

## Visual Aspects of Musical Text

As a preliminary, let us offer a working definition of text to specify this concept in our present discourse. Text embraces everything that can be subjected to interpretation and that can act as an object of commentary, description, investigation and analysis. Anything may be used as text: a fable or a theorem, a rite or the mode of tillage, grey matter of the brain or a lunar substratum. In its turn interpretation, e.g. a myth, can also be viewed as text.

Treating music as text, we should first of all answer the following question: does the visual aspect of music represent text, or to put it differently: is visuality a real substance of music so as to be regarded as an object and considered as text?

When we speak about notation in music, the answer will be definitely in the affirmative. For musical scripture involves a transfer of time into spatial parameters. As a real substance, notation is certainly text with the sole reservation that it does not serve as a graphic *equivalent* of music since a system of conventional signs in itself cannot be viewed as a product of spatial arts. Though, we know some examples of such equivalence from Xenakis's architectural and musical structures.

But when we speak about sounding music, a direct answer to the above question is not so simple. According to the physiologists, it is the brain that is primarily responsible for human vision, but how one exactly sees anything – by one's eyes or through the skin of one's hands – this is another matter. Hence it follows that a human being perceives all by the brain, also when one hears anything, in particular, when one listens to music. This gives rise to the seemingly paradoxical question: is pure audio perception whatever possible in music? Why does any appearance of visual elements used as accompaniment to music in the concert hall arouse such an enthusiastic response in the audience, be it Haydn's *Farewell Symphony* with a real happening in its finale, Scriabin's *Prometheus* with its scoring of light (son of lumiere), or performances of the «Hortus musicus» ensemble playing on the stage in fancy-dresses? Why did electronic tape-music give way so fast to the live presentation of electronic music by live performers on the stage? Perhaps, the reason for its failure to receive wide recognition in the concert life lies in the fact that, being recorded in a studio on a storage medium, it needs no performers, as a result of which you have *nothing to see* on the scene. The demonstration of music on tape or CD without a performer is a situation incompatible with its presentation at a concert, for in the last case you have not only to hear but also to see. It enjoyed currency at festivals, among connoisseurs and like-minded persons in studios, clubs, and in the earphones of an audio player that can be listened to anywhere except at a concert. But eventually in concert halls there appeared versions of performing electronic music, supplied with visual elements ranging from pantomimes, stage decorations, symbolic attributes, lighting and diverse specific extra-musical effects, as we could observe at the concerts of Stockhausen's music or rock-groups, e.g. "Pink Floyd".

Thus we have outlined the following range of issues to discuss: (1) anthropological capacities of a human being to see while hearing and to associate audio and video information; (2) the audiovisuality of music and (3) the general public and quests for a new situation.

### What the Listener Sees, or What Music Shows

The interaction of arts belongs to the category of eternal problems, which is extremely acute in modern music. Different kinds of art have never failed to remember their primeval community. The aspiration for a synthesis, a symbiosis of arts is quite natural, bearing the traces of generic memory about syncretic unity in the archaic ritual. Their community always reveals itself, even then, and perhaps particularly so, when arts get free from "alien" components, in the first place, from an open plotline, and are preserved in their specific form. And their interlinks prove so stable that it may be presumed that this syncretism has never ceased at all. Therefore, the appeal for multi-sensorial capacities of human perception is in fact nothing but an attempt to evoke the anthropological nature and anthropological memory storing the structural archetypes of a primitive ritual in the unconscious.

The above-said pertains equally to the sound as such. Ontologically the sound of archaic folk music is of a different nature as compared with sounds of the later European culture since it is endowed with magical meaning. It is syncretic, material and sacral, representing the unity of form, imagery and function: it is identical to rhythm, movement, gestures and facial expressions, merging with them and being inseparable from them in the same way as it is indivisible from the interjection syllable it articulates.

Professional European music produces spatial aspects itself: in the Baroque times the use was made of rhetorical figures to outline the vectors of space (anabasis à catabasis, up and down). In 19<sup>th</sup>-century music, the sound and tone-coloring technique was applied to create the illusion of volume, virtual three-dimensionality and sound vibrancy. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sonores or sound objects came to be associated with the notion about multidimensionality of space and time. It is not difficult to notice that the philosophy of spatial aspects in music and the philosophy of contemporary pictorial arts are always identical, and the visual figurativeness of music and pictorial arts are kindred, be it abstract categories or real figurative images, similarly to abstract or figurative painting. The audiovisual aspect got an intensive development especially in 19<sup>th</sup>-century music when programmatic composition was making just timid steps on this road among many others. Otherwise how can we explain the "terminological exchange" between music and painting? The matter concerns the concept of *coloring* applied to sonority, timbre or tone-color quality of music and the concept of *tone and tonality* as applied to paint, color and light in pictorial arts. This intersection became most evident in modern nonfigurative paintings and, respectively, in the sonoristic works of Varèse, Xenakis, Ligeti and other composers dealing with spatial sound objects. The sonoristic compositions gave rise to a specific kind of notation in the form of graphic signs, diagrams and figures visually identical to spatial parameters of music. The ANS synthesizer with its technology geared to new music, e.g. by means of photo-electronic scoring, placed focus on graphic representation, which was first to be drawn and then subjected to sound recording. The experiments in decoding Earle Brown's avant-garde notation gave Edison Denisov the idea to score contemporary pictorial works for sound. Moreover, he strove to do so not in a figurative sense, not to convey their imagery, but in the literal sense of the word, i.e. "to transfer a spatial object into the temporal plane" by transcribing the visual text of *pictures* by Paul Klee and Piet Mondrian into aural text.

The idea of an audiovisual synthesis is always novel but at all times it is realized in the new manner. Its novelty in music at the turn to the 21<sup>st</sup> century is due to the fact that, in contrast to the "synthesis of arts" modeled on Wagner and his project *Gesamtkunstwerk* based on a myth as a *literary plot*, the latest ways of this synthesis seek to blend arts outside any narrative, where different arts assert themselves in pure forms of their own language devoid of any outside effects and based on a myth treated as a *symbol and structure*. This is what we call *new syncretism* and, respectively, *new syncretic text*.

### **Audiovisuality of Music**

"Our age is the time of visual arts" – these words of Vladimir Martynov can be addressed to music as well for we are currently witnessing the visualization of music and its visual perception. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, music started to overflow its banks. It often happens so that we are going to a concert hall but find ourselves in the theatre. The very titles of musical compositions speak for this merging of territories. For instance, Faraj Karayev's instrumental opus *Waiting for Godot* carries the following subtitle "Music for performance on the theatrical stage". This piece for four soloists and chamber ensemble was played and *shown* in the theatre and not in a concert hall. The festival arranged in Moscow by the composer Alexander Bakshi and most aptly called "The Theatre of Sound" was founded on the concept of a self-valued and self-sufficient sound merged with a gesture and a behavioral act, and existing outside any narrative.

The intrusion upon musical text started in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with Cage's happenings and his "music of the environment", Stockhausen's spatial compositions, and Kagel's "instrumental theatre". Today many new kinds of audiovisual interconnection have appeared, such as performance, multimedia and audiovisual installations. The multimedia undertaking presupposes the interaction of different arts (ART-MEDIA), as well as the application of electronic devices and various means of sensory effects and techniques acting in real time. The multimedia, multi-sensory processes are

often provided by the commutation of computers, audio-video programs and accompanied by the demonstration of spatial objects aimed at implementing a certain idea and, taken all together, a certain conceptual design by affecting different senses and different aspects of perception: sensual, figurative-associative, analytic, and so on. The multimedia composition can go far from an academic concert genre. The implementation of multimedia projects calls for a new situation: when the listeners can walk among objects, freely move in the hall from one object to another, or stay in the centre surrounded by the works of art. Their actions are programmed by the situation itself, turning spectators into participants. Such projects require special premises adjoining concert halls or quite different locations and sites.

Vladimir Martynov's artistic **multimedia installation** entitled *Towards Ludwig* (2001) included a lot of components. On the walls of exhibition halls you could see landscape photographs with metaphysical drawings or texts written over them, and you could hear ringed fragments from Wagner's piano sonata (audio recording in the earphones). On the stand you could read Ludwig Wittgenstein's treatise opened at a *relevant* page. Simultaneously, in the non-stop mode they showed some episodes from Visconti's film *Ludwig* in one hall and, in another hall, the finale from his film *Death in Venice* accompanied by Mahler's music. Concurrently you could watch the documentary pictures of Leni Riefenstahl's historical news-reel *Triumph des Willens* (on the video recorder). The exhibition accompanied the concerts in the adjacent hall where the composer was playing his piano pieces.

The multimedia performances in the open air offer quite a different situation of text. The combination of audio and visual elements in K. Stockhausen's *Helicopter String Quartet* (1992/1993) takes place in the plein-air. The performance of this composition is intended for string quartet and an air crew, since the instrumental parts are appended by a score for air pilots, showing the trajectory of helicopters' movement. This opus cannot be performed in a concert hall but in the air-field, for it is addressed not to the philharmonic public but a crowd of people congregating in a city airport. It begins with the simultaneous take-off of several helicopters, each carrying on board one player. All the performers including musicians are supplied with the earphones through which the action is coordinated via the remote-control panel from the land by the composer and his assistant staying at the sound mixing desk. The music is broadcast through a relay transmitter to the listeners on the land while the performers are soaring in the air in free flight. This Quartet by Stockhausen bears out Cage's viewpoint according to which a work of art, instead of being an object created by one person, turns into a process which is set in motion by a group of people. A person is no longer interested in the results but only in action itself. Art in the process of emerging from itself: this is life.

### **The Public and Quests for a New Situation**

Schönberg's categorical statement that "the public is the enemy of music number one" has recently turned into highly topical aphorism. What degree of confrontation should the "artist/crowd" romantic opposition have reached during the times of this composer belonging to the Second Viennese School, if it came to extend even over a loyal music lover! Perhaps, in this way the composer expressed a forthcoming crisis in the contemporary musical practice as regards the composer/listener interconnection, an association that had taken shape as early as in the times of the New Music. To explain the above-said, let us make a brief digression into the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the concert principle in new compositions was just emerging. It might be entitled as "The role of accompaniment in the institution of the listeners' audience, or how *basso continuo* is programming the public."

*Basso continuo* (here meaning accompaniment as well as the type of composition with an accompaniment) singles out the soloist among the other mass of voices, placing him in the foreground and pushing the "chorus" of accompanying voices into the background as if "into upstage". At the same time the echoing principle invented in Renaissance times (Lasso, Giovanni Gabrieli) was very popular in music. The echoing effect produced an illusion of depth by the simple *forte/piano* comparison. In both cases it created the image of *space*: "nearer – farther". But in respect to whom the latter categories are to be applied? These categories referred to those staying outside the musicians, i.e. to the listeners. An appeal for the listener inevitably entails the situation of a concert. Thus appears *the one who perceives* these new aspects of music<sup>1</sup>. A concert

has not only divided the musicians themselves functionally and spatially by making a distinction between the soloists or *concertante* group and the ripieni background, but it has also erected an invisible wall between the performers and the public by placing an object of art in the position confronting the subject.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the author (performer)/public opposition developed in two contrary directions: towards complete separation and, conversely, towards complete reunion. Schönberg's path brings the first classical configuration to an extreme: the public seems to be separated from the musicians by glass to make sure that this enemy number one could not affect them by its tastes and force them to follow its striving for easy pleasures; thus assigning the public only the role of a sponsor. The case of Glenn Gould also reveals the absolute division between the object and the subject not only in space and time but also in ontological terms: the pianist's performance and the hearing of his discs are two different life experiences since the sound recording annuls the concert situation.

Cage's experience is opposite to that of Schönberg, and in respect to the public it is positive. In the disintegrating author/performer/listener chain Cage treats the latter not as "an enemy" but as an ally and even as a confederate. His earliest compositions already showed a break of the "author/performer/public" triad while their performance at a concert turned into an action and a real happening.

In the non-concert surroundings the listener becomes a participant in the preconceived situation. As shown above, a composition sets a mode of perception and behavior. The situation dictated by a composer calls not for an aesthetic *experience* but for real *co-participation*. It resembles a rite, e.g. wedding, where there are no spectators but only participants in and witnesses to the event. The listener turns into a copartner in performance and, to a certain extent, a collective coauthor. Modern music has different audiences.

**The public of philharmonic concerts** in its majority is made up not of traditional music lovers since it emerged on the postmodernist wave of "new simplicity"; it easily understands the language of classicism and romanticism, baroque and Renaissance styles of music. This occurred largely thanks to cinematography. After the first performance of Schnittke's First Concerto grosso in the 1970s you could often hear the following phrase: "I have understood nothing but I liked it." Schnittke's compositions follow the principle of cinematic dramatic patterns, his music being charged with "*hidden visuality*". The method of stylistic comparisons, a vivid genre intrigue, and the contrastive blending of quoted sequences are akin to the technique of film montage. The audiovisual experience proved also useful to those listening to the music of Kancheli whose compositions may be compared to *associative, lyrical pictures produced by film directors*. As films and music live according to the uniform time laws of dramatic art, the audio-video contact in the cinema actively promotes the introduction of modern music to the general public.

The audiovisual forms have eventually penetrated into academic concerts as well. Paintings, graphic works and sculptures are intensively used as entourage in close interaction with the music performed at the "December Evenings" festivals arranged at the Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow. These festivals have from the very outset manifested the multimedia inter-text design, even though in its academic version.

**The general public.** As an example of mass culture, we can take audiovisual laser shows presented in the streets, squares, and at the stadiums gathering millions of spectators. Jean Michel Jarre is the most famous figure in this genre. The fascinating video-fantasies projected into the clouds and at the skyscraper fronts make up the main component of these syncretic actions.

**A club**, the former musical underground, has its own programs, participants, and its *own* public. Its musical endeavors embrace various actions, "situations" (Vladimir Martynov), performances, the multimedia projects, computer techniques, films, pictorial arts, philosophy, literature, pantomimes, choreography, art-objects, installations, etc.

**An exhibition hall** gives the composers a real chance to transfer their music from an auditorium onto the territory of visual arts. The National Centre for Contemporary Arts put forward a special project entitled "What we hear and what faces us. Visual acoustics" for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Biennale of Modern Art held in Moscow last March. As its annotation says, "The project explores the strategies of sound visualization in the figurative system. This artistic trend that emerged a decade ago is manifested by the composers creating an absolutely new language and new alternative iconology.

This art seeking for new ways of sound production in visual technologies has by now established its own image and consolidated its status". The annotation abounds in key concepts of contemporary *actual art*, such as "integral installation forms", "acoustic visibility", "integral art", "the usage of strategies combining the fundamental structures (Gregorian chant) and the latest postfluxus trends", etc.

A special visual sphere in music is notation, both traditional and conceptual, i. e. graphic scores, drawings and symbols, so widely used and clearly presented in medieval and modern music (Browne, Cage, Crumb, Denisov, Artemyev, Ekimovsky). Yet, I leave the analysis of this theme outside the framework of the present article, whose purpose is formulation of the problem and discussion of current trends in the study of visual phenomena in music.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> These categories express the spatial *perception* of music, which turned into a homophonic structure. The phenomenon of depth and three-dimensionality may be compared with the effect of direct perspective – the system of *vision focused from the viewer's standpoint* – the effect arising only when a picture takes into account the observer looking at it from the sole fixed point outside the canvas in relation to which the perspective is structured.

### Santrauka

#### Muzika kaip vizualinis menas

Pranešime aptariamas muzikinės kompozicijos kaip teksto vizualinis aspektas. Vizualumas čia nagrinėjamas keliais atžvilgiais:

1. Vizualumas kaip vidinė fiziologinio suvokimo savybė.

Fiziologai tvirtina, kad žmogus „mato“ visų pirma smegenimis, o kaip tai „matoma“ – akimis ar rankų oda, – jau yra visai kitas klausimas. Taigi galima daryti išvadą, kad žmogus mato smegenimis ir tuomet, kai klausosi, o ypač – kai girdi muziką. Visai galimas dalykas, kad dėl to grynai klausinis suvokimas muzikoje nėra įmanomas.

2. Vizualinis tekstas kaip muzikinės kompozicijos užfiksavimo priemonė. Grafinės partitūros.

3. Vizualinis muzikos atlikimo aspektas. Naujas šiuolaikinės muzikos, apimančios ir vizualinį komponentą, sinkretizmas. Multimedinės šiuolaikinio muzikinio teksto savybės.