SINFONIA AND BERIO'S PIONEERING POETICS

Stephane Crayton

Abstract: Luciano Berio's name appears once in the 1,134-page *Oxford Handbook of Western Music and Philosophy* (2021), yet his poetics sits among the most profound and expansive of the twentieth century. By the mid-1960s Berio was writing lucidly about tensions between synchronic and diachronic meaning. Such works as *Sinfonia*, the *Sequenze* and the electroacoustic output are radical applications of these ideas, yet they have been claimed by the proponents of the very structures they challenge and their meanings effectively reduced, notwithstanding Berio's insistence and clarity across his substantial writings. This article characterises Berio's work according to his poetics, demonstrating the ways in which *Sinfonia* actively stages the mechanisms of musical meaning, before situating Berio's writing in a context of contemporary theories of meaning. Particular comparison is made to the work of Harold Bloom, whose words transformed poetic discourse in the 1970s.

I must have said this before since I say it now
Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*

T1 │ For, when we find ourselves, face to face, now here, and they remind us that all this can't stop the wars, can't make the young older or lower the price of bread
(hard)
A1 │ say it again, louder!
(desperate)
T1 │ it can't stop the wars, can't make the young older, or lower the price of bread, can't erase solitude or dull the tread outside the door. . . And tomorrow we'll read that ⋆⁾ made tulips grow in my garden and altered the flow of the ocean currents. We must believe it's true. There must be something else. Otherwise it would be quite hopeless. But it is quite hopeless.
⋆⁾ mentions composer and title of a work included in the same program
Sinfonia/iii, BB-DD

This text is heard above the orchestra towards the end of the third movement of Berio's *Sinfonia*. It is a remarkable declaration in the context, an ugly confrontation between the existential and the optimistic. The optimism quickly falters, however: 'it is quite hopeless', concludes the tenor. The declaration comes from Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable*, the principal textual influence of the movement.[1] We can assume Beckett wasn't explicitly evoking the powers of

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[1] Originally published as Samuel Beckett, *L'innommable* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1953); later translated by Beckett and published as *The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 1958).

music when he wrote this phrase. Rather, Berio generates a new meaning for Beckett's text, transforming its state of limbo into that of a concert hall.[2]

The third movement of *Sinfonia* is mapped on to the third movement of Mahler's Second Symphony, the Scherzo.[3] Mahler's Scherzo is, in Berio's own metaphor, like 'a river' in the landscape of *Sinfonia's* third movement: at times it is all we seem to hear; at other times we seem to lose sight of it.[4] But it is nearly always there, its bar structure preserved so that whenever it reasserts itself it is as if the Scherzo has been sounding all along.[5] Only once the majority of the Mahler has been exposed does this relationship to musical time begin to disintegrate.

There is an unusual moment at bar 272 of Mahler's Scherzo, a dramatic shift in timbre (see Example 1) in which a full woodwind – forte – supported by tubas and percussion, reduces to a choir of trumpets – piano – accompanied by harps, and a muted line in the second violins sounds like a distant echo of the first violins. It is a moment of extreme clarity: the timbral change effects a kind of separation, as if we are overhearing music that was not really intended for us – a glimpse of devotion perhaps. Mahler's direction in the score is appropriate: *Sehr getragen und gesangvoll* (Very solemn and songful). The solemn E major is far from the suspenseful C minor that opens the movement.

Berio transcribes this moment, **N** in the score, preserving the trumpets and first harp, but with the muted violin line ingeniously adopted by a saxophone (see Example 2). He adds to it a sheet of sound: full strings, divided into 22 parts, very resonant, spanning their entire range; the blanket of shimmering strings cushions the trumpets and harps. In effect, Berio frames Mahler's gesture. We are not eavesdropping on the melody; rather, it is presented to us. It is a dramatic moment and, indeed, at precisely this moment the first tenor begins a monologue: 'you wait for the compulsory show to begin, it takes time, you hear a voice, perhaps it is a recitation, that is the show, someone reciting, selected passages, old favourites, or someone improvising'. This moment also marks the beginning of the

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[2] Such futility is also pertinent to the principal musical influence of the movement: Mahler's Scherzo is indirectly related to a tale in which Anthony of Padua preaches to a crowd of fish, only for them to return to their habits unchanged. Mahler set this tale to music in the song 'Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt', taking his text from Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano's collection of folk poems and songs, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn: Alte deutsche Lieder* (Heidelberg: 1805–1808). The song is a simpler version of the Scherzo, both of them completed in the summer of 1893. David Osmond-Smith goes into more detail in *Playing on Words: A Guide to Luciano Berio's* Sinfonia (London: Royal Musical Association, 1985), pp. 40–43; a broader context to Mahler's work with the tale is provided in Donald Mitchell, *The Wunderhorn Years* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1975).

[3] Berio had considered as an alternative Beethoven's op. 131, the C♯ minor quartet. In Luciano Berio, Rossana Dalmonte and Bálint András Varga, *Luciano Berio: Two Interviews*, tr. David Osmond-Smith (ed.) (New York and London: Marion Boyars Publishers, 1985), pp. 107–108, he described '"harmonically exploding" the last three movements of Beethoven's Quartet in C# minor, Op.131 – though without quotations, and with "little flags" composed by me instead. The vocal parts would have had a more instrumental character and the text would naturally have been quite different. . . Translating Beethoven's Op.131 into orchestral terms would have been a very risky operation and, in view of the task in hand, not an entirely justified one.'

[4] Berio describes 'a river flowing through a constantly changing landscape, sometimes going underground and emerging in another altogether different place'. Luciano Berio, 'Sinfonia: author's note', Centro Studi: Luciano Berio, www.lucianoberio.org/sinfonia-authors-note?1683069894=1 (accessed 15 September 2022).

[5] On various occasions Berio even orientates Beckett's text so that it appears to refer to the structure of the Scherzo: 'Yes, I feel the moment has come for us to look back, if we can, and take our bearings, if we are to go on' sounds over the start of Trio I (**E**11 in the score).

Example 1:
'Sehr getragen und gesangvoll',
Gustav Mahler, Symphony No. 2,
third movement, bars 268–76.

disintegration of the temporal relationship between Scherzo and *Sinfonia*: the Scherzo is framed by the *Sinfonia* in such a way as to transform not simply the material of its expression but also the location of the expression's characterising distance. Because this relocated, transformed expression begins at the very moment that strict adherence to the temporal structure of the Scherzo is abandoned, it is as if it represents *Sinfonia* finding its own time, generating its own expression beyond that of its influences.

There is an intoxicating energy to this movement. Into and away from the river of Mahler flow references to the history of music, from Monteverdi to Boulez. At times the musical fabric becomes so dense it can be difficult to perceive individual references, many of them hidden beneath the undulating surface of the music. Heard like this, the effect would seem to decontextualise the referenced music, a melody from Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*, for example, suddenly recognised as it floats above the orchestra. It might also seem that these complicated layers of quotation can only be comprehended by referring beyond the score, perhaps to the catalogue of references compiled by David Osmond-Smith in *Playing on Words*.[6] Yet, although we should be grateful for Osmond-Smith's 'inventory of

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[6] Osmond-Smith, 'An Inventory of Interrelations', *Playing on Words*, pp. 57–71.

Example 2:
'Sehr getragen und gesangvoll',
Luciano Berio, *Sinfonia*, third
movement, rehearsal letter **N**.

interrelations', this was not, as he well knew, the movement's raison d'être. As Berio recounted in interview in 1981, 'I'm not interested in *collages*.'[7]

The question is not what the references are, but why they are. Berio considered the fabric of the Scherzo as a kind of generator,[8] that the Scherzo can not only support other musical references and be transformed into them, but that these references can also transform into the Mahler and support it.[9] Webern can thus 'generate' Mahler and Mahler can 'generate' Webern. History is presented as a complex, rather than as a series; linearity collapses into a network of relations between ideas.

In *Remembering the Future*, the published version of the Charles Eliot Norton lectures that Berio gave at Harvard from 1993 to 1994, he

[7] Berio, Dalmonte and Varga, *Interviews*, p. 106.
[8] Ibid., p. 107.
[9] There is a parallel here to Berio's incorporation of Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Le Cru et le Cuit* (Paris: Plon, 1964) into the first movement of *Sinfonia* (Osmond-Smith, *Playing on Words*, pp. 8–15). Of course, in the third movement, Berio employs such transformational relations within a wider philosophy of history.

describes how '[a] melody by Schubert or a musical configuration by Schoenberg are not the pieces of a musical chessboard; they carry within themselves the experience of other melodies and other configurations, and their transformations are inscribed, so to speak, in their genetic code'.[10] This thought is articulated in *Sinfonia*: Berio composed its third movement in such a way as to stage these musical experiences or histories, to awaken their latent transformative possibilities, not just to express their histories but also to generate histories beyond them. In concentrating specifically on transformational possibilities, Berio essentially stages the Between: the nature of the relationships between musical materials.

Thus *Sinfonia* is an enquiry into the nature of meaning. Berio described the third movement as his most experimental music.[11] He once concluded an interview with the thought that 'in music, the constant search for an answer to something that continuously shifts, the search for a deep unity, is maybe the most exciting, the most profoundly experimental and the least functional aspect of its presences'.[12] He might as well have summarised *Sinfonia*.

The theory behind *Sinfonia* bears a remarkable similarity to the ideas of Harold Bloom, first expounded in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) and further developed in *A Map of Misreading* (1975) and *Kabbalah and Criticism* (1975), and Berio was familiar with Bloom's work. Indeed, although *The Anxiety of Influence* was not published until 1973, Bloom wrote most of the book during the summer of 1967, the year before Berio began composing *Sinfonia*.[13] Similar patterns of thought can, however, be traced in Berio's writing as early as the 1950s; by 1963, they are at an advanced stage, with the publication of an essay theorising gesture, 'Du geste et de Piazza Carità'.[14] We do not know precisely when Berio read Bloom but it is evident that Berio later rearticulates his earlier thoughts in terms expressive of Bloom. Dates aside, however, it is important to remember that while Bloom theorises in relation to poetry, Berio thinks more loosely, jumping between language and music.

In the opening chapter of *Remembering the Future*, Berio references a famous statement from Bloom's *Kabbalah and Criticism*:

> In music, as in literature, it may be plausible to conceive a reciprocal shifting of focus between the text's supremacy over the reader and the primacy of the reader becoming his or her own text. As Harold Bloom remarked, 'you are, or you become what you read' and 'that which you are, that you can only read.'

The implications of these statements are endless.[15]

Bloom's is a complex thought that relates identity to influence and history, as well as identifying this history as a projection of the self.

[10] Luciano Berio, *Remembering the Future* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 11. This is essentially Berio's poetics, the publication of the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures and his most important writing.

[11] Berio, 'Sinfonia: author's note'.

[12] Berio, Dalmonte and Varga, *Interviews*, p. 167.

[13] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 2nd edn (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. xi; first published Oxford University Press, 1973.

[14] Luciano Berio, 'Du geste et de Piazza Carità', *La Musique et ses problèmes contemporains* (Paris: Cahiers Renaud-Barrault, 1963), pp. 157–62. The article is also available in Italian in *Sequenze per Luciano Berio*, ed. Enzo Restagno (Milan: Ricordi, 2000), pp. 275–77, and in Luciano Berio, *Scritti sulla musica*, ed. Angela Ida De Benedictis (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 2013), pp. 30–36, which includes an edited version from 2000, pp. 472–74. The latter is the best collection of Berio's writings.

[15] Berio, *Remembering*, pp. 3–4. Berio's reference is to Bloom's *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), p. 96.

History, an ever shifting constituent of meaning, renders meaning fluid, such that we can say that there are no texts, only relationships between them. In this way, Bloom goes beyond the analytical into the psychological, ultimately aiming at a characterisation of structures of influence.

Bloom begins by describing the fundamental role of influence in *A Map of Misreading*:

> You cannot write or teach or think or even read without imitation, and what you imitate is what another person has done, that person's writing or teaching or thinking or reading. Your relation to what informs that person *is* tradition, for tradition is influence that extends past one generation, a carrying over of influence. Tradition, the Latin *traditio*, is etymologically a handing-over or a giving-over, a delivery, a giving-up and so even a surrender or a betrayal.[16]

For Bloom, influence is all-important. However, because we can read only according to our influences, meaning is an inevitably transformative process in which the transference of meaning, an active process, necessarily entails a change, and therefore loss, of sense, characterised by Bloom as a betrayal. Bloom termed this act of transformation 'misreading': not only is every poem a misreading of another poem, but every poem is a misreading of itself, or, as Bloom puts it, 'every poem is a misinterpretation of what it might have been'.[17]

In line with Bloom's ubiquitous 'misreading', Berio describes the history of music as a history of translation, whether from text to sound, instrument to instrument or experience to its description.[18] Berio writes:

> Translation implies interpretation... We are well aware of the implications of Luther's translation of the bible into the German language, the French translation of the American Bill of Rights...[19]

For Bloom in *A Map of Misreading*, '"Interpretation" once meant "translation", and still essentially does.'[20] Berio, like Bloom, confronts the inherent loss of creativity. Tied to history's fluidity, loss is the product of an active force of meaning: destruction; and Berio presents destruction as a necessary event of creation:

> Why forget music? Because there are a thousand ways to forget and to betray *its* history. Because creation always implies a certain level of destruction and infidelity. Because we must become able to call up the memory of that which is useful and then to forget it with a spontaneity that is paradoxically rigorous.[21]

Note Berio's selection of the word 'betray' to describe this active mechanism of creativity, echoing Bloom's conception of tradition as 'a giving-up and so even a surrender or a betrayal'.[22] Bloom, like Berio, regarded the creative act – writing or reading – as 'a sacrificial

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[16]   Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 32; first published Oxford University Press, 1975. *A Map of Misreading* was intended as an antithetical completion of *The Anxiety of Influence* (p. xiii).

[17]   Bloom, *Anxiety*, p. 120.

[18]   Berio, *Remembering*, p. 31. 'In reality this need is so pervasive and permanent that we are tempted to say that the history of music is a history of translations.' This second chapter/lecture is entitled 'Translating Music'.

[19]   Susanna Pasticci touches on Berio's approach to translation in '"In the Meantime, We'll Keep Translating": The Strength of the Ethical Dimension in the Creative Thought of Luciano Berio', in *Nuove Prospettive*, ed. Angela Ida De Benedictis (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2012), pp. 459–75. *Nuove Prospettive* is recommended reading, a collection of papers presented at a conference on Berio in Siena, 2008.

[20]   Bloom, *Misreading*, p. 85.

[21]   Berio, *Remembering*, p. 78. The third chapter is titled 'Forgetting Music'.

[22]   Bloom, *Misreading*, p. 32.

process, a purgation'.[23] It is easy to read Berio's description of his encounter with Luigi Dallapiccola in Bloomian terms:

> As often happens to me with important encounters, I reacted to Dallapiccola with four works: *Due pezzi*, for violin and piano, *Cinque variazioni*, for piano (based upon the three-note melodic cell – '*fratello*' – from *Il Prigioniero*), *Chamber Music* (setting poems by Joyce) and *Variazioni*, for chamber orchestra. With these pieces I entered into Dallapiccola's 'melodic' world, but they also allowed me to escape from it.[24]

The similarity between Bloom and Berio's thought, across genres, is striking. One imagines Berio's discovery of Bloom's writing to have been both thrilling and empowering, its influence visible in Berio's language in *Remembering the Future*. Indeed, by his 1985 interviews, Berio had seemingly embraced the psychological dimension of meaning: his description of Dallapiccola's influence is framed as a psychological escape, resonating with Bloom's 'misprision', and the word 'destroy' [détruire] even succumbs to the nuance of the word 'betray'. Yet the seeds of these thoughts are all to be found in Berio's earlier writing, most remarkably in 'Du geste et de Piazza Carità' (1963). In this essay, Berio describes the mechanisms of meaning within a formulation of gesture:

> Gesture therefore always has a history, and it is the history of the one who manifests it, before it becomes the history of the gesture itself. In effect, to make a gesture – a gesture can only be made, not invented –, that is to say, first of all, taking on its meanings and taking a critical position before the history it contains. The chronology of ideas and situations attached to gestures *is* history, just as the movement of the fingers is the movement of the hand, just as the trace of a footstep is the passage of someone: the relationships between the specific forms elaborated from these gestures are the *languages*, the techniques and the poetics. By gesture, we can therefore mean simply the action of doing something, of arousing some form of communication; or else a residue, a synthesis, a selection of typical processes (a mythological operation, in this case) deduced from a significant context inseparable in turn from its historicity and from other previous gestures, in turn inseparable from other significant concepts in which we would always like to find all these gestures that were necessary.[25]

Berio emphasises the history of gesture. Gesture is constituted entirely by history and so the composition of gesture entails a selective act; as such, it is the location of a destructive act.[26] Gesture, according to Berio, can be invented but not made, since it is itself made from history, and therefore inseparable from other gestures, such that we may summarise that the meaning of a gesture is simply that there have been other gestures. Or, as Bloom writes 12 years later in *Kabbalah and Criticism*, 'The meaning of a poem is just that there is, or rather was, another poem.'[27]

When I described the third movement of *Sinfonia* as an enquiry into the nature of meaning – as staging the Between – what I also mean is it that Berio stages this destruction, this act of creation. In *Kabbalah and Criticism*, Bloom asserted, 'I do not believe that meaning is produced *in* and *by* poems, but only *between poems*.'[28]

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[23] Bloom, *Anxiety*, p. 120.
[24] Berio, Dalmonte and Varga, *Interviews*, p. 53.
[25] Berio, 'Du geste et de Piazza Carità', translation my own, p. 41.
[26] 'Pour être créateur, le geste doit pouvoir détruire quelque chose.' Berio, 'Du geste et de Piazza Carità', p. 162.
[27] Bloom, *Kabbalah*, p. 122.
[28] Ibid., p. 88.

How is this destruction, this betrayal and influence codified? Bloom's answer led him to Kabbalah and a formulation of six 'revisionary ratios'; Berio's answer led him to the voice and a study of gesture.

Berio's early preoccupations with gesture were vocal. He would later write that 'the sound of a voice is always a quotation, always a gesture. The voice, whatever it does, even the simplest noise, is inescapably meaningful.'[29] This was not a revelation as such: from 1950 to 1964 Berio was married to Cathy Berberian and his remarkable understanding of linguistics, not to mention his close friendships with Umberto Eco and Edoardo Sanguineti, found resonance in the equally remarkable expressivity of Berberian's voice, able to animate Berio's thought in such subtle and diverse ways.

But vocal music presents a complication: language. Occupied with the operation of musical meaning, the parallel operation of a separate system was a distraction. This would remain a concern throughout Berio's life; in *Remembering the Future* he records that 'even in the highest moments of the German lied... it can be more rewarding to unglue the music from the text'.[30]

It is in this context that we should consider *Visage*. Composed in 1961, *Visage*, for electronic sounds and Cathy Berberian's voice on tape, has no text. In isolating the voice, Berio confronted this inevitability of associations, this inescapable meaning. Instead, *Visage* is based on vocal gestures. The narrative plays with the associations of gestures and their possible transformations: crying can become laughing, can become an expression of intense pleasure. Indeed, Berberian's voice generates such vivid ideas that the piece was banned on Italian radio for being too pornographic.[31] As fragmented sounds become gestures and narratives grow from the juxtaposition of their associations and transformations, meanings become remarkably clear, a clarity that is highlighted when the timbre is, ironically, disrupted by the pronunciation of a single word, 'parole'. Berio demonstrates that meaning is perceived in the transformation of associations: in the destruction of history.

This is taken to extremes in *Sequenza III*, for solo voice. Here there is a text, but it is disordered beyond comprehension – not simply words, their vowels, too. Like *Visage*, *Sequenza III* emphasises gesture, this time including singing. However, Berio avoids sounding reciprocal relationships: as he puts it, 'The work has no memory of vocal music.'[32] In other words, the text and vocal gestures are at odds with one another.[33] Berio considers this liberation from memory an invitation 'to witness that miraculous spectacle of sound becoming sense'.[34]

Sequenza III demands the entire technique of the voice. In its combination of textual, gestural and technical extremes it asks the question 'What does it mean to sing?'[35] The same could be said of all the

[29] Berio, *Remembering*, p. 50.
[30] Ibid., p. 46.
[31] David Osmond-Smith, *Berio* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 64.
[32] Berio, *Remembering*, p. 70.
[33] Berio describes in detail how *Sequenza III* functions in *Remembering*, pp. 68–71. Osmond-Smith describes Berio's use of text in detail in *Berio*, pp. 64–66.
[34] Berio, *Remembering*, p. 70.
[35] As Berio writes in 'Sequenza III: author's note', Centro Studi: Luciano Berio, www.lucianoberio.org/sequenza-iii-authors-note?1487325698=1 (accessed 15 September 2022), 'Sequenza III can also be considered as a dramatic essay whose story, so to speak, is the relationship between the soloist and her own voice'.

Sequenze: 'What does it mean to play the flute/harp/piano/trombone/viola/saxophone/violin/clarinet/trumpet/guitar/bassoon/accordion/cello?'[36] These works have an encyclopaedic quality. For example, *Sequenza VIII*, for violin, draws on the Ciaconna from Bach's D minor Partita, that 'musical apex... where – historically – past, present and future violin techniques coexist';[37] *Sequenza II*, for harp, intends to go beyond the 'rather limited vision' left to us by the French impressionists.[38] In other words, the *Sequenze* represent attempts to order the physical realities of the instrument.

There is an exhaustive quality to much of Berio's work. He composed one *Opera*, one *Sinfonia*; no instrument receives a second *Sequenza*. In interview he once suggested that a useful treatise would be 'something nearer to an encyclopedia with chapters on instrumental acoustics, timbre and harmony, timbre and instrumental register, timbre and speed of articulation, acoustic and psycho-acoustic instrumental kinship, voice and instruments, amplified instruments, electro-acoustic transformations of instruments', recounting that he had once sketched out such a project with Boulez for IRCAM and Universal Edition.[39] But Berio's oeuvre already constitutes such a technical encyclopaedia; there was no need to realise the IRCAM project because he already had.

There are rare moments when Berio separates his incisive technique from exhaustive enquiry. His description of the 34 *Duetti*, for two violins (1979–83) – 'they are not necessarily based on deep musical motivations, but rather connected by the fragile thread of daily occasions' – reads like a confession,[40] but it also finds resonance in Berio's heritage: 'like a good Ligurian, I never throw anything away'.[41] *Folk Songs* (1964) is another such delight, easy and spirited, like a reward after the intensity of anti-quartet, *Sincronie*.

Berio found the content of *Sequenza VI* for viola (1967) so rich that he extracted several pieces from it: *Chemins II* (1967), for viola and nine instruments, and *Chemins III* (1968), for viola and orchestra; later came *Chemins IIb* (1970), for orchestra, and *Chemins IIc* (1972), for bass clarinet and orchestra. Berio compared their relation to the layers of an onion; they are really a series of embedded analyses.[42] In *Chemins IV* (1975), Berio describes using *Sequenza VII* (oboe) as a kind of generator, the same word used to describe the role of Mahler's Scherzo in *Sinfonia*:[43] the functions it generates are adopted by the instrumental group, which in turn generates the solo part itself. It has been suggested that Berio's work can 'ridicule' analysis, but it is surely the case that such work *is* its own analysis.[44] The *Chemins* are analyses, like *Folk Songs*, like *Sinfonia*.[45] In *Remembering the Future*,

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[36] In this context, it would be remiss not to mention *Gesti* (gestures), written the year after *Sequenza III*, for the recorder player Frans Brüggen. It is appropriate that at this stage of experimentation with gesture, the next step would be recorder, the instrument closest to the voice. Brüggen thought of it as a small *Sequenza*. Frans Brüggen, 'Berio's "Gesti"', *Recorder and Music Magazine*, November (1966).

[37] Luciano Berio, 'Sequenza VIII: author's note', Centro Studi: Luciano Berio, www.lucianoberio.org/sequenza-viii-authors-note?177677955=1 (accessed 15 September 2022).

[38] Luciano Berio, 'Sequenza II: author's note', Centro Studi: Luciano Berio, www.lucianoberio.org/sequenza-ii-authors-note?131775360=1 (accessed 15 September 2022).

[39] Berio, Dalmonte and Varga, *Interviews*, pp. 37–38.

[40] Luciano Berio, 'Duetti per due violini: author's note', Centro Studi: Luciano Berio, www.lucianoberio.org/duetti-per-due-violini-authors-note?237685848=1 (accessed 15 September 2022).

[41] Berio, Dalmonte and Varga, *Interviews*, p. 90.

[42] Luciano Berio, 'Chemins IIb: author's note', Centro Studi: Luciano Berio, www.lucianoberio.org/chemins-iib-authors-note (accessed 15 September 2022).

[43] Berio, *Remembering*, p. 45.

Berio described the musical work as 'a set of partial systems that inter-act among themselves, not merely because they are active at the same time, but because they establish a sort of organic and unstable reciprocity'.[46] We should look for Berio in this instability, in those creative junctions which negotiate the terms of order. In *Allelujah II* (1957–58), for example, Berio examines space and the limits of comprehensibility within.[47] Frequently, Berio combines two ideas, exploring the negotiations of their relation. In *Circles* (1960), a process of extending the voice through instruments comes into dialogue with a kind of cycling text, proceeding beyond the point of physical capability. In *Epifanie* (1961) Berio brings together the *Quaderni* to stage the negotiations of these different studies. These are dialogues: destructive and productive.[48]

Certainly, commentary can seem specious when dealing with Berio's work because he spoke so well about his own music and was unusually transparent regarding his processes, ironic for a musician who believed that 'there is always something untrue about a composer talking about himself. . . the most illuminating self-portraits are those in which a composer doesn't speak about himself but about others'.[49] But Berio understood the complexities of these 'others', their refusal to stand still, their resistance to definition. Above all, he understood that his music itself meant nothing, that it was simply playing with history: a history for which he felt an enormous responsibility.

The poet Sanguineti described the complexities of post-war, modernising Italy as a 'Palus Putredinis' ('marsh of decay'), advocating the need to throw oneself 'head-first, into the labyrinth of formalism and irrationalism. . . to get out of it not just with dirty hands, but also with mud on the shoulders'.[50] Berio frequently borrowed Sanguineti's metaphor of 'mud on the shoulders'.[51] Faced with decay, fidelity to history was fundamentally important. In an essay published in 1968, Berio argued how 'it is essential that the composer be able to prove the relative nature of musical processes: their structural models, based on past experience, generate not only rules but also the transformation and the destruction of those very rules'.[52] The potential

[44] Richard Causton, 'Berio's Visage and the Theatre of Electroacoustic Music', *Tempo*, no. 194 (October 1995), p. 20.

[45] Berio, *Interviews*, p. 148: 'it is not my intention to preserve the authenticity of a folk song. My transcriptions are analyses.'

[46] Berio, *Remembering*, p. 12.

[47] The most comprehensive summary of Berio's works is Osmond-Smith, *Berio*.

[48] Berio summarises a number of works in *Interviews*; for instance, '*Différences* was the first attempt to develop a relationship in depth between an instrumental group and the possibilities of electro-acoustics; with *Chemins V*, on the other hand, I want to make the performance of a clarinet solo interact with the programmed functions of a digital filter', p. 126.

[49] Luciano Berio, 'Remarks to the Kind Lady of Baltimore', *Electronic Music Review*, 1, no. 1 (1967), p. 58.

[50] Edoardo Sanguineti, 'Poesia informale?', *I Novissimi: Poesie per gli anni '60*, ed. Alfredo Giuliani (Milan: Rusconi and Paolazzi, 1961), pp. 171–72; first published in *Il Verri* (1961): 'gettare se stessi, subito, e a testa prima, nel labirinto del formalismo e dell'irrazionalismo, nella Palus Putredinis, precisamente, dell'anarchismo e dell'alienazione, con la speranza, che mi ostino a non ritenere illusoria di uscirne poi veramente, attraversato il tutto, con le mani sporche, ma con il fango, anche, lasciato davvero alle spalle'. See also Osmond-Smith, *Berio*, pp. 70–73, and David Osmond-Smith, 'Voicing the Labyrinth: The Collaborations of Edoardo Sanguineti and Luciano Berio', *Twentieth-Century Music*, 9, nos 1–2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, March 2012), pp. 63–78.

[51] See, for example, Berio, *Interviews*, p. 66, or Berio, 'Du geste et de Piazza Carità', p. 162, where it is described as a necessary condition of gesture's creativity. Sanguineti's 'lasciato davvero alle spalle' is a play on 'lasciato alle spalle il passato', which more colloquially means 'leave the past behind'.

of dialogue obliges Berio's attention: order is a perception or, rather, a reconstruction of past experience; it delves into an 'impalpable zone with which we can only come to grips through the mediating influence of works that we have already assimilated', as Berio explained in interview.[53] In this way order is generative and its dialogues transformative.

Berio is sensitive to the agency of musical structures, acknowledging that they know something we do not. In the same interview he describes a 'strange feeling that musical processes can be more intelligent than the people who produce and listen to them'.[54] His work attempts to map this intelligence – it is an encyclopaedia of potential musical relations – and the third movement of *Sinfonia* represents such a task: every note is charged, prepared to erupt, loaded with what it proposes to move beyond. In interview, Berio concluded that 'For my own part, I hope that my work is one possible reply to the various fractures that exist within musical work: fractures that fascinate rather than worry me, because they oblige me to explore terrain that is creatively uninhabited as far as music is concerned.'[55]

To regard Berio's work as aiming for this 'uninhabited' space for its own sake would be to miss Berio's obligation to the theoretical, to mistake the ingredients of Berio's creativity as the new sounds of an absolute figure and to claim them as a representation of progress. Such a reading, as Berio might have said, has no memory. This presentation of Berio as an experimentalist effectively stifles the encompassing theoretical dimension to his work. Bloom reminds us that 'the strongest of poets are so severely mis-read that the generally accepted, broad interpretations of their work actually tend to be the exact opposites of what the poems truly are'.[56] It may not be entirely surprising, then, that Berio's achievements have been misappropriated in this way.

Fundamentally, this is a disagreement about how musical meaning is created, an argument that may be reduced to two different conceptions: 'in the beginning was the sound' and 'in the beginning was the gesture'. According to the former, musical expression is the product of the identification of analytical difference, a conception of composition that Berio describes as akin to the possibilities of an infinite chessboard: it is unavoidably rule-based and enshrines a kind of intellectual musical elitism.[57] At fault is a fundamentally linear conception of meaning that runs parallel to the obsession with newness for its own sake; the existential threat of new music is linearity.

Berio shows us a way out: 'gesture' is not antithetical to 'sound' but encompasses it. In this article I have attempted to demonstrate how Berio theorised gesture, locating its influence within his poetics. Gesture is necessarily generative: the meaning of a gesture is simply that there have been other gestures; sensitivity to gesture stages the fluidity of meaning, always transformational, which is to say it has agency. Nicholas Cook's article 'Theorizing Musical Meaning' conceives meaning as an 'autonomous agent', just one of music's

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[52] Luciano Berio, 'The Composer on His Work: Meditation on a Twelve-Tone Horse', *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 July (1968).
[53] Berio, Dalmonte and Varga, *Interviews*, pp. 17–18.
[54] Ibid., p. 23.
[55] Ibid., p. 31.
[56] Bloom, *Kabbalah*, p. 103.
[57] Berio, *Remembering*, p. 11.

emergent properties.[58] Decades earlier, Berio had planted such seeds, describing the generative autonomy of music.

However, the genius of *Sinfonia* is not simply that it explodes linearity, but that it holds this explosion in tension with the analytical. In *Remarks to the Kind Lady of Baltimore* (1965), Berio imagines a discussion between two groups of listeners, whom he labels 'operationalist' and 'structuralist'. It degenerates into a fight: 'The former group was yelling about twelve-tone sets, note-objects, combinatorial procedures, and pitch coherence. The latter, the "structuralists", about meaning, segmentations of the sound continuum, synchronic and diachronic views, history, and responsibility.'[59] Berio positions himself in the corner, watching, and in his music he does not take sides, either, instead maintaining both the diachronic and the synchronic with the analytical.

This is perhaps the ultimate dialogue in Berio's work, as well as the most critically misunderstood. In 2021, writing in *The Oxford Handbook of Western Music and Philosophy*, Christopher Norris advocates a sort of creative criticism, a move 'beyond formal analysis such that its real benefits are conserved... while its cramping effects are progressively undone by the powers of hermeneutic inventiveness'.[60] Translated to composition this is remarkably similar to the negotiation Berio attempts, whose lesson is surely the release from the institutionalisation with which new music continues to grapple. Berio's is a profoundly optimistic approach to composition which seeks to expand the possibilities of meaning. He understood and would often repeat that 'the most meaningful analysis of a symphony is another symphony'.[61] 'A theory *of* poetry,' as Bloom argued, 'must belong *to* poetry, must *be* poetry, before it can be of any use in interpreting poems.'[62]

[58] Nicholas Cook, 'Theorizing Musical Meaning', *Music Theory Spectrum*, 2, no. 2 (2001), p. 192.
[59] Berio, 'Remarks to the Kind Lady of Baltimore', p. 59.
[60] Christopher Norris, 'Continental Philosophy of Music', *The Oxford Handbook of Western Music and Philosophy* eds. Tomás McAuley, Nanette Nielsen, Jerrold Levinson and Ariana Phillips-Hutton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 108–109.
[61] Berio, *Remembering*, p. 125.
[62] Bloom, *Kabbalah*, p. 109.