

The New Commentary as the Strategy of Self-identification by Means of Myth

1. New *Cantus* Thinking

The term "new canon" is quite often used in modern art analysis. It would be more accurate to speak about a new commentary and about new *cantus* thinking. Moreover, in a broad sense, we offer to define as *cantus* any used text or context (from *cantus prius factus*).

Up to the New Time any composition represented some sort of a commentary. After going to all the extremes in the realization of modern projects in individualistic opus composition within the second avant-garde wave, the postmodern art actually turned to cultural traditions and contexts, seeing the essence of an artistic utterance in interpreting the borrowed text. This has signified the emergence of new commentary thinking.

A comparison of the new commentary with the old canonic method, despite a number of similarities between them, makes it possible to reveal certain considerable differences owing to their varying cultural contexts.

In nature, the old method is spontaneous, primarily modal, being based on the principle of replication. The new *cantus* method is conceptual since a composer carries out a task undertaken by oneself.

In character, the old canon is inseparable from context viewed as a ritual situation predetermining its material and its structure. The modern method of commentary is oriented towards new syncretism, a new ritual, which may involve several different contexts.

The principle of bricolage. The latter term (from the French word *bricolage* meaning an artifact, improvised means) is understood by Lévi-Strauss as the treatment of available material. The old commentary method evolved in the pre-opus while the new one belongs to the so-called post-opus endeavours. A modern composer drawing on historical stylistic idioms departs from the author's language as individualized musical material or discards it altogether whereas in the pre-opus compositions, authorship as a language system had not as yet taken shape. In contrast to a medieval anonymous melodist using fixed songs and tunes, a modern commentator can employ all the available cultural information.

2. One's own – somebody else's

Self-identification is a concept associated with the opposition of oneself to some other person or thing and elucidating a strategy of one's own as related with somebody else's discourse. In modern actual art this correlation has entered into intricate interaction. The earlier type of a dialogue between the author and *cantus* still retains its links with the avant-garde projects declared from the position of authorship: "one's own" and "somebody else's". The zone of "one's own" comes to enclose "somebody else's" not so much as *cantus per se* but as a sign of some other context, as a symbol for its substitution. And it does not matter whether a dialogue is conducted in the form of parallel discourse (i.e. in counterpoint) or in vertical, discrete discourse, as an exchange of phrases; in any case this dialogue is conducted in different languages. Each party speaks in one's own language, with the author's language being delivered in the first person.

The chief point of a dialogue is in a distance between one's own and somebody else's discourse, and its essence lies in the primacy of one's own. The author conveys one's own as surrounded by another's utterances, encasing one's own in another's contexts and, in doing so, he comments on his own discourse through another's utterances. "One's own" seems to be feeding on "another's", to be flourishing and enriching by the latter, being embellished by its heraldry, claiming a kinship with it and inscribing oneself into its genealogy. In this way, the avant-garde has renounced its postulate of "moving forward without a step backward" for a citation was viewed only in this light when treated as material. But actually a breakthrough towards tradition as some other material meant that the avant-garde had moved still farther, stepping into the territory of *cantus* thinking.

A postmodern project offers a more radical method of interaction between "one's own" and "somebody else's" utterances. The method of bricolage allows one to give up one's own ambitions for self-expression and usage of the author's speech as material, inducing the composer to turn to giving a commentary. The novelty lies in positioning one's own discourse with regard to another's utterances. The symbiosis of attracted contexts in general does not reveal the obvious presence of the author's material. The question about a distance does not even arise in this case. One's own approach manifests itself not in the musical material but in a concept appealing in most cases to the extramusical sphere. And here actual importance is equally attached to all historical languages and dialects, traditions and contexts. The author builds up contexts, compares them, and their interaction produces a certain accent, making up an ensemble of mutual reflections and semantic resonances.

In their arrangements of *cantus prius factus* medieval masters used to embody the utopian ideas of their times. Nowadays, *cantus*, or commentary, thinking expresses its time by partaking of the whole range of cultural traditions. The selected *cantus prius factus* now embraces all the available historical and cultural hypertext.

THE PRINCIPLES OF *CANTUS* THINKING

1. *Cantus* involves borrowed material, direct citations, paraphrases, allusions, languages, and the method of texture and structure.

2. A source exists autonomously, outside of interpretation.

3. A source is well known (or it may be not so). It should be recognizable. This is the main condition of its communicative role.

4. *Cantus* is always based on the non-authored, non-individual principle.

Commenting on *cantus*, the composer expresses his own ideas through another's statements. In the case of bricolage, he speaks in the *cantus* language. Moreover, the composer comments on some "selected source" by using other "selected sources" and in this way he "immaterially" expresses his own ideas. He creates a context, or in other words, a situation.

I would like to present here in brief the following three works of actual art: Edward Artemyev's opera *Raskolnikov* after *Crime and Punishment* by Dostoyevsky; action "St Matthew Passion-2000", and the production of Mozart's *Magic Flute* by director Yekaterina Pospelova. For all the apparent dissimilarity between these three projects, they are interrelated by belonging to the common cultural space which we define as a new commentary and, in a broader sense, as new commentary thinking.

3. Mythologism. Collective Consciousness. Narrator

All the three original works undertaken for interpretation by modern artists belong to the sphere of cultural mythology viewed by us as symbolic and generally recognized invaluable phenomena. Their interpretation also reveals a distinct approach to these phenomena as cultural myths. The same is evident from an appeal to collective cultural consciousness, the pathos of overcoming individualism, and the presence of a narrator's figure. The treatment of these mythological plots combines the features of elitist and mass consciousness: a striking shrewdness of thinking and the fascination of delightful primitivism, naivety, and ethnic character.

The libretto for **Edward Artemyev's opera *Raskolnikov*** (1987/2002) was written by directors Andrei Konchalovsky and Mark Rosovsky, and the poet Yuri Ryashentsev. The music blends different genres such as rock, pop (Dixieland used to portray the character of Porphyry, the investigator) and non-academic singing (ethno- and rock-vocal) into an integral manifold utterance. The authors themselves appear to act as the prime collective narrators of myths. In their treatment of Dostoyevsky's novel (sinfulness, the pangs of conscience, repentance, and absolution) the accent is placed on the evangelic archetype: the plots about a loose woman and Lazarus's resurrection. Moreover, the authors bring onto stage a street organ-grinder, a narrator and commentator. Organ-grinders breaking in the "latest news" from the hay-market square retell their story in low, colloquial language:

Тут, в переулке, по соседству,
 смертельный грех сокрыла мгла,
 убили старую старуху,
 котора проценты брала.
 Убийца был, видать, прилежный,
 Не как иные: тят да ляп!
 Он и убил, он и ограбил,
 И никаких тебе улик!..

[Here, in a nearby side-street,
 A mortal sin was committed under the darkness,
 An old woman was killed,
 The one who used to loan money on a short-interest.]

The debasement of heroes, on the one side, is to be understood as reduction, a downward tendency from the higher to the lower, from elitist to mass culture. Organ-grinders are semi-folk characters, the carriers of popular mythology, i.e. of that which is on everybody's lips, in the minds and mass consciousness. A commentary uttered by them becomes to sound anonymous and impersonal, that is, mythological. But on the other side, an organ-grinder is akin to the postmodern authors who by using colloquial speech express the highest ideas. And paradoxically enough, a high spirit preserves itself precisely thanks to the usage of a low language. The lowering removes the romantic fundamental principle, a heroic representation pose as external imitation. The lowering clears out pathos and falsity. The utterance becomes heartfelt, reduction proves to turn into simplicity, and the latter into holiness. In the scene where Sonia reads for Raskolnikov about Lazarus's resurrection: "... and when Jesus thus has spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth..." (John 11: 43–44), there appears on the stage an organ-grinder singing:

Гляди, Творец, в миру Твоем
 чему пришлось случиться:
 над Вечной Книгою вдвоем
 Блудница и убийца.
 Скажи хоть слово им, Господь!
 А слово то известно:
 И было так: из тлена плоть
 воистину воскресла.

[Look, the Creator, what has happened
 In Your world:
 The whore and the killer
 Are reading the Bible together.]

4. Remake

Remakes are characteristic of our time. A reproduced event, historical or artistic, gets imbued with the meaning of an invaluable archetype, which reveals the need to go back to it in order to experience it anew and interpret it in a new way. In other words, to return to one's origins. The remake of *St Matthew Passion-2000* appeared as a manifestation of *cantus* thinking. This grandiose opus lasting for five hours was written in memory of Johann Sebastian Bach and dedicated to his 250th jubilee. The new Passion was created by a team of like-minded persons belonging to a certain subculture of Moscow, St. Petersburg and Kiev. The contributing authors included 15 poets and 17 composers. The idea of a collective opus was developed by Yekaterina Pospelova, a philologist and stage director, Yekaterina Biryukova, a music critic, and Maria Stepanova, a poetess. All the contributions were compiled into an integral entity by **Pyotr Pospelov**, a music reviewer and composer.

The new Passion rests upon the plan of Bach's original opus (its dramaturgy, the number and order of items). It comprises the Evangelist's recitatives, presenting the course of events as recounted by the well-known characters (Jesus, St Peter, Judas, Pilate), arias expressing the individual

experiences, and chorales as exponents of collective religious feelings. The large-scale choral compositions frame up the entity. The function of a commentary is entrusted to cultural and stylistic strata: high classical and underground music, refined conceptual poetry and street primitivism, ethnic culture, folklore, Russian spiritual verses and church choral singing, electronic music, academic avant-garde, minimalism, "new simplicity," rock aesthetics, video clips, ballet, 20th century newsreels, and multimedia.

Dmitry A. Prigov, poet-conceptualist: "A remake allows modern composers to join into Bach's fundamental structure and, without parodying and travesty, try to understand what is Bach as transposed into our time. Our time is not so religious and authentic to the form of passions. But if you are sincerely concerned you feel that the old structure bears both semantic and intonation memory".

Gennady Aigi, poet: "The serious and genuine heat of passions represents the kinship with that which is larger than myself".

Despite a diversity of styles, the old structure has united all the utterances into a certain super composition.

IN POETRY: lyrical reflections, ritual suggestive actions. The chorales display childish naivety and simplicity:

Пойдем на площадь пляться, заламывая бровь.
Там Божий храм развалится и выстроится вновь.
Где Божий храм, там пыль столбом, там груда кирпичей,
Как будто Бог забыл свой дом, как будто дом ничей.

[Let's go to the square and stare at how
God's temple is to collapse and be recreated again.]

Ritual suggestive actions by Lew Rubinstein ("And I'll come to him" [Joseph of Arimathea and Pontius Pilate]):

И я приду к нему. И я скажу: "Отдай мне его. Тебе он зачем?
Отдай мне его. Тебе ведь не надо. Отдай мне его. Мне надо. Отдай".
И он мне скажет: "Возьми, конечно! Мне зачем? Возьми, ладно. Тебе надо. Возьми".
И я возьму его, и я сделаю, что надо.

И я прихожу к нему. И я говорю ему: "Отдай мне его. Тебе он зачем?
Отдай мне его. Тебе ведь не надо. Отдай мне его. Мне надо. Отдай".
И он мне говорит: "Возьми, конечно! Мне зачем? Возьми, ладно. Тебе надо. Возьми".
И я беру его, и я делаю, что надо.

И я пришел к нему. И сказал: "Отдай мне его. Тебе он зачем?
Отдай мне его. Тебе ведь не надо. Отдай мне его. Мне надо. Отдай".
И он мне сказал: "Возьми, конечно! Мне зачем? Возьми, ладно. Тебе надо. Возьми".
И я взял его, и я сделал, что надо.

[And I'll come to him. And I'll say: "Give him to me. Do you need him?
Give him to me. For you have no need for him. Give him to me. I need him. Give to me".
And he will say: "All right, take him! I don't need him. Well, take him. You need him. Take him".
And I'll take him, and I'll do what should be done.

And I come to him. And I say: "Give him to me. Do you need him?
Give him to me. For you have no need for him. Give him to me. I need him. Give to me".
And he says: "All right, take him! I don't need him. Well, take him. You need him. Take him".
And I take him, and I do what should be done.

And I've come to him. And I've said: "Give him to me. Do you need him?
Give him to me. For you have no need for him. Give him to me. I need him. Give to me".
And he has said: "All right, take him! I don't need him. Well, take him. You need him. Take him".
And I've taken him, and I've done what should be done.]

In its MUSIC the citations from Bach are rare and indirect. As a whole, the work on *cantus* includes:

- Bach's text presented in new electronic arrangement (the viola's aria);
- motto-bricolage: the first bars of Bach's initial chorus and the author's text follow without borderline marks (Iraida Yusupova, No 1);
- instrumentation according to Webern's method (Bach-Webern Passacaglia–Gavotte by Gai-voronsky);
- authentic stylization by Sergei Zagny: the arrangement of Protestant melodies in the Bach style, instrumental fantasias and choral preludes; and
- Baroque idioms. The *new sincerity* of Bach's idiom by Pyotr Pospelov in St Peter's Aria in the form of *da capo*.

Yet, in general, the predominance is given to free composition geared conceptually in one way or another to the idea of passion.

But in the chorales delivered according to the Protestant tradition the use is made of song melodies well familiar to everybody, such as "A fir-tree was born in the forest", "Suliko", "A God-father", "Evening Bells" and other popular hits. In the Lutheran traditional spirit, the audience joined in the singing of these chorales with the text underlay of the new first-rate verses displayed on the screen. The shared communion in reverence of Bach approximated the whole happening in St Andrew Anglican place of worship to a kind of spiritual cultural action. This experimental gesture of radical cherishing a tradition would have been impossible at a philharmonic concert.

5. Intertext. Medley. Poly-cantus

Both the medieval and the new type of a commentary are intertextual. But in the old method use is made of parallel pieces, i.e. different canonic texts expounding one and the same thought, though developing it in different ways. The new intertexture encloses different texts not necessarily or altogether unrelated with the general idea. The principle of correlation is "composed" by the author who can be quite selective, which means that the emerging macrotext, a situation, actually represents the author's discourse.

The ensemble of mutual reflections and semantic resonances is most extensive in *The Magic Flute* produced at the Small World Theatre by **Yekaterina Pospelova**, project designer and stage director.

The Small World Theatre staged Mozart's *Magic Flute* in a folk "vertep" (puppet show) style under the title of *The Miraculous Pipe*.

The young authors of this project, director Yekaterina Pospelova and poets Maria Stepanova, Psoi Korolenko and Igor Ebanoidze, precede the performance by informing the audience (in the theatre program) that Mozart's autograph was allegedly discovered in one of the Russian archives and that Mozart had after all accepted the invitation of Prince Golitsyn and had not only visited Russia but also had provided for it the Russian version of his magic opera calling it "The Miraculous Pipe." This touching mystification justifies the Russian geographical and cultural landscape against which the action of this *Singspiel* unfolds. Here are the remarks to Scene 1:

Winter, snowstorm, snow-drifts. Tamino, a German student of philosophy, has lost his way in the snow. Tamino in snow (singing in German):

Zu Hilfe! Zu Hilfe! Sonst bin ich verloren.

Mozart's vocal music sung by Roman Paier, the young Austrian tenor, carries the conceptual meaning. The Russian-German-Austrian alliance can be traced throughout the opera in the arrangement of mutually rhymed verses and the intercrossing of cultural blocks and sounds: the crunching of frosty snow under Papageno's felt boots and the tender "Die Puppe ist bezaubernd schön" at the appearance of Pamina, a small doll, from the puppet box. The texts are given in free translation, or to be more precise, recounted by the characters, including Tamino, the student, and Papageno, a vagrant showman, with his puppets: Pamina, the novice, Sarastro, the wise old man, the Queen of Night impersonating Death with a scythe, the rubicund Monostatka and his girlfriends, funny devils from the oven (reminiscent of Gogol's); three ladies presented as village girls; and three boys, winged angels on the skis. Papageno shows his puppets, tells a fairy tale and then finds himself in it. Schikaneder's plot was preserved, though some additional "motifs" (in the unofficial religious and philosophical spirit) were put into new contexts: Tamino is brave and pure at heart and, like Parsifal, is selected to be a heir to the dying Sarastro; the puppet showman is

associated with Schubert's vagrant miller and organ-grinder. In addition to plot allusions, the poem contains numerous citations from Russian literature, from Pushkin, Lermontov, Griboyedov, Tyutchev, Chekhov, Korolenko, and Mayakovsky.

A trial by silence is accompanied by Tyutchev's verses "Keep silent, conceal yourself and hide your feelings and dreams" and Pushkin's "Through life, tears and love".

This is a real mixture of genres, including a puppet show, a Bohemian-like intellectual festive gathering, home theatre, a cheap popular pattern, a Christmas tree, fairy and mystery tales, all of which taken together represent a real postmodernist paradise. The translators juggle casually with citations, mystification, and intertexture references to Gogol and Pushkin, Schubert and Wagner's Parsifal, Chekhov and Goethe. But as a whole, this easiness and witticism was not intended to just entertain the public. Quite the contrary, the authors speak about very serious things: about love, despair, holiness and devotion, about children and wise men, accentuating that (Sarastro singing):

Мы все – без имени, без рода,
стоим у гробового входа,
где виден тот и этот свет,
где видно то, что смерти нет!

[All of us, nameless and without kith or kin,
have one foot in the grave,
where you see this and the other world,
where you see that there is no death!]

Such matters told in a simple style turn out to be really genuine. But the most important point is in preserving Mozart's spirituality, its lucid, motley and fairy-like coloring. The performance proved to be a revelation to the elitist intellectually creative public and children alike.

Thus, Bach's Passion, an opera by Mozart and a novel by Dostoyevsky have been retold as great cultural myths to mirror our contemporary cultural panorama.

Translated by Romela Kokhanovskaya

Santrauka

Naujas komentaras kaip saviidentifikacijos per mitą strategija

Pranešime nagrinėjamas šiuolaikinės rusų muzikos posūkis tradicinių pasijos ir operos žanrų link. Autorė apibendrina šiuolaikinės kultūrinės savimonės bruožus pagal *naujosios bažnytinio giedojimo sampratos* koncepciją, pagal kurią nagrinėja dabartinę kultūros situaciją – naują požiūrį į tradicijas, tradicijos sąveikos su naujuoju požiūriu į ją mechanizmą, veikiančią pagal principą „savas – svetimas“. Autorė išveda analogiją tarp senosios *kanono* sąvokos ir *naujosios bažnytinio giedojimo sampratos*, rasdama ir bendrų, ir skirtingų bruožų, apibūdinančių šiuolaikinę kultūrinę paradigmą: mitologiškumas, konceptualumas, naujasis sinkretizmas ir intertekstualumas, *policantus* charakteristikos, mozaikiškumas, kolektyvinė galvosena, etninės ypatybės ir archetipiniai bruožai.

Šią kultūros situaciją iliustruoja trys muzikinės kompozicijos, kurių autoriai naudojami reikšmingais europinės ir pasaulinės kultūros klasikiniais modeliais, lėmusiais daugelio žmonijos kartų vertybių skalę. *Cantus* žanrai ir jų „komentariniai“ variantai kilo iš: 1) J. S. Bacho „Pasijos pagal Matą“ ir P. Pospelovo projekto „Mato pasija-2000“, įgyvendinto grupės poetų ir kompozitorių; 2) F. Dostojevskio romano „Nusikaltimas ir bausmė“ ir E. Artemjevo operos „Raskolnikovas“ pagal J. Riašencevo libretą; 3) W. A. Mozarto „Užburtosios fleitos“ ir J. Pospelovos projekto „Stebuklingoji dūdelė“, kuriame panaudota Mozarto muzika ir naujas P. Korolenkos bei M. Stepanovos libretas.

Pasakotojo vaidmenį atlieka personažai – nusimetę herojų kaukes, nuspalvinti folkloro spalvomis, atstovaujantys kaimo ir žemesniojo miestiečių sluoksniu kultūrai: gatvės rylininkas (operoje „Raskolnikovas“), kaimo pamokslininkas („Mato pasijoje-2000“) ir valkata Papagenas („Stebuklingojoje dūdelėje“). Komentuojami šie kultūriniai ir stilistiniai klausimai: muzikinė *undergroundo* kultūra, rafinuota konceptuali poezija, folkloras ir rusų religinė poezija, avangardizmas, minimalizmas, elektroninė muzika, roko ir popmuzikos estetika, „naujasis paprastumas“, videomenas, baletas, dokumentinė kronika ir multimedija. Trys meno šedevrai atpasakojami didžiojo kultūrinio mito, kuris tarsi veidrodis atspindi mūsų šiuolaikinę kultūrinę panoramą, forma.