

TIME IN MUSICAL ART: CATAPHATIC AND APOPHATIC ASPECTS

PETRUȚA-MARIA COROIU ¹

SUMMARY. Time represents the fundamental dimension of human existence, implicitly of any human enterprise. Everything man does is articulated in time and depends on time, having a specifically temporal unfolding, with consequences on the flowing time axis. Defining temporality and its conditions for existence is very difficult, it is an undertaking thousands of years old, with many attempts that only partially covered the aspects it supposes. Time is one of the fundamental concepts of science and of Philosophy. The two fields can be assimilated to the analysis of two aspects: cataphatic (objective) and apophatic (subjective) – with important consequences in Bach's Missa BWV 232.

Keywords: time, discourse, music, cataphatic, apophatic.

Time represents the fundamental dimension of human existence, implicitly of any human enterprise. Everything man does is articulated in time and depends on time, having a specifically temporal unfolding, with consequences on the flowing time axis. "In common sense, time is the continuous and successive course of things"².

Defining temporality and its conditions for existence is very difficult, it is an undertaking thousands of years old, with many attempts that only partially covered the aspects it supposes. Time is one of the fundamental concepts of science (studied especially in Physics) and of Philosophy.

The two reference fields of the temporal concept are:

- the objective, scientific one (relating to Physics); and
- the subjective, spiritual-artistic one (of theological, artistic and ideational nature).

The two fields can be assimilated to the analysis of two aspects:

- cataphatic (objective); and

¹ *Transilvania University of Braşov, Interpretation and Music Pedagogy Department, Faculty of Music, B-dul Eroilor nr.29, 500036 Braşov, Romania, univ. prof. PhD habil., maniutpetruta@yahoo.com*

² *Enciclopedia de filosofie și științe umane (Encyclopedia of Philosophy and Humanities)*, Ed. All Educational, Bucureşti, 2004, p.1102, TIMP.

- apophatic (subjective).

In Physics terms, time represents “the measure of duration of events (in an objective sense), a dimension of nature, a measure of change”³. For classical Physics, “time is a continuum, but modern Physics (the theory of quantum mechanics) speaks of a continuum space-time”⁴.

In the musical field, time has acquired due attention both at a national and at an international level. At a national level, the composer and musicologist, Adrian Iorgulescu, relates time with the communication act – essential for the very being of the work of art: “the outcome of communication is the characteristic of the work of autorevealing; communication is the very purpose of the artistic act; and communication possesses an objective-subjective ambivalence (between the reality of the structure and the idealism of the vision, between the real immobility of the content and the mobility of artistic representation) ”⁵.

In Philosophy, time is defined as “an irreversible, uninterrupted flux, that cannot flow but in one direction, a continuum in which events succeed one another from the past, through the present to the future and within which all the processes in nature unfold”⁶.

In the musical art, the temporal concept applies both in the composition art and in the interpretation and the perception of an artistic sound event.

In the creative, composition field, time is the main factor underlying the articulation of musical discourse.

In the interpretation act, time represents the frame within which it unfolds, upon which it depends fundamentally (not only at the level of the tempo of the musical work). In interpretation, the temporal concept is linked to the mental concept that has to be structured regarding the musical work and conveyed to the public: “the artistic act has to be expressed technically and interpretatively; the mission of the conductor is to perform the unity of the technical side and the artistic one in the process of interpretation of a choral work. This unity is possible only when the conductor has formed the mental concept of the work (the technical mental concept and the interpretative mental concept), which he can obtain by going through two stages: syntactic-musical analysis and vocal-choral analysis”⁷.

³ <https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timp>.

⁴ Idem.

⁵ Iorgulescu, Adrian, *Timpul și comunicarea muzicală (Time and musical communication)*, Ed. Muzicală, București, 1991.

⁶ <https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timp>.

⁷ Guțanu, Luminița, *The Complexity and Characteristics of Choral Art*, STUDIA UBB MUSICA, LIX, 1, 2014 (p. 75 - 80)

For the phenomenon of listening to music and perceiving its immediate and profound senses, time represents a factor that seems passive, but that has a fundamental role in grasping the most hidden layers of a work of art.

The notions cataphatic and apophatic can be transferred from the field of theology to the one of musical analysis regarding the description of some essential aspects of the musical time in the sound work of art. “The asceticism of monks and laymen aims at cleansing the mind and uniting to God through His grace. Orthodox theology testifies to this union by experience, which, in the case of those who are spiritually advanced, becomes an apophatic theology, impossible to comprise within the boundaries of reason of the fallen world”⁸.

The rational element can be linked to the one regarding analysis and deduction, without which the comprehension of the musical phenomenon would be impossible and incomplete. At the same time, in the absence of the sensitive, subjective element concerning the apophatic approach, the same profound study of musical phenomenon would be inconceivable. “Human reason (*dianoia*), on the one hand, and the spiritually advanced intellect (*nous*), on the other hand, as specific faculties of knowledge and living, display interference bridges on the grounds of reality itself, when this is regarded as a unity between the Creator and His acts, between the Logos and those *logoi* (divine reasons), more or less hidden in the creation, to which Saint Maximus the Confessor referred in detail. On these grounds, all human ways of quest and contemplation may live together in a synergy of knowledge and living. It is a matter of knowledge that can thus surpass its own limits inherent to discursive reason through the apophatic experience, through deepening into mystery, from where – contrary to what one might believe – the verb itself has the chance to return more lively and fresher than ever, although it resembles a beautiful flying creature that cannot be caught with one’s hand”⁹.

The German scholar Werner Heisenberg drew attention to the fact that scientific theories presenting totalising claims are mere utopias: “there are other phenomena that could not be comprised by means of the concepts of this idealisation; the concepts describing biological processes, for instance, the very concept of life, do not occur in this physical idealisation”¹⁰. (We could add in this respect the parallelism with the specific of the artistic event.)

⁸ Coresciuc, Roger, *Vederea în chip lămurit a celor duhovnicești (Seeing Spiritual Things Clearly)*, <http://ziarullumina.ro/vederea-in-chip-lamurit-a-celor-duhovnicesti-72839.html>, 28th Jan. 2012.

⁹ Caragiu, Florin, *Lumină de la Răsărit (Light from the East)*, <http://ziarullumina.ro/lumina-de-la-rasarit-72810.html>, 28th Jan. 2012.

¹⁰ Heisenberg, Werner, *Pași peste granițe (Steps across Boundaries)*, Ed. Politică, București, 1977, pp. 319-320.

Any spiritual-artistic field has its apophatic dimensions, but even more so the artistic experience in itself is comprised within the limits of such an approach: “the game visible-invisible, comprehensible-incomprehensible is approachable only in an apophatic-hesychast way. Theoretically, the apparent difficulty imposed by the mathematical-logical frames of reason is difficult to surpass. Practically, the spiritually advanced person, endowed with the wings of hesychia leading to grace, starts to understand what is not a mere in-comprehensible in itself, but the Super-Comprehensible pre-eminently. The Unseen remains unseen, but revealing Himself in sight above sight, in spiritual sight, full of the reality of the experience”¹¹.

The aspects of the musical event (that will be exemplified as follows) may refer to the apophatic dimension – the one that is capable to support that spiritual faculty (nous) through which the soul receives the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; the spiritual intellect (nous) is the one that necessarily gives birth to open, inexhaustible concepts – also applicable for the temporal comprehension of the musical event.

The materialist vision of the world offers only a quantitative, measurable, incomplete approach to reality, to the meaning and the essence of the object, leaving the subject-object relation aside. The “universe as an event”¹², in its real temporal dynamics, may be perceived only by means of open, spiritualised, apophatic analytical categories.

In order to clarify this approach (that is the subject matter of a broader study we are carrying out) also from a practical point of view, we resort to the two sections Kyrie Eleison within the Great Mass in B Minor by J. S. Bach.

“Only the sections Kyrie eleison and Gloria had been handed in at the Dresden court”¹³. In Kyrie Eleison I, there is a temporal dimension that we would call cataphatic, marked by a predominantly diatonic discourse, fluent, cursive, strictly measurable, declamatory, nonrubato, precise and affirmative, and marked by obvious interval leaps.

¹¹ Coresciuc, Roger, *Vederea în chip lămurit a celor duhovnicești (Seeing Spiritual Things Clearly)*, <http://ziarillumina.ro/vederea-in-chip-lamurit-a-celor-duhovnicesti-72839.html>, 28th Jan. 2012.

¹² Nesteruk, Alexei, *Originea ne-originară a universului și evenimentul nașterii: paralele fenomenologice și teologice (The Un-originated Origin of Universe and the Event of Birth: Phenomenological and Theological Parallels)*, Sinapsa review, No. X, 2011, pp. 21-49.

¹³ Huchting, Detmar, *Bach – A Biographical Kaleidoscope*, Edel Classics, Hamburg, 2006, p. 107.

E.g. 1

Musical score for Bach-Missa BWV 232, Kyrie eleison I (fragment of the score). The score is for Soprano 1, Soprano 2, Alto, Tenore, Basso, and Continuo. It shows the vocal lines with lyrics: "Ky - ri - e, Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son, e - le - i - son." and the continuo line with figured bass notation: "7 6 5 2 6 9 8 7 6 5 6 7 6 5".

Bach-Missa BWV 232, Kyrie eleison I (fragment of the score)

The style can also be noticed in instrumental music signed within the "Well-tempered Clavier" by the same J. S. Bach, within the Fugue in A minor, for 3 voices; the instrumental style is firm, misurato, strongly articulated at the metro-rhythmic level by equal, accentuated sounds, grouped in formulas clearly separated by pauses:

E.g. 2

Musical score for Fugue a minor (Well-tempered Klavier). The score is for Bass clef, marked "Ampiamente energico" and "Fuga II, XX (a 3 voci)". It shows the beginning of the fugue with a forte dynamic marking "f".

Fugue a minor (Well-tempered Klavier)

At the opposite end of the scale, we could place the second section Kyrie Eleison (II), that seems a reminiscence of that stile antico, marked by chromaticism (that continuously refers to the theme of the Cross), pertaining to a slow tempo, with a discourse based on a gradual evolution, that progresses slowly and mystically, towards an unpredictable direction; the analogy with the apophatic dimension is obvious if we think of the amplification of these remarks at a polyphonic level, each voice adding its own tension, in a narrow ambitus, oversaturated with meaning:

HOHE MESSE
h-moll/B minor
BWV 232

3. Chor: Kyrie

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

Alla breve

Sopran I & II

Alt

Tenor

Bass

Alla breve
Bass, Fag. Viola

Ky ri - e e - lei - son, e - le - i -
son, e - le - i - son, e - le - i - son, Ky - ri -

Bach-Missa BWV 232, Kyrie eleison II

REFERENCES

- Caragiu, Florin, *Lumină de la Răsărit (Light from the East)*, <http://ziarullumina.ro/lumina-de-la-rasarit-72810.html>,
- Coresciuc, Roger, *Vederea în chip lămurit a celor duhovnicești (Seeing Spiritual Things Clearly)*, <http://ziarullumina.ro/vederea-in-chip-lamurit-a-celor-duhovnicesti-72839.html>
- Guțanu, Luminița, *The Complexity and Characteristics of Choral Art*, *STUDIA UBB MUSICA*, LIX, 1, 2014 (p. 75 - 80)
- Heisenberg, Werner, *Pași peste granițe (Steps across Boundaries)*, Ed. Politică, București, 1977.
- Huchting, Detmar, *Bach – A Biographical Kaleidoscope*, Edel Classics, Hamburg, 2006.
- Iorgulescu, Adrian, *Timpul și comunicarea muzicală (Time and musical communication)*, Ed. Muzicală, București, 1991.
- Nesteruk, Alexei, *Originea ne-originară a universului și evenimentul nașterii: paralele fenomenologice și teologice (The Un-originated Origin of Universe and the Event of Birth: Phenomenological and Theological Parallels)*, *Sinapsa review*, No. X, 2011.
- <https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timp>
- xxx, *Enciclopedie de filosofie și științe umane (Encyclopedia of Philosophy and Humanities)*, Ed. All Educational, București, 2004.