ON THE PARADIGMS OF DIFFERENCE
IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF COMMUNICATION.
POLITICAL AND ETHICAL ASPECTS

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Rezumat. *Studiul propune şi investighează noţiunea de paradigme ale diferenţei, corelând diferenţele şi continuităţile dintre modernism şi postmodernism în filosofia comunicării şi în filosofie în general, unde se poate evidenţia o schimbare de paradigmă culturală, printr-o multitudine de paradigme reînnoite în filosofia contemporană. Analiza pune în lumină faptul că locul unei paradigme hegemonice în filosofie, cultură şi ştiinţă este astăzi de-legitimat şi adesea subminat, date fiind aceste noi paradigme care se pot numi ale diferenţei. astfel, acestea sunt toate aceste noi viziuni filosofice contemporane, expresii ale pluralismului şi fragmentarismului culturii şi filosofiei, într-o lume a politicii guvernată de seducţie şi spectacole de divertisment, influenţată de prezenţa „ironistului" şi a „omului dialogal/femeii dialogale".*

Abstract. *The study proposes and investigates the notion of paradigms of difference correlating the differences and the continuities between modernism and postmodernism within the philosophy of communication and philosophy in general, where we can highlight a change of cultural paradigm, through a multitude of renewed paradigms in contemporary philosophy. The investigation notices that the place of a hegemonic paradigm in philosophy, culture and science is nowadays de-legitimated, and often undermined given these new paradigms that might be called of difference. They are therefore all such contemporary new philosophical views, expressions of the pluralism and fragmentarism of culture, and philosophy, of the world of politics governed by seduction and entertainment shows, influenced by the presence of the „ironist" and of the „dialogical (wo)man".*

Keywords: paradigms of difference, ironism, dialogue, postmodernism

The paradigms of difference are describing the endless return towards origins (represented by the classical texts of philosophy), often, the authors approaching a deconstructive notion concerning the Subject, considered beyond all fixed, classical, reflexive categories, as well in what it concerns its meaning, deconstructed in plural constellations of meaning. Correlating the differences and the continuities between modernism and postmodernism within the philosophy of communication and the philosophy in general, we can highlight a change of cultural paradigm, through a host of paradigms of difference.

Within this new philosophical frame, *homo ludens* is the heir of *homo sapiens* and not a mere *epigone*. The diverse visualizations, the contextualization,

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the effort to place the same things in different perspectives, the modesty of the basic images that propel thought with the force of a thousand words, the creativity of conceptualizations and argumentations today are in the spirit of a new epistemology belonging to the contemporary postmodern world and culture. The place of a hegemonic paradigm in philosophy, culture and science is nowadays de-legitimated, and undermined with the influence of a constellation of new paradigms that might be called of difference. The paradigms of difference are hence all such contemporary new views expressing the pluralism and fragmentarism of culture, the world of politics governed by seduction and entertainment shows, influenced by the presence of the „ironist" and of the „dialogical (wo)man"[1].

Rorty's ironism is a post-analytical notion created around a certain profile of an individual, an ironist. Considering Rorty's definition in *Private Irony and Liberal Hope* an "ironist" is "someone who fulfils three conditions: (1) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered; (2) she realizes that argument phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite or dissolve these doubts; (3) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that is in touch with a power not herself. Ironists who are inclined to philosophize see choice between vocabularies made neither within a neutral and universal meta-vocabulary nor by an attempt to fight one's way past appearances to the real, but simply by playing the new off against the old."[2] The Rortian problematics of political power is to be recaptured in a correlation with the perspectives he opened on ironism and pragmatism, describing a particular type of pluralism. At the same time, his vision represents, to use a phrase from international relations, a *soft* vision of political power, interpreted so that it

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[1]Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony and Universality. Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, Londra, New York, Editura Verso, 2000. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice,*Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1982. Mary Lyndon Shanley, Uma Narayan (coord.), *Reconstrucţia teoriei politice. Eseuri feministe*, Polity Press, 1997, transl. in Romanian by Mihaela Barbă, Iaşi, Editura Polirom, 2001. See also Vasile Tonoiu, *Omul dialogal. Un concept răspântie*, Bucureşti, Editura Fundaţiei Culturale Române, 1995.Vasile Tonoiu., *În căutarea unei paradigme a complexităţii*, Bucureşti, Editura IRI, 1997.Vasile Tonoiu, *Dialog filosofic şi filosofia dialogului*, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică, 1997.Vasile Tonoiu, *Reverii lucide şi aporii ludice: meditaţii şi cugetări*, Bucureşti, Editura IRI, 1998. Vasile Tonoiu, *Şapte zile gânditoare (Conversaţii pro-, anti-, ante-, meta- şi post-Filosofice)*, Bucureşti, Editura Univers Enciclopedic , 2002. In these books he presents the dialogical feminist perspective along with the complex, and heterogeneous postmodern contemporary view over philosophical thought.
[2]Rorty, R., *Private Irony and Liberal Hope*, în Walter Brogan, James Risser (eds.), *American Continental Philosophy. A Reader*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2000, p. 46.

emphasizes the importance that Rorty gives to the ironist individual and to solidarity within contemporary democratic society. I consider that his vision of political power is a postmodern development on the power of the individual, seen in a Foucaultian perspective.

The "dialogical woman" overcomes the positions defended by traditionalist epistemology. She talks as a situated subject, by pointing at the ways in which gender does and ought to influence our conceptions of knowledge, the knowing subject, and practices of inquiry and justification. She argues about the identified ways in which dominant conceptions and practices of knowledge (involved in the attribution, the acquisition, and the justification systematically disadvantage women and other subordinated groups). Her discourse is an ironist discourse of reform, oriented towards the traditional conceptions and practices so that they could be transformed to support the interests of the feminine and/as disadvantaged groups. These reforms ought to be aimed at commenting the disadvantages of women and others generated by their exclusion from inquiry, and thus, as Rorty, Tonoiu and so many others in contemporary postmodern feminist philosophy notice the dialogical position is characterized by the feminist stance of coloring in feminine the neutral. With Rorty's ironist we talk about the general individual as "she" in order to fight against denying women epistemic authority, against the denigration of the "feminine" cognitive styles and modes of knowledge, and against reticulating theories of women portrayed as inferior, deviant, or significant only in the ways they serve male interests. The ironist position rejects producing theories of social phenomena that render women's activities and interests, or gendered power relations, invisible, and also disfavors the production of knowledge (science and technology) that is not useful for people in subordinate positions, or that reinforces gender and other social hierarchies. In our contemporary lives ridden with postmodernism the philosophical and epistemological stances get closer to everyday life choices, all these elements becoming apparent in everyday discourses. The ironist discourse would acknowledge for instance the fact that the feminist scholars leave their mark into different academic disciplines, especially in biology and the social sciences, generating new questions, theories, and methods, while the traditional discourse would not. The ironist discourse is rather inclined to emphasize that gender has played a determining role in these transformations, and interpret the transformations as dual, cognitive and social, advances. Knowledge reflects the particular perspectives of the subject, so with feminist epistemology we talk about a situated knower and a situated knowledge. In other words, feminist postmodernism spreads into the everyday life the discourse against both theories and discourses (more generally, against the practices) that either justify or support sexist practices, ideologies claiming that the noticeable differences between men and women are natural and necessary, that women have an "essence" and that

would explain and legitimate the subordination of women (Butler). This ironist position applies to tendencies of exclusion apparent within feminism itself.

Comparing in a full postmodern vein very different approaches such as Blaga's and Rorty's, we find similarities between the philosophy of the historical being and the philosophy of ironism. The question to pose in this comparative approach of two philosophical concepts that at the first glance have nothing in common este the following: "Is ironism an awakening from *the infinite sleep where our being floats*"? My postmodern investigation, conceiving postmodernism as the nascent point of modernism (Lyotard)[1] struggles to sustain a positive answer for this question. I consider that Blaga's architectural complex is a celebration of ironism *avant-la-lettre*. The parallel between the historical being and the "ironist" has its importance in the very contemporary relevance as in the hope it brings about: life brings about the opportunity to be exposed to different vocabularies, to so interesting vocabularies (read "worlds", "ideas") as either Blaga's or Rorty's. Both their thought and lives speak volumes about ironism. Approaching the parallel between ironism and the historical being one understands that the drama of the historical being is therefore counter-balanced, in a very complex and tensioned way, by the chances to live authentically as a (liberal) ironist and as an inherently creative being.

Given the paradigms of difference the philosophical debate offers a modest importance to the rational cognitive factor, within the context of the multiplication of the systems of values and beliefs, of the accent placed on difference, and not unity, on deconstruction, plurality and de-centering, on indetermination and discontinuity. J. Habermas accomplishes a first postmodern articulation of modernity. He characterizes his account of the crises of rationalism, by moving from a philosophy of the conscience towards a philosophy of language, mediated by (post-) structuralism and by the language games as conceived by Wittgenstein-II. There is a conceptual turn from rationalism towards the language games in the philosophy of communication. The Habermasian thought is already a reforming agency in philosophy. Along with Davidson, Dummett, Putnam and Apel, Habermas represents the stream oriented towards transforming philosophy through systematic changes.[2]

The Habermasian input offers the adequate theoretical platform to argue for the weakening of the "hard" metaphysical presuppositions and for the preeminence of the ontological and hermeneutic dimension (Heidegger-Gadamer-Ricoeur), for that of the analytical and pragmatic dimension (Frege, Carnap,

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[1]Jean-François Lyotard, *Condiţia postmodernă. Raport asupra cunoaşterii*, traducere şi prefaţă de Ciprian Mihali, Bucureşti, Editura Babel, 1993.
[2]Angela Botez, *Raţionalitatea între Scylla şi Carybda*, "Revista de filosofie", vol. XL, 6, 1993, p. 608.

Wittgenstein I and Austin, and Wittgenstein II, Searle, Davidson) and for the momentum of the semiotic-structuralist-poststructuralist dimension (starting with Saussure and Lévi-Strauss) in philosophy. Thus we find ourselves in the middle of the realm of the language games and everyday life philosophy. It is, more than ever, in this sense that we should conceive the Hedeggerian "language is the house of being." Some language games are born and others die out.[1] They give specificity to our social interactions and efficiency to our communication. They make materialism and idealism part of the same transaction.[2]

Nowadays philosophy is postanalytical, postpositivist, poststructuralist, hermeneutic, relativist and contextualist. The anti-representationalist approach presents new openings in philosophy to be considered along with the investigation of the disappearance or repositioning of the hegemony of metaphysics over philosophy as the only full-fledged philosophical quest, the quest for the unique truth, within a multitude of constellation of philosophical literatures bearing creativity and myth. We are assisting now, after the phrase of Angela Botez, at a postmodern resurrection of the metaphysics.[3]

Transversality is currently the most useful amongst the solutions identified to the problems posed by rationality. C.O. Schrag's contribution is exemplary in the effort to overcome the crises of rationality through a vision that goes beyond the limits of a thinking bounded by rigid formation of hierarchies (on a vertical symbolical dimension) and by imposed equalizations (on a horizontal symbolical dimension). These two (and the same is to be considered in what concerns the *logos* and rhetoric) are evaluated as complementary, via transversality. It is an attempt to retrieve the rationality for philosophy, without reinstituting it in its dominant, metaphysic, dominant position, generating universality.

Postmodern philosophy of communication evaluates the theories sustaining the paradigms of difference and emphasizes the epistemological effort of overcoming structuralism — by post-structuralism, considering the production of a constellation of meanings, of connotations that are relative from a contextual, cultural and subjective point of view (Lacan and Barthes) — of the reprezentationalism, of foundationalism and essentialism, via the postanalytic and post-positivist orientation, through the hermeneutic manner of recapturing the meaning, as through an orientation towards the semiotic, situating our investigation in a final epistemological stage of eliminating the transcendent from the explicative approach over the world.

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[1]Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* Oxford, 1953, § 127-130.
[2]Harold D. Lasswell, *Politics. Who Gets What, When, How*, Peter Smith, 1950.
[3]Angela Botez, *Concepte integrative în* Trilogia cunoaşterii, "Revista de filosofie", 5-6/2001, p. 575 *sqq.*

What was once unitary and universal in modernism becomes in postmodernism multiple and different, while what was once secondary and marginal in modernism – the fragmentary, the ephemeral, the discontinuity and the chaotic change – become a priority in postmodernism. From Lyotard's perspective, postmodernism may be understood as lack of credibility in what concerns the metanarrative and the grand narratives, while from an epistemological perspective, postmodernism is comprehended as a "rejection of the uniqueness of meta-theory, of method and truth."

As a consequence, the accent is placed either on the meditation over the dead end of philosophy (Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Rorty, Vattimo) or over the language games, essential for relating to the world (Lyotard, Wittgenstein), and for the plurality of the interpretations (Gadamer, Ricoeur, Deleuze, Guattari, McIntyre).

Exploring the paradigms of difference, we ascertain not only the ambiguity and, towards an extreme, the disappearance of philosophy as once conceived, but also the fact that the fragmentarily approach and pluralism of culture are creating the premises for the dialogue amongst the fragments and for the continuity of a (troubled) conversation of humanity, marked by disturbing polyphonies and by multiple discourses. On the one hand, these are expressing blunt antagonism in their fight for emancipation and, on the other hand, they are either ambiguously seductive, or engaged in frivolous parades of the discursive fashions, draped around the fights for power.

At the same time, the paradigms of difference are to be made explicit contextually, through the fact that they emphasize and celebrate the dialogue between the grand culture and the culture of leisure. „Instead of crying over an agony shouldn't we think of a mutation?

The troubling phenomenon of our epoch is the parallel expansion of the grand culture and of the industry of organizing leisure. How not to be surprised by the obvious incoherence of a public that is interested at the same time by Gaugain and by the Wheel of Fortune? By a public heavily watching Dallas and consulting Umberto Eco or Garcia Marquez? Maybe we became all cultural chameleons with highest intellectual exigencies bordering an area next to imbecility and bad taste? Otherwise, would a world free of kitsch bearable? We have no right, hence, to despair on the account of the lectors and the dilettanti (populating today's culture): we must expect from them in a contradictory way both the disaster and the miracle".[1] The paradigms of difference accomplished such a mutation. The intellectual exigences must keep the dialogue with both imbecility and bad taste.

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[1]Pascal Bruckner, *Melancolia democraţiei. Cum să trăieşti fără duşmani?*, trans. from French by Maria Ivănescu, Bucharest, Editura Antet, 1996, p. 98 (translated in English by the author).

Nowadays, philosophy, politics, as well as the hope for ethical commitment, all seem, for many thinkers, to start in disappointment. In disappointment places Simon Critchley[1] the origin of philosophy, in opposition with wonder, we understand. But there is not a complete opposition between the two, since, so many times, disappointment brings us straight into the arms of wondering, thinking and acting. How to fill our best ethical disposition with passionate intensity is Critchley's structuring vector for the argument.

Simon Critchley finds the missing link between politics and ethics in commitment, participation, active nihilism and direct democracy. His ethical subject has still a Promethean nature, though, since the motivational deficit at the heart of liberal democracy becomes his source of empowerment for committing oneself and pursuing a „politics of resistance" (another phrase for the practices of direct democracy). After Nietzsche and nihilism, we interpret the difficulty of assessing the question of meaning in this general context of philosophical and political disappointment. We point out that we experience now a sense of disappointment mainly given the corrosion of established political structures, the current political management of fear and the violence of our unjust world still defined by the „horror of war". Thus one of the key questions of the book is „What is justice in a violently unjust world?"[2] Re-establishing justice is an ethical task that should be undertaken by the ethical subject from below, too (or first of all?). This is a Promethean (Sisyphean?) task, hence the premises of the argument – *the ethical games are infinitely demanding*.

The argument of the book investigates subjective commitment to ethical action, sustaining that "ethical experience elicits the core structure of moral selfhood, what we may think as the existential matrix of ethics"[3], since only with such a matrix of ethics people can confront the present political situation. The author states, „The main task of this book is responding to that need by offering a theory of ethical experience and subjectivity that will lead to an infinitely demanding ethics of commitment and politics of resistance."[4]

This subject is perceived by Critchley in four parts – the first presenting a theory of ethical experience, the second about the structure of an ethical subject, the third comments on happiness, humour and conscience and the forth construes political subjectivity and action after Marx – adding very relevant comments for our contemporary times, concerning the crypto-Schmittianism, that is, the management of fear in Bush's America, and, we may add, everywhere.

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[1]Simon Critchley, Infinitely Demanding. Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance, London, New York, 2007.
[2]*Ibidem*, p.31.
[3]*Ibidem*, p. 9.
[4]*Ibidem*, p. 3.

We start in this approach from an outline of the mechanisms of ethics, explaining the interplay between approval and demand, deriving from such considerations a model of subjectivity. There are always ethical demands around us. The demands we approve as ethical subjects have to trigger undertaking action. In his ethical theory the reader finds a brilliant critical interpretation of Marx: he values Marx's socio-economic insights on capitalism, while he rejects Marxian over-simplified view of class structure. Political organization, radical action and direct forms of democracy should consider political subjectivity in the perspective opened by the Gramscian concept of hegemony and its interpretation given by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, in order to answer the current political disappointment. Critchley situates at the heart of a radical politics what he calls the *meta-political* ethical moment that provides the motivational force (the „propulsion") into political action. „If ethics without politics is empty, then politics without ethics is blind." (p.13)

Politics begins in disappointment and injustice triggers ethical action. „We cannot sit back and hope that the structural contradictions of capitalism will do the job of political transformation on our behalf. We cannot reduce the sphere of the political to the socio-economic, as is suggested by the crude base-superstructure model with which Marx flirted in the "Preface" to *The Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Ethics appears as a disruption from below of the political decisions made (from) above. It challenges the status quo in an ethical politics of resistance. „Politics is the manifestation of *dissensus*, the cultivation of an anarchic multiplicity that calls into question the authority and legitimacy of the state. It is in relation to such a multiplicity that we may begin to restore some dignity to the dreadfully devalued discourse of democracy."[1]

Politics is to be perceived after Marx (yet, not necessarily against his critics of capitalism) as the space of *dissensus* „fuelled" on by the ethical subjects (instead of a space of consensus). His comments on women's rights clearly illustrate this perspective: As such, the political rights of women are a powerful example of politics as the conflictual questioning of consensus and opening of a space of *dissensus* (...). Yet, having to ask myself if dissent and „true democracy" understood as distancing from the state can prove either vigorous and efficient enough in this process of invigorating democracy, I underline that the ethical thrive has to be stronger than complacency and more powerful than the present times dictatorial superego imperative „Enjoy!", as described and interpreted in the works of Slavoj Žižek.

On the other hand, I find the phrase „politics of resistance" awkward, since Critchley does not talk only about resistance in front of the political status quo,

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[1]*Ibidem*, p. 13.

with his „politics as interstitial distance within the state", but he emphasizes the importance of radical and ethical action. In my opinion, „politics of dissent" or the „politics of involvement" would have been more suitable phrases.

Thus, the argument says that the model of ethical experience provides a way of approaching morality in terms of an affirmation or approved demand that hopefully elicits what I called above the existential matrix of ethics. Second, ethical experience furnishes a possible account of the motivational force to act morally, of the way in which a conception of the good *can* move the will to act. This does not imply that it is compulsory for a person to act ethically once the demand was approved. The demand may be very well approved and the self may still act in bad faith. At this point, the argument should be developed considering other complex aspects, such as the possibility of (cynically) following personal and limited interests, while simulating an ethical answer to an approved demand. How should one evaluate the selfish acts with ethical consequences? How should the philosopher include the ambiguities and the dualities about the ethical actions into a coherent model? Say, for instance, in the case of the politician, there is always pretence that it *must be an ethical demand* calling forth the will to act, and that pretence is often suspicious. This is a kind of secondary consequence of the imperative of maintaining the free activity of the self within the moral realm. The possibility of bad faith is implied by the possibility of moral commitment („Bad faith is the long shadow cast by our commitment" Critchley says somewhere.) Is being suspicious politics of dissent?

Metaphorically speaking, the paradigms of difference represent a temerary tendency to investigate the abyssal relationship between disaster and miracle. Communication is entirely taking place between disaster and miracle, with all the philosophical, political and ethical implications. At an extreme, within the human relationships, communication may endanger the being or may save it. The paradigms of difference are capturing the communication in its polyphony, the pluralism of voices, the "absence" of the „author", the plurality of "lectors", as the replacement of the grand intellectual with a simple "lector", aspects underlined also by the limited hegemony and by the autocritical approach of the new epistemology. The paradigms of difference belong at the same time to emancipatory political games and discourses, to the rationality of open language games, to rhetoric, to transversal situations, and to the infinitely demanding ethical games, maintaining some sort of non linear continuity of thought, against a modernity suffocated under the burden of wisdom, grand narratives, and highbrow exigencies.

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