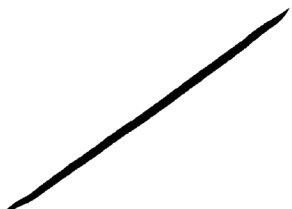


THE SINUOUS EVOLUTION OF CENSORSHIP FROM THE MYTH OF PLATO'S **CAVE** TOWARDS THE CONVERGENCE BETWEEN VIRTUAL REALITY AND THE SOCIAL NETWORK

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Abstract: The matter analyzed in this paper refers to censorship as a phenomenon that is part of human culture from the dawn of mankind. In this light the term “fake news” coined on the social network is the practice to project audiences a mystification of reality as reality itself intrinsically a practice as old as humanity. Having this for foundation, I consider censorship a subtle way of altering reality for the benefit of the power, but most interesting an individual inner process generated by a stiff interpretation of politically correctness often called public opinion.

Ergo I argue about Platonic realism, that postulate universals as abstract objects that exists objectively outside human mind, in the context of social networks. Scrutinizing Plato's Cave Allegory, as an artistic way of communicating with audience, I will summarize the genuine and indispensable elements that structure the artistic content of audiovisual communication of today.

Keywords: censorship, political correctness, Platonic realism, virtual reality, social network, Plato's cave, public opinion.

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To verify the hypothesis, I follow the method of empirical approach that includes the study of documents, books and articles published in the area of the investigated field and, of course, a historical, evolutionary look, to finally answer the question if censorship is a component of artistic discourse and if so, is it intrinsic? Starting from the example¹ of Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky that speak in the very introduction of *Manufacturing Consent* (2002, p. XXVI), but also in the conclusion of the book, that the media is influenced in the sense of altering information/truth especially by omission² and evaluating the various definitions of censorship, I decided that the act of censorship can be divided into two broad categories – namely: one that is imposed by a person or group of persons who have the (political or economic) power and an interest in influencing the audience for a specific purpose and second, self-censorship which in turn is the result of several cumulative factors that nurture it. Analyzing this second category of censorship and finding that the determining factors are complex and very volatile, especially in the current context, I will argue in a specific paragraph about self-censorship.

Thus, the answer to the question raised in the hypothesis seems to be at hand: the censorship imposed by the „power” factor, whether it is a political or an economic one, is not part of artistic discourse, even if alters the discourse when circumstances make this possible, the most important condition being the lack of democracy. It must also be said that I eliminated from this research the common censorship, which does not influence the artistic discourse, but which permanently forbids it, a situation that occurs in dictatorial regimes, as being the determinant factor in elimination of democracy. In this case, in the absence of the speech itself, it is obvious that the situation is of no interest in my approach.

1 '...with the Yeltsin regime strongly backed by the U.S. Government and its Western allies, the New York Times again found this election "A Victory for Russian Democracy," and so did the U.S. main stream media in general' – Introduction p. XXVI.

2 In conclusion, the authors note that the owners are the ones who set the editorial policy and for this reason, the media, including the news, is seen only as a profitable investment environment and the role of information obviously takes a back seat.

Scrutinizing self-censorship in the artistic discourse, the answer seems to be as well at hand: self-censorship seems not to be an indispensable element of the artistic discourse. However, the answer is superficial and during this article I will assert and argue that self-censorship as a component of everyday life it is also a part of the artistic work structure where the author brings elements from real life that build up the artwork itself.

Also, in the title of the article I refer to the allegory of Plato's cave or, as it is better known in our culture, *The Myth of the Cave* (Plato, 2013), described in Book VII of the Greek philosopher, in the form of a dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon. In order to verify the working hypothesis, this dialogue is the place in time and space from which we will argue and substantiate the conclusion that the hypothesis is correct.

Analyzing thoroughly, consulting the Romanian text from the edition of Antet Publishing House, and the one translated by B. Jowett (2010)³, and the translation of Andrei Cornea and Cătălin Partenie (1986) I will abstract the elements of the allegory structure, and compare them with the "Wall" constituted by SN⁴ and VR⁵ from the immediate topicality. But before moving on to the text analysis, I must define the role of information in relation with the public opinion and I consider that it is very well exemplified by Walter Lippmann (1997) in a book which, although published for the first time in 1922, is extremely contemporary and forms the basis for any thorough research into censorship. The author imagines a small island inhabited by several French, English and German citizens. We are in 1914 and the only source of information is the mail that arrives every 60 days by ship. It's September and the ship has not yet arrived, so the community is discussing the latest news, a crime in French high society. A few more days pass, the ship arrives and the islanders find out that the French and the English are fighting against the Germans therefore they have been enemies⁶ for more than six weeks. The connection with the cave described by Plato is obvious, in fact the author even questions the conclusions from Book V of Plato's Republic as an argument supporting his own final ideas⁷, so it is assumed that the example I will analyze below was not at all unfamiliar to him.

The allegory from which we start the research is presented in the form of a dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon. As always, Socrates, or rather the character of Socrates in Plato's vision, practices the craft of maieutics⁸ by presenting to the interlocutor an image that, he says, refers to "the state of our nature regarding

3 M.A. Master of Balliol College Regius, Professor of Greek in the University of Oxford, Doctor in Theology of the University of Leyden

4 In this article I will use the acronym SN for social network.

5 For virtual reality, I will use the acronym VR.

6 The situation is described at the beginning of the chapter entitled "The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads."

7 The chapter "The Appeal to Reason".

8 MAIEUTICS s.f: Method used by Socrates in philosophical discussions, consisting in revealing, through clever questions and answers, the just knowledge that his interlocutors had in mind. [Pron. Ma-ie-u - / cf. fr. Maieutics, cf. gr. Maieutike - the skill to moan] (Marcu and Maneca, 1986).

education and ignorance” (Plato, 2013, p. 215). In reality, as we shall see, the state of human nature referred to by Socrates is rather our ability to see the truth or, as the author says, that light of the Sun which shines outside the cave.

Thus, he paints for Glaucon an underground world, in fact a cave that has only one entrance, the same as the exit to the outside world. This connection with the “intelligible” world (Plato, 2013, p. 218) is inaccessible as it is situated at the end of a steep climb and for this reason is not even visible to those who inhabit the cave. They live in this place from an early age, and they are placed next to each other in a row, so they can look only forward to the cave wall as they have “tied necks and legs” (Plato, 2013, p. 215). Behind them, in the opposite direction to the cave wall, toward which they cannot turn their heads to look, is a small wall high enough to hide those who pass by, just like the one used by the puppeteers not to be visible to the public. A little further on, is a fire, the only light in the cave.

After making sure that Glaucon has his vision to and that he confirms “this image in front of his eyes” (Plato, 2013, p. 215), he discusses another category of those who inhabit the cave. Those are the handlers, people who in the shelter of the wall preventing their shadow being projected on it, the one in front of the chained ones, carry statues of people and animals raised above their heads, as well as other objects. Some of them talk, comment, but not all. Anyway, prisoners can hear due to the echo, all the voices and noises, but do not get the meaning of them.

Once the cave universe is structured, Socrates begins the series of questions that will determine Glaucon to move towards the conclusion desired by the philosopher. He first emerges Glaucon right into the world of the underworld, urging him to put himself in the situation of those there, with obvious intention that he understands and accepts the “world” projected on the wall is the real one, the only one they know, that he knows. He immediately adds the auditory component as part of the projection on the wall, because, he says, as the images are reflected, so do the sounds, thus the audience believes that they are produced by the shadows. Also, the cast on the wall integrates the shadows of the audience itself as the fire is placed in a manner that makes it possible.

I will stop for a moment to make a brief analysis of the information obtained so far from the dialogue between the two. So, we have an outside world that the cavemen do not know or suspect. It is, of course, a censorship of information about this world that, for reasons still unknown, someone has decided to practice. Instead of the real universe, the audience is offered another, which mystifies the inaccessible one, therefore the audience believes it to be the only one and consequently the real one. On the other hand, we are dealing with a manipulative component, perfectly described by Edward Bernays⁹ in one of the most important works on manipulation (2004). “If we understand the mechanism and mental motivations of a group, is it not possible to control and regiment these masses according to what they want, without them knowing?” (Bernays, 2004, p. 47). It is obvious that the one who locked those children, now adults, in the cave, knows everything about

9 Edward Bernays is the one who structured the influencing public opinion technique, which he called „public relations”.

how they think and how they will react, thus making them a perfectly manipulable group, easy to lure in an alternated universe as the manipulator or the today SN influencer wishes for undetermined purpose or benefit.

The experiment continues and Socrates proposes a new development of the narrative, opposite to the initial situation. One of the chained ones is released and forced to look at the light source in the cave (the fire) and the statuettes that the invisible puppeteers carry. At first the brightness of the fire prevents him from seeing the statuettes that cast the shadows he has seen on the wall. He will immediately be asked questions about them which will confuse him because only the shadows of the statuettes are familiar to him and by no means the objects that produce the shadows and even less the people who carry those objects or even the fire, the only source of light. Also, I reiterate that the shadows on the wall seem significant to him compared to the statuettes he can only look at with great difficulty because, as I said, his eyes are almost blinded by the brightness of fire, thus he will perceive them as faded and meaningless shapes.

Socrates expands the experiment and the released one from the chains is forced up to the exit of the cave outside where the sunlight shines. Obviously, this outburst of daylight is blinding him just like the fire light before and he will again be unable to distinguish "the things we call true" (Plato, 2013, p. 216). He will also complain about the violence with which he was taken from the familiar cave universe and forced to look at another world that he momentarily does not see and that, when his eyes have become accustomed to the light, he does not even understand. Because it is not part of his known universe of shadows casted on the cave wall, about which he believes to be the reality. However, the one released from the chains of the cave will perceive in a random amount of time, shorter or longer, and will assume the complex reality of the universe inhabited by those outside the cave. Contemplating the former universe of the cave and thinking of those with whom he lived underground, "he will enjoy change and mourn them" (Plato, 2013, p. 217).

Plato's allegory universe, described by Socrates as a cave and the outside world through the eyes of the unchained one, points us that an audience exposed to an audiovisual message presented as the reality but altered by censorship, whatever the purpose of this action is, will believe that this is the only universe. Even if exposed to the real one, the audience will reject it for certain amount of time, suffice to replace the fake but familiar universe and hardly accept the other even if it is the real one. This is exactly what happens to the released one who needs time "to get used seeing the objects in the upper region" (Plato, 2013, p. 216).

Once this handicap is overcome and the world outside the cave is assumed by the former prisoner of the cave, Socrates proposes a new situation to Glaucon on the way to resolution. The former underground dweller, now in possession of reality, returns to the cave and sits on the place he left some time ago, with the others. And in this hypothetical situation, returning to cave, the darkness will prevent him from seeing clearly the shadows on the wall as a reverse situation of his journey to the real universe. Thus, his comments about the images he unclearly sees on the wall will be inappropriate and will make those who did not share his knowledge from his journey out of the cave laugh and mock him „his gaze has weakened to such an extent that it is not even worth climbing" (Plato, 2013,

p. 217). In this situation, if someone offers to release them, it is obvious that the proposal would not be accepted and, if he dared to release them and force them to go up into the real world, that person would have been killed on the spot or at least risk being killed if he did not give up quickly enough to the intention to release the cave community. Also, says Socrates, the released hero will accept any sacrifice to return to the light of the Sun and would gladly give up the honors that he could possibly acquire in the cave by performing in front of the community according to the knowledge he has about the shadow world pictured on the wall.

Plato ends the allegory and through the dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon establishes what are the qualities of a good ruler of the Polis and how he should be trained. I will make an ellipse in the account of Book VII and reveal that, following Socrates maieutic discourse, Glaucon adheres to the conclusion suggested by Socrates's question: "Therefore, do you think we can call dialectics the crowning of our studies, that there is nothing we could put on top of it... ." In other words, dialectics is the science that governs the decisions of the one who will lead the Polis and is indissolubly linked to the knowledge of common good as becoming of truth, which clarifies the role of the philosopher in the life of the Polis the only one who would possess the knowledge of the real universe. From this paper's point of view, it is interesting that accepting or not knowing how to avoid censorship, the world of shadows, the person in question could not be a good leader. Therefore, if we admit that only the philosopher can avoid this danger by having knowledge of the "outside the cave world", then he is the only one able to be the leader.

Analyzing the three universes that the released hero, former chained in the cave, gradually goes through, we distinguish three levels as well: the first is the one in which he lived since birth, mediated by the projection of shadows on the cave wall. It is a universe, the only one he perceives and has knowledge about, in which he believes and in which he has defined his ontological, gnoseological and especially axiological criteria. This only universe is real and plausible as he shares it with those in the cave. It is obvious that this universe is built by censors altering the real one, hidden by the inaccessible and unseen entrance to the cave, so censorship is altering the reality even by omission, not only by distorting it projecting shadows.

The second level is established through knowing the origin of the shadows. This does not happen without syncope and all of a sudden because of primal blindness due to the blazing light of the fire. Once this level is known and assumed, fire and objects carried by unseen puppeteers become elements that constitute the new reality. In this case too, we are not dealing with anything other than censorship that alters reality by substituting the elements of reality with simulacra: for example, fire replaces the sun, and dolls (statuettes) beings, humans and objects outside the cave.

The journey continues with great efforts because of the steep climb, and finally, the hero reaches the entrance of the cave where he is blinded once again by sunlight and stops in the doorway unable to see what is in front of him. It is the first contact with the authentic, real universe, as only a dialectical philosopher will be

able to know and possess it as a whole, as Socrates concludes and, at his insistence, Glaucon too. The one released from the chains of the cave needs time to be able to see it and more to accept, know and assume this third level, to trade his hypothetical self-contained plane of existence, the former universe of shadows for the truth of the outside world.

If in the first two elaborated levels discussed we are dealing with a censorship initiated by an external force, probably the divinity mentioned by Socrates, able to produce simulacrum of the outer world of the cave, while this time the only censorship that could alter the real world is personal: self-censorship. For this reason, from my point of view, the allegory would not be complete without the return of the released one in the cave. I will stop for the moment from the allegory analysis attributed to Socrates by Plato and I will discuss the elements that can be considered similar in the underground world and in the immediate and current SN.

First of all, what seems like a coincidence, the fact that the audience in the cave and the one that uses SN and VR look at something called “wall”, whether it is a real one, as much as it can be in the allegory described by Plato, whether it is a virtual one, but which for the audience is as “real” as the first. The projections on this wall are produced by a distant light source, located behind the audience, which happens in the case of VR and SN too. Thus, one could conclude that the information on the “wall”, is assumed by audience even if the source is quasi unknown. Even if the source has an identity, the similar situation of the released person who can look on the opposite side to see the fire, behind the light of the source we see nothing. The similarities are many but considering that the presented ones are sufficient we can conclude that in both situations the censorship imposed by the one who built the cave, the influencer in SN, are demonstrated. As one could see, I did not and will not question the purpose of this censorship, because it is not part of the area of interest of my research.

In this context, I must say that the European Union has funded a project¹⁰ to investigate the convergence of the two media. The purpose of this approach is to verify the possibility of structuring an online environment that allows a realistic interpersonal communication. Thus, the REVERIE platform becomes an educational place focused on the social network and, therefore, on education. There is another component that is designed to emulate the image and sensation of a physical presence with which the user can interact recreationally and collaboratively. First of all, we are dealing with the relationship between teacher and student, and in second, we are dealing with the teaching through play¹¹ technique. Moreover, from the official description of the project¹², we find that the REVERIE platform intends to bring a new dimension to the interactive experience, introducing an independent dimension in the behavior of users who can use various personalities (avatars), capturing and restoring both emotional states and physical

10 REVERIE 2014 project. The name of the project is an acronym for: Real and Virtual Engagement in Realistic Immersive Environments.

11 Game-based learning

12 <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/287723>

activities in such a way as to provide a rich recreational experience¹³. The resemblance to the experience of those in the cave described by Plato through Socrates is striking. The community in the cave argue on what they see and how their shadows are projected on the same wall as the shadows of statuettes and objects carried by those behind them, hidden by the wall described by Socrates. Thus, it is obvious that they "sink"¹⁴ or "enter" through their own shadows in the world of shadows casted on the wall. Let us remember that those in the cave are chained in such a way that they cannot see the source of the shadows or look at each other, the only known identity of the one next to each one of them, but also to the others, is the shadows projected on the wall. If we replace "shadows" with the term "avatar", the similarity is perfect.

But let us return to Socrates and his dialogue with Glaucon. After making sure that the interlocutor is in the possession of the described world, both the cave and the real one from the outside, Socrates directs Glaucon, using maieutics, to the conclusion that will establish the role of the philosopher in the Polis. First of all, he identifies the criteria which defines the profile of the person released from the cave and what qualities he should possess and how he could acquire the next level of using them. This time, however, being an educational process, it refers to the child in the cave rather than the released one, but the ambiguity is preserved because of the journey through the three levels is in essence, an educational process. One by one, he proposes for research the various disciplines that the one released from the cave should learn in order to be the one who, mastering reality, becomes the leader of the Polis. Mathematics or the art of numbers, geometry or the art of space, to which is added the third dimension, the "depth" as Socrates says, astronomy and finally dialectics. Thus, the conclusion becomes indisputable: the only one who qualifies and is able (and imperatively necessary) to lead the Polis is the philosopher, because he is the only one who possess the truth established by knowledge of the three levels.

Without questioning the ability of a philosopher to be the leader of the Polis, I will substitute his role with that of the artist, the creator of the artistic discourse articulated by the creation of work of art. By all means, this substitution does not refer at all to the role of the ruler of the Polis, but to the role of seeker of the real world, the one who reaches the "truth".

And in this case, we can distinguish the three stages of the journey of the one chained in the cave from childhood. If we admit that talent is a gift that can be lost but cannot be acquired, then let us argue about of the qualities of that inhabitant of the cave of whom Socrates speaks, the one who is chained looking forward to the wall on which the shadows are projected. Obviously, he, like any other child, will be convinced that the only existing world is the one to which he has access, the world he sees, analyzes, renders and assumes by commenting in the case of Plato's allegory, because those in the cave comment on what they see. After his journey and when he will be in the possession of the outside world he will comment the complexity of the universe through an artistic

13 <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/287723>

14 Immersive virtual reality

discourse, whatever its form will be in front of the cave community. From my point of view the first manifestation of commenting on the shadows and sounds reflected on the cave wall represents an extremely important aspect of the evolution of censorship. The artist or, in Plato's vision, the philosopher, both in the becoming are offered an artificial world created by censorship and which will determinate this first form of communication, the commentary on shadows as the first artistic manifestation or as a philosophical approach on the journey to knowledge of the truth or the real world. Thus, it becomes obvious that the author of the speech, either of the two will articulate it, will sublimate what is presented to him as the universe or the world and thus the speech will be indirectly censored, the narrated universe not being outside the cave, but one altered by censorship.

The examples are many and handy, so I will summarize by discussing an extreme example: the educational factor in, let's say, China's cultural revolution and that of Western European universities. In both situations, the one exposed to each of the systems will perceive the universe differently, of course, each of these presented universes will be assumed through the artistic approach of the audience. Thus, censorship perpetuates in the first example, while in the second, although there is a subtle tendency to influence the perception of reality, the artist has the freedom to research and especially to question what is "learned". The release from the cave chain happens in the case of the artist, but the recollection of the former universe, the one that projects the shadows, is often so overwhelming that the talent is not suffice for the author to climb the steep hill to the outside of the cave. The light of the fire can blind or frighten the artist in such a way that he returns to the place allocated by the one who chained him in the cave, the censor of the universe.

This hypothetical situation only shows us that the journey to truth is neither simple nor safe. If the released one manages to overcome this first obstacle, he will face the escalation of the steep road to the exit of the cave. Even so, after an exhausting journey, it is not certain that he will be able to see beyond the bright sunlight.

In fact, further analyzing the discourse of Socrates, we see that the one to be elected the ruler of the Polis also needs to be "learned", in other words he needs education other than the one he has from the shadow world. The qualities that determine the release from the underground chains are often not enough and for this reason it needs a complex educational process. Looking back on this process, from the current context, it is obvious that the information transmitted becomes, over time, more and more complex, some of it disappearing, being replaced by other in the evolutionary process of scientific research.

Thus, the "arts" proposed as subjects of study must be seen in evolutionary dynamics, and as an example I will use astronomy, which Socrates says is of utmost importance in educating the future leader. Astronomy is one of the fields in which major discoveries will largely change the knowledge of which Socrates speaks of an epoch almost 2500 years before. The same goes for the other areas proposed for the study. The solution proposed by Plato, through the discourse of Socrates, that of dialectical thinking is a solution that I believe the artist must adopt.

Definitively replacing the philosopher with the artist released from the cave, it becomes obvious that he must be the possessor of a personal, authentic axiology, able to

determine an evolutionary view of artistic discourse in the context of subtle censorship that undoubtedly existed, exists and will exist, accompanying our civilization in the evolution that brings us today, whether it is a censorship imposed by power, regardless of its nature, a situation increasingly rare, or it is an unconscious censorship, which occurs when the author comments just what he sees on the cave wall.

To summarize, we can establish that the censorship imposed by the power factor determines either the perversion of the artistic discourse or its annulment. Let's remember about the 1980's cinematography in Romania and we can analyze many films that tried to avoid political and especially ideological censorship by various means. It is obvious that in this case the artistic discourse has been altered. However, there are other cases in which the discourse was banned or abusively modified without the author's consent. It goes without saying that this type of censorship can also have an economic component, the role of the producer being often to ensure that artistic discourse, in this case the film, will bring economic benefits regardless of the "truth" contaminated by economic censorship. Last but not least, propaganda censorship is a subtle perversion of artistic discourse and, most of the time, it occurs in the artist's unconscious desire to be politically correct, therefore censorship must be viewed evolutionarily, dynamically, in the current context in which the cave wall is replaced by the place of convergence between VR and SN.

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