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# Vladimir Martynov's "Night in Galicia": Towards a New Cultural Paradigm

*Vladimiro Martynovo „Naktis Galicijoje“: naujosios kultūrinės paradigmos link*

## Abstract

The cultural paradigm at the close of the 20th century breaks off with the priorities prevailing in the New Times, such as autonomies and specializations, but by contrast it gravitates towards the integration of types, forms and genres. Today, topical significance is attached to the works produced at the junction of different languages used in arts, that is, a tendency revealing a “unified field of culture”.

The idea about “the end of composers’ time”, as formulated by Vladimir Martynov in the title of his book, fundamentally fits into the new paradigm. The idea underlining “the end of composers’ time” implies nothing other than new syncretism. It manifests not so much the end of the old as the assertion of the new in the modern composer’s perception.

*Night in Galicia* set to the lyrics by Velimir Khlebnikov is one of Martynov’s most characteristic works bearing out the latest cultural trends. It is a game, rite, ritual, or an installation. All taken together, it can be clearly united in the term borrowed from the modern theatre, namely, “game structure”. This composition breaks away from the opus-written culture and manifests an open project. Its boundaries are open and its interpretations never repeat themselves. The game structure of a ritual combined with an interactive installation offers one more way to new syncretism and another situation alternative to a concerto.

**Keywords:** Vladimir Martynov, Velimir Khlebnikov, *Night in Galicia*, new cultural paradigm, “the end of composers’ time”, a unified field of culture, *quadrivium*, *trivium*, new syncretism, situation alternative to a concerto, the game structure, new ritual, *post-opus* music, an open project.

## Anotacija

Kultūros paradigma XX a. pabaigoje išsiskiria Naujesiems laikams būdingais prioritetais, tokiais kaip autonomija, specializacija, bet kartu linksta ir į rūšių, formų bei žanrų integraciją. Šiandien didžiausia reikšmė teikiama darbams, sukurtiems skirtingų meno kalbų sankirtoje. Šia tendencija siekiama atskleisti *vientisą kultūros sritį*.

*Kompozitorių eros pabaigos* idėja, suformuluota Vladimiro Martynovo knygos pavadinime, puikiai įsikomponuoja į naująją paradigmą. Idėja, pabrėžianti *kompozitorių eros pabaigą*, reiškia ne ką kita, kaip *naująjį sinkretizmą*. Ji ne tiek skelbia pabaigą to, kas sena, kiek patvirtina tai, kas yra nauja šiuolaikiniame kompozitoriaus suvokime.

„Naktis Galicijoje“, pagrįsta Velimiro Chlebnikovo lyrika, yra vienas būdingiausių Martynovo darbų, palaikančių naujausias kultūros tendencijas. Tai žaidimas, apeigos, ritualas, instaliacija. Visus juos akivaizdžiai galima sujungti į sąvoką, pasiskolintą iš šiuolaikinio teatro, t. y. *žaidimo struktūra*. Šis kūrinys išsiveržia iš opusų kultūros ir skelbia *atvirą projektą*. Jo ribos atviros, o interpretacijos niekada nesikartoja. Ritualo žaidimo struktūra, sujungta su interaktyviąja instaliacija, siūlo dar vieną kelią į naująjį sinkretizmą ir dar vieną koncertui alternatyvią situaciją.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** Vladimiras Martynovas, Velimiras Chlebnikovas, „Naktis Galicijoje“, naujoji kultūros paradigma, *kompozitorių eros pabaiga*, vientisa kultūros sritis, kvadriviumas, triviumas, naujasis sinkretizmas, koncertui alternatyvi situacija, žaidimo struktūra, naujasis ritualas, *post-opus* muzika, atviras projektas.

## Introduction

The issue of the boundaries of art is the *idée fixe* of the 20th century. Throughout that century it attended the birth of any innovation, being inevitably reduced to another focal point: what is art? If we were to address composers, it would be hardly possible to find an unequivocal answer to this question. The conventional definitions such as “the art of sounds” or “the language of feelings” after Debussy, Stravinsky and Varèse have become hardly viable. Instead, now and then we are used to hear the following utterances:

• “Music is not only what we appraise as fantastic but also that what reflects life itself.” (John Cage)<sup>1</sup>

• “Music is the singing of the world about itself.” (Valentin Silvestrov)<sup>2</sup>

• “Music is the manifestation of a cosmic or sacral order.” (Vladimir Martynov)<sup>3</sup>

The composer Vladimir Martynov puts forward the idea of “the end of composers’ time”, placing accent on the new insight into the essence of music compatible with the current cultural processes.

At the close of the 20th century the cultural paradigm as a new approach to the boundaries of art was developed. It breaks off with the priorities prevailing in the New Times, such as analytics, autonomies and specializations, but by contrast it gravitates towards the integration of types, forms and genres. Today, topical significance is

attached to the works produced at the junction of different languages used in arts, that is, a tendency revealing a “unified field of culture”. That’s why the idea about “the end of composers’ time” (the title given to one of V. Martynov’s books) should be understood not as termination of the composer’s endeavours but as going beyond the boundaries of autonomous musical activity. It is to be understood that a composer rejects the author’s reign in the autonomous field of music and inscribes oneself into the unified field of culture wherein he plays just one of potential roles. Alternatively quite the reverse, he expands his influence over the broader space wherein he stops being only a composer but becomes a conductor of multidisciplinary strategies of art wherein music is a constituent part of the whole.

The idea about “the end of composers’ time”, as formulated by Vladimir Martynov in the title of his book, fundamentally fits into the new paradigm. It acquires the form of an interdisciplinary approach and universalism, manifesting itself at the different levels: at the level of external links of music with other languages and at the level of internal links, i.e. in the interaction of disciplines within the musical space dictated by a certain concept. The first aspect is evident in the transformation of a musical situation into performance, action, ritual, game structure, installation. The second facet is embodied in the multi-layered polysemy shaping the musical substance, language and form.

Another feature of Vladimir Martynov’s method is its ontological intensity. His conceptualism may be defined as a shift from mimesis to ontogeny, that is, it is designed not to express but actually represent being. The composer’s utterance assumes the meaning of a composer’s gesture and vital action.

The idea underlining “the end of composers’ time” implies nothing other than new syncretism. It manifests not so much the end of the old as the assertion of the new in the modern composer’s perception. Vladimir Martynov is organically tied with the new paradigm because an interdisciplinary approach and universalism are ingrained in his nature, his intellect and his artistic method. Precisely for this reason he ranks on a par with the painters, poets, stage directors, and performers who have shaped and realized this cultural breakthrough and who pursue this cultural strategy in their works: the stage and film directors Anatoly Vasilyev, Yuri Lyubimov, Robert Wilson, Peter Greenaway, poets Andrei Monastyrsky, Dmitry Prigov, Lev Rubinstein, painters Ilya Kabakov, Francisko Infante, Boris and Sergei Alimovs, and the performers Tatiana Grindenko, Alexei Lyubimov, Dmitry Pokrovsky, and Mark Pekarsky.

Martynov’s artistic interests embrace eastern and western traditions, secular and religious arts, both

professional and folk. His innovations are radical but as to the old traditions, he is primarily engrossed in their sources and archaism. It is characteristic of him to view music in its merging with extra-musical principles. *New syncretism* is one of his leading methods. He himself is syncretic since his endeavours are not confined to composition alone. He is also known as a collector of folklore, an investigator of ancient vocal manuscripts, the writer of books, and the founder of highly original philosophical-culturological conceptions making the basis of his creative projects, such as “New Sacral Space”, “New *devotio moderna*”, “The End of Composers’ Time”, and “The Opus Posth Zone”.

Here is one of the composer’s statements: “Art cannot be an end in itself. It is simply a kind of vehicle that can deliver you the truth for which you are seeking. And when you have found that truth then the vehicle can be abandoned – there is no need to attract attention to it. It is very characteristic that while reading his own verses Khlebnikov often said: “And so on”. He was against such a barrier of existence, reached such deep layers that neither poetry nor music – nothing human, nothing comprehended by the mind or perceived by the senses – could penetrate. Music, poetry and philosophy are all aspects of a craft. Khlebnikov smashed the shells of individual activities. It is probable that we find the truth at the boundaries between activities. Syncretism is philosophy and poetry, music and magic. The time has now come when this can be said. Man must be syncretic. He does not have to be a philosopher, he does not have to be a poet, and he does not have to be a musician. He must be all of these things at the same time. This is exactly what I am referring to when I speak of the Shaman. The Shaman stands for action and for a much closer cosmic unity than the philosopher, the poet or the musician. Whereas the artist or philosopher simply expresses or interprets the idea of unity, the Shaman actually embodies it – he truly realizes it”<sup>4</sup>.

*Night in Galicia* set to the lyrics by Velimir Khlebnikov is one of Martynov’s most characteristic works bearing out the latest cultural trends.

### **Text and Music**

By his methods of treating text Martynov enters into polemics with the approach established in the New Music. To quote the composer himself, “The text constitutes a grammatical, semantic and syntactic structure. The New Music virtually ignores the structure of the text, concentrating in its treatment on pure feelings invoking cheerfulness or sadness. I see my task in restoring the correlations of melody and the text that had prevailed in the divine-service chanting systems, e.g. the Gregorian

and *Znamenny* liturgical chants, and in archaic folklore. The chief point is that I'm not interested in the emotional or psychological content of the text. I'm concerned only about the text as a structure. I'm working only on those texts which can represent this structure. My task is to create a structure reflecting the structure of the particular text or existing concurrently or imitating this structure. It necessarily involves the presence of certain syncretism in which a musical form reflects the preset, selected extra-musical structure."

### Three Worlds

Martynov has set to music two poems by Velimir Khlebnikov, namely *Night in Galicia* and *The Woodland Blues*. The first poem is distinguished by the mermaids' songs included in its fabric and published as early as the 19th century by I.P. Sakharov in the collection *Tales of the Russian People*. To quote the composer, "The songs of water-nymphs are magical incantations; these are arcane, i. e. constituting a set of sounds conventionally regarded as nonsensical, though in their time they carried some magical meaning. Outwardly, these invocations strike a chord with Khlebnikov's avant-garde ideas of "esoteric" language. Therefore, they make part and parcel of the text in Khlebnikov's poem. Here you can discern an intersection of maximally archaic elements with the modern linguistic methods used early in the 20th century. I decided to transfer the problem I faced to a musical plane, i. e. to take up archaic patterns and apply to them modern composition techniques, in particular, minimalism. Galicia is located in the western part of Ukraine, a place where certain elements of archaic perception are still preserved. This land abounds in legends about *mavkas* (dryads), naiads and demigods. For this reason the piano score is drawn on the Western-Slavic melodic element: not so much quotations as abstract tunes based on Guzul harmonies. Hence, it comprises three components: authentic archaism, linguistic archaism characteristic of Khlebnikov's avant-garde verses dating back to the early 1920s, and the composition techniques used late in the 20th century, partly minimalism, and partly including some elements of pop and mass culture." Hence, the text incorporates three spheres: the alphabet, vocalized vowels – the simplest prime elements, magical syllable-phonemes, and ordinary verbal verses. These three spheres symbolize the world hierarchy in its vertical line. The alphabet is the supreme world, the world of primordial non-manifested reality. A magical word stands for the world of gods, and the colloquial words represent the human world.

**Ritual.** The other levels and concepts are also fitting into the situation. The alphabet embodies the

fundamental principles of being, a world order. A magical word from the world of gods is identified with a certain magical action. Finally, the colloquial word and the human world correspond to everyday actions. To quote the composer, "The matter involves the building of a certain ritual action, with its essence seen in putting life in order. A ritual restores the order violated by the stream of life."

### Concepts

Khlebnikov's plot forms another substantive plane. One of the protagonists in the intrigue, the Wind, symbolizes poetic inspiration. He is asked to tell a story, and he invents a story about a mermaid who finds herself caught in the fisherman's net. To quote the composer once again, "Here it is all finely interlocked: since a poetic word is real, it is what occurs actually in real life. The mermaid finds herself caught in the fisherman's net because the Wind has made up such a poem. Thus a parallel semantic lagoon arises – a problem of real and virtual processes. Then comes the morning, according to Khlebnikov, and all this obscurity is washed away."

There is another connotation which we shall define as *quadrivium* and *trivium*. In the Middle Ages, along with arithmetic, geometry and astronomy, music was included in *quadrivium*, i. e. a system of disciplines concerned with ontological problems, while *trivium* (grammar, dialectics and rhetoric) was engaged in the study of expressive means.

In the New Times, music moved from *quadrivium* to *trivium*, from *ontogeny* to *mimesis*, from the real plane into virtual space: along with grammar, dialectics and rhetoric, it started to explore the matters of expression. According to Martynov, "It is not accidental that there appeared the following set phrase: 'Music is the language of feelings'... Music turned into the language of feelings only in the New Times. It means that it has been caught in the nets of literature, in the same way as that above-mentioned mermaid. It may be said that *Night in Galicia* is understood as the slumber of humanity during the New Times with its phantoms of great literature and great music, but upon awakening from that sleep all these phantoms turn into the primordial order and the alphabet." As we can see this passage involves the philosophical question: what is music? Khlebnikov's plot serves Martynov as a gigantic metaphor for a change of paradigms: from *ontogeny* to *mimesis*. But the composer reigns in his poetic space, he develops that story further on and dictates that music should return from *mimesis* back to *ontogeny*, into *quadrivium* so that music would again engage itself in the matters of being but not those of expression.

### The text structure

The text structure forms a kind of circle. It all begins with the alphabet, followed by magical words, then gradually making the basis for the appearance of words used in daily life. And at this point, when this order is disrupted, the magical words are running low, there emerge different semi-mythical creatures: mermaids, the Wind and the like, bringing forth the narration about love and betrayal. In the following texts, the number of colloquial words is augmenting while the number of magical words is diminishing. But when this situation reaches a certain peak, the number of magical words starts gradually to increase, and eventually it all comes over again to the alphabet, i. e. back to the primary order. As a matter of fact, this circle may be started out in a new way.

### Musical devices

According to Martynov, the musical structure is founded on the following three principles: addition, repetition, and binary opposition. These principles are not only musical. When the terms used by Martynov are converted into the terms defining structural archetypes of a myth and ritual, repetition corresponds to the archetype of a series (the principle of invocation: incantations). Addition (accumulation, augmentation) is engraved into a series as its variety (let us recall *The House That Jack Built* or the Russian tale *Little Turnip*). The principle of binary oppositions conveys the struggle based on *agon*, i. e. contest. The universal mythological structures took shape in a myth and ritual, acting as meaning- and structure-generating factors in any text, but not only in the musical text.

So far as Martynov refers to a ritual, the musical structure is subjected to the action of these archetypes. The alphabet is sung as invocations or incantations: a-a-a, o-o-o, e-e-e and u-u-u. The same underlies the stream of magical words. The texts of vocal movements are built up as couplet-like strophes, also according to the series principle.

**The principle of opposition** or *agon* acts in various structural aspects: vocal/instrumental, male/female, solo/choral singing. **The principle of addition** as a sequence of augmenting series controls several spheres. The range of melody is growing from one movement to another: from one note-phoneme up to songs within the octave and backwards (the addition is offset by subtraction of series, i. e. the diminishing range). The number of voices at first grows from monophony to two-voice texture and gradually up to chorus, but upon reaching this culmination point the fabric falls apart slowly into monophonic

invocations. On the whole, the structure is built up as a circular process, cyclic and sweeping into infinity.

From the highest order through a magical action, this process descends down into the world of daily actions, into the human world where all is violated but “the ritual elevates these actions up towards magical actions, and they regain order all over again.” In this case we can observe how the shaping of musical forms lays down not proper musical principles but universal structural archetypes ingrained in a ritual.

### Performance

*Night in Galicia* necessarily contains a visual component. Its plastic elements include roundels and games, gestures and pantomimes, costumes and scenery decorations. What is it? Perhaps, it is a cantata, concerto or an opera. No, it is a game, a rite, ritual, or an installation. Taken all together, it can be clearly united in the term borrowed from the modern theatre, namely, “game structure”. This composition is written for the authentic folk ensemble directed by Dmitry Pokrovsky. The members of this ensemble can easily sing in ringing, guttural voices, being equally capable of avant-garde and archaic sound production, imitating and expressing relevant sounds. The ritual type of action is inherent in ethnic singers. Their games, roundels and game contests reveal their authenticity. Their syncretism is authentic, being ontologically genuine. *Night in Galicia* strikes a chord with the film *Shadows of our Forgotten Ancestors* by Sergei Parajanov not only in its mystical Carpathian colouring but also in its ritual archaic and mythological aspects.

Yet, syncretism embraces not only the areas going beyond genre characteristics but music in general, namely: the word, music, the magic of numerals, ritual, philosophy, culturology, and the manifestation of the author’s philosophical intensions.

This composition breaks away from the opus-written culture. Its boundaries are open and its interpretations never repeat themselves. The same is true of its visual aspect: the singers’ motions are spontaneous, with each new soloist bringing in his or her own plastic quality. *Night in Galicia* has easily adopted such extra-musical components as performance, scenery decorations and kinetic installations used by Francisko Infante. This artist is famous for his “objects” and “artefacts” in the vein of land-art combining spatial structures and natural landscapes. His action entitled as “Sign Structuring” took place in the rear of the stage, behind the Opus Posth Group and the Dmitry Pokrovsky Ensemble. The spatial composition was expanding concurrently with the musical line. In either case, the hidden process of gradual and steady

structuring was going on throughout behind the vivid scenes of games and roundels. The closing of a circle in music and the structuring of a "sign" within the space of the artefact – the Sun – came to an end simultaneously. The game structure of a ritual combined with an interactive installation offers one more way to new syncretism and another situation alternative to a concerto.

While Martynov stands up for overcoming the author's individuality in composition, Tatiana Grindenko declines the status of an eminent virtuoso performer. Martynov hides himself behind the authentic tunes of ethnic music and an austere pagan ritual, while Grindenko makes the members of her ensemble wear the black priestly vestments of Japanese monks and helmets on their heads. The nameless brotherhood of "Opus Posth" looks like a detachment of special rangers and reminds of Malevich's supremacist figures. Grindenko accepts the first comparison by saying: "But we are indeed special rangers." This acknowledgment speaks for itself.

As for the second comparison, it is no mere chance to mention Kazimir Malevich in this case. The kinetic installation moving Infante's screens are akin to Malevich's pictographic palette and geometrical figures, which thereby arouses allusions of a paradigmatic magnitude by entwining folklore and avant-garde, Khlebnikov's "esoteric" poetry and Malevich's suprematism, Martynov's music and ritual, into a unified conceptual knot. Taken all together in Martynov's game structure, it implements the idea of a unified field of culture, that is, new syncretism. This is what, according to Martynov, implies the end of an autonomous musical opus. Therefore, the end of composers' time ushers in "the advent of new epos, new folklore, and a new ritual".

## References

- 1 Quoted from: Чинаев, 1990, p. 31.
- 2 Сильвестров, 2004.
- 3 Мартынов, 2008, p. 1.
- 4 Martynov, 1996.

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## Santrauka

Meno ribų klausimas yra XX a. *idée fixe*. Šiame amžiuje menui teko būti įvairiausių naujovių liudytoju, kol neišvengiamai iškilo esminis klausimas: „O kas tai yra menas?“ Kalbant apie kompozitorius, vargu ar galima rasti vienareikšmišką ir aiškų atsakymą į šį klausimą. Tradicinės sąvokos, tokios kaip „garsų menas“ arba „jausmų kalba“, prarado savo perspektyvas po C. Debussy, I. Stravinskio ir E. Varèse'o. Kompozitorius Vladimiras Martynovas plėtoja „kompozitorių eros pabaigos“ idėją, pabrėždamas naujas muzikos esmės įžvalgas, atitinkančias dabartinius kultūros procesus.

Šiandien didžiausia reikšmė teikiama darbams, sukurtiems skirtingų meno kalbų sankirtoje. Šia tendencija siekiama atskleisti *vientisą kultūros sritį*. „Kompozitorių eros pabaigos“ idėja, suformuluota Vladimiro Martynovo knygos pavadinime, puikiai įsikomponuoja į naująją paradigmą. Ji įgyja tarpdisciplininio (įvairias temas apėriamčio) požiūrio bei universalumo formą ir pasireiškia įvairiais lygmenimis: muzikos išorinių sąsajų su kitomis kalbomis lygmenyje ir vidinių sąsajų lygmenyje, t. y. disciplinų tarpusavio sąveika muzikos erdvėje, kurią lemia tam tikra koncepcija. Idėja, pabrėžianti „kompozitorių eros pabaigą“, reiškia ne ką kita, kaip *naująjį sinkretizmą*. V. Martynovo meniniai interesai apima Rytų ir Vakarų tradicijas, pasaulietiškus ir religinius, profesionalius ir liaudies menus. Jo perteikiamos inovacijos yra radikaliai, tačiau, kalbant apie senąsias tradicijas, jis visų pirma gilinasi į jų ištakas ir archaizmą. Būdinga V. Martynovo savybė – matyti muziką jos susiliejimo su užmuzikiniai principais plotmėje. *Naujasis sinkretizmas* yra vienas pagrindinių jo metodų. „Naktis Galicijoje“, pagrįsta Velimiro Chlebnikovo lyrika, yra vienas būdingiausių Martynovo darbų, palaikančių naujausias kultūros tendencijas. Straipsnyje nagrinėjami įvairūs kompozicijos aspektai: tekstas ir muzika, trys pasauliai, ritualas, koncepcijos, teksto struktūra, muzikinės priemonės ir atlikimas. Šis kūrinys išsiveržia iš opusų kultūros. Jo ribos atviros, o interpretacijos niekada nesikartoja. Čia natūraliai įsikomponuoja tokie užmuzikiniai elementai, kaip performansas, scenos dekoracijos ir kinetinės instaliacijos, naudojamos Francisco Infante'o.

Kompozicijoje V. Martynovas stengiasi „įveikti“ autoriaus individualumą; Tatjana Grindenko atmeta įžymaus virtuozo atlikėjo statuso idėją. V. Martynovo savitumas atsiskleidžia autentiškomis etninės muzikos melodijomis ir asketiškomis pagonių apeigomis, o T. Grindenko būdinga tai, kad ji ansamblio narius aprenkia juodais japonų vienuolių drabužiais ir uždeda jiems šalmus. Nežinoma „Opus posth“ brolija atrodo

tarsi specialiųjų patrulių padalinys, primenantis K. Malevičiaus suprematistines figūras.

Sujungus viską į V. Martynovo žaidimo struktūrą, įgyvendinama vientisos kultūros srities idėja, t. y. naujasis sinkretizmas. Pasak V. Martynovo, būtent tai reiškia nepriklausomo muzikinio kūrinio pabaigą. Taigi „kompozitorių eros pabaiga“ skelbia „naujojo epo, naujojo folkloro ir naujojo ritualo pasirodymą“.