Luigi Nono

and the Metaphysics of the Avant-Garde

by

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PREFACE

Luigi Nono (1924-1990) was an Italian composer and a leading figure in the post-war European avant-garde. My dissertation *Luigi Nono and the Metaphysics of the Avant-Garde* contributes to the body of thought surrounding the music of Nono by shifting the conversation from the technical, social, political, and aesthetic intentions, which are emphasized by existing scholarship, to the ontological characteristics and implications of his work. Although many studies that theorize Nono's distinguished status as a stylistic demarcation within the category of avant-garde music point successfully toward Nono as a figure differentiated from his musical milieu, they do not explore the groundwork to talk about Nono's *otherness* in an *otherly* way or, to put it differently, they miss the question "*what is avant-garde in Nono's avant-gardeness*?" Instead, the intertwinement between avant-garde music composition and Nono's political activism or the narrow conception of the avant-garde as the revolution that engages with the most advanced techniques and technologies make manifest an uncritical use of the concept 'avant-garde,' which, in turn, makes manifest a silent refusal to rethink its conditions of intelligibility. The question about Nono's avant-garde raises the question of the avant-garde itself: What is avant-garde? Why is it *avant-*? And, what is the avant-garde *avant-* of?

The first problem that arises pertains to the discrepancy between the use of the term 'avant-garde' in music and in literary and visual arts. In the latter, while there is a long debate regarding which historical movements belong to the tradition of the avant-garde, commonly accepted ground is that the archetype of the avant-garde is French and German Dadaism, Futurism, and early Surrealism. From this perspective, the avant-garde is historically contingent. In music, however, the picture is slightly different. Although there are examples of Dadaist and Futurist music, these

works did not have stylistic, formal, and ideological characteristics that point to a broader 'school'

or movement nor did they have the same impact on the development of materials and forms in the

music works of the following generations that the movements of Dadaism, Futurism, and early

Surrealism had, respectively, in literary and visual arts.[1]

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[1] Eric Satie and *Les Six* are usually linked to Dadaism. However, they did not identify themselves as avant-garde; rather, they collaborated closely with other artists in Dadaist projects. Some of the most famous Dadaist artists who were influential in other artistic fields (for instance Duchamps, Schwitters, Ball, and Tzara) did also produce music or music events. With respect to Surrealism, there are no historical examples of surrealist music. Although Adorno gives a definition of surrealist music as that which *"juxtaposes its historically devalued fragments in a montage-like manner which enables them to yield up new meanings with a new aesthetic unity,"* I think that this tendency does not come with specific stylistic, formal, or ideological characteristics. With respect to Futurism, Russolo is the representative artist of the movement in music. He was a painter and composer. He published a Futurist Manifesto with the title *The Art of Noises* in 1913, and suggested that traditional orchestral instruments be replaced by noise-generating devices. That being said, I do not aim to undermine the artistic, aesthetic, and ideological integrity of these artists but, rather, to say that the post-war generation of European composers founded their work not upon Dadaism and Futurism but, rather, on the tradition of the Second Viennese School. To put it differently, I do not claim that the tradition of Dadaism and Futurism was deemed unimportant but, rather, that the young composers of the 1950s understood themselves historically as the carriers and inheritors of the tradition that stems from the Second Viennese School, including also composers like Messiaen, Varèse, and Krenek, among others. Although this is a bold historical simplification, it can explain the confusion that lies in the use of the term 'avant-garde,' which applies either to the music of Schoenberg, Webern, Berg, and their students or to the composers associated with the Darmstadt New Music Courses –i.e. Boulez, Stockhausen, Maderna, Nono, and Goeyvaerts. On the one hand, the musical avant-gardes are usually linked to the radicalization of musical materials and forms. Therefore, they seem to reject the political activism of the avant-garde movements in literary and visual arts and their demand for radical change in the praxis of life. On the other hand, the work of the post-war generation of European composers is often linked to the term *Neue Musik* and, thus, to the idea that the music of the future should be adequate for a new society. Therefore, they seem, at the same time, to inherit the ideological project of the historical avant-garde for radical change in life. Very often, the term 'avant-garde' is also associated with the composers of the American tradition of experimentalism (Partch, Cowell, Ives, Cage, Feldman, Wolff) or also with composers such as Kagel, Berio, Xenakis, Varèse, Ligeti, and Lachenmann, whose work does not necessarily belong to a broader movement or school but is rather unique and revolutionary. The lack of a systematic way to recognize and categorize the musical avant-gardes and to match the technical/formal aspects of the music works with a particular ideological background renders the project of determining what is avant-garde and what is not, not only uninteresting, but also unfeasible.

The problem with the term 'avant-garde' becomes even more acute, for the lack of historical specificity raises the assumption that the musical avant-gardes resist "*two opposing categories: the first is 'classical music,' a category that emerged in the 19th century and was institutionalized above all in the public concert; the second is 'popular music,' distinguished by its untroubled acceptance of the commodity status of art.*"[2] This bold homogenization strips the avant-garde completely of its historical, cultural, and ideological specificity, and renders the term 'musical avant-garde' empty and meaningless: it is so broad and varied that it can be applied anachronistically to composers from different eras (i.e. Beethoven was the avant-garde composer of his time) or to different genres (i.e. avant-garde jazz). The term turns out to be another way to say revolutionary or progressive, but without any clear distinction about the kinds of progress or revolution it pertains to, without any formal, technical, cultural, or ideological commitments, and without any criterion that could determine whether the ideals of progress and revolution are essential and not merely vague epiphenomena.

My dissertation aims to restore the integrity of the avant-garde, to challenge its status in the present, and to defend a revival of the concept and praxis of the avant-garde in music composition. The avant-garde is one of these concepts that come with heavy historical baggage and without a coherent meaning, for the concept itself is internally conflicted and contradictory. I cannot simply use it without, each time, rehearsing those contradictions and addressing those inconsistencies and dilemmas. Furthermore, the concept derives from the visual and literary arts, and it is applied freely and inconsistently by critics, musicologists, historians, and even the artists themselves in music. The theories of the avant-garde focus primarily on poetry, painting, sculpture, film,

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[2] Samson, Jim. Avant-garde. *Grove Music Online.* January 01, 2001. Oxford University Press, Date of access 5 Apr.2019.

architecture, and theater, and rarely mention examples from music. Because there is no theory of the musical avant-gardes, I will start from the theories of the avant-garde in the other fields.

The theory of the avant-garde is almost nearly synonymous with Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. According to Bürger, the avant-garde movements have a very particular ideological agenda: they attack "*art as institution*," that is, the framework of artistic function, production, and reception in which an artwork becomes intelligible. The archetypes of the avant-garde, which Bürger calls "historical" – in contradistinction to the "neo" avant-garde movements of the 1950s and 1960s – are Dada, Futurism, early Surrealism, and post-revolutionary Russian avant-garde. The work of Bürger comes with a fundamental presupposition, that is, a sharp distinction between the movements of the avant-garde and the movements of modernism. Although the two categories share concerns regarding formal aspects, they differ radically in their ideological commitments: the avant-garde demands radical change in the form of life, for it aims to sublate art and integrate it into the praxis of life, whereas the movements of modernism manifest only formal and technical revolutions.

Every text that aspires to contribute to the discourse of the avant-garde ought to engage critically with the theory of Bürger. Some critics suggest that Bürger's theory be modified or 'corrected' in order to 'make' space for more avant-garde movements.[3] For instance, because Bürger rejects unequivocally all the movements of the 1950s and 1960s from the status of the avant-garde, a lot of criticism comes from this direction: many critics claim that the post-war movements (Neo-Dada, New Realism, Fluxus, Pop, Minimalism, Conceptual Art) are legitimate

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[3] For instance, Murphy argues that German expressionism should be also included in Bürger's historical avant-garde. (Murphy, Richard. *Theorizing the Avant-Garde: Modernism, Expressionism, and the Problem of Postmodernity*. Cambridge University Press, 1999).

representatives of the avant-garde proper, and forge connections between the movements of the historical avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde.[4] Other critics forge connections between the avant-garde and post-structuralism,[5] while others open up the space for a third-generation avant-garde, one that pertains to former socialist countries, to the countries of Latin America, and to Africa.[6] More recent critical theory addresses Bürger's eurocentricism as well as his implicit *"commitment to the idea of continuous progress within a single, nationally unified culture."*[7] According to this criticism, the idea of a historical avant-garde that presupposes a single and central culture is no longer viable; the "geography" of the avant-garde has to be *"rear-garde,"* de-centered, pluralized, and take into consideration the marginal, the peripheral, and the non-European.[8] With respect to the relation of my dissertation to Bürger's theory, I make a two-fold gesture: first, I presuppose it; second, I aim to revive it. Let me unpack this claim.

Against the critics who aim to 'correct,' modify, expand, reconstruct, and even reject it, I will defend Bürger's theory along with his sharp distinction between the movements of the historical avant-garde and the movements of modernism. This is a very crucial commitment especially in relation to the second part of my gesture because, in order to revive the concept of the avant-garde, I have to rescue the avant-garde from its ideological absorption into the project of modernism. In other words, maintaining Bürger's distinction is necessary for the second step, for the specificity of the ideology of the historical avant-garde should be preserved. I will defend

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[4] The best examples of this tendency are Foster's book the *Return of the Real* (Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real*. MIT Press, 1996), and also a collection of articles edited by Hopkins (Hopkins, David. *Neo-Avant-Garde*. Rodopi, 2006).

[5] Mann, Paul. *Theory-Death of the Avant-Garde*. Indiana University Press, 1991.

[6] Erjavec, Aleš. *Aesthetic Revolutions and the Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde Movements*. Duke University Press, 2015; Also: Bäckström, Per and Hjartarson, Benedikt. Eds. *Decentering the Avant-Garde*. Rodopi, 2014.

[7] Samson, Jim. Avant-garde. *Grove Music Online.*

[8] Bäckström, Per and Hjartarson, Benedikt. Eds. *Decentering the Avant-Garde*. Rodopi, 2014.

Bürger's eurocentricism along with a specific genealogy of European innovative art not because this genealogy is culturally higher, intellectually richer, or better in any other sense but, rather, because my final goal is to contextualize the work of Luigi Nono, which is inseparable from this particular genealogy, within the framework that made it possible. In other words, I don't defend Bürger per se, but I utilize Bürger's theory as the vehicle for understanding Nono's work. Although the historical avant-garde is my point of departure, the framework that Bürger provides will prove in the end to be inadequate in order to encompass fully Nono's undertaking. In this sense, the new space that I provide will ultimately render Bürger's theory historical.

Although Bürger does not leave any window open for the repetition of the avant-garde, I will draw upon – and in doing so transform – Foster's thesis from his book *The Return of the Real,* and argue for a revival of the avant-garde. Foster aims to connect the historical avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde, for the latter, he claims, "*comprehends for first time the project of the historical avant-garde*" and "*enacts the project of the historical avant-garde for the first time.*"[9] I will argue that Foster is correct to assume that the comprehension of the historical avant-garde requires a repetition of its project, but that he is wrong to believe that the movements of the neo-avant-garde will play this role. I will argue that the repetition of the avant-garde requires a more fundamental transformation than the historical context that Foster advocates, and this is the transformation of the status of the avant-garde from a historical (ontic) to an ontological era. The distinction between an ontic and an ontological era presupposes Heidegger's concept of ontological epochality, which I will outline in Chapter 2, but I will explain briefly here: an

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[9] Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real*. p.14-15.

ontological era subsumes multiple historical eras; it is an epoch that comes with its own historical constellation of intelligibility and, thus, with its own historical contingency.[10]

From this perspective, the revival of the avant-garde that I suggest is not a mere repetition but, rather, a fundamental transformation of the historical avant-garde and its metaphysical commitments. I will demonstrate why Nono's avant-garde does not really fit into the project of the historical avant-garde and why it points, rather, to a genuine repetition of it. In other words, my project is precisely to think, through the late work of Luigi Nono, the conditions of intelligibility of a repetition of the avant-garde, which no longer pertains to a new historical era but, rather, to a new ontological era that comes with a new constellation of intelligibility and with a new set of metaphysical commitments. To put it simply, I will presuppose Bürger's theory, I will maintain the ideological distinction between modernism and the avant-garde, I will defend a revival of the project of the historical avant-garde, and I will transform the status of the avant-garde from an ontic and historical to an ontological era. Finally, Nono's late work will be the embodiment of this revival and transformation.

The repetition of the avant-garde requires a better understanding of the historical avant-garde as well as the reasons underlying its failure. This is precisely where Chapter 1 begins, and it begins with the genealogy of the avant-garde. Although the concept of the avant-garde was born within the framework of philosophical modernity, the project of the historical avant-garde envisioned the negation of autonomous art, that is, the culmination of cultural modernity, and, thus, envisioned a radical rupture with modernity itself. In other words, the historical avant-garde

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[10] I want to stress that an ontological era is not a trans-historical era or a concept that can be retroactively applied backwards to other times. Although it subsumes multiple historical eras, it is historically contingent. According to Heidegger, the ontological eras are the pre-Socratic, the Platonic-Aristotelian, the medieval, the modern, and the late modern. (For more details, see 2.1.4).

failed, for it misunderstood its object of negation and, thus, its fundamental condition of intelligibility. Therefore, understanding the failure of the historical avant-garde requires a better understanding of the structures of modernity. This is precisely why I turn to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. My analysis of the text will bring to light the fundamental commitments of modernity: negativity as determinate negation, modern subjectivity as a social practice, and a concept of progressivist temporality. In light of the discovery that the conditions of intelligibility of modernity are, at the same time, the conditions for the possibility of the avant-garde, I will argue that the historical avant-garde remained *parasitical* upon modernity, for its project of sublating art and breaking from modernity was internally contradictory. If modernity is the idea of perpetual self-transformation, then the avant-garde was precisely its transformative instrument. The fundamental condition of intelligibility of the avant-garde, which is to break from modernity by sublating art, ceases to exist, and the avant-garde fails to complete its project.

It is important to stress that I do not simply point out the contradictions of the avant-garde, which are already well known. My contribution is that I provide an analysis of those contradictions, that is, a metaphysical diagnosis of the failures of the historical avant-garde, and demonstrate that their existence is not trivial; it is inherent in the project of the avant-garde and, thus, inseparable from the metaphysical commitments of the avant-garde, which is what I call the "*metaphysics of the avant-garde*." Chapter 1 presupposes Bürger's definition that the project of the avant-garde is art's sublation and the demand for a radical change in the form of life. The entire chapter is the result of thinking through this very premise. Three main arguments spring from this thinking: first, that the historical avant-garde has been parasitical on modernity; second, that the concept 'avant-garde' is a metaphysical concept in the way that metaphysics has been traditionally employed; and, finally, that the failure of the historical avant-garde does not prevent

us from thinking and preparing another potential realization of the project of the avant-garde. Chapter 1 also engages with the debates about the relation between modernism and the avant-garde.

The diagnosis of Chapter 1 leads to Chapter 2, where Heidegger's work provides the possibility of thinking and preparing an era beyond the metaphysical commitments of modernity. My turn to Heidegger (1889-1976) is justified not only because Heidegger's work is a profound critique of modernity; it is justified also by the structure of his thought, which moves from the analysis of ontic forms of life and history to the ontological structure of time, history, the self, and negation. Therefore, in Chapter 2, I will explore the fundamental commitments of modernity, namely determinate negation, modern subjectivity, and time, by rethinking the conditions for their possibility.

More precisely, I will show that Heidegger's discoveries of time-space [*Zeit-Raum*] as a fourth-dimensional temporality and of the event of appropriation [*Ereignis*] point to a genuine understanding of time as originary presencing [*ursprünglich Anwesen*]. In turn, I will show that Heidegger's ontological appropriation of the subject as a relational identity between the beginning of an era and the beginning of the thought of this era points to an ontological deepening of modern subjectivity and, thus, responds to the modern understanding of subjectivity as synthetic activity (Kant) or social practice (Hegel). Finally, regarding the redefinition of negativity, I will show that Heidegger's shift from negation as overcoming [*Überwindung*] to negation as appropriation [*Verwindung*] signals a genuine transformation of the status of metaphysics: from metaphysics as the ground of other sciences to metaphysic as the thinking that corresponds to the openness of being or, in Heidegger's words, the thinking of being as being. I will argue that it is Heidegger's shift regarding his conception of metaphysics that can be the model for the transformation of the

avant-garde from a mere historical example to an ontological era that points beyond modernity. The transformation of the avant-garde pertains precisely to the transformation of the metaphysics of the avant-garde.

In Chapter 3, I will turn to Luigi Nono, and examine one of his late works, *A Pierre. Dell' azzurro silenzio, inquietum (1985)*, for contrabass flute, contrabass clarinet, and live electronics. I will argue that *A Pierre* points to a radical transformation regarding the concept of the avant-garde and to an era beyond modernity. I will show that *A Pierre* is the result of a series of transformations regarding Nono's compositional ideas between his early and late work. The reason I focus on continuity over novelty pertains to my argument that the overcoming of the standpoint of modernity has to come from within modernity. In other words, in order to show that *A Pierre* points to a radical break from modernity, I will have to show that the novelty of the work pertains to a gradual shift from the standpoint of assuming and validating the fundamental commitments of modernity to the standpoint of questioning and displacing them. The chapter is divided in two parts, an historical and an ontological analysis of this transformation.

Placing Nono and Heidegger next to each other raises the question of their relation. Heidegger was not aware of the work of Luigi Nono, and even if he were, there is no evidence of it. Furthermore, the works of his on which I focus – with the exception of the essay *On the Question of Being* (1955) and the lecture *Time and Being* (1962) – were written before Nono's first publication. Nono does not reference Heidegger, but his familiarity with his work is evident: first, from a large number of annotated volumes of Heidegger's work preserved in his library;[11]

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[11] Nielinger-Vakil, Carola. *Luigi Nono: A Composer in Context.* Cambridge University Press, 2016. p.302-3.

second, from giving credit to Cacciari for bringing Heidegger to the attention of the Italian left.[12] Besides these indirect connections, the only things that these two people shared during their life were their fascination with the Black Forest and the poetry of Hölderlin.[13]

In this light, I cannot argue for a prospective reciprocity between Heidegger and Nono; after all, there is no evidence that shows how the work of one influenced directly the work of the other. Instead, I argue for a retrospective reciprocity between them, which is, in my opinion, the primary contribution of my dissertation. I do not conduct my research simply in philosophy (Heidegger) or simply in music composition (Nono) nor do I conduct my research in philosophy and in music composition. I rather see my project as a reciprocal understanding of their work and as the exploration of that which springs from this reciprocity. To put it differently, it is not that Heidegger's work becomes the theory and Nono's work a case study that affirms the insights of the theory. Instead, it is a new mode of artistic production that is elucidated by philosophical concepts, and, conversely, the transition into the new ontological era that is elucidated through the lens of music composition. In this sense, Heidegger's work provides genuine ways of making Nono's work intelligible, and the genuine intelligibility of Nono's work feeds back into Heidegger's writings to illuminate new perspectives.

The structure of the dissertation might create the confusion that, as soon as I establish a new concept of the avant-garde through my reading of Heidegger, I apply it to Nono. In other words, the reader might reasonably think that I put the lens of Heidegger on Nono and, therefore, that the final result is already presupposed and unsurprising. The linearity of the presentation of the

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[12] *Ibid.* p.247.

[13] Nono often spoke of his fascination with the Black Forest, in the midst of which he resided while working in the Experimental Studio of Freiburg. (*Ibid.* p.243). Regarding Heidegger's relationship to Hölderlin, see 2.3.4. Regarding Nono's relationship to Hölderlin, see 3.2 and 3.5.

content of the dissertation (Hegel→Heidegger→Nono) covers up the origin from which the project wells up, that is, Luigi Nono and, specifically, his work *A Pierre. Dell' azzurro silenzio, inquietum* (1985). To be more precise, besides listening to the work and looking at the score, the point of departure of my dissertation is two sources: Vieira de Carvalho's article *Towards Dialectic Listening: Quotation and Montage in the Work of Luigi Nono* (1999), and the article of Zattra, Burleigh, and Sallis *Studying Luigi Nono's A Pierre. Dell' azzurro silenzio, inquietum as a Performance Event* (2011).

The first article provides an extensive analysis of Nono's historical trajectory from his first work to the last works with live electronics. Most of the concepts that I employ in my historical analysis of Nono's transformation between his early and late work (i.e. quotation of permeation as constructive material, the technique of delinearization, the techniques of spatialization, the fragmentation of the subject of the performer –which he calls *dramatis persona*– the concept of 'laboratory composer') are to be found in Vieira de Carvalho's article. Not only do I engage with these concepts, but I also make one step further in connecting them under a common thread and single transformation that gives a full account of Nono's stylistic changes between his early and late work. However, what is disappointing is the end of the article, where the author writes, "*Nono brought into the avant-garde scene the interpellation of a social and political other.*"[14] Although the article provides a genuine standpoint to understand Nono's musical ideas throughout his entire career, it ends up reducing Nono's distinctiveness to the "other." This leaves me with a sense of dissatisfaction, for I want to know "*what is the other*?" What are the ontological characteristics, the metaphysical commitments, and the historical implications of the other?

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[14] Vieira de Carvalho, Mario. Towards Dialectic Listening: Quotation and Montage in the Work of Luigi Nono. *Contemporary Music Review, 18:2,* 1999. p.74.

The second article provides the historical context and the technical information regarding Nono's use of live electronics in *A Pierre*, which are necessary in order to understand the ontology of the work, not as a fixed entity but, rather, as a performance event. However, what is disappointing is that the authors understand the logic of an event merely on the basis of its unrepeatability. But, if this were the case, then all music works that are not fully determined in notation and employ live electronics would be performance events. While the idea of a performance event is fascinating, and I second the main insight of the authors, I was left with the questions: What is an event? And, in what sense is this particular event, *A Pierre*, genuine?

What I am getting at is that it was a lack of proper modes of thinking that dictated my departure from Nono and my turn to the work of Heidegger. Through Heidegger, I aimed to develop a new conceptual framework in order to rethink Nono's work. Heidegger is not simply the thinker of the other; he thinks beyond modernity in concrete ways, and I aim to make these ways of thinking explicit in Chapter 2. Heidegger is also the thinker of *Ereignis* [event]; he thinks through the logic of an event, and it is precisely through the logic of *Ereignis* that I will get access to Heidegger's late work and, finally, to Nono's *A Pierre*.

To put it differently, it is not that "*Luigi Nono*" is the proper response to the question "*which is the most avant-garde composer?*" and it is not that "*A Pierre*" is the right answer to the question "*which is the best example of the avant-garde?*" It is rather "*avant-garde*" that is the proper response to the question "*why is this particular music work striking?*": this work is striking because, in it, the new ontological era of the avant-garde discloses itself. The reversal of the priority between *A Pierre* and the concept of the avant-garde and, therefore, the precedence of the former over the latter justifies the title of my dissertation, which is not *The Metaphysics of the Avant-Garde in the Work of Luigi Nono*, as if I apply a theory of the avant-garde to the work of

Nono, but, rather, *Luigi Nono and the Metaphysics of the Avant-Garde*, which means that the metaphysical commitments of the avant-garde are reconstructed anew through the work of Nono.

I do not have to be absolutely clear why Luigi Nono and why *A Pierre* throughout the dissertation. Instead, I have to be absolutely clear why this particular music work is avant-garde and nothing else, why this particular music work does not really fit into the usual ways of speaking about music composition, and why I need to make 'space' for a new realm beyond modernity. This is where Nono's genuineness and *A Pierre's* distinctiveness lie: they need a 'new space.' Therefore, I do not call for any sort of exceptionalism in the work of Luigi Nono nor do I claim that *A Pierre* re-presents the ontological characteristics of the new era better than any other music work. Instead, I argue that it is the avant-garde that presents itself in *A Pierre* as the new ontological era. The work is not a *re-presentation* but, rather, the *presentation* of the avant-garde disclosing itself. From this perspective, I argue that *A Pierre* makes visible that which lies next to us and remains invisible: that we already experience the consequences of a new ontological era.

My dissertation springs from my yearlong preoccupation with Luigi Nono. It starts and ends with Luigi Nono. And, I put pressure on the idea of retrospectivity, on the difference between re-presentation and presentation, and on the reversal of the priority between the new concept of the avant-garde and the work of Nono, for the directionality (the order of the chapters) of the dissertation blurs the fact that Nono's work lies in the very beginning and in the ground of my undertaking. Although saying that the dissertation starts with Nono when his name appears after 300 pages might sound oxymoronic, I still think that there is a good reason for that: I lacked the words, the concepts, and the structures of thought to talk about Nono according to the ways I experience his music and his thought. What I am looking for in Heidegger's work are the words and the thinking paths that are adequate to express my care for the work of Nono. From this

perspective, Chapters 1 and 2 are only preparatory for my final goal, which is to argue for the revival and transformation of the concept and project of the historical avant-garde in the late work of Nono. It is in this sense that my dissertation is about Luigi Nono, although it is reasonable to say that it is, at the same time, about lots of other stuff.

One century after the unanimous failure of the movements of the historical avant-garde and after a fuller understanding of the reasons and implications of its failure to sublate art and integrate it into the praxis of life, I think that music composition can be the open space in which the project of the avant-garde, as it had been employed primarily outside music itself, has more chances to be realized; and I think that there is at least one historical example that points in this direction. If *A Pierre* captures a new ontology of sound and, thus, a new dimension of intelligibility, then I argue that Luigi Nono is avant-garde, for he composes what sound 'is.' If the avant-garde is the name of the new ontological era, then *A Pierre* is a music work that captures it, and Luigi Nono is the agent who *presents* it.

In our time, when everything is possible from an aesthetic point of view, we cannot simply say that we are *meta-* or *post-avant-garde* and simply forget the question of the avant-garde. We have to engage with this question, for in it lies inherent the question of progress. It is precisely the question of progress – and how progress is actually relevant to a new hearing of sound – that emerges from the investigation of the work of Luigi Nono. My dissertation is an invitation to rethink time, the subject, and negation, and to think through the possibility of transforming the status of the avant-garde from a mere historical example of twentieth century to a new and genuine ontological era that overcomes the horizon of intelligibility of modernity and points beyond music and towards new forms of life.

Far from suggesting the overcoming of the metaphysics of the avant-garde, my dissertation embarks on reflecting upon the failure of the historical avant-garde and upon searching for a new relation between the concept of the avant-garde and its praxis. My suggestion is, thus, metaphysical at its core, and aspires to think upon the metaphysics of the avant-garde in a metaphysical way. This thinking beyond itself, beyond modernity, and into the openness: that, precisely, is the metaphysics of the avant-garde in a genuine way. If "*each epoch dreams the one to follow*," as Walter Benjamin wrote, citing Jules Michelet,[15] then I stand on the opposite side: my dissertation does not aim to reproduce the illusion of a utopian avant-garde in the future by deferring the transformation of the world to an imaginary utopia but, rather, to advocate a new era that is already here. The ontological era of the avant-garde has already happened, and only now do we find ourselves gradually emerging from within it.

I will conclude my preliminary remarks with a metaphor as to describe the role I see myself playing regarding the work of Luigi Nono: I am a light engineer. The work of Nono is a sculpture made of glass. It lies in the center of a big hall, and is surrounded by spectators: the readers. There is a big rigging system on which many different lights are hoisted. There are also lights embedded in the ceiling, in the sidewalls, and in the floor: different lights, different colors, different intensities, and different filters. My first task is to know my object, that is, examine all surfaces of the sculpture, explore the different shapes of the glass (where the glass is straight and, thus, lets the light pass through and where the glass is curved and concave and, thus, distorts the direction of the light), the different textures (where the glass is transparent and where it is textured), the

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[15] Quote from Benjamin. In: Adamson, Walter L. *Embattled Avant-Gardes: Modernism's Resistance to Commodity Culture in Europe.* University of California Press, 2007. p.341.

corners (where the different pieces of glass are interwoven, and where there is tension between them), and the ways that the different pieces of glass interact by reflecting each other.

My second task is to light my object, that is, to shed light on the sculpture. The sculpture then rises anew. It is no longer the glass sculpture it once was but, rather, a genuinely invented artwork. The transition from the first to the second level is tricky. On the one hand, I aim to make the artwork visible in an unprecedented way. On the other hand, I want to guide the spectators to see the new object as an inherent possibility of the original artwork and, thus, as absolutely dependent on the original, which does not change but is, rather, illuminated anew. In fact, it is the inexhaustibility of the intelligibility of the original artwork that allows for it to be lighted anew, seen anew, and understood anew. The new object, in other words, should not present itself as the result of a magician but, rather, as the result of a skillful technician who knows how to transform its lighted object while still maintaining a relation of proximity with the original sculpture.

My third task is to 'cast light' upon the light itself, that is, to withdraw the artwork from the eyes of the spectators so that they see the light itself as it passes through the glass. The original work is no longer visible, but this lack is not negative, for it uncovers that which the presentation of the original object had covered up, that is, the condition for its possibility, the light itself. The presentation of the light cannot be imposed by the light engineer; the spectators have to be guided how to 'let see' the light; how to let light show itself. It is important to follow all three steps without jumping too quickly from one to the other and without covering the moments of transition. In sum, my job is threefold: to present Nono; to light Nono; then to 'let see' the light. Hence all these metaphors throughout the dissertation about light, and hence the constant use of the verb 'illuminate.' I am not illuminating in the sense of revealing a secret. I am illuminating in

the most literal use of the term: I simply shed light on the work of Luigi Nono, and render visible

that which is so immediate to us that as a result we do not see it.

ABSTRACT

In my dissertation, I offer a metaphysical diagnosis of the contradictions of the historical avant-garde, a movement which I assert failed to break from modernity and establish radical changes in the form of life, for it lacked reflection upon its object of negation, that is, modernity itself and, thus, upon its own condition of intelligibility. In light of a thorough analysis of the structures of modernity through Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, I claim that if modernity is the idea of perpetual self-transformation, then the avant-garde remained parasitical upon modernity and became its transformative instrument. In turn, I reconstruct a genuine concept of the avant-garde through attentive readings of Heidegger, whose work provides a profound critique of modernity. I argue that Heidegger's shift between his early and late work regarding his conception of metaphysics can be the model for the transformation of the avant-garde from a mere historical example to an ontological era that points beyond modernity and opens up the possibility for a future realization of the project of the historical avant-garde. Ultimately, I show how the work of the Italian composer Luigi Nono (1924-1990) reveals strong affinities with the work of Heidegger, how Nono makes manifest a genuine ontological understanding of sound, and how his music points beyond sound and toward new ethical concerns regarding the new ontological era of the avant-garde. Nono was a leading figure in post-war European avant-garde music who sought idiosyncratic modes of listening/performing and new forms of lived spaces, which would embody persistent ethical concerns with perception, human interaction, and new forms of life. This dissertation explores the groundwork to talk about his *'otherness'* in *'otherly'* ways or, to put it differently, to tackle the question of *'what is avant- in Nono's avant-garde?'*

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