

Du son au sens, du sens au son

Berio, Sanguineti et la nouvelle avant-garde italienne

An artistic trajectory that rose in the cultural fervor after the Second World War, and that was nourished by all the experiments and challenges that can be summed up under the term *neoavanguardia* (new avant-garde); a trajectory that proposes, however, a form of elaboration and overcoming of this same avant-garde, aiming at new communicative codes. A curious action open to art of all times and from all sources, but well aware of its historical and cultural collocation, of its irreducible singularity.

All this constitutes a powerful link between the musical work of Luciano Berio and the literary work of Edoardo Sanguineti. Our research tries to show this relationship, starting from the phenomenon of the new Italian avant-garde to arrive, with the conclusive experience of *Stanze*, at the beginning of the 2000s; historical reconstruction is necessary to understand the evolution and originality of the poetic idea at the base of the works of Berio and Sanguineti, a changing and complex idea, but always anchored in fundamental nodes that crosses the decades.

It would therefore be difficult to understand the origins and developments of the two artistic paths, without explaining the historical and cultural coordinates that generated them; that is, without understanding the historical and philosophical roots of a crucial moment for 20th century Italian culture.

In the galaxy of personalities and experiences that shaped post-war Italian culture and helped to provide an alternative approach to Croce's idealism, the names of Luciano Anceschi and Luigi Pareyson stand out.

Anceschi, a pupil of Antonio Banfi, represents a decisive actor for a series of experiences of primary importance (the poetic anthologies, the magazine *il Verri*, the collection *I Novissimi*, the Gruppo 63), not to mention his link with the young Edoardo Sanguineti ; Pareyson, author of *The Theory of Formativity* and responsible for the first Italian Chair of Aesthetics, helped to open up important perspectives for young intellectuals of successive generations, such as Umberto Eco. In the musical field, the figure of Luigi Dallapiccola is decisive in bringing the music of the Viennese school to Italy and receiving the dodecaphonic proposal without giving in to the fetishism of technique.

But the Italian cultural context after the Second World War is an extremely complex reality, irreducible to a simple opposition between defender and adversaries of Croce, or between conservatives and innovators. The experience of the Novissimi poets, for example, faced opposition not only from the traditionalist field, but also from a large part of left-progressive culture (Pasolini): the theoretical work of Fausto Curi, the young protagonist of this era, contributes to restoring its

complexity, by underlining the problematic relationship of several intellectuals with the idea of the avant-garde – and with the prospect of its overcoming.

In the musical field, for the new generations of instrumentalists, critics and composers, the confrontation with the experience of Darmstadt is unavoidable, just like the encounter with the work and the thought of Pierre Boulez, of Karlheinz Stockhausen, until to John Cage. Composers like Luciano Berio, Luigi Nono and Bruno Maderna, who grew up in the oppressive context of fascist censorship, draw heavily on these opportunities, without setting tradition aside.

The direct and curious confrontation with History and its forms constitutes a distinctive feature of the research of Berio and Sanguineti: a research which, already from its first phases, is dedicated to mixed genres (theatre, *azione scenica* for Berio) and dialogue with tradition (the references to Dante in the works of the young Sanguineti). The collaboration between the two artists is the response to a particular requirement, that of experimenting with new communicative codes, always with the idea of an art rooted in its time (and capable, why not, of acting on it) but open to any stimulation or perspective.

It would therefore be possible to retrace a common trajectory in the course of the two artists. An initial phase characterized by the voracious openness to the European and cosmopolitan dimension, by the radical experimentation with language and with the social and cultural implications of the work of art – a phase that could be represented by *Laborintus* (1956) and by *Thema. Omaggio a Joyce* (1958), through relations with Darmstadt, Gruppo 63 and the Novissimi; then, the decisive moment of the meeting and of *Passaggio* (1961-62); and the development of a phase more open to communication, starting with *Purgatorio de l'Inferno* (1963), *Folk Songs* (1963) and *Laborintus II* (1965).

Admittedly, the reading proposed here covers roughly a decade of activity: the following forty years were dense in events and developments, and it would be unfair to think that Berio and Sanguineti had already obtained, at the end of the 1960s, all their most significant results.

However, in this crucial knot that links the 1950s to the following decade (crucial for artists, as for Italian and international history in general) it is possible to grasp the contradictions and conflicts of 20th century culture, concentrated and therefore even more obvious. The opposition between expression and communication, already theorized by Adorno, emerges in the tension between experimentation and comprehensibility: a wound that marks all experimental art, and which gains its maximum visibility in avant-garde art.

It is a question of considering the social and political dimension of an art that does not resign itself to silence in the face of the tragedies of contemporary history, or the abyss that increasingly separates artist and public. When Sanguineti claims to want to go beyond the avant-garde, "to make

the avant-garde a museum art", it is because this idea of the avant-garde, inherited from the movements of the beginning of the century, now belongs to tradition: it does not translate into the end of all socio-political connotation, but into the need for art to find new ways of exercising its commitment to reality.

History and politics do not disappear from Sanguineti's poetry: a collection like *Purgatorio de l'Inferno* shows quite the contrary. But language evolves in a less hostile and difficult direction, compared to the first times and to *Laborintus*: it no longer seeks shock, but subtle doubt, without ceasing to experiment and reflect on itself.

In Berio's music this development is less evident; however, after a phase of serial experimentation inspired by Darmstadt (*Nones*, *Serenata I*), its relationship with tradition changes: competition gives way to analysis and reflection, to use the terms used by Giorgio Pestelli. Instead of closing his music in splendid isolation, in a pretension of purity, Berio appropriates everything ("the most omnivorous musician I have known", according to Sanguineti) with curiosity and amusement, but always with the greatest respect for history. History that, in the work of Berio, enters in a more discreet way, compared to Sanguineti; not to mention the difference in the means of communication, Berio's distrust of the commitment exhibited is well known – in the case of *Passaggio*, he had opposed the idea of Sanguineti, who wanted to see in the female figure Rosa Luxemburg, with a political element in the foreground.

After having spoken of avant-garde and experimental art, a final consideration is necessary: the works of Luciano Berio and Edoardo Sanguineti essentially remain within a boundary, that of the work-object of the Western type. The risk, otherwise, is that of looking at the two artists as revolutionaries, saboteurs of the artistic tradition to which they belong. While they have only experimented, with courage and intelligence, within the limits of a traditional conception of the work of art.

In this regard, in relation to the idea of chance, crucial for the musical culture of the second half of the 20th century, Ivanka Stoianova identifies two different approaches:

Unlike the European aesthetics of the open work seeking to integrate directed chance, while maintaining the status and social functioning of the musical work, the aesthetics and musical practice of indetermination, represented during the 1950s by the American musicians John Cage, Earle Brown, Morton Feldmann, Christian Wolff, David Tudor, etc., extend free chance to all dimensions of musical composition and interpretation and, as a result, call into question the status of Western music as a social phenomenon.

None of this is intended to diminish Berio's work in any way: he did not want to "question the status of Western music". In the same way, the avant-garde of the Novissimi constituted a formidable movement of openness for Italian poetry: but its subversive dimension is located in a formal, social and political dimension which is intimately linked to the cultural climate of Italy. of the 1950s and 1960s.

Berio and Sanguineti were linked above all by a tenacious desire for communication, by the refusal of an ascetic experimental approach closed to the world; from this point of view, therefore, the notion of openness could be understood as a tension towards the other, a desire for contact and sharing.

The development of the artistic production of Berio and Sanguineti shows a progressive distancing from the most radical instances of the experimental season; using Umberto Eco's terms, these are open works, yes, but the moving work – which achieves the most extreme form of openness – remains tied to a specific time and context.

The evolution from *Epifanie* to *Epiphanies*, like the structure of *Stanze*, seems to confirm this hypothesis.

Our work tries to consider two crucial figures for contemporary Italian culture, from the perspective of a complex relationship with their time and their roots: within the framework of the work of Berio and Sanguinetti, we have chosen compositions capable of underlining, at the same time, the originality of their artistic idea, the importance of the collaborative and intermedial dimension, and the changing relationship with the coordinates of the new avant-garde. The relationship between this cultural phenomenon and the work of artists is the real subject of research; a relationship that turned out to be far more complex and articulated than a politicized and superficial interpretation might suggest.

The very nature of this work, in balance between a philosophical, historical and musicological approach, captures many fields and opens up perspectives that are impossible to exhaust within the limits of this work. Other research, aimed at addressing the presence of instances of the new avant-garde of other composers or other historical moments (without excluding contemporaneity), could contribute to restoring an even more complex, but deeper image of the Italian culture of the 20th century and its links with our time.