

In the Celtic societies of western Europe, the bard was transmitting knowledge to the people, conveyed through songs and poems. He was the link between the rational and the irrational, the visible and the invisible, the physical and the spiritual. The bard was a major influence in the organization of a village, alongside the druids¹.

Music at this pre-Christian time played the role of Medieval icons in the transmission of Christianity. The bards had to be initiated to transmit their message through learning sacred verses and their melodies. This initiation was very important, because they were the only one representing the oral tradition of their people. The music and the chants were the only way of transmitting, because writing was forbidden. Writing was considered dead and fixed for eternity, compared to direct oral transmission being in perpetual evolution.

In a similar manner, the shaman uses music to transmit knowledge and to heal the members of his tribe through rituals. It guides the subjects into a trance and towards psychic transformations. The transcendental experience here is surpassing the natural plane of reality or knowledge. This tradition is still perpetuated today in certain tribes around the world. It is then still possible for us to witness or even take part in these manifestations.

The question raised is if music performance today can still play a transcendental role in our society. Today, the transcendental is widely considered as "beyond our experience of phenomena, although not beyond potential knowledge".

From the second half of the twentieth century, some artists started to provide through their performances a similar experience of transcendence. The relation created between the musician and the audience is at the center of this research. I will try to understand how this transcendental interaction can operate.

In order to do so, I will use the model of the communication theory to question the pragmatic, semantic and syntactic relationship of this interaction.

The pragmatic regards the users, meaning as much the person making music as the person listening to it. The semantic concerns messages being sent in between the users. Finally, the syntactic refers to the relation between the users through their messages.

This research is led by books about shamanism, Celtic tradition, communication theory, semantic and philosophy.

This research is not conducted under the scope of theology, but rather from a humanist point of reference. I believe that all experiences of reality become consistent only in the human experience. Moreover, shamanism considers the transcendence process as being rooted in the human and nature.

The development will be based on Claude Shannon's information theory², a theorem initially used to describe communication between machines. This theory presents the tools used in the research, because it is the applied theory for the artistic practice. Moreover, musicians today have the tendency to increase their use of machines as instruments. Although this model translates in an incomplete manner human communications,

² Claude E. Shannon, "A theory of communication", *Bell System Technical Journal*, 1948.

the tools used in it and its simplicity of knowledge allow a better understanding of the presented research.

Shannon's model is structured by four components: a transmitter, a receptor, a message, and a context. In this scheme, the context is considered as a distractor, some noise. According to Shannon, the noise or the context disturbs the comprehension of the message. Furthermore, Shannon states that the understanding of the message is necessarily based on a common language.

At this moment of the development, the context is not considered as a positive or negative element, but it influences nonetheless the message without judgement. It is somehow a neutral element of the interaction between a transmitter and a receptor.

The transmitter is here assimilated to the artist-musician, the receptor is the spectator (or the audience), the message being contained in the performance. Before considering internal relations, it is important to define their fields of action.

The musical performance is executed by an audio-visual language, which is by essence different every time it takes place, depending on the transmitter and the receptor, in opposition to the conventional written or spoken language which is shared by a specific community.

Cultural legacy allows the spectator to understand the immaterial language of music, but a trained spectator has a better understanding of its codes.

The Beatles member George Harrison went for example to India in order to experience and gather new knowledge about music. He learned to incorporate in their songs the modal range system, dominant in Asia. The modal or tonal range is the axiom, a basic element to create a melody. This can be assimilated in Shannon's

system to the role of coding and decoding of the message. George Harrison managed to decipher this other language, and to reconstitute his own with this new addition.

The song by the Beatles *Within you without you* (1967) is a good example of this combination. Thus, the personal context of the transmitter, and the personal context of the receptor, do not seem to have a major influence in the comprehension of the message as a whole.

How is it possible that a protagonist whose culture and background-knowledge is entirely different could still communicate with another system of references? How is it possible that the transmitter, expressing a message encrypted in its own code, is still understood, deciphered, and reconstituted by a receptor of another nature?

In my opinion, this question takes place in the big scheme of the musical experience:

**astonishment, stupefaction,
revelation of the received message,
are the condition(s) under which
the previously unknown message
is understood.**

From there, the musical experience ensures the same goal as the language, but differs on the way to reach it.

In opposition to the theory of communication, I believe we do not need a common language such as defined today, to share a musical performance.

The power of music is to directly influence emotions, compared to language which is a codified way to trigger them, associating the meaning of a word to a proper definition.

In this sense, one could consider shamanic rituals and musical experiences to be similar, because it transcends the gaps found in the difference of languages. It therefore seems that the solution to the research question is not embedded in the actors.

As previously seen in the introduction, the bards and the shamans acquire their abilities to transcend their audience through a culturally codified initiation. In our contemporary cultural context, the artists who also transmit transcendence through their performance do not necessarily undergo this common cultural training. Thus, the transcendence is an ability which cannot be acquired, but also not innate to the transmitter. In fact, regarding the innate ability of transcendence is to say that it supposes a superior entity above the Human, preventing any attempt of research.

One explanation of this comprehension of transcendence, is that each protagonist sends to the other an impression that the message is being understood, giving on the moment of the transmission of the message, a constant feedback of understanding. For example, a spectator witnessing a game of chess, not knowing the rules nor the language of the players, can still understand a few rules, such as the two opponents playing one after another, and the goal being to remove as many opposing pieces as possible using movement combinations. However, these basics understanding do not allow this spectator to understand the game of chess as a whole.

It is a hypothesis, but here lays a problem of the length of experience and attention span.

For instance a quid pro quo, confusion consisting in taking one thing for another³, starts to exist when the protagonists become aware of its existence. From this awareness, the constant feedback of apparent

³ Calvin, Institution chrétienne, III, IV, éd. J. D. Benoît, p. 107.

understanding disintegrates through elapsed time. Henri Bergson, in his *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, published in 1889, states that “grace or art monopolizes your entire soul⁴” to the manner of transcendental experience.

This invasion of the soul by the emotion in contact of an art piece is important: the transcendence is based on the experience of length, a total transformation of the Self.

Arnaud Bouaniche⁵ (a specialist of Bergson) even considers that Bergson's works about art are essentially based on this privileged relation between length and art.

Regarding this consideration of the length of experience, The intention of protagonists could be the primary filter to allow a new experience to be created. This intention renews the permanent feedback of common understanding. Therefore, the receptor perceived at first as a passive element, becomes active in the relation with the transmitter. Thus, the *quid pro quo* does not play a part in a transcendental experience, for it cannot exist on the long run.

Although the process of transcendence does not lay its foundations in the nature of the actors (it is not restricted to one person or another), their common intention is the starting point of interaction. In 2014, I have attempted in a project named *The Room is present*, to incorporate the intention of the viewer inside the artwork. The movement of the viewer would interfere with a sound installation which diffuses different ranges of low frequencies. Thus, without the movement of the viewer, the artwork would not have the message incorporated in the experience.

⁴ Henri Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, PUF, 2011, p. 13:

⁵ Arnaud Bouaniche, *Dossier critique de l'Essai*, directed by Frederic Worms, PUF, 2011, p. 207.

The musical performance does not exist without the intention of the spectator. Its presence is a necessary condition but does not play the main part in the process of transcendence, even though this transcendence can only appear through the spectator.

If the source of transcendence does not rely on the actors themselves, it could be embedded in the message of the experience.

At this stage of the development, I will attempt a semiotic study, dealing with the signification of the message. French director Jan Kounen has himself experienced transcendence by the means of shamanic rituals in Peruvian Amazonia, as shown in his movie *Other Worlds*. He recorded his experience, the chants of the shaman, and has interviewed the different actors of the ritual. He found a deep understanding of these remote practices through his experience, even though he did not share the same language with the other protagonists; solely the intention to understand their culture⁶.

Among the Altaic Siberian tribe, the shaman uses a non-verbal language during a healing session⁷. Non-verbal communication indicates, inside a conversation, every exchange which does not require words. Instead, it uses gestures, behaviors, sounds and smells. For example, the shaman invites the receptor by means of miming, singing, dancing, and screams to journey with him/her. The experience that the shaman undergoes is so complex, that he or she uses every possible way to induce the transcendental state to his/her peers.

⁶ Jan Kounen, *D'Autres Mondes*, 2004.

⁷ Joan Halifax, *Shaman – The wounded healer*, Thames and Hudson, 1982, p. 18.

In this sense, musical performance is similar: with the help of instruments and other tools, the artists try by all means to invite the spectator in their world. In both cases, the message conveyed by the transmitter is not fixed; does not respond to a well-defined concept.

Musicians and shamans both assert the function of transcendence. This is the reason why the state of consciousness reached does not depend on them but to the implication of the spectator.

In the end, transcendence is not a place you reach but a movement they inspire, in which the psychic state of the actors is the substance. If transcendence is considered as a movement, it is shifting in space and time. The movement of transcendence translates the distance traveled by the spectator between the basic and a higher state of consciousness over time.

Thus, if the goal is to know whether nowadays musical performance has the ability to transcend the spectator, then the answer does not seem to reside in the message. This is the reason why learning the message pronounced by the bard or the shaman is not sufficient to reach transcendence. The theory supported by François Hartog in his book *Régime d'historicité*⁸ implies that History does not give enough consideration to how a society deals with its past, and the self-consciousness that it had depending on the different ages of the human community.

From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, societies had the tendency to organize themselves around the past.

⁸ François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité, Présentisme et expériences du temps*, Seuil, 2003.

More precisely, their means of translating and putting in order their experiences and their conception of the present was directed towards the past. Knowledge was acquired thanks to the teachings of the past. In the nineteenth century, the present is the center of attention. The present became the horizon without past nor future⁹.

The twentieth century merged futurism and “presentism”, that is to say a tendency to consider the notion of progress as a unique temporal horizon. By questioning our ability to consider the past within History, Hartog shows the importance of context from a bygone era.

The context of the musical performance is the last element that I will focus on in regards to the Shannon-theory.

Nowadays, in preparation of a musical performance, several elements can be added to the context. The instruments to create sound, the speakers to diffuse sounds, the lights and décor to create a visual atmosphere, a stage and an audience. It is a near conception to the notion of total work of art, “Gesamkunstwerk”, defined as an attempt to gather all or as many art-forms as possible in order to transmit the message. This notion has been created by Karl Friedrich Eusebius Trahndorff¹⁰.

Music plays a major role in the creation of an independent context. For example, in shamanism, it plays an essential role in the trance. Besides, Gilbert Rouget assures in this regard in his book *La Musique et la Transe. Esquisse d'une théorie générale des relations de la musique et de la possession*¹¹ that “music is the main mean to manipulate trance, not as a way to trigger it but to create a social fabric.”

In other words, a musical performance can only operate within the social context in which it is integrated.

⁹ Bertrand Lessault, “F. Hartog. Régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et expérience du temps”, *L'Orientation scolaire et professionnelle*, n°33, 15 Sept. 2004, pp. 479-483.

¹⁰ K. F. E. Trahndorff, *Aesthetik oder Lehre von Weltanschauung und Kunst*, Maurer, 1827.

¹¹ Gilbert Rouget, *La Musique et la Transe. Esquisse d'une théorie générale des relations de la musique et de la possession*, Gallimard, p. 21

Thus, the ability of music does not solely depend on the nature of sound (the message) but of the socially related function of music and the sonorous codes that it emits. These codes are immediately perceived and integrated by the intentional spectator. The diversity of instruments, tones and structures of music which succeeded transcendence in different cultures shows that it is not a cultural process but a contextual process. Following this thread, Henri Lecomte states that “the use of electric guitars or synthesizers replaces the drums”¹² in few Siberian neo-shamanistic ceremonies.

An observation of this kind of ritual shows a corresponding between different musical sequences and the different steps of this ritual. Music is able to induce a psycho-acoustic atmosphere suitable to trance, to extend and develop it over time¹³.

Although nowadays actors are not celtic bards, that the transmitted message is not the same than in their traditions, it is in a similar context than these ancestral societies that musical performance gather the necessary conditions to transcendence.

The transmitter and the receptor interact in a constant flow of informations, a continuous feedback. The relation between the actors becomes thereafter instinctive. This will result to the emergence of a context which will regulate the whole of the communication.

The context becomes autonomous and takes over the control of communication by its influence on the transmitter, the messages and the receptor. This is the reason why it is no more about having a common language between the specific actors the condition to understand the message because it is provided by an independent context previously built by them.

Georges Lapassade in his book *La Transe* (1990) considers in this regard: “Social circumstances of the communities and the local situation of the actors govern the shapes of different state of consciousness”¹⁴.

It is of course the interaction initiated by the transmitter who enabled the induction of this context and ensures its longevity. The experience hic et nunc then comes to sense on the foreground of the process of transcendence. Similarly to bardic and shamanic traditions, the musical experience is sometimes accompanied by the use of drug as part of the search for trance. The use of the same substance by the different actors can facilitate their linking and the creation of an independent context in which transcendence can operate.

The festival which seemed to gather all the necessary components of a transcendental musical experience is the first edition of *Woodstock*. It was a place where the intentional liberation of the individuals was at the core of the event, in response to the social context present at the time in the United States. This festival gave inspiration to many other organizations until today, mainstream or underground, to create the ideal framework to allow a transcendental music experience.

In opposition to the Shannon-theory, the context does not play a negative role of noise anymore, which deteriorates the message but a major role in the transmission, the code and the reception of its identity. The context is built on a residue of communication, in the manner of the unconscious which retains all that the conscious has rejected¹⁵.

¹² Gilbert Rouget, *La Musique et la Transe. Esquisse d'une théorie générale des relations de la musique et de la possession*, Gallimard, p. 50

¹³ Laurent Aubert, “Chamanisme, possession et musique, quelques réflexions préliminaires”, *Cahiers d'ethnomusicologie*, n° 19, Nov. 1st, 2006, pp. 11-19.

¹⁴ Georges Lapassade, *La Transe*, PUF, 1990.

In conclusion, many cultures with different languages achieve to communicate thanks to a non-verbal language. Like words, music is a mean to transmit a message but in a different disposition, showed by the shamanic and bardic traditions. Each of these cultural actor is truly involved in their rituals. From an early age, the members of the community are introduced by the shaman or the bard to enter in a process of transcendence. Although it appears to be the result of learning, members of different communities and cultures can together achieve this transcendence.

Therefore, it is not the result of the inherent context of the actors. On the other hand, the use of non-verbal language shows that every possible means are expressed to transmit a message which is irreducible to words. In the rituals of their traditions, dance aroused by music is a main component of this way of communicating. Naturally, the audience or spectator is the primary substance of this transcendence.

The bard or the musician guides only the movement of transcendence, although the message transmitted is not fixed. This is why learning the message pronounced by the bard or the shaman is not sufficient to reach transcendence. The consideration of the present moment *hic et nunc* by the spectator is the trigger.

Finally, the movement of transcendence translates the distance traveled by the spectator between the basic and a higher state of consciousness over time.

In preparation of a musical performance, several elements can be added to the context. In a similar direction than *a total work of art*, the context plays a predominant role in the process of transcendence. Music imposes this context and ensures its independence. This ability does not rely on the individual social context, but rather on the constant interaction between the actors. Music does not

only have the role of the transmitter, but to stimulate the relation between the receptors.

The message is instantly and instinctively understood. Besides, many europeans achieved to share this experience with 'remote' cultures. Thanks to the emergence of a context, which will regulate the whole of the communication, transcendence is being reached. It is a continuous influence on the actors and their interactions. These are initiated by the transmitter who is the source, which allows the independence of the context.

The transcendence is then achieved by Music by dint of inducing a context, activating all the present elements and creating a continuous social fabric inspired by the *hic et nunc*. The internal organization of this context still remains in the cloud of the unknown in the comprehension of the trance phenomenon.

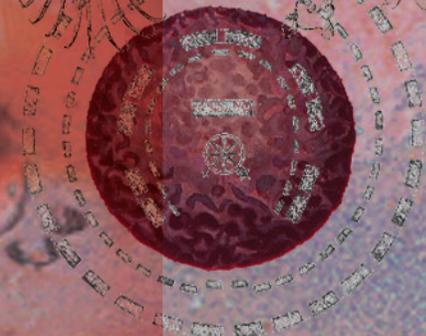
One potential answer to this question, brought by the shamanic and bardic cultures, is that context carries a human patrimony common to all cultures. It carries the marks of the whole of human experience and the different states of awareness. In this sense, the musician would be the prolongation of the shaman and the bard, with which it shares human inheritance, and transforms it in our contemporary society, bringing "new logs for an old fire"¹⁶.

If we were to continue this research looking through the scope of this human inheritance, one potential direction could evolve around the notion of collective unconscious, on which Carl Jung was the first to shed the light on in 1916¹⁷.

¹⁵ Maarten De Reus, inspired by T. S. Elliot's poetry, explaining the role of the artist towards Culture. 2015.

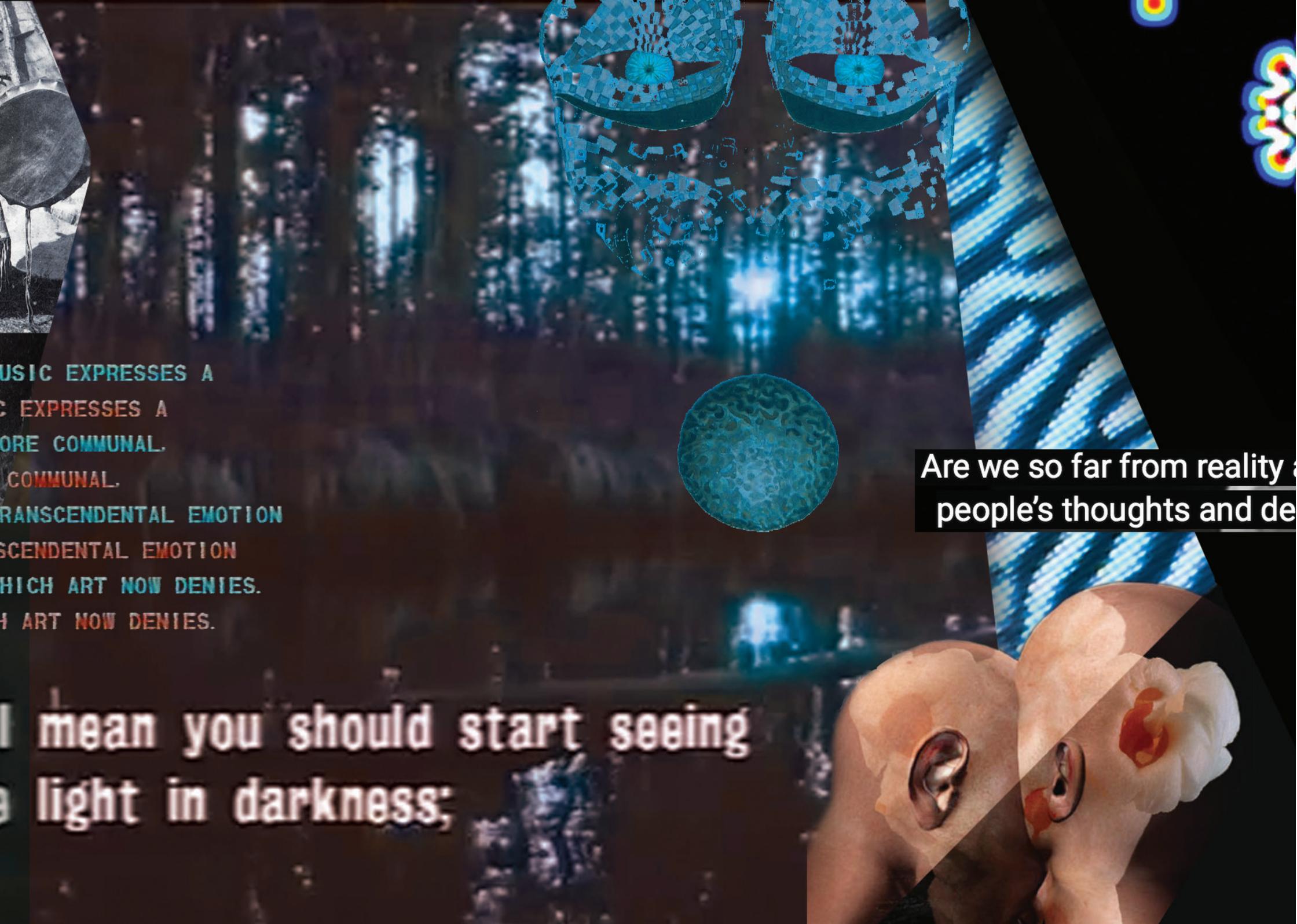
¹⁷ Carl Jung, *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, 1916.

¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, "Five lectures on Psychoanalysis", Clark University, 1909.



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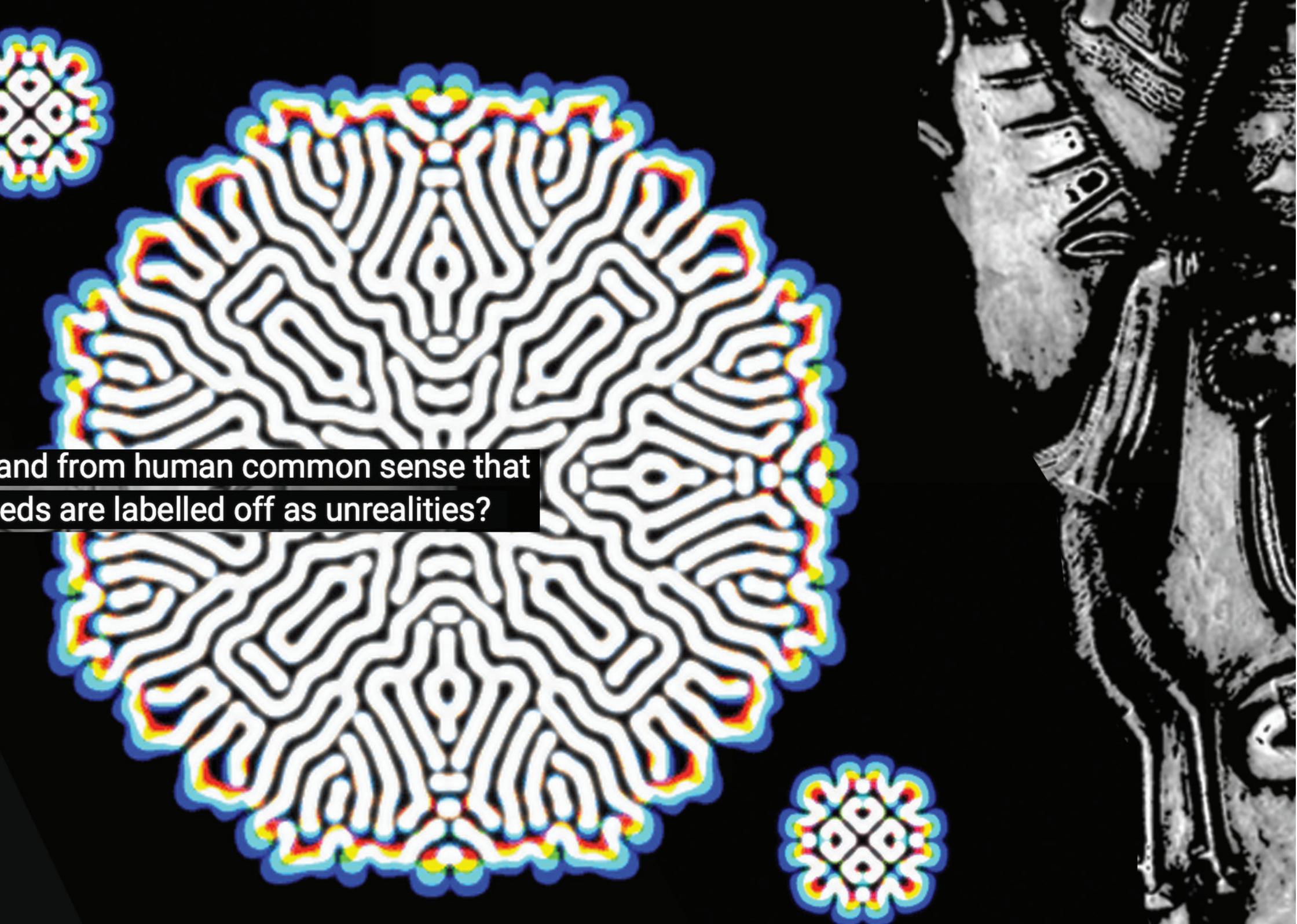


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This essay on paper would not exist
without the help, inspiration or contribution
of Alrico, Geertje, Épiphanie, Piline, my roots,
Internet the Global Brain, Saint-Cyr, the Fireplace,
Alien, Aalsmeerweg, personal introspection
and shared experiences.

BASILE MONSACRÉ