

Cultural Dialogue and the Pushing of the Boundaries

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Abstract

The main subject of the research looks at the problems of intercultural dialogue. The most important aspect of this dialogue is the «reading of the Other» through his ethnical, sexual or simply human position, in the same manner in which we understand ourselves. This means that this very research will be about the relations of communication between the different cultural traditions, which coexist in one same community. Sometimes, these kinds of relations can be developed by either interpersonal communication or distancing of the two cultures from each other. The distance usually leads to a type of isolating the people from one same cultural environment and are a reason for confrontation and not a dialogue.

The understanding of the dynamics of the cultures depends not on the reconstruction of the past, but on recognition and critique of the past, which is actually present in the contemporary stories. The complexity of the processes of so-called open cultures should be analyzed through the meanings inside the narrative text. We usually ask for the implications that are not pronounced, but are in connection with some passion of freedom.

The main goal of the study is to present the deployment of the senses that are conducted to our origin and are open for further processes of changing during the life. It means investigating the understandings of where we come from and how we can find ourselves in the contemporary culture, beginning with the question: «How can we constitute the identity if we use the meanings that come from the past and make our identification in the present?» Is it so free or a very dependant narration from the position of the subject in the cultural context of his living?

The analysis is based on the narrativity understood as a constitutive impulse of many different spheres such as narrative literature, poetry, film, theatre, television and as an influential element of the religious and philosophical texts as well. The concept of the narrativity implied the analyzing of the symptoms that are its constitutive features: event, process, time, perception, power, representation, subject, sense or absurd, construction or reconstruction of the history.

Our object of analyzing is focused especially on the problems of perception, representation and reception in the sphere of culture that is influenced by presence of different traditions. The study develops specific area of research and rethought of many specific aspects of the mixed cultures, where the problems of integration or isolation are based on living with the others.

Specific meanings of the contemporary works, especially autobiographical works are made by the presence of the historical material, the events that constitute our past life and continue to be influent in the present. Are we free to accept the past and to use the memory in presentation ourselves today, or do we have to accept different norms of everyday life?! Are we inside the land of boundaries, are we divided between too many dilemmas that are made by mixed context in which many ideas coming from the past and are active in the present? Autobiographies are recent versions of the presentation of the past and present life and imply to be scrutinized not as a single, but as a complex version of the narrativity.

I would like to begin my paper with the words of the Greek poet Constantine Cavafy:

Because night has fallen and the barbarians have not come.

And some who have just returned from the border say

There are no barbarians any longer.

And now, what's going to happen to us without barbarians?

They were, those people, a kind of solution.

1. CULTURE. ASPECTS OF ITS UNIVERSALITY AND DIVERSITY

In an attempt to describe the concept of culture, the contemporary, post-modern epoch usually uses the picture of the museum with the goal to present what culture really is in a metaphorical manner. How does culture look like, when described as a museum? The museum represents the entire world in a certain period of time and synchronically unites exhibits from various epochs.

According to Yuri Lotman, there are signs in different languages in use. There can also be instructions which help us how to use those languages. In the museum one may find texts composed by analytics, which describe the exhibition. The museum includes directions of movement and instructions of behaviour of the visitors. The presence of a curator and visitors is not excluded. The museum is a picture of not only the world, but also the culture and the multitude of languages used to present the phenomena of the cultural area where we exist, the semio-sphere. Lotman also claims that, in every living culture lies the mechanism of the languages, of the systems of signs, which tend to represent the phenomena. He speaks of a constant quantitative increase of the languages in the cultural area. This area or semiotic area together with the term bio-sphere, taken from the natural sciences (introduced by V.I. Vernadski) is named the semio-sphere. It mirrors diversity and fills the semiotic space of the culture with a different nature. Nevertheless, they are translatable, but also sometimes, too distant and not possible to translate. Not only are they diverse, but they are also heterogenic and hetero-functional. In one single moment, in the semiotic space of the culture, all of the languages appear to be exactly as they are present in the museum, not unlike the exhibits from various epochs. The presence of the multitude of languages points out to the fact that no single rules of explanation or deciphering are to be used, but rules belonging to various systems. In the synchronic overview of the semio-sphere, numerous languages collide, along with the numerous stages of their development and texts which are created by using numerous languages. All of the above-mentioned facts point out to the concepts of semiotics, as a specific methodology can be of use. However, the concept of norm and/or rule, code which can be used to decode the ruled becomes a more problematic issue by the day.

(Лотман 2000: 185)

Hence, in contrast to these norms, we activate the interpretation as a tool used by the hermeneutic, different methodological approach to the culture, which favours the individual, original approach to explaining the phenomena, leaving the rules behind.

Art itself is no longer accepted as art, based on its own rules, but according to the password «Art is everything that the readers, the viewers, the audience accept and understand as art.» (Iser 1989: 3-30)

It is finally clear that the concepts are far from stable, and are dynamic and shifting. The XX century is the period when the artistic activity is connected not only to the author, but also to the audience. The history of the novel is known, which is written in the native tongue, and for a long time, makes attempts to legitimize itself as art, in the ranks of the known languages of drama, poetry etc. Furthermore, nobody would have bothered to research the activities at the fair, the circus, the street colloquialisms, or the signs on the road, although these became a subject of analysis in the XX century. There is the example of the cinematography, which, in the beginning, was only a marginalized activity, turns into a high art, if not the centre of the culture that is our lives. From here, a fact exists, that the contemporary research cannot focus on the individual languages and phenomena, such as the literature, but only throughout their analyzing throughout comparison, and through their acceptance as «sunk and fit in the semiotic space», where they are in a constant co-relation with this space, which surrounds them. This, once again points out that the role of one language, one individual or one phenomenon is of no importance, but of the *relations* in the complete semiotic space. It is compelling, that the structure of the culture is not in any case symmetric. The translation is really, a basic and useful mechanism of consciousness, which one human being can use to discover its nature. However, the language also represents a boundary, to fully understand the nature of the being. (Starobinski 1999: 24-25)

2. THE MEANING OF THE BORDER

The language itself, used by the individual, points out to the phenomenon of asymmetry and limitation, both the individual and the subject could identify themselves as beings. Martin Heidegger holds that, which is empirically present for perceptive and obvious. R. Decard shows the self-identification as a possibility, whilst for the most problematic and the most criticised is his thesis that the thinking subject is undoubtedly an existent one («*Cogito ergo sum*»). The enlightenment gives the advantage to the powerful subject. Albeit this statement, Heidegger believes that, for the relationship with the world and for the so-called «situation of the subject being thrown out» there can be no exclusion of the relationship between the subject and the Other, the world which surrounds the subject. In the world, the subject faces its past, the pre-structures which define the way it thinks and sees. (Bourdieu 1996: 99)

The enlightening thought is criticised, due to the exclusion of the complicated behaviour of the world to the subject, because it is an ancestor of the relation that the subject has with the entire world and itself. In his study «Eye and Mind», Merleau Ponty, states: «The world is all around me, and not in front of me. I do not see that which envelops me, I live inside it. I am sunk in it» (Merleau Ponty 1993: 121-149). All of a sudden, we see that there are two things present: the subject and the world. There can be no unity, but two separate things, and a border in between them. If we took a look at the concept of the border, we would not be able to speak of the difference between the two areas split by it. On the one side, there is me,

on the other one, there is the world. On the one side, there is the centre, created by the most clearly structured languages, on the other one, there is the margin. On the one side, there is grammar, codification of traditions and legal norms, on the other, non-regularity and anarchy. The self-description of the individuality or of the culture means using of the pronoun «I». It, in the sense of the semiotic individuality, has a materiality, space and time, to the point where it reaches. For that space we use the words «our space», «selfness», «identity». It is defined by the characteristics: culture, harmonic organisation, order. The opposition of this space is the strange, the enemy, the foreign space, the chaotic and the barbaric.

In J.M Coetzee's novel «Waiting for the Barbarians» (1980), whose title refers to the poem «Waiting for the Barbarians» — Cavafy, the philosophy of torture and violence in the relation «Me and the Barbarian» is presented. The otherness is not just dangerous, chaotic and peripheral, but an object of torture, violence and crippling. The novel has a very simple story, used as an allegory for the relation between the centre and the margin, and is called «Empire and Barbarians». In the moment when the Empire and/or the so-called civilization feels that the order is in jeopardy, it activates the concept of barbarism, and it matters not whether they are nomads, herders or fishermen, it constantly insists on interrogation, with the intention of boosting its identity.

According to Stuart Hall, the concept of identity is in a co-relation with the politics of articulation and presentation, with the discursive practices. The novel is focused on the great idea of countering the Barbarians, which tend to bring chaos, and reversibly mirror the chaos of the Empire. Hall claims that, should the identities be affirmed inside the presentation, and not outside of it, then the positions of the Empire and the Barbarians in Kuci's novel are identical. What the Empire puts to use, as a series of cruel actions of human degradation, can hardly be connected to the high achievements of the Empire, no matter how much history, language and culture it can place in its area of existence, answering the questions: «Who are we? Where do we come from?» (Hall 1997: 97). The identity can be formed with the social practice and of changed dialogue. The exchange and the dialogue are practices, which create a certain temporary connection between the individual and the group of individuals. We can approach ourselves through the long way created by the others in the past. Thus, we can create our present thoughts, views, feelings, words and language. Without the symbolic ordering of our own experience with the experience of others, we cannot communicate with the others.

Forming an identity depends on the norms a lot, by which it can be recognized and interpreted as a phenomenon. Therefore, the use of violence in practice, as presented in Kuci's novel, speaks of the absence of communication, exchange of experiences, and recognition. Here, no positive references are present, which can be used to compare «I» and the «Other» as similar, and even equal. Thence, we meet the problem with interpretation and the enormous role of the understanding. The power to recognize the strange and the capability to enter the unknown seems to be one of life's deepest known theoretical and practical problems. The norms of exchange and dialogue always depend on the partners in the dialogue, which may interact, but may also never reach out to each other. It may seem impossible to exit the dominant languages, the culturally created pictures and meanings, if we want to communicate. The process of communication itself is defined by agreement and norm, which would secure the communication, whether it is a language, translation or interpretation that is the topic of discussion.

In the thoughts about oneself and about the others, we shape the identities, based on inherited resources, not free-willingly and the conditions which we would create by ourselves.

Instead of using Lotman's concept semio-sphere, Kaya Silvermann uses the concept «screen» and calls it «dominant fiction». It is something of an obligatory reality. Here, we can find the primordial norms, based on the Sun's movement throughout the sky, the seasons, the anthropological characteristics related to the human body, a man's weight, the vertical posture of the body, which results in the relations: male-female, up-down, right-left, alive-dead, mobile-immobile, hot-cold, as much as the social distinctions of the race, age, class, profession and so on. The «screen» is a collage of pictures, where the visibility and the recognition of the acceptable actions are a condition and affirmation of the existence of an identity. Hence, it is emancipated. That, which does not enter the frames of the «screen», is invisible, erasable, inexistent, or even barbaric and unallowable. (Silverman 1984: 126).

Manfred Frank counters the thesis which radically confirms the identity as a fulfilment, then the theories which define him as an emptiness to be filled, and the theories which operate with the opposition, regulated content of characteristics or absence thereof, characteristics which have to be enforced. He seems to be searching for the romantic model of a subject. Faced with the otherness, he finds self-consciousness to be a predecessor of the consciousness. The ethic moment and the responsibility play an enormous role, when the reflexion of the Other is being derived. He speaks of a so-called «pre-reflexive, interpretative, hypothesis», as an individual foundation, as a consensual horizon, where each «I» is to begin, with the intention of communicating with the other in the process of dialogue, to reach exchange and confirmation of the identities, our own, and that of the Other. It comes to a inter-subjective centre of the culture, where the individual responsibility is emphasized. Together with the individualized subject, Frank accepts the responsibility of creating a social whole and communication. (Frank 1997: 177).

The Bulgarian author Adela Peeva in her documentary «Whose Is That Song?» tries to play with the need of the people who live on the Balkans to massively insist on putting themselves above everybody else in a rather ironical manner. Her plot is extremely engrossing, through connecting of the events which happen to her in Turkey, Bosnia, Albania, Serbia, Macedonia and Greece. These events are connected with the question which she asks the people of this region. Calling upon a same melody, she asks the people in these countries: «Whose is that song?» The melody is the same, and the text of the song varies and functionally differently useable, depending on the conditions. Sometimes it is a love song, sometimes a war march and sometimes it has a patriotic character. In every country all of the representatives, musicians, or normal people, which are interviewed, give the answer that the song is from their country. What seems to be the problem here? There is neither communication whatsoever and reflexion for the Other, nor need to know him/her and attempt to understand him/her. The title of the documentary is a question, «Whose is that song?» The question means creating a relation, a need for communication and interpretation. The answers, according to the film, are always written in stone, closed and definite. They are aimed against the Other, as if the identity is established only by negating the existence of the Other. The film is an entirety of negations of the Other, and in a political and ideological sense, a reflection of an introvert world of the province.

The example of the short story «Black Bird, Yellow Beak and Syncope» by Marija Stankova, is not different, when discussing the discourse, by using the rude, furious vocabulary of the female narrator. She is in a provincial state prison, but is not disappointed and thinks about ways of how to begin the new cycle of ascension, which would bring her to the space «above» the set limitation of the Balkan- which is Europe. The structure is derived as a diary written in a period of 6 days. Every day shows a faze of crossing the line of the new level, which does not satisfy, due to its being introvert, limited and provincial.

According to Radomir Konstantinovikj and his «Philosophy of the Palanka», Palanka is a closed system. It is highly defined by its own introversion, its rules being written in stone, destruction of privacy (everything is public, but kept silent), and with the yearning of the same to be left, but it is always only a yearning, never a success. The female narrator in «Black Bird, Yellow Beak and Syncope» by Marija Stankova, is in an attempt to defeat the marginal position and migrate in the centre (to leave the Palanka). In this attempt, she forgets and leaves out all of the aspects of communication, related to love, friendship and understanding. Her goal is defined by the idea to go forth no matter the cost. In the text, the concept of envy is often manipulated, and is characteristic for the modest and limited provincial consciousness of the individual. The narrator and the main character in this text, in reality of the imaginary space of the text, reaches her so beloved goal, gets all of the highest degrees of education and meets the man, Englishman, with who she would leave for London. However, the relationship with the man who she used to get to the capital of the Republic of Bulgaria, leaves a mark in her. She is pregnant with his child. The new relationship with the Englishman, according to her meaning, should eliminate the entire heritage, which defines her identity as a person from the Balkan. In the end, she murders her child, and thus, ends up in prison, in Palanka. The prison is a metaphor of the consciousness, which is unable to surpass the primitive thoughts, and has remained provincial. The tragedy is obvious. This is where we reach the migration as a concept (Konstantinovikj 2004: 101).

The relation centre-margin is popular in the installation called «Poetics of the Migration: Facing the Separation». In this work, the author Mieke Bal asks the question why some people from the margins decide do leave their lives behind and start over in another, elite sphere, where they can adapt their identity to the new sphere. The installation is composed of the shots where only the face of the person interviewed is shown. These women are mothers of people who have forever left in some western country. The first woman is Gordana Jelenikj from Serbia, the second one Masauda Taieb Medi from Tunis, and the Omoan Armagan from Turkey. The installation is called «Nothing is Missing». The aim is to explain the contribution of the migration cultures to the Europe area, and above that, to understand the weight of the consequences and of the changes of the soul of the individuals who have taken that drastic measure, migration. Why do people from the margin and/or the periphery believe that they must leave behind their affectionate relations, their relatives, friends and habits, their entire foundation of that which makes the everyday life? It represents the faces of three mothers, in their emotional state, shown on their faces, while they speak of the children who have left them forever, the viewer is forced to face their sorrow, horror and fury. The example of this installation is included with the intention of giving an advantage of the viewer, who is capable, as an Other, to understand the emotional state of these women. The attempt to create an installation by focusing on the

face, its gestures, no matter the language, which is often not understandable to the audience, the author of the installation forces the act of visual communication, and interpretation of the concept called «Migration and Separation». The installation is composed of documentary elements, because these women are real, as real as is the act of separation between them and their children. It has an esthetical and political basis in its intentions to explain the consequences of migrations, the disintegrative processes, which leave deep wounds in the individuality of the people, which build an entirely new identity in a new environment. The political and ethical effects of this installation are exceptional, taking into consideration the fact that the ability to perform and the performance, in the theatrical sense of playing a role, such as this one, while we can still see the faces of the mothers, mean a mediated facing the distanced world of the periphery and connecting to it.

3. THE NEED OF THE INTERPRETATION

From the contemporary point of view, various types of research are related to the texts, which belong to culture. Actually, literature is no longer a subject of research in relation to the literatures, but in relation to the role played by the context, from which a literature is derived. Thus, what is researched is in close co-relation with the literature and culture, and the contemporary science focuses itself on the intercultural relations, instead on the inter-literature relations. Hence, a wide area of space is vacated, where an even stronger process of actualizing of the comparative analysis, equally of the culture and literature is possible, which enables us to summarise the cultural studies and the studies of comparative literature.

There is no certain position out of the literary work, which would provide us with understanding of all the meanings incorporated in the work itself. However, the effort to grasp the meanings in art or generally, the human need to find sense in everything is unstoppable. Therefore, the process of interpretation is constantly present: in literature, in culture and in life.

The concept of interpretation or the methodology of hermeneutic is in and unbreakable correlation with the concept of the point of view. In fact, we are always in the constant possession of an individual standpoint, from which we look for a reason for our existence in the culture. Still, culture possesses texts which differ from each other. A real problem is the fact that for the traditional doctrines of Beauty, Truth and Good there can be no rules. Ergo, living in the age of the modernity is defined by the end of the traditional values and the universal principles. The idea of emphasizing a secure position, from which an objective, real manner of announcing can be secured, a real thing or the truth seems impossible. Thus, we find ourselves in the role of an interpretator of the one on the quest of Truth. Consequently, we are surrounded by a large number of theoretical and critical approaches, which can be realized in the canons with the use of power.

Our era is in the state of constant crisis and in the constant search of the theoretical assumptions, in an attempt to create evidence and arguments, and then, by their quick destruction, able to set itself on the quest of a new Truth. This is an era in which the status of the scientific Truth and its application are in constant crisis. Is there a correct interpretation for the contemporary literature, where the meanings are multiplied, and the literature is a plural whole

with a multi-layer structure? We wonder: Is the interpretation in the comparative literature a theoretical or a practical issue?

Paul Ricoeur makes a difference between the types of interpreting by using the terms critical and re-constructive interpretation. He tries to rise above the fact that all meanings are equal in worth, but never claims that there is no plurality in the meanings. Interpreting a literary piece of work, which is included in the borders of literature by the culture, because of the work's complicity stands between the language of the author and the age, the intention of the author, the context, the reality and the reader. Thence, there is a multitude of areas where a literary piece of work is created, and fitly, a multitude of interpretative perspectives, which usually collide, but also may engage in dialogue. (Ricoeur 1974: 27-29)

Encouraging the hermeneutic in the comparative research usually means engaging in a web antinomies, paradoxes and differences. This means that the norms of assessment are in a continuous dynamics, and the criteria of defining the Truth and Worth are shifting. If we take a look at the context that is our lives, we can assume a presence of ambivalence. On one side, the power to norm and the authority of the institutions: state, family and church are demolished, while on the other, alternative institutions are formed, which tend to de-construct, re-construct and construct new kinds of Worth. All of the development lines of the epoch of our lives point out to the fact that the interpretations are not exclusively set as Truth or Worth, except for the case when force or violence is used, in order to be accepted. Nevertheless, what is happening to us is a dogma that whatever happens now roots back to the past. The wholeness of the landscape is filled with many traditional or old things, which are popular time and time again, but in a new manner and represented by a different points of view. The contemporary culture and its landscape cannot be interpreted without the historical background in which it was created.

What is culture generally? It comprises individuals and institutions, practices and discourses, texts and images, which have a symbolic structure. We attempt to interpret them, using a complex kind of methodology of the critical theory, the theory of systems, the hermeneutic, the discourse analysis, the psychoanalysis, the anthropology, the structuralism and the post-structuralism, the semiotics and the analytical philosophy. In fact, the culture is a symbolic encompassing, a product of symbolic processes, a complex organisation of words, gestures, pictures and words.

In an attempt to interpret culture, we analyse her boundaries of intelligibility, her possibilities and ethno-political influences. The realization of the interpretations as theories and the narratives is also a part of culture itself. As much as the piece of art consists of words, gestures, pictures and words, its interpretations consists of the same elements. Culture really is a polemical conception. It searches a stabile and a common base, but is exposed to constant changes of ideas, worth and good. It consists of a high, a low, and also a massive culture. It unites the aspects of everyday life, the normal and the banal, but also the original and the elite. The culture really looks like a conflict of a wholeness of worlds which above all sets itself as a concept in defence of the universal.

Culture is organized through the forms of space and time. Outside of the organization it ceases to exist.

In the spirit of the great debate on the topic of interpretation, and through it, of the Worth and the Truth, as well as the identity, we can see that this concept is really important,

as a process of self-defining, and self-emancipating. Nevertheless, speaking of identity, it is very difficult to talk about its fulfilment of characteristics or its essence. Thus, it cannot bond with the subject in its entirety, central position, and capability of defining its actions. This can concern not only the identity of «I», but also the identity of the Other, defined by the position of «I». Sadly, according to Paul Gilroy, the identity is extremely distanced of any free choice, in the sense of building our own identity (Gilroy 1993: 27). Therefore, we return again to the meaning of the relation «I» and «the Other», understood as history, language, culture and individual, understood as a way of self-presentation in various names.

In the film «Baraka» by Ron Fricke, the wholeness of the culture, and of the world is presented in a perfect manner. The film is a picture of the space of the world presented in a specific way, as a mosaic of various cultures and languages. The picture of the museum which was discussed in the beginning could help us establish a synchronised entirety of peripheral and central parts of the world. Therein lie the most perfect achievements of cultures, like the American and the Japanese, but also the ritual acts of the African peoples, shown with their naked bodies, a specific kind of dance in the ritual and language understandable in the frames of their world. The film consists of consequential fragments related to multiple religions which dominate in this world, the way of their presentation speaks of their connection, although in every religion there is a different kind of code and a relationship with a different god. The wholeness of the culture that is this film also has a diachronic line, that leads from the very beginnings, connected to the white apes as a rare specie, the insides of a volcano, where the magma boils, the historical periods of conflict and destruction, such as the concentration camps throughout Europe. One may also find the human situation of disciplining the movements throughout the working process, as well as the monotone rhythm of the activities such as cigars manufacturing and poultry farming. A part of the tracking shots represent the peripheral worlds of the streets, where the beggars and homeless people live, and then the same ones are used to represent the perfect achievements of the godly temples of numerous religions or the pyramids. The wholeness is really full of languages, created meanings and forms of symbolic production, which speak of the enormous creative potential of man. Finally, the very title «Baraka» is a word, derived from the Sufi (Arabic) language and means «blessing bestowed by a saint».

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