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Patriarhul şi martirul – Ioan cel Milostiv şi Anastasie Persanul. Sibiu: Deisis, 2018
Books, the Art of Reading
and the Meaning of Life

Abstract: According to Foucault, up to the 17th century, words and things were linked together, as there were deep similarities between all the realms of nature. The world was a book and a mirror (liber et speculum), whose signs had to be deciphered. Starting with the 17th century, language and things became separated. The words are no longer similar to the things they designate, they become an arbitrary system. In agreement with this assumption, the world no longer holds a pre-established meaning, in which man can insert himself. In the 19th century, Nietzsche elaborated this thought, speaking for the first time about the meaning of life. In his view, only the major individualities lead a life full of meaning: the philosopher, the saint and the artist. The purposes of this text are to show that 1) the issue of the meaning of life appears in Nietzsche’s early aphorisms as a consequence of his philological conception about text, reading and interpretation, which already announces a philosophy of life and that 2) in the late aphorisms this notion is refined by the will to power theory and by the genealogical critique of nihilistic ideals.

Keywords: hermeneutics, reading, meaning of life, Nietzsche, Foucault.

1. The Reading Monster

What is reading good for? This is the question raised by the Portuguese novelist Rui Zink in O Anibaleitor. A poor child, having become a pickpocket, is lucky enough to discover books and reading. In this fantasy-infused story, the teacher’s part is played by a cannibal monster, Anibalector. The author alludes, of course, to Hannibal Lecter’s name, the character in Thomas Harris’s novels, brilliantly portrayed by Anthony Hopkins on the big screen. Anibalector means “the reading animal”, considered a monster by his contemporaries, who, unfortunately, have completely lost the sense in reading. The monster introduces the child to the art of reading, and, just like any initiation, this is not an easy thing to do. The child is forced to read certain books, chosen carefully, only to discuss them afterwards with the monster, with the child’s life depending on it. It all happens like in A Thousand and One Nights, where Scheherazade had to tell the sultan a story every night, but weaving a thread of suspense for the following night, also in an effort to save her own life. With time, the child begins to like reading, and when he eventually sets the captive monster free, he is condemned to

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become a writer. “It is worse than prison for life”, he says. Moreover, he is forced to talk about books with pupils trapped in their own cages.

The novel is an excellent opportunity to meditate on the nature of reading. This is a “meeting between two voices: ours and the book’s”. But how does this meeting occur? Is it a free flowing encounter, or is it a violent crash? Does it cause genuine inner storms, altering the brave soul that dares to approach the book?

A reader must keep his neutral stance before the book he is reading, you ask? I wouldn’t be so radical. Why would it be appropriate for me to cease being me just to hear someone else’s thoughts? And how could I stop being me, even if I wanted? Could they have invented plastic surgery for spirit? However, it is true that the reader must try to speak the language of the book. Being able to speak it means surrendering to its melody, giving in to its streak, instead of wasting precious energy through rowing against the tide. That is by no means an invitation to subside, to obey, but we must become available. The book, through the mere quality of having already been written, has already made a big step towards us: it is a gift. Now it is our turn to thank the book for its kindness and make a step towards it.

What seems to be an act of hospitality before the book becomes, in a different context, an actual hunt. Ultimately, “a book is a house with many doors.” The key can sometimes be hidden. In this instance, the reader has to become a genuine predator: sometimes attacking immediately, other times leaving and returning the following day. At last, there is the blissful situation when the book and the reader are a perfect match: “just like love, reading is an encounter between two imperfect individuals who can complete each other perfectly.” The conclusion of the novel might seem sceptical. Apparently, reading does not serve any purpose. The reader remains with his own things. But, the author adds, “the most important things in life are the ones that are good for nothing.” Each individual is left with his own inner world, but reading allows him to know it thoroughly and differently.

2. Words, things, life

In the 17th century, the Neoplatonist Alain de Lille highlights an old medieval idea through a comparison that would later make history, the one between the book and the mirror: “Omnis munda creatura / quasi liber et pictura / nobis est in speculum: nostrae vitae, nostrae mortis, / nostri status, nostrae sortis / fidele signaculum” (“All the creatures of the world/ like a book and like a painting/ are like a mirror for us;/ our life, our death,/ our condition, our fate/ all are minutely inscribed”). In the Middle Ages, the book was a fundamental symbol, because the world was regarded as the book written by God; next to the book of nature, the book of life was the
one that contained the destiny of man; the book of experience was the soul itself, for the saint Bernard de Clairvaux, and every man had to read it; and even the Bible was the book holding the Word of God. Beginning with Augustin, a new idea emerged, that of a harmony between all these orders – this very idea is captured by Alain de Lille. Carefully observing the natural world helps us understand our life. Nonetheless, from a theological perspective, we acquire a mirror of our life through reading the book of nature, but this is not enough for possessing a mirror of redemption as well. Being written by God, the book of nature comprises, besides the signs of life, the signs of redemption, but the latter category is coded and requires deciphering. The same idea is highlighted by Umberto Eco as well. The Book of Creation is to be read between the lines, as its signs bear a reference that transcends them, reaching the divine author. For the Christian thinker, this idea still holds the same complete significance. In The Conflict of Interpretations, Paul Ricoeur talks about the effects of the Bible on the self who is fuelled by belief, and, concurrently, on the Western world, and the image used is the very liber et speculum: “By receiving the text, we identify with it and turn the book into a mirror” (Ricoeur 1969, 377; Ricoeur 1993, 47-8). In this mirror we can discover ourselves, being in fact invited to inhabit the world opened by the sacred text.

In The Order of Things (1966), Michel Foucault advocates the idea that similitude was at the centre of Western knowledge until the 16th century, language functioning simultaneously as mirror of the world and theatre of life. From its diverse semantic network, Foucault highlights four main orders of similitude: convenientia, aemulatio, analogia şi simpatia (Foucault 1989, 19-50).

1) Convenientia, as Foucault claims, designates the resemblances between adjacent elements, like the soul and the body. Nature does everything gradually, without skipping stages, making proximity function as a tool for adaptation. In short, the world is a great chain of beings. 2) Aemulatio signifies the similitude between beings that have no contact with each other. Elements dispersed throughout the whole world apparently respond to each other, imitate each other. Sometimes, the world seems to be a placid mirror, but other times this mirror reflects the conflict of similar elements – here, Foucault refers to the perspective of Paracelsus. Now, the world appears as a suite of concentric circles, reflected and sometimes rival. 3) Analogia, in Foucault’s vision, represents the subtle similitudes, not between things, but between their rapports. Everything is a network of rapports, of resemblances, having one privileged element: man. He is the focal point of all proportions, the irradiance centre that supports all rapports and the place from where they are reflected once more. 4) Finally, simpatia portrays the free movement in the depths of the world, causing the approach of elements far-away. It is, in Foucault’s perspective, the power of assimilation, of making things become identical.
As Foucault states, in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century we can observe a conjunction between semiology and hermeneutics. Identifying the meaning is the same as placing resemblances in perspective. To know is to interpret, and approaching texts and approaching things are similar in their nature. The world is full of words, full of signs that must be decoded, just like in the case of texts. Language is still an integral part of the world, Foucault points out. But beginning with the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, the interdependence, the interconnectedness between the language and the world is destroyed. Language no longer resembles the things it designates, but becomes an arbitrary system. Words and things drift apart, Foucault claims. And beginning with Nietzsche, interpretation falls apart from semiology, it stops being a repetition of the latter (Foucault 1998, 269-278). Interpretation frees itself from the fixity of signs, descending towards the interpretative acts that gave birth to signs in the first place. New questions arise in philosophy. What type of will stands at the origin of signs? Who is the one that can impose a sign? What life trajectory must one adhere to, to become able to dictate the meaning of signs?

3. Slow reading and its meaning for life

A lucid reflection on reading can be discovered in one of Nietzsche’s early writings, On the Future of Our Educational Institutions (Nietzsche 1999a). Here, Nietzsche addresses a calm reader, who should not be captive in his own cultural age. This reader still reflects upon what he has read for a long time after he has laid the book aside. Secondly, Nietzsche points out, one’s individuality and one’s education should not be permanently involved as measure and criterion for all things, in the manner of the modern man. Only this style of reading allows for lending oneself to the author’s will, learning from him. Then, the reader desired by Nietzsche should be equally equipped with historical and medical sense. He must understand the maladies of his time, but also their place among the broader history of the diseases tormenting the European culture. Lonely and altruistic, such a reader takes the risk of feeling the suffering and the debasement of his age. From the reader who is an embodiment of all these qualities, Nietzsche expects a symbolical destruction and a virtual obliviousness of the book he is reading at the moment, that urges him to throw himself on the battlefield and turn words into deeds. The book is a herald of action, but one that melts in its result.

The reader who suspends his own culture, his own convictions and beliefs, only to surrender himself to the guidance of the book and its author is like the genealogist philosopher, who places everything under a question mark, including his own way of being. A good practician of the genealogical method, the philosopher does not shoulder any divine eye, any viewpoint
above the phenomena explored, but understands that he is also part of their configuration, carrying their mark within themselves. Assimilating the Humboldtian model of education, Nietzsche conceives education as building oneself. For this purpose, enabling individuals to achieve their potential, education is centred on a philological model: reading great authors and great books. Moreover, approaching texts from an uninvolved perspective and a neutral standpoint can never lead to adequate understanding. We only understand what we accomplish in our own life. “We want to understand the most precious phenomenon and we want to grow side to side with it. Our task is to get accustomed to it and to transpose the text to our life”, to live within the reality of the book (Hineinleben), Nietzsche writes in his Introduction to the Study of Classical Philology, in 1871 (Nietzsche 1920, 339). This hermeneutic principle is known as subtilitas applicandi. In Gadamer’s formulation (Truth and Method), we only understand if we succeed in applying a certain meaning in our own life (Gadamer 1990, 312-316). Only then does life become a meaningful one.

Meditating on reading, Nietzsche also reflects upon the manner in which he would like to be read. The image of the ideal reader that he constructs also determines him to remodel his writing. In Thus Spoke Zarathustra, he states that “he who writes his sentences with his own blood – that writer does not desire to be read, but learnt by heart” (Nietzsche 1999b, 48). For Nietzsche, authentic writing springs from life itself. On the contrary, the writing that remains at the level of abstract ideas represents a proof for an alienation from life as such.

I have always written my texts with my whole body and my whole life: I do not know what purely spiritual issues are... You know these things as ideas, but your ideas are not your experiences, but the echo of something else: as if your room trembled when a car passes by. But for me, I am in that car, and often I am the car itself (Nietzsche 1897, 396 and 401 sq.).

The authentic spirit is nothing else than blood, Nietzsche points out. And in On the Genealogy of Morality he completes this idea: the reader who understands must be deeply hurt, but simultaneously thrilled by the text he is reading, by each and every word of it (Nietzsche 1999c, 255).

Here we come across a perfect illustration of the hermeneutic circularity. As an attentive interpreter like Viktor Pöschl notices, Nietzsche uses Goethe’s principle. “You must be something to do something”, adapting it, however, to understanding texts: you must be something to understand something (Pöschl 1979, 142). Understanding texts and educating through philology both require the involvement of the human being as a whole, not just its ability to reason. This is why Nietzsche criticized the philological practice of his time, because it remained abstract, bearing no connection to
Life. Contrariwise, understanding is intimately tied to the practical life of the individual whose purpose is to understand.

Let us weave these ideas together. So, in order to understand we have to become something, to embody a form of life, but not an ordinary one, one of exemplary value. And in view of becoming something, it is necessary to transpose into our own life what we understand. So, books and life are two elements with a symbiotic relationship, with each of them acting as a much needed counterpoint for the other, the existence of one being indispensable for the other – in this respect, Nietzsche resembles another representative of the philosophy of life, Dilthey. Life expresses itself, while texts, works of art and religious elements are its actual expressions and objectifications. One commentator, Günther Figal, calls them hermeneutic objects (Figal 2004). For Nietzsche, these mediations of life contribute to understanding life or, on the contrary, act as negations of life, signs of a negative will to power. In fact, what matters to him is the type of will to power that finds its expression in a certain objectification of life: one which affirms itself, or, on the contrary, one which negates itself.

4. From the meaning of texts to the meaning of life

One of the most important interpreters, Volker Gerhardt (1992, 21), points out that we owe the phrase “meaning of life” to Nietzsche, this phrase being relatively novel in the Western culture. First used in a fragment from 1873, to discuss the “meaning of earthly life” (Nietzsche 1999d, 668), it is then used again in an aphorism, in 1875, in which he dwells upon the fate of philology and philologists, whose mission is to train the philosopher, who in his turn can say something about the value of life. Without clarifying whether the phrases “the meaning of life” and “the value of life” are synonymous here (later texts only seem to display a partial synonymy), Nietzsche specifies that “the man is an individual solely through three forms of existence: as a philosopher, as a saint or as an artist” (Nietzsche 1999e, 32).

In conclusion, the meaning of life is not a gift to everyone, being only acquired by the people with a robust individuality: the philosopher, the saint, the artist. If we attach this idea to the previously stated aphorisms, we can assert the fact that life garners meaning only if a certain will to power synthesizes its vicinity, thus offering a sense of direction. So, meaning equals, simultaneously, direction, understanding and purpose. Some critics claimed Nietzsche translates into philosophy the concepts he collected through his experience as a philologist, with the most obvious example found in the utterly surprising use of the idea of interpretation. However, the concept of meaning undergoes a similar alteration, a fact which warrants Jean Grondin to highlight a “philologization of existence” (Grondin 2003). And
the reason why Nietzsche reaches the point where he approaches the meaning of life in this manner, Grondin explains, lies in the fact that life itself had reached a point where it did not hold a given meaning anymore. It cannot remember the meaning received from outside, from the order of the universe, like in the previous centuries (Brague 1999), and thus we can find an explanation for the reasons why the meaning of life did not raise a question mark throughout so many centuries of philosophy. With Nietzsche, a new concept on the meaning of life is established, and this concept still holds its ground in our time: “life only has meaning for an individual who decides for his life, turning it into a work of art” (Grondin 2003). If we plunge into Nietzsche’s late works, we can observe a fruitful continuation of this idea. In order to decide on our own life, we need to freeze in it all the ideals of the past, all the values and meanings that our life holds – not only in our reason, but in our whole body. This is the only way to give life a new meaning, a new direction, a new significance. This is Nietzsche’s utopia, his “brave new world.”

References


Petru BEJAN *

Anthropologie du corps et l’identité. A partir d’une métaphore ancienne

Anthropology of the body and identity, based on an ancient metaphor

Abstract: The following text seeks to justify: a) the relevance of the anthropological perspective on the field of the imaginary; b) the role of the body in the functioning of the symbolic register in creating fantasies; c) the imaginary dynamism of an ancient metaphor (“tunics of skin”), with echoes in the fields of anthropology, theology, philosophy, the visual arts and in everyday life; d) the place of the body in forming and consolidating identity.

Keywords: anthropology, body, imaginary, metaphor, tunics of skin, identity.

1. Image, imagination, imaginaire


G. Bachelard avait anticipé, à son époque, la nécessité d’un plus de clarté conceptuelle et avait fait lui-même quelques remarques tout à fait nécessaires:

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Le vocable fondamental qui correspond à l’imagination, ce n’est pas image, c’est imaginaire. La valeur d’une image se mesure à l’étendue de son auréole imaginaire. Grâce à l’imaginaire, l’imagination est essentiellement ouverte, évasive. Elle est dans le psychisme humain l’expérience même de l’ouverture, l’expérience même de la nouveauté. (Bachelard 1943, 5-6)

De son côté, dans la même veine, G. Durand étendra la sphère de l’imaginaire à l’ensemble des productions culturelles (de la psychanalyse, des institutions rituelles, du symbolisme religieux, de la poésie, des œuvres d’art, de la mythologie, de l’iconographie, de la psychologie pathologique) (Durand 1963, 33).

Ces dernières décennies, les contributions à l’étude de l’imaginaire du Centre de recherche sur l’imaginaire de Dijon, dirigé par Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, ayant des sièges dans plusieurs pays d’Europe, d’Asie et d’Amérique Latine, même en Roumanie. Selon Wunenburger, le désordre conceptuel relatif à l’imaginaire dérive du fait que la philosophie contemporaine tributaire à une tradition, relevant du XVIIe siècle qui conçoit l’imagination comme une activité productrice de fictions, appartenant, principalement à l’art (Wunenburger 2001, 17). Le philosophe français propose en contrepartie une définition assez large de l’imaginaire:

Un ensemble de productions mentales ou matérialisée dans des œuvres à base d’images visuelles (tableau, dessin, photographie) et langagières (metaphore, symbole, récit), formant des ensembles cohérents et dynamiques qui relèvent d’une fonction symbolique au sens d’un emboîtement de sens propres et figures. (Wunenburger 2013, 5)

En mettant en valeur le champ épistémique propre aux arts visuels, l’Allemand Hans Belting propose une « anthropologie des images » où il met en avant le rôle décisif du corps humain dans l’activation et la stimulation du dispositif imaginaire. L’homme « est naturellement le lieu des images… une sorte d’organe vivant pour les images » (Belting 2004, 77), affirme-t-il, et en reprenant à son compte l’une des thèses de G. Durand selon laquelle l’imagination est un moyen d’expression de la liberté humaine confronté à l’horizon de la mort). Hans Belting insiste sur la manière dont le phénomène de la mort suscite l’imagination, en devenant une source importante dans la structuration de l’imaginaire d’une certaine époque ou d’une communauté (« L’expérience de la mort a été l’un des moteurs les plus puissants de la production humaine des images »). Dans ce contexte, le corps devient le repère symbolique privilégié.

L’histoire de la culture a décrit le corps humain, selon les circonstances, en employant parfois des métaphores. Dans le discours philosophique, celui-ci a été successivement envisagé comme: microcosme, tombeau, geôle, organisme, machine, automate. De la sorte, G. Deleuze et F. Guatari parlent du « corps – sans – organes » de la société capitaliste, et un certain Paul
Ardenne invoque les esthétiques disparitionnistes qui proclament « la mort du corps » et, à la fois, « le sacrifice de l’image » (Ardenne 2001, 441). Il est temps de faire ses adieux au corps... Pour ce monde gnôstique de la haine envers le corps humain qu’une partie de la culture virtuelle préfigure, le paradis devient obligatoire, un monde sans corps... La communication sans corps, sans visage même du réseau engendre des identités multiples. Le corps humain est par conséquent un élément facultatif (Le Bréton 2001, 259-263).

2. La métaphore « des tuniques de peau »

De nombreux philosophes, sociologues et des anthropologues envisagent le corps comme une « invention culturelle » et ils motivent leur option par le recours au moins à trois types d’explications: créationniste, artistique et scientifique (médicale).

La première, l’explication créationniste, est tirée de la Genèse (3, 21) et renvoie au fait que Dieu a créé les corps des premiers êtres humains à son image. Adam a été créé à partir de la poussière de la terre et animé du souffle divin, alors qu’Eve a pris naissance à partir d’une côte de son mari. Le texte nous dit que ceux-ci se promenaient dans le jardin d’Eden tout nus, sans avoir honte et qu’ultérieurement, après avoir commis le péché originel, ils se sont habillés de « tuniques de peau » (Et Yahveh Dieu fit à Adam et à sa femme des tuniques de peau et ils les en revêtit) et ont été exilés sur la terre. À ce moment-là, gênés par leur propre nudité, ils ont couvert leurs corps de feuilles de figuier. Le passage en question a donné naissance à plusieurs interprétations. Certains exégètes ont souligné l’ambiguïté et à la fois l’ambivalence de cette expression – envisagée comme une « clé » décisive même dans la compréhension de l’être humain et de l’histoire.

Dieu leur a fabriqué des « tuniques de peau » qu’ils ont dû porter parce que Celui-ci les a envoyés à commencer une nouvelle vie sur la Terre. Quelle serait par conséquent la signification de ce passage ? A la suite de sa désobéissance, l’homme est jeté du Paradis et obligé d’assumer sa faute. La perte de la perfection entraînera fatalement la dégradation, la perte de l’innocence, lors de la pénétration dans un ordre de la précarité biologique. L’homme se défait de son apparence céleste pour en revêtir une autre charnelle et éphémère. La mort pénètre ainsi dans le corps et dans la vie de l’être humain lorsque celui-ci s’éloigne de Dieu et il déchoit moralement.

Le Grec Panayotis Nellas, l’auteur d’un ouvrage d’anthropologie chrétienne, reprend quelques-uns des arguments patristiques et scolastiques forts pour conclure que « les tuniques de peau » sont une conséquence du péché originel et de la punition inhérente ultérieure. Par conséquent, le blasphème et la bénédiction divines, ce sont autant de moyens de remettre la mort, d’avoir une chance de survie et de retour au paradis céleste.
Qu’est que « les tuniques de peau » sont ? Bref, des corps humains mortels différenciés du point de vue sexuel (Philon, Origène, Ambroise) ou des habits, au sens fort du terme (Iriniée, les pères antiochiens) ou le signe de la corruption et de la mortalité (Hippolithe, Origène, Augustin). Vladimir Lossky, philosophe et théologien orthodoxe russe, considère que les « tuniques de peau » seraient notre nature actuelle, notre état naturel biologique actuel, complètement différent de la corporalité du paradis. Par l’évocation de ces aspects, on assiste à la création d’un nouveau cosmos, l’un qui se défend contre la finitude par le sexe, en fondant la loi de la naissance et de la mort (Nellas 2009, 40). Dans la vision de Panayotis Nellas « les tuniques de peau » représentent le « nouvel habit », celui avec lequel l’être humain affronte la mort (Nellas 2009, 111). En d’autres mots, les habits sont, aussi bien une conséquence du péché, que l’effet de l’intervention judicieuse de la divinité qui passent pour des chances de survie et de rédemption.

3. « Le défi » de Saint Barthélémy


Cependant, celui qui illustre de façon convaincante le moment de la « découverte du corps humain » est Michel Ange. Après un effort de sept ans, celui-ci a fini de peindre la scène du Jugement dernier, en recouvrant un mur entier de la Chapelle Sixtine. Les dimensions de la fresque sont impressionnantes et sa beauté en est une de singulière. Les critiques n’ont cependant pas hésité dès son inauguration même à sanctionner âprement « la conduite inconvenante » le manque de respect dont le peintre faisait preuve, en le souffrant dans une égale mesure de défi, d’obsénité et de blasphème. Trop de corps dénudés, trop de nudité – avaient pharisaïquement imputé quelques-uns des prélats de l’Eglise.

Le Jugement dernier renferme plusieurs scènes qui donnent lieu à des interprétations toutes chargées de symboles mystiques et religieux. La Saint Barthélémy, par exemple, qui figure au centre de l’image, aux pieds de Jésus Christ, tient dans ses mains une tunique de peau et sa représentation ne respecte pas le modèle iconographique de l’époque. Il n’est ni jeune, ni quelqu’un qui fait pousser sa première barbe, ni « écorché » vif, comme il était arrivé lors du martyr terrible qu’il avait souffert. Tout au contraire, la
Saint Barthélémy est intègre et sur la surface de la peau qui pend il y a *le visage de l’artiste* – un exemple classique d’« insertion» de la signature de l’artiste.

Matteo di Giovanni, *St. Bartholomé* (1480)  
Michelangelo, *St. Bartholomé* (1541)

Michel Ange fait allusion, à ce qu’il paraît, à l’épisode biblique de l’expulsion d’Adam et d’Eve du Paradis et aux tuniques de peau que les deux époux portaient pour ne pas être gênés par leur propre nudité. La pudeur est par conséquent une « trouvaille » chrétienne. En arrière-plan, nous pourrions croire que Michel Ange dénonce l’hypocrisie, la fausseté moralisatrice des moralistes d’occasion – des critiques de la nudité. Dans la fresque du *Jugement dernier*, la Saint Barthélémy abandonne « la tunique de peau » de la sacralité et la laisse tomber à l’enfer. Il laisse ainsi de côté la honte et il s’exhibe complètement nu, c’est-à-dire, en toute franchise. Il renonce à son masque, afin de refaire le langage de l’innocence perdue à l’aide des lambeaux de son habit charnel et, de cette manière, le corps idéalisé cède sa place à celui biologique, naturel.

4. « Les abandon » successifs du corps humain

Les artistes de la Renaissance transforment la morgue en l’une des places préférées pour l’étude et pour l’inspiration qu’elle confère aux peintres et aux anatomistes qui la fréquentent obsessivement. Dépourvu de tout intérêt macabre, le corps non animé est longuement étudié – le bistouri dans une main et le crayon dans l’autre, comme les ébauches de Léonard de Vinci le
témoignent encore aujourd'hui. Comment peut-on le connaître en profondeur, sinon en le disséquant pour le regarder de l’intérieur, en pénétrant au-delà du tissu éphémère ?

Andreas Vesalius Bruxellensis (1514-1564), un anatomiste d’origine flamande, est l’auteur de l’un des premiers livres d’anatomie humaine basée sur des dissections et sur des observations originales (*De humani corporis fabrica*, 1543), étant considéré comme l’initiateur de l’étude moderne de l’anatomie humaine. Le cadavre n’est qu’un corps quelconque, vidé de celui qu’il incarnait et réduit à la condition d’écorché ou de squelette, tel qu’il apparaît, par exemple, dans *Anatomia del corpo humano* (1560), l’ouvrage de Juan Valverde.

Dans la plupart des sociétés traditionnelles, l’image du corps était l’image de soi, ce qui révélait la convergence et la réciprocité des deux images. On ne considérait donc pas que le corps était différent de l’individu auquel il appartenait. Une fois les premières dissections officielles réalisées (au XVᵉ siècle), leur prolifération et leur banalisation accomplies (XVIᵉ et XVIIᵉ siècles), on est parvenu à faire la distinction entre corps et personne (Le Bréton 2001, 44). L’individualisme marque l’apparition de l’homme enfermé dans son corps, marque de sa différence, et cela surtout dans « l’épiphanie du visage » (Le Bréton 2001, 55).

Le corps devient une simple frontière entre les gens, la ligne de démarcation entre le moi et le toi. Après la parution de l’ouvrage de Vesalius, la mise en place de la notion de « corps » correspond à une triple rupture: l’homme est séparé de soi-même (on commence à opposer l’homme au corps, l’âme...
au corps, l’esprit au corps), des autres (après le passage de l’éthos communautaire à l’individualisme), de l’univers (la connaissance du corps ne dépend plus de la cosmologie) (Le Bréton 2001, 14-16). Le dualisme cartésien accentue la faille entre le corps et l’âme, envisagés comme deux substances distinctes/différentes. L’homme, c’est son âme et non pas son corps, bien que les deux semblent se confondre/être confondus (« Je ne suis point cet assemblage de membres, que l’on appelle le corps humain ») (Descartes 1970, 29). Le corps humain devient un simple accessoire, dépourvu d’importance. Descartes n’hésite pas à le comparer à un cadavre, à une « machine » composée de muscles, d’os, de nerfs, de veines, de sang et de chair ou à une horloge (« comme une horloge composée de roues et de contre-poids », affirme-t-il Descartes (Méditation VI) (Descartes 1970, 99).

L’étude anatomique revêt à la longue une direction artistique parce que les peintres, les sculpteurs et les dessinateurs s’efforcent à représenter toutes les intimités, les plis et toute la raideur du corps humain. L’écorché, c’est-à-dire la reproduction du corps sans peau, « écorché vif », constitue l’une des preuves déterminantes dans la plupart des écoles des « beaux-arts ». Une telle tradition prend naissance graduellement et parmi ses précurseurs français on retrouve Edme Bouchardon, Louis-Pierre Deseine, André-Pierre Pinson, succédés à distance par Cézanne, par van Gogh et par Matisse. Ajoutons ici le Roumain Constantin Brâncuși dont l’Ecorché (1902), réalisé à la fin de ses études faites à Bucarest, est considéré comme l’un des plus réussis des œuvres d’art de ce type.

Marco d’Agrate, St. Bartholomé (1562)  
C. Brâncuși, Ecorché (1902)
En revanche, de nos jours, Gunther von Hagens, un médecin anatomiste qui a inventé « la plastination ». Les cadavres humains qui sont écorchés, séchés et modelés prennent des postures dynamiques, voire audacieuses comme s’ils étaient vivants. Von Hagens pense avoir trouvé de la sorte une manière inédite de prolongation de la vie des corps humains, au-delà de leur disparition physique et ses expositions combinent le scandale à la fascination. C’est pourquoi, de nombreux donateurs virtuels se sont déjà inscrits sur une liste d’attente, en préparant leur voyage posthume, imprévisible, à travers les galeries et les musées où ils vont être admirés en tant qu’œuvres d’art.


Von Hagens propose assurément une perspective cynique et athée, en remarquant que la mort est le terme final de l’âme, alors que le corps est définitivement conservé. Comme l’être humain a la chance de survivre par l’intermédiaire de la conservation, il peut décider de vivre sa propre mort, en assumant consciemment un rôle dans la perspective de l’éternité. Une fois devenu acteur, le cadavre remplira le rôle anticipé par le donateur ou attribué par le metteur en scène de la mort, ce qui veut dire que, dans les spectacles de Von Hagens, le paradis des corps humains est comme une arène de cirque macabre. Le corps humain devient sans faute l’acteur d’un théâtre macabre, source d’un divertissement morbide étrange.
5. L'identité, constitue-t-elle un problème ?

La philosophie moderne associe en général le corps humain à une machine ou à un automate, en le dévalorisant de la sorte, ce qui détermine David Le Breton à relever le problème du lien entre l’identité et le corps. En d’autres mots, il nous invite à établir quel est le rôle du corps humain dans la définition de la personne (Le Bréton 2001, 13). Compte-t-il encore, lors d’un effort normal d’individualisation ?

Le corps de l’homme contemporain marque plutôt la limite entre deux individus en soi ; celui-ci étant considéré comme différent de la personne incarnée, car, à ce qu’il paraît, l’être humain n’habite plus son propre corps. Les études de David Le Breton sur l’imaginaire du corps confirment une réalité difficile à contester: l’homme n’est pas à l’aise à côté des autres, mais il essaie d’être bien « dans sa peau », en accord avec lui-même. Le corps humain devient ainsi une sorte d’« écran » ou une image sur lesquels on peut projeter un sentiment identitaire toujours remaniable et, par conséquent, l’anatomie n’est plus un destin, comme Freud le pensait, mais une instance facile à modifier. S’appuyant sur la dispute qu’il mène avec soi-même ou sur son estime de soi toujours diminuée, l’être humain recourt à un véritable « bricolage identitaire », en corrigeant ou en améliorant en cours de route ses qualités physiques. Le corps humain devient de la sorte un « brouillon » qui attend à être pris au sérieux ou achevé. Pour les orientations techniques et scientifiques de la modernité, le corps humain est une esquisse, un brouillon dont il importe de contrôler et d’améliorer les performances (Le Bréton 2001, 263).


Le corps, c’est un brouillon incapable d’incarner le soi si celui-ci n’est pas transformé … Quand l’identité personnelle est en question à travers les remaniements incessants de sens et de valeurs qui marquent la modernité quand les autres se font moins présents, que la reconnaissance de soi fait problème,
même si ce n’est pas à un niveau très aigu, il reste en effet le corps pour faire entendre une revendication d’existence. Il s’agit de faire de soi une écriture par l’intermédiaire des signes de la consommation ou, au pire, par la somatisation. (Le Bréton 2001, 180).

D’ici dérive le besoin de masques, de stratégies réparatrices et de trucs cosmétiques, en témoignant d’un narcissisme généralisé.


6. Conclusion


References


Alina Silvana FELEA *

**L’interprétation de l’oeuvre littéraire en débat:**
notes à ajouter à un dossier ouvert

**The interpretation of the literary work in debate:**
notes to be added to an open file

**Abstract:** The article starts from the question of whether there can be symmetry between the literary work and its interpretation and to what extent. Gregory Currie states that the debate on the issue of interpretation is deemed to fail when distinguishing between objective and relative, absolute and plural, respectively. Considering these opposites, we aim at discussing a series of literary works, namely Henry James’s *Figure in the Carpet*, Vladimir Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* and David Lodge’s *Small World*. These texts ironically deplore critical “helplessness”, thematically depicting the difficulty and even failure of interpretation. However, interpretation is legitimate not necessarily as a matter of accounting for the literary work, but more in terms of performance, regulation and adaptation to personal problems or the social and cultural context.

**Keywords:** interpretation, literary work, absolutism, objectivism, pluralism, relativism

1. **Introduction**

«The sometimes confused debate over whether literary interpretation can aspire to objectivity suffers from a failure to distinguish between two contrast pairs: the objective-relativistic, and the absolute-pluralistic, which cut across one another»¹. Ces distinctions appartenant à Gregory Currie peuvent représenter un outil méthodologique dès que l’on cherche à distinguer les voies ouvertes par et pour l’interprétation littéraire. Il s’agit d’une cristallisation basée sur des polarités, produite au cours des deux derniers siècles autour d’une question noyau: est-il possible de trouver une symétrie parfaite entre l’œuvre littéraire et son interprétation? Une cristallisation plutôt théorique, puisque dans la pratique critique, l’objectivisme est souvent confondu avec l’absolutisme et le relativisme avec le pluralisme. La compréhension du processus qu’implique l’interprétation est difficile et complexe, engendrant de nombreux dilemmes qui ont préoccupé et préoccupent non seulement les critiques et les théoriciens, mais les écrivains aussi. Les œuvres littéraires discutées ici revêtent, comme lieu de manifestation

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d'une arrière-scène, une légère ironie envers les questions épineuses de l'interprétation. Une possible explication de cette distance prise par les créateurs réside dans les tensions qui ont presque toujours existé entre l'écrivain d'une part et le critique littéraire d'autre part. Mais les problèmes restent les mêmes quelle que soit la perspective, celle des écrivains ou bien celle des herméneutes ou des théoriciens.

2. La doctrine du sens unique. L'absolutisme

En 1896, Henry James fait paraître *The Figure in the Carpet* (L'image dans le tapis), une œuvre littéraire construite sur une idée très en vogue à cette époque-là. Il s'agit, essentiellement, de la recherche des significations « cachées » dans la création artistique, significations qui ne sont ni visibles ni à la portée de tous. La problématique cadre devenait ainsi le rapport de l'œuvre à son interprétation, les difficultés que ce rapport engendre, les défis qu'une telle interprétation doit relever. La nouvelle thématise l'abîme creusé entre l'auteur d'une part et d’autre part le critique narrateur, la voix sans nom qui raconte une histoire qui a tous les ingrédients d’un best-seller (le suspens inclus!). Hugh Vereker, unanimement reconnu comme un très bon écrivain, est pour nous le prototype du créateur, peut-être un *alter ego* de Henry James lui-même. En ce cas, la configuration d’une mise en abyme, d’une réflexion métadiscursive sur le processus créatif deviennent évidentes. Vereker a construit et laborieusement ciselé pendant toute sa vie l’*opéra magna*, l'œuvre majeure. Le fondement de cette œuvre est une signification globale, un sens évident et pourtant caché pour les yeux de ceux qui regardent mais ne voient pas ce qui est apparemment si simple, si direct. Il s'agit donc d'une signification qui n’est pas donnée dans la transparence, mais qui se présente comme dissimulée. George Corvick, l’autre critique, avec l’intuition de ce sens caché, devient la garantie de l’existence réelle d’une telle signification. Lui et le critique narrateur de la nouvelle partent, dans une vraie compétition, à la recherche de ce qui passe, d’un défi à l'intelligence, à une question existentielle!

On sait que l’écrivain pose des questions, des problèmes et en même temps y donne les réponses. Mais tout se passe à l’intérieur de l’œuvre artistique avec des instruments spécifiques qui ne sont pas les instruments des critiques, les lecteurs professionnels. Les créateurs ne traduisent et n’expliquent pas leurs intentions ou leurs œuvres! Ils disent tout ce qu’ils veulent dire dans leurs textes. Vereker attendait depuis toujours l’interprétation comprenant l’intention générale de son œuvre, la seule lecture adéquate. En même temps, l’orgueil du créateur, son orgueil, nourrit l’espérance qu’il sera pour toujours le seul bénéficiaire de cette vérité. Le jeune critique enthousiaste et motivé par la promesse d’une réussite pleine de gloire (il pouvait réussir là où d’autres avaient échoué) écrit un essai éclatant, intelligent,
profond. Son interprétation, appréciée par d'autres lecteurs, est totalement ignorée par l'écrivain parce qu'elle ne se différencie pas des autres commentaires « aveugles ». C'est le moment où Henry James contredit une conviction qui garde son autorité aujourd'hui encore. Il nous suggère que la lecture attentive, l'intelligence et l'acuité de l'observation ne sont pas toujours suffisantes. La réussite de l'interprétation est indissolublement liée à la découverte d'un sens et non de n'importe quel sens, mais le sens déposé délibérément dans l'œuvre par son créateur. Intentio auctoris coïncide par conséquent avec l'intentio operis !

Mais s'il n'y a qu'une seule interprétation vraie, authentique, celui qui sait qu'il n'est pas l'élu (l'auteur est très avare avec les indices et confirme uniquement la réussite ou l'insuccès) perdra peu à peu non pas l'intérêt, mais quelque chose de plus important encore: le plaisir de la lecture. À sa place, la déception. L'effort sans résultat devient de plus en plus pénible et la profession de l'herméneute maudite. D'autre part, l'écrivain lui-même a besoin d'une confirmation, d'une conscience garante qui le rejoigne dans son royaume et en reconnaîsse, d'une manière objective, la supériorité. C'est Corvick qui intervient ici et qui cherche, lui aussi, d'une manière obsessionnelle la réponse à l'énigme de l'œuvre de Vereker. Il entreprend un long voyage et laisse la distance nécessaire (la distance impliquée par tout examen critique) intervenir et clarifier dans sa conscience le secret, l'essence, le fondement de cette œuvre qu'il connaissait déjà par cœur. Le fait que Vereker même lui confirme la réussite représente l'idée de la possibilité d'un accord, d'une harmonie entre écrivain et critique. Il en résulte la supériorité d'une œuvre qui a comme réplique, sur le plan discursif de la critique, une seule interprétation, l'interprétation absolue. Si dans la nouvelle tout restait à cet état, la conception artistique de James serait facilement attaquable ou discutable. Mais il résout génialement (comme seul un écrivain de sa taille pouvait le faire) le problème de cette signification unique. Il n'en donne pas de précisions. Elle reste à peine suggérée et non dévoilée. La mort de Corvick dans un accident avant qu'il ne puisse parler à tous de sa découverte, le refus de sa veuve de révéler le secret qu'elle seule avait appris de lui, nous plongent à la fin de la nouvelle dans une confusion totale (voir James 1896, 1996).

Henry James est le type d'écrivain qui préfère garder le mystère et laisser le lecteur donner ses propres réponses. Il le laisse aussi se poser des questions. Comme, par exemple, si Henry James en tant qu'écrivain avait construit lui-même son œuvre avec une intention générale, une signification qui révèle sa richesse avec chaque élément (de contenu ou de forme). Ou, peut-être, compte-t-il avec la curiosité habituelle des lecteurs, avec leur désir presque incontrôlé et élémentaire d'être les décrypteurs émerveillés des secrets des œuvres d'art. Il n'y a pas de doute que l'œuvre ne se laisse pas déchiffrer par tout le monde, qu'il n'y a pas d'analyse finale révélée, que celui qui a trouvé « le trésor » meurt prématurément d'une manière accidentelle.
L'interprétation de l'œuvre littéraire en débat: notes à ajouter à un dossier ouvert

comme beaucoup de ceux qui ont trouvé des trésors maudits. Le sens ainsi que la vérité d’une œuvre sont devenus des questions de vie ou de mort non seulement pour George Corvick, mais aussi pour sa femme qui va avouer que cette signification est sa vie même! Il en résulte que le commentaire peut être une activité banale et parfois pleine de platitudes, tel que « exceptionnellement talentueux », un simple bavardage sans aucun rapport avec l'interprétation authentique. Celle-ci implique une dimension existentielle, c’est une révélation qui touche à l’essence même de l’être humain! L'interprétation authentique est donc attachée à un sens profond, unique, mais lourd de conséquences. Théoriquement! Parce que tout ce que l’écrivain (Vereker et Henry James lui-même) nous offre reste au niveau de la généralité. C’est une promesse jamais tenue, la confirmation partielle de l’illusion qui nourrit l’imagination du créateur et celle de son lecteur également: l’illusion qu’il y a une vérité de l’œuvre, une signification ultime. Mais, concrètement, on reste seulement avec la réalité décevante des interprétations échouées. Tout le monde ne parvient pas à la connaissance du sens absolu, on en parle, en effet, mais est-ce qu’il existe réellement?

Wolfgang Iser traduisait ainsi le message de cette nouvelle: l’œuvre ne permet pas qu’on lui arrache son secret et le texte de fiction se refuse à être consommé. Au niveau le plus subtil, cette création qui thématise la tentation de la découverte d’un sens absolu, laisse au lecteur la possibilité de décider, de croire ou pas à cette signification, de faire des suppositions concernant ce sens puisque pour James « writer and reader are partners on equal terms », écrivain et lecteur sont des partenaires à part entière! Les conceptions artistiques et théoriques de James, qui était fasciné par la question de la lecture, l’ont propulsé, après une longue période d’oubli, parmi les écrivains les plus importants et aussi parmi les prédécesseurs des reader-response theory pour lesquelles les textes deviennent sens seulement après leur lecture. Pourtant, à cette époque-là, l’idée de l’hégémonie du sens était évidente, un édifice qui commençait à perdre sa stabilité. On le voit déjà dans l’incertitude qui baigne l’image dans le tapis, c’est-à-dire une arabesque qui ne se lit pas facilement, qui existe à condition d’y croire, sans pour autant pouvoir vérifier, évidente et quand même cachée.

3. L’objectivisme non plus n’est pas à la portée de tout le monde

La conception de l’interprétation littéraire connaît au XXᵉ siècle des perspectives très diversifiées. Dans la relation auteur-œuvre-interprétant les accents sont fluctuants et le changement le plus notable consiste peut-être dans la perte pour l’auteur de son autorité. Longuement maintenu sur un piédestal, le créateur n’est plus un tabou, situation qui se radicalise jusqu’à la déclaration de « sa mort ». 

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Dans le roman de Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (*Feu pâle*), paru en 1962, on n’est pas encore arrivé à ce point extrême. Le poète, John Shade, jouit de l’estime et de l’admiration de son milieu et de ses lecteurs dans toute l’Amérique. Le personnage narrateur, le professeur Charles Kinbote, occupant la place de l’interprétant du poème final du poète, ne fait pas exception dans ce concert laudatif. Pourtant, il est très loin de la foule, c’est du moins ce qu’il veut faire croire à ses propres lecteurs. Sa fabuleuse histoire de roi fugitif d’un pays imaginaire, Zembla, mais qui passe pour vrai dans le monde du roman, lui assure un statut remarquable. Le roi, Charles Xavier le Bien Aimé, alias Charles Kinbote pour ceux qui ne le connaissent pas, n’est pas comme les autres. Non seulement grâce aux aventures de sa vie de roi cachant son identité pour se protéger contre ceux qui veulent le tuer, aventures racontées dans les pages qui devraient être le commentaire du poème *Feu pâle* de John Shade. Mais surtout parce qu’une relation toute spéciale le lie sans aucun doute à « son poète » pour lequel il éprouve un grand sentiment d’admiration. Son intime conviction est qu’il voit en Shade ce que les autres ne voient pas, c’est-à-dire, une présence fabuleuse. De plus, il se croit le témoin privilégié de la transformation du monde dans le creuset du poète, fait qui lui donne un ascendant sur les autres. C’est l’ascendant qu’il revendique sans appel mais est-ce qu’il le mérite vraiment ? Une question pour le lecteur déçu dans ses attentes. Il a devant lui deux textes : le poème de John Shade et le « commentaire » de Kinbote sous la forme des notes aux vers, en fait un autre texte, un roman aux accents poétiques, aucunement pertinent pour le poème. Le commentateur qui assume ce rôle comme son privilège, le privilège d’un roi qui est en même temps – on l’apprend par ses aveux – un très bon professeur de littérature, se situe très loin aussi du critique narrateur de la nouvelle de Henry James. La réputation du génie poétique ne l’intimide pas, au contraire, il le considère comme son égal. À ses dires, parce que nous avons une perspective unilatérale sur les événements, celle de Kinbote, John Shade préférerait sa compagnie, fait envoyé par tout le voisinage académique. De plus, le poète voulait demander l’avis de son voisin et ami après lui avoir lu son poème. Par conséquent, Charles Kinbote estime que son droit d’être, après la mort du poète, son commentateur est évident et incontestable. La distorsion du travail que présume traditionnellement un commentaire est expliquée par des circonstances toutes particulières. Kinbote, convaincu qu’un pacte secret le lie à son poète, croit que celui-ci écrit une espèce de « romaut » sur le roi de Zembla, une histoire basée sur tout ce que Kinbote lui raconte jour après jour. Mais la lecture du poème de John Shade, longuement attendue, s’avère être une terrible et amère déception pour Kinbote. À la place de son histoire « glorieuse, romanesque et sauvage », l’œuvre autobiographique du poète, un récit « foncièrement appalachien, plutôt démodé, dans un style prosodique néo-Pope – très bien écrit naturellement – Shade ne pouvait écrire que très bien... » (Nabokov
1965, 257) mais rien de la soi-disant « magie » des histoires zembliennes ne subsistait dans les vers. En dépit de cette désillusion, Charles Kinbote s’engage à faire le travail de commentateur pour rendre service à son cher poète et surtout pour déceler dans le poème *Feu pâle* « des échos et des paillettes » de son esprit de roi amoureux de son pays, « les vaguelettes du long sillage » de sa gloire et « toutes les nombreuses dettes subliminales contractées » envers lui par le poète John Shade... (Nabokov 1965, 257)

La forte implication personnelle dans le commentaire le transforme pratiquement en roman. Ce qui reste comme référence directe au poème se veut quand même discours critique objectif. Et on voit maintenant pourquoi il est très facile de confondre l’absolutisme interprétatif avec l’objectivisme interprétatif. C’est bien évident que l’arrogance de Kinbote le détermine à croire que ce qu’il écrit dans ses notes sur ce poème peut être regardé comme l’unique commentaire possible, satisfaisant certainement « le lecteur le plus vorace ». Pourtant, ce n’est plus l’absolutisme en discussion. Ainsi les lecteurs sont-ils avertis dans l’introduction écrite par Charles Kinbote qu’il est « le seul responsable des erreurs » de son commentaire. L’unité de l’interprétation absolutiste est ainsi mise en question, mais ce fait ne représente pas le signe d’une défaillance ou d’un manque de confiance en soi de la part de l’herméneute. On apprend que « pour le meilleur ou pour le pire, c’est le commentateur qui a le dernier mot » ! La rocade entre l’écrivain et son critique quant à l’interprétation est ainsi explicite et l’admiration envers le génie du créateur n’équivaut plus à la soumission du critique face à la personnalité de celui-ci. Les intentions et les significations désirées par le poète ne sont plus essentielles. C’est l’herméneute qui a le dernier mot et ce n’est pas dramatique ou très grave si le commentaire n’est pas dans l’assentiment de l’auteur d’une œuvre littéraire. D’ici à la déclaration solennelle de la mort de l’écrivain, il n’y a qu’un pas ! Mais l’objectivisme a besoin de « standards » ou de critères considérés comme pertinents pour juger une œuvre littéraire. Et ces repères sont offerts dans la même introduction: la réalité humaine d’un poème comme celui de John Shade doit reposer entièrement, dit Charles Kinbote, « sur la réalité de son auteur et de son entourage, de ses affections et ainsi de suite, une réalité que seules mes notes peuvent fournir » (Nabokov 1965, 27). Pourtant, l’invocation des critères et des principes objectifs ne garantit pas l’objectivité réelle. En fait, seulement l’évidence est celle qui ne peut pas être contredite. Et dans le cas de ce commentaire trompeur, le lecteur est obligé d’avoir une attitude. Soit qu’il croit Kinbote et se contente d’un simulacre de commentaire, soit que, irrité par l’autosuffisance du personnage, il accepte les notes en tant qu’un roman plus qu’une interprétation au poème de Shade. Et l’auteur de ce livre, qui ne peut pas être confondu avec le narrateur fictionnel, prend subtilement et aussi ironiquement sa revanche contre le prototype de commentateur vaniteux et très convaincu que ses lecteurs seront pleinement satisfaits. Une
interprétation « objective » plutôt ratée ou détournée de ses visées qui met une fois de plus en doute les possibilités herméneutiques.

4. **Du pluralisme à un relativisme voisinant avec le nihilisme**

Plus proche de notre actualité, David Lodge, dans un de ses romans dédiés au milieu universitaire, *Small World*, parle, dans un discours totalement différent, de la même réalité, celle de l’interprétation qui échoue (Lodge 1995). Lodge, ancien professeur d’université et théoricien, choisit la modalité d’une conférence donnée par un de ses personnages pour caricaturer le désir de tout dire sur une œuvre littéraire. Morris Zapp, professeur aux États-Unis invité en Angleterre, est le représentant typique d’une culture non conservatrice, lui permettant d’être nonchalant, spontané et très direct dans ses propos. Les métaphores qu’il choisit choquent l’audience qui a des réactions que Lodge considère avec humour, mais ses idées, malgré leur forme originale, si on les met dans un contexte, ne sont ni neuves ni inédites. Il s’agit des théories assidûment véhiculées à la fin du vingtième siècle. Zapp parle à son auditoire de son expérience, d’une illusion quant à l’existence de la possibilité du commentaire. Il croyait, comme beaucoup de critiques d’ailleurs, que le but de la lecture est d’établir la signification du texte. Par conséquent, il avait essayé, en tant que spécialiste de Jane Austin, d’épuiser les perspectives d’analyse des romans de cette écrivaine, qui sont les perspectives d’analyse de n’importe quel autre auteur: historique, biographique, rhétorique, mythique, structuraliste, freudienne, marxiste, existentialiste, allégorique, éthique, phénoménologique, etc. On adopte donc la doctrine du pluralisme. Mais cette ambition n’est-elle pas celle de tous ceux qui veulent être les détenteurs de la vraie signification, du jugement construit d’une manière exhaustive, totale, comme accumulation cette fois-ci des perspectives critiques ? On parle ici de la même illusion qu’animaient le critique narrateur de la nouvelle de James, c’est-à-dire l’illusion que la lecture attentive et intelligente, ainsi que le travail fait avec attention et sérieux, peuvent conduire au constat qu’il n’y a plus rien à dire !

L’explication de cet échec, cette fois-ci, réside dans la nature même du langage: la signification est en permanence transférée d’un signifiant à l’autre, une instabilité fondamentale qui détermine l’impossibilité de la fixation des sens. Et puis, Morris Zapp introduit dans son exposé le parallèle qui fait tout le piquant de ce discours. Le texte littéraire ressemble très bien à un numéro de strip-tease. La danseuse tente son public avec la promesse d’une révélation finale qui est retardée à l’infini. En fait, c’est l’attente qui est palpitante et pas le fait de se dévêtir comme tel ! Car un secret dévoilé n’intéresse plus et on en a besoin d’un autre. Un truc que Henry James connaissait aussi, puisqu’il a maintenu l’intérêt sans imaginer un dévoilement du secret. La tentative de voir le noyau même du texte, dit toujours Morris
Zapp, est inutile, on se retrouve soi-même et non pas l’œuvre. Par conséquent, le texte s’offre au regard, mais il n’est jamais possédé ! Ce scepticisme fondamental, quant à la possibilité d’une certitude, proféré spécialement par le post-structuralisme et le déconstructivisme, suscite presque instantanément une question. Si tout est arbitraire et un accord entre texte et lectrices, entre lectrices-eux-mêmes est impossible, s’il n’y a pas de vérités certaines, à quoi bon l’interprétation, le commentaire ? Et la réponse cynique de Morris Zapp, qui clôt la discussion, n’est pas du tout une véritable réponse: on continue avec cette activité, même si on sait très bien qu’elle est un effort inutile, pour maintenir les institutions universitaires ! C’est un devoir, un rituel que la société impose et rien de plus !

De toute façon, l’auteur de l’œuvre littéraire se perd pratiquement dans cette multitude des points de vue focalisés surtout sur le texte. À tour de rôle l’auteur, l’herméneute et l’œuvre elle-même ont gagné le devant de la scène sans pour autant être les vrais gagnants dans cette compétition interprétative. Le pluralisme non plus, avec son ambition exhaustive, ne résout pas le problème du texte. C’est pour cette raison que, dans la conférence de Morris Zapp, il laisse la place au relativisme pour lequel n’importe quelle interprétation est valable puisqu’il n’y a pas de signification qui réussisse réellement à dévoiler la nature intime du texte.

5. Tour d’horizon

Le constat d’échec concernant l’interprétation dans les textes invoqués est une conclusion à laquelle on arrive par des voies bien différentes. La première, celle du texte de Henry James, est tributaire de la conception qui valorise l’unicité, la stabilité, la vérité singulière, la compétition pour la prééminence d’une seule variante gagnante. Et c’est la philologie la discipline qui avait pour but la détermination d’un sens vrai ou hautement probable dans un texte. « Tant en philosophie qu’en littérature – notait George Steiner dans son essai Le sens du sens – cette herméneutique est fondée sur le souci de la clarté et sur l’accumulation des preuves, sur la recherche du sens et de la valeur les plus probables et les plus légitimes, dans la pleine conscience que l’interprétation est toujours une relation entre l’interprète et l’auteur et que l’interprète est par la force des choses, lui aussi, un créateur » (Steiner 1988, 18).

Bien sûr, l’œuvre de Henry James peut suggérer l’échec non seulement de l’interprétation unique, absolue mais aussi celui de la doctrine de l’absolutisme. Le roman de Nabokov met indirectement en discussion un type d’attitude critique qui n’est plus tributaire des « vérités » que l’auteur a voulu communiquer dans son œuvre. Emancipé des dettes envers l’intention de l’écrivain, qui complexaient autrefois son ancêtre, l’interprétant littéraire assume son rôle avec courage, mais lui aussi a besoin d’un moyen de
prouver qu’il mérite d’être écouté et approuvé. Il cherche alors comme garant un autre point de référence que la conscience de l’auteur et le trouve dans des critères ou des principes qui doivent nécessairement être objectifs. Puisque tout ce qui passe pour objectif au XXème siècle est indiscutable, la réussite paraît certaine. Pourtant, le domaine littéraire n’est pas adhérent aux critères universellement valables. Le renvoi aux principes de valorisation soi-disant objectifs n’a pour résultat le consensus des lecteurs (philosophes, critiques ou amateurs) ni pour le commentaire de Kinbote au poème de Shade ni pour les orientations critiques aux ambitions « scientifiques ». Alors, y a-t-il vraiment des critères d’appréciation fondés objectivement ?

Et, finalement, la voie que le roman de David Lodge révèle est le résultat d’une longue et très riche expérience critique accumulée à travers le vingtième siècle. Une époque qui a été, à ce niveau-là, l’expression de l’avènement de la critique littéraire, de la polysémie, de la multiplicité et de l’acceptation des vérités diverses, qui peuvent même se contredire, mais qui passent toutes pour plausibles. Le passage de l’un au multiple dans l’activité critique a paru être la solution adéquate du dilemme de savoir quelles sont les analyses, les interprétations qu’on doit accepter parmi les nombreux systèmes théoriques proposés. La coexistence s’est imposée comme un principe *sine qua non*. Et pourtant, Morris Zapp, le personnage du roman de David Lodge, parle de l’impossibilité de l’interprétation. Si la recherche d’un sens unique, le sens de l’œuvre, a été vouée à l’échec, si la somme des interprétations n’est pas non plus la solution juste, la question qui surgit est de savoir quel sera pour l’avenir le chemin que va prendre l’examen critique, l’herméneutique du texte littéraire.

6. Que peut-on savoir sur l’interprétation ?

La mise en évidence des aspects généraux, des lois qui concernent l’interprétation – c’est-à-dire la pratique de l’herméneutique réservée aux objets textuels peut s’avérer utile. Mais la révélation d’une des sources fondamentales des erreurs et des dilemmes s’impose comme étape préliminaire. Il s’agit de la très fréquente confusion discutée par E. D. Hirsch (1967) entre compréhension (*understanding*) et interprétation (*interpretation*). La compréhension représente l’accès à la signification logique, commune d’un texte. Pour être correcte, si l’on s’en soucie, elle doit remplir quelques conditions. Jean-Marie Schaeffer en parle de quatre: a) « Le lecteur doit identifier correctement le cadre pragmatique de l’œuvre (il doit notamment être capable de distinguer entre texte factuel et texte de fiction) »; b) « Il doit identifier correctement les significations des phrases (*sentence meaning*) fixées par les règles syntaxiques et sémantiques de la langue dans laquelle le texte est écrit »; c) « Il doit identifier les sens de l’énonciation du locuteur ou du scripteur (*speaker’s utterance meaning*) » parce qu’il y a aussi des actes de lan-
gage indirects comme les métaphores et/ou la fiction; d) « Il doit intégrer ces actes de compréhension dans un ensemble de représentations mentales transphrastiques » (Schaeffer 1998, 22-23).

Quant à l’interprétation (interprétation), elle traduit plutôt la signification ou la signification portant la marque de l’impact sur le lecteur ou, autrement dit, ce que la signification du texte représente pour lui. Et si on parle de la métatextualité, la relation critique dite de « commentaire » qui unit un texte primaire à un autre texte, produit justement par le processus de l’interprétation, elle n’est pas obligatoire pour tout lecteur et toute lecture. Dans nos textes, les personnages confrontés aux défis de l’interprétation sont des critiques, des lecteurs professionnels. Leur lecture est basée et doit être basée sur la réflexion et le jugement raisonné. Mais, toujours dans cette pratique, c’est le jugement de goût qui intervient, parfois l’atout de l’interprétant, parfois son point faible, vulnérable, justement parce que la valeur n’est pas une propriété de l’objet textuel, elle est une propriété relationnelle. C’est pourquoi l’essai de commentaire, l’analyse, l’exégèse ou la glose doivent inculquer à leurs pratiquants le souci de s’interroger à chaque instant sur la validité des moyens d’expression. D’autant plus qu’il y a de multiples critères d’évaluation qui ont déterminé et déterminent l’élargissement du champ de la notion d’interprétation. Le critique a la mission d’aller au-delà du texte pour éclaircir ce que le document suggère, présuppose ou sous-entend. Et puisqu’il est l’arpenteur d’un travail fondé sur des réalités qui ne sont pas tout à fait transparentes, il doit être plausible, prouver à ses lecteurs que les hypothèses qu’il développe sur le texte sont conformes à la spécificité de celui-ci. Comme Jean-Marie Schaeffer le souligne,

Le critique nous propose des pistes pour notre propre engagement esthétique, étant entendu qu’il incombe à chacun d’expérimenter pour lui-même si la voie proposée lui agréée ou non. Ce qui fait le prix d’un texte critique, ce n’est donc pas qu’il nous dise comment il faut apprécier, mais qu’il nous indique des voies possibles d’une attention esthétique satisfaisante ou qu’il nous amène à nous demander si nous ne nous contentons peut être pas de satisfactions bien maigres (Schaeffer 1996, 247).

Le discours critique n’a, bien sûr, rien d’une démonstration mathématique et le principe de validité n’équivaut pas à celui de vérité. Il s’agit d’une activité dans laquelle on exerce un jugement, on évalue en fonction de critères complexes sans pour autant pouvoir prendre appui sur aucune certitude objective. Il n’y a pas de neutralité possible. En fait, chacun a ses propres adhésions épistémologiques, idéologiques ou métaphysiques dont il est volens non volens tributaire. La critique littéraire repose sur des jugements de valeurs, sur la nécessité de la décision et du choix. Ce qui est certain, c’est le fait que l’activité d’interprétation implique la subjectivité, mais on peut légitimement se demander si l’arbitraire n’est pas lui aussi implicité...
7. Le noyau dur du texte littéraire

Wolfgang Iser (1985, 2001) donne une explication plus technique à la distance qui se crée entre le texte et sa réplique, l’analyse critique. Il constate que l’interprétation est une forme de traduction et le passage se fait d’un objet (celui qu’on désire interpréter) à un « registre » (register) de nature linguistique. Le « registre » n’est jamais l’image de son objet, raison pour laquelle il se crée dans le processus d’interprétation une « différence », un « espace liminal » (liminal space) qui constitue un frein à l’interprétation et en même temps un stimulus générateur de cette interprétation. Autrement dit, tout comme la mimésis n’est pas la copie de la réalité, l’analyse n’est pas tout à fait l’image dans le miroir d’un texte primaire, puisque ses couches de sens ne sont pas épuisables et prêtes à être consommées une fois pour toutes. Et c’est justement cette nature inépuisable qui exige l’examen critique et la réévaluation des traditions artistiques du passé, la justification à nouveau de la place des textes. La théorie d’Iser est fondée sur le présupposé qu’un texte est une structure d’indétermination et le sens ne réside pas dans l’objet comme un trésor attendant d’être découvert. Il apparaît plutôt comme une potentialité activée seulement dans le processus d’interprétation. Iser estime comme essentiel le rôle de l’interprétant puisque c’est lui qui fait parler le texte dans les structures d’indétermination. D’autres théoriciens ont vu ces structures d’indétermination comme l’affirmation d’une insuffisance, d’une incomplétude du texte. Toutefois, pour Roman Ingarden, le premier à parler des « lieux d’indétermination », il ne s’agit pas d’un attribut exclusif de l’œuvre littéraire, mais d’un trait plus général de la symbolisation humaine. Il s’en suit que seulement l’objet réel « ontologiquement autonome et individuel » soit déterminé de manière univoque. L’objet figuré, quant à lui, présente (on peut dire fatalement ou heureusement) des zones d’indétermination (Ingarden 1983).

Mais pour revenir à la question de l’interprétation, on se trouve face à un autre paradoxe parce que si le commentaire justifie l’œuvre telle qu’elle est, parfaite et riche en significations, il postule en même temps une forme d’insuffisance, l’explication supplémentée. En fait, l’interprétant prétend dire la vérité de l’autre, de l’écrivain, une vérité que celui-ci ne peut pas dire d’une manière très explicite. Et alors ne peut-on pas dire que le critique prétend « faire mieux » que l’artiste ? Et alors ne pouvons-nous comprendre les raisons de ce conflit séculaire qui oppose le créateur à son critique ? L’échec de l’interprétation dans les fictions discutées y trouve une possible explication. Iser, et non seulement lui, passait le contrôle, l’autorité du côté de l’herméneute, fait qui n’annule pas les incertitudes concernant l’activité de celui qui se confronte au texte. Par exemple, comment savoir à quel
ordre de choses, parmi toutes celles qui composent une œuvre, il convient de donner le pas ? Puisque l’interprétant a le libre choix et cette liberté est à la fois le principe de propulsion de son travail et son talon d’Achille. Est-ce qu’on peut oser dire que n’importe quelle interprétation est légitime (comme le fait par exemple le déconstructivisme) ? Et d’autre part, comment prouver au critique qu’il excède son rôle, s’il le fait vraiment, qu’il déforme ou peut-être néglige des aspects qu’un autre considère comme essentiels ? Qui a l’autorité de dire qu’une opinion peut et doit s’imposer, autant qu’on peut la refuser, et à juste raison si on n’a pas de critères valides permettant de hiérarchiser les poétiques et les méthodes littéraires ? Il convient de dire que plusieurs positions critiques sont légitimes mais qu’on n’oublie pas l’importance de la didactique de l’explication de texte. Ce qui implique l’idée d’un rôle public de cette activité. Et par conséquent d’une responsabilité que les critiques doivent assumer. Mais quels critiques ?.... Face à tous ces problèmes et difficultés que la question de l’interprétation du texte soulève, n’est-il pas presque logique de parler d’une entreprise vouée à l’échec ? La persistance et, on peut même dire, la prédominance et la puissance du modèle de l’analyse littéraire, du commentaire annule ce présupposé.

8. Le domaine métalittéraire aujourd’hui et la place de l’interprétation

De toute évidence, on ne peut pas se dispenser de l’activité critique. En même temps, on remarque que le champ des études littéraires fait l’objet de réaménagements importants, affectant la vision mise en œuvre par chaque interprétation. Après les ismes de toute sorte du vingtième siècle (formalisme, new criticism, structuralisme, déconstructivisme, etc.), aujourd’hui on constate la difficulté à s’accorder sur les idéologies littéraires à venir. On ne croit plus à la possibilité scientifique et objective de « disséquer » un texte pour apprendre les secrets de son fonctionnement, il y a, d’autre part, un nouvel intérêt concernant la question de l’auteur (on voit se rouvrir le débat sur la mort de l’auteur). C’est l’époque du renouveau de l’approche historique du littéraire et le contexte de l’œuvre (une œuvre qui n’est plus isolée dans sa matérialité !) est reconsidéré. De plus en plus, la littérature est décrite comme une activité de communication. L’importance de nos jours des orientations telles que Cultural Studies, Post-Colonialism, Media Studies en représente un argument très fort. Une autre tendance qu’on peut lire dans les manifestations culturelles contemporaines est la volonté de retrouver une unité, il s’agit d’un possible redécouvert de la « métaphysique de l’un », donc le retour des catégories longtemps soumises à une critique virulente. Dans ce concert, y a-t-il une possibilité quelconque de rechercher les sens uniques,
authentiques qui peuvent légitimer l’analyse critique ? La nécessité des certitudes est indubitable, mais la vision du texte et la modalité de l’approcher ne pourraient pas faire abstraction d’un siècle de débats critiques. On a vu, l’accumulation et le foisonnement des propositions et des positions théoriques et critiques ont eu pour conséquence le refus de la sélection. Si l’égalité validité de toutes les interprétations est acceptable, tout peut être également rejeté. Mais on a besoin de repères, de critères d’évaluation, de hiérarchies et si elles sont presque impossibles au niveau objectif, il y a quand même la possibilité de choisir parmi les interprétations (au moins pour un temps) “celle qui nous frappe comme étant la plus ingénieuse, la plus riche en surprise, celle qui a le plus grand pouvoir de décomposer et re-crear l’original ou pré-texte”. (Steiner 1988, 55-56) Certains des acquis antérieurs vont être gardés ou transformés pour s’adapter aux nouvelles exigences qui privilégient les contenus, les idées, les valeurs puisqu’on vit une époque de réévaluation de soi et des autres.

Le rôle du commentaire, de l’interprétation, de l’analyse n’est pas uniquement de sauvegarder les institutions. L’obligation didactique des examens critiques a créé l’impression erronée d’un mécanisme usé et inutile. Mais puisque chaque lecture peut être une forme plus ou moins rudimentaire de critique vu qu’elle implique volens nonlens des jugements, des choix, la recherche des sens, le commentaire aura toujours une utilité. D’autre part, l’échec de certaines interprétations est aussi une réalité, mais qui ne doit pas être regardée dans l’absolu, car on ne peut pas être d’accord avec l’idée de l’impossibilité de l’interprétation. Chaque analyse est un échec ou une réussite en fonction de la perspective adoptée, mais généralement elle s’impose comme valide si elle est justifiée et qu’on la partage. Essentiellement, l’interprétation est une réussite. L’argument incontournable réside dans sa longévité. Si on accepte la théorie d’Iser, l’examen critique est un acte d’adaptation, de réglage. Plutôt qu’une explication, il est de l’ordre de la performance. Les processus d’interprétation sont appelés à s’adapter à l’évolution des problèmes du contexte social et culturel. Et les explications qu’un commentaire fournit ne se résument pas au texte, elles sont en même temps un document de mentalité, on valorise ce qui intéresse la société, les individus à un moment historique tout comme l’œuvre littéraire fait la même chose d’une manière symbolique, métaphorique, allégorique. La littérature, l’art en général est une invitation à la réflexion, elle appelle les interprétations comme des répliques confirmant la validité des problèmes qu’ils soulèvent. Jean Starobinski rappelait que l’un des sens du verbe grec krinein, source du mot « critique », désignait le geste de la déesse Déméter tamisant le blé, le passant au crible. « L’interpres serait le garant du prix et de la valeur justes, l’arbitre, dans une transaction de troc ou de vente » (Starobinski
L'interprétation de l'œuvre littéraire en débat: notes à ajouter à un dossier ouvert

2001, 32). Le critique devrait comprendre, faire comprendre et puis assumer le rôle d'arbitre qui sait proposer ce qui est le meilleur.

Les textes littéraires choisis par nous ironisent « l'impuissance » critique et théorisent les difficultés, même l'échec de l'interprétation. L'explication de cet échec réside dans l'idée qu'il est presque impossible de découvrir en quoi consiste le « trésor » qui assure la pérennité de l'œuvre littéraire, cet ineffable « je ne sais quoi » qui rend l'écriture toujours attractive. Pourtant, qu'on ne l'oublie pas: un texte vit à travers ses lectures et s'il ne fait pas naître des questions, c'est qu'il est assurément un texte nul. De plus, très souvent les bonnes interprétations enrichissent le texte sans pour autant l'épuiser, fait qui certifie au bout du compte la légitimité de l'analyse, de l'interprétation.

Notes

1. « Le débat parfois confus sur la question de l'objectivité de l'interprétation souffre un échec à distinguer entre deux paires contrastées: objectif-relatif et absolu-pluriel qui s'entrecoupent. L'auteur met en évidence non seulement la confusion que l'on fait habituellement entre les membres de deux paires, mais il identifie aussi les erreurs que chaque position implique. Pour l'objectivisme, le point vulnérable consiste dans la thèse de l'existence des critères objectifs selon lesquels certaines interprétations sont meilleures que d'autres. Au pôle opposé, le refus de l'idée même des critères objectifs et le relativisme extrême – chaque interprétation est aussi bonne que n'importe quelle autre – n'est pas une meilleure solution. Dans le couple absolutisme-pluralisme, l'erreur consiste, d'une part, dans la conviction que pour chaque œuvre littéraire il n'y a qu'une seule interprétation valable et conforme au texte. D'autre part, les tenants du pluralisme estiment que l'accès à la signification de l'œuvre littéraire est possible en abordant des perspectives critiques multiples. En fait, c'est l'extrémisme qui érode la stabilité de chacune de ces quatre positions » (Currie 1990, 108).

2. Beaucoup de commentaires consacrés à ce roman privilégient l'analyse de la crédibilité du narrateur Kinbote qui dit la vérité, ne la dit que partiellement ou bien il ment. De toute façon, c'est un narrateur qui a une position indécernable qui contrarie les lecteurs.

3. Ce fait a été souligné par Currie (1990, 102): “What I deny is that something other than total evidence might determine the correctness of an interpretation”.

4. En tant que critique, David Lodge a écrit plus d'une fois sur Henry James qui est devenu aussi le personnage principal de son roman L'Auteur ! L'Auteur ! D'autre part, il observait (Lodge 2007) que Pouine de Vladimir Nabokov peut être considéré comme un des premiers romans universitaires. Lodge lui-même écrit des romans universitaires comme Un tout petit monde, en discussion ici.

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Paul Neagu and Hylesic Symbolism. A Tribute to His Memory

Abstract: With British and Romanian critics alike, Paul Neagu (1938-2004) ranked as possibly the most important Romanian sculptor since Brancusi. A sequence of citations is provided which articulate into a professional portrait of the artist. Despite favorable critical response, Neagu’s work seemed to elude analysis, with the result that the sculptor was to remain to the end of his days a lonely island. Drawing on a monograph published one year before the artist’s death, the essay outlines a line of visual discourse in Neagu’s work that may account for his rank and status in posterity. An attentive reader of philosophy, he appears to have correctly identified and evaluated the roots of Brancusi’s artistic excellence only to engage into the challenging project of cultivating the same vein of thought. Brancusi emphatically claimed that his work was respectful of the language of materials. Underlying the sheer beauty of shapes, the spectator’s eye was challenged to read and understand the discourse of materials. This innovative use of materials as bearers of meaning may be conceptualized as hylesic symbolism (gr. hyle standing for material). While with Brancusi hylesic discourse is usually illustrated in autonomous compositions, Neagu made it his contribution to create cycles of works as strings of hylesic metaphors on one given material (steel, wood, bronze). He thereby succeeded to highlight the scope of the artistic current Brancusi may be credited to have launched in 20th century art.

Keywords: Paul Neagu, nine catalytic stations, hylesic symbolism, hermeneutics, abstract sculpture, Brancusi.

A question Paul Neagu seems to have persistently asked himself through the later part of his career in the UK was about the lack of consistent critical response to his work. In a letter to his friend and critic Mel Gooding, he asked: “Have you ‘new words’ to describe my un-English catalytic sculpture? The (first) analogical (modern) sculpture in the world stands in a garden in Colchester and no one dare touch it.” (Gooding 2015, 11)

As Mel Gooding was to explain later, “Neagu’s artistic project, was of a kind alien to the emphatically empirical modes of modern British art (…) variously characterized by natural analogies and by a direct engagement with the visible world, the world of appearances, and above all, by its avoidance of metaphysical symbolism” (Ibidem).

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Surely, something like a fracture in Neagu’s career is to be noticed by the end of the 70’s, when he rather unexpectedly ceased to show up in buoyant performances as often as he had used to. But the reason for this, as Charles Stephens put it, was the sculptor’s growing “engagement with the philosophical roots of the ‘postmodern’ condition (rather than) with its dizzy and glittering surface”. The art which Neagu created after the 1970s “was more engaged with the work of philosophers like Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida than with the, often meretricious, productions of the contemporary art world of the 1980s and 1990s” (Stephen 2003, 16).

David Brett locates Neagu’s work “in the full flow of one of the most important currents of modern art; that which springs out of the dialectic of Mind and Material (...) We are in the lineage of Brancusi, Malevich, Gabo and their ilk. It is the lineage, notes Brett, that most of what today passes for ‘post-modern’ neglects to its cost and which is incomparably serious” (Brett 1989).

Several qualified assessments may be cited to compose a profile. “If someone asked me, writes Andy Christian, to say in a single word what Paul Neagu’s sculptures were about, I would say energy. Energy compacted into the points of his Hyphens or bursting out of the star-shaped Fusions. They seem to be generators of an unseen force.” (Christian 1980) William Varley describes Neagu as being a manifesto artist. “I believe that his fundamental
drive to produce an art that is ‘the most expressive of all philosophies’ is crucial to him, distinguishing his activities, as he sees it, from that of gratuitous, self-referring abstraction. (…) He remains for me one of the artists of sternest integrity working in Britain today.” (Varley 1978)

His career as a teacher was no less remarkable. “Neagu’s influence has been persuasive, notices John McEwen. It is surely no coincidence that almost all the best-known British sculptors of the 1980s and 1990s – Cragg, Deacon, Gormley, Houshiary, Kapoor, Langlands & Bell, Whiteread – experienced his teaching.” (McEwen 1998) Early work by Neagu, as Richard Demarco pointed out, “resisted definition in merely aesthetic terminology. The objects
in that room [Richard Demarco Gallery, 1969] demanded to be considered as receptacles of a spiritual energy. They were containers re-organizing the European race memory.” (Demarco 1988, 2 and 11)

When considering the bulk of such statements, one needs to emphasize that they originate from British critics showing little reserves to Neagu’s style and achievements. Favorable critical response to Neagu’s work in the UK failed however to be supported by substantial analytical argument. Not unlike Brancusi, Neagu was to remain to the end of his days a lonely island.

In Neagu’s *Hyphens*, noted Donald Kuspit, “symbolic meaning is piled upon symbolic meaning, all eloquently supported by the thin, seemingly frail legs of the structure. Neagu cloaks the work in conceptual enigma, but in and of itself it is enigmatic – its genuinely enigmatic form is Neagu’s true achievement.” (Kuspit 1998, 23)

![Group of Catalytic Sculpture, 1988, wood, canvas, gesso](image)

Ironically, some of the sculptor’s strivings to motivate his approach may have unwillingly deepened perplexity with his critics. “My aesthetic search, points out Neagu, inscribes itself in a larger cosmogonic movement which is called academically ‘a visual hermeneutics’ or simply ‘tossing Fish over Gate’.” (Neagu 1981, 2)

It may be remembered how aphorisms by Brancusi also seemed quite hazy at first sight, only to eventually reveal themselves as highly coherent and uppermost bold to the open minded. Likewise, there is a gravity in Neagu’s statements which is meant to challenge routines. “The eye is
fatigued, perverted, shallow, its culture is degenerate, degraded and super-annuated, seduced by photography, film, television…” (Neagu 1969, 1) Here are some more citations from Neagu on the same topic: “What I call catalytic sculpture, if it must be emphatically expressed, is that category of sculpture which wants to avoid optical primacy.” (Neagu 1999, 2) Or: “For me sculpture is neither a decorative activity nor a whimsical preoccupation, but a highly specialized language which reflects matters of crucial importance about humans and their relationships.” (Chaimovicz 198?, 3)

*Anthropocosmos, psychotechnic human concept, 1973, drawing*
Anthropocosmos, a cycle initiated in 1969, made up of an impressive number of small boxes, opened up a daring Œdipian and/or Cartesian project to explore the unseen face of the sphere of knowledge, the one governed by symbolic thinking. While challenging routines in the visual arts, the artist was embarking on a quest for knowledge in an area beyond direct visual perception. And to do so, he paradoxically chose to rely on minimal units as is common with scientific knowledge. “True abstraction frees human thought and human nature in artwork. (...) To show the glance without showing the eye – that is the challenge.” (Neagu 1996, 5)

Despite apparent hermetism, these are powerful statements and they invite a steady effort to apprehend the sculptor’s idiom. Shere re-reading them several times may considerably help reaching to their underlying meanings. And once turned transparent to the mind, statements abruptly get an inner intensity as if they were shouted out. “Throughout these years, while working on the idea of doing (things) that have not been done so far, I believed in a hierarchy of the significance of signs that might be correlated to a hierarchy of the quality of substances.” (Neagu and Omescu 1996, 11)

Our contention is that two apparently hermetic projects, Brancusi’s and Bachelard’s, are hyphenated in Negu’s work, and their respective aims are most excitingly revealed as complimentary to each other (Stircea-Craciun 2013, 469-490). On the one hand Brancusi’s revolution in sculpture was assessed as unanalysable and unclassifiable (Rowell 1995, 38; 48), and on the other hand, Bachelard’s writings were similarly referred to as “paradoxical philosophy” (Wunenburger 2012, 15).
“An early intuition called ‘subject generator’, writes Neagu, was drafted, shifted, built, destroyed and re-drawn hundreds of times, (...) re-enforced, lost several times, refunded as fulcrum and meeting point between subject and object, as sculpture and idea. It rounds up the libido, ego and the self in one contemporary symbol.” (Neagu 1985, 3) *The Hyphen*, a table resting on three hook-like legs, initially used to display various objects, all of a sudden acquired a new status to him, and he presented it as a *subject generator*, i.e. an austere muse meant to inspire a late 20th century artist.

Neagu’s wooden *Hyphens* look different from his steel *Hyphens* or his bronze *Hyphens*, though they all manifestly derive from a common module. As such, they are meant to challenge the viewer to question what *material* specificity is about. With his stated interest in substances and materials, Neagu’s tacit allegiance to Brancusi can be readily established. Brancusi explicitly recommended that a material “should not be subdued to satisfy preconceived ideas and forms. A material should suggest by itself the theme of a composition and its shape. And both of these were to come from within, not to be imposed from the outside.” (Middleton 1923, 16-17)

*Epagoge*, 1993, bronze, dimensions 1.50 x 2.00 m

Having retained their specific qualities on earth for millions of years, materials qualify as fixed points within culture at large. They are containers of cultural information. In the evolution of human thought, earth, stone, water, wood, fire have provided the source of the most reliable landmarks, and it may be safely anticipated that there are unlimited reserves of aesthetic vitality in the material messages of art, if only because human experience of materials is infinite. (Stircea-Craciun 2007, 51)
In previous contributions, we came forward with the concept of *hylesic symbolism* (from the Greek *hyle* standing for matter) to designate visual discourse expressed in material language rather than shape language. (Stircea-Craciun 1986, 54) In hylesic codification (*hyle*, Greek, material), materials are not simply used as passive support of shape and color, they emerge as the focus of the work.

While Brancusi pioneered hylesic symbolism in autonomous compositions, where the novelty of the idea made it difficult to have it fully grasped, Bachelard chose to explore material imagination in poetry and prose, that is, in one particularly arid area for such pursuits – as literary texts are bound to be subjective. In an outstanding attempt to further challenge this indeterminacy, Paul Neagu initiated what might be called an *intensive* approach in hylesic symbolism. In the cycle *Nine Catalytic Stations* (1975-1987), also dubbed “A tale of the Spiral”, the artist exalts material attributes within one of his most ambitious sculptural projects. Each *Catalytic Station* is intended as a sculptural metaphor for the human experience of iron. This is strikingly the case with the *Stations resembling* a knife or plough. Yet Neagu does not limit himself to focusing on recognizable objects. His interest is in commenting on how iron and its cutting standards impacted ways of thinking. *Hyphen* as a sculptural form, is “the true materialization of an epistemological metaphor”. (Neagu 1979, 7) *Hyphen* is “a sculptural tool” designed to generate shapes but also, and more importantly, to probe knowledge.

*Nine Catalytic Stations*, 1975-1987,
Installation at Traquiere House, Scotland, September 1988
Several Catalytic Stations suggest that iron implements may have spread standards of “penetrability” or “sharpness” or “rigor” that were later to contaminate abstract operations in the human mind. In others, Neagu goes so far as to discriminate a sequence of broad cultural models. It lies with the viewer to respond to the challenge and question the capacity of the Stations to resonate with European history (Hellenic culture and its dream of undivided harmony, the Middel Ages and its obsession with good and evil, modernity and its awareness of the polyvalent nature of truth).

Nine Catalytic Stations needs to be acknowledged as setting forth an emphatically materialistic founding myth, addressed to present day Europe as well as to all civilisations across the world, and define in new terms a promisse for strengthened human harmony.

*“When I started to meditate about the beauty of materials – writes Gaston Bachelard –, I was surprised to notice the striking absence of considerations on the material cause in the deliberations of writers in aesthetics. The capacity of materials to highlight individuality thus seemed underestimated. Why is it that the individual as a notion is steadily associated with a shape? In a deeper sense, individuality is right from beginning inherent in any material, whatever the quantity of it.” (Bachelard 1942, 8) Bachelard’s thesis on material imagination served to spotlight an enormous gap in European aesthetics. For over two thousand years, Bachelard pointed out, philosophy had ignored the material cause, i.e. the prime and first of Aristotle’s four causes – i.e. material, formal, efficient and final.

On the other hand, it needs to be reminded that a similar reconsideration of materials had been initiated two decades earlier by Brancusi. “Matter has its own individuality, that we cannot destroy as we please, but we can only make it speak its own language.” (Dation Brancusi 2003, 86) Brancusi’s artistic vision is aimed to counter the millenary old definition of sculpture as shape language and to replace it with a new one, where sculpture is to be defined in terms of material language.

This momentous shift was clearly meant by Brancusi to strengthen the status of modern art at a worldwide level. For, indeed, while shape is basically associated to an ethnic background or specificity, materials stand out as a global common wealth.

More importantly, quests to achieve perfect shapes contribute to round up aesthetic knowledge, while harnessing expressive energies inbuild in materials are headed to substantiate ethic knowledge.

To give imagination a free scope, the hylesic revolution in sculpture, as initiated by Brancusi and worldwidely supported this far by five generations of artists claiming a Brancusian ascendancy may be promised to pave the road to a progressive bridging together into a common structure of the ethical systems underlying ethnic and cultural diversity.
It is time to revert to a previous citation from David Brett, referring to Paul Neagu’s creation as positioned “in the full flow of one of the most important currents of modern art”. History will never cease to produce enticing paradoxes. To David Brett, and not just to him, one of the most important currents in modern art does not have a name!

Paul Neagu ranks with the few who realized that for what may be called *hylesic symbolism* to be fully acknowledged, critical mass of information needed to be supplied, like in nuclear reactions. To achieve this goal, the visual discourse had to be inscribed not in singular compositions but in comprehensive cycles of works.
Neagu’s creation and Neagu’s contributions still lack adequate appreciation and rating. We are slowly coming to acknowledge a prominent even if distinct postmodernist dimension in his strivings. However, one sound statement to be made is about Nine Catalytic Stations marking a threshold in 20th century art history. (Stircea-Craciun 2016, 357) Maybe, further anonymity imposed on hylesic, i.e. material, i.e physical (irrespective of metaphysical) symbolism is bound to turn anachronistic.

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A Contemporary Artistic Lection of Architectural Space

Abstract: Contemporary logic of art supposes, amongst other things, the understanding of artistic activities as practices of ordering cultural terms, regardless of the form in which they are used. In this context, artistic practices more and more assume a stake in interhuman relations on diverse artistic themes. In the light of relatively recent theories, this analysis looks at architecture as a practice that offers cultural space tailored for this experience (Brian O’Doherty) and its artistic dimension – where art is an event (Nicolas Bourriaud). My approach looks at the artistic offer of architectural space, *habitation*, seen as a situation that poses two anthropological lines of questioning (André Leroi-Gurhan) – the bond between utilitarian and aesthetic and the restructuration of physical space as culturally signifying space.

Keywords: art, architecture, habitation, aesthetic, utilitarian, significations, artistic function, significative cultural space

1. A contemporary artistic lection of architectural space

This paper discusses today’s understanding of the visual artistic offer made by an architectural edifice, from the perspective of two anthropological lines of questioning posed by André Leroi-Gurhan in the middle of the 20th century (Leroi-Gurhan 1983), first being the link between an artefact’s aesthetic and functional qualities, the second being the use of architecture as a means of humanizing physical space with the use of symbols – the re-forging of physical space into a significance rich cultural one.

The two lines of questioning look to employ an analytic framework based on the sum of the changes regarding the understanding of art’s cultural perception and understanding that came about since the birth of aesthetics up until present day, as a driving force behind the aesthetic behaviour and attitude of individuals. In short, the trajectory of these changes can be described as the transition from understanding art as an abstract institutional entity, structured on linguistically autonomous theoretical entities with dedicated rules and practices, to art being a cultural space, built from countless formal combinations and possibilities, meant for the interaction of individuals.

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Today’s relationship to the idea of artistic space is understood at the intersection between 1) the idea of total art, introduced by the first avant-gardes and mainly reintroduced by situationists – and other artistic movements of the second half of the 20th century – as an adequate practice model for the contemporary world, and 2) the evolution of artistic practices after the 1960s – towards a production that employs language as an endless string of elements, practices, and techniques – seen as an important breakaway from the cultural logic of art proposed at the beginning of its modern aesthetic systemisation, in the form of taxonomic structuration of artistic practice based on aesthetic norms of employing language (Morley 2003, 12-14).

Generally, contemporary understanding of the purpose of art is based mainly on the major changes that took place in visual artistic practices. It manifests itself as exceeding the idea of retinaly autonomous expression as a specific stake of traditional artistic practices and, in this context, is boasts the reassessment of the artistic function of an artefact.

The characteristics of contemporary artistic practices which support the new artistic identity can be broadly summarised as:

1. Inter and trans-disciplinarity, used by professionals without regard for normative boundaries belonging to logic employed by early modernist aesthetics which set clear autonomous artistic categories: painting, sculpting, architecture, visual arts, literature, decorative arts, etc. (Morley 2003, 14-16). From methodologic perspective, the main result of this lack of regard is the re-evaluation of artistic language: anything can be used as a language element – from technological novelties to philosophical concepts and inter-human relations – employing its potential as a signifier.

2. Shifting in the lector’s role in experiencing art, from just contemplation to active participation (Nae 2013, 155) which reshapes artistic experience as a cultural exchange or negotiation, close to the idea of potlach (Sansi 2010).

3. Recognizing the evolution of arts cultural state, both as a mark and as a discursive element present in works1.

4. The use of context as a way to (re)signify2. From professional perspective, the main result of this logic is the re-evaluation of the idea of visual artistic representation. Beyond aesthetic norms of representation, proper to any particular field, the idea of artistic visual representation stands for: presenting any common entity again (re-presentation), in a new context able to change its initial common identity into an artistic one. The artistic identity of the representation is not dependent on technique or artistic medium but on the artistic logic of the context. The obvious repercussion of this is that anything can be a work of art if the context in which that anything is re-signified/re-presented is acknowledged as being artistic.
This evolution of artistic practices has not resulted in the annulment of traditional practices, but in their integration in a different cultural logic or mindset as different simultaneous techniques, which support the idea of vastly varied artistic production meant for a group-fragmented audience.

“Artistic practice”, as Rosalind Krauss wrote at the beginning of the `70s regarding “sculpture”, “is defined by [...] logical operations applied to an ensemble of cultural terms”, for whom “any medium can be used: photographs, books, lines on walls, mirrors or even the sculptures themselves” (Krauss 1979, 42).

In lack of a consensus, democratic acceptance of diversity of opinion represents the cultural logic of contemporaneity.

In the words of Nicolas Bourriaud, the logic of the formentioned changes implies a new understanding of the work of art as a cultural event, as a state of interaction between individuals (Bourriaud 2007, 13-14). In this context, for the individual, art isn’t the identification and connection of a category of archived objects with a database of aesthetic norms (seen as artistic qualities), but the participation in a contemporary cultural ritual. This situation – in my opinion more an anthropological setting than an aesthetical one – defines the manifestation of art as an instance of human interaction within a particular experience.

In such a comprehensive context, the particularity of the experience is in the delimitation, within a wide cultural field, of a self-serving symbolic space. This means that artistic identity is based, first and foremost, on the association of an artefact with a cultural space loaded with artistic significations (Danto 2001, 180-181), regardless of artistic medium, technique or logic of expression. Any contemporary artwork contains and uses, as an implicit element, the corpus of ideas about art that constitute the space. The artistic quality of a work of art is dependent on the author’s ability to integrate – to order and include the elements within the expression medium – this corpus. Architecture, seen as a visual artistic medium, submits to the same logic.

2. Architecture and the contemporary artistic dimension of space

Based on contemporary practices and the idea of art as a cultural space, we can say that Leroy-Gurhan’s ideas – buildings as ways for man to “tame” (Leroy-Gurhan 1983, 124-127) real (physical) space with the aid of significances and the link between utilitarian and aesthetic – are not far from the situationist total art stake and its methodology. For example, in What Is Situationism? A Reader, Essays from Leaving the 20th Century, the Situationist International frame of thought was presented thus:

The situationists’ programme was based on what they called “the construction of situations”. In the first place this meant the bringing together and fusion of
various separated art forms in the creation of a single unified environment. Nor was this process restricted to a new focusing of contemporary artistic activity. All the great artistic visions and masterpieces of the past should be pillaged and their contents made real: “subverted”, as the situationists called it, as part of a real script. All scientific knowledge and technical skill could be brought into play in the same way. For the first time art and technology could become one: put on the same practical footing with reality (Grey 1974, 5).

In this setting which engages art as an event, the contemporary cultural offer of architecture as an artistic medium (and artefact) manifested mainly in terms of *habitation* than *monumentality*. In other words, the artistic quality refers more to the power of signification associated to inhabiting a space than to adhering to aesthetic norms of volume arrangement, ornamentation, etc.

Understanding habitation as an artistic experience is based on seeing architecture as an act of symbolic representation, described by Leroi-Gurhan as: “The organisation of living space is not only an example of technical convenience, but, in equal measure to language, the symbolic expression of human behaviour as a whole” (Leroi-Gurhan 1983, 135). In the same logic Roland Barthes later discusses architecture as a means of communication (Harvey 2003, 73).

Architecture as artistic language means two things: 1) its artistic quality derives from the transformation of a real space, through symbolic re-presentation, into a cultural one – this is also the modernist professional logic of plastic space in traditional artistic mediums; 2) the significances of space are in equal measure, both utilitarian (regarding the use of the building itself) and aesthetic (its aesthetic qualities). The two aspects overlap with the two lines of questioning mentioned at the beginning of this paper.

3. The relationship between utilitarian (functional) and aesthetic

From the perspective of artistic expression, the relationship between the aesthetics and utility of architecture is treated particularly, different is when discussing these two concepts separately, where distinct protocols are employed for understanding the aesthetic function of a building and it’s utilitarian one. My goal is not to pursue this distinction when using the building as shelter or when treating it as a modernist aesthetic item. I am only analysing this distinct relationship from the perspective of a more organic bond, proper to understanding architecture in the terms of contemporary artistic language. In this case, both the utility and aesthetics of a building are engaged as elements of contemporary artistic language. The presence of utility as a visual element marks a change in attitude in understanding the cultural purpose of art. On one side, from an artistic perspective, functional means more than “artistic disinterest”, and on the other side, any version/functional destination of an artefact provides an implicit aesthetics tied to
that functionality. The functional aspect is part of an artistic discourse where the presence of aesthetic aspects is not more important than of any other ones in that work of art (e.g. its communicational function socially engaged within a cultural trend).

The logic of the artistic bond between utilitarian and aesthetic has a self-evident:

1. The artistic experience of an artefact is owed to a particular function that supports its manifestation as a work of art.
2. Its manifestation as a work of art is understood as:
   a) The appropriation of utilitarian and aesthetic functions of an artefact as elements of artistic language means their manifestation, on the level of artistic expression, as significations.
   b) This situation generates another cultural function – an artistic one – as a result of their dissolution into the new function.
   c) The new artistic function transforms the artefact into a significant whole, that manifests as unique artistic substance resulting from the dissolution of the functional identity of the two dimensions – utilitarian and aesthetic – which, when it comes to language, lose their significative identity (of utilitarian and aesthetic) in favour of the significance of the relationship between them (the unity between aesthetic and functional).

The unity between aesthetic and functional, present on the level of their common significative substantiality, is implicit to their trans-disciplinarity, seen as the methodology of a unique artistic medium – in the idea that, on this level, there are no more differences between artistic mediums (architecture, painting, sculpture, etc.), nor differences regarding the categorial identity of different elements present in a work of art (wood, brick, metal, colours, cultural codes, etc.) often attributed and distributed based on their different utilitarian functions.

4. The artistic taming of real space

In architecture, real space is both a particular artistic medium and an element that actively participates, through positioning, dimension, proportion, etc, in establishing a building’s artistic quality, along with its solid aspects (walls, façade elements, materials, chromatics, etc.), through compositional use by the author. The transformation of real space into artistic space means, in this logic, its re-presentation alongside its solid elements, so that it re-defines its importance as utilitarian physical space in favour of gaining cultural significances that transform its utilitarian reality into significant elements of artistic space. In other words, the physical space between the walls of a building gains the function of a relational element that, along with the solid elements, can generate a cultural context with an artistic
identity. Thus, the architectural edifice gains the same quality as the plastically pictorial space because it provides the same particular cultural function in relation to an interaction between individuals (that in this case becomes an artistic experience).

In the contemporary world this function is operationalized in the for-mentioned way: the legitimation of a work of art is a cultural one, acquired along with its appurtenance to the cultural space of a series of artistic significances, and architecture, as an artistic medium, submits to the same ruleset.

The theory about the artistic-cultural dimension of an architectural space that best supports this point of view belongs to Brian O’Doherty and it pertains to the artistic function of space in an art gallery (O’Doherty 1986). Essentially, it’s based on the unity of the bond between aesthetical and functional. O’Doherty’s logic is that the destination – in other terms, the utility – of a gallery invests its own physical space with the legitimating power of the understandings and discourses present in the modern evolution of art, that establishes the cultural identity of exposed artefacts in the contemporary world: “Conversely things become art in a space where powerful ideas about art focus on them” (O’Doherty 1986, 14).

In the theory of the white cube, the field of artistic cultural significances is implicit to the gallery space. Thus, space becomes a form of existence for the field as a cultural spatial context with double function: a) the artistic legitimation of displayed objects, b) that of significant content for said objects. The relationship between the two functions can be described as: With the objects as content, this context can legitimate them as works of art. The unity between space and objects manifests itself as a qualitative harmonic state transferred to the objects, where the cultural significances of the object are indiscernible to the ones of the context. O’Doherty states that:

Indeed, the object frequently becomes the medium through which these ideas are manifested and proffered for discussion- a popular form of late modernist academicism (‘ideas are more interesting then art”). The sacramental nature of the space becomes clear and so does one of the great projective laws of modernism: As modernism gets older, context becomes content. In a peculiar reversal the object introduced into the gallery, frames, the gallery and its laws. (O’Doherty 1986, 14-15)

In his opinion, this situation means, in fact, the artistic autonomy of a space (acquired by being part of a cultural identity and function):

The ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is “art”. The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its
own evaluation of itself. This gives the space a presence possessed by other spaces where conventions are preserved through the repetition of a closed system of values. Some of the sanctity of the church, the formality of the courtroom, the mystique of the experimental laboratory joins with chic design to produce a unique chamber of aesthetics. So powerful are the perceptual fields of force within this chamber that, once outside it, art can lapse into secular status. (O’Doherty 1986, 14)

I will make the observation that, in O’Doherty’s logic, gallery space today fulfils the same role that the religious edifice did in Middle Ages and Renaissance, specifically it isolates the significances that constitute the cultural identitary corpus of art – meaning it frames the territory of artistic space. When, in occidental society, the cultural consensus of the religious condition of art, which ensured the identitary coherence of this frame, was removed, another corpus that covers that loss must be established. Retinal aesthetic identity regarding taste, proposed by the Illuminists, never had sufficient consensual stature to cover a cultural phenomenon as complex and unstable as art. That is why it brought along complaints and impugnments, followed by polemics that generated even more confusion. Arguments and confusion established themselves as elements of the new cultural identity of art – seen as providing space for theoretical speculations regarding the axiological boundaries between art and non-art. Something had to gather all these aspects under a functioning corpus capable of having autonomy, and that proved to be gallery space.

About this situation, O’Doherty writes that:

And in its midst, one notices an evenly lighted “cell” that appears crucial to making the thing work: the gallery space. The history of modernism is intimately framed by that space; or rather, the history of modern art can be correlated with changes in that space and in the way we see it. We have now reached a point where we see not the art, but the space first. (A cliché of the age is to evaluate over the space on entering a gallery.) An image comes to mind of a white, ideal space that more than any single picture may be the archetypal image of twentieth century art; it clarifies itself through a process of historical inevitability usually attached to the art it contains. (O’Doherty 1986, 14)

In light of the theory of the white cube, the separation of easel painting as a secularised practice, independent of wall painting (its independence of the building) can be understood in other terms. Significatively speaking, painting never actually left the wall or the artistic function of architecture
to which it belongs, but enveloped artistic space within. The difference between mural and easel painting only regards technical or methodological aspects, with no influence on its artistic dimension. It establishes itself as a distinction between ways for painting to relate to the wall, one dynamic, the other static. Such a distinction is only relevant in real space because in artistic space (basically its artistic function) the relationship is the same. The artistic logic of a picture contains this relationship within the painting, in the following process: the cultural artistic quality of plastic space – seen as artistic visual autonomy – is linked to the formentioned corpus of cultural significances. The artistic engagement\(^7\) of this corpus leads to, maybe paradoxically, the reference to the cultural role of art, meaning its functional (utilitarian) dimension. The utility of a painting can be described as: an image dedicated to a space (context) in which – and alongside which (the total link between context and object in which, according to O'Doherty, context becomes content) – the painting (as an object) satisfies the human need for artistic experience\(^8\). For painting, this function is tied to the wall, since its origins to this day, in the form of an existential condition. The wall on which the painting earns its status as art contains its cultural context, because the wall is the depiction of the space which conveys the corpus of significance that legitimates its artistic identity. The development of easel painting as a representative of modern secular art\(^9\) mainly shows the fact that painting swapped out the wall for something else because of the apparition of a new cultural context of artistic identification and legitimation. In this situation, only the context changes – provided by the gallery to cover the function of the cathedral wall – and not the logic of the bonds with the context or its importance. Even the paintings in an apartment portray to some degree\(^10\) the idea of a gallery, and transfer to those walls the significance corpus of gallery space, because it is directly linked to the painting itself, the same as a religious painting brings with it the significances of a religious space.

Regarding the power of an architectural space to culturally autonomize and legitimize, O'Doherty notes the similarities between the religious edifice and gallery space – even if his theory doesn’t particularly explore the artistic dimension of religious space.

A gallery is constructed along laws as rigorous as those for building a medieval church. The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light. The wooden floor is polished so that you click along clinically, or carpeted so that you pad soundlessly, resting the feet while the eyes have at the wall. The art is free, as the saying used to god, to take on its own life (O'Doherty 1986, 15).
Speaking from a constructive (compositional) point of view, the neutrality of white, its antiseptic nature, etc. are aesthetic orderings dedicated to the functionality of the gallery – conditioned by its utility – by the same visual considerations for which the luxuriant ornamentation of the orthodox church or the luxurious space of a catholic cathedral were dedicated to the function of church space to provide an experience transcending profane time and space\textsuperscript{11}, as an intermediate space:

Unshadowed, white, clean, artificial – the space is devoted to the technology of aesthetics. Works of art are mounted, hung, scattered for study. Their ungrubby surfaces are untouched by time and its vicissitudes. Art exist in a kind of eternity of display, and though there is lots of “period” (late modern), there is no time. This eternity gives the gallery a limbo-like status; one has to have died already to be there (O’Doherty 1986, 15)

The logic of artistic space as an expression of the bond between the utilitarian destination of a building and the aesthetics that are associated with this function can be extended to the artistic appreciation of the religious architectural edifice. For example, from the perspective of a contemporary interpretation, we can say that Paul Evdokimov understands religious art in the logic of the event and in the terms of a performative act on religious themes brought to the space of the edifice by its ritual destination.

The architectural forms of a temple, the frescos, religious icons, religious objects, are not just put together simply as objects in a museum, but as the members of a body, they live the same sacred life, they are integrated into the liturgic mystery. This is essential, a religious icon can never be understood outside this integration (Evdokimov 2014, 176).

In situationist logic, Evdokimov’s theological statements can be understood as: it’s not the retinal autonomy of the religious icon (objects of worship) or of the architectonic monument that represent the artistic depth of religious art but the fact that for a few thousand years the cultural condition of art, consensually accepted, was its tie to religion, and in this context the religious destination of space implies this link. The edifice, the space and all other entities linked to the ritual function – from objects of worship and participants to rituals to the ideas they convey – legitimate the artistic quality of the event, because until the first forms of the secularisation of art (the iconoclasm of the Reform), cultural acceptation of art did not exist outside of religion. It was all gathered under the same roof of an artistic signifying cultural space, by the religious and cultural condition and origin of art that constituted the artistic field of signification of the time – and that were implicit to the religious event as the sole source of artistic material.
In my understanding, O'Doherty understands architecture, in a broad sense, as cultural space dedicated to a series of “inhabitations” on a significance tier. Some may be artistic, some may not, regardless if it implies contemporary architecture or old religious architecture. Essentially, his theory presents itself as a pattern with anthropologic direction that talks about the logic of interaction between man and the artistic phenomenon, and that includes both the cultural consensus and the debate that sees art as social practice and cultural exchange between individuals. From this angle, the artistic logic of the gallery is the same as the great cathedrals of the Renaissance: a building manifests itself artistically, only because of a particular type of habitation – conditioned by presence of a corpus of significances – that transform its connotation of shelter into a cultural artistic space. Regardless, in the absence of this particular type of habitation, architecture can satisfy other cultural needs that are not necessarily artistic.

Instead of conclusions we can make the following observations.

In the contemporary setting that admits a puzzle of contradicting opinions in relation to art, architecture can be seen as a cultural space particularized as an artistic space by a certain type of habitation. In the words of Nicolas Bourriaud, such habitation is a work of art seen as an interstice that “inserts itself in social tissue” (Bourriaud 2007, 15).

We can also observe something else regarding the theory of the white cube. Its power to legitimate a cultural corpus of significations reflects – where context is content – both on artefacts and on the building itself. If the legitimation is based on the fact that the artefacts are identified as art because of the cultural context that becomes content (according to O’Doherty, it frames it), then the context, which is equally content of the building, legitimates the building as a work of art. Thus, in the presence of the corpus of significations, thanks to the destination attributed to a space, a building auto-signifies itself as a work of art, regardless of it being a gallery, a religious edifice or a nonconventional space (a factory) which, for some reason, gains the utility of an artistic space.

Notes

1 For example, the way debated by Daniel Marzona, as a fusion between language and document in conceptual art, seen in Cezanne, where “painting reflects on its own rules” (see Marzona 2005, 8).
2 Seen by situationists as building situations (see Gray 1974).
3 For example, in his lectures and general word philosophy, Bjarke Ingels, an influential Danish architect, considers that inhabiting a space is more important than the space itself, and that it only gains significance once it is put in the service of its inhabitants.
4 For example, Mihály Jenő Bartos discusses this situation in terms of the double dimension of plastic space: real space and significant space (Bartos 2016, 21-27).
Regarding the values of functionalism in architecture, Jean Nouvel states: Many places have aesthetics without aesthetic intent (Baudrillard, Nouvel 2005, 18).

The artistic medium in architecture is space, where the goal of construction is the delimitation of space. In the same logic as drawing – where we draw black lines to see the white – as an anecdote attributed to Picasso.

Beside other type of engagements (historical, sociological, etc.)

This is the main cultural utility of art, in the same logic as the utility of clothes must satisfy the structural availability of man for the experience of robing or medicine for the experience of getting healthy.

This does not discuss religious oil paintings, whose ties to church space are obvious.

This regards paintings that are generally accepted as works of art, not the decorative function of a painted image.

Where profane means one that sits in front of the temple but has not entered yet (Duve 2001, 110).

References


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The Ethical Standards of Food Production in the Background of Modern Lifestyle

Abstract: Considered to be a particular science, the ethics of food production raises awareness and makes both the producer and the consumer to assume more responsibility. By modifying his option paradigm the consumer will probably alter the producer’s economic behavior if industrialization has not definitively dulled any moral sense concerning economic action. In spite of its evolution as a fragment of human consciousness, social ethics related to food domain remains an opened field of diagnosis, analysis and solutions.

Keywords: social ethics, situational ethics, eco-economy, social psycho-biology, economic behavior.

In 1973 when the Romanian communism reached its climax, the Romanian psychologist Nicolae Mărgineanu in his attempt to define the human condition, tried to emphasize the relationship between man as solitary being and zoon politikon (Aristotle), i.e. man as social being. In this regard it is obvious that man’s features and functions cannot be considered only his own attributes, depending only on him, because they are ways to join the world, especially the society. Therefore, the natural environment plays an important role. Nicolae Mărgineanu’s definition helps us to open the ethical dimension of our research:

Human condition defines this interconnection among the psychological structure, the biological infrastructure, and the social superstructure. The completeness of human being’s determination in the world satisfies it only because the psychological features and functions complement reciprocally with the biological and social features and functions, from which they cannot be separated. The human condition (bio-psycho-socio human structure) is not static, but in continuous evolution. Therefore the past plays an important role through its causality as well as the future, namely its planning or its prospective character; ergo, the human condition considered in its bio-psycho-social plenitude should be explained through its causal pre-structure and interpreted through its prospective future post-structure (...). Man is not only consciousness, but behavior, too. Thus, consciousness is not only the successful or unsuccessful reflection of

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unconscious, but also the reflection of socio-cultural condition with which it interacts through behavior. In normal psychological and socio-economic circumstances, behavior is an expression of the consciousness. When the individual or the neighbors are insincere and deceitful, then word and behavior become mechanisms of individual consciousness. (Mărgineanu 1973, 9)

Human society on the whole functions like a human organism, developing its own organizational interconnections or structures of the mechanisms of group or organizational consciousness.

Important analyzes have given the phenomenon culture a series of specialists among whom we mention Raffaele Pettazzoni, Ernesto de Martino, Georges Dumézil or Franz Altheim. They are only those who refer to these paradigms in the world of religions, without reference to Christianity (see wide analysis of these authors in Montanari 2001).

In the Christian world Max Weber’s work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* published in 1904 (translated into Romanian, Humanitas Publishing House, 1993) is considered by specialists the main synthesis although it represents only a synthesis of the papers contained in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*¹. It was criticized over time. Some critics virtually negated its value. In this regard it is worth mentioning the works of moderate Besnard Ph. (1970) and that of the historian and social critic R. H. Tawney (*Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1926)². Max Weber proposes and develops a moral scheme that includes motivation, education and the ethical exigency of the economic valorization of the product through which capital is produced³. The obvious or subtle influence of the religious on morals in a money-oriented society is difficult to prove and is related to the anthropology specific to the ethos of every people. Thus, the idea that Orthodoxy as form of Christianity obstructs the economic motivation is scientifically inappropriate. Allan G. Johnson is the one who synthesizes maybe the best Webber theory and how it influences the economic behavior of the producer and the consumer, including the modern world. He asserts that:

Protestant ethics is a religious ethics that emphasizes a carefully controlled behavior, methodical planning, tenacious labor, abnegation, commitment and vocational success. Trying to explain the cultural complex in which capitalism developed, Max Weber argued that the ethics generated by the Protestant Reformation in Europe facilitated and sustained the essential trends of capitalism, especially those related to investment and wealth accumulation. By rejecting the Church and the rituals as safe means of salvation, Protestantism put in their place the autonomy and individual responsibility, which generated an intense anxiety and the need to confirm that salvation is certain. In response to this anxiety, Protestantism promoted an ethical consistency and a way of life that contributed to the creation of a cultural environment that legitimizes and promotes precisely practices and values conducive to the flourishing of capitalism. (Johnson 2007, 147)
One of the criticisms of Weber’s ideas is to be noticed here. Catholicism also proposed models of ethics and cultural support of capitalism. One of them is offered by Bernadine of Siena and marks until today a series of contracts of Economics. It is worth mentioning that the entire patristic culture of the Church including the Orthodox part, promoted moral requirements aimed at fulfill the economic hypostasis of both man and human society at whole. The motivational ethics including charity and mutual aid were fundamental to the development of an integral pre-capitalist form. It is also necessary to acknowledge that many of the outstanding figures of the Christian holiness raised both the profile of managerial qualities and the ability to organize Christian communities not only in crisis situation (famine, alien attack, drought, material shortages, and generalized poverty) (see Necula 2009 and 2013). Precisely these qualities imposed them in the lucrative consciousness of the Church. Moreover the concern for the ethical construct of the leader is not only related to Protestant ethics but it appears in well-known treaties of Byzantium or in the area of the Romanian Medieval culture. However, we subscribe to Allan G. Johnson’s conclusion regarding Weber’s most sustainable contribution to the development of social ethics that it “simply consists in the argument that various aspects of culture deeply affect the structure of social systems”. He also underlines that “the idea deeply contrasts with the Marxist vision that production is of primordial importance in shaping the culture rather than vice versa” (Johnson 2007). Hence the difficulty to define social-economic ethics or the unique standards of production ethics that can be law in a culture evolved in parameters of economic and absurd rigidity in an ethos affected by mediocrity and induced consumption.

The European thinking on Ethics defined the concept in a wide range of connotations. What remains as basis of interpretation is connected with the word Ethics, derived from the Greek adjective ethikos, éthos that means nature or disposition. It is usually used either philosophically or practically. Philosophically we are dealing with moral philosophy whose purpose is to systematically study human behavior in connection with the justice or injustice of human actions, with good and evil that governs the motives and the consequences of such actions. The specialist in moral philosophy seeks to present how to arrive at value judgments by approaching concepts such as: good/evil; just/unjust; must/should; justice, duty, obligation and other specific terms to assess the value. One of the fundamental premises of the moral philosopher sounds like that: “human behavior takes place within a context of values; when people have the freedom to choose a series of action and their activities are not completely forbidden, the inevitable question is whether the chosen action is just or unjust, good or bad”. The answer to such interrogations creates a conceptual or theoretical model, thus constituting the most general level of Ethics (Bloch and Chodoff 2000, 8).
From the point of view of moral theology, which is a form of active philosophy with a more practical hue than the mere differentiation of concepts, current ethics is a sum of evolutions of Christian ethical systems starting from the Saint Ambrose of Mediolanum (The duties of the clergy is a Christian adaptation of Cicero’s work, De officis), collections of Church canons, monastic rules (St. Basil the Great, Augustine), marked by the first attempt of systematization made by St. Thomas Aquinas. The Reformation and then its moral modernization (Butler, Kant, Barclay) led to the intuition of major issues of social ethics. Moreover under the pressure of this intuition it was developed the situational ethics.

Of course, this position is attractive from the perspective of the modern uprising against authority of any kind and fits well with two other contemporary influences. First, reducing the world to global village status through communications and travels has highlighted the great diversity and inconsistency of existing ethical systems that undermines all. Secondly, the increasing complexity of the modern world, which faces more and more moral dilemmas (nuclear war, abortion, contraceptive means, drug addiction, genetic engineering, and other likewise) has highlighted the inability of all existing codes to respond to questions raised by contemporary situations. This lack of adequate predetermined indications is the essential truth that situational ethics raises to the only principle of ethics. It builds upon it a so-called new morality, which repudiates all rules, guidelines, laws, principles, the religious respect for past experience or superior authority, and reduces morality to instant, individual, intuitive and isolated decisions that differ from one situation to another” (White 2012, 431-433).

In order not to generate capricious reactions, with no moral fundament but in the name of morality, to avoid anarchy and amorality to circumstances, it has become necessary to develop norms or standards of morality, according to which the quality of some decisions can be described. Thus, the singular norms (consistency towards one’s own judgments, compassion, utility, truth, pleasure) and the norm scale emerged. Situational ethics chose love as a unique and self-sufficient norm of moral action; hence, the chaos that various interpretations of love content bring to society. In modern Protestant ethics, the exponents were K. Barth, E. Brunner, or the famous Nygren with his work Eros und Agape, whose principle seems to be reliable until today for situational ethics: where love is, there is no need for other precepts. By situational ethics, we approach the core of the definition of social ethics, which we need to identify a social situational ethics, the ethics of food production standards in the modern world.

It is impossible to maintain a clear distinction between social ethics and personal (individual) ethics. There is no individual behavior without social consequences. There is no situation or social problem without individual repercussions. (...) For social ethics good and evil are not located only in individual moral agents or in concrete decisions or actions, but they can also be attributed to institutions, traditions, settlements and social processes. (Gill 2012, 435)
An ample vision of social ethics would be proposed by Thomas Nagell (professor at Berkley, Princeton and New York) in the volume *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford University Press, 1986), in which he analyzes ethics through its peculiarities related to the distinction between the relative and neutral values. He proposed as central theme of the ethical debate the question how can the lives, interests, and welfare of the others raise claims on us, and how can these claims – which can take various forms – be reconciled with the purpose of living our own lives. His hypothesis is that the form taken by moral theory depends on the interaction of forces of psychic economy of all complex rational beings (Nagel 2009, 313). His effort to identify social moral agents, the reasons for autonomy, personal values and impartiality, deontology and moral progress proves an active digestion of social ethics. The effort can also be seen both in the attempt of Canadian journalist Naomi Klein (*The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*) and Noam Chomsky (*Interventions, Hegemony or Survival, Failed States*) to identify the moral vacuum of interventions in natural disaster areas or land of war, easily emphasizing the force lines of an ethic influenced by geopolitical more than by truth. The same caustic analyze of social ethics is proposed by John Ralston Saul, who sees in the collapse of globalization the reinvention of the world and in the decline of competition as a valuable effort a return to “oligopoly” (Ralston Saul 2018, 176-179).

Does it make any sense to discuss the ethics of food production in this context of social morality or ethics of social intervention? Can it be a priority in the field of education of producers or of the people who investigate the quality of life? How can it be achieved in nutrition field? In this regard maybe it is worth to remind the way in which Romania was engaged in the transition from communism to eccentric consumption, emphasizing the way in which the effort to heal hunger-related trauma of the first years of communism (1947-1958) and the last years of the Ceausescu’s dictatorship (1985-1989) has materialized in the excess of consumption that is reproduced today in various directions. If specialists identify a set of activities related to food search and nutrition called “food behavior” and distinguish a series of changes due to the spontaneous variations of energetic metabolism and the incidence of these behavior variations on psychological activity – we dare to think that general human behavior is defined by eating behavior and food rhythm (*Larousse – Marele Dicţionar al Psihologiei* 2006, 63-64), too. The argument is provided by the analysis of many of contemporary components of the ethics of producing and selling food production. One of the most careful analyzes on the subject registers:

The world food system was developed under the auspices of free trade. Very quickly though free trade was countered with protectionism in the form of
policies favoring national and cultural food security. The traumas of World War led to the introduction of international commitments on individual rights with respect to labor and the right to freedom from hunger. From the seventies, the pendulum swung back in favor of free trade, this time provoking a response in the form of fair and ethical trade. The introduction of new food markets promoted by social movements as from the eighties where values were attached to the conditions and processes of production rather than the product itself led to agriculture and food markets becoming imbued with ethical attributes. At the same time, an increasingly holistic concept of food security became adopted in international forums pointing to the need for policies which were no longer reducible to food aid. While for a period, broader ethical values were identified only with alternative food networks, as from the turn of the new millennium, under the collective umbrella of economic, social and environmental sustainability, they became adopted by the global agri-food players as the triple bottom line for all agricultural and food markets. Although a new consensus has been achieved on the centrality of sustainability and food security a range of tensions and conflicts persist over the relation between food security and trade, investment, biofuels, producer and consumer rights, animal welfare, nature and the environment. (Wilkinson 2015, 9-14)

In the context of the general bibliography on the subject, it is worth mentioning a few contributions that have become basis of possible further research, which may be important at the level of the Romanian organizational culture in the field of agriculture and food production. We find important to mention the work of Lehman H. (1995), *Rationality and Ethics in Agriculture* (Moscow, Idaho 1995), that approaches a series of issues related to theory of ethics concerning agriculture, as well two other sources: Mepham B. (1995), “Agricultural Ethics”, in R. Chadwick (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics*, 1998, Volume 1, 95-110 and Thompson P. B. (1998), *Agricultural Ethics – Research, Teaching, and Public Policy* (Iowa State University Press, Ames, 1998). About the latter we retain the general description made by the researchers: This book deals with the ethics of food production and related topics such agricultural research, teaching agricultural ethics and public policy.

Is it important the ethics of product? What mechanism of knowledge belongs to it? We start from two analyses proposed in the former years by two researchers in the field of agrarian economy and resources and economic ethics. Analyzing social psychology related to food ethics Călin Georgescu asserts:

Healthy food means, in fact, regaining our autonomy, freedom and health. In Communism we were slaves because we were hungry all the time. For years we tore one another limb from limb so that I, and not you, can catch a piece of cheese or a liter of oil over the quota. The starvation of Romania’s population during Communism era has exacerbated the acquiring instincts, the indifference
to the needs of the neighbor, egoism, conformism and cowardice. A hungry people cannot be generous, neither free nor conscious of its own interests. Hungry people are not martyrs; they usually end up kissing the hand, which sometimes throws them a collop. When the masters have the control of the subjects’ food, their power becomes absolute. Terror begins. In the last 20 years, the situation has not radically changed. We have transformed ourselves from hungry proletarians into passive consumers, who drink and eat unhealthy and for free and on credit. Socialism artificially created hunger while global capitalism artificially creates money – and illusions hunger. Both communism and neoliberal globalism prevent us from being the owners of a healthy food supply and shelter; Communism takes it from us by force, globalism allows us to have access to food and shelter only through usurators (i.e. credit from banks) and transnational corporations. Thus the source of monetary income has become more important than the food source. We are running bewildered for money. For twenty years we fed with the illusion of financial prosperity. We have transformed our existence into money-oriented existence, we have sold the land inherited from the ancestors on two-bit, and we have sold ourselves, cheap goods, in the illusory hope that we will raise money. We forgot that healthy, spiritual and body food is the true wealth. (Georgescu 2014, 112-113)

Beyond the pathos of expression, we remark the cruel reality of a declining agriculture due to the lack of concern about the use of Romanian products on the national market. Hypermarkets competition was enthusiastic in the first phase of the former starved consciousness. Escaping from emotion obliges to acknowledge serious legislative and managerial competence gaps of the leaders in the field of ethics of products proposed for consumption by the population. Several years of detective action of both Romanian and former Soviet Bloc specialized journals revealed the truth that the big producers treated the stores of Romania as landfills. Another direction in the ethics of the products is identified by the academician Cristian Hera, who starts from the analyzes proposed by Lester Brown, the remarkable analyst of the development of contemporary society and the founder of both World Watch Institute (1974) and Earth Policy Institute (2001). Thus, using Lester’s remarks made in his work Eco-Economy (2001, chapter Economy and the Earth), Hera asserts in a text dedicated to the agriculture and sustainable development:

In the pursuit of profit at any cost, economic indicators and economic theory do not explain how the economy undermines the natural systems of the Earth, with major repercussions on the environment, on the present and the future of agriculture: increase of desertification, increase of carbon dioxide emissions, pronounced greenhouse gas, global warming, increase of sea level, reduction of fresh water sources, erosion and loss of soil fertility, reduction of forests and pastures or meadows, disappearance of plant species and animals. All this leads to increasingly tense relations between the economy
and the ecosystem of our planet. (...) Lester Brown introduces the concept of *eco-economics* that is environmentally sustainable, arguing that it is necessary to establish a framework for formulating economic policy on the basis of ecology principles and the economists and ecologists must work together to shape a new economy. (Hera 2010, 82-83)

The need of ethical construction of food economy has become extremely stringent in recent years when, despite technological progress in agriculture and food production areas, major crises concern water and soil. Moreover the economy of food sales is also a space for a catastrophic ethical apocalypse. To complete this point of our analyze we retain the conclusion of a study concerning the relation ethics-economy:

In the past two decades, the world has experienced deep changes in terms of globalization of goods and people, the emergence of new economic powers, political turmoil, and a sustained growth of an increasingly urban global population. These and other factors have deep implications for global water and food security, and make discussion of ethical values – often implicit in global debates – more pertinent. An understanding of the ethical issues underlying water and food security is the key to formulating solutions that truly contribute to their achievement. This is particularly true when considering that water and food security is strongly intertwined with human security and environmental security, and these cannot be addressed separately.

The study proves that solving water and food problems is not only a technical challenge but also a problem of fundamental ethical values and political will. It showcases three technological advances (desalination, information technology, and modern groundwater abstraction technology) and one concept (virtual water) that could contribute to secure water and food for a growing population, thus shedding light on the lack of concerted political will to face global and water food securities. In this context, trade has the potential to help countries manage water security in a globalized world, provided that global trade is revisited and undergoes a process of deep reform in the light of ethical considerations. Water and food are not isolated from general socio-economic and political trends. (Lopez-Gunn, De Stefano and Llamas 2012, 89-105)

Of all the issues that have been analyzed so far, we find extremely important an honest effort to diagnose the ethics of producing and proposing food toward the population. Marco Pizzuti offers one of the most important analyzes concerning the penetration of the Italian market. We notice the same phenomenon in our country, namely junk-food, cheap food with high content of sugar and fat. These trends are specific to USA habits, some of them being key elements in the future *Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)* negotiated between the European Union and the United
Pizzuti notes an ample reality present almost all over the world subjected to the tension of a devastating, situational and always changing ethics in behalf of the producer:

Our grandparents did not have the huge variety of products offered by the supermarket and fast food chains, but with little exceptions they knew exactly what they were eating because their natural food did not hide genetically modified organisms, chemical poisons, or harmful treatments to health. On the other hand, today, with industrial agriculture, characterized by culture and intensive growth, food is stuffed with chemicals, processed and so transformed that most consumers completely ignore the information about its actual composition. But this is not about data that can be overlooked because researches made by epidemiologists since 1970 has undoubtedly demonstrated that the industrial food revolution has a predominant role in the emergence of modern disease (tumors, cardiovascular problems, diabetes, obesity, intolerance, allergies, infertility, etc.). This situation is exclusively in the benefit of the industry that takes advantage of the general undervaluation of the dangers of industrial food and continues to maximize the profits at the expense of consumers. (Pizzuti 2017, 13)

Pizzuti’s work is worth to be proposed as an alternative to a food ethics course both for its realism and cordiality with a seemingly stifled research style, suffocated by the surplus of academism that itself is a kind of genetically modified organism (GMO) in relation to freedom of expression in research.

There are researched different aspects that the social ethics of food production have to assume. Issues related to lobbying and market control, pesticides, GMO food invasion, food industry specific frauds (alphanumeric codes on labels, colorants, emulsifiers to be avoided, preservatives, flavor enhancers, phosphoric acid, and acrylamide – the poison without label, hydrogenated fats, and palm oil), the serious problem of industrial sweeteners, irradiated food and endocrine disruptors. Another part of his paper deals with food as our natural pharmacy and the last chapter approach the idea of a new agro-food industry. There are a few subchapters (meat of camps animal, food that creates addiction) that excite and require ethical reactions before any other reaction concerning economics. He explains in the introduction that Epigenetics and Nutrigenomics – new sciences – have demonstrated that the substances assimilated by us while eating and digesting also influence the genetic structure by activating or deactivating the genes in our DNA. This should be a good reason to be more cautious about knowing the actual properties of the food we ingest. Some GMO products that independent academic research associated with toxic effects have already entered the food chain without our knowledge. Thus, it is no coincidence that we live a period characterized by an unexpected and mysterious explosion of previously absent or very rare pathologies (Pizzuti 2017, 13).
For the same direction of development of a food production ethics in the modern era we mention Stefano Liberti (Liberti 2017, 238) too. He also belong to the same research direction emphasized by the contributions of Raj Patel, Michael Pollan, Lester Brown, Martin Capparos, as well as the Dutch sociologist Jan Douwe van der Ploeg and many others. This proves a fulminating development of civic sense in the ethics of food, necessary for a rational opposition to irrational issues.

For Romania, the ethics of producing food research is somewhat reduced. However, it has become extremely obvious the change in consumption. Statistics recently provided by IRES (Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy) under the title Romania 2018 give us some facts that are very important for the researcher in the field of social ethics. Thus, a first conclusion of the study is that prudence dominates consumption:

- Romanians are increasingly careful concerning the price factor when shopping
- From the financial perspective the most prudent Romanians are between 36 and 50 years old
- Discount campaigns and events like Black Friday are gaining more and more ground.

It is important to note that responsible education bears fruit. According to the statistics 58.7% of men buy branded products, 57.5% of them being young people, 73.7% having higher education and 56.9% living in urban area. In Romania the purchase value is 200 million euros, the average purchase cost being 782 lei. To a great extent, 47% of population has begun to watch the price of products not just the glamor of marketing and promotion. It is interesting that 67% of those interviewed do not get used to making lists of products to buy them during the discount period. (SINTEZA 2018, 14)

The second important conclusion is that we witness a decline in cosmopolitanism (SINTEZA 2018, 22), while local brands gain ground:

- The interest for Romanian products, and especially for so-called local products (i.e. those coming from the closest area where the consumer lives) is on an upward trend in Romania.

We note that 94% prefer to buy Romanian products, 87% would sign a petition to force supermarkets to hold a Romanian stock; 53% of them think that there are not enough products in store shelves. Concerning brands, the evolution is interesting: 18% prefer international brands, 25% European, 33% national, 12% regional, 42% local. At the agrarian economy level, the result of this buyer pressure is interesting and constitutes a third conclusion of the study. The BIO & ECO phenomenon escalates. (SINTEZA 2018, 24)

- Bio-organic products market is growing.
The population segment interested and consuming this type of products is represented by men, university graduates people and those aged 35-50.

The figures are interesting, because at the question whether they have bought such products in the past, the respondents answer negatively (46%); sometimes yes (42%); and frequently yes (11%). Currently 50-50% of respondents is interested / not interested in bio products / organic products, while 41% will buy sometimes or frequently (19%). Is it much? Is it a little? Will it only depend on the buyer or on the producers and their commercial and lobby ethics to change the margin of bio product buyers? Or moreover will it depend on their advertising ethics especially since the 8th (SINTEZA 2018, 34) conclusion of the study shows that public confidence in advertising is collapsing? Did this aspect cause the 4th conclusion of the study? It records that the Romanians are beginning to consume responsibly. (SINTEZA 2018, 26)

- Raise awareness about consumption.

- A quarter of respondent admits that they belong to the category of those who overbuy food and afterward throw it away.

- 9 out of 10 will be more careful about this.

Of course, all the other findings of the study are important for the aspect we have noted from the beginning, namely the way ethics derives from culture and can influence the consumer’s social behavior, but also the general register of the producer. It becomes extremely important that in the coming years the social ethics experts to develop the eco-moral-economic model that moves the accent from homo economicus on homo sapiens\(^1\) in order to recover the ethical reason of eating and how it develops addictions or consistency with the economic world. The civic sense must not only mark the consumer but also the producer, especially since he is fully aware of the constitution of his product, risking to produce the irreparable. From this point of view perhaps the ethics proposed at the end of our study and its image offered by the IRES study do not suit producers but open the way for an absolutely necessary ethical reconstruction in the field of food production.

**Notes**

4 See Todeschini 1976, 283-309. The analysis starts from „*De contractibus et usuris*”, sermon in the volume *De Evangelio aeterno* in Bernardini Senesis Opera Omnia, tom IV (Firenze, ed. Quaracchi, 1956). Another specialist in analyzing the economic dimension of Bernardine de
Siena’s work is professor de Roover (1967 and 1971). In order to follow the genesis of the economic ideas at Bernardine of Siena, we have extensive studies of the following authors: Scaramuzzi (1930), Trugenberger (1951) and Rinaldi (1959).

5 An idea is offered in the 16th century work Învăţămintele lui Neagoe Basarab către fiul său Theodosie. For the beginning of the managerial thinking and the transmission of the inheritance of the management (Rom. “chivernisire”) of the business, see Letopisețele (in Contribuții la conturarea unui Model Românesc de Management 2014, 62-66).

6 Another meaning of éthos: habit (cf. Enciclopedie de Filosofie și Științe umane 2007, 301).

7 Details can also be identified in Clark (2014, 190-210 – chap. Puritans and situational ethics – and 214-216 chap. Situational ethics).

8 See entire chapter IX, related to ethics (pp. 313-362).

9 The campaign, sustained in Romania only in 2017, was extremely vivid in Slovakia, for example, as early as 2011, the specialists from there alerted a number of international organizations on the issue. (https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/social/produse-de-calitate-mai-slaba-la-noi-decat-in-vest-care-este-explicatia-676821, accessed March 18, 2018).

10 The data is part of the Romania study of 2018, conducted by IRES between January 31 and February 2, 2018, on a sample of 1159 representative subjects for the adult population in Romania. The maximum tolerated error of the study is +/- 2, 9%. The study was presented in SINTEZA no. 49, 2018.

11 For the Christian solution concerning the subject it should be mentioned Ioja (2010).

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**Transcendental Homelessness and Longing for Totality in Thomas Mann**

**Abstract:** This paper interprets the actions of Thomas Mann’s bourgeois characters, specifically their struggle to regain an image of totality, as the result of a certain transcendental homelessness described in Lukács’s *The Theory of the Novel and Soul and Form*. Indeed, some of the “life” figures in Mann’s early works can be understood as aesthetic constructs of a lost community, shaped by an insoluble tension between the protagonists’ “soul” and (social) “orm”. The element of irony in Mann could be explained by the futility of aestheticisation. A Lukácsian reading attempts to complement Schopenhauerian and Nietzschean analyses of Mann’s artist-heroes while alluding to the relationship between a desire for wholeness and reactionary attitudes.

**Keywords:** transcendental homelessness, aestheticism, totality, reactionary politics, Thomas Mann, Georg Lukács

1. Introduction

“... there is a nostalgia of the soul when the longing for home is so violent that the soul must, with blind impetuousness, take the first path that seems to lead there...”

(György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*)

This paper explores the possibility of placing the bourgeois heroes of Thomas Mann – conflicted by a lack of meaning and a necessary gap between action and thought – in a Lukácsian framework of lost totality. Doing so would allow one to interpret the aesthetic transfiguration of the object as a result of longing. Adopting the Lukácsian framework, the following motif may be identified: the subject (driven by “transcendental homelessness” and a longing for totality) constructs an artificial “whole” through the aestheticisation of life in order to complement the fragmentedness of modern conditions and yearns to connect with this artificial image, yet organic totality is never achieved since the reflective protagonists are distanced from their illusory constructs. If the distance vanishes, the image vanishes with it. In this view, aestheticisation is an insufficient coping mechanism for abstract loss.

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Critical analyses of Mann’s artist-heroes frequently rely on a psychoanalytic or a Schopenhauerian-Nietzschean structure (Bornedal 2012). The attempt to establish a different interpretation calls for a focus on being cast out of a primordial state, as well as an emphasis on tensions between soul and form along with conflicts between the “aesthetic” and the “social”. This is achieved through a close reading of Buddenbrooks as well as that of Mann’s early works – in particular Tonio Kröger, Death in Venice, Vision and The Dilettante. The closing remarks return to the potential dangers of such efforts.

Aestheticisation is merely one of the possible answers to abstract loss, a mechanism to cope with the duality of life and form in modernity. Based on Márkus (1983, 10-12), Terezakis maintains that the possibility of grasping the concept of form, a prerequisite of the possibility of an integrated life through diagnosing the “crisis of culture”, remains a central issue for Lukács throughout his life (Terezakis 2010, 228); for my mind, this is also true for the literary characters considered in this article. Though Márkus may be right, Lukács’ later thought (e.g. Realism in the Balance) is characterised by a distinct shift in the portrayal of life and form as related to society; indeed, Lukács explicitly renounces The Theory of the Novel and Soul and Form after his conversion to marxism-leninism (Lukács 1980, 49). Considering the relevance of the latter works to questions of form (Butler 2010, 1-2), early Lukács will be given more attention.

2. Longing and “transcendental homelessness” in Lukács and Mann

“Happy are those ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths...”

(György Lukács, The Theory of the Novel)

Lukács asserts that an encounter with “the Tonio Kröger-problem” (Lukács 1948, 6) had a significant effect on his early works. Before an outline of longing, the admittedly romantic Lukácsian notions of totality and form need to be addressed, especially since they rely on, but are not identical with, similar concepts in Plato, Schiller, Kant, Hegel et al.¹

The logic of The Theory of the Novel is Hegelian insofar as it grounds aesthetics in historical necessity (“A work of art cannot entirely free itself from the culture of its time” – Hegel 1975, 297-298), and the image of an idyllic Greece evokes Hegel’s lectures on the timespace of Greek art (Miles 1979, 27), yet – as opposed to Hegel, for whom the decline of art as the primary expression of the Idea is a sign of the self-discovery of Spirit (Hegel 1975, 11) – art for Lukács expands because the world has “gone out of joint”. For Lukács, the rise of questions about essence and being are, instead of signalling an increased self-awareness, signs of the fragmentation of a
totality (Lukács 1971, 35) in which the passive receptivity of given meaning had unquestioned primacy. Lukács’s totality also parallels the unity the “play drive” restores in Schiller (Schiller 2002, Letter XV), who claimed that we all were, and necessarily have to become again, objects of human longing. That said, Lukács employs the concept of totality in a multitude of ways (Stahl 2013), both in aesthetic and social contexts, without providing an exact definition: there exists organic (as opposed to artificial and unstable) totality as well as individual (as opposed to social) totality. In general, it is a constellation of meaningfully interrelated elements: these elements can only be understood in relation to each other. The hero of the novel longs for an organic totality in which form is not externally imposed upon life\(^2\), but this requires a historico-metaphysical structure no longer available (Lukács 1971, 97). The lack of this former, unified historico-metaphysical structure results in “transcendental homelessness” (see below)\(^3\).

Similarly, “form” is used in different, though interrelated, senses: Lukács discusses forms of works of art, e.g. the essay as form, as well as forms of life, e.g. a bourgeois form of life, asceticism and so on (Lukács 1971, 69). Along with social forms of life, the individual can attempt to give a form to his own life e.g. through gestures (Lukács 2010, 45-46). Forms are historical and attempt to communicate the individual and social conditions of their own emergence (Butler 2010, 4; 6-8); as Butler states, Lukácsian forms have a “Platonic streak”, but are not identical with Plato’s Forms or with Kant’s notion of form as a spatiotemporal dimension, despite having Kantian aspects (artificial form is hostile to essence in both Kant and Lukács).

For every literary genre, there exists a corresponding state of affairs characterised by its distance from the metaphysical and the degree of its fragmentedness as a result of this distance. Works of art – in this case, Mann’s stories – reflect on these states of affairs. The novel in particular transforms the “sentimental striving for the immediate unity of life” to a state, to “being” (Lukács 1971, 77). For Lukács, the literary problem is inseparable from the social problem: both the form of the novel and the forms depicted in the novel are shaped by an attempt at homecoming.

How do literary forms express homelessness? For Lukács, and for the outsiders of Mann, a yearning for home is a yearning for another time because modern man is a “latecomer” to the world (Miles 1979, 23) and is “truly at home nowhere” (Castillo 1986, 89). Matthias claims that a simple sign of transcendental homelessness is that “major portions of novels [are] no longer set in the characters’ homes” (Matthias 2006, 1). In the concrete sense, Foucauldian heterotopias replace the ancestral abode: Castorp remains on the magic mountain, Tonio’s home becomes a public institution, the withering Buddenbrooks retreat to Travemünde, and Felix Krull spends his days at a hotel. In an abstract sense, physical home is gradually disattached from “heimisch”. The few remaining threads that bound Tonio to the
declining Kröger family and his ancestors grow even weaker as the story progresses (Mann 1954, chapter III): his former home seems “tiny” and “comical” after his return, yet it evokes a sharp “pang” of yearning. Another sign of homelessness is the structure of the Bildungsroman itself, the genre which Mann subverts through the Magic Mountain: the Bildungsroman is considered (Cheah 2003, 242-242) an attempt at the symbolic resolution of the subject’s alienation from the world. To understand alienation, one needs to look at Lukács’s notion of a primordial unity.

For Lukács, the object of yearning is a closed totality exemplified by Greekdom, in which “life, culture, meaning, action and social institutions formed a harmonious whole” (Stahl 2013). As opposed to the life-denying maturity of modernity characterised by a “sterile existence too close to the earth and too far from heaven” (Lukács 1971, 57), Greekdom is described as childhood, ironically evoked in Hanno’s stuttering recital of classical literature in Buddenbrooks (Meyers 2014, 24). Lukács posits a primordial community (Miles 1979, 25), a true totality of being – which seems to be a precondition of organic forms (Lukács 1971, 17) – grounded in metaphysics. In this pre-reflective state, the world “feels like home” because soul, society and natural phenomena are, though clearly distinct, of the same essential nature. It requires a metaphysical structure in which subject and substance is one in a Hegelian sense: the substantial connection between the epic hero and the world enables “meaning” to be clearly visible. Goals are given, answers come naturally and precede existential questions (Lukács 1971, 32) because a metaphysical compass renders everything possibly intelligible – if gods, stones and men are of the same substance and function according to the same logic, there is no unknowable noumenon for the pre-Kantian subject. “Life” gives birth to its own form, i.e. the actualisation of inherent potentialities is a simple process of “becoming conscious”; forms are not externally imposed on life, there is no contradiction between form and life in a modern sense (Lukács 2010, 136).

The introspective literary subject and the “craving for substance” is born through the collapse of this social and metaphysical unity. Yearning is thus a matter of historical development (Terezakis 2010, 222): the world loses its substance for the subject, who can find substance only in himself. The alienation of the subject from “the external” means that an organic totality of life becomes elusory for form (Lukács 2010, 204) both on a literary and on an existential level, i.e. for post-epic literary forms and individual actions. As opposed to organic totality, in which life and organic form are not in contradiction, adequate artificial forms can still be created after the collapse, yet they are unstable and fragmentary (Lukács 1971, 76) since time, as opposed to e.g. the timeframe of the epic, becomes constitutive through a loss of the primordial home. In short: for Lukács, time becomes a defining factor in shaping forms after the loss of a timeless, organic totality depicted
in the epic. The fact that every form is subjected to the destruction of time means that the stability of the “transcendental points of orientation” (Lukács 1971, 40) (i.e. the direction given by a stable unity of gods and men) is lost, the world outside the subject ceases to be a source of meaning. Since the “Gods of Greece [were] driven away”, the Buddenbrooks’s motto (Dominus providebit – “the Lord will provide”) becomes bitterly ironic, mocking the family’s decline. In Greek totality, definite and fixed social bonds would be an unnecessary burden; this self-made second nature, along with the never-ceasing demand of the categorical imperative (Lukács 1971, 36), results from the loss of “supra-natural necessities”, i.e. the rules of a world not yet abandoned by gods, through constitutive time. Yet these artificial rules are alien to human aspirations, and Kant’s imperative restricts the richness of experiences – thus the increasingly self-aware subjects⁴ find them more and more constraining, and are therefore increasingly distanced from them and from each other. Mann himself states that Tonio Kröger and Tristan are conflicted by their “isolation (...) in the world of reality”, both socially and metaphysically (Mann 1936, vi).

It is this isolation that produces a nostalgia for the irretrievable, lost simplicity (Lukács 2010, 79) of a former whole defining Tonio’s yearning for an uncomplicated life or the Sehnsuchtsmotif Meyers identifies in Mann’s Tristan (Meyers 2014, 42). The promise of totality, a longing for a “form that completes itself” (Castillo 1986, 89) is the unsettled desire of the modern novel. The heroes of Mann’s novels are seekers (Miles 1979, 23) trying to express life through a proper form, but life has become irreparably heterogeneous. Indeed, after organic form is no longer possible, the creator strives to give a proper (artificial) form to his authenticity. This is problematic: first, the increasing inwardness due to the hostility of an unknowable world cripples the subject, thus every form he creates, be it action or artwork, is “incomplete” (Butler 2010, 14) as seen in Christian Buddenbrook, whose pathological self-analysis makes him unable to finish anything he starts. Second, the unstoppable movement of the “historico-philosophical position of the world’s clock” (Lukács 1971, 91) means that the created form eventually becomes restricting. In a given historical period, bourgeois ethics temporarily suspend eternal loneliness and longing (Lukács 2010, 75), but for Mann’s protagonists, the historico-metaphysical conditions giving birth to these ethics crumble; the disintegration of Hegel’s bürgerliche Gesellschaft (Lubich 2004, 210) means that Thomas Buddenbrook’s Haltung (composure) subdues life instead of framing or balancing it. Mann’s heroes exist in an era of “no longer but not yet” (Broch 1984, 46), reinforcing the desire to return to mythical totality – see Aschenbach.

This motif of longing and the problem of artificial forms is identifiable in Buddenbrooks, Tonio Kröger and Death in Venice. Though signs of decay are present from the beginning of Buddenbrooks – the company which built the
home of the family goes bankrupt, and the collapse is described as “inevitable” and “destined” (Mann 1995, 19) – Thomas and Tony hold on to the bourgeois form of life shifting beneath their feet, despite being suffocated by the ideal of the older generation. Johann Sr. is described as rose-cheeked, full of vitality (Mann 1995, 6–7) and dedicated to the present. He is committed to an orderly, structured environment, while Jean feels comfortable in an untamed garden, longing for a “unity with nature” (Mann 1995, 27). Despite initial cracks pointing towards an inevitable fate, the lives and attitudes of the older Buddenbrooks are internally consistent and analogous, as Johann writes: “we are not separate, independent, self-subsisting individuals, but links in a chain” (Mann 1995, 140). This chain gradually ceases to be a source of meaning, parallel to the deterioration of the external world and the atomisation of the family property. The distance between fragile introspection (Hanno) and a natural ability to act (Johann), the Lukácsian “chasm” between cognition and action (Blanc 1997), also signals the growing distance between life and essence. Though Thomas longs for the vitality unconstrained by social norms characterising his forefathers, he is unable to adapt to a changing Germany. The “performative” replaces the natural: the sober outlook that came naturally for the older generations becomes a facade for Thomas. Tony similarly adopts the mask of the bourgeois ideal, but because of these artificial constraints, she remains a child forever. Lukács claims that “once [continuity and a sense of belonging] is destroyed, even the past disappears” (Lukács 2010, 129); in this case, the fragmentation of unity results in a longing for an idealised past which rewrites the actual family history, as seen in Tony’s exaggerations of the Buddenbrooks’ former wealth.

Whenever the subject feels that his “soul”, his identity is disattached from a given form (here: the bourgeois way of life), he attempts to create new forms; the Buddenbrooks are unable to do so – see Christian’s clownish directionlessness or Hanno’s overflowing compositions – because, in a Lukácsian sense, the soul is “wider” than the “destinies which life has to offer” (Lukács 1971, 112). This leads them away from a substanceless external world to the internal adventures of the intellectual and the aesthetic. Following the loss of home, Hanno turns towards art and Thomas turns towards Schopenhauer. Since Thomas’ life is overburdened by the shackles of form, he is pleased by Schopenhauer’s idea that “birth is captivity”; through philosophy, Thomas realises a “longing envy” for what man can not have and can not be, and that the gaze of the “longing envy (...) turns to love” (Mann 1995, 632). Hanno is the most aware of the inevitability of the fragmentation and is the most inclined to escape to his closed world through art, described as an ecstasy of “urgent longing” (Mann 1995, 486). Yet Thomas can not exist in an absence of will and Hanno perishes prematurely – similarly, Toni’s artistic gaze opens his soul for
him, but all he sees is “Komisch und Elend” (comical and tragic). In conclusion, art and philosophy are inadequate answers to a longing for the unrestrictive form of an uncomplicated totality.

In modernity, a glimpse of meaning is the most the subject can attain, longing can only be satisfied temporarily (Lukács 1971, 115). Aschenbach is rescued from the taxing monotony of “being an amateur in the gay, outside world” by contemplative moments of mystical meaning through the associations evoked by the facade of the chapel outside the social reality he is accustomed to. It is “the widening of inward barriers”, similar to the largeness of the soul constrained by form in Lukács, that sets him off on his journey of transfiguration (Mann 1954, chapter I). Like Tonio and Thomas, he is disconnected from previous generations (his appearance betrays his mother’s longing for the exotic while his desires betray his father’s work ethic) and attempts to escape to the “lotus-eaters” whose realm Adorno describes as a deceptive image of bliss of a pre-productive stasis (Adorno 2002, 49-50). Aschenbach longs for a state in which no more Haltung, no more tension between the life-instinct and social requirements, is needed to sustain forms. Indeed, the starting point of the search for an image of wholeness is a conflict between physical reality and the “fiery ardours of the spirit” (Mann 1954, chapter II): the adventures which Aschenbach is unable to experience in the external world is lived internally, but this is only possible through soul-crushing self-constraint. The artist’s fancy yearns for the “simple”, “vast”, “immeasurable” and “eternal” in which these tensions disappear, yet salvation through art is necessarily short-lived, restricted to the duration of the artwork’s influence on the subject creating or perceiving said piece of art.

Likewise, Tonio’s adoration of Hans and Inge is the longing for a “solid majority” (Mann 1954, chapter IV) due to his own “doubtful standing among men”. This is, in Lukács’ words, “a longing for the thing most opposite to ourselves; a longing for the great, holy simplicity” (Lukács 2010, 74). Tonio is, as opposed to the desired objects, directionless, dictated by the loss of the points of orientation in Lukács. His potentialities can not be actualised – there are a “thousand ways of life” within him, all “sheer impossibilities” (compare this to The Dilettante). Tonio is lost. He can not overcome the yearning for unity, mourning “a certain joy that was of the soul” which “once [...] had been his own” (Mann 1954, chapter III), which leads him to reconstruct the image of Hans and Inge – yet he takes an almost masochistic delight in the impossibility of an organic unity, since it shapes his individuality and reinforces his position as the outsider. This joy is overshadowed by the tension between soul and form: if the “heart if too full”, the soul is “not fated to receive a final form” and can only be expressed in distorted banalities. On the other hand, the masterfully crafted prose is void of life. Tonio expresses a view similar to the Lukácsian notion.
that conceptualisation “kills life”: “there’s a [...] cool cheek in the [...] way a writer can get rid of his feelings by turning them into literature. If your heart is too full, [...] go to the literary man, [...] he will analyse and formulate your affair, and [...] make you indifferent to it” (Mann 1954, chapter IV).

In turbulent times, attempts to restore an image of totality – Lukács’ examples are artworks conceived in a style shaped by the Winckelmannian understanding of ancient Greece – can make men “forget [...] the irreparable cracks in the edifice of their world and tempt them to dream of new unities” (Lukács 1971, 37). This is what Mann’s heroes attempt to accomplish through their transformative gaze, yet organic unity can not be restored. The distance between the subject and the image, like the distance between Keats’ bold lover and the object of his desire, is bound to remain (“Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss / Though winning near the goal”).

3. The transfiguration of the object, failure to achieve totality

“Longing makes a link between those who are unlike one another, but [...] it destroys every hope of their becoming one; becoming one is coming home, and true longing has never had a home.”

(György Lukács, Soul and Form)

Since longing for a home means longing for a pre-reflective state and since conceptuality itself “kills life”, the subject tries to grasp totality through art. As shown above, alienation and increasing subjectivity are the spring for a desire of synthesis (Lukács 1948, 70); Broch claims that distinguishing the beautiful as an aesthetic elect is a reaction to the horror of a fragmented life, and that an attempt to restore totality has to come from a breakthrough into the irrational, requiring a “single, essential symbol” of inalterability (Broch 1984, 33; 48). It will be shown that Tadzio, Hans, Anna and Alfred (from The Dilettante) can be considered such symbols. In a Lukácsian framework, this breakthrough is the subject’s attempt to project the soul to “the external”; the creative agent tries to recreate meaning by assimilating everything that is valuable into the formed world – but these two are too hostile to another to be simultaneously affirmed.

How does one apply the Lukácsian notion of totality to the object transformed by creativity? On an individual level, totality implies a soul “at rest” even in action, one that is never a stranger to its surroundings. Life is ignorant of the form assigned to it, yet form envelops life perfectly (see the older Buddenbrooks). This requires unreflectiveness (Lukács 1971, 35), a life unburdened by normative questions of life, enabled by “epic” time: time loses its constitutiveness, thus the aesthetic image retains its essence
through the passage of time – just like Helen of Troy, Hans and Inge do not age in the modern sense. The artificial image is of a being whose predispositions and attitudes towards the world are aligned with social expectations, as in the integrated and “bounded” societies of antiquity (Miles 1979, 23); there is no Other to be confronted, the soul is at home. Errors can be made, but they are contingent, and can be determined by their distance from a locus of meaning which is intelligible. This does not imply a strict identity between subject and object, only that the individuals and objects divided by sharp lines can be placed in a homogeneous system of “love, family and the state”, the archetypal home.

The idea that a “ pang of home-sickness ” is associated with a longing for an uncertain past – manifesting itself in a symbol based on vague memories of happy companionship (Mann 1956, chapter VIII) – can be traced back to Mann’s Vision (1893). While “ forgotten things [and feelings] rise up ”, an image “ full of bliss ” appears and blurs into the whole. This image is described as “ perfect ”, “ a world ”, “ a universe [in itself] ”; a “ sweet enigma ” pulsating with life (Lawson 2005, 14). This image of wholeness is elaborated upon in more mature artistic attempts such as The Dilettante. The protagonist, driven by a lack of substance in “ the external ”, paints an image of wholeness, that of individual life in harmony with social forms and the transcendental, through bestowing his aesthetic objects (Anna and Alfred) with the qualities he attributes to a former totality. They are described as “ children of light ”: easy-going, spoiled, friendly and admired by all. These favourites of the Gods thrive in the necessity Tonio Kröger struggles with. The dilettante continues: “ I confess that I should like to be them. (...) I am possessed with the feeling that I once belonged among them ” (Mann 1936, 41); yet the children of light are characterised by a lack of “ the faintest self-consciousness ” (Mann 1936, 45), thus it is his own reflectiveness that distances the dilettante from this image of wholeness. He feels disqualified and unknown despite their assumed former unity.

Tadzio is, as a par excellence aesthetic object (Bornedal 2012, 14), identical to the children of light. He evokes an image of “ the noblest moment of Greek sculpture ” (Mann 1954, chapter III), yet his pure serenity is “ unlike anything ” in nature. Similarly, Hans is described as uncommonly handsome, a scholar and a sportsman basking in popularity and, as opposed to Tonio, in harmony with society at large. Through Aschenbach’s gaze, contradictions dissolve: Tadzio’s hair is described as “ golden darkness ” in contrast to his pale skin, his body is formed of something transparent, something “ other than flesh ” (Mann 1954, chapter IV). He is seen as the “ perfection of form ” expressing the “ perfection of thought ”; in the absence of a certain creative agency, these contradictions can not coexist without tension. The transformation of Tadzio to an image of pure perfection allows Aschenbach to experience reality, through Tadzio, as that of the
idealised ancient world: for example, dawn is humanised once again, described as “Eros (...) rising from the side of her spouse”. In short, the image of the boy is, paraphrasing Meyers, the result of the artist’s struggle to unite real and ideal (Meyers 2014, 63) at the cost of his Haltung – as seen in the collapse of Aschenbach’s own form.

In Lukácsian terms, Tadzio’s actions – along with those of Alfred, Hans etc. – are, as opposed to the actions of the late bourgeois subject, “well-fitting garments” for the world (Lukács 1971, 30). The tension between the internal and the external dissolves; this is because the children of light are aesthetic experiments modelled after a state preceding the reification of consciousness, and thus exist in doubtless unity. Evoking the old Gemeinschaft, Hans and Inge are “removed from time”; likewise, Tadzio “blurs time” (Robertson 2004, 96) for Aschenbach. The attempt to create an image of totality is also identifiable in the character of Felix Krull, who becomes “nameless, ageless, free and pure”, a harmonious union of life and art, through the gaze of the military committee (Lubich 2004, 210). Encountering the star of the theatre shaped young Felix’s outlook on life: Müller-Rosé is an image of perfection for the petty bourgeois audience of the operetta (Mann 1970, part I chapter V), radiating brilliance through seemingly natural, flawless form. In Felix’s imagination, the conventions of theatre do not restrict Müller-Rosé, but release him from “the limitations of everyday life”. This other-worldly image is the result of Felix’s, and the bourgeois spectators’s, longing for the “realm of the great, the whole and the infinite” (Lubich 2004, 204). Yet as soon as the distance between the creative mind and the object dissolves, Felix is confronted with the reality of the repellent creature behind the “beautiful and symmetrical proportions” of the image, and is disgusted by the sight.

For Aschenbach, the problem of distance manifests itself in the fact that there is no contact, physical or otherwise, between himself and Tadzio, though the image of Tadzio appears everywhere in Venice. Chasing the boy, Aschenbach’s soul “beats in vain” against a glass wall (Lukács 1971, 90). Tonio concedes that he both desires and renounces the shrinking of distance between himself and Hans, since closeness would destroy the image just as in the Dilettante; a certain detachment is maintained since Tonio both desires to be Hans – at the very least, to take part in the unreflective unity he stands for – and desires Hans to remain the image of a wholesome other. In Lukács’s words, a “profound sense of union” is, contradictorily, enabled by “being-separate” from this union (Lukács 2010, 112). After the disappearance of an organic unity, the aesthetic transfiguration of the object is not directly suitable to systematise totality. To extend this aesthetic notion to the world of the novel: the attempt of the longing subject to create organic totality fails because of the inadequacy of the historico-metaphysical conditions. The form-giving intention can not surmount the distance
between subject and object; on the contrary, it maintains the distance. Though Tadzio may speak of commonplace events in Polish, it remains “mingled harmonies” for Aschenbach (Mann 1954, chapter III) as long as he does not understand Tadzio; similarly, Tonio and Inge exist in different (linguistic) worlds. The necessity of distance in transfiguring an object is supported by Kierkegaard and by Benjamin, who state that inapproachability is a primary quality of the auratised image (Benjamin 2002, chapter XI). One could also claim that this problem of distance is the root of irony: though Solger asserts that irony is a modern method of form-giving, perhaps it is the limitedness of the modern method of form-giving that results in irony. Indeed, for Lukács, irony is the attempt of the subject to “imprint” the content of its longing upon a world alien to it (Castillo 1986, 96), along with a realisation of the futility of this endeavour. The reflective hero accepts that soul, once universal, exists only in the lover instead of both the lover and the adored object – which results in irony.

Though longing seems to be inseparable from modernity, acting on longing through aestheticism may have considerable consequences in both aesthetics and politics. Lukács draws attention to the fact that, in a fragmented world in which aesthetics is “no longer metaphysics”, an attempt to restore totality through art means a violation of the particular that lies outside art (Lukács 1971, 38); in fact, a longing for totality – a “hunger for wholeness” – in an era defined by the inaccessibility of organic forms may lead to reactionary attitudes, i.e. forcibly subsuming the particular under the whole. Modern artworks can give a false sense of unity, and form is sometimes fetishised to the point of inauthenticity (Terezakis 2010, 229). Indeed, one may doubt the authenticity of the image of Greekdom Lukács paints in order to sustain his argument: for Adorno, the totality of Greekdom was just as alienating as modernity and the image of communality is merely a result of the oppression of instrumental reason. Second-degree critical philosophies (Jameson) centre exactly around critiques of the oppressive whole while pointing out the dangers of trying to eradicate the distance inherent to longing. Though a detailed discussion of these dangers is beyond the scope of this paper, one may identify them in works of critical theory such as Adorno’s Negative Dialectics or Dialectic of Enlightenment, Hermann Broch’s assessment of modernity or Benjamin’s politicisation of the aesthetic. The point of this chapter is that the artificial image of wholeness is, because of its instability and exclusivity, necessarily inferior to the organic totality Lukács links to a primordial home.

4. Conclusion

In early Lukács, organic totality is lost and adequate artificial forms emerging after this loss can only suspend longing for organic totality in
certain historico-metaphysical conditions. Transitional periods, in which forms become increasingly restricting, are characterised by an increased longing for totality. This results in experiments with artificial forms in an attempt to regain totality, to return “home”. The aesthetic transfiguration of the object is such an attempt, yet – since maintaining the image requires a distance from the subject – totality is beyond reach. What is more, efforts to create par excellence aesthetic objects in order to satisfy longing may be damaging; fetishising the image of the “children of light” does not improve the situation of the dilettante, Tonio or Aschenbach, and in case of the latter, it brings about the disintegration of Haltung and dissolves the pure style of the classical writer, a life’s work (Robertson 2004, 97-101). The importance of examining the connection between longing and the transfiguration of the object lies in the potentially devastating implications of said connection; for example, Leverkühn’s pact with the devil leads to the birth of fascism in Doctor Faustus (Meyers 2014, 122). Using a reactionary idea of wholeness as a rhetorical device so as to constrict conceptual solutions is not unheard of in contemporary politics, either.

Investigating the assumption of a supposedly raptured historico-metaphysical structure, extending the inquiry to a framework potentially able to substantiate claims on the loss of totality and pre-given meaning, could be a logical continuation of early Lukács’ study of form and culture – one may look to Nietzsche or Heidegger for a more detailed analysis of the erosion of Gemeinschaft and its consequences. Another approach to elaborate on the relation of aestheticism to a loss of totality is through the ethical notion of absolute sinfulness (“vollendete Sündhaftigkeit”), a term borrowed from Fichte: sinfulness – like Adorno’s concept of the “false condition” – seems to limit the subject’s possible reactions to transcendental loss insofar as it is an essential feature of modernity. A “mood of permanent despair” (Lukács 1971, 12) may not only open the way towards the emergence of the novel as a literary form, but also reinforce aestheticism as an answer to a “wrong” (substanceless) life which – again, paraphrasing Adorno – can not be lived rightly.

Pointing to Dostoevsky in the The Theory of the Novel, Lukács maintains a vague hope that, despite the fragmentedness of the world, the birth of a new literary form could signal some kind of restoration of meaning (enabled by a new relationship between the individual and the external). These signs of optimism notwithstanding, the longing for wholistic communities prevails. If aestheticism is indeed an inadequate reaction to abstract loss, it is unclear what other attitudes can the subject of late modernity hope to rely on in face of a substanceless wold.
Notes

1 The image of modernity as an age of fragmentation expressed through the novel form is also comparable to Broch’s assessment of the modern condition.
2 This is what Lukács implies by “home”.
3 While introducing the notion of totality, Lukács hints at rationalisation as a possible reason for the collapse of organic totality, but Cheah is wrong to believe that Lukács established a relation between disenchantment and instrumental reason. Lukács’s intention is not to describe the cause of the transformation of the metaphysical or the social, as opposed to e.g. Adorno (Cheah 2003, 241).
4 ...whose increasing self-awareness is itself due to a loss of “objective” meaning and the resulting journeys inside the psyche (as opposed to the Homeric journeys in a colourful world of mythical creatures).
6 For Lukács, philosophical thought signals a rapture between the “internal” and the “external” (Lukács 1971, 29).
7 The English translation (tragic) does not do justice to the original expression, Elend.
8 This is what Lukács referred to as the “Luciferian” aspect of art.
9 Like Antoine Roquentin in Sartre’s La Nausée, the dilettante is driven to travel in search of meaning (exploring the salons of Paris, the mountains of Asia etc.) and, like Roquentin, he discovers universal meaninglessness.
10 “There are men, the favourites of the gods (...) whose happiness is genius (...) children of light, who move easily through life with the reflection and image of the sun in their eyes; easy, charming, amiable, while all the world surrounds them with praise, admiration, envy and love (...). And they mingle in the world like children (...) spoiled as the sunshine (...) as though it were impossible things should be otherwise.” (Mann 1936, 41)
11 In Robertson’s reading: a self-contained, free-standing form detached from the spectator (Robertson 2004, 96).
12 Invoking Plato’s Symposium, Kierkegaard states that “loving is the only thing I’m an expert in, (...) just give me an object for my love (...). But here I stand like an archer whose bow is stretched (...) and who is asked to shoot at a target five paces ahead of him. This I cannot do, (...) but put the target two or three hundred paces further away and you will see!” (Lukács 2010, 50-52)
13 “The mechanism of longing at times denies or ignores [distance] in an effort to grasp the whole in the present moment.” (Castillo 1986, 97)

References

Transcendental Homelessness and Longing for Totality in Thomas Mann


Ana-Maria PETRACHE *

The Transformative Impact of Eschatological Narratives:
A Reflection on the Theology of History

Abstract: This article discusses three XX century theologians, one Catholic, Gaston Fessard, one Protestant, Jürgen Moltmann and one Orthodox, Ioannis Zizioulas, who have in common an inverse reading of the timeline: not from past to future, but the other way around, from the future to the present and the past. According to them, it is our eschatological future that makes us what we are today, shaping also our past. All three theologians explain how the eschatological narrative causes behaviours, how the act of imaging the eschaton transforms the present by enlightening our decisions, giving us hope or by the real presence of eschatology in history. On this material, I will argue that the eschatological turn in theology and the rediscovery of the importance of the theology of history imply certain existentialist consequences. Thus, the article explains how living in the eschatological horizon makes it possible to escape the materialist mechanical timeframe, where the past causes the present and the present causes the future.

Keywords: eschatology, ontology, Zizioulas, Moltmann, Fessard, theology of history

A Jewish story about a traveller walking through a village in Eastern Europe tells how the traveller finds a watchman in the village. Thinking that the village is too poor to afford to pay the guard, the traveller asks him what is he doing. The answer is surprising: “I’m watching for the Messiah!” Years later, the same traveller comes back and finds the same guardian. He asks him whether he finds his job boring. “Yes”, replies the messianic watchman, “but think of the job security” (Landes 2011, 7). Leaving the joke aside, one can definitely speak of a theology of watching, bringing together watching and praying. In the biblical text, praying and watching go together praying is not a mystical inner feeling, but a search for the presence of God. The one who is waiting for the Messiah lives in God’s advent, in expectation of the coming of the One (Moltmann 2016, 173).

Shaped by the Judeo-Christian tradition, but nowadays independent of its religious origin, the eschatological framework models our relationship with the future. Of course, this relationship with the future differs according

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to whether the Kingdom is perceived as being near (as in the early years of the Church) or as a remote and transcendent reality. Eschatology provides a rich set of resources for imagining a better world and therefore influences behaviour in the present one. There are many extremely interesting aspects of eschatology, but in this paper, I will focus only on the relationship between time and its end, and how this final point of history influences the way we conceive the past, the present and the future.

In the last decades, a number of studies have demonstrated how the eschatological imagination plays a role in shaping daily-life realities. A notable book that established a new paradigm in the field was Karl Lowith’s *Meaning in History* (Lowith 1949). Written by a German Jew who was a refugee during World War Two, the book offers an explanation of why people still believe in historical progress, in spite of the extremely violent history of the twentieth century was. Lowith argues that the belief in progress in present-day society is no more than the secularized belief in Paradise. When people stopped believing in Paradise, the promise of a better world became the promise of a better tomorrow. For Lowith, belief in progress is not sustained by facts. There can certainly be some scientific progress, but one cannot generalize this kind of progress over other aspects of human life. According to Lowith, the Judeo-Christian eschatological narrative provided a new understanding of time. The future became more important than the present or the past.

Awaiting and watching became categories for thinking and acting, while modern philosophy of history relies on the Christian theology of history and its eschatological orientation.

In the Hebrew and Christian view of history the past is a promise to the future; consequently, the interpretation of the past becomes a prophecy in reverse, demonstrating the past as a meaningful “preparation” for the future. (Lowith 1949,4-5).

This is not only true for Christianity: Judaism is maybe the most prophetic religion of all, with the expectation of Messiah at its core. The watchman from the story can be a Jew waiting for the First coming, or a Christian waiting for the Second coming. The specificity of Judaism is the Messianic moment that interrupts the linear course of history and therefore challenges all habits consequently, the breaking of time delegitimizes all powers in the world. Christian eschatology is different in that the incarnation breaks the unity between the coming of the Messiah and the restoration of the Kingdom (Delecroix 2016, 255), and therefore Christians needs to give a sense to the time that remains, the time between the moment of the incarnation and the end of the world, the time that one normally calls history. Christian eschatology shift between *already here*, a realized eschatology, and *not yet*, a future eschatology. This prefiguration in
One is apt to think that the past influences the present and the present influences the future. But even though for us time flows in this particular direction, comprehension doesn’t follow the same path. Meaning emerges from the future into the present. Even in the structure of language, a sentence achieves its meaning at the moment when the speaker finishes it. In a similar manner, in Christian eschatology, History will achieve its meaning through the final revelation.

At the core of the Christian tradition is the sacrament of confession. Confession should not be interpreted from an ethical perspective only: confession is not just the act of atoning for the evil one has done, but more importantly, for its existential consequences. The act of confessing a sin of the past, as well as the present resolution not to repeat the sin in the future transform the confessing subject from a sinner into a repentant. For those believing that confession is a sacrament, this means that a decision concerning future acts is working today as a changing vector. What is happening here is that something that is not yet, our future ego, transforms both the present and the past, so that the future will be more ontological consistent than present and past (Zizioulas 2016, 262).

In this paper, I will argue that the eschatological turn in theology and the rediscovery of the importance of the theology of history imply certain existentialist consequences. In my analysis, I will take into account two aspects: modifications of the timeline and the ontological consequences of these modifications. I will discuss three theologians, one Catholic, one Protestant and one Orthodox, who have in common an inverse reading of the timeline: not from past to future, but the other way around, from the future to the present and the past. Believing in the end of History followed by the Kingdom to come structures our comprehension of history.

The first author is a French Jesuit who built a philosophy of history mainly influenced by the Hegelian tradition and the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. Gaston Fessard’s main project is to offer a guide for people living in troubled periods (he fought in the First World War and was in the Resistance against the Nazi in the second). Following this project, a Christian theology of politics (Fessard 1976, 1) was born. This theology aims to use faith to shed light on the concrete political situations, but without offering a ready-made action handbook. According to Fessard, faith should help Christians to guide their own liberty in history. He proposes a technique of spiritual discernment founded in Ignatian spiritual exercises adjusted for political issues. Discernments of Spirits is a spiritual practice rooted in a 16th century Catholic tradition, with very clear and specific rules (Loyola 1991, 257-268) that can help Christians to embody and live the truth theoretically confessed (Fessard 1956, 10). The purpose of these
exercises is that each person might better understand God’s will and consequently orient his or her existential choices. Embodying Christians values is important especially for those living in today’s world, where having a religious identity isn’t just about an abstract belief in God and going to Sunday mass. Having a religious identity today entails a certain ethical and social behaviour.

At the core of this decision process is a thought experiment. We should imagine the Judgement Day, the second coming of Christ. This is the event that can brighten our future (Fessard 1960, 66). Making a good decision in the present moment involves the use of eschatological imagery in order to produce a certain behaviour. Eschatology provides a rich set of resources for imagining a better world and therefore can influence our behaviour in the present one. Consequently, for Fessard a Christian political theology draws spiritual lines for making the optimal political decisions:

Eschatology can make clear the real meaning of events. Not in the sense that it permits us to prophesize about a determined future allowing us to affirm that capitalism or communism will prevail tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. But it offers us a better strategy: Transposing us at the term of our great journey, it allows us to judge our own judgements, projecting them in Parousia’s light, in order to separate, starting from now, truth from false and right from wrong, only the End of History can show the truth meaning of events. (Fessard 1960, 423)

Supernatural history should inform any decision taken in the political, economic, national or international level, at least for Christians (Fessard 1956, 10). Imagining ourselves before the judging seat of Christ helps the decision making process. More than the last chapter of theology books, eschatology becomes a hermeneutical tool for reading the signs of times. The present moment is seen as the stage of God-human dialogue, a meeting point between God’s freedom and human freedom.

The second author I want to discuss here is the famous Protestant theologian, author of the *Theology of Hope*, Jürgen Moltmann. He situates eschatology at the centre of his reflections, and so for him the main issue of theology is the future of God, the coming of God. That is why the place of eschatology should not be end of one reflections, but its beginning, Christian doctrine should start by reflecting on the promise of the Kingdom. For Moltmann, to think eschatologically means, generally speaking, thinking somethings through the end, the end of all things. This means considering life, human history and natural history in the light of Christ’s resurrection. A Christian should imagine the Future of eternal life and live his or her entire life in the light of the promise of the creation of all things (Moltmann, 2014, 189). Furthermore, Christianity is creative expectation, anticipation of the future in its core eschatology, forward looking and forward moving, and consequently it also transforms the present. (Moltmann 1965, 3).
Conversion and the rebirth to a new life change time and the experience of time, for they make present the ultimate in the penultimate, and the future of time in the midst of time... the future made present creates new conditions for possibilities in history (Moltmann, 1996, 22).

Moltmann has brought back into Christian reflection the category of hope. By hope he doesn’t mean like Bloch, a resource for a better tomorrow; rather, hope means living the Christian life in the light of the promise of the Kingdom, in the expectation and in anticipation of the joy of the Kingdom. In this sense, making present “the ultimate in the penultimate” has an ontological meaning. It reminds us that there is more than we can experience in the present time. Promise, as well as hope, is a bridge between the present moment and the eschatological future. To Live in hope means to be open to something else than the present: to remember the past and to anticipate the future. Through the power of remembrance, we save the past and through the power of the imagination hope we save the future (Moltmann 2014, 187-188).

First, this perspective has consequences for our everyday behaviour, because imagining the future in the light of the promise of God opens new possibilities for action in the present. Secondly, this relationship between what is not there anymore, the history of the people of God, told in the Bible, for example, and what is not there yet, the coming of the Kingdom, is lived by the community of the believers. This reality experienced by remembering and anticipation changes not only our present behaviour but also our relationship with time. The believer becomes in a certain way, as Kierkegaard has put it, a contemporary not only with Christ, but also with the events of salvation history.

Finally, the Greek Orthodox bishop John Zizioulas is arguing that our current ontology is protological instead of eschatological and that an eschatological ontology will be much more compatible with Christian faith and freedom. His idea is rather innovative at a philosophical level, while being an offspring of the theological tradition. The Orthodox theologian begins by asking a question: how can something be said to truly be, if this being will one day eventually cease to be? In our current ontology, something or someone is or has been, if it is present or has been present in the past. From this perspective, the future doesn’t yet have any being, but it will acquire being when it will become a reality that can be enclosed in the past. Nevertheless, until this condition will be fulfilled, the future is only in our imagination. Our past shapes and determines our present and future, we are what we have been, rather than what we shall be (Zizioulas 2016, 259-278). Being very critical to an ontological system that privileges the past, Zizioulas proposes another perspective centred on Christ’s presence in the Eucharist now and forever and ever.
At the core of this vision is the paradox of the Eucharist that brings eschatology into history, while extract out of time an historical event. Offering a glimpse of the Kingdom, the Eucharist makes people experience ultimate realities. The past and the future, the present and eternity are all reconciled in the Eucharist (Zizioulas 1996, 204). For this reason, the Church should not privilege the past over the future. If the reconciliation is already there when celebrating the Eucharist, it means that the future reality of communion enters into our present, divided communities and transform them (Zizioulas 2009, 157). This means that the reconciliation achieved at the eschaton is already working in history. The eschatological future is the one, which determines the present. Zizioulas’s perspective represents a reversal of the philosophical idea of causality as well as of our common sense rationality, according to which the cause precedes the effect chronologically as well as logically.

What we experience in the divine Eucharist is the end times making itself present to us now. The Eucharist is not a repetition or continuation of the past, or just one event among others, but it’s the penetration of the future into time (Zizioulas 2009, 155).

For Zizioulas, anticipation is not a psychological act, an act of hope and waiting, but a fulfilment of the promise, a real presence of the *hinc et nunc* of the eschaton (Zizioulas 2009, 202). In this case, the tension between *already here-not yet* seems to be resolved through the *already here*.

Zizioulas urges us to liberate ourselves from the past and discover that our truth resides in our future, that is, in resurrection. The existential consequence is that whereas in a protological ontology, a criminal is a murderer, in an eschatological ontology, a repentant murder is not a murder anymore. A criminal’s being is determined by what he will be in the end. Our future is not in death as in Heidegger’s perspective, but in resurrection. Eschatology should not be conceived as an end nor as an eternal present, as in Greek philosophy, but as a temporal moment in the future that will come to save history from its most disturbing possibility: death.

**Conclusions: the chronological order and the order of the spirit**

All the three theologians discussed here suggest that one should read our current time line differently. According to them, it is our eschatological future that makes us what we are today, shaping also our past. This way of reading history brings meaning to all events in the light of the eschaton and saves the memories of the past. The present moment, even though it remains important for the history of redemption because it is the moment of decision, loses its ontological priority. Living in the eschatological
horizon makes it possible to escape the materialist mechanical timeframe, where the past causes the present and the present causes the future.

All three theologians explain how the eschatological narrative causes behaviours, how the act of imaging the eschaton transforms the present by enlightening our decisions, giving us hope or by the real presence of eschatology in history through the Eucharist. The eschatological perspective supposes more than just rediscovering the hope of the Kingdom and acting today with this hope in heart and mind; it represents the beginning of the time of reconciliation promised for the end of time. The future starts in the present because the future has started in the past, in the resurrection moment. Even though salvation history takes place in the linear order of creation, incarnation, resurrection and eschaton, this chronological order co-exists with the teleological order of the Holy Spirit, where the eschatological end gives meaning to the resurrection, the incarnation, and even to creation.

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Dimensions of Sacrifice in Rite
– Hermeneutical Perspectives –

Abstract: The anthropological discourse on the mechanisms and significance of the rite at René Girard and Roger Caillois is centered on a few basic points. The ritual device means the topography of the cadres of the ritual system. Prohibitions as categorical imperatives are those that maintain social order and stability. The theoretical model of analysis developed by René Girard has in the center the “sacrificial violence” which interrupts the “sacrificial crisis” based on the “crisis of differences”. Christianity interrupts this “sacrificial violence” by basing the sacred on moral values. For Roger Caillois the sacred is ontologically grounded on a social and individual idea, representing a transfiguration of transcendence. In the present text we will set foreword some of the main dimensions of sacrifice specific to the rite.

Keywords: anthropology, hermeneutics, rite, sacrifice, sacrificial victim, sacred, religious, transcendence, René Girard, Roger Caillois

1. Preliminary considerations

Defined as a “general science of man” or “social and cultural science of man,” anthropology builds its own epistemological field: a glance at “the other,” on archaic and traditional societies (Copans 1999, 24, 25; Mihăilescu 2007, 13-19; 51-60; Mihu 2000, 13, 14; Geraud, Leservoisier, Pottier 2001, 11-25, Gavriluţă 2009, 19-38, Dordier 2006, 19-23). A generic look at the West’s thinking of the “other”, on “alterity”, involves the long way from participatory “fieldwork” observation to pertinent abstractions and analyzes to understanding the plurality of beliefs and manifestations of the “symbolic nature” of social relationships in these societies. Anthropologists’ speeches on human diversity in order to demonstrate the unity of Man operates categorizations. Vintila Mihăilescu analyzes this issue of the categories of society and makes a brief summary (Mihăilescu 1999).

The issue of “alterity”, of “difference” promotes the metaphor of sequen-
city, heterogeneity, and holistic vision (Dordier 2006; Mihu 2000, 16-27;

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Anthropological trends as evolutionism, diffusionism, functionalism, structuralism, dynamic anthropology etc., engage analytical constructs like the concepts of man, culture or society in their efforts to identify general constants and laws. The subject of anthropology structures the uniqueness of the social man under two divisions: individual and collective: “Shows the levels of coherence and multiple aspects of mixed phenomena (forms of representation, statements, corpus of rules of groups of individuals).” (Sindzingre 1986, 45)

The issue of the human nature and universality of the human spirit highlighted in “archaic” societies is manifested in the field of religion, magic, and rationality. This interferes with philosophy, history, linguistics, psychology etc. In this sense, Claude Levi-Strauss in the head of the IX chapter “History and Dialectics” in “Wild Thinking” is outlining the influence of Jean Paul Sartre’s “Critique of Dialectical Reason” through the concepts of “analytical reasoning” and “dialectical reasoning” on his work. The French anthropologist states: “Wild thinking puts into practice a philosophy of finitude” (Levi-Strauss 2011, 270). Concepts of “structure” become key concepts.

Along with structuralism, hermeneutics through the concepts of “interpretation” and “comprehension”, through research method and ideological perspectives, develops the anthropological exegesis. Hermeneutics announces a need to substantiate the meanings of the spirit, to analyze the “categories” of thought, the way and the extent to which they represent the phenomenality of the world.

For the founding fathers, Dilthey and Gadamer, the two concepts of “comprehension” and “interpretation” have specific meanings. Wilhelm Dilthey states: “The concept of comprehension falls under the general knowledge in which knowledge is considered a process in which it tends to be a valid general science.” (Dilthey 2004, 46)

For Gadamer, the hermeneutical experience is “dialogue with the text,” and its understanding means more participation in a tradition than the mastery of writing (Codoban 2001, 126). Analyzing and discussing the status of hermeneutics, the “exigencies” of the method, principles, concepts and stages of development, Petru Bejan elaborates a “decalogue” that explains what hermeneutics is.

Rule no. 1:
“The hermeneutics is the science (art, ability) of interpretation, it must be recognized either as an autonomous discipline, reuniting the theory of interpretation or as an exegetic method.”

What is interpretation? Rule no. 2:
“Interpretation is an intentional process of” negotiation “and elucidation of the author’s dream in his work. It consists in the fulfillment of the goal,
that is, in its optimal comprehension in the conversion of this understanding into the identification process with respect to oneself, to the others or to the world.”

What is the subject of interpretation? Rule no. 3:
“The objects of broad interpretation are signs, symbols, mental representations; in a narrow sense, the hermetic object is the text, thought to be a meaningful practice. Exegesis (commentary) is textual interpretation.” (Bejan 2014, 12, 13).

There is a code for reading the signs. The interpreter will find “a double appearance of them”. “On the one hand, it is their condition that the simple phenomena and, on the other hand, is their participation in a cipher of life” (Afloroaei 2004, 13). Like the “cipher of life,” the rite along with myth and logos crosses the history of humanity. We will stop in our approach to the comprehensive interpretations of this code, the constructions of René Girard and Roger Caillois, operating a “deconstruction” of these discourses of rite and sacrifice, starting from the sacred mechanism.

In his work, René Girard believes that the founding sacrifice of society is sacrificial crime, which will be manifested periodically throughout history. The violence of a society is transfigured into a “sacrificial victim” considered to be guilty of all the disasters that have fallen on that society.

Roger Caillois develops the idea of the sacred that enforces norms, ensuring the life and permanence of communities, the order of the universe. He outlines the ideas of M. Mauss and H. Hubert who state:

It is the mother idea of religion. Myths and dogmas analyze their content in their own way, rituals use its properties, religious morality is drawn from it, sacerdotes incorporate it, sanctuaries, sacred places, religious monuments fix it on the soil and nourish it. Religion is the administration of the sacred. (Mauss, Hubert, after Caillois 2006, 20)

For René Girard and Roger Caillois the field of exegesis is the representations of the rites and sacred representations of the clans of the Indians from North America, the tribes of Australia, Oceania, the world of Greece, India, ancient China, and the ancient Jews. It is a world they find in his works: Ed Tylor, B. Malinowski, James Frazer, Emile Durkheim, Levi Bruhle, Marcel Mauss, Claude Levi-Strauss, Mircea Eliade; in the philosophical and literary works of antiquity and in the texts of the Gospels.

2. Morphology and ritual representation. About the “ritual device”

The phrase “ritual device” is launched by Marc Augé and developed by Pascal Lardellier:

Built to become a sign, it expresses space, making it a continuum that aims operability. And behind its contingent character, this device operates a delimitation,
which is a horizontal closure, but above all a vertical opening to another dimension. (Augé, in Lardellier 2003, 83)

The rite takes place in a certain space that separates the world from the outside and the divine world. It is a mark of the sacred space, against the profane space; those entering this space are profane but change their status by the power of the rite. M. Mauss and H. Hubert talk about the Jewish tradition where purity and sanctity of the temple must be maintained, and about brahmanism where the purification of the place is made by placing the sacrifices, which were the deity itself (Mauss, Hubert 1997, 74, 75). Sanctuaries and temples are portions of space bounded by sacred things and functions.

In the rites of the Australian tribes, the ceremonial theater can be composed of elements of nature (a mountain, a hill, a rock, a river), which are the totemic ancestors of the clan. It is a temple, “Where there is no sound coming from the profane world; is the realm of holy things.” (Durkheim 1995, 341)

In the space of the creative power of the ritual, precisely defined, according to circumstances, behaviors, symbolic objects, modes of communication etc., are resigned and built. The objects of sacrifice belong to the profane, but by their integration into this space, through ritual technology, they fall into the sphere of divinity. From objects and plants to living beings, sacrificial objects differ from the nature of sacrifice. In the act of substitution, animals replace the human being.

The monstrous features attributed to the escape goat explain that he can seek substitutes both among animals and among humans. The victim will serve as a mediator between the community and the sacred, between the interior and the exterior. (Girard 2008, 92)

Roger Caillois finds a location of the “center”:

The blessed forces dwell in brightly colored totemic pillars, the pride of the market in the middle of the village, where the altar and the men’s house rise, or the high chief of the tribe. No one dares to approach a place where the different powers of the sacred are so clearly concentrated. (Caillois 2006, 59)

The objects of sacrifice are the offerings that enter the sacrificial scenario, even if they are living beings, plants, or material objects. The ritual device enters into a temporality which is totally different from the usual time. Entering this time is done by going through different stages of ceremony. Thus, every rite is structured in three essential stages: entry into the rite, the culmination of sacrificing the victim, and finally leaving the rite. This scheme changes with respect to the special functions of the sacrifice.

Time has a totally different meaning in the structure of the feast. The holidays are fixed by a calendar, a rupture of time and space is established,
“a season of holidays” as R. Caillois says. Profane life and religious life cannot exist in the same unity of time.

3. The issue of interdictions

The concise statements of interdictions and their punitive significance are structured in codes that tell us that any act has symbolic resonance. Interdictions underlie ritual systems and imply the notion of sacred. They limit the communication between the profane and the sacred, separating the two worlds from the principle that the profane should not interfere with the sacred; hence, the interdiction to consume sacred animals or plants. This signifies the totem, being the representation of the ancestral ancestor.

Touching or looking at sacred objects is a ban. Profanes are forbidden to address sacred beings or speak in their presence. Silence is also a language. In the great ceremonies there are moments of silence (Durkheim 1995, 280). Ritual systems build true abstinence systems that “exert on the religious and moral nature of the individual, a positive action of the greatest importance” (Durkheim 1995, 280-284).

The asceticism becomes a real life, prepares the profane for meeting with the sacred. Abstinence and deprivation cause pain and suffering. The rites, however, attribute pain to a sanctifying power. Man detaches himself and gives himself to suffering. Ascetic systems ground the religions of all time.

The sacred reacts against profane transgressions, marking the antagonism between the sacred and the profane through the rigorous boundaries of interdictions. The interdiction of violence within groups is the category imperative in all cultures. “There is the mimetic evolution in the heart of the religious system.” From external threats (floods, calamities, etc.) to “the internal degradation of human relationships within the community, with slipping towards mutual violence”. “Prohibitions aim to remove everything that threatens the community.” Mimetic conflict is “the true common denominator of interdictions.” It is interpreted as “the evil epiphany of the sacred, the avenging rage of divinities” (Girard 2008, 24).

In the Book of Faith, in the second half of the Decalogue, devoted entirely to the prohibition of violence, the most serious are: Do not kill! Do not be unrestrained! Do not steal! Do not give false testimony against your neighbor!

The tenth command forbids action, restraining a desire: “Do not seek anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Exodus 20:17). This desire bears the responsibility for the forbidden violence through the four burning commands. “The legislator who forbids the desire of his neighbor’s goods strives to solve the number one problem of any community: domestic violence” (Girard 2006, 21-23).
Other meanings of interdictions, such as those related to the taboo term, which generally express the prohibition, are also open. J. Fraser attempted to draw up a catalog of the various taboos in the world. In *Golden bough*, a series of clarifications are made on objects, people, words, taboo actions (Frazen 1980). This problem is also found in the works of R. E. Smith, L. Levy-Bruhl, A. de Gennep, M. Mead, M. Douglas, C. Levi-Strauss etc.

Going on the line of E. Durkheim, who considers taboo to be “an ensemble of ritual interdictions”, Roger Caillois finds that this system maintains the integrity of the organized world “Good order and good functioning of the universe”. Any transgression disturbs the whole equilibrium (Caillois 2006, 25). Anthropological research has shown that the sacrificial system functions as a system of clarification, establishing opposition classes: what can be sacrificed and what cannot be sacrificed, things subject to prohibitions and those that are not in the category of interdictions. Interdictions have the role of maintaining the stability of the world and the cosmic order. “Society, and nature are considered to be based on the maintenance of a universal order protected by multiple prohibitions that ensure the integrity of institutions, the regularity of phenomena.” (Caillois 2006, 153).

Interdictions become norms that underpin the consolidation of cultural and social systems.

4. “Sacrificial Violence” and the mechanisms of the rite

The opposition between the “impure” violence linked to the internal conflicts of the community and the pure violence regulated by the rite mechanisms are the basic elements of René Girard’s theoretical model. There is a causal relationship between the elements, which involves the efficiency relationship.

The first element of this bipolarity illustrates the following mimetic mechanism. A member of a group exerts violence against another member of another group. The other group will support the victim, who will claim revenge or compensation. This gesture will produce a cycle of revenge between the two groups. Girard finds here a private revenge management that, through the endless chain of revenge (in today’s terms), would be public revenge. In archaic societies, there are only private revenge, a reciprocity of mimesis-based violence (Girard 1972, 22, 23). R. Girard says: “In societies without a judicial system and vulnerable by vengeance, sacrifice and ritual, in general, must play an essential role.” (Girard 1972, 24)

Without the intervention of the sacred, the reprisals go into retaliation. Violence has “mimetic effects” and devours the subjects of this social game. The foundation of the “sacrificial crisis” is the “crisis of differences”. This destruction of differences increases violence. Contamination of violence leads to this crisis of the differences that now have a negative significance.
The “other” becomes a “rival”, an “enemy,” a “bearer” of dangers. The list is quite heterogeneous. For them the rights are almost non-existent. Circumstances that favor persecution are not always the same. These can be epidemics, floods, famine, political disturbances, religious conflicts.

During the black plague in medieval Europe witches, and marginal characters are massacred. Institutions collapse by hitting “hierarchical differences.” Individuals blame society as a whole, or other individuals or categories of individuals are blamed for very special crimes. The stereotypical accusation is marked by the conviction that those individuals are the cause of all disasters.

René Girard analyzing medieval documents from the 19th century. XV, builds the following scheme of meanings: 1. The community is in crisis; plague makes terrible ravages; There is disorder, violence, death 2. Jews oppose God. They brought the plague. 3. Increase collective violence against Jews. 4. Killing Jews means cleaning the community (Girard 2008, 167). In these four groups of meanings the “negative connotation” prevails. The structure is found in all periods of crisis of the collectivities. The texts of the Old Testament are based on sacrificial crises, the theme of the founding murder being developed.

In the Gospel texts, Jesus is persecuted as a sacrificial victim in a society in crisis, but his death is not defined as a sacrifice. R. Girard believes that the passages invoked to justify a sacrificial conception of the Passion can and must be interpreted beyond sacrifice. “There is nothing in the Gospel to suggest that the death of Jesus is a sacrifice. Whatever the definition we give to sacrifice, atonement, substitution.” (Girard 2008, 246)

The death of Jesus cannot be interpreted as a sacrifice of divinity for the sins of mankind. The explicit revelation of the common casualty foundation of all religions is accomplished by the non-violent divinity that plays the fundamental role (Girard 2008, 250). In the Gospels, violence is not reported to God, but only to men. Girard shows that what makes confusion is the analogy between the Passion of Jesus and the sacrifices of all religions. Crucifixion, being the last sacrifice, makes any sacrifice absurd, thus stopping the mimetic violence, being replaced by the Gospel values.

The sacrificial violence is concentrated in the expression “scapegoat”. James Frazer in *Golden bough* says that scapegoats are the bad spirits of misfortune and plague. There may also be human beings who will be sacrificed (Fraser 1980).

René Girard affirms that by sending Jesus to death, the “scapegoat” mechanism enters the brightest light possible. It becomes the most known thing in the world, the most widespread knowledge (Girard 2000, 141). Jesus becomes the “focus of all meanings,” becomes an infinite monster of meanings.
In the Gospels there is no phrase “scapegoat”, but the phrase “the lamb of the Lord” is used, which better expresses the innocence of a victim, the injustice of condemnation. Jesus is close to all the Old Testament “scapegoats”, persecuted and murdered prophets by their communities: Abel, Joseph, Moses. It is the cornerstone of the entire sacrificial building. Caiaphas’s direct statement in the course of the “Jesus’ trial” defines the essence of the phrase “scapegoat”, defines the political reason that dispels the doubts of gratitude. It illustrates the aspect of the “scapegoat” at the origin of the sacrifices. (Girard 2000, 146-148). “… it is more useful for a man to die for the people, than to perish all the people” (in John 11: 47-53)

In the “scapegoat” category, R. Girard also analyzes the position of the king, the sovereign. From the entrance to the “rite of incoming,” the king becomes a victim whose sacrifice is delayed. “Kingdoms staged this metaphysical and religious illusion of the scapegoat and its mechanism.” (Girard, 2008, 71) The sovereign is the source of discord and concord, gathers maximum prestige. Prestige is the principle of any political and religious sovereignty. The royal power is the heart of society and determines respect for the fundamental norms and observes their observance. Regularity, says Girard, is “mythology in action” because it remains linked to the founding sacrifice of society. The king through the increasingly real and beneficial influence on the community will make the sacrifice impossible and then there will be sacrificial substitutes. By these substitutes (king’s madman, close to the king) the sacrifice is directed to the liminal area of the institution. If the king does not crystallize a concrete power, social dysfunctions occur in society, then the evolution of the sacrificial act will accelerate and the king will be transformed into a “scapegoat”, sacrificial victim (Girard 2008, 72-74). As Girard says “dominates what is going on before the sacrifice, and in deity what happens after” (Girard 2008, 77)

R. Caillois reports that with the death of the king, the order, the measure, the rule, all these principles break, and the area of disorder and excesses opens. In the islands of Sandwich, Guinea, Fiji, when it comes to the death of the king, the crowd commits all transgressions: it burns, plunder, violates, and kills. This clutter continues until the new King succeeds (Caillois 2006, 137-138).

Beyond human sacrifices, in the logic of ritual “substitutions”, sacrificial victims can be animals, which, by symbolic equivalence, replace man. Durkheim shows that in Australia, members of a totem clan, participate after the totemic animal’s sacrifice at the “ritual table”. The sacrifice of the animal makes living principles free from the animal’s body to reach the table of divinities. Many times the totem animal is a domesticated animal (Durkheim 1995, 314). Marcel Mauss presents a series of very complicated rituals, from India, Greece and ancient Rome, where the sacrificial victims were animals. Here the sacrifice has the major role, through sacrificial
act mediates the connection with divinity (Mauss, Hubert 1997). Girard believes that all domestic animal species have entered the sacrificial system. Before the domestication of the animals, by the complex techniques that trigger them, the hunt had a ritual character. He says: “Sacrifice is a tool for exploring the world” (Girard 2008, 91-96).

5. The road to the sacred

The road, the path to the sacred, represents the rite as a religious experience through excellence. M. Mauss and H. Hubert define the sacrament through the “unity of the sacrificial system”; a paradigm that includes “the specific functions of sacrifice”. The sacrifice has something contractual. The two worlds, the sacred and the profane, are doing their services, and each has something to gain. “The sacred things, the gods and the others, in relation to which the sacrifice works, are social things. And this is enough to explain the sacrifice.” (Mauss, Hubert 1997, 174)

When defining the sacred, E. Durkheim takes over the meaning of the definition in the works of Mauss and Hubert. Many of the later uses of the sacred significance are taken up by anthropologists in the sense that it has in the work Elementary Forms of Religious Life (Durkheim 1995). Sacred is the totem, and the manna is his force. It links social religion. The sacred is the transcendence with which man connects. Durkheim reaches the following definition: “A religion is a unitary system of beliefs and practices relating to sacred things, that is, separate, forbidden, beliefs and practices that unite in all the moral communion, called the Church, all who adhere to it” (Durkheim 1995, 54).

He makes the study of the sacred by bringing to light the social, the religious being manifested at the universal level as essence. Synthesizing the doctrine of Mauss and Durkheim, R. Caillois starts from the religious conception of the world. Defining the binarity sacred – profane Mircea Eliade will develop more broadly in his monumental phenomenology. The sacred is the basic category of the religion, “the source of all efficacy”, “a dangerous energy,” incomprehensible, hard to handle, extremely effective”, “an unprepared organism cannot bear such an energy transfer” (Caillois 2006, 23). Rituals and prohibitions contribute to the functioning of the world order. It helps its cohesion or the dissolution of order.

Caillois sacred within the category of “pure and impure” are fundamental and appear as “equivocal forces”. Dialectics of the sacred is born of its polarity. Caillois analyze the social distribution of purity and impurity, the location of the sacrum in a certain topography that ensures cohesion and dissolution. The sacred has preserved an indisputable unity along civilizations. In his analysis, the social is significant, which by its elements forms a system. In this case he gives the example of the solidarity of the
brothers of the Australian tribes. He concludes: “Society and nature are considered to be based on maintaining a universal order protected by multiple interdictions that ensure the integrity of institutions, the regularity of phenomena.” (Caillois 2006, 153)

Another opening on the sacred is the “sacred transgression” through the feast. Caillois develops Durkheim’s theme, after which tribal feasts, with their multiple effervescence to excess, represent the sacred in contrast to everyday life, with its hardships, representing the profane. The sacred transgresses by eliminating the time spent. This social theory of celebration identifies the cyclical character of the rituals that renew society and become an essential coordinate of the archaic society at the base of which is sacred-profane polarity.

Caillois does not intend to sketch a metaphysical of the sacred, but to identify the sacred-profane polarity, which gives life to existence. “The sacred is what gives life, and what is abducting it is the source from which it flows and the estuary that is lost.” (Caillois 2006, 163).

René Girard’s thesis places the sacred at the basis of the origins of human societies. In his vision, the sacrificial victim’s theory of scapegoat is the key to all rites and religious sacrifices. “We affirm that foundational violence is the matrix of all mythical and ritual meanings.” (Girard 1995, 124).

This thesis demonstrates the special role of the casualty mechanism in archaic societies. Domestic violence multiplied by mimesis can only be stopped by casualty sacrifice. The mimicry of antagonism triggers an alliance against a common enemy. In humanity, the community is convinced that it has found a single cause of all disasters. Because he is responsible for crimes, disorder and disasters, the victim is responsible for the crisis, which R. Girard calls a sacrificial crisis. This victim brings death to the community. By her death life is established. Victim’s death transforms relationships within a community. This transition from disorder to harmony is attributed to the victim himself. This transgression escapes common thinking. A double transfer occurs: the transfer of aggression and the transfer of reconciliation sacrificing the victim (Girard 1972, 2000, 2008).

Extremely well-structured is the issue of ritual prohibitions that lie at the lack of cultural systems and institutions. In his research on the sacred, Girard focuses his energy on the Greek tragedy, the myth of Oedipus, Dionysus, on the rites of archaic communities and Old and New Testament texts, outlining a vicarial anthropology based on sacrifices centered on the atoning casualty. The sacrificial victim, recognizing the presence within the sacred of everything that involves the identity of violence and sacred. Girard does not offer a definition of the sacred, but the theory of sacrifice conceived as sacred violence at the level of society is a foundation of the religion. However, this type of sacred is the sacred of a “transcendence diverted” and not of a “vertical transcendence” (Codoban 1998, 54).
6. Conclusions

The anthropological discourse on “alterity” offered by the basic anthropological trends has at their center the analysis of rite mechanisms. The hermeneutical approach to dialogue with the text by “deconstruction” and “reconstruction” is intended to decipher a code that we find in the rite. Starting from remarkable contributions in the field of cultural anthropology two perspectives on the rite outlined our analysis that of R. Girard and that of Roger Caillois. The scroll of the “ritual device” reveals the plurality of spaces, objects, characters, which the sacred person individualizes through the mechanism of substitutions. The types of bans highlight the codes which underlie the ritual systems. Bans as categorical imperatives maintain order and social stability. Rene Girard builds a theoretical model that revolves around the “sacrificial violence” that stops the endless series of domestic violence of the “sacrificial crisis” that is based on the “crisis of difference”. The interruption of the cycle of “sacrificial violence” occurs with the Christianity that replaces the founding victim, the founding love, both of which essentially define the sacred. These are the essential ways to the sacred. For both Rene Girard and Roger Caillois the sacred appears as the basic category of religion, highlighting in the sacrifice mechanisms, the most complex rite. The sacrament manifests itself in ontological order. The experience of the sacred is a social experience, and an individual experience an exemplary transfiguration of transcendence.

References

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The Facticity of Practices
and the Factuality of Human Agency
(Outline of a Hermeneutic Theory of Practices)

Abstract: The hermeneutic theory of social practices treats the relations between the subjectivity involved in collective agency and the trans-subjectivity of concerted practices in terms of interpretive circularity. The paper argues that the conceptualization of a kind of such circularity operating within properly arranged social practices helps one to find a way out of the depressing dilemma between agency and structure. Actions and activities – as they are situated in and entangled with interrelated practices – neither causally determine nor impose norms on the ways in which practices are interrelated in their performances. An autonomous ensemble of social practices projects its being upon a horizon of possibilities which agents choose in accordance with their desires, plans, intentions, projects, moods, ambitions, presuppositions, prejudices, background and tacit knowledge. In the hermeneutic theory of practices, there is an important caesura that takes place in the passage from what human agency strongly determines to the authenticity manifested by the modes of being-in-concerted-social-practices.

Keywords: ensembles of concerted practices, cultural forms of life, hermeneutic circularity, trans-subjectivity, endogenous reflexivity of practices

1. Personal and Social Practices

Any particular social practice is a repeated network of collective actions, organized around shared patterns, norms, and rules. The single social practice is determined by joint agency, and furnished in accordance with joint intentions. Even in the case of a practice devised and performed by an individual actor – and, in addition, not expressing an explicit we-attitude – it is not a personal habit but a social unit, granted that its normative design and performance presuppose a social partner implicitly present in the network of actions and rule-following activity. However, this picture becomes drastically changed when at stake is not an isolated, singular practice. An interrelatedness of social practices is no longer to be comprehended as continuous with repeatable collective actions and determined by joint agency. “Something astonishing happens” when an ensemble of concerted practices comes

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to the fore, and this happening cannot be accounted for – so a basic argument of this paper goes – in terms of the approaches searching for a mediation between structure and agency. The reducibility to actions/activities is tenable for any isolated social practice, but not for an ensemble of concerted practices. The non-derivability of such an ensemble from routine actions and goal-orientated activities should have profound implications for practice theory. The crucial turning point – supposedly legitimizing the autonomy of this theory – takes place not in the passage from actions guided by strongly personal intentions to actions/activities of group agents relying on collectively accepted conceptual presuppositions, but in the passage from what human agency strongly determines to the authenticity manifested by the modes of being-in-concerted-social-practices.

The guiding motif of this paper is that interrelated practices constitute something essentially different from inter-subjectively coordinated activities performed for identifiable reasons. An interrelatedness of practices “generates” its independence from constituent actions and activities. For several reasons that will be spelled out in the remainder, to conceive of a field of concerted practices as a field of purposeful skilled activities is ontologically wrong. Insisting on practices’ independence, however, is not to be misunderstood as an attempt at attaining a “stratified” essentialist ontology of human behavior. It would not be correct to say that aptly organized orders of practices create the social-practical being as a special stratum of human existence that persists along with several other strata, like the “stratum of emergent personal properties and powers, which include the human capacity for innovative action.” (Archer 2010, 123) The rationale for insisting that interrelated social practices are capable to generate their irreducibility to the constituents of any particular practice is not to be sought in a presupposed – or a specially unfolded – stratification of human existence. The argument for the independence draws strongly on the “ontological authenticity” of what becomes disclosed, constituted, and articulated within and through a properly arranged interrelatedness of practices. The most evident example for such authenticity is a clearly delineated domain of discursive processes, techniques of symbolization, and material artifacts that embodies an autonomous cultural form of life.

Before embarking on a discussion of what “properly arranged” means, some preliminary distinctions are to be introduced and elucidated. I start with the distinction between personal and social practices. Using a combination of dried herbs and Indian spices in preparing a dish made of teeny tiny potatoes, brown rice, and organic aubergines is a particular culinary practice that is clearly delineated, and can be algorithmically executed. It consists of coordinated actions, organized around a pattern (recipe), inspired by the motive for having a tasty food, and determined by the intention of consuming ecologically sound food products. (One can say that it
belongs to “sound food hygiene practices”). But is this a personal or a social practice? Let me place the question in a broader context.

When, for instance, Elizabeth Shove (2015, 35) reaches the conclusion that the scenarios for the future carbon intensity of energy supply as they are organized around, in particular, the sector of heating and cooling do not allow one to “distinguish between specific visions of the various practices that are lumped together”, she obviously refers to strongly social practices. (It is another question that personal motivations of practitioners play a decisive role in Shove’s context of discussion.) This is not the case with my example. The practice I cited might be designed only to fit my individual taste, and to serve my personal form of life. It gains its alleged strongly personal character by the fact that the recipe is not taken from a cooking book or directly imported from a certain culinary tradition. Moreover, I am supposedly the only consumer of the outcome of the practice’s performance. There is no “collective intention” or “we-attitude” behind this performance. But even under these circumstances my strongly individual recipe and way of preparing the dish have come into being through modifications of (and deviations from) established culinary practices. Thus, my personal practice of preparing food presupposes a large portion of social experience. What I am trying to say is that there is no definite criterion for demarcating between personal and social practices since the distinction is always relative and contextually dependent, whereby all personal practices – no matter of how idiosyncratic they may be – turns out to be, in a sense, social ones. No doubt, however, a concept of strongly personal practices is completely justified in disciplines such as developmental psychology.

A class of practices characterized by a special amalgam of personal and social components pose severe challenges to the conceptualization of the personal way of being in social practices: Foucault’s “technologies of the Self” refer to personal practices – or “practices of self-culture” – that through their performances express their social nature. They are practices permitting “individuals to effect by their own means … a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.” (Foucault 1988, 17) He makes clear that the (somatic and mental) states which the individual tries to attain through his personal technologies are projected as trans-personal possibilities by these very technologies. A case in point are the practices of sexual abstinence as a part of a broader repertoire of practices of a certain kind of asceticism. The behavior characterized by sexual abstinence appears in a broad range of cultural-historical contexts. In the context of Christian asceticism, for instance, it can serve as a (strongly personal) means for imitatio Christi and recovering the efficacy which God has printed on the soul and which the body has tarnished. The way in which the practices of sexual
abstinence are situated in a certain form of life (such as the monastic *angelikos bios*) is open to possibilities whose actualization specifies the social relevance of these practices: For instance, weakening of the bodily passions and enhancing the body’s resistance to “sinful practices” in order to suppress destructive desires promote a new kind of sociality and communal life. Thus, following his celebrated axiom that as soon as there is a talk of sex at stake are issues of power, Foucault is able to study the socially relevant disciplinary effects of the practices of abstinence as they take place in forms of life ranging from Late Antiquity to the early modern times. The amalgam of personal and social components in the “technologies of the Self” concerns the ecstatic unity of practitioners’ (individual and collective) subjectivity and practices’ trans-subjectivity. The topic of this unity occupies a central place in the present paper.

2. The Reducibility of an Isolated Practice and the Irreducibility of a Practice Integrated with an Ensemble of Configured Practices

Pragmatically, there is room for making a distinction between explicit and implicit social practices – the latter being presupposed in the performances of the former. Discriminating between these two kinds has some relevance to the discussion of the irreducibility of practice theory to action theory. An explicit social practice – identified as having the status of a separate item – is a recurrent network of collective actions, temporally and spatially organized around shared patterns. A philosophically more elaborated definition is provided by Joseph Rouse (1996, 134) who argues that a singular social practice – always simultaneously material and discursive – is a pattern of ongoing engagement with the world, provided that this pattern does not exist per se but persists through practice’s repetition or continuation. (However, it remains an open question whether there are purely conceptual social practices, i.e. practices deprived of a material dimension. Think, for instance, of the collectively organized thought experiments as a practice in scientific inquiry.) The distinction between explicit and implicit practices has a pragmatic and conventional character, since it is based on the observation that under given circumstances certain practices can be made explicit. Yet one can make a social practice explicit only against the background of indefinite number of presupposed practices. Moreover, making a particular practice explicit does not amount to disentangling it from the configurations in which it takes place. The explicit status of a practice goes together with unveiling a number of (actual and possible) contexts with which it is entangled.

In sticking to Rouse’s cited view, a practice is made explicit when one is able to envision the minimal field of its circulation\(^1\). It is my contention that the unity of explicit and implicit practices – as implied by the contextual
entanglement of what is made explicit with what is presupposed – plays a crucial role in any conceptualization of social practices that is based on hermeneutic arguments. (The predicate “implicit” in this formulation refers to practices’ mode of being, and should not be confused with the cognitivist connotations of Michael Polanyi’s “implicit knowledge”.)

To reiterate, any one practice is analytically completely reducible to actions/activities, granted that it is regarded in isolation from the contexts in which it is configured with other social practices. One can find a variety of formulations in social theory concerning the groundedness of social practices in collective actions. Thus, any single social practice is a socially recognized bundle of activities, “done on the basis of what members learn from others, and capable of being done well or badly, correctly or incorrectly.” (Barnes 2001, 27) In trying to avoid both a nominalist elimination and an uncritical reification of practices as particular entities within the scope of social theory, Barry Barnes treats them as those routine social activities which cease to be routine at individual level. A social practice – considered beyond any kind of reification – exists through displaying emergent properties on the level of recurrent collective activity. In combining collective know-how and “procedural memory” with individual skills to participate in collective performances, a practice is the outcome of hybridizing social routine with individual qualities. Approaches that lend more weight to the concepts of habituation, learning, and socialization as well as to several concepts of social psychology look for accounts of social practices in terms of habituated actions and activities, granted that what becomes habituated takes the form of Bourdieu’s “durable and transposable dispositions”. On another formulation gaining currency in both organizational studies and science studies, the organization of a social practice and the governing of its constituent actions done by particular individuals coincide. It is the apparent congruence between organized agential behavior and governed actions that enables one to argue that performing repeatedly collective actions for a shared social reason is a social practice. And perhaps the most succinct formulation: Acting on a we-attitude forms a social practice. (Tuomela 2002, 92) By implication, an established social practice takes the form of a repeated collective action performed for a socially significant reason. It is my contention that all these formulations retain their validity, if the claim of reducibility to actions/activities is restricted to any particular social practice that is not made explicit in the sense indicated above – being explicit by becoming entangled with a variety of contexts – but is treated in isolation.

Let me now turn to the very difference between a single social practice and an assembly of interrelated practices. Any single practice confers a stylistic specificity to the network of actions involved in it, but does not constitute an autonomous unit that in its mode of operation gains independence from the course determined by the agency of the respective social
behavior. To perform such a practice requires skilled comportment, implicit and/or explicit norms for activities’ coordination, and rules that can be instructive for the agents. Performing a practice is manifested as a habitual behavior based on agents’ capability to learn and internalize cultural patterns and models, granted that the actions composing the practice satisfy Searle’s criterion – a movement is to be counted as an action if it is caused by an intention in action. In other words, performing a practice presupposes the well-known scheme of internalizing behavioral models through (more or less) institutionally organized processes of learning and externalizing “cognitive content” in social-symbolic interactions. As I will argue, this – still dualist – scheme may have a restricted validity in some disciplines, but it is completely irrelevant when one confronts the task of conceptualizing the being-in-social-practices. With regard to this task – so the argument goes – the internalizing-externalizing schematism must be replaced by a conceptuality assuming an “ecstatic unity” of practitioners and practices. The hermeneutic theory of practices should step-by-step substitute the vocabulary of learning, internalizing norms, participating in normative orders by performing social roles, habituation, and externalizing cognitive models for a vocabulary that enables one to spell out the being-in-social-practices in hermeneutic terms.

Tentatively, the difference between a single practice and an ensemble of concerted practices is not only an analytical distinction, but a difference that effectively contributes to the autonomy at issue: An interrelatedness of social practices is autonomous only through its difference – in the mode of being – with each particular practice involved in it. Furthermore, the conception I am going to spell out rests on the assumption that this difference is always contextually manifested, and does not have the character of a postulated demarcation. Unlike the way of making a contextual difference, drawing a firm demarcation line takes for granted that what becomes demarcated is merely present out-there. However, as it will be shown, the factual presence achieved through procedures of objectification is not on a par with the way of being of social practices. This is why the difference between a single (isolated) practice and a practice entangled with an ensemble of configured practices is always a contextual (and non-dichotomous) difference. The actions and activities composing any one practice remain contextually entangled with various (changing) configurations within the whole interrelatedness to which the practice belongs. Moreover, any particular social practice – regardless of how essential is the role played by individual and collective agency in its designing – is generated with the assistance of other practices. Once becoming a clearly shaped practice, it takes place in a continuous stream of configured practices.

The observation that any practice presupposes this stream is also a good reason for arguing that the difference between singular practices (treated in
isolation) and continuously changing configurations of practices does not amount to a conventional and/or methodological difference. The way in which the stream is presupposed has much to do with the autonomous way of being of interrelated practices. No doubt, social practices change “when new elements (of meaning, materiality, and competence) are introduced or when existing elements are combined in new ways.” (Shove, Pantzar, Watson 2012, 120) But both the introduction of new elements and the combinations of existing ones are “events” in the stream of practices. This provides a preliminary rationale for prioritizing the streaming continuity over the discrete elements. How to conceptualize this stream – without losing sight of how the non-dichotomous ontological difference contextually operates – is the central question that hermeneutic practice theory should address.

A further disclaimer should be stressed at this point: It is not the (joint) agency that defines the difference in question. Any one social practice is (analytically) fully reducible to its constituents, but when involved in the stream of configured practices it undergoes constant re-contextualization that changes the meaning assigned to it by its correlations with other practices. Thus, it would be incorrect to say that any one practice is totally determined by the agency operating in its network of actions and activities. But it would also be incorrect to claim that the properly arranged assembly of practices is completely freed from the power of agency. Although the assembly’s arrangement (especially the changing configurations of practices) remain underdetermined by the behavioral agency, the latter still works within this agency. In stating this, I would like to underline once more that the non-dichotomous (and ever contextualized) difference between the network of actions/activities composing any one practice and the ensemble of configured practices is not a special case of the traditional structure-agency dichotomy. In the perspective of this difference, any particular social practice is distinguished by a dual ontological status: On the one hand, the practice – as enclosed in its own network of actions/activities – is entirely conceivable in terms of a factually present manifestation of human agency, and on the other, the practice – as contextualized by a configuration of practices related with it – exists within the open horizon of possible changes of this configuration that would lead to the practice’s re-contextualization. (This horizon “belongs” to the practice’s way of being and cannot be conceptualized as a factual presence.)

The non-dichotomous difference I am discussing is a difference within the relations of mutual interpretation between “the particulars” and “the whole”. A practice that takes place in an arranged interrelatedness of practices becomes specified by the latter in a manner that allows the practice to specify its relational position in every configuration in which it takes place. For the sake of illustration, I will cite the way in which properly configured
artistic practices express stylistic specificity, provided that an artistic practice is a social practice when it brings to the fore joint motives of a group subscribing to a style and its aesthetic manifesto. Such a practice – no matter how authentic and unique it might be – is unavoidably enmeshed with practices manifesting artistic peculiarities. To concretize this illustration, the practice of dispensing with modelling light and shadow within colors as a means for dispensing with the “illusion of space” (George Braque) was typical for several avant-garde artists at the *Fin de siècle* who otherwise were committed to essentially different aesthetic worldviews. More specifically, this practice was applied in works of painters like Paul Sérusier, Maurice de Vlaminck, Raoul Dufy, and George Rouault. But in styles like early fauvism and postimpressionism it was only vaguely related with the styles’ core artistic practices.

The performance of the artistic practice of dispensing with modelling light and shadow within colors challenged the use of established color techniques. But it gained the status of a core feature of a new style when this performance was integrated in a configuration with practices such as the reduction of complex spatial structures to a geometric form approximating a cube, the minimal combination of colors in order to avoid the distraction of the emotions evoked by the abundance of color, the aggregation of geometric forms rhythmically in an extremely shallow space, the accentuation of the geometric shapes underlying the concrete subject matter, the decomposition of images into a series of interlocking planes, and the polymorphic portraying with shifts in perspective. The advent of (early, Analytical) Cubism was precisely distinguished by this configuration. When Picasso proclaimed that Cubism has tangible goals, he referred to the possibilities of artistic expressivity engendered by the way in which the practice of dispensing with the illusion of depth was specified by the practices expressing the “Cubist thought”. The specification of the artistic practice by the configuration in which it takes place is not to be detached from the way in which it contributes to the specification of a style as expressed by concerted practices. It is this mutual reinforcement between a single practice and a stylistic configuration that is built upon the model of interpretive circularity.

3. Disclosing Cultural Forms of Life within Properly Arranged Social Practices

As already stressed, only a *properly arranged* assembly of social practices are capable to disclose and articulate something that is distinguished by ontological authenticity. Accentuating on the “proper arrangement” entails that the conception I am going to outline is not interested in each and every interrelatedness of social practices. The most ensembles of interrelated practices – even when they persist for long periods of time – have ad hoc
character, and do not disclose and constitute culturally unique events, discursive orders, or symbolic realities within human existence. In many cases sets of randomly related practices are artificially maintained for dubious political reasons. Think, for instance, on the “implantation” of ceremonial practices in the routine everydayness of societies with totalitarian political regimes. When “hybridized” with professional, pedagogical, administrative and other initiatives, these ceremonial practices serve various functions: They indoctrinate the young generation, periodically emphasize the “unlimited power” of the political authority, support the insinuating feeling of practitioners’ historical mission, and so on. An alternative example – this time referring to allegedly non-totalitarian societies – is the artificial maintenance of a non-authentic (and “irrational” in the sense of critical theory) constellation of commercial and political practices that in combination with mass information campaigns produces a favorable milieu for various sorts of manipulation that contribute to the practitioners’ existence in the form of “one-dimensional man”. Maintaining such a constellation in which the hybridization of political and commercial practices leads to “practices of commodification” is effective in keeping alive the lifestyle of consumerism, but it cannot disclose and articulate an authentic form of life.

But when the interrelatedness reveals and produces “ontological authenticity”, then there is a “phenomenon that has to be saved”, i.e. to become a subject of theoretical conceptualization predicated on the irreducibility of social practices to actions and activities. In this account what needs conceptualization in theoretical terms is the phenomena manifesting the capability of a specifically arranged complex to disclose, in particular, an authentic form of life. For instance, the ensemble of exegetical, ritual, organizational (inter-denominational), conversational, and dietary practices characterize the confessional ethos of a religious form of life. This ethos sanctions the righteous (individual and collective) behavior of those who are committed to the form of life. But succumbing to the normative force of the confessional ethos does not automatically provide a guarantee for a righteous behavior and life. The members of the community are obliged to constantly give evidence – through their individual and communal agential behavior – of their true faith in God which coincides with having a righteous life union with God. They can only do this by routinizing configurations of the aforementioned practices, making them routine everydayness of their lives. The everydayness of a religious form of life is assigned with the special task of bringing the doctrinally postulated “Sacred Reality” – understood as both the moral-social order ideally sanctioned by God, and the imagery of an ideal reality through which the religious human being has to make sense of what takes place in her/his way of being – in the most intimate spheres of personal and communal life.
The everydayness of recurrent practices should transfer the “Sacred Reality” (along with its transcendent authority) into the moral behavior of those committed to the form of life. What is most remote from the prosaic (mundane) affairs of daily life should become “most immanent” part of this life. The faith in salvation as this faith is maintained and propagated by the properly configured practices enables the maintenance and propagation of the transcendent authority in the diversity of daily life’s contexts. This authority becomes ubiquitous in all personal and communal affairs. However, the transference of the “Sacred Reality” through (properly configured) everyday practices – or the task of bringing God’s kingdom on earth – is a never-ending task. Nonetheless, only by engaging this task, one is able to become committed to the orders of the transcendent authority, and to integrate these orders in her personal life as it is morally characterized by a free will (and corresponding responsibility) and the voice of conscience. Succumbing to the normative force of a confessional ethos amounts to internalizing the (doctrinally and exegetically defined) transcendent authority as the voice of conscience. This can only happen within the routine everydayness of properly configured practices whereby the “Sacred Reality” agreeable to God (or God’s kingdom) becomes progressively actualized in the life-form’s everydayness.

The way in which practices are configured to maintain the religious form of life reflects the imperative of transferring the transcendent authority in the everyday life. Configured practices become reflexively resilient in their arrangements and rearrangements for the sake of keeping alive the form of life. They accomplish the transference independently of the changes of agential behavior. In this account, transference is the meaningful articulation of the religious form of life. However, reaching this conclusion does not imply that the properly arranged practices are a (meta-human) agent. Practices that disclose and constitute a form of life do not rest on a separate agency operating along with the joint agency of the community’s members committed to this form of life. In particular, configured practices do not manifest agency that can be described in terms of purposive-inferential patterns. Their possible and actual configurations do not express a range of teleological scenarios for agential behavior. The interrelatedness of these practices rather *fore-structures* the members’ agential behavior. It opens a horizon within which this behavior is meaningful – a behavior that by being succumbed to the ethos’s normative force serves the task of transference. With regards to this independence, the never-ending transference can be addressed as having its own phenomenality, typically illustrated by the manifestations of practices’ endogenous reflexivity. At issue in the hermeneutic theory of practices should be that phenomenality which manifests the irreducibility of practices.
Differentiating between an ad hoc assemblage of practices and an ensemble of concerted practices that discloses an authentic form of life is not always an easy task. Thus, to adduce another example, there are many arbitrary and idiosyncratic combinations of practices of preparing and consuming vegetarian meals. Some of them reflect medical diets, some others manifest aspects of ethno-cultural traditions. Yet certain configurations of such practices enmeshed with several other lifestyle practices may disclose an authentic form of life, if the whole ensemble of practices supports and activates moral obligations and duties that, in their turn, become coupled, in particular, with political practices and policies of defending animal rights and avoiding any kind of animal exploitation, deep-ecological environmental initiatives, and social practices that promise to reverse climate change by breaking with the paradigm of “sustainable growth”. However, what would warrant the authenticity of the disclosed form of life is not only the routinization of all concerted practices. The way in which the changing configurations of practices involved in the whole ensemble become a routine everydayness should engender at the same time a genuine ethos (along with the correspondent habitus) of the practitioners situated in this everydayness.

This ethos should be crafted not only within an appropriate restrictive moral code (enhancing the non-authoritarian kinds of positive liberty), but it also has to keep alive practitioners’ belief that the (pathological) status quo can radically be overcome in favor of a completely different situation guided by the values and tenets of deep ecology and degrowth (as alternative to dangerous strategy of “sustainable growth”). This desired and expected situation has the character of a “transcendent entity” in whose achievability those committed to the life-form’s ethos believe. It is this belief that should incrementally transform – within the routine everydayness – the “transcendent entity” into entities that are ready-to-hand within the configured practices. The belief might rest on the imagery of a certain global utopic vision about the planetary ecosystem that goes far beyond the instrumental-utilitarian anthropocentric environmentalism. But much more important for the vitality of the form of life turn out to be more local “iconoclastic utopias” – utopias eschewing blueprints and breaking with visions and images, but adequately responding to expectations arising out of particular situations and contexts. (Jacoby 2005) These utopias are operative and instrumental in the contexts of everyday life. They “translate” the global utopia’s “visualizing-visionary” imagery into contextually relevant sensibility characterized by (what Russell Jacoby calls) “visual asceticism”, and referring to entities and processes that are ready-to-hand within the life-form’s configurations of practices. (The lack of visualizability enhances the sensibility about what has to come.) Only “the initiated” – the member of a community committed to the form of life – could understand the meanings articulated in contexts imbued with utopic expectations. In this case, the “translation” of the global
imagery into contextually relevant utopic expectations has the character of a never-ending task.

Against this background, the criterion for authenticity sounds as follows: When the disclosed form of life is capable in its everydayness to transform step-by-step the non-actually-present but potentially attainable entity – in whose existence practitioners (quasi-religiously) believe – into something meaningfully identifiable within the routinely repeatable configurations of practices, then the life-form is ontologically authentic. An authentic form of life is distinguished by the combination of (1) a belief in a transcendent reality that can be brought on the earth through day-to-day efforts that are shaped in a corresponding habitus; (2) the everydayness of properly configured and recurrent practices in which the transcendent reality incrementally becomes something that is ready-to-hand; and (3) the life-form’s ethos which excludes the control of any external moral or political authority. It is important to note that the ongoing transformation (or transference, or translation) of the transcendent reality as it is rooted in a (quasi-religious) belief does not take the form of a teleological process. An authentic form of life is disclosed and articulated within a hermeneutic circularity (composed by various interpretive circles) cannot be recast in terms of goal-oriented activities. Hermeneutic circularity can never be turned into teleology.

The authentic reality of social practices is due not to increasing complexity of goal-oriented actions and activities that hang together, but to the impossibility of approaching practices without taking into consideration the self-interpretive character of human existence. Accordingly, there is a shift in the methodological perspective of theorizing – a shift from explanatory to interpretive conceptualizing – that should correspond to the ontological requirement for the autonomy of practice theory. The analytic of the principal phenomena through which the character of human existence reveals itself is the theme of hermeneutic phenomenology. In stating this, I try to adduce a tentative evidence for grounding the theory of social practices upon existential analytic. The ontological autonomy of interrelated social practices might take various forms of empirical manifestation. The previous example was designed to show that intertwining practices may disclose, delineate and articulate the (material) domain of a cultural (vegan and deeply ecological) form of life. But the list of examples for what interrelated practices may disclose also includes: a cultural field of a “production of symbols” in Bourdieu’s sense; an institutional framework already laid out by configured practices before a system of formal laws becomes established; a dispositif in Foucaultian sense, or more generally, configurations of discursive practices that enable the circulation of power; a reproducible local order (a “local life-world”) as this is a subject of ethnomethodology; a system of conventions and customs that expresses a certain style of doing something (say, doing scientific research guided by a thought-style in Fleck’s
sense); a “domain of the sacred life” and the corresponding ritualized comportment, etc.

4. Conceptualizing the Facticity of Social Practices

The hermeneutic theory of social practices should be developed as a theory with a constitutive conceptual apparatus, and not merely as a collection of notions that are flexible enough to be applied to the vast variety of case studies devoted to the constitutions of new domains, forms of life, regimes of powers, etc. within properly organized multitudes of practices. Accordingly, this theory should not be subordinated to cultural studies dealing with the dynamics of social practices circulating and “migrating” in cultural spaces. Seen in a historical perspective, cultural studies is guided by the pathos of anti-theory. The rebellious spirit of cultural studies tends to receive theorizing – that can be reconstructed in accordance with the philosophy of science’s standards – as a gesture of justifying the (centrisms of) the dominant culture. The appeal to a critical theory in cultural studies masks in many cases an appeal to a destruction of theory as a self-sufficient cognitive body. Thus, for instance, this destruction is construed as a part of the struggle against androcentrism or western ethnocentrism. Arguing that theorizing the other is already an act of dominating the other was in the 1970s used as a principal argument against the construction of general theories in cultural anthropology. However, the destruction of the theory as a cognitive body – in favor of particular analyses that are resilient enough to capture heterogeneous contingencies of cultural life and to diagnose symptoms of new tendencies in this life – is often intertwined with the uncritical acceptance of essentialist notions of race, class, ethnicity, sex/gender, sexual orientation, nationality, cultural identity, cultural antagonism, violence, hegemony, etc.

It is my contention that the deconstruction of received essentialist concepts is a task that can only be accomplished within an appropriate theory. Briefly, deconstructing essentialism is a theoretical task, and cannot be addressed by an enterprise that tries to destruct the theory’s cognitive autonomy. In this vein, the critical agenda of the hermeneutic theory of social practices cannot be achieved without having its methodological identity as a self-sufficient conceptual body.

To reach the status of a genuine theory, the hermeneutic theory of social practices has to conceptualize in its own terms the caesura taking place in the passage from the actions involved in any one practice to the interrelatedness of practices. In the same way in which the autonomy of properly arranged practices is not to be construed in terms of a linear increase of the complexity of the particular practices’ constituents, it should not to be accounted in quasi-naturalistic terms of self-organizing complexes distinguished by “emergent properties”. Making use of such terms would only
substitute one form of reductionism for another one. It is my contention that this form is illustrated by the attempts—typically undertaken by critical realists in social theory—to recast Bourdieu’s concepts of social order and agential powers in terms of an “emergentist ontology”. If the task of the theory of social practices consists in conceptualizing practices without treating them as a quasi-natural (“autopoietic”) stratum, then the theory must not be predicated on procedures of objectification. The theory’s structure has to involve a kind of radical reflexivity that would prevent one from making use of naturalist and objectivist assumptions in coming to grips with practices’ authentic reality. However, radical reflexivity is a risky enterprise since it may call into question any conceptual assumptions in the process of theorizing. Finding a way out of the dilemma between procedural objectification and destructive-regressive reflexivity amounts to paving the path to the desired theory. The first step in that direction is to clarify the proper terms through which the aforementioned caesura can be captured.

The caesura embraces a series of breaking points. To list them requires using terms whose meaning will be subsequently elucidated. The breaking points are: (a) between inter- and trans-subjectivity; (b) between normativity and pre-normativity (which is by no means to be equated with still-not-articulated-normativity); (c) between reflexivity of agents who organize their activities and the endogenous reflexivity of practices; (d) between goal-oriented rationality and rationality as the phronēsis of practical intelligibility; (e) between the teleology of human activity and several kinds of interpretive circles that are the main topics in the hermeneutic theory of practices; (f) between temporal regimes of normatively organized human activities and “chronotopes” of arranged practices; and (g) between the discrete facts about actions and activities that become represented through the data models of (deductive-explanatory) behaviorist and cognitivist theories, and the interpretive articulation of meaning as a continuous process taking place within interrelated practices, which cannot be represented by data models. These breaking points mark at the same time the lines in which one should quest for the distinctiveness of the hermeneutic theory of social practices. It is my contention that the contradistinction between intentional action based on epistemic representation and (what Hubert Dreyfus, Charles Taylor and others call) “absorbed coping”—a conception that places Heidegger’s approach to human behavior as deliberative circumspection within-the-world in empirically verifiable theoretical frameworks—is too narrow to account for the caesura mentioned.

There is an essential ambiguity involved in the above listed series of breaking points. If any pair of the series of oppositions from (a) to (g) presents a transition from one state of affairs to another (entirely different) one, then it is unclear what should be counted as initial state and what as final state of the transitions. Paradoxically enough, both possible answers
are correct: One can treat as initial states both the first and the second components of the pairs. Which answer would be preferred depends on the starting philosophical assumptions. I will use the term *facticity* for designating the reality of concerted social practices in which ontologically authentic forms of life become disclosed and meaningfully articulated, whereas the term *factuality* will be reserved for the discrete entities of human behavior that are directly observed and involved in the explananda of the deductive-explanatory (cognitivist and behaviorist) theories. The distinction between factuality and facticity is a central one in hermeneutic phenomenology. The conceptualization of factuality should be accomplished by objectifying theories whose theoretical models must be interpretable by data models as ordered manifolds of discrete elements. Let us call this a strategy of ontic conceptualization. By contrast, the conceptualization of facticity requires an ontological strategy that consists in the interpretative analytic of those symptomatic events in the disclosure and meaningful articulation within concerted practices which seem to be bounded with transcendental conditions stipulating the way of being of what becomes disclosed and articulated.

Treating social practices as factuality unavoidably reduces them to normatively organized goal-oriented activities. In putting teleology first, one is able to demonstrate that temporality is a pervasive feature of human activity. (Schatzki 2010, 111) Yet in so doing, one still operates with a model based on the idealizations of objective time. To successfully address the intrinsic modes of temporalizing characterizing the agents’ being-in-social-practices, it does not suffice to acknowledge that existential temporality occurs as unity of past, present, and future, and then – for the sake of a factual conceptualization of human activity – to schematize this unity in terms of teleological models of (procedurally objectified) time. The views of the “teleological temporality” adjust idealizations of objective time – like that of the succession of past, present and future events – to the needs of conceptualizing activities and practices as factuality. Even when the authors of these views correctly admit that all the structures constituted within human existence are modes of (what Heidegger calls) the “temporalizing of temporality”, they fail to spell out these modes in terms of the ontological nexus of understanding-and-interpretation-within-practices as this nexus enables the articulation of meaning. The schematization of existential temporality as teleological time (timespace) of activity can only be accomplished at the price of ignoring the (hermeneutic-ontological) issues of the facticity of the articulation of meaning within practices – the articulation which by operating as temporalizing of temporality fore-structures the teleological (factual) organization of human activity. By contrast, any attempt to conceptualize the facticity of practices must take into consideration the intrinsic temporalization of projective future, selective past, and present-in-the-making which the continuous stream of configured practices produces. In
other words, one must take into consideration the kind of temporalizing that works within concerted practices, and cannot be redescribed by objectivist (physical-mathematical) models of time. Thus considered, the facticity of practices is fully amenable to empirical inquiry, but not by means of objectifying procedures.

Against the background of discriminating between these two strategies of conceptualization, one can differentiate between the ontic approach to social practices – an approach that inevitably would be committed to reductionism and essentialism – and the ontological approach which is at issue in this paper. When one is following the former approach, one gives priority to the first states of affairs (inter-subjectivity, normativity, actors’ reflexivity, etc.) indicated in the list of turning points. Accordingly, one remains on the territory on which social practices are taken to be discrete entities and collections of such entities, granted that each practice has its own history and trajectory, and the history of a particular collection is merely a juxtaposition of the single practices’ historical trajectories, each of them devised by “agential carriers”. All changes within a collection of such discrete entities result from alternations of individual trajectories. (Ginev 2013, 20-28) Prioritizing the second states of affairs (trans-subjectivity, pre-normativity, practices’ reflexivity, etc.) is the hallmark of the ontological approach and the hermeneutic theory of social practices. Thus, for instance, normativity (as norms enacted by directly observable rule-following acts) has “ontic primacy” over pre-normativity – as a feature brought into play by the capability of concerted practices to project their interrelatedness upon possibilities – when the goal of inquiry is to delineate that kind of joint agency which is the force behind certain collective-agential behavior, granted that this force is constrained and controlled by an imposed normative structure. By contrast, “ontological primacy” is to be assigned to the pre-normative fore-structuring of normative structures within the facticity of social practices, when in the focus of inquiry is the articulation of normativity within the hermeneutic circularity disclosing and constituting a form of life.

It is the ontological approach to practices’ facticity that reverses the order of things by attributing primacy to pre-normativity. Yet this reversal should not be trivialized as a replacement of one kind of deductive-explanatory construction of “saved phenomena” with another one. As already hinted at, a theory of the facticity of social practices cannot be developed as an explanatory theory. Consequently, pre-normativity as a dimension of facticity cannot be conceptualized as manifolds of theoretically laden facts. Pre-normativity manifests itself within a characteristic hermeneutic situation – a tendency of meaningful articulation of what is disclosed by concerted practices – and the only possible way of its conceptualization is
via interpretive means. (More generally, the facticity of meaningful articulation can only be thematized by means of interpretive theory.) Interpreting the tendencies of interpretive articulation of meanings within ensembles of practices should shift the attention from the procedural production of factuality organized in data models to the empirical manifestation of facticity as ongoing temporalization – contextual differentiations of projective future, selective past, and present-in-the-making through which meanings becomes articulated. This empirical manifestation takes the form of temporalized narratives that exist before any kind of narration takes place. (As already mentioned, Rouse uses the expression “narrative fields”.) This is why the manifested facticity of concerted social practices acquires the character of pre-narrativity.

According to the thesis of the irreducibility of practice theory to action theory, it would not be correct to say that collectives of practitioners are – via their (a) collective subjectivity (that supposedly is a source of “collective causality”), or (b) joint plans, or (c) consensually accepted intersubjective normativity – creators and designers of practices. Social practices are generated within the trans-subjectivity of ever changing configurations of contextualizing and contextualized practices. Configurations of practices that are repeated recurrently in the everyday life constrain, regulate, and eventually coordinate agents’ subjective choices, thereby forming trans-subjective tendencies of choosing possibilities. On the hermeneutic theory, the interrelatedness of practices appropriates the same possibilities upon which it projects its totality. Because both the projection upon – and the appropriation of – possibilities transcend agents’ subjectivity, their unity has the character of trans-subjectivity. This trans-subjective status of the interrelated practices (as projecting and appropriating possibilities) corresponds to the agents’ mode of being-in-practices. Agents are in ecstatic unity with both the configurations of social practices and the horizon of possibilities, whereby their activities are contextualized through the ways in which projected possibilities become appropriated. Agents are not passively embedded in what social practices constitute – forms of life, cultural spaces, traditions, styles, institutions, etc. Rather, they exist in the realities constituted by their practices through choosing and appropriating possibilities engendered by these practices, whereby every choice reveals and conceals the respective socio-cultural reality anew. In accordance with the ecstatic unity mentioned, the appropriated possibilities concern both the arrangements of practices and the agents’ personal lives. This can be a unity with an artistic style, a historical tradition, a professional ethos, a ritualized way of being of a religious community, a paradigmatic style of doing research of a scientific community, or any other cultural form of life.
5. The Concept of Trans-Subjectivity

The concept of trans-subjectivity is of prime importance for the way in which the hermeneutic theory of social practices advocates the irreducibility thesis. In line with the discussion so far, trans-subjectivity is the dynamic unity of projection and appropriation of possibilities – a unity in which agential (individual and collective) subjectivity is situated by being in each particular context transcended by a horizon projected by a particular configuration of practices. Trans-subjectivity is the hermeneutic circularity in which the non-dichotomous ontological difference (between agential factuality and practices’ facticity) resides. Tentatively, trans-subjectivity is distinguished by its own interpretive circles by being involved in co-interpretive relations with the agential subjectivity which contextually is entangled with it. Agential subjectivity entangled with trans-subjectivity is (what Heidegger’s calls) “thrown projection”. The kind of existential ontology which manages to link the thrown projection with finitude-temporality of the modes of being-in-the-world unveils essential features of trans-subjectivity, but it cannot directly be applied in the construction of the hermeneutic theory of practices. This theory opposes the very idea of schematizing the being-revealed-in-facticity in terms of “fundamental ontology”, even when the latter proves to be quite successful in destructing the “metaphysics of presence”.

In conceptualizing social practices with regard to the ontological difference between the factuality of actions/activities as they are determined by human agency, and the facticity of practices capable to disclose authentic forms of life, the hermeneutic theory admits that this difference exists only within – and through – the trans-subjective hermeneutic circularity inherent in practices’ facticity. (To reiterate, the ontological difference is not simply between actions/activities and properly arranged practices, but between factual manifolds of human agency’s outcomes and actions/activities entangled with configured practices.) There is no being that can be schematized in conceptually self-sufficient ontology when at issue is the ongoing contextualization of the ontological difference within the hermeneutic circularity. By the same token: Trans-subjectivity in which agents’ subjectivity is always entangled with takes place within the hermeneutic circularity, and has no independent existence apart from this circularity. Conceptualizing trans-subjectivity within the hermeneutic circularity excludes any threat of hypostatizing it. Agential subjectivity exists through its choices of possibilities that invoke shifts in the in the trans-subjective horizon.

Moving from one configuration of practices to another also shifts the horizon of possibilities that are open to be appropriated. Since every configuration sets up a context of constituting meaning through actualizing a possibility, the process of re-contextualization – ensued by the changing
configurations – runs parallel with the horizon’s shifts. With regard to that shifting, the possibilities are not “available once and for ever”, but become contextually revealed and concealed. It is the horizon of possibilities that plays the role already indicated: The interrelatedness of social practices projects its totality upon possibilities, thereby gaining its ontological status as a potentiality-for-being. On a corollary to this statement: The interrelatedness of practices projects the totality of its possible configurations upon a contextually shifting horizon.

The changing configurations in the interrelatedness and the shifts in the horizon are mutually reinforcing events. The actualization of a possibility within a context of configured practices reveals new possibilities (along with precluding some of the existing), while the shift in the horizon provokes a new configuration. Accordingly, there is ongoing interplay of practices and possibilities that does not leave any room (within it) for practitioners’ (personal and social) existence as a-temporalized presence unaffected by the shifting horizon: All entities, occurrences and processes involved in this interplay hinge on the horizon’s shifts and the process of re-contextualization. Since there is a mutual dependence of the whole horizon of possibilities and the actualization of every particular possibility within a configuration of practices, the ongoing interplay of practices and possibilities is characterized by a continuous hermeneutic circularity as resulting from the synergy of the aforementioned interpretive circles. An interrelatedness of social practices exists through and within this circularity. By implication, what is disclosed and articulated within such an interrelatedness is predicated on being open to interpretive re-contextualization. The way in which the hermeneutic theory conceptualizes the circularity (and the ontological difference within it) brings into being the caesura between the objectified factuality of collective agency operating through agents’ intentionality and normatively regulated actions, on the one hand, and the (pre-normative and pre-narrative) facticity of interplaying practices and possibilities.

Notes

1 Rouse speaks of “narrative fields of practices” – a concept that I will later discuss. In introducing this concept, he carefully tries to avoid (what he calls) “pragmatic foundationalism”, i.e. the view ascribing original intentionality to skilled comportment organized within interrelated practices. In the same vein, Rouse criticizes Hubert Dreyfus’ suggestion for treating social and linguistic practices differently. Practices are not “naturally” divided into species in accordance with the kind of the “original intentionality” which grounds them. Practices are contextually specified with regard to the local (material) settings in which they take place, and constantly open to re-specification through circulation in broader fields of practices. Thus, Rouse’s conception implies that making a practice explicit requires describing it as taking place in a variety of local setting, and tracking of its characteristic trajectories in narrative fields of practices.
I fully agree with the way in which Theodore Schatzki discriminates between actions and activities. For him, activity and action are related as event and accomplishment. Being inherently teleological, activity is an event of performing. What happens in such an event is action. It is activity that accomplishes action. In another formulation, “activity is the performance of action.” (Schatzki 2010, xv) However, I disagree with Schatzki’s claim that there is a strong similarity between his construal of the performances of actions and Heidegger’s construal of “clearings” in their relation to humanity. They both share the feature – so Schatzki’s argument goes – of befalling entities. In the case of “clearings, these entities are historical people or mortals. In the case of actions, these entities are the people performing them.” (Schatzki 2010, 170) My argument against this claim is quite simple. Heidegger’s “clearing” makes only sense against the background of the historicity of the ontological difference – the way in which the Being reveals itself in each historical epoch as a range of (accessible) beings. Without taking into account the “epochal history of Being” – and Schatzki for good reasons avoids to integrate it into his theory of human action – “clearing” can be used metaphorically, but not conceptually.

This claim is a consequence from the thesis that the facticity of interrelated practices cannot be objectified as a theoretically laden factuality. The thesis will be discussed later.

Elizabeth Shove, Mika Pantzar, and Matt Watson acknowledge the primacy of the stream of practices by observing that all elements of meaning, materiality, and competence are outcomes of practices-as-performances. What I cannot accept, however, is the way in which these authors place practices and elements on the same (ontological) level. Approaching social practices in this way is succumbed to what I elsewhere call a “paradigm of discreteness” – a paradigm that forecloses the conceptualization of practices’ facticity. (Ginev 2013) In contrast to classical versions of practice theory – like those of Bourdieu and Giddens – Shove, Pantzar, and Watson pay little attention (if any) to reflexivity of practices. It is my contention that stressing the role of practices’ own reflexivity is a sine qua non for demonstrating the irreducibility of practices to more elementary units of social life.

With regard to the dual status of habitus – being promoted by human agency and its generative and unifying power, while remaining fore-structured by interrelated practices – one can reach the conclusion that habitus makes accessible to the agents the entities which they assume to exist beyond their actual reality. The agents’ commitment to this assumption is a sine qua non for having authentic form of life. At the same time, “immanentizing” these entities in agents’ everydayness is also an indispensable dimension of such a life-form. Believing in transcendent entities and immanentizing them through the performances of progressively routinized practices is a duality that has much to do with the dual status of habitus.

The initial claim that only “properly arranged” practices are capable to disclose and articulate a domain of specific meanings stands and falls with the evidence which can be provided for practices’ endogenous reflexivity. The thesis of irreducibility necessarily assumes that it is not human agency that is liable for the “proper arrangement”. Evidence comes from various lines of research. With regard to the capability of concerted practices to constitute meaning, several ethnomethodologists show how the accountability of local social orders depends on the complementarity between actors’ reflexivity and practices’ reflexive self-regulation. Ethnographic descriptions of scientific work bring to light the ways in which the endogenous reflexivity of scientific practices enables the formation of contexts in which the meaningful articulation of a domain of inquiry takes place. In a similar vein, Bourdieu’s “logic of practice” places emphasis upon the fact that what becomes meaningfully constituted in social contexts in which practitioners’ skills and dispositions play essential role remains entangled with tendencies of practices’ reflexive alignment with one another.
The logic of practices is the logic of the constitution of meaning within and through practices capable to reflexively contextualize what they constitute.

7 All factuality is procedurally produced through practices of inquiry. (Ginev 2016) This thesis can be read in two ways. The first one proceeds in accordance with the well-known thesis of the theory-ladenness of what is counted as facts-providing-empirical-evidence. The production of objectified factuality is considered to be enclosed in the process of theory construction. In the analytical philosophy of science, the theory-ladenness of objectified factuality is a thesis that keeps its absolute validity for the deductive-explanatory theories. The factual basis of theorizing is not something initially given, but the outcome of theory construction. In the second reading, the theory construction is regarded not as a self-sufficient process. This kind of cognitive construction itself consists of particular practices (Rouse 2002, 263-300), and is embedded in various configurations of scientific practices. In this reading, all kinds of factuality are produced within the facticity of scientific inquiry in which domains of reality becomes disclosed to be factually articulated. Both readings share the view that factuality is constituted by the theoretically “saved phenomena”. They differ, however, in the ways of envisioning the saving of phenomena. Following this line of reasoning, the explanatory theories of human behavior conceptualize (theoretically construct), as a rule, a factuality of normative functionality (i.e. data models about functionally related and normatively regulated observable activities).

References


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Anregungen zu einer Theorie
der produktiven Rezeption:
Hans Robert Jauß und Hans-Georg Gadamer
im ‚Gespräch‘

Suggestions for a Theory of Productive Reception:
Hans Robert Jauß and Hans-Georg Gadamer through Dialogue

Abstract: The receptive-aesthetic program has probably found resonance in Hans
Robert Jauß’ challenge for the contemporary study of literature and has addressed
the core problems of aesthetics and literary hermeneutics and historiography. This
fact, that is, the aesthetic experience and its specific relation to the literary-historical
model, gives Jauß a certain point of view. In this perspective, the interest is focused
on the question of how the dialogue between aesthetic experience and literary
hermeneutics could prevail as an aesthetic norm and how literature should be
understood in the historical horizon.

A first task would be how Jauß, following Hans Georg Gadamer, orientates
himself through the logic of question and answer and the dialogical relation of the
present to the past, and how the present can be understood as a productive
instance of the past. In view of this fact, however, Jauß reverses this relationship in
Gadamer’s sense and emphasizes the function of the present in the renewal of
literary historiography, whereby the appropriation of the past belongs to the fusion
of horizons (Horizontverschmelzung).

This resulted in the need to answer an urgent question. The fact that the
articulation of dissatisfaction with existing literary historiography leads to a public
mandate to portray the history of literary criticism as a reception history becomes,
for Jauß, the subject of a reception and impact research.

Keywords: productive reception, fusion of horizons, receptive aesthetics, literary
historiography, literary hermeneutics

1. Überlegungen zu den Hauptbegriffen Erwartungs- und
Verstehenshorizont, Horizontwandel und Horizontverschmelzung
im Hinblick auf Hans Georg Gadamers Wahrheit und Methode

Aus der Geschichte der Hermeneutik geht die Entwicklung des
Leseaktes aus der Auslegung heiliger Texte hervor, die eher den Charakter
einer Offenbarung ankündigten. Mit Schleiermacher setzt sich ein

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Die Einführung der leseorientierten Begriffe unter dem Zeichen der Rezeptionsästhetik hat das Lesen als aus dem Text hervorgegangene Kategorie betrachtet. In diesem Rahmen stellt sich die Frage der Textexegese nicht nur als „produktive Produktion“ (sic!), aber auch als „produktive Rezeption“, wobei das Verstehen die ‚Last‘ des „hermeneutischen Zirkels“ trägt:

Die einzelnen Teile eines Textes sind nur zu deuten aus dem Gesamtverständnis des Textes, dieses kann aber nur durch die Deutung der Teile erlangt werden. Neben dem Verhältnis von Teilen zum Ganzen ist ein zweiter Widerspruch unvermeidlich: Jeder Leser trägt an den Text sein Vorwissen heran und versteht ihn (zunächst) entsprechend seiner Vorurteilsstruktur; andererseits kann diese aber durch die Textstruktur – wenn beide nicht übereinstimmen – bewusst werden und so kann eine weniger voreingenommene Lektüre denkbar werden (Graf 2004, 107).

Man darf demnächst wohl behaupten, dass die Jaußsche Theorie des Zusammenhangs zwischen der ästhetischen Theorie und dem geschichtlichen Bewusstsein in Anlehnung an die Theorieansätze von Hans Georg Gadamer zu bestimmen ist.


Vielmehr muss von der Voraussetzung ausgegangen werden, daß zwischen jeweiliger rekonstruierender Gegenwart und zu rekonstruierender Vergangenheit ein Wechselverhältnis besteht: Der Akt, mit dem sich der Interpret in die Vergangenheit „hineinversetzt“, ist zugleich derjenige, mit dem er den „Horizont“ seiner Gegenwart bildet:

Wenn sich unser historisches Bewußtsein in historische Horizonte versetzt, so bedeutet das nicht eine Entrieckung in fremde Welten, die nichts mit unserer eigenen verbindet, sondern sie insgesamt bilden den einen großen, von innen her beweglichen Horizont, der über die Grenzen des Gegenwärtigen hinaus die Geschichtstiefe unseres Selbstbewußtseins umfaßt. In Wahrheit es also ein einziger Horizont, der all das umschließt, was das geschichtliche Bewußtsein in


Diese Sinnstruktur ist nicht traditionell aufzufassen, denn es setzt keine im modernen Sinne verstandene Interpretationsvorgänge aus, sondern treibt

2. Die Vorrangigkeit der Frage im Verhältnis zur Antwort


Im Aufbau von diesem Werk taucht der Abschnitt „Der hermeneutische Vorrang der Frage“ auf, wobei die Bedeutung der Dialektik von der Wechselverhältnis von Frage und Antwort geschildert wird. Die Überlegungen dieses Abschnitts kulminieren zwar in der Behauptung der ‚Dialektizität‘ des Wissens, das die Methode der Vorrangigkeit der Frage zur Erhellung der Struktur der Welt- und Selbstverfassung sein kann (Schneipf 2003, 303):


Insofern das Spiel, die juristische Applikation und die Horizontverschmelzung ein hermeneutisches Modell des Verstehens bilden, das der „Logik von Frage und Antwort“ deutet auf ein anderes Modell hin, das die Gedanken von Martin Heidegger und R. G. Collingwood zu dem Problem des Verstehens zusammenfasst („Die Kunst des Fragens ist die Kunst des Weiterfragens, d.h. aber sie ist die Kunst des Denkens“); das Verstehen fungiert als eine entflammbte Suche nach der Frage, auf die das Werk die Antwort ist, und als Möglichkeit, die Beantwortung der Frage schon im Laufe des Fragestellungprozesses herauszufinden und zu überschreiten:

Wer verstehen will, muß also fragend hinter das Gesagte zurückgehen. Er muß es als Antwort von einer Frage her verstehen, auf die es Anwort ist. So hinter
das Gesagte zurückgegangen, hat man aber notwendig über das Gesagte hinausgefragt. Man versteht den Text ja nur in seinem Sinn, indem man den Fragehorizont gewinnt, der als solcher notwendigerweise auch andere mögliche Antworten umfaßt. Insofern ist der Sinn eines Satzes relativ auf die Frage, für die er eine Antwort ist, d.h. aber, er geht notwendig über das in ihm selbst Gesagte hinaus (Gadamer 1965, 352).

Gadamer entwickelt hier eine Methode, die über das Werk zurück- und hinausfragt, nicht aber ins Werk hinein, wo die ästhetische Erfahrung von dem Werk ausgeklammert bleibt. Dann zeigt sich aber, dass keine Horizontverschmelzung, sondern eine Horizontabhebung für den Vollzug des Verstehens verantwortlich ist (Jauß 1982, 27).

In dem dialogischen Prozeß vertreten sowohl Gadamer, als auch Jauß die These des Primats der Frage: Kunstwerke als Monolithen des Verstandes bleiben ‚stumm’, wenn sie nicht ‚befragt’ werden. Doch muss dabei bewusst bleiben, dass Horizonte der Literatur aufgrund des philosophisch-geschichtlichen Bewusstseins einer elementaren dialogfähigen Argumentation und Ausführung bedürfen, wenn sie aus dem blinden Fleck der eigenen Wirklichkeit herausgehen möchten:

Das in literarischer Form Überlieferte wird damit aus der Entfremdung, in der er sich befindet, in die lebendige Gegenwart des Gespräches zurückgeholt, dessen ursprünglicher Vollzug stets Frage und Antwort ist (Gadamer 1965, 350).

Ganz im sokratischen Sinne, wie Gadamer und Jauß wohl behaupten, wird das Fragen als ein Instrument des Dialogs; die platonische Dialektik (Simms 2015, 41), also das Ideal des sokratischen Fragens als Weg zum Wissen über das Nichtwissen ergeben die Möglichkeit eines Gesprächs, die auch in Hinsicht auf das Verstehen literarischer Texte gültig ist. Bei Gadamer geht es darum, in differenzierter Abhebung der historischen Horizonte der Produktion, der Geschichte der Rezeption und des aktuellen historisch-gesellschaftlichen Betrachterstandpunktes die besonderen Fragen herauszuarbeiten, auf die die Werke in unterschiedlichen historischen Situationen Antworten geben. Die Rekonstruktion der hermeneutischen Frage würde dann nur im Kontext einer immer wandelnden ästhetischen Wahrnehmung stattfinden:

Das Überlieferte, das uns anspricht – der Text, das Werk, die Spur – stellt selbst eine Frage und stellt damit unser Meinen ins Offene. [...] Wir suchen die Frage zu rekonstruieren, auf die das Überlieferte die Antwort wäre. Wir werden das aber gar nicht können, ohne den historischen Horizont, der damit bezeichnet ist, fragend zu überschreiten. Die Rekonstruktion der Frage, auf die der Text die Antwort sein soll, steht selbst innerhalb eines Fragens, durch das wir die Antwort auf die uns von der Überlieferung gestellte Fragen suchen. Eine rekonstruierte Frage kann eben niemals in ihrem ursprünglichen Horizonte stehen (Gadamer 1965, 356).

3. Über die geschichtliche Dimension der Literatur


Er charakterisiert als Ausgangspunkt seiner Abhandlung die Lage der Literaturgeschichte die „keineswegs unverdient in Verruf gekommen ist“ (Jauß 1982, 144); vielmehr wird es ihr vorgehalten, „daß sie nur vorgebe, eine Form der Geschichtsschreibung zu sein, in Wahrheit sich aber außerhalb der geschichtlichen Dimension bewege und dabei zugleich die


Literarische Werke, abgesehen von ihrem Erneuerungspotential, sind immer nur lesbar und verständlich in einem Erfahrungskontext, und setzen Erwartungen voraus, die sie eventuell bestätigen und übertreffen. Das Neue an dem Gelesenen wird nur dann als solches empfunden, wenn man der Horizont der Wahrnehmung vertraut ist.

Es [das literarische Werk] weckt Erinnerungen an schon Gelesenes, bringt den Leser in eine bestimmte emotionale Einstellung und stiftet schon mit seinem Anfang Erwartungen für ‚Mitte und Ende‘, die im Fortgang der Lektüre nach bestimmten Spielregeln der Gattung oder Textart aufrechterhalten oder abgewandelt, umorientiert oder auch ironisch aufgelöst werden können (Jauß 1982, 175).

Nach der Analyse der Rezeption von Flauberts Madame Bovary lässt Jauß durch die Beschreibung jeweiliger Erwartungshorizonte im Horizontwandel der Lektüre die geschichtliche Dimension der Literatur sichtbar werden.

Die Rekonstruktion des Erwartungshorizontes, vor dem ein Werk in der Vergangenheit geschaffen und aufgenommen wurde, ermöglicht andererseits Fragen zu stellen, auf die der Text eine Antwort gab, und damit zu erschließen, wie der einstige Leser das Werk gesehen und verstanden haben kann. [...] Er [dieser Zugang] bringt die hermeneutische Differenz zwischen dem einstigen und dem heutigen Verständnis eines Werkes vor Augen, macht die – beide Positionen vermittelnde – Geschichte seiner Rezeption bewußt und stellt damit die scheinbare Selbstverständlichkeit, daß im literarischen Text Dichtung zeitlos gegenwärtig und ihr objektiver Sinn dem Interpreten
jederzeit unmittelbar zugänglich sei, als ein platonisierendes Dogma der philologischen Metaphysik in Frage (Jauß 1982, 183).

Dieser Ansatz beruht auf die hermeneutische Differenz zwischen dem vergangenen und gegenwärtigen Verständnis eines Kunstwerkes. Mit dieser Theorie meint Jauß, dass Rezeptionsgeschichte nicht den Ausgleich verschiedener Verstehenshorizonte bedeutet. Weiterhin entsteht ein für die historische Erkenntnis des Lesers konstitutiver Moment, wo die verschiedenen Horizonte aufgehoben werden können und das Wesen des Textes im Kontext seiner ursprünglichen Rezeptionssituation zu begreifen ist. Man muss hingegen in Erwägung ziehen, dass die Berücksichtigung der hermeneutischen Differenz im historischen Prozess Gadamers Konzeption des wirkungsgeschichtlichen Bewusstseins widerlegt:


Nicht zuletzt bezieht sich Jauß auf das Wechselverhältnis von Literatur- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte, indem er entscheidend auf den Gedanken einer neuen Literaturtheorie eingeht: Literatur ist keine Widerspiegelung gesellschaftlicher Verhältnisse, sondern besitzt ihrerseits eine ‚gesellschaftsbildende Funktion‘: 
Die gesellschaftliche Funktion der Literatur wird erst dort in ihrer genuinen Möglichkeit manifest, wo die literarische Erfahrung des Lesers in den Erwartungshorizont seiner Lebenspraxis eintritt, sein Weltverständnis präformiert und damit auch auf sein gesellschaftlicher Verhalten zurückwirkt (Jauß 1970, 199).

Der geschichtlichen Dimension der Literatur der Jaußschen Theorie gilt daher volle Aufmerksamkeit, selbstverständlich aufgrund der spezifischen Leistung der Literatur im geschichtlichen Dasein, das im Bewußtsein künftiger Leserschaften eine Rolle zu spielen hat.

4. Die Erschaffung eines neuen Paradigmas. Die Möglichkeit der produktiven Rezeption im Rahmen der historisch-ästhetischen Erkenntnis


Die Wahrnehmung der radikalen geschichtlichen und gesellschaftlichen Bedingtheit der Literatur ist der Hauptansatz der marxistischen Schule. Ihr zufolge war das Kunstwerk in der Entfaltung seiner Geschichte, also „im Wandel der Systeme literarischer Gattungen und Formen zu sehen“ (Jauß 1970, 167). Dabei distanziert sich der ästhetische Eigensinn des Werks aus dem Blick, denn


Weiterhin schließt sich Jauß an den Ansätzen von Karl Marx an und behauptet


Jauß’ Vorschlag zur Erneuerung der Rezeptionsforschung ist, wie bereits angedeutet, die traditionelle Literaturtheorie zu erweitern:


Diesen oben ausgeführten Prinzipien versucht Hans Robert Jauß nachzugehen, indem er die traditionelle Literaturgeschichtsschreibung in Frage stellt:

Eine Erneuerung der Literaturgeschichte erfordert, die Vorurteile des historischen Objektivismus abzubauen und die traditionelle Produktions- und Darstellungssästhetik zu fundieren. Die Geschichtlichkeit der Literatur beruht nicht auf einem post festum erstellten Zusammenhang literarischer Fakten, sondern auf der vorgängigen Erfahrung des literarischen Werkes durch seine Leser. Dieses dialogische Verhältnis ist auch die primäre Gegebenheit für die Literaturgeschichte. Denn der Literaturhistoriker muss selbst immer erst wieder zum


References


Mat MESSERSCHMIDT *

**Mircea Eliade and the Death of God in America**

**Abstract:** In this paper, I will discuss the reception of Mircea Eliade in the American academy, particularly among scholars of Christian religion. I will focus especially on an objection voiced by many American academics during Eliade’s earliest years at the University of Chicago – namely, the charge that Eliade’s thought is “anti-historical” (a charge that, as I will indicate, can mean more than one thing). This objection to Eliade sometimes went hand in hand with the notion that Eliade’s treatment of “historical religions,” by which scholars generally meant Abrahamic religions, was unfair or under-nuanced. Taking as my starting point the work of theologian Thomas Altizer, the author of America’s first full-length book on Eliade, I will address this picture of Eliade the anti-historian, starting from Altizer’s belief that Eliade’s conceptions of the sacred and the profane can help us understand the historical event that Nietzsche called “the death of God.” I will argue on the basis of Altizer’s work that Eliade can be taken as offering us, to speak in Heideggerian terms, a “history of Being,” one that is based on the history of the sacred and the profane, according to which history is narrated as the gradual, continual receding of Being.

**Keywords:** death of God, history of Being, history of religions, sacred, profane

In 1979, the American theologian Thomas Altizer said of Mircea Eliade, “Mircea Eliade is the most distinguished and influential religious scholar of our time, and his coming to America in 1955 might almost be said to mark the point at which America passed from a Christian or Judeo-Christian religious ground to a truly pluralistic religious identity” (Altizer 1979, 257). The notion that Eliade diversified religious scholarship in the United States is not surprising or controversial; however, it is also worth pointing out, that it was Altizer himself, who was not a scholar of comparative religions, but rather a Christian theologian, who wrote America’s first full-length book on Eliade’s thought. The book, titled *Mircea Eliade and the Dialectic of the Sacred*, appeared in 1963.

In general, in fact, despite Altizer’s accurate statement in the late 70s about Eliade’s role in the diversification of religious scholarship, much of the earliest response to Eliade in the United States (that is, the response during the 1960s) came from people thinking primarily about Christianity.

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Mircea Eliade and the Death of God in America

Eliade arrived in the United States just in time for the rise of “death of God theology,” the brand of Christian (and sometimes Jewish) theology which posited that a loss of belief in God was in some way unavoidable, a line of thinking of which Altizer was a leading light. Today I will focus centrally on Altizer’s reading of Eliade, and argue that his work serves as a platform from which to understand Eliade’s relationship to history.

A scholar who, like Eliade, was to so thoroughly alter the course of religious studies was bound to elicit strong reactions, and Eliade had his share of detractors in the United States. Many of the objections leveled against him raised some version of the following charge: he was not a historian, but an anti-historian. For Eliade, the argument went, transhistorical truths about human nature trumped historical change, and the phenomenon of “the sacred” appeared in so similar a manner across vastly separated times and spaces that historical development and cultural difference seemed to be radically downplayed. Eliade’s critics felt this way about his work nearly all the time, but it is worth noting that even those whose careers were deeply inspired by Eliade often felt compelled to cede some version of these criticisms. A striking example is that of Wendy Doniger, a professor at my university, the University of Chicago Divinity School where she worked extensively with Eliade. Doniger writes, in her preface to Shamanism, that Eliade’s work implies “assumptions about unchanging human attributes that we no longer find true or useful,” and that these assumptions led to his being called an “anti-historian of religions” (Doniger 2004, xxii).

The objection that Eliade was “anti-historical” based itself on both the content of Eliade’s scholarship and its methodology. Eliade was accused of demonizing history, valorizing the experience of the sacred as a sort of escape from history, as the successful obtainment of a nonhistorical point of view. The unchanging nature of sacrality corresponded, in his thought, according to his critics, with an untenable notion of an unchanging human nature. This picture of humanity went hand-in-hand with a methodological approach that sought first to find similarities across time, rather than developing a diachronic picture of change across time, allegedly treating differences between cultures or epochs as accidents too often.

It is useful to keep in mind the thematics according to which American sympathizers and detractors of Eliade organized themselves in general terms, as we now approach the more specific issue of Eliade’s treatment of Christianity, because the theme of Eliade as a historical or anti-historical thinker is important here, as well. Kenneth Hamilton’s oft-quoted 1965 essay on Eliade’s treatment of religion, called “Homo religiosus’ and Historical Faith,” argues that Eliade’s basic assumptions leave him unprepared to adequately consider the spiritual outlook of a worshipper who belongs to a “historical religion,” by which Hamilton means an Abrahamic religion. Reading Eliade primarily on the basis of the work The Sacred and the Profane,
Hamilton concludes that Eliade’s picture of sacrality is admirably perceptive when applied to non-historical religions. For these religions, such as archaic religions, “The sacred provides a center around which [religious man] can order his universe” (Hamilton 1965, 216). This cosmic center is not subject to historical change, because it stands in “sacred time,” and “sacred time is not really temporal but only the manifestation in time of the eternally real and true” (Hamilton 1965, 216). The center of the universe is thus an ahistorical sacrality. So far, for Hamilton, Eliade’s picture of *homo religiosus* is fine. Eliade’s stance becomes objectionable for Hamilton (and others like him) only when he turns to historical, Abrahamic religion. For the Mircea Eliade of *The Sacred and the Profane*, Judaism and Christianity represent losses of the sacred, because this ahistorical center of the universe, sacrality, has been infected with history. Here, Hamilton claims, Eliade’s scholarly standpoint rather arbitrarily privileges archaic religion over Judeo-Christian religion, asserting the former as true religion by unjustifiably evaluating Judeo-Christian religiosity against the standard of a sort of sacrality that is foreign to it. Hamilton’s 1965 essay, early on in America’s reception of Eliade, invites us to inquire, Why is Judeo-Christian religion’s experience of the sacred being judged, in Eliade’s work, according to the paradigm of archaic religion? Why not the other way around? Or, rather, why does one manifestation of the sacred have to be understood as a diminished or imperfect version of the other?

When we turn to Thomas Altizer’s meditations on Eliade’s thought, however, we can see that Christianity’s relationship to the sacred as expressed in *The Sacred and the Profane* is not refuted, but is certainly deepened, by casting our gaze elsewhere in the Eliade corpus. Altizer, a death-of-God theologian, gives us a radically different kind of American Eliade reading. We observe immediately, when we begin reading Altizer’s book, *Mircea Eliade and the Dialectic of the Sacred*, that we are considering a strain of Eliade’s thought that is neither so tone-deaf to the diachronic concerns of the historian as many of Eliade’s critics would have us believe, nor is it so straightforwardly dismissive of Christianity as a critic like Hamilton takes Eliade to be. The first major epochal transition identified by Eliade is a kind of “death of God,” but the first “death of God” discussed by Eliade appears not at the beginning of modern times, as by Nietzsche, but in the receding of the *deus otiosus*, the High Deity or Supreme Being who, Eliade posits in *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, has already departed in virtually every observable religion. Eliade says, in his journal that the lesson of the concept of the *deus otiosus* is that “myths and religions, in all their variety, are the results of the vacuum left by the retreat of God … ‘true’ religion begins only after God has withdrawn from the world” (Eliade 1977, 74). Religion only gains cultural stability once the High Deity has been lost or killed, and then replaced by a pantheon of weaker, compensatory gods. When
humanity’s encounter with the sacred ossifies into “religion,” God is lost. The sacred, Eliade says in his journal, hides itself by showing itself. This structure’s “most radical” example, Altizer says (Altizer 1979, 265), is Christianity, in which God fully enters the world of the profane by becoming man, thus appearing as utterly un-sacred. According to this logic, religion, as a visible scheme of cultural organization, is always founded on a loss of the sacred. This loss has always already taken place prior to religion’s appearance, meaning religious experience can only be understood diachronically – that is, historically – with reference to the prior loss of the sacred which causes it. On this picture, Christianity is not just a “real” religion, for Eliade, but even offers a paradigm or template for “the religious” – precisely in and through its historicity.

There is thus a tragic trajectory in humanity’s experience of the sacred, according to the Eliade narrative that Altizer develops. Once we have fallen into history, the following rule applies: the more religious we become, the more the sacred recedes in favor of the profane, which comes to dominate more and more of human experience. On the journal page referenced above, dealt with at length by Altizer, Eliade could not be clearer:

Today, when I was leafing through my Patterns in Comparative Religion, I lingered especially over the long chapter on the sky gods; I wonder if the secret message of the book has been understood, the “theology” implied in the history of religions as I decipher and interpret it. And yet the meaning emerges clearly: myths and religions, in all their variety, are the results of the vacuum left in the world by the retreat of God, his transformation into deus otiosus, and his disappearance from the religious scene. … But has it been understood that “true” religion begins only after God has withdrawn from the world? That his transcendence merges and coincides with his eclipse? The movement of religious man toward the transcendent sometimes makes me think of the desperate gesture of the orphan, left alone in the world. (quoted in Altizer 1979, 262)

Yet this historical creep of the profane is not the end of the story, according to Altizer, because a concept which comes directly from Eliade, namely, that of the coincidentia oppositorum, implies, in a way not fully plumbed by Eliade himself, that access to the sacred depends, for historical humanity, not on an overcoming of the profane but on a reconciliation of the sacred and the profane. This is not an uncontroversial claim, since Eliade first and foremost defines the sacred as that which is not profane. Altizer argues that Eliade demonstrates the possibility of the ultimate reconciliation of the sacred and the profane in his work on yoga and alchemy. In alchemy, profane materials unite to become a more sacred substance; in yoga, true Being is reached from the standpoint of temporal Becoming.

If Eliade had pushed such a logic to its natural conclusion, Altizer argues, he would have seen a tremendous opportunity in the modern death
of God. For Eliade, the sacred is, definitionally, the absolutely real. With the death of God, modern humanity’s consciousness becomes filled with the profane as never before, and we accept the profane as the ultimate reality. The absolute amplification of the profane and our embrace of it as the utterly real implies the possibility of a radical, dialectical synthesis of the sacred and the profane. Altizer names Nietzsche as the thinker who most clearly sees this dynamic in his vision of the Eternal Return, but Nietzsche lacks the vocabulary of the historian of religions possessed by Eliade, which would have allowed him to more fully contextualize his vision of the death of God in concrete history.

It hardly needs to be said that this is not, contra the Eliade critics we discussed earlier, an “anti-historical” Eliade. That is not to say that every single aspect of the anti-historical charge has been addressed in Altizer’s picture of the Chicago historian of religions. On the whole, however, one crucial and central objection seems to have been confronted. Critics of Eliade object to his methodological premise according to which we must obtain the position of a phenomenological epoché that lets the sacred phenomenon appear as spontaneous, self-generated, and transhistorical, arguing that this implausibly implies an identical experience of the sacred across time. But the possibility of such an experience, the accessibility of the sacred phenomenon, is, for Eliade himself, radically historically contingent, and, perhaps even more importantly, “the sacred,” which Eliade at times calls “being,” can not only lose its accessibility, but even its very status as absolute Being. Indeed, in The Sacred and the Profane during his discussion of modern humanity, Eliade specifies that it is “on the archaic levels of culture” that “being and the sacred are one” (Eliade 1989, 210), suggesting that it is otherwise in modern culture.

As a means of articulating what is wrong with the picture painted by some American scholars under which Eliade is an “anti-historian,” I would like to suggest that, following the strain of Eliade’s thought developed by Altizer, we can understand Eliade’s work as providing us, to speak in a Heideggerian diction, with a history of Being. This sounds, perhaps, like a more ambitious claim than I take it to be. I mean only that Eliade, in his history of the sacred and the profane, gives us a diachronic narrative of humanity’s sense of its relation to “ultimate reality,” and a history of what counts as “ultimate reality.” This paradigm of interpretation is suggested, I think, by Eliade’s own terminology. In Eliade’s work, the term hierophany replaces the more traditional term theophany, as Eliade points out that not all manifestations of the sacred are manifestations of a god. “Hiero-” indicates the sacred, ιερός, Being, and “-phany” indicates φάνειν, to show, or, in modern philosophical terms, to phenomenalize. The sacred is Being. On these terms, Eliade’s history is the history of the gradual loss of Being, of
Being’s diminishing ability to show itself, to phenomenalize itself. This history unfolds in the recession of the Sky God, his transition into the distant, passive *deus otiosus* in agrarian cultures, the admixture of the temporal into the sacred in historical, Abrahamic religion, and, finally, in modern man’s utter embrace of the profane. We might translate these moments as, respectively, Being’s refusal to show itself to humanity, humanity’s decision to do without Being, humanity’s confusion as to what Being is, and humanity’s forgetting of Being. History is, as by Heidegger, the history of a relationship with Being, which is the history of the receding of Being, until, as on Heidegger’s picture of the modern technological world, ontological difference is decisively effaced. For Eliade, this means the immersion in the profane as the absolutely real. Yet this inversion is not a straightforward replacement of the sacred by the profane, as it sometimes appears to be in Altizer’s interpretation. It is an inversion we can never fully commit to; the distant memory of the sacred as Being lives on in us. Eliade makes abundantly clear that mythological structures live on in the mind of modern humanity, and modernity never quite kills the archaic human.

There thus may be, in Eliade’s history as in Heidegger’s, a strong element of nostalgia, as implied by those who say Eliade is anti-historical, and it may be that nostalgia, by its very nature, is *normatively* resistant to historical change. When Carl Olson wrote, shortly after Eliade’s death, that “Eliade’s understanding of *homo religiosus* betrays a nostalgic attitude towards archaic religious beings” (Olson 1989, 102), he is entirely correct. However – and here I borrow the phrasing of the American Eliade scholar Douglas Allen’s useful 1988 discussion of critical responses to the question of Eliade and history – to confirm that Eliade “favors a return to some archaic mode of being” is not at all to consent to the accusation that he “assumes an ahistoric archaic model for all religious experience” or that he “universalized a nonhistorical archaic ontology as the norm for all religion” (Allen, 1988, 548). A negative assessment of historical change (if that is what we see in Eliade) is not the same as a suppression of historical change, or the denial of the importance of historical change. Nostalgia, in fact, affirms the fact of historical change and the importance of that change, even as it laments it. Nostalgia for Being indicates the loss of Being. “The man of the archaic societies tends to live as much as possible in the sacred” because “The sacred is saturated with being” and “religious man deeply desires to be,” whereas “modern man has desacralized his world and assumed a profane existence” (Eliade 1987, 12-13). This is the story of the loss of Being. We can call this nostalgic, but certainly not resistant to integral, fundamental historical change.

Here we can note a methodological dynamic that both Heidegger and Eliade grapple with: as an inheritor of Husserl’s phenomenology, it is
difficult, on the face of things, to produce something like a “history of Being.” After all, the phenomenological *epoché* brackets the interpretive structures responsible for belief in both “history” and “Being.” There is something fundamentally ahistorical in the starting point of Husserl’s approach, which “presupposes … that human experience forms an infinite but unified field for potential investigation,” where this “unity” holds across historical epochs (Geuss, 2002, 211). Again, Douglas Allen’s precise wording is helpful: “Eliade insists upon the irreducibility of the sacred, which involves the phenomenological *epoché* and the sympathetic effort to participate in the experience of *homo religiosos*” (Allen 1972, 170). This description strikes me as accurate, but raises questions about the feasibility of the endeavor. Eliade’s kind of comparative religions will require the scholar to “sympathetically participate” in the “experience” not only of another human being, but of another human being on the other side of a history of vast change in the very possibilities open to “experience.” Isn’t such an imaginative leap problematic for the *epoché*, which is strictly performed in the first person, here and now, and which depends on a certain universalizability of its own results? For this reason, the project of engaging in an *epoché* that scrutinizes someone else’s religious experience of the sacred across time and space is always, as Allen’s phrasing indicates, an “effort,” and not an accomplished fact. This is not to say that one cannot generalize to a degree from the starting point of the *epoché*, as Husserlian philosophy obviously does, but the journal entry which we read at length above indicates that, when we are concerning ourselves with the question of the experience of the sacred, certain experiences are irrecoverable to modern humanity.

Yet Eliade indicates that close investigation of the “structure of religious phenomena” (Eliade 1963a, 107) is the only way to identify what holds together a phenomenon as “religious.” Since the sacred is accessed in a special kind of experience, if one does not pay attention to transhistorical similarities in the structure of the sacred experience, one fails to ever develop a sufficient sense of what the sacred is, and, consequently, of what religion is. In the essay “History of Religions in Retrospect: 1912-1962,” Eliade’s goal, in taking his phenomenological approach⁵, seems to be an avoidance of the “reductionism” that he condemned – the “reduction” of religion to one aspect of religion. In Husserlian terms, Eliade sees himself as going back to “the thing itself;” in his case, religion, rather than reducing religion to an “interpretation” that may express an aspect of religion, such as social cohesion, Oedipal drives, will to power, the material interests of a ruling class, etc. To the critics that accuse him of ignoring diachronic concerns, Eliade responds that religion is always structured around hierophany, the experience of the sacred’s revealing itself, and that this means starting with a phenomenological approach, not *starting* with a diachronic approach.
When one starts with this diachronic approach, one neglects “the essence and the structure of religious phenomena” (Eliade 1963a, 107), going straight to how religion changes without having a clear idea of what religion is.

I will now summarize my understanding of Eliade’s relationship to history by addressing a statement of his about Nietzsche. Eliade says that “In Nietzsche … a new idea confronts us: the responsibility of history in the degradation, the oblivion, and ultimately the ‘death’ of God. The following generation of scholars will have to wrestle with this new meaning of history” (Eliade 1969, 48). Eliade is a kind of scholar of the death of God, although there is no single moment, perhaps, that can be called the definitive death of God, for him. In the terms in which we discussed them earlier, the receding of the Supreme Being, the advent of historical religion, and the beginning of the modern, post-Enlightenment, secular world are all “deaths” of God in a sense, although only the last one is the “death of God” referred to in the Nietzschean phrase. God’s death, on Eliade’s picture, is more gradual. Unlike Nietzsche, Eliade seems to view the death of God as more or less a bad thing. God’s unfortunate death is “the responsibility of history”. When humanity falls into history, God dies. Each epoch of religious (or pseudo-religious) experience must be understood in light of the degree to which God has died. Eliade’s comments on the deaths of sky gods suggest that he agrees with Nietzsche that “history” kills the highest Gods: “one might say that ‘history’ has effectively pushed into the background the divine ‘forms’ of a celestial nature … but that ‘history’ … has not been able to do away with the direct and abiding revelation that the sky is something sacred” (Eliade 1963, 111). “This new meaning of history,” which is the meaning of a history in which God dies, is the history of the loss of Being. This “degradation of God” is the “new meaning of history” which “scholars will now have to wrestle with.” In the final analysis, it is not fair to suggest that Eliade, by formulating a supposedly anti-historical conception of religion, is effectively running from this “new meaning of history” – to the contrary, he faces it head on.

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Notes
1 See Douglas Allen’s “Eliade and History” for a history of this objection (Allen 1988).
2 Altizer’s essay’s strategy in reading Eliade is interesting in its attempt to, rather seamlessly, reference diverse genres of writing within the Eliade corpus in building a coherent picture of an author deeply concerned with the “death of God.” Literary works, diary entries, and historical scholarship all figure centrally in his argument. One might question whether such diverse sorts of texts can really be treated as a single, unified “body of work” without
motivating such an interpretive paradigm. In Altizer’s defense, however, his view of Eliade as a “death of God” thinker had already been articulated in Mircea Eliade and the Dialectic of the Sacred, with a more exclusive focus, there, on Eliade’s scholarly work in comparative religions.  

3 I have serious disagreements with many of the objections raised by Mac Linscott Ricketts against Altizer’s interpretation of Eliade in his 1967 essay “Mircea Eliade and the Death of God” (as, for example, his assertion that, contra Altizer, “Eliade does not, in fact, believe that God is dead” – a claim that seems at least under-nuanced to me, and certainly contrary to much of what Eliade would write later in The Quest). Ricketts does, however, make a fair point when he points out that, in Mircea Eliade and the Dialectic of the Sacred, Altizer’s treatment of Eliade and modern “profane” existence does not really acknowledge that “One of the recurrent themes in all [Eliade’s] studies is that the modern world, for all its denial of religion, is teeming with manifestations of ‘crypto-religious’ behavior which signify that the transcendent realm still persists in the depth of man’s psyche, whence it is continually emerging in the form of symbolically significant actions, whose meaning can be deciphered by a historian of religions” (Ricketts 1967, 41).  

4 Geuss, in this essay, is discussing the epoché precisely in relation to historical investigation – Foucault’s historical investigations, specifically. From a Foucauldian standpoint, he suggests, one aspect of the epoché as it appears in Husserl is untenable for the historical genealogist: the historian cannot accept the epoché’s universality.  

5 To be fair, despite the frequent reference to “Eliade the phenomenologist of religious experience” by myself and many others, Eliade does not fully self-identify, in The Quest, with what he identifies as the phenomenological approach to world religions. He does, however, see it as an essential part of what the ideal approach would be.  

6 “The fact is that the primitive High God became a deus otiosus … Ultimately he is forgotten… This oblivion of the High God means also his death. Nietzsche’s proclamation was new for the Western, Judeo-Christian world, but the death of God is an extremely old phenomenon” (Eliade 1969, 47-48).  

7 In this sense Heidegger’s picture of Nietzsche pushes Nietzsche in the direction of Eliade, as Heidegger insists that the seeds of the death of God had been planted in Western values all along (Heidegger 1996).

References


Le dictionnaire comme pratique signifiante. 
Une approche sémiotique du *Lexicon de Buda*

The dictionary as signifying practice. 
A semiotic approach of the *Buda Lexicon*

Abstract: This study belongs to the field of applied semiotics, proposing a semiotic approach of the first explicative and etymological dictionary of the Romanian language: *The Buda Lexicon*. Elaborated along three whole decades, this work sums up several versions, being printed in 1825. The Lexicon reflects the lexicographic signifying practices of the time, bearing the marks of the specific era in which it was created. Methodologically, the semiotic analysis makes use of the triadic model developed by the American philosopher Charles Morris, which focuses on the research of the semiosis from a three-fold perspective: (1) The study of formal structures (the macro and micro-structure of the dictionary); (2) The study of semantic relationships (lexical inventory, definitions, semantic relationships) (3) The study of the relationships between lexicographic signs and their users (the authors’ intentions, the relationship with the users).

Keywords: semiotics, Romanian lexicography, signifying practices, functional analysis

1. Introduction

Définie de manière générique comme l’étude des signes et des processus de signification, la sémiotique représente une discipline relativement jeune, qui acquiert de l’autonomie dans le cadre des sciences humanistes à peine au XXe siècle. Créée à la confluence de la direction logico-philosophique, représentée par les contribution des philosophes américains Charles Sanders Peirce et Charles W. Morris, et du structuralisme linguistique, représenté par la sémiologie développée par le linguiste genevois Ferdinand de Saussure, la sémiotique se caractérise par un domaine de recherche en expansion permanente, ayant à la base la prémisse de la signification comme dénominateur commun de toutes les sciences, et par une approche méthodologique inclusive, qui valorise les instruments de plusieurs disciplines.

Parmi les objets d’investigation de la sémiotique on compte aussi l’analyse et l’interprétation de textes comme des pratiques signifiantes particulières.
Le concept de texte couvre une vaste catégorie de choses, des langages aux films, des gestes aux livres, des éléments d’architecture aux affiches publicitaires, etc. Tout en élargissant les concepts de texte et signe, nous pouvons affirmer que toutes les pratiques de connaissance impliquent la manipulation de certaines catégories de textes. La lexicographie, en tant que science de la composition des dictionnaires, ne peut pas faire abstraction de la sémiotique, et les dictionnaires, en tant que macro-textes, peuvent faire l’objet d’une analyse sémiotique en vertu des phénomènes de sémiose qu’ils supposent.

L’histoire de la lexicographie met en évidence le processus par lequel les pratiques de signification conduisent à la constitution et à l’imposition de certains objets culturels (Annoni 2014, 261-269). De ce point de vue, le dictionnaire de langue constitue « le lieu privilégié de référence à la connaissance et au savoir linguistique et culturel » (Dubois & Dubois 1971, 8). Définis comme des travaux qui font l’inventaire du vocabulaire d’une langue à un moment donné, les dictionnaires sont des objets culturels qui portent l’empreinte du temps et de l’espace où ils sont composés. À cet égard, les spécialistes considèrent que « les dictionnaires reflètent de manière aussi précise que les œuvres proprement littéraires, les préoccupations et les besoins d’une époque. L’histoire des civilisations (...) pourrait être tracée en examinant les dictionnaires qu’elles ont produits » (Guerard 2015, 1). Les démarches de révision permanente des éditions lexicographiques sont imposées, d’une part, par la dynamique de la langue et du vocabulaire, d’autre part, par les besoins de plus en plus variés et complexes des utilisateurs de dictionnaires.

Le dictionnaire, en tant que texte métalinguistique, suscite un intérêt particulier de point de vue sémiotique, étant donné que le signifiant d’un tel texte est constitué par l’information offerte sur le signe (l’inventaire lexical inventorié). L’approche sémiotique des dictionnaires offre une image sur la manière dont la langue, en tant qu’instrument, modèle la langue en tant qu’objet de la description lexicographique. Les dictionnaires représentent, en même temps, des objets socioculturels traditionnels: des instruments de travail destinés à l’usage large, ils inventorient les unités lexicales des langues historiques, étant orientés vers la satisfaction des besoins de certaines catégories variées de public. À cet égard, la lecture des dictionnaires offre des informations généreuses concernant les attitudes métalinguistiques d’une communauté historique, des aspects essentiels tant pour la philosophie du langage que pour l’histoire des mentalités. La nature des unités lexicales inventoriées, la manière d’élaboration des définitions lexicographiques, la qualité des exemples offerts, l’ordre de l’inventaire des entrées, la manière d’organisation des informations lexicographiques contribuent à la réalisation d’un tableau complexe sur les normes et les habitudes linguistiques qui
caractérisent une communauté historique. D’autre part, l’analyse sémiotique des dictionnaires met en discussion les aspects pragmatiques visant tant les intérêts des auteurs des dictionnaires, comme le profil et les besoins spécifiques aux catégories de public auxquelles on s’adresse. En ces conditions, le processus de création et de composition des dictionnaires ne peut pas évoluer les facteurs contextuels, extralinguistiques, comme: l’horizon culturel dans lequel les ouvrages ont été élaborés; les politiques éditoriales qui modèlent la sélection de l’inventaire lexical et des langues composantes; les caractéristiques des utilisateurs visés. La préférence de certaines unités lexicales au détriment des autres, l’ordre de l’inventaire des sens d’une unité lexicographique, la manière d’établir les correspondances en langues étrangères, la sélection des langues composantes et l’ordre de leur reproduction sont des aspects qui ne peuvent pas être interprétés en dehors du cadre pragmatique.

La parution d’un nouvel objet textuel, au XVIe siècle, qui enregistrerait deux formes et structures sémiotiques distinctes: dictionnaire et encyclopédie, a conduit à des mutations d’ordre culturel en vertu du prestige et de l’autorité dont les instruments lexicographiques jouissaient dans le cadre de la société. La démarche lexicographique fait appel à l’univers de connaissance, à l’expérience de vie, aux suppositions et préjugés des utilisateurs, étant modelée en même temps par l’ancrage idéologique et culturel des auteurs des dictionnaires. La délimitation des inventaires lexicaux, les modalités d’élaboration des définitions, la mise en relation de deux ou plusieurs langues (dans le cadre des dictionnaires bi et multilingues), le contournement de certaines catégories de mots (voir les éléments de jargon), respectivement la concentration sur les termes spécifiques de certains domaines particuliers de connaissance, le rapport entre le langage objet et le discours lexicographique (le métalangage) sont des aspects qui dérivent de la conception lexicographique des auteurs, étant modelés en profondeur par l’univers épistémique propre aux époques où les travaux ont été élaborés. À cet égard, en tant qu’objets culturels appartenant à un contexte social, historique, politique, culturel déterminé, les dictionnaires peuvent faire l’objet d’une analyse sémiotique destinée à mettre en évidence tant les dimensions du processus de sémiosie que la pratique lexicographique suppose, comme les relations avec les facteurs contextuels extralinguistiques.

2. La démarche lexicographique comme pratique signifiante

Pour la plupart des langues de l’Europe, le début de la lexicographie est lié aux inventaires lexicaux des manuscrits médiévaux (Brown 2006, 787-796). L’église a joué un rôle essentiel dans la parution et le développement de la lexicographie européenne: en Europe occidentale médiévale, où la langue des érudits et des clercs était le latin, le besoin de répandre l’évangile a
déterminé les missionnaires à composer des listes de correspondances (langue latine – langue vulgaire). Ces glossaires comprenaient, d’habitude, des termes usuels, nécessaires à la lecture des textes bibliques et liturgiques, et ils étaient destinés aux hommes d’églises et aux traducteurs, assurant la fidélité de ceux derniers par rapport à la lettre du texte religieux, considéré sacré.

Dans l’espace roumain, l’histoire de la pratique de la lexicographie remonte jusqu’au XVIᵉ siècle, d’où on a gardé deux fragments de vocabulaire slave-roumain, étant étroitement liés à la parution, dans les Principautes, des premiers textes bibliques traduits en slavon. Les premiers travaux de lexicographie répondent à des besoins pratiques, étant conçus comme des annexes à la littérature religieuse, en langue slavonne ou traduite, qui circulait en Valachie. La lexicographie roumaine du XVIIᵉ siècle est en totalité d’origine valaque, l’augmentation du nombre des glossaires étant favorisée par la multiplication des traductions en slavon. Une radiographie de la lexicographie roumaine, à ses débuts, est réalisée par Mircea Seche, dans la monographie Schița de istorie a lexicografiей româneștî (Esquisse de l’histoire de la lexicographie roumaine). Seche identifie trois grandes étapes de la création lexicographique roumaine (1687-1825; 1826-1880; 1880-1969), délimitées par rapport à trois moments essentiels pour le développement du domaine lexicographique dans notre pays: la parution du premier dictionnaire multilingue – Dicționar latin-român-maghiar (Dictionnaire latin-roumain-hongrois) (1687-1701); l’édition du premier dictionnaire explicatif, étymologique, polyglotte – Lesicon romanescu-latinescu-ungurescu-nemțescu (1825), connu sous le nom de Lexiconul de la Buda (Lexicon de Buda); le changement du contexte technique et scientifique international, qui a conduit à la parution des dictionnaires terminologiques plurilingues ayant le roumain dans leur composition (Seche 1966, 7-33).

Quelle que soit sa typologie (explicatif, encyclopédique, général, terminologique, mono-, bi ou plurilingue), le dictionnaire est un miroir où l’utilisateur reconnait tant des données concernant l’histoire de la langue, comme des données concernant l’histoire de la culture. En répondant à des besoins pratiques: l’apprentissage du vocabulaire de base d’une langue, l’apprentissage des langues étrangères, la réalisation des traductions, la compréhension d’une terminologie, etc., les dictionnaires sont le résultat des pratiques de signification qui ne supposent pas seulement la description du vocabulaire (général ou terminologique), mais aussi le traitement des règles (sémantiques, syntactiques, pragmatiques) d’utilisation des unités lexicales inventoriées. À cet égard, le discours lexicographique (représenté par le contenu proprement-dit du dictionnaire) est doublé et soutenu par un discours métalinguistique censé expliciter le processus de sémiotose par lequel les signes verbaux, respectivement les unités lexicales inventoriées, deviennent et fonctionnent comme des signes. Nous présentons dans les
lignes suivantes une analyse fonctionnelle du premier dictionnaire général de la langue roumaine – le *Lexicon de Buda*, travail qui parachève les efforts des représentants de l’École d’Ardeal d’établir les normes de la langue roumaine.

3. **Le Lexicon de Buda**

3.1. *Bref historique de l’ouvrage*

d’Oradea. Avec le soutien financier de Samuil Vulcan, Corneli voyage à Buda, où il revoit et amplifie le dictionnaire à partir de la lettre I, en ajoutant de nombreux termes techino-scientifiques. À l’aide des fragments, les lexicographes ont reconstitué la contribution de Corneli au dictionnaire: les articles rédigés par celui-ci sont beaucoup plus étendus que dans le Lexicon de Buda, les définitions étant parfois interminables. La nouveauté apportée par Corneli vise les indications étymologiques, qui détiennent une plus grande pondération dans sa version que dans la forme finale du Lexicon. Corneli est obligé de retourner dans le pays, et en 1820, la révision de l’ouvrage est confiée à Petru Maior. Même s’il a peu travaillé au dictionnaire, s’éteignant en 1821, la contribution de Maior est extrêmement consistante, surtout en ce qui concerne la finalisation des étymologies. La révision et la finalisation du vaste ouvrage ont été réalisées par le prêtre Ioan Teodorovici et par son frère, Teodori, docteur en médecine et philosophie (Pricop 2017, 104-106).

3.2. L’analyse fonctionnelle du Lexicon de Buda


En définissant la sémiose comme le processus dans lequel quelque chose fonctionne comme signe, Morris montre que ce processus implique trois facteurs: ce qui fonctionne comme signe (sign vehicle), à quoi fait référence le signe (designatum) et l’effet produit sur un certain interprète en vertu duquel une chose concernée fonctionne comme signe pour cet interprète-là (interpreting) (Morris 2003). Pour Morris, les termes signe, designatum, interpretant et interpret ne sont que des manières de designer certains aspects distincts du processus de sémiose. Quelque chose ne fonctionne comme signe que dans les conditions où cela est interprété par quelqu’un comme signe pour autre chose. Par conséquent, l’objet d’étude de la sémiotique est limité aux choses, aux objets qui fonctionnent comme signes ou, autrement dit, qui participent à la sémiose. À partir de la définition de la sémiose comme relation triadique entre un sign vehicle, un designatum et un interpretant, Morris délimite les trois
dimensions du phénomène: syntactique, sémantique et pragmatique, correspondant aux trois niveaux de l’analyse fonctionnelle:

1. L’étude des structures formelles, des relations entre les signes (la syntaxe);
2. L’étude des relations entre les signes et les objets désignés (la sémantique);
3. L’étude des relations entre les signes et ceux qui les utilisent (la pragmatique).

Alors que la syntaxe est purement formelle, visant la structure des expressions signifiantes et des relations entre celles-ci, la sémantique envisage les rapports de signification entre les expressions et les objets ou les concepts, leurs règles d’évolution, et la pragmatique surprend les relations psychologiques et sociologiques entre les participants à l’acte de communication. Chacun de ces aspects constitue le cadre d’objectivation de l’analyse des autres, et le processus permanent de décomposition/recomposition du langage-object, en vue de l’explication de la fonctionnalité, assure une perspective complexe sur l’objet de la recherche. Si la sémantique étudie les corrélations entre les formes et les significations, comme partie du système de la langue, la pragmatique est ciblée sur les processus de création des significations en contexte. À cet égard, la pragmatique vise l’analyse de ce que le langage dit, mais aussi de ce qu’il laisse faire comprendre, des moyens de manipulation, mis en jeu par les manifestations discursives, et des effets générés sur les destinataires.

En transposant les concepts de la théorie de Morris dans le domaine lexicographique, nous considérerons que tout processus de sémiose lexicographique suppose l’existence d’un sign vehicle (le dictionnaire comme objet culturel), d’un designatum (le vocabulaire général / terminologique que le dictionnaire inventorie) et d’un interpretant (constitué des sens attribués par les utilisateurs aux unités lexicales inventoriées). La sémiotique tridimensionnelle de Morris impose la recherche des relations entre les trois composantes d’une triple perspective: la relations des signes les uns avec les autres (la syntaxe du dictionnaire), la relations des signes avec les référents (la sémantique), la relation entre les signes et les utilisateurs (la pragmatique). Nous présentons, dans les lignes qui suivent, les particularités de la sémiose lexicographique spécifique au Lexicon de Buda, telles qu’elles résultent de l’investigation des relations sémiotiques suggérées par la triade de Morris.

**La syntaxe**

L’organisation des dictionnaires est soumise à des contraintes d’ordre formel, dictées par le caractère instrumental des travaux de ce type. Ainsi, nous distinguons, dans le cas des ouvrages lexicographiques, entre une organisation macrostructurelle (visant l’ordre des parties composantes du dictionnaire) et une organisation microstructurelle (relative à l’organisation
des informations lexicographiques dans le cadre des articles de dictionnaire). Parmi les aspects liés à l’organisation macrostructurelle des dictionnaires, on peut compter: le choix des unités lexicales qui composent l’inventaire des entrées; la forme de l’inventaire lexical; l’ordre de la reproduction des unités lexicales; la sélection des langues composantes; l’ordre des termes correspondants etc. De point de vue macrostructurel, nous remarquons la préférence des auteurs pour l’organisation bipartite des dictionnaires polyglottes, ceux-ci étant composés, essentiellement, par un corpus de dictionnaire et des indexes. Dans la première partie, représentée par le dictionnaire proprement-dit, les entrées (mots/termes/combinaisons de mots ou de termes) sont mises en relations avec les équivalences/ les correspondances/ leurs traductions en d’autres langues. La manière de mise en relation varie, étant distingués deux moyens principaux: sous forme de tableaux, en colonnes (une colonne pour chacune des langues composantes), ou de manière groupée, par articles, avec la présentation des correspondants dans les langues étrangères à la suite du terme/du mot-titre, en série (horizontalement, à l’aide de l’énumération) ou « les uns sous les autres » (verticalement, à l’aide de l’énumération) (Pricop 2017, 23). L’inventaire lexical, ordonné d’habitude d’après le principe alphabétique, peut compter de quelques dizaines d’entrées jusqu’à quelques mille, dans les dictionnaires de grandes dimensions.


Au niveau de la microstructure, les articles du Dictionnaire sont organisés de la manière suivante: le mot en roumain (les initiales en majuscule, orthographiées avec l’alphabet latin), suivi des informations grammaticales, le mot-titre orthographié avec l’alphabet cyrillique, la définition en roumain suivie des correspondants en latin, hongrois et allemand, selon le modèle suivant:

Păgână, ... pl. ni, f. ne. ..., adj. 1) de credinţă: paganus, ethnicus, gentilis: pogány: heidnisch. 2) i. e. cumplitu, varvaru: barbarus, crudelis, immanis: pogány, kegyetlen: grausam. 3) i. e. blâstâmatu, becsnicu, lăpădatu de lége: scelestus, seleratus, perditus, perversus, impius: gaz, gnosz, istentelen: verrucht, gottloš. a Lat. pagonus.

Le dictionnaire est accompagné par une généreuse section introductive, qui comprend 103 pages et qui contient des informations concernant l’historique de la démarche lexicographique, les contributions des auteurs et leur conception concernant l’origine et le développement de la langue roumaine. Les textes qui composent la préface du dictionnaire exposent et justifient les intentions lexicographiques de ceux qui ont contribué à l’élaboration de l’ouvrage. D’ailleurs, la structure de profondeur du dictionnaire en entier relève les tendances puristes des auteurs d’éliminer les éléments considérés étrangers à l’origine et à l’esprit de la langue roumaine, reflétées par l’indication systématique de l’étymon pour les mots d’origine latine et par le contournement des indications étymologiques dans le cas des entrées non-latines.

Le dictionnaire proprement dit, étendu sur 771 pages, expose par ordre alphabétique les unités lexicales du vocabulaire général de la langue roumaine du début du XIXe siècle. L’inventaire des entrées inclut de nombreux syntagmes, noms propres, diminutifs, mots populaires, instruments grammaticaux du type des prépositions et des conjonctions, des interjections et des éléments de jargon. Au niveau de la relation entre les phrases, les facteurs de cohésion visent les aspects caractéristiques à la pratique lexicographique: l’unité de la reproduction des entrées de dictionnaire (par exemple, la forme de nominatif singulier, pour les noms, respectivement de l’indicatif, première personne singulier, pour les verbes); l’unité du système de reproduction des correspondances dans les langues composantes (la séparation des correspondants par l’emploi du symbole [:]); la différenciation numérique des acceptions distinctes des mots-entrées; l’unité des temps et des modes verbaux utilisés dans le cadre des définitions; l’utilisation des pro-formes à référence endophorique dans la structure des notes explicatives et des définitions; l’ellipse des mots-entrées dans la mention des relations syntagmatiques et dans les notes explicatives etc.

Les dictionnaires sont des ouvrages qui décrivent la langue par une approche lexicale. Par la délimitation de l’inventaire lexical qu’ils réalisent, par le traitement des unités lexicales enregistrées, par le discours metalxicographique qu’ils développent, les dictionnaires se constituent dans des signes de conceptions sur la langue d’une communauté donnée. Les dictionnaires explicatifs, dont l’exemplification paradigmique est offerte par le
**Lexicon de Buda**, sont athématiques, se proposant l’enregistrement de toutes les unités lexicales d’une langue à un moment donné. Même s’ils se limitent à la description du vocabulaire général, les dictionnaires explicatifs manifestent une dimension grammaticale normative aussi, par les informations grammaticales qu’ils englobent, tout comme par les exemples énonciatifs qu’ils proposent, offrant ainsi une image sur les règles de grammaire qui gouvernent l’emploi de la langue dans une certaine époque.

Considéré par les spécialistes comme notre premier dictionnaire moderne, le *Lexicon de Buda* comprend un inventaire lexical de plus de 11000 unités, créé pour offrir une image unifiée de la langue roumaine du XIXᵉ siècle. Presque tous les mots du dictionnaire présentent de courtes indications sémantiques (périphrases ou synonymes), cette chose offrant un caractère explicatif au travail. Comparée à la version de Micu-Klein, la forme finale du *Lexicon de Buda* comprend des informations grammaticales aussi: chaque mot-titre est encadré dans la catégorie morphologique correspondante, le pluriel des noms et des adjectifs est attesté, tout comme la forme longue de l’infinitif et la forme du participe des verbes. Contrairement à la version de Micu-Klein, qui concentrait les nuances sémantiques dans une énumération unique, dans la version finale du dictionnaire les mots polysémantiques sont groupés à partir de leurs sens. Les sens des mots sont présentés en diachronie, du sens étymologique, aux sens récents, selon le modèle:

Aședžemântu, sêu aședzâmêntu, m. pl. uri. f. .... subst, 1) orênduelâ, intogmir, ponere in rôndu: disposîtio, ordinatio, redactio in ordinem: el rendelés, rendtartás: die Ordnung, Einrichtung. 2) — hotârire, rônduelâ: statutio, disposîtio, ordinatio: rendelés, végezés, intézet: die Verordnung, der Beschluß. 3) — intrâ quei que au queva proçesu: transactum, compositio: el igazítás; der Vergleich, die Ausgleichung. 4) — intélégere, nôråvêlâ: conventum, consensio, pactum: meg-egyezés: die Ubereinkunft. 5) — hodinâ, pace: quiescentia; nyugalom, nyugodalom: die Ruhe. a Lat: sedimentum, i: e: quod in re aliqua subsidit.

La valeur du dictionnaire augmente aussi par le grand nombre d’expressions comprises dans la structure des articles, accompagnées souvent par des définitions:


Nota mai ieste de insemnatu que se dzice de quineva, quarele au muritu: lau iertatu Dumnâdev: obiit, defunctus est: meg hólt, meg haláldozott, ki múlt: er

La tendance puriste des auteurs est reflétée par l’indication systématique de l’étymon pour les mots d’origine latine et par le contournement des indications étymologiques dans le cas des mots non latins. Malgré les exagérations puristes qu’il reflète, le *Lexicon de Buda* contient plus de mille étymologies latines encore valables de nos jours, contribuant ainsi, de manière importante, au développement de l’étymologie roumaine (Seche 1966, 7-33).


Parmi les relations sémantiques retenues par les auteurs du *Lexicon de Buda*, on compte: les relations de synonymie (v. *Fală*, *Hulă*, *Păgănu*) et les relations de polysémie (v. *Pustiescu*, *Țeșmu*, *Vrednicie*, *Urgie*). Les informations sémantiques sont complétées par des informations grammaticales concernant les entrées: des indications concernant la flexion verbale *Aflu*, *Alergu*, *Zidescu*; des indications concernant la forme de pluriel du mot-titre: *Ramu*, m. pli; *Temțoriu*, f. tôre, pl. ri, f. re. À côté de ces données, beaucoup d’entrées bénéficient aussi des indications d’emploi: *Babă* (in unele părti a Țerei ungurescă se întrebuențiază coventu aquestu in locu de Mamă); *Coconu* (se intrbuențeză in chipu de titulă la féciă mai alése pre com’ la domni, boeri); *Iertu*, are, *atu* (mai ieste de însemnatu que se dzice de quineva, quarele au mutitu: lau iertatu Dumnădu) etc. L’enregistrement des sens est tributaire à l’horizon culturel de l’époque: beaucoup de sens enregistrés dans le *Lexicon de Buda* ne sont plus actifs de nos jours, mais une série de mots ont acquiert dans l’usage actuel de nouvelles acceptions.

Les informations étymologiques, la riche illustration des relations syntagmatiques, l’inclusion des notes à caractère explicatif encyclopédique, l’illustration des contextes d’emploi à l’aide des citations des œuvres littéraires consacrées, les renvois fréquents à d’autres articles du dictionnaire sont des aspects sémantiques qui prouvent la modernité de l’ouvrage, malgré du caractère pionnier de la démarche lexicographique.
Eléments de pragmatique

La pragmatique examine les effets des paramètres contextuels sur la production et la réception des textes, dans notre cas des dictionnaires, tant sous l'aspect de la structure, comme sous celui de la signification de ceux-ci. Le caractère normatif-instrumental des dictionnaires impose aux auteurs une série de restrictions tant sur le plan formel comme dans le plan du contenu. À cet égard, le choix d'une manière ou d'une autre d'organiser les informations lexicographiques est dicté, d'une part, par le désir des auteurs de mettre à la disposition du lecteur un instrument de travail facilement à consulter, et d'autre part, par la nécessité de répondre aux besoins extrêmement variés des utilisateurs: l'apprentissage d'une langue étrangère, la compréhension de la terminologie d'un domaine, la réalisation des traductions, le développement des compétences de communication en différentes langues, etc.

Précédé par un Mot au lecteur assumé par l'Imprimerie de l'Université de Buda, le Lexicon de Buda établit, dès de début, une relation avec les possibles lecteurs. Le texte débute avec un captatio: « Lectori benevolo Salutem! » [Salut, chers lecteurs !], suivi de l'information des utilisateurs sur le processus d'élaboration de l'ouvrage, qui s'est déroulé « in cursul a trideci și mai multtoru ani » [pendant trente années et plus], sur les auteurs qui ont participé à la réalisation du dictionnaire (Samuil Micu-Klein, Vasile Coloșî, le prêtre de Sâcărâmb, Ioan Corneli, Petru Maior et les frères Ioan et Alexandru Teodorovici) et sur la contribution de chacun dans l'achèvement du travail. L'interpellation directe: « Ti se pone inaintea ochilor binevoiitoriule Cetitoriu! » [On met devant tes yeux, cher lecteur !] (LB, p. 7), à côté du rôle de captatio benevolentiae, a aussi le rôle d'initier un dialogue avec le possible utilisateur, ayant le but de susciter des réactions particulières de la part de celui-ci. On confesse, dès le début du texte qui précède le dictionnaire, l'intention des auteurs de démontrer la latinité de la langue roumaine, par la mise en évidence des racines étymologiques des unités lexicale inventoriées. L'avant-propos finit avec une prière adressée au lecteur: s'il trouve des défauts ou des manques dans l'élaboration du travail, il est prié de ne pas oublier qu'il se trouve devant le premier essai de ce genre, les auteurs n'ayant pas eu à leur disposition des ouvrages antérieurs auxquels ils auraient pu se rapporter: „Tu singuru lesne vi judeca, și de comva vi vede a lipsire queva in deplinirea, quarea dora intr'ensul o ai poifu, aduți amente, comche aquesti Barbati au intratu într'o cale grea, pre quarea mai inainte nemine nu amblase‖ (LB, p. 8). Le texte finit avec la formule „Fii sănătos‖ [Bon santé !], étant daté le 30 août 1825.

pronunțare [L’extrait avec des règles de prononciation] (p. 103). Dans Préface à l’Orthographie on souligne le besoin d’adopter une « orthographe latino-valaque qui corresponde à la nature de la langue roumaine et qui comprenne tous les parlers de cette langue, rendant la langue roumaine accessible aux étrangers et contribuant au perfectionnement de celle-ci » (p. III). Les intentions qui ont modelé l’activité de Maior dans l’élaboration du dictionnaire sont présentées dans le cadre du même texte:

Par conséquent, lorsque j’affirme dans ce travail qu’un mot ou un autre provient d’un mot latin ou italien, espagnol ou français, je ne veux pas montrer que les Roumains ont repris ce mot-clé de la langue latine culte ou des dialectes déjà mentionnés, mais je veux seulement noter leur liaison ou leur parenté. (p. VIII)

L’Orthographie comprend six chapitres: le premier parle des lettres en général, le deuxième des lettres en particuliers, le troisième traite des diphtongues, le quatrième des accents, le cinquième de l’apostrophe et le sixième, du découpage en syllabes. Le texte est complété par Le dialogue entre le neveu et l’oncle sur l’origine de la langue valaque, en roumain, écrit avec l’alphabet latin et cyrillique. Structuré sous la forme des répliques alternatives entre le neveu et l’oncle, rappelant les dialogues socratiques, Le Dialogue met au premier plan la conception de Petru Maior concernant l’origine et le développement de la langue roumaine, conception qui soutient les efforts de l’auteur de mettre en évidence les liaisons de la langue roumaine avec les autres langues romanes.

Un autre aspect pragmatique vise les indications d’emploi, certains articles comprenant des notes explicatives ayant le but de clarifier les situations d’emploi des mots-titres:


Une approche pragmatique du Lexicon de Buda, visant la relation avec les utilisateurs, apporte au premier plan l’aspect normatif du travail aussi, dans une époque où l’action d’établir les normes de la langue roumaine ne jouit pas encore d’instruments lexicographiques d’autorité. Le dictionnaire rejoint ainsi notre première grammaire normative (Elementa linguae daco-romanae), parue à Vienne, en 1780, et le premier livre d’explications orthographiques
pour l’écriture roumaine de type étymologique (*Ortographia romana sive latino-valachica*), imprimé à Buda en 1819. Modelé par la tendance puriste des auteurs, le *Lexicon de Buda* reflète les conceptions linguistiques des représentants de L’École d’Ardeal concernant l’unification de la langue. « La graphie des mots-titre était ainsi destinée non seulement à identifier l’origine latine de beaucoup de mots (les termes ayant d’autres origines étaient écrits de manière normale, analogique), mais aussi de faciliter l’unification formelle de notre langue de culture » (Chivu 2012, 50). La fixation des normes morphologiques était assurée par l’indication, d’après le modèle de la lexicographie latine, des formes de base, du genre et des formes de singulier et du pluriel pour les noms, des catégories grammaticales de genre et de nombre pour les adjectifs, des formes d’indicatif présent, première personne, infinitif et participe, pour les verbes. La fixation des normes orthographiques est visible au niveau de la graphie en lettres cyrilliques, retrouvée après les indications de base qui faisaient référence au mot-titre. À son tour, la fixation des normes orthographiques est reflétée par les essais des auteurs d’imposer une série de graphèmes spécifiques à la langue roumaine: à voir le cas de ş et þ qui apparaissent fréquemment dans le *Lexicon de Buda* avec leur valeur actuelle, même si seulement comme des variantes contextuelles pour s (+i), respectivement t (+i) (Chivu 2012). Malgré les exagérations puristes qu’il reflète, l’influence du *Lexicon* sur la lexicographie roumaine est immense, presque tous les dictionnaires du XIXe siècle se rapportant à celui-ci comme à un étalon. Le prestige de cet ouvrage a conduit à la propagation du courant latiniste dans la majorité des ouvrages lexicographiques de la Valachie et de la Moldavie, jusqu’après 1870.

4. Conclusion

L’analyse du phénomène de sémiose spécifique au *Lexicon de Buda* a mis en évidence une série de traits spécifiques à la pratique lexicographique du début du XIXe siècle. Dans une époque où la lexicographie roumaine était faiblement représentée, le *Lexicon valachico-latino-hungarico-germanicum* impressionne par: le nombre d’entrées, le caractère encyclopédique des articles, les ouvertures enregistrées au niveau de l’illustration des relations syntagmatiques et paradigmatiques que les mots-titre comportent, les informations étymologiques offertes, les affinités établies entre les langues romanes contenues dans le dictionnaire, la manière de traiter l’inventaire des entrées. Le dictionnaire s’élève au niveau des travaux lexicographiques étrangers, par la présentation d’un appareil scientifique moderne. D’autre part, nous remarquons le caractère non-systématique de l’ouvrage, généré, d’une part, par le grand nombre d’auteurs qui ont contribué à sa rédaction, et d’autre part, par la longue période d’élaboration. Le caractère hétérogène est mis en évidence
par les fluctuations de traitement des articles, par la manière dans laquelle l'information est structurée, par la présence dans le dictionnaire de plusieurs systèmes orthographiques qui rendent difficile la lecture des articles.

L’approche sémiotique de la lexicographie offre les prémisses d’une image revitalisée sur la pratique lexicographique, qui n’est plus perçue comme une activité mécanique, de compilation de certaines sources lexicales, mais comme une démarche complexe qui demande une culture encyclopédique et des compétences extrêmement raffinées de la part des lexicographes. Également, la sémiotique met en évidence le rôle co-participatif des utilisateurs de dictionnaires, dans les conditions où la démarche lexicographique fait appel à l’univers de connaissance, à l’expérience de vie, aux suppositions et aux préjugés de ceux-ci, misant sur leur rôle actif dans le processus de consultation.

References


Abstract: The complexity of today’s cultural and social reality has turned the contemporary scene into the perfect playground for postmodern theories. One of the most prominent voices of pomo critique, Baudrillard sees the present age in dark colours, with a society lost in a simulated reality and, paradoxically, with information lost in communication. The present paper starts from various concepts of utopia constructed in the postmodernist think-tank, to eventually point out the similarities between a Baudrillard-infused, dystopian definition of “now” and the descriptions provided by a metal band (Sepultura) and a cartoonist on an educational mission, Steve Cutts.

Keywords: postmodernism, utopia, dystopia, media culture, representation

Utopia has always been the functional dream of humanity, the equation with no solution that generated a discourse of hope altogether with an acute sense of impossibility. Yet, the present state of humanity displays a series of features that transforms the very concept of utopia into a shifting metaphor of contrast – if the theorists of postmodernism (Baudrillard, Jameson, Lyotard, Fukuyama, Debord, Best, Kellner, Hassan and others) had gathered to sum up their fears, hopes and expectations about the future, the contemporary reality might have been an accurate representation of the result. For Fredric Jameson, the interconnectedness between utopia and reality can be reversed, to the extent that the discourse of utopia can provide a more accurate representation of the real and can account for the evolution of the social environment, thus acting like an educational tool. He identifies utopia as a rare phenomenon, having its conceptual meaning developed at the same level as its reality, with its ontology coinciding with its representation (Jameson 2004, 35). Jameson sees the quasi-disappearance of a social function of utopia in terms of “historical dissociation”: namely, the extraordinary differences between the highly developed countries and the under-developed ones, or between the rich and the poor. These colossal differences have reshaped the world, transforming it into two different versions of itself, with each of them having a unique perspective on utopia. For the poverty stricken communities and individuals, utopia has become irrelevant, as its discourse places it too far from the actual reality. For the wealthy part,
utopia is no longer a match for reality itself – it is the phenomenon of “utopia realized” described by Baudrillard, when all possible ideals of liberation and welfare have been already attained, thus disappeared, with society simulating their existence (Baudrillard 1993, 4).

A necessary condition of envisioning utopia is, according to Jameson, the utopian state of mind; he divides it into two distinct categories, corresponding to the duality between science and ideology. The first category is represented by authors like Thomas More, who approached the status of Utopian as an integral part of their life and profession, with the willingness to act as a model through personal example; this category has a rather scientific and radically articulated background, of professional involvement. The second major category, represented by thinkers like Rousseau, acknowledges utopianism as “another form of idle day dreaming” (Jameson 2005, 42).

Theorists like Lyotard avoid pairing certain types of societal construction of utopia with particular cultural movements, highlighting the idea that several views are simultaneous: realism, modernism and postmodernism coexist, at any given moment in time, in each and every culture, abiding by various modes of representation (Lyotard 1984, 60). Whereas realism provides a universally legitimate manner of representation, along the lines of master narratives, modernism and postmodernism seem to have a disruptive effect on the idea that everything can adequately become the subject of representation, with postmodernism in particular undermining the potential of art, scientific inquiry and even communication to properly function as modes of representation. Debord goes one step further to suggest that postmodernist representation is inherently oblique and significantly more subjective, compared to the modernist approach, with language no longer holding a clearly defined mechanism of signification and signs often losing their connection to reality (Debord 1970, 22).

In the arguably postmodern cultural environment of today, the line between utopia and dystopia is blurred. Both utopia and dystopia are essentially part of the same framework of intentionality, aiming at certain improvements of the socio-cultural, political or economic life, within a particular human community: utopia sums up the idealized components of a better future¹, a series of possible elements of societal evolution, while dystopia attempts to designate the perceived evils of the society, usually through their hyperbolization and the creation of an even darker setting than the very reality it criticizes.

Each change in the perception of historicism corresponds to an alteration in meaning, as far as the “deciphering” of the utopian design is concerned. The particularities of postmodernism have added a supplementary layer of subjectivity, relativity and fragmentarism to the classical dimensions. By modulating interpretation patterns, the discourse of postmodernism has
affected the coherence of its utopias as much as their conceptual consistency. The various readings of the same articulation of a utopian discourse can greatly differ, in as much as utopia can turn into dystopia along the same temporal axis, or even be interpreted in contradicting terms when analyzed through disparate ideological lenses.

When trying to understand the subtle ways in which the contemporary cultural puzzle works, one needs to pin down the redefined concepts of space and time, and the novel consciousness and philosophy accompanying this change. A certain awareness of spatiality is manifest at any level, from individual to global. The spatial philosophy of the postmodern – irrespective of the degree of subjectivity or superficiality – seems to prefer surface, not depth. The exterior, even though stereotypical and manipulative, but much more spectacular than the interior, assumes its domination, from urban architecture to the idealised imagery of Disneyland (Eco 1986, 43).

Any definition of the present state of reality seems to be reduced to a subtle interplay between subjectivity and communication, against a background of increased fragmentariness. If Derrida, Lyotard and Jameson still considered communication as a consistent tool in handling information (at least in part, and albeit subjective), Baudrillard perceives communication as an added layer of confusion on top of the already chaotic build of the present. The over-abundance of information, through all possible channels, from television to Internet, has a paradoxical effect as well: that of cancelling the very possibility to extract meaning. Moreover, information ultimately causes an impossibility to signify meaningfully, because of the proliferation of signs at such a rate. Another element upon which Baudrillard focuses his attention is the central item of the commodification process, also theorized by Lyotard, Jameson and McLuhan: the commodity itself. The new sign-value associated with the commodity in the contemporary age acquires certain discursive elements, since it can convey a variety of messages and can display a significant amount of information within the framework of cultural and social norms.

This sign-value eventually exceeds use- and/or exchange-value, since it can also provide a more consistent effect within the process of simulation around which the entire functionality of the postmodern environment revolves. Simultaneous with the reversal between representation and reality, the occurrence of a new type of “real” – the hyperreal – further dissolves meaning, against the same background of over-abundance of information. Here, as well, the mechanisms of media act not as facilitators for the process of apprehending reality, but as an annulment of the very possibility to do so. Everyday life is inherently tied to this deterioration of perception and representation, making the individual prone to fall under the disorienting influence of media.
Thus, the individual permanently experiences a schizophrenic pattern of existence, when the reality surrounding him unravels itself aggressively, destroying intimacy and turning introversion into impossibility. The inherent state of confusion that follows becomes a regular expression of the way in which the individual seeks to adapt to the social/cultural environment – with too much information and too little distance from everything around him, the individual is sentenced to a psychologically crippling openness to reality. In this scenario, staged by postmodernity, with proximity being an invasive influence on the subject, existence is simultaneously transparent and coded (through media, culture and the overflow of images, exceeding one’s capacity to properly interiorize their meaning) (Baudrillard 1983). Amidst an environment shaped by simulation and a seemingly meaningless play of images, external reality has become a forgotten myth, since any appropriation of the real is either mediated, biased or excessively subjective.

Baudrillard’s vision is a complex assemblage of simulation, hyperreal, cultural metamorphosis and shifting concepts of utopia; these are all tenets of present-day media culture, with individuals lost in-between social media, an objective reality perceived through the lenses of consumerism-driven norms and a perpetual need for originality in a world of copies. Captive inside an endless duplication of signs and imposed meanings, the contemporary self is reinvented at the same pace with global trends and the disarticulated needs. What Baudrillard theorized – a distorted, dystopian instance of a certain stage in human evolution – is paradoxically similar to the realism-infused representations of today’s humanity in two of the most prominent vehicles of expression today, music and cartoons. Namely, the video for a song called “Phantom Self”, from Sepultura, one of the most iconic metal bands, and a short animation by Steve Cutts, “Consumerism”. They both crucify people’s addiction to technology and their obsession with mobile phones, and they both have a double layer of signification. On the one hand, they question the disruptive relationship between man and technology. On the other hand, we catch a glimpse at a much more intense debate, one on the very nature of reality – since perception is mediated through various cultural and technological mechanisms, and the concept of the real is undermined by subjective perspectives, reality is no longer the immediate source of inspiration to create versions of utopia, but becomes a utopia in itself; the thought of accessing reality as it is has become the utopian dream of contemporary culture, while individuals behave like avatars in a hyperreal environment.

The video for “Phantom Self”/ Sepultura uncovers fast moving images, as if seen through a robotic eye; alternating scenes – religious icons and modern architecture; a world populated by zombie-like humans, absorbed
by their mobile phones, indifferent towards the surroundings – and the environment. In such a demented, technology-driven universe, the most severe individual crisis is a phone battery dying out – and any attempt to borrow energy from other individuals is obliterated by the all-encompassing indifference that seems to be the central governor of this particular Brave New World. This is a world where people are essentially manufactured, as they have come to rely on technology to such a degree, that not only is everything replaceable through robotics, but any attempt to perceive reality directly, through human senses, is regarded as a flaw. Humans mimic their whole existence in front of the phone camera, postponing their actual life.

Symptomatic for people’s attitude towards technology is the running competition between two runners – one of them, with a prosthetic leg, easily wins the race, while the other curses his “only human” nature and decides to take matters into his own hands by cutting off his right leg. The high level of visual aggression in the “repair” scene symbolizes the intensity with which society imposes its newly found ideals upon the individual; giving up a healthy, fully functional limb just to access an alleged superiority is a syndrome of a society that imposes artificial ideals of perfection, while rejecting what is authentically human.

An entire society seems captive inside the two dimensional utopia of a small screen – the mobile phone, the symbol and symptom of the new breed of human, simultaneously functions as road and destination for all possible human desires. Unable to distinguish between the natural and the artificial, the individuals who seem to favour the former are regarded as flawed and sent to “repair”; everyone needs to be cured from a non-mediated perception of reality. A direct connection to what is real is perceived as a sign of illness, and consequently cannot fit into the framework of technologically imposed perfection. The ending of the video entails two layers of signification: on the one hand, we have an illustration of hope, of solution to the men-becoming-robots problem. A man who throws away his mobile phone and a woman who chooses to actually look at the world instead of staring at a screen. On the other hand, the ultimate symbol of hope – and of religion, in the same time – Christ the Redeemer, in Rio, is presented as a robotic assemblage of metallic parts, a machinery covered by a mere illusion of humanity. So, even if at the individual level salvation can be found, as a species, as a global community, humanity seems to be doomed, with its downfall brought by its own creation: technology.

The same idea of salvation allowed individually but denied collectively is shared by Steve Cutts’ animated story “Consumerism”. The viewer is abruptly introduced to a mechanic, senseless destruction of the natural environment with the sole purpose of producing mobile phones (just like “Phantom Self”, in the cartoonish rendition of the modern times the mobile
phone acts as symbol for technology and for people’s addiction to it). The complex technological stages are presented accompanied by eerie music (rarely interrupted by what seem to be screams of nature being mutilated), against a background of a grey, somber, decaying world. The viewer witnesses the maddeningly repetitive work of countless robotic workers, performing the same movements over and over again, to ensure the appearance of the ultimate product, a mobile phone with “built in obsolescence”, metaphorically called “Y Fone” – the question alluded to in its name is soon answered by a generic individual who seeks emotional fulfillment through relentlessly purchasing newer and newer models of Y Fone, with a decreased intensity of the moment of delight and an increased frustration caused by the speed with which new models make their way into his life. Symbolical for the eventual destruction of human life through mindless consumerism, the weight of all the now-obsolete mobile phones eventually leads to the prolonged fall of the man (or Man) into an immense wasteland of abandoned cellphones. As if awakened from an apocalyptic nightmare by a phone ringing, the man finds himself sleeping at home, with his TV set obsessively broadcasting the latest news about mobile phones. Just like immersing from a hypnotic state, he turns off both his TV and his phone, only to experience a sudden realization that he had long lost contact with the reality around him. He longingly looks at the portraits of his family and slowly starts to appreciate the small wonders of the world again. He looks at a bird, fascinated by its presence; he goes outside, talks to real people in a real park, and then proceeds to walk along with them on a real path. However, just when the signs of a happy end are adding up, the devastation of the nature around him is resumed, as a brutal reminder that humanity is still on the same journey of self-destruction, unimpressed, uncompassionate and unforgiving.

In both cases, individuals are faced with a brutal intrusion of objective reality into their own personal utopia; what is significantly different, however, is the presence – or, respectively, the absence – of religion. In “Phantom Self”, there is an apparent veil of hope at the end, the image of Christ the Redeemer, but that veil is soon deconstructed and the viewer witnesses the dissolution of the religious icon into the same robotic make-up that acts as novel foundation for the entire human kind. In “Consumerism” there is no reference to religion – but this absence could signify the author’s subtextual intention of highlighting technology as the ultimate religion of humanity, and the cellphone as an egocentric God that desires absolute commitment and sacrifice. Yet the conclusion is the same: irrespective of individual efforts, collective doom is to follow.

The profoundly dystopian outlook encoded in both “Phantom Self” and “Consumerism” finds its exact replica in Baudrillard’s writings about utopia,
dystopia and reality. For Baudrillard, the discourse of utopianism is not necessarily a formula for envisioning better versions of reality, but rather reality itself can trigger some unconscious utopian mechanisms – perhaps one of the best examples is America, in which an entire nation is viewed as a work of fiction, whose ambivalent and dispersed projection becomes the very equivalent of utopia. More specifically, two places in the United States personify the ultimate utopian scenario: Biosphere and Disneyland. Both of them have the function of proving that America does not consist of a real, true-to-life component – that, beyond the two perfect incarnations of utopia, the real America ceases to exist – and its disappearance transforms the subjective utopia into a seemingly objective dystopia. Relentlessly bombarded with audio and visual bits of falsification, Americans are led to believe in movies and propaganda. And not only do they actually believe the utopian scenario they are permanently exposed to, but they eventually get to believe in nothing else (Baudrillard 1988) – we find the same level of obsession in Sepultura’s video and Steve Cutts’ animation, with individuals no longer connected to the real. Living in a society that has exceeded all expectations, with reality having already surpassed fiction on so many grounds, the imaginary is no longer a pretext for the real. Once the reality principle has been cancelled by the complex socio-cultural devices of postmodernity, accompanied by an endless mass production of arbitrary symbols, against a background of generalized simulation, the imaginary no longer needs legitimation. On the contrary, reality is the one that is undergoing a process of dissolution, of mutation into a non-attainable dimension, so that the real itself becomes the utopia of contemporaneity (Baudrillard 1991). Instead of designing improved versions of reality, projections of a better future or alternate realities that more adequately correspond to its dreams, humanity has lost contact with reality itself, being suspended between the real and the fictional. Baudrillard, Sepultura and Steve Cutts all seem to sentence humanity to a perspective of life inside a carefully manufactured dystopia, constructed on the ashes of a long-forgotten technological utopia.

Notes

1 Temporality itself is subjective, when it comes to the design of utopia: the imagined place and time of each utopia do not necessarily belong to future per se. Alternate realities, distorted time or simulated spaces also represent valid options for envisioning utopia/dystopia.

2 “Information is directly destructive of meaning and signification, or neutralizes it. The loss of meaning is directly linked to the dissolving and dissuasive action of information, the media, and mass media. Information devours its own contents; it devours communication and the social… information dissolves meaning and the social into a sort of nebulous state leading not at all to a surfeit of innovation but to the very contrary, to total entropy.” (Baudrillard 1994, 96)
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The werewolf before the door of the law: Considerations on bando and language in the thought of Agamben

Abstract: For Agamben, the situation of sovereignty resembles the event of language in that both are affected by the state of exception. This essay thus seeks to investigate the incidence of the state of exception in language and how through language, man, or rather the humanity of man, is called into question. The conclusion appears to be a warning so that the dehumanization that occurred in Auschwitz does not occur again, as it is in the field of possibilities of man.

Keywords: Agamben, Bando, State of exception, Language

In a passage of The Trial, Franz Kafka (2015) describes a scene where a peasant arrives in front of an open door protected by a guard who tells him he cannot enter. The peasant wishes to enter; therefore, he waits. He does not confront the guard, nor does he attempt to violate the injunction; he merely waits for a release that never materializes, although the door is always open. No one else approaches to pass through the door, and they stay there, just him and the guard, before the open door. At the end of his life, at the last moment, the peasant asks the guard why no one, except him, has ever attempted to pass through the door, and he learns that the door was created just for him.

Giorgio Agamben (1995) uses this scene to note that the peasant’s situation before the door of the law is a situation of abandonment – a situation that in Latin, bando, suggests that the man is abandoned before a law that exists but has no meaning, a pure law that does not prescribe anything, a law that merely abandons. Kafka’s text, from this perspective, reveals that man is handed over to the bando, that is, to the power of the law that prevents him from entering, to the pure form of the law, which is that the law is stronger, as it does not provide for anything, it only exists as enunciation.
This situation of *bando* explains the state of exception suggested by Agamben. In technical legal terms, this exception is the suspension of the entire legal system, which is made possible by a rule within the legal system—a rule that suspends what the system itself has prescribed, revealing an inside and an outside, in a relationship that includes something through exclusion. Hence, it is through the *bando* that Agamben conceives the sovereign exception scheme in which the law is applied by not being applied, keeping itself out of itself, in its *bando*, that is, the *bando* reveals two features of the sovereign exception: the first is a blur between legal and outlaw; the second is that the law exists without law, i.e., with no form of law.

Agamben’s interpretation (2003) of Kafka’s text also suggests that the peasant is not a loser, someone who lost his life before the law, because the text does not say that the peasant died waiting to walk through the door but as someone who actually wanted the closure of the law. We can imagine that he hoped the law would no longer be in effect in its exception so that another law could arise, or perhaps that this situation was not a state of exception.

The state of exception, in legal discourse, is a legal form of that which cannot have a legal form, and it is in this sense that Agamben can include life, which is unpredictable, in the sphere of law. At the same time, by including life, the political issue is placed into question because the state of exception is a situation in which is at stake the difference between political and legal, between the law and the living. Before this situation, Agamben (2003) seeks to understand what it means to act politically.

We must recall that the text guiding Agamben’s answer to this question is Walter Benjamin’s *On the Concept of History*, written in 1942, in which the German philosopher argues that the state of exception has become the rule. From this affirmation, Agamben (2003) claims that the state of exception reveals not only a government technique but a constitutive paradigm of the legal order that demonstrates its actuality in several contemporary events where the legal safety device has become the rule, as in Guantanamo and in the US after the September 11 attacks.

Another example provided by Agamben (2003) is the case of emergency decrees, which are common in Italy. In such cases, the executive exercises the atypical role of legislating. A similar situation arises in Brazil through the use of the provisional measure, which has replaced the decree of law in the 1988 Constitution. The provisional measure largely allows the executive to perform the legislative function. The emergence of the executive in the field of the legislative is merely a demonstration of what to Agamben is a larger problem because it is possible to consider the state of exception in a broader context, in the applicability of law as a zone of indifference, in
which there is neither inside nor outside the legal system, only a threshold where inside and outside exclude each other.

However, what is paradigmatic in the state of exception is the relationship between the law and the living. In the eyes of Agamben, the ultimate goal of politics is, in an undisguised way, the management of life. Through the idea of exception, Agamben seeks to answer the question of how life inhabits the polis through the understanding that man is not only a social being but also a being of language. Just as man can be banned from the polis, he can be banished from language: man is a being of language that may not have language, precisely because the non-word can occur.

Agamben (2016) recognizes that what distinguishes men from animals is not that the former have language while the latter do not but that man is the animal that is conscious that he has language and tongue, that he can use his tongue as an object and create a division between subject and speech because through the tongue, man performs a speech act, that is, man turns the use of language and its interpretation into an event.

From this notion, we can say that there are states in which the life of the citizen who inhabits the polis is a bare life, that is, a life treated by politics as purely biological, without human or animal attributes, removed from human language, and therefore that can be killed.

The Homo sacer is the paradigm par excellence of contemporary politics explaining the bare life, according to Agamben (1995). It is a term from classical Roman law that takes the form of a speech act consecrating a subject and then abandoning him, keeping him apart from other men. It does not mean that the subject is being punished in a technical legal sense. However, because he partakes neither of the human, nor of the animal, nor of the divine, the Homo sacer can be killed. In other words, this is a borderline case in which this “undetermined” being can be killed without committing a crime. The Homo sacer is not condemned but abandoned by the law. He thus becomes a victim of his destiny without any legal or religious sphere to protect him.

By suspending a man’s rights, by abandoning him to his own destiny, the Roman State creates a state of exception of the law itself. In other words, there are cases in which the law itself announces when it is no longer valid. For Agamben, the paradigm appears to be an inconsistency: it is the establishment of a case that suspends what made it possible – a state of exception. The Homo sacer is thus left on his own; he is taken from his “social being” and left in his bare life.

From that point, following in the footsteps of Michel Foucault, Agamben (2008b) is able to rethink what we traditionally consider as law, state, and sovereignty, for example. These are no longer considered based on the notion of a law that can be defined in all its aspects and without something outside of it but on the notion of a law in relation to what is
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exterior to it and at the same time constitutes it. This is exactly how Agamben understands the term abandonment in relation to the universal themes of law, state, and sovereignty – they are thereafter understood based on a model in which power penetrates the bodies and the rules in our forms-of-life.

The term form-of-life employed here refers to how Agamben understands the life that cannot be separated from the way the living being lives.

Therefore, if it is true that power penetrates the bodies and rules in our forms-of-life, then every life is an example and not the rule – each case, each singularity, reveals power in some way. From singularity to singularity, power is revealed in its exception – an exception that reveals what was hidden in power. Thus, we understand why the Homo sacer represents a paradigm for Agamben (2008b): this case uncovers a form-of-life that has become the rule, as is suggested more radically by Benjamin (“the rule is the exception”). It is a case that reveals how politics became biopolitics, in which different forms-of-life became simply lives.

If the case has become the rule, Agamben (1995) can state that the Homo sacer is the original political relationship, and the sacredness that justifies this state of exception is the form of implication of the bare life in the legal-political order. However, even if it is not a punishment in a strict sense, is banishing a man from his own social world not a form of violence?

Agamben (2008a) states that a man is designated Homo sacer when he breaks the oath of peace between men and gods. By breaking this oath, man breaks with his human order and passes into an order of indeterminacy. Breaking an oath does not lead man to punishment because it was not exactly a crime that was committed; instead, it is an act that begets a curse.

In the relationship of dehumanization suffered by the Homo sacer with regard to language, man is only abandoned from his condition of living being to become a bare life through a speech act in the form of a curse.

Language is not a divine creation or a human invention, as Agamben (2016) demonstrates, it is a means by which man humanizes himself dividing life and language so that both are articulated.

With the gods as witnesses, the act of breaking an oath, this speech act, as Agamben (2008a) understands it, becomes an event. This event, this act that is established by language in the breach of an oath, is what makes the curse possible. This curse means that the oath breaker is no longer human, as he is no longer in the domain of those that keep the oath, nor divine, as he is not welcomed by the gods as their equal, nor animal, for he does not participate in the human language, neither vowing to nor blaspheming the gods. With the gods as witnesses, in the speech act, man curses himself and enters a zone of indeterminacy.

Vowing, in this case, is an act that announces the possibility of its own exception – it announces the possibility that a man’s speech does not
correspond with his action. If a person makes a vow but does not fulfil it, this person not only loses his dignity as a man but also announces his curse – through his own speech act, he places himself in the possibility of excluding what is essential to him. The oath is, therefore, the essential possibility of man becoming non-human – a possibility that speech itself can announce the exclusion of man from language, from the human realm. In this perspective, language, the speech act, has the same structure as the state of exception created by the Romans: it is within the law itself that the possibility lies of law no longer being valid.

With the oath, curse becomes possible. Consequently, it is language, that which makes us human, the speech act, the possibility of blasphemy, that makes room for the existence of a non-language, a non-human. Thus, the curse is not what justifies the oath but that which is opened as a constitutive possibility of the very act of vowing.

In this case, Agamben (2008a) is using language as performance, that is, there are acts that establish new states of affairs. Through the act of vowing, the state of affairs that was in effect becomes another state of affairs. What is in effect can be abandoned in a speech act – such as blasphemy, for example. From that moment on, what existed ceases to be in place. When he is declared a Homo sacer, man ceases to be a man – and that which was valid is abandoned.

What is striking in this performative speech act is man’s ability to become non-human by announcing what suspends his humanity. In addition, language, because it can be performative, can be violent. Even as it establishes a union between two people, it can break the humanity of man – the pledge of peace between men and gods. Man is essentially a language being, and it is exactly this language that can break his essence. In other words, man is a being who places his own life in danger with the act of fulfilling what is essential to him: to speak.

Furthermore, for man, there is also the possibility of becoming an exception, a Homo sacer, where the non-possibility of talking is what justifies its exception. Agamben (1998) uses as an example the case of Auschwitz, where men became non-human. In this case, they lost their humanity not by an act of their own speech but because they were dehumanized and because their life became a bare life by the very fact of having been removed from their humanity, from their conviviality with other men, and because they were placed in a situation outside the human, without a motherland, without any identity with a State.

That is what Agamben (1998) identifies as the Muselmann, or rather the non-man, as people used to designate those beings who subsisted in concentration camps without any possibility of being identified with what we call human. A man who has lost his language, released to the world as object, this Muselmann wanders, even if he has not voiced any blasphemy,
without word, without the ability to participate in the communicative act. These living-dead bear witness to the possibility of the human announcing to others his capacity to no longer be human, namely, the possibility of having in the voice of someone else the state of exception as a possibility of being that which is not but that the evocation of the voice echoes as an event...

How can man no longer be human?

In *Sein und Zeit*, written in 1927, Martin Heidegger (2006) states that the *Dasein* is a being of possibilities. In other words, even the most absurd situations are on the horizon of possibilities of man. Thus, we would be acting in bad faith, following the thought of Jean-Paul Sartre, if we did not assume that it is possible to act in an inhuman way – in a way that we do not expect man to act.

However, certain events, according to Agamben (1998), can change what we deem possible. Auschwitz was one of those events. As in performative speech, in which speech introduces a new way of being, an event introduces new possibilities that were not foreseen. Heidegger’s conception of the *Dasein*, in this case, cannot embrace the performative aspect in the establishment of something. It is true that we are beings of possibility, that there is a horizon of possibilities that we are able to perform even if we are ashamed to imagine them. However, there are cases that were not in this horizon. It is as if something broke what was considered possible. Auschwitz opened a horizon in which man becomes non-human.

The question of the animality of man is not new. There is a long reflection on the threshold between the human and non-human. In fact, Agamben (2002) states that, since Aristotle, this is the fundamental question of metaphysics, as the very definition of man incorporates animality (“rational animal”). There is an animality in man. However, could this animality be something non-human?

It is on the basis of openness that Heidegger (1982) seeks to differentiate man from animal. In certain ways, animals are open to the world. However, such openness does not allow the animal to partake in world-formation. The animal does not shape the world — he is “poor in world”. Man is able to use openness as something of his own – to realize entities as entities and to use the world around in his world-forming. To have a world means being open to it in the same way the entities around us are, and to take care, take ownership, be absorbed, and act in relation to them. Man is world-forming because he meets the world with openness.

However, there are times when human life is no longer able to be absorbed in this world – times when the human form-of-life is disconnected from its form and becomes simply living. It is this possibility that Heidegger would not have predicted when considering the *Dasein* a being of possibilities. By its very definition, the *Dasein* can never be thought of unless
it is thought of in relationship to a way of life. The *Dasein* is being in relation: a being-in-relationship-with others (concern); a being-with others; a being-together-with the world; and a being-towards-an-end (a being-to-death). Furthermore, what if man no longer has a form-of-life and simply has a bare life?

This is the case of Auschwitz – man loses his human condition by losing his form-of-life and becomes simply a living being. This bare life demands, furthermore, that we confer upon this being a new name: *Muselmann*, a living being, in a bare life, without any form of life defining him that can attest to man’s humanity. It is true that we are animals. It is true that there is an animality in man. Agamben (2002) is actually highlighting another possibility: that this animality can become the very definition of the being – without any adjective that differentiates man from another animal, that is, a bare life without any adjective, a being in which we can no longer recognize humanity, not even in its physical form.

Shortly after the Second World War, Primo Levi (one of Agamben’s main references) attempts to describe what a man is after having suffered dehumanization in the concentration camps. He describes a man-animal in whom we cannot precisely determine the threshold between man and animal. Giorgio Agamben (1995) notes that this is not a new figure in Western history. Although Auschwitz was the event where this new possibility was established, the man-animal, the *werewolf*, is a figure that, in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, appears as borderline. In this tradition, there is a chance that man be tried and abandoned, by that same trial, by the law. He starts to wander in an area of indeterminacy and can no longer be considered a man – or at least a man who lives with other men under the same law. The werewolf wanders through the world, and he no longer has a human form-of-life. That bare life, that life without form-of-life, is what Auschwitz produced in a way that we had never expected: to turn a being of possibilities into a being *without* a form-of-life.

However, if the figure of the werewolf already existed, why is Auschwitz an event? If the man-animal was possible, why was he not foreseen in the being of possibilities such as Heidegger describes?

Auschwitz is an event because it establishes as rule that which was only a possibility – it introduces the exception as the rule when contemplating what is man. When Levi (1989) asks, “what is this, a man?”, he forces us to use the exception as rule when reflecting upon what is the man (the singular becomes the rule to think about the universal – what is “the” man and not “a” man). When man is turned into a werewolf, an animal-man, there is no longer any law that can ensure his form-of-life because all that is left is his bare life – something that any living organism has. The animal-man enters a zone where the possibility of being killed is real. The law abandons him and makes possible what was not possible: man becoming non-human.
In a way, the animality of man is not strange. It is something very close, because we are animals, but also distant, because we are men. Sigmund Freud (1919), for example, highlights how there is something unsettling in situations where *that* which is familiar and simultaneously strange becomes present. What is apparently foreign is revealed because it is part of who we are. Agamben never questions the animality of man. What he challenges are the moments when the animality of man becomes the rule: when a law imposes the abandonment as rule, that is the state of exception.

The Auschwitz event compels us to resignify our history. Something that introduces new possibilities also requires the past to be resignified based on these new possibilities. Freud (2010), for example, states that any event can have a delayed effect that resignifies our history. Living brings the risk that an experience ruptures our way of being and makes us be differently due to a resignification of who we are. Benjamin (2009) insists that history is the field of thought par excellence because every event makes us look at things in a different way than the way we were used to – nothing should be forgotten, and even the things we were not expecting must be uncovered. History is, somehow, our way of being humans. Suspending any moment of this history is barbaric. Even Auschwitz must be remembered. In fact, it is not a question of “even”, but rather, “it is precisely” Auschwitz that must be remembered. This event made us face something that necessarily resignifies our way of being. *We will never be as we were before*. Forgetting, in this case, is acting in bad-faith. If that which was impossible has become possible, so the possible becomes necessarily a horizon.

The *Homo sacer* is the establishment of a possibility that was once impossible. It introduces an exception that was made possible. In addition, it has the effect of obliging us to rethink everything under the light of something we previously thought to be impossible. *The strange becomes familiar*. Our animality becomes present, and the bare life, *real*. An event that becomes real resignifies what we were. We can then be open to the bare life (without a form-of-life) – something unthinkable for Heidegger, for example.

The position of Agamben (1996) also leads us to rethink the spectacle. For him, since Guy Debord, it has become common to affirm that we live in a society of spectacle. What is innovative in Debord (the idea of spectacle), when it is announced, becomes natural – naturalized. What once appeared as a disruption, a reading that resignified our understanding of society, became too obvious but not too much in all its possible dimensions. Agamben (2001) once said that it is not worth writing a text if it does not have addendums. In other words, it is not worth writing something that does not have a larger horizon of thought or further questions that may be raised. In one of his works, he decides to compose a gloss of the work of Debord. In this commentary, Agamben states that we live in a society of spectacle, but he resignifies this state of social being by
saying that our spectacle is language. Just as there is the possibility of a bare life, without a form-of-life, there is the possibility of a language that is expropriated from man – which takes away from man what is essential to him (an empty speech that is not directed at another person as something of his own). Speaking is, to man, his most essential way of being (that which makes man a social being). If he is mute (merely babbling and randomly saying this or that without really communicating), man could not have been defined as a social being; if he is unable to communicate, man languishes (loses his unique feature: to be a form-of-life) in a bare life. Speaking, man is capable of forming social relationships. Losing what makes him a man, man is dehumanized.

Perhaps Agamben’s greatest denunciation of our times is to show that man becomes Homo sacer not only because of an event, such as the concentration camp, but also due to the very nature of man: to speak. The fact that man is human makes it possible for him to lose his humanity. The fact that he speaks makes it possible for man to blaspheme. Having a body is to have the possibility of losing it. Both to be and to have appear to collapse in this case. Being a man can turn him into non-human. Having a social, communicative nature can bring man to muteness (in relation to those close to him). We can be and have something and, at the same time, given we can be and have something, we make it possible the loss of being and having something. There is something strange in that. That which constitutes us brings the possibility that we languish. The animality of man, for example, can be what makes living possible, even if it dehumanizes him. A Muselmann – that being in an area of indeterminacy – might be the only witness to the impossible: making possible what is not expected. What type of speech would we hear? Would it be something we could recognize?

If speech is something communicable, which makes us understand each other, maybe the secret of a Muselmann’s muteness would lead us to a different order in respect to what we know about ourselves. Its incommunicable wheezing, as Levi recounts, might have reconfigured forever what a man is. Expropriated, it makes the man a simple living being and uses the singularity as the reference point to define what the man is himself.

This possibility is not unusual in the 20th century. Freud once said that we just have to throw a crystal on the floor to see that it breaks at the invisible lines that were already there. We just have to throw a man on the floor to see a Muselmann…

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The History of Korean Philosophy
Dialogue between Tudor Petcu** and Halla Kim*

TP: At the beginning of our dialogue I wish to make reference to the meaning of Korean philosophy in the context of the universal philosophy. I mean I think it would be necessary to present in a relevant way the role that Korean philosophy has played in the evolution of the universal one, especially western philosophy. So, what could you say about this topic?

HK: The abstract thinking in Korea began with native religious thoughts but it received a critical impetus from various thoughts originated from

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outside of Korea. Buddhism was originally conceived in India and greatly developed in China, but it was enthusiastically received and promoted during the Three Kingdoms Period (57 BCE – 668 CE) in Korea as well as Unified Silla (668-918) and Koryo dynasty (918-1392). Indeed, it played a critical and decisive role in the development of mature philosophical theorizing in Korea. Among many of its brilliant contributions, an attempt to effect the achievement of wisdom and perfection in an individual life and in a society under this light was an integral part of this tradition. Later in the 14th century, Buddhism gave hegemony to Neo-Confucianism which originally arose in Sung China. In particular, Choson dynasty (1392-1910) in Korea turned out to be a fertile ground for its further development. For example, the making of a sage in each individual and a virtuous government of a community by such a figure, which culminates in the ideal of sage king, has occupied a central place in this effort.

TP: Which are the main philosophical approaches assumed over the years in the different academic milieus in Korea? Can we talk about a strong Korean phenomenology, or about any analytical Korean philosophy, or so? Every country where philosophy was assumed as a field of research has had a specific and general philosophical tradition, as for example England, very well-known through its analytical philosophy, or Germany through its idealism or phenomenology expressed by Edmund Husserl or Martin Heidegger. In this case, what about the philosophical tradition in Korea?

HK: To understand what is Korean about Korean Confucianism, we have to look at the issues that Korean Confucians debated and identify those issues that seem to have interested them more than other issues, and which issues seemed to attract more interest in Korea than in the rest of the Confucian world. In the process, we should try to identify distinctive ways Korean Confucianism evolved, what sort of new schools of Confucian thought and practice it produced.

Though I have been studying Korean Confucianism for years, there are many nooks and crannies in Korean Confucian thought and practice I have not had time to explore. Confucianism in Korea, like Confucianism in China and in Japan, is multi-layered and even contradictory, with different scholars arguing for significantly different interpretations of the Confucian Classics and providing significantly different suggestions for how to apply Confucian principles to the world around them. Nevertheless, in my necessarily incomplete survey of Confucian thinking over the five centuries of the Choson dynasty, I have noticed one distinctive thread that stands out—a concern for moral psychology.

It is that concern, generated by the recognition of the contradiction between the assumption of human moral perfectibility and the reality of human moral frailty, that led to the disputes between T’oegye and Yulgok.
over what role the Four Fonts and the Seven Emotions should play in moral cultivation and between Han Wŏnjin and Yi Kan over how much of a sanctuary from evil our basic human nature provided. That same concern led to Tasan borrowing from Catholic writings to create a theistic Confucianism and inspired Ch’oe Cheu to create Korea’s first indigenous organized religion. Because their concern over human moral frailty led Korean Confucians to discuss issues that either were not as important or were not discussed the same way in neighboring countries and even led them to develop novel approaches to solving old Confucian issues, I argue that one thing, at least, that is Korean about Korean Confucianism is this emphasis placed on the search for an explanation of, and a solution to, the inevitability of human moral failure, of the inability of human beings, no matter how much they study the Confucian Classics and how well they understand them, to consistently act in a selfless manner, to act in the way their Confucian tradition tells them they should and could act.

TP: Western philosophy has always accorded a huge attention to the relation between philosophy and religion although there is basically difficult to find too many common denominators, first of all because of their comprehensive logics. Of course, from this point of view there would be a lot to say, especially if we should take into account the modal logics as a way to explain the Reality in comparison with religion, mostly based on a mystical worldview which has its own logics. But we shouldn’t forget about the different Christian efforts in the Middle Age to create a liaison, a strong connection between philosophy and religion, as Saint Anselm or Thomas Aquinas did. Anyway, what can you say about the way by which was defined the relation between philosophy and religion in Korea and who were the main Korean philosophers focused on the analyses of this topic?

HK: Philosophy and religion go hand in hand in Korean Philosophy.

In his Eleven Theses on Feuerbach, Karl Marx claims that “the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it,” thus incisely criticizing the abstract, isolated way that philosophy in the West had been practiced, in separation from the true reality of the world. According to Marx’s conception, philosophy is to be fundamentally practical beyond ‘theories,’ both simple and complex (from the Greek verb, “theorein”). Marx’s criticism, however, would be completely pointless if directed against the Korean Neo-Confucianism/Buddhism. For the latter has always been preoccupied with a concrete praxis in the daily context. Neo-Confucianism and Buddhism is, by its very nature, fundamentally practical, regardless of any shortcomings it is occasionally perceived to have.

In the familiar division of philosophy influenced by Western approaches, we commonly conceive it as being composed of three parts, metaphysics,
ethics and epistemology. For Korean philosophy, this would be completely inadequate. For it miserably fails to capture the most essential part of it - the art of self-cultivation (or as we can put it, “a way of life and thought”) is the most important part of philosophy proper. Just like metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, the art of self-cultivation (which I propose to call “sugihak (The study of self-cultivation)”) surely has theoretical components but the most essential component of it is its practical part. One who studies it must not only understand it or theoretically know about it but must also internalize it and actively practice it in his or her concrete relation with others. This is why it is different from theoretical disciplines (including the typically theoretical ‘philosophical ethics’ as it is widely taught in academia). You don’t have to be ethical to teach philosophical ethics but you cannot teach sugihak without exemplifying it yourself. There should be a unity of thought and action in the art. The Neo-Confucian/Buddhist reflection can be on things in the world but it must be directed toward oneself, thus “self-reflection.”

**TP:** Would it be correct to say that Buddhism as worldview represents one of the most important foundations of Korean philosophy?

**HK:** As Charles Muller suggests, Korean Buddhism is distinctive within the broader field of East Asian Buddhism for the pronounced degree of its syncretic discourse. Korean Buddhist monks throughout history have demonstrated a marked tendency in their essays and commentaries to focus on the solution of disagreements between various sects within Buddhism, or on conflicts between Buddhism and other religions. While a strong ecumenical tendency is noticeable in the writings of dozens of Korean monks, among the most prominent in regard to their exposition of syncretic philosophy are Wŏnhyo (元曉 617–686), Pojo Chinul (普照知訥 1158–1210) and Hamhŏ Kihwa (涵虛己和 1376–1433).

The chief operative conceptual framework with which these scholar-monks carried out their syncretic writings can be shown to be derived from the metaphysics connected with the Hwaŏm (華嚴 Ch. Hua-yen) school, as well as the soteriological discourse of the closely related Awakening of Faith (大乘起信論) tradition, both of which have dual roots in Indian Buddhist and native East Asian philosophy.

Among all the earliest forms of Buddhism, the most outstanding is the synoptic philosophy of Wŏnhyo. According to him, the most fundamental Buddhist doctrines are to be understood from the logic of interfusion which enables him to embrace and harmonize different strands of Buddhism without forsaking the substance of them. His view then culminates in the metaphysics of One Mind with its soteriological implications. Then the
holism of Ŭisang (625-702) and his Hwaŏm Buddhism is discussed with an account of his Ocean Seal Chart (華嚴一乘法界道) followed by a brief discussion of Pure Land Buddhism and Consciousness-Only School in unified Silla dynasty. No discussion of Korean Buddhism is complete without Chinul (1158-1210), the founder of Sŏn (c. Chan, j. Zen) Buddhism in Korea. Chinul’s Sŏn philosophy with a focus on the notion of “True Mind” is developed in the scheme of Sudden Enlightenment to our true nature under the guise of nothingness followed by a Gradual Cultivation via the practice of nothingness. This gave rise to the age-long controversy over Tonjŏm debate, i.e., Sudden Enlightenment vs. Gradual Development in Korea. Indeed, defying Chinul, T’aego Pou (1301-82), towards the end of Koryŏ, the final national master, emphasized Buddhism as a quintessentially practical discipline where both awakening and cultivation are fully realized in one fell swoop. This effort of Chinul and T’aego Pou were later continued by Chosŏn Buddhist monks, especially, Kihwa and Sŏsan (1520-1601). The Neo-Confucian attack on Buddhism, it will be shown, is in this respect unfounded, for Buddhism, in particular, the quintessential Buddhist concept of nothingness, simply does not entail nihilism conceived as expressing a fatalistic stance about the forces of nature (including human nature) with a strong implication for inaction and despair.

**TP:** We shouldn’t forget to highlight the contemporary philosophical theories in Korea, because in our days it’s very hard to find a philosophical task given the technological revolution and the development of pragmatism. I am saying that because the general question that is addressed even in the British and American schools of philosophy is the following one: what role can philosophy play in our days, in a society where science is evolving on and on? But in spite of this fact and according to the question I have mentioned above, there are numerous contemporary philosophical views related especially to politics, science and economics. So, which are the most important contemporary Korean philosophical theories and approaches?

**HK:** I hope to promote the value and meaning of Korean philosophy in the very context of the age of globalization without forsaking our deep-rooted tradition in Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism and Tonghak (Eastern Learning) among others. This is why the topic of Korean philosophy as such and its modernity is important. Our vision is that there is something very valuable in the traditional Korean thought but this merit cannot be fully appreciated until we consider it in light of the achievement and dynamics of western philosophy. Therein lies the importance of East-West comparative philosophy, in particular, East-West comparative moral theory. The latter is all the more important because Koreans traditionally prided themselves on epitomizing the value of morality “in the East.” The issues in
traditional moral theories can best be elucidated and illuminated by the recent development and achievement in moral and cognitive psychology (e.g., moral modularity hypothesis). Finally, we plan to approach and analyze many of the major issues in traditional Korean philosophy in the context of this comparative scheme and provide new answers to those old questions. For example, we strongly hope to come up with a contemporary understanding of the essential notion of li and qi as well as the causal concepts such as “produce” (pal), “ride” (seung), “begets” (saeng). Thus we can see that all these topics - philosophy and modernity, East and West comparative philosophy, some major issues in the history of Korean philosophy, Korean Neo-Confucianism and its moral psychology as well as the East-West comparative moral philosophy are all closely intertwined in the context of the comparative approaches to the problems in Korean philosophy against the most recent development in Western philosophy.

Korean philosophy is in its unique, particularized situation in the Korean peninsula and it can be best illuminated when we historically revisit the socio-political-economic-intellectual development up to now since 1945. Korea was freed from the Japanese colonial rule (1910~1945) as soon as WW II ended. At that time, there were fierce ideological disputes between socialists and liberalists. Since then until now, North Korea has followed Marx-Leninism and Juche (self-reliance) Ideology of its communist founder Kim Il-sŏng, while South Korea has discussed various theories of philosophy under liberalism. Thus the South Korean philosophy in the 1950s and 60s leaned toward German Idealism and Existentialism. This inclination was natural for the South Korean philosophers who experienced the Japan’s colonialism and the Korean War (1950~1953). The South Koreans had to gather powers in order not to lose the sovereignty of nation and recover the loss of human dignity from the war. At that time, the leading ideology was one-nation-ism (一民族主義) that we are one ethnic race speaking one language. Such a strong nationalism in South Korea led to staunch anti-communism. This anti-communism was combined with the nation theory of Fichte and Hegel. The combination of nationalism and anti-communism remained unchanged until the pro-democratic resistance movement in June of 1987 occurred. In this situation, even liberalism was regarded as an impure thought. Korean traditional thoughts were deemed valuable only to the degree to which it supported nationalism. Therefore, South Koreans could not enjoy the freedom of thoughts much like North Koreas. However, the philosophers in South Korea made incessant efforts to achieve democratization. They actively discussed the social critical theory of Frankfurt Schools in the 1970s, Marx-Leninism and North Korean Juche-Ideology in the 1980s, and neo-rationalism, post-Marxism, and post-structuralism in the 1990s. Finally, the issue of environmental value and welfarism came to the fore in the 2000’s. They made continual efforts for
the purpose of democratization as well. Of course, these efforts were chiefly made rather outside the academia rather than in it. The philosophers in the academia concentrated on German Idealism, Existentialism, Phenomenology, English and American Analytical Philosophy, East Asian Philosophy, and Korean traditional philosophy. Though there were conflicts between the philosophical activities within academia and those outside of it, various schools of philosophy emerged in South Korea in contrast to North Korea. South Korean philosophers have discussed philosophy in a various ways in order to solve the conflicts between Korean traditional philosophy and the accepted Western philosophy, and then they tried to recover the identity of Korean philosophy which they lost during the 36 years of Japan’s colonial rules. They have also discussed the true modernization of their community. Furthermore, they have discussed how to unify South and North Korea. True, it must be acknowledged that there were conflicts between the traditional Korean philosophy and the Western philosophy in the process. But we hope to elevate and develop this into productive communication between the two. This is the area in which East and West comparative framework can be considered and employed most fruitfully.

The relevance of traditional Korean philosophy to the meaning and value of Korean philosophy for the sake of ecological value as well as communal value can be seen from the way that I pursue various topics in the efforts of individual efforts. We do our best, and do plan, to make contribution to the issue of environmental values in our research agenda (e.g., post-modern variations with a touch of Taoism). The communal value is addressed in our research too (Confucian communitarianism.) The Korean society has now reached a critical juncture where its tradition has come into conflict with modernity and postmodernity. Its modernization was achieved not by the revolution from below but by the order imposed from above. In a word, the Korean society was modernized in the premodern way. Strictly speaking, the Korean society was not modernized until the pro-democratic resistance movement in June of 1987 took place. However, on the one hand, strong collectivism still exists in the Korean society, and, on the other hand, strong egocentrism thrives. Furthermore, Koreans achieved a certain measure of success of modernization at the price of environmental disasters such as the pollution of the air as well as the rivers among others. I plan to shed new lights on how to solve these problems as Koreans are now faced with the task of harmonizing the Confucian communitarianism of our traditional society with the modern libertarianism of the Western society. Some of them say that we have to recreate the Western modernity on the basis of our tradition, and some of them say that we have to keep alive our tradition on the basis of the Western modernity. Others say that we have to follow either postmodernity respecting difference among one another from the viewpoint of
Post-structuralism, or the ‘autonomous movement’ from the point of the Spinoza-Marxism. Now, some South Korean philosophers accept the theory of J. Habermas and J. Rawls, but others embrace the theory of A. MacIntyre, M. Sandel, and C. Taylor in order to synthesize the new tradition and modernity after 1987. Of course, there is also an attempt to solve the problem of modernization from the standpoint of Post-Marxism and Spinoza-Marxism, especially G. Deleuze, and A. Negri. In addition, many South Korean philosophers are seriously discussing this issue in regard to our Confucianism, too. The philosophers inclined toward communitarianism contend that we should not accept the liberalism of the West. They say that the liberalism is not suitable for us because our way of life is essentially based on Confucianism. According to their view, the South Korean society is now more individualistic than any other society, and so we must develop the Confucian communitarianism in order to solve this problem. We must also recreate the Confucian value in the economic sphere as well as the political sphere in order to realize the truly East Asian value. Thus we can see that all these important areas of research have been incorporated in the Korean lab project.
Florin CRĂŞMĂREANU *

Le VIIème siècle byzantin: des homes et des saints

(Patriarbhul și martirul – Ioan cel Milostiv și Anastasie Persanul. Dossiers hagiographiques traduits et commentés par le diacre Ioan I. Ică jr. Sibiu: Deisis, 2018, 424 p.)

Il y a plus d’un siècle, en 1915 plus précisément, le savant russe S.L. Epifanovitch affirmait que « le temps n’est pas encore venu de prouver l’importance littéraire de Saint Maxime » (Epifanovitch 2009, 190). Soixante-dix ans plus tard, un autre éminent exégète de l’œuvre maximien, M. Doucet, estimait que « l’“heure” de Maxime viendra » (Doucet 1985, 155). En effet, on voit dernièrement croître, dans plusieurs perspectives, l’intérêt pour la vie et l’œuvre du Confesseur: on a publié des éditions critiques de ses écrits, on a traduit son œuvre dans les langues vernaculaires; on rédige des monographies au sujet des thèmes fondamentaux de sa doctrine; on organise, du moins annuellement, un congrès international consacré à Maxime – on parle déjà de maximologues –, on bâtit des églises ayant comme patron Maxime le Confesseur, etc. Bref, le temps de Maxime est venu.

Il est vrai que, par comparaison à d’autres Pères de l’Église, la vie de saint Maxime le Confesseur (580-662) est assez bien connue (il existe, dans la littérature de spécialité, deux dossiers concernant l’épisode biographique bien documentés et encore disputés par les exégètes), mais l’on pourrait comprendre mieux l’œuvre et surtout la vie de saint Maxime dans le contexte de l’époque dans laquelle il a vécu, d’où l’on peut apprendre quels ont été ses camarades dans ses combats contre les hérétiques, à quels événements a-t-il assisté, quels ont été les changements majeurs que la société de cette époque-là a subis.


De même, afin de mieux comprendre l’époque, il convient de considérer également l’ouvrage plus récent de Phil Booth, Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and

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Dans la littérature autochtone, l’inlassable professeur de Sibiu Ioan I. Ică jr. s’est proposé de réaliser un vaste ouvrage consacré au VIIe siècle byzantin. Le volume que nous considérons ici, Patriarhul și martirul – Ioan cel Milostiv și Anastasie Persanul/ Le patriarche et le martyr – Jean le Miséricordieux et Anastase le Perse (Dossiers hagiographiques traduits et commentés par le diacre Ioan I. Ică jr., Sibiu, Deisis, 2018), n’est autre que « „le développement de la seconde section”, „Tipuri de sfântenie la sfârșit de lume și început de veac”/ „Types de sainteté à la fin du monde et au début du siècle”, du livre en train de paraître Apocaliptică, sfântenie, mărturisire. Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul și contemporanii săi – epocă, procese, exiluri, și „vieți”/ Apocalyptique, sainteté, confession. Saint Maxime le Confesseur et ses contemporains – époque, procès, exils et „vies” » (Ică 2018, 5). En effet, « la figure prégnante dans le développement au long du VIIe siècle de la doctrine chrétienne à l’Orient, ce fut Maxime le Confesseur, que les historiens modernes considèrent comme „l’esprit le plus universel du VIIe siècle et, probablement, le dernier penseur indépendant parmi les théologiens de l’Église byzantine” (H.G. Beck), „probablement, le seul penseur prolifique du siècle entier” (W. Elert), „le véritable père de la théologie byzantine” (J. Meyendorff) » (Pelikan 2005, 38). Aucune investigation relative au VIIe siècle byzantin ne peut donc marginaliser le rôle fondamental que Maxime a joué dans le cadre de cette époque.


Personne ne doute que le VIIe siècle ait été une période extrêmement tourmentée de tous les points de vue, l’instabilité politique et sociale étaient ressenties dans la vie quotidienne des gens de cette époque-là; qui plus est, « pendant quelques décennies seulement trois empires se sont succédés ici:

s’étendant des Pyrénées et jusqu’à l’Indus » (Ică 2018, 316). On parlerait, peut-être, d’un monde tout différent, si les Byzantins n’avaient pas résisté héroïquement au siège arabe de 717-718 (aidés par de « feu grec »), et que, à l’autre bout de l’Europe, Charles Martel n’ait pas arrêté le tourbillon islamique dans la bataille décisive de Tours/ Poitiers (le 10 octobre 732).

A côté des saints qui donnent le titre de l’ouvrage, deux personnages importants de la période étudiée sont Jean Moschus (Μόσχος) et Sophrone du Jérusalem qui, entre autres, ont été les conseillers théologiques (periti) du patriarche Jean le Miséricordieux. Ils appartenaient au groupe des eukrata (de ἐὐκρατῶς – dans les textes latins, viratus –, terme qui aurait dérivé de ἐὐκράτον, un mets avec de la coriandre et du poivre que les moines mangeaient (Moshu 1991, 175). Dans le texte cité ci-dessus, à la p. 212, n. 1, on dit que « il y avait à l’Ouest du delta du Nil un fameux monastère avec ce même nom, où le saint Maxime le Confesseur s’est réfugié lui aussi ». En effet, dans une lettre adressée à Jean le Cubiculaire, Maxime mentionne un monastère des eukrata (des modérés), près de Carthage (Epistula 12: ad Ioannem cubicularium adversus Severum (datée novembre – décembre 641), PG 91, 461 A; trad. par D. Stăniloae, Scrieri şi epistole bisericeşti şi duhovniceşti/ Écrits et lettres christologiques et spirituelles, Bucureşti, EIBMO, 2012, 99), où, très probablement, il avait habité pendant son séjour au nord de l’Afrique (P. Sherwood suppose que Maxime est arrivé dans le nord de l’Afrique entre 628 et 630). D’autre part, Charles Diehl considère que Maxime a vécu au nord de l’Afrique du moins entre 640-646 (Diehl 1896, 548). De ce monastère, des « modérés » se lient également les noms de Jean Moschus et de Sophrone du Jérusalem, les deux étant appelés, dans plusieurs manuscrits, ἐὐκρατῶς (von Schönborn 2007, 69). Un personnage qui aurait vécu pour quelque temps dans ce monastère apparaît également dans les documents du procès de Maxime, Serge Eukratas (Relatio motionis 6, trad. Ioan Ică jr., 125). On ne connaît pas des données relatives à ce monastère, qui a probablement été fondé à l’époque de Sophrone, qui dirigeait cette communauté, et de Jean Moschus, lorsqu’ils se trouvaient au nord de l’Afrique (Jean et Sophrone arrivent en Alexandrie en 607). La mention que Maxime fait, à savoir qu’il respectait lui aussi les règles de ces moines errants (monachi gyrovagi), qui ont joué un rôle fondamental à cette époque-là, est d’importance.

Le VIIe siècle – celui de l’activité de Maxime, Sophrone, Jean Moschus, Jean le Miséricordieux, Anastase le Perse – „est connu comme le temps où « l’histoire du dogme dans l’Église grecque est fini, [de sorte que] toute ressuscitation de cette histoire est difficile à imaginer » (Harnack). L’esprit de la christianité orientale commence son récit avec le VIIe siècle” (Pelikan 2005, 29). Si ce n’était que pour cette raison – d’ailleurs fondamentale – et il faudrait attendre impatiemment l’impressionnante œuvre annoncée par Ioan Ică jr.
Références


