
DOCUMENTARY ART FILM AS A EUROPEAN SPACE OF COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

The author examines the mechanisms of the communicational process through the film dedicated to arts on the bases of the arguments of the domestic and European cinema. He substantiates that due to new techniques and technologies the process of communicating of spiritual values is facilitated – an important fact in the comprehension and assimilation of these values worldwide.

Keywords: *communication, cinematic language, film of art, reinterpretation, spiritual identity, sign, stylistic device, symbolic language.*

The process of ineluctable globalization, of great migration of the people, and all people's community and many problems of planetary importance has already constituted certain closeness among people, a certain consolidation for comprehension of complex phenomena of different nature occurring in the evolution structures of our civilization. A process which involves intercultural psychology concerned with "exploring", assimilating the spiritual identity of "the other" and discovering cultural treasures which need to be known and valued, is an indissoluble process of the communication mechanisms.

At the present time, due to new techniques and technologies the process of communication of the cultural values is facilitated. Pictorial, musical, choreographic, cinematic creations became international goods. Communication through film created the most real possibilities so as spiritual values, art creations to become accessible worldwide. A great role in this process is given to non-fictional films dedicated to arts and its makers, both professionals, as well as great anonymous creators.

The exchange of spiritual values by audiovisual communication, peculiar to cinematic language, has enabled the valorization, sometimes safeguarding of the universal cultural patrimony.

Communication – this continuous process of exchanging information, meanings and messages – represents a precondition for the human existence and social life. Since the ancient civilizations it has imposed itself as an inherent and definite dimension of the culture, but, as the esthetician Grigore Georgiu noticed, "...only in the 20th century communication became an object of reflection and semantic research for social disciplines, after the cultural and linguistic philosophy, structural linguistics, axiology values, semiotics and hermeneutics developed the anthropological signification of the communication, the role of signs system in the codification of human experience and in its conveyance through generations"¹. Being asserted as a primordial reality of the human activity, the communication also becomes the basic event of art as a superior form of the culture, linguistic systems and its signs. From the perspective of communication, artistic work is an imaginary pattern of the reality which codifies and communicates essences and meanings or significant essences to the world.

By its genesis art has asserted itself as a fundamental form of interpersonal communication, becoming one of the most effective ways to know the world, to constitute the ego and self-comprehension. Namely by art man expresses his feelings, aspirations, emotions and all states of his inner universe. André

Malraux conceived art as “one of the most powerful cultural ferments”.

Art as a system of meanings expounds the reality modeling it from imaginary and poetic perspective – fact that leads to the treatment of art as a symbolic language. This concept was advocated by Roland Barthes and Roman Jakobson in literature, while in cinematic art by Andre Bazin, Christian Metz and others.

Thus, art could be conceived as an act of communication, and language – as a way of interpretation and transmission of contents and figurative components. Of course the language has a communicational competence specific for genre of arts. Arts evolution proved that art work goes through a complex and special process of communication of contextual substance and its formal elements in order to be assimilated. It is perceived as a complex of symbolic systems forming a special language. Accepting that the artistic language is not only a way of expression of art, but it is its way of existence. From this point of view art contents could be considered as a communicating language with its own methods of transmitting the artistic matter.

According to the French aesthetician Jean Caune the language “is the basis of the human society, concerning the identity and its evolution, and this primary character is not devoid of complexity”². In the artistic creation art itself becomes a language of self-communication and is the one which can render emotion. Jean Caune himself will add: “Art, as a social fact and personal expression, at the same time, informs and orients the perceptions, builds the imaginary, underlines emotions, establishes relations”³.

Grigore Georgiu, after elucidating the art peculiarities which favored the semiotic approach – the complexity of the forms of expression, the accentuated tendency towards formal innovation etc. – urges the art theoreticians and critics to characterize “the sign system of the work, a system with communicative functions (...) in order to analyze the problem of access and art interpretation”⁴.

The famous aesthetician Umberto Eco, reduces, in general, culture, including art, into a communication phenomenon, considering it first in the process of art functionality. Thus, perceiving and assimilating the work of art a

specific process of communication is produced when every content or formal sign/element communicates information/meanings. This process is related to the semiotic field, which according to Umberto Eco – one of the most famous reviewers from the field of this meta-science, “studies all cultural processes as communicational ones”⁵. Any art creation is an ensemble of signs and for its good functioning; it should be integrated in an active communicational process. That is why semiotics is involved seriously in the comprehension of structures and activities of the internal mechanisms of the art, namely in the illumination of the functional aspects of signs. Some of the most important are those with the possibility to communicate something important, a message, for example, or a meaning which would present a new reality or a new truth.

In the visual and audiovisual arts, for example, the communication is executed by codes specific to images, as well to the iconic (figures, signs, symbols) and to iconographic (archetypes, enlightened signs: Cross, Agnus Dei, Crucifix, Birth, Doomsday etc.) ones which connotations are related to mythology, biblical legends, history etc.

One of the most significant problems of assimilation and analysis through communicational process of the cinematic product obtained by synthesis of various art genres consists in the concept of sign system, in a large openness to these signs bearers of the meanings. More evidently, this process is perceived in the documentary film of art, where finished art creations (pictorial works, choreography, interpretive art, film, popular art, etc.) become raw material or subject of investigation, and, being subdued to the cinematic language by filmmakers, a new art creation is obtained – cinematic one with autonomous aesthetic statute.

At the end of the ‘30ths of the last century, after the issue of the documentary films of art on the world screens, French aesthetician Elie Faure through the art film foresaw the appearance on screens of “some geniuses as Michelangelo, Tintoretto, Rubens, Goya, Delacroix who would accelerate their inner dramas to meet the space ones, to the torrential movement of forms and

movements in action, by symphonic expression able to sink the reunited picture, music and verb in a continuously moving transformation"⁶.

We would like to mention that the dream of Elie Faure was realized long time ago. Nowadays, besides the films foreseen by him, there are hundreds of art films from all worldwide filmographies. Some titles: *Terrestrial Paradise*, *Leonardo da Vinci*, *Pablo Picasso* (film directors Luciano Emmer and Enrico Gras), *Van Gogh* and *Guernica* (directed by Alain Resnais), *Picasso Mystery* (directed by Henri Clouzot), *Nicolae Grigorescu*, *Theodor Aman*, *Babes Murder* (directed by Ion Bostan), *Pictorial Universes*, *Ice Painter*, *Luchian*, *Theodor Pallady*, *Cantata Profana* (directed by Nina Behar), *Constantin Brâncuși*, *Onisim Colta* (directed by Laurențiu Damian), *The Sculptor* (directed by Cornel Mihalache), *Alexandru Plămădeală* (directed by Anatol Codru), *Obsession*, *The melody* (directed by Vlad Druc), *Mihai Grecu*, *Beyond the Colour*, *Confession* (directed by Mircea Chistrugă).

These films of art as many others prove that the cinematic art, in its universal meaning, can be defined as a method of codifying symbolically the human experience and offering possibilities to the communication of messages and meanings. Messages of the art film derive from its structure, from the significant configuration of signs conceived by creators. The film of art, in comparison with an ordinary documentary film, affirmed itself as a language which codifies a complex system of signs conveyed from its components by different audiovisual ways. In case of the film dedicated to fine arts, for example, we will have the possibility to decode and enjoy the meanings of signs of the original works representing the film basis, and the meanings got through the cinematic language, i.e. those from the contents of the film.

The evolution of the art film, its multilateral functionality leads us to a synchronic process of signification and communication. Thus, at the same time, there is a double process of communication in the art film: details and the whole/ensemble of the original work are conveyed (ideational background, form, rhythm, chromatic spectrum; the system of artistic images or stylistic devices). According the ideational background and the message are conveyed

- repercussions of the synthesis and the assimilation of the original work, the transition of the arts language (painting, choreographic, theatrical, interpretative etc.) into other language - the cinematic one. After all, it communicates the values of the new work: the artistry of the filmmakers represented by film components (image, soundtrack) and integrally, as a whole. Hence, the canonical schemes of the communication are not characteristic for the art film.

The art work, being subdued to the cinematic language, is resized by different procedures (camera movement, zoom, and montage) and vocalized by music score or sound effects in this category of films. Fixed objects, colors, lights from the original works become living and mobile, speaking, contrasting and full of expressiveness and meanings. A detail less important for the author of the original work could become more suggestive, could communicate new meanings in the film, being emphasized by framing, close-up and sound accents. In the film a sensitive reality expresses another reality, different from the original one, for example, the detail with the flower in the film *Guernica* directed by Alain Resnais. In the homonymous work of Pablo Picasso, the basis of Resnais film mentioned above, the image of the crushed flower was placed as though accidentally among other images of the painting. In the film the image of the flower sign/symbol, being emphasized by close-up, "accompanied" conforming the frame of the terrible screams of the German bombers, which destroyed the Spanish city Guernica, obtains new generalizing meanings. The communication processes becomes a shortcut which pierces, vibrates and shake the spectator's consciousness.

This sequence brings a more general idea that the film of art includes two simultaneous processes: one of meaning and other of communication.

In this genre of film the detail becomes suggestive with an emphasized metaphorical valence of the image of that electrical bulb, turned on, swinging as a pendulum of light and hope, beating over the Earth, full of pain and horror, the rhythm of an apocalyptic period of time. In the film *Guernica* this detail is the single

image, the main theme of the cinematic narration, which gives a little piece of hope and light to broken souls of those hundreds innocent men.

In this case the reality related by these symbolic signs, comes from the state of human consciousness of those two artists: first of all is that of Pablo Picasso – the author of the original work and afterwards the state of the filmmaker Alain Resnais who succeeded to synthesize an audiovisual creation based on the painted work, using juxtapositions, interferences and intersections of cinematic frames, reproducing sound rhythms and their alternation by the montage, retaking the pictorial subjects of the original works of Picasso.

These examples confirm that the process of meanings communication is executed through a system of signs/symbols (or icons) – fact that determined some reviewers (Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Levi-Strauss, Christian Metz, Yuri Lotman, Kyril Rozgolev etc.), who conceived this phenomenon from the semiotic perspective, to come to idea that the whole culture, including the cinematic art, represents an ensemble of signs/codes which by semiotic mechanism and juxtaposition of the physical image of film sign with the idea or spiritual (and artistic) grounding of the customer, burst out the delight or artistic-aesthetic explosion of the new meaning. Only when the customer realizes that complex (spiritual) action of comprehension, connotation and interpretation of the meaning or message, we can speak about a genuine process of communication.

The filmmakers' artistry, the possibilities of cinematic technique to work with sign/symbol, detail, gives to the film of art an impressive energy unknown for other arts. The detail from the original work, emphasized by the cinematic language, obtains an individual way of existence, a symbolic element with its micro-message bearer of essences, completing the general message of the film. Here the form of symbolic language constitutes the structure of a whole whose elements obtain meaning only being related to this whole from an affective and intellectual complex of the dialectic reaction between artistic image and customer. For example, the frequent approach of the metonymy – linguistic rhetorical device, consisted in the

logical contiguity between things by naming an object by another, being in a logical relation with the first one – reconfirms the thesis mentioned above related to arts, especially to the art film. These details also communicate the fact that in the film of art persists a special knowing of the general by the particular, of the particular which includes the meanings of the general “codified” in signs, symbols and metaphors.

Therefore, the art film, besides its general message, communicates also micro-messages from the basic film components which in their turn contain sources of messages generated and expressed by procedures and methods of the cinematic language: camera movement, travelling, angulation, frame composition, chromatic spectrum, stage lighting – often with dramaturgical functions/effects etc. As an example of artistic way of directing the light on a subject absolutely non-cinematic could serve the film *War Disasters* directed by Jean Gremillon and Pierre Kast, which is based on the homonymous series of engravings of Francesco de Goya. In his works the light “carves” figures, giving them dimensions and unforeseeable shapes. These somber engravings get time and space, get life only by light.

The dramatism, by which the contrast between shade and light fills the images, turns cinematic art into a field of experiments of the virtues of chiaroscuro more generously than painting itself, where this method was invented. Also the animation of Goya engravings by movement, illuminating, angulation and other procedures of the cinematic language modified the perspective of forms and proportions, imposing new relations between parts and the whole of the pictorial work, new symmetries and asymmetries – decisive factors in the “space dynamisation” and “time spatialisation”, where the communication gets a symbolic character, specific to the film of art.

Thus, in a film of art all components and elements bear meanings and the entire meaning of the work is crystallized by their interaction and transmitted to the people.

In the film of art the symbol meanings mainly depends on the context of their utilization. Director Vlad Druc, for instance, released two art films conceived under the same sign – Bird sign:

Melody – dedicated to dramatic destiny of the famous opera singer Maria Cebotari and “Poor dove” (*Vai, sărmana turturică*) whose protagonist is Maria Drăgan – popular singer of folk music. Besides the multiple meanings of the Bird image – ascension, divine freedom, intermediate between sky and earth, unchained of earthly burdens, etc. – of this “archetypal symbol of evolution, aspiration to rise to sky perfect/absolute values, constant and universal metaphor of the soul”⁷, the director Vlad Druc, by suggestive environments, gives to this image another meanings. In the film context the Birds communicates risings and fallings of the artist Maria Cebotari, triumphal flying and its dramatic breaking, singer worldwide wanderings who was always fighting for spiritual freedom, for the beauty. And all these are in counterpoint with the dramatic condition of the country adopted by the whole Europe stricken by the sufferings of the WW2. The film *The Melody (Aria)* includes an entire episode entitled *Flying bird* which concentrates more connotations of this symbol becoming a metaphorical construction. For example the image of the nestling bird despaired and lost between life and death, which is straying among the huge and threatening car wheels, among the horrible feet of the cruel and careless people.

Filmmakers record on film the crowd in such a way that it reminds a furious headless monster with many feet which will squash the poor nestling. This image becomes a symbolic metaphor in given environments, perfectly substituting the fate of Maria Dragan (her guilt was the huge talent and she had sung too “Romanian” in a Russianized Moldavia), and by generalization this metaphorical construction makes references “beyond” her, placing them multi-directionally in a social and cultural reality which go through the limits of the concrete image, communicating the conditions of the art person in a totalitarian regimen.

Both Maria Cebotari and Maria Dragan (got in a dramatic state) were like the dove in the ballad sung by Maria Dragan: “were flying until they fell”. The director gives to Bird symbol the meaning of Sacrifice in the name of art, in the name of the beauty.

All these give depth and expressiveness to the symbolic language which is processing the communication within the art film.

If the process of aesthetic interpretation (made by filmmakers) of the interpretations (by the authors of finished works) lays on the basis of the art film – an organic, aesthetic-analytical synthesis composed of many point of view, concepts, assimilations of the language of different art genres, methods of interpretation, then the communication of the consequences of spiritual and artistic impact of some personalities from different spaces and civilizations is possible though the components of this type of film, we mean the meeting within the film of filmmakers and their protagonists or with the strange artistic material subdued to cinematic investigations. Only here the oldest and most modern traditions intersect and interfere – fact that require a multidisciplinary (aesthetic, philosophical, historic, cultural, anthropological etc.) and intercultural involvement which is valorized and communicated making common the problems of modern culture and ancestral subjects from the variety of mythological stratification from all nations and all times.

Thus, the film of art, due to its multifunctionality and the potential of exploration and audiovisual communication – the most complicated of the reality, of assimilating and subduing more art genres from different civilizations and cultures to cinematic language, challenged the filmmakers from all time and “cinematic” spaces. They are interested in the valorization of the art works – one of the most principal functions of the art film, but also they are obsessed by a strong desire to communicate something new, something important to the world, not taking into account the geographical borders, nationalities and other reasons. This fact can be explained, for example: the Italian filmmakers Luciano Emmer and Enrico Gras issue on screens successful art documentaries *Terrestrial Paradise*, created on the works of the Holland painter Hieronymus Bosch and later – another film about the paintings of the controversial Spanish painter Pablo Picasso. The films of the Holland filmmakers Henri Storck and Paul Haesaerts dedicated to the Flemish painter Rubens and *From Renoir to Picasso* – a

panorama conceived according to an axiological rigor. But the French directors Jean Gremillon and Pierre Kast found unusual film expressions in order to recall the war disasters by the works of the painter Francisco de Goya – a symbolic figure of Spain.

The famous French director Alain Resnais asserted himself by the art documentary dedicated to Dutch painter Van Gogh – the film was awarded with Oscar and constituted a new stage in the genre evolution. Later, filmmaker Resnais released on world screens the film *Guernica*, inspired by the work of painter Pablo Picasso who created the fresco *Guernica* characterized by great civil and artistic resonances, based on the documentary fact – the tragedy of the Basque city which was completely destroyed forever in 1937 by the fascist bombardments. There are two cultures in the film components – French and Spanish – concepts of two great artists on the same event. Thus, the tragedy of the poor Basque nation became a pain of the Spanish artist Pablo Picasso and afterwards, by cinematic discourse – a harrowing pain of the film authors, of sacred monsters such as Alain Resnais – director, Paul Eluard – poet, and author of the comments, as well as the actress Maria Cassares – a peerless performer of Eluard's poetry. By means of cinema these French artists succeeded to communicate worldwide the tragedy of another nation.

Studying thoroughly the concepts of the reviewers, M. Foucault, F. de Saussure, W. Benjamin, M. McLuhan, E. Benveniste, P. Ricoeur e. a., Jean Caune concludes that “the language expressiveness (...) could be considered as the founder of meaning and culture. And the art could be perceived as language by its capacity of communication (related to the human expression) and not by its functions which are not related to language”⁸. Thus Jean Caune states for a purity of the linguistic/language function. Generally we can add that every art genre improves and imposes, first of all, its language and the verbal expression should be (less) used rarely – it is the most simple and accessible form of expression very often/frequently converted in all arts, even in visual arts, cinematic art and in fictional and non-fictional arts, in cases when verbal substance very often substitutes film components. Firstly it

is about the alleged documentary films, feature films, which represent just TV shows running long time of doubtful quality, where everything was based on the verbal language, neglecting often the other components as image, musical score and sound effects, i.e. the proper cinematic language.

Talking about signs and meanings we don't want to create the impression that the art film represents something hermetic with signs and coded symbols, something that cannot be subdued to the communicational process. “Reading” an art film as the aesthetician Jean Chalumneau noticed “doesn't mean just decoding by certain theoretical grids, signs from works: the decoding could be only partial because the art creation could not be reduced to a coded message. Reading the art means to understand it, imposing a more profound adhesion called emotion”⁹. Challenging an emotion and communicating it to the customer represents one of the basic possibilities and functions of the art film. The Romanian filmmakers Nina Behar has contributed in order that the fact mentioned above to become an axiomatic truth, directing twenty six art films and emphasizing the possibilities of communicating the emotive substance by this genre of film which in comparison with documentary with an ordinary aesthetic statute aims to “express, explain, suggest, to communicate a feeling and to give an impulse to spectator”¹⁰. For the same reason she stood for the dramatization of artistic “reality”, i.e. the dramatization of original works the source of creating the art films and which should interest and lead to meditations on life and world, on the binomial art-film. In these films the communication is effectuated by a dramatized interpretation of that artistic “reality”. “Studying the dramatization, staging the pictorial elements – method of the art film to be realized as spectacle – we conclude that from/on one side it was a manifestation of the creating freedom, from other side it didn't hide the anecdotal character, the crazy race for effect. Analyzing the art film concerning artist's personality, we think that representing a life has often been an occasion to introduce the anecdote, to try to produce emotions by extra-pictorial means”¹¹. In such matter filmmaker Nina Behar avoids the polemics of French reviewers Andre

Bazin and Jean Mitry against the art film and especially to the process of dramatization.

Some reviewers accused the directors of such films of betraying the genuine works because the film "destroys" the unity of the basic work and creates a new work of synthesis, the cinematic one. From our point of view André Bazin answered them very right: Instead to blame cinema of impotence to restore the painting, we should be amazed that a miraculous key for opening the gate of masterpieces to millions of spectators is finally found¹². Namely the dramatization creates the atmosphere of the cinematic spectacle interpreting that artistic "reality". In these films the art work is decomposed and re-composed according to the dramaturgy laws. Art films, from the perspective of this way of interpretation of reality, lead us to the idea of a new model of communication: the communication as a cinematic spectacle, giving us the opportunity to state that only in the art film the idea of André Bazin that "film is an aesthetic state of the matter" is realized.

Thus, in the art film the process of communication integrates the messages, meanings, ideational fund of the new created work – film, and it includes also those kept and given by the original work, the core of this audiovisual product. For this reason the phenomenon of communicating by means of the art film requires a complex approach of investigation from psychological, semiotic and hermeneutical perspective.

In this context, the film of art by its methods of universal communication (originated from the synthesis of arts and from the universal feature of the cinematic language) is open for the

diversity of cultures, sensitivity and knowledge, imposing itself as an important instrument in the service of multiculturalism.

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