



Resistance music finds new shapes

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Abstract: Music and politics are undoubtedly bound by a relationship whose origin has to be looked for in the far past. This can be proved by the fact that many composers in history chose to comment through their works on the conditions of human beings and on the events involving them, hence taking a clear stand on the political choices which led to these happenings. The topics that influence my creative process as a composer and which are addressed in my works, are the Italian politics of immigration and the political corruption in Italy, along with their relationship to illegal organizations. In my compositions, the alternation of singing with open or closed mouth symbolises the effort of a mafia penitent to testify in court. Sometimes the stage turns into a shore, on which immigrants, whose bodies lie lifeless after their journey to Europe, take the floor a few steps from tan tourists. Somewhere else, Nephele, a cloud created by Zeus, embodies constituency, disappointed by corrupt politics, and is arranged by a choir of female voices which attack Ixion, a mythological character considered the first man who committed acts of violence against nature and civil society, and therefore he is compared to the corrupt Italian politicians. Music, inspired by text and combined with theatre, finds new ways to speak to the emotional side of the audience. The written word becomes sound and an audible metaphor of the unheard, giving voice to those who can no longer speak or who never did.

Introduction

The concept of music as a reflection of human history and contemporary society has been supported by several artists and philosophers (Ramazzotti, 2007; Ligeti, 1978). Theodor Adorno claimed that artistic works mirror human history more faithfully than documents (Adorno, 1949). Ethnomusicology supports this view, since it studies the musical culture of a people, taking into account its social context and the historical and political background of the country (Blum, 1975).

There are a number of compositions whose formal structure, language, spatial organization and instrumentation are directly linked to political issues that have been carefully analysed by their authors. Historical examples of these relationships will be provided in the following chapter, with particular focus on music with a theatrical setting which has been written in the last two centuries.

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In the third section, once the connection between the two disciplines has been established, it will be illustrated how the findings have been applied in my works. The aim of my research is to point out how politics serves as a source of inspiration for composers and how musical elements in their compositions come to mirror political situations, as well as how musicians strived to find new shapes for the musical material in order to faithfully reproduce society and its relations of power (Wignall, 1990).

The present paper is not to be confused with a dissertation on the capacity of music to express content. On the contrary, it intends to analyse how political and social relations can provide the composer with new ways to organise the musical parameters in a composition. This point of view is strongly supported by György Ligeti. Speaking about the relationship between music and politics, he claims that ‘part of music and of every artistic genre is that which is taking place in society at this very moment’ (Ligeti, 1978:20).

‘Music, a totally-defined ordering of acoustic events, can through use actually become something repressive. [...] But to become this, music needs the addition of something semantic and conceptual’ (Ligeti, 1978:24).

This statement introduces another consideration: the importance of employing material with a semantic² content. Therefore, my research will mostly focus on the contribution of text to a musical work, either as a medium of meaning or as an enrichment to the sound material. In particular, the examples will mainly be related to operas or to music theatre, so that, besides text, contextualisation through theatrical elements will be considered.

Historical references

The influence of politics on the compositional process can of course be found before the 19th century, for example in the case of Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina who was obliged by the Council of Trent to follow determined rules in his compositional process in order to keep the intelligibility of the text in his sacred works (Allorto, 2005). Nevertheless, the present paper will focus on the last two centuries in order to take into account political situations which are closer to the ones I examine in my compositions.

In the first half of the 19th century, Europe witnessed the outbreak of several riots, caused by the

²Referring or related to meaning, especially of words.

emerging sense of national identity which pervaded some of the peoples on the continent. It is this period in which the use of choirs in opera began ‘to represent *the people* as a mass [...] their voices organised, as only music could organise them, into sustained, unified, and commanding utterance that expressed their identity, independence, unity, and importance’ (Parakilas, 1992:184). Vincenzo Bellini, an opera writer, employed the simplest musical techniques for choirs singing in solidarity with soloists, like repetitions, doublings, refrains and harmonisations, in order to realise the relation between a group that stands for the individual and the individual who stands for a group. In Bellini's *Norma* (1831), the chorus of Gauls joins their priestess in the refrain of her aria “Casta Diva” to show their agreement that she speaks on their behalf in matters of war and peace. The audience identifies with the chorus and recognises the power that people can have when they decide to act. Many other composers felt the need to mirror this interaction in a musical structure, for example Georges Bizet. In *Carmen* (1875), the choir responds to the first two stanzas of the habañera³ sung by the protagonist, letting the audience understand that the people of Seville know her. The use of a folk dance with a characteristic rhythm marks a crowd's ethnic identity and, therefore, acquires a political role, particularly when included in an opera whose main topic is the liberation of a people (Parakilas, 1992). Choruses like those in *Nabucco* (1842) and *Aida*⁴ (1871) then become statements of national identities and symbols of nations fighting against oppressor, and it facilitates the process of identification by the audience with those human masses which resist subjugation.

Nevertheless, choruses are not the only mean by which composers supported riots or political views which opposed oppressors in the first decades of the 19th century. Franz Liszt, who in 1830 began spending time with contemporary writers and intellectuals, such as Lamartine, Berlioz and Lamennais, progressively developed an awareness of his social duties as a musician. The impact of the workers' riot, organised in Lyon in 1834, led him to employ the rhythmic intonation of the Marseillaise and other marching rhythms in some of his compositions, particularly in his piano cycle *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* (Zoltai, 1991).

In the 20th century, the use of choruses further developed according to the meanings and functions that composers wanted to confer on them. New structures evolved, or well-known structures were attributed new meanings. For example, Ernst Krenek's opera *Karl V* (1933) was developed in the shape of a didactic oratorio⁵ as a medium for imparting social values (Tregear, 2001). The composer

³ A habanera is a type of dance that is a synthesis of European and African elements. Its roots are to be found in the English country dance, but it was imported to America by the Spanish, and later took hold in Cuba. The exotic character of this dance attracted many composers such as Bizet when it was re-exported to Europe in the 19th century.

⁴ *Nabucco* and *Aida* are both operas composed by Giuseppe Verdi.

⁵ A oratorio is a musical setting of a sacred text which has great emphasis on the chorus. Its musical forms tend to

chose to tell Emperor Karl V's life⁶ in order to promote faith among the Austrians as a main binding agent in place of Nazi-inspired nationalism. Nevertheless, this was not the only element in the opera which was not to the Nazi sympathisers' tastes. The composer used the twelve-tone technique,⁷ thus dodecaphony, which was an artistic choice far from the Nazi favourite,⁸ and, therefore, the opera did not see its première performance in Vienna,⁹ as it had originally been planned and as it would have been obvious, being a commission of the Vienna State Opera. There are several analogies between Krenek's opera and Arnold Schönberg's *Moses und Aron* (1932). Both of them were written with the twelve-tone technique and focus on a religious theme. Moreover, the two compositions depict the same dilemma with regard to authority and the individual,¹⁰ whose dramaturgical complementarity has been realised in *Moses und Aron* by the division of the choir into two groups, one singing and one speaking (Ramazzotti, 2007). Some analogies can also be found between the two composers' lives, since they both left their country during the Nazi regime and moved to the US. Schönberg depicts Moses as a man who suffered from being a stranger in a strange land in order to reproduce how he felt when he and his family, as Jews, were forced to leave Mattsee¹¹ in 1921.

Another Austrian composer who decided to use the twelve-tone technique, and whose music was impeded by the Nazis, was Alban Berg, one of Schönberg's pupils and best friends. As a soldier in World War I, the composer was acquainted with the living conditions in the army, and his opera *Wozzeck* (1925) is an open criticism of them. Büchner's drama about *Woyzeck*¹² came from the true story of the first soldier to be absolved of a crime as a result of his mental condition. The composer identified with the main character, who was malnourished and overwhelmed by the hierarchical structure of the army. *Wozzeck*'s psychological instability culminates with the killing of Marie, his lover. The scene is accompanied by the obsessive multiplication and repetition of a tone, B, which spreads among the instruments of the orchestra. Events have been translated into music, technical details are connected to the characters or to the atmosphere of each scene. In the fourth scene, the

approximate to those of opera. It was widely used in the 17th and 18th century, but its significance as genre has continued.

⁶ Karl V had the title of "Holy Roman Emperor" and took the role of titular ruler of any Christendom accorded to him very seriously. When Protestantism progressively usurped his authority, he abdicated (Tregear, 2001).

⁷ Devised by Arnold Schönberg, this technique rejected the sounds' hierarchy in the tonal system and hence could be considered as a natural product of the influence of socialism on music.

⁸ Dodecaphony was later included in the group of music forms labelled as degenerate music, which was not acceptable by the Third Reich.

⁹ It was performed in Prague in 1938.

¹⁰ Both Moses and Karl V remain an enigma to their people because of their attempt to live their faith in its purest essence.

¹¹ An area in Austria where they owned a vacation residence near a lake.

¹² *Woyzeck* is the original title of Büchner's work. Emil Franzos's edition (1879) was published with a transcription mistake in the title, which became *Wozzeck*. Berg referred to Franzos's edition and this is why he used the wrong title. In 1909, a new edition by Paul Landau reported the original title.

doctor's obsession for experimentation on human beings becomes an *ostinato*¹³, whose twelve sounds are constantly repeated during the twenty-one variations in the *passacaglia*.¹⁴

This scientific inclination towards human experimentation seems to preview what will happen a few years later in the concentration camps. Therefore, it is not surprising that some composers felt the need to include death as a character in their operas. György Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre* (1977) illustrates the tyranny of the prince Go-go, exerted not by the prince himself¹⁵, but by his ministries, which have to deal with Nekrotzar (Tzar-Nekro), the dark character who embodies death. The libretto¹⁶ contains many elements of fragmented text that are the result of the composer's studies on voice conducted in the previous works *Aventures* and *Nouvelle Aventures* or even in *Nonsense-madrigals*, which involved a special use of phonemes.¹⁷ In Ligeti's opera, the absurdity of censorship in the Soviet Union is embodied by the character of Gepopo, who whispers, cries or obsessively repeats parts of this fragmented and sometimes abstract text. Moreover, the chief of the security can also be seen, as his name suggests, as a member of the Nazi police, the Gestapo. It has to be underlined that in Ligeti's case ethnomusicology played a fundamental role in the compositional process, as it had done for some Hungarian composers of the previous generation, such as Zoltan Kodály and Béla Bartók. They reflected the need of the Hungarian people to find a common denominator for their national identity. This led them to a new evolution in musical language, which, especially in their latter works, developed a new way to merge folk music with an educated musical language, and hence it was no longer restricted to the mere citation of melodies. Nevertheless, Ligeti chose to use his knowledge of ethnomusicology not to establish Hungarian identity against the domain of the Soviet Union, but rather to extend his techniques thanks to the influence of foreign music. This can be tracked in his three books of études for piano (Steinitz, 2003), in which his knowledge of polyrhythmic technique, developed through his contact with African cultures and his friend Simha Aron, have been largely applied (Ligeti, 2004).

Some composers experienced life and death in the concentration camps even more directly. Viktor Ullmann wrote his opera *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* (1943) when he was in the Nazi concentration camp of Terezín. In this work, death is again a fundamental character. The French composer Olivier Messiaen also wrote music¹⁸ in a concentration camp¹⁹, but, unlike his colleague Ullmann, he was

¹³ A sequence of notes that is repeated.

¹⁴ A musical form whose main feature is based on an *ostinato*, which can be more or less varied.

¹⁵ The prince is just a puppet in the hands of his ministries. He is depicted on a rocking horse.

¹⁶ A book whose contents are used as the sung and spoken text in an opera.

¹⁷ Any of the abstract units of the phonetic system of a language that correspond to a set of similar speech sounds, which are perceived to be a single distinctive sound in the language.

¹⁸ Very popular is his *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* for clarinet, violin, cello and piano. The first performance was in a

lucky enough to survive. In his works, it is possible to find a direct reflection of his deep Catholic faith, which may even have been enforced by his experience of the Nazi camps. In the last bars of his composition for organ, *Messe de la Pentecôte* (1950), he realises an ascending scale which covers a very wide range by making use of the instrument's features. Hence, the organ represents the biblical narrative of Jacob's dream of a staircase, connecting sky and earth (Messiaen, 1997). Apart from his traumatic experience and his admirable faith, Olivier Messiaen's music also originates from his great passion for ornithology, which led him to depict birds' singing in his compositions. Nevertheless, the fascination with science and the influence of scientific progress in music is not limited to Messiaen. The works of the French composer Edgard Varese reflected the structures of minerals and were influenced by the Italian movement of Futurism. Moreover, he was inspired by the noise of the factories and included it in his music (Bernard, 1987).

Luigi Nono had the same interest as Varese, whose lectures in Darmstadt²⁰ he had attended, and, as official composer of the Italian Communist Party, he translated the condition of the factory workers, both abroad and in Italy into musical elements. He recorded the workers' slogans during the strikes of the 1950s and 1960s and represented the binomial²¹ collectivity-individual through electronic music. In *floresta é jovem e cheja de vida*, performed at the 1966 Biennale in Venice, many social and political issues were mirrored in the music. The text is made up of eleven letters, interviews, diaries, talks and documents on armed struggle in Africa, Asia and South America, as well as the student riot in Berkeley, all of which were connected through the concept of struggle against capitalism and imperialism. Nono aimed to realise the acoustical essence of war, in which soldiers have to focus on hearing to distinguish spaces, noises and situations. This effect was achieved through the spatial disposition of the interpreters and the speakers. One further element was employed to symbolise the war and its noises: copper sheets. They were settled on the stage's background, and floodlit to dramatise their vibrations when they were hit by hammers and chains (Ramazzotti, 2007). Every parameter was carefully designed in order to mirror his political convictions: instrumentation, space distribution, lights and sounds. The importance of finding new forms for musical compositions has been underlined by Giacomo Manzoni²²:

concentration camp with a very old piano and a cello with only three strings.

¹⁹He was interned in the concentration camp of Terezín.

²⁰A city in Germany in which the musical tradition has been enriched since the end of World War II by the contributions of contemporary music summer courses and their close relation to avant-garde music. Some of the most brilliant composers and musicians of the second half of the 20th century have taught or have been educated there (Thomas and Schlüter, 2001)

²¹Couple, pair.

²²An Italian composer of the 20th century. Manzoni is particularly popular for his translations of writings by Schönberg, Adorno and other artists.

they were even more connected by their deep involvement in politics and class-struggle. *Tema*, *Pression* and *Air* are pieces which represent for Lachenmann an example of a break in social-aesthetic matters. He conceived of tonality and traditional *sounds* as symbols for an ignorant audience and bourgeois music making, while the composer stood for “aesthetics of resistance” whose main task was developing a new form of listening. Inaudible sounds, fragmentation, advanced techniques and interferences with familiar sound combinations embodied a provocation against the common (Hockings, 1995). I want to conclude this background with these extremely significant words by Lachenmann himself:

‘The decisive specification of compositional thinking can be extracted from the particular way of reducing the term of structure in favour of inclusion of the “aura”²⁴, because through this procedure the social reality and the existential experience of the individual appear not only as a component to hide from or to reject but as an essential component of musical information, however mirrored’ (Lachenmann cited in Hockings, 1995:12-13).

One further example of a social issue translated into musical ideas is in the work *What is the word* by György Kurtág (1991), the well-known Hungarian contemporary composer. He wrote the piece for the Hungarian singer Ildikó Monyók, who because of a car accident had been unable even to talk for a long period. This story has a connection with the woman of *Not I*, a work by Samuel Beckett, in which the main character loses her voice and finds it again only after many years (Astro, 2011). The composer decided to employ a text by Samuel Beckett, fragmenting it in short syllables so that they could be sung by the injured woman. Her voice was always supported and “coloured” by the doubling of an upright piano, one of Kurtág's favourite instruments. Therefore, the music itself is fragmented, and every time it gushes out from the silence as if to mirror the woman's situation and to give voice to those who cannot speak.

Methods and applications

When composers in the past chose a text and strove to find new technical features which could mirror its meaning in their works, there was always a new development in the history of music. This happened in the 17th century when Claudio Monteverdi introduced one of the first examples of tremolo²⁵ and pizzicato²⁶ for the strings in order to more faithfully reproduce the excitement in the

²⁴ Lachenmann uses the term 'aura' in an existential context.

²⁵ Rapid reiteration of a single note or chord.

²⁶ Technique which implies the plucking of the strings with the fingers.

scene of *Il combattimento di Tancredi and Clorinda*.²⁷ Further progress in formal structure was achieved in Italy with the first operas, and several more recent examples of development related to the use of text in Luigi Nono's music have been illustrated above. Therefore, as a composer, I position myself in the Italian music tradition in which text and music have been strictly connected. In particular, my research has combined this concept with the choice of texts involving political content. Nevertheless, since the present work focuses on the last two centuries, I willingly neglect to count the influences that music written before the 19th century has exercised on my works.

Undoubtedly, the role of the choruses in my compositions is still the same as some opera choruses in the last two centuries. They represent a mass or embody a social group, for example a constituency, so that the audience can recognise in them the power the multitude has when it is united against corrupt politicians. In a way similar to what Luigi Nono did in *A Floresta é jovem e cheja de vida* (1966), I used recorded voices in order to generate the chorus effect, in some cases using only one source and producing all the other voices from it, hence underlining the cohesion and the common purpose of the group.

Another element I adopted from Nono's artistic concepts and political point of view is the displacement of classical music events to unusual places, in order to involve an audience which otherwise would not have visited concert halls or theatres. In June 2012, I collaborated with an Albanian painter, and the result was a two-week exhibition which hosted a sound and visual installation and a live event in the free space of a closed shop inside a shopping centre in Trieste. People were enthusiastic to leave their shopping for a few minutes in order to appreciate the paintings and the music, even if they had not had any kind of musical education and had never attended a concert of classical music. This can be compared to the music events Nono used to organise in the factories and to the artistic activities he planned in order to demolish class differences.

Nevertheless, my music has also been deeply affected by non-Italian composers. György Kurtag and Helmut Lachenmann influenced the fragmentation of the material and the extreme use of the extended technique.²⁸ In the following paragraphs, I will describe how the frequent silences and singing with a closed mouth symbolise a woman's efforts to testify against mafia criminals, much like the short syllables of Beckett's text were articulated by the injured woman in an attempt to regain her voice in Kurtag's *What is the word* (1991).

²⁷ Claudio Monteverdi describes this technique in the preface to his 8th book of madrigals.

²⁸ Unconventional methods of using an instrument in order to obtain unusual sounds.

The Second Viennese School²⁹ has also played a fundamental role in my music. In particular, I deeply admired how Berg built the contrast, like the one in *Wozzeck* (1925), between the fearful state of mind of the main character, who feels threatened by everything whilst taking a stroll with a colleague, and the mood of his friend, who is so serene that he sings a song. In a similar way, I tried to provoke the audience by collocating in the same scene a couple of European tourists and the dead bodies of two immigrants. Moreover, the strategy of repeating the same sound, which Berg adopted in order to show *Wozzeck's* madness at the climax when *Wozzeck* murders Marie, has been used in one of my compositions to indicate the unavoidability of fate, a doomed destiny.

The following two paragraphs illustrate some methods employed in my music to translate the influence of political and social issues into technical elements, such as pitch, rhythm, formal structure, polyphony and the spatial distribution of sound. In particular, the compositions are grouped according to the themes they are related to; hence, immigrants and integration or political corruption and illegal organisations.

Maybe because I have lived for many years in Trieste, an Italian city on the border of Slovenia which boasts a very long history of cultural mingling and bilingualism, I developed a positive attitude to the integration of 'foreign' people into European society. I see it as enrichment. As a bridge between East and West, my city has always been witness to a huge flow of Balkan people towards Central Europe. My awareness of their integration problems stronger when I lived in the international environment of Mozarteum University in Salzburg, in which Korean, Arabic and Middle-Eastern people struggled with isolation and the uncertainty caused by the choice of a musical career. In this climate, I produced three compositions which focused on integration. In addition, my other works, *La nube e Ixion* and *Omertà I and II*, deal with problems which are typically Italian. The above-mentioned pieces are intended as an exposure of political corruption and mafia crimes, and they mostly come from reading about these issues in Roberto Saviano's books (Saviano, 2006 and 2009).³⁰

Immigrants and integration

INTEGRAZIONI is based on the topic of immigrants' integration. It has been performed in Salzburg by the ÖENM the Österreichisches Ensemble für Neue Musik, in December 2009, and its title

²⁹ This term indicates Schönberg and his Viennese students, with particular reference to Berg and Webern.

³⁰ Roberto Saviano is a young Italian journalist, writer and researcher, specializing in camorra. He constantly lives under escort since his book *Gomorra* was published, in which he describes how this illegal Mafia system works in Italy and abroad and openly quotes many names of camorra families. In 2008, Saviano was invited to talk about his life as a victim of persecution and freedom of speech at the Swedish Academy, which awards Nobel Prizes.

contains a double meaning: interaction and integration.³¹ The work is divided into three sections, each one symbolising a necessary phase of integration. First, the flood of people into a country in order to find a better life; second, the consequent interaction of different cultures; and third, the moment in which integration occurs. A great variety of timbres and the use of extended techniques (mouth articulation of consonants in the flute and harmonics in some strings and in oboe, Fig. 2) represent the presence of cultural multiplicity in the first part, while the employment of imitation in terms of musical figures symbolises the travel towards a common place.

Fig. 2: INTEGRAZIONI bars 9-14. In the line of the flute (Fl.), the indicated consonants 'f' and 'k' have to be pronounced in the instrument by the player. The oboe's line (Ob.) and the first violin's line (vln.I) show notes with diamond-shaped heads, which indicate that the sounds to be produced are specific harmonics.

Instruments sometimes play singularly as if they were human beings who lived similar experiences, which they tell to one another, sometimes loudly, as in the case of the oboe, flute and cello (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3: INTEGRAZIONI bars 50-53. The indications *mf* and *mp* mean *mezzoforte* and *mezzopiano*, which, compared to the *p* and *pp* (*piano* and *pianissimo*) in the previous bars, are loud dynamics³².

The central section appears like a magma of interactions, where groups of instruments articulate their own rhythm (Fig. 4) in a narrow range. Each person-instrument represents an identity, which takes the shape of a rhythm, slowly showing itself more and more clearly. The way that different cultures are forced together and progressively draw closer is mirrored in the narrowing of the range.

Fig. 4: INTEGRAZIONI bar 76. The numbers 3, 5, 6, 7 and 9 on some groups of notes indicate the

The image shows a musical score for bar 76 of the piece 'INTEGRAZIONI'. It consists of nine staves, each representing a different instrument: Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Bsn.), Horn (Hn.), Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The Flute part has two groups of notes marked with a '9' and a dynamic marking of 'mf'. The Oboe part has a single note marked with 'mf'. The Clarinet part has a single note marked with 'mp'. The Bassoon part has a single note marked with 'mf'. The Horn part has a single note marked with 'mp'. The Violin I part has three groups of notes, each marked with a '5'. The Violin II part has a single group of notes marked with a '7'. The Viola part has two groups of notes, one marked with a '6' and the other with a '3'. The Violoncello part has a single group of notes marked with a '3'. The score is written in a standard musical notation with treble and bass clefs, and various accidentals.

amount of notes which have to be played in a time unit or in half a unit. Therefore, it is clear that in this bar, the instruments are playing different rhythms from each other. The range is narrow because there are no extremely high or low notes.

In the last part, the integration process is represented by the resonance of notes played by one instrument through the other instruments in unison, using octaves or overtones³³ of these sounds.

³²Volume indications.

³³When an instrument plays a note, the sound produced is never made by one single component. The sounds that added

One example of such a process can be observed in Fig. 5, which shows bars 108-109 of the composition. The second violin plays a descending glissando from G sharp to A, while the flute plays the fifth harmonic one octave lower. The clarinet doubles and prolongs the A of the violin as a sort of resonance. At the very beginning of bar 109, the first violin is still holding a B when the second violin reaches A. Consequently, this sound acquires the function of the ninth harmonic (played one octave lower) of the sound produced by the second violin. After a short pause, it moves to another harmonic of A, which is played two octaves lower. In bar 109, the bassoon also develops a resonance of A, in this case by producing the fifth harmonic transposed five octaves lower. Sounds slide into one another, or into one another's resonances, in order to reinforce them, much as integration helps improve the conditions of immigrants' lives and injects new cultural traditions into the host country.

Fig. 5: INTEGRAZIONI bars 108-109. The second violin (vln.II) plays an A, while the other instruments reinforce it with harmonics.

to the fundamental note create the timbre characteristics of this note are called overtones.

Selbstbeglaubigung is another piece which I wrote on the issue of immigration. It is for a singer, actress, dancer and ensemble, and I worked on its staging with the German director Thierry Bruehl. When I showed him the text I had chosen, about an African woman coming to Europe across the Mediterranean Sea, he told me about a picture that had struck him several years before. It consisted of some tourists sunbathing on the beach, while the bodies of two dead immigrants were floating close by in the sea. Therefore, I decided to build the formal structure of the piece according to the contrast between the banal actions of the tourists, swimming or playing ball, and the painful memories of the immigrant's journey to Europe, particularly the death of her husband and son. Nevertheless, the African woman's story is not told by the immigrant herself, but by one of the two tourists, as if they were remembering it from an article read in a newspaper. She tells it to her friend without realizing the dramatic nature of the event. Narration is assigned to the actress, while her friend, the singer, comments on her words using music to underline the atrocity of the facts. When tension reaches too high a level, a banal gesture, such as taking pictures or covering one another's bodies with sunscreen, interrupts the narration. This procedure is mirrored in the music with great contrasts, mostly in terms of dynamics, and this has been conceived in order to reflect how the Europeans, although listening to the news about immigrants or reading about them, are able to ignore these tragic deaths.

*Marija all'alba*³⁴, for flute and soprano, focuses on the story of a Serbian woman who leaves her country after the Balkan War in the 1990s. After some years spent as an immigrant in a country of the European Union, she is forced to go back to Serbia because she has lost her job and her visa is expiring. She has two young daughters, one from a previous marriage and one from a recent relationship that has since not long ago come to an end. The piece depicts Marija, after a night of poor sleep, who is nervous and confused, as if continuing her previously interrupted monologue.

Marija all'alba was submitted to the Taschenoper Composition Competition in 2009, and this subsequently led to the commission of the chamber opera *Versteinerte Flüge*, which will be briefly analysed in this paper and was performed during the Taschenoperfestival 2011 at ARGEkultur Theatre in Salzburg between July and August 2011. Narration is realised by the dialogue between the flute and the voice, which occurs in two different layers: the musical layer and the layer of theatrical action. At the beginning of the piece, Marija is seated at a dresser, head leaning on her

³⁴ Marija at dawn.

crossed arms.³⁵ In place of the mirror stands the flute, which embodies both her consciousness and the noise that starts to come from outside as the city comes to life. The state of mind of the woman is clearly expressed by a quick rhythmical whisper (Fig. 6, bars 2-4). Marija starts to wake up and her words flow quite unintelligibly while her face is still hidden. Shortly after she raises her face, the flute produces a particular trill³⁶ (bar 13 in Fig. 7), which the woman confuses with the phone ringing. The call could convey bad news from the lawyer, or it could be her partner regretting the split-up, or she could have confused the sound with one of her daughters' weeping. In the first two cases, the instrument builds the relation between the isolated room (the immigrants' world) and the scene outside (life of European people).

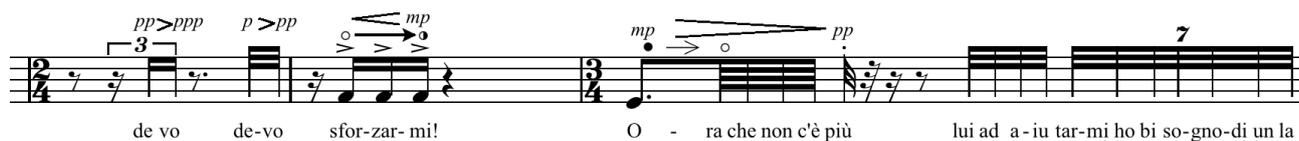


Fig. 6: Marija all'alba – bars 2-4. The more horizontal lines that a note has, the quicker it has to be played. Therefore, it is clear that in bar 4 the text is uttered quite quickly.



Fig. 7: Marija all'alba – bars 13-14. The trill is indicated by the letters 'tr' followed by a wavy line.

Marija is the imaginary projection of the numerous women who have immigrated to Europe, hoping to find better living conditions. The woman spent some pleasant years in the new country, believing she could integrate and be accepted, but, when she loses her job and her partner leaves her, she feels like a stranger again, and she is afraid for her and her daughters' future.

Political corruption and illegal organisations

Ixion is a character in Greek mythology who represents the first man to commit a treacherous crime against civil society by killing his father-in-law. Though forgiven by the gods, Ixion acts with

³⁵ This position has been carefully described in the score.

³⁶ This trill does not sound like a traditional one, since it is produced by alternating the D keys while playing a glissando between two different pitches. The result is a very fluid mixture of discontinuous sounds, due to the double mechanic movement of the glissando and of the trill.

violence against Nature, as embodied by Nephele, a cloud made by Zeus³⁷ himself in the shape of a woman (Graves, 1960). I fragmented a text³⁸ by Cesare Pavese in order to build a parallel between Ixion and Italian politicians who are more interested in obtaining power than in fixing their country's problems. The result was a piece for four female voices and one speaker called *La nube e Issione*.³⁹ At the beginning of the piece, Ixion is in the middle of the stage surrounded by the female voices. He speaks with arrogance and expresses little regret, while Nephele tries to make him realise how serious the consequences are. The cloud, made up of several tiny drops, is represented in music by punctual material (Fig. 8), and the rhythmical organisation originates from the multiple essences of Nephele herself. The musical objects are rarefied and they are rarely simultaneous. The metaphor is crowned by the stage action. The female voices, settled in different points of the stage, stand for the multiplicity of the constituency. They slowly move towards the middle of the stage, and when they take full possession of it, Ixion feels menaced and leaves the stage, reaching the farthest point of the hall. The theatrical action symbolises how a united people can fight against an ineffective government.

The musical score for bars 29-30 of 'La nube e Issione' is presented for five parts: Soprano 1 (S.), Soprano 2 (S.), Soprano 3 (S.), Alto (A.), and Bass (B.). The notation is sparse, consisting of individual notes and rests rather than continuous lines. The Soprano 1 part has lyrics 'u-n-a' under the notes. Dynamic markings include 'f dim. molto' and 'p'. The Bass part is mostly silent, indicated by a long horizontal line.

Fig. 8: *La nube e Issione* – bars 29-30. It is clear from the score that the singers only occasionally utter a sound at the same time. They are very rarely vertically aligned.

³⁷ When Zeus learnt that Ixion was interested in Hera, he forged a cloud in the shape of her so that Ixion would not couple with the goddess (Graves, 1960).

³⁸ *La nube e Issione* (the cloud and Ixion) from *I dialoghi di Leucò*.

³⁹ *La nube e Issione* was performed by “Vocal Arts” Stuttgart Ensemble in 2009 in Salzburg Biennale.

The pitch organisation mirrors the idea that Ixion's fate is settled. At the beginning, the female choir uses a wide range (see Fig. 9). This interval progressively narrows, and at bars 110-111 (Fig. 10) it has been reduced to less than a half. At the end, the four female voices sing in unison on B (Fig. 11) the words “la tua sorte è segnata” (your destiny is settled). Ixion's arrogance fades into bewilderment when he realises he cannot avoid his destiny. The regime has at last come to an end.

Fig. 9: La nube e Issione – bar 40. The notes in the alt's line (A) are far from those in the first soprano's line (first line).

Fig. 10: La nube e Issione – bars 110-114. The distance among the notes sung by the voices is significantly reduced.

Fig. 11: La nube e Issione – bars 157-161. In the last three bars of the figure, all the voices sing the same note (B) or a note just slightly higher or lower than it (arrow upwards or downwards).

Omertà I (for voice and live electronics)⁴⁰, a homage to Roberto Saviano, is entirely built on the word “omertà”, used in Italian when a witness to a crime decides not to testify. A mafia penitent's efforts to collaborate with justice are symbolised by the singer's alternation, in the first part, of the vowel “o” and the consonant “m” (open and closed mouth). The structure of the piece is a canon: the singer is the first voice, while the others, produced by electronics, follow symbolising a collective reaction to the first's bravery. During the second part, where the letters “e” and “r” are employed, the canon reaches thirty-five voices, transposed by a patch of Pure Data⁴¹ (Fig. 13). Afterwards, previously recorded piano harmonics appear in the piece as an alien element, which embodies the illegal system. This sound has been recorded and processed in two different versions, which move through the four speakers at different speeds and in different directions. Towards the end of the piece, the word “omertà” is at last entirely sung (Fig. 12), loudly, as a statement of courage, while the electronic canon is modified by ring modulation⁴² through the signal of the piano. The audience is involved, through the four speakers around them, in a fight between reaction and illegality whose sound fades slowly out.

Fig. 12: Omertà I – bars 49-54

⁴⁰ The piece was premièred in May 2010 at Mozateum University and performed again in Salzburg in January 2011. In both cases, Wiebke Wieghard was the singer and I managed the live electronics.

⁴¹ Pure Data is a real-time graphical programming environment. A patch is an abstract object which processes sound.

⁴² A signal-processing effect in electronics.

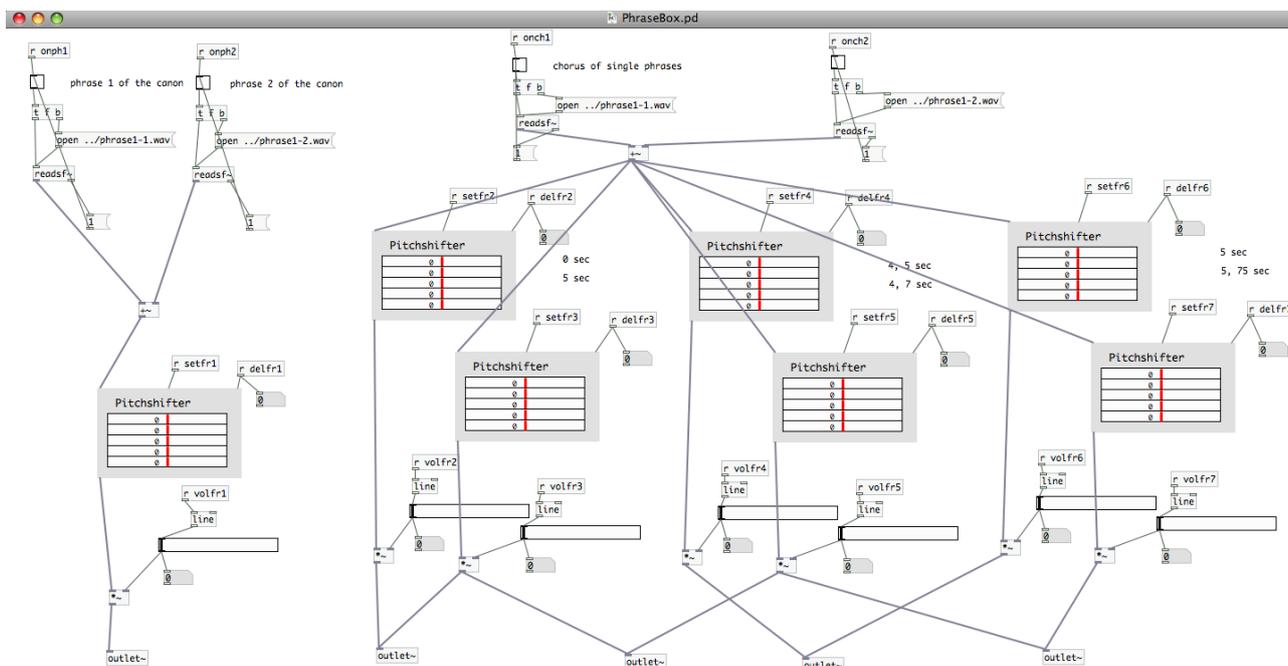


Fig. 13: Omertà I – one of Pure Data patches created for the live electronics

Omertà II was written for a workshop with the ensemble *El Perro Andaluz*. The piece has been conceived as a sort of re-orchestration of the previous version for voice and electronics. I analysed the spectrum⁴³ of the voice⁴⁴, which had been recorded during one of the performances of *Omertà I*, and re-synthesised its components with the ensemble. I never meant to synthesise an intelligible reproduction of the voice, but it was interesting to orchestrate the singing without simply playing the melodic line, while still maintaining many of the other features of the sung line⁴⁵. The struggle between “talking and not talking”, reflected in the alternation between open and closed mouth singing or between half-air, half-full sounds and full sounds sung in the first version, is translated in the second piece according to the technical features of each instrument, into air or full sounds and, when possible, into the intermediate stages. Woodwinds realise comfortable and smooth transitions between air⁴⁶ and full sounds, while the accordion can produce air sounds by moving the bellow without pushing any of the buttons.⁴⁷ Strings can carefully play on the bridge in order to produce a

⁴³The spectrum is one of several representations of a signal (in this case we consider sounds, thus audio signals) and it shows amplitude plotted versus frequency.

⁴⁴This has been done using AudioSculpt, a software for viewing, analysis and processing of sounds.

⁴⁵If the melodic line had been traditionally orchestrated, all the information from the text would have been lost. By taking into account the voice's spectrum, it is possible to maintain the complex pitch structure of a consonant or the different filterings, which affect the same sounds even if different vowels are used.

⁴⁶Nevertheless, a distinction has to be made in the family of woodwinds and in particular for those included in the orchestration of the piece. When a flute plays an air-sound, it is indeed always possible to identify a pitch, while for a clarinet this does not happen.

⁴⁷Two kinds of air-sounds have been employed for the accordion. One is produced when pushing the bellow and the other, which is louder, by pulling it.

sort of breathy unpitched sound, and they can slowly move the bow along the string to mute or amplify harmonics on a determined pitch, acting as a filter on its spectrum. Therefore, in the second version, this gesture, which acts as a metaphor, appears to be amplified by the possibilities of the ensemble. An example of a bar in which air-sounds are played is the following:

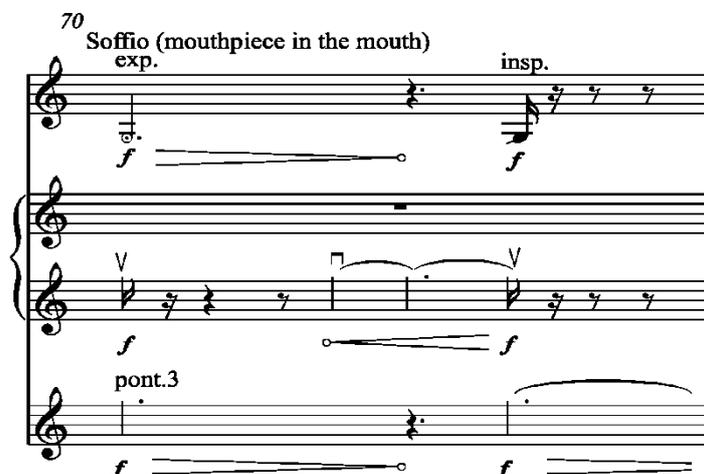


Fig. 14: *Omertá II* – bar 70. The notes without heads in the third and fourth line indicate air-sounds for the accordion and the violin, respectively, while 'exp' and 'insp' indicate air-sounds produced by the flutist by exhaling or inhaling in or out of the instrument when the mouthpiece is in the mouth.

Furthermore, the new structure developed the original canonic form in order to more strictly connect the social issue of mafia penitent to the piece. The former structure has been modified through the insertion of some elements of the *concerto grosso*⁴⁸ and the theory of “windows” exposed by Salvatore Sciarrino (Sciarrino, 1998). The Italian composer claims that nowadays human beings are able to generate space-time windows through the use of TV, cameras, computers and other devices. This procedure can of course be employed in music as well. The ensemble includes nine instruments, which in the piece have been divided into three groups. In the first part, the group with the flute, accordion and violin, constitutes what in the *concerto grosso* is the *concertino*, and it starts a dialogue in alternation with the other instruments. During the second part, when the modified canon begins between the first two groups of instruments, the third group, which includes the piano, viola and cello, opens brief windows through the use of the material in the first part in a varied version. Consequently, the introduction appears to be a depiction of the crime characterised by the spectrum of the syllable “om”, which contains the inability of the penitent to talk about it,⁴⁹ while the second part, based on the spectrum of the syllables 'er' and 'tà', represents

⁴⁸ A Baroque musical form, in which three instruments form the *concertino* and dialogue with the other instruments.

⁴⁹ In the first version of the piece, the singer alternated 'o' with open mouth with 'm' with closed mouth, which symbolised the difficulty of the repentant to talk.

the penitent's testimony, during which his mind returns to the events he witnessed, opening short windows into the past.

Conclusion and further research

A relationship between musical parameters and political issues has been established in the works of selected composers, with a special focus on pieces which involve the use of text, and it has been shown how similar processes were successfully employed in my compositions. In particular, I illustrated how elements such as choruses, stage action, rhythm, pitch, resonances, spectral analysis and performance spaces can be used in order to mirror the political content of a text, and whether these elements had been previously employed with the same purpose by other composers.

My future research will try to establish a deeper relation with ethnomusicology, since it will apply some of the methods I have used in my previous pieces to folklore songs and traditional instruments. The importance of quotation being more or less apparent in auditory elements which identify a culture or a people has been underlined in the case of Liszt and the *Marsilliese*. Therefore, the spectral analysis will not be limited to text, but will include the sounds of traditional instruments and songs, whose timbre and playing techniques will suggest new solutions for pitch organisation and performance. I will have an opportunity to apply these ideas in a project I am organising related to immigrants' illegal work in fields in southern Italy and the study of the agreements among the European countries on immigrants' asylum requests. It will include a previous session of interviews with immigrants in Puglia, a second processing session for the audio and video material and one last session in the form of a conference concert.

Some years ago, when I first read about immigrants' travels through the desert towards Libya (as they hoped to reach the coast and from there find a ship to Italy), I was struck to find out how many of them died during the journey or were beaten or robbed by the Libyan military. Not to mention how many died at sea because of thirst or drowning. Among those who arrived, many were almost immediately sent back to their countries by the Italian border police. Indignation grows further when one finds out that Italy and other European countries have an agreement with Libya in order to fight illegal immigration, and that this agreement supports the denial of help to those who get stuck in the desert and the violence done to illegal foreigners found in Libya (Gatti, 2008). Many of those who reach Italy are treated like slaves by mafia organizations and work in the fields in conditions that fail to meet the standards of basic human rights. In 2010, the killing of some immigrants by the mafia caused a riot in Rosarno, and eventually people started to become aware of this situation (Saviano, 2010). The conference concert will be organised in order to sharpen this

awareness and to reach those who have not yet realised the seriousness of immigrants' conditions. The material of the performance will be collected during the meetings with immigrants who live in Puglia. Interviews will be filmed and recorded and their voices will be electronically processed and mixed, as in Nono's *La Fabbrica Illuminata* (1964) the voices of the factory workers were included. Again following the Italian composer's example, new performance spaces will be explored. The event could be held in a masseria⁵⁰ in Puglia or at the Memory and Welcome Museum in Nardò. Moreover, the original language version of their stories will be placed side by side with the translated version. Some crucial words will be analysed with Audiosculpt⁵¹ and the resulting spectrum will constitute the basis for the pitch organisation of the instrumental part, which will act as a resonance to these key-words.

The experimental part of my research could also include the analysis of the spectral content of sounds produced by traditional African instruments. This would lead to the composition of a piece in which non-European traditions find a natural integration into European contemporary music, through the employment of the text and the theatrical context and through the direct translation of the spectrum of folk instruments into pitch organisation or sound transformation. The spectral analysis of a sound has already been used to build the pitch organisation in a piece by several composers⁵² and it can be seen as an extension of the traditional spectral music.⁵³ Nevertheless, in this context the choice of the sound, which would be a traditional instrument or a word in one of the African languages, would assign this technique a particular meaning. It is very likely that the performance will include one or more texts by African authors, which could be played or sung by singers on the stage. Consequently, it would be possible to create a dialogue between the electronic part and the live part, using the possibilities offered by the theatre in order to generate two-time or space layers. The conference preceding the concert will be held to inform the audience about immigrants' conditions in south Italy in relation to mafia organisation, and to introduce how politics can change this situation and to impede illegal organisations.

Music entails an audience. Consequently, composers have always had the opportunity to mirror their political thoughts in their works, sometimes just as a personal aesthetic, sometimes with the aim of influencing the audience. Thanks to new technologies, in the last few decades it has become

⁵⁰ Many of those farms in the south of Italy are really valuable artistic building but are falling into pieces because they are more or less abandoned. Besides their artistic value, an event organised there would be enriched by symbolic value, since those buildings were usually owned by landowners who supported latifundium.

⁵¹ See note 43.

⁵² The Spanish composer José Manuel López-López recently used it to build an ensemble piece based on the spectral analysis of one of the oboe's multiphonics. In the past, composers such as Gerard Grisey, Tristan Murail, Kaija Saariaho and many others have also employed this technique.

⁵³ Music composed in Europe in the 1970s, which based its compositional material on sound spectra.

much easier for the musicians who felt this urge to find the musical means and collect the historical references necessary for a deep understanding of politics and the inclusion of it in their compositions. Music archives⁵⁴ are being scientifically organised and historical databases⁵⁵ are enriched with videos and audio files, and they are easily accessible from home. Moreover, the new ways people listen to music – not only in concert halls, theatres, arenas or at home, but while walking, working or studying – offers an opportunity for political communication, which can occur on a massive daily scale and reach all kinds of people, particularly young people.

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⁵⁴ Music research centres such as IRCAM in Paris have structured their archives so that the material is carefully catalogued and easily retrievable.

⁵⁵ I personally contributed to some videos which have been added to the archive at the historical institute Saranz in Trieste.

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