

MUSIC THEATRE AS A PLACE OF INSIGHT. REFERENCES TO FRIEDRICH HÖLDERLIN (AND TO ARNOLD SCHÖNBERG) IN LUIGI NONO'S PROMETEO

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SUMMARY. Luigi Nono's music theater work *Prometeo*, which is often referred to as Nono's key work of the 1980s, dispenses with a consistently developed narrative dimension. However, it draws all the more comprehensively on the potential of several musical, literary and philosophical approaches from earlier times as well as from Nono's own time.

Keywords: Luigi Nono, *Prometeo*

The starting point of my lecture is an important but (it seems to me) often overlooked characteristic of Luigi Nono's music theater work *Prometeo*.

Prometeo realizes this with extremely finely nuanced mixtures of familiar and unfamiliar moments, which are often only hinted at. For us as listeners, the task is to decipher these traces. After all, the impressive magical aspect of this piece, which takes a lot of time to unfold all the sound situations, does not mean that details and shades of sound and semantics should remain undiscovered. For this very reason the piece is not merely a music of devotion, but a composition that (to put it somewhat pointedly) aims at an alert mind. And it is precisely this quality, as I would like to outline, that shows some far more than superficial references to the composing of Arnold Schönberg, also and especially to Moses and Aron (a piece who's premiere Nono himself experienced in Hamburg in 1954).

It is therefore about the interaction of the tonal side and the communicative side. The extent to which Nono considered the two to be inextricably linked and the way in which he focused on them is shown by his turn to familiar musical approaches of earlier times. For in them he discovered many different ways of being able to say something with certain arrangements.

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Nono often let it be known how much he was inspired by earlier approaches in this respect. For example, he enthusiastically emphasized the art of fragmentation that emerged in Robert Schumann's instrumental music. Nono was concerned with the renunciation of "thematic development", i.e. an aspect of shaping form and time, as it comes to the fore in the piece *Der Dichter spricht*, which is characterized by a quite big number of fermatas. And Nono combined his reference to Schumann with reflections on two poets important to his own composing: on the one hand Friedrich Hölderlin (a contemporary of Schumann's), but on the other Edmond Jabès (a contemporary of his own time with whom he had an intensive exchange in the 1980s and for whom he wrote a homage piece entitled *Decouvrir la subversion* in 1987.²

Nono's preference for particular poetological premises of poetry, which appears here, is a crucial element of my paper. Because this is always related to the question of how art can serve to create alertness of the mind. And it always leads beyond immediately evident moments of meaning. And for all that, his own compositional approach to poetry is never merely passionate or diffuse, but almost always precise at its core, borne by a truly intensive preoccupation with the structural ideas of poetry (in this respect he can perhaps best be compared with composers such as Pierre Boulez or Bernd Alois Zimmermann). And time and again, he endeavors to link the tonal and structural ideas of composing with world-related and communicative elements in a meaningful way.

His work *Prometeo*, for which this is particularly true, takes up approaches from his own earlier pieces at this point. But these are continued with unmistakably new creative moments. And they include resonances of a compositional, literary and philosophical nature.

Accordingly, not only the thematic side, i.e. the treatment of the Prometheus material is an essential part of the "statement" of this music theatre work. Rather, its magical and highly emphatic side and its differentiation in relation to some of the resonances of literature and philosophy it contains can also be considered. With sounds, structures and communicative elements³, Nono operates far beyond a preachy pathos: *Prometeo* is filled with fragile moments that establish a gesture of exploration that is unusual in the music

² Cf. "Eine Autobiografie des Komponisten. Enzo Restagno mitgeteilt", in: *Luigi Nono. Dokumente – Materialien*, hrsg. von Andreas Wagner, Saarbrücken 2003, p. 23-128, here, p. 52; we will return to this reference to Jabès and Hölderlin later.

³ On the aspect of communicability, which always has to do with questions of the attribution of meaning or the determinability of meaning, cf. the helpful considerations in: Nanni, *Politik des Hörens, Zur Lesbarkeit Luigi Nonos*, Hofheim 2022, esp. p. 142f; and cf. fundamentally: Jörn Peter Hiekel / Wolfgang Mende (eds.), *Klang und Semantik in der Musik des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts*, Bielefeld 2018.

theatre of recent decades. And it is precisely this gesture of exploration that, it seems to me, deserves special attention. It aims, I would argue, at a reception that can best be described as "observational listening". *Prometeo* thus distances itself from a devotional attitude - and from the fulfilment of "sacred longings"⁴, which was sometimes associated with Nono's music of the 1980s. The fact that Nono himself very pointedly criticizes the "ritual self-abandonment to worn-out mythology"⁵ with regard to interpretations of Richard Wagner's music fits in with this. *Prometeo* moves far away from this.

This point seems particularly important to me and it has to do with our conference and the comparison with Arnold Schönberg. For it seems that the experience of Schönberg's text-related music was an essential impulse. If we take *Moses and Aron* as a point of references, this means three aspects in particular, all of which were taken up by Nono (with different means in each case): Firstly, a preference for world-related texts; secondly, the search for forms of articulation of language that change within a piece and even produce completely new shades; thirdly, the attempt to use these shades to move away from the clear or even striking side of texts and create a multi-faceted expressivity.

In view of the special significance of the poet Friedrich Hölderlin that has just been mentioned, it makes sense to reflect on these three aspects by looking at some of the special features of the central section of *Prometeo* that bears the title "Hölderlin".

The typical of this section of the work is that it combines varied vocal and instrumental sounds with worldly accents focused on the fate of mankind. The latter are much less drastic than the textual level of Nono's three decades older work *Il Canto sospeso*, for example. However, they are also extremely important for the conception and content of *Prometeo*.

The third verse of *Hyperion's Song of Destiny* can be heard in this work. And this is done in a way that is as comprehensive as it is differentiated. The wealth of facets on the expressive side is already very great in Hölderlin's poem. For in Hölderlin's epistolary novel *Hyperion or The Hermit in Greece*, *Hyperion's Song of Fate* is an "expression of a momentary low point of grief"⁶, but at the same time a reference point for overcoming tragedy.

Nono (presumably consciously) builds on this. *Prometeo* offers this poem by Hölderlin in a way that suggests a comparison with *Il Canto sospeso* in one respect in particular: In both works, the pathetic side is counterpointed

⁴ Peter Niklas Wilson, "Sakrale Sehnsüchte. Über den 'unstillbaren ontologischen Durst' in der Musik der Gegenwart", in: *Musik und Religion*, ed. by Helga de la Motte, Laaber,² 2003, pp. 323-338.

⁵ Cf. "Eine Autobiographie" (note 1), p. 105, referring to an alienation idea of Alexander Kluge.

⁶ Lawrence Ryan, *Hölderlin oder Der Eremit in Griechenland*, in: Johann Kreuzer (ed.), *Hölderlin-Handbuch. Leben Werk Wirkung*, Stuttgart 2002, pp.176-197, here p. 191.

by a particular form of nuanced composition and provided with unusual expressive shadings. This way of fanning out the text prevents it from being too simple or boldly tangible. This reinforces the impulse to experience it as something that is to be explored, as it were, and is intended to stimulate thought. And in the vocal part, this also means a physical, creaturely side.

In an illuminating description of *Il Canto sospeso*, Helmut Lachenmann emphasized the use of “human sounds” and accentuated this as a counterforce to serial composition. And although *Prometeo* is not serialized, one can also speak of a “counterforce” here: directed at all the homogeneous tendencies of the work.

All of this does not apply to the Hölderlin *section* alone. But it is particularly emphasized here by the richly differentiated interplay of instruments and voices, intensified by electronic means. Sound is not something static, but something inwardly moving and animated that draws the listener’s attention into the unfamiliar.

Three exemplary strategies and sound situations relating to vocal, instrumental and electronic arrangements of the *Hölderlin section* in particular are mentioned here as examples: The first is the idea, explicitly noted in the score, of using microphones “to expand and refine the sound possibilities of the voices.”⁷ A second piece of evidence that is particularly close to Lachenmann’s own strategies of composing with breathing moments is provided by a change in the wind part: From m. 86 onwards, “half of the breath is to be blown onto the mouthpiece and the other half scattered onto the microphone.”⁸ A third piece of evidence can be found later on: the instruction “Aria intonata” for both wind instruments as well as the instruction to the clarinet to remove the mouthpiece when playing.⁹

Such moments of amplification of breath accents result in situations in which the differences between the vocal and instrumental parts become blurred. The expressive possibilities of the voice are integrated into an overall structure of fanned-out sounds. And in doing so, it is part of the quasi-creatural tonality to accentuate the human sound in the instrumental part as well. As in *Il Canto sospeso*, the focus here is also on the finest shades of the vocal, which conceivably go far beyond all expressive clichés and topoi. And in each case, what Paul Valéry so beautifully called the “threshold between sound

⁷ Supplement to the score, new edition: Milano 2019, p. 229.

⁸ Cf. score, new edition: Milano 2019, p. 128, and cf. supplement to the score, p. 238, the comment quoted here is supplemented by the words “The distance between the mouthpiece and the microphone must be flexibly adjusted according to the volume.”

⁹ Cf. supplement to the score, p. 244 (German: intonierte Luft), and score, p. 131. The playing of wind instruments without mouthpieces is a technique that has long been familiar in Lachenmann’s music.

and meaning”¹⁰ appears to be simultaneously clear, as it is characterized by existential texts, but at the same time unstable or wavering.¹¹

This interplay and the resulting process of intensification are reinforced by the other sound factors. On the one hand, there are the electronic design elements that are essential for the sound of the entire piece, namely halaphones, delays and vocoders, which create forcing and very unusual colorations.¹²

On the other hand, it is precisely here that two speaking voices enter the sound event. They offer the same excerpt from *Hyperion's Song of Destiny* and articulate it in an equally unusual way, far removed from all the usual forms of compositional treatment of world-related texts.

And what Nono created here shows him to be a descendant of Arnold Schoenberg.¹³ For it seems both stylized and pronounced in a peculiar way, and at the same time as a distant echo of the tradition of the speaking chorus also taken up in *Moses and Aron*. This seems all the more noteworthy, however, as the final section of *Prometeo* contains echoes of this very work by Schoenberg on a textual level.

At the same time, the tendency to expand the tonality (for which Schönberg is also a kind of forefather since his extensive use of Sprechgesang in *Pierrot lunaire*) is once again noticeable. In the Hölderlin section of *Prometeo*, for example, this is shown by the special articulation described with the words “mormorato *sul* microfono, molto articolato”¹⁴.

And the same applies to the explicitly required emphasis of consonants through both explosive sounds and certain elongations. The score characterizes this rather matter-of-factly as an “interesting combination of speaking and whispering”.¹⁵ But it is important for the expressive design of the piece. Such accentuations and the overlapping of different layers - vocal, spoken, electronic and instrumental parts - condense and nuance the declaimed text. It is a wave-like structure that features both word repetitions and consonant constellations with a strong pull. At the same time, it operates far away from expressive clichés or schematic synchronicity.

¹⁰ Paul Valéry, *Windstriche. Aufzeichnungen und Aphorismen*, Frankfurt /M. Comparable obscurations also characterise Lachenmann's work *Das Mädchen mit den Schwefelhölzern*.

¹¹ Cf. the description in: Lydia Jeschke, *Prometeo. Geschichtskonzeptionen in Luigi Nonos Hörtragödie*, Stuttgart 1997, p. 213. For an accentuation of the concept associated with the thought of Martin Heidegger, see Carola Nielinger-Vakil, *Musik als Gedanke*, in: Beiheft zur Partitur von *Prometeo*, pp. 170-192, here 178.

¹² Cf. Jeschke, *Prometeo*, pp. 226f. and p. 213.

¹³ On Nono's interest in Schönberg's handling of voices, see “Eine Autobiographie” (note 1), p. 63.

¹⁴ Score, p. 130, supplemented by the instruction “consonanti articolatissime: explosive - dentali - labiali - gutturali *durissime*”. (Emphasis in original)

¹⁵ Cf. supplement to the score, p. 230.

The latter also has to do with the fact that the *Hölderlin section* combines very different tendencies: phases of quite clear text presentation are juxtaposed with a tendency towards reduction and fragmentation as well as the type of stylization just outlined. Such and similar changes of perspective deepen something very important for the work as a whole: composing with different degrees of comprehensibility. They can be seen in correspondence with the passages from Walter Benjamin's historical theses contained in the libretto. But they also allow a comparison with Benjamin's idea of an active exploration of thoughts.¹⁶

The distance from the usual text settings achieved with all this is great. It equips the experience of this work, which is largely filled with magical tones, with an additional situation of observation. And this is focused both on the special design of the textual level and on its richness of associations, i.e. on the dimension of content. And in this link lies a form of exploration of the threshold between sound and meaning that is typical of Nono. In this piece, this threshold is not static and immovable, but unstable. It thus appears as a visualization of the searching attitude that also fills the textual level in many places.

The *Hölderlin section*, which lasts more than eight minutes, stands out clearly within the overall architecture: in contrast to the often-fragmentary passages, which are hardly characterized by speech intelligibility, it acts as a crystallization point formed by special moments of significance, which no interpretation of the piece should ignore. How explicitly the essential function of the *song of destiny* in Hölderlin's *Hyperion novel* as a situation of reflective pause is continued here is made clear right at the beginning of the section with the adversative "Doch" (m. 7-8), which opens the third verse of Hölderlin's poem.

Nono formulated remarkable thoughts with regard to the basic ideas of his composition *Il Canto Sospeso*: he spoke of „sound qualities which, in differentiated layering, also shaped by pauses, break up the banal consistency”¹⁷. At the same time, however, he hinted at the extent to which the realization and expansion of this idea required further creative means and experiences. “Beyond the original provocation of the level of meaning, the text functions as a special acoustic-phonetic material. Only later, in the Studio di Fonologia of the RAI in Milan and even more so with the Freiburg live electronics, did I realize what I hoped to achieve with some of the choral parts of the *Canto sospeso*.”

¹⁶ On Nono's understanding of active attention, see *ibid.* p. 105. And on the idea of listening-learning that appears in Benjamin's writings, see the helpful reflections in: Nanni, *Politik des Hörens*, p. 218.

¹⁷ “An Autobiography”), p. 76, the following quotation *ibid.*

These are remarkable words, especially as they by no means negate the intended “provocation” on a semantic level. They are based on the idea of linking this “provocation” comprehensively with other elements and thus shading it in different ways. This is always (as in *Canto sospeso*) related to the communicative dimension of language. But Nono’s words just quoted also draw attention to what is different about his later works. With this in mind, Nono himself spoke of “choral parts reminiscent of distant choirs, echoes, inspirations”.

In a remarkable way, Nono proposed the term “‘cancelled’ choirs” with regard to some of his late works (including *Prometeo*).¹⁸ He associated the idea of cancellation, which even appears in the title of *Il Canto sospeso*, with his vocal works of the 1980s, each of which was characterised by electronic differentiation. But he was also aware of the diversity of the choral parts in Schönberg’s opera *Moses und Aron*.

The Hölderlin passage in *Prometeo* bears particularly clear witness to all the experiences mentioned here. And the understanding of texts realized in this work as an expression of “provocation” and simultaneously “illumination”¹⁹ is reminiscent of what Nono formulated in a text about Lachenmann with reference to Ludwig Wittgenstein. Specifically, it recalls the idea of always aiming for “other ways of looking at things”²⁰ when composing. These considerations can be related not least to Wittgenstein’s reflections on language play. And Nono, who (as some sources in the Archivio Luigi Nono in Venice show) was explicitly concerned with the similarities between Wittgenstein and Schönberg, realizes these “other ways of looking at things” in *Prometeo* in a truly comprehensive sense. The starting point here is the courage to make doubts about common traditions productive when dealing with poetry as well as with representations of magical.²¹

Within the multifaceted reception of Hölderlin in more recent compositions, not only does the string quartet *Fragmente. Stille - An Diotima* (1979/80) is an important milestone, but *Prometeo* also offers a remarkable accentuation. The preference for the fragmentary developed in the string quartet also comes to the fore here. However, there is now something that

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 77.

¹⁹ Cf. ibid., p. 79: “You know that the texts have great significance for me, I use them as provocation, as illumination”.

²⁰ Cf. Nono’s reflection in: Helmut Lachenmann, *Musik als existentielle Erfahrung. Schriften 1966-1995*, Wiesbaden 1996, p. XIII.

²¹ As his library preserved in the Archivio Luigi Nono shows, Nono was intensively involved with various writings by and about Wittgenstein; numerous entries can be found in one book in particular, in which a new view of the magical aspect plays an essential role: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Note sul “Ramo d’oro” di Frazer*, ital. Edition Milano 1975.

clearly goes beyond this: There is an interplay of fragmentary, often suddenly interrupting design elements as well as tangible moments of meaning. The Hölderlin passage used plays a significant part in this.

And the compositional result of *Prometeo* comes even closer to Hölderlin's poetry, which is inconceivable without expressive moments, than the idea of dispensing with sounding words, which is favored in the string quartet *Fragmente. Stille - An Diotima*. This is because the music theatre work combines the expression of the persuasive power of silence and moments of pause even more significantly with the idea of concealing meaning.

Nono thus corresponds to the basic attitude of some of Hölderlin's poetry, which the philosopher George Steiner compared not only with the work of Webern and Cage, but also with that of Beckett.²² Nono was probably familiar with this possible interpretation from the extensive quotation of this consideration in Pierre Bertaux's Hölderlin book (a copy of this book can be found in Nono's library in the Nono Archive). And by directly incorporating Hölderlin's words, he goes one step further than in the quartet.

However, *Prometeo* also reacts to a further tendency in the more recent reception of Hölderlin. This consists in the linking of times and horizons of experience which, in addition to the reference to antiquity, also means reference to one's own present. This can be seen above all in the choice of text. But it is also perpetuated by two other important factors: on the one hand by the multilingualism that Nono also associated with Hölderlin's thinking,²³ and on the other by the linking of 20th century compositional devices with individual elements pointing to earlier times. As for other composers, the linking of horizons of experience that emerges so boldly in Hölderlin's work was obviously a factor that encouraged him to create contrasting, sometimes even montage-like compositions. And his own reference to the "elaboration of Hölderlin's poetic thought" can be related to this.

But how can what is unfolded in *Prometeo* be related to Hölderlin's poetry in a way that not only reflects its form but also its content and even specifically includes *Hyperion's Schicksalslied*? An answer to this question can be orientated towards the constellations of dealing with the text that I have outlined, especially as these also determine the style of the work in

²² See Pierre Bertaux, *Friedrich Hölderlin und die Französische Revolution*, Frankfurt am Main 1969, p. 416; and George Steiner, *Sprache und Schweigen*, Frankfurt /M. 1969, pp. 87f. Bertaux is often criticised for the one-sidedness with which he understands Hölderlin as a political author. But other aspects of his book have sometimes been overlooked, which are more important for Hölderlin's interest in composers' circles.

²³ Cf. his reference to "the elaboration of Hölderlin's poetic thinking" in: "Eine Autobiographie" (note 1), p. 119.

other ways. In *Prometeo*, Nono takes up the situation of permanent restlessness reflected by Hölderlin and recognizes it as a basic state in the *Hölderlin section*. At the same time, however, he is wary of a one-dimensional tragic or dramatic accentuation (very similar to that of the title figure).

Accordingly, the situation depicted in the selected text passage appears to be an expression of permanent vigilance or openness. This brings to mind an interpretation proposed by Lawrence Ryan with regard to the significance of the *Schicksalslied* for this novel and Hölderlin's entire conception of poetry. According to Ryan, the core of both lies in the "'mightiness' of the spirit", which comes to the fore in "the 'calm' of the narrator Hyperion"²⁴ and even recalls Hyperion's path to a brighter future, as described by Hölderlin. Hölderlin's idea of the "spirit that cheers"²⁵ and his understanding of an "alternation of tones" also come into focus here. This is echoed in the phrase "in still eternal clarity" in *Hyperion's Schicksalslied*. Nono clearly emphasized it in his Hölderlin edition²⁶ although it was omitted in *Prometeo* in the final instance.

In the 1980s, the composer read Klaus Heinrich's work *Parmenides and Jonah. On the relationship between philosophy and mythology*. And a characteristic consideration of this book in particular, which Nono gave to Lachenmann in 1987 and provided with an emphatic dedication, can also be linked to the reflection on fatefulness developed in *Prometeo*: "Only the alternative remains: submission to the power of fate or meditatively rising above fate."²⁷ This is precisely what one might think of when listening to this piece.

The fact that the extensive Hölderlin passage is almost imperceptibly transformed into an excerpt from Pindar's *6th Nemean Ode* in Italian (mm. 126-180) supports the possibility of such sideways glances. And these show how emphatically Nono's sense for the illuminating and, as it were, provocative aspects of poetry were developed. As a composer, he was always keen to move away from the overly unambiguous and thus to call up new, possibly speculative interpretations. His linking of Hölderlin's and Pindar's poetry seems all the more striking as his preoccupation with this ancient author in particular fed into Hölderlin's fundamental idea of interweaving different periods. Moreover, the excerpt from Pindar's ode chosen for *Prometeo* links the level of the human and the divine in a way that corresponds to Hölderlin's own thinking.

²⁴ Ryan, *Hyperion*, p. 196.

²⁵ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*. Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe, vol. II/1, Stuttgart 1951, p. 220.

²⁶ Archivio Luigi Nono Venezia.

²⁷ Klaus Heinrich, *Parmenides und Jona. Zum Verhältnis von Philosophie und Mythologie*, Frankfurt/M. 1985, here p. 19, Lachenmann clearly marked this passage in his own copy.

Nono has reflected this in a significant way. It is precisely at this point in the vocal part that he brings microtonal fluctuations into play. This reinforces the expression of uncertainty first emphasized in the recourse to Hölderlin. And it is characteristic of what is particularly important to me in my performance: the way in which this piece reflects and, as it were, rethinks textual content.²⁸ If we think of the way in which the question of the lawful is reflected in *Moses und Aron*, both on the level of content and on the structural level, it becomes clear here too how much Nono acts as Schönberg's descendant in *Prometeo*.

In the sketches for *Prometeo* preserved in the Archivio Luigi Nono, the name Brahms persistently appears in connection with *Hyperion's Schicksalslied*. In addition, there are even occasional musical references to the setting of this poem by Johannes Brahms.²⁹ One motive for both may lie in the individuality with which Brahms already responds to Hölderlin. And Nono was also aware of Brahms' significance when he reflected on this reference.

Nono's documented interest in the history of Hölderlin's reception, and its perspective suggests that we should return to his aforementioned reflection on the significance of the fragmentary in Schumann, which leads to comments on the poetry of Edmond Jabès and Hölderlin, underpinned by links between the two poets. "Think of Hölderlin, of the relationship between yesterday, today and tomorrow"³⁰, Nono formulated here, imagining "an authentic past that lives buried within us and suddenly springs forth." Statements such as these clearly indicate the important and multifaceted significance of Hölderlin's thinking for the conception of this work.

However, this also refers to the special characteristics of Hölderlin's poetry as well as its content. And last but not least, it probably refers to the reflection of Western traditions of thought that Hölderlin's poems realize with the help of fragmentation and surprising fields of signification. The composer Hans Zender, who opened a cycle entitled *Hölderlin lesen* a few years before Nono's work, expressed the thesis that Hölderlin had deliberately "shaken the fundamental premises of the European tradition of thought" with some bold connections in his poetry³¹. This idea deserves consideration. For the obvious question of the influence of Hölderlin's work on Nono's *Prometeo* can begin precisely here. This means the possibility of linking the non-linear

²⁸ Cf. Jeschke, *Prometeo*, pp. 221f. and "Eine Autobiographie" (note 1), pp. 108f. And on Pindar's conceptual significance for the political dimension of the entire work in a broader sense, see Nielinger-Vakil, *Musik als Gedanke*, p. 170.

²⁹ Cf. Jeschke, *Prometeo*, pp. 220f.

³⁰ "Eine Autobiographie", p. 52; the following *ibid.*, on the link between Jabès and Hölderlin cf. *ibid.*, p. 119.

³¹ Zender in a letter of 25 January 2008 to Karin Dahlke.

representation with the particular world of thought of this piece - which seems all the more obvious as it has always been part of Nono's composing to reflect on the specific world-related contexts of the texts used (and thereby differ from classical setting to music). One can also think here of those literary interpretations that are based on Hölderlin's particularly pronounced awareness of the connections between Greek antiquity and Christianity as well as his own time. This is precisely what *Prometeo* seems to react to. And the play is far removed from Hölderlin's understanding of history in any form of coherence or harmonization.

Friedrich Nietzsche also comes to mind here, especially as Nono cited his writings in connection with *Prometeo* as well as those of Walter Benjamin as an intellectual starting point and source of inspiration for the "search for new 'laws' "³² and, moreover, both authors referred to Hölderlin. In view of the many magical and suggestive moments on a textual and tonal level, Nietzsche's poem *Der Wanderer* is particularly suitable as a point of reference, which was important for Nono and appears in many places in the sketches for *Prometeo*.³³

One interpretation of this reference can be directed towards the courage to enter into danger accentuated in this poem. In *Prometeo*, this accentuation can be related in a special way to the dimension of the magic. In addition to the content, however, this also refers to the musical level, such as the use of barely audible moments or suggestive consonant sounds or the unusual use of time. All of this is, to put it pointedly and in the spirit of Nietzsche's *Wanderer*, as risky as it is indispensable.³⁴ The same applies to the danger reflected in the poem, which is associated with deviating from familiar paths, with looking into the abyss and at the same time with temptations. And it is precisely in this respect that it is close to Hölderlin's often quoted *Patmos Hymn*. I mention this here also because the sketches for *Prometeo* contain a clear indication that Nono obviously had this line of thought associated with Nietzsche and Hölderlin in mind and also sought to link it with Benjamin: "Augenblick --- Jetztzeit --- Gefahr (Hölderlin)", it says here.³⁵

³² Cf. Matteo Nanni / Rainer Schmusch (eds.), *Incontri. Luigi Nono im Gespräch mit Enzo Restagno*, Hofheim 2004, p. 110. Nono's library contains numerous books by and about Nietzsche.

³³ Cf. for example the sketches for the work, which can be found in the Archivio Luigi Nono under the number 51.05.04/01-04.

³⁴ Cf. its significant beginning directed towards the will to knowledge "No more path! Abyss to the left and deathly silence! So, would you have it! From the path thy will departed!"

³⁵ Cf. Archivio Luigi Nono, collection "Prometeo".

As is well known, Nono reflected on the thinking of Hölderlin and Nietzsche, and the same applies to Nietzsche and probably also Wittgenstein, in an extensive dialogue with the philosopher and writer Massimo Cacciari. But it should not be forgotten, he always did this with his own musical means. And above all, they ensure that the often-emphasized archipelago structure and the magical and sometimes enigmatic space of experience it contains are not to be misunderstood as a diffuse mix or a murmuring, nebulous devotional work. On a musical level, there are significant counterpoints to the tendency towards the magical and contemplative on all levels, as well as to the almost indulgent abundance of lyricism and allusions in the libretto. Nono avoids broad brushstrokes as well as common strategies of spiritual or even religious composition.³⁶ It should also be mentioned at this point that in the 1980s Nono set out in search of alternatives to spiritual music that was simply faith-based. During this period, in which he also intensively studied some of Franz Rosenzweig's writings, he expressed an explicit interest in the Hebrew chant tradition and its microtonality; Nono even spoke pointedly of a "culture of listening", which was opposed to a "culture of faith"³⁷.

From here, it is not difficult to establish a link to the idea of the "tragedy of hearing" realized with *Prometeo*. And this applies to all levels of this piece. Particularly characteristic and at the same time probably one of the reasons for the long compositional process, characterized by revisions and changes of plan, is the way in which the texts and sounds operate with very different degrees of presence. The piece proves itself here (as on all levels) to be a strategy of the finest settings, veils, ambivalences and refractions. It is precisely in these ways that it realizes Nono's idea of understanding texts as a means of illumination or even provocation. And it offers not only evocative and suggestive moments, but also calm, simple, open, highly fragile and at the same time illuminating and insightful ones. I would like to conclude with two quotations: The first of the two is by Nono himself (and dates from 1987): "I could say with Arnold Schönberg that at the end of every work I want more than ever to breathe the air of other planets."³⁸ And just three years later Helmut Lachenmann wrote in his obituary of Luigi Nono, to describe the special nature of the aspect of inwardness that emerges:

"His later works conjure up, more consciously than his earlier ones and yet at the same time clarifying their messages, that inwardness from which the realities that characterise our existence, the inner and outer ones,

³⁶ Cf. also the thoughts on the spiritual or even theological aspect of listening in: Nanni, *Politik des Hörens*, p. 215

³⁷ Cf. "An Autobiography", pp. 108f.

³⁸ „Eine Autobiographie“, p. 86.

are ultimately determined. Hölderlin, Nietzsche, but also the great philosophers of religion characterised his thinking - basically from the very beginning, but even more decisively since the late seventies.”³⁹

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³⁹ Lachenmann, *Nachruf auf Luigi Nono*, in: *Musik als existentielle Erfahrung*, 2020.

