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## *Form, figure, and the experience of time in seven southern composers of the 1950s-60s*

**ABSTRACT.** After the 1980s it is difficult, following stylistic criteria, to draw a map of contemporary academic music. All styles are compossible, and all are practiced. In this context, the geographical entity “South of Italy” does not stand out for a musical identity with special technical-stylistic features. Rather, at a socio-cultural level, the South remains today – in music no less than in all areas where there is a gap between top development and stagnation – a land of emigrants: six out of the seven composers treated (Ivan Fedele, Giuseppe Colardo, Rosario Mirigliano, Giuseppe Soccio, Nicola Cisternino, Biagio Putignano, Paolo Aralla) live in the North of Italy. The positive aspect of this is the affinity of the South with the transnational and superstructural community of contemporary music, which from European and Western has now become almost global.

The composers under consideration belong to the generation of the ‘50s, rooted in the serial and post-serial movements (from which Franco Donatoni, Luciano Berio, Luigi Nono, Salvatore Sciarrino, Giacinto Scelsi, are the principals models, to mention only the Italians), dipped in the general phenomenon of timbrism (particularly spectralism), and acquainted with electronics. They draw from these sources various instruments of compositional technique and aspects of their poetics. In particular these composers, active from the ‘80s, develop new ways of construction of the temporal form of music. They share the goal to establish a new continuity, different from the tonal one but at the same time transcending the serial and post-serial disintegration and fragmentation. The primary means to this end is a new enhancement of the category of figure, as a clear and distinct, recognizable aggregate of pitches, intervals, register, durations, timbre, articulation, dynamics, and texture. Each composer elaborates the atonal figural material in different ways, emphasizing one aspect or another. For example, Fedele (1953) is a master in the management of form *per se*, Colardo (1953) in the activation of disturbed harmonic effects, Mirigliano (1950) in the creation of a slight tension from the smallest vibrations of sound, Soccio (1950) in the set up of movement by means of accumulations and discharges of energy, Cisternino (1957) in a Cagean-Scelsian emphasis on sound as such, Putignano (1960) in the suspension of time through the succession and transformation of images, Aralla (1960) in the foundation of form from below, from the concreteness of sound.

**KEYWORDS:** Post-serial, Atonality, Continuity, Ivan Fedele, Giuseppe Colardo, Rosario Mirigliano, Giuseppe Soccio, Nicola Cisternino, Biagio Putignano, Paolo Aralla

For Ivan Fedele<sup>1</sup> (b. 1953, Lecce), as for many of his contemporary and also younger composers, the influence of Franco Donatoni, not exceptionally

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integrated with the elective reference to Luciano Berio, has been crucial to his formation. A strong sense of the *figure*<sup>2</sup> joins with the display of instrumental gesture; a control of form so sovereign as to seem almost a *rappel à l'ordre* falls in fundamental obedience to the pleasure principle. The music of Fedele is beautiful in quotation marks, it is “beautiful”.<sup>3</sup> A consummate aesthetic theory should know how to distinguish the “beauty” of music from its ability to induce emotions, to constitute a knowledge, and also from its beauty in a general sense. Which technical features has a music that is beautiful inasmuch as it is “beautiful”, not because it is intensely expressive or knowledgeably truthful etc.? Probably it has a harmonic beauty, balanced and classic, that is perfectly complete (with all the difficulties the definition of these terms could cause). “The idea of classical form lays in concepts like repetition, symmetry and order; the ideal timbre is a ‘pure’ sound, *bel suono* – harmony is based on the resolution of the tensions between consonance and dissonance. Thus every element rests on the concept of *harmonic*, of *well* proportioned” (Melchiorre 1988, 92): this definition fits Fedele to perfection. To say that the music of Fedele is “beautiful” is different from saying: “how beautiful his music is!”. “Beauty” is a whole of technical attributes, partially determined in a supra-historical and supra-stylistic way (relating in this to the classical idea), and is diagnosed by analytical judgment. It is not necessarily accompanied by an exclamation mark, which graphically symbolizes a listener’s emotion rather than an analytic judgment. In fact, even music that is not “beautiful” may stimulate emotions. On the other hand, “beautiful” music produces a precise type of emotion, an aesthetic one, which, different as it may be from the possible emotion even without “beauty”, is anyway an emotion, not just a judgment.

The Latin *forma*, which also means beauty (Georges and Calonghi 2002, 618), gives us a useful starting point to understanding the music of Fedele. In fact, among all the things with which a composer is preoccupied while composing, form is the one that governs all of Fedele’s work, so it seems that the current meaning of form carries with it the older one. His tendency to euphony, harmony, balance, towards luminous areas of existence rather than the dark and chaotic, finds expression in a musical thought that is rather formal: by conceiving form in the first instance, Fedele makes everything “work out”, or “square”, recomposes and arranges the divergent impulses. His control of the material subjugates all the other constructive dimensions, elementary (pitch, duration, etc.)<sup>4</sup> or complex (counterpoint, *figuralità*, texture, etc.) – on every level Fedele thinks of the material and he is in complete control of it –, but no one takes authority over the formal prospect. Typically Fedele thinks of form from the top, not evoking it from the bottom, from

<sup>2</sup> Regarding the rise to the foreground in the compositional and theoretical debate of the category of *figure*, see Donatoni 1986, Ferneyhough 1984 and 1986, Borio 1990.

<sup>3</sup> I owe this concept of “beauty” to a conversation with Heinz-Klaus Metzger on 3 February 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Here I use the term “dimension”, with its derivatives “dimensional”, “interdimensional” etc., instead of the incorrect and overused “parameter” (see Solomos 1994).

the independent development of the lower strata of the material. He projects it and then fills it in; with care and ability to avoid conflicts and discrepancies in joining the pre-established whole with the insurgent details. Since in Fedele this conjunction occurs in a harmonic and coherent way, what is relevant – generally speaking – is not whether the form is considered from above or below, but the importance given to the form itself, considered as an isolated object of fruition, as an end in itself instead of a result. A curved symmetrical form like that of *Ali di Cantor* (2003) for four instrumental groups, could never come out of the free development of the material from below, but this is not the point; the point is, what experience can it generate in the listener beyond being noticed.

Fedele's formal management – delving deeper into his constants – shows regressive traits. Today, when the ideal of maximum coherence of the material necessarily orients us towards the form of a single movement, or when the opposite ideal of maximum compliance with variety leads to fragmentation, Fedele's frequent use of forms in three, four, or five movements, contrasted among themselves by calm/agitated sequences, can only be defined as neo-classical. But even the pieces in a single movement, as for example *Scena* (1998) for orchestra or *Ruah* (2002) for flute and orchestra, are organized on the same principle of contrasting sections. Similarly neoclassical in Fedele is his *concertante* proceeding, which manifests itself clearly in the typical case of the concert for soloist and orchestra, but also often in other, neutral cases. Contrasting sections or *concertante* soloist are not absolutely regressive procedures in themselves: Fedele's way of using them is regressive, manifesting itself from interweaving with the lower compositional strata. On the material level, the instrumental gestures of Fedele are taken directly from traditional solos and virtuosity, with all the rhetorical figures and psycho-affective connotations (showy fast fingering, extended melodic lyricism, etc.). Now, however, one must not take for granted that to turn backwards is a turn for the worse. The results of the search for newness at all costs show that often it is good to conserve. In the abstract there are no criteria that distinguish good from bad tradition, valid from aberrant progress. Thus one must state precisely what is lacking in Fedele because of his conservation option, if we are not content to consider this in itself a fault. Contrasting segmentation is a formal procedure, but it has meta-formal implications. The type of contrast between the various sections shows their incomplete intimate necessity: the fact that they are freely heterogeneous in all aspects – technical, stylistic, poetic – shows their fungibility in terms of craft. Fedele belongs to the category of composers who are able to compose in various ways, and is profoundly different from those who can compose in only one way. His perfect ability to reconcile harmoniously different manners establishes a need which is reciprocal and relative but not absolute. The writing of Fedele shows the problem of the notion of craft, and of its value. Traditional gestures and those of the contemporary *koiné* (in particular Milanese-Parisian and Donatonian-Berian-spectralist), which are the ones available to a consummate craftsman such as Fedele, cannot

be criticized in themselves because they are respectively traditional and common to a school. The craft, as such, lacks motivation, but this deficiency cannot be imputed to the craft, whose only duty is to give form, to formalize something whose motivation is outside craft. Too close to the moment of pure craft, which in itself can offer only conventional indications of expression, the music of Fedele is not radically expressive in any original direction, nor, however, radically anti-expressive (in the manner of Cage), but it is dedicated to the formalization of expression, and, what is more, of a pre-existing expression. This is the duty of etiquette: to channel expressive urges into socially acceptable formulas. In this way the music of Fedele is always polite. Even when he expresses agitation, he uses the classic mode of an “agitated” movement. Besides beauty, all technical and expressive categories in Fedele are in quotation marks: an “agitated” movement, a “dramatic” passage, a “melody”, a “nocturne”. Music has always channelled forces, but this is not the point: valuable music channels forces that only it evokes, and not in order to make them socially acceptable, but only to make them intelligible,<sup>5</sup> while Fedele channels forces not previously unheard into socially acceptable forms.

The music of Fedele can only please, and that is why it is disturbing. Whoever asks music to transport him into a sphere of experience that is not prefigured is hostile to its beauty, which is undeniable but *formulated*. Fedele uses the term “expressive archetypes” (Fertonani 2003, 5) to indicate the musical situations that make up his forms. This is as much as to say that they are perennial types, antique but never obsolete. In the abstract there are no criteria to distinguish archetypes from stereotypes, which instead are old, worn-out situations. In other terms the same difference exists between classicism as a timeless and supra-stylistic attribute, and neoclassicism as regressive and stylistically determined attitude: a difference whose result can be determined only with a concrete example. In any case all of Fedele’s adroitness lies in brinkmanship between archetype and stereotype, classicism and neoclassicism. Apart from opinions as to his success in this effort, that is his risk. Fedele consciously chooses a special way to proceed, to produce newness not by putting out a feeler towards the unknown and going toward the future. He, rather, draws archetypes from the past and reviews them in the light of a modern composer’s craft, stretching the cord between the present and the past to the breaking point, but – that’s his acrobatics – without breaking it. Fatally the cord must break, not only because the composer is human and fallible, but even in principle this kind of orientation is questionable. It infers a sad mistrust, the lack of faith in something new, a purely and authentic new that reaches further heights of musical sense without nodding to past styles, higher peaks of musical-human sense beyond mere musical-technical play.

There are also those who require that music transport them into an unsettling experience, and why not? Apart from the archetypal or stereotypical quality

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<sup>5</sup> The concept of form as a second stage in respect to the idea, as a means to understanding it, comes principally from Schönberg.

of certain musical events, one must admit that some archetypes are already in principle not unsettling for anyone. On the one hand the formulation of dramatic drains the drama, the formulation of expressive limits the expression, and emulation (in the information technology sense) of romantic longing neutralizes it. On the other hand the formal handling of that which is already in itself form, not expression, does not unsettle. This is the price paid by almost all *neofigurali*, given that the figures are substantially formal objects. Fedele's great quality is his masterly handling of the figures: their fullness, their shading from nothing and in nothing and among themselves, by exploiting to the hilt the continual gradation of dynamics, timbre, register, contrasts in texture, and the dialectic of repetition-variation. No one could do better than this. But the figural composition handles figures, clear and distinct objects, it does not handle power, the powers of music. It does not deal with the specifically musical quality of music, given that the operations available with the musical figures are intellectually analogous to those possible with any other type of logical-material object, while the power of music is irreducibly specific.

Giuseppe Colardo (b. 1953, Campobasso) is another of many composers to have studied with Donatoni and have turned his teaching – principally generative devices and procedures in elaboration of material – in different directions, typically rejecting the drastic Donatonian separation of formal sections. In Donatoni this was dictated by a correspondence between art and life, almost a species of exercise in mental hygiene – a section, a workday<sup>6</sup> – which no one except him has had reason to adopt. Thus even Colardo revives the figure, and constitutes form through an evolutionary figural dialectic, establishing a continuity that is potentially linear over the differences. But figural writing can have a defect: being – so to speak – an expression of competition, or of a *master class*, writing that shows a lot on paper and can be read and understood by a jury or a teacher who do not have the time to imagine mentally all the events and relationships in the finest detail, nor the possibility to control the reality of the sound. In truth, even facts of major importance can lack all figural evidence, and vice versa important figural evidence, on paper as in the listening, may have no musical relevance. Thus it is notable in Colardo that his scores must be seen in every detail, even in the hidden relations, and they flee from the automatisms that post-Donatonian procedural and figural writing can generate on a sub-figural level: at any moment it allows an unexpected event to occur, that functions only in that moment according to local rules. The title *Espressivo* for a percussion piece (1996) is, given the instrumentation, indicative (and almost provocative): not that the music is actually very expressive, nor very beautiful, but it is searching for a sense, a musical sense instead of one dictated by vain instrumentalism. Generally the music of Colardo is convincing in the musical sense, instead of constructive or cultural or otherwise: without all the arguments of theory of perception typical of the post-serial genera-

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<sup>6</sup> I owe this information to Paolo Aralla.

tion, Colardo writes pieces that affect the listener. In *Punte nell'arco* for strings (1991) the events pass with proper speed, and are meaningful in themselves. There is a healthy vagueness: the figures, for musical behaviours (Sciarrinian: harmonic glissandi, etc.) which imply a slight imprecision, are in part indistinct, so that one does not have the annoying impression of understanding everything. The sounds are complex, and transcend the classic *bel suono*, and at times are even almost monstrous. The final melody – differing from many of the post-Donatonian “constructed” melodies (with the proliferative techniques of the teacher) and yet at the same time dull – is not disturbing: it is expressive, yet sober. There is no figural complacency, that is figures serve to make something happen, to bring about an effect on the consciousness apart from merely manifesting themselves. Only, unfortunately, some junctures of figures and different sections are somewhat brusque, a bit out of time. *Inquieto* (2002) – again for strings, which seem congenial to Colardo – is an equally powerful piece, with figures that are even more indistinct, less clear. Rarely do other pieces show less punctual timing: in *Iam surgit hora tertia* (1997) for narrator, soprano and chamber orchestra, a certain slowness and predictability of contrasts come from the text which calls for solemnity. Here, and in “*tra ali notturne*” (1998) for soprano and five instruments, the only weak moments are those in which the automatic instrumental gestures (arpeggios, etc.) are too slow and too few, so that they do not mix and do not bind: in themselves, since they are automatic, they are not interesting enough as singularity. In *Visions* (1995) for guitar and in *Scintille azzurre ardono* (2000) for violin and piano the small number of instruments itself impedes Colardo’s characteristic construction of massive textures, in bands, but anyway the handling of pitches – here with more transparent intervals, in other places more disturbed – is always precise: harmony, to which Colardo gives particular importance, is effective both horizontally and vertically, following an expressivity that descends from a tonal sensibility, and yet it is absolutely post-tonal.

For Rosario Mirigliano (b. 1950, Borgia) the problem of the crisis in contemporary composition is more valid than for others, given the contrast between the quality of his music and his recurring silences, lasting since 1999. “I am a composer non-composer”, says Mirigliano,<sup>7</sup> but the assertion could be turned around – together with the perception of the problem – and reply made that now is a time in which the music of Mirigliano music is lacking. Up to a certain point he felt the crisis and still found ways to overcome it, as he said in an interview which he considers still valid (Conti 1991); but now it is different, and with a stroke of intellectual elegance, he remains silent.

Mirigliano belongs to that type of composer who *could*, as an able craftsman, write in any way, but who, in fact, for an immovable adherence to an extremely

<sup>7</sup> Personal communication of September 7, 2006.

precise and exacting poetic vision, *can* write in only one way. His style is absolutely unique, constant over the years despite natural evolution, and is characterized by what it rejects as much as by what it adds. It is the vibration of living material – or the living evolutionary duration of a vibrating material – wakened and watched in detail by the composer himself. Pitch, dynamic and *tempo* intervals are minimal, but for an acute perception they constitute the full range of an incessant transition. There is no sound or aggregate that is not vibrant, but one might say, in itself intrinsically vibratile: vibrancy that invests every dimension – pitch, duration, loudness, timbre – so that the typical procedure is not so much the traditional vibrato as much as tremolo, trill, frullato, ribattuto in very various forms (never mechanical), a dynamic fork. Vibration as a tremble, like an energetic state of the material. But also, above all, vibration as a quiver: quiver of impatience, a present state prescient of the future, the present instant that tends to the following instant. Although material, the writing is diastematically full, intensive, the interval is given its distinct and expressive value. Neither homophonic nor compactly contrapuntal, the weave is made of a superimposition and alternation of lines and breadths (in vibration the line is thickened) which change and progress slowly. In respect of today's dominant principle of harmonic fixity (Lombardi Vallauri 2006, 153) Mirigliano is an exception, his music has clear horizontal tension: his slowness is not less antithetic to immobility than velocity, it is the thoughtfulness of harmonic rhythm, wisely used to underline perceptively the function of the objects, internally moved. The melodic interval acts as distance in the space of sound, and also in temporal space: it is because in the same breath it both exposes the distance and fills it, that it puts a strain in both. The vibration of the material is thus not only the exaltation of the luminosity of the present moment, rendered similar to eternity through contemplative slowness, but also the exaltation of the successive breakings up of the moment: it is the luminosity of the present moment but also that of the moments present in succession, all the more luminous for their continuing contrasts. But the breaking up is delicate. The effect of every instant of light, of every change, is already startling, so that Mirigliano has no need to emphasize more. The measure is essential, so any other largeness – dynamic, textural, figural – would be too much. The tension subsists in the pure sense of leaning forward, not of neurotic unbalance; it's a subtle tension, a tropism towards the light across a dark ground, chiaroscuro, across a gradual or sudden changeability. With the sensation of luminosity as glimmering, always searched but never sure, the use of tremolo and of its interdimensional variants is coherent. Also coherent is the frequent use of instruments – like harp, guitar, or piano – which have a well-defined resonance and render well the sense of momentary illumination, and only with artifice can they simulate the everlasting. For instruments with sustained sound this sense of duration is natural and obvious, so less evident; they are induced willingly to act as resonating instruments. The presence of pedals, drones (vibrating, oscillating) together with slowly advancing lines (dotted) establishes a tension in its turn:

between fixity and movement, the everlasting and the ephemeral, that in their very contrast become evident and gain reciprocal power.

Giuseppe Soccio (b. 1950, San Marco in Lamis), mature after a phase of showing good but anonymous craftsmanship, has a distinct, always recognizable style. His characteristic writing begins clearly with *Schrei: altri echi* for guitar (1990): even though peculiar to the *Pulsar Songs* cycle, it is still embryonic in *Pulsar Songs I* (1989). He has never abandoned it since then, which is both a limit and a richness. Soccio totally rejects technical-stylistic multiplicity, he does not aspire like other composers to use all genres, nor to vary his tones and character: he seems to write the same piece over and over just changing the players. On the other hand his distinctive mark transcends the ambient of the mere stylistic variant and belongs to music as cognitive-affective experience, proposing a singular phenomenology, especially a particular way of showing the passage of time. Even for a musicology that avoids subsidiary non technical metaphors, terms, and concepts when possible, in respect to Soccio's writing it is impossible to avoid a comparison to energy (Soccio 1998, 3; Migliaccio 1998). Music – time, which is curved by music as if by forces – proceeds by pulses, shocks, discharges. These are complex, articulated, and stratified events that even so are perceived as unified and cohesive. On the other hand only with difficulty we could define them as figures – if by figure we intend something particular in respect to a context (not necessarily in the figure/ground relationship), something different in respect to something else – since in their succession they constitute the completeness of the form with almost no residue, no otherness. In this sense one may say that Soccio composes the same sound object varying it. Soccio's object-impulse is the *n*th historic expression of the conception of sound as energy. The impulses are distant, but never so far that one cannot perceive the dominion over a unitary arc of time, or close, but never enough to cause a loss of individuality. They are in themselves punctual or extended, but in any case form a peak in respect to the surrounding sounds. They prevail thanks to an interdimensional convergence between dynamics, harmonics, rhythm, and timbre-articulation. The typical dynamic course is: strong stroke/subito piano/crescendo/strong stroke; the harmonic one: fixed chord/foreign fixed or variable notes/fixed chord; the rhythmic one: long or short but anyway linearly isolated sound/short accumulated sounds/isolated long or short sound; the timbre-articulation one: naturally strong instrumental sound (for example brass or percussion)/normal sounds/strong sound. A means of making impulses preeminent is also in redundancy: the fixed or semi-fixed timbre, harmonics, and dynamics, the often constant metric distance continually affirm and reinforce the perceptive priority of the peaks. On the contrary the interjected events are, besides being less intrinsically important, also somewhat more varied, even as they tend to be repetitive. Overall the perceived energetic track resembles a tension that gradually and elastically increases until it is released, cyclically, in an explosive impulse.

Between the moments of release and phases of accumulation a further dialectic sets in, between order and disorder, because the interjected events are also chaotic and divergent, except that they always converge towards the explosive impulse which instead expresses regularity, power in the double sense of energy and normative dominion. In this way a characteristic mode of being in time is established, paradoxically directed and static at the same time. Time is measured by the principal impulses, to which all the smaller events clearly refer. The cyclical tension toward and away from the impulses causes linearity, moving time forward; on the other hand the cyclic return of the impulses and interjections, always more or less the same, blocks time and suspends it. An uncontainable pressure continually erupts, starting always from the same beginning, yet with rather contained expression.

The study of the global work of Nicola Cisternino<sup>8</sup> (b. 1957, San Giovanni Rotondo) poses a fundamental question of the theory of musicology: how much must the musicologist go into detail with the extra-musical meanings connected to the composer's music? On one hand there is the risk of lacking authority in making unfounded affirmations, because those factors do not belong directly to the given musical objective. On the other hand an excessive positivism creates the risk of not gathering important meanings connected more or less directly to the music, and perhaps also of misunderstanding the music itself, to the degree in which the extramusical is instead musical and that music is indeed also other than more or less organized sound. At bottom the question is about the theory of music: how much are the extramusical annexations extraneous or consubstantial with music. If they are consubstantial, the musicologist who does not deal with them and become capable of discussing them technically, lacks authority.

In his numerous writings Cisternino alludes constantly to a content other than music and material-informational reality. The duty of the musicologist would be to analyse completely both the music and this content as well as their relationship (and this is the hard part): the mode of the extra-musical presence in music, the mode of musicality in the strict sense of the extra-musical. With different technical-stylistic results Cisternino adheres to the Pythagorean and then romantic, Weberian, Scelsian creed, that the material has its own meaning and that especially that meaning attains in some way to the absolute, to transcendence. Thus he assumes in the centre of his compositional thought a fulsome concept of *sound*, according to which he composes with sounds – rather than with notes, durations, articulations, etc. – trusting in their numinous character, aureate in itself, apart from syntax. Thus he is associated with the epochal movement – post-Varèsian, in debt to electronics and to spectrographic acoustic analysis – but with a sensible difference. While for example the spectralists compose with sounds instead of notes

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<sup>8</sup> See not only music but also the cycle of graphic-musical hybrids *Graffiti sonori* and the cycle of musical installations *Preghiere Tibetane*.

and make sounds hyper-determining them as multidimensional objects, Cisternino uses sound at its primordial level in respect to the analytic multidimensional sound, almost as if it were an *objet trouvé* (excluding the classic *bel suono* with all its typical characteristics in terms of timbre and instrumental behaviour). He chooses the raw, physical aspect of the material instead of the relational abstract and in consequence on the formal level he practices coherently an accumulation instead of an elaboration. This raw pre-syntactical use of the material could be justified by its epiphanic quality, a means to a further sense, but also intrinsic. But in fact, in the epiphany of the raw material only the raw material is manifested, that of the material material is too much of a down-to-earth transcendence. Substituting the value of the *sound* for that of the intervals, rhythms, articulations, leaves only the sound: and to concentrate on sound ignoring the relations can bring, more than an exaltation of the sound, only a mortification of the relations. If the material really functions as means, then there is no fetishism, but it is the missing consubstantiality of the transcendence in the immanency that turns pseudo Pythagorism of Cisternino into a new *material fetishism*. The fact that the complexity and phenomenological richness of the sound is in itself already immense, let's say not even comparable with that of human musical organisation, does not make it anyway transcendent. To think otherwise is pure superstition. Not that there do not exist leaps of quality between immanent levels and transcendent levels of reality, and in particular of music, but these leaps are always further on as knowledge increases: earlier there was magic in a breeze, a planet, a sound – today magic, the continuously diminishingly unexplained, is for example in the relation of material to mind, material-form-signified, music-emotion-knowledge. Cisternino, instead, regressing to the stage in which magic is everything, is content to emit sounds, emit and adore them as they are instead of taking them to their highest and more recondite power. As masters of the ideal of sound itself, Cisternino cites Scelsi and Cage. But Scelsi, to magnify sound dominates, forces and twists it, rather than letting it just be, while Cisternino magnifies it by simply inflating, overblowing it. On the other hand Cage does not magnify sound, he places it, brings it to pure existence or just indicates it, which does not satisfy Cisternino, who wants to emphasize it. That is his contradiction: he has the mystique of sound itself, but in order to make it resonate instead of offering it as such he magnifies it and, once magnified, he does not do it by infusion of sense but only by accumulation.

The transubstantiation of material into meaning concerns the passage of time above all, which in itself is the object of neutral physical measure, but in music may have different connotations because the possible experiences of *temps durée* deforming the *temps espace* (which is unique) are multiple. In pieces like *Okanagon*, Scelsi manages to establish a sense of time which is definable only as ritual: it is slow but not suspended, marked but not metronomic, it is articulated by moments of breaking verticality but proceeds, advances, inexorably. Cisternino attempts to create temporal anamorphoses of this sort, which are among the most arcane

effects in music. But notwithstanding his arguments about the not chronological *aión*, on *kairós* ('right' time) and on the misquoted relativistic curvature, in his music time is never curved, it runs along like a clock, even without the periodic pulsations. It depends on the fact that the material, simply emitted and not changed by an opportunely forceful will, accumulates in time as it runs smoothly, not drawing across it any lines of force. In particular one of the more efficacious means to stretch and curve or suspend time would be the short and long term management of pitch intervals. But Cisternino, sacrificing notes in favour of *sound*, normally neutralizes intervals by mixing them in a panchromatic homogeneity, or devitalizes them by insisting on a blocked harmonic field. By exception at a certain point in *Andros-Gynée* (1986), since in the gestural improvisation sonorised by computer there is a crescendo of tension, even the music has a diastematic, and thus temporal, tension: however it is simply the rhythmic increase and rising of register, not the activation of the specific power of intervals. On the formal plane it is the dialectic of repetition-variation, coherence-fantasy that creates the meaning, using relationships at a distance. In Cisternino however, just as the material is simply produced, exposed, so is the variety of materials, just exposed and not composed into an integrated whole: there are frequent sudden and unexpected changes of material that do not divide the form in any intelligible way, are devoid of any apparent reason whether *hic et nunc* or *a posteriori*, but which simply happen. As the material on an infra-formal level just happens, so the form just happens, with the result that it is unformed: the only thing that holds it together is time itself, but given that it is impossible to subtract oneself from time, this means nothing.

Singularly Cisternino stands out among the composers of varying tendencies who concentrate on sound as such. His alternative to any formal constructivism coming from the Vienna-Paris/Darmstadt/Paris-Milan schools, in terms of strict atonal observance, is anyway positive. The absence of any reference to the past is precious, given that today even the best composers find newness only in new relationships with the old. Also his complete refusal of polystylism is positive, considered that today the uniqueness of style often lies in the unique combination of the many available styles. His courage in practicing the informal is rare and therefore precious, while all around a regressive figuralism prevails – in the psychological sense: that conceives of the figure as a refuge. Even though it is not endowed with great formal cogency, and is directed according to the principle of accumulation and disordered diversion, the material does have a certain coherence and aesthetic quality: guaranteed by the orderly exclusion of un-material material. And even if not transcendent according to the *desiderata* and the manifestos, the material contains an intrinsic meaning as material. If not otherwise, the risks of failure and the effective failures of the music of Cisternino are in proportion to his properly immense ambitions. He is among a few composers who, not limiting themselves to mere operations of form or style, ask music to be something more than an object or aesthetic experience, who ask music to be music, which means: more than music.

Biagio Putignano (b. 1960, Lecce) is not a radical eclectic, as he excludes all reference to genres extraneous to the contemporary academic, except for pre-twentieth century classical music in a quite filtered manner. He is, rather, a purist, but a certain stylistic nonchalance is still recognizable also as generational. His non-drastring modernism shows in the variety of choices and quantity of his projects, possible only for a composer who does not aspire exclusively, modernistically, to the previously unheard. Further, this sovereign serenity in his writing is a personal talent that finds its foundation in a total and consummate craftsmanship. An exhaustive use of an extensive technique leads inevitably – if not to poly-stylism – to a certain polymorphicity. To judge from his catalogue he composes as he breathes, and if he is never deflected from the severe demands of quality and technical updating, nonetheless he is not one of those who embody the crisis of the music of their time – in both negative and positive senses – asking music and themselves something that stays beyond possibility. His prolific production corresponds to a dedication to all areas of musical life. Accomplished composer, organist, teacher, Putignano writes for all occasions: on commission or not, absolute or functional music, professional or dilettante or didactic, original or in transcription, sacred or profane, acoustic or electronic, for large or small groups, for himself as instrumentalist or for others, for the future and the world or local occasions. And his pieces always fulfill their aim, both aesthetically and socially.

Technically, Putignano himself notes correctly that his music's constant and prominent quality is its "temporal suspension", the "constant work at the edge of silence."<sup>9</sup> As to the former, one must distinguish: this is not a Cage-like absolute suspension where every event is chronologically interchangeable and the succession of events may be changed without substantially changing the form and sense – since, to the contrary, in Putignano there are figural processes that render time equally a process. But these are not processes tending towards a goal or an apex so as to render time strongly dynamic, linearly progressive. They are, rather, processes from a point of departure, or many equivalent points of departure, in circumscribed zones, so that the material or materials simply mutate, are transformed (Basso 2004, 235–37), neither negating nor emphasizing temporal irreversibility. Putignano learned the technique of diagrammatic writing which supports the initially visual analogical imagination of musical events from Sciarrinian teaching. But, since in the Cartesian space of diagrams he traces the mutations of an exquisitely temporal sense, not even on the basis of this ideational procedure can one think that his suspension of time terminates in an absolute spatiality. In fact Putignano likes to call himself (citing Grisey) a "master of time". Manager – and at the same time contemplator – of a succession of sound images that change, but change in a present that lasts, not in a present that tends. A title such as *Mobili immagini* (2006) for organ, two trumpets and percussions is paradigmatic of this

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<sup>9</sup> *Curriculum vitae* supplied by the composer.

attitude. Sometimes the unrelated succession of the images and the near prevalence of their Gestalt function over their aesthetic quality renders Putignano's craft a little vain. Sometimes in rhythmic, loud pieces with fast blocks of compact texture (almost always for keyboard instruments) the figural and digital play aspires to a merely adrenalinic energy of execution: here Putignano the instrumentalist gets the better of the composer. But in the best cases – from *Passaggi di pietra* (1996) for ensemble and electronics to *Variazioni sui colori del cielo* (2006) for violin, cello and piano – the passage of time becomes intense (the listening intently lost), and the timbre-texture changes give precious glimmerings. More than spatial the music of Putignano is spacious. This is true also in its relation with silence: it is not, like the late Nono, music close to silence in that it lies for the most part in a hardly perceptible *pianissimo*, but because it contains in itself much space, free airy space. It contains, that is, the silence, that is an absence felt as presence. The sound, debtor to the Sciarrinian articulations and the spectralist concept of timbre as groups, as aggregates, is material: not neat, clean, full, round, but rather porous, rough, irregular. A sound like this is sound and at the same time it is silence, since its ravelled edge and evanescent border marks also the presence of a pregnant emptiness.

The musical vision of Paolo Aralla (b. 1960, Lecce) may seem as difficult to grasp as is his total vision of the world, given that Aralla refuses to surrogate with art what is impossible in reality. Above all in the pieces for large groups – which in terms of complexity may be compared to the world, while the pieces for camera could be analogous to only portions of the world – he refuses to put himself in the place of the divine creator that sees all ahead of time and in order. From Donatoni, his principal teacher, Aralla borrows only one trait, the decision to gather as he goes from the material itself the suggestions for its development, instead of directing it according to the design of a superior will or even less according to a pre-established harmony. Since pre-established harmony does not exist in the world and man anyway does not perceive it, the composer does not profit from his position by simulating it in his work. Constructing the form from below impedes all false monumentality, every asserted but unreal order, because everything finds justification, if it does, in the detail. Thus for example in *Die gestundete Zeit* (1994) for two pianos, two percussionists, tape and live electronics, *Studio sul blu* (1997) for percussions, orchestra and electronics, *Maree* (1999) for 23 players, *Architektur der Ebene II* (2002) for piano and 13 instruments, which reach a massive sonority, composite, the breadth is not obtained by determination and specification of an abstract initial idea, but from the sum of many concrete strata. The phrasing is constituted by the addition of sketched-in lines and figures, not too finely finished, the sounds and aggregates are added, accumulated, more than beautifully strung together. This corresponds to the contemporary conception of physical reality, composed also of *continuum* and chaos as well as of clear forms, distinct and ordered. In fact, symmetrically, as the whole grows from below by

accumulation, thus it does not decline closing in an equilibrated descending curve, but rather it falls to pieces.

The loss of pre-established formal harmony is symptomatic of a tragic sense of history. Of the history of music, that is. A form constructed of the once assertive means is no longer credible: neither I nor society are reliable foundations for it. But the fact that this awareness is obvious today does not make it painless. The refusal to hypostatize an unreal order is typical of those who are sensitive to order: precisely because there is the desire for its reality, mystification is not tolerated. Giving up the establishment of fictitious balances, Aralla continues to search for those perceptible and intelligible relations: "sense is relation" (Lombardi Vallauri 2004, 4) is still true for him. Above all coherence is given to the whole by a specific and selective harmonic conduct that articulates and orients the atonal chromatic total, so that there are long cohesive arcs, uniform zones of medium and short length and even local foreign notes. A further unifying factor is the instrumental writing and the figural imagination is largely based on its concrete foundation. Aralla complies even too readily with the principle of instrumentalism, which gives a guarantee of craft, and of realism, but not of originality, neither in respect to tradition nor the contemporary academy. Most of all the complete instrumental groups too facilely evoke traditional sound, even if the writing is in all other senses atonal. It is difficult to subtract oneself from this effect: the orchestra is the most traditionally connoted instrument, because it sums all the connotations of the single instruments, families, and relations among families. Aralla is more accomplished at transcending the typical sound of the usual practice when he does not feel constrained to write so that the instrumentalists do what they already do well. In *Die gestundete Zeit* the timbre is not at all conventional and, especially, not assertive: the pianos, elaborated and deformed electronically, are absolutely denuded of their 'grand' piano connotation. Here, and in *Studio sul blu, Maree, Impromptu VI* (2006) for wind instruments and live electronics, those that function best are the moments of accumulation, of mass: thanks to electronics, noise (the percussions), and an agglomerating phrasing. Or to the contrary the moments of subtraction, rarefaction, in which instrumental behaviour becomes more conative and is based less on the habits and peculiarities of the instruments, which, inasmuch as typical, consolidated, sound improperly affirmative on both the expressive and ideological planes.

In general Aralla gains from operating with a conative approach where what becomes evident is the challenge of intelligence in respect to the possibilities and impossibilities of composition (stylistic and deontologic), not the final stage of a presumably perfect creative success. With an interlocutory attitude: not definitive or abusive, rather a dialogue. Instead of extreme positions Aralla prefers to place himself on difficult brinks that call for mediation and balancing opposing forces, both – if isolated – poor and mistaken. In *Varianti* for solo violin (1991), for example, he brings back the traditional category of the melody, but with all its

contemporary precariousness. In general he expresses all the precariousness of the traditional categories – melody, harmony, etc. – trying anyway to give them value. The credibility of the restoration is also in the measure to which it does not pass itself off as well done, in the disenchantment. The reference to traditional categories is not neoclassicism, because it is not based on any misplaced faith in their lasting validity. The position of those who use the extended melody and the grand orchestral gesture etc. without reserve, thus expressing their nostalgia, is today unsustainable for reasons that are no less psycho-anthropological than musically historic-stylistic. Aralla shares nostalgia, but also demonstrates that one cannot let oneself go to it. That which is unsustainable is not nostalgia – because it's universal: who does not love traditional music? – but bowing to its sad instigations. In *Varianti* the melody is not directly re-constituted but brought as a melody that continually passes in a timbric-articulative process, and vice-versa. In general Aralla's musical gesture is characterized by a non-assertiveness, by figural, phraseological, and formal discretion. There is never a stentorian statement, super-convinced, emphatic exaltation of any object, but at a certain point always an interruption, a diversion (avoiding total fragmentation). Perfectly conative and dialogue-like is the field of *live electronics*, where the piece – in relation to the instrument, the interpreter, the place, the time – is in continual adjustment *hic et nunc*. In *Káros* (2004) for flute and electronics, for example, the electronics furnish from phrase to phrase a live and dialectic ambient for the flute. It amplifies sound in the spatial sense of the term, rendering it vast, and mobilizes the instrument, which for its own part on the phraseological plane moves in a discrete exploration, attentive in turn to the ambient (which it itself contributes in creating). At every expection contextualized by the electronics, the flute takes time to breathe, a pause to understand fully the contextualization itself. The flute, spiritual instrument par excellence, thus at the same time makes itself more physical because it occupies the space, crosses it in traversing the listener. Fatally this dialogue, at the intersection between the different experiential categories of time, sound and space, brings Aralla to an encounter with dance. In *Silence/Text* (2005), dancers interact with microphone and produce sounds that electronics elaborate in real time. Thus, using the microphone as a medium, music is dance, dance is music. And in particular, while it usually exceeds in abstractness, electronic music becomes absolutely corporeal.

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