

Contemporary Music and Visual Arts in the Light of Postmodern Philosophy

The problem of the relation between music and visual image becomes especially actual in the epoch of domination of visual perception in the world view. The visual image is full of hidden symbols and implicit messages and we have to decode all of them, claims the semiotic conception. Clifford Geertz, assuming that the culture consists of psychological structures, notes the necessity of its description by the systematical rules which he calls the “ethnological algorithm” (2005, p. 26). We may suppose that the similar algorithms are inherent not only to the descriptions of the culture from an ethnographic point of view but to the contemporary art too. Thus, we have to find the sign system of contemporary art to understand it. These mental structures, which form the culture, make the influence on creators of different kinds of art. That allows us to consider the relations between music and visual arts in the light of postmodernism and its philosophy.

Jean Baudrillard, in his famous work *Simulacra and Simulation* argues two necessities for the modern society – necessity of the “visible myth of beginning” (2005, p. 16) and necessity of the “wild naturalness” that had disappeared (2005, p. 21). The compensation of the need for myth of beginning is going by revival of elements of the archaic culture: by interest in authentic traditions of ancient cultures (oriental in particular), by imitation of petroglyphic painting, or by passion in the Middle age and Renaissance art, which is more close to our time. The range of possibilities to recover the lost “wild naturalness” by art is also quite wide: from rejection of artificial cinema effects and appearance of New Simplicity as music direction, to the compound of genetic codes of plant and human in experimental art. All these cases will be described below.

Now let's try to define the time limits which separate the medieval art from Stone Age, with its cave paintings in context of the myth of beginning search, which is characteristic for postmodern society. According to Foucault, the episteme of Renaissance is the last episteme containing connections between sign and that what this sign mean (1966, p. 62). However, more interesting aspect, which has to be described here is the connections between episteme of 16th century and magic, symbolic conception of the world, based on the system of similarity inherent to the trinital system of relations of signs in the Renaissance epoch. Jerzy Topolski, the author of preface to the *Archeologie du Savoir* of Michel Foucault argues the same principle:

According to M. Foucault a dominating episteme in the Renaissance was the episteme of similarity, assuming that the sense of things may be found by discovering of the proper word. Thanks to that the possibility of power under things could be established by the words, on the base of similarity with things which these words mean. As we can see, we have there the magic and symbolic conception of the world (2002, p. 15).

The principle of similarity, according to which everything could be connected to everything by the common precedents, may be considered not only in the context of search for the lost authenticity, but makes the main algorithm of information selection in the Internet search engines. The same principle expresses the II non-hierarchical model of world view, claimed by Manovich, the model of hyperlinks (2006, p. 73). In the light of above mentioned, the time ambitus doesn't impress anymore, because the magic and symbolic conception of world was inherent to the 16th century episteme as well as to the totemic believes of humanity in the Paleolithic Age.

The relation between archaic and contemporary time on the level of computer technologies is not limited to application of similarity principle as the selection algorithm of online search systems, but also as direct analogies with Digital Art. Thus, illusion to the archaic culture appears in the interactive installation *Ghost Pole Propagator* of Golan Levin (Liesler, 2009, p. 255). On his own site, the author of this installation explains his conception and makes reference to the “ancient petroglyphs of the British Isles” (Levin, 2007). Hence this reference to the archaic culture is made consciously, as part of the author's conception.

The other creator who made the conscious references to the archaic culture was the American painter, author of the dropping technique of painting, Jackson Pollock (Zuffi *et al.*, 1999, p. 390). It's true that he turned on to this subject in the late 30th, but this is important to note that this period was characterized by the very fast cinema and media development. This is really important, because of these multiple copies production of one original artifact, the media led to the appearance of simulacra, inherent to our time.

The art work of Pollock has some connections with postmodernism too. His pictures was used to illustration of certain pieces of Steve Reich, for example in *Octet* (Shvets, 2012, 1.2) and minimalism, with its famous

repetitive technique of composition, creates an allusion to the repetitions of spell-intonations from the time of shamanism and totemic beliefs. The aim of such a repetition was putting into trance and meditation state, and meditation state as part of culture life plays an important role in the postmodern condition too. Just the same way, using the images of idols and petroglyph paintings, was visualized the *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices & Organ* of Steve Reich by some admirer of his work (Shvets, 2012, 1.3).

Designating some ways of the lost authenticity compensation by emergence of some elements of the archaic culture, let us consider the ways of the wild naturalness compensation. Just before Baudrillard the other french philosopher, Claude Lévi-Strauss, also drew attention to this problem, but in the context of the ethnography and endangered primitive societies (Lévi-Strauss, 1962). It's important to note, that the ways of the wild naturalness compensation are multiple too – we can find it in traditional paintings and in New Simplicity music direction, as well as in Digital Art, cinema and experimental art.

Let's begin from examples of cinema to better understand the expression of the idea of naturalness in the New Simplicity music direction. Lars von Trier, creator of *Melancholia* film, is famous by complete reject from any cinematic effects. He believes that cinema should refuse from any artificiality in angles and light and follow only one principle – the principle of naturalness. This rush to the naturalness, especially of emotional expression, and the reject from any avant-garde complexities of form or musical language is inherent to the New Simplicity too. This music direction has appeared in the early 70th, and the most famous representatives of this style are Arvo Pärt, John Tavener, Henrik Górecki (Fisk, 1996) and Valentin Silvestrov. The critique of the New Simplicity by apologists of the avant-garde, however, doesn't detract the merits of this direction and in the context of the above mentioned aspiration to the naturalness, the new simplicity possess the features of regularity and conditionality by the needs of contemporary society. A further confirmation of this thesis as psychological structure of the postmodern society is the French poetry of 60th–70th, which also tends to look for simplicity and naturalness of expression:

In the era of urban civilization, technology and science, his [*of Pierre Oster*] search for the “true place” is manifested by a passionate attention to the most simple and basic things (Brunel, 1999, p. 697).

Traditional painting art more directly expresses this aspiration of the postmodern society. The nature subject appears on the canvases of the contemporary Italian painters Paolo Veniziani, Adriana di Dario, Claudia Cecconi, Gene Pompa (Shvets, 2011), as well as in the tree-dimensional installations of polish contemporary artist Janusz Jerzy Cywicki (Katalog, 2009), with artifacts, resembling the texture of raw marble, suspended to the ceiling and “voiced” by generative music.

Digital Art also contains the examples of those needs embodiment. The idea of nature is expressed here on the level of 3D paintings creation of Gerhard Manx (Liesler, 2009, p. 97), of Eelco Brand (Liesler, 2009, p. 113), as well as in installations with real plants used by Ken Goldberg (Liesler, 2009, p. 149) or Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau (Liesler, 2009, p. 243). Quite unusual the idea of the nature is shown in the common project *Rectified Flowers* of Golan Levin and Kyle McDonald (Levin *et al.* 2010), where the nature becomes the starting point for creation of some other nature, some alternative nature to the previous.

The most courageous reflection of this trend presents the experimental art, which realized the compound of human and flower genetic codes, as result appeared the new live organism – *Edunia*, which means the syllabic abbreviation of “Eduardo” (the name of author of this project) and the kind of flower – “petunia” (Zawojski, 2009). The idea of nature which was “the passionate deciphering of the universe here below” for the French poetry in 70th, in particular for Pierre Oster (Brunel, 1999, p. 698), with idealization of the physical being expressed by the description of the process of sensor feeling, by exaltation and idealization of natural forces, transformed to an attempt of the physical, genetic splicing of human and wildlife for 21st century's artists.

In such a context the bio-philosophical rhizome concept of Gilles Deleuze (Hansen, 2000) and the search of concepts of multiplicities by Michele Serres in the forms of natural phenomena – clouds and fire, becomes clear (1995, cited O'Sullivan, 2006). It's quite interesting that the sounds of natural phenomena (the noise of the wind, the noise of the sea, the bird singing) begin to play an integral role as the textural element not only in numerous works of the “common” authorship presented in YouTube, where the fans of some composer work make a remix by adding the video or the sound of above mentioned natural phenomena (Shvets, 2012, 2.1), but in the conceptions of professional composers too (for example *Vestnik* of Valentin Silvestrov). The added sounds of nature, according to the theory of Gunther Kress (2006), constitute a semiotic form, expressing thus the image of an environment from which this sound was taken.

Previously specified isolated cases of the known musical compositions processing by admirers, in fact, have a mass character and the range of possible transformations is quite large: from the add of static image, just to the musical remix in programs for creation of electronic music. Such a tendency acquires a special meaning in the explosion of creativity. This phenomenon is the sequence of esthetization, though the assessment of explosion of creativity is not always positive, because it contains the danger of obligatory creativity and which is, as some authors assume, not peculiar to all humans (Krzysztofek, 2006, p. 69).

In this phenomenon of creativity explosion we are especially interested in video and images, selected by admirers to the postmodern music compositions, representatives of two directions – minimalism and New Simplicity. The attempt to find any criteria of the visual images selection, could allow us to give the answer to the range of questions, important from the semiotic point of view as: which semantic series are provoked by this or that composition and is it possible to find any regularities in it?

Let's take for our analyze the *Spiegel im Spiegel* of Arvo Pärt, because this composition got the largest number of different visual interpretations. Among the raised subjects – pictures of nature and the paintings on the nature theme (5 video from 6). In those photo and video of living nature dominate the images of water, sky and sunset (Shvets, 2012, 2.2). The sky image appears also in *Nunc Dimittis*, *Summa for Strings*, *Fur Alina*, and the image of water – in *Silouans Song* (Shvets, 2012, 2.3).

The visualizations of Steve Reich's compositions are also rich in images of nature, but there we can find some other images of the same nature. The images of plants which appear in *Digital Art* appear in both parts of *Music for a Large Ensemble*, pictures of nature from the point of the bird in flight view – in *Six Pianos* and the images of desert and fire in *Desert Music* (Shvets, 2012, 2.4). In the last example the composer pointed the program concept of the work by him-self – is it an accidental fact or not? We'll see later. The common image for visualizations of Pärt's and Reich's compositions is the image of water, which appears in *Music for Mallet Instruments*, *Voices & Organ* and *Four organs* (Shvets, 2012, 2.5).

The pictures of nature and the same image of water appear in visualization of John Tavener's music too (Shvets, 2012, 2.6). This composer belongs to the Sacra Nova sacral music direction, so the consequent question appears – what relation have the pictures of nature to religion? Especially in the context of typical psychological structures, mentioned above. The answer to this question gives the introduction to *Harmonium* of the other minimalist composer – John Adams. Analyzing his own composition, he argues the image of the sea as universal archetype, “archetype of the Unconscious”, which aspired him to write this work (Adams, 1981). If we remember the pictures of the wild nature, which made the base of *The Tree of Life* film of Terrence Malick, every time when the heroes turned to God, we can see, that the images of nature was related with non-anthropomorphic image of God. Now, if we compare the non-anthropomorphic view of divine essential in this postmodern film (in which, by the way, the music of Tavener and Górecki have been used), and those images of nature, added to the sacral compositions of John Tavener and Arvo Pärt (which belongs to the Sacra Nova direction too), appears the third need of the modern society. Thus, by analysis of music and visual parts, we came to the third psychological structure – the need of metaphysics.

The absence of the metaphysics in the postmodern society was also noticed by Baudrillard, but in another work (2004). The absence from one point of view and the loyalty to the metaphysics from the other point (Bauman, 2000, p. 277) generated numerous forms of its search. Someone is looking for it in mystical orthodox Christianity, as composers of Sacra Nova direction, others – in eastern wisdom. Whole series of Paolo Cohelo's literary works, who according to some critics “sell” the lite forms of eastern wisdom proves this suggestion. Without giving any assessment to the creativity of Cohelo, let's pay attention to another film of other author – *The Fountain* of Darren Aronofsky, in which the spirit life of the hero was presented as a range of meditation scenes of his “spirit body”. As reflection of the common tendency of Eastern images references, appears *Desert Music* of Steve Reich, mentioned above already. Finally, the numerous images of the cosmic space appearing as visualization added by admirer, for example in *Ludus* of Arvo Pärt, or, and more frequently, as authors conception: *Cosmic Lament VI* of Tavener (Shvets, 2012, 3.1), *Stars* of Brian Ano, *Shades of Orion 2* of Pete Namlook and Tetsu Inoue etc. (Shvets, 2012, 3.2). The last two compositions belong to the ambient direction, which is one of the most characteristic music direction for postmodernism (Shvets, 2011). If refer the New Simplicity examples, the *Copernician Symphony* of Henryk Górecki will correspond to the same embodiment of cosmic space image.

So, summing all above mentioned we may conclude the appearance of three needs of postmodern society – authenticity, naturalness and metaphysics. Visual images, selected for the compositions of postmodern composers of such directions as minimalism, New Simplicity, Sacra Nova and ambient (as well as their program

conceptions), proves this fact in both, conscious or unconscious expression, cases. The dominating images of the sky, plants and fire are reminiscent of the concepts of multiplicity in Deleuze and Serres philosophical conceptions – clouds, fire and growing grass, seen as rhizome structure. Thus, the regularity of the appearance of those images and themes in postmodern art may be regarded on the level of the psychological structures, inherent not only to the art of masters or admirers attempts, but to the postmodern philosophy too.

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Santrauka

Šiuolaikinė muzika ir vaizduojamieji menai postmoderniosios filosofijos šviesoje

Šiame straipsnyje šiuolaikinių menų, o ypač muzikos ir dailės, kontekstas nagrinėjamas remiantis postmoderniąja filosofija. Postmoderniosios kultūrinės erdvės dėsningumams nustatyti ir apibūdinti pasitelkiamos tokios sąvokos kaip „psichologinės struktūros“ ar „kultūrinis algoritmas“, kurias amerikiečių antropologas Cliffordas Geertzas naudojo savo etnologinėse kultūrų studijose. Postmoderniojoje visuomenėje autorė įžvelgia tris tokias psichologines struktūras: autentiškumo siekimą, natūralumo siekimą ir metafizinis ieškojimus, susijusius su Jeano Baudrillardo teiginiais. Tokiose muzikos kryptyse kaip naujasis paprastumas, minimalizmas ir ambientinė muzika šių psichologinių struktūrų pasireiškimo formos pristatomos konceptuali lygmeniu. Vaizduojamuosiuose menuose (šiuolaikinė tapyba, skaitmeninis menas, eksperimentinis menas ir ypač biomenas) minėtos struktūros pristatomos ir konceptuali, ir vizualiniu lygmeniu. Šios pasireiškimo formos mene atitinka sudėtinius Michelio Serreso modelius ir Gilles'io Deleuze'o biofilosofiją. Šioje postmoderniosios visuomenės poreikių analizėje labai svarbus vaidmuo tenka daugybei postmoderniojo laikotarpio kompozitorių (Arvo Pärtas, Johnas Tavener ar Steve'as Reichas) muzikos vizualizavimo ir remiksavimo pavyzdžių, atliktų jų kūrybos gerbėjų ir pristatytų „YouTube“ portale. Šių kompozitorių muzikos papildymas laukinės gamtos vaizdais ir garsais rodo semantines sąsajas tarp postmoderniosios muzikos ir minėtų vaizdų bei garsų konotacijų. Taigi tiriant minėtų psichologinių struktūrų pasireiškimus galima remtis postmoderniosios visuomenės mąstymo pagrindais, t. y. analizuoti postmoderniosios filosofijos sąvokas ir lyginti jas su postmoderniosiomis profesionaliosios muzikos ir dailės kryptimis, pasitelkiant daugybę postmoderniosios muzikos vizualizavimo pavyzdžių, atliktų šios muzikos mylėtojų, ir taip ieškoti šiuolaikinės postmoderniosios kultūros algoritmo ženklų.