

# INTERMEDIAL DOMINANTS: FROM ANTIQUITY TO MODERNITY

Mykyta Isagulov

## ANNOTATION

The given article presents the analysis of major intermedial tendencies in the history of art and literature from Antiquity until postmodernism, the understanding of which is crucial for the application of hermeneutic method and the close reading technique in the course of the analysis of literary works with synthetic elements. The comparative-historic approach with the application of the elements of cultural-historic method allowed us to draw a conclusion that each artistic epoch tried to unite all arts around certain syncretic dominants (Antiquity – sculpture and theatre, Middle Ages – architecture, Renaissance – painting, Enlightenment – theatre, Romanticism – music, Realism – literature, *fin de siècle* and Modernism – painting and literary art, Postmodernism – literature). At the initial stages of the development the so-called ‘mechanical or technical’ arts became the syncretic dominants (i.e. painting, sculpture and architecture), while starting from the XVII century they were the so-called ‘muse’ arts – literature, music and theatre.

**Key words:** intermediality, art synthesis, syncretism, dominant medium, integral medium, syncretic dominant.

At different stages of the development of the European arts there appeared and developed different types of intermediality, certain media<sup>1</sup> dominated. It is impossible to identify the exact time when intermediality appeared as a wilful desire to return the lost synthesis of arts of Ancient times; however, there should be no doubts that ekphrasis, as an attempt of one medium to describe form and content of another medium, got extensive spreading during the epoch of Antiquity. Though with the appearance of first ekphrastic description in Homer’s *Iliad* (e.g. the pictorial fragment describing the Achilles’s shield) the intermediality as a phenomenon already existed, although, theoretically, yet non-reflected.

The art of Antiquity, having left the womb of mythology, did not manage to preserve initial integrity and, therefore, split into several artistic streams and types: verbal arts (epos, lyrics and drama, art of eloquence), decorative arts (mosaics, frescoes, stone carving, vase painting, etc.), theatre, music, sculpture and architecture. According to M.S. Kagan and A.F. Losiev, the separation process in the arts is confirmed by the following ‘specialisation’ of muses: thus, for instance, originally there was only one goddess named Muse in the Ancient Greek mythology, however,

---

<sup>1</sup> Medium is an integral component that forms the basis of each art, such as a sound, a word, a colour, a dance movement, etc.

later on, there were three and afterwards, during the classics time, nine of muses [3, pp. 11-12]. Although, along the separation tendency there existed an organically opposite tendency – of unification – which altogether creates the dialectics of the development of arts in general.

During Antiquity the role of the integral medium could have been adopted by literature, as three of its kinds – epos, lyrics and drama – together with art of dancing, orchestrics, comprised the golden quarter of ‘muse’ arts, i.e. proper arts from the perspective of that time; they were opposed by ‘technical’ arts (or crafts) – painting, sculpture, architecture, etc. that, according to M.S. Kagan, have never been considered proper arts [3, pp. 188-189].

Literature and music synthesis is a very bright sample of separation-unification processes in the history of art synthesis and, most likely, the very first one. As A.E. Makhov puts it, musical and verbal origins, after having got their ‘autonomous worlds’, took the opposite sides, which, at certain moments of history did not prevent music from becoming verbal and the words from seeking realisation in musical [5, p. 11]. Having left the historic unity with the poetry, the music created itself similarly to it – the composition of a musical piece is very alike to the one of a literary work, and at later stages of art history some literary texts have been built according to music canons, having built literary symphonies and other unconventional genres [5, p. 37].

As for the synthesis of verbal and pictorial, the separation-unification relationship between these two arts have been indicated by Simonides of Ceos in V century BC. Philosophers of Antiquity, as well as the representatives of later epochs operated with the notions of one art for the definition of another, i.e. *painting is the dumb poetry, poetry is the blind/talking painting* [1, p. 6]. Despite the aesthetic discussion that appeared at the epoch of Antiquity painters and writers shared the understanding of imagery nature of painting and poetry, therefore, the category of a literary image still remains one of the most conventional and stable.

Due to the above mentioned typological contradictions between literature and other arts sculpture became the dominant medium of Ancient Greece. Sculpture conveyed all the aesthetic beliefs of the epoch. Classic theatre also played crucial

role, being itself a synthetic art. Having united various literary forms, the theatre became a de-facto integral medium of the epoch, tied together other arts and served the ideological purposes of the state-cities.

Among the most important achievements of Antiquity is the appearance and recording in literary forms of almost all basic plots and fables that later on became the basis for various types of intermediality in arts: siege/city defence and the death of main character – Trojan war and the destiny of Achilles; journey back home – adventures of Odysseus; the artefact search – journey of Jason and Argonauts; transition between the world – going to the Hades' underworld; self-sacrifice – story of Prometheus, Heracles, and many other.

Normative art of Middle Ages, opposite to syncretic art of Antiquity, is characterised from the positions of intermediality by two periods: art synthesis (*unison of arts* – Romanesque art) and art separation (*polyphony of arts* – Gothic art).

Intermedial synthesis of Middle Ages took place due to the appearance and spreading of Christianity as the official religion of European states, as well as due to the Holy Books recorded in writing – Old and New Testaments.

The peculiar feature of medieval culture was the fact that architecture became the dominant medium, although, it was not about the general construction works, but the erection of sacral Christian buildings – churches, cathedrals, basilicas, chapels, etc. Nevertheless, the scholiasts of Middle Ages championed the music (as the striving for eternal harmony), having put it on the same level with literature/poetry: the theologians of Middle Ages separated the arts into '*liberal*', verbal-musical – music, literature – and other '*mechanical*' arts [3, p. 13].

The Christianity united within itself all known classic arts: architecture (erection of Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals and chapels), painting (stained-glass windows, frescoes, altar paintings, and icons), sculpture (figures of Catholic saints, donors, popes and bishops), music (hymns and psalms, organ music), literature (holy texts and their interpretations), etc. All of them have been aimed at glorifying the church, strengthening its authority and concentration of congregation's life at the church, where everything praised god in one or another artistic form [2, p. 10].

Besides, literature researchers and writers could not avoid the problem of the structure of a literary work. Text, like any building, has its own frame, basis, that are built by specific verbal 'bricks' – words, phrases and literary images, which launched the discussions about the medieval synthesis of literature and architecture, the birth of the so-called 'stone Bible'.

The Middle Ages witnessed the further realisation of an ancient idea of 'music of a human'. Music turned into the allegory of person's inner world, and, later on, during the Romanticism epoch, the inner world of a person was understood as a musical process – music became the major category of subjectivity, while the literature, as an attempt to express the 'soul' became secondary [5, p. 26-27]. Middle Ages also gave birth to the idea of music being the universal principle of art in general. According to A.E. Makhov, music occupied the highest position in the system of seven liberal arts [5, p. 27-28].

The integral dominant of Renaissance was painting that managed to impose its own laws on architecture, sculpture and the text. Fragmentation became the specific feature of the aesthetic thoughts of the epoch, being similar to the fragment principles of the Romanticism. Through part, fragment artists tried to convey literary, musical or pictorial artistic components as a whole. Such perception of the fragment as a meaningful artefact was caused by numerous archaeological findings from the ancient times. The fragment was no longer perceived as a deformed piece or 'chunk', but the organic part of currently destroyed and once ideal and holistic art piece.

According to the statement of E.V. Zavadskaya, *'each epoch chooses in the past, sometimes consciously, sometimes chaotically, traditions close to its spirit that correlate to its own experience'* [2, p. 58]. Renaissance attempts to find the lost syncretism is characterised by the *conscious* search for inspiration in previous historic epochs, willingness to imitate. Meanwhile, due to the archaeological excavations, the artists paid sufficient interest to the arts of Antiquity. As L.D. Liubimov puts it, the Renaissance artists *'worshipped Christian saints and praised the beauty of ancient gods'*, while *'Christian theology was sometimes understood as the new mythology'*, which allowed them to glorify with their art both Apollo and Christ [4, p. 124].

XVII century, epoch of Enlightenment, is characterised by rivalry and parallel development of four artistic approaches: Mannerism, Baroque, Rococo and Classicism that had their own aesthetic concepts. The first three treated art critically and chose painting, architecture and landscape design as their dominant media.

Mannerism, as a transition between Renaissance and Baroque, is important for its attempts to resurrect the literary-artistic traditions of pastoral genres of Antiquity. This epoch also presented to the world of art '*play for reading*' (Lesedrama) by John Milton (*Samson Agonistes*, 1671), that is characterised by M.S. Kagan as the first synthetic form of modernity; later on it was praised and popularised by the Romanticism poets [3, p. 219]. Baroque epoch is famous for the appearance of natural-anthropogenic synthesis, as well as such verbal-musical genres as opera and oratorio, musical drama that tied together musical academism, theatre and literature. Of particular interest is also the new genre of *sound depicting plays* (e.g. Jean-Philippe Rameau's *La Poule (The Chicken)*, 1706, François Couperin's *Les petits moulins à vent (The Little Windmills)*, 1713). Among the achievements of Rococo one should indicate the rebirth of ancient pastoral traditions with specific erotic components, which facilitated further rehabilitation of sensual feelings and spiritual subtlety (especially in Sentimentalism and Romanticism). In its own turn Classicism became the normative epoch in the history of arts, it championed theatre and attempted to re-create the syncretic art of Antiquity.

During Romanticism the syncretic ideas of art perception were mostly spread in Germany, where the critical search for artistic synthesis prevailed. From the point of view of romanticists who always sought universality only music could become an integral medium, however, in fact, the most significant genres of the epoch have been formed in literature and music only (in particular, musical dramas of Richard Wagner based on medieval literary epics).

As M.S. Kagan puts it, romanticist worshipped artistic activities as a basis of life and art that is aimed at transformation and creation of the world, which allowed, for instance, for Hegel and Schelling to formulate and objectivise the new intermedial paradigm *architecture/sculpture – painting – music – poetry*, where the intermedial

search of the history of arts was reflected: Antiquity and Middle Ages correspond to architecture and sculpture, as during these epochs these media became integral; painting represents Renaissance; music is of a paramount importance for Romanticism; and poetry corresponds to Post-romanticism, Realism, Modernism, Postmodernism [3, p. 66].

Romanticists also stressed out the complex perception of any poetic image, as its components are '*vision, pictorial observation, plastic image, inner person*' [6, p. 238]. Therefore, any pictorial work has been treated like certain fragment, similar to scenic *mise en scene* or literary culmination, like, for instance, they saw it in the works of J.H. Füssli: '*Füssli's painting is a stage, and the spectator has to get used to the drama that take place on the stage*' [6, p. 242].

Special interest is raised by the fact that romanticists, along with traditional non-depictive/technical and depictive/muse arts, distinguished the third category of mixed or *complex arts*: (1) architectural-depictive art synthesis; (2) music-choreographic and music-dramatic art; (3) theatrical art; (4) music-poetic synthesis; (5) pictorial-poetic synthesis, etc. [3, p. 94].

Realism, as an epoch of normative art, is remarkable for literature's becoming a dominant medium due to its mass publishing in XIX century. The perception of intermediality in the aesthetics of Realism was formulated in the creative concept of Romain Roland, representative of late realistic tradition, which was borrowed from the philosophy of Presocratics and Antique theatre: '*The boundaries of arts are not as absolute, as some theorists believe, arts transform from one into another constantly, one type of arts finds its continuation and end in another one*' [quot. from: 8, p. 252].

*Fin de siècle*, transition between XIX and XX centuries, is characterised by critic perception of art synthesis. Two arts come to the foreground: 'muse' art – literature and 'technical' art – painting. Special role is played by new arts, photography (1839) and cinematography (1878). Being widely spread, the specific photographic imagery influenced greatly the whole system of artistic creativity, facilitated the appearance of new genres and styles and the development of documentalism in arts. In its turn cinematic art can be considered as a synthesis of

photography and literature, from which there were borrowed plots, fables, system of motifs and symbolism, names and various other techniques from the verbal arts.

Art of Modernism, being the period of new synthesis, selected painting and literature as its syncretic dominants. Collage technique also became widely popular, with author's message being conveyed by chaotic combinations of various materials: pieces of newspapers, photographs, artworks, notes, etc. In literature this technique was implemented via conscious use of recognisable quotes in the text. Modernism of XX century also revived the ancient genre of calligrammes that became synthetic (e.g. the works by Guillaume Apollinaire should be perceived as a synthesis of words and bizarre lines). Within the collage technique the 'sound' poems from Dadaistic and futuristic experiments should be mentioned. Modern intermediality is also manifested in theatre and cinema synthesis, as well as multiplication. Several researchers even state that numerous modernistic plays, e.g. Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird/L'Oiseau bleu* (1908), were created under the influence of cinematographic art – as well as many other works of the first third of XX century [7, p. 105]. In XX century the practice of creating cartoons and movies based on plays and literary works has become universal.

More than that, the modernists believed that the masterpieces of many painters, especially Van Gogh, would not exist without the painter's ability to see pictorial in a literary way and literature – in pictorial way. Besides, some modernist writers accompanied their texts with self-made 'illustrations' that became inseparable parts of them (e.g. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince/The Little Prince*, 1943), or replaced the alphabetic text with ideographic compositions that imitated the body of text and fused with it (e.g. the works of Henri Michaux).

Modernism epoch also facilitated the strengthening and popularisation of such synthetic forms as photography, cinematography, multiplication, animation, comic books, musicals, music films, colour-music synthesis and kinetic arts.

Postmodernists, in their turn, tried to finalise the century-long search for an integral medium. First of all they objectivised the historic-cultural necessity of certain syntheses, such as, for instance, *prose – poetry – music, painting – décor –*

*architectonics, theatre – pantomime – dance*, etc. [3, p. 292, 303, 313]. Secondly, they selected literature (as the most holistic realisation of Text and Word) as their integral medium that expressed and characterised other arts. In addition, there developed the understanding of mechanisms of synthesis and understanding of parallel ties between arts horizontally (synchronically) and vertically (intertextual canvas), created with the help of allusions, quotes, reminiscences, etc.

Following everything that has been stated above, we have come to the conclusion that intermediality is a more complicated and complex cultural phenomenon than ancient syncretism. Being the indicator of the epochs and major artistic tendencies and connection between various arts within the same cultural-historic period, the intermedial dominants, similarly to keys, allow unlocking the code of authors' messages in those cases, when there appears synthesis or artistic dialogue (due to the additional cultural and artistic layers involved and not named directly). Therefore, understanding and analysis of artistic works in the context of integral dominant media of each epoch become the crucial part of complex literary and cultural researches at the beginning of XXI century.

#### LIST OF SOURCES

1. Vartanov A.S. About literature and art correlation: О соотношении литературы и искусства // Литература и живопись / ред. А.Н. Иезуитов. – Ленинград: Наука, Ленинградское отделение, 1982. – С. 5-30.
2. Introduction to culture studies: Введение в культурологию: учеб. пособие для вузов / руководит. автор. колл. и отв. ред. Е.В. Попов. – Москва: ВЛАДОС, 1996. – 336 с.
3. Kagan M.S. Morphology of arts: Морфология искусства: Историко-теоретическое исследование внутреннего строения мира искусств: монография, части I, II, III – Ленинград: Изд-во «Искусство», Ленинградское отделение, 1972. – 440 с.
4. Liubimov L.D. Arts of Western Europe: Искусство Западной Европы. Средние века. Возрождение в Италии: книга для чтения – Москва: Просвещение, 1976. – 319 с.
5. Makhov A.E. Musica Literaria: Идея словесной музыки в европейской поэтике: монография – Москва: Intrada, 2005. – 224 с.
6. Mikhailov A.V. About artistic metamorphoses in German culture of XIX century: О художественных метаморфозах в немецкой культуре XIX века // Литература и живопись / ред. А.Н. Иезуитов. – Ленинград: Наука, Ленинградское отделение, 1982. – С. 227-251.
7. Problems of synthesis in artistic culture: Проблемы синтеза в художественной культуре / ред. А.В. Прохоров, Б.В. Раушенбах, Ф.С. Хитрук. – Москва: Наука, 1985. – 288 с.
8. Takho-Godi M.A. Literature and painting in the novel of R. Roland *Jean-Christophe*: Литература и живопись в романе Р. Роллана «Жан-Кристоф» // Литература и живопись / ред. А.Н. Иезуитов. - Ленинград: Наука, Ленинградское отделение, 1982. – С. 252-267.