

## Art and Mass Communication

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In front of a tree struck by the flashes from heaven, our ancestors would have seen in this phenomenon an act of power and magnificence of the natural world. The individual presence was full of fear and astonishment. The „signs” from heaven, lightning and burning, had been preceded the formation of community opinion across tribal communities. The stage of the natural events will be transformed into a cosmic sanctuary.

The crowd is assumed to be formed around the source of heat and light. Behavior derives directly from the views of the group members since the opinion is created through the act of communication. For troglodytes, the meaning of the things was invariably the same. For example, the fire would have been undoubtedly sacred. The normative perception, created by the reddish flames, had operated at the level of collective beliefs, shared by the entire community. Thus, we see that attention - as mental activity to observe nature in action - allowed the first humans to record in their memory all the details they will engrave later on the rocky caverns.

It goes without saying that the prehistoric artist painted from memory. We could not imagine him or her doing sketches “by model” or drawing a live antelope leap, the run of a bison or the mammoth monumentality<sup>1</sup>.

The art of the imitation will be for Prehistory people a method to gain “power” over the visible world through the unseen ways, and so the walls of the caves will be drawn in the smallest details with animal images. The cave paintings materialize the humans’ aim to gain an identity between living nature and their abstract signs, painted or incised on the stones.

Undoubtedly that any outward appearance held up to us from the ancient times, depicts an ideational content which often comes from a distant past, as the starlight. The fact that people have dedicated resources and energy to *create* – in fact to communicate – shows the importance of the art for any human activity, beyond the immediate needs related to survival. We might think as the German sociologist Tönnies, that the roots of opinions and beliefs shared by community as a whole are the *judgment* and the *will*.

The “Thinker” of Hamangia is perhaps one of the best example : a three-dimensional image of a character musing in a meditative position, leaning his head in his hands, had been proved the prehistoric artist's abilities to express an abstract idea. This work is an act of will, a testimony of an ancient power of our

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<sup>1</sup> Marcel Brion, HOMO PICTOR, traducere de Maria Vodă Căpușan și Victor Felea (București: Meridiane, 1977), p. 33.

ancestors to communicate consciously or not an artistic message. The symbols have been interpreted to signify differently by those who came in direct contact over history, but they were regarded with the same eyes, belonging to the same people from different times and locations. Therefore, the “Thinker” inherited from Neolithic culture in Dobrudja (Romania) has certainly a higher audience today than it has in the past. Archaeological discovery of the ancient ceramic statuette meant the choosing an interpretation of its data, according to the contemporary human commitment to its own belief system projected in the field of the mass communication. This might be the triumph of significance given through the recognition of *homo sapiens*’ stylized personification: the thoughtful human being.

At a closer look, opinions contain at least potentially, the trend of exclusion of other views, explicitly or implicitly rated as unsatisfactory. The act of expressing an opinion reveals the faith of the speaker that his or her views are correct, while other views are either “false” or does not cover the parts of the truth that the speaker seeks to reveal. This report of „exclusivity” is present in the expression of each opinion<sup>2</sup>.

According to Ferdinand Tönnies, in his fundamental book *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887), we are differentiating the concept of “community” (*Gemeinschaft*) in respect of rural specific association (governed by unwritten customs and traditions), and the concept of “society” (*Gesellschaft*) in which traditional duties (family, religion) fades in favor of relations objectified by economic and political factors. This may occur a significant change in the perception, referring to the same object. For example, cave paintings such as Altamira, Lascaux or Val Camonica reflects the primitives’ understanding of nature as *religion* (such as animism), while the contemporary perception, in the 21st century, is related to the *public opinion*. This determines the attention which clot out the crowd towards the forms and the content of life. We can also observe the interaction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* through the acculturation of populations that have adopted the behavior of the dominant culture - urban civilization. According to the memorandum signed by Robert Redfield, Melville J. Herskovits and Ralph Linton in 1936, “acculturation understands those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come in contact with cultural changes in the original model of one or both groups”<sup>3</sup>. So we can conclude that all cultural components, taken together, are restructuring the contacts between different cultures, which will

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Dobrescu, Alina Bârgăoanu, Nicoleta Corbu, ISTORIA COMUNICĂRII (București: Comunicare.ro, 2007), p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton, J. Melville Herskovits, „Memorandum for the study of acculturation”, AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST, vol. 38, 1936, p. 149.

merge finally in the global culture. In this transformational process, the decisive role is played by the public opinion, which determines the appearance of criticism, that dissemination of opinion who can generate groups “pro” and “against”. For example, rural youth, who left home to live and work in the cities, brought jeans matched with jackets, shirts or blouses in regions where only traditional port was wearing. Folk dances, rites or ceremonies related once agrarian were replaced with rhythmic movements played in the discotheques. This subject is regarded by some contemporaries as the inevitable consequence of progress, and by others as a loss for our civilization. The differences of opinions can take, sometimes, radical forms, as noted with continued history of iconoclastic crisis that shook the Christian world of the first millennium after Christ. During a century, the „public opinion” in Byzantium and throughout Europe was split between iconoclasts, the prosecutors of the icons (seen as a way to idolatry) and iconodules, the advocates of figurative sacred images. Even if the opponents of the iconodules were emperors of Byzantium, the public opinion won because it had consensus of the collective will, being more powerful even than imperial policy. Other situations, less tense, resulted in a syncretism process, such as Brazilian religious environment, merging the Roman Catholic faith (brought by Christian missionaries in Latin America) with the ancient African rites.

Perhaps one of the main attribute of the public is, paradoxically, to be critical. Its ability to resist, do express the adherence to the collective will. If the public will cease to make judgments, it will dissipates into a homogeneous mass. Thus, the bruitiste experiments has failed, despite the critics’ efforts to impose them as „values” in the public conscience. The concert halls remained empty, unable to collect a number of spectators at least equal to the number of musicians on the podium. In the absence of the audience, only a few experimenters and their supporters can be seen in the concert halls. Why Beethoven's music, despite the fact it comes from a relatively distant time, clot out the most music lovers today, filling the philharmonics up to the brim? Stefan Niculescu seems to give us an answer in his book, *Reflections on Music* (1980), by his study about Beethoven.

It rightly says: “Beethoven lives among us”, sentence verified by the impressive number of concerts, records, studies, etc. constantly dedicated everywhere. But just as fair might say, by a substitution: “We live by Beethoven” - a reality that we are much less aware, despite the fact it is complementary to the first one<sup>4</sup>.

Eventually, cave paintings and Renaissance paintings, once entered into the field of mass communication, along with early music or the Classicism art become contemporary aesthetic assets of our time - meeting the public

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<sup>4</sup> Ștefan Niculescu, REFLECȚII DESPRE MUZICĂ (București: Ed.Muzicală, 1980), p. 231

consensus. Moreover, let's notice a paradox while saying that contemporary art, in this sense, comes mostly from the past. The innovative artistic inspiration in major artists such as first Viennese classics, is the basis of belonging to this ongoing work.

Beethoven's sonata reach the peak of its development centuries old and proves, in this author, aesthetic opposition between two groups of subjects after a similar scheme evolving from ancient or classical tragedy (Beethoven has often declared himself a great admirer of Shakespeare) : exposition of themes, their conflict and the end reveals the three steps of music growth (exposition, development, conclusion) like the famous Hegelian triples (thesis, antithesis and synthesis)<sup>5</sup>.

Therefore, we distinguish Beethoven's sonata as a form of musical drama or as a tragedy in which the characters are even the musical ideas that modulates one to another. Sonata is built from the material of tonality. The music harmony expresses what is standing in humans - the aspiration towards a balance established between reasoning and intuition. Opera is free from any historical conditioning today, via mass media. A synchronous perceive as reality, whether it is a Hieronymus Bosch painting or Magritte, whether it is an amazing work of Mozart or Puccini, whether is a poetry of Tristan Tsara or a stochastic composition of Iannis Xenakis.

Music can be listened today beyond the concert halls, it might be listened while driving the car, broadcasted by the radio, it might be watched TV or DVD or via Internet or reached even on ISS. The pictures, no matter they belongs to primitives or avant-garde painters, they might be seen in the artistic albums, in reproductions, or via Internet. The art is transformed in the present days in a mass art, since it is transmitted, televised, put on air, advertised and relay by all our modern means of communication.

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<sup>5</sup> Ștefan Niculescu, op. cit., p. 232.

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### **Abstract**

The essay proposes a perspective over the contemporary artistic phenomenon, reported to the technological changes that have been resized and redesigned the artistic events, from cave paintings to Beethoven's sonatas, in the field of mass communication set up by the mainstream of the information society. Through mass communication channels, the artistic message spreads from the past to present days, across radio, television, Internet etc. being perceived by the public. Today, Beethoven's music is equally contemporary music, like Xenakis'.