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RITUAL & NOISE

Ritual y Ruido

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Abstract

Starting from an ethnographic study of ancient rituals, the evolution of the production of noise in different kind of rites is analyzed up to the contemporary society. The definition of rite and noise, and the concatenation of stimuli on people produced by rites that induce habits -that in a certain sense are addictive- are discussed. The use of noise in tribal, religious, sport, political and festive rituals are described.

Keywords

Ritual, noise, social evolution, history, anthropology.

Resumen

A partir de un análisis etnográfico de rituales primitivos se analiza la evolución de la producción de ruido en diferentes tipos de ritos hasta la sociedad contemporánea. Se discute la definición de rito, ruido y la concatenación de estímulos sobre las personas que hace que los ritos produzcan hábitos y en cierto sentido sean adictivos. Se describe el uso de ruidos en rituales de tipo tribal, religioso, deportivo, políticos y festivos.

Palabras clave

Ritual, ruido, evolución social, historia, antropología.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The rites are intrinsic and necessary behaviour to the humans. They come from their own nature and they have become massive and formal social institutions with different aims that goes from the simple social solidarity to profit.

It is unquestionable that the rites have been developed by the humans from their more primitive stages to the present time, taking its forms of tribal, religious, political, sport or simply entertainment business rites. Their production can be under the control of organizations, leaders or businessmen whose aims not always are clear or totally positive and whose interests can be or not recognized consciously by the peers in the rituals.

This last aspect it has expanding in an alarming form, due to the development of a consumer society, which has found in the info-entertainment one of its main source of evasion and pleasure.

In this conference the definitions of noise and rite will be discused first, the rituals will be analyze ethnographically throughout history to recognize their functions, characteristics and aims, and finally the functions of the noise in the ritual acts will be discussed.

II. DEFINITIONS

II.1. Noise

The noise definitions are many and the acceptions vary from one place to another, partly because their roots are different. As example we can compare: "noise" in English, that comes from Middle English, from Old French, perhaps from Vulgar Latin *nausea*, discomfort, from Classic Latin *nausea*, seasickness; nausea [1], with "ruido" in Spanish that has his etymological roots in the Latin word *rugitus*, that means "rugido":roar , that in vulgar Latin already took the sense of " estruendo": loud noise [2.3].

Because of the many variations between languages, before starting the discussion on the subject of this work, we will be able to define noise according to the main acceptions related to the aims of this paper [4].

D1.- Any sound with very high sound pressure level.

D2.- Any sound that bothers or damages the people.

D3. - Any undesired signal that interfere the transmission, perception or interpretation of a useful signal.

D4.- Any sound with continuous or very complex spectrum.

Noise is generally interpreted, or presented, like something negative; but if noise is usually produced until now, still with so many regulations that prohibit it, it must be because fulfill some useful function or is considered necessary to the human being [5].

II.2. Ritual

The term ritual comes from the Latin *rituālis*. The dictionary definitions are poor and mostly focused on religious rites, so to understand the concept we must go to the literature on humanities, where the issues behind the rites and rituals are addressed allowing us to understand in a broad sense and, above all, in a contemporary way, since a large number of them are not religious

In a first place ritual must be understood as:

- A series of actions, performed mainly for their symbolic value, which is prescribed by a religion or traditions of a community [6].
- A significant institutionalized action accompanied by illustrative words within a fixed context of order of priority / exclusion of actions aimed to produce specific effects, at least psychological and social.

Among its most important characteristics [8] are that:

- a. It is both a collective action (social) and a personal conduct.
- b. It is a regular practice to the public.
- c. The rituals are formal, ie: stylized, stereotyped, have a predetermined order.
- d. The ritual creates, in some people, a form of addiction, because they want to return to it.
- e. The rite provides indoctrination, keeping down the intellectual defenses by a under questioning result of having the senses saturated.
- f. The ritual promotes spending to sustain the state of stimulation.

On the mechanics of the rites must be clear that as an intentional act, should be planned, arranged and conducted according to a script that leaves room for improvisation and variation. An important aspect of the rituals are their functions, and must be differentiated those connected with the organizers from those with the follower.

The ritual can enforce a wide range of elements and tools for their implementation such as: gifts, prayer, sacrifice and self-sacrifice, possession, vision, dance, chants, shouts, music, processions, battles, and so on.

From the earliest times rituals to enhance perceptions, and thus increase susceptibility to fellowship and acceptance, have used chemicals: stimulant foods, alcohol, drugs, etc.. [9, 10, 11].

To obtain full immersion of the participants in the ritual is important to have a sensorial control of the participants, this is the generation of actions or conditions that trigger all the senses in people, exiting them: visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and gustatory senses, producing and isolation from their everyday life.

In the acoustic dimension, from early times, sounds are important part of the rites, and inside them the noises have a very special place.

III. ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH TO RITE AND MYTH

Among the major theorists of anthropology can be mentioned: M. Mauss, C. Levi Strauss, A. Van Gennep, Victor Turner and C. Geertz. The last one pointed out that "In a ritual, the world lived and the world imagined, fused at the hands of a single set of symbolic forms, they become the same world and so that idiosyncratic produce transformation of reality" [12].

In this sense we would highlight the anthropological vision of Marcel Mauss, who identified as the basic principle the "reciprocity", an element widely described in his classic book *The gift*, which recognizes the exchange, or more accurately the communication of goods and the provision of services without a direct compensation, or at least one not immediately observable, as a general form of social communication: "The thing given is not inert, it still has something about him, through it the donor obtain a power over the beneficiary ..." [13].

Simple societies naturally exchange goods, constituting a primary form of ritual, as in the case of the Kula Circle where each member delivered one object to another member that circulate it and so until it returns to its point of origin, or the also knowledgeable Potlatch, an exchange system that helps keep the tribal society organized by hierarchical levels and secret societies based on the exchange of goods. Potlatch is basically a network of rites and ideas. From that concept Levi Strauss develops his whole theory of exchange, later explained by the structural method, i.e. binary oppositions.

Parallel to this concept, Van Gennep introduces the following definition of rites of passage: "Customs associated with the transition from one place or stage of life to another, which is found around the world." (Van Gennep cited by Kottak [8]), which have the following characteristics:

- These are formal.
- Stylized.
- Repetitive.
- Stereotyped.
- Include a liturgical order (sequences of words in action invented prior to the ritual in that are used).
- Are social events.

On the other hand, Kottak within the line of symbolic anthropology provides the following concept: "Rituals serve the social function of temporary or permanent creating solidarity among people, forming a social community". In this sense, we can highlight the role of ritual as the core of the community, made from a series of myths that will be discussed later. Suffice is to mention now the case of Aztec and Mesoamerican rituals that help to give solidarity to the community through detailed and complex rituals, which absorb some of the time and resources of indigenous societies and require the participation of a numerous clergy and the participation of the population. These rites were based on a cosmogonist thought

The primitive rite reproduces the biological law of natural cycles which eventually becomes a great ceremonial complex (initiation rites, marriages, funerals, etc.), which generate a ritual symbolism by songs, movement and shouting. These rites respond to the myths that are being created in community life. Then we will discuss the concept of myth.

A myth (Greek μῦθος, mythos, "story", "tale") is a traditional story of miraculous events, featuring extraordinary or supernatural beings such as gods, demigods, heroes and monsters [14].

According to Fages, the myth is read as a musical score, leaving out musical phrases and trying to read the full page: Each rite is fullness. "The myth and the music locked deep structural analogies. Both are fed by an external continuum, a wellspring of social events (myth) or a store of sounds physically realizable". Both operate from a "internal continuum": the psychological time of the mythical narrative, and the physiological time –visceral– of the performance and hearing of music. And above this "visceral" time music operates through two patterns: the natural pattern of organic rhythms and the cultural pattern of the musical sounds, or its scale or range [14].

Levi-Strauss in his "mythological books" [15,16] develops the following myth ranked as the M170. Tsimshian: History of Nalq. "In ancient times young people used to gather in the afternoon behind the houses. They were fun and made so much noise until late at night. Irritated by the noise, the sky sent down a magic feather that young people tried to catch in flight. But the first to catch it was lifted into the air and then in long chain, all the others, each of whom wanted to hold the feet of its predecessor. When this human line departed completely from the ground, the feather escape and the young, thus lacking grip, fell and smashed. Not a single one survived.

However, a young woman was at home because just given birth. Have a series of miraculous childrens. Aware of the fate of his family, decides to seek revenge lead back the heaven to send them the feather, of which they get possession. Armed with this talisman embark on a sky journey and eventually they marriage the winds of the four cardinal points, of which fixing the schemes, which remain to date [15].

Societies, no mater of their level of evolution, have developed a language tied to its organizational structure, known as rites. Each society builds its rites in terms of the life cycle: birth, adolescence, marriage and death, and of extraordinary events: wars, disasters, and so on. These rites mean a form of exchange or of reciprocity sometimes even violent, but in which all work together toward a common goal: to survive and give sense to the community. Thus, through the rites, identity is constructed as various anthropologists describe it, so that you can rebuild a society based on their various ritual forms. In fact many of the ethnographies are written based on the observation of rituals, for example, the rescued by Fray Bernardino de Sahagun in his Florentine Codex [17].

It is important to note that in the rites one of the most important conceptual tools is the "opposition", that is, the statement of a "contrast between opposites," which is essential for establishing the purpose of the rite as the ratio of option the excitation of a system of opposites, a dialectic, which allows the existence of a continuum where one is positioned.

These opposites: good-bad, night-day, sound-silence, cold-hot, are the limits of the positioning of opinion in humans.

There are a variety of rituals, among which, for their goal, stand out the rites of:

- Strength of Myth:
- integration to nature
- Healing
- Rites of passage
- Phases to a cycle
- Warfare
- Sports (Derived of Warfare)
- Excitement
- Group cohesion-Identity
- Amusement.
- Human or animal Sacrifice

Understanding ritual in its present form requires to go back to previous centuries, since the societies were in constant battle, in open struggle, until the times of peace. Each step in this direction was taken through the alternative systems which meant for example, the Olympics as a direct mechanism for give vent to the individual and collective energies.

The transformation of the rites has been in form rather than in content. Today, the current rituals, like the medieval, still are substantial part of any event or celebration. Regardless of social status, always have a ritual structure either military, ecclesiastic, sports or educational.

What has changed is the massive scale and scope that these rituals have, for example a soccer stadium is full of ritual elements: shouting, singing, massive body movements (like the wave), cheers, beer, etc., and a countless of elements that made up the soccer liturgy of every week.

IV. NOISE & RITE

On the use of noise specifically in ritual acts, they are related to several functional schemes, which imply utility for the people as: alarm, acoustic barrier, draw to attention, mechanism of aggression, exciter of the nervous system, virtual company, vent of stress or other emotions, generator of emotions, transition, contrast, and so on.

During the rites, the most important functions of the noises are, among others:

- To excite the nervous system.
- To vent stress or other emotions.
- To generate emotions.
- To produce contrast.
- To support a transition.
- To draw attention or to distract.

Next we will deepen, without trying to be exhaustive, in the uses of the noise to fulfill such functions on rituals and other related aspects.

It is important to begin analyzing the main source of natural noise production in humans “the shout”, and its great liberating power when it is used to vent emotions. Of course that the shout combined of a community during a rite is a great generator of noise and can be used in different ways, from support to protest, from pain to joy.

On the other hand, hundreds of persons singing together, that never can be 100% coordinate in time, frequency or amplitude, produce an increase in the sound level of the noise, and a more complex spectrum of the noise, which hide the out of tune of singers or increase the sensation of social cohesion.

If we added to the voices some sonorous instruments like drums, trumpets, whistles, etc., the noise will be much louder. Any instrument in the joy of music increases the loudness of noise.

In the development of the rites the noises can be used for the generation of emotional contrast (basic key for the staging of the rituals). On the generation of contrast, this is obtained by means of the production of opposite, for example going from silence to high sound level, from a spectrally simple sound to a noise (continuous spectrum broadband) or by means of a pitch change of the noise (or sound) e.g. from bass to acute.

On the transitions, they are very useful to maintain the attention and to avoid the boredom, as well as to generate “surprise”, to support or “to accentuate” some act or message or to “draw to attention” so that all people listen some specific message.

The development of the audio systems has allow to power the noise in the rites, thanks to the amplification and the design of better instruments and synthesizers, than generate a greater repertoire of noises that practically cover all the audible human rank and that can produce hearing damage.

Another important aspect is the social generation of a repertoire of developed acoustic codes from the theater, but mainly by the cinema from which we had a sonorous toolbox for transitions, effects and preparation to emotion changes, that are very used at present and that include not only loud sounds but noises with different spectral characteristics.

An aspect of the contemporary proconsumer society, and addict to the sensorial stimulation, is that the noise became a rite in itself. This is that, during the nights of weekend and in the free times, thousands of people go in search of noise in discotheques, sport, bars, churches, and events.

On the other hand, a social fear to emptiness has been generated, reason why silence, for many, instead of something desirable becomes something anguish, from which is necessary to flee.

V. FINAL COMMENTS

The types of rituals has been extended with the advance of the centuries, going from cosmogonic/religious acts to social, political, sports and entertainment events, with a very wide rank of variants.

Rites are necessary to humans and this has produced a dark side in them, which is necessary to decode, because they produce a great number of social manipulations of variable morality and many clearly nonethical businesses.

The noise has been, is and will be one of the main tools for the ritual acts, this due to the different functions that can provide to the humans.

The development of science has powered the human capacity to generate noise, and in the case of the rituals, the technology has been integrated to the conceptual and instrumental toolbox available for its achivement.

Unfortunately the noise besides serving the humans produce undesirable effects in the people, which go from auditory damages by exposition to high noise levels, to annoyances of the neighbors by sleep interference produced by events, which can even produce relatively low sound levels.

At present, in societies full of rules, that seems not to restrain the humans, refocusing and designing rituals that promote the human happiness, in an ethic profile and without risk, is an urgent necessity of the society.

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