

THE POSTMODERN'S MEN SELF-IMAGE

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Abstract: *The author presents aspects of communicative behaviour in a postmodern era where values no longer have consistency and their selection is made without any criteria. Communicative relations between individuals involve psychical involvement and the gestures, mimicry, voice tone are elements that occur almost unconsciously in the individuals' expressivity. The lack of inhibitions and the assumption of certain “democratic” unconstraint lead to risk waste in hiding the true identity of individuals in communication. Synergologic elements are identified by means of which the real intentions of individuals belonging to different cultures can be observed. They are the consequence of herd mentality and different behavioural remanence.*

Keywords: *postmodernism, communication and psychology, synergology, mentality, culture and civilization*

1. Postmodernity. We do not intend to plunge neither into the problematic nor the history of postmodernism, but we will make some remarks required by the clarification of certain aspects pertaining to contemporary education. The closeness between a concept and a reality can determine serious wonders if the impact brings about the idea of incongruence. Education builds a canonical tradition and the educational systems are among the most rigorously structured and reluctant to changes. Through its aspects of manifestation, postmodernism deconstructs, breaks patterns, and maintains uncertainties and the relativity of values. Two apparently dichotomist situations have come to coexist, to weaken intransigencies and to adjust opinions. Lipovetsky (2002) considers that „*postmodernism is characterized by a loss of benchmarks*”. An education without benchmarks, without models and vision has no existential legitimation. What type of education is sustained by a postmodern society, animated by different tendencies despite certain globalizing intensions? The contemporary world has too little moments of constancy. Not only is the future under the threat of “shock” (Toffler, 1973) but so is the present (maybe even the image of the past). The electronic means of communication link voluntarily informational desires in the “global village”, determining a transfer of mentalities and behaviours. Communities used to keep traditions thanks to a personality ethos. Nowadays, their identity has the cosmopolite opportunity (maybe even the tendency) to veil its margins, to “escape” the fosterage of identity nucleus. There is a chance –exploited or not – to crave for new mental configurations based on voluntary acceptance of “the Other” through an appeal to ethical cohesion and through a desire to deconstruct hierarchies, until recently intangible. „*Deconstruction*, stated Derrida (1967), followed by Norris (1988), *involves displacement of traditional conceptual hierarchies*”. In an educated and change and adaptation oriented world, de-construction can no longer be perceived as a fault, as an act of rebellion against tradition. The need for new construction – determined by “shocks” of high knowledge found in public comfort technology – involves adjustments, destructions, recalibrations. De-construction is necessary in order to build something. Behavioural reshufflings are determined not only by the perspective of the contemporary world but also by its existential dynamism.

Communities discard any inconvenience that would affect and impede adaptation in order to enjoy democratic freedom. From such an inventory, identity ethos and mental sacrifice would never miss. Lack of scruples rises from such an attitude which promotes “disaggregation of any

authority” and the relativity of self-value around which the uniqueness and the community’s identity frame have been formed.

The tendency to relativize self-values inflamed the idea of de-canonization, of breaking mental patterns, of replacing labels which until recently were considered intangible. When one “dared” to remove Eminescu from committed enunciations (“national poet”, “unpaired poet”, “the most important...”) the gesture of de-constructors was interpreted as a blasphemy. No intention of overlooking the real virtues of Eminescu’s work could be found in their attitude. The thinkers wanted to develop a new epistemic basis for another type of text analysis. The destruction of “the idol” has a strong ontological explanation in the tendency to reshape and revalue him.

L. Vattimo (1993), theoretician of postmodernism, supports the idea that it is necessary to allow the dissolution of absolute value in order to display individual values. Without authority, “everything is permitted” because facts become contextual. The art itself – as creation phenomenon, a mimesis of divine gestures – is democratized, blending into public existence. It gets out on the streets, dissolves in the mass-media, labels matchboxes, blends into reproductions and cohabits generously in the hypermedia. The art has become a “background event” (Heidegger, 1980) by its des-aristocratization as well as by its weakness for the unpredictable mixture with kitsch.

Therefore, the lack of value authority leads to an ontological transformation of the subjective and objective world “*into a huge site of survivals*” (L. Vattimo, 1993). The struggle to survive is a training for a human being’s duality. On the one hand, the being craves for the agglutination of desires around a “centre”, on the other hand, likes democratic savagery, finding in the isotropic closeness between *margins* and *centres* a source of happiness and existential meaning.

This is our postmodern world, a world that we build and comfort with democratic freedoms. Some of its features are: de-canonization of values, decapitation of classical values of authority, decompressing ethics, buckling perception of time and space, humanizing information and technology, oscillation between identity vocation and global aspiration, the aggression of sensual performance, epistemological indecisiveness, and humanizing education.

The above mentioned facts can be summed up in the apothegm “*what’s not forbidden, is permitted*”. The present generation is no longer interested in what it was, doesn’t steal a glance at history, they look at themselves. There is no longer time for future plans, because time no longer has three dimensions. It is one-dimensional (the present counts). There is only “*now and here*”, mine, ours, a present that involves only broken reflections of lived and anticipated time. Such flattened and reduced time is balanced by a real and virtual time extension. No earthly distance is impossible; almost no space can hide its mysteries. The cosmic space is claimed, extraterra has become optional space.

The insertion of art in everyday life and the stimulation of sensual, epidermis voluptuousness is another postmodern challenge. The shows on TV with free gestures, colourful scenery, naked breasts and buttocks, VIPs with excessive make-up reveal another image still maintained by the consumers’ taste. In all this mixture of lights and sound, appear actors from select theatres, cabaret dancers, successful writers and poets, politicians in search for an image and cat hairdressers, circus performers and athletes. Seriousness seems abandoned in favour of good mood, the entire facility scrolling down with the most insensitive *intellectual innocence*. “The commercial aspect” and its advertising manifestations polarize the interest of artistic manifestations, causing their impregnation with sensitive experiences stimulated by moving shapes, colours, gross gestures and compensatory ethics. Postmodern attitudes can be identified in virtual experiences, too. Pressing a button from one channel to the other, “cultural surfing”, soap operas, TV series, informational briefings join the performance offered by the websites; a huge and fascinating universe of artificial but vivid, dynamic and catchy world. Obviously, it is

a new type of civilisation with other benchmarks than the modernity; a world where one can live with adjuvants, with imitations in the middle of a crowd excited by music, dynamism and hot, spectacular events.

Global communication has changed the vision, “has lift up the man’s eyes” to the Others in distance, *and this opening to horizons* means “*the stand-up of the old ancestor*”. A new world is being built thanks to communication, in each society, in every inhabited space. Communication is bower for beings, said a philosopher and wise men have developed extremely professional tools so that information about Others and their deeds to be known by All and immediately.

2. Affective involvement in communication.

Communication is a process, which involves interaction in a **context**. Relationship between people is a **transaction** of social type (“*one cannot not communicate*”, Watzlawick (1972), and the man enters into the communicative relationship accompanied by “contextual” elements like an orchestra. Even if we are referring to the relationship between individuals, **the same problems hold true for groups, organizations, institutions and/or even self-communication**. Aspects referring to **social psychology**, to a series of determining psychological factors and to specific interlocutors should be reconsidered in order to have an optimal communication act. For example, in the interactive communication process, the person X does not know the hidden intentions of person Y and cannot anticipate the subsidiary interests and motivations of this person.

By reducing the communication process to a plain exchange of information we bring about a distortion in the real value of its manifestation in the relationship between “locutors”. It is believed (Abric, 2002 and others) that the communication process is influenced by some factors among which also the **psychological** ones. The communication process is motivated by individual needs and tensions, obviously of psychical nature; an individual has “needs”, the needs bring about tension, tension generates behaviour necessary to reduce dissatisfaction and eliminate needs. There are both positive and negative desires (needs) that disturb and rebalance the interlocutors’ psychical moods. Individual specific affective aspects with their heritage of tendencies and particularities cannot be excluded from the communication process.

On the other hand, each individual, group, institution has a certain **type of culture**. We interact with the Other by means of a cultural identity or with the intention to find an emotional equilibrium; affective subtleties and the interlocutors’ hidden objectives are linked to a certain situational psychology. After all, every individual is the bearer and representative of a culture and – by extension- the communication of individuals is a form of relationship between cultures and mentalities.

3. Cultural mentality and civilization. a. Culture.

A definition provided by a dictionary of neologisms (1997) considers culture as a „*wholeness of material and spiritual values created by the mankind, by the society*”. The definition induces confusion determined by the usage in the same context of “material values” and “spiritual values”. A Dictionary of Philosophy maintains the confusion by including in the concept “material and spiritual products” and „*conscious transformation of the natural and social environment*”. These inaccuracies led to the identification of almost 300 intentions of defining the concept. The **Larousse** Dictionary (1996) defines **culture** as „*social and intellectual formation of the individual*” (deriving the notion from „cult”), and Lucian Blaga determines culture in relationship with artistic values. Regardless of the multiple meanings that determine such an easy concept up to the moment of its **definition**, we will consider cultural products only those which are the result of a spiritual creativity process. Culture is connected to art genesis and intellectuality, to creative virtues of sciences, to proliferation of texts about culture. An educated man possesses intelligence, wisdom and creative impulses, being able to generate creations and to appreciate axiological products

resulted from cultural gestures. We put into concept literary works, aesthetic, musical, plastic creations, product design and any other consequence of artistic aesthetics. Concretely, culture includes *Faustus* and *Miorița*, *The Hanging Gardens* and *Versailles*, *David* and *Laocoon*, *The Last Supper* and *Ox Cart*, *Romanian Rhapsody* and *Bolero*, *Endless Column* and *The Eiffel Tower*, *Ferarri* and *Pentium VI*, but also *Aircraft carrier*, *the Submarine* or *Cosmic Missile*. Culture, as concept has artistic, functional, institutional, scientific and technological definitions. The man is a creator of culture, assigning meaning, content and configuration to his entire activity in an supreme and creative form. Generating culture, the man is ordained in divine deeds, perpetuating the myth of creation by Faustian and also Sisyphian repetition of his becoming. Man is *synthetic consequence of a community culture*.

b. Civilization, another concept difficult to define, has a lot of dictionary entries. It comes from the Latin word „*civis*” („*citizen*”), i.e. inhabitant of a city, of a settlement in the community (as opposed to the isolated, the hermit, the Grobian). To be tolerated by the community as a citizen requires compliance with the rules of coexistence which the individual had to assimilate in behaviour and conduct. These rules are related to hygiene, communication, mutual respect, tolerance, decency, but mostly attachment to social values like traditions, customs, and rules of good coexistence. Finally, civilization involves proper social relations gathered around good manners and politeness.

The concept has evolved, having other connotations, by keeping and adding semantic tones. Some refer to including in “civilization” means by which man changes and organizes the environment; others refer to insurance of comfort and life aesthetics. Therefore, a consequence of the mankind’s effort to improve its habitat in the “citadel” in what can be meant by “home” (house, village, city, region, country, continent) is synthetized in the concept of “civilization”. Specifically, *civilization* involves elements linked to comfort, material and utility needs, such as housing, food, clothes, behaviour, communication technology, mobility, economic-administrative activities, legal, political and civic organization. They reach the dimension of a community’s lifestyle and help configuring a civilization. Civilization entities have been set and it is said that they are the source of conflicts („*Humanity is divided into subgroups-tribes, nations, wider cultural entities normally called civilizations*”) (**The Clash of Civilizations**). Huntington (1993) considers that in a civilized world there are seven civilizations that can start a conflict at any time due to different norms and cohabitation styles. Without insisting on division (A. Toynbee, 1956, identifies 21 civilizations), or on clogs that hinder communication between them, we will show that confusion is maintained in establishing a coherent relationship between “culture” and “civilization”.

c. The effects of culture are expressed in *acts of culture*, converted into *products of civilization*. The level of culture configures the level of civilization. Therefore, civilization is understood as an echo of culture, a material representation of the spirit of cultural creation. Only a superior culture will be able to build/generate a higher civilization. Without technical and scientific culture it is impossible to imagine socialization of information and communication techniques. Household equipment, public television, personal computers, cars, etc. are the consequence of progress in culture. When culture is in jeopardy of becoming history, civilization saves its opportunities. Therefore, between culture and civilization there is a mutual relationship of inseparability. Leading a civilized life, the man places himself in the echo of culture, just like when creating he improves his existential comfort: “*Intercultural communities are cultural, ethnical, religious groups that live in the same space, have relationships of open interaction, exchange and mutual recognition showing respect for values, traditions and each other’s lifestyles.*” (Cozma, Seghedin, 2001).

4. Intercultural communicative style. Cultures and civilizations belong to an existential style. When the culture of a community is strongly influenced by religion, language, history,

customs, values, symbols, behaviours – elements that assign uniqueness – civilization is unitary. The volume “*Ten thousand culture, one civilization*”, says M. Malita would be a sketch of the geomodernity in the 21st century. Cultures can coexist in one plenary civilization based on science, technology, administration, economy and lifestyle. When citizens (all of them) benefit from the advantages of a civilization that would satisfy their needs for a comfortable life, then they would withstand cultural diversity.

We can communicate and live in “interculturality” only to a certain standard of civilization. It is wrong to believe that we have the right (or request) to dance on a dance floor with a woman with dirty fingernails or to sit at the same table with someone with a shirt with torn elbows. Communication between people of different cultures tries to find ways of coexistence, of assuming civilized behaviour, of promoting equal dialogue. Culture encourages the individualism tendencies of communities, such as belonging to a race, nation, religion, geographic area, social or historical areal, etc. A civilized community (intercultural”) becomes real and effective only if it removes blockages caused by the belonging to a community style, to a strongly individualized mentality. Coexisting means accepting the other” as s/he is, only when he is above a certain standard of civilization. Accepting the other involves the triggering of emotional faculties that would exclude racial, social, national, ethnical, religious differences.

To achieve communication in intercultural environments one needs to trigger relationships that would diminish uncertainties towards the “other” belonging to coexisting cultures (*The Other* is in the same “space”, but is “another” due to cultural differences). These uncertainties are related to his cultural identity: language, ethical group, nationality, religion, habitat, social and economic status, authority. *Knowledge* about the other, *interest* for interaction, *ability* of involvement and transfer *skills* are required to remove these uncertainties (T. Cozma, 2001).

An important aspect of intercultural relating is about identifying “*sense shared by both sides*”, namely negotiating understanding to diminish **uncertainty** (cognitive representation of the other) and **anxiety** (affective representation of the other). The above mentioned plead for the necessity of *intercultural competence*, defines as “*the ability to negotiate cultural significations and to perform adequate and effective communication behaviours that recognize different identities of interlocutors in a specific environment*” or “*the ability to use knowledge, action methods, affective experiences, positive attitudes in solving cultural interaction situations*”.

Interaction requires certain abilities such as: tolerance for uncertainty, development of new relating categories, others besides the reference “mine”, empathy, adapting communication, refrain from asserting prejudices, handling interaction. The balance of intercultural communication calls for the concept of *democracy*, through which the will of the majority does not impose authority and common good, becomes supreme humanity value. Democracy generates variable geometry in cultural interactions, where each has the right to identity (respect for values, traditions, and ways of living) without harming the Other.

5. Synergology as behaviour. Hamlet, Shakespeare`s character tells his troupe: “*Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness*”. “*Nor do not saw the air too much with your hands*” refers to the gesture accompanying the saying. The hand is the extension of the thought, the voice and the feeling. The gesture becomes “the soul” of the message, its sentimental side, and the carnation of dry, rough idea. It is the emotional breath of rational thought as it can be the “equilibrium” of a wild, passionate saying. Verbal and extra verbal communication (paraverbal and nonverbal) coexist, are displayed simultaneously and not only do they not exclude but they imply each other. **Paraverbal communication** is represented by elements that accompany speech, such as “*voice and pronunciation characteristics, intensity of pronunciation (saying), rhythm and flow of*

speech, intonation, pause, etc” (C. Postelnicu, 2000). One can notice that paraverbal communication involves auditory, voiced commitment, determining a certain displayed affection. Paraverbal act can be found only in oral communication, being accompanied by intonation, accent, volume. This paraverbal “suite” that accompanies oral communication was called “meta-communication” phenomenon that fully exploits “*the “hollow” of significations of the uttered word*”(C. Postelnicu, 2000).

The role of paraverbal communication is to determine the interlocutors` state of emotion and affective involvement. The tone of the voice is also linked to a certain education, to an art of speaking, to affective involvement in what is being said. Paraverbal communication expresses not only the attachment to what is said but also their rejection. Paraverbal communication is connected to a certain education in communication, to emotional engagement and involvement more than other types of communication. Affective speeches, modular by tone, attitude revealed by the quality of the voice are related to paraverbal communication.

One of Slavici`s characters used to sit on the bench in front of his house from Şiria for a long time. The author justifies his decision: „*He enjoyed observing faces*”. The ability to observe the others, to scan their behaviour, to analyse their “faces” means knowledge in reading people`s thoughts by decoding their gestures and looks. A specialist in non-verbal communication, university professor Allan Pease confesses to having heard of “body language” only in 1971 at a seminar where it has been said that “*through gestures, attitude, position of the body and distance keeping a greater amount of interhuman communication is fulfilled than through any other means of communication*”(A. Pease, 2002). Later, A. Mahrebian, based on specific research stated that out of the multitude of signs and signals of interhuman communication 7 % are verbal, 38 % are paraverbal (voice tones addressed to the hearing) and 55% are nonverbal messages. Ph. Turchet, French actor and director developed a body language reading method which helps reading partly the Other`s thoughts, called *synergology*.

Thanks to its components the human body has a language through the manifestations that it highlights. The body “*says loudly what the voice thinks quietly*”, says Turchet. A synergologist knows how to read the signs of hands, legs, body movement, palms, fingers, face, eyebrows, eyes, mouth even hair. All confess honesty. Gestures, mimicry and body position are instinctual expressions more powerful in manifestations than ration and language can hide. The last two parts of Ph. Turchet`s volume (2005) are named after a linguistic concept: *The lexis of face* and *The body lexis*, which shows an identification of signs emitted by face, body and words.

What does the synergologist “read”? Ph. Turchet justifies his synergologic option starting from the man`s existential hypocrisy (one might say that man is defined as being capable of lies unlike animals): „*In each man, two profiles fight for harmony: a rough, instinctive, pulsating, sensual face which harmonizes or decomposes according to what the individual likes and a second face, educated, refined, conditioned. The man grants himself with one hand freedoms which he censors with the other. He wants to say he loves but he hides it. He secretly hates while he utters civilized and comforting words... The man says one and thinks the other... His mouth speaks the wisdom of the group while from the bottom of his body, an inner voice determines him to act in contradiction with the voice of seriousness and civilization*”.(Ph. Turchet, 2005)

„*So the body says loudly what the voice thinks quietly*”. Through words, the man communicates rationalized, thought and common sense controlled messages while the forms of nonverbal messages (the body) transmit affective, honest, spontaneous, natural messages. Some individuals are even frustrated and face dissatisfaction because they are unable to control their communicative behaviour completely. Therefore, communication has almost always two measures for the quality of the message: any message has an internal appearance (psychologically spontaneous and intuitive, but mostly sincere) but also an external appearance (elaborated and agreed by the partner). When you tell someone “*I would like to invite you to a*

cup of coffee” the uttered text has (in the man’s intention) several meanings: „*I would like to drink a cup of coffee with you*”, his eyes say: „*if she accepts, she likes me*”, the warm and welcoming voice advances friendship, and the face expression betrays his true intention: „*I would like to make love to you*”. In the receiver’s mind, the invitation anticipates all these. Reading the face mimicry and the warm tone, the woman can say „*I don’t usually drink coffee*”, which would imply an absolute rejection, but decent at the same time. When answering „*I don’t drink coffee but I will accompany you for a cup of tea*”, the woman has decoded the final significance of his intention and answers proactive by raising her eyebrows in surprise, she can as well throw harsh glances; beyond words the rejection of a potential friendship increases and is firmly manifested.

Never too simple, a dialogue develops a series of tones and suppositions because the interlocutors have hidden intentions and relating duplicity. Words hide an attitude betrayed by the body. The man’s misfortune is that he cannot assure a congruency between his forms of communicative manifestation, that honesty is given to be free but words project him in the sphere of lies: „*the man is the only species on Earth that integrated lies in his everyday life needs and who is able to lie “naturally”, whenever necessary. He forges reality when his little weaknesses impede him to resemble the image of the perfect man that he himself createdLying appears like a necessary certainty.* (Ph. Turchet).

People still have a lot of innocence and spontaneity having a (social) interest in not being completely honest. Reason calls for objectivity and honesty in social relations and the heart has its reasons to be suspicious of a thinking mind. The first impression about an interlocutor includes feelings – and not a reason-based judgement. When you meet a girl for the first time, the first impression could be extremely subjective and fake: „*She is too elegant to be honest*” or „*She has no charm*”, „*She is too beautiful to be smart*” etc. These are innocent cheatings that mark the moment and influence the status of a relationship. Communication with the other has its own deceitfulness derived from the duality of the reason-affection, thought-feeling relationship. Reasonable thinking tends to ensure decent, real, sincere, honest communication and the gestures are of genuine honesty revealing a Faustian contradiction. When you tell a woman that she is beautiful looking at her askance, you grin unconsciously. The truth can be read in nonverbal communication, in body language which certify the truth of what is being said. J. J. Rousseau supports the above mentioned by stating that „*reason created man but feelings lead him*”.

The synergologist is like a wizard because he reads the truth in the man’s soul as it is projected by his gestures. In his own way, any individual has synergologic talent. Reading the gestures, he senses the real conflict between words and deeds and discovers that words almost always speak lies. He „sees” what people hide, asking the “mirror of reversed eyes” to identify the transparency of the soul and to reveal the interlocutor’s true feelings placed in communicative relationship. He infiltrates in the privacy, in the hidden parts of the soul through gestures, body language, instinctive and honest body movements.

Certain basic gestures are familiar to everyone. A glum man is sad and angry while a happy man laughs. A “yes” involves vertical body movement while “no” a horizontal one. The smile is a gesture of acceptance and frowning one of rejection. Shrugging shoulders means “I don’t know”, and shaking the forefinger is a warning, etc. Gestures have their significance in the context in which they occur and have their random quantity. We could read the people’s gestures, starting from the position of the body, of hands and legs and continuing with the movement of the eyebrows, eyes and facial muscles (soul is placed in the eyes; there is social, relational, passionate, metaphorical look, as well as their opposites). („I don’t see what you want to say”). In other words, the means people have at their disposal as members of the same community and with the same mentality are *vocal and body language*.

The conclusion of these considerations synthesizes the relationship between individuals in a postmodern society in which – as stated in the beginning- values are masked by a certain type of relating in an artificial context. People do not communicate, but their psychic relates, engaged in a competition of finding the real truth, innocently disguised in the complex personality of each individual. A postmodern man–like we are-adorns his existence according to the communicative events he is engaged in or is motivated to be a involved actor. *In fact, a communicative situation leaves the individual space of expression for Ego and a new Self-image.*

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