

Dramaturgy of sound, mobile sound and digital garden as grounding concepts of multimedia works

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Abstract

This project is focused on the analysis of some aspects of the last compositions of Luigi Nono to detect the elements that can contribute to the dissolution of the idea of ‘concert’ towards a new concept of multimedia work.

The multimedia installations more and more present as an art form of our time are a meeting point for the dissolution of the idea of ‘concert’ in music domain and at the same time of a definite idea of ‘built space’ in architecture.

We will try here to show what are the characters of Nono’s ‘dramaturgy of sound’ which can form the premise of the next philosophy of multi-media installations by analysing some aspects of his last works.

In architecture domain as well we can find analogous ideas, for example the ‘aesthetic of atmosphere’ that we can connect to ‘dramaturgy of sound’ grounding a new conception of musical and visual event.

Background

“Listen to music. Not in a single chance to listen. But with different probabilities of transformations in real time”.¹ These are the words of Luigi Nono that in 1984 described his concept of ‘dramaturgy of sound’ preparing in Venice the first performance of *Prometeo*, a work in which the music is an open structure able to create a new way of sound perception defined by his author a ‘tragedy of listening’. *Prometeo* and all the latest works of Luigi Nono are an expression of this idea, made possible by the new technologies of live electronics. At the same time the ‘dramaturgy of sound’ implies a new idea of listening music, and a change of the concept of performance. Even the performance space may not be only the traditional concert hall: “The concert hall is an horrible space. Because it doesn’t offer more ‘possibilities’ of listen but only a single possibility of listen”.²

Then, ‘dramaturgy of sound’ is not only a new idea of sound, but also an experience of overcoming the ‘concerto’ as a way of listening music and appears today a premise of the

¹ Luigi Nono, “Verso *Prometeo*”, in *La nostalgia del futuro : scritti scelti 1948-1986*, Angela Ida De Benedictis, Veniero Rizzardi (eds), Milano, Saggiatore, 2007, p. 143.

² Luigi Nono, Massimo Cacciari, “L’itinerario di *Prometeo*”, in *Program notes for Prometeo*, Milano, Teatro alla Scala, 1985.

multimedia installations. The main technique used from Luigi Nono in his works as *Prometeo* composed in the 80's, was live electronics.

Today, with the subsequent progress of digital techniques we can discover in the complex events like multimedia works, an evolution of the concepts of 'dramaturgy of sound' and of 'mobile sound' applied from Luigi Nono in his last works.

Contributions and implications of the project

Analysing some aspects of the last compositions of Luigi Nono we can find the elements that can contribute to the dissolution of the idea of 'concert' towards a new concept of musical performance. What's "dramaturgy of sound"? We try to explain this concept by analyzing the sound spatialisation in the Nono's work *La lontananza nostalgica utopica futura* for violin and tape and by relating it to the interaction between performer and listener requested from the composer. Finally, we will connect the idea of 'mobile sound' expressed by Luigi Nono in musical domain to some concepts born in architecture. The idea of 'third landscape' of Gilles Clément and the 'aesthetic of atmosphere' founded from the philosopher Gernot Boehme are basis concepts of multimedia installation.

La lontananza nostalgica utopica futura for violin and tape is one of the last works of Nono performed for the first time in Berlin in 1989, just 25 years ago. Together with the opera *Prometeo* and the others Nono's work of the 80's it is an important step toward a new conception of musical event. In this work we have two kinds of sound events: live sound and recorded sound. The 'live sound' is 'played' from the violinist walking from a stand to the other in the performance space. The 'walk' is an essential element of the composition. The recorded sound is divided and distributed on eight tracks of a tape. It can be organised and reproduced in different ways depending from the choice of the sound direction. A possible schema of the sound spatialisation in the performance is showed at the beginning of the printed score³ where we can see a possible way of distribution of loudspeakers in the performing space; but this proposal is only a suggestion and can/must be changed in each performance in function of the characters of the location. Even the position of stands between which moves the violinist can change in each performance. Also the sound projection and the live playing are realised in a continuous interaction between the performers and the sound direction, who decide each time a new possibility of performance.

What happens in this work is a progressive shift of the composer's conception towards a music where the formal and the rhythmic elements, are embodied in a new idea of the sound. Sound is free to move and to take shape in function of different elements as the characteristic of the performance space and the behavior of performers and listeners, just as happens today in the multimedia performances. The words of the composer itself in respect to her last compositions are indicatives: the sounds of the composition are as 'voices of caminantes and caminantes don't have a marked way.

In the opera *Prometeo*, a 'tragedy of listening' we can find a similar conception of the sound. The work consists in a non-linear path realised with a succession of episodes called 'islands'. The sung text is fragmentary to indicate a every changing situation. The 'live electronics' applied on the voices and on the instruments contribute to create the 'mobile sound'

³ Luigi Nono, *La lontananza nostalgica utopica futura, madrigal per più 'caminantes' con Gidon Kremer per violino solo 8 nastri magnetici*, da 9 a 10 leggii, Eicordi, Milano 1988.

representing the idea of a constantly changing sound. This idea of ‘mobile sound’ creates a new way of vocal and instrumental writing. In fact the sounds requested to the performers are even in a particular texture : dynamics in the extreme *piano* and *pianissimo*, sound effects like harmonic sound and so on.

Compositions as *La lontananza nostalgica utopica futura*, and *Prometeo* implied also an important consideration of the space in performance and listening. In *La lontananza*, we have the walk of the violinist that represents the never predetermined ‘caminos’. In *Prometeo*, we have the different ‘islands’ representing the fragmentary way of the recounted events. The *Prometeo*’s structure of the performance, implied a specially designed performance space built from the Italian architect Renzo Piano, and representing a wood ship in which stay the performers and the listeners. This space is suitable for a new way of listening highlighted by the title itself, a ‘tragedy of listening’.

A changing space of performance, an idea of ‘mobile sound’ and of sound moving as protagonist of the work are the characters of the Nono’s conception of musical work that we can consider a premise of the new idea of ‘multimedia’. A concept similar to that of ‘mobile sound’ and of ‘dramaturgy of sound’ is the ‘planetary garden’ expressed by the French architect Gilles Clement, starting from 1985 and contained in his main work *Manifesto of the third landscape* published in 2004.

As well as the gardener observes the musician listen. The musician is a listener of sound before than a composer of musical forms. The gardener is an observer of the landscape before to be an organiser of the garden’s space. In the following table are showed the relations between the idea of ‘digital garden’ and of ‘mobile sound’:

Sound is always changing.	Garden is always changing and naturally growing.
Sound is the main element of musical event, more important than rhythm and formal structure and is itself the composition. The ‘sound’ comes before the ‘composition’.	The ‘uncultivate’ is the most interesting garden. ‘Uncultivate’ comes before the garden.
Space in evolution is an element of planetary garden.	Sound in movement in the performance space is the concept of dramaturgy of sound.

The idea of the ‘digital garden’ is strictly related to the conception of ‘aesthetic of atmosphere’, expressed in the architecture domain. The founder of it, the German philosopher Gernot Boehme, states:

Atmosphere are experienced as an emotional effect. For this reason the art of producing them- above all in music-but also throughout the entire spectrum of aesthetic work, from the stage set to the orchestration of mass demonstrations, is at all times also an exercise of power.⁴

Following these concepts, we don’t have to create preordinated spaces or definite artistic expressions. We must catch the atmosphere of the place and the essence of the sound.

A new direction of architecture is to overcoming the idea of ‘built’ in it and a consideration of atmosphere as a new aesthetic of the city. We must leave the atmosphere working around us

⁴ Gernot Boehme, “Urban atmospheres: charting new directions for architecture and urban planning”, in *Architectural atmospheres: On the Experience and Politics of Architecture*, Christian Borch (ed.), Basel, Birkhäuser Verlag, 2014, p. 46.

in a natural way. A new idea of ‘naturally’ is involved in the contemporary context of the city. But we must consider that:

We are surrounded by another nature formed by fragments of deserted landscapes, natural parks, agricultural expanse, pollute grounds, extensive and magma cities, transport infrastructures... a mosaic of different natures, some kept in their original status, other irreversibly contaminated and altered [...].⁵

All these ideas are at the basis of an art form defined as ‘audio-visual installation’ in which form, vision and sound are changing in function of spectators and in which an important element is interaction. The actual development of the ‘dramaturgy of sound’ and of the ‘planetary garden’.

As well as music, the architecture is therefore oriented, no longer to define predefined shapes but to a ‘process’ that interacts with these various ‘natural’. Applications of all these considerations are applied for example to an experience of one of my compositions, *A changing landscape*, an audio visual installation in which the listener walking inside the performance space could change his perception of the sound and of the images projected on a wall.

A lot of interesting examples of installations developing the idea of the ‘aesthetic of atmosphere’ are present in different domains: music, architecture, visual arts. The Spanish architect Pablo Padilla Jagsdorf for example, applied a conception of changing landscape in different projects: the audio-video installation called *Resonance of things to come* or the realisation of the Jardín de San Francisco en Madrid. Another interesting example can be the sound sculpture of the Italian composer Pietro Pirelli, *Idrofoni*.

Conclusions

We can conclude this project by summarizing the previous observations: the concepts of ‘dramaturgy of sound’ and of ‘mobile sound’ that we can find in the works *Prometeo*, *La lontananza nostalgica utópica futura*, and in all the last work of Luigi Nono are the premises grounding the future idea of ‘multimedia’ work. The main characters of these works are:

- 1- the sound is always changing in function of interaction between listener and performer;
- 2- the sound is the main element of the composition more important than the rhythmic structure or the thematic conduction;
- 3- spatialisation and consequently the space dimension is another important key element;
- 4- space is a key element of architecture too.

We can find similarities between Nono’s conception of musical work and the idea of the ‘digital garden’ or the ‘aesthetics of the atmosphere’ expressed in the same years in the architectural domain.

All these ideas are contributions to the actual form of multimedia works containing interaction and changes during the performance and where each new performance is different from another. In the 80s all these characters of a work could be realised using live electronic techniques in music. Now the ‘multimedia’ makes possible a new kind of interaction present in the audio-visual installations.

⁵ Cristina Diaz Moreno, Efrén García Grinda, *Breathable*, Madrid (Spain), Universidad Europea de Madrid, ESAIA (Escuela Superior de Arte y Arquitectura), 2009, p. 23.

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