

Semiotic Trans-Temporality: Communication of Culture in Two Cultures of Communications

(Middle Ages Music-Liturgical Drama Officium
Stellae and Contemporary Star's Plays)

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Abstract

My paper wants examine the trans temporality importance of the semiotic approach to realize newness in two music/dramaturgical phenomenon temporally distant about seven centuries: on the one hand giving a new approach to the relationships between middle age Officium Stellae drama's inner expressive codes and its communicative resonances and on the other hand discovering in contemporary Star's plays, descending from medieval drama, a real culture of communication of own values of identity and belonging, an unexplored point of interest for semiotic investigation.

Musical signification's power of ri-semiotization on the informational polyphony and density of signs in the drama of Officium Stellae, already reveals a real culture of communications ante tempore, that is evident in particular analyzing the rules-relations between music and: conventions governing kinesic, proxemic codes and dramatic space, scenic subcodes, syntactic, semantic, phonological constitutive rules, semiotic potential of multilanguage that reflects socio-cultural attribution of sense, overcoding of voice projection, paralinguistic constraints on character interpretation, influence of local and regional factors on performance, "authenticating" conventions constraining dramatic action as real; ethical constraints on the judgement of character regarding good and evil, stereotypes "comic - parodist" and "tragic" behavioural rules, communicative resonances.

In contemporary musical practices, Star's plays in north Italy represent an interesting source of innovation and originality, in constant evolution, transformed by socio- cultural audience, but loyal to medieval heritage and symbols, a new musical dramaturgy, often heir of that medieval, where globalization and musical-anthropological archetypes interact. From historically point of view Sabbia Valley missed the political opportunities to mature a strong sense of identity, so the songs of the Star seem to give shape to this identity, distinguishing it form other valleis, creating an own culture in which identify and setting up a range of communicative devices to hand out its values and symbolical significations.

Officium Stellae in Middle Age and Star's plays today, perpetuates, like all rites, their own meaning: ri- signifying year after year, they mark and give values to time-seasons' flow, creating participations and allowing to share knowledge.

The trans temporality importance of the semiotic approach is fundamental to realize and to study the deep communicative newness in two music/dramaturgical phenomenon temporally distant about seven centuries: on the one hand giving a new approach to the relationships between middle age liturgical drama *Officium Stellae*, its expressive codes and its communicative resonances and on the other hand discovering in contemporary Star's plays, descending from medieval drama, a real culture of communication of own values of identity and belonging, an unexplored point of interest for semiotic investigation.

EXPRESSIVE CODES AND COMMUNICATION OF CULTURE IN OFFICIUM STELLAE

Officium Stellae is a kind of liturgical drama developed between X and XIV century belonging to the celebrations of Epiphany: it consists in a religious dramatized deed, sung on Latin text, and represents Magi's coming to Jerusalem and their adoration in Bethlehem. Until today we've found about thirty sources of *Officium Stellae* in a large geographic expanse.

Since X century, in early liturgical drama, representations born into Middle Ages liturgical practices, not merely for a development of the liturgy, but mainly for creation of a monastery *schola*, cultural school of well educated anonymous monks, destined to the public of believer, but in first place to the drama's performers, the same monastic community, in a particular logic of production-representation that reflects the connection between artistic-dramatic production and collectivity.

Musical signification's power of re-semiotization on the informational polyphony and density of signs living in the drama of *Officium Stellae*, reveals a real culture of communications *ante tempore*. Already in this medieval drama we find interesting inner elements of newness and originality, such as an uncommon interaction among different communicative codes: musical, theatrical, cultural, dramatic, textual and liturgical. We find also developments, innovations, even some forms of madrigalism *ante tempore*, something that is in advance of *Affectenlehre* baroque opera's time and of the theorization of melodrama dynamics: all that projects this phenomenon in an evolutive historic line.

This medieval culture of communication reveals its features in particular analyzing the rules-relations between music and: conventions governing kinesic, proxemic codes and dramatic space, scenic subcodes, syntactic, semantic and phonological constitutive rules.

Since the beginning of the drama the music constitutive part of the ceremony, accompanies it, announces it. The entry is a way to invite public with music, with a phatic function, to put in touch. Music is in terms of synecdoche and metonymy, part of the ceremony, moves public to action and assumes on itself the ceremony's characteristics .

Music plays a fundamental rule because operates a distinction between the Three Kings, differentiating their melodic chant *ambitus* (extension) and articulation, low for the first King, medium and syllabic for the second, high and more melismatic for the third, so that every King has own musical, and consequently dramatic, identity like character: the two codes (musical and theatrical) interact so that the demarcation line between them sometimes disappears.

In the source from Rouen, Three Kings speak with different and incomprehensible idioms to give a realistic impression of being foreigners: the semiotic potential of Three Kings multilanguage reflects socio-cultural attribution of sense, the intentional simultaneous presence of signs belonging to two or more linguistic codes in the same text, implies a socio-cultural environment able to understand the different ideological value of each language, its range of pertinence, its communicative resonance, a reception up to parodic text dimension. Since XIth century, middle Latin parodical production intensifies at the same time with a growth of social, political, cultural conflicts.

But there's more, in rubrics we find an apparatus of indications about musical interpretative praxis, an overcoding of voice projection, articulation, intonation that influences paralinguistic constraints on characters interpretation, the expressive mimic code, rules, theatrical costume and its connotations, scenic subcodes, syntactic/ semantic/ phonological constitutive rules, rhetorical and stylistic conventions (as *pronunciatio*, *decorum*) all as real director's prescriptions.

About the text functional pertinence, single acoustic aspects, take from sounding continuum, are invested with musical statute in so far as they were entered in the prospective of what the culture of the age considered the musical text.

SEMIOTICS COMMUNICATION OF CULTURE IN STAR'S PLAYS

Coming to contemporary musical practices, Star's plays in north Italy represent an interesting source of innovation and originality, in constant evolution, transformed by socio-cultural audience, but loyal to medieval heritage and symbols, a new musical dramaturgy, often heir of that medieval, where globalization and musical-anthropological archetypes interact.

From historically point of view Sabbia Valley missed the political opportunities to mature a strong sense of identity, so the songs of the Star seem to give shape to this identity, distinguishing it from other valleys, creating an own culture in which identify and setting up a range of communicative devices to hand out its values and symbolical significations.

Epiphany Star's plays represent a broader practice developed from river Ticino to Germany and Hungary, but in Sabbia Valley, in particular, due the extraordinary openness to the ideas, religious influences that swept across the Alpine range, its popular devotion and rites, that combine traditions originated in Europe alongside locally/developed customs, is possible recognize traces of the medieval *Officium Stellae*, an unexplored topic of interest both for studies about medieval music that for those of contemporary- current music practices.

In Star' Play during the night before Epiphany groups of young and adult singers, usually wearing dark cloaks, suits and hats to represent Three Kings of Orient and Sheppard, are preceded by a flamboyant paper star fitted on a wooden frame, lit by electric torches inside, sometimes they are accompanied by folk instruments during their night tour of Valley's villages, with special stops to perform their songs.

Very little was known about the origin of this repertoire, although we lack of any historical sources that attest a previous presence of this tradition in Valle Sabbia, we know for sure that the main part of the texts sung is in relationship with *Officium Stellae*, this shows that those

songs, have survived from the Middle Age period up to now with the continuous support of the written tradition and that they have been only slightly modified with few local changes.

The modern cantors, as well as the cantors of the immediately preceding generations, are not at all aware of the historical origin of the repertoire they sing, in fact this is often considered a peculiar «tradition of the valley».

Descending in a deeper level to analyze heritages of *Officium Stellae* liturgical drama in Star's plays, we verify, in this common ground of similarities and differences, a permanent comparison between old and new musical liturgies with different dynamics, but the same meaning and communicative rite's complex. The common aim remains re-actualize one important event of Christianity, perpetuates its meaning, playing also on public expectations deriving from knowledge about Christ's life events, in a effective communicative intent.

Despite Star's play are usually settled in streets, squares and mountain's farms, in some villages songs are performed inside churches at the Mass end, before starting the procession and often is the same Celebrant that symbolically gives to the singers the Star to enlighten the dark winter night.

Music function remains exactly the same described for *Officium Stellae*. Ceremonies are only apparently fixed realities, due that characteristic of permanence and a -temporality that rite has by nature, instead they're also object of less or more evident innovations: social and epoch changes, meeting with different cultures, adaptation to context's transformations, these are only some of the forces that contribute to innovate and transform a rite.

When first Star Plays born in XVI century, the sistematic form of direct communication, in an age when movable type printing was only its infancy and illiteracy rampant, also hepled Chrch to create, so to say, a cordon sanitaire across the Alpine range against Protestant heresies from Northern Europe. It explains the importance of the three Kings and why Luther wanted to abolish their worship and that of Saints.

Besides songs of sure medieval liturgical origin, some are are probably transalations of sixteenth century German songs, while others are likely to have been «imported» by street singers from Southern Italy. As a whole, this tradition is often compared to the «lauds in spiritual clothing», for example folk songs adapted to religious words, used by the Roman Church to communicate even to the simplest people certain principles of the Catholic Reformation prompted by the Council of Trent.

We notice a use of medieval compositional techniques: cantillation, modal echoes, centonization, the practice of **composing a melody**, or piece based on pre-existing melodic figures and formulas within contemporary tonal and popular musical styles (homophonic, polyphonic, heterophonic). We note also a use of pre-existent Gregorian plainchant transformed by new musical and socio-cultural context in several aspects, (texts, music, language), a clear sign of the meeting, contamination, irruption of the use of popular music in religious ritual, with the consequent theorization of newness in current music.

In this way Star's plays represent an interesting source of innovation and originality, different in every land and countries, in constant evolution, transformed by socio-cultural audience, but loyal to its medieval values and symbols, a new musical dramaturgy, often heir of that medieval.

CONCLUSIONS

Greimas wrote about Gregorian chant «a deed that tell about life's evanescence, an aesthetic deed only in appearance limited and localized, deep regular and repetitive, but able to create something of radically new». I add, a newness able to hand down across centuries, recognizable in its identity also today, in this common ground of constant dialogue and evolutions with and thanks to new musical languages.

Officium Stellae in Middle Age and Star's plays today, perpetuates, like all rites, their own meaning: re-signifying year after year, they mark and give values to time-seasons' flow, creating participations and sharing knowledge.

Semiotic trans-temporality allow to investigate this research field and to reveal the features of the communication of culture thanks also to the musical signification's power of re-semiotization the density of codes, signs and syntagms of sense living in both the two cultures of communication analyzed, and reflecting outside too, in meanings of communicative resonance with public, society and culture of centuries and places crossed by their presence.