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BRICOLAGE – COMPOSITION TECHNIQUE OR TYPE OF THINKING?

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Summary:

The present article discusses the type of contemporary composing, in which the role of composer can not be explained in the traditional sense. At present time, composers often do not write their opuses, but they “build” them up through transformation with different ways of the borrowed material. It should be noted that, creators of contemporary music identify “someone else’s” material as “their own”. The similar stylish intertextuality is implemented intentionally and consistently through formulas’ thinking method, which is today recognized as a phenomenon called BRICOLAGE.

The study represents the samples of different musical practices where the similarity with Bricolage methods is clearly shown. From preceding systems, here is brought liturgical-chant system, particularly Georgian, which musical compositions were created by combination of ready melodic formulas.

The postmodern Bricolage method is characterized by modeling of musical constructions from heterogeneous elements. “Someone else’s” material might be art product as well as non-art: academic music of different styles, folk music, jazz, rock, film soundtracks, launch music, recording of city, nature, technics voice/sound etc.

Technical aspect of creation of Bricolage forms also is subject of interest. The carried out analysis revealed which compositional technics are used by the bricoleurs during the working process. Among them there are: polistylistic, aleatoric, minimalism, montage, sample compositions, DJing.

Keywords: *Cloude Levi-Strauss, Polistylistic, Bricolage, Bricoleur, Beat Machines of Nikoladze, Thinking with Formulas, Georgian Eight-Tone System, Michael Nyman, DJing, Sample Composition.*

A relatively new type – Bricolage has been added to modern composition techniques, and the composer who applies this technique is referred to as bricoleur.¹ In this type of composition the composer’s role cannot be explained in traditional form. In his book “End of composers’ time” composer V. Martinov who studies this problem notes that historically, two types of musical creations were formed: creativity that seeks anonymity and creativity that seeks authorship. Moreover, the researcher presumes that the music of the great cultures of the past, as well as present cultures do not recognize the composer’s figure. There is no place for composer in the systems of divine service and chanting: the role of composer is minimal in musical practices such as Jazz, Rock [1: 1-2]. In this very context Martinov discusses creative works of the composers who instead of composing their own opuses, “construct” them via transforming the borrowed material in different ways. It is noteworthy,

¹The term originated from the game of billiards and means ricochet.

that creators of contemporary music identify "other's" material with "their own". Such a stylistic intertextuality is most intentionally and consistently implemented via applying the method of thinking with formulas, which is recognized as the phenomenon of **bricolage**. The "creator" of such opuses – bricoleur is the author of a meta-text. He structures "something" from the already-existing; this is what makes him completely different from traditional composer.

French word bricoleur, meaning "skilful master," recently intruded art and philosophy. Bricoleur – is a talented inventor, who can create something from nothing. Bricolage itself is perception of the old in the new context. In philosophical sense, the concept of bricolage is associated not with a new direction, a sort of ordinary "ism", but with attributing a new meaning to the 'objects', items, sources around etc. In the search of universal values, bricoleur has acquired complete freedom to make his creations from any available sources.

The founder of the new concept is French philosopher-structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who introduced this term to explain some postmodern phenomena [2]. In his book "The Savage Mind" Claude Lévi-Strauss writes that bricoleur is the person who creates independently and uses all available means unlike specialist. Bricolage has become a semantic term of new artistic direction [3].

There is a similar method of creating the 'new' in music. This is exactly what Lévi-Strauss notes in his study. He believes that when creating "one's own" text it is quite possible to use "someone else's". In this case bricoleur is in the role of meta-author, and the text "created" by him is a meta-text. That is, he structures from "something" already existing. This is why bricolage radically differs from music composition. If musical composition reflects the event through the structure, musical bricolage - is just a presentation of the structure. This is why bricolage is what it is, and not what it expresses.

Bricoleur-musician perceives everything that was created before as a common property, something to be constantly used, an auxiliary tool, from which he can construct, create "something" of meta-music type. Perhaps this is why in one interview composer Michael Nyman describes the technique of creating his work in the following way: "I do not hide that I steal" [4].

There is another definition of bricolage technique, for instance in the footsteps of Lévi-Strauss researcher Mircea Eeliade notes that bricolage is the technique manipulating with stable melodic-rhythmic structures, blocks. The number of such blocks can be quite large, but limited from the very beginning. Thus this is a locked system, inside which only combination displacement of the formula-blocks is possible [5].

It is interesting that alongside the new term, the following pairs of synonyms are encountered:

- **Bricoleur – artisan**
- **Bricoleur – compiler**

The afore-mentioned pairs of synonyms are adapted to 2 basic principles of bricolage itself.

First principle – take what you have at hand – use it in another capacity. This principle generates Bricoleur – artisan.

Second principle – creates new from the existing old. This principle generates Bricoleur – compiler.

The first principle appears when in the creative process author uses the items, objects which he himself has created from available materials.

This is what the Norway-based Georgian composer Koka Nikoladze does when he cannot find the desired sound for his work; he experiments and creates unusual "musical" instruments.² All my

² K. Nikoladze is the author of electro-acoustic works for different instruments, "Koka's Beat Machine" – one of the first among them; "Starshine" – for prepared guitar, violin and percussion instruments; "Poezdeplacement-Differentzeitmaßscope" – for universal harpsichord, violin and cello; "Luminarium" – for piano, violin and clarinet; "Kepler Star DJ" – for piano, kettle-drums and electronics. A number of his works for non-traditional instruments have been performed in recent years.

instruments are completely non-standard; I simply make some things for me – things that I cannot find. When I plan to make an instrument, my rule is that it should be something that does not exist, it should look different. I make music boxes for this [6].

Koka is considered a postmodernist composer. Like other composers of this direction, he presents a new method of experimental music, for which basic paradigms of music such as traditional notation, intonation, rhythm, performance – are alien. In his compositions he includes different types of artificial sounds, and constant experiment with the sound of the instruments made by him - is a true postmodern sign.

Koka has multidisciplinary knowledge (violinist, composer, music technologist), has the skills of programming, electroacoustic and audio design techniques, consequently, his creations contain a wide range of detection parameters: traditional composition, computer, electroacoustic music, installation art, invention of new musical instruments.

Koka can unconditionally be called a bricoleur. In the sense that Lévi-Strauss has put in the term. In his fundamental work, he noted that bricoleur “is someone who works with his hands and uses devious means [in order to complete the task and hand] compared to those of a craftsman” [2: 16-17]. Then, Lévi-Strauss describes how bricoleur finds musical material, his sound in the outer world: “His universe of instruments is closed and rules of his game are always to make do with “whatever is at hand....” [2: 17].

What instruments does composer Koka Nikoladze make? In recent years several instruments, the so-called “music boxes” were made according to the rules of his “game” (I would name so the process performed on the stage at Koka’s concerts). Koka called the first one “Beat machine”, the second, which is made of wood, “sings” in a human voice, the third stretches over several square meters and this box is connected with the composer’s idea to involve the listeners in music-making during the concert. The instruments created by the musician arouse great interest. At the concerts there is a spontaneous, non-academic atmosphere, the author tells how, of what and why he made the instruments with his own hands, demonstrates them and most importantly, the audience is always involved in the creative process at the concerts. No one remains indifferent.....

In a sense, at least partly some aspects of Eka Chabashvili's new work, symphony-exhibition” *Khma*” (“Voice”) (premiered in the autumn of 2018), can be explained from the perspective of bricolage. According to the composer's concept, the work is a combination of different art genres. More precisely, audio installation is constantly on during the performance and visual installations are exhibited in the concert space; the listeners are involved in music-making, they read the randomly-chosen spells preliminarily written by the composer and at some point, improvise on the instrument, which the composer calls “Voice” and which was specially made by the author for this performance. This last factor – an instrument specially made by the author of the composition, arouses my associations with bricolage.

The second principle of bricolage is close to those musicians who are characterized in the so-called **thinking with formulas**. At this time, the new is created from the existing old. The strategy of this type bricolage is – to select the elements from the “old” source, systematize them and create a new work by using various means of form-making. It should be noted that the techniques, used by composers when processing the formulas of the so-called “other’s” text, are distinguished by great diversity.

Among the predecessors of modern bricolage, can be named all fundamental systems of the divine service and chanting – Byzantine octoechos, Gregorian chorale, old Georgian eight-tone system, Russian octoechos (*osmoglsasiye*). During their oral existence these systems applied special intonation

models - novans,³ a combinative movement which stitched musical tissue of the chant. Oral chanting tradition of octoechos underwent evolution when moving onto the written tradition. Thinking with “live” formulas was also transformed parallel to this evolution.

How did this difficult process develop in Georgia? Considered should be the fact, that Georgian chanting is polyphonic. And type of melodic in the leading voice manifests proximity with the monody of Orthodox tradition which introduced general centonic principle of melody constructing from Byzantium. Chant compositions have purely combined character and are formed via uniting with ready melodic formulas as in all afore-mentioned systems. A number of researchers write about this: “Traditional melodic formulas of different sizes are integral basis for the intonational fund of Georgian chants, from which polyphonic chant was stitched under the conditions of oral chanting...” [7: 15]

The afore-mentioned technique can undoubtedly be considered bricolage, as bricolage is the technique for manipulating with intonation and melodic-rhythmic formula blocks. In Georgia this technique was used consistently in oral neumatic and well as “chrelebi” writing systems. Tamar Chkheidze – the researcher of ecclesiastical chant speaks about this [8].

Postmodern bricolage method is characterized in modeling musical structures from heterogeneous elements. “Other’s” material may be an artistic or non-artistic product: academic music of different styles, folklore, jazz, rock, soundtracks, lounge music, audio recordings of city, nature, and machinery sounds, etc.

Also interesting are the technological aspects of creating bricolage forms. The analysis has shown the means of assimilation of various elements and compositional methods applied by bricoleurs in the working process. Noteworthy among them is polystylism, aleatory, minimalism, montage, sample and electronic composition, deejaying. Of great interest is P. Sion’s monograph “The Music of Michael Nyman: Texts, Contexts and Intertexts”, as it thoroughly describes the technique of processing other’s works, which originated in Nyman’s creative work [9]. It should be noted that already in 2007 the author of the book compares Nyman’s composition technique with bricolage and sets central, chief question – about intertextual connection of bricolage with the techniques such as quote, auto quote, collage, processing, reconstruction and others [8: 147]. Describes the proximity of bricolage method with palimpsest, because with bricolage technique new music is as if written on the surface of the old one, but old texts still “leak” (as an example Sion refers to Nyman’s Quartets #3 and #4) [9: 149].

Among the previously listed postmodern techniques less studied is **samples based music composition**, which combines academic music with the art of deejaying. One of the first works created with this technique can be considered “Revolution #9” of The Beatles; in the composition a large number of excerpts from the group’s own songs are combined with various natural and artificial sounds. This finding of The Beatles creates a chaos impression. It is noteworthy that the group used **sampler** for the first time in preparing, processing and certain ordering of the sounds.

Today sample composition, as mentioned, combines academic music with the art of deejaying. This art originated in Bronx in the early 1970s, and got the name Turntablism⁴ in the 1990s. Deejayism – is the art of playing audio recording on the DJ instrument via specific performance technique. This original method created by DJs, can unconditionally be considered bricolage, for different audio recordings are used as source material to create new compositions (improvisations), i.e. others’ audio recordings are deconstructed, divided into constituent parts – samplers, and from them completely new music, sometimes too alienated from the source, is “composed” in real time.

³ N. Efimova’s term, which the researcher introduced in her dissertation work: “ Rannechristianskoe penie v Zapadnoi Evrope VIII-X stoletii” (“Early-Christian Chanting in Western Europe of the 8th-9th centuries”). Moscow., 1999.

⁴ Turntables – a Vinyl record-player. The term was introduced by DJs, to emphasize the exclusiveness of DJ art.

As for the polystylistic nature of sampler composition, musicologist D. Shchevelev thinks, that it can be explained by the assimilation of modern academic music with the phenomenon of hip hop deejaying [9]. The author of the article discusses the experiment similar to detecting intertextuality phenomenon on the example of “RPM” of Canadian composer Nicole Lizée.⁵ The form of the work is stitched from short fragments of the musical material, which with their features and function remind of samplers. The material includes soundtracks from the feature film “The Sounds of Music”, George Winston’s “Reflection” and Perry Como’s “Catch a Falling Star”, “Don’t Let the Stars Get”, “Papa loves Mambo”, The Sandpipers: “Inchworm”. The work comprises two different types of samplers: the first – performed by a virtual acoustic ensemble, the other – by a DJ. The DJ’s “part” affects musical structure of the ensemble’s part, i.e. the first type of samplers is formed impromptu depending on DJ’s musical function. It should be noted, that the work is not a kaleidoscope of samplers. They are organically involved in three large parts according to the composer's dramaturgical intentions. The work is supplied with the scheme created by the composer, to illustrate his dramaturgical idea.

Finally, as a summary, I will briefly answer the question set in title of the article: what is bricolage – a technique or type of thinking? There is no univocal answer to this question, due to the existence of two different principles of bricolage and assimilation possibility of these principles. One of them, as confirmed by the study, is dictated by the author's conceptual approach, if you want, – by his aesthetic credo – **all that was created before me – is common property**...and the second one – **take what is at hand and use in a different capacity** – is related to the means for the realization of his technology. Besides, in the art of new time technique is often more important than the method, which is a direct manifestation of the composer’s thinking. Today author’s technique, in some sense, is the know-how of a specific composer, who himself chooses the rules of the game, but behind the “game” there often is an original musical concept. P. Boulez’s statement: - *let's bring technique to the idea level* - was not unreasonable.

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⁵ The title of the work “RPM” is the abbreviation of the English **rotations per minute**, what reflects chief parameters of DJ’s instrument. This way the composer determines the basic idea of her work.

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