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Synaesthesia in Time: Notes and Colours

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Abstract

This article examines synaesthesia as a compositional force within my musical practice, understood not as a system of fixed cross-sensory correspondences but as an embodied perceptual condition unfolding in time. Rather than applying pre-prepared synaesthetic mappings, my work approaches synaesthesia as a temporal process through which changes in rhythm, intensity, timbre, pitch, and focus continuously reshape musical perception from within. The article situates my personal synaesthetic experience within contemporary compositional practice, outlining how it intersects with an improvisatory method of generating musical material. My compositions are developed through direct work with performers, real instruments, extended vocal and instrumental techniques, and phonemic sound, often producing timbral transformations that blur instrumental identity and simulate electronic processes through acoustic means. I propose an artistic theory of synaesthesia grounded in practice, introducing concepts such as dominant features, focal points, incompleteness, fusion and non-fusion, and the dimensionality of synaesthetic perception. Synaesthetic scales (such as pitch–colour relations) function here as stable perceptual alphabets whose elements do not change, yet manifest differently depending on temporal context, musical action, and perceptual focus. Two case studies illustrate these ideas: the chamber piece Notes and Colours, which explores synaesthetic recolouring and timbral metamorphosis over time, and the video-opera Tintagiles, where synaesthetic relations connect music, text, movement, and video within a shared temporal flow. The article argues that synaesthesia, conceived as perception-in-time, enables a compositional agency that resists standardization and opens alternative modes of listening, notation, and musical worlding.

Keywords: Synaesthesia, Improvisatory Method, Artistic Research, Practice-Based Research, Music Composition

Introduction: Synaesthesia and Compositional Practice

Many synaesthetes initially do not know that they possess a rare and particular perceptual faculty in which sensory boundaries intersect with one another. They assume that such a mode of experiencing the world is characteristic of all people and is something natural,

even, to a certain degree, ordinary. When comparing the colours of alphabet letters with another synaesthete and discovering that we coincide in the colour of only one letter (the letter "o"), this may seem like a normal exchange, almost an expected result — as if, in another situation, two people listening to a piece of music were to agree only on a single fragment or element of the work they had heard. Yet while the subjectivity of perspective can be claimed by almost anyone (even by those who possess no perspective of their own), the discovery that, according to scientific research, only 4–10 percent of the population possess synaesthesia (Simner et al., 2006, pp. 1024–1033) transforms synaesthetic being from being-in-the-whole-world into a separate, narrowed island-world of synaesthetes. In this world, other people — non-synaesthetes — prove scarcely capable of understanding what you perceive and what you speak about. At that moment, the previously shared language begins to stratify and ceases to be common. The unity that was already limping finally turns into an illusion, because, as a synaesthete with a specific type of synaesthesia, you may not only see the colours of letters, syllables, and words, but language itself acquires other properties and qualities, becoming "coloured" and interwoven with various synaesthetic sensations and associations, thereby further increasing the distance of inevitable misunderstanding and estrangement from the dimensions familiar to non-synaesthetes.

The study of synaesthesia is not only the recognition of an unsettling uniqueness-without-effort and the inhabiting of an island-world of synaesthetes. It also involves overcoming the awkwardness connected with directing persistent, concentrated attention — with maximal detail — toward something that previously existed almost in the mode of non-noticing, as a constant habitual background, similar to one's own breathing. Breathing performs a vital function, yet at the same time, we do not hear it, we do not observe the changes in its rhythm; it is as though our breathing does not exist. It would likely be quite strange to live in a world where it were suddenly discovered that only 4–10 percent of people possessed such a respiratory function, and this minority would immediately be questioned about how, exactly, they manage to breathe.

Théodule Ribot (1901, pp. 23-99) considered coloured hearing to be "the consequence of incomplete differentiation between the senses of sight and hearing and the accidental revival of a characteristic which, in some remote epoch, may have been the general rule in humanity." Since in the contemporary era differentiations have become not merely a possibility of distinction but a means of further detailing, altering, fragmenting, extracting from contexts, and generating new ruptures, one might rather expect that the existing senses

could acquire — or are already acquiring — even more substantial fragmentation, dividing into ever smaller parts, accumulating new psychological and physiological terms. In the future, what we now habitually call sight or hearing may be interpreted as a kind of "visual synaesthesia" or "auditory synaesthesia," assembled from the fragments, divisions, and shards that have emerged as a new norm of separateness.

Thus, synaesthesia as it exists today is synaesthesia of contemporary time — a point of fixation within a state of disintegration, reflecting the present epoch and the contingent condition of the world at this moment.

The world of contemporary music is likewise a mirror of present-day being, where the striving for individuality, uniqueness, or distinction has endowed music with the properties of Freud's split subject. Human music, if it ever was something unified and whole, is now fractured into composer, performer, conductor, listener, musicologist, critic, instrument maker, concert hall architect, manufacturers of technical musical equipment and software, creators of samples; it is fractured into the score, into recordings of already existing interpretations or performance versions, into remixes and fragments (advertisements, social media, smartphone ringtones). We observe how each composer today (and even those who do not call themselves composers) attempts to solve their own musical puzzle, joining together the unjoinable. Gazing at this music in a manner reminiscent of Lacan's "mirror stage" (though it must be acknowledged that this mirror acquires ever more cracks and shatters into fragments), the composer discovers their "I."

Synaesthesia also connects the unconnected, but not through technical or rational means; rather, through the internal interactions of the sensorium. The phrase "this is how I see it" in the process of creating a musical work, in this case, is not a sign of a lack of rationality or deliberation in compositional decision-making. It may be regarded as a statement of fact — through synaesthesia, I truly see it this way. One might assume that when different modes of connection in art, and in music in particular, converge, we obtain a different type of result than when internal connections are sufficiently weak, pale, and scarcely distinguishable from randomness that provokes bewilderment or boredom.

The invariability of individual synaesthetic scales resembles a "personalized" alphabet — certain basic perceptual cells that attract the interest of many researchers, much like the bright colours of flowers attract butterflies, bees, and other insects. The constancy of these scales appears to lie beyond time, as though representing a "frozen" segment from some indefinite moment. This recalls Freud's concept of the unconscious in his 31st lecture (Freud,

1933), "The Dissection of the Psychical Personality," where he speaks of the absence of time in the unconscious: "In the unconscious ('Id') there is nothing corresponding to the idea of time, no recognition of the passage of time, and — what is most remarkable and awaits consideration by philosophical thought — no alteration in mental processes is produced by the passage of time." Thus, even if all subjective views of a person change over time, their synaesthetic scale does not reflect such transformations.

At the same time, synaesthesia is capable of changing over time, not through alteration of the scale itself, but through the various contexts in which it is applied. If we continue the analogy with the alphabet, the same letter may sound different depending on its position within a particular word — and sometimes it may not sound at all. In synaesthesia, similar transformations occur, for example, with the colour of a letter within a word or the colour of a note within a chord. Nevertheless, this does not alter the alphabet (ordinary or synaesthetic) or the musical scale, which remains invariant in all contexts — even when a word is mispronounced, spoken with an accent, distorted by noise or technical interference, even when a musical instrument is out of tune or far from new.

A synaesthetic scale connects the unconnectable, rather than "the same." We will not find a synaesthetic scale that explains what colour a synaesthete sees when looking at the colour red, because visible colours, in all possible combinations of letters, names, or pronunciations, remain for synaesthetes exactly as they are in reality. Indeed, it would be difficult to be a synaesthete if one saw yellow instead of red simply because the first letter in the word "red" happened to be yellow. We would then begin to confuse synaesthetes with colour-blind individuals. In many cases, synaesthesia does not contradict reality but adapts to it, and the properties of this adaptation are particularly interesting to observe. In certain situations, synaesthesia may almost disappear (for example, when I fill out administrative documents, my colours nearly withdraw from the field of vision, leaving black-and-white or grey-toned traces). In creative work, by contrast, synaesthesia may blossom.

Analysing my own creative output, which has accumulated a substantial body of music over more than thirty years[1], I think that perhaps one reason why I have for many years been engaged in contemporary opera, chamber vocal, and vocal-instrumental compositions — and why even in instrumental music I regularly employ phonemes, add syllables or words spoken by musicians, mix instrument and voice into a unified whole — lies in the

[1] The complete catalogue is available at the following link: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/400862236_Olga_Krashenko_COMPOSITIONS

synaesthetic attraction of using the linguistic alphabet. In addition to colours derived from pitch and from musical instruments and timbres themselves, I receive additional colours from letters, phonemes, syllables, words, and texts. In this respect, I most often choose the title of a composition so that it resonates, synaesthetically enriching musical perception, so that it draws inwardly like a magnet and gives the sensation that the music is "already here," that it sounds almost in the palm of one's hand, and that what remains is either to decipher it, if the composition has not yet been created, or to immerse oneself in listening as into a bottomless ocean.

Improvisatory Compositional Method and Sonic Material

The history of compositional music demonstrates, across its various periods, both composers who wrote at the piano (Fedjakin, 2022; Ramuz, 2020, p. 26) or while playing another musical instrument, and those who wrote notes directly onto paper without touching any instrument at all, relying solely on musical knowledge and memory of the instruments for which they were writing (Berlioz, 1870/1969; Rondarev, 2021). The obvious limitation of the second approach lies in the use of existing musical means as though the composer were situated in a museum where touching paintings or sculptures is forbidden, not to mention attempting to introduce something of one's own into that space. In such a situation, compositional writing habits come to the foreground: the way the hand records notes, the characteristic and often involuntary submission to established mechanisms, even when these mechanisms do not correspond to what one truly wishes to write.

But if I am not writing what I hear, should I continue writing? Is the creation of music identical with the act of writing music? This divergence, which became increasingly visible and conscious, once led me toward a different compositional method connected with improvisation — a method that fits neither composing at the piano nor composing at the desk, but instead opens another creative process, which I will now describe.

If a traditionally written score "at the desk," whether on paper or on a contemporary screen, represents the division of music into measurable elements and parameters, and the composer's control within pre-established coordinates — where the birth of music is the score itself, and the life of music is a being-after-the-score — then the improvisatory method literally overturns this habitual and expected scheme.

A composition recorded in the studio using an improvisatory method — where I can play any musical instrument and immediately hear the result — departs from the very

beginning from the possibilities of conventional notation. It resists rigid control and illusory measurability, forming complex nuances that are difficult or impossible to decipher, with the possibility or impossibility of exact repetition. This presupposes invariance rather than merely different interpretations of the same thing. Instead of proportionally calculated rhythmic figures assembled like Lego pieces, we enter an immeasurable space of music — its breathing, its nature, the impossibility of measuring the phenomenon of music by human metrics.

In my book *River of Thought. To Think Is Already to Sound* (Krashenko, 2019), I wrote: "The score provides a set of measurable quantities (pitch, duration, dynamics, and other parameters), yet it does not provide what we are measuring, that upon which we perform the act of measurement — namely, music itself. Music seems to exist separately, on its own, independently of the score."

The graphic and aleatoric scores that emerged in significant numbers in the twentieth century and continue to appear — score-paintings, verbal instructional scores, and other similar forms — signalled a tendency to move away from total control and from illusory measurability, while at the same time assuming all the risks of descending into chaos. The improvisatory method carries similar risks, since each sound is recorded separately in the studio, and it remains unknown whether the recorded sounds will converge into the intended result. Thus, the improvisatory method is an inevitable encounter with not-knowing — an opportunity to look directly into the face of the Socratic "I know that I know nothing," shifting from Lacan's discourse of the university as expert knowledge to the discourse of the analyst as the supposed knowing subject (*sujet supposé savoir*) (Lacan, 2007).

I do not know what new sound may arise if I merely turn the flute slightly, sway it, touch it differently, or add a voice. Perhaps my voice at that moment will not simply resemble the cry of a seagull but will even coincide with the cry of an actual seagull flying past the window — and this will then become a new element of the piece.

In being-before-the-score, music is already born and begins to live, and there is not always a necessity to produce a score, even while maintaining a certain naivety in believing that this music can be repeated, and that the generally accepted method of writing a score guarantees the possibility of repetition under the preservation of the same compositional title — although in practice the audible result often does not coincide with the intended one.

Being-before-the-score and independence from the score align this approach with the musical folklore traditions of various countries of the world and remind us of the question of what originally came first. Unlike the well-known analogy of the chicken and the egg, we clearly understand that the trace of music left on paper in the form of a score is precisely that — a trace.

An Artistic Theory of Synaesthesia

Synaesthesia may be called a creator within the creator. Despite a history spanning centuries — beginning with philosophical observations and evolving into scientific investigations of genetic and structural features of the brain — an artistic theory of synaesthesia, in my view, still awaits its true emergence: one with a developed terminology of its own and a shift from comparing basic synaesthetic scales toward complexities of another order, comparable to the "New Complexity" in music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Neurobiology concentrates its intellectual efforts on deciphering synaesthesia in isolation from its possible creative application, focusing on the brain and conducting tests outside the natural conditions of artistic practice (Triarhou, 2019).

Yet the synaesthetic sensorium is highly sensitive to the environment in which it finds itself, and also depends on thinking, knowledge, mood, and many other factors that extend far beyond science — unlike, for example, a chemical reaction, where the formula of combining substances functions independently of whether one knows it or not.

Among the first terms I formulated for myself and began applying in describing synaesthesia are *dominant feature* and *focal point*. If I enter a music studio filled with numerous instruments, technical equipment, furniture, and so on, this does not mean that synaesthesia immediately bombards me with kaleidoscopic flashes of colours and other synaesthetic sensations characteristic of perceiving each object separately. In a certain sense, synaesthesia "comes to the surface" not by itself but through thinking; otherwise, it remains in a dormant or unnoticed mode, while ordinary perception prevails. This is the essence of the *focal point* — the necessity of focusing, that is, the need to think about a particular object or to attend to the overall atmosphere, distinguishing it from where I was previously.

Now, let us imagine that in this studio, I hear a recording of the note "D," and we attempt to determine possible *dominant features*. The perception of what is usually, for me, the blue colour of the note "D" can change or be altered in my perceptual field depending on

the tuning of the "D," on the type of naming ("D" or "Re"), on the choice of instrument on which the pitch "D" is played (since an instrument's name or timbre may itself possess synaesthetic colours), on instrumental noise accompanying the sounding of "D" (for example, the pressing of valves or keys, audible breathing). My synaesthetic perception of the note "D" is also affected by which performer plays it, whether "D" is heard in works of composers of different eras, by my associations in listening to "D" across its historical layers; by the acoustics and spaces in which that "D" is performed or recorded; and by neighbouring notes surrounding "D" vertically and horizontally, interacting with it. All of these factors modify the synaesthetic colour I perceive when listening to the note "D." From this, we literally observe different synaesthetic results depending on what, at a given moment, becomes the decisive *dominant feature*.

Another term I use in relation to synaesthesia is *incompleteness* — not only because numerous types and subtypes of synaesthesia demonstrate particular absences (for example, a person may see colours for the notes C, D, E, F, G, A, and B, yet perceive no colour whatsoever in C-sharp or E-flat), but because there exists a fundamental dependence of synaesthesia on knowledge as such. The connection of each perceived object or symbol to its meaning and significance largely determines the synaesthetic result; the degree of knowledge, its level of detail, and the capacity for differentiation exert a direct influence.

If, for example, I look at Chinese characters without understanding their meaning due to a lack of necessary knowledge and reading skills, then for me all these characters are, so to speak, "of one face," lacking sufficient distinguishability, which narrows synaesthetic perception. At the same time, resisting this, my gaze attempts to find something familiar, something resembling known forms, capable of evoking associations, sounds, parallels with painting or geometry, to expand synaesthetic perception even slightly. In this situation, synaesthesia as uniqueness-without-effort nevertheless demands effort.

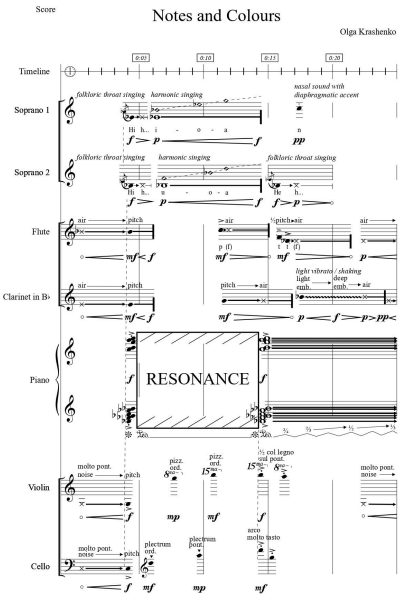
In this context, differences in synaesthesia among individuals consist not only in their personal synaesthetic scales but also in their accumulated knowledge and ways of knowing. Recalling Lacan's *pas-tout* ("not-all") (Lacan, 1998) as the absence of universal completeness in principle, we understand that a "complete" synaesthesia based on the totality of all knowledge is far from possible. For this reason, the term *incompleteness* in relation to various types of synaesthesia — each with its own distinct form of incompleteness — serves as an important contrast to what is sometimes described as synthesis or a "palette with a chemical fusion of all the arts" (Scriabin, as cited in *Prirodu v zvuki pretvoril… A. N. Skryabin glazami*

sovremennikov [He Transformed Nature into Sounds… A. N. Scriabin Through the Eyes of His Contemporaries], 2022, p. 22, my translation), which should rather be read as an artistic metaphor.

Synaesthesia connects the unconnectable, yet it does not represent a mixing of everything into everything else with a loss of distinguishability. If, from a maximal distance, it appears so, this is primarily an effect of distancing rather than of synaesthesia itself. Upon closer examination, synaesthesia does not merge different senses but adds interrelations between them, enriches them with its own nuances and subtleties, expands the scale of parameters — including that which has no definite name — while significantly animating the inner sensorium. And if letters, when forming a word, are coloured in a unified hue, numbers preserve their sequence of colours, not merging in principle.

The emergence of electronic music in the twentieth century (and earlier attempts to create mechanical music) attracts the synaesthetic ear above all by the nature of beyond-the-instrument, when synaesthetic perception concentrates on the sound itself instead of decoding habitual recognition — "this is a violin, this is a flute" — where the imposition of a pre-existing pattern replaces synaesthetic perception "from zero." The veiling of the musical source generates new associations and impressions, and the search for similarly mystical, otherworldly sonorities is then transferred to acoustic instruments and voice. Acoustic echo, "slow motion," "fast motion," and "reverse" unexpectedly find fertile ground for application, and the concept of "live electronics" acquires here other properties of life.

When beginning work on a composition, the composer may synaesthetically see, hear, and feel their own inspiration, the idea of the piece, its emerging motifs, harmonies, and timbres — imagining all this as though one could already touch this condensed mass of musical energy, filled with vibration and life. But as soon as the first bars, the first section of the composition appears, synaesthesia changes, responding to what gradually emerges in the compositional process. When the piece is finished, synaesthesia changes again — not only because the concrete result has replaced what previously existed in inspiration, but because a separation occurs between composer and completed creation, and distance arises where there had once been a thread of intimate co-presence.



Case Study I: *Notes and Colours*

The chamber composition for two sopranos, flute, clarinet, piano, violin, and cello (in another version, the cello is replaced by viola), *Notes and Colours*, was completed in 2026. The title of the piece is connected not only with the specific colours linked to notes synaesthetically through "colored hearing" — chromesthesia — but also because, in a certain sense, the composition was written precisely for specific notes selected from the very beginning (B-flat, B-natural, C, D-flat, E-flat, F, G, A-flat, A-natural).

Fig. 1: First page of the score of *Notes and Colours*

These notes change their shades of colour in the process of shifts between musical instruments or voices, timbral transformations, the addition of noise or breath, changes in intensity, depth, dynamics, pulsation, and so forth. There is a constant internal repainting, in which colour in synaesthesia is not merely attached to a specific note but unfolds in time. Thus, this piece exists not only in musical time (including, in some of its fragments, a polyphony of temporalities), but also in synaesthetic time.

If there had not been a practical necessity to create a score for performers, where each staff corresponds to a particular musical instrument or voice, then musically, I would have assigned each pitch from the above list its own separate musical staff. On such a staff, one could trace the succession of instruments and voices carrying that pitch, as well as the moments in which two or three sources intersect simultaneously (in unison or at the octave). This would demonstrate the temporal unfolding of each pitch, where changes of timbre, tempo, dynamics, intensity, registers, breath, amplification effects, the presence of particular overtones or partials, and its position within the overall musical texture (a more open or more concealed character, resonance, "coincidence" with another note in time or independent motion, spatial displacement, possible merging/dissolving, disappearance or appearance, and so forth) would be visually represented on a single line rather than fragmented into small parts.

The colour scale, which constitutes a subjective synaesthetic "alphabet," is presented in this piece as follows:

B-flat — white, almost transparent, like a drop of water

C — black

D-flat — dark blue, rather wet, with the addition of a drop of water

E-flat — dark green, wet, like a leaf with drops of water

F — between violet and gray, since the letter "F" in this case adds a grayish shade

G — burgundy

A-flat — orange, quite strongly diluted with water

A-natural — orange, but not bright

B-natural — white, in some ways similar to snow

Since synaesthesia is influenced not only by pitch but also by other parameters and factors, examples of which were given earlier, when speaking of synaesthesia in time we are not referring merely to a change of brightness or saturation within a single colour, as one might simplistically imagine, but to transformations of what I call the "colour image" that occurs around a given colour/pitch.

In the same way that a single note has its complex sound spectrum from which it is constituted, synaesthesia in relation to that note possesses its own synaesthetic image with a complex relief. Despite the unchanging foundation (its belonging to a particular colour), the range of transformations is very wide. For example, in a very low register, this colour darkens so much that it may disappear into an indistinguishable hum of darkness; in a very high register, it may become overexposed, turning dazzlingly white because of an excess of light. If, at another moment, this note is heard as a distinct, strong, stable-sounding overtone, then synaesthetically in this quality it becomes light itself, or a luminous element perceived in golden semi-transparent tones, like a ray of light.

When we speak about musical harmony, just as within a chord we can often hear individual sounds and name them, similarly, in synaesthesia, the relationships between colours are preserved while vertical connections are formed. By superimposing the sound spectra of different notes upon one another, we simultaneously superimpose the "colour

images" of synaesthesia, forming layers in which something is obscured, something is highlighted, and overall, a "picture of pictures" is created. Moreover, synaesthesia moves into three-dimensional or even multidimensional space.

The concept of multidimensionality in synaesthesia requires separate clarification. Suppose we take a sound that is maximally filtered, practically devoid of overtones or other enriching elements, and with a clearly defined pitch that lies as if on the surface, similar to a sine wave — then synaesthetically this sound is perceived two-dimensionally. In effect, it is only a colour lying on the surface, with a sensation of flat contact with this reduced timbre. Duration in time and dynamics may only emphasize a brighter or paler shade of colour and its colour "point" or "line," while remaining within two-dimensional space. To achieve synaesthetic three-dimensionality or multidimensionality, sonic enrichment is necessary.

In this composition, *Notes and Colours*, the amplification of audible breath in the flute, the perceptibility of percussive sounds from the contact of the bow with the string, and the amplified resonance of the piano strings are among the ways of approaching increasing multidimensionality in synaesthesia through music.

When I record air sound from flute and clarinet, I hear within it the overtones of various barely perceptible pitches, which can then transform into more clearly defined partials (otherwise we are dealing only with "smoke" without any sparks). One might say that this is a pre-multiphonic — not yet a multiphonic, but not "bare" noise either. The force of breath synaesthetically seems to "lift" the colour of the note, creating volume, as though a leavening agent had been added to that colour.

I also amplify the resonance of the piano, concentrating on it, immersing myself in the deep sphere of that resonance and marvelling at its waves, its internal life. This resonance, combined with overtone singing in the voices and with string playing rich in harmonics and partials, forms in this piece the foundation of both musical and synaesthetic multidimensionality.

The unfolding of multidimensionality in time occurs through constant timbral, dynamic, rhythmic, tempo, and other transformations that constitute synaesthetic breathing. Instead of frozen, "lifeless" paints, our music, having touched the roots of nature, begins to shimmer, flow, darken or lighten, respond to breath and wind, and thus live. In this respect, harmonic change is a change of gaze (for example, from one flower to another), while remaining within a single harmony is immersion in the nuances of the life of one flower, from

the dried tip of one petal to morning dew and low rays of sunlight.

Returning to the multidimensionality of synaesthesia with its volume and space, in this piece, we may speak of what appeared during the compositional process with particular clarity — namely, the synaesthetic sculpture.

A synaesthetic sculpture requires that we show it from different sides. In this respect, the material of the piece is presented precisely as such a process. At the beginning of the piece, there is a gradual approach toward the sculpture, as individual notes and motives step by step assemble what we will subsequently see. After this, the sculpture that has opened to view is shown from different angles, when the same musical material is presented under different perspectives of listening and displacement. Each variant is in some ways similar and in some ways completely different. The music provides time to remain within each of these sides and to examine details.

Then a kind of "general freezing" occurs — we pass through a rapid pulsation of the same chord with its internal melodic line, where the sculpture achieves final assembly and a "view from above." The piece ends with distancing — after a final thrown glance, we depart, different motives begin to sound separately, and the sounds themselves become increasingly distant.

Initially, when I first began writing *Notes and Colours*, I imagined the synaesthetic sculpture as cold as possible, where reflections of light would be equivalent to light on snow or ice. Nevertheless, upon completing the piece, I discovered that its overall temperature had risen, and the image sometimes even begins to "melt." The reason for this rise in synaesthetic temperature may be that while certain sounds, taken individually like stones, preserved their original temperature, when coming into contact with other sounds and in the connections that emerged, certain frictions occurred (just as two stones can produce a spark or even ignite a fire), and this influenced the overall synaesthetic temperature.

Case Study II: *Tintagiles* (Video-Opera)

Fig. 2: Video still from the opera *Tintagiles*

Within the sphere of art, the operatic genre from the outset allows for the

unification of different modes of perception into a single experiential act, thus overcoming the fragmentation and specialization that have developed within artistic disciplines and recreating a creative synthesis, including the use of available means and technologies.

Today, in contemporary academic music, the genre of opera — inherently close to synaesthesia — continues to remain relevant, not only within the walls of opera houses but also beyond them. For example, my opera *Tintagiles*, based on the play *The Death of Tintagiles* by Maurice Maeterlinck, represents an example of a video-opera in which textual, musical, and light–colour symbols are synaesthetically united through modern sound and video recording technologies. Their interweaving encompasses the entire possible spectrum of associations, from literal to distant and abstract.

The opera seems to continue the "part of light" (Luce) designated by Alexander Scriabin in his symphonic poem Prometheus: The Poem of Fire, expanding it into a "video part," where different colour palettes, types of material, filming techniques, movement, and montage are used to signify particular themes/words/timbres/characters/atmospheres/emotions and other symbolic elements. It is an attempt to approach synaesthetic abstraction through a point of "indeterminacy," arising from the fundamental nature of the symbol, which does not possess a single strict interpretation or explanation.

The composer Richard Wagner, in *The Artwork of the Future* (Wagner, 2002/1849), employs the term *Gesamtkunstwerk* when speaking of the ideal work of art in which dramaturgy, music, and other performing arts are integrated, each subordinated to the whole. This idea emerged within nineteenth-century debates on opera reform and the renewal of mythic drama, where Wagner sought to overcome the separation of artistic genres characteristic of modernity. The avant-garde aesthetics of the 1960s likewise sought pathways toward such "total art," often through radical performance practices and intermedia experimentation, as seen, for example, in the ritualistic and multi-sensory actions of Hermann Nitsch and other artists associated with expanded performance environments.

If the synaesthetic abilities described by musicologists and other scholars (Skryabin, 2016, pp. 15–20, 252–268) in composers such as Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Alexander Scriabin, or Olivier Messiaen were, in theoretically simplified form, based on correlating specific colours with specific notes or tonalities — existing, as it were, outside the broader perceptual context, as though we focused only on isolated details — today new approaches to synaesthesia are emerging (Rudenko, n.d.). These approaches allow us to move beyond the constancy of a fixed correlational base, since the schematic conditionality of colour–sound

relationships constitutes a particular kind of signifier without a signified, where the signified eludes us at the very first attempt to grasp it — something especially characteristic when working with video-opera.

One could enumerate an infinite number of details that directly influence synaesthesia and form a mixture of elusive, subtle sensations, or synaesthetic abstraction, in comparison with which familiar recognizable musical parameters may appear overly precise and concrete — even though music itself is usually classified among abstract art forms. What is at stake here is the intersection of many factors, one of which becomes dominant and is capable of influencing the perceived colour to a greater extent than the others (what was previously described as the *dominant feature*).

In addition, a person may deliberately set the goal of focusing on a particular property of the music or video and, through concentration on a certain detail or association, "repaint" the perceived colour (what was previously mentioned as the *focal point*). This may be compared to an example from acoustics: when listening to a choir and concentrating, for instance, only on the alto part, we hear it more prominently than the other voices, although the overall acoustic balance remains unchanged.

Composers possessing synaesthesia have given special attention to timbre in music and have also sought connections with nature ("the sea" in Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, "birds" in Olivier Messiaen, and so forth). Ideally, the more senses/parameters/spheres/characteristics synaesthesia integrates, the more "alive" the musical work becomes, incorporating within itself countless unknown elements.

The opera *Tintagiles* was created over the course of five years; therefore, it is appropriate to speak not only of writing or creating the opera in the customary language of a composer, but also of experiencing the opera (both musically and synaesthetically), of the lived experience within it, when one's very existence becomes inseparably bound to it.

Since the artistic theory of synaesthesia is still only in the stage of its formation, we do not yet possess a sufficient theoretical foundation even to begin speaking adequately about the complexity of synaesthesia in this kind of musical being.

Conclusion: Synaesthesia as Compositional Agency

Having briefly described certain aspects of artistic synaesthesia and the improvisatory method, and having provided two illustrative examples, the "conclusion" in this case does not

arise as a final summation, since we are only beginning to uncover the complexity of the territory — the island-world of synaesthetes (which it is indeed time to begin exploring) — but rather as something toward which thought leads us after everything mentioned above.

Vladimir Bibikhin wrote in his book *Pora: Time-Being*:

> "Without withdrawing from the schedule, without relocating to the forest or to nature, one's eyes change when one begins to see time as season: season for the tree and within the tree, in what it is as it is; season for water and for rain; season for me to stand or to work, or to walk, and in general not to do anything without 'season,' which, I do not know how, comes and goes. Calendar and schedule usually exist here and serve as a way of fleeing from time as such, which itself flows and shows." (Bibikhin, 2015, p.7)

If the rational component of composition is the measurability of musical presence — its material dimension and time as something packaged into schedules and into limits of duration (for example, not exceeding a certain number of minutes) — then the synaesthetic component of composition is its inner call, its "season." It is the moment when the coincidence of several sounds and temporal simultaneities occurs precisely when it was "time," when the musical fabric itself called for this new sonority, and not because measure no. 53 arrived at 3 minutes and 40 seconds.

When speaking about synaesthesia in art, it is important to distinguish between synaesthesia as such and the synaesthetic method. The synaesthetic method is something that can be adopted by non-synaesthetes and integrated into their creative activity. The concepts developed within this method may be interpreted individually and translated into being-in-the-world. This does not mean that by applying the synaesthetic method, a non-synaesthete becomes a synaesthete. Rather, by enriching creative practice through this method, new connections are established, and a bridge appears between the island-world of synaesthetes and those who are not synaesthetes.

Thus, at this stage, synaesthesia may be understood not as a closed theoretical system, but as an opening — a mode of compositional attentiveness that invites further exploration.

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