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Contemporary music in central Italy: an overview of recent decades

ABSTRACT: The present article tries to make thematic the geographical plan of the present volume, by examining the major focal points of Contemporary Music in Central Italy which act as centres disseminating compositional trends through a long-established interest in recent music, as well as didactical structures and important teachers. Clearly, Rome is a more influential centre than Florence (where the endemic tendency of Florentine culture towards a sense of order, the settlement there of Dallapiccola, and the rise of a pioneering activity in the field of electronic music since the '60s are noteworthy); this is due to the teaching – through different generations – of Petrassi, Guaccero, Donatoni, Corghi and now Fedele, as well as the presence of many musical institutions, and the availability of artists and writers involved in exchanges and collaborations with composers. For this reason, many composers who were educated or active in Rome developed an outstanding – often prophetic – predilection for mix-media or theatrical works. After Bussotti, Guaccero, Macchi and Bertoncini, Giorgio Battistelli is a pivotal figure representing this trend in the next generation of composers; nonetheless an aptitude for it can be perceived also in other composers from both generations (Clementi, Pennisi and Renosto; Sbordonì, Lombardi, Rendine, D'Amico and De Rossi Re), including among the younger ones Silvia Colasanti, Roberta Vacca and Francesco Antonioni. In parallel, electronic music has been cultivated by Evangelisti and Branchi, as a way of renewing musical thought and language from their foundations: researches in the musical application of digital processing have been remarkable in Rome, along with experimentation in real time sound-generation and -transformation (Nottoli, Lupone, Di Scipio). On the whole, the generation born in the 1950s seems to tend (in aesthetics as well as in poetics) towards a change of thinking about musical form, integrating paradigmatic (structural) categories, typical of serial music, with syntagmatic (fictional) ones. Such an integration is perceivable as early as in the works of Donatoni, which have widely influenced many younger Italian composers, whether they have studied under him or not.

The compositional horizon in Central Italy will be examined, with a special focus on that generation, with regard to two issues: 1) Has this change been determined (or helped) by post-modernism? Before post-modernism became widespread during the 1980s, some composers from Rome had already elaborated a language which included heterogeneous sound materials and playing with musical codes, even if they did not deny the necessity of historical progress of musical language. Furthermore, post-modernism doesn't suffice to explain the music of many composers, for whom the stratification of musical language and the sphericity of internal relationship inside a work is a result of the theory of complexity. 2) What is the aesthetical and poetical tendency in the youngest generation of composers, since a radicalization between a fictional and a visionary approach seems to have been established in their music?

KEYWORDS: Compositional Teaching, Post-Modernism, Complexity [Theory of], Electronic Music, (Post-)Serialism, Rome, Florence, Musical Theatre, Multimedia, (Neo- and Post-)Avantgarde.

1. Following the Second World War: the driving role of Rome in Central Italy

In this essay I would like to attempt to give themes to the geographical make up of the volume, posing the following question: is it still valid, in the study of the generations of composers from recent decades in Italy, to propose, if not a school criterion, then at least a criterion of identity relating to a historical-geographical environment (background and/or prevalent activity)? This is a complex question that now sits on a completely altered horizon regarding the transmission of knowledge and technique: even before the current technological epoch in the history of musical creativity, the more or less direct selection and assumption of one's models (to be calqued, to be superseded, or to be discussed radically) has not always respected the criterion of historical-geographical proximity. This criterion has often been surpassed, modified by aesthetic choices or by ordinary biographical circumstances, or altered by knowledge of models through the transmission over distance of musical texts (with the musical press increasing in influence).

Despite the considerable availability of recordings and radio broadcasts of recent music, which in part has counterbalanced the crisis in musical publishing, and the increased biographical mobility of musicians, a historical-geographical criterion may still have a minimum of sense today, especially with regard to the educational choices of young composers: in the academic field the educational route seems to have become the same for everyone, and it aims to confer to the young musician a perfect technical grounding. But having chosen this route under the guidance of a particular mentor, or in a precise cultural context, may have had in the recent past, or even still today, an influence that is not negligible.

For composers of the generation born in the 1950s (who constitute the central axis of my analysis) the available educational contexts – academic and more generally musical – were not numerous up until the beginning of the 1970s: the main centre was certainly Rome, and even those centres which began to have teachers of composition at their disposal – as well as a musical life that was not linked exclusively to tradition, such as Perugia, L'Aquila, Pesaro, and so on – turned to Rome for their teachers. This context had been marked, from the immediate post-war period, by the presence – as teacher and as composer – of Goffredo Petrassi, who taught both at the *Conservatorio Santa Cecilia* and at the *Accademia* of the same name. Despite this, it cannot be said that the most advanced front of Roman New Music – the group that gravitated from roughly 1960 onwards around the society *Nuova Consonanza*¹ – passed entirely through the teaching of Petrassi: Aldo Clementi, Domenico Guaccero, Ennio Morricone, Mauro Bortolotti, Mario

¹ Regarding the first thirty years of life in the capital of the *Associazione Nuova Consonanza* see Tortora, 1990.

Bertoncini, Fausto Razzi had all been his pupils;² but other important figures in the group (Franco Evangelisti, Egisto Macchi, Francesco Pennisi, Guido Baggiani, Walter Branchi, belonging to the same generation of those born about 1930), had followed different – and at times less academic – apprenticeships.³ Evangelisti in particular had followed the *Ferienkurse* of Darmstadt almost uninterruptedly – from the mid 50s to 1962, with regular performances from 1957 onwards – and thus had assimilated a compositional education (as well as a technical one) in Germany.⁴

The passage through Darmstadt had nevertheless been pivotal for the others as well, whether repeated or episodic; the direct experience there of the most recent tendencies in western art music (serialism, alea, gestualism) and its various flag-bearers (Boulez, Stockhausen, Maderna, Pousseur, Cage, Kagel), led to the Roman composers feeling the need to found an organism that spread knowledge of the

² Among the significant pupils who never formed part of Nuova Consonanza, we can cite the still active Boris Porena (b. 1927). Porena, after having initially adhered to the serial language, conceived of composition as an operational process that can and must adapt to different contexts in which the composer works today; in granting this practice an anti-ideological load and therefore turning to basic structures of sound thought, Porena has realized authoritative sylloges of initiation to musical sound, opened up to a linguistically renewed conception and practice.

³ Walter Branchi (b. 1941) developed a systematic conception of sound creation, in the sense that each step along his creative route intends to explain moments – autonomous and yet correlated – of a single compositional project, indeed called ‘uno’; this project sees the meeting of Cagean (composition as listening and intention of the natural phonosphere), ecosystemic (music as sound landscape, albeit ‘organized’) and computational (composition as progressive generation of sound material on the basis of a system) proposals, but fundamentally there remains the compositional exploration of a ‘closed’ sound system (evident in the piece *Twins*, for amplified cymbals), given that even the largest sound eco-systems are, in their way, closed systems. Guido Baggiani, though born in Naples in 1932, studied in Rome with Boris Porena and then with Domenico Guaccero (electronic music), sharing with this last a fluid conception of sound space, but in some regards more open to the unforeseen, arriving not only through improvisation, but through the entire formal and inventive gesture. Regarding Branchi, see the site: <http://www.walter-branchi.com>.

⁴ Franco Evangelisti (b. 1926-d. 1980) had a parallel technical–scientific and musical education (the latter more in Germany than in Italy). The condensed structures of his first pieces highlight a work of fragmentation of musical discourse, aimed at foregrounding the sound structures of the subject with its expressions and its flights, and at bringing nearer the energetic conception of Varèse’s music. The structures therefore are of value as quantities of crystallized sound energy, ready however to free its potential according to combinatorial arrangements that are not tied to the sequence of happening. This is the deepest and most personal reception of the music of Varèse, where others have limited this reception to the metaphor of the sound-mass and its architectural value that is both naked and looming (regarding Evangelisti’s time in Darmstadt, see Trudu 1992). Macchi and Pennisi developed their own approaches (Pennisi’s distinguished by an extraordinary capacity – only apparently decorative – for running a watermark through sound, fathoming the most delicate depths of timbre) with their training outside of academic institutions, but within Roman contexts.

music and the tendencies of those composers – as well as their own work – which in the traditionalist setup of the capital were not particularly welcome. However strange it may be, for young composers in the 1950s it was easier to have their works heard while still students at the Conservatory than after they had received their diplomas, since the few opportunities could have been linked to radio or musical union programmes⁵ rather than to the activities of the Italian section of the SIMC (with its difficult political equilibriums) or the slight interest occasioned by public concert seasons. In the Roman post-war context other figures proved important – involved in teaching or organization – due to the constant attention paid to the music of the historical avant-garde, and also due to the door that was left open to the more innovative and experimental experiences of contemporary music, in which – electroacoustic music for example – they worked (this is true of Roman Vlad) directly. Even if these figures had also studied with Petrassi, they thus appear as a less youthful generation, on the aesthetic–compositional level rather than in terms of age, remaining close to the idioms of the historical avant-garde: I allude to figures such as Guido Turchi,⁶ Irma Ravinale, Barbara Giurana, who were of considerable importance as operators and/or teachers.

Among exponents of the neo-avant-garde who were direct pupils of Petrassi, only Clementi, Morricone, Razzi and Bertoncini (and two pupils of the more recent generations, Marcello Panni and Ada Gentile), as well as the Hungarian – but adopted Italian – Ivan Vandor, are still alive and working:⁷ this sample is enough

⁵ In the early 1960s the *Sindacato Musicisti Italiani* [Italian Musicians' Union], born out of an initiative by Goffredo Petrassi and others on the remains of the Fascist musical union, led to incisive action for the valorization of Italian *Nuova Musica* in some institutional ambits (especially in the programming of national radio) as well as to the introduction or the reevaluation of musical education in schools.

⁶ Guido Turchi (b. 1916-d. 2010), pupil of Pizzetti, very active in RAI and musical institutions, belongs together with Roman Vlad to the generation for whom the limit-experience, from the linguistic point of view, consisted of dodecaphony; his music therefore adheres, with a solid eclecticism (involving Bartók, Schönberg and Stravinsky), to the modernism of the historical avant-garde, distinguished from it by a knotty dryness and an architectural constructivism that emphasize the structural, abstract and non-stylistic aspect of musical thought; significant, in this light, are also the most recent pieces: *Adagio* (1983) and *Parabola* (1983–1993) for orchestra, and the cantata *Exil* (1995).

⁷ Unfortunately, Aldo Clementi died in Rome on the 3rd of March 2011, after this article had been written, but before its printing. Marcello Panni (b. 1940), active prevalently as an orchestral conductor, concluding his studies in Paris during the second half of the 1960s, reveals in his career the first signs of an eclecticism destined to mark a new season: in *Klangfarbenspiel*, an experimental musical theatre work realized with Mario Ricci (b. 1972), the alternation between two basic and antithetical materials seems to turn – without expressing its stylistic dictates – to minimalism, which Panni was one of the first conductors in Italy to interpret; subsequently, the eclectic recovery of historical languages and styles was channelled towards the representative dynamic of musical theatre (*The Banquet*, 1998; *Garibaldi en Italie*, 2005). Ada Gentile (b. Avezano, 1947) therefore belongs to a subsequent generation, and indeed the elegant materism, terse and almost mineralized, of her most mature writing, albeit related to Petrassi's teaching,

to testify to the ethical, and non-stylistic, teaching of the maestro, dealing as we are with musicians who have extremely different linguistic outputs. For decades Clementi has worked on structures which resolve themselves into a rigorous geometrical-figurative planning of musical space–time with techniques close to the most complex canons; these structures fossilize all potential discursive residues of the materials (even those extracted from Western European art music) and represent the extinguishing of dynamic energy in a temporal experience that transforms into a spatial experience.⁸ Bertoncini's operative dominion lies in the same territory of the space–time reversibility (gesture-or figure-sound), in order to give space however to a more evident protagonist role of the sound material and its a-periodic and asymmetrical virtues, with a subtle and insidious play between its independence and its control by the performer–composer. This often has led Bertoncini to invent and build personally sound-objects, that are specific for a single opus (or a series of works) whose substantial relationship such a sound-object is able to embody, being sound-sculpture, instrument and concrete score at the same time.

⁹ Razzi instead studied in depth a rigorous temporal organization of material, arranged in grids of modules that have no relation with the simplistic minimalist iteration, but rather look towards complex (even when not stratified) canonic structures; the material that Razzi projects into these grids is not only instrumental (*Per Piano 2* is among his most significant works), but – especially in recent years – is also vocal, with particular attention paid towards both semantic and sonorous value

no longer participates in the dialectic problem between materic expression and the definition of a system that departs from a material, a dialectic that marks the experience of the preceding generation. Ivan Vandor (b. 1932) was a pupil of Petrassi (after having been a pupil of Turchi) in two periods, up to the beginning of the 1960s. Later Vandor, as a musicologist, deepened his knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism, the influence of which can be traced in his music, including his most recent pieces. This influence is to be found not so much in the form of determined stylemes as in the tendency to support a non-discursive, contemplative tendency in the flow of sound. Rather than structures that generate a spatial experience of musical time (a widespread solution among the composers who emerged around 1960), the musical structures of Vandor generate a rapt but lucid meditation on sound, indeed without touching the same stylemes of the music of, say, Giacinto Scelsi, with whom nevertheless Vandor shares the reflection on a link between West and East and an ambivalent route involving the uprooting of European cultural tradition.

⁸ Regarding Clementi, and in particular his most recent diatonic production, see Mattiotti 2001.

⁹ Regarding Bertoncini, see the upcoming proceedings of a round table that took place in the context of the meeting (*macro*)teorie – (*meta*)linguaggi – (*inter*)azioni. Roma, la Nuova Musica, il contesto artistico-intellettuale negli anni '60-'70 (Rome: Nuova Consonanza, December 18, 2007), edited by Alessandro Mastropietro (contributions from Pierluigi Petrobelli, Gianmario Borio, Walter Branchi, Giorgio Nottoli, Guido Baggiani, Christine Anderson, Daniela Tortora, Valentina Bertolani, Michelangelo Lupone). Also pertinent is the chapter in Mastropietro 2005, 278–92. Bertoncini's own dialogues, in which he expresses his theoretical and historical reflection, have only been partially published (Bertoncini 2009).

of the word.¹⁰ Morricone attempts in the production of absolute music a linguistic revitalization of sonorous ciphers abstracted from historical systems (modal/tonal, diatonic/chromatic, within or without the tempered system).¹¹

2. Another cultural capital: Florence

In the 1950s (the years in which the composers briefly illustrated above received their training), the only other city apart from Rome to have its own tradition of the modern was Florence: a tradition that indeed had been consolidated historically in the decades between the two wars and which on the one hand owed much to the centuries-old humanistic element in the city's culture, and on the other to the problematics in the ethical sense of modernism. This last was a process underway in Florence from the second decade of the twentieth century onwards, especially in the literary context (see the journal *La Voce*).

I will deal immediately with the question of the character of contemporary Florentine music, both because others have already worked on this (Cresti 2002), and in order to distinguish the nuances of the ethical component present in both the possible historical–geographical schools (Rome and Florence). If in Petrassi's ambit ethical research involves the musician in tension with language and even in its torsion, which therefore allows the dynamics (magmatic or crystallized) of the sound matter to emerge more easily, in the Florentine context the definition of a linguistic grid is consubstantial with the ethical approach, determining a rigorous and priority control over the subject. It is for this reason that Florence in the immediate post-war years becomes an incubator for neo-classical revision and recovery – now nostalgic, now more essential and abstract – of formal composure as a value. This approach spread variously, from Pizzetti, Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Bucchi, Frazzi, Lupi, up to the next generations and among those still active (Benvenuti, Prosperi), and in this regard Gaetano Giani Luporini (b. 1936, Lucca) and Romano Pezzati (b. 1939, Florence) should be mentioned by virtue of the equilibrium between architectural sharpness and up-to-date compositional technique. The coincidence between ethical rigour and the definition of a rigorous linguistic system is valid not only for Luigi Dallapiccola, the most important figure in post-war Florence: first Lupi and Frazzi and later Prosperi developed a theoretical background to their own compositional system, without this pre-announcing or becoming *tout-court* a dodecaphonic–serial approach. The expressively tense aspect of Dallapiccola's music is perceived episodically (for example in the juvenile works of Paolo Renosto, his pupil), but what

¹⁰ Significant, in this regard, are the works – theatrical and non-theatrical – from texts by Edoardo Sanguineti, including *Protocolli* (1989–1992) and *Smorfie* (1997).

¹¹ A piece by Morricone to which reference can be made safely remains the concert for trumpet, strings and percussion, *Ut* (1991), due to the magisterial weave of chromatic and diatonic materials. Regarding Morricone, not only as author of music for the cinema, see Miceli 1994.

counts more is the charisma of the personality and the recognition of his technical-compositional and ethical-cultural background, to the point where a solidarity among young musicians – which took the name of *Schola fiorentina* – was founded in 1954 with the blessing of the authoritative composer, and with the participation of his pupils (Benvenuti, Prosperi, Company, Bartolozzi, Smith-Brindle and Bussotti). For Cresti, “the term Schola should be understood as an aggregation of musicians who seek to practice a free cultural exercise [...] with the only intention being to know and to study in depth contemporary music, to cultivate mutual interests and to cement friendships through a reciprocal and frank exchange of ideas.”

Sylvano Bussotti (b. 1931, Florence) is still active, but his wide-ranging artistic trajectory should be discussed also apropos of the Roman centre: following the season of the great 1960s frescoes (*Pièces de chair; La Passion selon Sade; The Rara Requiem*), in which elegance and sentiment of timbre, tragic manner and urgency, Apollonian Muses and Dionysian vitality are interwoven, in the most recent Bussotti there survives – indeed it emerges progressively in the foreground – a taste for a classic stylization and transparency. This route is not an incongruous one considering what appeared as the strong and subversive nucleus (with regard to the apparent neo-rationalisms of the Darmstadt School) of the years of his affirmation, culminating with his move to Rome: the presence of the body, as exuberant as it is mannered, with its vibrating movements (graphic and thus semiographic) and yet also decorative, with their taking form in voice or in gesture, within his rebellion led in the name of Eros. The multiple forms – musical, graphic–pictorial, performative – in his work led him quickly towards the theatre in which he represented, only apparently contradictorily, the magnetic presence and the narcissistic disembodiment of the body and the voice, their simultaneous glorification and passion, accompanied on the semiographic plane by a parallel value – graphical (visual–abstract) and sonorous (concretely acoustic) – of the same sign.¹²

In one precise phase this trajectory intersected with that of the Italian colony of the Fluxus movement, of which a Florentine, Giuseppe Chiari (b. 1926-d. 2007, Florence) was the main flag-bearer. An interest in the most provocative artistic movements (from the above-mentioned Fluxus to musical graphism, back to Futurism) is to be found in the pianist–composer Daniele Lombardi (b. 1946, Florence), in Giuliano Zosi (b. 1940, Florence), exponent of ‘sound poetry’, who moved to Milan, but was a pupil of Lupi in Florence and then member of a Newdada duo with another Tuscan figure who was strongly influenced by Cage (the pianist-composer Giancarlo Cardini (b. 1940, Querceta), and in Albert Mayr (b. 1943, Bolzano), a pupil of Grossi, his successor to the Florentine chair of Electronic Music, deeply interested in the experimental field of the soundscape.

¹² Regarding Bussotti there is still a lack of an up-to-date critical synthesis of the last years of his work. There are, however, three historical readings: Carapezza 1966, 10–12; Bortolotto 1969, 201–26; La Face 1974, 250–68. Furthermore, Mastropietro 2005, 248–76.

Indeed it should be remembered that from the 1960s onwards Florence was a lively centre for Italian electronic music, thanks to one of its pioneers, Pietro Grossi (b. 1917-d. 2001, Florence). Previously a cellist in the *Orchestra del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino* and founder of the concert society *Vita Musicale Contemporanea*, Grossi was in 1965 the first teacher of electronic music in an Italian Conservatory (Mastropietro 2000), and above all he was the first to develop in Italy research into the field of producing sounds through the use of a computer, founding and directing in 1969 the computer division of the CNUCE-CNR in Pisa. With the beginning of his academic teaching in electronic music, Grossi set up a semi-private studio (S 2 F M, *Studio di Fonologia Musicale di Firenze*), in which works were created and signed collectively with pupils; this was a natural result of the technical-interdisciplinary nature of computer-based composition, the related change in the concept of intellectual property, and the basic – for the most part malleable – nature of the materials used as a point of departure (which normally included works already created in the studio). This collective conception, found also in other electronic research centres in those years, led Grossi to hypothesize – much earlier than the appearance of home-based computer equipment – the advent of private electronic music production, without a public destination (concert performances or through collective media), put together by technician-composer hybrid figures simply by combining materials. But actually it was not the materials that determined this approach; for Grossi it was instead the shift in focus from the work of art (and its traditional intellectual property) to the *modus operandi*: a new way of working was being offered, which came with the attitude “Look what can be done: do it!” (Giomi and Ligabue 1999).

Today in Florence the heritage of the electronic and computer music sector is more significant than that left by contemporary acoustic concerts. This thanks to the foundation (with the encouragement of Luciano Berio) of the *Centro Tempo Reale* in 1987. This centre, set up in order to investigate live applications of the most advanced technologies of computer sound processing, attracted the work of several composers and/or researchers who for some time had led Florentine electronic music production (Francesco Giomi, Marco Ligabue). But we should not forget also the work of musicians who, although Tuscan, had trained elsewhere, in Milan, and followed trajectories that were independent of a territorial school (Riccardo Vaglini – b. 1965, Pisa – for example, an experimenter in electro-acoustic pieces and in installations who was so against monolithic linguistic and aesthetic models that as a provocation he even created some fake works or even the deconstruction of historical musical texts; or Andrea Mannucci – b. 1960, Pontremoli – who owed a debt to Camillo Togni and Aldo Clementi for a rigour that was filtered through the serial experience). Others worked on a musical horizon that deliberately excluded Italy, seeking to establish links with experiences deriving from scientific thought, such as the *nuova complessità* [new complexity] (Diego Minciacchi – b. 1955, Rome – but who for almost 20 years has lived in Florence).

3. Once again in Rome: the new context from the second half of the 1960s

Following the experience of *Nuova Consonanza*, which still continues as an association not only of composers, but also of musicians and musicologists close to contemporary music, the directions of groupings in Rome, in the capital, were no longer complex, but were rather complicated by political-institutional factors, as well as by a number of figures who, with the explosion and the variety of tendencies, have followed paths that are sometimes interwoven, more often individual.

The first generation to step into the limelight after the founders of *Nuova Consonanza* still has today among its protagonists Alessandro Sbordonì (b. 1949, Rome) and Luca Lombardi (b. 1947, Rome). Both share with Guaccero some experience in strongly heteronymous improvisation groups (for the former the experimental jazz of *Dé Dé*, for the latter the live electronic sound generation with the first analogue synthesizers, given expression in *Musica Ex Machina*), and from this came the lesson of multiplicity and openness to various sound materials, attempting a new articulation according to different strategies. Sbordonì also went through the experience of the *Gruppo di improvvisazione Nuova Consonanza*, an ensemble of composers within which each individuality (all of them considerable: Evangelisti, Bertoncini, Morricone, Macchi, Branchi, etc.) interacted with the other, melding in the performance an unconventional lexis of materials in an action marked temporally by a-periodicity and asymmetry; the need for a systematic principle (which in the Group worked by negation, seeking a collective liberation of the energy and self-organizational potential that the composers experimented in their individual creations out of the material and the sound objects) led Sbordonì to create a system, not only harmonic, that organizes through juxtaposed sets the chromatic total, and subsequently to recover a notion of gravitational centre beginning with the study of Gregorian melody and its corporal-vocal centres of support. As early as the beginning of the 1970s, Lombardi, together with Antonello Neri from L'Aquila and Giuliano Zosi, founded the *Gruppo Rinnovamento Musicale*, which investigated in depth the liberating and research approaches regarding sound matter as expounded by Cage and Stockhausen (with whom he had studied), performing concerts even in unconventional spaces and contexts.

I must open a parenthesis here to deal with the progressive transformation of the Roman musical context in those years: alongside the traditional institutions, new spaces had opened up in a city that for some time had been expressing a vocation towards transversal meetings among artistic experiences in different fields. These are experiences that generate complex multimedia texts which – apart from some Futurist experiments – are in essence new: works for a new musical theatre planned and created with visual artists and musicians together (a pairing that is typologically geared towards the rejection of a literary genesis, or libretto-

based, of musical theatre, which was not coherent with the growing movement away from music as narrative), such as the couple Perilli-Clementi for *Collage*, Nonnis-Evangelisti and Nonnis-Guaccero respectively for *Die Schachtel* and *Scene del potere*, or the couples (who recall another important place for 1960s new music – Palermo), Titone-Macchi and Diacono-Macchi for the latter's works. There were also those who expressed both competences, musician and artist, and this is the case with Bussotti and with Pennisi, who came from other geographical areas, but had been settled in Rome – and had been organic parts of the cultural fabric there – since the 1960s (Mastropietro 2005).

Let it be clear that this is not a widespread Bauhaus, but is a context that favours contact, knowledge, the simple meeting or the radical sharing of creative phenomena and pursuits, and in a formula that is, from a social point of view, partway between being socially committed (linguistically or politically) and being socially on display: let us not forget that Rome from before the war onwards has been the city of the cinema, of visibility and of age-old manifestations of power. In this context,¹³ at the end of the 1960s there is a ripening of the need for spaces – concrete in social terms or strictly intellectual – in which meetings, knowledge, artistic experiences can find expression in a freedom that at the time was defined as being counter-culture: these places were, for example, the so-called *cantine*, 'cellars' created in warehouses or even in real cellars, adapted as theatrical, musical, social spaces in which performing groups could, without time limits, rehearse and perform – for a generally limited audience – their own productions. The most famous of these spaces, affirming itself around 1970 thanks to the interdisciplinary openness of its productions, is *Beat 72*, which was the leading one among other related venues – the art galleries *La Tartaruga* and *L'Attico*, in which trans-disciplinary performances were held or (only at *L'Attico*) minimalist music was introduced to Rome for the first time. This environment was naturally very receptive towards Cage's production (sometimes performed by Cage himself) and gestural production (Kagel, Schnebel, and the Italians who followed or were close to this tendency), which lends itself by its very nature to the crossing of frontiers between musical, theatrical and – episodically – cinematographic forms; nevertheless this is a reception that, being already significant in the first *Nuova Consonanza* festivals, began to make an impact in some more traditional institutions that were ready to welcome the appearance of a new, young audience with specific curiosities, and more generally in those years there was the affirmation of a radically anti-narrative conception in music as a current historical value.

In this context the Fluxus or Fluxus-style performances reached their zenith: while bearing in mind that in Rome there was no official Fluxus artist working constantly, the Florentine exponents were willing to be present and to work in the

¹³ For a comprehensive history of the interweave between art and social life in the twentieth-century Roman context, a minimum trans-disciplinary approach is adopted by Salaris 1999.

capital; but above all, the Fluxus provocations and revolutions became for a period a general code, to which musicians and composers (even some who were not Roman, but who were resident there) adhered, for example Bussotti and Rzewski. Another phenomenon valorised by the *cantine*, but not two-way to them, was the appearance of live electronic improvisation groups: technological extensions of the prevalently instrumental improvisation groups (but the Nuova Consonanza group had already made systematic use of electro-acoustic instruments), these groups exploited the spread of the first electronic synthesizers (VCS3, Moog) to intervene on extreme heteronymous materials with the greatest possible freedom in their sound processing and temporal organization. The Roman group representing a point of reference in this field, MEV (*Musica Elettronica Viva*), is in truth formed by three American musicians, Rzewski, Curran and Teitelbaum: alongside other American musicians (over time including the composers Robert W. Mann, John Heineman and Lukas Voss, or the musicians William O. Smith and Richard Trythall), these three were active in the capital by virtue of their residency at the *Accademia Americana*, a type of institution that – due to its lateral position with regard to official Italian ministerial institutions – was incisive, together with the German *Goethe Institut*, in promoting the new international music in Rome.¹⁴

Returning to the two composers, it is in this framework that Lombardi makes his first moves as a member of groups of electronic improvisation (the *Synthesizers*, *Musica ex Machina*) together with peers and authoritative mentors (Guaccero). Subsequently a pupil of Stockhausen and B. A. Zimmermann, from the 1980s Lombardi works on an aesthetic-compositional line that moves in two parallel and variously present directions: ‘exclusive’ and ‘inclusive’; the former constitutes an intra-linguistic in-depth investigation, the study and the application of a precise compositional system and a delimited typology of materials, the fathoming, therefore, of defined linguistic and expressive potential; the latter adopts an openness towards heteronymous materials and systems with regard to the cone-shaped investigation that digs deep, a horizontal widening of linguistic and expressive potential towards other motifs, genres, repertoires, sonorities (Galliano 1995, 252–65). The inclusive tendency is naturally very perceivable in the composer’s dramatic musicals, beginning with *Faust, un travestimento* (text by Sanguineti from Goethe, 1991, Basel) and *Dmitri* (2000, Leipzig), a work on Šostakovič, right up to the very recent *Il re nudo* (2009, Teatro dell’Opera di Roma, written for Elio

¹⁴ To these two non-Italian institutions, we must add – on surveying the institutions present and the regular concerts of contemporary music offered – the *Accademia di Francia*, with its headquarters in Villa Medici. Between the second half of the 1970s and the first half of the following decade, the *Accademia di Francia* hosted the major exponents of French spectralism, musicians who were interested in Rome especially because of their knowledge of the music – and the person – of Giacinto Scelsi. Rather excluded within the Roman ambit, esteemed – if not venerated – by a limited circle, Scelsi and his music nevertheless never constituted a school in Rome, and indeed spectralism itself was only very moderately received in the capital.

from the *Storie Tese* – a progressive-rock ensemble – as protagonist), passing through the great fresco of *Prospero* from *The Tempest* by Shakespeare (2006, Nuremberg). Inclusive/exclusive are nevertheless also a dialectical pair present in some instrumental pieces, among which I note here *Infra*, for ensemble (1997), or the still-open series of the exquisite, miniature *Grüße* (2001–2003) for piano, each of which is dedicated to a real, existing person.

The career of Alessandro Sbordoni soon met with the problem of overcoming the multiplicity of materials through a personal reorganization of the chromatic whole and to channel the writing through a renewed need for communicative clarity. The solutions developed in the works belonging to his early maturity therefore recall a rich harmonic sense, prismatic but in essence unitary (based on circular harmonic fields) and a plastic expression of sound figures. Sbordoni's research on the harmonic aspect of writing is evident in particular in the work for piano, *Le strade dell'aurora* (1990) and in the *Eros* chamber series, then leading to the wide-ranging symphonic–vocal works (the cantata *Alba*, 1991) and consolidating itself from *Fantasia della lontananza – 6 Canti da Emily Dickinson* (1992) onwards in a reflection on the voice; this last was then enriched by the study of the Gregorian repertory (*Agnus im Absprung*, for voice and magnetic tape, 1995; the work *Sehn-Sucht*, 1996, Rome, Accademia Filarmonica Romana) as a meta-historical example of roots in the concrete “body of the voice”, a general principle of centricity and of a complex melodic attraction (Mastropietro 1996, 86–92).

In both cases, there is a mediation between the non-narrative thrusts (material, geometric-visual, composition ‘of sound’ and not ‘with sounds’) of contemporary musical thought, and a re-assumption of some linguistic–musical principles carefully filtered by the linguistic–musical narrative tradition of past centuries, but here strikingly reinvented and, ultimately, personalized. This route towards reinvention, coming out of a new and personal motivation of elements both from tradition and from the most recent musical avant-garde, together with – at times – elements from other musical genres and cultures, is investigated in various forms by many exponents of the immediately subsequent generation, of which Lombardi and Sbordoni are after all the senior members.

4. A post-modern generation?

The Italian compositional generation born in the 1950s is certainly, after that of the neo-avant-garde, the most substantial in terms of numbers of exponents, regularity and substance of creative production, and international recognition: in this respect it involved the general expansion of the Italian musical system (in teaching, in concert activity, in the birth of ensembles dedicated to contemporary music) from the end of the 1970s throughout the 80s. There was a proliferation of varied and new contexts in which it was possible to operate creatively

(not only specialized festivals, but also traditional institutions – stimulated by the new normative framework determined by the 1968 law on live performances – and activities bordering with other genres or arts), and there was also a strengthening of structures for electronic music.

This situation is valid above all for the Roman context, which functioned as inseminator for other geographically peripheral areas: some Roman composers travelled there to teach compositional subjects, thus modernizing the musical panorama.

But in my opinion what also counted was the breaking of the wave – up to that point only apparently monolithic – of the neo-avant-garde, and its explosion into tendencies that overturn the very reason for an aesthetic avant-garde, indeed the historical direction and need for a musical language that the avant-garde announces and which within itself it gives value to. Therefore there emerge in the foreground tendencies that are generically post-modern, which range from the palinode of musical language (polemic or nostalgic or functional) and from the adoption of commercial stylemes (or stylemes believed to be so, expressing an interest in the reacquisition of a socio-economic role or a communicative virtue on the composer's part), to the rethinking of the constructive and listening complexity of contemporary art music. The recognition of a multiplicity has therefore been affirmed gradually – and in parallel – both in the ambit of new music, and in the total musical praxis and reception, and perhaps with a greater evidence in the former: the panoramic text that summarizes the experiences of the Italian and non-Italian neo-avant-garde and opens the road to the definitive gap of the aesthetic and poetic-compositional tendencies of the 1980s is *Oltre l'avanguardia*. In this book Armando Gentilucci gives a theme right from the very title to overcoming the single and historical directionality that binds the entire front of linguistic research, with an invitation to the “multiple” of the various creative routes in composition of the second half of the twentieth century, without being able, nevertheless, to announce the polemic fracture (in Italy more than elsewhere, with linguistic positions inspired by the Anglo-Saxon socio-musical world having been imposed) of the following decade.¹⁵

The complexity of the compositional fact (from the creative and the receptive point of view) is not therefore a projection that originates only from absolute structural relations internal to the material and the musical system: it extends to the context – social, cultural, operative – in which the artistic action is thought and realized, and for this reason it can generate a network that extends from a nucleus (inventive, technical, linguistic) towards other musical territories, more or less

¹⁵ I have tried elsewhere to demonstrate how this multiple, nevertheless, was not felt, in an initial moment, in terms of categorical otherness or generational fracture, but rather as an internal articulation within the universe of the neo-avant-garde; only in the course of the 1980s did the irreconcilable positions for and against the neo-avant-garde begin to appear clearly, and were polemically expressed (Mastropietro 2011).

peripheral, eventually distinguished by heteronymous materials and systems, to be linked with the opportune motivations at the original nucleus.

The Roman context was in this regard historically favourable towards a line of this type: the informal tendency, which valorises sound material with regard to the project and the system (in as much as each of them can be coherent with a heterogeneous material and its protagonist – even multidisciplinary – feature), had generated from the early 1960s compositional poetics apparently heteronymous, multiple, mix-media, gestual, provoking incursions among artistic expressions as well as – as we have seen – open linguistic routes. It is not by chance that Roman composers both of the avant-garde (Guaccero, Macchi, Evangelisti, Bussotti, Bertoncini) and of the subsequent generation (Battistelli, D'Amico, Rendine) had a regular interest in musical theatre, experimented in its performative fullness rather than in the possibilities that the new technologies offered in substituting or transforming the live performance; a field, that of mix-media genres that grew with the development of new technologies, which the Roman composers closest to electronic music (after Bertoncini, we cite Cardi, Lupone, Ceccarelli, Pachini) increasingly often tried out.

This characteristic of the Roman ambit was not substantially modified by the teaching activity of Donatoni at the specializing school at the *Accademia di Santa Cecilia*: the only state-run post-diploma course of compositional specialization in Italy, it took pupils from all over Italy, not just from Rome (where it is held). If therefore the heterogeneous linguistic as a seminal creative category is absent in Donatoni's thought, and the protagonist role of the material moved briefly through his production – in the mid 1960s – only as a passing phase in a negative dialectic, it is also true that the pupils who followed him in those Roman years were only partly trained in that environment, and when this happened they metabolized the teaching of Donatoni without conforming too much to the maestro's stylistic dictates. This indeed was the case of a composer such as Matteo D'Amico, who under Donatoni may have consolidated a certain rigour (even slightly rigid, in his juvenile pieces) in the generative procedures and a marked taste for the figure, but without any trace of post-serial epigonism.

The question remains, before looking closely at some of the figures mentioned, how much this generational tendency (certainly not only Roman) is 'post-modern' in an authentic way: if, with Lyotard (Lyotard 1981), the post-modern – epilogue of the modern or its further phase – coincides only with the awareness of the sunset of historical meta-narrations and therefore of the complex sphericity of linguistic relations, the same authors who emerged from the historical progression of the complex, generative, post-serial techniques (in Italy, Fedele, Solbiati and, to a certain extent, Francesconi, previously Berio's assistant; in the Roman context, Cardi and, to an extent, Dall'Ongaro) are not totally extraneous to this, despite the fact that their poetics are far from other phenomenologies of the post-modern and are rather closer to the hypothesis more involved in the new-

modern, the hypothesis of the ‘complexity theory’. So much so that, with Bauman (Bauman 2002, 91–113) the post-modern work of art plants in itself and with itself the seeds of its own artistic language, renewing it absurdly – together with the experience it involves – at each work: as is well known, this is a claim carried forward by seriality and by post-seriality of the generative-combinatory type. The work of art (musical and non-musical) therefore becomes inevitably disturbing with regard to the system of genres and traditionally recognized codes: it attempts to make sense without passing through consensus, in other words by its compliance a priori of language (avant-garde language too) and of genre; mobility, the escape to preordained definitions, the continuous reinvention and the problem of dramaturgy according to the project and the codes used, is for example a constant in Battistelli’s production.

But it is precisely on the terrain of the search for a con-sense, or for the evident, non-problematic sharing of linguistic sense and of the institutionality of genres, up to consensus true and proper – of the audience, of the economic system, of the sphere of communication (Borio 2003, 1–47) – that we can recognize some undoubtedly post-modern phenomena of contemporary Italian music. These phenomena are inclined – in line with the more strictly intense post-modern thought – to the hedonism of the aesthetic experience, to art as a game (linguistic, social) uncommitted and nevertheless functional, rather than absolute and sanctioned by its own norms, inclined to the juxtaposition of codes rather than their organic synthesis (I allude to authors such as Ferrero, Tutino, Betta, and – in the Roman context – to Rendine).

This does not detract from the fact that, beyond their position with regard to post-modern praxis and thought, the composers who were born more or less in the decade of the 1950s belong to an aesthetic generation, and not simply a chronological generation: technical and poetical solutions differed, but some big problems were shared (the rethinking of the historical-linguistic vector still postulated by the neo-avant-garde; the coherence of formal relations in the presence of linguistic references or dramaturgical-musical elements of multiple character; the option for or the refusal of a narrative form, especially in the case of non-theatrical works, given that in this last case the narrative structure cannot be an aware recovery and cannot be nostalgic with respect to non-narrative musical theatre of the avant-garde; the function of the composer in the new socio-economic framework of artistic production), the coordinates of which had now changed with regard to the previous generation.

This horizon, as problematic as it was fecund, can be seen in perspective behind the production of Giorgio Battistelli (b. 1953, Albano Laziale) and is correctly defined “experimental”: with no limited stylistic parameters that can be called up to understand its essence, this work “proceeds not by thesis, but by attempts”, each time drawing a different picture of relations between the properly musical elements and impure elements, “other” with regard to the territory in which a dramaturgy

– a musical dramaturgy – is rooted (Catucci 2007).¹⁶ The privileged locus of these relations has been, for Battistelli, the musical theatre in the general sense, in which each title has proposed a different solution through a dramaturgy-musical form specific to it (given that the node is that of renewed forms, generated by an energetic field that the musical elements project in the non-musical circumstances of the dramaturgy, more than the use of new musical materials or of new extra-musical subjects or media). The wording that has most often been used, among the complements of genre in Battistelli's catalogue,¹⁷ is nevertheless "theatre of music": we can assume this as the media of a poetics that develops complex and multiverse experience from a musical core, leaving to the music "a directorial function", but bringing back to the field of sound experience the heart of this poetics. The narrative aspect, which this 'theatre of music' may have assumed, did not therefore appear as its original feature: the noteworthy result of *Experimentum mundi* (1981), "a work of imaginistic music", takes form beginning with a problem that is purely musical, indeed rhythmic (the temporality of productive and sound actions in their gestuality of 16 different artisans, and the vocal actions of five *stroleghe* [witches] from the most humble folk of the Lazio region), widening the focus to the Cagean problem of the inclusion of the "sounds of the world" in the musical work, and this inclusion finishes here with the end of the different productive cycles (Annibaldi 1981, 6–14). And yet, a latent narration is brought to the work by the reader, who runs through the captions on the arts and crafts taken from the *Encyclopédie*: the work that is a symbol of western rationalism, alongside the sound presence of actions that are rationalized in a super-cycle; in a way this is the philosophical instance that informs the modern conception of the work of art, alongside an unfolding of the work that incarnates both its problematics and its persistence as it is renewed. This is a meta-critical narration, to which a contribution comes in a magical position (subtly linked to the experience of the world that is 'other' to the rationalistic world – the *stroleghe*) from the Maestro of the game, a sub species of performer on percussion (usually the author), generating a timbric incantation before a rhythmic modularity.¹⁸

Narrative latency remained as a dominant note in the theatre of music of Battistelli for about a further decade, during which the projects realized often took

¹⁶ Stefano Catucci, quote: "Battistelli's fundamental intuition is that music cannot be conceived of as an island, but neither as the extension of or as a supplement to a universe of cultural experiences that live independently of music."

¹⁷ The most recent printed version of the catalogue of Battistelli's works dates from 2005, Milan, Ricordi, edited by Marco Mazzolini.

¹⁸ The conceptual force of the project has made it, over time, available for accepting, in the many-faceted "experience of the world", other musical elements, which have mutated some sound connotations, but indeed not the dramaturgy-musical substance. Among these countless new realizations, we recall *Experimentum mundi remix*, to which the DJ Elio Martusciello 'Martux' (2004) contributed, or the 2008 version with a symphonic orchestra, performed in Florence for the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Constitution of the Italian Republic.

the form of a Kammerspiel and made a problem of the singing voice, excluding it – this is what happens in the *Begleitmusik zu einer Dichtspielszene* (1994) in which the trinitarian consubstantiality gesture-sound-dramaturgy reigns – or avoiding references (unless clearly grotesque, as in *Jules Verne*)¹⁹ to lyrical production: in *Aphrodite* (1983), “monodrama of ancient customs”, the articulated vocal seismogram is tied to the algid sensuality of texts by Louys stripped to their phonemes, while in *Frau Frankenstein* (1993, text by Mary Shelley), “monodrama of the modern Prometheus”, it collides with Varèse-like instrumental masses to articulate a visionary, accursed transfiguration. In this phase the work *Teorema* (1991–1992) – a “parable in music” – remains central not only because it narratively recounts the problem of the relationship with the other (Stoianova 2004) with the element of perturbation, but because it resolves the exemplary Pasolinian story in a drama that is well structured, above all on instrumental–sound elements and on a congruous formal arrangement.

But the millennium and the century are coming to an end: the former of these events was taken as the point of departure for the ballet *Globe Theatre* (1990) that refers to the Shakespearean place as “theatre of memory” turning to the Renaissance timbre as evoking a new suavity in sound and in relations between iterative and exploded structures; the latter is the point of departure for a new apologue in music, *Prova d’orchestra* (1994–1995), with which Battistelli also turns to the productive machine of the opera. It is above all the comparison with the narrative machine of a story and the possibility of translating it into “theatre of music”, that runs through his subsequent production: from the surreal narrative structures of *Impressions d’Afrique* (from Raymond Roussel, 2000) and from *El otoño del patriarca* (from Gabriel Garcia Marquez, 2003, with a circular disposition of events that I believe is aware of works by Berio, such as *Passaggio* or *Outis*), to the tragedies that are both meandering and linear of *Auf den Marmor klippen* (*On the Marble Rocks*, 2000–2001, “musical visions from the novel by E. Jünger”) and *Richard III* (2004), and in this last – despite the wide opening, traditionally operatic, in orchestration, conformation of the scenes, solo and choral vocal curves – there is perceivable a tightening of the harmonic vocabulary. Having emerged in recent years, the line of operatic vocality has returned underground in *L’imbalsamatore* (2001–2002), in *Miracolo a Milano* (2007) and in *Divorzio all’italiana* (2008): in the work taken from the homonymous story by Zavattini (again a bitter apologue of considerable dramatical–musical incisiveness), the vocal emergence remains, with the exception of the reciting Totò il Buono, on the grotesque–satirical plane, leaving space for a sound invention that is all told

¹⁹ *Jules Verne* (1987), “chamber fantasy in the form of a show for three percussionists”, gives a trio of accomplished musicians, who are deliberately assigned instruments other than their own, and are therefore placed in risky and delicate and planned impostures, i.e. the representation of an impossible rendezvous (the tragic impossibility of which is made clear), of three grand characters/authors from fantasy literature.

of noteworthy narrative clarity and of a clear purely sonorous structure, while in the latter (again, this time, a plot that is delivered to the collective imagination in a cinematographic guise) the vocal conduits are themselves the instrument of a satire on the crisis of the family institution. In *L'imbalsamatore*, another bitter apologue (on the evaporation of the politico–geographical body supported by communist ideology), there is instead a focus on an ‘obliged recitative’ that is continuous and binding between actor (narrator) and instrumental and electronic sound, investigated in depth in the very recent *Sconcerto* (2010) thanks to the intuition of uniting together in an actor–orchestra conductor verbal, gestual and musical action.

Matteo D’Amico (b. 1955, Rome) presents a singular approach that is indicative of the freedom and the independence with which it is possible to move today in compositional poetics. He was a pupil of Donatoni, and from the maestro he transfused into his first pieces (listen to *Notturmo*, for three instruments, 1982) a certain figural rigour, in which however one intuits that what is leading here is not the depersonalization of the process, but is the narrative orientation and, I would say, the intelligence of the game, both in the subjective sense (a game that invites its understanding, without openly exhibiting its rules, while maintaining something allusive), both in the objective sense (a game that is capable of being resolved in a clear intelligence of the text, written or heard, by virtue of the substantial clarity of the processes). Precision, clarity, but also allusion and concealment, these are qualities that lead easily – in the historical twentieth century – to Ravel and French culture at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was perhaps the muse of this culture that had a role in the choice of Mallarmé’s texts for *l’Azur* (1988), a substantial and well formed cycle of chamber lyrics. Since then, D’Amico’s most mature production has been directed along the route of a “logic of freedom”, which tends above all (by means of its many works of musical theatre, disparate in terms of genre) to weave a network of signs, identified by an intersection between historical codes and pure sound figure, so that their combination in dramaturgy depends – each time – on the compositional context. Among the most significant theatrical and circum-theatrical works of D’Amico, is the “scenic cantata for Lorenzo il Magnifico” *Angelus novus* (1992), the “tale in music” *La finestra su Kensington Gardens* (2000, text by Giovanni Carli Ballola based on the character of Peter Pan), the chamber works *Dannata epicurea* and *Lavinia fuggita* (both 2004 and using texts by Sandro Cappelletto), the latest extended version – 2008 – of the *Auden Cabaret* for voice and instruments (text by W.H. Auden and Ch. Kallman), up to the “black comedy in two parts” *Patto di sangue* (2008, on a libretto by S. Cappelletto from R. del Valle-Inclán, Florence) or the very recent *Le malentendu* (text by Camus, Macerata, 2009), again a chamber opera that confirms the tragic subject – also veined with existentialism – of the previous work, and the propensity towards a vocal writing that is nude and syllabic, supported however by an instrumental component that is as essential as it is incisive in its dramatic

links. This is nevertheless a circumstantial passage, having previously touched in his production subjects that are light and humorous in tone (from comedy to cabaret), and various vocal typologies, always supported by a meditative but significant instrumental element.

A different interpretation of Donatoni's teaching, based on a materic poetics of sound, can be seen in the production of Mauro Cardi (b. 1955, Rome). In Cardi, the generative processes do not flatten the sound thought in the single direction of an atomistic–digital conception, but they open up in the fabric formal/expressive spaces and functions that are not secondary for a *clinamen* that acts directly from the material, from its curving fluctuations and insurgences, with a gusto and techniques that are akin to electronic music (among the pieces to which reference can be made: *Fil rouge* for quartet with piano, 1997; *Manao tupapau* for flute, percussion and electronics, 1996, *Calendari indiani* for voice and ensemble, 1990; *In corde* for orchestra, 1984); Cardi has been active in the electro-acoustic collective *Edison Studio* (see below), and he achieved significant results in the multimedia field with the seven scenes of *Oggetto d'amore* (2008, texts by P. Panella, videos by various authors).

The music of Michele Dall'Ongaro (b. 1957, Rome) seems to present in its watermark a conjugating poetics of a generative–combinatory matrix of the most rigorous and radical type (such as that practised by the maestro Aldo Clementi), with dramatic–narrative formal thought, and this not only in his music most chronologically distant from today. Indeed in his music today the operative presence of narrative formal structures is very strong, generating (this can be felt ever since pieces such as the 1996 *Grimoire* for violin and electronics) fecund and not at all banal dynamic–formal tensions, evident both in the concert music (*Freddo*, for violin, cello, piano and orchestra, 2005) and in the non superficial theatrical divertissements (*Gilda, mia Gilda, per non dire il Rigoletto di Verdi*, 2001, texts by Sermonti, for reciting voice, string quintet and recorded sounds; the small opera *Bach-Haus*, 2000). Another thing that emerges in Dall'Ongaro, in the knit of subtle play between intentionality and self-production in the formal–narrative game, is a new emergence of the sound matter in itself, as a further poetic–aesthetic actor: listen, in this sense, to the recent *Quinto Quartetto per archi* (2004) and *L'ombra di Tiresia* for ensemble (2006).

The protagonist role of sound matter returns to prevalence, more extrovert than weakly manifested, in Lucia Ronchetti (b. 1963, Rome), in whose *Pinocchio* – an entirely vocal dramaturgy, conceived for the *Neuevocalisten* – each *ubi consistam* that is not a dramatic role play, is banned, granting to the music an inimitable formal liquidity; or again in Fabrizio De Rossi Re (b. 1960, Rome), for whom materism has the function of a virus that distorts stylistic clichés, freeing potential out of them, potential linked not only to their appearance as parodies (see the work *Cesare Lombroso*, 2000); or then in Stefano Taglietti (b. 1965, Rome), whose “magmatic thought” often finds, with a conscious risk, the route of

the cross-over between genres, dismantling all mechanics and repetitiveness from its own modular process, for example, in pop genres.

The music of Gilberto Cappelli (b. 1952, Predappio Alta) shows us just how much a materic compositional poetics can be different, even in terms of the various historical–geographical studies: unlike its flamboyant version in the Roman composers already mentioned, Cappelli’s materism is initially steeped in an intimacy and is then expressed outwardly in an interiority that is almost expressionistic; but not, naturally, an expressionism in the melody, or in harmony, or in the textual dramaturgy, but in an expressionism of the timbre, of the sound-mass, moving towards trajectories that are entirely constructed on the energy within it.²⁰

For those exponents who were once included – in Italy – within the label of ‘neo-romanticism’, the critics have had time to bring into focus a less generalized poetics and, all things considered, less deceiving in that initial formulation:²¹ they could be defined neo-tonal, neo-modal, neo-simple, neo – (rather than post-) minimalist, but with some difficulty in freezing their production into just one of these labels. This is also due to their preference for the terrain of musical theatre, on which the sub-codes of the specific genres (including that of the melodrama or lyric opera in the traditional sense) can be easily invoked due to their fitness for the productive structures, or due to the fact that they can be mixed with other sub-codes in hybrid solutions, but with the ingredients of the cocktail still clearly perceivable. Within this tendency, there appears unbridled, deliberately ‘heretic’, the inlay of styles, codes and languages practised by Sergio Rendine (b. 1954, Naples), especially – but not only – in musical theatre;²² the evident artisanship does not impede its precariousness, in part exhibited polemically, of the aesthetic position of these works, in which the exhibition of the aspect of the artefact (literally “made in art”, through the means of an impertinent hybridism) and the nostalgia for the linguistic–expressive function of the codes generates contradictions that are not always (and not deliberately?) resolved. It is impossible, on the contrary, to

²⁰ As an example, I cite here the piece *Blu oltremare* (2004) for ensemble.

²¹ See above. In fact the definition neo-romanticism was imported into Italy from the German compositional panorama in which, due to the presence of authors such as Wolfgang Rihm and above all Wolfgang Killmaier (Rihm is better defined as a neo-expressionist), it was much more incisive, given the specific historical–cultural German tradition. The critics, however, liked the label and perhaps too did the composers thus labelled, since it alluded to a revolt against the intellectualism and rationalism prevalent among the avant-garde.

²² The most resolved among Rendine’s works – due to its pervasive meta-criticality conjugated with the divertissement of a fanta-historical-musical – appears to me to be *Un segreto d’importanza* (1991, Montecarlo), rather than the patchwork melodrama-musicarello of *Romanza* (2002, Opera di Roma). The a-problematic pairing of neo-modal and melodramatic solutions, or openly ‘functional’ solutions of his sacred production is found in a symphonic work, the *Sinfonia n. 2 ‘Andorrana’* (2007), only mutated and adapted stylistic phenotypes (steeped in the traditional mould of the symphonic genre, of which the author had provided a very interesting assay of vast architecture in modules in his *Passacaglia*, 1988).

flatten with 'neo-' positions the work of a musician who, like Rendine, comes from the maieutic school of Guaccero: in Carlo Crivelli (b. 1953, Rome) the linguistic and stylistic elements of tradition are deconstructed, and metamorphosized – with a gusto for timbre that is entirely personal – in a mannerist direction that is not lacking in qualities of enveloping and vision.

5. Electronic music in Rome

The history of electro-acoustic research in Rome merits a brief summary, from its earliest phases: compared with other contexts (Milan, for example), Roman electro-acoustic experimentation has never been able to count on a laboratory supported by an institutional structure. Without considering the pioneering work of Vittorio Gelmetti – and in part of Clementi and Macchi – at the *Discoteca di Stato* or in cinematographic production laboratories, the first group was born around 1970 with *Studio R 7*, a private, collective studio developed thanks to the personal commitment of seven founders (including Evangelisti, Morricone and Macchi), within which – as well as the commercially available equipment of the time – use was made of the Synket, the analogue, home-made synthesizer designed by Paolo Ketoff with the technician Guido Guiducci. *Studio R 7* did not survive for long because it failed to find finance from industrial or research sources. It was, however, important because of its prophetic qualities: the collective association of participants (not only composers), and the efforts made in designing new equipment alternative to (and in some cases in competition with) the official industrial market for electro-acoustic technology. A similar idea led in 1980 to the formation of the *Società di Informatica Musicale* (SIM): this was constituted by five figures with competences that were both technical and compositional (many of them were pupils of Giorgio Nottoli, in his turn a pupil of Guaccero, with regard to electronic music), but the field in which they worked was already the field of computer technology; in particular, this group developed two prototypes that were able to process sound – with digital sound processing – in real time, an idea that had animated Guaccero's electronic improvisation groups and which back in 1980 was a pioneering step. A branch of SIM (Lupone and Bianchini) founded in 1988 the *Centro Ricerche Musicali*, which still exists today: the line continues to be that of the design of original, complex machines for advanced applications both musical, physical-acoustical and computational, avoiding compromises with any traditional musical thought or clashes with equipment already provided by the computer technology market (which was rapidly evolving). When commercial technology reached an excellent level of complexity and flexibility in digital sound processing, the CRM's research moved towards the design and the creation of unconventional sound diffusers that functioned also as audiovisual installations – true and proper sculptures of sound, such as sound tubes, holophones, planephones (Mastropietro

2003, 1–4). Reaching a level of widespread diffusion of the most advanced means of digital sound processing has, after all, favoured the birth of working groups that, without designing or building specific machines, promote – individually or collectively – research specific to electro-acoustic means.

Such a group is the *Edison Studio*, founded in 1993 by the already mentioned Mauro Cardi and by Luigi Ceccareli (b. 1953, Rimini), Alessandro Cipriani (b. 1959, Tivoli) and Fabio Cifariello Ciardi (b. 1960, Rome). The Edison Studio is an electroacoustic production structure geared both to the work of the individual members, some of whom – as we have seen – are regularly active as composers without electronics,²³ as well as a compositional team, involved in recent years in projects to add sound-track to famous silent movies (including *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*). Composers who have dedicated their work almost entirely to electro-acoustic and digital research, with its inevitable complexities and tangential relation with scientific thought, therefore seem to be at the extreme opposite of the general simplification (without wishing to give to this word connotations that are necessarily negative) of the ‘neo-’, the inclination of this research has nevertheless various aesthetic and poetic spirits. Ceccarelli’s, for example, is based on an overflowing and turbulent motility of the electroacoustic material, ready to spill over – with an attitude that is as expressionistic as it is ironic – into multimedia precisely due to the great mass of expressive energy. Works such as *Tupac Amaru* (1997, multimedia on a text by Gianni Toti) or the splendid *Isola di Alcina* (2000, text in Romagnolo dialect by N. Spadoni) are noteworthy, both of them being – not by chance – incursions into the terrain of a proteic and materic voice.

Research along the lines of the energy of sound material, the extraction of a form not only of sound, but also of the gesture in fertile tension with the sound produced, and an extraordinary richness of information of textures (as extrovert as they are solid), are evidenced in the works of Michelangelo Lupone (b. 1953, Solopaca): that this fitted in with the dramatic productions in the literal or metaphoric sense (within a narrative form), does not perhaps have a direct relevance, narrative legibility being a temporal function of the plasticity of the acoustic images. In Lupone’s production one work that stands out is *Grancassa* (2002) for feed-drum, a large membrane with vibratory modes that are inverse to those of traditional percussion: the membrane is maintained in a state of constant vibration, so that the musician’s performative gesture is called to subtract – and not to provoke – frequency components, making use of a map traced on the membrane itself; thus the usual gesture–effect relation in percussion is inverted, since a particularly energetic gesture now corresponds to an inhibition of sound for-

²³ Cifariello Ciardi has carried forward research into “memory” in a series of instrumental pieces that carry this title. The focus is on memory not as a nostalgic stylistic datum, but as a psycho-perceptive parameter in the definition of a form and of an evolution of materials within this.

mants, and the gesture most full of energy (almost desperate and painful) sets in motion – at the end of the piece – a decantation of the previous complex textures that had been in a piercing melodic arrangement. The performative arrangement thus also renders visible a conception of form as a plastic itinerary, unitary and at the same time multiple, within the original matter of the sound, a conception that in Lupone is also perceived clearly in other previous works: the pieces for soloists with live electronics of the *Ciclo astrale* (1985–1990), and the works for magnetic tape *Forma del respiro* and *Canto di madre* – both based on corporal-vocal materials – of 1993 and 1998 (Mastropietro 1998, 98–112).

At the Conservatory in Rome, after the teaching of electronic music by Riccardo Bianchini (b. 1946, Milan-d. 2003, Rome), came the present-day teacher, Giorgio Nottoli (b. 1945, Cesena). Nottoli was a pupil of Guaccero, Bertoncini and Branchi (therefore a pupil of three lynchpin figures in the Roman avant-garde) and he uses in most of his works electroacoustic means both for synthesis and for sound processing with the intention of making timbre the main parameter, making it constructable through control of its microstructure. The works composed between 1972 and 1978 already used analogue or hybrid equipment, most of which was designed by the composer himself and together with a team he subsequently designed and realized digital chips and systems for digital processing, using them – in coherence with the micro-construction of sound – within a logic of additive synthesis that is particularly complex and stratified.

The panorama of electronic production in the Roman ambit is completed with the names of Maurizio Giri (b. 1961, Rome) and Nicola Sani (b. 1961, Ferrara). In the work of the latter, the meditative immersion in vast, slowly developing acoustic surfaces, which recalls (in the minimal changes of colour) the later works of Nono, seeks to overturn itself in the perception of sound spaces and to unite – in pieces such as *Oltre il deserto spazio* – with a more dramatic conception of form.

6. Channels of geographic diffusion

In central Italy at the end of the 1960s, there were few fully active teaching–musical structures (also not very developed) for training in composition: there were concert associations and intellectual groups that had begun to inform the wider public about contemporary music (among the livelier cities were Perugia and L’Aquila). Nevertheless, the consolidation of a larger and more receptive ground (made up not only of enthusiasts and operators in the sector, but also of young musicians and composers) was tied to the increasing numbers of Conservatories with their composition classes, and hence their students, and the possibility of having in these classes teachers who were informed and who were open to the linguistic innovations of the period following the Second World War. In this sense the teaching by exponents of the Roman avant-garde and the genera-

tion that followed it was fundamental in the central area of the Italian mainland: Guaccero, for example, taught first in Pesaro (where his pupils included Baggiani and Nottoli), then – following a brief spell in Perugia where he taught electronic music – in L’Aquila and Frosinone²⁴ (with pupils such as Crivelli, Lupone, Rendine, Sbordoni, as well as composers who have not as yet been mentioned – Piero Niro, Enrico Cocco, Franco Sbacco) before returning to Rome. In the following generation, Cardi taught in L’Aquila and in Florence, and Lupone in Pescara and L’Aquila. But having stated this, there is no desire to limit the spread over the geographical territory of a compositional culture to a simple dissemination from a central point, given that the opportunity to get to know and to have experience in composition has diversified and has allowed for the emergence of figures who are relatively independent of the great geographical centres. Perugia is the capital of Umbria and Valentino Bucchi worked in its Conservatory in various roles. Carlo Pedini (b. 1956, Perugia) trained in Pesaro, completing his studies with Donatoni and Sciarino, out of whose materism his music evolved into neo-tonal and post-minimalist territories. In Pescara, the most populated and economically vibrant centre in Abruzzo, the Italo-Bolivian composer Edgar Alandia and the native Fulvio Delli Pizzi were active, favouring the birth of a lively analytic-musical school and the training of some composers who were aesthetically very varied among themselves. In the Marche town of Pesaro (where Rossini was born), during the years in which Branchi taught there, Fernando Mencherini (Cagli, 1949–1997) completed his training. Mencherini was a composer with a *ductus* that was both playful and matic, expressed in labyrinthian and strongly irregular structures.

The music of Marco Di Bari (b. 1956, Casoli) displays a strong imprinting dictated by the pianistic timbre or by the presence – both charming and alienating – of sound mechanisms (musical boxes), or by the research into harmonic verticality unfolded in figures through the application of fractal architecture (a trait that makes him a distant relative of French spectralism, without there being a real link with it). Di Bari studied in Milan, and has used episodically materials that come from the folk music of his region (Abruzzo), but his most personal production is found in the works – including musical theatre – which put the piano at the inventive centre of the sound fabric (the work *Camera obscura*; the cycle of the *Studi nuovo-classici sulla fisiologia della percezione* for piano; the chamber work, *Bird’s Fractal Voice*).

Also in Milan, but in a different context, Carlo Boccadoro (b. 1963, Macerata) came to light: he was active in the *Sentieri Selvaggi* association, which he founded in 1997 together with Angelo Miotto and Filippo Del Corno and which produced a concert season, an ensemble of the same name and other initiatives for promoting

²⁴ With regard to the Conservatory in Frosinone (a province of Lazio), the direction of Daniele Paris should be noted. He was a favourite interpreter (as a conductor) of much of the production of the Roman avant-garde, in particular in the context of *Nuova Consonanza* festivals and the *Settimane Internazionali Nuova Musica* in Palermo.

contemporary music. The association's idea of contemporary music was essentially close to that of the New York post-minimalist new scene (the model certainly being the *Bang-on-a-can* group, and, in part, the personalized ensembles of minimalists such as Glass and Reich). The eclecticism that this approach presupposes achieves results that are as emblematic as they are solid from a craft point of view.

Agostino Di Scipio (b. 1962, Caserta) trained instead in L'Aquila as a pupil of Cardi in composition and Lupone in electronic music: the sound energy that is found in Di Scipio, always both urgent and at the same time contained, is expressed within multiform processes of interaction, among which an important role is played by those involving the sound environment, its perception and its feedback in the sound to be generated, between automatic process and compositional or performative control, in its turn between performative gesture and evolution of the material performed. These live interactions (between electroacoustic processing and performative environment or variables of interpretation) are controlled on the edges of entropic states of the sound material, channelled into alternate phases of turbulence or crystallization in slowly evolving states to generate formal energy or authentic dramaturgy of sound: this is what happens, in particular, in the series *Ecosistemici Udibili*, in which the live electronics is the instrument of a man-machine-environment triangle generating a lucid and rugged material just as it is turbulent and liminal, subtly dialectical with the compositional project but also a concealed protagonist – above and beyond – of the evolution of the sound. In wider-ranging multimedia and textually collagistic projects (*Sound & Fury*, 2000; *Tiresia*, 2002), this structure informs the word and the voice as bearers of interference that is not only acoustic, but is also semantic.²⁵

7. Epilogue

So what are the general features of this panorama of the latest compositional generation, the generation of emerging (perhaps just emerged) composers? This is a generation that seems to exhibit an increasingly sharp ability in managing compositional techniques and poetics, both traditional and those of the avant-garde, together with – as required – electronics. Azio Corghi's teaching on the specialization course at the *Accademia di Santa Cecilia* will certainly have contributed for many exponents of this latest generation to the opening up of a polyphony of techniques that have been solidly assimilated. What is important, however, in this learning is the method of personal selection and synthesis of techniques and thus the construction of a poetics, initially comprehensive and

²⁵ In the electronic music field the Research Institute *Gramma*, founded by Lupone and Maria Cristina De Amicis, operated in L'Aquila. This organism's continued existence has been jeopardized by the recent earthquake disaster (2009) that struck the capital of the Abruzzo region.

then aimed at the specific piece. Each artist has to carry this out, in this way linking the teaching of Corghi with Petrassi's teaching in the ethical sense of composing, now constituting part of a plural linguistic constellation. For a young composer who has not yet reached maturity, there is still the risk of resolving this approach into an eclecticism that has not yet settled into a strong inventive and poetic nucleus, unless there is a concentration – and often the considered pursuit of specific electronic projects in international research ambits, such as *Ircam*, can translate into an anti-eclectic thrust – on a focus of circumscribed sound and linguistic research. The creative act, in other words, can oscillate between an 'eclectic' excess of opening and a 'mannered' excess of closure; but despite their various positions on this poetic–aesthetic axis, the figures I will mention now seem to have focussed on a solid, coherent and precise location.

Silvia Colasanti (b. 1975, Roma), for example, has consolidated a technical–poetic mastery, orientated more in the dramatic than in the lyrical sense, which has a tendency towards a shading of techniques and writing that has skilfully gone beyond the stage of simple personal synthesis. Among the works that characterize Colasanti's production, the symphonic *Vision-air* (2005) and *Grido velato* (with solo viola, 2006), the scenic concert *Amor non conosciuto* (2006, for ensemble and reciting voice, on the mystic Angela da Foligno), and the wide-ranging piece for ensemble *Ahi!, vista troppo dolce e troppo amara (Orfeo nel buio)* of 2007, are emblematic in the construction of a formal architecture departing from a dramaturgy. In another composer, Roberta Vacca (b. 1968) from L'Aquila, the lyrical virtuality prevails over the dramatic, but with an original inclination towards the combinatory play of signs that are de – and re-structured (listen to the pieces for piano *De-sequentia* and *Nomen*, 1999 and 2003, and *Trave barocca* for strings 2003).²⁶

The music of Marco Momi (b. 1978, Perugia) instead seems to depart from an informal sound: the combination of rough edges with the rapt tasting of barely striated materic surfaces, produces in it, however, a limpid formal breath, albeit discontinuous. A residual acoustic material, deeply noisy, in which the instrumental, anti-conventional gesture is indissoluble with the sound output (the reference seems to be to Lachenmann) animates the music of Francesco Filidei (b. 1973, Pisa); this involves, even more so than in Momi, a visionary music that is almost maniacal in pursuing a circumscribed, inventive focus.

The label of eclecticism would also fail to render justice to the music of Francesco Antonioni (b. 1971, Teramo), although at first listening it might appear to: as with the others who have already been mentioned, behind the linguistic, stylistic and formal choices made by this musician there is more than ever a project, an idea – roughly expressive, more precisely, narrative – that directs those choices,

²⁶ A free tendency toward a fictional logic of musical form is at times perceivable also in the music by even much younger composer, like Paolo Marchettini (b. 1974, Rome; *Un'altra invenzione* for 8 instruments, 2005) or Riccardo Panfili (b. 1979, Terni; *Danzario* for large orchestra, 2009).

from the most successful (the “visual cantata” *Codice ovvio*, 2006, from Bruno Munari; *Lo specchio di Polimnia*, 2003) to the less successful, perhaps because too ambitious (the *Chat-opera*, or the dense symphonic work, *Giga*, 2006, masterfully led, but perhaps a little schematic in certain formal ganglia). Is this perhaps the feature – or even the destiny – of the generation that is still in full progress? Now having to choose between a formal-narrative plane, required by a strong inventive thrust, but then to be steeped problematically in the concrete of materials to be chosen, of technical procedures to be set up and governed, of lines of formal force to control, like the termini of a dialectic that might reject a synthesis? And the other option, no less risky, of a temporal unfolding, narrative even, of a single image, of a plastic and synchronic node, to be made coherent to the point of obsession and capable at the same time of sustaining this temporal unfolding? This is a question that now seems to go beyond – as far as young Italian composers are concerned – all geographical confines.

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Translate by *Lian Halliday*