ASPECTS OF NON-VERBAL ARTISTIC COMMUNICATION IN THE NEW CULTURAL PARADIGM

Veronica GASPAR[*]

Abstract: *The change in cultural mentality which confronts the contemporary culture led to drastic transformations in Arts, which have influenced mainly the verbal Arts, but played a role also on the non-verbal ones. We start from three hypotheses which might be orienting direct an ascertainable discourse toward a didactic and/or en-cultural pragmatics. The first hypothesis relies on the representation of two basic compounds of the cultural sphere: patrimony and communication and also on the finding that the focus of the actual cultural policies is significantly oriented to communication, to the detriment of the educational moulding. A second hypothesis concerns the nowadays replacement of the concept of "culture" with "cultures"; hence occurs the disclosure from the haute culture reference, which had been an ideal for former times. The third working-hypothesis considers the major changes which occur in the last decades in social, political, economic and technologic environments; mutations which are also reflected in non-verbal Arts and in their social and psychological influence. Therefore, the present essay aims at proposing a succinct prospection on contemporary non-verbal Arts and on the subsequent changes on mentalities, following the renewal of the cultural paradigm. We identified some general directions, which we believe to improve the understanding of the evolution of the present-day culture.*

Keywords: *mentality, non-verbal language, communication*

Modern times operated on culture in three fundamental ways: laicization, progress, levelling. The new cultural identity which seems to burst in the 18th century had actually have precedents in the evolution of European culture in the last millennium. According to Paul Hazard, the Modern revolution "a slow preparation which finally ends, the renewal of eternal tendencies which, after having slept in the earth, arise one day, endowed with a strength and adorned with a brilliance which seem unknown to ignorant and forgetful men" (Hazard 1981: 314)

As for laicisation, the cultural activity was separated from the ecclesiastic spirituality in an on-going process, visible mainly in non-verbal art works. This assertion can be proved by the evolution of painting, which gradually allowed laic themes, or naturalist reproduction of the human body. Man regain with Renaissance the Protagorian title of "measure of all things", symbolized by Leonardo's Vitruvian Man. In music, starting from the early Middle Age, secular melodic structures, themes and popular harmony sneaked in the Church musical ritual, which was firmly established from the 6th Century. Thus in the 18th Century there were no differences between religious and lay music. Their dissimilarities lasted no more than as words (text) or rituals were concerned. Laicization cannot be separated from democratization, meaning a broaden access to education, public

[*] Universitatea Națională de Muzică, București, e-mail: gasparveronica@yahoo.com

BDD-A29994 © 2018 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 08:46:23 UTC)

responsibility and social visibility. The social progress of low gentry could be also found in old Europe, especially in the ecclesiastic hierarchy, but in Modern Times, the individual no longer seeks to adapt fully to the new environment, but comes along with the behavioural and cultural characteristics of its own environment.

The idea of progress, as positive ideal came together with a noteworthy progress in science and technology that definitely changed European life and, eventually the entire world. After the 16th Century, mathematics, physics, mechanic, natural sciences, and soon anthropology flourished as separate fields and, concomitantly geography and navigation have widened the ways of communication, permitting circulation of people, goods and, thereupon, intercultural exchange. The spreading of printing also facilitated the circulation of ideas and opened the reform of laic education. The Modern revolution brought the supremacy of novelty. The alteration, or even the denial of tradition becomes to be considered a positive fact. "We call novelty a certain way of posing the problems, a certain accent, a certain vibration; a certain willingness to look to the future rather than the past, to get out of the past while taking advantage of it […] the intervention of ideas-forces which become vigorous enough and sufficiently sure of themselves to act obviously on daily practice; a change whose consequences have come down to our present time" (Hazard, *op. cit.*: 302). At the end of the 19th Century the main imperative of Art creators becomes originality – a tendency lasting until today.

The cultural levelling occurs later. It is the aftermath of the meeting to different cultures, due to the easier circulation and comes together with a fundamental characteristic of European culture: the permanent change. Unlike Asia, where any new cultural style, ideology or art form coexists alongside traditional forms, in Europe, each epoch or major influence clears up and replace the former style or ideology (Gaspar, 2015: 34). Even in Antique Greece, the theatre of Euripides had modification, compared to Aeschylus' and there were find documents attesting changes (reforms) in the Hellenistic musical education. Besides, the last century brought a severe mutation in the perception of culture. "Culture" becomes no longer an ideal to be reached by study. The recent use of the term limits the average meaning to "the totality of life forms and habits of any nation". That points out exclusively the local specific existing in the same time simultaneously. Thus, the term is degraded and simplified until a pure anthropological notion. The gap between these conceptions is clearly illustrated by too definition of culture: one from 1805: "*The training, development, and refinement of mind, tastes, and manners*" (Oxford English Dictionary) and other from the American Heritage English Dictionary: "*The totality of socially transmitted behaviour patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought*" (Gaspar, 2017: 35). Cultural levelling on the one hand favours access and intercultural tolerance, but on the other is an undoubtedly mean for the deformation of value criteria, which brings spiritual impoverishment and mental laziness, fully illustrated by the contemporary academic education.

The modern society put together several forms of culture, art and beliefs. Starting to the end of the 19th Century a complex process of interculturation occurs. The European civilization and culture, namely arts of which especially music determined one of the strongest acculturation at global level. The penetration of the foreign imaginary, firstly

BDD-A29994 © 2018 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 08:46:23 UTC)

evident in the Arts, was not just an exotic ornament, but a vehicle for a real change as well in the value criteria as in the perception of the "cultural frontiers".

In exchange, Europe opened to other cultural forms, which had a consistent influence and, at the same time "merciless for itself" (Hazard, *op. cit*: 309) it develops a peculiar tendency of self-denial very rarely found elsewhere in the world. The defamation of their own arts started with avant-garde artists in the early 20th Century and was followed by the actual cultural policy of the European Union.

The consequences of the features which characterise the nowadays culture is plenty mirrored in art creation. For instance, the term "non-verbal Arts" designates not only elaborated art disciplines as Music, or Visual Arts, but also any local particularity aiming at influencing ear or eye. The technologic improvements led to some important consequences as facility of communication, possibility to preserve temporal events through recordings and means to combine at everyone reach musical and visual effects. This later capacity gave birth to hybrid art forms and put into question the fields' frontiers. In the educational milieus cultural education is shadowed by rapid information. The artist is present in the social conscience in a formalized manner. He becomes a vehicle of social and/or political schemas that replaced the ancient role of religion. The ancillary condition of the artist was shortly interrupted in the early modernity approximately between the middle of the 18th century and the middle of the 20th century.

In conclusion, the nowadays culture implies change in landmarks and criteria (axiological, temporal and spatial) favouring experiment, imagination, hardihood and less the knowledge burden, which was long ago seen as essential to define culture.

The novel features defining contemporary culture as: timelessness, laicization, or propensity toward novelty, not to mention inter-disciplinary ambiguity are correspondingly influencing the three essential compounds of culture: patrimony, communication and education. The social, political, economic and technological environment favour especially non-verbal arts. This might be explained by the supremacy of direct communication over patrimonial preservation and by the trend promoting evanescence. The relationship between non-verbal arts and milieu is tight, to be compared to "a metaphor and its own designation" (Hausman, 1989: 121). Besides, verbal arts are more distant from the ancient human gestures which created art form much earlier, than the birth of myths. The gesture is more close to human beings and the average signification could have more common elements. According to Gilbert Durand "The energetic gesture, prolonging the human action, becomes symbolically frozen in art forms and public rituals" (Durand, 1960: 46 et follow.).

Still, some specific peculiarity, be them effects of a cultural tradition or just part of the everyday life might provide contrariety and misunderstanding between members of different communities. For instance, in the thorough ritualized traditional China, the jump was a sign of mourning. The higher the jump, the more eloquent the pain was expressed (Granet, 1959: 103, 234).

Another contradiction of the natural perception due to cultural intervention is the reversal of the customary perception of the space made by the Hebrew and Arabic musical cultures, where the acute register was described by "down" and the low by "high". Robert Francès presumed that the explanation came from the role of the man comparing with the woman's: one could not assign a higher position to the natural voice of an inferior

BDD-A29994 © 2018 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 08:46:23 UTC)

creature… (Francès, 1958: 309) The Maori greetings with the tongue out, which have profound cultural significance, seems at least peculiar to Europeans.

The non-verbal Arts have the potential to improve inter-cultural communication, because they are not prevented by linguistic differences. Still, there are musical languages and performance ways that need a prior acquaintance. Human's brain have a natural barrier, which is selecting musical preference, called musical expectancy and localized in the right anterior area. The musical expectation was theoretically described by the composer, author and philosopher Leonard B. Meyer in his outstanding book *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (University of Chicago Press 1956) and confirmed in the last decades by the Magnetic Resonance Imaging technology. It provided hundreds of experiments and research studies aiming at discovering the complex mechanism of human emotional reactions. A research seems to be particularly interesting for both sociologists and artists: the event-related brain potentials studied mainly by Stefan Koelsch, Angela Friederici etc. In an article published in 2002 Stefan Koelsch and his collaborators prove that the musician's resistance to unaccustomed music can be more easily overcome than the non-musicians'. (Koelsch, Schmidt *et alii*, 2002: 661-2) So, a musical expert can easier listen and understand the music of other cultures. A study concerning the appreciation or repulsion of the foreigners' music between Europeans and Japanese infers that the Japanese music was positively perceived by composers, musicologists and increasingly less prised by those Europeans musically uneducated (Eppstein, 2007: 191-2). (There is a strong foundation to presume that a structured (cultured) form of art is less inclined to change and that the predominance of popular structure for at least one of the subjects is conducive to a successful inter-cultural connection. (Gaspar, 2015: 54) Yet, the most severe disparities appeared when the cultured music was concerned (*Gagaku*, *Shōmyō*), while the popular Japanese music was tolerated and even appreciated by the European visitors as described by Ury Eppstein in his above-mentioned study. (Eppstein, op. cit: 192, 203) The reciprocal acceptance is easier for 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 European opera performance with roars of laughter, in the same Japan where the European (instrumental) music was eagerly adopted twice during the history. (Eppstein, 1994: 46) Likewise, any European with exclusive classical music education has a similar reaction facing a traditional Orthodox psalmody or the *Noh* Theatre chant.

A similar negative reaction is stirred by the elaborated (abstract) visual arts to public, especially the public lacking education in visual art. Yet we must mention that such a reaction could provide also from inside a same culture. Nowadays the visual environment is globally spread. Fashion, street images, graffiti, architecture can be seen at TV or movies by most of the world population. Visual art is for the most part appreciated according to the level of education of the people, unrelated to geographic locations. Moreover, the post-modern form of arts, combining sounds and light effects might gain popularity even for less educated public. Therefore a lot of visual artists prefer to perform a temporal event (a happening) instead to create static works to be displayed in exhibitions or museums.

But not only might cause difficulties in communication the gestures that are shaped according to cultural traditions, but also the average elements of non-verbal communication as proximity, eye contact, mimicry, ways to greet etc. For Europeans to avoid eye contact

BDD-A29994 © 2018 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 08:46:23 UTC)

means weakness or, worse wile or bad conscience, while in the Far Eastern countries as Japan, to look directly to your interlocutor means aggression or arrogance. The habit of hands contact or hugs, which is current to Europeans and Americans is considered to be too intimate for a lot of foreign societies. Not to mention the horror stirred in Japan, for instance by the old gesture to kiss the hand of a lady, a habit which, in fact, is no longer popular even in Europe.

Nowadays the cultural gaps appear rather inside a same society, due to the increasing difference between educated and less-educated people. This phenomenon is plenty illustrated by the musical cultures. The communicational revolution almost dissolved the geographical frontiers, but increased the musical ones. The young public is listening a same kind of music and the Rock shows gather hundreds of people from North America to Eastern Asia. Likewise the classical music public can be found as well in Japan as in France. Nevertheless the internal frontiers seem to be thicker and more difficult to surpass than the old geographical ones. The contemporary technologic development led to the deconstruction of boundaries, but the same epoch brought a tightening of educational differences. The global opening is no more simulative to aspire upwards, but to horizontally scrutinize the world, seeking for a same kind of art, ideas or culture. It seems that we have a natural limit of cultural reception. The widened horizon put together the virtual "inhabitants" of a same cultural style no matter where they are from.

A positive aspect of the present day extended cultural concept is the concern to know, to study and to amend cultural differences without trying to modify them. Therefore the non-verbal communication comprises an important asset for inter-cultural communication, advancing mutual understanding and enhancement of human solidarity. Yet we think that the non-verbal traditional arts are in danger to be deprived of aspiration towards an ideal, which comes together the decrease of public. This opens the need for a new educational strategy meant to harmonize the contemporary society with the intellectual potential of arts. Sometimes, in different places as in Europe of 19th century the artist was in fact the king of the society. That makes us optimistic with respect to the future of the arts and of the preservation of our patrimony.

Bibliography

Ansermet, Ernest, *Les fondements de la musique dans la conscience humaine* (*Foundations of Music in the Human Consciousness.*) Ed. de la Baconnière, Neuchatel, 1961

Bentoiu, Pascal, *Gândirea muzicală*, (*Musical Thinking*) Ed. Muzicală, Bucharest, 1975

Caune, Jean, (1995) *Culture et communication* (Romanian translation) Ed. Cartea Românească, Col. Syracuza, Bucharest, 2000

Cross, Ian, „Music, cognition, culture and evolution", 2001, *The Cognitive Neuroscience of Music*, Ed. Isabelle Peretz, Zattore, Robert, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 42-56

Durand, Gilbert. *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire*, (*Anthropologic Structures of the Imaginary*) Dunod, Presses Universitaires Françaises, Paris, 1960

Eppstein, Ury, "From Torture to Fascination: Changing Western Attitudes to Japanese Music", 2007, *Japan Forum* 19 (2), Routledge, London, pp. 181-216

Eppstein, Ury, *The Beginnings of Western Music in Meiji Era Japan* (Studies in the History and Interpretation of Music) Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, New York, 1994

Francès, Robert, *La perception de la musique* (*Perception of Music*) Vrin, Paris, 1958

BDD-A29994 © 2018 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 08:46:23 UTC)

Gaspar, Veronica, "Culture, Cultures, Apprenticeship" 2015, *Journal of Romanian Literary Studies* no. 6/Mars 2015, Ed. Arhipelag XXI, Târgu Mureș, p. 33-41
Gaspar, Veronica, „Reassessing the premises of the Western musical acculturation in the Far-East Asia", *Acta Asiatica Varsoviensis* 29/2017 Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, The Central European Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, pp. 47-58
Gaspar, Veronica, *A Musical perspective upon Culture*, Ed. Arhipelag XXI, Târgu Mureș, 2017
Gaspar, Veronica, "Die senkrechte Grenze" und die kulturelle Herausforderung der globalen Gesellschaft ("The Vertical Border" and the Cultural Challenge of Global Society) *Journal des Institut für Romanistik*, Philosophische Facultät, Humboldt-Univerität, Berlin, 2008
Granet, Marcel, (1926) *Dances and Legends of the Antic China*, Paris: Presses Universitaires Françaises, 1959
Granet, Marcel, (1929) *Civilizaţia chineză,* (*The Chinese Civilization*) (Rom. Translation) Ed. Nemira, Bucharest, 2000
Harich-Schneider, Eta, „A survey of the remains of Japanese court music" 1951, *Ethnos - Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 16, 1951, nr. 3-4, pag. 105-124
Harich-Schneider, Eta, *A History of Japanese Music,* Music & Letters, Oxford University Press, London, 1973
Hausman, Carl R., *Metaphor and Art: Interactionism and Reference in the Verbal and Nonverbal Arts*, Cambridge University Press, 1989
Hazard, Paul, (1935) *La crise de la conscience européene* 1680-1715 (*The Crisis of the European Consciousness*) Le Livre de Poche, Paris, 1944
Hazard, Paul, (1946) *Gândirea europeană în secolul al XVIII-lea; De la Montesquieu la Lessing* (*European Thinking in the 18th Century*) (Rom. translation) Ed. Univers, Bucharest, 1981
Koelsch, Stefan, Björn-Helmer Schmidt, Julia Kansok. 2002. "Effects of musical expertise on the early right anterior negativity: An event-related brain potential study" 2009, *Revue of Psychophysiology,* vol.39, 2002, pp.657-663
Sartori, Giovanni (2000), *Pluralismo, Multiculturalismo e Stranieri (Pluralism, Multiculturalism and the Foreigners)* (Rom. Translation) Ed. Humanitas, Bucharest, 2007
Shepherd, John, *Music as Social Text,* Ed. Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991
Winkin, Yves, *Anthropologie de la communication* (*Anthropology of Communication*) Ed. Seuil, Coll. Points, Essais, Paris, 2001

BDD-A29994 © 2018 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 08:46:23 UTC)