

BASTANDOSI LA NUCA A SCORRERE DIETRO LA FRONTE, A COMPOSITION FOR A SOLO MIND

Dario Buccino

1. Introduction

I'm a composer and performer, and since the early 1990s I have been developing a musical system consisting of compositional, notational, and performance techniques based on the parameterization of performative processes, and which focuses, both on a philosophical as well as performative level, on the *hic et nunc*, the “here and now” (which I abbreviate as HN).

By “performative processes” I mean everything that is happening in the body and in the mind of the performer in the moment in which they give life to sound. There is something that happens that is so deep it can even be hard to remember what was happening inside us while we were playing. And these forces, I believe, may be captured and used as a compositional tool.

The system, which I call the HN System®, breaks the performative act down into parametric layers attributable to its acoustic, motor, and emotional dimensions, and compositionally organizes the entire process through algorithms created *ad hoc* and a specifically designed notation system.

2. “Body-centric” composition

One of the first pieces I wrote in this way is *E allora, oggi, la mano la scorgo spiegare le linee, ordire pazienza*, a composition for voice and violin in which I created many parameters related to the body and the perception of the body, leading the performer to unleash their emotional energy into an audible form (encompassing silence).

My interest in fully involving the body led me to develop the *HN Steel Sheet*®, a version of the thunder sheet. It is a hung steel sheet with only one hole, which gives it considerably different acoustics than a standard thunder sheet, and is made from a specific alloy of steel. I designed the instrument to have very simple but precise features that allow me to have a total body relationship with it: the instrument can be played using the entire body.

I find that the importance of the body in music is both underestimated and overestimated in contemporary culture. This underestimation is well-known, but I would like to expand on how it is overestimated: we think that when we want to include the body in our music it has to become as physical as possible. But this is not what I mean by “body-centric” music. I call my music “body centric” because what interests me in the body is the aspect of the body wherein our inner reality takes place. The musicologist Stefano Lombardi Vallauri wrote:

The Italian composer Dario Buccino [...] goes beyond the approaches of Karlheinz Stockhausen’s “intuitive music” [...], Dieter Schnebel's *Maulwerke* [...], Helmut Lachenmann’s “musique concrète instrumentale”, and Brian Ferneyhough’s extreme demand for effort. [...] The original element added by Buccino as a means for the creation of form is an indication not only of bodily actions, but also global (bodily, mental) experiences. Stockhausen also prescribes experiences, though he indicates them in a generic and intuitive manner, in mystical terms. [...] Buccino adds an exact description of the required experiences.¹

¹ S. Lombardi Vallauri, “The Composition of Experience (and its Notation) in the Musical-Holistic Art of Dario Buccino,” EuroMAC2014 – Eighth European Music Analysis Conference, Leuven, Belgium.

Vocalista

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	1	2	3	4	5
Tempo	^!	A!	□	□	^
Spazio	VCNI!	VCNI!	VCNI!	VCNI!	VCNI!
↑	A	,	,	,	,
↓	A	—	—	—	—
↑	Imm. ^{no} Emss. ^{no}	HN	HN	HN	HN
	Cstr. ^{no} SUP	HN	HN	HN	HN
	Cstr. ^{no} INF	SI NO	SI NO	SI NO	HN
	RGST	♩!	♩!	♩!	♩!
	QLTA'	ORD	ORD	ORD	ORD
	VC FT	○ ●	○ ●	○ ●	○ ●
	FLOW	P! F!	P! F!	P! F!	P! F!
↓	MSCL ^{no}	U	U	HN	U

pag 1

Violinista

	1	2	3	4	5
Tempo	^!	A!	□	□	^
Spazio	VCNI!	VCNI!	VCNI!	VCNI!	VCNI!
dx	A	—	—	—	—
	L	CORDE	CASSA	CASSA	CASSA
dx	Punto arco Quali dita	CRN	CRN	CRN	CRN
	Punto corda Incl. ^{no} arco (mano)	TST!	—	—	—
	PRSS	ORD	ORD	ORD	ORD
	VLCT	—	—	—	—
	ENRG	—	—	—	—
	MSCL ^{no}	U	U	HN	HN
sx	CRDE	I	—	—	—
	Punto corda Punto cassa	—	—	—	—
	DITA	1, 2, 4	—	—	—
	Incl. ^{no} dita	—	—	—	—
	PRSS	—	—	—	—
	VLCT	—	—	—	—
	MSCL ^{no}	U	U	HN	HN

Image 1. Score excerpt from *E allora, oggi, la mano la scorgo spiegare le linee, ordire pazienza*, for violin and voice ²

² Video of *E allora, oggi, la mano...*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgrQBgDVEm8>

The image shows a musical score for 'Mi dico n° 1' for HN Steel Sheet soloist. It is divided into two variations: I VAR. and II VAR. Each variation has a 'Tempo' section and an 'ACTION' section. The notation is complex, featuring various symbols and abbreviations such as NCC, P!, F!, P, and dynamic markings like *pp*, *ppp*, *f*, and *ff*. There are also structural elements like 'Finale I' and 'Finale II'. The score is written in a unique notation system for HN (Hic et Nunc).

Image 2. Score for *Mi dico n° 1*, for HN Steel Sheet soloist ³

3. Involving the mind

HN music is not “gestural” music. It is not about the exteriority of the physical action; it is about its intensity, which is experiential before it is physical. That's why I composed *Bastandosi la nuca a scorrere dietro la fronte*, a detailed score for a “solo mind” written using the HN System's notation: its aim is to shape the mental experience as a structured stream, turning the act of thinking into a musical act.

The performance of *Bastandosi la nuca a scorrere dietro la fronte* takes place only in the mind of the performer. It is conceived to be performed on one's own but it can also be “played” in a collective mental performance with an active audience guided by a conductor. In both cases it is a silent performance because each performer is engaged in thinking.

In a collective performance, though there is only one score, the composition will *happen* differently in each person's mind, which is exactly what happens when we listen to music: there is only one written page and one acoustic phenomenon, but the minds experiencing the music are many and unique.

As a silent piece, there is an important affiliation with *4'33''* by John Cage, a piece which I consider to be the “grandfather” of my composition. However, the difference between the two is evident: in *4'33''* what is written is the silence (*tacet*, in the score), while the inner experience is its natural consequence; in my piece what is written is the inner experience, while the silence is the natural consequence of the person being focused on their own thoughts. Both compositions demand an active ignition of the here and now dimension, the *hic et nunc* enclosed in the acronym “HN.”

³ Video of *Mi dico n° 1*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vg_P7J2NWUU

4. The score

The score for *Bastandosi la nuca a scorrere dietro la fronte* is made up of symbols and a set of instructions for how to interpret the symbols. Here, I will examine some examples of the symbols.

4.1. Time

Tempo—“time” in the composition—is approached as something which is intuitive and experiential rather than objective.



Image 3. *Tempo*, represented by a series of fermatas

The fermatas indicate the time to be spent on each bar of the score. The first symbol means “as short as possible,” which is to say: perform the bar for the shortest time possible, just enough to plunge inside it. The next one means “very short”: linger on the bar a little bit more. “Short”: linger even more. And so forth. It’s the internal experience that defines the phenomenon.

4.2. Breathing

One line of the score is dedicated to the symbols for breathing.

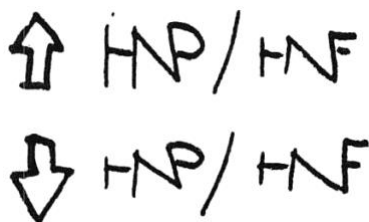




Image 4. *Respiro*, “breathing”

Inhaling  and exhaling  are treated independently and follow intuitive dynamics: HNp, i.e. freely *piano*, and HNF, i.e. freely *forte*. Dynamics refer to the energy with which the act of breathing has to be carried out rather than to its audibility.

4.3. Mental “cond-actions”



One line of the score is dedicated to purely mental actions,  , of which there are eleven, and each mental action can be represented in three forms: (a) / (b) / (a)+(b).



Image 5. Suppress any thought / Ignore any thoughts / Alternate and/or mix

For example, the first symbol, form (a), means “suppress any thought.” When that symbol appears in the bar, the reader-performer should try to suppress any thought that comes into their mind. It is impossible, but what counts is both the attempt at an action and the condition in which the performer puts themselves in while attempting that action. I call them mental “cond-actions”: the conditions set by actions. The second symbol, form (b), means “ignore any thoughts,” and the third symbol, form (a+b), means “alternate and/or mix freely the two approaches.”

Another “cond-action” is to “feel heavy.” It is an inner experience: everyone will feel heavy in a different way. The second form, the (b) form, is “feel light,” followed by the alternation and/or mix of (a) and (b).

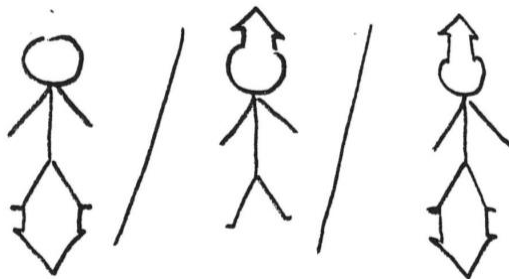


Image 6. Feel heavy / Feel light / Alternate and/or mix

Another “cond-action” is to “mentally verbalize all of your thoughts”: everything the reader-performer is thinking must be verbalized. The opposite, which is the symbol reversed, means “try not to verbalize any thought.” Again, it is not important what is being thought and it is impossible not to verbalize thoughts in any way, so what is important is aiming to do so.

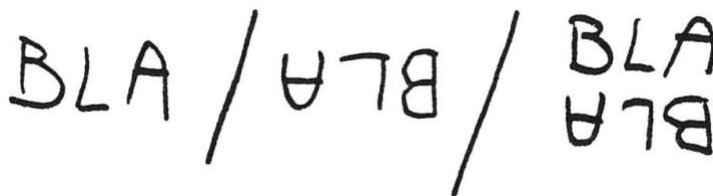


Image 7. Mentally verbalize all of your thoughts / Do not mentally verbalize any thought / Alternate and/or mix

The last “cond-action” is expressed by the HN symbol, which represents the mental dimension which a person finds themselves when living spontaneously in the here and now.



4.4. Awakening of the senses

Another line of the score is dedicated to the act of “awakening the senses.” For example, in some bars I indicate for the reader-performer to awaken their sense of sight (*vista*) while they focus alternately on the center and the periphery of the field of vision, without any movement of the eyes. If the symbol of the little sphere is present, they focus on the global unity of the center and periphery.

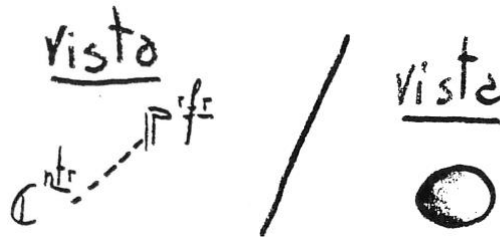


Image 9. *Vista*, “sight.”
From center to periphery / Global unity

Another example is the awakening of the sense of hearing (*udito*). The reader-performer is asked to focus alternately on the real sounds that are close and those that are distant from them, or if the symbol of the little sphere is present, to focus on the global unity of what they hear around and inside themselves.

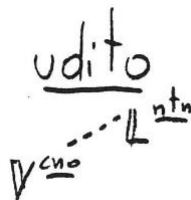


Image 10. *Udito*, “hearing”. From *vicino*, “near” (V^{cno}), to *lontano*, “far” (L^{ltn})

4.5. Mentalization of time-space

Another line refers to a more conceptual act: the reader-performer must be focused on the inextricable unity of time and space, which is perceivable here and now.

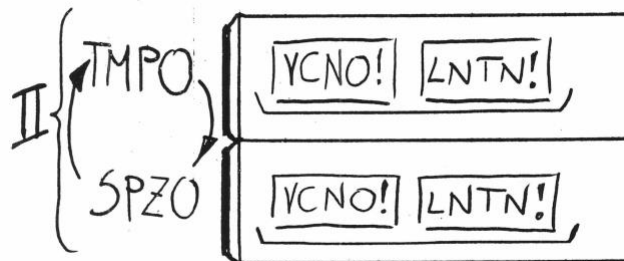


Image 11. *Tempo-spazio*, “time-space.”

From *più vicino possibile*, “as near as possible,” to *più lontano possibile*, “as far as possible”

The reader-performer is asked to move with their imagination using a sort of counterpoint focus, for example, focusing on a very distant moment in the past while exploring points in space ranging from as near as possible to as far as possible from here, trying to imagine their existence in that moment in time.

I find that there is a common misconception according to which the here and now ends here and now. Space and time are infinite and eternal, so when we really focus on being here and now, we also realize that we have always been here, now. It is always now, it has always been now, it will be eternally now. And what appears to be the “here” coincides with the whole reality.

5. Compositional method

At the end of the score, a simple algorithm (*operazioni compositive*) is provided and allows for the composition of continuously new versions of the piece. Images 15, 16, 17, and 18 (see below) show three example versions (*stesure*). The rules that combine the actions together are strict, but the combinations are random and infinite. By rolling dice to make selections it is possible to write infinite variations of the same piece using the blank staves provided at the end of the score.

OPERAZIONI COMPOSITIVE

1) Forma: I | II / II | I
 op. ≠ (e prosegui da lì, seguendo i percorsi indicati)
 NEXT

- Parte I -

2) Quante battute dura la parte I: 3/6/9/12 battute.

[Prima battuta]

3) Quali parametri in gioco: « » / SNSI / « SNSI »

Quale condizione mentale: (1)/.../(10) [vedi la LEGENDA]
 Quale delle sue tre forme: (a)/(b)/(c)
 [... e SNSI sarà HN]

Quale condizione mentale: (1)/.../(7) [vedi la LEGENDA]
 Quale delle sue tre forme: (a)/(b)/(c)
 Risveglio di quale senso: [vedi qui sotto]






Risveglio di quale senso:
 vista / udito / tatto / gusto / olfatto / 
 C₁ / P₁ / r / 
 C₂ / P₂ / r / 
 C₃ / P₃ / r / 
 (... e « » sarà HN)

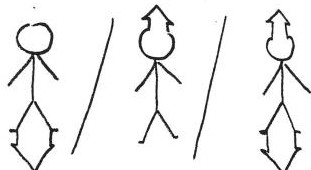
Image 12. First page of the two-page algorithm

I

« » ⇒ cond-azione mentale:

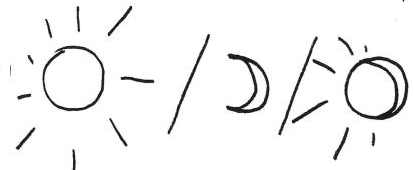
$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} (a) / (b) / \left(\begin{array}{l} d \\ b \end{array} \right) \end{array} \right.$: ogni cond-azione mentale può presentarsi in una di queste tre forme.


1)  : sopprimi ogni pensiero / ignora ogni pensiero / alterna liberamente i due approcci


2)  : sentiti pesante / sentiti leggero / alterna liberamente

3) $SNTM^{nto} / INDF^{nee} / SNTM^{nto}_{nee}$: percepisci il mondo qui ed ora con sentimento / percepisci indifferenza / alterna liberamente

4) $BLA / U7B / \begin{array}{l} BLA \\ BLA \end{array}$: verbalizza mentalmente ogni pensiero / non verbalizzare mentalmente alcun pensiero / alterna liberamente

5)  : sentiti sveglio, tonico / sentiti stanco, fiacco / alterna liberamente

6)  : concentrati su un unico pensiero, un'intuizione... / non concentrarti su alcun pensiero, intuizione... / alterna liberamente

7)  : fai silenzio dentro di te; ferma il rumore della tua mente / scateni il rumore dentro di te; sommergi il silenzio della tua mente / alterna liberamente

8) CARPE DIEM / ORDIRE PAZIENZA / CARPE DIEM / ORDIRE PAZIENZA :
 intuitisci di affermare la tua vita, ora. / intuitisci di costruire la tua vita, lentamente. / alterna liberamente

Image 13. List of symbols representing eight of the eleven mental "cond-actions"

-ELENCO dei SIMBOLI-


Tempo	[A!] / A! / A / [] / []! / []! // HN						
Respiro	HN / ↑ HP / HF ↓ HP / HF						
I	« »	HN / -vedi oltre-					
	SNSI	vista P ^{inf} / c ^{inf}	udito L ^{inf} / V ^{inf}	tetto (interno ed esterno) P ^{inf} / c ^{inf}	gusto	olfatto	
II	TMPO	[VCNO!] [LNTN!]					
	SPZO	[VCNO!] [LNTN!]				Bastandosi la nuca a scorrere dietro la fronte. (1333/34)	

Image 14. Summary list of symbols and page outlook

I stesura




Tempo	[]!	[]	[A!]	A	HN	
Respiro	↑: HP ↓: HF	HN	HN	HN	HN	
I	« »	HN	HN		CARPE DIEM	HN
	SNSI	olfatto 	udito L ^{inf} / V ^{inf}	HN	vista 	HN
II	TMPO	[VCNO!] [LNTN!]				
	SPZO	[VCNO!] [LNTN!]				

Image 15. Prima stesura, "first version"

II Stesura

Tempo	△!	△!	△	△!	∟	∟!	
Respiro	HN	HN	HN	HN	HN	HN	
I	« »				HN		
		SNSI	HN	olfatto 	HN	tatto 	HN
II	TMPO SPZO						

Image 16. Seconda stesura, "second version"

III Stesura

Tempo	HN	∟!	△!	∟	△	△	
Respiro	HN	HN	HN		HN	HN	
I	« »	HN	SNTM ^{no}	HN	HN	HN	INDF ^{no}
		SNSI	HN	HN	olfatto 	udito 	olfatto
II	TMPO SPZO						

Image 17. Terza stesura, "third version," page 1

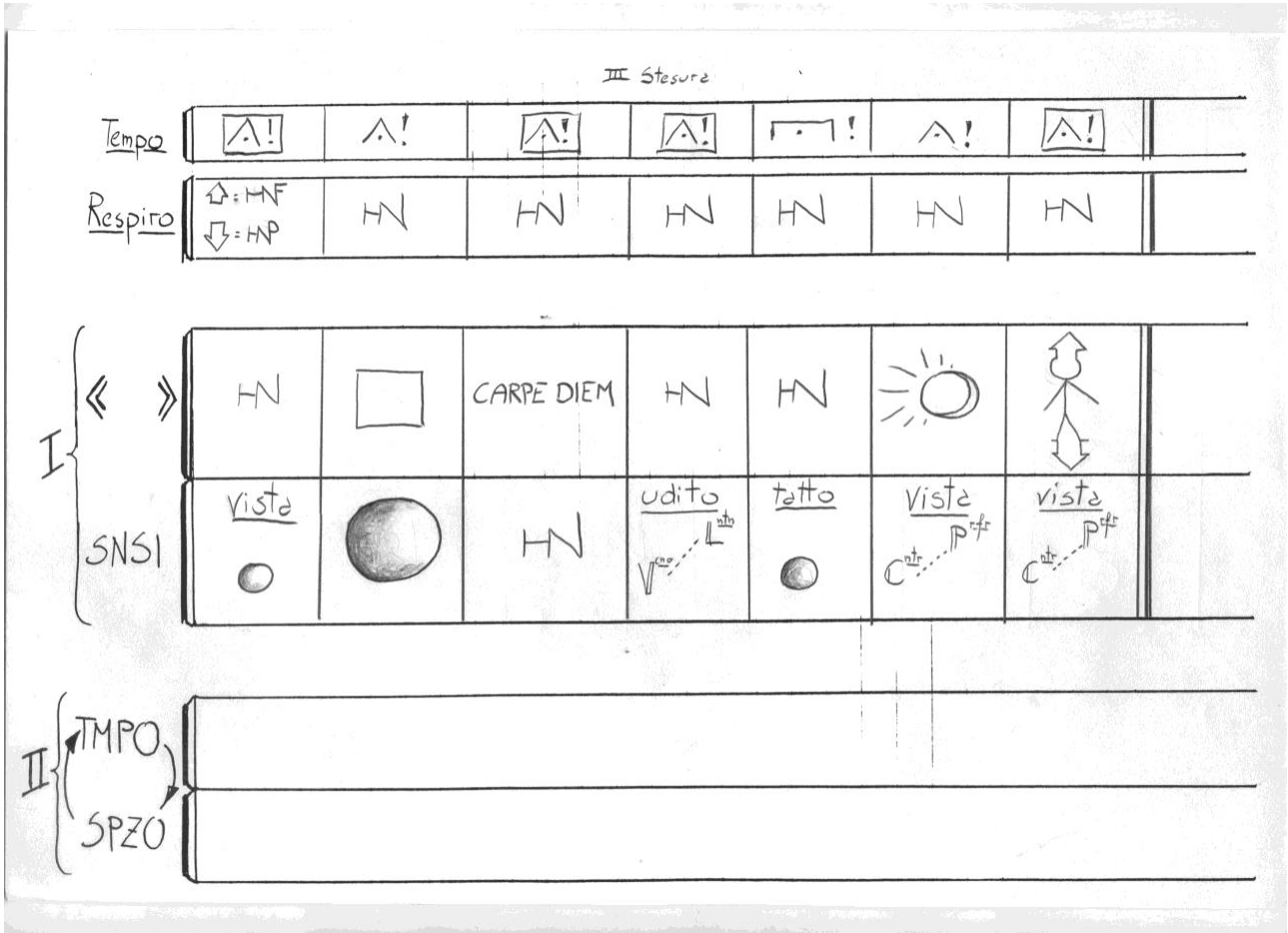


Image 18. Terza stesura, "third version," page 2