

Exploring multi-temporalities: An orchestration of Luigi Nono's*sofferte onde serene*...

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Collaborative creative practices between composers and performers have a long history. Famous examples include collaborations between Giovanni Gabrieli and Girolamo dalla Casa, Johannes Brahms and Joseph Joachim, Peter Tchaikovsky and Hans von Bülow, or, in the twentieth century, Luciano Berio and Cathy Berberian, and Luigi Nono and Maurizio Pollini. In*sofferte onde serene*... (1974-77) for piano and tape—written with and for Pollini—several new elements emerged in the musical language of Nono, including new modes of organizing “multi-temporalities,” with the piano and the tape following different paths on the same journey. As a result, renderings of this piece involve various degrees of uncertainty and unpredictability of sonic combinations—an aspect that is reinforced by the use of “shadow” sounds: similar sonorities that come sometimes from the piano, sometimes from the tape and that generate a perceptual (con)fusion for the listener. The author’s own transcription of this piece for orchestra in four groups aims at further exploring and developing specific practices of multi-temporality, focusing on the collaborative creative performance, where two conductors, reading two fully independent scores, have to develop a sense for a “chamber musically oriented” performance. Recently premiered in Cologne (Germany), this orchestration points to new modes of exposing and performing multi-temporal pieces.

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In September 1971, Luigi Nono (1924-1990) started working with Maurizio Pollini (b. 1942) at the Studio di Fonologia della RAI, in Milan, for the composition of *Como una ola de fuerza y luz* (1971/72) for piano, soprano, or-

chestra, and tape. Having recently returned from an extensive South-American tour, Nono was excited about the idea of creatively collaborating both with Pollini, as well as with Claudio Abbado (b. 1933), with whom *Como una ola de fuerza y luz* would be premiered almost two years later, on June 28 1972: “Claudio Abbado and Maurizio Pollini: their new musical activity is the development of an artistic partnership into the acquisition and adoption of musical responsibilities that result from the human necessities of our time” (Nono, in Stenzl 1975, p. 143). As this quotation makes evident, Nono was fascinated not only by Pollini and Abbado’s impressive musical and technical qualities, but also by their strong commitment to society, to their engagement in sociopolitical causes, and to their strong, outspoken political positions. Before and beyond the mere making of music was a human component that proved to be quintessential to Nono’s creative collaboration with them, particularly Pollini.

Four years later, starting in December 1975 and in several diverse shorter recording sessions during the year of 1976, Nono and Pollini collaborated on another piece—.....*sofferte onde serene...* for piano and tape—a fundamental work in understanding Nono’s late style and his polemically debated aesthetic and ideological turnabout. The working sessions with Pollini at the Studio di Fonologia della RAI in Milan concerning both pieces (*Como una ola de fuerza y luz* and*sofferte onde serene...*) are extensively documented through working tapes and sketches preserved at the Foundation Archivio Luigi Nono, in Venice. A detailed description and analysis of the concrete modalities of the Nono-Pollini collaboration would be out of the scope of this paper and has formed an extensive part of the author’s research (see Assis 2006). Here, however, the focus is on*sofferte onde serene...* and how, in this work, several new elements emerged in Luigi Nono’s musical language, namely a new understanding of the use of vertical sound-aggregates (“chords”), the exploration of complex variational and canonical procedures, and, crucially, new modes of organizing “multi-temporalities,” with the piano and the tape following different paths on the same landscape. This piece—written in a moment of personal and artistic crisis for Nono—marks the beginning of his late creative period. It was conceived experimentally (especially the tape production), as its concert rendering involves various degrees of uncertainty and unpredictability of sonic combinations. Nono achieves this, in the first instance, through the use of “shadow” sounds: similar sonorities that come sometimes from the piano, sometimes from the tape, and that generate a perceptual (con)fusion for the listener. This (con)fusion is enhanced by relatively free time relations between piano-live and tape, allowing the performer on

the piano and the performer controlling the sound-projection to intertwine a great variety of sonic rappings.

From an analytical perspective (see Assis 2006, particularly pp. 208-237, and Linden 1989) the piece might be seen as a succession of five units, each with its specific sound material and employing different compositional tools and strategies. Taking into account the durations in the tape and the bars in the score, the five sections of *.....sofferte onde serene...* appear in Table 1.

To provide an example, let us briefly consider the first section. It is made of five different presentations (“variations”) of the basic sonic material—a transparent constellation of twelve pitches. Following the sketches pertaining to the recording sessions (ALN 42.01 and ALN 42.02, see Figure 1), Nono asked Pollini to play these pitches in diverse combinations and successions. The results were recorded almost as a basic sample of sounds, which would be mixed and assembled later by Nono at the mixing desk. It was the concrete recorded sounds that slowly, progressively, defined the precise sequence of sonic events. And if it is very clear that the score and the writing of it is the complete responsibility of Nono (who remains “the composer” in an orthodox sense), it is also true that the sonic input produced by Pollini was of the utmost importance for the definition of the music.



Figure 1. Sketch of recording session ALN 42.04/02.

Table 1. *.....sofferte onde serene...* form synopsis.

Section	Tape	Bars in the score
1	0'00"-2'32" [2'32"-2'45"]	1-25
2	2'45"-4'50" [4'50"-5'00"]	26-49
3	5'00"-9'17"	50-101
4	9'18"-11'49"	102-137
5	11'50"-13'40"	138-155

Beyond the creative collaborative practice between Nono and Pollini is their collaborative performance practice. There has been much discussion (among performers and sound technicians) about how far one might go in the acoustic level of the tape. In recent years the tendency has been to overemphasize the tape, to make it an equally important part as the live piano. This tendency seems to contradict early recordings, including the world premiere, whose recording is preserved in Salzburg at the *Luigi Nono Archiv Jürg Stenzl*, and where the tape plays the role of a soft background: a shadow of a shadow. Independent of that important question, a major feature of the piece is the correspondence between tape and live piano, i.e. the problem of synchronization. Nono, liberating the music from strict prefixed temporal grids (as he still used in *Como una ola de fuerza y luz*) creates for this piece an extremely flexible system based on eight “reference numbers for the tape” (Nono 1977, p. 4). If we consider that, between these reference points, there are time slots of up to two minutes, it becomes clear that there is room for flexibility in terms of vertical coordination. This aspect is extremely relevant, since it creates the basic structure for a concrete multi-temporality where the “live” part (the piano) gains a new dimension—that of being able to generate real differential repetition from one performance to the next. Piano and tape, both built around the same sonic materials (pitches, rhythms, and timbre), enter a dialogue full of echoes and resonances but also of announcements and foreshadowings. That these relations should not be fixed once and for all is a consequence of Nono’s (contemporaneous) new orientation, both aesthetically and politically.

Almost four decades after the premiere of *.....sofferte onde serene...* this work is well established in the broad concert repertoire. Many pianists performing it, however, do not reflect the profound component of multi-temporality that pervades this music. Moreover, the question of reconsidering the piece, of critically rethinking the unpredictability of sonic combinations for every new performance, remains widely unaddressed. It seems pertinent to revisit such questions, particularly from the perspective of new collaborative practices, and particularly on the following topic: how do we establish new layers of collaborative performing activity on top of pieces already originally conceived collaboratively?

MAIN CONTRIBUTION

After many performances of *.....sofferte onde serene...* (between 1995 and 2012) as a pianist, after a doctoral thesis (1999-2003), and after the realization of a critical edition of its score (2009, supported by the Orpheus Institute

Ghent), the author decided to revisit this work from a completely new angle, making an orchestration both of the piano part and of the tape. In order to further explore and develop specific practices of multi-temporality, two completely different scores were written down: one for the orchestra (on stage) playing what was the piano part, and another one for three groups (positioned around the audience) performing on acoustical instruments what was originally the magnetic tape. The two conductors—reading two completely different and partially independent scores—have to develop a sense for a “chamber musically oriented” performance while conducting over sixty musicians. The focus is thus placed on the collaborative creative performance. Every rehearsal and concert rendering will be concretely different, while retaining the basic musical structure. An aspect that reinforces the fundamental idea behind this orchestration is the concept of “differential repetition,” inspired by the philosophy of “permanent becoming” (Deleuze 1994). Beyond the flexible coordination of temporalities established by the two conductors, the individual orchestral musicians have certain degrees of freedom, especially in the many notated suspensions: spots where their creativity is “locally” demanded. In such moments, the conductor stops conducting for a moment and gives space to the individuals.

Another crucial element of the original composition is the specialization of the tape projection. According to the evidence from the sketches and from the LP produced by the *Deutsche Grammophon* (with Maurizio Pollini) Nono composed a stereophonic tape with some sections in mono. Sections 1, 4, and 5 (see Table 2) were in stereo, whereas the central sections 2 and 3 were in mono. This means that the return of the sound materials from section 1 in section 4 coincided also with a re-opening of the acoustic horizon—from monophony to stereophony. This aspect is currently lost, given the fact that the existing tape is completely monophonic. In the author’s orchestration it is brought back to life: sections 1 and 4 are played by the two external groups (left and right), while sections 2 and 3 are played by the centrally positioned group. For the last section all groups play together. Table 2 summarizes this aspect.

IMPLICATIONS

This orchestration of *.....sofferte onde serene...* was commissioned by the WDR Cologne and premiered on the 9th of November 2012 at the Kölner Philharmonie with the WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln, conducted by Peter Rundel and Léo Warynski. During the rehearsals several possibilities of vertical coordination between the two musical entities (orchestra on stage and groups

Table 2. Luigi Nono/Paulo de Assis*sofferte onde serene...* for 4 orchestral groups.

Section	Bars in the score	Original tape	Orchestral groups
1	1-25	Stereo	Left and right
2	26-49	Mono	Front
3	50-101	Mono	Front
4	102-137	Stereo	Left and right
5	138-155	Stereo	All

in the space) were tried, explored, and worked out. For all the musicians involved in the project this seemed to be an innovative exploration of different temporalities running parallel to each other but coinciding in basic structural points. By re-working a composition that resulted from a collaborative creative practice and that enacted multi-temporalities through the articulation “piano-tape,” this orchestration suggests new modes of presenting and performing multi-temporal music pieces: works with multiple, independent, smoothly-varying tempi. These concrete artistic investigations—where the practice of art functions as a research tool—may lead to new kinds of collaborative *creative practices* and to extended collaborative *performing practices*.

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