

# The Bells - from Liturgical Artefact to Sculptural Installation and Social Memorial. An Interdisciplinary Survey on the Evolution of a Traditional Artefact to the Status of Social Symbol and Cultural Icon

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**Abstract:** Visual Arts, architecture, and especially contemporary sculpture exhibit the bells in the most visible manner, together with their supporting structures, whether functional or not, useful or just display artefacts. The belfries of modern churches become aesthetically and visually autonomous and are visual and sound landscape generators, as created by architects like Mario Botta and Le Corbusier. In contemporary sculpture, the bells become readymade sculptural objects fully integrated into sculptural installation, as artists like Jannis Kounellis, Claudio Parmiggiani, Barry Flanagan does, or even manifest memorial and social attitude, like Zaphos Xagoraris and Marcus Vergette.

The phenomenon of bells as Social Memorial has emerged from the need for social attitude and involvement in the post-war era, also on the background of an evolutionary process of symbolic values secularization of this typology of traditional liturgical artefacts.

The Social Memorial identified today by the artefacts of bells covers from remembrance, heroism, the signalling of a memory archive symbolic or not, to attitude, motivation and social commentary, passing through artistic involvement in contemporary crises - war, suffering and human loss, drama in any situation. It always marks ideas or memory through the sound landscape and the visual structure that inevitably accesses a liturgical reflex of bells, a community memory.

The bell and its adjacent structures, all elements of the art and science of campanology, triggers an anthropological vector and evolving cultural icon, due to already occurred essential mutation through the secularization of the original liturgical artefact into a sculptural object and installation, now a militant Social Memorial or archive of memory.

**Keywords:** *bells; liturgical artefact; sculptural installation; social memorial; campanology.*

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## Introduction

The bell as a liturgical artefact, namely the church bell, seems like something of another era, although is still present, not only as the centrepiece within liturgical instruments of many religious confessions, but also taking on new roles in the postmodern cultural context, through the Visual Arts and the status of Social Memorial.

Our method is a survey of artistic research, over the social landmarks of bells evolution through 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. We applied the principles of *research for art* (*research for art and design*, Christopher Frayling, 1993), which states that processes of thinking, connecting the artistic theme, hypothesis, method and results are integral part of the final artefact, intended for non-verbal communication of knowledge, but for visual communication, through the sculptural object.

## The current state of research in the field of Campanology

There is a science already established that studies bells, the *Campanology*; although defined as a science that studies the physics of bells, their technologies and way of use, is more like a branch of Arts and Humanities.

Specialized publications on this subject are less common and dates back to 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, even older, displaying a rigid, evolutionary, historiographical perspective, quartered to a particular geographical or cultural area; some are technical manuals, dedicated to casting and installation of bells; the most comprehensive publications present symbolic references, transposition technologies, religious context references, without cross sections or interdisciplinary approaches. In our opinion, the artistic research methods offer the contemporary tools to access and understand the realities of modern campanology within the social body of today.

The term campanology has a significant footprint on the Internet, which is a multimedia support and an extremely valuable archive for the scientific field tackled here; even Wikipedia offers a definition of campanology in its dedicated page, although is not a reliable source for a scientific reference - but it proves the contemporary cultural interest and popularity of the subject. Another important web resources for publications on campanology subjects are the sites of *gutenberg.org* and *archive.org*, covering the copyright free titles from mainly 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, or much older.

Almost as a rule, *campanology* is the most used term, although the French tradition of the domain prefers the one of *campanography*. However, the Internet has imposed the first option, which in fact seems to be the most adapted to the diversity of cultural and scientific activities about bells.

*Il y a lieu tout d'abord de définir la campanographie, qui tire son origine du mot bas latin **campana**, cloche, et du mot grec **graphein**, décrire. Il signifie l'étude des cloches ou, plus précisément, la science qui traite des cloches. C'est un mot relativement récent, que nous ne rencontrons il y a encore seulement quelques décennies dans aucun dictionnaire, exception faite du **Dictionnaire du XX siècle**, qui en donne une définition erronée parce que trop restrictive à notre sens, en disant qu'il s'agit de l'art des carillons. Nous supposons qu'il a été employé pour la première fois à la fin du XIX siècle par Joseph Berthelé, qui fut le plus grand campanographe français. (Ronot, 2001, p. 15)*

The 20<sup>th</sup> century has been the constant witness of secularizing the bell still considered a religious artefact, particularly important and visible in both Western and Eastern Christian traditions; although there is an equally important, perhaps even wider tradition of this artefact in Asia and the Far East, but the references are more complex and require a separate approach. The bicentennial process of secularization begins with the science of campanography in the eighteenth century, and as a paradox, the scientific study of bells ends up by extracting this artefact, its meanings and symbols from the current religious context in which it emerged and developed since Early Middle Ages.

*Ce fut au XVIIIe siècle que l'on commença à s'intéresser aux cloches et à quelques-uns des nombreux problèmes qu'elles posaient aux esprits curieux. (...) Un peu plus tard, Diderot et d'Alembert, dans **L'Encyclopédie**, donnent de même aux articles "cloche" et "fondeur" des renseignements surtout technologique, après une introduction sur l'origine des cloches et leur emploi dans l'Antiquité, et ajoutent au milieu de larges aperçus philosophique, inspire du plus pur esprit déiste, quelques éléments intéressants de caractère folklorique, notamment sur le baptême des cloches. (Ronot, 2001, p. 15)*

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the science of campanology developed its main work structure, addressing areas such as *epigraphy*, *iconography*, *folklore* and *archaeology*. The most important for today is the archaeology of bells, proved to be the most difficult one. Older than 18<sup>th</sup> century bells are extremely rare, for practical reasons: they got broken and need to be replaced, melted and recast. Another reason is also practical and much more

common: the bells have always been considered as a source of precious material, as trophies of war and a metal reserve accessed at any time by the interests of state for reasons of economics and war situations.

*L'Archéologie des cloches fut un des premiers objets de recherché de la part de cette génération de campanographes et notamment de la part des Allemands (Heinrich Otte, Glockenkunde), mais il faut reconnaître que sur ce point les chercheurs furent déçus. En effet, presque toutes les cloches existant au Moyen Âge sont aujourd'hui détruites, de même que la majeure partie de celles qui avaient été fondues de nouveau aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècle, parce que le plus souvent les cloches cassent par suite d'usure, après une période de service plus ou moins longue qui dépasse rarement un à deux siècle. Enfin, il y eut des accidents, provoqués par l'imprudence d'un sonneur improvisé ou trop enthousiaste, par les razzias opérées par les protestants dans les églises catholique au cours des guerres de religion, puis par les nombreux envois à l'Hôtel des Monnaies à la fin du XVIIIe siècle et aux fonderies de canons de la Première République. C'est dire assez la rareté des cloches datant du Moyen Âge, qui cependant ne manqua pas de surexciter la curiosité des premiers campanographes d'une façon tout à fait exagérée. (Ronot, 2001, p. 17)*

We think the subject of bells, primarily as liturgical artefacts, became more sensitive in social perception during the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century due to both World Wars, when most bells from conflict zones and from the countries directly and heavily involved were requisitioned for the war industry, with the rare exceptions of bells with great historical value. The same thing happened in Soviet Russia, where the revolutionary government considered church bells as an economic non-ferrous metal resource that would be recycled for industrial development. In the case of war requisitions, and also the Soviet metal recycling, the social effects were considerable and remained in collective memory. The communities confronted with these measures were deeply affected, because besides the liturgical function, the bells also have community significance and were usually financed through the local public collected money. For the same reason, one of the first successes celebrated by a war-affected community is the replacement of the bells requisitioned or destroyed in urban battles or air raids. In the case of the former Soviet Union, bell casting was resumed as distinct activity only after the fall of communism in the early 1990s. The same area of public awareness to the fate of bells was strongly influenced, in our opinion, by photographic documentation, in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, of the same requisitioned bells, usually dismantled and loaded, for transport to recycling centres, in carts, trucks, or even on railway platforms

and wagons. The same effect had photographs of the bells stored within recycling centres or harbours, or those destroyed in the fires caused by the air raids; some remains of bells are preserved even today as symbolic artefacts and relics of the effects of the war. Some of these photos are already iconic for campanology studies, a reference for the time period and for the magnitude of the phenomenon; most of these photographs are usually available on the Internet. It should be noted that from the point of view of contemporary sculpture and artistic research in the field, these documentary photographs of the bells generate the quality of *sculptural object* and *sculptural installation*, being reference points and inspiration for artistic projects. In this context the bells make their entry into the Visual Arts becoming an element of sculptural language present in modern and contemporary sculpture, especially in the well-defined context of post-modernism. The artefact has the quality of *sculptural object* since its origin as *readymade*, and most of the works and artistic projects that contain it are defined by the landmarks and methods of artistic research.

We consider, within contemporary Visual Arts, three stages of evolution for the bell as an artefact with symbolic, artistic and social reference: *readymade*, *sculptural object*, installation, and *Social Memorial*. Although these three stages are not usually clearly defined, with textbook examples, some works, sculptures, installations or artistic projects are better defined than others and have the function as landmarks. Depending on circumstances, they intertwine or have multiple status, an installation using the readymade bell objects or a bell sculpture gaining the value as Social Memorial; the proposed stages are indicative, as landmarks of evolution during the post-war modern sculpture and Visual Arts.

We tried in this study a classification of contemporary artists who use the bells by its origin as a traditional artefact in a postmodern context; a *classic* area of postmodern sculptural object and installations, represented by artists like Jannis Kounellis, Claudio Parmiggiani, Barry Flanagan, Antoni Tàpies, Adrián Villar Rojas, Eberhard Münch, Marcel Wanders; and a conceptual area, described by experimentalism and the status of Social Memorial with artists like Steven Claydon, Herman Nitsch, Konrad Smolenski, David Gurman, Kris Martin, Zaphos Xagoraris and Marcus Vergette. In modern and contemporary architecture – usually the sacred space architecture – the bells are designed to be very visible, in their external, open belfry, what gives them certain qualities as a functional *sculptural object*, or artistic installation. This time is not an *artistic appropriation*, but an *insertion* within the sacred space described by the architectural volume: Le Corbusier, Mario Botta, Marcel Breuer, or the Romanian architects Anca and George

Mitrache, Radu Mihăilescu, Radu Teacă, Ioan Andreescu and Vlad Gaivoronschi.

A method of working with bells of liturgical origin is the artistic appropriation, especially in the field of artistic research involving contemporary sculpture and Social Memorial projects. The object itself, the bell, is produced in the same manner as traditional liturgical artefacts: clay forming and metal (usually bronze) casting, as it has been done in the bell foundries for the last centuries. However, the artist intervenes on the artefact's original concept, creatively altering symbolism, meaning, cultural, social and even religious context. The load-bearing structure - a kind of belfry which supports and exhibits the bell, in a form of urban insertion - is obviously adapted not only to the sound function but also to the aesthetic qualities of the bell. One alternative within the method of artistic appropriation is to work with readymade objects, usually the original liturgical artefacts, borrowed from a collection of historical bells.

This is also the working method of contemporary data artist **David Gurman** for some of his sculptural installation:

*We have a long history and bodily relationship with bells. The bell is the size of, essentially, a human core. The ones I select are about 42 inches high, so they become bodily surrogates, in a way. And in the church, you really felt the intense energy of the bell tolling in that confined space. It shook the whole building. I also find it interesting that bells are tolled both as a call to worship and the call to arms. During the US Civil War, bells were pulled from churches and melted down for bronze to cast cannons. When the war was over, the cannons were melted down and church bells were cast from gunmetal. So they are complex objects that have been historically used in our most spiritual and violent practices. I borrow most of the bells from historical collections. In the case of **Divine Strake**, I borrowed the bell from Hastings College because they had one that was cast in one of the first weapons-production facilities in the United States, around the time of the Revolutionary War. I found it interesting that they cast bells out of the same alloy as cannons. So this bell was resonating in my mind with the sounds of Manifest Destiny, that this was all steeped into this object, this history. (David Gurman, "The magnitude of mindfulness: Fellows Friday with David Gurman", n.d.)*

The artist's site, <http://davidgurman.com>, is edifying for the typology of some projects involving bells; this sculptural and also kinetic installations are defined as *Real-Time Memorials*, based on traditional bells – real, historical artefacts - augmented with cutting edge data technology that feed streams of real-time data and creates an immersive experience in events

that happen thousands of kilometres away. *The Nicholas Shadow, 1<sup>st</sup> Installation St. Ignatius Church, San Francisco, 2009: A Russian founded Orthodox Church Bell bearing the icon of St. Nicholas tolled hourly registering the number of reported civilian deaths in Iraq on that day. Web data from IBC (Iraqbodycount.org). Installed in a former confessional chapel of St. Ignatius Church. Apple Computer. Custom Software, MAX 5, Site Sucker. Electromechanical bell tolling mechanisms. Pulleys and silk ribbon.* (David Gurman, “*The Nicholas Shadow, 1st Installation St. Ignatius Church, San Francisco, 2009*”, n.d.)

His projects are extremely complex and require interdisciplinary teamwork due to the artistic approach, categorically defined by the field of artistic research, which is here conditioned by the most technologically advanced digital applications. Interestingly, such an artistic project can evolve into a real life and real time data networking system. The artistic project, beyond creativity and originality, could be considered as a *try and error* stage for a future development more relevant as a data communication system. Even the artistic and sculptural installation area – the bells that interact sonically with digital electronic devices could become a friendly and original interface for spreading the typology of runed informations.

*The “Divine Strake project” was an early warning system indicating to viewers the moment a nuclear weapon detonated on the Nevada Test Site. I worked with seismologists to tap a real-time seismic feed from the Nevada Test Site to the installation in San Francisco. I installed a historic bell that robotically tolls according to earthquakes caused by nuclear weapons tests and latent seismic events, registering the exact moment of impact. The project was built in response to the impending 700 ton bomb test called “Divine Strake,” expected to blast radiated soil into the atmosphere and produce a mushroom cloud visible from Las Vegas, 65 miles away. The project was made in the spirit of bringing us closer to events that are violent yet obscure, making the invisible present. (...) I collaborated with Glen Biasi, a seismologist from University of Nevada, Reno, Josh Stachnik, a seismologist from University of Wyoming, Jim Alitieri, a New York based musician and programmer and Steve Whitson, CCA’s network administrator, to set up a livestream of ground motion data from the seismometers on the NTS to CCA. The realtime connection acted as a conduit connecting the two sites.* (David Gurman, “*The Moment of Divine Strake*”, n.d.)

Another textbook case study for our survey is **Jannis Kounellis**, which is a classic of post-war modern sculpture and one of the first to use bells in their works and installations. The way in which he uses the bells belongs to area of artistic appropriation of original liturgical artifact, but in a

postmodern context of *site specific* sculptural installation. The materials used are traditional, bronze for bells, wooden beams, rope. The bells used by Kounellis are installations inserted to architectural sites, usually buildings from the Middle Ages and Renaissance. The main symbolic reference remains clearly defined by the status of liturgical artefact, although the postmodern sculptural representation refers more to the social function of the symbol. The general appearance of its bell's installations, favoured by the spaces of insertion, is that of the belfry, but still makes strong reference to the status of Social Memorial of bells, through the amplitude of the work and the number of readymade bells artefacts.

*The bell represents a kind of sonic and spatial extension of the body of the cathedral; it serves to rally the citizens and has fulfilled this double function in our society since the eighth century. However, Kounellis is not a realist; his bells are not going to be hung high up in a bell tower from where they normally chime and peal out in all the cities of Christendom. For him, the truth of the bell can be found in its very shape, in the casting of its very shape, in the casting of its bronze surface, in the echo of its acoustic presence that is engraved in us, in its historic and cultural dimension. The bell is the symbolic object of a centrality and verticality; it is a metaphor for the unity of a tongue gathering the social body. (Scheps, 2010, p. 98)*

Jannis Kounellis has a Greek origin and most likely grew up in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, where the bell still has an important status as a liturgical artefact. This explains the vertical, hieratic, highly symbolic and traditional nature of his sculptural bells installations. In his creation, the bell sends a strong signal as sculptural readymade object (there are no clues for Kounellis using historical bells borrowed from a collection) or custom made in a bell foundry; the dimensions of these bells are relatively small, so the costs of sculptural installations were not prohibitive, and they were used as readymade and artistic modules in various compositions.

*In this hall, Kounellis arranged sixty wooden beams, close to each other, reaching up to the arched ceiling. A bell has been hung on the top of each of them with a hemp rope and its opening is pointed towards the interior of this impressive ensemble that takes up the entire space of the room with the exception of a path permitting one to go around it (cat. 215). This accumulation of beams creates a rectangle, defines a territory and also occupies the entire volume of this hall. The first image we think of is that of an extremely dense, almost impenetrable, forest. (...) These places, with their numerous elements of Gothic architecture were inspired by the sacral and this produces the second powerful image that comes to our*



*mind, the image of a cathedral. Of course, the bells contribute to that, but possibly it is even more this vertical upward movement that is so characteristic of Gothic cathedral architecture. The trees of the holy wood have been metamorphosed into columns that support and define the cathedral; that is to say, a place of the faith. (Scheps, 2010, p. 285)*

### **Marcus Vergette and *The Time and Tide Bell Project*: the new shapes of bells and the site-specific design of Social Memorial.**

Originating from United States, the interdisciplinary artist lives and works in the UK. Strongly involved within bells sculpture, installations and Social Memorials, he runs and applies the computer based scientific and research data of *Finite Element Analysis*, which determine how vibrations work on a material. Interesting is exactly when the artist becomes involved in the movement of the bells as a Social Memorial, the right moment his epiphany happened. Isolated on his Devon farm for six months due to foot and mouth outbreak from 2001, Marcus Vergette accompanied his neighbour, the parish bell-ringer when he peals the old bells to mark and announce the end of the epidemic and quarantine. This moment turned out to be an artistic epiphany, realizing the artistic, sculptural and symbolic status of these liturgical and communication artefacts. It was also the ground zero of the forthcoming *Time and Tide Bells project*, which debuted as a Social Memorial commemorating the terrible cattle slaughter, the suffering and hardships they all had during the quarantine.

Professionally trained as an artist at St. Martins in London, he was initially involved in the usual exhibitions and corporate commissions, although he became more interested on working projects within social context. His concepts regarding bells as Social Memorials are evolving, as he states:

*Since I am not a religious person, I thought a bell that could be rung by anybody would be nice. Everyone thought it was a lovely idea. But then it transpired that it was illegal to make a 'democratic bell' because the control of the peal of a bell is an expression of power. So we had to go through a legal process to prove that it wasn't a matter of law but a fault of the history of power [Church and State] that had denied the idea of a democratic bell. For me, this was more or less the final piece of a puzzle – that this object contained that much power, and that it was a communication device. (Marcus Vergette, "Social artist who was summoned by bells", n.d.)*

The originality of this artist is not working with readymade bells, but creates them with radical new forms and shapes, quite different from those of traditional liturgical artefacts that we all familiar with. This process of creating new bell forms results from a rather scientific process, based on researching the effects of the vibrations on materials (*The Finite Element Analysis*). He designs new bells shapes with specific harmonic relationships, which makes their form looks strange, recalling the archaic curves of bells from the Middle Ages.

*Open bells can take various forms, from the low, 'beehive' shape common in the eighth and ninth centuries, found particularly in Germany, to the taller, conical, 'sugar-loaf' form typical of Italian examples at least from the twelfth century. Due to the difficulty of transporting large bells, foundries were often established at the site for which the bells were being cast. Bell-founders were therefore itinerant, which meant that forms were transmitted throughout Europe. The more open 'krater' shape was established by the fourteenth century and was gradually developed, with the flattening of the crown of the bell, until the nineteenth century. Since then bell shapes have become fairly standardized.* (Motture, 2011, p. 34)

Marcus Vergette's most popular project and Social Memorial is *The Time and Tide Bells*, consisting of twelve bells, located in specific chosen places: rivers, coastlines and estuaries, all of which share the presence of the tidal movement that rings the specially designed bells, casts into a mixture of anti-corrosion treated aluminium and bronze.

### **The Banner of Peace from Sofia, Bulgaria.**

The Banner of Peace in Sofia, Bulgaria, defines the institutional area of World Peace Memorials, and we consider it the most important example due to historical and cultural context details. As a style, the monument belongs to the brutalist architecture of socialism, specific for the last two decades before the fall of the Iron Curtain. Sculptural volumes of reinforced concrete that should symbolize the progress and tenacity of communist ideology with a nationalist shade, specific to former Soviet Union satellite states.

The monument is a perfect case study which culminates, in our opinion, the cultural process of secularization of bells and transition to status of *Social Memorial*. Built in 1979, when the United Nations declared that year as *The Year of the Child*, the project of this related monument was supported by Unesco and driven by *Lyudmila Zhivkova*, daughter of Bulgarian

Communist Party leader Todor Zhivkov; she was also in charge of the Committee for Culture of Bulgaria. At the inauguration, all delegates from 78 countries brought bells, each one specific to their cultural tradition, to be mounted and integrated into the monumental ensemble. At present, there are a total of 186 bells, including those part of the original design of the memorial, attached to the central pillar, forming a sort of carillon that is used on occasions to play music.

*The UN declared 1979 the Year of the Child. From that nomination Lyudmila Zhivkova, daughter of the former communist head of state, conceived to construct a monument. With the participation of the UNESCO Banner of Peace children's movement, the Bells Monument was built in a mere 30 days. Four 122-foot-tall pylons oriented toward the cardinal directions. Strung at the very top are seven bells to represent each continent. These bells are mostly decorative but are occasionally rung to accompany concert performances at the monument. Encircling the towering pylons are two semi-circular walls containing 95 bells, each from different countries and/or social organizations. These are emblazoned with a message from the children of each distinct nation. (Banner of Peace/The Bells Monument, n.d.)*

Although is no longer considered today as a resounding cultural success, initially being a combination of national communist ideology and opening to world-wide human values, it remains the perfect example for an institutional *Social Memorial* that hardly avoided demolition in the 1990s, being rescued by direct intervention of locals who opposed dismantling. Fully secularized as a social symbol, the structure of reinforced concrete still carries the reminders of the original liturgical artefacts, all bells being chosen as the cultural and traditional symbol for the country of origin; in fact, some of the artefacts are neither bells in the formally accepted western shapes, but idiophones - metallic percussion folkloric instruments.

### **Kris Martin - The Social Memorial as participative Work of Art**

His artistic career is definitely marked by the use of readymade bells through which Kris Martin connects conceptual sculpture to the history of religious artifacts in the context of the Social Memorial sculptural installation. This extra muros project, *For Whom II* (the title does not refer to Hemingway's novel, but the poem of an Anglican priest-writer John Donne from 1624) is made by the internationally renowned S.M.A.K. (*The Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art - Ghent*) in association with the Ghent City Council. This time, the bell is a traditional, historical artifact, installed in a

reinforced concrete belfry, brutalist-style and austere as material but creative in its presence and significance. This entire liturgical facility (the external/*extra muros* concrete belfry of a local church) was appropriated by Kris Martin for five months, by adding on top of the belfry and bell a digital display running the names of the inhabitants of Ghent, who agreed to individualize the temporary *Social Memorial* with their names. Obviously, there was established a procedure by which the citizens of of Ghent were able to give their consent and to participate within the artwork, by sending an e-mail with first and family name to an e-mail address of the Municipal Museum S.M.A.K. *The 'Grote Triomfante' bell, which was cast from the broken pieces of the earlier, historical bell 'Klokke Roeland' in 1660, will ring once, softly, for every inhabitant of Ghent. In this poetic way, Kris Martin (1972, Kortrijk), will offer every inhabitant a personalised work of art. Each inhabitant can choose whether their name appears at the same time as the bell strikes. Those who prefer to remain unnamed will hear an anonymous chime. It will take about three months for the bell to chime once for all 257,983 inhabitants, and after that the artwork will fall silent. Lastly, those Ghent people who are mentioned may pick up a signed edition of their personalised chime at the museum if they so wish. In this project, Kris Martin is making a gesture of solidarity between all the cultures, ages and social levels in Ghent. He makes us reflect on what it currently means to live together in a city. (Extra Muros / Kris Martin / For Whom II, n.d.)*

### **The Dark Side of bells as Social Memorial**

In any cultural trend or movement, the level of ideological involvement is always an issue. Regarding the church bells and those of Social Memorial value, things take an even more complex turn, which causes unpredictable historic effects, even after centuries. In particular the extreme ideologies and their regimes tend to impose their presence and values in all aspects of everyday life and especially on symbolic and cultural artefacts - is true that sometimes they finance, but always appropriate them politically.

As religious artifacts, bells have always been a powerful symbol, owned, used and regulated by the *Church*, *State* and any ideology. Even today, the use of bells is carefully regulated, due to their meaning sound and ancestral force that announces the danger and mobilizes the masses. In other words, bells have always been integrated into *Propaganda* – from the *Church*, the *State*, or both together. The main element of this propaganda was the bells epigraphy, precisely the inscriptions on them; difficult to be seen by many, but it marked the official history of personalities and events over the centuries. During the 20th century, the process of secularization the bells

accelerated and they became part of the political *Propaganda Machine*, as in the case of *Nazi Bells*. Without being unique in this historical subject, *Imperial Germany* and *The Third Reich* are the perfect example for the strange and destructive relationship between bells, wars and ideologies. Only in World War II, more than 150,000 bells requisitioned from the Western Europe conquered territories were recycled to the German armaments industry (statistics for East European areas are incomplete and confusing, and the Soviet Union has already industrially recycled the church bells from its territory since the 1920s). Regarding the ideologically dedicated church and Memorial bells from the Nazi era, the *Propaganda Machine* coordinated by Joseph Goebbels was extremely effective, given the short window of opportunity between 1933 and 1940s when restrictions were reintroduced for the priority use of strategic materials (bronze, tin, brass) only for the war industry. The first example of the *Nazi Bells* is the Olympic Bell, made for *Berlin Olympics* in 1936, marked with Nazi symbols and transformed into a landmark of the event (obsessively multiplied in the form of allegorical carts and countless memorabilia artifacts) The bell survived the war, being cast from iron, and still found today on the site of the former *Olympic Stadium* in Berlin, preserved as a historical artifact, although the Nazi symbols of the epigraphy continue to cause heated discussions. The second example is church bells whose epigraphy carries Nazi symbols and dedications: slogans, swastikas, the name of the Führer, etc. According to the prestigious newspaper *Der Spiegel*, currently are still in use, in Germany, 23 such bells, mainly in Protestant churches from the countryside; periodically, debates aroused about what should be done with these Nazi artifacts bells: not necessary to be destroyed, but removed from liturgical function and preserved in museums as historical artifacts. In symbolic terms, the problem of these bells is serious due to their active liturgical status, ringing and representing dark Memorials of violence and injustice. The closest approach to this situation is the case of *Confederate* statues and monuments in the southern states of the US - in their turn, direct symbols of slavery and injustice that have't been destroyed, only removed from their consecrated sites and transferred to local museums. The solution is to deactivate the *Social Memorial* function of Nazi bells used as liturgical artifacts by removing them because such a bell, dedicated by its Nazi symbols epigraphy, conveys the original message of violence and injustice to the contemporary sound landscape.

## Conclusions

The Social Memorial of bells covers from remembrance, heroism, memory archive, to attitude, motivation and social commentary, passing through artistic involvement in contemporary crises - war, suffering, human loss and dramatism of various situations. It always marks ideas or memory through visual and sound landscape that inevitably accesses a liturgical reflex of bells, a community memory.

We tried to highlight in this paper the main points of a semiotic model applied on the bells, objects viewed as aesthetic and useful artefacts in occidental society mainly. The bells suffer some metamorphosis in this social memorial, and these transformations follow some interesting logic. Even if we treat them in different ways – liturgical, sculptural, social bond, social memorial, mortal instruments (war instrument) – the symbolic aura of the bell seems to cover these levels:

1. The bell as hieratic „installation”. This is the level of hieratic function of it. Under this aspect, the bell is not „seen” – it fulfils the function of the „absent object” or the „hidden object” in his sculptural shape. It is placed into a tower, and its presence is made only by the *sound* of its materiality. The bell, as sculptural object, finds its sense only in association with the acoustic aspect. The focus is on its „abstract” and nonmaterial manifestation, which is the pure sound – music. The sound is the element which linked the human mind and spirit with the transcendental being, God. At this level, the sound of the bell takes all the functions in virtue of its intentional reason to be an element of reliance between the human and divine. It has a specific function during the religious ceremony and it represents a liturgical element. It accomplishes a pure religious function.

2. The bell and its religious complement objects. On this ontic level, the function of the bell is to manifest some religious rituals. A) The sound of the bell has a *musical* function when it is used under the hieratic order. Now it realises a relation between the human mind and God by the over-transition of the language words. The goal is the realise a kind of resonance between the two ontological orders. On this function, the bell must rest as „pure” as it can. The music of the bell induces all the human being in a certain state of mind/consciousness, by integrating all mind functions – affective and cognitive – which are spliced to the divine. B) If we associate the bell with the sound, and in this first/second level the focus is on the acoustics manifestations, we must consider also the other „bell-instruments”, also used in the religious ceremonies. For example, in

Orthodox Church we find another instrument which realises a kind of „dialogue” with the bell (the tower bell). This is *toaca* (semantron) – a piece of wood or iron which is beaten with two gavels in different rhythmic sequences. This instrument has always a sort of „dialogue” with the big bell of the church. The rhythmic of *toaca* is not anymore, a pure sound, but a sequential and complicated emission of „phrases”. From the pure sound of the bell, we pass to the *rhythm*, which start a sort of *language*, even than it is not the case of *semantic* one.

3. The bell and the *semantic* function. At this level, the bell starts to extend its functions in the sense of *announcement*. It accomplishes many functions which are often related with the specific referential manifestations. The bell is not anymore, an instrument which is symbol and object to fulfil a meditation, which corresponds to some modification of the state of mind/spirit. The bell has a *communication* function. Some sounds disposed in several rhythmic sequences *transmits* information about different social events (birth of a new child, death, marriage, danger, war, plagues, illness etc.).

4. The bell as sculptural object. This is the level of the *manifestation*, the integral manifestation of the object. We meet the „cause” of the sound and we are aware of its forms, figures and shapes which can take. Its sculptural form must be in a very strong relation with its acoustical function. It requires a *science* linked with aesthetic sense/skill. We find in our culture the new architectural styles – after 20<sup>th</sup> century – which *show* the bell, present it and make it visible, as material object. The towers of the bells open their windows. The bell becomes the main object to be seen and heard, and the tower where it is placed is reduced to be a simple architectural basement. The bell is always linked to the religious sense.

5. The bell as independent sculptural object. The object becomes a pure aesthetic object, separated from its religious function. It became a museum artefact. At Mihai Rusen sculptures we meet the bell more often separated from the sound. It remembers us and still keeps a sort of religious symbolism but released by its acoustic function. We return, for example, to the divine sense not through the pure sounds, but through the *abstract image of the matter*.

6. The bell as useful object. It is very interesting to see the usance of the bells during the wars. Their material is used to realise canons. It seems that we speak about a sort of *matter memory*, because we use them to realise some instruments which announce the death by very strong sounds. The bell continues to live in this new figure/shape.

Indeed, we find a very wide pallet of metamorphoses of the bell image in the social imaginary. It starts from a very abstract and transcendental function to a very specific materialised form, which contain a mundane usability.

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