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Between the Avant-garde and Post-avant-garde: The Continuity of Ideas

The avant-garde and post-avant-garde are perceived as two different paradigms, which is quite justifiable. The prefix 'post-', likewise 'a-' or 'anti-', indicates a change in the vector, but in contrast to the latter, it does not infer negation. The vector is not oriented to the opposite direction. 'Post-' implies that art started to tackle quite different problems without breaking off with its predecessor.

Yet, a boundary line between these two paradigms is barely perceptible and, in some cases, even illusory. The musical avant-garde was bearing far more ideas than it had time to explore, including those contradictory to its initial impulses. It was up to the composers who came to live in the post-avant-garde period to develop avant-gardist ideas. Therefore, their interpretation proved to be different and yielded, quite naturally, unexpected results. It is noteworthy that a change in these paradigms occurred within the lifetime of one generation of composers and many of them took it hard, as a crisis in their creative career, which partly explains the continuity of ideas. An utmost upsurge of the purely European progressivism, an extreme departure from any tradition of the avant-garde art and, on the reverse, the post-avant-gardist intersection of cultures constitute poles apart, which we'll try to delineate in our comparative study of these two paradigms.

The Type of Thinking

The avant-garde is the product of subjective creative consciousness and individual freedom with its intrinsic analytical and functional thinking. This is a culture of the so-called opus music, a musical phenomenon known as *opus perfectum et absolutum*. Its underlying idea remains significant in the 20th century, during the second avant-garde period. A strict serial composition dating back to the 1950s represents a self-sufficient acoustic object valued for its own worth. Its purport lies in the very fact of its realization and in its structure providing for the autonomous existence of *opus perfectum et absolutum* in the structured virtual cosmos.

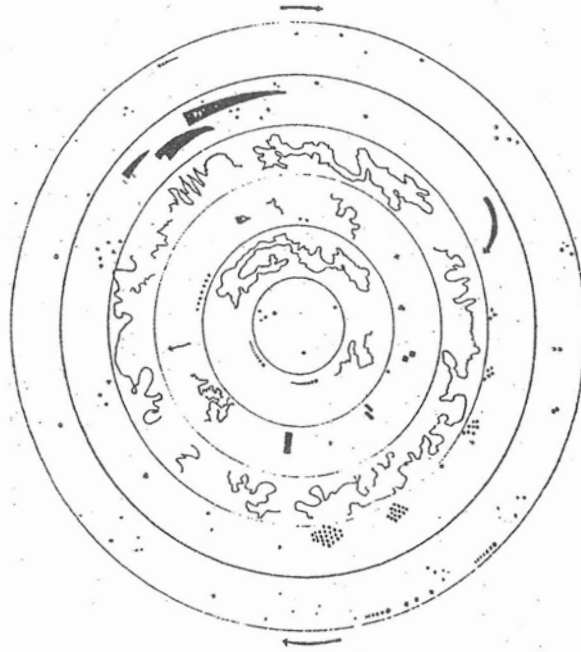
The post-avant-garde was generated by the avant-gardist principles, but its subjective consciousness addresses impersonal objective categories. Its musical structure is not self-valued, serving just as a means for communication. Its aim is to create a context as a field of action and dialogue. Thus, the avant-gardist idea of structuring a universe transformed into the post-avant-gardist building of existential rather than virtual reality, by transcending the limits of music as an autonomous opus and by employing special compositional techniques applicable to any material: tonal, modal, electronic, sonoristic, folkloric, historical, etc. But most importantly, it is no longer an opus (or to be more exact, not quite an opus), for it does not look complete and, therefore, it cannot be regarded as absolute.

Transcending self-sufficiency was already a hallmark of the avant-garde art. Special types of new notation used in sonoristic and aleatory music attest to the emergence of a mobile element in composition. The breakdown of absolute principles and openness to accidental elements outline an invisible line giving rise to the so-called stream (of spontaneous creativity).

Edison Denisov's *Birdsong* (1969), an electronic piece for magnetic tape and soloist, demonstrates two polar characteristics of the 20th-century music. Its one layer is tape, i.e., a rigidly fixed text. The other layer comprises the soloist's improvisation in real time, delivered as an absolute stream. It is important to note that *Birdsong* was composed concurrently with the article "Stable and Mobile Elements of Musical Composition and Their Interaction"¹.

After achieving the full fixedness of an opus by recording it on tape, the avant-garde began to develop quite the opposite idea. Concrete music and aleatory are unfolding simultaneously as two different layers. The tape depicts woodland which is simulated by manipulating the pre-recorded natural sounds and noises in the studio. The composition of concrete music is similar to *cantus firmus*: the birds' voices present the *cantus* of natural sounds. Rejection of the composer's intonation in favour of natural realities and authentic work on them is regarded by Denisov as the authorship at the conceptual level whereby he seeks to establish a controllable world order. This approach involves the giving up of a written work. The notation for a soloist is just a picture, a system of graphs indicating not what to play but how to do it. The composer has formulated his idea as follows: "Nothing concretizes anything but everything should be logical"².

Ex. 1 E.Denisov *Birdsong*



This indication reveals the most extreme trends in the avant-gardist notation used in the 1960s side by side with compositional innovations, especially in the sphere of aleatory and sonoristics. At the same time, it brings to mind the old tradition of graphical games used to conceal the author's intention in cryptographic or allegoric form, such as rebuses, charades, and enigmatic remarks encoding a canon. The encoded canon acts as an invitation to co-authorship. Today this note implies a super gesture on the part of a composer and a super performing response expected from a soloist. It is a kind of challenge to a performer to play a game on a par. As we know, Denisov was not among the advocates of postmodernist and conceptual art, but what he has done in his *Birdsong* is a purely conceptual act in its results, albeit not in its message. This piece seems to defy and question the general categories of a composer, an opus, and a performer.

Goals

The avant-garde endorses the idea of progress. Its strategy is innovation, radicalism, experimentation, and expansion of musical means, while its aesthetics are exclusive. The rejection of traditions explains its stylistic purity: the appearance of mono- and individual styles. The post-avant-garde is radical in its attitude to the avant-garde. Its innovation springs from its recognition of traditions. Its radicalism lies in a new approach and reappraisal of traditional cultures. It all started back in the 1910s-1920s. Many artists, among them Gauguin, Matisse, Stravinsky, Bartok, Goncharova et al., were captivated with archaic cultures which provided boundless primitive energy for their imagination. The primitive art made it possible to employ the most sophisticated expressive means. However, general change in traditions occurred at another stage and for different purposes. Recapturing the past, the post-avant-garde extends the limits of interaction by assimilating everything and adapting to everything. It looks for analogies, associations, a context and an intertext in the models set by history, seeking for general cultural space, its foundations and common roots. Hence, it is characterized by the expansion of cultural boundaries, multicultural approach, multiplicity of styles, and the assimilation and adaptation of diverse cultural currents.

Categories

The avant-garde rests on science and rationale. It makes use primarily of methods and techniques which provide the autonomy of an opus. Besides, its techniques, especially those used initially (e.g., dodecaphony that emerged during the period of the first avant-garde), guaranteed a departure from tonal thinking of the Romantic and late Romantic period and, as a result, a break with the emotional and

psychological motivations of harmonic and temporal development. If serial composition has only claimed the status of an objective law whereby to organize the sound material, total serialism of the second avant-garde and, especially, the methods it has drawn from the exact sciences, such as numerical calculation and language of abstract formulas, was a real transition to the principles of objective structuring.

Oriented towards anthropology, culturology and communication, the post-avant-garde looks for relevant means and techniques. Having inherited the modern structural means, it finds now its own impetuses for structural development of tonal matter. Its new approach to tonality, rhythm, consonance, and diatonicism securing it against banal sentimentality appeals to the non-subjective type of music perception. It explores myths, culture, the collective unconscious and its archetypes. Its methods are characterized by a factor of suggestion provoking the audience into an intellectual (culturological), and emotional (mythological, collective) dialogue. It builds up an intertext by using historical idioms and ethnostyles as metaphors with their own semantic elements.

Let us compare two different approaches to the ritual of lamentation. The avant-garde is represented by Edison Denisov and his *Wails*, a cycle for soprano, piano and percussion (1966). Set to folk texts, this dodecaphonic composition displays a musical rendering of the folk funeral rite, disclosing its psychological aspect and the depth of a human drama, with the emphasis placed on expressing subjective emotions.

Ex. 2 E. Denisov *Wails*

The image shows two systems of musical notation for Edison Denisov's *Wails*. Each system consists of a Soprano part and a Claves part. The Soprano parts are written in a single staff with lyrics underneath. The Claves parts are written in a single staff with rhythmic notation. Dynamic markings such as *mf*, *p*, *mp*, *pp*, and *ppp* are used throughout. The score includes various musical notations like slurs, accents, and fingerings.

In her post-avant-gardist *Requiem* for folk ensemble (1997), Tatiana Mikheyeva reconstructs the archaic ritual and finds melodic patterns in the form of their unfolding ontologically authentic to archaic magic rites. Unlike in Denisov's *Wails*, the subject of Mikheyeva's *Requiem* - an archaic ritual - is not directed towards individual listener and is not intended to evoke his or her sympathy. There is no presence of the author, too. Powerful impact, exerted by the apprehension of the living history, springs from an entirely different perceptive framework.

The use of historico-cultural idioms and certain ready material remove the effect of the composer's direct involvement and personal utterances. Self-expression is replaced by figurative and metaphorical musical language or, to cite Valentin Silvestrov, a 'metaphoric style'. Vladimir Martynov defines it as a 'method of indirect usage of musical material'. When asked why he turned to Schumann in his piano piece *Bricolage*, Vladimir Martynov replied: "A stream may be evoked from any real music, even from Webern's, since any live composition contains a stream in some form or another. It is one thing to use this stream for structural music and it is quite another matter to give oneself up to it. And if you can get it released from a structure without opening it, it may turn out that it is intrinsic to Romantic music and, perhaps, especially to Schumann".³

Ex. 3 T. Mikheyeva *Requiem*
Material. Prime Elements. Sounds

In the avant-garde, sound performs the function of a construction unit for building an entity, serving as an element of its hierarchical system. In the post-avant-garde, sound is used as a symbol, image, or metaphor. The composers aim at syncretism of sound. This objective was initially posed by the avant-garde: in serial composition sound is treated not only as a function but also as a micro-form, a point at which the series of different parameters intersect thus providing it with spatial, multidimensional characteristics that distinguish it from the adjacent sounds. These micro-forms, however, were not treated as independent entities but rather as functions within the multidimensional macro-form. Whereas electronic sounds possessed syncretic character from the very first avant-garde electroacoustic compositions. Spatial, three-dimensional electroacoustic objects combined both structure and image, and entailed spatial, that is audiovisual perception.

Let us compare two examples of sound treatment. The first one, avant-gardist, is *12 Looks at the World of Sounds*, an electronic composition by Eduard Artemyev, which was recorded in the Moscow Electronic Studio in 1969 on the ANS synthesizer. Subtitled as *Variations on One Timbre*, it starts with a Yakut folk tune played on the temir-komuz (a kind of Jew's harp), though the leading theme is not assigned to this tune but to a single timbre of this Yakut folk instrument. The composer explores this sound, dividing it initially into large blocks and then dissecting it into the tiniest parts up to their complete extinction. The treatment of overtones as structural microelements rests on mathematical calculations made according to the formant spectrum theory based on prime sound vibrations. The culmination renders only the sound of pure tape. But then, by adding overtones, Artemyev gathers the timbre together again to its initial sounding. His series of variations outlines the stages of disintegration and restoration. This avant-gardist composer of electronic music regards a magic sound as cosmic; therefore, he treats it as space in his research laboratory for unique experimentation aimed at creating a picture of the world from a single sound. The applications of scientific methods in the avant-garde composition marked its transition to new ways of structuring based on *objective* motivation.

A post-avant-gardist example is Vladimir Martynov's *Night in Galicia* for folk ensemble (1996). In this fantastic ritual the sound is self-valued, even magic, but it is calculated and structurally functional in the

avant-gardist manner. The composition is built around numerical progression 1-2-3-4-5 and so on, up to 8. The avant-gardist treatment of sound as a construction unit is applied to minimal material which by way of additions (the method of addition is one of the most ancient structures found in the folklore) grows up to quasi-folk tunes: it unfolds from minimal points of sounds, through melodic formulas of 2 to 3 sounds and so forth, toward the octave and entire songs. Then the sounds are gradually reduced to a single one. It is interesting to note that the two above-mentioned compositions employ the opposite principles. Artemyev's principle is based on dissection of timbre into separate elements and then, its synthesis. While Martynov first builds up a systemic series, which is followed by its disintegration. As a result, Artemyev explores the structure of sound, whereas Martynov presents a ritual game.

Ex. 4 V. Martynov *Night in Galicia*

Ready-made Material

The use of pre-recorded natural or man-made sounds characteristic of the post-avant-garde was generated by the second avant-garde. Let us recall Pierre Schaeffer's concrete music, children's voices in Stockhausen's *Gesang der Jünglinge*, and birdsong in Denisov's piece. All of this has a historical precedent in the form of *cantus prius factus*. To obtain new sounds, first electronic studios made use of special techniques for taped arrangement of concrete material, highly reminiscent of those used in medieval cantus arrangement. A change in speed of reproduction (retardation) is akin to the prolongation of cantus, as in *cantus planus*; multitrack superimposition is identical to imitation forms; backward reproduction of the tape may be compared to *cantus retroversus* (crabwise motion, quickening); and the tape glued into loops produces the effect similar to ostinato, endless canons, and the like. The avant-gardist composers in the 1960s created electronic sounds by hand: their striving for innovations revealed itself primarily in producing unique sounds (to quote Artemyev, "It should be incomprehensible how it was done"), but the present-day digital technology makes it possible to use ready-made sounds.

The post-avant-garde treats ready-made material as a historico-stylistic complex that indicates the source of composition. By the way, the word *bricolage* was coined by Pierre Schaeffer to describe his musique concrete, but the present-day post-avant-gardist composers regard it as an alternative to composing. The principles of handling ready-made material are also strikingly similar to the old methods, though yield quite different results. Additions were widely used by the Franco-Flemish composers (such as Ockeghem and Josquin); in some cases, the compositional technique itself turns into "ready-made material" used as a means of communication.

In the piano piece by Alexander Rabinovich, *Musique triste, parfois tragique* (1976), the source material is derived from Schubert's impromptu in A flat major, Op. 90. The composer transforms it from a fixed structure into a minimalist stream, turning it into a series of tonal patterns. This is a direct analogy with the cantus segmentation in a motet; only segments are distributed here according to the repetitive technique.

Ex. 5 A.Rabinovich *Musique triste, parfois tragique*

Allegro con Brio (♩ ≈ 160)

On the other hand, Webern in his arrangement of Bach's *Ricercare* from the *Musical Offering* followed the *Klangfarbenmelodie* procedure by using pointillism akin to hocket. The same pointillistic dialogue, in the spirit of *Klangfarbenmelodie*, is evident in the arrangement of Guillaume de Machaut's motet *Pastor bonus* by Vladimir Tarnopolsky (2002). This arrangement is combined in contrapuntal setting with Machaut, Bach, Webern, and Yuri Kholopov, to whom this humorous offering was dedicated. Finally, it reveals a post-avant-gardist crossover of elitist and pop cultures in its orchestration, which, apart from the classical combination of instruments, includes saxophone, concertina, mandolin, marimba, harpsichord, and mouth organ.

The Composer's Status

In contrast to the *avant-garde*, where the composer appears as an inventor, in the *post-avant-garde* the author becomes a demiurge, a creator of his or her own universe. Demiurge is a modern form of anonymous creative work on integrated cultural strata. The authorship does not betray itself neither in intonations that avoid presenting a narrative in first person, nor in personal apprehension of the subject matter. An example is Vladimir Nikolayev's *Giraffe* (2000), where the composer appears as a demiurge of an electroacoustic monodrama rendered by the singer Valentina Ponomaryova. It proved to be sufficient for the composer to

build up an exquisite electroacoustic performance from a succession of virtuoso transformations by using just a few lines from Nikolai Gumilev's like-named poem recited by the acting singer in various moods and images: laughing, crying, seducing, humiliating, adoring, etc. Experienced primarily as a composer of electronic music, Nikolayev earlier used the singer's voice for the purposes of varied electronic arrangements. In this case, the singer appearing in the role of an actress does everything herself with her own voice, while the composer stays behind the scenes, his work being assigned to the structure of successive masks reflected in electronic counterpoint.

The Performer's Status

According to the academic tradition, a performer acts as an interpreter and a mediator between the inventor and the audience. In post-avant-garde music, performers are regarded as elements of the text, bearers of its syncretic form, language and imagery, designed to participate in the composition of the text as its anonymous co-authors. As it is evident from Denisov's *Birdsong*, the performer is more than just an executor, for he has to carry out a composer's task without fixed results. This is a happening. The composer expects from a performer to display the elements of free improvisation, *ludus absolutus* on a par with the recorded *opus absolutum*. Nikolayev's piece is devoid of thematic development, as it is understood in opus music. His theme is rendered by the singer's voice, while variations reflect a change in articulation, tempo, rhythm of recitation, intonation, vocal modulation, and pitch and timbre of the voice. All this is done by the actress, whereas the composer changes the background, an acoustic environment, and the depth of space.

Execution

The realization of such projects evolves into a situation looking far from a customary concert appearance. It may be defined as a search for a situation excluding the installation of the footlights and a stage standing between the musicians and the audience, such as a game, a mystery play, a ritual, an action, an instrumental theatre, a happening, and a performance.

Metamusic (2001) by Sergey Zagny may be attributed to conceptual projects which radically transgress the concert situation. This piece may seem more appropriate among Vladimir Martynov's videoinstallations or graphic books of Ilya Kabakov or as a performance like John Cage's "Lecture on Nothing". The latter association is easy to explain, because here one is offered to look at a notated score and read commentaries *instead* of a sounding of music.

The notated text of this work displays a score of Anton Webern's Piano variations, Op. 27, without pitches. The rest of parameters remain intact so that the original score is still easily recognizable. Webern's Piano variations are a benchmark in the 20th-century music and epitome of the first avant-garde. That it was turned into a post-avant-gardist opus by one single gesture – by this very gesture, which came closer to another benchmark of the 20th-century, John Cage's 4'33" – makes it an altogether original project. And the offered score is its original text.

Webern is 'interpreted' here in true Cagean spirit. But it represents only one part of this opus. The other part includes autocommentaries of the first. This is an excerpt from these commentaries: "to perform this piece, the score, page by page, must be projected on the screen. Obviously, visual form is the only possible form in which this music can be performed. The score consists of 9 pages without the title pages. At the end I intend to put one more fragment from another score by another author [one page from the Webern's autograph – M.K.]. This piece is related to Cage and some important, at least to my mind, issues of contemporary music (which nowadays are somewhat different from those in Cage's times)".

In what follows the author lists themes addressed in *Metamusic*. Let's browse them selectively:

"relationship between models and approaches"

authorship problem

sound and silence

language and expression

eidos and embodiments

conceptualism and minimalist reduction: work with unmediated concepts or *eidos* instead of work with material

Webern – a master of silence

intertextual connections

4'33" – a framed space

Cage – a master of silence

paradigm of avant-gardism and progressivism

intratextual connections

Oberius: a passionate desire to avoid falsehood

Revival of buffoonery as a social institution in the world of total economics and political correctness

Ex. 6 First page of "Metamusica" by Sergei Zagny (reproduced with the permission of "Zagny Edition").

METAMUSICA

I

Sehr mäßig ♩ = ca 40 S. Zagny, Op. 27

1 2 3 4 5

6 7 8 9 10

11 12 13 14

15 16 17 18

rit.

The Listener's Status

Within the academic concert tradition, the listener is included in a triad author-performer-public. This triad began to decompose in the very first avant-garde happenings where the concert transformed into an action or event. But when the author becomes post-author or anonymous author and the performer is no longer a mediator but a co-author, the public disappears as well. In other words, it is enough to remove one member of the triad and the whole chain breaks apart: if there is no author, there is no public.

Outside the concert environment, the listener becomes participant of a beforehand planned situation. This is a neo-modal situation, which imposes a mode of behaviour and perception. This kind of situation neither invokes sympathetic reactions, as in concert, nor it appeals to the public. It reminds more of a ritual, for instance, a wedding, in which no one is just watching – everybody's participating. Whenever it occurs that the listener is invited to join not the concert but the event (sometimes marked with existential significance), s/he becomes a participant. Even a co-performer. And maybe even a co-author, to a certain degree.

Notes

¹ Denisov, E. "Стабильные и мобильные элементы музыкальной формы и их взаимодействие" ("Stable and Mobile Elements of Musical Form and Their Interaction"). *Теоретические проблемы музыкальных форм и жанров* (Theoretical Issues of Musical Forms and Genres), Moscow, 1971.

² Quoted from Edison Denisov's interview with the author of this article, recorded in 1996 and originally published in: Denisov, E. "О «Пении» птиц" ("Of 'Birdsong'"). *Свет. Добро. Вечность. Памяти Эдисона Денисова. Статьи. Воспоминания. Материалы*, Москва, 1999.

³ Quoted from Vladimir Martynov's interview with the author of this article, originally published in: Katunyan, M. "Между хэппенингом и ритуалом: «Переписка» Георгия Пелециса и Владимира Мартынова" ("Between the Happening and Ritual: 'Correspondence' between Georgy Peletsis and Vladimir Martynov"). *Альтернатива-98 // Музыкальная жизнь*, 1999, No. 2.

Margarita Katunian

Nuo avangardo į postavangardą: idėjų tęstinumas

Avangardas ir postavangardas yra suvokiami kaip dvi skirtingos paradigmos. Dalelytė „post“, panašiai kaip „a“ ir „anti“, rodo krypties pokytį, tačiau priešingai nei pastarieji du, šis neturi neigimo. Vektorius nenukreiptas į priešingą pusę. „Post“ iš tikrųjų reiškia, kad menas susidūrė su visiškai skirtingais reiškiniais.

Vis dėlto riba tarp šių dviejų paradigmų nėra vien iliuzinė. Dažnai ribos visai nėra. Tikra tiesa, kad avangarde buvo daugiau idėjų nei įmanoma įgyvendinti, įtraukiant tas, kurios iš esmės prieštaravo savo pirminiams impulsams. Šias idėjas išrutuliojo postavangardizmo kartos kompozitoriai.

Tokiu būdu idėjos buvo visiškai kitaip suvoktos, todėl lėmė visai skirtingus rezultatus. Reikšminga tai, kad paradigmos pokytis atsispindėjo vienos kompozitorių kartos kūryboje. Daugelio kompozitorių kūrybinei biografijai šis pokytis turėjo kritinį poveikį.

Šiame darbe yra pateikiamas lyginamasis pagrindinių avangardo ir postavangardo estetikos požiūrių tyrimas, jų skirtumai ir panašumai. Tarp keleto kitų tiriamų aspektų yra tiriami ir mąstymo būdai: strategija, idėjos, metodai, muzikos duomenys ir garso filosofija, visumos organizavimo principai, kompozitoriaus asmenybė, teksto tipas, atlikėjo asmenybė, muzikinio kūrinio atlikimo vieta bei publikos kategorija...