

**The “New Religious” Mission of Totalitarian Art
in the Example of Compositions by Soviet Composers from the 1930–1950’s
in the Genres of Cantata and Oratorio**

The early 1930s in the USSR witness the final formation of the totalitarian system based on socialist principles of management (a state-run economy), an ideological imperative (the Marxist-Leninist Communist utopia), a political unipolarity (one party rule, the cult of the personality) and a repressive mechanism of control of the state. All of these aspects found their direct reflection in the *totalitarian mythology* imposed by the government on society. This mythology, which had replaced by itself *the religious world-view*, had found its expression in the *totalitarian chronotope*. The spatial coordinates of this chronotope presented a vertical line which combined ideological and mythological conceptions:

LEADER – CULT – CULT FUNCTION
(CULT OF THE LEADER: LENIN-STALIN)
PARTY – FAITH – RELIGIOUS FUNCTION
(COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY)
PEOPLE-MASSES – MENTALITY – SOCIAL FUNCTION
(INTERNATIONALISM, SOVIET PATRIOTISM)

The temporal coordinates in their turn formed an utopian triad:

THE FUTURE		+ _____
THE PRESENT	- _____	+ _____
THE PAST	_____ - _____	+ _____

In this triad the past and the present possessed qualities of imperfection, since they contained negative characteristics. Nevertheless, both of these temporal concepts were also distinct for their progressive characteristics, being directed towards the future. In sum total all of the three temporal functions made up a mythological continuum of time in which the progressive, positive elements testified about the *end of history and of the apotheosis of utopia*. It must be noted that unlike the classical utopias, in which the gap in time between the present and the future presented itself as an attributive feature of the conceptions, the totalitarian utopia practically equated the present with the future. At the same time, this particular identification was by no means purely conceptual. The achievement of *perfection* in the sphere of state and social formation was officially proclaimed in 1936 (the year of adoption of Stalin’s constitution).

If these triadic constructions of the domains of time and space in the totalitarian world-view certain interesting inter-functional correspondences and doublings could be perceived. In this case the “future” and the cult of the Leader would turn out to be on the top stratum, which is absolutely logical, since the Leader in a totalitarian society is exactly who represented in himself the embodiment of the perfect representative of the new formation. The middle level would be taken up by the “present” and the Party as the bearer of the “new religious” mission (which also presents quite an obvious correlation, since the mission of the Party and of the communist faith is too unite the present with the future). The lower level of the triad would be represented by the “past” and by the people. It would seem to be not a very adequate coincidence of the rejected, negative time with the declared subject of the new world order (the government of the people)! However, the scheme is merely a mirror of the totalitarian mythology, similarly to the systems of ideological political of manipulations in which the people present merely the variant element, the *imperfect form*, from which upon the whim of the higher levels of the triad there could be formed enemies as well as heroes, new leaders as well as slaves. The past and the people presented, essentially, a zone of selection, which determined the *usefulness* of the elements of this level *for* the future.

THE FUTURE

LEADER – CULT – CULT FUNCTION
(CULT OF THE LEADER: LENIN-STALIN)

THE PRESENT

PARTY – FAITH – RELIGIOUS FUNCTION
(COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY)

THE PAST

PEOPLE-MASSSES – MENTALITY – SOCIAL FUNCTION
(INTERNATIONALISM, SOVIET PATRIOTISM)

The presented *mythological totalitarian chronotope* is particularly what presented during the Stalin era the conceptual construction which substituted history as well as reality with itself, placing Soviet society for many years into a virtual domain of mythological perspective.

The mythological totalitarian chronotope as the solely possible, self-contained and noncontradictory perspective of the world was implemented into the consciousness of society by all possible means of propaganda and agitation. However, a leading position in its retransmission during the period of Stalin's rule was taken up by *art*, which by means of artistic symbols and images was able to construct from an ideological dogma *a mythological system in the full meaning of the term* and even (following the concept of Nikolai Berdiayev) *a new religion*. It is not by accident that the structure of the mythological chronotope had found its direct reflection in the structure of the totalitarian aesthetics artificially created in the early 1930s, the so-called *socialist realism*. The model for socialist realism in its overall features coincided with the mythological triad. The canons of *adherence to ideology – adherence to the party – adherence to the people* reflected the spatial vertical vector of the chronotope. The canon of *depiction of "reality in its revolutionary development"* corresponded with the perception of time.

Depiction of reality in its revolutionary development

ADHERENCE TO THE IDEOLOGY

THE FUTURE

LEADER – CULT – CULT FUNCTION
(CULT OF THE LEADER: LENIN-STALIN)

ADHERENCE TO THE PARTY

THE PRESENT

PARTY – FAITH – RELIGIOUS FUNCTION
(COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY)

ADHERENCE TO THE PEOPLE

THE PAST

PEOPLE-MASSSES – MENTALITY – SOCIAL FUNCTION
(INTERNATIONALISM, SOVIET PATRIOTISM)

Depiction of reality in its revolutionary development

If one is to observe that the aesthetical triad “adherence to the ideology – adherence to the party – adherence to the people” accepted as the basis of socialist realism virtually duplicated both the social (leader-party-people) and the mythological (cult-faith-society) vertical vectors of the chronotope, the “religious” content of the socialist realist paradigm would appear to be quite obvious. The requirement of depiction of “reality in its revolutionary development” would indicate within the framework of this paradigm upon the utopian directedness of art (the overcoming of the temporal gap between the present and the future). This characteristic functional coincidence of the triadic levels in the totalitarian mythology and aesthetic is precisely what gives us as a result a *generalizing model* of socialist realist totalitarian art, its method and style, which could be conditionally labeled as the *aesthetic mythological chronotope*.

In the Soviet musical art the canons of socialist realism found their most obvious manifestation in the genres of cantata and oratorio. The significance of cantatas and oratorios as the dominant genres was conditioned by the following circumstances: a) the presence of a poetic text written according to the rules of socialist realist aesthetics; b) the ability to build a mythological “subject” in a most concentrated form, – i.e. to embrace within the scope of one composition all the mythological canons of the totalitarian culture (the cults of the leader, heroes, the homeland, the Party, the people, labor, childhood, etc.); c) an accessibility of musical language, closely connected with the song tradition; d) specific features of musical dramaturgy, basing itself on theatricality, as well as on symphonic principles of development (at least in terms of its monumental qualities of the conception and the breadth of its movement). Especially noteworthy in this connection is the point of view of T. Livanova, which emphasizes the predominant function of the genres of cantata and oratorio in the context of the “grand style” of the Stalin era: “The cantata and the oratorio seem to solve partially some of the new challenges in Soviet opera. The cantata and oratorio concretize and bring onto more lucid and realizable ground the elements to which the Soviet symphonic tradition had aspired. The dramatic, active beginning, a concreteness of images, a folk-choral basis and widely understood features of symphonic writing are successfully combined in the genres of cantatas and oratorios, determining their rich and wide possibilities” (“Sovetskaya muzyka,” 1949 N.3, p.14). These words could equally be applied to such compositions as “The Return of the Sun” by E. Golubev, “The Song of the Spring and of Happiness” by M. Yudin, “The Poem about Stalin” by A. Khachaturian, “The Cantata about the Fatherland” by A. Aratunyan, “The Song about the Forests” and “The Sun is Shining over the Fatherland” by D. Shostakovich, “Emelian Pugachev” by M. Koval, “On the Kulikov Field” and “The Lay of the Battle for the Russian Land” by Yu. Shaporin, “Alexander Nevsky,” “Zdravitsa” and “On Guard of Peace” by S. Prokofiev, “Kirov is with us” by N. Myaskovsky, “Moscow” by V. Shebalin, “A Free China” by K. Korchmarev, “My Ukraine” by A. Shtogarenko and others. It must be noticed that in the year these lines were written the Stalin Premium was bestowed onto an unprecedented quantity of works written in the genre of cantatas and oratorios: D. Shostakovich’s “Song about the Forests.” G. Zhukovsky’s “Praise to You, My Fatherland,” D. Djangirov’s “Beyond the Arax,” A. Manevich’s cantata “For Peace” and V. Dekhterev’s cantata “The Russian Land.” The great attention given by the government to this genre niche could be perceived by this list.

The significance of cantatas and oratorios as the predominant genres in the history of Stalin-era art was so great also in connection of these composers virtually fulfilling a “*new religious, quasi-sacred mission*.” No other musical genre could reflect with such obviousness the *new church ritual function*, – namely, to represent the totalitarian mythology, at the same time reconstructing certain features of religious rites. Veritably, the cantata and oratorio compositions of the 1930–1950s were, firstly, *mandatory elements of all the holidays in the Soviet holiday calendar*, which replaced by itself the church calendar, and also *festive events (they were composed in honor of Party Congresses, in honor of activation of state documents, in honor jubilees of the heads of the government, etc.)*. Secondly, within the subject matter in Soviet cantatas there took place *a substitution of the traditional religious symbolism*. For example, the heroic Leader took the place of the spiritual Shepherd, communist symbols took the place of Christian symbols and the image of the Soviet people took the place of the congregation. Practically always (indirectly – even in the context of historical subject matter) these genres exhibited symbols of the new faith and new religious canons, just as they signified by themselves the sacred involvement of the people in the context of those symbols (noteworthy in this sense is the mandatory inclusion into these forms of “glorifying” sections, predominantly in the Finales).

We must not fail to take into account the historical and cultural aspect as well, which brought out the cantata and oratorio to the level of the predominating genres, and at the same time including them into the sacred space of totalitarian culture. After all throughout all of music history there have not been other genres which had such a specific “genre memory.” It suffices to remember that the composition of works in the genres of cantatas and oratorios in the past was almost always connected with social commission, manifested in either providing for the necessities of a religious cult or for political demands of governments. Even such outstanding works of art as Handel’s oratorios were unthinkable outside of the framework of social commission. It is not by chance that that particularly the genres of cantatas and oratorios depicted the religious or political perceptions of their times in such direct ways, unfolding the mythology of the era in monumental, picturesquely spectacular and extremely accessible forms.

The cantatas and oratorios of the Stalin era take into account this “genre memory,” by merely combining the *sacred and political* sources of the genre within the framework of a specific symbiosis.

This present symbiosis in an a priori manner presumed the primacy of the ideological mythological functionality in regards to the aesthetic. In other words, the artistic criteria in these kinds of compositions were substituted, first of all, by criteria of the correspondence of the content of these compositions with the mythological chronotope.

Hence, first of all, in the cantatas and oratorios of the era of the “Grand Style” the canonic, quasi-religious approach to the poetic text was considered of the utmost importance. It is not perchance that the poetic texts in one way or another repeated the same images, the same clichés, continuing from one musical composition to the next. It is not perchance that these texts more often than not were of mediocre artistic quality, at the same time, mandatorily signifying a complete assortment of totalitarian mythological symbols.

In this sense the texts of the Stalin-era cantatas and oratorios could particularly be correlated with the “dead languages” of the Catholic and Orthodox Christian church service in which the congregation is distanced from the artistic outline of the Latin and Old Russian texts. After all, the philosophy of the liturgy is connected, first of all, with the everyday modeling of the same sacred subject matter. Its language rises above the common, everyday language. The musical setting in relationship to the text could be quite ordinary (a perfect example of this is the music in an Orthodox Christian church).

It is taken for granted that it would be incompetent to bring out in a mechanical way, even more so to assert analogies between the religious consciousness and the totalitarian. However, such connections do exist, at least because totalitarian systems, as is well known, imitated the structure of religious cults in all the spheres of social life. And in this quasi-religious context totalitarian started to play a role in a certain sense of religious and, hence, *canonic* art.

In order to prove this thought, it suffices to turn to the poetic texts of the aforementioned compositions in the genre of cantatas and oratorios, written in at the time of Stalin’s rule, in which the *structure of the totalitarian myth is not merely depicted in the poetic text but gives a hand at forming the text and building out its dramaturgy*. One such text is cited below: from the Finale of Shostakovich’s cantata, written to the poem of E. Dolmatovsky “The Sun Shines over our Fatherland.”

Glitter, shine towards all lands,
My Soviet country!
Faithfully carrying out the precepts of Lenin,
We go forwards along Stalin’s path.
Our generation shall witness communism,
Our people shall build communism.
To the Communist Party of our country
We pledge our fidelity,
The children of the Soviet spring.
We renew our native land with our labor.
To the Party of Lenin, to the Party of Stalin,
We sing glory!
Communists, forward! Communists, forward!
Glory! Glory! Glory! Glory!

All the components of the totalitarian mythological chronotope (even in such a short fragment) are present here (similarly to the way that in a mass all of the religious symbolism must be depicted):

- 1) the leader (“the precepts of Lenin,” “the path of Stalin”);
- 2) the Communist Party, communism;
- 3) the people, the international fraternity (“the children of the Soviet spring”);
- 4) the future (“the people will build communism”), the future as the present (“our generation shall see communism”);
- 5) the present as the heroic present day (“we renew by our labor”);
- 6) the past (here: as an anticipation of the present – “the precepts of Lenin”).

In addition to the basic system-forming symbols, the cited text also includes mythological subsystems:

- 1) the USSR as the center of the world (“shine towards all lands”);
- 2) the myth of fatherhood (the people as the children of the Leader-father);
- 3) initiation (“we pledge fidelity”);

- 4) the myth about the Fatherland and the earth;
- 5) the “dynamic” canon of the socialist realist aesthetics, depicting the utopian totalitarian world-view, – namely, the depiction of “reality in its revolutionary development” (communists, forward), etc.

Great significance is attached to the sacred aspect itself:

- 1) the triunity (Lenin, Stalin, the ideal of communism, bequeathed by Marx);
- 2) the sacrament of communion (“faithfully carrying out,” “we pledge fidelity”);
- 3) “Glory.”

It must be emphasized that the musical dramaturgy of the cited fragment from Shostakovich’s composition as well as of the integral form of this work and other musical compositions depended to a considerable degree on the dramaturgy of the poetic text, its semantics and structure. This was conditioned by the specific connection between the stated mythological subject matter and its musical embodiment. The stereotypic qualities of the poetic texts were reflected to one degree or another in the stereotypic qualities of the musical dramaturgy, fundamental principles of genre, thematic material, form, harmony, etc.

The present observations call for the following conclusions to be made:

1. As a rule, not one of the musical compositions (either in their poetical or in their musical aspects) carries any independent musical information. The poets and composers who wrote them, having been guided mainly by pragmatic aims, formed the dramaturgy on the basis of the crystallizing (during the 1930–1930s) or already crystallized (during the 1940–1950s) canon, which presumed mandatory representation in works of cantatas and oratorios or the basic symbols of the totalitarian mythological chronotope.

2. In this sense the canon, first of all, obliged the poets and composers of these works to include system-forming mythological symbols, – namely, the symbol of the triunity of time, referring to the earliest notions of the cyclic aspects of life, of resurrection and eternal life; the symbol of the Leader, reflecting the similarly ancient conceptions of the divine origin of gods and heroes; the symbol of the idea (the spiritual-religious meaning of communism as a utopian world of happiness and good); the symbol of the people (the congregation to which the will of the Leader and the meaning of the idea are turned). The description of this peculiar “creed” the compositions by Soviet composers in the genre of cantata and oratorio abounds in idiomatic expressions, clichés of imagery, which migrate from text to text, becoming the distinctive identifiers of the style (not being changed upon the change of subject matter, time and place of the object of the narration).

3. In its dramaturgical aspect the canon almost always, regardless of the proportions of the composition, its subject matter and structure, presumed the exposure of totalitarian symbols in the guise of absolutely steady, invariable images.

4. The epic type of unfolding of these symbols did not presume their subsequent transformation. This resulted, as a rule, in compositions in the vein of suites (albeit with possible inclusions of symphonic methods of development, as, for instance, in the music of Shostakovich or Khachaturian). This distinctive vocal-symphonic suite, not having been formed on the basis of musical logic proper, but having been derived from mythological subject matter, more often than not was crowned with an apotheosis in its conclusion (“glorification”), indicating the victory of the totalitarian utopia.

5. The lack of interest on the part of poets and composers in the aesthetical results of their works, especially in the cases of them being endowed with a considerable amount of talent, call for the supposition that totalitarian art and the conditions of the developing “Grand Style” demanded from the artists a maximal distancing from their own individuality. This is especially true in the sphere of cantatas and oratorios. In this sense the mechanisms of the created art, just as the ideological model itself, in many ways coincided with canonic, religious art, in which, as is well-known, the aesthetical result was of secondary significance. At the same time, the cantatas and oratorios seem to possess the unrealizable, in truth, insignificantly weak and, simultaneously, almost conscious effort to create the model for a new “Holy Scripture,” and in regards to its musical interpretation, in one way or another, to revive on a new historical phase the liturgical image of musical art.

6. In other words, the quasi-sacred meaning of the cantatas and oratorios of the era of Stalin’s rule depicted the quasi-sacred image of the totalitarian system and its culture, which made the attempt to direct art onto fulfilling not an artistic-aesthetical, but a religious-political function.

Santrauka

Totalitarinio meno „naujoji religinė“ misija tarybinių kompozitorių kantatų ir oratorijų žanro kūrinuose 1930–1950 m.

1930 m. pradžioje Tarybų Sąjungoje galutinai susiformavo totalitarinė sistema, pagrįsta socialistinio ekonominio valdymo principais (suvalstybinta ekonomika), ideologiniu imperatyvu (komunizmo utopija), politiniu vienapoliškumu (vienpartinė valdžia, asmenybės kultas) ir represiniu valstybės valdymo mechanizmu. Visi šie aspektai rado savo tiesioginę išraišką visuomenei primestose totalitarinėje mitologijoje. Ši mitologija, kuri pakeitė religinę pasaulėžiūrą, rado savo išraišką *totalitariniame chronotope*. Jo erdvinės koordinatės pasireiškė kaip vertikale *vadas-partija-liaudis*, o laiko koordinatės – kaip utopinė triada *praeitis-dabartis-ateitis*, kur praeitis buvo vertinama negatyviai, o dabartis ir ateitis – teigiamai. Skirtingai negu klasikinėje utopijoje, kurioje tarpas tarp dabarties ir ateities buvo skiriamasis koncepcijos bruožas, *totalitarinė utopija* tapatino dabartį su ateitimi. Tobulybės siekimas valstybės ir visuomenės raidos sferoje buvo oficialiai paskelbtas 1936 m. (kai buvo oficialiai priimta Stalino konstitucija).

Mitologinis totalitarinis chronotopas, kaip vienintelė galima, uždara ir neprieštaraujanti pasaulio perspektyva, buvo diegiama į žmonių sąmonę visais įmanomais propagandos ir agitacijos būdais. Tačiau centrinė pozicija jo retransliacijoje priklausė menui, kuris meniniais simboliais ir vaizdais galėjo iš ideologinių dogmų sukurti mitologiją ir netgi naują religiją (N. Berdiajevo koncepcija). Neatsitiktinai mitologinio chronotopo struktūra rado savo tiesioginę išraišką totalitarinės estetikos, vadinamojo socialistinio realizmo, struktūroje, kuri buvo sukurta 1930 m. pradžioje. Socialistinio realizmo modelis bendrais bruožais sutapo su mitologine triada. Kanonai ištikimybės ideologijai, partijai ir liaudžiai atspindėjo erdvinę chronotopo vertikale. Reikalavimas vaizduoti *tikrovę jos revoliucinėje raidoje* atitiko laikotarpio koncepciją.

Tarybinėje muzikoje socialistinio realizmo kanonai ryškiausiai pasireiškė kantatų ir oratorijų žanre. Kantatų ir oratorijų, kaip *dominuojančio epochos žanro*, svarba buvo sąlygota šių aplinkybių: a) politiniai tekstai, sukurti pagal socialistinio realizmo taisykles, b) galimybė išplėtoti mitologinį „siužetą“ centruotai, t. y. vienoje kompozicijoje panaudoti visus totalitarinės kultūros kanonus (vado kultą, didvyrį, tėvynę, liaudį, darbą, vaikystę ir t. t.), c) masėms suprantama muzikinė kalba, glaudžiai susijusi su dainos tradicija, d) specifiniai muzikinės dramaturgijos bruožai, kuriais reljefiškai pristatomos teigiamos ir neigiamos vaizdinės ir intonacinės sferos (dabarties didvyris, įkūnijantis klasikinį idealaus asmens suvokimą – Eugenijaus Golubevo „Saulės sugrįžimas“, Aramo Chačaturiano „Poema apie Staliną“, A. Arutiuniano „Kantata apie Tėvynę“, Dmitrijaus Šostakovičiaus „Daina apie miškus“, Jurijaus Šaporino „Kulikovo lauke“, Sergejaus Prokofjevo „Aleksandras Nevskis“ ir „Taikos sargyboje“ ir t. t.).

Kantatų ir oratorijų, kaip dominuojančio žanro, reikšmė totalitarinio meno istorijoje buvo tokia didelė dėl jų atliekamos „naujos religijos“, kvazisakralinės misijos. Joks kitas muzikinis žanras negalėjo taip aiškiai atspindėti naujos eklesiastinės funkcijos, t. y. pristatyti totalitarinę mitologiją, kartu rekonstruodamas religinius ritualus. Pirma, kantatos ir oratorijos žanras 1930–1950 m. buvo privalomas šventinių renginių elementas, numatytas pagal tarybinių švenčių kalendorių, kuris pakeitė bažnytinį kalendorių. Antra, tarybinių kantatų ir oratorijų siužetuose buvo pakeisti tradiciniai religiniai simboliai. Pavyzdžiui, didvyris-vadas atsidūrė ganytojo vietoje, komunistiniai simboliai pakeitė krikščioniškus simbolius, tarybinės liaudies įvaizdis užėmė bažnyčios kongregacijos vietą. Visur (išskyrus istorinius siužetus) šie žanrai eksponavo naujo tikėjimo ir naujos religijos kanonų simbolius ir simbolizavo šventą žmonių prisirišimą prie jų (tai ypač ryšku „Gloria“ dalyse ir finaluose).

Tokiu būdu kvazisakralinė kantatų ir oratorijų prasmė Stalino laikais atspindėjo kvazišventą totalitarinės sistemos ir jos kultūros prasmę, kuri bandė estetinę meno funkciją pakeisti religine-politine.