



No Borders

Electroacoustic Music Composition with a Socio-political Theme

Margherita Brillada
bachelor's thesis

*“...at the heart of the aesthetic imperative
we discern the moral imperative.”*

Jean-Paul Sartre

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Introduction

This project stems from a variety of influences and discoveries gathered in a long learning journey that started curiously with a project carried out at the end of my studies at the Conservatory of Turin, my hometown.

Fascinated by Sound Art and radio dramaturgy, the goal that I set is to develop an electroacoustic composition with a social theme and current topics. For my degree project in Italy I produced an allegorical composition, “MareNostrum”, regarding the issues of immigration and it was during this time that I became very passionate in this field, working in the same direction developing my bachelor’s thesis in Den Haag at Sonology.

The direction taken by this research project moves towards the aim and the need to diffuse content through the communication channels of radio, podcast and music streaming platforms. My study moves on this powerful channels of communication and its relative so vast forms of expression, such as Radio drama and Radio documentary.

In parallel, a firm trust in the communicative scope of music and the need to express through it the contradictions of our society led me to a research towards the compositional approach and the social commitment expressed in the works of Luigi Nono, which was for me a very strong source of inspiration. I then tried to frame the compositional idea of the “Maestro” by researching his work between political commitment and experimentation.

Delineate a critical-artistic space to express artistically these delicate and difficult topics to discuss would be a good chance to bring a greater level of awareness to the audiences.

My intent is to create a composition that can be a source of reflection to achieve greater awareness on the social issues like immigration and social integration.

Chapter I

1. Radio Art and Sound Art

My research explores the rich history of radio as an artistic medium and the relationship between the artist and the new networks promised by the exponential development of new media.

The direction taken by this research project moves towards the aim to diffuse strong socio-political message through this powerful channels of communication, like radio, podcast and music-streaming platforms.

My research is driven by the vast forms of expressions that can be projected by this media and how the use of mass media can impact in the socio-political life. My initial research into this topic involved a historical-artistic contextualisation of the project and was guided by Rudolf Arnheim's 1936 book, "Radio, an Art of Sound".

1.1. Radio Art according to Rudolf Arnheim

For those unfamiliar with Arnheim, it should be explained that he was a writer, perceptual psychologist, as well as an art and film theorist/historian.

"Radio, an Art of Sound" was written at a time (1936) when radio was still a relatively young medium. However, Arnheim's book has, over the years, become a classic in communication studies. This is due to his ability to penetrate and anticipate the new and future impact of mass media. In short, his book is still very insightful from a contemporary context.

In his book there are various key concepts that piqued my interest and I now find fundamental for my research. In his book he wondered if radio can be considered an art form and this question was connected to his observation about the reproductive character of this new communication medium; namely that of the visual and acoustic channels that it offered. His reflection on Radio Art moves precisely from the recognition of what he himself calls "stretch marks of the medium" or which can be more simply paraphrased as imperfections inherent to radio, which make it appear more defective than film due to the fact that the medium is not visual — the primary sense that we are accustomed to.

However for Arnheim, these qualities of radio make the medium unique and fascinating. According to him, on the one hand there is a visual language with a passive audience, on the other hand there is an auditory language with a strongly active audience. In addition to focusing on speech and music, Arnheim also suggests that a listener has a large capability to reflect and think through "pure sound" and "blind listening".

If wireless claims the whole attention of the theorist of art because for the first time in the history of mankind it makes practical experiments with an entirely unexplored form of expression in pure sound, namely, blind hearing, it is a no less enthralling phenomenon for the sociologist.¹

He describes "a world organised by ear", where there are only two kinds of art capable of completely renouncing the eye — music and radio. His book is dedicated to the invention of the radio, and probing its artistic potential. Only a small part of the book, right at the end, will deal with "wireless" as a means of transmission and dissemination. During the same period, in Berlin, Goebbels and Hitler invaded the airwaves, declaring that radio's destiny was to become a state propaganda tool of unassailable force. In that moment, Rudolf Arnheim is not yet the famous American art historian who would make arts understandable through experimental psychology but he was only a young film critic, temporarily exiled to Italy after the Nazis came to power. At this time however he asked Gestalt psychology's fundamental questions: why do we see or hear things as we do and how can art change the way we see and hear? Arnheim tries to answer these above questions in his book, examining the social and political possibilities of the technology of radio. In the chapter "Wireless and the Nation" he writes, "wireless eliminates not only the boundaries between countries but also between provinces and classes of society."²

Wireless without prejudice serves everything that implies dissemination and community of feeling and works against separateness and isolation.³

¹ Rudolf Arnheim, *Radio: An Art of Sound* (Salem: 24 Russell Square London Publishers, 1936) Pag. 226

² Arnheim 238

³ Arnheim 232–233

An apparatus whose technical peculiarity simply consists in enabling sounds made at a particular spot to be simultaneously reproduced in as many and as far removed places as one wishes by disrespectfully breaking through boundaries of class and country, signifies a spiritual event of primary importance, and creates a situation at once dramatic and humorous.⁴

He not only believed in the capacity of radio to abolish frontiers but also, as deduced from his essay, he was optimistic about radio's capacity to draw the entire planet into the sphere of sonic influence and to be able to create a music of global dimensions.

Then he comes to the conclusion that only by exploring the singular macrocosm of the radio would our world be restored. Not as a static presence, but as a dynamic potential for activities and changes.

The new and close alliance of natural and artificial sound will not only create a new branch of art, but will also bring about a refinement of our sensibility. The new aural education by wireless, which is so much talked about, does not consist only of training our ear to recognise sounds, so that it can learn to distinguish the hissing of a snake from that of steam, and the clanking of metal from the clatter of porcelain. Such a discrimination is doubtless desirable: it brings about, so to speak, the enrichment of the aural vocabulary by whose help the loudspeaker describes the world. But it is more important that we should get a feeling for the musical in natural sounds; that we should feel ourselves back in that primeval age where the word was still sound, the sound still word.⁵

Not only does Arnheim rewrite here Luigi Russolo's Art of Noises Manifesto, but he also anticipates Pierre Schaeffer's *musique concrète*.⁶

Over the years, the potential of the mass media has expanded and changed, developing in various aspects and artistic forms.

My interest is focused especially on how new media can impact in the socio-political life. The context of "Radio" and its audience has changed so much in recent times.

⁴ Arnheim 226–227

⁵ Arnheim 34–35

⁶ See Luigi Russolo, *L'Arte dei Rumori* (Milano: Edizioni Futuriste di "Poesia", 1916); Pierre Schaeffer, *Traité des objets musicaux* (Paris: Seuil, 1966)

2. Impact of Mass Media in socio-political life

Mass media have a profound impact on the ways in which our reality is constructed; they inform and help shape our ideas and beliefs about society, politics and culture. News and entertainment media offer particular representations of reality through selection, framing and discourse.

The radio⁷ is cheap and portable, a tool used by people of any class, and everyone in our society can have access to it, thanks to its advantages it can be used to send a message and receive feedback from the masses and can be used as a powerful tool to influence the political participation.

The radio produces programmes which inform and educate the audience on new issues and trends happening in society, such as socio-political issues which are aimed at creating awareness.

Radio dramas and Radio documentaries both entertain and educate the listeners about politics and the importance of participation in it.

The radio has a wide reach. Because of the nature of the audience, if such messages are properly communicated, they can produce an increase in political participation.

Thus I wonder how media representations can construct new ways of thinking about the social world and relations in it.

Arnheim emphasises that we should be able to evaluate the success of a radio programme from its capacity to arouse empathy and participation of our senses.⁸

The communication of political information is an important process in the political system, and the mass media play a central role in this activity.

The mass media provide most of the electorate with a framework for understanding past, present and future events. Yet there is extensive debate about both the extent and the character of the impact of the mass media on politics.

According to Bill Coxall and his book “The mass media and politics”, there are two basic viewpoints concerning the relationship between the mass media and society. Some theorists believe that the media are part of democracy since they

⁷ In this subchapter when I talk about Radio, I refer to the Radio itself and its facets as well as music streaming platforms and podcasts.

⁸ Arnheim 136

are themselves a ‘free’ institution; they facilitate democracy by allowing a wide variety of views to be expressed. Some believe that the media are anti-democratic because of their power to manipulate the way people think about politics at home and abroad.⁹

In conclusion, the radio generally determines the masses’ involvement in political participation either positively or negatively.

This is because the way messages are communicated via the radio affects response of the audience to such messages.

2.1. AGF aka Antye Greie-Ripatti

Contemporary German artist AGF aka Antye Greie-Ripatti has strongly attracted my attention, she defines herself as an audio sculptress, poetess and new-media artist. She utilises language, electronics, field recordings, politics and explores speech within the audible depths of anti-rhythmic assemblages.

Her work inhabits an augmented space where pounding Berlin experimental techno, spoken word, abstract video art, feminism and radical ecology create a self-sustaining environment.¹⁰

Her works are a constant source of inspiration.

“How to be in the world, feminism as methodology” is a composition born out of an engagement with anti-capitalist, anti-racist feminism struggles as women of colour from the Global South, Feminist Freedom Warriors (FFW) is a project about cross-generational histories of feminist activism addressing economic, anti-racist, social justice, and anti-capitalist issues across national borders.

Another important work is “RES-IST [for Daren Tatour] bass pulse version”. The poetess Daren Tautor was arrested in October 2015, and spent several months in prison before being placed under house arrest — with no access to the internet — in January 2016. She was confined to a Tel Aviv apartment and was released only in September 2018, charged for posting a poem on Facebook: “Resist, my people, resist them”, on the charge of “incitement through social media.”¹¹

⁹ Bill Coxall, Lynton Robins and Robert Leach, *The mass media and politics. In: Contemporary British Politics* (London: Palgrave, 2003) Pag. 156–169

¹⁰ <http://www.poemproducer.com/haus.php>

¹¹ <https://soundcloud.com/agf-antye-greie>

3. Background research

This project started after the realisation of “MareNostrum”, an electroacoustic music composition that can be defined as a compositional/sound experimentation between Sound Art, Radio drama and Radio documentary. This is why my research has moved towards these forms of artistic expression.

3.1. Radio documentary

The Radio documentary or audio documentary as a form of artistic expression allows us a more intense listening experience, with a deeper knowledge of topics: without filtering images. through the radio-documentary we can tell stories that are difficult to deal with in video. It can be said that the audio has enormous potential to tell and explore the most intimate aspects of reality, also because a microphone is much less invasive than a camera. This makes the experience unique for two reasons: the interviewees are more available if they are not visible, and listeners actively participate in listening, creating their own images with imagination. So, it is possible to re-read reality from another perspective.

The audio documentary is the compositional form used by the sound artist Joaquín Cófreces. In “A dynamic sonic portrait of the 2001 crisis in Argentina”, he explores how a society becomes an accomplice to its own misfortune. Listening to this composition was fundamental for me to understand what aesthetic-artistic cut I give to my work, inspired by the sonorities and dramaturgy contained in it, the vastness of the sounds, their editing, the social themes treated and the quantity of voices in different languages.¹²

¹² <http://www.radioatlas.org/robbery/> - A dynamic sonic portrait of the 2001 crisis in Argentina. - Joaquín Cófreces

3.2. Radio drama in Italy

Con il termine radiodramma si intende una forma di espressione acustica composta da parole, musica, canto, effetti sonori, suoni naturali, rumori e silenzio. Tutti questi elementi possono essere utilizzati in una struttura lineare (per giustapposizione) o in una struttura multi-layer (per sovrapposizione). Il messaggio comunicato tramite le componenti del radiodramma può essere comunicato:

- dalle parole attraverso la voce (dialogo narrazione)
- dalla musica e/o dai suoni attraverso strumenti acustici (voci e strumenti) o elettronici/elettroacustici
- dal silenzio (spazio di elaborazione per l'immaginario dell'ascoltatore)
- all'interno dell'insieme Radiodramma possono riconoscersi tanti generi per quante sono le forme di espressione: narrativa, descrittiva, dramma, commedia, tragedia, reportage, documentario e così via.¹³

An expressive ideal of Radio Art seems to have emerged in Italy since the mid-1950s thanks to the development of Radio Drama.

Since the 1950s there has been a significant change in radio history and in that of the composers themselves, which starts from a renewed interest in creative innovations. The Studio di Fonologia RAI was created in June 1955 at the RAI center in Milan, by Luciano Berio and Bruno Maderna. During that year, Milan was on the verge of becoming a pivotal point in the international electroacoustic music post-war scene, through a new expressive language.

The studies and experiments carried out by the composers Luciano Berio and Bruno Maderna contributed between 1955 and 1960 to raise the artistic level of radio productions. Particularly in the 1960s there was an unparalleled production of Radio that tried to beat the television competition inaugurated in the 1950.

¹³ Angela Ida De Benedictis, *Radiodramma e arte radiofonica, Storia e funzioni della musica per radio in Italia* (Torino: De Sono, 2005) Pag. 53

English translation: "The term "Radio drama" means a form of acoustic expression composed of words, music, songs, sound effects, natural sounds, noises and silence. All these elements can be used in a linear structure (by juxtaposition) or in a multi-layer structure (by overlapping). The message communicated through the components of the Radio drama can be communicated:

- from words through the voice (narrative dialogue)
- from music and/or sounds through acoustic instruments (voices and instruments) or electronic/electroacoustic instruments
- from silence (space for the elaboration of the listener's imagination)
- within the set Radio drama, as many genres can be recognised as there are forms of expression: narrative, descriptive, drama, comedy, tragedy, reportage, documentary and so on."

In those years a strong interest was developed for musical experimentation, new technologies and communication channels.

In radio drama, even more forcibly than on the stage, the word is first revealed as sound, as expression, embedded in a world of expressive natural sounds which, so to speak, constitute the scenery. The separation of noise and word occurs only on a higher plane. Fundamentally, purely sensuously, both are first and foremost sounds, and it is just this sensuous unity that makes possible an aural art, by utilising word and noise simultaneously.¹⁴

“Ritratto di città” is a radio composition created in 1955 by Luciano Berio and Bruno Maderna. As can be inferred from the title, it aims at “depicting” a series of moments and it proceeds by juxtaposing sound images. The piece’s subtitle, “Studio per una rappresentazione radiofonica” (Study for a radio representation), contains a hint at the experimental nature of the composition. Berio and Maderna met in Milan for the first time and what they had in common was that they both intended to spread the music culture of their time. “Ritratto di città” is a sort of dramatic sound laboratory.

The analogies with the contemporary productions of the United Kingdom for the construction, the assembly, the type of articulation of the word and the alternation with the sound-setting are evident. The authors were very impressed by Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*, which aired the previous year for the BBC.¹⁵ There are no characters, nor a narrating ego, only two neutral and descriptive voices. The unity of the narrative is sought through the lyrical transfiguration and the abstraction of its elements. The modularity, circularity and repetitiveness of the sound elements are the basic principle of this radio language.

That radio drama, in spite of the undeniable features of an abstract and unearthly character, is capable of creating an entire world complete in itself [...]; a world of its own which does not seem defective or to need the supplement of something external such as the visual. ¹⁶

¹⁴ Rudolf Arnheim, *Radio: An Art of Sound* (Salem: 24 Russell Square London Publishers, 1936) Pag. 27–28

¹⁵ My research on the history and various forms of the Radio Drama focuses on the birth and development in Italy. The history and development of the Radio Drama in the rest of Europe and in the USA, is one of my future research goal.

¹⁶ Rudolf Arnheim, *Radio: An Art of Sound* (Salem: 24 Russell Square London Publishers, 1936) Pag. 137–138

3. Luigi Nono between political commitment and experimentation

Trying to outline the evolution and ramifications of how Nono spoke about the concept of *commitment* is as arduous today as it was in the 1960s. In short, such an attempt is destined to be incomplete and not really representative of the complexity, wealth and versatility inherent in this notion. Although in recent times various studies and research has been carried out, often aimed at analysing the relationship between music and politics in the work of Luigi Nono, these important contributions can be seen as individual pieces of an overall interpretation yet to be accomplished.

In the last years of Luigi Nono's work and thought, the greatest margins of investigation became those relating to problem of *commitment*. The richest and most susceptible period seems to relate to the 60s and 70s, in which biographical data (e.g. travels in Latin American countries, comparison with theory and with the practice of international Marxism, the participation in the workers' struggles of the 1960s and the student movements of 1968, etc.) form an indivisible whole with those of art. Political militancy - explicitly declared in ethical, social and artistic choices - becomes in this phase inseparable from that of a musician *in progress*, one in the continuous search for new sonic solutions.

The character of his music of this twenty year period has often led to some degree of confusion between (political) "ideal" and (compositional) "idea". In parallel, a firm trust in the communicative scope of music and the need to express through it the contradictions of its own time gradually led Nono to select for his works committed texts that were more and more political towards current events.¹⁷

Sicuramente una partitura può causare una rivoluzione così poco come un quadro, una poesia o un libro; ma una musica può esattamente come un quadro, una poesia o un libro dare nota dello stato desolato della società, può contribuire, può fondare consapevolezza se le sue qualità tecniche si mantengono allo stesso livello di quelle ideologiche.¹⁸

¹⁷ See: A cura di Angela Ida De Benedictis con la collaborazione di Laura Zattra, *Presenza storica di Luigi Nono* (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, LIM, 2011) Pag. XII–XIII

¹⁸ Luigi Nono, "Intervista di Hansjörg Pauli," in *Luigi Nono: Scritti e colloqui*, ed. Angela Ida De Benedictis and Veniero Rizzardi, vol. II (Milan and Lucca: Ricordi and LIM, 2001), Pag. 23–33: 26.

English translation: "Surely a score can cause a revolution as little as a painting, a poem or a book; but music, like a painting, a poem or a book, can exactly give notice of the desolate state of society, can contribute and establish awareness if its technical qualities they maintain the same level of ideological ones."

In 1971 he described himself as an “activist-musician not *above* but *within* the class struggle as it exists.”¹⁹ This idea refers to one of Nono’s biggest interest: how to reconcile in a coherent manner his artistic activity as a composer with his political commitment and the role he attribute himself in the transformation of society. As Nono asserted in 1969, for him there was “no difference between music and politics”, since through music composition he aimed to contribute “to class struggle and help to push it forward.”²⁰

Nono was also a ferocious, life-long opponent of injustice and exploitation. In 1952, he joined the Communist Party of Italy (Partito Comunista Italiano, or PCI). Nono’s own historical moment was characterised by Italy’s post war period, which emerged from a disastrous experiment with fascism.

Nono’s political activism was rooted in a particular combination of Italian Marxism and postwar antifascism. This combination reveals the significance that the emancipation struggles in Latin America, Asia, and Africa had for him. Nono supported liberation movements throughout the developing world and gave many of his pieces dedications or titles in tribute to guerrilla leaders; “Y entonces comprendió,” for instance, carried a dedication to “Ernesto ‘Che’ Guavara”.

Speeches and texts by political icons are present in Nono works. Other pieces feature the actual voices of revolutionary leaders or anonymous crowds of protestors. According to English music journalis and critic Simon Reynolds, One example is “Non consumiamo Marx,” a composition that documents demonstrations against the 1968 Venice Biennale, regarded by student radicals as “a fortress of bourgeois art.” For Nono, works like “Non consumiamo Marx” and “Contrappunto dialettico alla mente” were expressions of sonic acts of solidarity, artistic endeavours which aligned himself with all those who were struggling for liberation. This included both people on the other side of globe or

¹⁹ Italian version: Luigi Nono, “Una lettera di Luigi Nono: ‘Sono un musicista militante’ (1971),” in *Luigi Nono: Scritti e colloqui*, ed. Angela Ida De Benedictis and Veniero Rizzardi, vol. I (Milan and Lucca: Ricordi and LIM, 2001), Pag. 288.

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²⁰ Luigi Nono, “Intervista di Hansjörg Pauli,” in *Luigi Nono: Scritti e colloqui*, ed. Angela Ida De Benedictis and Veniero Rizzardi, vol. II (Milan and Lucca: Ricordi and LIM, 2001), Pag. 31.
“Per me non c’è più differenza tra musica o politica. Componendo musica contribuisco alla lotta di classe e la aiuto a spingersi avanti”

closer to home, like the workers from northern Italy's industrial cities who inspired "La fabbrica illuminata."²¹

In the 1968 essay "Music and Power," published in September 1969, Nono described composing as "something to which I am committed in a way that is no different from participating in a demonstration or a clash with the police, or, as could be the case tomorrow, in the armed struggle." In this regard, the strident statements Nono made, both in and around his work, did meet resistance. The political content in Nono's work led to conflicts with his publishing company. In response, Nono tried to bypass the official channels of high culture and engage directly with both student youth and the workers; he staged performances and playbacks of his work in non-concert hall contexts like factories and union buildings.²²

3.1. Nono and the theatre

It goes without saying that the places and procedures for communicating this new message can no longer be the traditional ones: work is increasingly projected towards a collective dimension; factories become concert halls.

The institutions are not considered outdated, but rather the forms and customs deposited in those institutions (cultural, concert, social). Suffice it to think, once again, of Nono's experience in the theatrical field and the evolution of his ideas in the stage: here, the concept of commitment is also conveyed in the use of space. Ever since the first notes and sketches dedicated to scenic projects or ideas, the will to abolish the traditional separation between the scene and the public has been constantly present (seen by Nono as a legacy of a ritual and 'anti-democratic' representation with 'the faithful who attend and the priest who celebrates').

Innovative, in this case it is the sound (and visual) dimension that Nono wants to project in a space without barriers. The space imagined by the composer is an environment in which the space-time relationships break into a total dimension both on the acoustic level, with the multiplication and spatialisation of the sound sources, and on the visual level, through the elimination of the

²¹ See the article "Luigi Nono and Communism in the Post-World War II Avant-Garde, How the uncompromising Italian composer gave voice to liberation movements around the world." April 11, 2019 By [Simon Reynolds](#)
<https://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2019/04/luigi-nono-communism-ww2-avant-garde-feature>

²² As indicated above

detachment scene/audience and active public participation in the show (as in his work "Prometeo, The tragedy of listening"). In this, dragging the spectator into the show, which is at the same time also extending the scene beyond the representation, we can see the will to live the theatrical moment not as an 'event', but as a situation of 'connection' between art and people - between operators of different social categories - which aims to destroy any prejudicial barrier on the ways of artistic fruition.²³

3.1. Nono and Stockhausen

Nono compared his conception of musical activism to the compositional practices of other composers, such as Karlheinz Stockhausen. Nono's critical comments about the West German composer explicitly shed light on his ethical and aesthetic conception of the music use in relation to political struggles of the time.

Seeing composers as intellectuals, Nono granted them the function of struggling against the conception of the world of the ruling class (bourgeoisie) by promoting a revolutionary and socialist imaginary. This action had to take into consideration the social, economic, and cultural conditions of their creative activity.

According again to Simon Reynolds, "Stockhausen's mystic exaltation of science and space, Cage's embrace of Eastern spirituality and surrender to the operations of chance, were both evasions of the present and therefore ultimately complicit with capitalism and the post-colonial order. For Nono, the purity these composers sought was neither possible nor desirable: the conscious composer must respond to the historical moment in all its messy urgency. To do any less would be to fail the test of your time".²⁴

²³ See: A cura di Angela Ida De Benedictis con la collaborazione di Laura Zattra, *Presenza storica di Luigi Nono* (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, LIM, 2011) Pag. XVIII–XIX

²⁴ See the article "Luigi Nono and Communism in the Post-World War II Avant-Garde, How the uncompromising Italian composer gave voice to liberation movements around the world." April 11, 2019 By [Simon Reynolds](#)

3.2. Nono and the “Studio di fonologia”

The *Studio di Fonologia* of the RAI in Milan helped Nono with the possibility of realising a number of sonic processes, such as the incorporation of previously recorded sounds into new acoustic spaces, as well as the transformation of sound morphology.

Nono believed that the use of new technology, and the work within the studio, was indispensable for the dissemination of cultural and revolutionary ideas.

The composer should diffuse the ideas, information, and material from political struggles in order to contribute to raising consciousness.

He believed that the composer must understand and appropriate any element and any technological progress that is actually innovative, for example: the development and application of electronic technology in contemporary music is an advance and an unprecedented expressive possibility for musical creation. Nono’s laboratory for the development of “possible musics” was the Studio di Fonologia. He was a fearless explorer of new techniques of composition with tape and electronics, first embracing them in his 1960 piece *Omaggio a Emilio Vedova*; Studio di Fonologia became “an original musical world” at once equal and different to its contemporaries in Paris and Cologne.

3.1. The political relationship in the last few years

In the style of the '80s, Nono’s music abandons the “evidence” of commitment and moves towards sound dimensions increasingly characterised by silence, pause, the juxtaposition of fragments in which *pianissimi* at the limit of the imperceptible alternate with sound explosions and from the structural valorisation of the spatial dimension (all elements that in a different way were already present in some works of the 50s).

The awareness of the progressive loss of a collective subject and the illusory nature of a social revolution is revealed in the new textual choices of his works. Nono’s political commitments did not dim: themes of injustice and class struggle recurred in his compositions right up to his death in 1990. But he also wrote from a more “civilian” place, with works that were introspective, spiritual, and approaching the threshold of silence.

In the last period of Nono's work we can see an artist who is certainly not apolitical or far from the concept of commitment, but a man projected towards other manifestations of his 'political creed'. The revolutionary spirit gives way to a kind of wise awareness that does not abdicate the reality of its 'present', but roots it even more deeply in the inner spheres of the 'indescribable'. In the 1980s, this was a form of "political maturity", in which the concept of *commitment* freed itself from every ideological superstructure while continuing to be nourished by the awareness that every artistic fact is, in the first instance, a 'political' fact and that the sense of music dwells, however, in its being *res publica*.²⁵



- Luigi Nono and Massimo Cacciari during the procession against the XXXIV Venice Biennale. June 1968. -

²⁵ See: A cura di Angela Ida De Benedictis con la collaborazione di Laura Zattra, *Presenza storica di Luigi Nono* (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, LIM, 2011) Pag. XXI-XXII

Chapter II

4. Origin of the work

This project has extended out of my bachelor's thesis project, which was developed in Italy and involved producing an electroacoustic composition with a strong socio-political theme. It is a composition that aimed to give space for reflecting about the issue of immigration, taking inspiration from a specific situation in Turin, my hometown, where more than 3 000 North African refugees were occupying commercial/municipal buildings (called EX-MOI). Inspired by radio dramaturgy, I decided to create an allegorical composition, "MareNostrum", using the audio material of interviews and tales from the people who lived in this reality.

One of the main reasons my interest was piqued towards this topic was because of my proximity to the "social centres" in Italy, where I participated in social activities by providing aid and assistance to refugees and immigrants.

The project started after the collaboration with a friend of mine, Paola Cordero, who decided to produce a documentary on the EX-MOI for her thesis project in Educational Sciences. She was teaching there, collecting testimonies and interviews, recording more than 12 hours of audio material. She contacted me to fix and mix all the sound material. In addition, during that same year, immigration became a central topic of public discussion in Italy, often being referred to as the "migrant crisis". For these reasons, after I developed the audio-documentary I decided to express what I thought about this delicate situation with my own composition. I saw the work as an invitation to reflect on the topic of immigration/integration and critique the phenomena of urban abandonment. My aim was therefore to express important aspects about this topic from different societal points of view.

Becoming passionate about this kind of work, I decided to continue working in the same direction, choosing to deal again with the delicate issue of immigration, which was still a very hot topic in Italy and throughout Europe as well.

5. Research and motivation

I have always been interested in issues of social nature, especially about immigration and related policies, and those that affect daily Italian life. When I started the production of this project I wanted to have a more in-depth view on the subject in order to broaden my views on the European reality. This led me to collect documentaries, articles, films, photographs and informative material about this topic.

Furthermore, after moving to the Netherlands, my attention shifted to seeing the situation in a larger European and even a global context.

This was a fundamental step for the development of this project, as it allowed me to have a greater awareness on the issue in general and decide upon how to face the topic during the production of my own composition. In this way the topic of immigration was useful for me to help develop my ideas and make comparisons with works that also focused to the topic — even if these works were in other artistic fields.

5.1. Works in other artistic fields

One of the documentary films that most aroused my interest is “Human Flow”, by the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei. It was useful for me to have an overview of the conditions in which migrants from all over the world are forced to live and travel.

Over 65 million people around the world have been forced from their homes to escape famine, climate change and war in the greatest human displacement since World War II. Human Flow, [...], gives a powerful visual expression to this massive human migration. The documentary elucidates both the staggering scale of the refugee crisis and its profoundly personal human impact.

Captured over the course of an eventful year in 23 countries, the film follows a chain of urgent human stories that stretches across the globe in countries including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, France, Greece, Germany, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, and Turkey. Human Flow is a witness to its subjects and their desperate search for safety, shelter and justice: from teeming refugee camps to perilous ocean crossings to barbed-wire borders; from dislocation and disillusionment to courage, endurance and adaptation; from the haunting lure of lives left behind to the unknown potential of the future.

Human Flow comes at a crucial time when tolerance, compassion and trust are needed more than ever. This visceral work of cinema is a testament to the unassailable human spirit and poses one of the questions that will define this century: Will our global society emerge from fear, isolation, and self-interest and choose a path of openness, freedom, and respect for humanity?²⁶

Mainly two points of view are present in Weiwei's "Human Flow", the first is the notion of how headlines are used to describe the various situations of migrants and refugees and secondly how the words of poets from these areas are included into the piece. In attempts to map all the migratory flows of migrants, Weiwei has traveled to refugee camps all over the world in order to see how these migrants are being detained or processed. From Africa to Europe, from Asia to America, his works documents their daily life, which is achieved by listening to their words and those who work on issues connected to the overall social issue. Weiwei's epic film attempts to make the public aware of the reasons that are causing the exodus of people and how this is leading to a corresponding closure of borders. The artist manages to give the idea of migration as a global phenomenon, unstoppable and unmanageable with current policies.

What struck me most was the artist's ability to combine both the strict documentary style, characterised by text, stories, interviews shown alongside images of struggle and hope, which are then combined with the most artistic images of beauty. This combination is inherently captivating as the beautiful images in the movie are impressive, the author uses drones to produce a very striking image), placing in this sense a series of doubts and ethical questions that cannot be easily dismissed.

An artist who has attracted my attention is the Turkish photographer and graphic designer Uğur Gallenkuş who aims to draw attention to various injustices happening all over the world. He creates dramatic collages by combining photographs from different parts of the world to show the extreme contrast between them and his art is truly eye-opening.

Gallenkuş says that an image can be more effective than a thousand words.

²⁶ Human Flow (Official Movie Site): About; <https://www.humanflow.com>



Pictures from the Web. Source:
<https://www.instagram.com/ugurgallen/?hl=it>

“The solution to a crisis can be described by many complicated words, but you don’t need to know a language to read and understand a work of art. Art is the master of all languages.”²⁷

²⁷ Uğur Gallenkuş form an article on the Website
<https://www.demilked.com/contrast-between-worlds-ugur-gallen/>

6. European situation

Dwelling on the situation at European level. There are mainly two migratory flows of people moving to reach Europe; those who move from North Africa and then reach the southern part of Europe (Italy and Greece) by the Mediterranean sea, and those who come from Western Asia (mainly Iran, Iraq, Syria, Israel and Afghanistan,) move across Turkey and then pass by Balkans to reach Western Europe.

The city of Bihać situated at the northern frontier of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is a hot border of Europe. The “Bosnian route” passes through here. It is the route taken by migrants attempting to bypass the stiffening of checks along the Serbian-Croat and Serbian-Hungarian borders. According to the official data of the International Organization for Migration, 24,000 migrants passed through Bosnia in 2018, most of them attempting to cross the northern border, going towards Bihać.

Migrants arrive in Bihać on foot or on buses, regardless of the cold and the snow that still covers the mountains, and they wait for the right moment to cross the border: some go for it alone, at times aided by smartphone maps and the advice of those that already made it, while others rely on traffickers.

Migrants call it the “game”, because for most of them, each attempt ends them up right where they started. A macabre game of chutes and ladders which often gives rise to physical and psychological injuries.²⁸

An estimated 362,000 refugees and migrants risked their lives crossing the Mediterranean Sea in 2016, with 181,400 people arriving in Italy and 173,450 in Greece. This movement towards Europe continues to take a devastating toll on human life. Since the beginning of 2017, over 2,700 people are believed to have died or gone missing while crossing the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe, with reports of many others perishing en route. These risks do not end once in Europe. Those moving onwards irregularly have reported numerous types of abuse, including being pushed back across borders.

With so many lives at risk, rescue-at-sea operations undertaken by all actors must remain a priority.

²⁸ Servizio Informazione Religiosa. 2018. <https://agensir.it/europa/balcani/2019/03/05/between-bosnia-and-croatia-the-desperate-game-of-migrants-to-the-eu/>

Despite some progress in increasing the number of safe pathways to Europe, these opportunities are far too few to offer a feasible alternative to risky irregular journeys for people in need of protection. Further efforts are needed to increase access to existing legal pathways, including family reunification. [...] Those arriving in Europe need adequate reception and assistance, particularly those with specific needs [...]. More solidarity is needed within the EU to ensure protection, including through efficient and speedy family reunion and relocation. Overall, there is a need for a comprehensive plan of action that will support long-term solutions to the complex issue of mixed migration and help address its root causes, in close cooperation with countries of origin and transit and in line with international law.²⁹

In Italy the attitude of Italians towards immigrants arriving in the country is becoming less and less tolerant. Distrust and, in some cases, hostility increase; even the political guidelines have become more stringent. Just this is one of the reasons that pushes me to artistically interpret this delicate subject, I think there is a lack of works of this kind and a need to talk as much as possible about this situation, the aim is to transmit strong messages and try to create a more informed and sensitive collective consciousness.

“The simple truth is that refugees would not risk their lives on a journey so dangerous if they could thrive where they are.”³⁰

²⁹ <https://www.unhcr.org/europe-emergency.html> UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a global organisation dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people.

³⁰ Melissa Fleming, UNHCR

7. Collaboration in Den Haag

Since I moved to Den Haag I started looking for foundations and organisations that deal with immigration and refugees. The Humanity House is a museum located in the center of Den Haag, where it is possible to experience what it is like to live through a disaster or conflict and explores related themes in temporary exhibitions. The Humanity House also provides a platform, a place of encounter for people and organisations that deal with humanitarian themes.

Humanitarian themes such as equal rights, freedom of speech and migration are important issues all over the world. The Humanity House makes people aware of the impact of humanitarian themes that dominate the lives of many millions of people every day. By discussing situations from a human point of view, they try to raise people's understanding of issues that are often unimaginable, complex and urgent. By sharing stories, they bring situations far away closer to us. This is possible through images, debate, music and discussion from the perspectives of various participants.³¹

I participated in one debate that took place during the "Hague Talks" in the Humanity House. Hague Talks is a meeting place for creative minds, an interactive stage and incubator for new ideas and different perspectives, essentially a platform for reflection.

The title of the debate in which I participated is "How can media contribute to human rights?". The talk focused on the opportunities that media provide for human rights and freedom of expression. Three speakers from Nigeria, Kuwait and Turkey shared their experiences in a personal talk about how they used and transformed media to create a dialogue about human rights and related issues in their own countries.

My participation was useful as food for thought about the use of the platforms on which I intend to broadcast my works, such as radio and podcasts.

Stories and news are more accessible than ever to people all around the world. Social media can provide a platform for human rights activists. But how is media really changing the work of human rights activists? How can it be used

³¹ See the Official Web Site of Humanity House in Den Haag, Prinsegracht 8
<https://www.humanityhouse.org/en/about-us/>

for the benefit of human rights and freedom of expression? And what are the risks?

In the Humanity House I have found a platform where I can find people interested in the work I am doing and can create connections for future collaborations.

Another important meeting was made possible thanks to a friend of mine, Kardelen Buruk, a viola player who was involved in the production of a concert for Turkish immigrants here in Den Haag. The theme of her concert was 'Yearning for Human Connection'.

On 3th of may 2019, she organised together with the Orkest Morgenstond and Akin Yalcin, organiser of artistic and cultural events, the first of the Neighborhood Concert Series at the Wijkcentrum Bouwlust in Escamp. They mixed Turkish 70's theme songs from cult movies with classic music. The purpose of this project is to create cultural activities based on the demand for minorities in the Netherlands, bringing more diversity and participants to the cultural scene.

During the concert I made some audio recordings; being present in this project allowed me to create contacts for new and interesting collaborations. I had the chance to talk to Akin Yalcin about my project, which showed me his interest and put me in touch with Nikita Swikker, a girl who works with the Wij Zijn Hier in Amsterdam (a self-organised refugee action collective) who is collecting information and people for the production of a documentary about Syrian refugees.

Our goal is to propose an artistic exhibition on the theme, in collaboration with other artists (photographers and film-makers).

We have just started the collaboration and our first goal is to exhibit the project inside the Humanity House and in the city hall of den Haag.

8. Narrative line

The theme in the composition is characterised by the simultaneous presence of various points of view.

The compositional idea with which the piece is formally divided is linked to narrative history.

The imaginary narration represented in the composition begins with the exile of a family forced to flee Syria towards Europe due to the civil war in their country that has been underway since 2011.

Their journey begins with the crossing of the eastern Mediterranean Sea (Aegean Sea), from Turkey to Greece.

The story opens with the crossing of one of the many boats on which every day thousands of immigrants undertake this journey in very often inhuman and harrowing conditions, without any guarantee of reaching their destination.

It then continues with the arrival of the family on dry land and the beginning of the second phase of the journey through the Balkans, having to overcome hostile borders, to finally arrive in the western part of Europe.

During the narration of this story interject multiple points of view on the subject, such as political speeches and extracts of poems related to the topic.

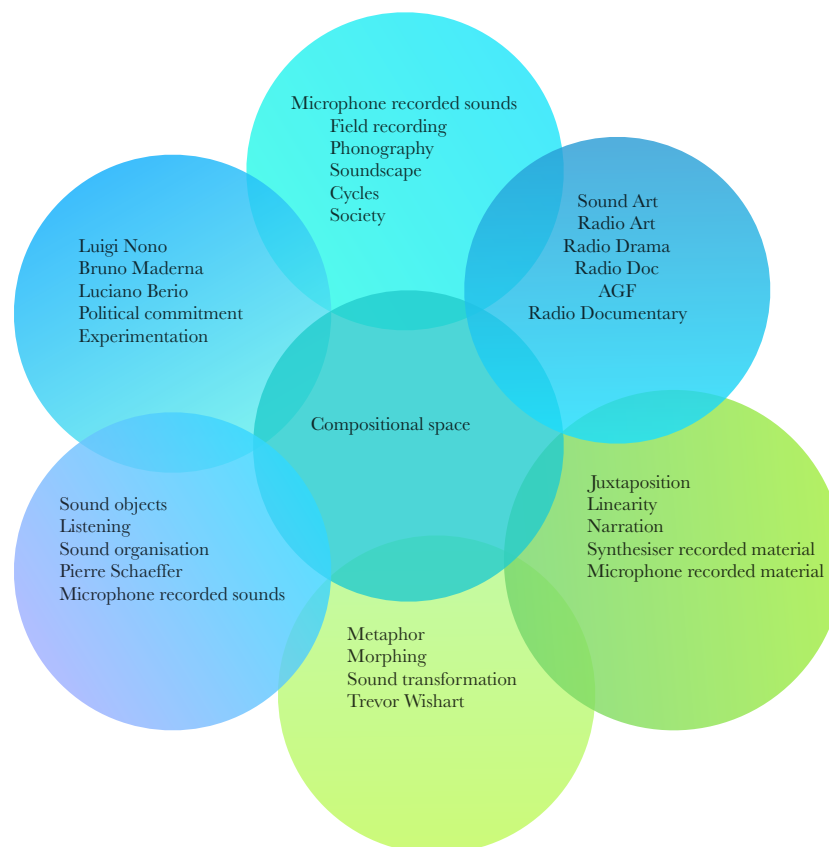
The story should help the listener to immerse himself in reflections on important topics:

- Imagine the conditions in which thousands of immigrants are forced to live
- Have a general idea of how immigration is perceived by political forces
- Create ideas for reflection/awareness on the subject

Chapter III

9. General composition space

In order to better visualise the compositional direction my project was going to occupy, I tried to envisage various sets of overlapping areas of influence. Each of these areas are defined with a few small number of keywords about aesthetics, techniques and practices associated sometimes to a composer or group of composers. By doing this, I obtained a map that helped to exemplify the major aesthetic points of reference that are relevant to my current practice. The topology of the sets is loosely based on simple connections that one may find between bordering areas, but it is only secondary to the freedom of movement I chose inside the central compositional space. Within these areas of influence there are names of composers whose work I have arbitrarily selected to provide points of reference for explaining broader and more complex concepts connected to my work.³² All this was done so I could better grasp the context of my work. These areas of influence can be visualised in the figure below.



³² See Chapter I

I aimed at exploring the broad field of “found sounds”³³, field recordings and the middle ground defined by the intersections of the aesthetics and techniques of several composers, whose works I have discovered and appreciated over the course of my career as a music conservatory student first in Torino and then in Den Haag. Such an extended period of time allowed me explore and fall in love with and explore a number of different approaches to composition, finding my own compositional space.

9.1. Compositional aims

The narrative line automatically dictates the formal musical sections into which the piece itself is divided. The intent is to create sonorities and soundscape in each specific section that would recall and frame the situation.

The second intent is to combine sounds of different nature in a single texture (field recording and “artificial sounds”), creating a coherent flow.

My search of sound with field recording is constantly expanding, going towards a gradually more sophisticated and profound direction, not only in terms of technical procedures but in other senses, like political, cultural and social contexts.

The composition moves towards a reflection around the boundaries between sonic experimentation and audio documentary, creating a bridge between political perspectives, philosophical ideas, contextual approaches and aesthetic perspectives.

It is my first project where I experiment with spatialisation on multi-channels. The work will be presented in a 8-channel spatialisation system implemented with AbletonLive9, assigning to each track a different output, which can be assigned stereo or in mono on each single loudspeaker.

³³ During my research I collected audio samples from documentaries, films, news and newscasts from which I extrapolated some brief significant samples. The options here are limitless, in this sense I have a lot of freedom of research, by doing this that I can morph sounds into a unique form for my own composition.

10.Audio material

The sound material used for the development of the composition is mainly produced with recorded audio material and samples of “found sounds” which I have subsequently manipulated, as I will expand upon later.

Sounds that clearly refer to the related scene, which appear in a clear and recognisable way as in a phonography, through manipulation processes are transformed/morphed developing into different sounds.

For example in the initial part of the composition, as I explained in the previous chapter, the scene opens with the crossing of refugees offshore. In this first part there are sounds that refer to this specific situation, such as:

the lapping/swashing of the sea waves, the hum of the boat engine, the audio interference of the walkie talkies used by the first aid unit, the shouting-voice of people forced to travel mercilessly.

In this first section, sounds created with synthesisers which simulate the noise of boat engines, intertwine and overlap with the original sounds creating deep atmosphere.

In other cases they perform an accompanying function, helping the formal subdivision of the piece, marking the end and the beginning of the various sections but always merging with microphone recorded material.

10.1. My sounds palette

The compositional idea that I am following is to create a sort of “sound palette”, with various sounds and related nuances, like the one available to the painter in front of a white canvas, having clear in mind the choice of subjects that he will paint and the various nuances adopted to create them.

The reasons that led me to use certain sounds of my "palette" at certain times rather than others, as already mentioned above, make clear reference to the narrative scene within which they occur, while in some scenes they are unrelated to a logical-narrative chronological connection but have a function of preparing for future events or referring to previous ones according to more purely aesthetic choices.

In the composition there are often sounds to which a symbolic value is attributed, since the elements represented are precisely symbols that help us enter into the reality of some strong and enigmatic social issues.

The intention is to create an overall sound texture full of references, allusions and symbolic meanings. Sounds alternate on the scene and recur but modified and with different characteristics and nuances.

10.2. Treatment and manipulation

The work started as audio editing and mixing of the recordings, thus allowing me to manipulate primarily the levelling of dynamics, the use of equalizers, dynamic filters and compressors carried out first with iZotope RX and thanks to the Waves plugins that I used through AbletonLive9.

I first divided the material for both time and frequency bands and then reassemble them by using crossfades.

The editing and composition work carried out on the original material consists of dividing and reassembling on a timeline, that is, mixing together various sound objects and working in detail on the dynamics and internal envelopes of each individual sounds. This procedure allowed me to reach morphed sounds that I found interesting for my composition.

The second step consisted in the subdivision by frequency bands, basically into 3 sections: high, medium and low; this process was carried out with the help Adobe AuditionCC software. This process was not carried out according to fixed scheme, that is taking standard frequencies as a limit on which to make the cut, but rather analysing the spectrogram with AudioSculpt, and trying to emphasise or completely eliminate some bands.

I carried out the same procedure on all the sound material, this allowed me to reach various nuances of sounds in terms of timbre and “colour”.³⁴

³⁴ Considering that I am still working on the composition, it was difficult to go into the technical details as I wanted.

11. Technical-aesthetic issues and resolutions

As I explained in the previous paragraphs, I aim at exploring the broad field of “found sounds”, this is also one of the reasons why I started with listening to podcasts, electro-acoustic compositions and with watching many documentaries, films related to the topic, selecting audio samples that I found interesting for my composition.

The first main issue encountered during the compositional process was to decide which samples to select in order to create a coherent path that best summarised most of the concepts I wanted to express.

Therefore the first compositional choice I made consists in carefully listening to many hours of audio material and in sorting the audio samples that could be integrated into my composition.

For this procedure I used Ableton Live9, with which I am familiar with the manipulation of the clips, thus easily managing to cut superfluous parts and reassemble the material with fades in, fades out or crossfades.

The texture is spread over about 20 different tracks that intertwine, creating an articulated multi-layer system.

Mixing "natural sounds" with purely synthetic sounds I had to find a method to create a coherence between sounds of different nature, seeking a balance on the same acoustic/aesthetic level.

To overcome the aesthetic problem, I used manipulation techniques to modify "natural sounds", for example by using audio effects such as distortion, reverb or resonance filters, managing to obtain a sound coherence between material of different origin.

The composition is interwoven with microphone recorded sounds, derived in particular from the natural world where the digital processing of sound tends to highlight some parts of the treated material. Natural sounds are blending with synthetic sounds trying to create suggestive perceptive illusions.

Virtual soundscapes are interesting from an aesthetic viewpoint. A virtual soundscape is composed by mixing field recordings made in different locations together with other sounds (instruments, electronic sounds, voice, etc.) to create a phantasmagorical composite.³⁵

³⁵ Curtis Roads, *Composing Electronic Music: A New Aesthetic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) Pag. 83

Final thoughts and future goals

Thanks to the research carried out during this project I have gathered many ideas for the growth of my artistic thought.

During the development of this research, I have dealt with topics that deserve further study and which I would like to continue developing.

The main goal will be to broaden the research and continue following a different perspective than the one discussed in this thesis.

In particular, as regards the history of Radio drama and Radio in general, my research has developed mainly focusing on a historical/artistic aspect.

I would like to elaborate on how this is contextualised in the socio-political form, trying to understand how Radio can impact in the socio-political life, and analyse works that are oriented in this direction.

It would be interesting also reflect on the social context of the project, especially as the context of “Radio” and its audience has changed so much in recent times. Radio, music streaming platforms, podcasts, Sonology concerts all have their audiences and ways of listening.

Questions for research are, for instance: How do young people use online media in their political practices? What is the role of media performances in managing and negotiating the consequences of politics? What is the role and position of new and entertainment media in the representation of diversity? What socio-political impact does popular media culture have on people’s beliefs and values?

I aim to investigate the psychological processes involved in the experiences of production and fruition of Radio Art and listening as a cultural practice.

Elaborate on theories and methods of Radio Art, radio studies, sound theory and aesthetics, and try to understand Radio as an expression of social relatedness.

Conclusion

The compositions will be in 2 formats, stereo to be broadcasted via radio and multi-channel to be presented as sound installation with spatialisation. I think that my compositional approach, characterised by the presence of numerous intertwined sounds on multiple-layers and the documentary element, find meaning and definition in the total immersion in the spatialized sound.

The idea is to bring the installations into social contexts related to the subject matter, as I did with the first composition of this project, which was exhibited inside the EX-MOI during an artistic-cultural event called “Librincontro”. I plan to exhibit my composition within Humanity House, during an exhibition in collaboration with the project started by Nikita.

The goal that I set is to develop a cycle of electroacoustic compositions with social theme and current topics that are dear to me continuing improving my compositional aesthetic and techniques.

I aim to understand radio as a space of experimentation and Sound Art as a global way of telling stories in an emotional language.

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