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Cuvinte cheie: cultura, sens, identitate, patrimoniu, gândire simbolică

Modalități de (re)asumare a identității – recuperarea sensului*

Rezumat

Alunecările/anularea sensului, dar mai ales alunecările de funcție au condus de multe ori la interpretări eronate ale unor acte culturale, dar și la renunțarea mai mult sau mai puțin voită la o serie de elemente ce țineau de o moștenire culturală străveche. Redescoperirea sensului va conduce la conservarea elementelor aparținând patrimoniului material și imaterial. Considerăm astfel, că recuperarea sensului va permite găsirea acelor modalități de a trăi împreună, de a-l înțelege pe celălalt prin toate diferențele sale, implicit de a te înțelege pe tine și de a învăța (re)asumarea identității. Prima parte a studiului își propune să abordeze sub formă de sinteză teoriile legate de rolul gândirii simbolice în încercarea de reactualizare a sensului actelor culturale. Întoarcerea la simbol și la sistemele de semnificații pe care le presupune înseamnă posibilitatea de redescoperire permanentă a identității.

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* This material intends to tackle firstly the concepts with which one will work in subsequent case studies operating under the same issue: (re)assuming identity – an action required for the preservation of the elements of cultural, material and immaterial patrimony. The text is a synthesis of certain theories related to the manner in which man is situated within the contemporary social and cultural reality. Fragments from this text were published in the newspaper “Lumina”, 22 December 2017, under the headline *Bucuria colindatului în Maramureș (The Joy of Caroling in Maramureș)*.

Key- words: *culture, meaning, identity, heritage, symbolic thinking.*

Means Of (Re)assuming Identity – Recovering Meaning

Summary

Alteration or invalidation of meaning, but especially the alteration of the functions, often led to misinterpretations of cultural acts and also to the abandonment of a series of elements belonging to an ancient cultural heritage, more or less deliberately. The rediscovery of meaning will lead to the preservation of elements belonging to material and immaterial heritage. Thus, we consider that the rediscovery of significance will allow us to find ways to live together, to understand the other through all its differences, implicitly to understand yourself and to learn (re) assuming identity. The first part of the study aims to approach in a synthesis, theories related to the role of symbolic thinking in the attempt to update the meaning of cultural acts. The return to the symbol and to the significance systems which they imply could be seen as a the possibility of permanent re-discovery of identity.

Means Of (Re)assuming Identity – Recovering Meaning

The return to cultural values to (re)assert identity is necessary due to the fact that people are defined first and foremost through the inherited cultural patterns, which denotes, in A. Schutz's conception, "all those particular valorizations, institutions, orientation and direction systems (such as habits, rules, laws, common practices, folk traditions, etiquette, models) which characterize any social group at any moment in its history". (apud Gheorghiu 2004: 277)

In order to recover one's identity one needs to get as close as possible to the profound meanings of culture, both particular and universal, which can rediscover those elements that are part of the deep structure of the evolution of a human being?

In the context of globalization, at the end of the XX Century and the crossing into the next millennium, the need to accept the existence of different cultures appeared, along the need to leave the possibility of real exchanges amongst these open. Interculturalism and multiculturalism, focusing on the dialogues between cultures and civilizations through the assumption of diversity, as well as of unity in diversity, have become major requirements of the time we live in. As a matter of fact, all these concepts have become commonplace in all studies which focus on the manner in which one needs to understand the cultural reality of today's world.

Most research on the phenomenon of globalization insist on the fact that contemporary man is a *plural, diverse subject*, while at the same time being a unity in diversity, a being who assumes reality, yet who does not relinquish mystery. The manner in which human existence has evolved is the result of a historical evolution which has always been based on the specificities of various cultures, fact which most often includes national identities as the defining element. The diversity of cultures rightfully represents a reality within which the human being constantly defines and redefines its nature as creative being, as well as conservative being.

Levi-Strauss considered that "authentic identity is a function of the relation between societies and cultures, not a consequence of isolation and withdrawal." (apud Gheorghiu 2004: 277). Thus, in the modern world, understanding oneself means relating to the Other, the border does not separate but unite. *Authentic identity* implies transformation; it does not entail stagnation.

What we propose is a hermeneutic attempt on the cultural phenomenon, an attempt to discover from the inside those elements which caused the preservation of certain elements, as well as the adaptation of certain structures to the new patterns generated by the changes in the individual's relation with the World. It is necessary to reconstruct discursive structures and understand their manner of constructing and reconstructing as text within

the new conditions.

These communication relations multiplied along the evolution of mankind and societies, and identities are defined mainly within the manner of communication. Present day world is in search for itself; it is in a constant move between unity and diversity, between assuming multiple identities and the elements which have the ability to unite, not to separate. This permanent question about who one is, constitutes – we believe – the main mechanism of integration, achievement and awareness of unity without affecting diversity.

Rediscovering meaning will lead – we consider – to the preservation of those elements belonging to the immaterial patrimony, as well as those of material patrimony, because they will keep the motivating elements, the sense without which nothing can withstand the passing of time. In sense we find meaning and meaning is hidden in sense. In order to really discover meaning, we have to correctly identify the specific forms of significance/communication; it is a law applied by all researchers who study the communication phenomenon. The communication process has always been a complex one, the achievement of the semantic transfer which will enable understanding being the most important. We always have to pay attention to the manner in which every society in its historical evolution, as well as within the actually complicated process of interaction between cultures, chooses its significances.

Every society is characterized by the various ways of representing reality; all these are built over time in a specific code which is capable of defining that TO BE. Building such a framework makes communication between the members of that community possible, even though certain data change along the way, the general framework of the code makes communication possible. Of all the inherited significances and behaviours passed down along generations, only some are accepted, building in time significant ensembles which define a specific.

It is obvious that myths, beliefs, habits, elements of folk art etc. are not mere *products* of a well-defined moment; on the contrary: they must be seen as a *process*. Any process can lead to the occurrence of certain slips in meaning, sometimes even losses of meaning. Interpretation, which takes into account all aspect, especially the implications of the transformations cultural interaction brings about, is the one which has the power to rediscover the *discursive chain*, truly making communication possible in time and beyond time, as we stated in the paper *Simbolica riturilor de trecere (The Symbolism of Rituals of Passing)*. In other words, today it is compulsory to rediscover ourselves, to look for ourselves within the elements which seem to no longer belong to us, because we no longer understand those fragments of meaning; this action will allow us to learn the (re)assumption of an identity. In order to achieve this type of reading of the cultural phenomenon, beyond that which evolution means, we are not allowed to forget the significance of symbols, of ritual and ceremony acts, of mental and behavioural structures. The return to the symbol and to the significance systems it requires, means the possibility of permanent rediscovery of identity; and this is so because “symbols have not only expressive value, as with the simple semantic level, but also a heuristic value, because they provide universality, temporality and onto-

logical force for understanding oneself'. (Ricoeur 1998: 49)

Assuming – not accepting – identity is highly important; without it the comprehension of such a complex phenomenon is not possible. Asserting identity has the power to invalidate the rupture and its effect is the active involvement in the life of a global society, reasserting affiliation to an ensemble; as we well know, losing one's identity leads to the disaggregation phenomenon.

The celebration and the festive, in its various forms of manifestation, can reveal the manner in which modern man relates to his own identity. In this context, assuming identity would mean a conscious relating to a system of values, beliefs, an (at least) periodical (re)actualization of the system of mental and behavioural codes which differentiate him and at the same time frame him in an ensemble.

Even though today we can no longer really speak about the same features of the manner in which man relates to the celebration and the festive, we will agree with M. Eliade who stated that "symbols swarm within the dullest of existences, the most <<realistic>> man lives from images /.../, symbols never disappear from the psychological actuality: they can change their appearance; their function remains the same." (Eliade 1994: 20)

Contemporary man feels the need of sense; most often he defines himself as a pragmatic being; in his permanent search for sense, which no longer has the same features of logic as the once-useful, sometimes man loses the connection with that creative side of his. He becomes captive within the walls of a utilitarianism, which requires the obtaining of certain mainly material advantages from anything, he becomes lonely. Despite all these, even of not all the time, modern man gives himself the right to step outside the quotidian rhythm, of empiricism, and enter into a different state. No matter if he assumes the new condition entirely or partially, we discover in his case as well the same joy of (re)discovering the feeling of belonging to a reality, a completely different one than the one from which he just came.

In this contexts, man relinquishes the individual, the particular and re-becomes part of an ensemble, and rather unconscious than aware, "all actions achieved in a structured space and time are immediately qualified symbolically and functions as structural exercises through which practical ownership of fundamental patterns is constituted", according to Bourdieu's formula. (Bourdieu 2000: 120)

The great collective celebrations of modern man, such as festivals for instance, in their tendency of becoming rituals, which is quite obvious actually, bear the role of ensuring the rebirth of social relations and the need to communicate. The effect of the ritual is that it establishes a new reality which creates the premises for the reconstruction of the symbolic system and has the capacity to generate substantial changes at social and institutional level. "It is only up to modern man, we would say, <<to reawaken>> this inestimable treasury of images that he carries within; to reawaken the images in order to contemplate their purity and acquire their message." (Eliade 1994: 24)

During these ritualized public meetings every subject succeeds to become aware – to a larger or smaller degree – of his role in relation to the others through the symbolical

appropriation of the role of the other as well. These collective celebrations facilitate the communication between I and the Other, as well as between I and Myself. Starting from this idea, we will agree with the statement according to which “the symbolic designates the common denominator of all the means of providing sense to reality. [...] The symbolical represents the universal mediation of the spirit between us and reality; the symbolical wants to express above all the non-immediateness of our apprehension as regards reality.” (Ricoeur 1998: 18)

The symbolic efficacy is visible, we consider, within these contemporary public meetings. We witness the same type of idealized representation of the community and of institutions. The actors do not communicate but rather *communicate themselves*, build images. Nothing is gratuitous, and we can find numerous elements which prove the existence of profound symbolic structures. “Symbolical memory is the process through which man not only repeats his past experience but he also reconstructs it. Imagination becomes a necessary element of true memories.” (Cassirer 1994: 79)

Shows, excesses, wasting money, food, embellishments, energy – all cause disorder, lead to a symbolic death, the purpose being regeneration, rejuvenation, annulment of the dull and the monotonous. As it had been mentioned before, modern man lives *between celebrations*. Myths and symbols, even though *camouflaged* (Eliade) succeed in bringing modern man back in the proximity of meaning.

“Elements of the festive: the embellishment, the colour, the pompous, the gifts, the ceremony, the grandiloquent speech, the common meal are not gratuitous inventions, nor are they phantasms, but forms of language and behavioural codes widely experienced, meant to project the human cell in the order of the myth. Any initiation and passage ritual means reintegration or location into the cosmic existence.” (Ursache 2014: 30)

Not only festivals and public meetings are the topic of discussion in this context, but also celebrations such as Christmas, Easter, as well as ceremonies of family life, the manner in which present-day man understands to perform or not certain ritualistic gestures. Excessive embellishment of the house, buying new clothes, expensive gifts, food in excess, lights etc. for Christmas, for instance, prove to be symbolic gestures, rhythms, objects which correspond to the being’s need to communicate with the sacred, still very active in Maramureş. All these are signs of the *state of exceptionality* in which one enters. In this context we discover still active that function of the ritual defined by Pascal Lardellier as “dynamic vector which articulates two temporalities: a utopian one and one actualized by the ritual and which mainly benefits from a sacred load. Due to the fact that the principles for establishing the rhythm and the repetition also participate in the transformation of the ritual as social practice into a symbolic practice.” (Lardellier 2009: 108-109)

During celebration days man rediscovers his need to imagine, and imagination gives him the right to relinquish horizontality and to get in touch with verticality. Assuming Gilbert Durand’s theory, we will state that “symbolic thinking readjusts the balance”. (Durand 1999: 22)

Reciting of carols, receiving carolers, sitting round the table offering gifts, returning

the carol etc., for instance, become ways of active participation in a symbolic reality, by assuming certain roles and implicitly certain masks. We thus witness a true initiation ritual, which transforms the individual from a social being into a religious one, capable of receiving messages, as well as sending them. “The celebration appeals to a new sincerity. It uncovers unused possibilities. It helps man to discover himself by means of the mask he sets upon himself. Man disguised in his character has access to a new feeling of his existence in the universe through the awareness regarding the functions within the social ensemble. Nobody here is self-sufficient; everyone affirms themselves in cooperation with the others.” (Gusdorf 1996: 75)

Thus the symbol still has the power to determine modern man to go beyond the limitations of his own being, a narrow and estranged being, and to (re)learn affiliation; the symbol becomes capable of revealing the solidarity between the structures of human life and the cosmic ones, and open man up for the other cosmoses.” (Chevalier; Gheerbrant 1994: 25)

It is very true that that anxiety generated by the *contradiction between unity and uniqueness* specific to modern man, so beautifully defined by Constantin Noica (see Noica 1992), is visible, yet it is overpowered by the need to become part of the family again, part of the people, the community to which he belongs during this period. Very often we also witness forms of *fake game*, in the formulation of the same author.

In this context we will bring into discussion the desire to learn as many carols as possible, which sometimes is even an obligation, highly present in Maramureş. Not being able to respond to one carol with another is often viewed in this part of the country as shameful, and this is so because not being part of the *game* would mean to render it void, to assume the position of the one who attracts disorder. *Thanking* for the carol and returning the carol by transforming every member of the group/collectivity from visited to visitor plays the role of amplifying the effect of the message and/or the wish contained within the text and the rhythm of the carols, not letting it get lost/wasted. This becomes similar to getting and offering gifts, a type of symbolic exchange which, beyond the simple desire of not being the lesser one, also has the role of invalidating the ruptures and transforming a simple unit into alliances capable of making the individual stronger, of regenerating him.

We will agree with Roger Caillois who said that “excess does not only just accompany the celebration constantly. It is not a mere epiphenomenon of the agitation it stirred. It is necessary for the success of the celebrated ceremonies; it participates in their holy virtue and contributes like them to the renewal of nature or society” (Caillois 1997:111) We thus cannot speak about a total assumption of the sacred; many gestures and behaviours occurring during these moments are only results of habit, yet repeating them year after year, very often consciously pushing the limits of the spectacle, gives us the right to speak about entering into a different state, about the need for a rupture, yet which does not have a negative effect but a positive one, the result being death and rebirth – totally assumed or not.

Contemporary man, conscious or less so, exists the limitations of space and quotidian time and re-learns to communicate with that which is beyond the immediate, the visible; he

re-becomes a *homo symbolicus*, by repeating certain gestures, through the contact with various foods, by performing certain actions etc. “Reason is a very unsuitable term for understanding the patterns of man’s cultural life in all their richness and variety. All these patterns are symbolical ones. That is why, instead of defining man as an *animal rationale*, we should define him as *animal symbolicum*. We thus can designate his specific difference and can understand the new path open to man – the path to civilization.” (Cassirer 1994: 45)

Assuming the role of judge in a play whose parts he knows, firstly has that power to render the quotidian void, making it witness to some messages which come from a world which no longer belongs to his individual nature, it brings him back in contact with the collectivity, the family, even with strangers. All elements have the power of supporting the fact that under the appearance of a gratuitous spectacular and of an intentional (or not) excess, certain profound significances of caroling, of the celebration are still hiding. Thus we will once more agree with M. Eliade who stated that: “the life of modern man quivers with half forgotten myths, fallen hierophanies, decommissioned symbols. The uninterrupted desacralization of modern man has spoiled the content of his spiritual life, yet it did not crush the matrices of his imagination: an entire mythological waste lingers in the weakly controlled areas.” (Eliade 1994: 22)

Through the celebration and the festive one can still discover modern man’s need – whether verbalized or not – of belonging to a community; one can still find ways of representing solidarity. The celebration and the festive play the role of not simply restoring behavioural or mental models, but also analyzing the norms which define present-day society. Roger Caillois also observed: “no matter how different we imagine them or they may appear, united in one season or spread throughout the year, celebrations seem to fulfill an analogous function everywhere. They represent a break in the obligation to work, liberation from the limitation and servitudes of the human condition: these are the moments when one lives the myth, the dream.” (Caillois 1997: 137) This “freedom” modern man assumes every now and then saves him from himself, rediscovers his power to imagine: “having imagination means seeing the world in its entirety; because the power and purpose of Images reside in the fact that they reveal all that remains refractory to the concept. This is how we explain why the man who <<lacks imagination>> losing his freedom and crumbles – torn from the profound reality of life and from his own soul.” (Eliade 1994: 25)

In this context, along other great thinker (Cassirer, Jung, Durand, Eliade etc.), we speak about the *biological role of imagination*, and to an equal extent about modern man’s “disease” generated by the intentional (or not) surrender of the symbolic function. “The socio-historical balance of a given society would be nothing other than a constant <<symbolic achievement>>, and the life of a culture would be made up of these diastoles and systoles, more or less slow, more or less fast, depending on the perception these societies have about history. Just as psychiatry applies a symbolical rebalancing therapy, we could here conceive that pedagogy – deliberately based on the dynamics of symbols – may become a true social psychiatry, very precisely establishing collections and structures of images for a given society, which it requires for its evolutionary dynamism. In a century of technical

acceleration, a tactical pedagogy of the imaginary appears as more urgent than the slow advancement of the Neolithic society where rebalancing was carried out by itself, at the slow rhythm of generations.” (Durand 1999: 113)

Acceptance of the symbolical thinking as a main form of staying in touch with the sense, capable of curing mankind of the anxiety of modernity, was very well identified by Charles Taylor (see Taylor 2006), in his work *Etica autenticității (The Ethics of Authenticity)*. Sense in this case saves man from straying, from loneliness. We will agree with the fact that contemporary man's too forced refuge towards individualism, whose consequence is the “flattening out of life” (Taylor), causes ruptures and even chaos. Returning to the mystery, to the ability to create meaning and transmit it, would allow the individual to recover himself.

Borella, in his turn, expressed this very well in one of his papers: “mental knowledge, which is knowledge through sign, is essentially a reflexive knowledge. With this term we would like to indicate the fact that human intelligence is capable of returning upon itself, but it does not necessarily perform this return which could practically be designated through the term reflected knowledge. It possesses only this capacity, permanently, which means it can objectivize in itself precisely because it operates by means of signs which already are, in themselves, reflected objects, and upon which one can return. In other words: which are not dependent (and indiscernible) on the momentary acuity of the intelligence who rationalizes them, but possess, through their cultural origin, a certain permanence of its own” (Borella 1995: 248-249)

It is also he who recognizes the fact that “European thinking [contemporary thinking, we would say, widening the meaning] only seeks to erase from its soul the divine traces left by sacred symbols, even at the price of its own death” (Borella 1995: 251)

A first conclusion is that it is necessary to return to meaning; the rediscovery of the true value of symbolic thinking can be one of the main ways of staying in contact with the real meaning. Understanding the world around us will allow us to communicate with it. Communication is the one that has the ability to reconnect the links and produce knowledge. Understanding generated by knowledge will in time allow a re-learning of the proper way to be, an assumption of identity and a need to keep and further transmit the elements which define us, learning at the same time that we properly belong to the entire world.

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