

COMMUNICATION AND NOISE

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Abstract

Starting from L. Bloomfield's structuralist description of the act of speech in terms of "noise", this paper shows the relationship of total antagonism that is established between noise and communication, denouncing the underlying Darwinian influence that fed mechanistic views upon language.

Keywords: *communication, noise, behaviorism, structuralism.*

American linguistics in the 20th century witnessed two totally opposite but equally powerful lines of thought: the former was represented by the *mentalist* direction in anthropological linguistics, initiated by Franz Boas and carried on by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, while the latter was Leonard Bloomfield's *structuralism*. Mentalist descriptivists considered that the language of a people could only be studied in close connection to the culture of that specific people, because their language structures reflected the speakers' mentality (or particular way of seeing the world), influencing it, at the same time, by transfer of linguistic norms into the domain of experience. At the opposite pole, structuralist linguists (Bloomfield, Zellig Harris, Noam Chomsky), despised any reference of language analysis to mental processes, since they strongly believed this approach was highly unscientific, and made a purpose for themselves to completely ignore *meaning*.

Leonard Bloomfield is considered to have been for American linguistics what de Saussure was, in his time, for the European one. He set out to take a fully scientific, empirical approach to language, which meant exclusively direct observation of visible phenomena. He thought variability in human behavior was due solely to the complexity of the human organism, especially

that of the human nervous system. In this line of thought, any of man's activities could be described in purely scientific terms. For example, a word like *salt* can be described very accurately because we can give it a scientific definition: NaCl or sodium chloride. In contrast, words like *love* or *hate* cannot be defined yet, since we lack the necessary knowledge at present, but the future might change that.

As for human language in its totality, Bloomfield considered it to be a system of conditioned reflexes triggered by verbal stimuli. This is how he explains the act of speech: a speaker produces a noise (stimulus) that triggers a reaction (response) in the nervous system of the interlocutor (receptor). Any reference to ideas is left out in the description, because "Non-linguists /.../ constantly forget that a speaker is making noise, and credit him, instead, with the possession of impalpable <ideas>. It remains for the linguist to show, in detail, that the speaker has no <ideas> and that the noise is sufficient" [1].

Judging things from a wider perspective, we notice that American structuralism is well impregnated with behaviorist values. Indeed, the psychology of the same early 20th century was dominated by behaviorists. In Russia, the principles of classical conditioning had been firmly established by Ivan Pavlov and his experiments that demonstrated how an originally neutral stimulus (a sound), if repeatedly associated with a reflex (salivation before food), induced a reflex response. In the U.S.A., psychologists like John Watson and B.F. Skinner founded their research on the direct observation of animal behavior, ruling out any reference to concepts like *mind* or *psychic phenomena*. Any behavior originated in learning to associate a stimulus and a response.

The fundamental laws of learning were extracted from this type of study, but they were applied on man as well. This is a very bizarre extrapolation from the mechanic nature of animal kingdom activities to the infinite complexity of human activities. Speech, for example, displays features of utmost sophistication, yet all behaviorists could see in it just another type of behavior (called *verbal behavior*) that could be accounted for in (the same) terms of stimulus-response.

We can now parallel the two phenomena described so far: on the one hand, psychologists trying to formulate a psychological theory without any reference to the central concept of *mind*, and, on the other hand, linguists trying to formulate a language theory without any reference to the central concept of *meaning*. Since *meaning* lies in the *mind* of the speaker, everything becomes clearer if we detect the fundamental idea that overwhelmingly influenced the scientific thinking of that time: Darwin's hypothesis on evolution. This is how we can explain the behaviorists' obsession with visible exterior forms and their extrapolation of animal observations to man, and this is also how we can explain structuralists' obsession for phonemes and morphemes, these material, concrete, measurable segments of language.

But let us go back to the way in which Bloomfield sees communication: a reflex act conditioned by the noise emitted by a speaker. Two are the things I will insist upon here, namely *the conditioned reflex act*, and *the noise*. As for the former, since we are anyway dealing with deductions drawn from the animal kingdom, let us take a quick look at communication as it is established among primates (which, according to evolutionist biologists, are our closest relatives). Observations made by American primatologists document that big apes (chimpanzees, orang-outangs, and gorillas) vocalize only in the presence of a stimulus. David Premack [2] shows that, if two lab chimps that have been separated want to find each other, they will never give out a call (as man would). Instead, they will silently start searching around until they see each other. This means they are unable to initiate communication, because they have weak voluntary control over their

sensory-motor systems. The same is indicated by the fact that a lab chimp never calls out to attract the attention of its trainer, instead it pounds on a resonant surface. The chimp that manages to steal food from the trainer always gives itself away by uttering the sounds signaling "food". This inability to suppress spontaneous vocalizations points once again to one of the fundamental features of animal communication, existing with all species *but* man: dependence on stimuli. Man's speech acts are, uniquely, stimulus-free: communication can be initiated at will, irrespective of the presence or absence of any auditory stimulus (Bloomfield's *noise*) from someone else. Moreover, even in the presence of such a stimulus (a question, a greeting), anyone is free to decide whether they react or not (ignore the *noise*).

Besides, - and this takes us to the latter part of the Bloomfieldian description of speech acts -, no animal vocalization is devoid of content. It signals, every time, a very concrete message: hunger, danger etc. In other words, *information* is transmitted. All the more in the case of man, no confusion should be ever made between *noise* and *message*, since the key feature that sets them apart is the presence of meaning, that is of information. *Noise* is far from positively contributing to the act of communication. Quite the contrary: according to its definition in communication theory, noise is that which corrupts message integrity. In verbal discourse, it appears as mistakes, gaps, repetitions, hesitations, ambiguity, everything that prevents information from being transmitted properly. Human language is a code that miraculously maintains orderly structure in spoken messages, while noise, which signifies chaos and disorder, must be kept off.

Here we can also clearly see why structuralism was such a complete failure (Chomsky will later "reform" himself): a theory of language that advocates that the surface form of a sentence is the only reality, a theory that turns its back to meaning, that even deplores (through Z.Harris) the intrusion of meaning in linguistics, such a theory has no chance to understand the quintessence of language: making sense as the manifestation of man's rationality. Going beyond the strict semantic determination of language,

meaning is a faithful companion to *any* human activity, testifying to the existence of a *super-world*. In language, speech (concrete, exterior, quantifiable, visible, audible) is doubled by a psychological reality whose measure is given by meaning. In the same way, in life, forms and phenomena of all kinds are only imperfect, noisy symptoms pointing to the existence of a different type of reality, to which we have access only

through meaning. This time, however, not as a token of rationality, but as one of man's godlike nature.

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SYNCRETISM: AN INTRICATE MEANS OF FELICIA DONCEANU'S ARTISTIC COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Considering the premise of the syncretism of arts which lies at the very core of the instrumental theatre, the contemporary music composer Felicia Donceanu redefines through the works that are characterized by this concept, the relationship between music and speech, offering the opportunity of perceiving music through the means of theatre, plastic arts and choreography.

Keywords: Felicia Donceanu, syncretism, art, music.

The artistic creation as a whole aims at performing more than a mere communication; the objective of the artistic effect is to share a genuine expressive vision, determined by an inherent aesthetic aspiration. There is no doubt that the most intricate system of nonverbal communication will always be the art of sounds.

Within the vast compositional domain of contemporary Romanian music, a unique and distinguished "voice" stands out: the composer Felicia Donceanu. Witty in spirit *par excellence*, she is an artist touched by God and endowed with genius, gifted with fantasy and ingenuity, whose music outlines the merging boundaries of sounds, images and poetry, combining the artistic and the poetic imagery that point to her outstanding pictorial perspective, for she is not only a composer but also a writer and a painter, showing a strong tendency in fusing words with musical sounds, colors and movement.

In order to accurately perceive her artistic experiments, her own testimony remains the decisive argument in apprehending such an original work of art. That is the reason why we have resorted to her own reflections on art that she had shared with me during our numerous personal encounters.

Having a natural inclination in combining several arts, the composer has been endowed with numerous artistic talents which, apart from

music, have determined her to love the theatre in a special way, and thus, her passion for the dramatic art distinguished her creation. In the decisive moment of her carrier, Felicia Donceanu chose to become a stage director, but, due to several events that marked her life, she was advised to opt for music instead, a field in which she could freely express her ingenuity and creative fantasy.

Felicia Donceanu managed to define her own style through her wisdom, talent and refinement, a style which she preserved along her carrier spanning over more than six decades and thus paved the way for the Romanian vocal chamber creation along with her illustrious professor, Mihail Jora, being rightfully called the *Great Lady of the Romanian Lied*. In addition to the vocal chamber creation of Felicia Donceanu, there are also other instrumental and orchestral scores that widen the spectrum of the Maestro's creation as a whole.

Felicia Donceanu has always had a preference for the musical genres that brought together both poetry and music, in which the human voice, as a primordial instrument, vividly expresses the creator's inner thoughts and emotions; her use of the poetic imagery is prominently manifested in the instrumental compositions as well. Regardless of the genre, one cannot overlook the composer's keen interest in extending, specifying and materializing the artistic message by encoding within the musical piece a poetic thought which, being pragmatically formulated, is characterized by a prevalent lyric background.

She is also very passionate about painting proving an inexhaustible power of imagination and artistic expression in her works. *I very much like to do portraits, amateurish as they may seem; they are the equivalent in music of my intended or*

unintended endeavor to grasp the true essence of the human soul.

One of her other talents consists in costume designing. *I was influenced by this field. What one does with his own hands reflects in music. It is here that the sense of proportions originates and mirrors itself in music through one's ability of knowing how to build and carve.*

Apart from her compositional works, Felicia Donceanu is a skilful writer as is shown in her poetic lines that were written for some of her composer friends and for many of her compositions as well: "Odă lui Ciprian Porumbescu" (Ode to Ciprian Porumbescu), "Miț și Chiț" (Miauw and Squeak), "Rodul bun" (Fruitful harvest), "Baladă cu îngeri" (Ballad on Angels), "Urare pentru toate zilele" (Good Wishes for Everyday), "Înserare" (Twilight), "Culori, flori, fructe" (Colours, Flowers, Fruits), "Pace pentru viață" (Peace for Life), "Lacrimi" (Tears) "Cutia cu surprize" (The surprise box). She has also written several scripts for musical shows and radio broadcastings. In this respect, it is noteworthy to mention the words of appreciation of the stage director Mihai Berechet: „Proving a dedicated, vibrating and many-sided talent, Felicia Donceanu has composed the music script for three of my pieces... (...) Just as diverse as the many performances for which I have requested her contribution, most temperate and refined, sensitive and literate, Felicia Donceanu has fully unfolded her artistry...” [1].

The disposition to playfulness, the delicate humour and her optimism, without shadowing the dramatic element, are present all throughout her creation. This playful spirit that has always required a rich imagination and freedom of thought has manifested itself in the works dedicated to children – such as the literary cycle entitled "Ten Miniatures" (Zece miniaturi), *A Fantasy for Children's Choir, Soloists and Piano* "Miauw and Squeak", (Fantezia pentru cor de copii, soliști și acompaniament de pian "Miț și Chiț"), the compilation of 30 melodies with comments and drawings "The Smart Tinkler" (Clopoțelul cel isteț), the musical story "Looking for Tinkler" (În căutarea lui Clopoțel) – but also in more elaborate works characterized by the same delicate and temperate background of feminine sensitivity, such as the fantasy for

children's choir, tenor violin, organ and percussion, entitled "Picolicomando".

The composer's ingenuity is also materialized in the various instruments of percussion that she has especially designed for some of her musical works, and also in the elegant and refined pieces of stained glasses and deep pyro engravings. *I like to think that I have a lot in common with Robinson; I always have ideas and some may say that my common sense is in a way contradictory to my own artistic nature.*

The exhilaration with which she devotes herself to music, the spiritual gaiety, her presence in the concert halls of the Association of Composers and Musicologists (UCMR), all these go against her age. *I am mainly concerned only about what is good and beautiful, obviously the selection criteria are purely subjective. I have never allowed the hardships of life get to me. Most of all, I like to play using my fantasy and this playful spirit of mine has never left me. I also feel encouraged by the joy I see in my friends to whom I often dedicate my playfulness.*

Strictness is a quality that determines the composer Felicia Donceanu to carefully elaborate her works. Her creative endeavor is diligently put into practice after long thought and consideration over the future musical piece. *I actually compose all the time. The creation, however, is like giving birth, painful and exhausting...* confesses the artist; that is the reason why Felicia Donceanu is not a prolific type of composer who races her act of creation just to attain a certain number of works. On the contrary, she feels that the act of creation is not acquired by adding, but by cleansing and purifying in order to reach the pure expression and attain the essential.

Felicia Donceanu is, nevertheless, a prodigious music writer, her creation covering a large number of opuses generously speeded throughout the musical genres, favoring the human voice. Her compositional undertaking makes use of several genres, such as: vocal-instrumental music, vocal symphonic music, symphonic music, choral music, chamber music, opera music, music for children, instrumental theatre, film music, entertainment music.

The lack of affiliation to a predefined theoretic system renders her work unique by not fitting in any stylistic movement, making it impossible to

conform or classify it into canons (be they traditional or modern). Referring to herself as non-conformist and atemporal, the Maestro is not familiar with the detached judgment, thus implying that her music is a reaction to speech, an aesthetic trait that governs her entire creation. The compositional strategies are always subservient to the musical concept, the connection between text and music being closely interrelated. The composer lets herself guided by the musical insight, with no transgression from it, so as to attain the concrete result of the musical sounds. The vast and rich array of themes calls for an appropriate musical language, that is why they do not comply with the traditional norms, thus entailing a genuine language, one that is gradually turning into a personal style, without disregarding the tradition and following the line of a temperate innovatory spirit well adjusted to a distinct universe of sounds.

Proving a keen sensibility in dealing with the dramatism of the poetic line, the artist has created works that reveal her view on the body and speech expression, which implies from the part of the interpreter a particular scenic sense. The dramatic gesturing is common not only in her vocal chamber compositions in which the implications of the poetic text are a pretext for suggesting a clear "scene movement", but also in those that are officially considered to comply with the genre of the vocal-instrumental theatre. There are several works that combine in a very innovative way both singing and gesturing with the actual representation of the artists' stage props which most of the time are picked and even manufactured by the composer herself.

In time, the theatric inclination of Felicia Donceanu has seeded the coming into light of several chamber works belonging to the genre of vocal-instrumental theatre, that supposes either the momentousness of both the instrument and the interpreter in their climax, either the manifestation of the character-instrument. It is well known that one of the central characteristics of postmodernism is syncretism, that is, the combining of various artistic forms so as to obtain a „complete performance" where music, theatre, poetry and dancing fuse with one another.

Considering the premise of the syncretism of arts which lies at the very core of the instrumental

theatre, Felicia Donceanu redefines through the works that are characterized by this concept, the relationship between music and speech, offering the opportunity of perceiving music through the means of theatre, plastic arts and choreography. Her own perception of this type of creative intricateness is similar to the playful spirit that *plays and has a lot of fun* – as she herself likes to put it.

The instrumental theatre of Felicia Donceanu implies not only a general syncretism, on a stage of relatively limited dimensions, but locates the idea of syncretism within the interpreters as such. This concept is obvious in two special situations. The first one is when one expects from the interpreter to be more than a virtuoso and to surpass his own limitations by assuming a role and act just like an actor. The other one refers to the relationship between the person that plays and the musical instrument, an instrument that has been invented as an extension that helps him communicate his own thoughts and feelings.

The interpreter has a certain freedom which is closely supervised in as much as the Maestro has the outstanding ability to encapsulate in a genuine stage-managing overview the whole syncretic development of the creative act, supervising the setting of the artistic discourse, starting with the text, continuing with music, scenery, setting and finishing with the body language that contributes to the performance of the musical act as such.

Displaying a highly versatile creativeness, the Maestro accomplishes an original syncretic language, by bringing together both traditional and modern elements, both neoclassical details and modern clusters, carefully selected, in order to communicate messages that have strong contemporary implications.

In spite of the fact that her name does not regularly appear in the concert programmes – in the relatively few musical performances dedicated to the contemporary national creations – her music is still much too little promoted and played for the broad public as it is the case with almost everything that stands for authentic value. Considering that the compositional creations are not easily appreciated by the contemporary public, Felicia Donceanu's art has always had a positive feed-back, primarily due to the sincerity that reflects in her works and to her resonant expressiveness embedded in a

variety of experiences stemming from an overflow of feelings: *every work – a confession*.

The relationship composer – interpreter has held a major role in the instrumental creation, as well as in the vocal chamber one. Felicia Donceanu acknowledges that she has composed works in order to dedicate them to other people, and most of the time she has composed on the artists' demand. As a consequence of her collaboration with various artists there are no "chest scores", most of her work being performed in front of the public. In this respect, the interpreters' approval confirms their appreciation of the composer's work as they still solicit new compositions from the Maestro. This feeling is mutual: *I love the interpreters because my music is primarily for them; if they understand me, if I get to their hearts, then they will definitely get to the public's hearts, too*.

Among the privileged interpreters who have benefited from the Maestro's inspired creation and to whom she has dedicated most of her instrumental works, I will mention only some of them: the group "Studioul de Muzică Veche" (Old Music Workshop): Verona Maier (piano and percussion), Anca Iarosevici and Robert Dumitrescu (*viola da gamba*); the late clavecin player Marta Joja, the harp player Stana Bunea, the clarinet players Leontin Boață, Aurelian Octav Popa, "Trio Mozaic": Ona Spânu Vișenescu (violin), Diana Spânu-Dănilă (piano) and Emil Vișenescu (clarinet), The old music band "Flauto Dolce", "Archaeus", a band led by Liviu Dănceanu.

Watching over the evolution of the singing voice along the centuries, one notices the invariable tendency of fusion between speech and music, these two so-called *sublime aberrations* as Emil Cioran beautifully refers to them. Felicia Donceanu's vocal-instrumental creation is the result of such a symbiosis, it is a fusion between two universes: the poetic and the musical one.

Felicia Donceanu is strongly preoccupied with the musical implications that can be worked from texts belonging to the Romanian classic and modern poetry. In her songs accompanied by piano or by instrumentalists "the composer's musicality is irrefutable and the lack of stylistic preconceptions, simply remarkable. She is able to afford the luxury of singing while reciting and reciting while singing!" [2]

I will quote one of the composer's confessions referring to the translation of lines into music: *Perhaps I would have liked to be a poet. It seems to me that there are poems which while I read them need to be expressed through music, too. By expressing them I don't mean to interpret their meaning, but to create another dimension, a movement, a setting, a colour... I have this tendency to be syncretic*.

Felicia Donceanu wishes to bring forward the semantic value of words by converting all musical traits into a unitary whole: melody, harmony, rhythm, quality of voice; in most of her works, the semantic transformation is rigorously supervised by taking into account the dynamic and agogic indications.

The influence of the text over the structure of the sounds represents the main premise in interpreting both the vocal model and the choral one. As the choir conductor Nicolae Gâscă concludes, the relation between text and melody entails two major considerations: one is the agreement between the meaning of the text and the expressive meaning of the melody, and the other is the extent in which the melody intensifies the meaning of the text.

Felicia Donceanu acknowledges the prevalence of the poetic line in the musical-poetic undertaking, going back to the origin of poetry and conferring the utmost importance to the prosodic stress. One cannot overlook the perfect fusion between the different types of melodic outlines and the poetic images of the text, for Felicia Donceanu has always opted for lines that *have sung by themselves*. It is through her music that the composer invests the text with a distinguished eloquence, emphasizing its emotional, figurative and philosophic meaning.

Felicia Donceanu is a remarkable voice, an exuberant talent with a refined musical perception, a unique personality who imparts the overflow of her sensibility in drawings, ornamental arts, poetry for children, having succeeded in veiling the artistic experience with authenticity, purity and expressiveness.

References

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