

## Handout

### *La Fabbrica Illuminata* by Luigi Nono Time of Work, Time of Leisure? Time of Conviviality

The presentation will be held in Italian.

The English version of the paper is available at: <https://eliapilati.com/WS/Novacella.html>

This handbook is intended to help you follow the presentation; it outlines:

- i) *Paper overview*, the key concepts of the paper.
- ii) *La Fabbrica Illuminata*, the full text of the opera.
- iii) *Reference glossary*, to better understand how I applied certain concepts.
- iv) *Konvolut der Ideen*, a section with some thought-provoking suggestions.

### Paper overview

The paper sees *La Fabbrica Illuminata* by Luigi Nono as a case study to challenge the proposed divisions between work and leisure, and to demonstrate how art can be a transformative social experience, particularly drawing on the works of Theodor W. Adorno and Ivan Illich.

### Argumentative Structure:

**Starting question:** If, as Adorno pointed out, social barriers typically exclude workers from artistic experiences creating a class-based divide in cultural consumption, is the distinction between *time of work* and *time of leisure* useful in understanding the problem of the exclusivity of art and its fruition? Are there better categorizations? What is the role of audience participation in shaping art?

**Real-life case study:** Nono's composition breaks this divide by collaborating directly with factory workers, using their sounds, language, and experiences. *La Fabbrica Illuminata* demonstrates that complex art can be accessible and meaningful to non-expert audiences when approached participatively. The composition represents a transformative approach to art: not as a distant aesthetic object, but as a collective learning experience that reveals social alienation.

**Concluding thoughts:** Ultimately, it is a matter of participation rather than a technical virtuosity; the piece suggests art can be a tool for social consciousness: it doesn't matter if it is work or leisure, the core factor is a convivial expression by creating a shared, critical space of understanding. Very plainly: if something piques your interest, it hardly matters how difficult it may be.

# La fabbrica illuminata

Info: 1964.

Combines human voice, industrial sounds, and electronic manipulation.

Initial censorship of the piece: RAI refusal to broadcast due to political concerns.

Text by Giuliano Scabia and a fragment from *Due poesie a. T* by Cesare Pavese.

1. They called it the factory of the dead  
Workers' exhibition  
to burns,  
to toxic fumes,  
to great masses of molten steel.  
Workers' exhibition  
to extreme temperatures—  
out of eight hours, only two belong to the worker.  
Workers' exhibition  
to projected materials,  
human relations designed to speed up time.  
Workers' exhibition  
to falls,  
to blinding lights,  
to high-voltage currents.  
How many MAN-MINUTES to die?  
2. And HANDS do not stop attacking  
UNINTERRUPTED, emptying the hours,  
they grasp the BODY, naked.  
Dials, faces: and they do not stop  
staring STARING, fixed eyes: eyes, hands.  
Evening, turning in bed  
all my nights, but barren orgasms.  
THE WHOLE city of the living DEAD.  
We, in constant PROTEST.  
The crowd grows, speaks of the DEAD.  
The booth called a TOMB  
they cut down time.  
A factory like a concentration camp.  
KILLED  
3. Mornings will pass,  
Anguish will pass.  
It will not always be like this  
You will find something again

1. fabbrica dei morti la chiamavano  
esposizione operaia  
a ustioni  
a esalazioni nocive  
a gran masse di acciaio fuso  
esposizione operaia  
a elevatissime temperature  
su otto ore solo due ne intasca l'operaio  
esposizione operaia  
a materiali proiettati  
relazioni umane per accelerare i tempi  
esposizione operaia  
a cadute  
a luci abbaglianti  
a corrente ad alta tensione  
quanti MINUTI-UOMO per morire?  
2. e non si fermano MANI di aggredire  
ININTERROTTI che vuota le ore  
al CORPO nuda afferrano  
quadranti, visi: e non si fermano  
guardano GUARDANO occhi fissi : occhi mani  
sera giro del letto  
tutte le mie notti ma aridi orgasmi  
TUTTA la città dai morti VIVI  
noi continuamente PROTESTE  
la folla cresce parla del MORTO  
la cabina detta TOMBA  
tagliano i tempi  
fabbrica come lager  
UCCISI  
3. passeranno i mattini  
passeranno le angosce  
non sarà così sempre  
ritroverai qualcosa

## Reference glossary

Defining terms helps in grasping concepts. The ones I present here are proposals for connections between ideas rather than strict and accurate definitions—those belong to dictionaries, which are little graveyards of meaning. For clarity, I have categorized them by the author.

### Theodor W. Adorno

***Beherrschung*** (f.): ‘Domination’; a drive for domination and control over nature, over society, over self that leads to the *verwaltete Welt*, “administered world”. A concept that is particularly worthwhile relating to Illich's thinking on the autonomy of the individual and conviviality.

***Natura naturans***: Common concept from medieval Scholasticism to German Idealism. In Adorno, the living, qualitative aspects of nature – nature as a dynamic, self-determining force; but modern rationality and instrumental reason have increasingly suppressed this aspect of nature.

***Natura naturata***: Nature reduced to mere resources, to quantifiable matter that can be categorized, controlled, and exploited. To privilege *natura naturata* involves suppressing *natura naturans*. A nature — Illich would say — under the promethean glaze.

### Maurice Blanchot

***Nuit***: For Blanchot there are two nights; the one I am interested in putting into dialogue with Bloch is *l'autre nuit*, where the comfort of negation and dialectical movement are no more, and where something can't be understood and approached through reason. This night is where the space of essential solitude emerges, is where language speaks in its pure state and cannot be mastered or controlled. That is why it is interesting to compare it with Bloch's more rational *Diurne*.

### Ernst Bloch

***Diurne*** (n.): How can you engage with genuine utopian potential, if your dreams are only in the realm of the night? *Das Diurne* represents an active, alert state where it is possible to recognize genuine possibilities in the present; to distinguish between abstract and concrete utopias; to engage critically with historical reality and maintain a *docta spes*, educated hope.

***Ungleichzeitigkeit*** (f.): "Asynchronous", a complex concept to grasp. The simplest way to phrase it is perhaps to say that historical consciousness isn't uniform but stratified. The consequence is that there are various modes of consciousness and various material conditions. This unveils how the present contains multiple temporal layers and how past elements resisting in the present can contain unrealized progressive potential.

**Noch-nicht-Sein** (n.): Is a way to express the ontology of possibility; it includes various categories, but the main concept to remember is that the *Noch-nicht-Sein*, that which is not yet, if coupled with the *Diurne* recognition of the *Ungleichzeitigkeit*, is a concrete possibility for the revolutionary potential to exist.

## Ivan Illich

**Conviviality:** A way of living where tools serve individuals and communities rather than controlling them. It emphasizes autonomous and creative intercourse among people. A convivial society aims at building relationships that are not mediated by institutional or industrial outputs. A world so very foreign to the *verwaltete Welt*.

**Promethean:** A Promethean is a descendant of Prometheus, he who thinks first, he who is a child of techne. A way to do not reach conviviality. The promethean world embodies the belief in mastering both nature and society; as a result, the promethean technological systems create dependency, its tools and institutions monopolize understanding. Not feeling great today? Go to a specialist: human problems require professional solutions.

**Epimethean:** An Epimethean is a descendant of Epimetheus, he who thinks later, he who embraces the gifts of Pandora's box, for Illich a banner to bear. A way to do reach conviviality. The epimethean world promotes tools that enhance autonomy, it emphasizes hope and present living over future-oriented progress, it tries to maintain balance between human needs and natural limits. Its aim is to foster autonomy and conviviality. Not feeling great today? Here's a hug, human problems can be solved within us.

## Konvolut der Ideen

In this section, I have selected three points that are not directly related to the proposed paper, but which allow for observing concrete cases of how the fruition of art is tricky and interconnected with work. I decided to title the section *Konvolut* because these ideas are still layered, one on top of the other, and I do not have an answer. The challenge for me lies in trying to understand how Adorno or Illich would have approached these issues and perhaps questions myself again.

### BBC News: Brâncuși, Birkenstock, Carpaccio

Brâncuși fought to ensure his art wasn't mistaken for a utilitarian object, while Birkenstock is fighting to have its blatantly utilitarian product recognized as art—isn't that rather amusing?



1) Does the sculpture *Bird in Space* beside you look like a bird? It didn't to the American customs officer in 1926; in fact, he classified the sculpture under 'Kitchen Utensils and Hospital Supplies'. Are utilitarian items not considered art because they are utilitarian (once again, work or leisure!)? Was Brâncuși upset because he felt misunderstood, or because he had to pay taxes to import it (art was duty-free, kitchen utensils not)? Why didn't the customs officer recognize it as art?

2) Birkenstock has recently (9 January 2025!) once again attempted to have some of its designs recognized as art. If successful, they would be protected under copyright for artistic works, preventing other companies from imitating them. This is the second time Birkenstock has tried this little trick. Last year, the court determined that the sandal designs could not be equated with art because Karl Birkenstock did so primarily for economic reasons. What do you think in relation to the Brâncuși case? And what would Adorno have to say to Birkenstock?

3) Is Art what defies money? Yet Vittore Carpaccio (between the 15th and 16th centuries) dedicated great effort to his paintings when well compensated and put in less effort when paid less. If you are visiting the Brera Art Gallery, near Mantegna, you can see three pieces by the Venetian painter: the first was done with questionable effort, the second is a little more sophisticated, the third is considerably better. He certainly did them primarily for economic reasons as Mr. Birkenstock. What a business art-duo!

