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THE DRAMATURGICAL FUNCTION OF THE IMPROVISATORY SEGMENTS OF FORM IN ALFRED SCHNITTKE'S *FIRST SYMPHONY*

Abstract: Alfred Schnittke's controversial *First Symphony* (1969-1972) represented a sound panorama of the world of Socialist Realist kitsch in which Schnittke was forced to live and work. All the various musical materials, styles and techniques that Schnittke used in this symphony have a dramaturgical/narrative function. Among other things, Schnittke included a variety of improvisational segments, ranging from aleatoric sections for the entire orchestra to cadenzas for various soloists. The improvisatory segments are incorporated in this symphony either to depict the chaos of everyday life, or as an expression of the composer's frustration and resignation at the devaluation of contemporary art music. Furthermore, in the Soviet totalitarian society, Schnittke's inclusion of segments which unleash the musicians into the genre of the 'great' symphony represent the composer's act of resistance and an expression of his urge for artistic and personal freedom.

Key words: Alfred Schnittke, Soviet Union, symphony, improvisation, aleatorics, cadenza, chaos, polystylism

Alfred Schnittke's controversial *First Symphony* (1969-1972) marked a turning point in his career, not only because it promoted his 'polystylistic' compositional idiom in the domain of symphonic music,[1] but also because it helped to establish his reputation as an avant-garde, non-conformist artist in the Soviet Union of the day.[2]

Schnittke considered several (sub)titles for his *First Symphony*, among them 'K[eine] Sinfonie'[3] and 'Symphony-Antisymphony/Antisymphony-Symphony'.[4] These (abandoned) titles testify that

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[1] The 'polystylistic' method, characterised by an extravagant and explicit clashing of styles within a single work, first appeared in some of Schnittke's chamber compositions from the 1960s, such as *Dialogue for cello and ensemble* (1965), Second Sonata for violin and piano *Quasi una sonata* (1968) etc.

[2] Levon Hakobian noted that the premiere of the *First Symphony* in Gorky (Nizhny Novgorod, on 9 February 1974) was truly 'sensational' and represented a 'symbolic date' in the history of Soviet music. Levon Hakobian, *Music of the Soviet Age 1917-1987,* Stockholm, Melos, 1998, 221. Michael Kurtz calls this premiere 'a key event in the history of Soviet music': Michael Kurtz, *Sofia Gubaidulina – A Biography,* Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2007, 109. Schnittke's biographer Alexander Ivashkin notes that 'a majority of critics agreed that the work marked the beginning of a new era in Russian music and that it suggested completely new ideas for the [symphonic] genre.' Alexander Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke,* London, Phaidon Press, 1997, 121.

[3] Untranslatable; approximate meaning 'One non-existent symphony.'

[4] Валентина Холопова и Евгениа Чигарёва, *Альфред Шнитке. Очерк жизни и творчества*, Москва, Советский Композитор, 1990, 73-74.

Schnittke was aware that his work was deeply rooted in the symphonic tradition but, at the same time, constituted a radical break with it. Although much has been written on *First Symphony* (both positive and negative), the work is performed only occasionally, and the score has never been published.

The reaction to the first performance of the *Symphony* in the USSR was 'stormy but for the most part extremely enthusiastic. For many musicians and music lovers it was a stimulating shock. They had never heard anything like it before.'[5] Western critics have been much harsher.[6] The *First Symphony* (alongside other Schnittke's works) was often dubbed a superficial, banal and excessive piece; the composer was accused of communicating by means of quotations because he was unable to create a coherent musical language; also, it was noted that the compositional procedures applied were unrefined, and the complex avant-garde machinery used in an unsophisticated manner.[7] However, when this work is seen in the context of Schnittke's oeuvre and the entire Soviet aesthetics, the situation alters drastically. Schnittke himself was aware that he would be accused of plagiarism, lack of invention, etc.[8] Already in 1971, he wrote that no 'pure' style (tonal music, serialism, jazz, sonoristics, etc.) was capable of expressing the contemporary reality; thus the stylistic eclecticism had become mandatory.[9]

Following the tradition of Soviet 'realist' art, Schnittke works with various 'real(istic)' sound materials, which are expected to symbolise different phenomena and stand for social relations and situations.[10] All the various musical materials and techniques used in this symphony have a dramaturgical/narrative function. Many scholars agree that the *First Symphony* would present nothing but a curious essay in collage music making had the composer not cast himself in the role of a socially conscious humanist. I am going to focus on the improvisational segments of the *First Symphony* and try to clarify why the composer included them in this work, i.e., what they signify, represent, or mean. Although Schnittke's *Symphony* is not the first orchestral work to contain improvisational segments, the

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[5] Alexander Ivashkin, op. cit*,* 120. The cult status of this work was furthered by the fact that it was only performed once again in the Soviet Union, far away from Russia – namely in Talinn, the capital of Estonia, on 25 December 1975. Cf. Michael Kurtz, op. cit, 123.

[6] For example, on occasion of the symphony's London premiere in 1985 it was dubbed 'Russian vaudeville', 'deadpan comedy' *(The Independent),* 'symphonic anarchy' *(The Daily Telegraph)* and 'crazy, chaotic, exuberant construction' *(Financial Times).* Cf: Alexander Ivashkin, op. cit*,* 123. Also, on the occasion of its 1988 Boston performance, the audience booed and walked out: cf. Michael Kurtz, op. cit, 199.

[7] See, for example: Arnold Whittall, 'Judging Schnittke', *Exploring Twentieth Century Music*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, 121; Alastair Williams, *New Music and the Claims of Modernity,* Aldershot, Ashgate, 1997, 128; et al.

[8] Alfred Schnittke, 'Polystylistic Tendencies in Modern Music', in: Alexander Ivashkin (ed.), *A Schnittke Reader,* Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2002, 89-90.

[9] Ibid.

[10] In Ivashkin's words, Schnittke 'preserves the link between music as a system of sounds and the system of symbols which, thanks to the experience of many generations, is encoded in music .' Alexander Ivashkin, 'Shostakovich and Schnittke: The Erosion of Symphonic Syntax', in: David Fanning (ed.), *Shostakovich Studies,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, 268.

[11] Several factors influenced the 'revival' of improvisation in the second half of the 20th century: (i) John Cage and the 'experimental' aesthetics; (ii) electronic music; (iii) jazz (especially 'free jazz' which could embrace almost anything); (iv) non-European music traditions; (v) the general movement in Western culture towards democratization and universal self-expression, especially in the late 1960s; etc. Cf: Bruno Nettl et al., 'Improvisation', *Grove Music Online,*

variety of them is striking.[11] The symphony contains aleatoric sections performed by the entire orchestra, formulaic improvisations by members of the jazz ensemble, as well as improvised cadenzas for individuals and groups of soloists.[12] The latter anticipate the merge of the genres of symphony and

http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/13738?q=Improvisation&hbutton_search.x=33&hbutton_search.y=6&hbutton_search=search&source=omo_t237&source=omo_gmo&source=omo_t114&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit (Accessed on 12/10/2008).

[12] The distinction between aleatory and improvisation in contemporary music has often been unclear. For example, Paul Griffiths notes that the term *aleatory* should apply to music 'in which the composer has made a deliberate withdrawal of control, excluding certain established usages which fall within this category: for example, keyboard improvisation, the cadenza, the ossia, the ad libitum, unmeasured pauses, alternative scorings and the provision of sets of potentially independent pieces.' Griffiths distinguishes three types of aleatory techniques: '(i) the use of random procedures in the generation of fixed compositions; (ii) the allowance of choice to the performer(s) among formal options stipulated by the composer; and (iii) methods of notation which reduce the composer's control over the sounds in a composition.' However Griffiths admits that the liberty offered by these various means can extend 'from a choice between two dynamic markings to *almost unguided improvisation*.' [emphasis mine] Cf. Paul Griffiths, 'Aleatory', *Grove Music Online*,
http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/00509?q=aleatoric&search=quick&pos=3&_start=1#firsthit (accessed on 12/10/2008). On the other hand, the term *improvisation* 'tends to refer to departures from the text that would have been notationally available but were not actually written out, often for reasons of notational economy, and which rely on the existence of well-known, implied conventions of performance'. Cf: Bruno Nettl et al., op.cit. As we are about to see, Schnittke uses both 'aleatory' and 'improvisation', and it is often impossible to make a clear distinction between the two.

Barry Kernfeld outlines several types of jazz improvisations: (i) paraphrase improvisation; (ii) formulaic improvisation; (iii) motivic improvisation; (iv) modal improvisation; (v) combinations of all previously mentioned techniques. Cf: Barry Kernfeld, 'Improvisation, III: Jazz', in Bruno Nettl et al., op.cit. What Schnittke employs in this symphony mostly fits into the category of formulaic improvisation.

concerto, fully carried out in Schnittke's *Fifth Symphony – Fourth Concerto Grosso* (1988).

In the Soviet music aesthetics, the symphony occupied a central position: it was considered a supreme genre, the crown of composers' achievements, and the 'greatness' of any given symphony was measured by Romantic standards. Alexander Ivashkin remarks that throughout the entire history of Russian music, composers have felt that it was their duty to 'make corrections' to the fate of [West] European musical forms.[13] The Soviet scholar Mark Aranovsky established an 'ideal' model of a symphonic work and discussed the archetypal role of each movement in the overall dramaturgy of the cycle.[14] His study provides valuable clues to the ways in which music was written, analysed and understood at the time when Schnittke embarked on creating his *First Symphony*. In essence, the most important feature of a symphony was the semantic/symbolic meaning both of its separate movements and of the cycle as a whole.[15] Soviet critics looked for hidden programmes and tried to explain the dramaturgy of analysed works in hermeneutical terms, firmly convinced that 'a work of art never exists as a fact of pure art.'[16]

Aranovsky understood the symphony as a 'substitute' for Mass in the atheistic society/world.[17] Schnittke's own writings confirm that he adopted the concept of symphony as an 'atheist Mass'; he also acknowledged that his interest in religious 'intonations' (and religion and mysticism in general) was a consequence of living in an atheistic society.[18] As it was, during the 1970s and 1980s, the concert

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[13] Alexander Ivashkin, 'Shostakovich and Schnittke...', 264.

[14] According to Aranovsky, the four movements of a symphony, by means of relations between the semantic and structural realms, embody four different aspects of the concept of Man:

        first movement – Homo agens (Active Man)
        second movement – Homo sapiens (Contemplative Man)
        third movement – Homo ludens (Playful Man)
        fourth movement – Homo communis (Man as a part of the collective).

Although Aranovsky himself admitted that this ideal model was rarely fully achieved in actual works (as even Beethoven's symphonies, which represented an ideal for generations of Soviet theorists, rarely conformed to it), he claimed that any given work employed a different variant of the ideal model (i.e. 'invariant'), the essence of which was nevertheless preserved. Марк Ароновский, *Симфонические исканиа – Проблеми жанра симфонии в советской музыке 1960-1975 годов*, Ленинград, Советский Композитор, 1979, 25-35.

[15] According to Aranovsky, the symphony is a 'complex sign construction, a statement consisting of 'words' with certain meanings.' Ароновский, op. cit, 160.

[16] Alexander Ivashkin, 'Shostakovich and Schnittke…', 256.

[17] Марк Ароновский, op. cit, 14-17.

[18] For example, Schnittke said: 'A finale like that in Tchaikovsky's *Sixth Symphony*, appears in the era of atheism when the certainty of belief in God has been lost.' Cf: Alexander Ivashkin, 'Shostakovich and Schnittke…', 259. Taruskin notes: 'The world of early Schnittke is Dostoyevsky's world without God, where everything is possible (and nothing matters).' Richard Taruskin, 'After Everything', *Defining Russia Musically – Historical and Hermeneutical Essays,* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997, 99-100. Alexander Ivashkin, 'Conversations with Alfred Schnittke', *A Schnittke Reader,* 6. In this respect Schnittke is not alone, since the works by his most prominent Soviet peers such as Sofia Gubaydulina, Galina Ustvolskaya, Arvo Pärt, Valentin Silvestrov, Vyacheslav Artyomov et al. reveal their constant fascination with religious and mystical topoi, resulting in attempts to convey or express their religious experiences through music. Hence all of them cast themselves in the roles of spiritually evolved creators, practising believers, ascetically devoted to their art. The Soviet audiences projected their utopian desires on art: these composers' works were seen as reflections of the urge for liberation from the gloom everyday life and as mediums for mystical purification.

performances of Schnittke's works in the Soviet cities figured as 'substitutes' for banned religious experiences and became sites for pilgrimage or mass exorcism.[19]

Richard Taruskin believes that the main impulse for creating this symphony was the composer's feeling of cultural alienation.[20] Taruskin labels the 'semiotic' or 'signalling' aspects of Schnittke's musical handwriting 'a traditional characteristic of Russian music' and claims that Schnittke 'fearlessly recycles clichés'.[21] Thus, 'the result is socialist realism minus socialism. […] With a bluntness and an immodesty practically unseen since the days of Mahler, Schnittke tackles life-against-death, love-against-hate, good-against-evil, freedom-against-tyranny, and (especially in the concertos) I-against-the world.'[22] In Ivashkin's words, 'It may be appropriate to apply the old Italian meaning of 'sinifonia' [*sic*](sounding together) to Schnittke's *First Symphony*, as every possible contrasting element coexists in a real microcosm**.** […] The *First Symphony* simply widens the frame of a work of art, making it easier to remove the barrier between music as a product of culture and music as a part of everyday life.'[23]

In Schnittke's 'anti-symphony', 'chaotic construction' actually unfolds in the traditional four movement symphonic cycle. All movements have a clear disposition, and the thematic unity of the cycle is achieved by means of transferring material from one movement to another, using the same thematic core in all movements (except the second), employing similar cadential formulae in outer movements etc. Gennadi Rozhdestvensky, the dedicatee of the symphony, suggested to Schnittke that the beginning of the first movement should be repeated after the end of the symphony.[24]

The scenic action is an integral part of this work: the symphony begins with a theatricised entry of orchestral musicians, the 'actors' in this farce. The Introduction starts with the sound of bells, and follows with the entry of musicians who burst onto the stage led by a trumpet player, who performs a grotesque theme (which is to be repeated in the Coda of the first movement). The composer only indicates the few initial movements for each musician, and then allows them to improvise.[25] This, almost unbearably cacophonic, improvised segment (lasting until [30]) has been dubbed by several Soviet scholars 'the symbol of chaos'.[26] When the chaos reaches its climax, the conductor appears and the

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[19] Ivashkin confirms that the premieres of Schnittke's works in the 1970s and 1980s were 'more than purely musical events'; his music represented a kind of 'spiritual vehicle'. Ivashkin also asserts that in the 1970s and 80s 'Soviet art gradually became a substitute for reality' and remarks that at the same time 'Schnittke enjoyed enormous and unusual popularity […] All performances of Schnittke's music were important events for Russian listeners: in it they found the metaphysical ideas and spiritual values which were lacking in life during the seemingly endless years of revolution, terror, thaw, Cold War, or stagnation.' Alexander Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke,* 123; 60; 215.
[20] Richard Taruskin, op. cit*,* 100.
[21] Ibid, 101.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Alexander Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke,* 120-121.
[24] It was also Rozhdestvensky's idea to hire, beside the Gorky Philharmonics, the jazz ensemble *Melodiya* for the premier performance of the work. Cf: Alfred Schnittke, 'On Gennadi Rozhdestvensky', *A Schnittke Reader,* 76-77.
[25] This segment could be interpreted both as improvisation ('departures from the text that would have been notationally available but were not actually written out, often for reasons of notational economy') and aleatory (the third type: 'methods of notation which reduce the composer's control over the sounds in a composition'). See footnote 12.
[26] Aranovsky claims: 'The formation of music as an ordered sequence of sounds is translated to the realm of realistic

musicians begin to tune up. But the momentum of the preceding chaos is so strong that it starts all over again, and the conductor is forced to interrupt it two more times (at [31] и [32]). The musicians' entry and tuning become integral parts of the symphonic score; furthermore, the thematic materials of the exposition are not given in a ready-made form, but created right in front of the listener.[27] Schnittke here deconstructs/demystifies both the compositional process and the institution of concert performance, thus crossing the barrier between art and reality.

The first theme begins at [33] with a unison *C* in the orchestra. However, this attempt at establishing a proper symphonic theme soon fails, as the initial unison evolves into clusters, and then into a new model of 'chaos' at [34] – twelve independent layers of pop tunes played simultaneously. This episode initiates a series of 'assaults' in which deliberately banal collages obstruct attempts at establishing a 'proper' symphonic theme. It is important to note that Schnittke neither engaged with popular music in order to make his works more accessible, nor stopped making a distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture. In fact, Schnittke explicitly linked the popular music genres with the diabolic.[28] Although he had a high opinion of jazz music, his basic attitude towards vernacular genres was decisively negative.[29] Schnittke used quotations of popular tunes to depict 'absolute evil'.[30]

The main theme is finally established at [36]: it is a 'recitative' that gradually takes the shape of a twelve-note series [*C – E-flat – D – B – A-flat – G – F – G-flat – B-flat – A – C-sharp - E*]. The last three notes of the series form an *A major* chord – but instead of ending the theme there, Schnittke adds a *C minor* chord, thus affirming *C minor* as the key of the symphony. This 'submotif' (*A major* and *C minor* chords in succession) will be repeated in the culminating moment of the third movement.

After finally acquiring a form, the first theme is 'developed' by means of sparse, disjointed fragments in different orchestral groups, with constant changes of meter and tempo.[31] The beginning of the transition (at [43]) is marked by yet another collage of banalities: repetitive rhythms of pop music

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scenic action. […] Music […] emerges from chaos and then gets shaped into organised forms.' Ароновский, op. cit, 159. Kholopova and Chigaryova assert that 'The dramaturgy of the first movement is based on the opposition of themes of harmony and disharmony […] Schnittke aims to position his listener on the very line of fire of the grandiose battle *pro et contra* a positive ethical ideal.' Холопова и Чигарёва, op. cit, 76-77.

[27] Aranovsky states that this 'trick' was first used by Rodion Shchedrin in his Second Symphony. Марк Ароновский, op. cit, 158, footnote 2.

[28] Alexander Ivashkin, 'Conversations with Alfred Schnittke', 32.

[29] Cf: Alfred Schnittke, 'On Jazz', *A Schnittke Reader,* 100.

[30] As aptly described by Taruskin, in Schnittke's later works 'good' is usually associated with a naïve diatonicism, while 'evil' comes in two forms: 'absolute evil' is represented by references to raucous popular music, while 'relative evil' or 'moral realism' consists of ''good' music distorted by avant-garde techniques.' Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music,* Vol. 5 – The Late Twentieth Century, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2005, 467. See also: Alexander Ivashkin, 'Conversations with Alfred Schnittke', 22.

[31] The theme ends with a *crescendo* and *decrescendo* on a single note (*E flat*); this figure (< and > on a single note or a cluster) is a main means of 'punctuation' both in the first and the fourth movements. In this movement, the aforementioned gesture can be found before [43] (beginning of transition), at [53] (end of the second theme), at [81] (end of the exposition) and after [107] (beginning of Coda).

performed by a combo consisting of timpani, electric guitar, harpsichord, harp, celesta and piano, slide into a new 'flood' of quotations and end with a massive *tutti* cluster at [47].[32] In Victoria Adamenko's words, 'the venerated temple of the classical tradition crumble[s] before our ears.'[33]

The second theme (at [48]), centring on *G* (the 'dominant' of *C*), basically offers nothing but this note (just as the first theme was initially represented by a single note *C*!). However these 'variations on one pitch' fail to develop into a theme, instead producing a pointillistic texture which is crudely interrupted at [53] by another cluster, and followed by an ever-growing 'sonoristic' texture mixed with echoes of popular tunes, peaking at [77] on an 80-part cluster.[34] As if this is not enough, Schnittke adds a further blow to an already wobbly sonata form, offering a cadenza for trombone solo at [81] as a conclusion to the exposition. The cadenza is written out in the score, but it can also be completely improvised – it is up to the performer to decide. In this place, the improvisation seems to be a consequence of the composer's resignation: since all his attempts at establishing a proper symphonic movement have failed, Schnittke finally 'gives up' and leaves it up to the soloist to conclude the exposition as (s)he pleases.

The development [82-102] unfolds in a similar manner. Fragments of the first theme occasionally break through the sonoristic layers, improvised chaos and quotations of banalities, but they constantly fail to dominate. At [100] a new 'scene of chaos' emerges: the musicians are allowed to get up, walk around the stage, exchange instruments, talk to one another, thus completely decomposing the already polymetric and polytonal collage. The development, which has already been more or less 'accidental' (and definitely non-developmental!), turns into a 'white noise', an aleatoric (i.e., improvised) cluster accompanied by the musicians' exclamations. At [102] Schnittke finally manages to establish the subdominant and dominant of *C minor/major*, thus preparing the recapitulation and making way for – Beethoven. Namely, at [103], Schnittke attempts to rescue the symphonic form by quoting the ultimate heroic episode of classical symphonism – the transition towards the finale of Beethoven's *Fifth*. However, even Beethoven cannot save the day, as his iconic, optimistic ethos is soon undermined: Schnittke immediately (at [104]) transforms Beethoven's theme into his own first theme.[35] This time it is played out in its full 'recitative', twelve-note form, ending in the same way as in the exposition, with the *A major* chord followed by a *C*

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[32] Among the quoted tunes one finds a cancan, several folk ditties and 'Estrada' songs, etc. Cf: Марк Ароновский, op. cit., 167.

[33] Victoria Adamenko, *Neo-Mythologism in Music: From Scriabin and Schoenberg to Schnittke and Crumb*, Hillsdale, Pendragon Press, 2007, 161.

[34] The section between [53] and [62] has been cut from the (photocopied, handwritten) score that was available to me.

[35] Adamenko notes that 'If the classical models cannot be repeated, neither can their ethos (the heroic, optimistic, reverent, or victorious). Herein lies Schnittke's tragic sense of the loss of the entire world of musico-ethical experience…' Victoria Adamenko, op. cit, 162-163.

minor chord. The transition leads directly into the Coda [107], in which the pedal note *G* (the 'residue' of the unsuccessful second theme) merges with the echoes of the trumpet theme heard in the Introduction. The movement ends with a 'dominant' *G* gradually sinking into a vibrant 'white noise'.

The second movement proceeds in a similar vein, but this time the contrasts are even cruder, the stylistic clashes even more ridiculous and, in accordance with the dramaturgical role of the scherzo, the entire movement is a grotesque joke. A simulation of a baroque *concerto grosso* represents the zone of 'positive', 'harmonious' ideas, while a conglomerate of various 'musics' represent the zone of 'negative', 'disharmonic' phenomena. However, this time Schnittke does not incorporate a single authentic quotation – instead, the movement is based on simulations, pastiches, and 'false samples'.[36] Materials simulated in the scherzo range from the quasi-baroque 'ritornello', to military marches, popular dances, etc. Instead of conveying Beethoven's high-minded heroic ethos, Schnittke here plays with middle-brow and low-brow music materials.

Schnittke described the form of Scherzo as 'some kind of a hybrid of rondo and double variations, with a cantus firmus of a concerto grosso type';[37] however the form of this movement can also be analysed as a mixture of rondo and ABA:

> **A (a)** [1-7] **Scherzo (Ritornello) –** 'concerto grosso'– Allegretto, D major;
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> **b** [7] 'jazz' and 'Webern', with echoes of 'military march'
>
> **a1** [16-22] 'concerto grosso'
>
> **b1** [22] 'jazz' and 'Webern', with echoes of 'military march'
>
> **a2** [31-42] 'concerto grosso': coupled with various 'marches' from [36] on;[38]
>
> **Trio (C)** [57] **Cadenza**
>
> **Transition** [59] 'sonoristics'
>
> **A1 (a)** [61-67] **Scherzo (Ritornello) –** 'concerto grosso'
>
> **Coda** [68]

The scherzo begins with a baroque-like theme in a bright *D major*, orchestrated for strings and harpsichord. From [4] onwards it is confronted by fragments of other simulated dances: 'skeletons' dance', 'foxtrot', 'ragtime', followed by a raucous military march in *C minor*. The different keys and rhythms of all these fragments emphasize the cacophony.

The complex second theme/episode (**b**) consists of cool jazzy rhythms and chords intertwined with atonal utterances *a la* early Webern. These two materials sharply oppose both one another and the merry *concerto grosso*. The banal waltz rhythm undermines any attempt at establishing a link to 'serious'

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[36] The term is introduced by Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman, *Fragmenti o muzičkoj postmoderni,* Novi Sad, Matica Srpska, 1997, 25.

[37] Cf: Дмитрий Шульгин, *Годы неизвестности Альфреда Шнитке,* Москва, Деловая лига, 1993, 65.

[38] The section between [42] and [57] is usually omitted in performances; Schnittke himself approved this cut, however the section has not been removed from the score.

modern(ist) music (represented here by simulations of Webern). Occasional interpolations of the intimidating military march tune in *C minor* further parody this forced coexistence of incompatible elements.

A cadenza *ad libitum* entirely replaces the conventional Trio section (or section C in rondo) of this movement, emphasizing its satirical character. The cadenza can be performed either by a solo instrument, or a group of instruments, or the entire orchestra; it can be based on the themes provided by the composer, or on quotations of materials borrowed from the treasury of classical tradition, or freely improvised – it is up to the conductor and performers to decide how to execute this section. One might interpret this cadenza as a homage to baroque practice, since the baroque tradition has already been successfully evoked (i.e., simulated) in Scherzo. However, as we have seen, in this movement the clash of the 'baroque masters' with popular music actually results in the defeat of the former: the negative forces, represented by the banal vernacular genres, obviously prevail. This is why, just like in the first movement, improvisation here possibly signifies the composer's disappointment and loss of faith in the possibility and purpose of creating art music; therefore, for the second time in this symphony, Schnittke 'gives up' composing.

A transition towards the recapitulation follows the cadenza, starting off at [59] as a *pppp* twelve-note cluster, which arises unnoticed during the cadence and goes on to encompass five octaves. This soft, full, stable sound morphs into a 'sonoristic' section with echoes from the Scherzo, and the synthetic 'white noise' eventually dissolves into multiple 'little noises'.

The recapitulation of the Scherzo (**A1**) is condensed: all the various materials from the Scherzo section reappear at short distances and compete with each other. The conglomerate of banalities 'suffocate' the cheerful concerto grosso. The movement seemingly ends at [67] on a *fff* cluster; however, the Coda (at [68]) resumes the theatrical line of the symphony. The flute player stands up and leads the entire wind ensemble behind the scene; as they depart, they play a multi-voiced canon.

As we have seen, the first two movements unfold in a similar manner and use similar resources. The third movement introduces a greater degree of contrast: for the first time in this symphony, Schnittke allows the 'positive' forces to overwhelm. The third movement reuses several motifs introduced in the first movement, thus establishing a cyclic principle. The third movement begins with the initial motif of the first movement's first theme (the rising minor third, *C – E-flat*), which becomes the main constructive element. Additionally, the culmination of the third movement 'borrows' the ending of the same theme (i.e., the *A major* and *C minor* chords in succession), thus emphasizing the rising minor third. This movement unfolds in an arch form: the gradual 'ascent' [1-12] and 'descent' [two bars after [12] until the end] in the strings are occasionally 'challenged' by interpolations of other motifs in various orchestral groups, but never interrupted. The ascent and descent are based on chromatic, atonal material, while the 'intrusions' are predominantly tonal. In the zone of highest density, the atonal sound mass slides into an *A major* chord, followed by a glum *C minor* chord, which initiates the massive 'landslide' of the entire

orchestra. The winds, still hiding behind the scene, can be heard more frequently, as they occasionally 'respond' to the strings.

In this movement, which is the only one 'untainted' by improvised segments, quotations or mock-quotations ('false samples'), the world of art music, if only for a brief moment, manages to overwhelm the cacophonous sounds of the everyday life. Therefore, all the unresolved tensions from the previous movements transfer to the Finale.

The fourth movement has been conceived as resembling the final movements of Beethoven's *Fifth* and *Ninth Symphonies*, because one hears reminiscences to previous movements before the ultimate resolution. As in the preceding movements, a gradual build up of stylistic layers corrodes the structure of the sonata form from the inside, and the polystylistic layers often morph into long episodes of chaos.[39] The 'theatrical line' of the *Symphony* continues in the beginning of the movement. The winds return to stage in a slow procession, playing a conglomerate of funeral marches.[40] The strings join in with a cheerful Johann Strauss' waltz *Tales from the Vienna Woods*, and the pianist with the first chords of Tchaikovsky's *First Piano Concerto*. The echoes of folk dances and funeral marches collide with them: in this polystylistic 'mash', every motif and instrumental group attempts to overwhelm the others.

The first theme (at [14]) is presented in the form of a twelve-note row, with the identical interval order as in the first movement [*C – E-flat – D – B – A-flat – G – F – G-flat – B-flat – A – C-sharp - E*]. The cyclic principle is at full swing here, but this time around the theme is presented in canon over a background of bells ringing. After a brief 'sonoristic' stint and another episode of 'tuning', this theme morphs into *Dies Irae* (at [22]). The transition ([26]) leads into an unusual, and in this context totally unexpected second theme (at [34]). In an attempt to establish control over the reigning chaos, Schnittke again reaches for quotations, but this time he interpolates themes carrying the highest 'ethical indices'[41]: namely, fourteen different *Sanctus* melodies, piled on top of one another and supported by a *C major* chord.[42] But after 24 bars only, this serene sound image gets distorted, and the exposition ends on a full 12-note cluster, followed by silence.

The development (beginning at [40]) is based on the *Dies Irae* theme, which undergoes various modifications and collides with all sorts of 'alien' materials, ranging from echoes of the classics to

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[39] In the Finale, 'the central dilemma of the work: harmony-anti-harmony, symphony-anti-symphony, is reflected on several mutually intertwined levels, which form a complex knot of dramaturgical contra-statements. These oppositions are: 1) art – pseudo-art, 2) positive – negative aspects of art, 3) style – eclecticism, 4) present – past.' Холопова и Чигарёва, op. cit, 82.

[40] Among them one finds: Chopin's *Funeral march* from his *Piano Sonata* in *B flat minor* (several sections), Grieg's 'Aase's Death' from his first *Peer Gynt* suite, a popular Soviet march *Behind the corner* etc. Cf: Марк Ароновский, op. cit, 161.

[41] The term was introduced by Mark Aranovsky, who noticed a conflict between different layers of culture, different 'musics' carrying different 'ethical indices'. Ароновский, op. cit, 163. The term has also been adopted by Levon Hakobian in his analyses of Boris Tishchenko's and Schnittke's works: cf. Levon Hakobian, 246, 277.

[42] Schnitte took these *Sanctus* melodies from Masses gathered in the volume *Graduale de Tempore et de Sanctis* (Ratisbonae, 1877, p. 8-54). This volume also contains the entire text of the Sequence *Dies Irae*, in *Missa pro Defunctis*. Cf: Холопова и Чигарёва, op. cit, 84, note 14.

'estrada' songs, rock solos, an incredibly cheesy tango and, most remarkably, a lengthy, partially improvised jazz episode (from [59] to [68]).[43] The pathos of *Dies Irae* is undermined and ridiculed by this collage of banalities, presented as an anarchic, uncontrollable force.[44]

At [68] a march replaces the jazz episode, leading to a noisy 'sonoristic' culmination and ending at No. 80 with the recapitulation of the first theme, which is here presented in *ff* semibreves – making its initial melodic similarity to *Dies Irae* quite obvious. At [83] Schnittke evokes the second theme of the first movement by creating another essay in variations on a single pitch. After a brief but loud transition, resembling various 'themes of doom' from Romantic symphonies, Schnittke does not repeat any of the fourteen *Sanctus* melodies, but provides his own theme in a similar idiom, again in *C major*, in a multi-voiced canon, beginning in the strings and spreading onto the entire orchestra. This 'apotheosis' (beginning at [96]) attempts to conclude the movement (and the entire symphony) in a triumphant, festive mood. However, after a *C major* chord in *fff,* this majestic edifice starts to crumble and slides into a new episode of chaos, in which all the materials previously used in the symphony are recalled or paraphrased. At [101] we hear a short excerpt of the second movement's *concerto grosso,* followed at [102] by the first theme of the first movement in its original, 'recitative' disposition. Since the composer's attempt to end the symphony triumphantly has failed, he seeks help from an authority for the last time, choosing to quote here the composer who had established the symphonic genre as we know it, Joseph Haydn. Schnittke quotes the last 14 bars of Haydn's *Farewell Symphony*. But then, as Rozhdestvensky suggested, repeats the first movement until [33], i.e., until the first unison C.

The First Symphony represented a sound panorama of the world of Socialist Realist kitsch in which Schnittke was forced to live and work, and expressed the composer's protest against the devaluation of art and music, as well as his invitation to the audience to start listening to all the various musics surrounding them more actively. According to Aranovsky, the 'tragic hero of this symphony' – art music – ceases to be art and becomes immersed into the noise of raucous real life, thus turning into noise itself.[45] As for the improvised/aleatoric segments of the form, Aranovsky associates them with technological progress and asserts that 'noise becomes a signifier of [contemporary] civilisation, and the tension it produces displays a real danger of technical progress, if we are unable to control and regulate it.'[46]

Kholopova and Chigaryova believe that the main 'subject' of the symphony is the revaluation of

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[43] Schnittke here opts for 'formulaic improvisation' (see footnote 13) and employs a combination of conventional and graphic notation. According to Barry Kernfeld, in formulaic improvisation 'many diverse formulae intertwine and combine within continuous lines' (the so-called 'licks'). 'The essence of formulaic improvisation is that the formulae used do not call attention to themselves, but are artfully hidden, through variation, in the improvised lines.' Kernfeld also notes that formulaic improvisation may be based on a theme, but 'the way in which the theme is treated is altogether freer than melodic paraphrase.' Cf. Barry Kernfeld, op.cit.

[44] Schnittke has remarked that the *Dies Irae* theme shares two pitches with a melody of a popular 'Schlager' which he used in the development; thus '*Dies Irae* and the diabolic banality [teuflische Banalität] interlock here.' Cf: Victoria Adamenko, op. cit*, 258.

[45] Ароновский, op. cit, 163-4.

[46] Ibid, 160.

the role of an artist, an heir to the humanist tradition with Beethoven as the reference point, in the chaotic and dehumanised contemporary world. The authors believe that the '*First Symphony* actively protests against the devaluation of art',[47] and point to the fact that the genesis of this symphony coincided with Schnittke's work on the score for the documentary movie *World Today* by director Mikhail Romm, which aimed to reflect the diverse problems of the world as perceived in the late 1960s.[48] Indeed, all movements of the *First Symphony* (except the third one) unfold in a manner resembling a narrative/documentary film: various 'frames' are depicted by fragments of different musical materials and a variety of compositional techniques. Ivashkin also draws parallels between Schnittke's 'serious' and film music and asserts that Schnittke's creative laboratory was *Mosfilm*, thus he tested a variety of avant-garde techniques in his film scores first.[49] In Schnittke's oeuvre the worlds of 'serious' and 'incidental' music interpenetrate and

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[47] Холопова и Чигарёва, op. cit, 86-87.

[48] Romm's film was conceived as a panoramic overview of twentieth-century history. The documentary covered, among other things, scientific discoveries of the century, student demonstrations in the 1960s, Maoism and China's 'cultural revolution', Communist parades, the Vietnam War, starvation in Africa, the abuse of drugs, environmental problems, etc. Excerpts of the *First Symphony* have been included in the movie score, and Schnittke claimed: 'If I had not seen all these shots in the film, I would never have written this symphony'. Alexander Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke,* 118. In this light, *First Symphony* can be seen as kaleidoscopic and apocalyptic panorama of the twentieth century, conveyed by musical means.

[49] Ivashkin notes that a new period for Schnittke started in 1968 with his work for the director Andrey Khrzhanovsky: 'Khrzhanovsky was working on his [animated] film *Glass Accordion* (1968), in which he used ready-made artefacts. It was an unusual collage […]a kind of narrative in which all the polystylistic elements are treated as the indivisible components of a new expressive language. Schnittke had to deal musically with this stream of visual idioms. […] His music for Glass Accordion is probably the first consistently polystylistic score in post-war European music, completed earlier than the famous *Sinfonia* by Luciano Berio (1969).' Ibid, 110-111. Ivashkin states that 'Schnittke used random, serial and sonoristic elements in his very first [film] scores of the early 1960-s, written for thrillers. At this time he was unable to introduce such elements into his serious music.' 'The combination of different styles and genres – waltzes, polkas, tangos, along with passacaglias, fugues and sonatas – is very clear in many of Schnittke's works of the [early] 1970s. Expressive stereotypes first used in his film music become the idioms of the language he uses in his symphonies and concerti grossi.' Ibid, 114-115.

complement each other, and it has been well documented that Schnittke transferred many pages from his incidental scores to his 'serious' works.[50] Undeniably, the *First Symphony* represents the most important link between his incidental and serious music(s).[51] Besides, the symphony is a product of the Soviet 'realistic' aesthetic, in which even non-incidental music operates with symbols and intonation codes, and symphonies are written for broad audiences and not for a narrow circle of sophisticated experts with all the latest compositional trends. But despite its stylistic eclecticism, Schnittke intended the *First Symphony* to produce an avant-garde impact in the Soviet cultural life, and it succeeded.[52]

As we have seen, the improvisatory segments are incorporated in this symphony either to depict the chaos of everyday life, or as an expression of the composer's frustration and resignation caused by the devaluation of contemporary art music. However, in the Soviet context, the improvisation fulfilled yet another role: namely, the performances of improvised music in the Soviet Union were, if not entirely banned, strictly monitored by the cultural authorities, because this type of music 'could not be controlled'.[53] In a totalitarian regime, in which any 'individual freedom was seen as a threat to the system,' in which every aspect of everyday life was strictly regulated and controlled and artistic production was expected to glorify the socialist progress of the proletariat, the incorporation of segments which allowed the musicians to play as they pleased represented the composer's act of resistance and an expression of his urge for artistic and personal freedom.[54] Forced to live in a society where all avant-garde had been efficiently suppressed by the exponents of the official utopia, Schnittke early lost all illusions. Instead of seeking comfort in nostalgia, he indulged in sarcasm and resignation, and exposed the ugliness of the world surrounding him. And the words that Boris Groys used to describe the works by Schnittke's contemporary, the painter Ilya Kabakov, could perfectly apply to the creator of the 'polystylistic' *First Symphony* as well: 'He views everyday life not as a set of stable forms, but as interwoven images, discourses, ideological attitudes, styles, traditions, and revolutions against traditions all of which eternally comment upon each other'.[55]

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[50] Cf: Холопова и Чигарёва, op. cit, 79-80; Alexander Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke*, 115.

[51] Alexander Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke*, 115.

[52] One must recall that, unlike their Western colleagues, the Soviet 'avant-garde' composers were not in a position to retreat into a hermetic individualism divorced from the concert goers. On the contrary, the tight control placed upon all the facets of people's lives inspired empathy and even aggressive bonding between the avant-garde and its audience.

[53] Cf: Michael Kurtz, op. cit, 122.

[54] Ibid, 146.

[55] Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism – Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship and Beyond,* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992, 86.

САЖЕТАК

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ДРАМАТУРШКА ФУНКЦИЈА ИМПРОВИЗАЦИОНИХ СЕГМЕНАТА ФОРМЕ У ПРВОЈ СИМФОНИЈИ АЛФРЕДА ШНИТКЕА

Контроверзна *Прва симфонија* (1969-1972) Алфреда Шниткеа промовисала је композиторов "полистилистични" идиом у домену симфонијске музике. Шнитке је 1971. године написао да ниједан "чисти" стил више није у стању да изрази савремену реалност, те да је стилски еклектицизам постао мандаторан. Прва симфонија дочарала је звучну панораму света соц-реалистичког кича у којем је Шнитке живео и стварао. "Трагични херој" ове симфоније – уметничка музика – бива утопљена у буку свакодневице којом је окружена, те се и сама претвара у буку.

Сви разнородни музички материјали, стилови и технике које је Шнитке користио у овој симфонији имају драматуршку/наративну функцију. Између осталог, Шнитке је у ову симфонију инкорпорисао разнолике импровизационе сегменте, у распону од алеаторичких одсека компонованих за читав оркестар до каденци за разне солисте. Импровизациони сегменти укључени у ову симфонију дочаравају бучну свакодневицу, али и изражавају композиторову фрустрацију и резигнацију узроковану девалуираним статусом савремене уметничке музике. Бројни критичари назвали су какофоничне алеаторичне оркестарске сегменте, нарочито упечатљиве у првом ставу, "симболом хаоса". У финалном ставу, патос секвенце *Dies Irae* је исмејан и подривен тако што је сучељен са невероватно баналном импровизованом џез епизодом; у овој симфонији Шнитке је представио жанрове популарне, народне, "естрадне" музике као анархичну, неукротиву силу, и доделио им улогу "апсолутног зла". Солистичке каденце (посебно дугачки "Трио" у другом ставу) разоткривају композиторово разочарање и губитак вере у могућност и сврху стварања уметничке музике: стога Шнитке "одустаје" од компоновања и препушта музичарима да свирају шта год желе.

С друге стране, у совјетском културном систему импровизована музика није била у потпуности забрањена, али се на њу гледало са великим подозрењем, јер су културни посленици сматрали да је овакву музику "немогуће контролисати". У тоталитарном режиму, у којем је свака "индивидуална слобода сматрана претњом за читав систем," Шниткеово инкорпорисање "слободних", "неконтролисаних" сегмената унутар строго организованог жанра какав је "велика" симфонија, представљало је композиторов акт отпора и израз његове тежње за личном и уметничком слободом.