

## LITERATURE AND THE FINE ARTS

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### Summary

Literature and the fine arts exist as processes and are not the same as culture or cultural processes. The arts are by definition creative acts of human beings. The main elements of art processes are artists, audiences, and distribution, and as historical phenomena, they exist within a certain timeframe. Myth and themes like love and death do not fade over time. Changes in the arts come with new knowledge (including new materials), and with new forms of communication brought about by new audiences. Most important for the context of the arts are power structures and markets. Modernization brought a basic change but up to now still has not led to a "global village." The culture of the towns is most important for artists. In addition, the world is still divided into those who live in poverty and have no access to the arts and those who are wealthy (and sometimes have no interest in the arts). From this perspective, the theses of UNESCO about the connections between the arts and "enhancing global sustainability" are most important.

## 1. Introduction

In a world perspective of literature and the fine arts it is not too difficult to find common elements for literature, but it seems to be not easy to use the term or concept “fine arts.” “Fine Arts” in the sense of “Béaux Arts” is often a close (“European”) concept and the scope is sculpture, painting, graphics, and sometimes music and dance. But in the last decades especially the arts from Africa and Asia have been included in the concept. And when you look today at the museums with “Fine Arts” in the title even in Europe and the United States, you will find a wide scope and nothing is excluded any more.

So to reflect “Literature and the Fine Arts” today in a world perspective means not to reproduce categories and disciplines which were important only for a short time and special groups but to study and analyze the processes. It still makes sense to use the concept “fine arts,” but not in the sense of an academic canon with its “qualities” (which always means exclusion criteria in small perspectives) but in the combination of the arts and creativity. In this perspective it is possible to reflect not only a very short period in only some countries, but the whole worldwide processes.

In this sense of “fine arts” as a specific form of human activity and knowledge, the concept can be also understood as a central element for sustainable development, for a culture of peace, as a part of human rights. And only in this form of understanding is it useful that a contribution about literature and the fine arts earns a place in EOLSS.

This new thinking started with new (transnational) media. In Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore’s book *The Medium is the Message* for example, first published in 1967 and one of the first publications reflecting the new situation, most pages are full of images, theses, and quotations (yet not melodies or other sounds, which can be found in modern Internet-based publications about artistic or cultural processes). McLuhan and Fiore’s book was and still is an introduction to a “new world” (which is still some hundred years old, and the authors claim that this new world was not invented today).

The form of the book is not suited to a world of disciplines and general division of labor and distribution. The range is—as we would say today—new knowledge about a complex “new world.” The presentation of knowledge, which was very important for the understanding of the cultural processes of the last decades, the role of the arts within these processes, and also for new action worldwide, is in a mixture of sciences and arts. It is not possible to take the knowledge out of this book in a linear form (for example, as rules). The book has to be read and interpreted.

One cliché derived from this book is known worldwide: the “global village.” New clichés were also born: global literature, global media, global economy, global governance, or simply globalization. Globalization is a cliché like all other clichés from different epochs. These epochs are constructs created by historians, acting in the role of power constellations or rulers (Canetti, 1980, p. 487).

For this theme of the EOLSS we will not use the form of presentation used by McLuhan and Fiore. Such a collage of very different elements of advertisement, the arts, and science was perhaps necessary to provoke a complex reception. It is not necessary to

use these different elements today because all possibilities of analysis, “description,” “mirroring,” or presentation are offered by language. From the beginning of “history,” language has been the main medium for memorizing cultural processes (this does not mean, however, that language is the central medium within the art processes, which are very different). Thus we will use the medium of language here to present knowledge about art processes (for a definition of this concept see the glossary).

Even if we do not use the same elements and strategies in this presentation, we have the same range and purpose as McLuhan and Fiore: to analyze the complexity of the cultural processes with their inventions, creations, media, diversities, and different forms of constitution. The intention is not only to take into account different elements, but also to analyze in its entirety what we call the constitution process of the arts (again, for a definition see the glossary), with some of its fundamental changes over time.

Within this constitution process, artists and audiences stand in the center of the analyses. The contexts for these elements in this contribution are power structures, media, communication structures, and markets (and in a wider sense, culture, civilization, societies, and states, as can be seen in the EOLSS theme “Culture, civilization, and human society”). As far as we know (see Sections 2 and 3), human beings are at the center of these processes, even if there are also other theories about the arts. (One thesis, for example, considers the arts as only a “mirroring” of nature or God and not as a creation of human beings.) All of the different theories were advanced by human beings, as is pointed out in the following articles in EOLSS on-line, 2002: “Memorists” (Anette Horn, South Africa), “Creators” (Valery Timopheev, Russia), “Visionaries” (Alexandr W. Belobratow, Russia), “Outsiders” (Gerlinde Ulm Sanford, USA), and “Nomads” (Knut Ove Arntzen, Norway).

This does not mean that everything is the same. It is necessary to stress that the arts and culture are not the same. Culture is mostly a form of reproduction or recycling: not only in everyday life and in education, but also at universities and academies. This is very different from the creativity of the sciences and the arts.

Both forms of labor (creation and reproduction) are very important for human beings, but their products have different consequences. A reproduction is good for everyday use, and the better the reproduction is distributed, the more people can utilize it. Without reproduction (or tradition and education), development and even survival would not be possible. Reproduction is an essential element of the richness of humanity. The creation of an alphabet, the discovery of space, the exploring of dreams, the performance of naked power and public memory can have consequences for millions of human beings and their lives. Such inventions and creations can mean a new quality and an important improvement of everyday life.

To emphasize the importance of creations the first topic is dedicated to the artists. First it is necessary to establish some roles of artists. This is possible because artists are a group, like scientists or engineers. Nobody is able to see and hear all of their (important or non-important) works of art (which, partially, are sometimes also reproductions). With different approaches Anette Horn, Valery Timopheev, Alexandr W. Belobratow, Gerlinde Ulm Sanford, and Knut Ove Arntzen describe memorists, creators, visionaries,

outsiders, and nomads, from the old Greeks to modern art in the United States, from minorities in Norway to large processes in China. In addition, there is also an introduction to the labor forms, social conditions, and possibilities for artists.

This does not mean that artists as persons have only one role. They can have different roles and usually they are active in different fields. They too have their social and intellectual functions (and not only as outsiders). To work out some of these functions, it is necessary to analyze the various roles.

The second main point in the theme is to analyze the audiences, which are also “masses” of individuals. There is not too much source material available for these analyses, because for a long time there was no interest in audiences. Not until the twentieth century did scholars begin to analyze the role of audiences, which earlier (in the case of “studies”) were mostly of interest only to special police departments. (These police departments—sometimes also parts of the secret services—were established with the beginning of mass communication, and the division of the structures of society between the public and administrative or political groups, which often said one thing and did another.)

Hence in the topic about audiences Steven Tototy (Canada) and Jamila Baier-Matthews (Afghanistan, India, Austria) deal mostly with the present. David Simo (Cameroon) offers information about major changes in audiences worldwide in historical perspective. These contributors demonstrate that the interaction between artists and audiences and the forms of reception have changed within a very short time. Tototy and Baier-Matthews base their contributions on small field studies, while Simo uses references to some of the important discourses about audiences.

The interactions between power structures and artists are older and better documented, and they are the third main point in this theme. Sometimes (as Peter Horn points out) only the names of the financiers or owners of artifacts are known (not the names of the artists). The history of the interaction between power structures and artists is full of manipulation, censorship, and even murder (see Peter Horn in “Power structures,” EOLSS on-line, 2002). However, sometimes it is also a history of enabling people to use the heritage and to invent new things and processes. For the enabling or empowering, distributors and organizers (discussed by Peter Horn) and education (by Gerlinde Ulm Sanford) are important.

The constitution of the arts within the context of power structures, communication forms, and markets takes place by using concrete “media.” The concept of “media” in this contribution does not only include books, magazines, newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet, but also such things as tone, image, and script. These serve as the basis with which the other “media” work; or more specifically, other media transport or distribute tone, image, and script (see also the glossary).

So the EOLSS topic entitled “Media” has a very basic meaning. The names of the categories and subcategories of the different arts based on these media alone would fill pages. These categories and genres were developed over time. Literature, epic, drama, lyric, and prose can be found as genres worldwide over a long period of time (but not in

every country). Theater, for example, has changed over time, and some countries in Africa, Asia, and the Americas have no tradition of drama. In Cameroon, for example, “theater” began—as David Simo tells us—with the schools of European countries. Moreover, without theater no drama exists.

In the visual arts, sculpture and images are known everywhere. What differ are the expression, the material, and the handicraft. Very different, too, are the aesthetics of music and musical instruments. Some forms of music, like pop music, are now known worldwide (which still does not mean everywhere).

The processes between artists and audiences are processes of communication. Communication is also a very young concept in scholarly analysis, as Peter Horn shows us in “Communication forms” and his other contributions related to this subject. Peter Horn develops his theses by interpreting the full range of communication (including letter writing and sending e-mails). The main point here is the reproduction of the arts. With changes in the method of reproduction, the genres and the forms of communication also changed.

The last topic is dedicated to three different processes: market processes, distribution (for example, by art centers), and “globalization.” Not everything that seems to be new in these processes is new, as Umberto Eco (1991) claims. In the Middle Ages human beings tried to present theses in a form that made them seem old. In the Age of Modernity it is different. Advertising brings even recycled products as an invention to the attention of audiences, and the old in the new clothes of advertisement seems to be the new (see Eco, 1991, p. 13).

And this was not a question of distribution. In the Middle Ages reproduction was necessary in the form of copying because there was not the option of printing. Copying was the major form of writing. The difference derives from different strategies to communicate in societies or to have the possibility to communicate in societies.

Some “new” elements—as advertising claimed—are myth, rituals, “golden age,” utopia, and so on. The new elements, like materials, technology, foods, and medicines, are part of new productions and reproductions. Thus the old elements are a part of the world of ideas (and sometimes very useful), and the new elements are a part of the world of creations. And also here creation makes the difference.

There are many contemporary artists who esteem myth, old tales, Sophocles, or Shakespeare much more highly than the works of their colleagues (not only because they resent unfair competition). Nevertheless, the same can be the same and be different as well, as we will see in the contributions in this theme.

Modernization in this sense does not just mean new clothes for old processes. A myth is no longer a myth when it is documented in literature or film or performed in a theater. Modernization means a new organization of memorizing, of imagination, of creation, and of reproduction, with all of the consequences this entails for human beings and their interactions.

The process of “modernization” which has been taking place for some hundreds of years has changed a great deal over that period. Modernization is the context of the art processes in the present (even if some mighty politicians of the twentieth century, like Hitler or Mussolini, tried to combine some sort of tribal behavior with modern technology, which always led to war, to destruction, to murder, and to self-destruction). Modernization brings about affluence, and when the resulting wealth is shared this removes the threat of violence caused by lack of food, drink, or other resources. The new forms of production and reproduction make it possible for human beings to become more and more independent.

The present polarization between the rich and poor does not result from a lack of resources (even if, for example, there is always a potential for conflicts over water). Polarization arises between those who use violence in families, within states, or between states, and the everyday life of billions of people who want a peaceful life. Violence destroys wealth day by day, and there is no winner.

The developing process of modernization also increased the possibilities for the arts. The history of the arts can be seen as an enlargement of the possibilities of their usage. The broader their reception was, the stronger the “autonomy” of the artists grew. The technical revolution has brought some intellectuals and politicians to the understanding that there is a connection between the arts and the enrichment of everyday life (this is also a thesis of UNESCO). The great chance for the realization of this connection can come with the “knowledge society.” However, again violence and war can be problems for humankind, if the new creations are misused. Historically many important products were developed for the military (for example, the Internet). Instead of spending the money on cultural (peace) processes (in education, creation, and innovation), armament systems (systems of destruction) are developed. In this sense the “barbarians” (Coetzee, 1980) are those human beings who represent the (violent) power structures or support them. This “barbarism” still represents a threat to humanity.

For politicians, who base their actions on the army and the police, the arts are only an ornament. But the arts are not the “good” in a theological or philosophical sense. They are full of contradictions, and their importance comes from creativity. In this sense they are a major factor in developing culture, society, and civilization. In the newly developing “knowledge society” their importance is increasing greatly, as is that of science. This is the thesis that will be examined in this theme by authors from different continents with varying perspectives. This contribution has been carried out in the sense of the founding documents of the United Nations, which from the beginning stressed that not only the world, but also views of the world are very important. One of the opening sentences of the UNESCO constitution says: “That since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed...” (UNESCO, 1998, p. 7) So for UNESCO it is important not only to improve access to knowledge, but also to make possible knowledge that is helpful in realizing a rich and peaceful life for the human beings of this world.

## **2. Non-Written History**

The first “documents” of human history are bones and stones. After millions of years (see “Modern and traditional culture,” EOLSS on-line, 2002) of nearly “white space,”

signs and images began to be handed down. These images were the first documents of the (artistic) creativity of human beings. Long after that we find that languages appear. It took until the twentieth century for the documentation (the mechanical reproduction) of musical tones to become possible.

For an understanding of the history of the arts, these facts are very important, because by thinking about these times we recognize that history is only possible when written documents can be found. Not only are written documents needed, but it is also necessary to know the thoughts and feelings that led to the creation of these documents. We know this from the books of Herodotus, one of the first historians in Europe, who combined “empirical” methods (traveling) with reflection, and myths, tales, and stories. His presentations were not simply a reproduction of the (oral) sources of his time, but “history.”

The same is also true for the history of humanity in China or Africa. From tools, buildings, vessels, decorations, weapons, and sometimes even food, we can reconstruct a part of the lives of human beings. With new methods we can determine how old these items are. With the help of images we can understand something about people’s behavior. Without written documents, however, it is still not possible to understand the history of these people and their arts. (For example, music also has its own language—musical notation—for documentation. The first system of musical notation was created in Europe by Guido of Arezzo (c. 992–1050) for the Gregorian chant; this invention made the reproduction of music possible.)

In this sense, both literature and other written forms (such as notes for music or numbers for computers) are very important for understanding the history of human beings and their art processes. This is not only important for the reach of memory back to early times and for memory as a cultural act, which is necessary if we are to use the richness of human knowledge. Literature also played a central role in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in “awakening” nation-states. The narration of the nation was the “backbone” of the development of nation-states. With these narrations (not only in artistic form but more and more also by scholars and journalists) the histories of sculptures, images, and tones were told. With written texts in different forms it was possible to understand the differences. Moreover, understanding the differences meant understanding the richness of the history of humanity.

These narrations, however, were also forms of exclusion and of legitimizing violence by claiming different values. Up to the present most differences between art processes or cultures have not derived from themselves or their principles. The problems arise when cultural differences are used to represent or express power or even to legitimize wars. The differences are therefore power differences.

In this perspective there were also in every age other forms to express art processes: for example, mathematics in the Middle Ages (see Eco, 1991, pp. 51 ff., writing about Boethius and others). These forms still exist: see, for example, scene one of *The End of the World* by Jura Soyfer, *Doctor Faustus* by Thomas Mann, or the novels of Thomas Bernhard.

There has always been an interchange between unwritten and written history (even a methodology called “oral history” was developed). In many scholarly books this process is no longer reflected. The “Merseburger Zaubersprüche” became part of a German National Literary History, but this text does not reflect the oral tradition, even if the brothers Grimm started out by collecting oral knowledge and thus introduced the discipline of German philology.

The Korean scholar Cho Dong-il begins his presentation of Korean literature with a chapter on “The oral sources of Korean literature” (Dong-il, 1977, pp. 31 ff.). He also works out the social context as well as the different influences and interactions. Also in Africa, Latin America and other Asian countries oral traditions were regarded as very important (as they are for UNESCO, which developed numerous programs in this perspective; see also Section 9.1.).

In conclusion, the history of the arts seems to be old, but it is very young with respect to the history of humanity, which, as far as is presently known, has existed about 30,000 years (see the EOLSS on-line theme-level article “Culture, civilization, human society,” part 4.1.). The written documentation of this history is much younger, and the narratives are very different (polarized between the history of the arts and national propaganda).

The little that is known is something that has to be kept in mind. This point is very important because the arts do not exist *per se*. They exist because of an audience. Distribution and reception are important aspects of the constitution process of the arts, even if for a long period this audience was only a small group (see “Influences of audiences on the arts” and “Distributors and organizers,” in EOLSS on-line, 2002). Even if artists only painted images of artists, writers wrote about artists, musicians composed music for artists, this was still an audience, and because of these audiences the processes developed. New opportunities have come with mass communication and the interactive possibilities of the Internet (and scholars, colleagues, and scientists are still playing an important role as audience). The bases for all of these developments were language in all of its different forms and culture as a means of memory.

### **3. Myths and Literature**

Even if myth seems to be only a historical phenomenon, it is alive as history is alive. Myths we find today in Indian films (the biggest film industry of the world), in African, Asian, and European theater (here in a wide sense) and also in the forms it was handed down: in literature. And the literature in Latin America and different other parts of the world is very famous. Perhaps one reason for that is that the first known elements of knowledge of humanity are the “myths.” When we analyze these old myths (as Jakob Grimm did in his book *Deutsche Mythologie* (German Mythology), which stimulated mythological writing and even inventions of myth in Europe in the nineteenth century), we have to realize that these myths are only known because they are documented in written texts like literature. The oral sources were not all influenced by the written history. This is different from the (fairy) tales or stories that were known by contemporaries of the Grimms after the publication of their book. The brothers Grimm even created new stories out of the “raw material” or modified the old tales. The aim of their immense scholarly work was to aid the creation of a nation-state: Germany.



Nevertheless, there are still “living myths” in different parts of the world. Wole Soyinka (2000) has analyzed such myths and showed their interaction with modern art in Africa. Here there are still possibilities for “understanding” mythical forms. But once they become part of scientific descriptions or of dramas, they are no longer (original) myths. This fact provides many opportunities to analyze the switching from myth to literature in a comparative way, but, as we will see, it is not possible to make a reconstruction. There are numerous scientific tools for an approach but no real proof. Even if we could prove the validity of the reconstructions, the result would still be a museum object and not myth.

Different from these are the myths of everyday life, which are called myths but are really not so in the original sense. They still play a certain role in the discourses and controversies of the present. Mostly the creation of these myths takes place within national narratives and within the everyday life of the twenty-first century, in divided societies.

The following gives some examples of these different myths.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

Herbert Arlt was born in 1958 in Bregenz, Austria. His artistic practices focus on literature and the theater. He has made study trips and studies to/in Italy, Spain, Portugal, England, Hungary, Germany, and Yugoslavia. He received his doctorate in 1988 from the University of Salzburg, and has taught at the Universities of Berlin, Vienna, Salzburg, and Innsbruck. He has been secretary of the Jura Soyfer Society since 1989, and Scientific Director of INST (Research Institute for Austrian and International Literature and Cultural Studies) since 1994. He has been editor of *Jura Soyfer* since 1992 (*International Journal for*

*Cultural Studies*); of the book series *Austrian and International Literary Processes* and *East, Central and Southeast Literature, Theatre and Linguistic Studies* since 1995 and “TRANS” since 1997 (*Internet Journal for Cultural Studies*). He was a member of the Austrian UNESCO Commission from 1998 to 2001, and has been on the board of the Elias Canetti Society since 2001.

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SAMPLE CHAPTERS