

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION IN CULTURAL BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract: a short survey on the most significant cultural confrontations in the last centuries aiming at highlighting implicit aspects of the cultural behaviour. We start from the premise of a difference between the area containing structured artistic images or stable cultural precepts and the sphere of an implicit, non-verbal dynamic. The gesture behind symbols and the sound behind words might help to understand the cultural gaps and the compatibilities/incompatibilities aroused during various cultural encounters: from enculturation to acculturation and constraint coexistences. The primary aim of the present essay is to identify relevant samples of cultural parallelism influencing the present cultural relationship. Alternatively we intend to open a discussion on the role of the performing arts in the cultural harmonization by adding socio-historical arguments to the psycho-pedagogical ones from recent research studies.

Keywords: inter-cultural (in)compatibilities, energetic flow, temporal-spatial, gesture.

The cultural outcomes – temporal and spatial – are relying on three coordinates: language(s), context and communication. They are used in variable proportions in both basic work hypotheses: highlighting cultural identity or cultural encounters. The research in the last hundred years, privileging static forms, is mostly focussed on language, completing with signification correspondences. The culture seen as an emerging process can also be found to some extent in recent communication studies. We consider nevertheless that the issues concerning cultural confrontation, be they acculturation or en-culturation could benefit from a more comprehensive account on the dynamic or temporal features of the culture.

We consider that the non-verbal communication is including as well cultural behaviours as performing arts.

We assume the standpoint of Paul Ricœur concerning the “temporal foundation of the human experience”¹ that exerts an influence not just on the performing arts but also on images and texts. The energetic gesture, prolonging the human action, becomes symbolically frozen in art forms and public rituals². The rhythms and the gestures might aid to better understand rejections or paradoxical compatibilities between different cultures and to complete the cultural map of the mankind which can barely be just a matter of ideology. In the same time, the performing arts, especially music are exemplifying a traditional pattern of the versatile relation between art and people, namely “the emerging relationship between artworks and a community of judging observers”³. We need to specify that, as the performing arts are concerned, the “judging observers” were usually former active participants, to turn into just onlookers when the “ideas’ constellation was immobilized in a timeless space”⁴. Their metamorphosis into “audience” as a process was directly related to the emergence of the

¹ Paul Ricœur (1986): *Du texte à l'action. Essays d'herméneutique II* [From Text to Action; Essays in Hermeneutics II] (Romanian version Humanitas 1995 p. 14)

² Gilbert Durand (1963): *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire* [The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary] pp. 46 and followings

³ Michael Gubser (2006): *Time's Visible Surface: Alois Riegl and the Discourse on History and Temporality in Fin-de-siècle Vienna* p. 55

⁴ Alois Riegl (1889): *Die mittelalterlicher Kalender Illustration* [The Illustration of the Medieval Calendar] quoted in M. Gubser *op.cit.* p 37

written text. The musical culture was itself built through successive changes between temporal and spatial displays⁵.

The movement beneath image

The anthropologists discovered that some cult objects, as the Australian *Churinga* totems used to be notations of an ancestral moving path – ritual or even musical notation⁶. The *Phaistos Disks* found in Crete could have been also prehistoric “scores”. The dynamic ritual was lost, but the engraved testimony became itself a cult object. The human culture is full of ritual residues that are preserving just the spatial contour from the initial mark. The transgression from dynamic to static (“catching time in the space alveoli”⁷) has a correspondence in the metamorphosis of symbols. Most of the traditional artistic performances have been initially magic rituals⁸.

A similar process is often accompanying the musical reading: a sign or a structure might lose its original meaning or signification, yet it embodies another symbolic weight. The essential difference between a transformation from temporal to spatial and a change of meaning within a dynamic process consists in the persistence of the energetic gesture; the new shape is always creating an energetic flow acquiring its own coherence, and eventually, truthfulness. In the musical communication, the consistency of the new energetic flow is prevailing on the initial signification. If the cultural context is lost the old symbols will be reconfigured in accordance with the most persistent stratum: the energetic gesture. A key example remains the case of the four-note musical motif bearing the medieval symbol of the *laying Cross*, designed to give a mystic wrapping to a particular dissonance solving. Along the centuries, the cultural context changed and the emptied shape was filled with a new signification: the *BACH* motive. The visible profile of the motif coincided with the name of (Johann Sebastian) Bach; and the mystic remembrance was not hard to be adapted to the rank played by this composer in the modern mythology. Such mutation was favoured by the visual impact with the musical text. It is worth to be noted a connection between de-contextualization and text, even if it is hard to assert a cause-effect relation from. We employ for “text” the meaning given by Paul Ricœur: “any discourse fixed by writing”⁹ and we equate the catching of a movement in image or text with the temporal-spatial transformation. The written culture, if losing the primary energetic basis can revitalize just for some initiates an unaltered tradition. Ricœur asserted: “we are interrupting the living in order to get its signification”¹⁰.

As for the loss of the initial cultural signification of a temporal expression, the music audience is frequently confronted to performances testifying deformations of cultural meaning. But they seem to disturb the horizon of expectation of just a few experts. For

⁵ Michel Imberty (2004): Aspects du temps dans la création musicale, Introduction; *Musicae Scientiae, The Journal of the European Society for the Cognitive Sciences of Music*, Volume 8. Number 2. Fall. 7-19

⁶ André Leroi-Gourhan (1964): *Le geste et la parole*, 2 vols. [*Gesture and Speech*] pp. 188 and followings

⁷ Gaston Bachelard (1957), *Poétique de l'espace*, p. 33

⁸ The well-known Romanian dance “*Călușarii*” was actually a healing ritual.

⁹ Ricœur, Paul (1986): *Du texte à l'action. Essays d'herméneutique II* [From Text to Action: *Essays in Hermeneutics II*] p. 111

¹⁰ Ricœur, Paul: *id.* p. 53

instance: the connoisseurs of the tragic reference of the *Fugue* in *d* sharp minor from the *Well-tempered Clavier* I (BWV 853) can hardly accept a virtuoso tempo or a bracing expression as displayed in rather numerous actual performances. The theme is an early medieval tune used in the *Via Crucis* service evoking St. Maria's dolour facing her son's torture: "you who are passing look and see a sorrow like mine" (from *Complaints* 1.12)¹¹. If unacquainted with the implicit cultural burden, the internal coherence of this specific musical flow and the rather homogenous texture might fit to another expression, more vivid, embodying a different interpretation even if deeply remote from its basic role. As for the time being the musical education is rather based on shaping the technical skills, the appreciation is bound up with accuracy and sound consistency no matter the cultural links. This is proving not just an obvious depreciation of the culture of text, but also the power of communication of the energetic ground and its resistance in time.

Cultural gaps and cultural encounters

For the musicians having an average musical training it seems astounding the reaction of the children from a school in South Africa facing classical music. They enthusiastically preferred one of the most dissonant works of George Enescu¹² to the detriment of the pieces considered "softer" (as Mozart's, Chopin's). This refuted all theories about musical expectancy, proved in decades of European music. However, beneath the centennial evolution and its theoretical valences, the energetic flow of the piece might have more similarity with some possible lively tune the children were accustomed to. In the same way, in the late 16th century when the Jesuit Missionaries went in Japan, the musical style based on harmony (chorus, organ or harpsichord) not only was immediately praised, but was even a main attraction point for an easy reception the Western culture and religion¹³. If the cultural implication and contexts are severely different, some elements as the syllabic structure of the Japanese language, the diatonic system and the vibrating sonorities of their traditional instrumental music might facilitate that peculiar musical encounter along with other non-musical arguments related to the Japanese social psychology¹⁴.

It seems that the binder between the sub-compounds of the non-verbal arts might be analogous with "the interaction tiding the verbal metaphor [...] and the relationship between non-verbal art and milieu are similar to those between metaphor and its own designation"¹⁵. The relative autonomy of these sub-compounds and the fact that, in music, for instance the difference between meaning unities and formal unities is more ambiguous than in speech

¹¹ The theme was employed by several composers, as Tomás Luis da Vittoria in his *Motetus Sancta Maria, succurre* and was commented in Alfred Cortot's *Performance course* (Chapter I *The prelude*) compiled in 1934

¹² The *Burlesque* of the *Pièces Impromptues* op. 18 no. 4

¹³ Christina DeCiantis Davison: *The "Patron Saint of Music"; Beethoven's Image and Music in Japan's Adoption of Western Classical Music and Practices* (partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the School of Musicology) University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009, p. 13

¹⁴ Veronica Gaspar: "History of a Cultural Conquest: the Piano in Japan" in: *Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia* no 27 2014, Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences, Akson Publishers (under print), 2014

¹⁵ Carl R. Hausman: *Metaphor and Art: Interactionism and Reference in the Verbal and Nonverbal Arts*, Cambridge University Press 1989, pag. 121

might suggest a different way to link to the human society and a potential to draw a different map of inter-cultural meetings.

Self-sufficiency and communication potential

In music, the structure unities are becoming meaning unities only assigned to a specific context. Sometimes the differences bearing possible cultural incompatibilities are real just for people aware of the diachronic evolution and the specific context of an art form. Often the appearance and the subjacent movement (in both meanings: energetic or emotional) might link remote forms providing a sensitive basis for a positive contact. A century ago, the composer and ethnomusicologist Béla Bartók discovered similarities in colour, ornaments and improvisatory-like performance between traditional tunes in the Romanian Maramureş and Algeria or Anatolia. Likewise, he noted similar features in the steppes of the Central Asia as in the old strata Hungarian peculiar songs. These strange correspondences led the musician to the conclusion that the map of the musical culture is different from the geographic or linguistic one¹⁶. We also found astonishing coincidences between Romanian music and some songs in the Shamanic rituals in South Korea. A thorough investigation on music could be relevant for a layer concealed behind the visible cultural symbols. It reveals the gesture behind the image, the ritual rhythms behind the tradition. The perceptible linguistic boundaries are doubled by underground links binding as well remote territories as different times¹⁷. If the written cultures could become attuned by compatible language and context, meaning intellectual ways, requesting time, education, habituation or even authority, the energetic compatibility might provide a necessary mortar to reinforce the new collaborative structure, be it inter-culturation, acculturation or en-culturation. Nevertheless, we should note that even if music is traditionally the main support for social communication, this apply especially to the instrumental (wordless) music. The vocal emission coming from a different culture can be one of the most difficult features to bear. In 1886, the audience of Yokohama have met their first opera performance with roars of laughter¹⁸ in the same Japan where the European music was eagerly adopted twice during the history. Likewise, any European with exclusive classical music education has a similar reaction facing a traditional Orthodox psalmody or the chant strictly following the rules in *Noh* Theatre. Moreover, the Romanian musical environment is strongly divided, having probably one of the most important musical gaps in Europe. The classical listeners abhor the popular oriental genre (*manele*) and the reverse is also true. Most of the students in the music schools in Bucharest don't like even our own traditional music. One of the explanations of the reduced adaptability of the vocal music we think to be connected to the discontinuance of the energetic flow due to the words, breathing pauses etc. and not necessarily related to the words themselves. As our country is

¹⁶ Béla Bartók (1915): *Notes on the folk song*, (Romanian translation), Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă, București, 1956 p. 28

¹⁷ Veronica Gaspar: "Zeitliche Gesichtspunkte in einer besonderen Kulturbegegnung: die westliche Musik in den rumänischen Länder" ["Temporal approach for a special Cultural Encounter: The Western Music in the Romanian Principalities"] in *Bul. Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur Mainz* 2009

¹⁸ Ury Eppstein (1994): *The Beginnings of Western Music in Meiji Era Japan (Studies in the History and Interpretation of Music)* p. 46

concerned, other spectacular difference comes from the basic musical language structure: chromatic versus diatonic and from particular rhythmic incongruities.

Cultural behaviour and performing art education

When the customary behaviour is embodying cultural issues, any encounter might be jeopardized by peculiar significations built in time, which need not just common language but also common (or compatible context) and a similar history. For instance the vigorous handshake, the eye contact with the interlocutor proving, for Europeans, honesty and good will is read as an aggressive and arrogant gesture by the Eastern Asians. To jump up can barely mean for Europeans a mourning sign as it was the case in the antique China¹⁹. In such cases, a mutual acknowledgement is a necessary but not sufficient condition to rebuild an internal construction revealed by a few disparate signs. Behind the important peculiarities the cultural communication had to consider also some implied elements as rhythm, speech flow, stress words, articulation characteristics, prosody and accents, pitch modulation, intensity and timbre variations, as well to the choice of words²⁰. The cultural structures caught in a static framing: image or text, need also re-construction of the whole and endeavour for language compatibility. The school begun to take account of the main pillar of en-culturation: the recreating of the cultural context too. Here we assume that a cultural meeting or cultural knowledge needs to be completed by any temporal art, in order to provide a more general and flexible ground to communicate. The internal continuity and the wordless logic of the temporal arts are answering to a fundamental need, present in the Eastern mythologies: to recover the heavenly harmony before the words have replaced music²¹. The lack of concern toward gesture, as social education has also a share in the professional forming of the non-verbal artists. Actually, the performance science is removed from the practical reality, being the matter of study for a thin layer of ultra-specialized professionals while the art performers' education might recover that increasing fissure between the average training and a minimal contact with the written culture. This kind of splintered society wherein any unifying binder becomes fortuitous is leading to the fact that the cultural inadequacy issues might occur in a same realm.

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¹⁹ Marcel Granet (1922): Le langage de la douleur d'après le rituel funéraire de la Chine classique [Sorrow Language in the Funeral Ritual of the Antique China] in *Journal de Psychologie* I pp. 10 and followings

²⁰ Nicolae Vintanu (1998): *Educatia Adultilor [Adults' Education]*

²¹ René Guénon (1962): *Simboluri ale științei sacre [Symbols of Sacred Science]* p. 39

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