir Propp and Victor Shklovsky at the beginning of the twentieth century. “*Fabula*,” per Peter Brooks, “is defined as the order of events referred to by the narrative, whereas *syuzhet* is the order of events presented in the narrative discourse.”

In the wake of the Russian Formalists, French structural analysts of narrative proposed their own pairs of terms, predominately *histoire* (corresponding to *fabula*) and *récit*, or else *discours* (corresponding to *syuzhet*). English usage has been more unsettled. “Story” and “plot” would seem to be generally acceptable renderings in most circumstances, though a structural and semiotic analysis will find advantages in the less semantically charged formulation “story” and “discourse.”<sup>27</sup>

These various (and often controversial) terminologies – whether *fabula/syuzhet*, *histoire/récit*, *histoire/discours*, story/plot, or story/discourse – refer to the same distinction

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27 Peter Brooks, “Narrative Desire,” in Brian Richardson, *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frame*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002, p. 130.



between a synchronic, retrospective, schematic, diagrammatic apprehension of the text versus a diachronic, performative, processual, recitative reading in which the listener (in the case of a musical text) appropriates the role of declaimer and, in so doing, identifies very closely with the author as a fictive protagonist: not in the sense of the diegesis's principal character (the “hero”) with which the audience empathizes, but in the sense of that intimate intertwining between an engaged listening to the articulation (*syuzhet*) of the story (*fabula*) and an assimilation, on the listener/reader/viewer's part, of the author's moment-to-moment task of negotiating the work's *voicing* that takes place within the outer circles of the narratological structure.<sup>28</sup> One might be reminded of Leonard Bernstein's comment that he would often feel, while conducting Mahler, that he was *composing* the music in front of the audience in real-time.

When I finally returned home from the hospital, these two impressions of the work were still distinct, and I when I looked at the score to *Fragmente* I was shocked at the difference between the musical notation on the page and both images of the work in my mind's eye. Years ago, I had fallen into the habit (partly because I had served as the programming director of a modern music ensemble, going through piles of submissions) of listening to new works along with the score – focusing immediately on detail, on localized performance issues, on notation; in other words, a “left-brain” (logical, linguistic, localized, analytic) approach. Meanwhile, my first deep musical encounter as a youth had been with

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<sup>28</sup> This essay provides a general description of the *fabula/syuzhet* binary opposition. A detailed exploration of the history of criticism of this relatively new theory of narrative construction – including the critiques by such figures as Jonathan Culler, Jacques Derrida, Mikhail Bakhtin, Jerome Bruner, and others – would necessarily invoke a discussion of fields of post-structuralism, linguistics, and semiology and thus lies outside the scope of this study.

the *Eroica*: I had memorized it as a child without knowing music theory or sonata form – without contextualizing, for example, the breakdown after the *fugato* section midway through the first movement as something crucially located within the development section; or without realizing that the surprise of the subtonic phrase modulation near the end marked the beginning of the lengthy coda. It was something of a privileged vantagepoint.

There is, of course, the important relationship between German romanticism and the trope of transcendence; and there is, too, a relationship between the trope of transcendence and altered experiences of time that should be noted. In 1876, Nietzsche, Hölderlin's great rival as the master of the fragment, wrote an essay called (rather provocatively, in the context of Nono's politics) "The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life." "A human being," Nietzsche writes, "may well ask an animal: 'Why do you not speak to me of your happiness but only stand and gaze at me?' The animal would like to answer, and say, 'The reason is – I always forget what I was going to say' – but then he forgot this answer too, and stayed silent."<sup>29</sup>

In the essay, Nietzsche describes a man being swept up in "vehement passion," intoxicated by life itself, where "all is so palpable, close, highly colored, resounding, [it is] as though he apprehended [a single object] with all his senses at once." He goes on to describe moments such as these as "forgetting," of freeing oneself from the weight of memory, of history. The description is highly suggestive of the musical world – that of Kramer's vertical time, in which each moment is entirely "freed" from the previous one – with which Nono begins the quartet and, then, shortly interrogates precisely with

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<sup>29</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 11.

intimations of the weight of memory, of history, via *quotation*. But in Nono's music, the concept of quotation is an expansive one that encompasses not only literal excerpts but rhetorical allusions and extra-musical citations.

Nono's highly eccentric utilization of quotation is a major element not just of this work but of his work in general. In *Fragmente*, as previously noted, one of the various forms quotation takes is that of the *words* drawn from Hölderlin, printed in the score, not to be spoken. Another utilization of quotation occurs at the climax of the piece, where a fifteenth century chanson, *Mahleur me bat* (a chanson also quoted by Ockeghem) is quoted in pitch and order, but not in rhythm, texture, or harmonization. Nono utilizes the *scala enigmatica* of Verdi's *Ave Maria* as a source for pitch relationships, including the prevalent tritone of the first fragment.<sup>30</sup> Yet another is a musical instruction of Beethoven, re-employed here as a performance indication: “mit innigster Empfindung,” drawn from one of the late quartets, Opus 132 (no. 15). (Nono's quartet was commissioned to celebrate the 210<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Beethoven's birth.) And the very dedicatee of the piece is herself a complex, polyvalent reference: Diotima is the Diotima of Plato's *Symposium*, the steward of the concept of Platonic love; as such, she may well be an actual historical figure (as are the cases for many characters in the *Symposium*).<sup>31</sup> Even circumscribed within the imaginative world of Hölderlin, she is a muse of many guises: the (intended) recipient of one of his odes; the female protagonist of his *Hyperion*; his alias for his beloved Susette Gontard; and her name also serves as the title of five of his poems after his first encounter

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30 Nielinger-Vakil, pp. 245-274.

31 Ruby Blondell, *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 31.

with Gontard in 1796. There is, too, the Diotima of Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. Diotima is the name of future Nazi propagandist Leni Riefenstahl's character in the 1926 Weimar mountaineering epic *The Holy Mountain*. Diotima also voices her belief of love as the source of immortality in *Summer*, a short poem by Soviet dissident Boris Pasternak – as if one could venture further into the opposite end of the political spectrum.<sup>32</sup> Diotima, then, is a figure caught between two mirrors, creating a series of Diotimas that stretch from Greek antiquity to the Cold War, traversing the very history of European civilization, the geography of the West, and the entire ideological spectrum. Nielinger-Vakil remarks that “the range of associations evoked by the name Diotima embraces eras from classical Greece to Nono's own time. Above all, the Diotima of Nono's title points towards Hölderlin's paratactic 'tendency to mix eras together, to connect things that are remote and unconnected' (Adorno). In an enigmatic way, Nono's music also alludes simultaneously to a number of eras of Western music history.”<sup>33</sup>

Nono's varied use of quotation – verbal, musical, and literary – differentiates him from the *status quo* of postmodernism's exercising of simple (or, less pejoratively, *unmediated*) pastiche. When laid against the reading of *Fragmente* as a narrative, it is this complicated operation of quotation that forges the link between the instrumental, formalist composer and the political artist. Nono's work invites the listener to utilize a narratological approach – one drawn from literary theory – that could create a convincing bridge between design and ideology. Portuguese musicologist Mário Vieira de Carvalho's discussion of

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32 Krystyna Pomorska and Henryk Baran, *Jakobsonian Poetics and Slavic Narrative: From Pushkin To Solzhenitsyn*, Duke University Press, 1992, p. 129.

33 Nielinger-Vakil, p. 249.

Nono's *Variazioni canoniche*, an early Darmstadt work that uses a twelve-tone row drawn from Schoenberg's *Ode to Napoleon*, is, in this regard, highly suggestive.

In the *Variazioni canoniche*, two kinds of quotation as permeation are, thus, present, on this level: *quotation of constructive material* from Schoenberg's Op. 41 (constructive material as such, all the more since the series loses entirely in Nono the motivic-thematic character it still had in Schoenberg – cf. Spangemacher, 1995); [and] *quotation of a process*, namely, that of the puzzle canon. At the same time, Nono assumes ever since this work, another kind of permeation, which will more and more individualizes him in the context of the new music: the explicit permeation of the “work of art” by the anxieties and preoccupations that the composer (also as a human being) experienced in his own life-world. In this sense, quoting material explicitly from Schoenberg's Op. 41 – “material from a pronounced anti-despotic piece” (Nono) – is also *quoting an attitude*: Schoenberg's similar attitude towards the relationship between musical composition and resistance to tyranny of taking sides in the field of politics. In the *Variazioni canoniche* this aspect of quotation appears discreetly expressed in the title (through the mere reference to form, material and a number of *opus*) as the series itself, in its totality, can only be discreetly noticed within the musical substance of the work: it appears in that form only in the last of the four movements, played by the harp (bars 219–222).<sup>34</sup>

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34 Mário Vieira de Carvalho, “Towards Dialectic Listening: Quotation and *Montage* in the Work of Luigi Nono,” *Contemporary Music Review*, 1999, Vol. 18, Part 2, p. 37.

The use of compound, polyvalent quotations, both musical and extra-musical, that Vieira de Carvalho describes is one of several points of entry to a narratological reading of Nono's music, and, perhaps, more broadly, to instrumental music. These points of entry are not necessarily *borrowed* from literary criticism but transposed, in the mathematical sense of the word, wherein a limited number of elements within the critical structure are exchanged provided that others are fixed. Indeed, the employment of the benefits of this notion of transposition allow the musicologist to render other aspects of music amenable to transposition without burdening the methodological approach with confronting the byzantine complexities of Nattiez's argument for a semiology of music; setting aside Nattiez, in other words, would not necessarily be judged as noncompliance with the principle of *audi alteram partem* if music is considered as, after all, as a phenomenon of a collection of sensual stimuli made available to the human ear and brain for interpretation as information,<sup>35</sup> and from which the ear and brain can derive further information. If one likes, one could consider the approach as something inspired by the Husserlian move of *Einklammerung*, the “phenomenological reduction” drawn from the Skeptics' ἐποχή. Other aspects of music amenable to transposition would include Nono's persistence in furthering post-serialism's devotion to multi-parametric, plastic design, which would distinguish him as a formalist; his rhetoric, as expressed in large-form

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35 Again, the scope of the essay will not allow the author to engage in a full discussion of Nattiez's attempt to contextualize music within semiotics or the various attempts at building models of music cognition. For the former, see Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, trans. Carolyn Abbate, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990. For the latter, see, among many others, Chris Dobrian, “Music and Artificial Intelligence,” 1993, <http://music.arts.uci.edu/dobrian/CD.music.ai.htm> (accessed 19 Oct. 2012).

strategies; a dual reading of the quartet that is isomorphic with structural linguistics' histoire/récit binary opposition; and (not least!) his appropriation of literary texts, properly speaking, building upon the reading of quotation above. The narratological approach, in turn, may help locate Nono's work on the map of neo-Marxist aesthetics. It's more than a little ironic that in spite of the fact that Nono is generally considered the most explicitly political member of the Darmstadt generation, commentators have largely ignored the question of where his work and philosophical attitude stand within the three major strands of post-Engels Marxist aesthetic theory, preferring instead, as we have seen, to submit his works to traditional post-serial analysis of compositional technique, ignoring the element of ideology altogether; or treating the relationship between his work and his political perspectives in an imprecise and undisciplined fashion, relying instead on clichés of a vaguely-defined left-wing humanism, alternative/heightened modes of perception, or even pseudo-mysticism. Even a cursory examination of the four major models of the Marxist approaches to art – the Marx/Engels, the Benjaminian, the Adorno, and the Bloch/Jameson – draws an enlightening portrait of Nono's complex personality.

That Nono's work is closer to the Bloch / Jameson model than to that of either Adorno (devotee of the Second Viennese School) or Benjamin (of the major Marxist thinkers, the one that superficially plays the most salient role in Nono's work) might surprise admirers of Nono's sensibility and may, indeed, have surprised the composer himself, who, after all, was a musician before anything else. Far from the mystical/naive poetic visionary in the fashion of a Rothko, Scelsi, or Tarkovsky (themselves, arguably, misunderstood artists), Nono is revealed via a narratological analytic approach as a wily,

canny dramatist armed with a conservative, late-modernist, and even, in a sense, neoromantic (if never regressive) technique, one always consciously resisting the true postmodernity of Cage: a portrait that both grounds Nono's complex personality and places its brilliance in relief.

The four major Marxist approaches to art are all ethical proscriptives with the aim of authenticity in mind: “if you want to be a good artist, then here’s what you should do.” The first theory is, of course, that of Marx and Engels themselves. Engels argued that the most authentic work of art would be characterized by a non-tendentious realism that reveals the complexities of class struggle. In other words, Engels was against an aesthetic of “tractor realism” as later dubbed under Zhadnov. Engels' literary hero, rather, was Balzac: in spite of the fact that Balzac himself was a reactionary and a royalist, *La Comedie Humaine* succeeded in eclipsing the author's own political prejudices by presenting a complete vision of the multiplicity of class perspectives in the society of his time. In a much-cited 1888 letter to the English feminist writer and reformist Margaret Harkness, Engels states

I am far from finding fault with your not having written a point-blank socialist novel, a *Tendenzroman*, as we Germans call it, to glorify the social and political views of the authors. This is not at all what I mean. The more the opinions of the author remain hidden, the better for the work of art. The realism I allude to may crop out even in spite of the author’s opinions. Let me refer to an example. Balzac, whom I consider a far greater master of realism than



all the Zolas *passés, présents et à venir*, in *La Comédie humaine* gives us a most wonderfully realistic history of French “Society,” especially of *le monde parisien*, describing, chronicle-fashion, almost year by year from 1816 to 1848 the progressive inroads of the rising bourgeoisie upon the society of nobles, that reconstituted itself after 1815 and that set up again, as far as it could, the standard of *la vieille politesse française*. He describes how the last remnants of this, to him, model society gradually succumbed before the intrusion of the vulgar monied upstart, or were corrupted by him; how the grand dame whose conjugal infidelities were but a mode of asserting herself in perfect accordance with the way she had been disposed of in marriage, gave way to the bourgeoisie, who horned her husband for cash or cashmere; and around this central picture he groups a complete history of French Society from which, even in economic details (for instance the rearrangement of real and personal property after the Revolution) I have learned more than from all the professed historians, economists, and statisticians of the period together. Well, Balzac was politically a Legitimist; his great work is a constant elegy on the inevitable decay of good society, his sympathies are all with the class doomed to extinction. But for all that his satire is never keener, his irony never bitterer, than when he sets in motion the very men and women with whom he sympathizes most deeply – the nobles. And the only men of whom he always speaks with undisguised admiration, are his bitterest political antagonists, the republican heroes of the Cloître Saint-Méry, the men, who at that time (1830–6) were indeed the representatives of the popular masses. That Balzac thus was compelled to go against his own class sympathies and political prejudices, that

he saw the necessity of the downfall of his favourite nobles, and described them as people deserving no better fate; and that he saw the real men of the future where, for the time being, they alone were to be found – that I consider one of the greatest triumphs of Realism, and one of the grandest features in old Balzac.<sup>36</sup>

Engels died in 1895, but Lukacs continued his view by preferring, in a fashion that might similarly surprise, Sir Walter Scott to the elitist and reductive (i.e. tendentious) modernism of Joyce and Proust, to take two examples. The Marx/Engels aesthetic gave rise to the three modern Marxist approaches, which we shall shortly discuss; but de Carvalho's Nono “*quoting an attitude*” – “the explicit permeation of the 'work of art' by the anxieties and preoccupations that the composer (also as a human being) experienced in his own life-world” – is the starting point for an approach to Nono's work that aims for an understanding of the composition – the formal content – as an assemblage of latent political voices. As De Carvalho writes on another early Darmstadt work, *Polifónica-Monodiarítica* of 1951:

Leaving for the moment all of the specific details, it must be stressed that all of this quoted material plays, as in the preceding pieces, a decisive role on the structural level. It does not work as an “Other” which remains untouched. On the contrary, each quoted “identity” – for instance, the *International*, is decomposed in its constitutive parameters,

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36 Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art*, eds. Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski, Candor, NY: Telos Press, 1973, p. 91.

namely pitch and duration, which are then treated independently from one another as reservoirs of intervals and rhythmic patterns. By dealing with such reservoirs of sound material, which do not obviously correspond to twelve-tone rows, but consist of short cells of intervals and durations, Nono proceeds in a way which seems to be more in keeping with the technique of the Flemish composers of the Renaissance, than to the technique of the serial composers of the fifties.<sup>37</sup>

De Carvalho doesn't mention Berio by name, but it's difficult not to think of *Sinfonia's* treatment of quotations whose identities remain solid, whose interrelations between themselves and with the Mahler scherzo are entirely dependent upon one another, whose value to the overall piece are assets – which remain, in a word, “untouched.” (Their respective uses of quotation form just one example of the degree of dichotomy between the two great Italian composers of their generation, so strong it seems scripted. The difference in their musical portrayals of birth is another. Nono's quartet is born the high-minded Heideggerian way of being “thrown into the world:” a sudden jagged ictus gives way to a bewildered, directionless major second, answered by disconcerted silence. Berio's brilliantly vulgar image of birth at the beginning of *Sinfonia* starts within the safety of the womb: prenascent voices almost immediately fear the worst, and they groan in a series of swells like strains, culminating in a pop into a unintelligible, multilingual adult world in which the voice of structural anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss is poking around. Both are musical imaginings of the loss of metaphysical safety, to use Stravinsky's

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<sup>37</sup> de Carvalho, p. 42.

memorable phrase in his Harvard Norton lectures: but Nono's is of the mind, Berio's of the body. Even the Heidegger/Levi-Strauss contrast – the German, existential, mystical myth-*maker* versus the French, Cartesian myth-*decoder* – might be too “Hollywood or Bust” for Adorno, whose ultimate cultural nemesis was the character of James Bond.)<sup>38</sup>

That Nono and Berio treat quotations in such radically different ways reflects their political positioning. De Carvalho searches for the semantic meaning above or beyond the work's design, positing a technique for an analyst to understand both the musician as political animal and the political animal as musician. Later in the article “Towards Dialectic Listening,” De Carvalho becomes even more explicit regarding the difference in attitude displayed by Stockhausen's *logical* step towards the spatial compositions *Carré* or *Gruppen* and Nono's use of spatialization as a critique of the unidirectionality of social relations.

Such as in all of his preceding music, different levels of the form, beginning here with the spatial decomposition of the orchestra, spring up from a poetic idea which transcends the “pure” sound material. If, in the works based on texts, the “literary” content gives some clues to understand the “musical” content, in instrumental pieces like *Diario polacco '58*, one must learn to interpret the musical elements, processes and structures as allegories which configure the equation of problems, theoretical of philosophical reflections, feelings, aroused by a particular experience of Nono's life-world. In this case, what at once becomes evident is the end of linearity on main formal

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38 I still cannot find the source for Adorno's comment on Ian Fleming's James Bond character, but I remain trying.

levels: the principle of delinearization has its fulfillment not only in the very spatialization of the instrumental design, but also in the *discontinuity* of the musical discourse. Here Nono deals with fragments, which he then assembles – in accordance with a strategy of *montage* – either in temporal/spatial superimpositions or in temporal/spatial juxtapositions. He thus creates dialogical structures with multilateral perspectives, which correspond both to the critique of the sociocommunicative structure of the traditional concert hall (based on a linear way of listening, centered in one single direction) and to a critique of the political system of “actually existing socialism” (based on a linear way of thinking and ruling the social relations, centered in one single political force and source of power.) Therefore, instead of following the same imperatives which had earlier lead Stockhausen to spatial composition – namely, the extension of integral serialism to the parameter of space – Nono aimed here at breaking with all rigid schemes, including those of serial thinking as a kind of linear thinking, and brought this attempt into direct relationship, with the decentering or spatialization of the musical sources as accomplished in the *cori spezzatii* of the Basilica of San Marco, by Renaissance Venetian composers. Accordingly, what is above all projected here as quotation of a process, is the spatialization of the orchestra.<sup>39</sup>

The point here hasn't to do with compositional approaches to spatial music *per se*, but with the understanding that no compositional technique is neutral. Quotations are “*moments* charged with human, historical, social resonance, and then captured by Nono

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39 de Carvalho, p. 51.

throughout their concrete and documentary manifestations, which also have in many cases a sound dimension: discourse fragments, statements, appeals, slogans, mural inscriptions, songs, as well as poems and other literary elaborations related to them.”<sup>40</sup>

These aforementioned inquiries, then – inquiries into Nono's appropriation of literary texts, including but not limited to the words of Hölderlin distributed throughout the score, with their attendant explicit and implicit references to political ideologies; into examples of his postserial, multiparametric schematic approach to compositional technique, schemas which are reinforced on multiple levels of the musical score; into reciprocal hearings of the quartet which align themselves with the classic *histoire/récit* binary opposition of Russian formalism and structural linguistics; into an understanding of the quartet as a work referring to the rhetoric of models of late classical/early romantic forms that invoke the poetic trope of transcendence (corresponding to the *récit*); and into his use of compound, polyvalent quotations, both musical and extra-musical – are predicated on the positioning of Nono's quartet within the aesthetic/cultural “field” (and here we can understand the term as both in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu's “space of position-takings”<sup>41</sup> as well as Foucault's “field of strategic possibilities” from his article *Réponse au Cercle d'épistémologie* in volume 9 of *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* (summer, 1968), a crucial piece written between 1966's *Les Mots et les choses* and 1969's *L'archéologie du savoir*,<sup>42</sup> leaving aside, due to the scale of the present essay, the distinction between the two as differential

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40 de Carvalho, p. 57.

41 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996, p. 234.

42 Elud Ibsch and Dick H. Schram, *Empirical Studies of Literature: Proceedings of the Second Igel-Conference*, Amsterdam 1989, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991, p. 24 (among other sources).

for the former, autonomous for the latter) as *text*, in the sense understood within the field of literary theory. The consideration of the work as *text*, then, permits the move to the discipline of narratology, under the umbrella of which both a musical and a political/ideological exegesis may be maintained, and within which an attempt to situate the work within the context of major Marxist aesthetic approaches may be performed, using literary analysis as a template. It is the general aim of this brief essay to suggest, in a preliminary way, that any work of music may be productively approached in this way; but it is true that the aforesaid attributes of Nono and his work render the subject of examination particularly conducive to this line of investigation. The three major Marxist aesthetic approaches to text that followed Engels – those of Benjamin, Adorno, and Bloch/Jameson, the three primary “options for a Marxist critic in aesthetic terms”<sup>43</sup> – are dialogues with Engels' viewpoint in particular as well as critical responses to the general commandeering of realism by the bourgeoisie,<sup>44</sup> i.e. the world of the mainstream Hollywood movie or the nineteenth century novel. That Nono's philosophy of art is closest to the Bloch/Jameson position might surprise us in that, on the one hand, it was Benjamin who was preoccupied with the notion of the *fragment*; and on the other, that Adorno, obviously, stands as the champion of Schoenberg and his progeny.

Benjamin's tenet is that the aura of great art – the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, say – must be countered by a participatory, rather than a passive, aesthetic, on the part of the

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43 Paul Fry, “Introduction to the Theory of Literature: Lecture 17” (lecture), Yale University, New Haven, March 24, 2009.

44 See, for example, John Barth, *The Literature of Replenishment*, Northridge, California: Lord John Press, 1982, among others.

artist and the viewer/auditor, which joins them in a virtual unity. In a teleological move, Benjamin proposes that the practical possibility of this participatory aesthetic is exactly what technology offers to both parties. It is technology, in other words, that permits Vertov (to use a celebrated example) to create the seminal film of self-reflexivity *The Man with a Movie Camera*, a work so self-conscious that the spectator and the camera occupy the same position. Whatever image the camera captures is always *auditioning* for the camera / editor / spectator. Rather than being swept up and immersed in the all-encompassing “total” world of *Gone With the Wind* or the nineteenth century novel – the bourgeois state of passive, immersed contemplation – the viewer of *Man with a Movie Camera* is autonomous, critical, self-governing. The viewer is in a position of privilege. She is in a state of flickering, dialectical *distraction*, here understood in a positive sense: on one level she is always aware of the fact that the camera is nothing more than an instrument that captures images, and that there is a distinction between the camera's lens and the retinas of the viewer and the man with the camera. Near the end of his classic and much-anthologized essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin writes

the distracted person too, can form habits. More, the ability to master certain tasks in a state of distraction proves that their solution has become a matter of habit. Distraction as provided by art presents a covert control of the extent to which new tasks have become soluble by apperception. Since, moreover, individuals are tempted to avoid such tasks, art will tackle the most difficult and most important ones



where it is able to mobilize the masses. Today it does so in film. Reception in a state of distraction, which is increasing noticeably in all fields of art and is symptomatic of profound changes in apperception, finds in the film its true means of exercise.<sup>45</sup>

Within Benjamin's concept of *distraction* we discover the notion of the fragment. The paradox of Benjamin's argument is that the only moments in which the viewer enjoys an authentic artistic shock are those moments of disengagement from the seductive aspect of the fictive, total world the artwork presents. During those moments, the viewer is not “paying attention” to the fictional world of the piece: she is overwhelmed not by the work, but by self-awareness. The viewer's attention is intermittent. The viewer is not a selfish individual enraptured by a luxurious masterpiece, shielded from the real shock of

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45 Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” 1936, in Lawrence Rainey, *Modernism: An Anthology*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2005, pp. 1107-1108. Benjamin's famous essay is, of course, widely available in numerous anthologies. You probably have it somewhere in an unopened banker's box from your undergraduate years, in one of those “packets” college professors used to pay commercial photocopying company Kinko's to create. Underpaid Kinko's employees were therefore obligated to copy excerpts from copyrighted textbooks and publications and bind them into “course packets” euphemistically called “anthologies.” These “anthologies” were then to students at rather exorbitant prices, although surely less exorbitant than the total price of the combined purchase of the source material from which the excerpts were drawn would have been. However, was any of this legal? Eventually, eight major publishing houses sued not the professors but Kinko's itself. Kinko's, the plaintiffs claimed, had not sought permission to do the copying. Well, neither had the professors. But Kinko's had to defend the suit, so they said, among other things, that their use of the excerpts was legal under intellectual property law's notoriously fuzzy “fair use” qualification, and, moreover, that the publishers had known about all this for twenty years, so they should be legally *estopped* (barred) from complaining. That's why professors can't do that anymore; it has nothing to do with FedEx's \$2.5 billion purchase of Kinko's in February, 2004. FedEx's purchase of Kinko's, however, has *everything* to do with customer confusion and the fact that Kinko's stores aren't 24 hours anymore, much to the great inconvenience of already beleaguered undergraduates around the country, .

genuine aesthetic revelation. She is, rather, a member of a communal public engaged not just with the internal world of the work of art but with its mode of (technical) production. The work's internal world, then, is viewed not as a totality, but as a series of fragments. Benjamin writes that “the spectator's process of association in view of these images is indeed interrupted by their constant, sudden change. This constitutes the shock effect of the film, which, like all shocks, should be cushioned by heightened presence of mind. By means of its technical structure, the film has taken the physical shock effect out of the wrappers in which Dadaism had, as it were, kept it inside the moral shock effect.”<sup>46</sup>

This concept of engagement is strongly suggestive of several aspects of Nono's project. The unadorned nakedness of his structures; the performative element so radically foregrounded (the rhythmic liberty given to the performers being just one example); the fragments; the utilization of silence: all of these elements combine to create a communal, self-conscious experience of listening shared by listener and performer alike. The relationship between moments of being touched, moved, by the work's internal expressive rhetoric and the distraction of being aware that one is listening is that of dialectical alterity. Nono writes that “silence, the musical pause, is truly intensive.” His use of the word “intensive” strongly correlates to Benjamin's participatory aesthetic. And when he muses that “one remains silent there, one realizes that one needs to be alert towards all directions,” the phrase “towards all directions” is similarly correlative to Benjamin's spectator's awareness of the produced work and the method of the work's production – the labor at work behind the work – at the same time. Compositionally, the freedom of choice

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46 Ibid, p. 1107.

given to the musicians and the persistent lack of coherent systems (the irregularities and irrationalities of the fermata scale in *Fragmente*, to name just one) will necessarily preclude the formation of a seductive work inviting bourgeois contemplation of masterpieces like Stockhausen's *Carré*, Selznick's *Gone with the Wind*, Boulez's *Pli Selon Pli*. If there is a sense of loss implicit in this preclusion, this alienation, it is precisely the *tragedia dell'ascolto* – the “tragedy of listening” – that forms Cacciari's subtitle to *Prometeo*. *Prometeo*, written in 1985 and scored for five vocal soloists (two sopranos, two altos, one tenor), two speakers (one male, one female), choir, solo strings, solo winds, *Gläser*, four orchestral groupings, live electronics, and two conductors, is a work of frank monumentalism to which *Fragmente* might be seen as forming a type of instrumental overture, or against which *Fragmente*, in its minimalism, stands as a companion piece, a contraposition. And if *Fragmente* proposes a Benjaminian aesthetic as described above, *Prometeo*, with Cacciari's incorporation of texts from Benjamin (as well as Rilke, Aeschylus, and others), makes the relationship explicit.

But Nono's post-serial formalism, as radical as it might be, ultimately refutes a Benjaminian aesthetic. The compositional process is, finally, *not* transparent. It does not possess the self-reflexivity of Vertov. That is to say, there *is* the presence of construction, of a skeletal architecture, which is unexposed: and we have seen that, via this architecture, Nono's interrogation of rhetorical and narrative devices, inherited from nineteenth century romanticism, is more complex than simple denial. Indeed, nominees for truly Benjaminian composers might well be, on one hand, the aesthetic nihilism of John Cage, or on the other, the neo-Brechtian *musique concrète instrumentale* of Lachenmann. But these are

not Nono.

Yet the fact that constructivism stands behind the sensual outcome of Nono's work – even if it is a precondition – does not mean that, on the other hand, Nono's outlook complies with Adorno's social perspective. Of the three major threads of social criticism of art after Engels, it is Adorno, in his defense of high modernism, who made the most unusual move. What disturbs post-Marxists in the face of such figures as Beckett, Berg, and Schoenberg (all heroes of Adorno) is that in their modes of artistic belief they are essentially late capitalist elitists; that they say little about society; they are either self-consciously privileged, belated aristocratic aesthetes; or that they are unaware of their bourgeoisie ideology. They are thus, in any of these cases, invalid, inauthentic, inadmissible. But Adorno's tricky defense of modernism is that dissonance is a critical move against that superficial *beauty*, that *commodity fetishism*, which seduces the victims of the culture industry. Adorno's point of view, therefore, ultimately produces a paradoxical position: *totality* in the work of art, far from being maligned as a narcissistic endeavor, potentially functions as a collective model of social opposition; totality, in fact, must necessarily form the end of the means of the work. The obscurity of the form is necessary, for the work's ultimate coming together models the totality of a collective state. Adorno writes that “[great modernist composers like Berg, Schoenberg, and Webern] are called individualists [by other Marxists], and yet their work is nothing but a single dialogue with the powers that destroy individuality—powers whose “formless shadows” fall gigantically on their music. In music, too, collective powers are liquidating an individuality past saving, but against them only individuals are capable of consciously representing the aims of

collectivity.”<sup>47</sup> But on the other hand – an obvious dig at Benjamin – he does explicitly take aim at “the delight of the moment,” which has “become an excuse for absolving the listener from the thought of the whole, whose claim is comprised in proper listening. The listener is converted, along his line of least resistance, into the acquiescent purchaser. No longer do the partial moments serve as a critique of the whole; instead, they suspend the critique which the successful esthetic totality exerts against the flawed one of society.”<sup>48</sup>

Insofar as Nono's art works on so many levels (the celebration of the fragment, the self-consciousness of the listener as listening, the austerity of the musical material and the bareness of its development) as an attempt at a critique of totality, it cannot be said to concur with Adorno's outlook: this leaves us, then, with Jameson. In his 1947 book *The Principle of Hope*, Ernst Bloch (not the composer!) proposes that if late capitalism has annulled the possibility of hope in social change, art's function is to project the possibility of hope even while both artist and audience alike know that the projection will not occur in social reality: the fantasy, nevertheless, through the power of art, lays claim to a certain ontological presence. Literary theorist Paul Fry illustrates Bloch's idea with a scene from the popular 2000 film *O Brother Where Art Thou?* in which a chain gang is pictured singing “Big Rock Candy Mountain.” The dispossessed's fanciful dreams of “cigarette trees,” “streams of alcohol” running down mountainsides, and hens “laying soft-boiled eggs” is airy, but it is also romantic; and the vision replaces the aesthetic of realism which

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47 Theodor Adorno, “On the Fetish Character in Music and Regression in Listening” (1938), in *Art and Its Significance: An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Stephen David Ross, SUNY Press, 1994, p. 547.

48 Theodor Adorno, “On the Fetish Character in Music and Regression in Listening” (1938), in *Essays on Music: Theodor W. Adorno; Selected, With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Richard Leppert; New Translations by Susan H. Gillespie*, University of California Press, 2002, p. 291.

has been bankrupted by the bourgeoisie (again, *Gone With the Wind*). In a weirdly circuitous revolution, bourgeois realism has become more quixotic than romance itself.

Fry continues:

In other words, it's not just a symbolic act, the fairy tale. It is a thumbing of the nose at hegemony. It is, in other words, an act of antagonism which, of course, recognizes the impossibility of resolution or reconciliation precisely in its register of antagonism; so that at the second level, the social level, in which the ideological voices of various classes and perspective are openly in conflict, you don't get resolution. What you get is subversion and reaction. You get, in other words, a tension of voices that is not meant to resolve anything but is rather meant to lay bare the conflicts that are entailed.<sup>49</sup>

“It is in the context of this gradual reification in late capitalism,” Jameson writes, following Bloch, “that the romance once again comes to be felt as the place of narrative heterogeneity and freedom from the reality principle to which a now oppressive realistic representation is the hostage.”<sup>50</sup>

Northrop Frye and Frederic Jameson's development of Bloch's concept of an “aesthetic” of romance is one in which conflicts that cannot (ever!) be resolved are, paradoxically, resolved magically through the work of art. On a textual level, Nono's

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49 Paul Fry, “Introduction to the Theory of Literature: Lecture 18” (lecture), Yale University, New Haven, March 26, 2009.

50 Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act*, Cornell University Press, 1982, p. 83.

quartet presents the listener with conflicts that ultimately cannot be resolved, and in this sense the final scenario is transcendental. Not the organic product of a logical process, it is a sudden juxtaposition, an insertion, a transgression of the aesthetic rules the quartet has erected, aesthetic rules that run nowhere besides an infinite regression. (On the *symbolic* level, as we shall see, however, the final passages are anything but arbitrary.) In comparison, a line borrowed (cribbed?) from Beckett in the central movement of *Sinfonia* of Nono's rival Berio, a line referring to the Mahler symphony that forms the backbone of Berio's scherzo – “for a moment, there was hope of resurrection, but now it's over” – comes off as deeply cynical, and the neo-Marxist critic would surely note that Berio's fashionable *ennui* was intended for the lucrative marketplace, a flashy sensorium commissioned by society darling Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic at the height of radical chic and flower power, when Berio was threatened by the success of the Beatles' album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, a success not only commercial and critical but one that infringed perilously upon the domain of high art. From this perspective, Berio's work is reduced to an artefact of socio-political reality that Nono, who was denied an entry visa for the United States in 1960, found so unendurably oppressive.<sup>51</sup>

Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* describes three analytical approaches, or “horizons,” shared by the critic, the spectator, and the artist: the political, the social, and the historical. Their relationship is not dialectical. They form concentric circles, he writes; the political is contained within the social, and both of these are contained within the

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51 Richard Teitelbaum, “Electronic Music Foundation Presents Music by Luigi Nono,” program notes, [http://www.emfproductions.org/upcomingevents1112/nono\\_teitelbaum.html](http://www.emfproductions.org/upcomingevents1112/nono_teitelbaum.html) (accessed 9 Oct. 2012).

historical, which is the imminent horizon. The political horizon is defined as the “individual symbolic act.” It is the realm of the working individual artist, writing a book, painting a painting, composing a piece of music. The act is “symbolic” because the work of art itself is a symbol which represents an attempt at resolving a contradiction that cannot be otherwise resolved. Nono's concept of the work of art approaches Jameson's theory more closely than those of Benjamin or Adorno. (Perhaps not unincidentally, Nono and Jameson were born just ten years apart – Nono in 1924, Jameson in 1934 – and thus both lived through the Cold War, the collapse of the Iron Curtain, and Reagan's tenure.) The final passages of Nono's quartet illustrate Jameson's notion of the arbitrary “happy ending,” a variant on the romance, the fairy tale: composer and listener alike know that the conflict at hand cannot be resolved, but in the fantasy world of the work of art, it can, although composer and listener realize all the while that the resolution is fantastical. Nono's act of writing the passage (as well as his decision to write the entire piece) is Jameson's individual symbolic act that takes place within the political horizon.

The political horizon is contained within the next concentric circle, the “social horizon.” Jameson writes that Bloch's reading of the fairy tale in *The Principle of Hope* “restores the dialogical content of this form by exhibiting it as a systematic deconstruction and undermining of the hegemonic and aristocratic form of the epic.”<sup>52</sup> As we move from the individual act to the social act (the dialogic), the work of art – in this case, Nono's quartet – is not only a symbolic act representing the conflicting status of the hope for

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52 Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act*, Cornell University Press, 1982, p. 71.



transcendence as both possible and impossible (undermining it) but is also an open act of antagonism against the romantic impulse, and as such, it is a movement made on the part of a member of a collective, against a collective. In Jameson's view, it is within the social horizon that rhetorical gestures are understood as appropriated: the “neutrality” of the major second dyad that opens the piece, the “hostility” of the the *alla punta aperiodico* material, the “enigmatic” nature of the tritones throughout, and the “transcendent” harmonies that close the work are semantic content whose meaning depends upon the collective history of music even as that meaning is questioned. The semantic content is “voiced;” those things that are voiced create conflict, dialogue, drama; and these voicings not only represent different points of view (who will win out, the listener wonders – will the quartet turn out, finally, to be “neutral” or “hostile” or “enigmatic” or “transcendent?”) but express themselves through linguistic codes of those points of view that are distinct (although all of this is subsumed within a coherent syntax): *heteroglossia*. From this perspective, the quartet is a drama of unresolved conflicts between voices that reflect different ideologies which are themselves products of different levels of socioeconomic status. Nono's quartet is “authentic” in that it is unresolved; no voice ultimately wins; and yet the mere expression (or to use Jameson's term, “exhibition”) of the transcendent voice is an action that Nono uses against what he perceives as dominant ideologies. The postmodern critic Akira Asada's comparisons of Stockhausen's, Boulez's, and Nono's encounters with spatial music illustrates Nono's tenacious resistance on the part of one of his admirers.

[When] in Stockhausen's *Gruppen*, for example, the three orchestras in triangular configuration, when the brass sections hit the same bold harmonic at the climax – not to call it Germanic megalomania – he creates a spectacular spatial experience backed with a certain brand of authority, an utterly extensive spatial experience. But Stockhausen's not one to be satisfied with that; he has to put string quartets on helicopters, he wants to play music in outer space, he has to go all the way to Sirius!... Boulez turned out a robust development by placing the orchestra and solo instruments around the audience in *Repons*... Nonetheless, these are strictly extensive experiments. All in all, when you listen to this work, you cannot help feel you are being feasted on a banquet of sumptuous yet somehow sterile sound painstakingly rendered with consummate skill. Though quite frankly, given my own decadent bourgeois tastes, I certainly have nothing against such sterile scintillation. Still, with *Repons*, it must be said that this yet sterile product has been realized by the most highly polished technologies and massive budget afforded [to] an artist who stands at the very forefront of French national cultural policy. Whereas *Prometeo*, even with its same spatial motion of sound and resonance... is of a completely different nature. Granted sounds do travel through space. But [Nono's] was not the pursuit of spectacular effects such as sounds revolving or responding back and forth across an extensive space. Rather, his is more, as Mr. Isozaki has said, an enclosed cavern-like space, a dark space both acoustically and visually.<sup>53</sup>

Asada's description of Nono's creation of a “dark space” is certainly evocative of a critical

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53 Akira Asada, "Prometeo as Non-Opera," *Symposium: Luigi Nono and Prometeo*, [http://www.ntticc.or.jp/pub/ic\\_mag/ic027/html/135e.html](http://www.ntticc.or.jp/pub/ic_mag/ic027/html/135e.html) (accessed 10 Nov. 2012).

framework within which Nono allows his different voices to do battle. And if his sketches of the three composers is somewhat stereotypical, it is no less so than Nono's own conception of them, as Lachenmann recounts:

Between 1958 and 1960 I studied composition under Luigi Nono. This coincided exactly with when Darmstadt was in the throes of searching for a “new music.” Three central figures dominated at Darmstadt back then: Boulez, Stockhausen, and Nono. Around the time I began my studies under Nono, while all three utilized the same techniques, it was becoming clear that Nono was taking a completely different path from the other two. To the other composers, Nono seemed stuck in a neo-Webernian expressionist mode. Yet in 1958, when Stockhausen came out with *Gruppen* and Boulez with *Improvisations sur Mallarmé*, both highly ornamental virtuoso works, Nono criticized them as recidivist backtracking to *status quo* bourgeois music. Whereas Nono as a composer really delved into the notion of music as “punctual,” which had its beginnings at Darmstadt, Boulez and Stockhausen had strayed from such thinking and become more ornamental. Not only that, we might even say that Nono differed from Boulez and from Stockhausen in his philosophy, the ideology behind the music; his concepts of freedom were something radically apart. At the same time, Nono once wrote me this in a letter: “Look out for Boulez. His music is just like Stravinsky's. He's trying to recreate the court music of Louis XIV, who'd stay in the palace listening to music instead of hunting.”<sup>54</sup>

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54 Helmut Lachenmann, "A Dialectic of Progress and Regression," *Symposium: Luigi Nono and Prometeo*,

Jameson's final horizon is the historical, which he defines variously as “necessity,” “that which happens,” or with his famous phrase that is both his most and least poetic: “it's what hurts.” In other words, the house always wins, and for Jameson the classic example of the house that always wins is the Enlightenment. Accepting the premise that for any given time there exists a dominant mode of production generated by an overarching socioeconomic system, the Enlightenment, with its values of capitalism and industrialization (*i.e.* the values of the bourgeoisie), replaces feudalism as the dominant mode of production; and, again following Jameson, there were two main modes of resistance to this philosophy. From the high end of the social scale came romanticism; from the low, folk resistance. Romanticism appropriates utopic visions which were obviously, conspicuously antiquated: this is the intellectual self-consciousness of Hölderlin and Beethoven, not the aesthetics of a Mozart or a Haydn, which represents the first phase of an Enlightenment art not quite ready to occupy the critical stance.

Opposing this elitist stance is the folk resistance against the mechanical forms of social organization that resulted from utilitarianism. Popular resistance movements – manifestations, labor activity – resist industrialization in an atavistic, reactionary mobility that can be considered a reversion to agrarian feudalism. With folk resistance, we leave the boundaries of mainstream classical music *per se* for the sociopolitical proper; and with the final horizon of the historical, we leave the realm of the artist's dialectical relationship with social/political forces – both autonomous and determined from the outside – for the

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[http://www.ntticc.or.jp/pub/ic\\_mag/ic027/html/128e.html](http://www.ntticc.or.jp/pub/ic_mag/ic027/html/128e.html) (accessed 10 Nov. 2012).

merciless text of history itself, an entirely “other” domain within which music is fated to rest subsumed: indeed, to use Nono's language against him, it stands outside of the limits of our perception, willed or otherwise.

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