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PRIVATE FEELINGS AND PUBLIC STATEMENTS IN THE MUSIC OF DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH

What does Dmitriy Dmitriyevich Shostakovich (1906–1975) express in his music? As for any other composer, no answer is complete and correct throughout. But no other composer's life and music have attracted as many attempts to bring such an answer as Shostakovich's. Why does he attract so many exegetes? It cannot be stated directly what he expresses in his 'artifacts' but it is clear that we are dealing with something highly intensive and human. His ability to communicate so directly his and his listeners' paradigms is unique. Despite the fact that musicologists are to deal only with musical sytagms[1] and related historical facts, the possibility of interpreting the facts ideologically (and sometimes yet politically) is tempting even for them. The string quartet, which is in Shostakovich's case perhaps the most significant communicative medium as a genre, together with symphonies, will be the reference field in dealing with the real or fictive antagonisms between Shostakovich's public and private worlds.

When a musicologist deals with problems of a particular era and/or country where an ideological doctrine ruled all the public life in a totalitarian manner, there is a danger of getting a similarly ideological (no matter if opposite), non-scientific approach in his work. This can be easily seen in the present situation of writing about Shostakovich. There are two stages of inadmissible scholarly

1 'Syntagm' is understood here as the opposite to 'paradigm'. Every paradigm, when being in any way communicated, has a syntagm, the concrete communicated semantic structure that exists between the expedient (composer) and the recipient (listener). 'Paradigm', the abstract non-verbal content of the information, is encoded by the expedient into a 'message' (composition). When the recipient shares the same decoder with the expedient, then he gets the right information from the message 'sent' by the composer. However, in the case of music the coders and decoders are never the same so there is a lot of space for misunderstandings. For more information about the paradigm and syntagm methodology see Volek, Jaroslav: 'The "Old" and "New" Modality in Janáček's *The Diary of One Who Vanished* and "Nursery Rhymes"'; in Beckermann, Michael & Bauer, Glen (eds.): Janáček and Czech music: proceedings of the international conference (Saint Louis, 1988), 1995, pp 57–82

ideological approach towards Shostakovich's life and works; the limit between the two being made by the apparition of *Testimony*[2].

This book, first issued in 1979, presents shocking composer's memoirs but appeared under highly suspicious conditions. In his introduction to Testimony, its editor and (perhaps) co-author Solomon Moyseyevich Volkov states that he met Shostakovich a number of times in composer's home and made a stenographic record with his private abbreviations from the sessions. Then he set them individually into a continuous text and asked the composer to read it. Shostakovich (supposedly) read all the text and signed the beginnings of each of its eight chapters. He didn't wish his memoirs to be published until four years after his death.

A year after the appearance of Testimony, American scholar Laurel E. Fay published an article[3] where she brings evidence that Testimony is Volkov's fake. She proved that beginnings of seven out of eight book's chapters are verbatim quotations of previously published Shostakovich's texts. As long as the authentication marks 'Читал. Д. Шостакович' (Read. D. Shostakovich) are all written on pages with these 'detected' texts with 'secure' contents (all of noticeably same extent of one typescript page), Fay suggests that Volkov could bluff the composer with the nature and contents of the book. Volkov refused the proposal for writing a statement to the following issue of the magazine and failed to answer satisfactorily the questions raised by Fay until present.

Since the publication of *Testimony* many different people who met Shostakovich personally in his lifetime share their reminiscences and opinions (sic!) with the wide public. Friends' and relatives' opinions on the matter became gradually the most decisive factors in the whole Shostakovich debate.

Before 1979, when *Testimony* appeared, both western and eastern music historians were in a rare unity when treating the ideological content of Shostakovich's works. He is seen by all but his close friends and family as a speaking-trumpet of the soviet regime and most of his music is being listened to through this prism. It is worth stressing that some indications of *'юродивый'* (yurodivy*)* contents in Shostakovich's compositions used to be carefully mentioned even long before. In 1959 David Rabinovich mentions for the first time the similarity of the music of opuses 46 and 47 – Four Romances on verses by Pushkin and the Symphony No. 5 in d minor respectively. This is the first of Shostakovich's famous hidden messages – by mentioning the melody (syntagm) of the *'Rebirth'* song in the symphony he reminds us of Pushkin's words (paradigm) about barbarian artists destroying their colleagues' masterpieces.

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2 Volkov, Solomon (ed.): 'Testimony: The Memoirs of Dimitri Shostakovich, as related to and edited by Solomon Volkov', translated [from an unpublished Russian original] by Antonina W. Bouis, Hamish Hamilton, London/Harper and Row, New York, 1979; Czech translation as 'Svědectví. Paměti Dmitrije Šostakoviče, zaznamenal Solomon Volkov', Praha, 2006

3 Fay, Laurel E.: 'Shostakovich versus Volkov: Whose *Testimony*?', in *Russian Review* 39/4, October 1980, pp. 484-493

After 1979 (or rather after 1980 when the endless *Testimony* debates launched) the scholar world started to gradually divide in two groups. One is called *'revisionists'* and represents the people who revise the *'old'* view on Shostakovich's creative and public activities from before 1979. *Anti-revisionists* occupy the opposite side of the spectrum despite the fact that recently nobody treats Shostakovich as a completely loyal communist without any critical attitude towards the regime.

The *revisionists,* represented for long by Ian MacDonald (1948-2003) with Alan Ho and Dmitri Feofanov and their books[4], are (despite Ho's professorship in the Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville) rather the 'folk', non-academic branch of the research. In their texts they often treat people with different opinions as 'idiots', 'stupid' or 'naïve'. Their paranoid attacks on supposed 'censorship' in high-ranking musicologists' circles and even their discretion of the musicology as a whole became their most significant methods.

The *anti-revisionists* (named so by revisionists) remain academically reserved towards all the popular romantic images of Shostakovich being a fearless hero and don't generally share revisionists' passions. Unfortunately they sometimes also play revisionists' ideological game and try to prove exactly the opposite from what is claimed by the *Testimony* supporters. Perhaps the most significant anti-revisionists are Richard Taruskin and Laurel E. Fay.

The result of all these attacks is the quarrel about Shostakovich's personality and intentions of his doing. Another problem is that most people involved don't see much difference between discussing the *veracity* and the *authenticity* of Testimony. Volkov, who belonged to the circle of Shostakovich's closest friends, might well know all the stories and opinions from the composer and express them in the book without the doubtful meetings with the composer. After so many different testimonies[5] it is clear that a great majority of Testimony's contents is accurate. But the authenticity of it is another question. Did really Volkov do all what he claims to have done? This seems on the other hand to be highly suspicious because of Volkov's inability to take his part in the debate. The everyday picture of the 'match' is that an 'anti-revisionist' examines critically the *authenticity* of the Testimony and receives vicious attacks examining his intelligence and an unbelievable mass of arguments supporting Testimony's *veracity* as the answer. The debate usually ends by evaluative statements about Shostakovich's opinions and about political contents of his music. As the pure *syntagm* (structure), music

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4 MacDonald, Ian: 'The New Shostakovich', Fourth Estate, London/North Eastern University Press, Boston, 1990, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991, new expanded edition by Pimlico, 2006; Ho, Allan B. and Feofanov, Dmitri (eds.): 'Shostakovich Reconsidered', Toccata Press, London, 1998

5 The best source of testimonies for queries about Shostakovich's life and works is the book collected and written by the daughter of the former British ambassador to the USSR who studied at the Moscow Conservatoire with Shostakovich: Wilson, Elisabeth: 'Shostakovich: a Life Remembered', Faber and Faber, London/Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1994; second expanded edition 2006

itself is unpolitical, the 'contents' or 'hidden messages' can be indicated but never resolutely connected with the musical structure itself. The Fifth symphony with all the past aureola of prototype of the socialist realistic art is a good example: The official optimistic *message* of the symphony is confronted with many little hidden *messages* expressing exactly the opposite.

How should then be the big 'Shostakovich' theme approached correctly? Which is the exact location of the 'permissible' field of classification of Shostakovich's personality? When talking about his private world it is necessary to be careful about ideo-political reasoning. It should be also noted that not always is the border between composer's public and private worlds visible and identifiable.

The differences between Shostakovich's symphonies and his string quartets are striking. The symphonies are written for a wider audience and attract stronger critical response. If the composer wanted to write something hidden and courageous what he would like to be passed over unnoticed by the authorities, the string quartet was a more adequate medium. The symphonies on the other hand (unless being an open protest as the 4th and the 13th) had to offer an official ideological 'Party–satisfying' educational or explanatory message. As he intended his hidden 'protest' messages to be read (decoded) rather by individuals than by masses (the free communication was very limited in the USSR so this came to be necessary), the place to look for the most intimate privacy is the string quartet. The medium of the symphony was very much looked at so all the private secrets or ambiguous tenor had to be perfectly hidden behind the official propagandist interpretation. These are undoubtedly cases of the Second (terror in music but revolutionary ending), Fifth (simplified 'social – realistic' musical language and noisy ending in a major key but hidden syntagms explaining the work in a completely different way), Seventh (fighting the enemy but uncertainty about the identity of this enemy), Eighth (quite the same case) and Eleventh (revolutionary theme but obvious recent historical connotations with the Hungarian uprising in 1956). The only symphonies that remain just as open protests without any attempt to disorient the authorities are the symphonic Fourth which couldn't be heard until twenty five years after its composition, when it came to be an unexpectedly good surprise even for the composer himself, and the choral Thirteenth set to the 'protest' poems by Yevgeniy Yevtushenko. The symphonic works supporting openly the Soviet ideology without any significant 'protest' are the Third (though still avant-garde) and the Twelfth (perhaps the most 'communist' Shostakovich's symphony). The remaining symphonies (though it's simplifying to 'classify' their contents so) are either (again supposedly) apolitical (the First and the Fourteenth; despite the fact that the ostentatiously 'politically unrelated' theme of the 14th could be also understood as a protest or as a political statement), or humorous and in this way political but not openly protesting (the Ninth), or enigmatic and intentionally illegible (the Fifteenth), or simply internally disunite with both tragic and joyful elements (the Sixth and the Tenth).

All these, dissident or opportunist messages represent rather composer's public life – his communication with the mass audience. Is this true? What was the composer's motivation to set into music Yevtushenko's poem Babiy Yar? Was it any public feeling? Or was it rather the expression of his own intensive feelings? He couldn't simply forget about the massive suffering of Jews and join the official Party's line of 'closing eyes'. He had to express his inner thoughts and made so publicly. Artist's 'Dostoyevskiyan' private attitude towards unjust and unrecognized suffering had to find its way out to the public. Where does the private life dwell and where we already talk about 'public' Shostakovich? At a *public* performance of Shostakovich's Thirteenth symphony there is the whole *private* composer on stage. The most profound privacy is expressed in the most public way.

The Eighth string quartet Op. 110 is quite a similar case. This autobiography, intended to be composer's own musical obituary (written possibly with a suicide in mind) and formally dedicated to the victims of the war, is full of autobiographical self-quotations. The used motifs are from these compositions: 2nd Piano Trio Op. 67 (the Jewish dance of death from the 4th movement), Symphonies Nos. 1, 8 and 10, First cello concerto, opera Lady Macbeth; from other compositions there is a tune from the revolutionary song 'Замучен тяжелой неволей' (Exhausted by the hardship of prison), the Trauermarsch from Wagner's Götterdämmerung and 2nd theme from the 1st movement of Tchaikovsky's Sixth symphony.[6] The whole composition is framed by its author's musical signature – the notes D – Es (E flat in Central-European terminology) – C – H (=B).

However, the Eighth Quartet is in some way special. It's the only one with a programme – all the others represent pure, absolute music. Shostakovich's quartet intention was to create a 24-part cycle like in his opus 87[7]: The 24 piano Preludes and Fugues. Thus he didn't repeat any keys so every string quartet has a different one. In this situation it is uneasy to find any traces of a certain *privacy* which would be understood as an opposite to the *public* world of symphonies. If the world of Shostakkovich's string quartets is taken as a prototype of *privacy*, then there appear problems when we find similar features in *'public'* symphonies.

The limit of the two worlds thus cannot be found between symphonies and quartets nor yet between the chamber and the orchestral/vocal genres. The border doesn't lie between Shostakovich's intentionally programmatic (with sung texts)

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6 From Shostakovich's letter to Isaak Glikman of 19 July 1960, in Гликман, И. Д. (сост.): Писма к другу: Писма Д. Д. Шостаковича к И. Д. Гликману. Композитор, Санкт-Петербург, 1993, p. 159, No. 137

7 According to the testimony of Dmitry M. Tsyganov / Дмитрий М. Цыганов (1903-1992), the first violinist of the Beethoven Quartet 1923-1977, in Хентова, С. М.: В мире Шостаковича: Беседы с Шостаковичем. Беседы о композиторе. Конпозитор, Москва, 1996, p. 207, information taken from Fay, Laurel Elizabeth: Shostakovich: a Life. Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 218

and non-programmatic music either. Where is this privacy/public limit then? The answer should be looked for in composer's personality.

During his lifetime, Shostakovich was both poor, fighting for basic needs, and extremely rich; he was both full of energy and sick, full of resignation; he was both repressed for his boldness and corrupt while occupying the post in the Party's and Union's organs. In the USSR, when living in these extreme polarities, there was never too far from one pole to the other. The Russians have always lived in a state of permanent tension. The fear accompanied every public human doing. That is why they would rather shut the door of their flats and stay alone only with the family. And artists usually remain alone in their spiritual creative worlds. This can be the reason why all the Russian music, art, and culture are so profound and touching. The human experience is omnipresent.

In Shostakovich's case it was a typical inner personal conflict. When he made some strong statement in favour of the regime, he had to re-evaluate himself in the eyes of people that he loved so much. That is why the Twelfth symphony was followed by a so different Thirteenth.

Shostakovich wasn't choosing between the two worlds: *public* and *private*. He lived without the possibility of choice. In a world public and private, official and unofficial, rich and poor, free and totalitarian, friendly and terrorist, wanted and obligatory, full of love and hate. Shostakovich had to share all at once in just one life.