

THE SYMBOLIC EXCHANGE AND THE SPECTERS OF COMMUNICATION

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The following analysis as a kind of hermeneutics is based upon the notion of symbolic exchange or symbolic metabolism, that is, the exchange of meanings (symbols) which has analogy with the well-known exchange of wares in economical processes. In general every exchange is the substitution of one entity (ware, property, meaning, etc.) for another, and these relations include the links of feed-back. However, every exchange becomes possible only on condition that all the elements of the exchange are in some aspects identical to each other. Therefore, the preliminary condition of every exchange is the identification of non-identical entities. It is quite clear that the elements of the exchange can be leveled only by the force which is implemented by the system as a whole. This force operates as if behind the back of every agent of exchange, and the lines of force generate the field of systemic violence that is the real substance of culture. Every artifact is a clot of systemic violence that exists as a quasi-object.¹

These considerations emphasize the artificial character of human existence, which differs from the natural existence of animals. Despite the fact that man as a creature has natural aspects, his existence as a human being depends on various artificial amplifiers which determine not only behavior, but also modes of thinking. Human behavior is determined by symbolic metabolism, by fluxes of signs and symbols as bearers of meaning. That is why the starting point of the analysis is the description of the inner tensions that ensure the very existence of every system. This analysis is based upon the notion of duality as it emerged in early mythology.

The token of human culture is the destruction of natural (instinctive) programs of behavior, so that precisely the lack of such programs compels the creation of artificial mechanisms. To explore this further, the so called "myths of origin" have to be examined. According to these myths, the world came into existence due to the dismemberment of the huge body of a mythical "First Man". The limits of that body before the dismemberment coincided with the limits of the universe; that body was in a way the world in a state of yet undivided totality. The next period, the state of the divided totality, gives rise to the mechanisms of integration that unite the uncoordinated parts, and it is this integration that becomes the matter of human history.

One can interpret the mythological topos of dismemberment as the disarrangement of natural programs of vital activity. Whatever the truth

of this it remains the case that the artificial mechanisms of adjustment need some basic patterns of structural unity, and these were really found in sexual order. Indeed, the disarrangement of the programs of natural sexual behavior after the emergence of culture provokes the redoubling, or rather, the bifurcation of the natural sexual order. In addition to disarranged natural patterns of sexual behavior, within the limits of culture begin to function also symbolic patterns that do not coincide with their natural prototypes. The consequence of the implementation of the sexual orders is that the duality of the sexes is reproduced as the duality of Being itself.

In this way the empirical duality of the sexes is made a cosmic principle, and becomes the paradigmatic symbolic matrix of all dualisms in the world. There thus comes to exist a rule that is able to join the heterogeneous, unlike poles of this dual structure. Indeed, every metabolism is possible only on condition that the entities to be exchanged are at the same time in some aspects different and in some aspects identical. This claim means the suppression of rigid duality, that is, the abolishment of the incompatibility of the entities to be exchanged. In other words, one unlike pole has to be expressed through another. It is necessary that they should be homogenous, materially equal, or rather, homogenized. This object can be achieved by the reduction of one unlike pole into the direct opposite of another.

The process of such a reduction has to be examined in the course of the interpretation of the second mythological archetype that appertains to the “myths of the origin” – the symbol of nutrition and digestion. This symbol is even more ancient than the archetype of the dual sexual order as the paradigmatic matrix of the cosmic framework. The archetype of nutrition and digestion is based upon the opposition of “entry” and “outlet”, so that the food to be digested secures the unity of these opposites. As a result, the unavoidable duality of sexes as unlike poles is replaced by the indissoluble relation of elements of exchange. The unity of opposites (the archetype of nutrition and digestion) is superimposed over the incommensurability of the unlike poles (the archetype of the dual sexual order), and assures homogenization. This “centrism” gives birth to the transcendental subject of all meanings.²

Henceforth duality as the cosmic framework is mediated by a third member which is neither the first member, nor the second, but unites both. In the end the duality is really suppressed, and it turns into a quasi-duality, or rather, a monistic unity. The monistic (quasi-dualistic) model of a system secures the exchange, and puts in good order not only sexual relations, but also social ones. This model becomes right away the basic pattern of abstract thinking. It is pointed out that the historical development of the principle of violent monism can be described as the metamorphoses of “centrism” and as the appearance of the general equivalence of the symbolic exchange.

It is also the process of unification, the propagation of the total power of pure quantity. In any case, it is always the identification of non-identical entities. But the financial and informational fluxes are only aspects of social exchange which is also impossible without the identification of non-identical entities, since every exchange tries to be an equivalent one. The identification of non-identical entities can be based only upon systemic violence that destroys the peculiarity of local cultural archetypes. That is why the expansion of the

area of social exchange means the leveling of national limitations of culture with the help of systemic violence which thus turns into a constituent one³.

Briefly, all the “cells” of society and culture prove to be saturated with violence as the “ether” of specific “systemic effects”. There is no social exchange without the violent identification of non-identical entities, and there is no culture without constituent violence as well. Therefore, this systemic violence has to be shaped and canalized. Moreover, the human mind itself functions only within the complicated artificial symbolic frameworks that constitute the so called perceptive and categorical lattices. Accessible reality is always mediated through these lattices and such a mediation shapes both the thinking and behavior of every individual within the limits of local culture.

From this point of view the evolution of philosophical thinking is the sequence of various models of totality, it being known that their variety depends on both the structure of the highest entity and the mechanisms of mediation between the elements of the totality and the unifying center. So, the history of philosophy in a way reveals its essence as the shaping of the models of totality that always has a center and margins. The paradigm of “centrism” was explicitly analyzed by Martin Heidegger who described it as the onto-theo-logical constitution of metaphysics.⁴ Such a “centrism” entirely embraces the “metaphysical epoch” which gives birth to the essential addition – “ego-logy” – as the consequence of European subjectivism. As a result, metaphysics turns into onto-theo-ego-logy and represents the archetype of culture as “centrism”.

This archetype presupposes the existence of many levels which have one and the same structure: a center that is surrounded by the marginal elements. The relations between the elements are suppressed and replaced by the relations of every element to the center. It is a very peculiar model of the whole and the part, although it is usually considered to be universal. The thesis of its universality has a special meaning, the more so as the evolution of “centrism” leads to an utterly different model. Strictly speaking, “centrism” describes a certain organization of the multiplicity of some elements.

Indeed, the unity or totality subordinates to itself all separate entities and in a way precedes them. It is just this model of unity that shapes the first steps of philosophical thinking that is only one level of “centrism”. The primitive forms of philosophical thinking are in search of the “center” of totality. The elements of this totality are beings whereas the “center” as the fetish of the whole, as the incarnation of the unity proves to be the embryonic form of the notion of Being. For that reason, the so called “ontological difference” (M. Heidegger) goes back to the starting point of philosophy as a specific mode of thinking. The “ontological difference” describes the structure of “centrism” as the standard form of internal differentiation.

The concept of Ëoãïð means the complication of this differentiation, since Ëoãïð is the model of unification (“ ëääääé ” means “to gather”, “to collect”, so that Ëoãïð means namely “gathered-together”). The posterior evolution of “centrism” results in the Christian synthesis of “Athens and Jerusalem” and in the rise of European subjectivism which was inspired also by the influence of some Gnostic trends.⁵ The very notion of the subject as a translation loan word (it exactly corresponds to the Greek ððïêâéïáíïí) emphasizes the central position of this new fetish of totality. However, these characteristics can be

applied only to a so called transcendental subject which does not in any way coincide with an empirical one. Transcendental and empirical subjects are connected by the principle of self-similarity, so that the empirical subject reproduces in miniature the structure of the transcendental one.

The very limits of every culture and therefore the monolithic unity of cultural norms and imperatives are conditioned by their paradoxical “local universality”. The peculiarity of the symbolic frameworks does not lay obstacle to their functioning as sufficient amplifiers of human properties and capacities. The thing is that every local set of symbolic frameworks engenders the complete and therefore the viable human type, although it corresponds to the particular matrix of generative patterns. The “completeness” means here the admission of the fact that almost every local culture is able to produce not the fragment of a man, but a whole man – otherwise the culture under consideration is lacking vitality and is doomed to failure and death. This is why the history of culture is the sequence of attempts to overcome such a localism.

To be sure, the first of all the numerous attempts to suppress the peculiarities of local culture have to be mentioned. The methods of such a suppression are not too diverse and they usually consist in the compulsory submission of the multiplicity to a certain normative model of unity. It is easy to understand that submission to the “imperial” totality needs a violence which can destroy the local peculiarities of all the cultures to be united. That is why deconstruction as the slogan of postmodernism is always a kind of destruction of cultures as elements of future globalism. All cultures have to be reduced to the same denominator as the “raw material” of an “imperial” totality. The type of totalization depends on the preferred model of global unity that nonetheless remains “imperial”, since it remains “quasi-dualistic,” as was stated above.

Violence as the constitutive element of totalization may be both covert and manifest, so long as it is obvious that the identification of non-identical entities can only be violent. Early attempts to create “imperial unity” looked like wars, whereas late attempts hide the violence under the cloak of allegedly non-violent ideology. The interchange of violence and non-violence generate the symbolic surroundings of human existence that is always penetrated with lines of force, even if they are imperceptible. Just these lines of force give rise to the perceptive and categorical lattices that mediate every contact of man with reality itself. In other words, the sensual images and the conceptual frameworks of thinking are constituted by violence that is yet to be revealed. Indeed, the coincidence of image and notion is the unity of non-identical elements, that is, the identification of non-identical entities with the help of violence.

According to the proposed approach, culture as an artificial being is considered to be a multidimensional organic totality. Moreover, such an interpretation presupposes that every culture always has various feed-back inner links. This is why culture as a network gives birth to some specific phantoms or ghosts as the result of its systemic construction. Culture as a multidimensional system is in principle invisible or, in broader terms, supersensual because of its multidimensionality. Nevertheless, it modifies and regroupes some its internal relations, and they become in a way condensable. The loops, knots, intersections, superpositions, branchings and ruptures of the relations within the “body” of culture appear in the form of spectral quasi-

objects. Thus, the multidimensional system is invisible as a whole, but it becomes apparent, easily reveals its multidimensionality, although only in the reduced form that belongs to three-dimensional space.

However, the quasi-objectivity of three-dimensional spectral images creates an illusion of dense corporeity which allegedly does not differ from the solidity of material things. The whole point of this thesis is that apparent phantoms are manifestations of deep and invisible “systemic effects”. From this point of view every form of communication is penetrated with “systemic effects”, a corporeal representation of immaterial relations. Just the translucent condensation of these relations successfully imitates self-efficiency and opacity. Only the analysis of the main phantasmal phenomena allows advantage to be taken of the optical effects on the surface of culture.

And what is more, culture as the sphere of an artificial being is always accompanied with spectral phenomena. In the first place here I mean the spatial aspects of culture. Hence, in general culture deals with a reduced form of the modified and regrouped internal relations of any totality. Such an approach paves the way to the exposure of a hidden, but basic framework that constitutes the artificial being of every culture. In particular, the specters in the capacity of the constitutive elements of culture are considered to be the shadows of an incorporeity. Every specter of culture is in fact a clot of systemic violence that exists as a quasi-object. According to this understanding, the specters of culture are steady and opaque day-specters in contrast to the subtle and flickering night-specters of myths, legends, fancy and fiction.

So, provided culture is subordinated to the principle of the identification of non-identical entities, all the kinds of symbolic metabolism become of the same type. Not only language, but all the symbolic fluxes of money and information are penetrated with the same systemic violence that makes them interchangeable. The framework of systemic violence is considered to be the basic pattern of human behavior that is guided by violence in the form of an imperceptible suggestion.

The presence of violence on the level of ideology reveals the hidden dimension of mental reality as a whole. As a result, the development of philosophical and religious thought from mythology and polytheism to Plato’s theory of ideas and monotheism can be interpreted as the regrouping of elements and the emergence of “imperial” totality (“centrism” in postmodernist terms).⁶ Both the Platonic idea and the early images of a monotheistic God prove to be saturated with violence, since they are a “subsummation”, the identification of non-identical entities. This hidden violence breaks to the surface only from time to time, the more so, as the following development (especially in Christianity) led to the project of the overcoming of every violence. The deconstructivist strategy is only an irrecognizable aspect of that global project which, of course, by no means coincides with the Christian one.

The deconstructivist strategy highlights the peculiarities of the globalist project under consideration, since the thorough analysis of this project is indicative of the existence of its impressive precedents. The situation is not altered by the fact that the various attempts to level all local cultures have not necessarily assumed the name of deconstruction. In spite of everything they were a real destruction as the starting point of the unification to come. For

instance, Plato's theory of ideas presupposes the deconstruction of local mythologies that divide humankind into various cultures. The diversity of mythological images was replaced by the universality of abstract ideas which are independent of place, time and man (this independence is simply the essence of abstractness in Plato's model of boundless universality).

From this point of view the transition from polytheism to monotheism introduces only another model of unification. Perhaps, the evident parallelism between philosophical and religious models of unification that are preceded by de(con)struction as purification and leveling might hurt hardened dogmatists to the quick. Nevertheless, it reveals the fact that de(con)struction even in its embryonic forms always plays a double game. De(con)struction is never an end in itself, it is always crowned by the creation of a new totality, it is known that this totality is thrust on the "leveled" social groups, so that the real structure of the unity to come remains hidden. The parallelism between philosophy and religion is reproduced also in the historical development that follows, so that, for instance, both ancient atomism and Christian teaching on the Holy Trinity are possible generative patterns of the totality which emerges after de(con)struction.

The imperative of the "purification of mind" that goes back to Francis Bacon culminated in the concepts of Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Marx. According to these concepts ideology had to be subjected to severe criticism. It is worth mentioning that the main goals of Edmund Husserl, Claude Levi-Strauss and Jacques Derrida are unquestionably deconstructivist. In Derrida's case, this thesis needs no further comment. As regards Husserl and Levi-Strauss, it is quite enough to point out that the concepts of "phenomenological reduction" and "bricolage" which imply the de(con)struction of the ideological phantoms that are mediators in the contact with the alleged "original reality" – with the level of phenomenological evidence and the initial structure of the mind as the respective desired goals. Whatever reality these procedures embody, they turn into the Procrustean bed: that is, the machine that shapes the identification of non-identical entities.

Thus, the deconstructivist strategy in general is by no means a novelty. On the contrary, nowadays we have to deal only with a certain type of the deconstructivist strategy that is neither more nor less than the concomitant effect of globalism. Such a strategy destroys all local ideological and religious patterns and replaces them with the universality of common-places which are universal only because of their banality. Within the limits of this approach the syntheses of ideologies prove to be simply an amorphous and insipid mish-mash of ideological wreckages that have succeeded in repulsing the attack of de(con)struction only because of their triviality. Such a result is not a real synthesis at all, it is rather the pounding of previous stable ideological forms that is not concluded by the arrival of a new strictly articulated structure. The absence of structure as an "original reality" is the result of a leveling which cannot create the inner differentiation of the ideological unity to come.

In this respect the problem of "original reality" remains the only salvation after de(con)struction, when the ground is slipping from under our feet. Undoubtedly, this salvation is illusory, since every "original reality" is the outcome of a local culture. This discussion explicates the meaning of Derrida's

neographism “differAnce” that is destined for the substitution of the classical law of sufficient reason⁷. This concept denies precisely the existence of stable ground as an “original reality”. “Original reality” in its turn always expresses the hidden archetypes of a local culture, but their advantage over the archetypes of other local cultures yields to no explanation.

In a case like that all the references to “human nature” become ineffective, since the archetypes of local cultures form the hard kernel of ideology. The firmness of culture means simply the existence of some threshold that divorces the realms of culture and nature from each other. Every attempt to cross the threshold involves irreversible destruction and reveals the limits of the “elasticity” of the human mind. In other words, the syntheses of both ideologies and cultures need a more tender and more accurate approach than the de(con)structivist leveling. Otherwise the very basis of human existence proves to be under threat of a final abolishment. According to the analysis above, we have to deal here with a new configuration of systemic violence that determines the perceptive and categorical lattices and therefore only shapes the syntheses of cultures. This configuration remains quasi-dualistic and still goes back to the mythological frameworks of symbolic exchange. Perhaps, the alternative model of deconstruction and the ideological syntheses could be found with the help of the new interpretation of those basic frameworks.

Postmodernism takes a stance against the “centrism” of culture, for this “centrism” has become apparent on all levels. But this stance notwithstanding, the contribution of postmodernism to philosophy consists not only in the mere analysis of “centrism” as a universal phenomenon, but also in the intention of the overcoming of all forms of “centrism”. Irrespective of the postmodernist interpretation of “centrism”, the postmodernist project imbibes many previous approaches. It is not mere chance that the inspiration of postmodernism consists in the pressing appeal to “universalism” and “pluralism” which have to emerge after the overcoming of various “centrisms” of culture. The main target of the postmodernist attack is the concept of subject, especially the transcendental one, so long as it embodies the very spirit of the developed forms of “centrism”.

The by-product of postmodernist intention is the sequence of parallel “centrisms” – “phallogentrism”, “logocentrism”, “phonocentrism” etc. It was emphasized above that phallogentrism characterizes the basic structures of culture. The unity of phallo- and logocentrism is characteristic of the deconstructivist project.⁸ This unity is the generative pattern of a “flaky” totality, in which every level has the same structure. This is why the obliteration of sexual differentiation in the form of phallogentrism involves similar transformations on all levels including the level of social relations. However that may be, only the inversion of the “binary opposition” occurs. The hierarchy is not destroyed, but it becomes more or less deformed. To be sure, the characteristic specters of communication are not destroyed, but they turn into *simulacra*.

The deformation of “centrism” results in the predominance of the mediating links, but not the elements between which the mediation takes place. The principle is not abrogated, but it changes its meaning. The absence of differentiation means that everything is really present in everything, but there is no

difference between the elements of the jumble. In the sphere of such a culture the interdependence of a whole and its parts changes radically. Such culture is diffuse, and it does not recognize the difference between the elements which belong to this culture itself and fragments of alien culture. Such a *lack of immunity* leads to total confusion of cultures, and the problem of communication is unsettled.

Notes

- ¹ See: T.W. Adorno. *Negative Dialektik*. Frankfurt a.M., 1966; idem. *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie // Gesammelte Schriften*. Frankfurt a.M., 1970. Bd. 5; idem. *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit: Zur deutschen Ideologie*. Frankfurt a.M., 1964; idem. *Dialektische Epilegomena // Gesammelte Schriften*. Frankfurt a.M., 1977. Bd. 10(2). See also: Baudrillard J. *L'échange symbolique et la mort*. Paris, 1976; idem. *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe*. Paris, 1979; J.-J. Goux. *Freud, Marx: Économie et symbolique*. Paris, 1973; A. Sohn-Rethel. *Geistige und körperliche Arbeit: Zur Theorie der gesellschaftlichen Synthesis*. Frankfurt a.M., 1970; idem. *Warenform und Denkform*. Frankfurt a.M., 1971.
- ² See: E. Neumann. *Ursprungsgeschichte des Bewußtseins*. Zürich, 1949. See also: A. Pigalev. Pan pan kai ekaston pan: *The scaffolding of dualistic systems behind the scenes of european metaphysics // An international journal of philosophy «Existencia»*. Szeged, Budapest, Münster. 2003. Vol. XIII. Fasc. 1–2.
- ³ See: R. Girard. *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*. Paris, 1978 (avec J. M. Oughourlian et G.Lefort); idem. *To double business bound*. Baltimore and London, 1978; idem. *Le bouc emissaire*. Paris, 1982; idem. *La route antique des hommes pervers*. Paris, 1985; idem. *Quand ces choses commenceront...* (Entretiens avec Michel Treguer). Paris, 1994; idem. *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair*. Paris, 1999).
- ⁴ See: M. Heidegger. *Identität und Differenz*. Stuttgart 1957.
- ⁵ This influence was analyzed, in particular, in the following works: T. Molnar. *God and the Knowledge of Reality*. New York, 1973; idem. *Theists and Atheists: A Typology of Non-belief*. The Hague etc., 1980; idem. *Utopia: The Perennial Heresy*. New York., 1967
- ⁶ It is worth mentioning that M.Heidegger anticipated the postmodernist concept of “centrism” in his anlysis of Plato’s interpretation of the concept of truth; see: M. Heidegger. *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit*. In: M. Heidegger. *Wegmarken (GA 9)*. Frankfurt a.M., 1976.
- ⁷ This problem was touched by J.Derrida rather implicitly; see, for instance: J. Derrida. *L'écriture et la difference*. Paris, 1987.
- ⁸ See: Culler J. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism*. Ithaca (N.Y.), 1982; *Feminism as critique: Essay on the Politics of Gender in Latecapitalist society*. Cambridge, 1987; Lloyd G. *The Man of Reason: “Male” and “Female” in Western Philosophy*. London, 1984.