

“Babeş-Bolyai” University
The Faculty of History and Philosophy
The Department of System Philosophy

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TEXT AND IMAGE IN MEDIA

Scientific co-ordinator:

Prof. Univ. Dr. Aurel CODOBAN

Applicant:

Dan CUREAN

CLUJ-NAPOCA

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INTRODUCTION

“At the beginning there was the image ...everywhere we turn, there is image”

Plato

At first sight, philosophy only touches on audio-visual communication – film and television in particular – tangentially. But image, as the support of all forms of audio-visual communication will influence every field of expertise, be it directly connected to them or indirectly. The esthetics of audio-visual expression is marked out by intersecting elements belonging to different fields of art, psychology, communication or philosophy. The rhetoric of audio-visual expression, figuratively rendered by cinema (as a particular means of depicting the imaginary) and television (as a specific way of picturing reality), with its numerous branches into the fields of communication, will make way to new research and scientific approaches, some that will go beyond communication and touch on psychology, linguistics, psychoanalysis, sociology, semiotics and, even philosophy. Nevertheless, for the rhetoric of visual expression meaning derives from form and elements pertaining to the style; thus, the fundamental cultural mutation.

Having taken into account these mutations of contemporary culture and civilization, this paper takes on the mission to explore the relationship between written text and image, the role and function of the means of audio-visual expression and information, with a focus on media and cinema. The vital intention is that of shedding light on the characteristics of the means of communication involved in the contemporary transformation of society. Without these, the existence, now universal, of visual culture (theorized over the years by the likes of Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, Gianni Vattimo, Umberto Eco, to name just a few), extended to the whole cultural and social consumerism, would be impossible. Reflecting on the convergence between media, film,

technology and consumerism, the visual culture points out their role as the main determiners of daily life and identity, outlining opinions and perceptions, building means of knowledge and social relationships.

The post-modern descriptions of the means of communication, of the audio-visual in general, frequently concentrate on the types of spreading, breaking up and alienation, due to the fact that we live in a society of generalized communication. To Baudrillard for instance, the media foretokens a world of mere mockery, of images that erode the distinctions between the reality and the means of communication. The idea that the reality is broken up into images is common to the post-modern discourse. Gianni Vattimo for one believes the contemporary society is mainly made up of “generalized communication”. As opposed to Theodor Adorno who advertised the homogeneity of society by means of media (which would give way and favor the emergence of totalitarian governments, similar to the “Big Brother” depicted by George Orwell in 1984), Vattimo states that the continuous expansion of communication, the intensifying of the means to render the reality and the constant information make the concept of a single reality harder and harder to conceive. Thus, the world of audio-visual culture sees “the prophecy” of Nietzsche fulfilled: “the real world becomes a story”; reality is nothing more than “the result of an endless multiplication of conflicting images, interpretations and reconstructions, lacking a “central” coordination and delivered through the means of communication.” The social representations we operate with are therefore already “biased” and even pre-constructed. The immediate reality of events and the sensational (in the political world, the world of science and that of the entertainment) become the matter that builds our conscience. And the experience of the original is replaced by the original experience of reproduction – such as in film – which in turn makes up for particular perception techniques. This approach alone, as opposed to that of many philosophers, aestheticians and sociologists who believed the reproduction and the multiplication of images to be the means of destroying “the uniqueness” of reality (as in Walter Benjamin’s famous essay *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*) places the present paper on constructive theoretical and dialectical grounds, turning for answers to connective fields, such as the philosophy of culture and communication, semiology, film and television studies.

The present paper aims to emphasize the forming effects of media; we see the media not only as a means to accelerate the way the message is delivered to the audience, but also, as a means of transforming the conscience of the receiver. We shall, therefore, attempt to identify the way the mechanisms of visual perception and the factors that define it find equivalents in the audio-visual language and generate new and particular forms of getting the message across. The study of communication by means of film and television will begin from the analogy with the pattern of inter-personal communication. The fields of non-verbal communication (kinetics, proxemics) shall serve as support and theoretical pattern to our attempt to identify the connections between the semiotics of gesture and the elements of the media audio-visual language.

Last, this research also aims to establish the way the culture of image contributes to the rendering valuable again of the humanities; to this effect we take a closer look at the documentary, seen as cutting edge of humane thinking and attitude.

Chapter 1. - The image of the media audio-visual discourse

This chapter describes the concept of image, seen as a binominal of a source (reference, reality) and a representation (real, virtual or mental copy); a whole made up of two separate entities – one made up of general real information (the source, the reference) and a second one (the representation) consisting of the suggestion to reproduce. The representation comprises a process (a mechanism) and a supporting means (real, virtual, physical, mental). The investigation of “the personality” of image will begin from the definition proposed by Jean Jacques Wunenburger (2004) and will take up on three separate directions: that of the type of representation; that of the source object; and that of the relationship between the representation and its source.

If at first sight, the image is perceived as a direct translation of the reality, on a higher level, it goes past the function of re-creating the reality, transcending towards creating the over-reality. Semiology turns to the analysis of the significance relationships, with a starting point in the object (in our case, the source). This analysis allows for a detailed description of the imagery of sources. The semiotics triangle of

Object/Significance/Signifying applied to the image will emphasize the way the different visual representations or cultural artifacts take over, in fact, the attributes of the sources.

The relationship between the image and the reference relies, theoretically, on the existence of a premise (hypothetical and ideal) of complete resemblance; further more, it relies on the ideal existence of “the clone”. The *Mimesis* describes the process of imitation; resemblance and analogy bring into discussion the question of realism, as a means to portray the reality and the *touch of reality*, identified by Roland Barthes, who believes the today enhancement of the techniques of image proliferation to be the surfacing of the need *to authenticate the reality*. Image has built and long consolidated its position as a mediator between the people and the world, going beyond the technical role of amorphous “communicational vehicle” that appeared to have stuck with it during some of the evolutionary periods of human existence. The works of image has been growing so much that, at certain points, there are mutations going on in the relationship between the copy and the model. Nowadays, images tend to transform into copy substitutes of reality. The overthrowing of the roles of the copy and the model is a known reality in this communicational age we are living and there are concrete examples to illustrate it. Reality is no longer that which we are able to perceive, but what is on the Screen; while the concrete Environment has been replaced by a copy of it. This re-positioning and change of roles between the source and its representation bring forth a concept described by André Bazin, according to which “the image of the model turns into the model itself”; this comes as undeniable proof of the absolute objectivity of cinema mechanisms. Furthermore, Bazin’s theory appears to validate a new hypothesis: man, in his continuous attempt to adapt to a new existential and communicational environment (made up of mainly audio-visual elements), is forced to re-think his ontological functions, under the pressure of the new personality of the image.

The new civilization of image is built on the knowledge brought on and mediated by the Eye, as a sole means of visual perception. The Eye takes us to the Cinema-Eye, the machinery that copies and stores the images in motion. The copy of reality, similar to that engraved onto our conscience by memory (mediated by the visual device) is the *raison d’être* of all, new or conservative, devices that help convey the images in motion. The copying of reality and its storage on the celluloid support relieve the image of its

ephemerality; it will remain saved and able to be repeated at any time, as a duplicate experience of reality, materializing “Plato’s metaphysical mimesis that illustrates our fascination with mirror-images”.

The device that stores images (still or in motion) is not just a mechanical replica of the eye (although it shares the same structure and functions); the camera is much more than that; it becomes a storage facility of images that make up the real experience of life; it is an external hard disk that immortalizes the essential pieces of our existence. In the communicational society, the camera becomes an indispensable attachment, a device we use to safely back up images that produce our emotions, pleasures, pain – the bits and pieces that make up our existence.

Throughout the sub-chapter entitled *Considerations on perception from the perspective of “the Cinema-Eye”* we discuss the way the perceptive process works: a stimulus will produce an “emanation of the object”, one with a particular form that can be processed within our conscience. “The Cinema-Eye” (given the fact that the camera is a mechanical copy of our head) shares the same functionality; it will produce, within its storage unit, a “synthetic” product, by means of “artificial” perception.

The eye and the visual apparatus produce images, as “synthetic analogies” of the objects. “The Cinema Eye” will produce semblances, in much the same way. In film expression, the particular materialization of such semblances is performed, at first, in the form of photocopies (*frames*) that will later be placed side by side, creating the impression of continuous motion. These “synthetic analogies” produced by the mechanical “Cinema-Eye” are the result of some artificial processes that pick out, by means of “sense perception” (through the camera) the same real stimuli from the natural environment. The end result will be a set of products similar to “the mimetic duplicates” produced in real visual perception; in “mechanical” perception they will come out in the form of continuous audio-visual flows.

These “perceptive” significant elements define the framework of cinema and are the key structure of audio-visual expression. The stills will produce, by means of creative placing side by side during the editing phase, sequences of units as semantic entities, in a process similar to the mental handling and interpreting of the images.

With this in mind, we shall look at the way the “Cinema-Eye” transforms the stimuli into “mimetic duplicates” of reality and generates “semiotical equivalents”, similar to those our memory works with. All these particular items generated by means of “mechanical” perception, in and through the “Cinema-Eye”, will make up an articulate sequence of signs as elements of visual communication, a language in itself. By looking at the process of real perception we shall attempt to better understand the way film re-constructs reality, by means of decoding and re-creating.

The mechanisms of sense perception will serve as a theoretical support to the process of audio-visual expression; they become apparent during the creative stages of editing.

Chapter 2. Verbal language, audio-visual language

The audio-visual language describes a series of “expression proceedings” performed with particular instruments capable of capturing images in motion; film expression, with its narrative, goes beyond linguistics and grammar.

A particular aspect of film expression is its psychological component. The main psychological content of audio-visual expression seen as a form of recreating the physical world refers to the fact that it re-enacts the mental process of successive images as a result of focusing one’s attention to different stimuli of the surrounding environment. The second psychological component of audio-visual expression adds up to the same psychological pattern identified above. It has been noticed that watching a film will induce a particular psychological effect on the viewer. The whole experience of watching a film seems to be very similar to that of day dreaming or simply dreaming. This particular state of mind brought on by watching a film is what Béla Balázs sees as a process of identifying and dividing one’s personality within the universe the film creates, of taking on a role and a place within the virtual space of perception. So, film is the first form of art and communication that allows (and searches) for this particular psychological effect.

Identifying one’s self within the film consists of a series of successive comparative juxtapositions between the forms of self-awareness and the feelings,

wishes, hopes of other individuals, visually perceived and materialized as a jump to a different identity. The viewer will abandon one's self and will take on a different self; due to the physical immobility specific to the condition of the viewer, the jump to a new identity will occur mentally.

Hugo Munsterberg identifies a number of similarities between the structure of film expression and that of human thought. He launches a theory that film is, in fact, a form of mental process, an expression of the human mind, involving the particular mental acts of attention, memory and imagination. Film is "a recording following the same process our mind deploys in order to assign significance to the reality around us". This process turns to the imagination and the memory – the mechanisms that allow for time compression, the mental rhythm and dream representation (with a logic similar to what happens during the editing of a film), the emotions (activated by the psychological component of the film). The signs of audio-visual "writing" or, the linguistic elements specific to film expression are defined in terms of time, space and esthetics.

Jacques Aumont introduces the temporal dimension of the filming device into a double equation, direct and mutual. We thus get, on one hand, the temporal component of image perception and, on the other hand, the issue of the notion of time within the perception. On top of this, we also need to take into account the existence in time of the viewer. Space also implies several dimensions. It all starts off with a real space, reproduced by means of images (stills or images in motion); the placing side by side of images, in sequences, will generate a virtual (imaginary) but plausible space. The space created as a result of the juxtaposition of fragments of the real space (partial truths), in a formal logic, will generate the illusion of reality.

In cinema, space and time are intricately connected, in order to make up an environment that allows for co-existence and sequences of events to take on a new order and different rhythms, to even be reversible.

Our analysis on the particulars of television communication begins with identifying the analogy between the audio-visual media communication and the human interaction. The study of non-verbal communication will serve as a support and theoretical model to our analysis on the visual component of communication; we first take into consideration Christian Metz's idea to find a connection between film

expression (seen as a sort of reality reconstruction language) and non-verbal language in human interaction; the conclusion we are proposing is that gesture communication is the source and the reference for television expression. The universality of the gesture semantics will make up for the same universality in the art of cinema, which is already considered to be a common language to all communities of people, nowadays. Having identified the visual gesture components of human interaction, we shall attempt to place them within the paradigm of audio-visual expression, in the form of a media audio-visual code (as a result of the above-mentioned analogy between the human interaction and the communication by means of cinema or television). In conclusion, we point out that the forms of audio-visual expression specific to television and cinema, the audio-visual communication in general, are a virtual, iconic replica of real human relationships, a subjective manner of reproducing the reality.

“The Cinema-Eye” does indeed create images, but these are not unitary fragments, as paintings or photographs, because they are part of a double reality: on one hand they are whole visual entities; on the other hand, film images are fragments of a whole that is yet to be created. The process of re-creating the universe with the aid of the fragment-images of the whole is known in cinema as editing. The operation of editing consists of bringing together of frames, in sequences, in an attempt to articulate a audio-visual message. Thus, films take on the form of narratives, wholes, as far as logic and emotion are concerned; this putting together in a new form of representation of neutral, isolated fragments is not simply an addition, but rather an exponential multiplication of the individual meanings of each image.

The issue of placing side by side (in a sequence) of images makes up for the so called “third element” of cinema: the effect of generating new meaning through the juxtaposition of the individual content of each image that is part of the sequence. The film expression and language contain a psychological pattern brought about by the technique of sampling visual representations (the film image); this psychological pattern is enhanced by the the technique of compressing and arranging the visual representations within the process of human thinking (the film editing); all these outline (and confirm) the idea of acquiring knowledge by means of images, as an alternative investigation on the intellectual.

Chapter 3. The particulars of the written text in audio-visual communication

The cinema, the television, the computer are discoveries that changed the public agenda of the twentieth century; they have allowed the society to reset its coordinates and shift references; the twentieth century is already known as the age of communication. The new audio-visual forms of communication have practically re-written the terms of human interaction, the whole society, in general, and each individual, in particular. The development of new technologies gives a new face to all forms of human communication.

The primary formula of communication, developed by Lasswell, applied to the Human Being/Screen couple is imagined as an experimental prototype for the study of audio-visual expression. In order to interpret the way this formula particularly applies to film and television we propose as a starting point the evaluation of communicational environment, taking into account the effects brought on by communication; this leads up to reading the formula backwards – effects first, cause next. This analysis suggests the re-writing of Lasswell's questionnaire, in a particular form: the creator/the broadcasting party (the image hunter) will cut up the information from reality by means of audio-visual techniques (the Mechanical Eye), putting together a specific message, in the form of an audio-visual trophy (the media), a message that is going to be conveyed through the teleportation of information (the television) towards the public (the viewer); the reception of this message will, in turn, bring on particular effects in the spectator.

The attempt to illustrate the specifics of audio-visual content becomes diluted into a greatly diversified set of criteria – functionality, purpose, support, domain, types of events. Our research shall stop at one of them – the type of event that is going to be illustrated; its repetability/irrepetability (in fact, the repetability or irrepetability of the moment in life) allows for the delimitations between two major forms of expression: the fiction and the reality (the documentary).

The sub-chapter **On the bending of values in the process of image hunting** explores two aspects of the “creative approach on reality”: the observational one (*direct*) and the one implying participation (*ciné-vérité*). Neither of the two is limited to just a

simple classification of the documentary; they both represent particular forms of the strategies the creator resorts to in his exploration of reality. The author, either through observation or participating, is searching for new ways to come across a subject for the film, for new techniques of getting closer to “the game” he is hunting; the making of a documentary is fundamentally a hunt for images and real stories and moments.

The documentary started out with a great trust potential, due to the verisimilar nature of the image copying the reality; the media context, however, and the strive to win more audience have generated a great amount of pressure and new challenges, forcing the fake or the artificial to take over and distort the true identity of reality. The fake and the staging of reality, the abusive use of the image, the invasion of privacy, all lead up towards the trivialization of rendering the reality in television and, also, towards questioning the integrity of the documentary. How do the ethical or human values translate in the virtual environment of representation? Is the patrimonial connection between the model and its representation subject to ethical and moral principles? If so, what are these and what is the deontology behind the public convey of images? All of these issues are dealt with in the sub-chapter entitled *On the bending of values in the process of image hunting*.

We have identified structural analogies between the documentary creator (the reality hunter) and the ancestral hunter (hunting in order to survive). With these in mind, we have outlined the principles of media deontology, taking as a model the ethical values of the hunt. The bending of values in the process of image hunting nowadays emphasizes more than ever the moral implications of the public convey of images. As an image hunter, the documentary creator plays multiple parts, described as a result of the type of introspection activated during the reading of reality. The documentary creators are, at the same time, “explorers, prophets, painters, lawyers, prosecutors, poets, journalists, observers of human existence”.

Humanism sums up all the theories that place the human being at the center of things, with everything that tends to the values of freedom and dignity; the documentary, in its specificity, due to the privileged part the human being plays in it and the unique manner of conveying human virtues, has a very particular place within the expression of humanism. The documentary – with the human being as its sole subject matter and the

portrayal of the human being in all his ontological aspects – distills the humane out of the mass of brutalization; it refreshes human virtue and suggests a new approach on the exploration of humanity. With a structure that tends to the human being and to the good, the documentary is a new and elaborate form of Humanism.

CONCLUSIONS

Tributary for a long time to language – written or spoken – media has come nowadays to use a whole lot of different channels: radio, television, photography, film, computer, othe gadgets and devices. The complexity of transmission all these bring will account for the multi-sensory perception of reality. Thus, the configuration of information and knowledge changes not only from a technical point of view, but also from a perception point of view; and a social one as well. “Mass broadcasting” or “mass culture” (as Adorno refers to it) is, therefore, a component that alters our idea of reality significantly. We discover that things exist only if they can be broadcasted – shown and viewed. It has been the intention of our research to identify and analyse the effects of the generalization of media; and we have attempted to do so by resorting to works of authors such as Roland Barthes, Theodor Adorno, Jean Baudrillard.

The intricate connection between image and word, constant in all theories of the audio-visual culture, has been another issue we have attempted to look into within this research. It is an issue that was the center of debate during the 70’s, when semiology became a pilot theory in the context of cinematography; it later turned to the analysis of cinema language and its codes, much like linguistics; the studies of Umberto Eco and Christian Metz on “the understandability” of film have been a support to this effect (according to this theory, the understandability of film is based on three important variables: the analogy of perception, “the codes of iconic designation” – that allow for objects and sounds to be recognized – and “the specific codes” – that constitute the language of cinema). The language of cinema is different to articulate language and Metz, in his 1964 article entitled *Le cinéma, langue ou langage?* will describe the language of cinema as opposed to all the traits that constitute a “normal” language.

The new means of audio-visual communication (film and its esthetics, television with its iconic representation of the human world) are, on one hand a source of serious mutations to the core of society and individual and, on the other hand, a launching platform for re-affirming of the human values, a universal support to the renewal of human branches of knowledge.

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