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***PLAYING WITH TIMES.***  
**POLISH SUR-CONVENTIONALISM OF THE 1980s**

**Abstract:** When postmodernism reached the height of intensity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was attracting the attention of Euro-American artistic critics, Polish composers proposed an alternative way of writing music. They invented the term “sur-conventionalism” as a way to experiment with different musical conventions from past epochs. The aim of this paper is to describe some examples of Polish sur-conventional music written by such composers as Paweł Szymański, Stanisław Krupowicz and Paweł Mykietyń.

**Keywords:** Polish sur-conventionalism, pre-composition, musical conventions, play with listener

**Sur-conventional music**

Art cannot exist in emptiness; every artist must express his own attitude both to an artistic tradition and to his own art, created in the present. There are basically two options: to accept the tradition – adopting some of its elements – or reject tradition and all its conventions. The idea of adopting elements from the past was the basis “Polish sur-conventionalism”, a specific idea born in specific circumstances.

The term “sur-conventional music” is uniquely Polish. It was invented in the early 1980s by two prominent young Polish composers, Paweł Szymański (b. 1954) and Stanisław Krupowicz (b. 1952). They coined the term “sur-conventionalism” during a playful conversation:

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“What would become of a canon if we beheaded all the notes?”

The answer was that the empty place would provide space for something else, “such as ready-made musical phrases”.<sup>1</sup>

In the Polish language, the term suggests an association with “surrealism” and can even be seen as parallel to it. In “surrealism”, elements of real life, when put in a new context, make a new quality. The relations made by old elements often are strange and abnormal, but sometimes not without sense. Examples of this kind of playfulness are easily found in the pictures of René Magritte. But “realism” as such doesn’t exist in music. There are only some musical styles, aesthetic or technical conventions, that aim to substitute for realism. So “sur-conventional technique” refers to a compositional process that employs, often in playful ways, various historical compositional methods and structures; sound gestures; and “ready-made” expressions – not quotations – that are understood generally as conventions. These conventions are pre-compositional musical elements, and function as elemental objects for new musical constructs; they are applied to a new, generally contemporary musical context. Thus, they make a new quality.

It’s worth-mentioning here that the problem of integrating extant “old” music with new, contemporary composed work generally has become an object of consideration of several musicologists, such as J. Peter Burkholder,<sup>2</sup> Leonard B. Meyer<sup>3</sup> and (the Poles) Zofia Lissa,<sup>4</sup> Mieczysław Tomaszewski<sup>5</sup> and others. They each look at the aforementioned problem from different perspectives. And it is possible to single out, from their propositions, different intertextual strategies. Meyer<sup>6</sup> distinguishes four basic, different, though somewhat overlapping ways in which the art of other eras has been used in the present. He calls them

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<sup>1</sup> Andrzej Chłopecki, “Sur-conventions”, in: *Polish collection of the Warsaw Autumn, 1956-2005*, Polish Composers Union, Warsaw, 2005, [booklet to the collection], vol. 5, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Peter J. Burkholder, “Modelling”, in: *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2001, vol. 16, 860 and Peter J. Burkholder, “Quotation”, in: *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2001, vol. 20, 689.

<sup>3</sup> Leonard B. Meyer, *Music, the Arts and Ideas*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Zofia Lissa, “O cytacie w muzyce” [About quotation in music], in: Z. Lissa, *Szkice z estetyki muzycznej* [Studies of Musical Aesthetics], Kraków, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1965.

<sup>5</sup> Mieczysław Tomaszewski, “Utwór muzyczny w perspektywie intertekstualnej” [Musical work in intertextual perspective], in: M. Tomaszewski, *O muzyce polskiej w perspektywie intertekstualnej. Studia i szkice* [About Polish music in intertextual perspective. Studies and sketches], Kraków, Akademia Muzyczna, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Leonard B. Meyer, op. cit.

*paraphrase*, *borrowing*, *simulation* and *modelling*, and he explains that: An unequivocal example of paraphrase in music is Stravinsky's suite *Pulcinella* based on the music of Pergolesi. In *borrowing* existing materials, brief excerpts or larger sections of old music are:

quoted, copied, or reproduced exactly, or almost exactly. When, as is frequently the case, the force and import of the borrowed material depends upon the audience's familiarity with the tone and significance that it had in its original context, he excerpts are generally taken from works which an educated Westerner might be expected to know.<sup>7</sup>

According to Meyer, "*Simulation* occurs when a composer invents musical relationships that are based on, and are similar to, some sound source."<sup>8</sup> But differently to *paraphrase borrowing*, it involves "neither literal nor varied use of materials – melodies, verses, or pictorial elements – taken from a particular work of art. Rather, salient features of a past style."<sup>9</sup> These features (e.g. melodic idioms, musical grammar, narrative methods) are combined and modified by new compositional techniques.

When the composer uses *modelling*, it means that the new work is based on some "basic structure and process of a particular [earlier existing] work, yet at the same time reshaping its manifest content and its significance."<sup>10</sup> So, as Meyer states, "the new work is constructed as a fairly rigorous analogue of the old"<sup>11</sup> or, as Burkholder explains, "an existing piece of music [...] is used] as a model or pattern for a new work, in whole or in part."<sup>12</sup>

*Musical quotation* is distinct from these above-mentioned intertextual strategies. As Burkholder explains, it is the incorporation of a "relatively brief segment of existing music [...] quotation usually means melodic quotation, although the whole musical texture may be incorporated, and solely rhythmic quotation is possible, if rare."<sup>13</sup> *Quotation* can be a special type of borrowing with musical material presented exactly, or nearly so. It also can play a role in such forms of borrowing as *quodlibet*, *collage*, *medley* or *potpourri*. Musical quotation is used by composers for specific expressive and semantic purposes. A composer, who counts on listeners being acquainted with a quotation, at the same time modu-

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Burkholder, "Modelling", op. cit., 860.

<sup>13</sup> Burkholder, "Quotation", op. cit., 689.

lates a content interpretation of further parts of a composition. A quotation is therefore an intentional phenomenon which functions properly only if the adequately receptive intention of a listener is applied to it.

Sur-conventional strategies differ from these above-mentioned strategies. Sur-conventional music is constructed in the manner, as it were, of a palimpsest from early times, in which text inscribed on a sheet was scraped off and overwritten, often leaving remnants of the original text visible through the new. It gives the impression of music created of many levels and dimensions (multi-dimensional music), where the traditional construct is apparent through the new-composed material. The listeners' imagination adds the missing elements of musical "landscape", as the human eye supplies the missing elements of a puzzle.<sup>14</sup> Conventions of the Baroque and of Classicism are deeply fixed in the listeners' psyche and memory, and they stimulate univocal musical experiences in many listeners. Consequently, sur-conventionalists use these conventions preferentially. When the composer distorts these archetypical formulas, he provokes listeners to guess. Perceptible work runs parallel with an imaginative music of past epochs, creating multi-dimensional sounds.

In sur-conventional music, the image of the past is called to mind and, at the same time, is continually impaired and distorted. The narration is intermittent and intentionally varied. A listener's expectations are put to the test; the horizon of expectations is disturbed, moved to the distance, reinterpreted. These "illusory constructions" allow listeners to intermix different associations: historical, genre, technical. The old music is "immersed in" the new context. These works are examples of meta-conventions, which link traditional (archetypical) structures with contemporary musical languages, and are examples of an original synthesis of tradition and modernity, a synthesis which is, at the same time, a blending of musical styles.

The term "sur-conventional", though a neologism, quickly took root in the language of contemporary discussions about music and took on a life of its own. Szymański himself often described this phenomenon. "The contemporary artist, including the composer, exists in fetters of two extremes. On one side is mumbo-jumbo, if he completely rejects the tradition, on the other side is banality, when he fixes his gaze too steadily on tradition. That is the paradox of today's environment for creating art",<sup>15</sup> said Szymański. He tried to find a solution.

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<sup>14</sup> A. Chłopecki, "Surkonwencjonalna muzyka Pawła Szymańskiego" [Sur-conventional Music of Paweł Szymański], *Polish Culture*, 1998, 3 (4), 38.

<sup>15</sup> Mieczysław Kominek, "Gdzie się mieści dusza? – wywiad z Pawłem Szymańskim" [Where is the human's soul? - An interview with Paweł Szymański], *Studio*, 1996, 9, 9.

If it is not possible to completely release oneself from banality, one must certainly play with this banality and take this trivial musical material as a substance, preserving some elements of the conventions, but at the same time using metaphorical quotation marks, metaphor itself, and paradoxes to maintain an adequate distance. The result of this strategy can be, of course, a mixture of musical means, leading to eclecticism, which in the time of avant-garde was stigmatized and rejected, and rightly, to some extent, [...] But there are many ways to avoid eclecticism while playing with tradition.<sup>16</sup>

He added, “For, the importance of such play is to disrupt the rules of the well-known language and creating a new context from the elements of tradition”.<sup>17</sup>

In another place Szymański said:

I’m trying to find a key to tradition. Tradition, understood as the music of the past, based on specific, well-functioning conventions, is a substance, but as such it is also something dead. I take from this substance something which I can disassemble, take to pieces, and later put it together in a different musical whole. But I don’t have any tendency to destruction. Quite the opposite. It’s a kind of nostalgia for something very well known, but unattainable, though very clear.<sup>18</sup>

When this new technique of “sur-conventionalism” was applied to music, not only Szymański, but also Krupowicz (both students of composition of Włodzimierz Kotoński in The Higher State School of Music in Warsaw) and Paweł Mykietyń (b. 1971, also a student of composition under Włodzimierz Kotoński in the Academy of Music in Warsaw) wrote works which perfectly adopt this new idea of “playing with tradition”. These pieces, among others, emerged:

*Gloria* (1979), *Sonata* (1982), *Quasi una sinfonia* (1990) and *Miserere* (1993) by Paweł Szymański;

*Fin de siècle* (1993) and *Miserere* (1996) by Stanisław Krupowicz;

*3 for 13* (1994), *Eine kleine Herbstmusik* for 11 instruments (1995) and *Concert for piano and orchestra* (1996) by Paweł Mykietyń.

The few chosen musical examples for this paper aim to present different possibilities of the application of this “sur-conventional technique” and are an arbitrary selection of works from a larger body. This is especially true if we accept the opinion of Polish music critic Andrzej Chłopecki that the most im-

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Jan Topolski, “Paweł Szymański, *quasi una sinfonia*”, 2010, <http://culture.pl/pl/dzielo/pawel-szymanski-quasi-una-sinfonia>

portant Polish music from the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century usually was composed as sur-conventional music.

### Szymański – *Gloria* (1979)

25 year-old Paweł Szymański composed *Gloria* (1979), for female choir and orchestra, as debut at the Warsaw Autumn Festival 1979. He set to music only a fragment of the *Gloria* text, “et in terra/ et in terra pax”. The piece was thoroughly analyzed by Polish musicologist Stanisław Dąbek<sup>19</sup> in his book: *Mass output of Polish composers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 1900–1995*, Warsaw 1996.

*Gloria* was composed in binary form.<sup>20</sup> It begins with about two minutes (50 bars) of controlled chaos, expressed in dissonance and the omnipresent heterophony of the tritone interval (D-A flat). The tritone is exposed both in the choir and in the instrumental parts.

The second part uses a canon technique. According to Dąbek, we can distinguish three types of canons:

- a. a strict double canon, rigorously constructed for six voices, comprising two three-voiced canons at the interval of a perfect fifth, in exact parallel motion (bars 62–95);
- b. a two-voiced canon (bars 92–107);
- c. a three-voiced canon (bars 106–121).

The music ends with a free form section (bars 121–137), recalling the initial motif.

The construction of the first canon recalls the medieval isorhythmic motet. The beginning of the canon, stated simultaneously in two voices, its rhythms and development resemble methods of the Dutch composer generation of Dufay and Josquin de Prez. The second, unison canon is reminiscent of the Dutch *fugue ad minimam*, with the alternating imitation of particular sounds, such as Dufay used in the motet “Nuper rosarium flores”.

The third is a canon at the perfect fifth.

#### Ex. 1: sound material of the first canon



<sup>19</sup> Stanisław Dąbek, *Twórczość mszalna kompozytorów polskich XX wieku: 1900–1995*, [Mass output of Polish composers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 1900–1995], Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1996, 72 and 138–140.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 72.



**Ex. 2:** sound material of the second canon



The contrapuntal technique used is a method of binding sounds “from the inside”, while “from the outside” such music often is heard as an example of “new humanism”.<sup>21</sup> Music composed in a so-called micro-polyphonic texture makes a coherent entity, vibrating with colours and sonoristic effects.<sup>22</sup> This multidimensionality is a characteristic feature of “sur-conventional” music.

**Ex. 3:** formal structure of the canon no 1

**Szymański – *Sonata* (1982)**

The next example of the sur-conventional musical technique is *Sonata* by Szymański, composed in 1982. The piece was commissioned by the Polish Society of Modern Music on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Karol Szymanowski’s birth. Szymański was asked to use Szymanowski’s *Mazurek op. 62 no. 2* as the source of inspiration.

*Sonata* was written for nine violins, double-bass and percussion. Though seemingly full of improvisational freedom, *Sonata* is very precisely composed. The formal construct alludes to two models: the Baroque sonata form and the

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<sup>21</sup> “New humanism” is an expression used by Polish scholars in order to describe some aspects of “new romanticism”, especially the preference for humanistic (sometimes literary) sources of inspiration, beauty of melody and traditional harmony.

<sup>22</sup> Stanisław Dąbek, *Twórczość mszalna kompozytorów polskich XX wieku: 1900–1995*, op. cit., 140.

Classical sonata allegro form. As in a Baroque sonata, the movements of *sonata* contrast: slow-fast-slow. As in the Classical sonata allegro, it is possible to identify parts that resemble:

- an exposition (the first theme in G minor and the second theme in C-sharp minor, at, please notice, the interval of a tritone);
- a development (the E minor slow movement); and
- a recapitulation (the final fast movement in which sound, simultaneously, both themes, first in D minor and then modulating to G minor).<sup>23</sup>

Interestingly, the entire composition is based on the same melodic material, introduced in the first six bars, divided into three two-bars sections.

Ex. 4: first six bars of *Sonata*, divided into sections: a, b, c



Szymański's *Sonata* subjects them to truncations, alterations, transformations and variations, but never do they appear completely in the primary form.

The reference to *Mazurek* by Szymanowski appears in the end of the *Sonata*'s slow movement in the form of a direct quotation in a duet of violin and double-bass, and also as musical ornaments, including trills and turns (bar 311 in *Sonata* and bars 41-42 in *Mazurek*).

Ex. 5: K. Szymanowski – *Mazurek op. 62 no 2*, theme, bars 12-16



<sup>23</sup> Dorota Szwarcman, "Paweł Szymański: Sonata", *Ruch Muzyczny*, 1984, 8, 6.



Ex. 6: P. Szymański: *Sonata*, bars 243-245.

The image shows a musical score for P. Szymański's Sonata, bars 243-245. The score is for a string quartet, with parts for Violin I (vn I), Violin II (vn II), Viola (vb), and Cello (vc). The score is in 2/4 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. Performance instructions include 'tutti unis.' at the beginning, 'ff molto marc.' for the strings, 's. sord.' (sordina) for the violins, 'pizz.' (pizzicato) for the cello, and 'f sempre' for the cello. The score is divided into three measures, with bar numbers 1-3, 4-6, and 7-9 indicated on the left.

The *Sonata*'s music is based on Szymański's preferred formula: a sequences of canons – in perfect fifths or in prime. The musical material was composed so as to make it possible to use it for both canonic versions. Each two-bar fragment creates a simple canonic and tonal scheme: the tonic in the first bar, the dominant in the second. When the section cadences in the tonic, a canon in prime follows; when the section modulates to the subdominant, the canon follows at an upward perfect fifth. In such a case the music is based on canons on the circle of fifths.

Single instruments sometimes state the canon, but so do combinations of instruments. Two, four-, and six-bar canons appear, as do double and triple canons. This rigorous musical structure is not perceived as such, because the composer often arrests the process before completion. We hear the music as suspended and transitory.

The slow and the final fast movements are also based on canons. These canons are not heard at all, because of the improvisatory character of the music. The composition uses glissandos and quarter-tones, which, with traditional violin sonority evokes Bohemian music.

Szymański's *Sonata* plays with such conventions as the major-minor tonal system, musical structures typical of the Baroque and Classical styles, and canon. But, at the same time, it calls into question these formulas through Szymański's use of stylistic modern compositional vocabulary, by the heterogeneity of sound, and through the contrasts among the different instrumental parts. The result of sur-conventional technique is ambiguity: the "musical world" is suspended between perfect order and improvisation, between play and its traditional compositional tools.

**Szymański – *quasi una sinfonia* (for chamber orchestra, 1990)\***

This piece was written for the London Sinfonia, and was premiered at the Queen Elizabeth Hall under Arturo Tamayo.

The starting point of this sur-conventional piece from 1990 was the classical style. The “tick-tock” of a metronome, treated as symbol of “absolute time”, pervades. This piece by Szymański was written as a panopticon of quasi-quotations, and the listener may experience this regular rhythmic motion as ironic.

Historical stylistic conventions, used by the composer in a playful way, are easily recognizable, open and distinct: Alberti bass, cadence resolutions, the basso continuo performance practice. The seriousness of the music is, however, displaced by brutal tone clusters from piano and percussion, and by more than 60 repetitions of the tonic chord. The music of *quasi una sinfonia* begins in the classic-like mode, “by waiting for the first theme” (the repeated repetition of the sound with appoggiatura in the first twelve bars), which will never appear.

The structure of those quasi-quotations in *quasi una sinfonia* is fragmented. Some fragments are omitted; others are incessantly displaced. This piece is an example of the continual sur-conventional “play with listeners”, trifling with their habits and expectations. Pleasantly intensifying the tension, from one side it prompts the listener to reconstruct the “classical wholeness”, and from the other side it always condemns these attempts to failure.

*Quasi una sinfonia* is in ternary form (‘A-B-A’), with contrasting tempi: fast – slow – fast. The time proportions are 8-11-3 and in the score (because of the tempo and number of musical events), there are accordingly 50-12-10 pages. It is based on a sonata form, slightly deformed. Its two main themes are presented in contrasting keys at the interval of a tritone: the first is in D minor, the second in G-sharp minor. Both thematic ideas are incomplete and “sliced”. The introductory melody, with appoggiatura, is presented over an Alberti bass accompaniment in D minor. The presentation of the theme is not complete, because Szymański introduces only some of the chosen theme’s motifs, primarily the beginning and the end, skipping its central notes. The musical narration is often interrupted by pauses. Many times it returns to the initial motif or jumps to the final notes. Some elements are multiplied, then stopped on some chosen sounds.

The second theme also is devoid of the typical classical development. It is interrupted by pauses, by the appearance of motifs from the first theme and by an Alberti bass. Its characteristic feature is suspended on the fourth note of the scale, without proper closure. It may remind the listener of the bridge from the orchestral exposition of the *Piano concerto in D minor* K. 466 by Mozart.

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\* It’s possible to hear the piece on: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CtW4tg4F\\_qc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CtW4tg4F_qc)

The beats in *blocco di legno*, constantly heard in the background, remind us of the ticking of the metronome and of the measure of “absolute time”. These beats are elements in common between both themes. The development has a chaotic character, with some fragments from both themes. A quasi-Bohemian melody is also heard, as is a virtuoso percussion part.

The recapitulation brings back the first theme, but in a different key from that of the exposition: B flat minor. The new, modified rhythmic version of the second theme is, at the same time, the contrapuntal voice to the first theme.<sup>24</sup>

The deformation of sonata form in *Quasi una sinfonia* is the result of a constant decomposing process of the musical syntax, achieved by the incompleteness and disturbance of musical order. Szymański’s compositional strategy leads to ambiguity, and provokes strong tensions and expectations.<sup>25</sup>

*Quasi una sinfonia* is a show of extraordinary craft, demonstrating a deep knowledge of classical convention (not only in theory but in compositional practice, as well). It’s also a show of the “juggler”, who misleads our perception and completely governs the time of music and the listener’s expectations. The idea of montage and of deconstruction makes use of current gestures, “well-worn” formulas, taken from the music of the past.

### **Szymański – *Miserere* (1993)**

*Miserere* (1993) by Szymański is another example of sur-conventional technique, but in this case in a more simple and open way.

This piece makes extensive use of Gregorian chant, which gives order to the musical narration. The text of *Psalm 51* is set by verse in alternating musical styles, a verse of Gregorian chant succeeded by a newly-composed six-voice *nota contra notam* technique. Szymański cites Gregorian chant, starting always from the same note, according to an identical formula. Another distinctive feature of the piece is the collective syllabization of the text, always starting as a whisper, always ending as unison singing. The resulting chord is a juxtaposition of two triads: C major and D minor. The dialogue between the soloist and the choir bears a resemblance to a sort of the liturgical prayer led alternately by the priest and the congregation. The vocal part is accompanied by a slow glissando – from D to d on the strings (four unison cellos). At the end, the glissando has

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<sup>24</sup> His description of the piece after: Anna Granat-Janki, “Klasyczne archetypy w dziełach Pawła Szymańskiego” [Classical archetypes in the pieces of Paweł Szymański], in: Anna Nowak (ed.), *Dzieło muzyczne. Archetyp* [Musical work. Archetype], Bydgoszcz, Akademia Muzyczna, 2006, 239–240.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

proceeded from ‘a’ to the highest possible note and is divided only by the polyphonic fragment elaborating the words *Comundum crea in me, Deus*. The lone sounds of harp and vibraphone add a celestial dimension to the music. The parts of harp and vibraphone are especially important, because they are based on the canon which navigates the entire circle of fifths.

The musical pieces of Szymański, as fully understood, have different titles. But the creative output of this composer is usually described as stylistically extraordinarily homogenous. And at the same time the music is very refined, based on precisely-defined technical rules. Despite this discipline the music astonishes by its variety of emotions and moods, starting from plays of sounds and ending on metaphysical thoughtfulness.<sup>26</sup>

### **Krupowicz – *Miserere* (1996)**

It is worthwhile to compare *Miserere* by Szymański with *Miserere* by Stanisław Krupowicz – the second representative of the “sur-conventional” technique in Polish music and co-author of this term.

The structural level of Krupowicz’s *Miserere* consists of three musical plans: the first is the quotation of Gregorian chant, sung by the contra-tenor; the second is an antiphonal dialogue between two choirs, and the third is the part of the solo soprano, executed in quasi-improvisational style. These constructs, and nine short quotations from Gregorian chant, initiate the narrative. They are followed by antiphonal choirs, and, at each stage, the virtuoso part of the soprano, which leads to a climactic end consisting of a harmonic cadence of chords.

The main melodic direction of the movement is ascending. Each quotation of Gregorian chant is introduced at a beginning pitch of the chromatic scale from c, to gis. Similarly, each fragment of the virtuoso coloratura soprano reaches higher and higher notes, from C sharp to C. The last and at the same the highest tone is part of another quotation, taken from a *Miserere* by Gregorio Allegri. This adds to the work the symbolic meaning accreting from the entire history of the traditional use of the *Miserere* acclamation, which began in the medieval epoch. In the music of Krupowicz, the quotation of Allegri’s *Miserere* also builds the climax of the composition, transforming the music into the “baroque sonata for soprano and chamber orchestra”, written in a style typical of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In Krupowicz’s *Miserere* the idea of “sur-conventionalism” is realized with musical quotations. The contrajuxtaposition of the ascetic sound of a contra-ten-

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<sup>26</sup> Małgorzata Kosińska, “Nowy język tradycji – surkonwencjonalizm” [New language of the tradition – surconventionalism], January 2002, <http://culture.pl/pl/tworca/pawel-szymanski>.

or intoning Gregorian chant segments is interspersed with more expressive musical gestures by the choir and soprano solo to create the work's musical narrative. A contra-tenor sings fragments. The quotations give the music well-ordered (or even schematic) shape, but also contribute to clashes of different aesthetic values. The quotations focus the listener's attention not only on the music itself, but also on other dimensions of reality.

### **Mykietyn – 3 for 13 (1994)\***

Before describing this musical piece, I have to introduce Paweł Mykietyn. In 1999, already quite a famous composer, he was acclaimed by Polish musical critic Andrzej Chłopecki as “a new star of Polish music”.<sup>27</sup> While studying music in Warsaw, Mykietyn met Paweł Szymański. He often admitted that this meeting was a key event in his composer's life: “Getting to know the music of Szymański was for me a most important musical meeting. Of course, the music of Lutosławski, for instance, is marvelous, but nothing possesses me as strongly as Szymański's music. Acquaintance with the composer himself was also important. He was my Master”.<sup>28</sup>

Really, at the surface, the music of Mykietyn is very similar to the musical output of Szymański. It is worth adding that Mykietyn studied the composer's techniques called “surcoventional” very carefully, in theory and in practice, incorporating these techniques into his own pieces.

As the result of Szymański's inspiration, Mykietyn composed such pieces as *3 for 13*, Piano concerto and *Eine kleine Herbstmusik*. All these pieces are easy to listen to and appreciate, referring to different musical styles and conventions. They are often described as “musical puzzles”, composed by Mykietyn in order to give satisfaction to the listeners who decipher it, recognizing pieces of musical tradition. Of course the satisfaction is based on the listener's musical knowledge; we may expect that better knowledge helps in experiencing greater satisfaction.

All three of these musical pieces by Mykietyn are based also on pre-compositional procedures and the application of precise rigorous compositional tools. These rigours help to organize the sound material within a given piece. Mykietyn says:

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<sup>27</sup> A. Chłopecki, “Paweł Mykietyn – nowa gwiazda muzyki polskiej” [Paweł Mykietyn – a new star of Polish music], *Polish Culture*, 1999, 1, 48-49.

<sup>28</sup> Agata Kwiecińska, “W co gra Paweł Mykietyn?” [What is Paweł Mykietyn playing?], *Ruch Muzyczny*, 2007, 6

\* It's possible to hear the piece on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9TBW4V88eU>

It is necessary to find reasonable proportions between mathematics and spontaneity. The phase of pre-composition gives me the possibility to astonish myself. I establish some rule, later I 'translate' it into music, and the result wouldn't be possible to achieve in any other way, not even through improvisation or through pure intuition.<sup>29</sup>

The pre-compositional procedure for the piece *3 for 13* makes use of a four-voiced fugue composed before this work. The fugue simulates baroque convention. This fugue is variously transformed in three different parts of the music (3 in the title of the work is a symbol of these three parts). In the first part, the fugue is "untwined".<sup>30</sup> Particular parts of instruments appear successively. The single part is made of single sounds mutually detached with pauses. The number of pauses in each voice diminishes (16, 15, 14... 2 quaver-pauses). The mutual overlapping of the succeeding voices condenses the musical fracture and finally makes the contrapuntal procedures and conventions audible. This part ends with a cadence full of tension.

In the second part of *3 for 13*, the important levels are: the glissandos of strings, the musical quotation of Tchaikovsky's music to the ballet *Nutcracker* and the long-lasting notes of the wind instruments. All these lead to the third part of the piece, which is made of short "musical pictures (images)" interrupted more and more often and more and more strongly by the interference of drums (tom-toms), which condense near the end of music. Mykietyn revealed that "interferences of drums, becoming dense as the piece develops, were calculated as the result of a precise geometrical row".<sup>31</sup>

### **Final remarks**

Music written in the sur-conventional technique is based on different stylistic conventions. Sometimes it evokes the palimpsest form, because one facet shines through another. But the sur-conventional similarity (convergence) with the palimpsest does not mean they are identical. In music, the disclosure of the hidden text (as in palimpsest) does not create an accidental obstacle, but makes an intentional "scaffold" for the piece. The course of time, in the case of music, might be freely adjusted – slowed down or accelerated; a procedure not possible for "spatial structures" that exist only on paper.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>30</sup> RP [Radosław Pypeć], "Mykietyn jako surkonwencjonalista" [Mykietyn as surconventionalist], <http://www.polskamuza.eu/siedemodslon.php?id=474>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Andrzej Chłopecki, "Festiwal muzyki Pawła Szymańskiego, 24 listopada – 1 grudnia 2006,



The starting point for the sur-conventional music is a previously-composed structure. The sur-conventional compositional process is based on the transformation of this already existing structure (musical skeleton) that runs, as it were, in parallel with the piece, as an implied meaning, but never appears in its original and complete shape.<sup>33</sup>

The Polish scholar Krzysztof Szwałgier wrote:

Compositions written in “sur-conventional technique” constitute an intertextual treatise on the presence of tradition in contemporary culture. The ironic distance, the system of double codes, of contemporary and traditional rules, enlighten us about the strength and omnipresence of inauthenticity. We may appreciate only the beauty of works by the Old Masters, displayed simply and in formulas. The revealing features remain hidden, because it is impossible for us to enter the context of past epochs. Art that wishes to be True Art, focused on artistic values, must be contemporary.<sup>34</sup>

These goals are achieved by sur-conventional musical play.<sup>35</sup>

Translated by the author

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książka programowa” [Festival of Paweł Szymański’s music, 24 November – 1 December 2006, program booklet], Warszawa, Polskie Wydawnictwo Audiowizualne, 2006, 57.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>34</sup> Krzysztof Szwałgier, “Festiwal muzyki Pawła Szymańskiego...”, op. cit., 56.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 56.