"REALITY" AND ITS COGNITIVE INSTALLATIONS[1]

Abstract: *The notion of 'reality' should be understood as a 'world image' or Weltanschauung and is not to be taken for the unique truth about the world. In spite of nowadays scientific explanations of 'reality', the mechanism of building up the image of the world has remained unchanged, as it does not follow objective, impersonal, homogenous criteria, but a heterogeneous perception of time and space, which are considered from an individual centre of psychological subjectivity and cultural memory. Being subject to change in time and space, 'reality,' as 'a true story' can be defined as a descriptive, cognitive model for identification, in the same terms in which Mircea Eliade defined myth. By analyzing the relation between the individual and the collective character of the 'world image' of different communities in terms of myth-formation, this study envisages the fact that 'reality' has always been a sort of a 'built up' image, or 'installation', an officially accepted narration about reality, converging a meaning. The same is valid for history as science, in which the relation of continuity: past-present-future is established according to the aim of the narration in which selected facts are used.*

Key words: *reality, myth, history*

The Notion of 'Reality' and the Possibility to Empirically Validate Truth

Any discussion about *reality* requires, first of all, the explanation of this notion, which also implies the clarification of the criteria necessary for its objectification. However, when we currently think of 'reality', we usually do not feel the need to clarify this notion, which we are inclined to take for granted, as we often think that what is 'real' is 'objective'. In this respect, we connect the criteria of the objectification of the notion of 'reality', to the school curricula we have been, more or less, familiar with, to our individual readings, to the information we have acquired by means of mass media, to the knowledge we have got in the contacts we have established with the people of the environment we grew up in, to further life experience, etc. In other words, the notions of *real* and *reality* represent a sort of acquired 'luggage' of knowledge, *within which* and *by means of which* we have become what we are, and which is, in a way, self-understood, and which we take for granted. Consequently, if 'taken for granted', *reality* implies a sort of a 'horizon of expectations', founded on the previous knowledge we have acquired, and we are familiar with.

The discussion about 'the reality' implicitly opens the theme of 'the imaginary', or of 'the fantastic'. In literature, for example, the definition of the fantastic discourse is always based on the explanation of the dichotomy: 'real' (which is self-understood, as currently accepted knowledge) *versus* 'fantastic'. In this respect, in the fantastic discourse, the author must develop a true strategy, as "in fact, at the level of the described world, the fantastic discourse develops a contrasting, antinomic structure, which is paradoxical in respect to the commonly accepted knowledge." (Vultur, 1987: 87) The idea that 'reality' should not be mistaken with 'truth', and that it represents only a 'credible', made up discourse is very old. In this respect, Aristotle stated: "Instead of the possible facts, which have an incredible appearance, it is better to choose impossible facts, which seem possible". (Aristotel, 1965: 90) The conclusion might be that "each epoch has got a sort of a 'knowledge luggage' made of all the ideas, believes and perspectives, which converge towards a well determined, ontological, logical, and axiological vision of the world, while the fantastic discourse is born by opposing this code". (Dan, 1997: 20)

[1] Mariana Dan, University of Belgrade, dan.mar@eunet.rs, danmar206@yahoo.com

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On the other hand, we are often inclined to equalise the dichotomy between 'objective' and 'subjective' facts with the dichotomy between science, on the one hand, and art/myth/symbol/religion, on the other. The dichotomy: 'real' – 'imaginary' might also often overlap with the dychotomy: 'mind' – 'heart'.

In spite of the fact that the old Greeks made the difference between *mythos* and *logos*, and in spite of Aristotle's opinion that, for the sake of credibility, it is better for a writer to describe imaginary facts that are plausible, than real facts, which are incredible[1], some of the nowadays anthropologists think that the dychotomy between the real and the imaginary is of recent date. In this respect, the Romanian anthropologyst Corin Braga states that this dychotomy did not exist in the past, and that the people in Antiquity, and during the Middle Ages used to 'build up' their image of the world, according to a system of rules, in which, unlike nowadays, there was no dychotomy between the real and the imaginary, between the natural, and the supernatural, between the inherited tradition, and its empirical verification. (Braga 2006: 13) The Romanian anthropologist states that nowadays current criteria for the *validation of truth* are fundamentally different from the „cognitive installations" of the past. Therefore, according to him, alchemy cannot be considered to be prescientific chemistry, nor is astrology the precursor of astronomy, nor can be the Antique and Mediaeval geography considered as representing pre-modern geography. The Romanian scientist uses as argumentation to such opinion the description of the Antique and Mediaeval maps of the world, in which, it is obvious that classical mythology and Biblical tradition modify empirical reality, describing, essentially, an imaginary space. He thinks that a new kind of science, such as psychogeography, could, actually, discover in the old maps a whole range of symbols and complexes emerging from the "collective imaginary", as such "description of the world", by means of maps, does not represent exterior geography, but the displaying of a whole gallery of images and symbols of one's own subconscious.

Although such conclusion might look acceptable nowadays, it still does not answer to the question in what way people perceive and view *reality*. Do they rely only on the empirical validation of truth by science? It is also not clear if subconscious, or maybe complexes might play a part in the definition of *reality* today as well. Can, for example, historical facts be empirically validated as 'true' in the same way as geographical facts, by using similar criteria? All these issued are still to be considered…

Weltanschauung **as Contemporary "Reality"**

It is obvious that *Weltanschauung* (the world view), emerging in a definite historical period, and within a certain geographical background, often overlaps with the notion of 'truth', being taken for 'the unique truth' about the world. Never does *Weltanschauung* define itself as a "temporary viw of the world", but as *reality*, as a generally accepted, official *understanding* of the world, which is valid within a group of people, within a community, a nation, defining the context and the meaning of existence, of life. This is the case of today's global community as well. However, in spite of nowadays discoveries, man still needs to define himself, and define his own existence, not only in relation to scientific discoveries, but within the background of a subjective-individualised representation of the world, as he did in the pre-scientific period. It is only this kind of representation that can account for his identity, and which provides, altogether, an explanation of the meaning of existence. Does today's

[1] which means that Aristotle made the difference between the real and the imaginary.

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individual make the difference between real and imaginary to a larger extent than the old Greeks did (as related to the world view that was valid in those times)? The categories of the *real* and of the *imaginary* cannot operate retrospectively, while the criteria of defining them should always be related to the 'official' *Weltanschauung* in which they operate, and which is valid in a certain, definite place, and historical time. If the categories of the *real* and of the *imaginary* are considered retrospectively, from today's perspective, our ancestors might appear as schizophrenic beings, which is absurd… They, of course, also made the difference between the *real* and the *imaginary*, but the *real* can be considered as *real* only within, and in close relation to their *Weltanschauung.* How will the science of the future consider our own, today's *Weltanschauung*?

Mircea Eliade was right to state that contemporary man still lives within the boundaries of myth. In this respect, myth is considered to be the valid *Weltanschauung* of today, which is, as all the other myths, a "true story", a sort of *a meta-discourse on reality*, in which people believe. The fact that a myth is sacred or profane is not so important, as it is the general, collective belief of a community attached to it. In this respect, M. Eliade states, in his overall scientific work, that today, it is only the *content of the myth* that has changed (as the content of all myths is subject to change in time and space), while the *mechanism of man's identification with the 'true story', be it sacred or profane, has remained unchanged.* That is why, it appears that *reality* is, in fact, the narration about reality, the story on reality present in a certain community.

Man's mechanism of identification with the "true story" is so powerful, that it is, sometimes, extremely difficult to prove to somebody that "facts" about reality might be presented in different ways, that 'reality' itself might be different from the way it is perceived and understood. This stands both for the rural communities, in which historical facts are commonly subject to myth-formation (Eliade, 1999: 47, 48), and for the urban society, in which, for example, in the second half of the 20th century, atheistic fanatics used to go to Lenin's Mausoleum. What we try to highlight here is the fact that the belief itself in the 'true story' has remained unchanged, as it essentially makes no difference if the object of belief is a deity, a traditional hero, or a communist figure, while the mechanism of percieving reality and identifying with it has remained unchanged. Is this issue valid as far as one might, for example, question the nowadays metadiscourse, or 'true story'on democracy? It is up to each individual to decide if he is able to be impartial, or not.

"Reality" and the Aspects of Identity

The recent culturological studies, having in view that *Weltanschauung* changes continually in time and space, have pointed to the fact that the concept of *realiry* cannot operate with stable axiological categories, which makes impossible the overlapping between the notions of *reality* and *truth.* In this respect, the C. Braga's requirement of the *validation of truth*, looks problematic. This also goes for the notion of the 'imaginary', which has always existed in parallel with a certain 'reality' (as people have always known to make the difference between 'the real' and 'the imaginary', as related to one certain *Weltanschauung*, which represented itself, or represents itself as 'reality'). One shoud accept the fact that nowadays 'reality' is, again, just a model, or a code, a system of understanding the world, based on the Cartesian type of logic, as, diachronically speaking, the concept of the *truth* has been replaced by the idea of *reality*

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(instead of the notion of *verité*, Bergson uses *réalité*)[1], which has been further on used, by the pragmatics, as *utilité*.

The main issue is the fact that 'truth' or 'reality' in humanistic disciplines cannot be empirically validated in the same way it is validated in chemistry, astronomy or geography, to use only some disciplines, as enumerated by C. Braga. If on the one hand *Weltanschauung* represents a changeable, labile sort of 'reality', on the other hand, the scientist himself is subject to the world view of his background, as to a context to which he himself belongs. It is almost impossible for a scientist to judge of cultural, historical, or any humanistic isuues with detachment. That is why, the impartiality required in other sciences is difficult to be achieved:

> Usually, we are not even aware of the special glasses through which we view the world. The same way fish have not discovered thet water exists, the scientist, who is not able to go beyond the boundaries of his own society, cannot expect to notice to what extent have the customs of his background contributed to the shaping of his opinions. (Fabijeti, 2002: 13).

The issue of the 'true story', or meta-discourse within which one's personality has been shaped is of utmost importance in understanding that man is both a sociogene being, and determined by culture. Jan Assmann (Assmann, 2005: 154-156) thinks that the identity of the *ego* can be a) individual, or b) personal. The *individual identity* is tied to the elementary needs of life, and represents the image that was created and preserved in the conscience of a person, with all the significative characteristics which distinguish him from the others; this is a corporal and individual awareness of his being unique, and cannot be replaced. b) *Personal identity* is the sum of all the roles, characteristics and skills accumulated by an individual, while fitting into a 'constellation' or a specific social organisation, and it refers to the social recognition of the individual. Both aspects of the *ego* identity are *sociogene* and *determined by culture*, as both the process of individuation and of socialisation take place within the background that was established by culture. As the scientist is also a human being with an identity, it is almost impossible for him to be impartial when discussing about 'reality'.

"Reality" in Space and Time

As 'reality' is usually defined in relation to somebody who perceives it, who talks about it, time and space cannot be homogenous, but heterogeneous, both for *homo religiosus*, and for the laic man of today. (Eliade, 1995: 22) Otherwise, there would be no possibility of orientation in an infinite, homogenous world:

> In the experiencing the profane space, certain values intervene which remind, more or less, of the lack of homogenity, which characterises the religious experience of the space. There are still priviledged places that are qualitatively different from the others: the homeland, the place of the first love, a street or a corner of the first foreign town one has seen in youth. All these places keep, even

[1] René Genon, discusses, in the chapter *L'Intuitionisme Contemporain* about Bergson's philosophy, and, among other things, he states: "Il est à remarquer que Bergson semble même éviter d'employer le mot de *verité* et qu'il lui substitue presque toujours celui de *réalité*, qui pour lui ne désigne que ce qui est soumis a un changement continuel." (Guénon, 1972 : 217 – in the foot note). One should notice the fact that Bergson seems to avoid the use of the word *truth*, which he almost always replaces by the word *reality*, and which, for him, represents only that which is subject to continuous changing.

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> for the most unreligious person, an exceptional quality, a 'uniqueness', as they represent the 'sacred places' of one's private Universe, as if this non-religious being experienced the revelation of *another* reality than the one to which he participates by his day by day existence. (Eliade, 1995: 23-24)

Similarly, homogenous time does not exist either, in which the experiences from the past have the same value; the way is incorrect time is represented in historiography, by a mere chronological enumeration of the data, as man inevitably experiences the facts of life as heterogene, being influenced by his own memories, as well as by the cultural memories of the specific community he belongs to:

> On the one hand, there are many stories in which as many groups of people reside within their memories, as well as in the image they have about themselves, and, on the other hand, there is a history in which the historian dwells in some facts, which were extracted from thet multitude of stories. But these facts are mere void abstractions, and which mean nothing to nobody, nobody has remembered them, as they are cleaned by any relation to identity amd memory. First of all, time in which history preserves its data is abstract. Historic time is a *durée artificielle* which no group percieves or remembers as a *durée*. This is the way in which time is for Halbwachs beyond reality. History is an artifact with no function, as it is dislocated from the context of continuity, and deprived of all those connections that represent life, that is from the social, spatial and temporal context of concrete life. (Assmann, 2005 : 51)

That is why, even if the man of today thinks no longer in the 'pre-scientific' dichotomies enumerated by C. Braga, the 'reality' of the world he perceives is not identical with the 'homogenous' descriptions of the 'exact sciences'. Moreover, the so called 'exact sciences' are not that exact as they seem to be. A good example is the way historical truth is *validated*.

"Reality" and History

The Serbian sociologist Todor Kuljić shows that history, as science, is also subject to conceptual transformations in time, which take place in parallel with the world view, or the *meaning* each historian wants to highlight. That is why, he considers that historiography is not just a range of chaotic and/or impersonal data (as M. Eliade, or Halbwachs believed), which, as such would be irrelevant for human existence. Todor Kuljić, as many other contemporary sociologists, reveals the fact that historical facts are not impersonal and homogenous, as: "the past facts acquire the status of history within the very process of their *selection*, that takes place while updating them". As the very *meaning* of history is necessarily tied to the *process of connecting of* the *past, present and future*, one can notice, for example, that:

> The antifascism and patriotism of the Serb partisans tie the past to the present while appealing at a *supranational meaning*, while the Serbian chetniks, and the fighters for national identity re-establish the connection of the same times from a *nationalistic perspective.* From the point of view of the *meaning*, the past is not important either thanks to the facts that took place, either because those facts might be useful today, but it is important, first of all, as a *need to create the continuity*, which organises and ensures the expectations for the future. *The meaning* is always related to expectations. (Kuljić, 2006: 243-244)

It is obvious that, by means of the *operated selection* that gives a *meaning* to those facts from the past, which can assure continuity with the present and the future, history, does not deal with mere *homogenous* facts, but the events of the past are *heterogeneous* in the case of history as science, as they used to be in the case of myth.

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By considering the historical time as heterogeneous, the Serbian author considers, as M. Eliade also does, that past confers the possibility of "getting culturally oriented, and only then, but not necessarily, the past might become a formula for ideological influence". (Kuljić, 2006: 245)

On the other hand, many scientists doubt about the possibility of drawing a clear cut line between the facts that took place in the past and their interpretation. In other words, history itself is made up on the foundation of different myths, or 'true stories'. In the process of *selecting* the data from the past, history takes over "the point of view of the Other, who is dominant, especially in the case in which it overlaps over the momentary feelings, which are tied to interests." (Kuljić, 2006: 243) T. Kuljić notices the consensus of all scientists who point to the fact that the shaping of the past in a *narration/story, created with an aim,* can easier mediate the *meaning*, than the fragmentary and complicated explanations which have no narrative structure: "In other words, the dexterity of the story lies in the persuasive connection of the different times. Therefore, Rüsen is convinced that *the meaning becomes history only when it is capable to mediate the relation between past, present and future.*" (Kuljić, 2006: 248)

It is obvious that this is the same process which is to be found in the traditional myths. Therefore, in spite of the apparent dichotomy between history and myth, the *process and the mechanisms of identification with the 'true story' have remained the same, no matter of the level scientific discoveries have reached.* Undoubtedly, the scientific discoveries have a significant impact on the world view of a certain moment, but the individual mechanisms of identification with this view(s) have remained unchanged, no matter if 'the true story' is sacred or profane; *the fact is important for this story to have a continuity of meaning within a certain narration*.

That is why, one cannot tell if *the meaning* of the narrated facts belongs to 'the real', or to 'the imaginary', while 'the validation of truth', which C. Braga requires for the scientific facts, is closely tied to explanation. Can explanation in history and culture overlap with 'truth', or at least with 'reality'? One might simply not be able to decide which of the 'realities' validated by historical narrations to consider. It is obvious that 'the cognitive installations' in defining and explaining reality are still present in nowadays science, as they were present in the 'true stories' of the past. All these 'installations' are built on the foundations of the accepted world view of a certain time, which always claims it is 'real'.

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