

TRANS/FORMATIONS OF VOCAL TIMBRE IN DIFFERENT CULTURAL EXPERIENCES: CONCEPTION OF “TRANCE/SPACE”

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In the global world, the contemporary artist is located in a crossroads of culture, and we could say that transcultural processes are unavoidable. From first glance, opened sociocultural borders and technologies should give opportunities for diversity, but the reality is different. Transcultural processes in the global world has a “black side” that lies in standardization and assimilation. Every artist seeks originality; however, according to Donald Woods Winnicott “it is not possible to be original except on bases of tradition” (Winnicott 1989 p. 95 -104). This statement suggests that originality lies within an individual’s own tradition. Due to the disappearance of ethnic traditions from their natural environment, they struggle to renew themselves. The contemporary artist and the contemporary folklorist live and create at the same time and in the same sociocultural space, very close to each other, which makes their encounter unavoidable. So, what kind of communication between them would ensue? Can the contemporary performer find a solution to the ethnic tradition’s problem of renewal and, vice versa, can the ethnic tradition slow down the fast identity mutations of the performer, becoming their “grounding” force as well as a source for originality? How can the vocal expression transform these problems, turning them into a creative product?

This lecture recital highlights one of the possible creative ways of facing these challenges of globalization and presents a performance called “TranceSpace.” It is a kind of game that Brigita Bublytė performs with her acting students from LMTA, Paulina Taujanskaitė, Augustė Pociūtė, Kamilė Petruškevičiūtė, and Milda Arčikauskaitė. The conception of this musical game is one of the outcomes of Bublyte’s artistic research “Transformations of vocal timbre: practices of ethnic traditional singing and impact on the contemporary performer” carried out during her doctoral studies at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre.

Applying modern compositional principles, “TrancSpace” combines three extremely contrasting vocal traditions geographically distant from one another: *sutartinės* (Lithuanian polyphonic sings), Spanish-Andalusian flamenco called *cante jondo*, and Mongolian throat singing called *khoomi*. Performing is a kind of trance space where the principles of space and time are different from those of regular life. We could compare it with the art of painting where

the law of perspective combines objects that are near and far into one space. The participants of this recital perform the Lithuanian *sutartinės* “Sidabro lakiūtė,” “Kadujo,” “Kudi kaka,” “Saulala sadina,” “Avižela prašė,” and others, and at some point put on the “vocal mask”¹ of *cante jondo* or *khoomi* and use some elements of flamenco rhythms. Thus, every tradition plays a role in this musical canvas: the *sutartinė* is the background and texture; the *khoomi* is the frame; and the flamenco is the figures. The roles can change as perspective changes. In this case, the *cante jondo* and *khoomi* are situated in the distance, where only essential forms are visible because the artists are Lithuanians. Therefore, only those elements of traditions that can be understood and adapted from the sociocultural perspective of Lithuanian artists are used. These different cultural vocal traditions are practically experienced for the purpose to expand possibilities of the vocal expression of the contemporary artist and to discover similarities in expressing human emotions. “TransSpace” is a diminished model of the global world where transcultural process manifests with its challenges and advantages and special attention is needed to retain the identical core of the traditions escaping processes of assimilation.

What is the identical core of vocal ethnic traditions and how does it manifest? What should we maintain and preserve while interpreting traditions? The analysis of the vocal timbre and its understanding in ethnic traditions demonstrated that a **specific vocal timbre** serves as an identification code of the ethnic vocal tradition, providing knowledge about its **origins and function**. I also emphasized bodily experience and importance of articulation of performing the act in general and gave titles to the three selected ethnic traditions:

Sutartinės—The Dancing Voices. Lithuanian polyphonic songs, also known as multipart songs, can be performed with at least two singers, but usually three or four take part. It is an archaic art form. The word *sutartinė* derives from the verb “to agree” or “to attune,” and the main aspiration is to achieve the **second accord**, which happens when different voices are well in tune with each other. Voices should clang together like bells. As Prof. Daiva Račiūnaitė Vyčiniienė emphasizes, “social accordance forms the basis of *sutartinės*” (Vyčiniienė, 2016, p. 31). In summary, the *sutartinės* are the psychological invention of social communication and function as a discovery of accordance, concurrence, and social interaction that manifest through the clash of voices.

¹ Voice is phenomenon that can transform its timbre and put on a kind of “vocal mask”; thus, according to researcher and singer Nina Eidsheim, vocal timbre can be performed (Eidsheim, 2009).

Flamenco—A Singing Body. According to sociologist Gerhard Steingress, flamenco was developed in Andalusia by people seeking to resist marginalization (Steingress, 1991). Because of that origin, two emotional catharsis, “grief (sadness) and anger” (Washabaugh, 2005, p. 70), are the main emotional sources in flamenco’s expression, which manifests through *quejío*. *Quejío* is a sort of whining in *cante jondo* that conveys the social pain of the “outcasts of Andalusia” through the singer’s physical muscles and nerves. From there, the full spectrum of emotions arises.

Throat Singing—A Resonating Body. Throat singing is based on the variations of vocal timbre, produced with the help of overtone, subtone, and diphonic singing as a conscious strengthening of the natural vocal overtones and harmonics. The timbre effects are made by the performer using their voice, mouth, lips, teeth, palate, tongue, lungs, and diaphragm, which teaches them to distinguish and connect their psycho-physicality from and with the environment. To summarize throat singing (*khomei*), we could say that it is an invention of union with the universe (both exterior and interior) and nature that manifests through the **strengthening of the natural vocal overtones and harmonics.**

To acquire practical tools and an understanding about how to put on the “vocal mask” of these traditions and perform a clash of voices, *quejío* and some ways of strengthening the natural vocal overtones there were made the psychoacoustic analysis of the vocal timbre. It showed that timbre carries two different meanings—that of identity and that of quality. In the context of speaking or singing, the vocal timbre carries the vocal aspects that help us distinguish one voice from another and grasp their meaning. In the context of the psychoacoustic experiments, as well as the sound level, length, and volume, the vocal timbre also indicates the elementary quality of sound.

“Vocal attack, fading out, formants and *vibrato*” (Ambrazevičius, 2012), all serve as important psychoacoustic identification and quality parameters of vocal timbre. These parameters differ depending on the ethnic tradition. Therefore, when a performer uses a vocal expression technique belonging to a specific tradition, they must pay special attention to how they sound and form the attack, the language or specific syllables, and the *vibrato*.

Some conclusions

- Transcultural communication can be expressed through artistic investigation and

research of ethnic vocal traditions and can offer solutions to the contemporary artist and the contemporary folklorist.

- The connecting points are based on human emotions and ritual aspects as regulatory functions of artistic expression in tradition as well as in innovative patterns.
- Voice modulation has an important value in emotional expression and regulation in the context of transcultural communication.
- Game is a space of communication and transformation revealing new creativity as well as inspiration for artistic investigation.

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