REFLEXIVITY OR THEORETICAL REPOSITIONS OF THE RESEARCHER

Gabriela BOANGIU[*]

Abstract*: To talk about reflexivity, as related to folkloristics, is an approach either shedding light to enthusiast discoveries, or showing imperceptible redundancies. Nonetheless, the objectivity of the researcher can be configured from these retroactive steps too, which are reconsiderations on the processuality of the research, that sometimes bring the enthusiasm of new discoveries, increase the energy of some interrogations, help the planning of some analysing schemes, in other words, they contribute entirely to the clarification of the epistemological and methodological aspects of the research.*

Keywords*: reflexivity, postmodernism, the voice of the interlocutor, folkloristics.*

To talk about reflexivity, as related to folkloristics, is an approach either shedding light to enthusiast discoveries, or showing imperceptible redundancies. Nonetheless, the objectivity of the researcher can be configured from these retroactive steps too, which are reconsiderations on the processuality of the research, that sometimes bring the enthusiasm of new discoveries, increase the energy of some interrogations, help the planning of some analysing schemes, in other words, they contribute entirely to the clarification of the epistemological and methodological aspects of the research. We cannot approach this theme without reflecting upon the importance of the voice of the interlocutor and the anthropologist, upon the relativity of positions and the necessity of repositions, for making complete the vision on the social phenomenon, upon representation and mentality, upon the experiment in folkloristics, upon interdisciplinarity and preserving of the disciplinary identity of folkloristics.

We are specifying that postmodernism brought forwards numerous interrogations referring to the type of registered data (the problems of the data representation), which are interrogations on addressing the authority of the researcher (the problems of legitimacy) that becomes one of the multiple voices referring to the subject of the research. It is given a special attention to the voice of the interlocutor, placing it in the area of a methodologically intangible position, a self-confession and a confession about the self, a voice encouraged to speak clearly, the interviewer remaining behind the challenges of a memory that confesses itself. It is therefore explained the frequency of the nowadays oral history collections, but there always have been similar attempts, on a radically different realm, and with other methodological means.

The portrays of some skilful storytellers have alsoexisted in the tradition of the Romanian researches before these problems were formulated, and I am mentioning here only two cases that I consider representative: one is that of Sechei Machedon, born in Braniştea, the Valley of Great Someş, almost 80 km away from Cluj, and the other is that of

[*] Institute for Social-Human Research "C.S.Nicolaescu-Plopsor", Craiova, of the Romanian Academy, boangiu_g@yahoo.com

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Elisabeta Ştefăniţă – "storyteller and « needle »painter" from Câmpulung, Argeş (Amzulescu 1969: 253-262). The both portrays were made by professional folklorists, in the 1960s, more precisely, in 1967 and 1969.

The portraying of Sechei Machedon appeared almost by default, becoming noticeable as one of the best storytellers. The folklorists that were working near him were Ovidiu Bîrlea and Doina Negulescu (Negulescu 1967: 223-230). The research of the narrative fund, for the investigated community, unravelled the craftsmanship and the innate gift of *Machedon a lui Manu*, and the importance of his repertoire appeared as natural as his figure, owing to the fact that he knew if his fairy tales were learnt and transmitted further, clearing the path for the research of the manner in which folklore is transmitted, or the way in which the narrations transmitted by the interlocutor are remembered.

Elisabeta Ştefăniţă represents maybe an even more interesting portray, through the novelty of his expressiveness. She "paints" stories using the needle, creating the works: *Gruia lu' Novac, Ilincuţa Şandrului, Genoveva, Istoria românilor (The history of the Romanians), Manole.* The narrative theme of the ballads was transposed by her in exquisite themes, "becoming remarkable the process of creation for the composition, which takes place according to the laws of the finest orality. In the same way as the song and the traditional folkloric story are realised, the sewer Elisabeta Ştefăniţă creates entirely spontaneously, without making a previous plan or drawing. Having "from the very beginning", "bearing from the first moment in mind" her theme, she strives "to represent everything I have had in my mind", as the creator tries to explain simply the way in which her canvases are elaborated" (Amzulescu, *op.cit.*: 256).

The composition of the pictorial narration of Elisabeta impresses through the thematic elements borrowed from ballads, "The pictorial narration of a simple woman, amongst the people, represents but another facet, innovative, of the most authentic folkloric narration" (*Ibidem:* 261). Yet, extremely important for me, were the reflections of the author: "although I have known and researched the creation of Elisabeta Ştefăniţă since 1966, I lingered when it came to bringing her to the public eye, from the desire to keep her safe yet a little while from some insistences and unwished interferences, which could have – eventually – changed the initial purity and the spontaneity of the soul of the artist from Muscel. Meanwhile, I have corresponded continuously with her, following her natural evolution discretely" (*Ibidem:* 261), mentioning in the same time that she wished to continue the research and to bring new consideration at an appropriate moment.

Through the maintaining of these portrays realised by professional folklorists in the 1960s, I am trying to underline that the voice of the interlocutor was heard and noticed, that the importance of individuality sometimes overpassed the strict rules of the anonymity, of orality etc. as characteristics of the folklore (Elisabeta Ştefăniţă is indeed a storyteller and "needle painter") , that the importance of the research and researcher on the subjects and the investigated community was realised (see Amzulescu « although I have known and researched the creation of Elisabeta Ştefăniţăsince 1966, I lingered when it came to bringing her to the public eye…»). Moreover, it is necessary to contest the idea that folkloristics would live under a glass bell, away from its own interrogations and reflections.

The problems of a supposed objectivity of the researcher appear in the context of contemporary researches. The textual representation of the filed experience, the subjectivity

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and the possibilities of objectifying the observations of the researcher need permanent questionings. Objectivity can be configured through a process of incorporation/assuming of subjectivity, as constant distancing, objectivity that emerges through continuous, recovering recurrences of the meanings, sifted through permanent distancing. The researcher represents an instrument of receiving, and his instruments ought to include this exercise of permanent oscillations between observing and conceptualization, incorporating dynamically his mobility.

In the context of the socio-cultural reality dynamics, the folklorist researcher is required to have a remarkable theoretical and methodological flexibility, but which should not diminish the academic rigour of his studies, thus, the functionality of some folkloric products might encounter limitations or, on the contrary, re-evaluations and re-contextualisations of them. The methodological sensibility of the researcher is provoked before these subtle modifications.

Reflexivity seems to have silently accompanied the studies of ethnology, the permanent questioning of the reality, the detaching from the studied phenomenon seem to have been constitutive for the act of research. However, the impersonal voice of the "author" used to turn the actual distance into a presumed game between objectivity, the investigated social reality, actors and researcher. Yet, the contemporary theories include the reflexive act as an essential component of the investigation, as a necessity of an inverse objectivity – the assumed subjectivity.

The epistemological implications of the reflexivity are obvious. The researcher contributes to the configurations of the denotations, all along his investigations. The limitations of the participative observing appear, this time, hidden under the limitation of the involuntary participation, of the impossibility to remain aside, of the total detaching, not only in the proper context of the challenges involved by the interviewed, but especially in the process of interpretations and theorisation of results.

There can be made a distinction between the personal reflexivity and the epistemological one. The personal reflexivity refers to its own values, experiences, interests, beliefs etc., which can influence the process of research. The feed-back can be also reversed, that is the way in which the research can influence and change people and researchers.

The epistemological reflexivity implies ample interrogations, such are: how did the hypothesis of the research pre-define and limit the knowledge. How did the used method contribute to the "accumulating" of data? How could the design of the research have been elaborated, in such a way that the investigation to not have limited the knowledge? By reflecting on the research as an abstract configurative act, there are overpassed certain reifications[1].

The epistemological reflexivity refers to the feed-back realised by the researcher on his own presumptions, conceptualisations, instrumentalizations. Nonetheless, reflexivity implies an ethical principle. Considered a principle of the valid research, a methodological

[1] The assertion "If people define the situations as being real, they become real through their consequences" is known in the sociological specialised literature as "The Thomas Theorem", being elaborated by W.I. Thomas in 1928 (Thomas: 1928: 571-572); the sociologist King Merton elaborated the concept of "the self-fulfilling prophecies" starting from the Thomas theorem (Merton: 1995:379-424).

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norm, it is expected that the theories referring to any social construction (religious, scientific, ethical or epistemic) to be explained considering the same principles and methods used for developing forms of knowledge that become an object of the research, at some point. Altogether, the effects involved by the presence of the researcher in the investigated community cannot be eluded, therefore, there have been formulated precise deontological principles that refer to the limits of the social investigations. The elaborations of the philosophy and sociology of science open new spaces for the debates that refer to the nature of the social sciences.

The development of the communicational abilities, of becoming aware of the ethical limitations, along with the theoretical-methodological profound studies on the specificity of the particular socio-human subjects, represent stages that will contribute, either in a formal organisation (studies, initial researches), or informally, to the consolidation of the researcher's professional experience. Thus, art becomes science, the art to interview can be refined without losing spontaneity, and even more, the researcher will have to give a special attention mainly to this "natural", "spontaneous" contextualization, to the interviews and the investigations that they carry out. No other science requests the involvement-detaching alternation, more than the social sciences do.

'The objectivity' of the researcher emerges through permanent reconsiderations of their subjectivity, through the sifting of the role that they fulfil within the research, from the informal aspects of the discussions, necessary for configuring the interactive context of the communication that can sometimes carry rich significant information, for the purpose of the research.

By assuming the reflexivity, it is born a certain detachment, distancing, not in the respect of an impersonal authority that narrates "objectively", but in that of a voice that knows its position, allowing more space for the multiple subjectivity. It is not a deciphering that closes up, but an interpretation that unravels and brings forward problems to be discussed, offering space for the multitude of views, and not only "directing the view".

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