THE PRINTING REVOLUTION AND THE BEGINNING OF MODERN TIME

NIADI-CORINA CERNICA[*]

niadi.cernica@gmail.com

Abstract: *In this project (paper) I drew up the cultural and social epoch of the Gutenberg era. Maybe, in another division into periods of the history, other than the present one, for the European culture, the „printing revolution" will count the same, or even more, as the wars and political event does. The present paper is meant to become an argument for that.*

Keywords: *printing revolution, religious texts, modern man, the author, the individualism.*

„The practice of printing spread through Europe (…). By 1500, presses had been established in more than 250 places in Europe – 80 of them in Italy, 52 in Germany and 43 in France. Printers had reached Basel by 1466, Rome by 1467, Paris and Pilsen by 1468, Venice by 1469, Leuven, Valencia, Cracow and Buda by 1475, Westminster (distinct from the city of London) by 1476 and Prague by 1477. Between them, these presses produced about 27.000 editions by the year 1500, which means that – assuming an average print run of 500 copies per edition – about 13 milion books were circulating by that date in a Europe of 100 million people"[1]. The printing press was invented in Europe in 1450.

The printing revolution opens, probabily, the modern era in Europe. The timing between Renaissance and the printing emergence are opening the discussions about humanism and Renaissance as an Europeean phenomena, the true border in history, between the Middle Ages and the Modern Era, a time in which the history of the continent developed in a quick and triumphal rithm. The Renaissance is however just an arthistic phenomena, with Italian roots, which became soon an artistic current in almost entirely Europe. This arthistic manifestation is generating an identic structure for two medieval styles of the Occident – the Romanic

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[1] Briggs, Asa, Burke, Peter, Mass-media. O istorie socială. De la Gutenberg la Internet, Ed. Polirom, 2005, p. 25.

and the Gothic. The first one arise in Germany and the second one in France (well-known through revolutions in architecture, while the Renaissance was born as a revolution in fine arts) and spread almost instantly in the Occidental Europe. The situation is, under different aspects, with a similar path in evolution as the Renaissance.

While in Italy Michelangelo was painting The Sistine Chapel, in Germany (1450) Johann Guttenberg from Mainz invented the first movable-type printing press. One artistic revolution was taking place in Italy; one cultural revolution was born in Germany and became the first step for a new history of Europe.

It is useless to ask oureselves if the invention of Johann Gutenberg is truly his. In China, where the wooden characters – printing press appeared, because of the great numbers of them (several thousands), only one plate for each page could have been created. Because of that, the printing invention was not seen as a revolution, and the need for a printed edition was extremely rare. In China`s Culture the printing was not a relevant piece.

In Europe, at all levels, the radical change was obvious:

The first book, printed in a large numbers of editions, was the Bible. Then several other religious books. The first effect was, between the believers, the aparition of the personal meditation, in solitude, focused on the Old Testament and the New Testament. In comparison with the sermon (at the church), which leaded to a non-personal feeling of believing and a common message, the individual reading of The Bible and of the religious texts made possible the apparition of a personal godliness or of different interpretations for the same text. It is explicabile in this way that after 1450 came a period of flourish for the christian religions, which were separating one by one from the Catholic Church, dominant in the Occidental Europe. On the other side, the spreading of the printed religious texts leads to a more adherent thinking for the traditional belief. The mentality climate characteristic of the religious wars was formed.

Other books printed were those of scientific and practic information. The general level of scientific technics and methods (from engineering and construction, to agriculture and zootechny) rise up, and the novelties spread out rapidly. The European civilization had, because of that, an ascendent trend; the novelty was quicly known. At the same time, the level of general education obviously grew up. The Medieval man turned into the Modern man (some of the characteristics are confirmed also at – what the historians call, from a long time – the Renascence man). First of

all, the explosion of printed texts, encouraged the liquidation of illiteracy; the more the knowledge grew, the more the books spread; and the more the books spread, the more the knowledge of reading and writting grew. Both phenomenons helped each other. The man of the Gutenberg Era was not only a reader but also an author. Numerous texts of the ones who wanted their ideeas, knowledge and experience to be known appeared in print. The author - his name was always on the cover. What Jacob Burckhardt observed in the italian civilization of Renaissance, the aparition of personality with it`s own aspirations, became a truth also for the „Gutenberg Era". The personality expresing itself, or revealed by a work of art is not only the artist or the political man of the Rennaisance, but also the author of printed and spreaded texts.

The lecture experience for a men, and not only the common experience (as a peasan, craftman or believer) leads to the individually selection of the informations (by choosing a book according to his own interests or curiosity). That makes the printing press era, an era of solitarity through out lecture, of critic reactions and of active atitude related to the informations, an era of the person. While the Renaissance is creating the exceptional personality, the printing creates, as I said before, the personality or, more corectly, the person, the individualism. The Modern era became the witness of the dissolve, under some aspects, of the influence of certain social association structures, like the guild, the craftship and even the communities in towns (the last one, indeed, with a larger population)

The diversity of the subjects broached by the printed texts takes, obviously, also to a better undersanding of the legal and the juridic domain. Samuel Hartlib wrote in 1641: „the art of Printing will so spread knowledge that the common people, knowing their own rights and liberties will not be governed by way of oppression..."[2] The independent way of the religious and scientific thinking is accompanied by a more independent position regarding the laws and authorities decisions. If the Middle Ages is an era of upheavals, and the end of it is marked by religious wars, the end of the Modern era (as some historians said) is the same with the first revolution in history – The French Revolution (1789). As is said in „Social history of the Media. From Gutenberg to Internet": „the political use of literacy for ordinary people should not be forgotten.

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[2] Apud Briggs, Asa, Burke, Peter, Mass-media. O istorie socială. De la Gutenberg la Internet, Ed. Polirom, 2005, p. 27.

Rebellions were accompanied by the formulation of grievances in writting, during the German Peasant War of 1525, for example, or in cahiers at the begining of the French Rebvolution, to mention only two of the most profound upheavals. The signing of petitions by a wide range of people was a practice which entered English politics in the seventeenth century."[3] We can add to that the social comunication of the political ideals and grievance that was spread through out the printed texts (and we are not talking only about the books, but also about the simple paper printed and distributed – „feuilles volantes" in France, „gazzette" in Italy and „zeitungen" in Germany[4]) In this way, if the discontentment created the rebellion and the upheaval, the discontentment, the grievances and the ideals created the revolutions. We have to do with more informed and more united people because of, partially speaking, the movable-type printing press created by Johann Gutenberg.

What must be added is that, because of the readers and writers (connoisseurs of the indigenous languages, and less of the latin), the printings of the „Gutenberg Era" are written in what will be called later „ national languages" – english, french, spanish, etc. This situation appeared right before the invention of printing, at a smaller level („The Divine Comedy" is written in Italian language). And so appeared the national languages, from the unification of the the indigen languages. The spoken language of a certain region tends to become national language for a country. For this process to develope, is essential that the printed books to be spread and to be in circulation in a certain national area. The language of a region is the language used to write down the code of laws and the official texts, even those literar and scientific. In this way the literary language appears.

All the same, the printing press brought an explosion of the translations – exactly what had happened also in the XIII century, but only refering (at that time) to the philosophy and science in the islamic area. The demand for the books is huge starting from the first period after the invention of the printing press. The translation is needed, as normaly, mostly from the european area. And the translations not only that acquainted the books outside the culture and the language in which they were created, but also encourage changes in other cultures. All the nations

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[3] Briggs, Asa, Burke, Peter, Mass-media. O istorie socială. De la Gutenberg la Internet, Ed. Polirom, 2005, p. 41.

[4] Coman, Mihai, Introducere în sistemul mass-media, Ed. Polirom, 2004, p.101.

from the Occidental Europe are integrater in the general tendences. The translations are sharing not only literature but also technic and scientific books. The printing press and the translations changed the face of the european cultures. All the countries in Occidental Europe are making the same steps for the future. The cultural and scientific comunications throughout printed texts makes this thing possible.

The spreading of the information – scientific, philosophic, juridic, and, of course, the spreading of literature in a big quantity and in an unbelieveing speed before the inventing of the printing press, radically transformed the european culture and society.

Soon, the spreading of art reproduction will begin. Craftmans, artisans or even well-known artists are diffusing themes and graphic novelties, without affecting the character of the european art. The popularisation of printed artistic images is a thing to be mentioned.

„The Gutenberg Era" formed the modern man: a man desintegrated by the loneliness of the reading, under some aspects, from the comunity; a man with personal ideeas and observations, more active in the social life as well as in the political one; a person with an educated culture, with peculiar interests and curiosities.

The aparition of mass society and of the mass culture, once with the process of industrialization and forming of the bigger cities, leded to a second epoch of the „printing era" – an epoch in which the newspapers and the books become, in the propre way of words – mass-media, forms of mass comunication. Docile in front of the information, manipulated by that, sometimes incapabile of discernment, the man of mass society will become a simple printings consumer. The quick and massive spreading of information will, apparently, destroy all that the circulation of the information have done, in it`s moderate way, until then. Demasification apeared once with the new forms of comunication that permits interaction. From the loneliness of the reading, to the constant dialogue permitted by the new media; a new man, the post-modernist, is replacing the modern man, the man of „the printing era".

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