

EERO TARASTI

Department of Musicology, University of Helsinki

Culture and transcendence

ABSTRACT: Culture can be approached from an existential semiotic point of view in many ways. The following results can be then obtained: The new notion which the Existential semiotic theory of culture (ESC) tries to launch is transcendence. The ESC theory is an attempt to see and analyse issues from the inside, using a model called Zemic which refers to four modes of Being. It deals with agency like any cultural theory, but now behind the theory is the idea of a subject as a transcendental ego, who is capable of pursuing acts, making choices and enjoying freedom. The theory of ESC can be tested by empirical cases of cultural life and history such as studies in cultural heritage. The theory is non-deterministic. There is “linguistic turn” in the sense that a new metalanguage is elaborated to deal with transcultural, supra-rational and metacultural issues. Formal language is used to some extent, stemming from the semiotic square, deontic logic and the grammar of modalities. The proper philosophical style is that of the continental and speculative theory, yet the ESC theory is not any regress in the history of philosophy. ESC theory is non-reductionist, i.e. it emphasizes the phenomena as such.

KEYWORDS: culture, existential semiotics, transcendence, subjectivity, modalities

Is an existential semiotic theory of culture possible? Such a question came to my mind when reading recent studies and books on British cultural theory. This theory, which seems to have become dominant in many fields of social sciences and humanities and which represents to me those theories belonging to the “nothing but...” category, is almost unavoidable in the academic world nowadays. It is taken as a given. No one seems to be aware of its inherent cultural imperialism, which favours the contemporary, globalized, technosemiotic, market-, media- and consumption-oriented culture which is expanding over the whole world. It is at the same time a way of relativizing all other alternative views of cultures and all different approaches to these issues. The culture emerging from this new “cultural theory” is nothing but an ideological version of the present world civilization. That remains the case even if we were to admit that culture can, after all, be a transcendental issue, since often the ideas, identities etc. to which it constantly refers, are absent, transcendental entities which in spite of this exercise a strong emotional appeal and have power over people’s minds. However, transcendence is totally relativized in just the same way as it was by sociology and history during the sociosemiotic phase of our societies. Communities in which we live are to a great deal imagined, just as Benedict Anderson tries to show. Does it mean that they are “transcendental”?

Yet the major question about cultures, when they become objects of scientific research and discussion, is whether there could exist a **meta-cultural theory** which would be more than an ideological reflection of one culture, albeit the victorious one. A hope of such a theory would seem to be the only possibility of avoiding those “cross-cultural misunderstandings” which Walburga von Raffler-Engel once discussed. To discover or elaborate such a theory is a challenge indeed for the concept of transcendence itself and its explanatory power for the mundane affairs of our *Dasein*. However, taking into account such an issue as transcendence does not mean a shift to, for example, theology. Societies which seem to try to function upon the transcendental principle, i.e. varieties of religion, have often proved to be inefficient over a longer period. Thus, in order to obtain an existential semiotic theory of culture, it is not sufficient to apply only the idea of transcendence. One needs other aspects as well, such as seeing the situation from within, and following the ethical principle of the subject’s ability to make choices and thus influence his/her fate in the world. Any such theory which denies this subjective point of view is certainly not existential. The cold and inhuman theories of structuralism, like Michel Foucault’s, are deterministic in this sense. There is something lifeless, extremely pessimistic and passive in those theories regarding man - who is, however, a political and active animal; such a creature as he appears in, among others, the writings of Hanna Arendt. She describes her subject as fighting against the dictatorship of conditions (a term also used by the Finnish philosopher Georg Henry v Wright), and for the “infinitely improbable”, which can be achieved in spite of everything. The Foucaultian vision of society evokes La Mettrie’s idea of *l’homme machine* – or Jean Cocteau’s *machine infernale*, a cruel game played with humans by the Gods. The existential semiotic view is never like that; it always gets into the skin of the protagonists of human history, its agents – and these agents can be anyone, not only in the Heideggerian negative sense of *das Man* – but any subject in his/her existential situations.

When lecturing recently on the theme **What is Existential Semiotics** at the Finnish Science Society in Helsinki, I was asked by my colleague, professor of translation theory Andrew Chesterman: “Are there any means to test your theory, or to forecast or predict something with it?” I said to him: “you are very British” – which was not intended to be an *argumentum ad hominem*, but to raise the eternal question whether philosophical theories in the humanities can be tested, or even need testing, by experiments or empirical facts; I wanted to point out that the truth criteria in these issues might be different from the traditional correspondence theory with its word-thing issues, being based instead on the coherence of the new model of reading facts, a new conceptual metalanguage. Then our discussion continued and my colleague put aside the idea of testing and put his criticism in another way: “Can you imagine any evidence which would show your theory is wrong?” Here I distinguished a Peircean undertone of fallibilism, i.e. that scien-

tific theories are characterized by their constant renewal when they are shown to be erroneous and that progress, if any, in science, was based precisely upon this. However, the hypothesis from which I start myself is that conceptual and philosophical theories are almost always nothing but **absolutizations** of the personal life experiences of the scholar. If this were true, to say that a theory is wrong would mean: a) your experience has been wrong, or b) the manner you inferred your theory from your experiences, i.e. your reasoning, has been wrong. The first point would be truly tricky: how could you say to anyone that your experience, your life history, growing into a person, into an identity and into a profession from a mere physical body, was **wrong**? To claim such a thing would mean to undervalue and even be contemptuous of a person and of subjectivity. Yet, there are standpoints which do this. Marxists say: you represent *falsches Bewusstsein* and therefore your ideas are wrong. Psychoanalysts say: you are neurotic, that is why what you say does not tell us what you really are; according to the Lacanian principle, your signifiers do not reflect your true signifieds; feminists and gender theoreticians say: you represent a repressive chauvinist ideology, a patriarchal order; accordingly, your standpoint is conditioned by your gender position and cannot represent any ultimate truth, nor even any authenticity. However, I have to leave this debate so as not to stray from the subject. The other point of view, i.e. my theory is wrong due to erroneous reasoning, is closer to the “normal” evaluation in science and humanities. A theory is wrong or right depending on whether it represents his intuition for the scholar and whether he is able to express and communicate it to other members of the scientific community.

However, let us also take the idea of testing a theory seriously to the extent that we could try to find out what kinds of cultural, psychological and social phenomena could be understood and explained by applying to them the **existential semiotic** viewpoint. Taking into account the huge quantity of mankind’s cultural experiences, what we call “traces of humanity” (I remember Jaroslav Jiranek saying so), we might try to interpret them by applying our existential theory and asking whether it functions as a cultural theory or not. Pursuing this line I would propose that we could use the international research project *Semiotics of cultural heritages*, with its approximately 60 young and more advanced scholars all over the world, as the empirical field where we could apply our theory. However, before doing so we should define what our existential theory is in this respect, and which elements of it are relevant here. In the semiotic tradition, we may ask how the other cultural theories have succeeded in progressing along the same line or digressing from it in other directions. We need to ask whether we can use the existential theory to criticize or approve the already existing cultural theories in semiotics, from Lévi-Strauss, Foucault and Barthes to Eco, Ponzio and even Nietzsche, Bakhtin, Benedict, Stuart Hall, Valsiner, Deleuze, Münster, Schütz, and many others.

The theory in brief

Clearly, the reader should know in advance something about the existential theory. However, it would not be necessary to read all my books on the subject;¹ it is enough to summarize some essentials. As in TV soap operas, the 19th century newspaper feuilleton novels, or Wagner's *Nibelungen Ring*, one has to learn what happened in the previous part. The theory concerns our *Dasein*, or the living world with all its subjects and objects. But the area **beyond** the *Dasein* is involved just as much, and that is called transcendence. What it is, is still quite open. The easiest definition I have discovered is: the transcendent is anything which is absent but is present in our minds. Modern man might think that it is something like virtuality, virtual space, some might even say that it is the internet of our time but that would be going too far! As to the structure of our *Dasein*, so far I have arrived at a model which is called Zemic. It consists of four modes of Being which have been arranged to form a square. The logical square itself was invented by ancient stoic philosophers. The Paris school of semiotics took it up again in the 1960s and called it the "semiotic square" with terms *s1*, *s2*, *not-s2* and *not-s1*. This was used to articulate four modes of being stemming from the Hegelian logic: from *an-sich-sein* to *für-sich sein* (being-in-oneself/being-for-oneself); in turn, this model was adopted by Jean-Paul Sartre in his existentialist philosophy (*L'Être et le néant*). Then, borrowing from these sources, I added from the semiotic theory of the body (*soma/sema*) by Jacques Fontanille, and from the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, the categories of *Moi/Soi*. Accordingly we have four cases of *Moi/Soi*, M1, M2, S2 and S1. They correspond to the body, to identity (person), to social practices and to social norms and values. Each one marks its own Greimassian modality, in the same order: will, can, know and must. Thus the last modality, that of "believe," has been reserved for transcendence which can become present and actualized at any time via acts of negation and affirmation.

Such a model has not been previously presented in semiotics, but in the history of philosophy I recently found, in the work of an Arabian-Persian Sufi mystic Ibn Arabi (full name Muhyi al-Dim Ibn Arabi, 1165–1240), an analogous model of circles of transcendence, also surrounding the four modes of Being. Ibn Arabi was born in Murcia, in Spain, but after long journeys finally settled at Damas in Syria. His model portrays six circles of transcendence: 1) the divine presence (outermost circle); 2) the second circle showing the place of Man; 3) the third circle representing the presence of the divine in man (similar to what we observe in the Platonic ideas) 4) this shows Man in contact with the world; 5) the axis cutting the inner

¹ Eero Tarasti, *Existential Semiotics*, (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000); *Fondements de la sémiotique existentielle*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009); "Existential semiotics in culture and psychology" in Jaan Valsiner (ed.), *Oxford Encyclopedia of Culture and Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); *Sein und Schein. Explorations in Existential Semiotics*, (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, forthcoming 2014).

circle into four parts represents multiplicity (the categories of existing things) in the World; and 6) the circle in the middle represents the World of which Man is master and its support. The four areas starting from the center towards periphery are separations among the diverse categories of the existing things in the World.

Transculturality

By showing this amazing parallel I simply want to emphasise that the existential semiotic cultural theory should be able to discuss such cases across cultural and historical borderlines, and develop reading models and concepts of such high universality that even phenomena as extremely remote from each other as Hegelian logic and Sufi mystics can find a common denominator. That would be true transculturality and “multiplicity” (see later Deleuze).

There would thus be two parts to this task: first — a historical overview of semiotic theories, including those which we do not regard as overtly semiotic in spite of their use of semiotic notions, and often ignoring their origins in the various contexts of European semiotics, as in the case of British cultural theory. The second task is to consider how existential theory would, as a theory, meet the challenge of the global ethical situation in which we find ourselves now, in our technosemiotic state, having not yet, hopefully, forgotten the earlier socio- and ethnosemiotic living worlds. For a long time semiotics has been looking for ways of answering the essential and vital questions of mankind, not only by being subordinated to the service of the capitalist consumer world and economic profit, but by pondering on a non-utilitarian basis the essence of such imminent problems of world cultures as *Umwelt*, a non-violent society, human responsibility, growth, education and cultural identity. The existential theory, by launching such difficult concepts as transcendence, the Zemic model, new categories of signs, *Schein*, post-colonial analysis, the theory of resistance and modalities, attempts to offer a promise in this direction. It is a comforting fact that often the most abstract theories prove to be the most practical and have the most pragmatic consequences when facing empirical reality.

For brevity's sake, the existential semiotic cultural theory will from now on be referred to as the ESC theory. So, the ESC theory cannot be a generalisation and an absolutisation of any particular culture or society. Yet, even this is ambiguous. On the one hand, Ruth Benedict warned about this as early as her classical work *Patterns of Culture*.² In the chapter *Study of manners* she states that a social scholar gathers a large quantity of material for a treatise on learning, on narcissism as the origin of neuroses, but deals with only this material. In other words: he/she does not care about social systems and cultures other than his/her own.

² Ruth Benedict, *Kulttuurin muodot* (orig. *Patterns of Culture*), trans Kai Kaila (Helsinki: Porvoo, 1951).

He/she identifies, for example, local Westerns attitudes with human nature and calls their description "Economy" or "Psychology".

Yet this happens very often, and did happen in earlier times with speculative theories of the human mind. However, we should not reject such theories out of hand, since they might contain something similar to what Lévi-Strauss called, in a neo-Kantian manner, "categories of the human mind" (*categories de l'esprit humain*).

Criticism of British cultural studies

Let us consider briefly the modern cultural theory course books used in all universities nowadays. First, let us take the book by Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*.³ In its foreword Paul Willis says: "At an everyday and human level, cultural interests, pursuits and identities have never been more important". Individuals and groups want [...] "something more than passive or unconscious acceptance of a historically/socially prescribed identity (simply being working class, black or white, young or old etc). Everyone wants to have or make or be considered as possessing cultural *significance*". This sounds rather "existential" and promising. Yet, it is not specified here who that "everyone" is, which I am afraid is very similar to the Heideggerian "average person", *das Man* of the contemporary global marketing culture. After a long list of "possible cultures", from interpersonal interactions to group norms, communicative forms, texts and images to institutional constraints, social imagery and economic political determinants, the author says: "We are condemned to a kind of eclecticism because of the very eclecticism and indissoluble combinations of the dissimilar in the increasingly complex "real" world around us".⁴ But what is "real"? This was precisely the theme of a major semiotic congress in Ankara, Cankaya University organized by the architect Zeynep Onur. It is exactly the present technosemiotic global consumption world and nothing else which is absolutized here as the "World as such". I have elsewhere posed this question from the standpoint of an emancipated subject: do we want to be part of that world? In fact this is already quite Hegelian. "Real" equals to *wirklich*, and Hegel said: *was vernünftig ist, das ist wirklich, und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig*. So the logic of this world is taken as universally true. However, let us remember what the Austrian writer Robert Musil said in his *Der Man ohne Eigenschaften: Wenn es Wirklichkeitssinn gibt muss es auch Möglichkeitssinn geben*. There is nothing determined about reality or the world, there are always alternatives, possibilities.

Even Willis speaks about the "postdisciplinary" nature of cultural studies. Instead of writing endlessly "introduction to... that and that", they are a privileged site for the emergence of the discipline of disciplines. He is impressed by how Chris Barker deals with topics such as world disorder, sex, subjectivity, space, cultural

³ Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (Los Angeles, London: Sage, 2008).

⁴ Paul Willis, in Barker, *Cultural*, xxii.

policy, identity, youth culture, television, ethnicity, race... which reveal "...some concrete grounds of a complex and rapidly changing "real" world... and these sites are presented in selected theoretical contexts. In one word: he aims for a supra-disciplinary base".⁵ It is certainly the case that the ESC theory shares the same goal, but not on such an eclectic basis. Barker sees all cultural forms as structured like language - how familiar that sounds! That was the thesis of the structuralists a long time ago. However, how is such a supra- or meta- or fundamental deep level of reflection to be reached? Jaan Valsiner discusses this in terms of cultural psychology.⁶ He has a diagram which, in cross-cultural psychological terms, "generates" the culture top-down, from humankind to particular societies A, B etc, to social institutions within the society, to individual persons. This model is then corrected and replaced by another, in which culture "belongs to" an individual, in this model the participation is first analyzed by using samples which exemplify the psychological systems of these individuals. The theory is then tested on other individuals and so forth. Ultimately, one may attain a general theory of humankind and its cultures.⁷ This means that such a meta-level is reached inductively, by studying a sufficient number of "cases" of human cultures. The existential theory is certainly close to this kind of "psychologizing" of anthropological theories; however, it is not a psychological theory as such, but rather a conceptual one. We shall soon see in what way.

Language games

In what follows, I shall purposely juxtapose the cultural theory and ESC theory, so that the latter's distinguishing features are foregrounded. The purpose is not to engage in polemics for their own sake, but simply to situate the new theory among other existing theories, and to state, at the least, what it is NOT. To criticize another theory by listing all that it is lacking would be the most primitive kind of scientific debate and should be avoided, since no theory can take everything into account.

Barker says in his opening: "I explore that version of cultural studies which places language at its heart". He gives greater attention to poststructuralist theories of language than to "the ethnography of lived experience".⁸

Barker then argues that: "Cultural studies does not speak with one voice..." but as early as in the next phrase he admits that his whole theory draws on work "developed in Britain, United States, Continental Europe (most notably France) and

⁵ Ibid., xxiii.

⁶ Jaan Valsiner, *Culture in Minds and Societies. Foundations of Cultural Psychology*. (Los Angeles, London etc.: Sage 2007).

⁷ Ibid., 28.

⁸ Barker, *Cultural*, 3.

Australia".⁹ He admits: it would be more accurate to describe this text as Western cultural studies. "I simply do not feel qualified to say how much cultural studies as I understand it, is pertinent to the social and cultural conditions of Africa".¹⁰ What follows throughout the whole book then clearly demonstrates that, true, certain French authors are accepted but they appear as individual geniuses, totally detached from their original ideas, historical roots and contexts. We all know how the American book markets are always "discovering" a genius from Paris, which is full of such talents only waiting to be discovered by managers; his/her output is quickly translated into American, he/she is turned into a new intellectual fashion icon — just as it happened with Foucault, Derrida, Barthes etc. etc.: the list is endless. Barker admits that Africa is outside his context, but where is Asia, Latin America, Russia etc? This is exactly what Benedict warned about: a theory is valid only within one limited area and culture — although now expanded as a new civilization via globalization to every corner of the world. But the imperialist purport of such enterprise is immediately clear. Such a totally Anglo-centric theory can never be the ESC theory!

Furthermore Barker remarks: "Cultural studies is constituted by the language game of cultural studies".¹¹ Is this then the famous "linguistic turn", the same as in Anglo-analytic philosophy? The ESC theory admits the importance of metalanguage to deal with different cultures, but that is another issue. The claim is then made about cultural studies as politics, in that the subject is important for its exploration and representation of marginalized social groups and the need for cultural change. The author then talks boldly about the production of meaning in language as signifying practices. How can this be claimed without a semiotic theory?

Moreover, the author states that "Cultural studies has for the most part been concerned with modern industrialized economies and media cultures along capitalist lines".¹² He thus tries to combine these signifying practices with political economy. He certainly takes the present economic system as a given: Signifying practices have to be adapted to it. He then argues that cultural studies are non-reductionist. Yet nothing is said about the culture itself. The same often holds true for communication studies, which investigate only **how** something is communicated, and not **what** is communicated.

Articulation

Then comes the notion of "articulation". It means the formation of a temporary unity between elements that do not have to be combined. Strange! It is certainly true that articulation stems from linguistics and refers to levels of

⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹¹ Ibid., 4.

¹² Ibid., 9.

articulation, the 1st and 2nd articulation in semiotics as defined by André Martinet (see also Eco). Nothing is said about its origin. In the chapter titled *Power* cultural studies are said to be concerned with subordinate groups. What groups? The next chapter, on popular culture, reveals that popular cultures are obviously thought to be subordinate. This idea also appears elsewhere. For instance, popular music is regarded as being in a minority position, although it holds all the power in the market and what is now subordinated and threatened is undoubtedly classical music, as well as all of high culture in general (Roger Scruton being the only scholar with the courage to defend it in his book *Modern Culture*).¹³

We then have the notion of the “hegemonic” text. Since images, sounds, objects and practices are sign systems which signify with the same mechanism as a language, we may refer to them as cultural texts. The distinction between verbal and non-verbal is totally omitted. Naturally, this evokes the Lotmanian theory of culture as texts. Text is there generalized to concern any cultural object or activity. A difficult point might arise when a scholar turns to an intra-textual world of objects without temporality (like painting or architecture). Texts, being faithful to their linguistic origin, normally have a beginning and an end. Why not replace this term by the notion of narrativity and narrative?

Next comes the issue of subjectivity. This is involved as a part of consumption, i.e. we exist as subjects only as consumers. “The moment of consumption marks one of the processes by which we are formed as persons. How we are produced as subjects”.¹⁴ The author does not ask: how do we **make** ourselves? Identities are discursive constructions, we then learn. We have to study the class basis of a culture that aims to give voice to the subordinated... but, again, who are they, those imagined “subordinated”? We then move on to structuralism, with only three authors named: Saussure, Lévi-Strauss and Barthes. Lévi-Strauss is introduced via Edmund Leach — we all know how superficial that is — and it is said of him: “Typical of Lévi-Strauss structuralism is his approach to food, which, he declares, is not so much good to eat as good to think with”.¹⁵ About structuralism, we are told that it is “synchronic in approach analyzing the structures of relations in a snapshot of a particular moment”. This sounds totally mysterious. Moreover, “structuralism is best approached as a method of analysis rather than an all-embracing philosophy”.

Postmodernism is supposed to claim: “knowledge is not metaphysical, transcendental or universal but specific to particular times and spaces”. Here transcendence is obviously misunderstood, transcendence is not “there”, somewhere high up, but it is here, where we have actualized it in our *Dasein*, as is proposed by the ESC theory. Later on, more is said about subjectivity and identity, in the chapter

¹³ Roger Scruton, *Modern Culture* (London: Continuum, 2000).

¹⁴ Barker, *Cultural*, 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

on personhood as a cultural production. What it means to be a person is social and cultural “all the way down”. Identities are wholly social constructions and cannot exist outside cultural representations... but later it is admitted: “...identity is an essence that can be signified through signs of taste, beliefs, attitudes and lifestyles. Identity is deemed to be both personal and social”¹⁶ — i.e. according to our theory both M2 and S2. It is then suggested that “There are no transcendental or ahistorical elements to what it means to be a person”.¹⁷ Thus the theory denies totally the concept of a “transcendental ego” behind our constructed social “egos”. Yet if this is so, how is it possible that we can read texts that are a thousand years old as if they were written yesterday? Moreover, the book claims that what it is to be a person cannot be universal. Psychoanalysis is to be read as a set of poetic, metaphorical and mythological stories. It cannot be the basis of a universal theory.¹⁸ In the chapter *Language and identity* we read that one cannot have an “I” and one cannot have an identity. Rather one is constituted through languages. Language does not express an already existent “true self” but brings the self into being.¹⁹ But then we can ask: do we exist only when we are talking?

Later on it becomes clear that articulation here means something totally different from its original meaning in linguistics. Following the interpretation used here, it applies, rather, to human development in general, as Kierkegaard used it once in his famous *Stages of life* (orig. *Stadier af livet*), which were aesthetic, ethical and religious. We could then say that they are levels with different articulations which always take place when we move from one “subject position” to another. There is thus no organic growth from one to another, as Goethe presumed. This provides man with the freedom to **rearticulate** himself again when shifting to a new level. Applying this to our Zemic model, a move from M1 to M2 and further to S2 can also mean a rearticulation of one’s inner semiotic mechanisms, modalities. If one is clumsy, slow, weak, inadequate in M1, one may suddenly become, with determination, like another person in M2, and even change one’s M1 profile by training; one can even have this happen in order to reach a degree of S2. Well, Richard Wagner never became an S2 actor, although he wanted it as M2 - because as M1 he was too short and his voice was unclear. Demosthenes stuttered in M1 but became a great orator in S2. The ballet dancer Jorma Uotinen was almost paralyzed in M1 in his youth by a rare illness, but became a famous dancer in S2. Other examples could be given. Oscar Parland has portrayed this kind of event in his novels: a new “person” or mode of being can emerge like a butterfly from caterpillar, as a metamorphosis.

¹⁶ Ibid., 216.

¹⁷ Ibid., 218.

¹⁸ Ibid., 223.

¹⁹ Ibid., 225.

Subject positions

In modern theory we might say that the “subject position” changes. As Barker puts it, “Thus the same person is able to shift across subject positions according to circumstances”.²⁰ But behind this argument is the very postmodern statement that “No single identity can... act as an overarching organizing identity... We are constituted by fractured multiple identities”. This is the favourite idea of many contemporary thinkers who deny the possibility of a transcendental ego. Naturally, if there is a transcendental ego, the person is not a new subject on the same level as others, but functions from another logical position altogether. Yet this is what has just been denied above. In our framework, does the subject position mean adopting one of the modes of being M1, M2 S2 or S1, and staying in it? This is certainly an error, since if you classify people according to one mode, you forget that everyone is always a combination of all four of them. Identities are better described as certain constellations of these modes with different emphases among them. In one identity, M1 is important, let us say, for a member of an athletic club, while for another the S1 mode is the most essential, as in the life of a saint in a desert, or a martyr. Therefore, if you classify a person according to the categories “fat/thin”, you dwell in M1, but maybe the person considers himself more in terms of M2, i.e. “cheerful/serious”? Yet, if subjects are regarded as idiots who do not know what happens within them — as structuralists are always claiming — someone else is making their discourse and thus subordinating them. So the emic aspect is totally lacking here.

What Foucault said

Nevertheless, it is interesting in itself to raise the problem of what is described as the “agency”, and the politics of identity. This is linked to the theories of Foucault. It has been said that, for him, subjects are discursive constructions and products of power. But he has been criticized for not providing us with a theory of agency.²¹ For him, ethics are concerned with practical advice as to how one should concern oneself with oneself in everyday life. He speaks about the “techniques of the self”. Ethics center on the government of others and the government of oneself. Ethical discourses construct subject positions which enable agency to occur. Agency is a discursive construction exemplifying the productive character of power, according to what Baker supposes Foucault has said. Yet, such an ethical standpoint is close to the utilitarian ethics. Ethics exist to improve the welfare of subjects. This ignores a very essential aspect of ethics, which is that, most often,

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 231.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 232.

to follow an ethical principle and to carry out an ethical act does not lead to any advantage, profit or promotion of the agent's own life, but rather the reverse. A person who does good things is hated by others, and ultimately destroyed. Why? Because to do good means that one is stronger than others. This is something most people cannot accept. Yet, we might say that doing good makes evil manifest itself, and when evil is visible, observable, it is easier to fight against. In any case, the ethical principle is a much deeper mental capacity than mere reflection of S1 and S2 in one's mind, i.e. coming from the outside, from the *Soi*. It is already in *Moi*, or rather it is in every mode, and particularly as a transcendental, virtual value waiting for its actualization. They, the director of the Great Encyclopedic Center of Islamic Studies, has said in Teheran, at the opening of a symposium on ethics, that it is more important than religion. Good is good, and bad is bad universally, for all human beings. Such a conception of ethics goes indeed much deeper than the Western theories of it often do.

However, what Foucault actually said was that he denied the existence of such a thing as a transcendental ego. He argues in *The Order of Things* (orig. *Les mots et les choses*): "If there is one approach that I do reject, however, it is that (one might call it broadly speaking the phenomenological approach), which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, which attributes a constituent role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity, which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness".²² Thus he seems to deny the whole idea of agency and claims, as Barker puts it: social systems operate to structure what an actor is. However, the concept of ethics centered around the care of the self is an extremely limited view.

It is true that there is something pessimistic and gloomy in the Foucaultian view of man. Famous and often quoted is the passage from the above-mentioned treatise: "Strangely enough, man — the study of man — supposed by the naïve to be the oldest investigation since Socrates — is probably no more than a kind of rift in the order of things, or, in any case, a configuration whose outlines are determined by the new position he has so recently taken in the field of knowledge [...] It is comforting and a source of profound relief to think that man is only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old.... that he will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form".²³ It goes without saying that such a standpoint could never be acceptable in the ESC theory. Yet, the Foucaultian archaeology project has a heuristic value in revealing a general space of knowledge, its configurations and the mode of being of the things that appear in it; all this defines "[...] systems of simultaneity as well as mutation sufficient to circumscribe the threshold of a new positivity".²⁴ Clearly, this is the aim of an existential metatheory of cultures as well,

²² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), xiv.

²³ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

in regard of the level of profundity. Foucault does not seem to notice that by saying that, he is positioning himself as a scholar in the role of a transcendental ego whom he wanted to remove from his scholarly discourse altogether. What Menard Boss said about scientific pre-understanding holds true here quite well.

If Foucault disliked the idea of transcendence, so also did Lévi-Strauss who ten years before Foucault said the same in his *Structures of Elementary Parenthood*²⁵ in the acclaimed chapter on “archaic illusion”. Yet, he did so with agency as it is understood in cultural theory: freedom, free will, action, creativity, originality and possibility of change through actions of free agents. Against these theses Barker proposes that subjects are determined by social forces that lie outside of themselves as individuals. He says that a great many actions of modern life are routine in character. Often we do not make self-conscious choices at all, but follow a socially determined routinized path. This is also the claim made by Umberto Eco when he talks of the automatism of the codes which force us to do certain things. Yet, for Barker “the best we can do is to produce another story about ourselves”, even though “we clearly have the existential experience in facing and making choices”.²⁶ However, the existence of social structures (S2) is not only negative: it also enables us to realize our actions. Thus, according to Barker, human freedom cannot consist of an escape from social determinants.

Action

We might then ask whether the ESC theory is a theory of pragmatic action? If the ESC theory essentially deals with the change and transformation of culture, the logic of **act and event** fits well with its essence, following Georg Henrik v. Wright. Is a shift from one mode to another an act or an event? Does it occur by itself or only by purposeful intentional act? Acts are not changes in the world as such. They are not events. But many acts are portrayed as causing changes. To act means, in a sense, to intervene in the course of nature. Yet, an event is a shift from 1) one state to another (for instance a window is opened); 2) from a state to a series of events (for instance to start running); 3) from a series of events to a state (for instance to stop talking); or 4) changes in series of events (for instance: a walking man starts to run). One has to distinguish the act categories — for instance to perform music — and an individual act — to perform Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony*. The logical difference between acts and events is in their activity and passivity. An act needs an agent. An individual event means that a general event takes place in a particular situation. An individual act is to perform a general act in a particular situation and through a particular agent.

²⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* (Paris: PUF., 1949).

²⁶ Barker, *Cultural*, 236.

We can now already apply this kind of analysis and ask whether in our existential model changes, i.e. shifts from one mode to another, from M1 to M2, from body to person etc., are acts or events? It is an event when, for instance, a body grows and becomes a person, but it is an act when a certain body decides to adopt certain habits and thus becomes a person. Thus a change from M2 to S2 means: a certain person becomes a certain kind of professional, let us say in the family of Habsburgs they all become kings and queens at a certain moment; in certain societies certain types of persons automatically take up certain positions, such as warriors, priests, governors, following Dumézil's Indoeuropean model. But if particular persons decide to take up particular professions as their choice, their decision and effort to reach these positions in S2, then these are acts. Moreover, in v. Wright's theory one distinguishes acts and events, and then activities — series of events or processes. Events take place, but processes just go on. So by applying the Wrightian logic of change we can analyse the growth of a culture, how a culture becomes a culture.

Moreover, we may ask: if M1 and M2 still represent the biological and S2 and S1 the social levels, how does the shift from nature to culture take place? Is it the Rousseauian narrative of the kind "all is good in nature and becomes bad in culture"? Yet we may suppose that the movement in the Zemic model is partly automatic, i.e. caused by events, and partly caused by acts. But in both cases the logical operations of affirmation and negation have their role. Forbearance is a kind of negation. An agent forbears in a certain situation from doing a certain thing, if and only if he could do it but in fact does not do it. If we then go on to establish norms, there are three types of them: something should be done — an order; something is allowed to be done — a permission, something is not allowed to be done - a prohibition. Thus, if we know the modes beginning from S1 — the social norms and values — and they have these statuses, the first two, S1 and S2, launch the chain from S1 up to M1, but the third one, M2, can stop it. But even then, this forbearance can have certain consequences which, again, have their impact on the course of events. Is the movement within the Zemic model the same as the temporal course, i.e. the duration of one individual's life and the history in the life of collectivities?

The model could be formalized here: "should" = $M1 \dashrightarrow - M2$, "allow" = $M1 \dots \rightarrow M2$ (i.e. M2 is permitted after M1), and "forbidden" = $M1 \dashrightarrow / \dashrightarrow M2$. Furthermore, we can ask whether the movements are the same in both directions, from M1 to S1 and from S1 to M1.

There is already so much use of formal schemes that we may return to the question of whether in fact ESC is close to Anglo-analytical philosophy. The use of formal languages was one of its criteria. However, if we think of the origins of the model, it was the logical square on four terms s_1 , s_2 , not- s_1 and not- s_2 , once used by ancient logicians. With A. J. Greimas it became the semiotic square. In the ESC it became the Zemic model. If we accept this as an approval of formal logic we have already

satisfied two criteria; the first one was the linguistic turn — which, however, in the ESC theory received a somewhat different interpretation. The third criterion still remains: is this the correct philosophical style? This is the hardest criterion, since a theory which also stems from Hegel, that “conceptual poetry”, as one semiotician said contemptuously, and which uses the notion of transcendence which others hate, certainly could not meet the challenge of achieving the correct philosophical style in the Anglo-analytical sense. However, let us keep on trying to use our Zemic model and its explanatory power for another presentation of a cultural theory.

Cultivating

Michael Ryan has published another course book, *Cultural studies. A Practical Introduction*.²⁷ It has the following chapters which by their titles already reveal all that belongs to the field of cultural theory: 1) Policy and industry, 2) Place, space and Geography, 3) Gender and Sexuality, 4) Ideologies, 5) Rhetoric, 6) Ethnicity, 7) Identity, Lifestyle, and Subculture, 8) Consumer culture and Fashion studies, 9) Music, 10) Media studies, 11) Visual culture, 12) Audience, Performance and Celebrity, 13) Bodies and things, 14) Transnationality, Globalization and Postcoloniality. The book begins as follows: “The word culture has always had multiple meanings. In one sense of the word, culture is inseparable from human life. Everything from how we dress to what we eat, from how we speak to what we think, is culture. You only notice this really when you change and enter another culture” ... “Culture becomes visible when we travel between “cultures””.²⁸ Let me note at this point another new British book about culture, namely Roger Scruton’s *Modern Culture*. He refers to Herder, who defines *Kultur* as the life-blood of a people, the flow of moral energy that holds society intact. *Zivilisation* by contrast consists of manners, laws and technical know-how. Nations may share a civilization but they will always be distinct in their culture, since culture defines what they are. So reasons Scruton.²⁹ I have already dealt elsewhere with the *Kultur/Zivilisation* distinction in my essay on Resistance³⁰ where globalization appeared as a new type of civilization, conquering all geographical spaces and places and destroying local cultures. Culture here is the essence of a nation. Yet another theory emphasizes its Latin etymology, namely the process and activity of **cultivating** something. Here we meet Wilhelm Humboldt and his famous *Bildung*, finely translated into English by Scruton: “cultivation” (not education, formation and so on). For Herder, culture, i.e. S1, constitutes practices and beliefs — S2 — creating

²⁷ Michael Ryan, *Cultural Studies. A Practical Introduction* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, viii.

²⁹ Scruton, *Modern*, 1.

³⁰ Tarasti, *Sein und Schein*.

the self-identity, or M2, of a tribe. Thus, it penetrates all the modes of the Zemic model! But then Scruton is almost the only author who dares to mention the idea of high culture versus common culture. When British cultural theory emerged, strongly influenced by the views of Raymond Williams, it was a rebellion against the elitist tradition; as Scruton says, alongside the elite culture of the upper class, there has been another culture, by no means of less value, of people who affirmed their solidarity in the face of oppression and through which they expressed their identity and a sense of belonging.³¹ This is exactly the case of Nancy Mitford's famous distinction between two languages: Upper class or U-language and Non Upper class i.e. non-U language (for instance in low culture you say: "greens", in upper class language you should say "salad"; in low culture one says: "What?", in high culture one should say instead: "I beg your pardon?"). This is certainly true.

In all of semiotics and its expansion in the 1960s there was always present this cultural trait: one could deal with the low culture phenomena in academic discourse by semiotic formal analysis, its rigorous method made it acceptable and legitimate in that sphere; whereas when the same approach was directed towards the high culture phenomena, they were regarded as alienated and distanced from their origins, a view which became politically acceptable in the often leftist intellectual semioticians' communities. The success of Roland Barthes was to a large extent based on this. However, the idea of culture as something elevated, something to be reached, a kind of goal for life aspiration, from M1 to M2 via S2 to S1, was the idea behind all of arts education — and why not education as a whole? Namely, if you adapt yourself to sociological relativism, you have only behaviours of equal value. In particular when you observe a society from the outside. From the inside, within the Zemic model, it looks different. Certain values become manifest only when one believes in them and follows them in one's activities. This explains why adherents of high culture claim that they, and not the others, represent the true values of a culture. They are right in this emic aspect.

We should thus distinguish between culture as a Zemic entity, i.e. in its inner aspect, and culture as a Zetic object, i.e. in its external aspect. Culture as a collection of cultural objects, culture as signs represents, of course, the Zetic view. The author then says: culture means conformity with the reigning standards, norms and rules — which is what we mean by S1. If culture means embedded norms, then norms are learned as one grows up — this means the gradual shift from M1 to S1. This means that culture consists of, on the one hand, practices in which we engage, norms by which we live in S2 and S1 in the Zemic aspect, and cultural artifacts, signs, texts etc. or S2, S1, as the Zetic aspect, or outer entities. To make a musical recording one must not only have talent, i.e. the Zemic M2 and S2, but also a production company, i.e. the Zetic S2. Culture in the sense of artistic objects is possible only if culture in the first sense, as a way of life, gives permission, argues

³¹ Scruton, *Modern*, 3.

Dr. Ryan. Thus the Zemic and the Zetic are in constant interaction and fluctuation. Yet, there is a creative aspect in culture on the normative side. Avant-garde art questions norms and thus yields a creatively dissonant collision. In fact, in our Zemic model, transformed into a narrative model of text analysis, we encounter such collisions among all the four modes or levels.³² Since that is the case, Ryan's idea of certain cultural forms being victimized is very strange. Who is victimized by whom and where, after all?

We may now have enough material to claim that ESC theory is certainly **not** the same as British cultural theory. Indeed, it tries to go beyond such kind of "ideological" science which stems directly from a particular type of society, albeit a triumphantly victorious one. British cultural theory is altogether an ideological variant of the globalized market culture without alternatives. Yet it has presented some categories which are of interest, since, even when developing the ESC theory, we live in the 21st century and not in 18th- or 19th-century Europe.

Content and Speculation

We have not said anything so far about the content of our existential theory of culture, i.e. what kind of image or view of culture it offers? Is culture something organic, something like an organism? This metaphor was once strongly promoted by Oswald Spengler and of course a long time before him by Goethe. Spengler writes: "Culture and the spirituality of great historic organisms differ from each other by habitus. The habitus of existence consists of a higher offer of all cultures, the manifestation of all life [...] there appears a style of a certain soul. Habitus includes a certain life span and tempo of development. The concept of life time of a man, butterfly and oak contain in spite of accidents of fate, a certain value. Similarly, every culture and period, rise and fall have their given duration expressed by a symbol".³³ Certainly "habitus" here is not the same as for Bourdieu. Spengler utilizes such notions as the soul and symbol and talks of the Apollonian, Faustian magic symbols of the ancient Greek, Western culture, as well as of Arabian, Chinese primal symbols, art works as living wholes... I would not be surprised at Professor Chesterman preceding this speculation with his question: is there any evidence which would show that these ideas are wrong? Spengler fits well with youthful minds, and so I may quote myself from my notebook from 1967 (written in Vienna): "Sometimes it seems as if we are living in a world of two cultures: one is the authentic Faustian one (to please Spengler!) which is to a great extent

³² See my study on Robert Schumann's *Fantasy C major* op. 17 in Tarasti, *Semiotics of Classical Music: How Mozart, Brahms and Wagner Talk to us* (Berlin – Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2012).

³³ Oswald Spengler, *Länsimaiden perikato. Maailmanhistorian morfologian ääriiivoja*, trans. Yrjö Massa (Helsinki: Kirjayhtymä, 1963), 98.

national, or let us say European — and the other one is the culture of technics and mathematics, one of “numbers”, which is international. That could be called a machine culture”.

Furthermore, we can of course ask whether ESC theory is a speculative theory, such as those produced in German philosophy beginning from the 18th century. If we dare to quote Hegel in semiotics, we certainly have to answer this question. Hegel aimed for a complete explanation of being. He adopted the Kantian idea of categories but for him the number of categories was limitless, and together they formed the absolute, the whole reality. Hegel’s philosophy was metaphysical or objective idealism. The objective reality is the absolute spirit. Things are concepts, such as we can know. Knowing is *Einführung* to the thing and its possession by thought. Thus Reason creates the world. Aristotelian logic operates with genus plus differentia. In Hegel the opposition of a concept is already contained in the concept itself: *Sein — Nichts - Werden*. Criticism of Hegel claims that without a particular speculative conviction his logic is not accessible. The absolute nature of his dialectics and certainty are based on the feeling of subjective certainty, not on objective facts. Therefore it is irrational by nature. To put it less bluntly, we might rather say that his aim was a kind of supra-rationalism. The subject he is talking about is not the same as the real, physical, psychological subject, Professor Hegel lecturing in Berlin. It is a construction, or what is called a transcendental ego, as Sartre and others referred to it later. Or we could take his philosophy as a narrative in which the implied philosopher or author is not the same as the real person (how this fits together with what Menard Boos said about the origin of any scientific thought is of course a problem). Hegel is said to represent the last attempt to concentrate on the constructive problems of ideas. He believes in thoughts and ideas as forces making world history, and therefore having great pragmatic import. If we accept the idea of a “system” in Hegel in our ESC theory we might as well accept its connection with praxis — albeit some say those consequences were disastrous for mankind.

The organism

There are many ideas of a speculative nature the relevance of which to the ESC theory needs to be examined, such as the idea of an organism. If we think of culture as Growth, as in the idea of *Bildung*, the metaphor is certainly striking. It means that culture is, if not reduced back to, then at least thought to stem from — nature. The whole Lévi-Straussian problem with the shift from nature to culture was with finding rules of a universal nature. It is typical of nature that it can give only what it has received, whereas in culture an individual always receives more than he gives and gives more than he receives. The exchange was called by Marcel Mauss “*fait total social*”, and mutual communication was one

such universal rule where culture emerges from nature. In the chapter *Archaic illusion* Lévi-Strauss mentions three universal rules: the existence of rules, the concept of mutual exchange between the self and others as the mediation of this opposition, and the synthetic nature of a gift, i.e. the transfer of value from one individual to another, creating a relationship between these individuals and adding a new quality to the value. This is what Bakhtin said later about the basic nature of dialogue. This is certainly very important in our Esc theory, which so far is based upon the inner structure of one subject only. The idea of an organism, for instance in the biosemiotics of Uexküll, originates from the German speculative organism philosophy and Kantianism, namely the idea of exchange between an organism and *Umwelt*, which is filtered by *Merken und Wirken* and by *Ich Ton* of the organism. Yet in Lévi-Strauss the idea of an organism is strange. The manner in which Lévi-Strauss portrays the Nambikwara society and its leadership is close to the Durkheimian idea of organic solidarity. “Personal prestige and the ability to inspire confidence are the basis of power in Manbikwara society”.³⁴ From this the Finnish scholar Tuomas Kuronen, in his study of political leadership in Finland, drew the conclusion that the same model applies in Western culture: “Cultural layers, especially those built upon Western educational and conceptual institutions are privileged in the way Western people make sense of their world. They... are taken as granted, in a similar way the Nambikwara would take theirs”.³⁵ What is behind such an analogy is certainly the idea of culture as a kind of organic entity, also present in the idea of *Bildung*.

In archaic culture the tribal structure shows features of such an organic nature as semio-anthropologist Jean Claude Mbarga has shown in his recent study of the Cameroonian culture and identity. Mbarga portrays a culture and society in which tribalism, clannism and sectarianism are dominant and make a real religion of everyday life. His approach is existential in the sense that it is not reductionist in any structural way but takes into account the life situation of every Cameroonian person. Yet, behind it are always the aforementioned big questions of the possible organicity of his culture, and analogies with Western culture. I once saw on TV a programme in which quite young African boys from Nigeria, 8 years old, spoke while fishing about how life was in the West. Their reasoning was amazingly wise, mature and right — from their point of view, albeit it dealt with an issue which for them was so transcendental.

The lesson from all this is that we can successfully apply the idea of organicity in so far as it does not become a reductionist model in which the primal, phenomenal, felt, lived-in realities are explained away by some abstract categories. Thus ESC theory is definitely anti-reductionist.

³⁴ Tuomas Kuronen, *Ritual in Constructing Strategic Leadership Mythologies* (Doctoral dissertation. Helsinki: Aalto University, 2011), 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Generation

However, the idea of organicity can take more sophisticated forms in various theoretical models going under the rubric of semiotics. For instance, the so-called generative models, no longer so “fashionable,” are like that. Repeating the earlier question about what culture looks like in an autopsy, one answer is that it is a multi-level organic process in which deep, unconscious structures yield the more superficial manifest structures. This is the Chomskyan tree model. Is all culture like that?

The temptation to apply this model has always been there, and, among others, the Greimassian *parcours génératif* was supposed to be like that. However, the model taken to the extreme, as in the work by the theater scholar Kari Saloari, has turned out to be over-rational, awkward theoretizing in which we launch a huge system in order to explain one cultural detail. Yet the heuristic value of such a model remains, since we have to find an organization and a structure for our semiotic observations. But I would hardly imagine that a generative model of Iranian culture or Cameroonian society were reasonable enterprises. Moreover, generativism can be seen in philosophy, as well in the Heideggerian system, where all is derived from the fundamental “Being”. Ontological semiotics can easily fall into the trap of such generativism, albeit all the evidence might show that reality is much more unpredictable and complicated, sometimes attaining the limits of irrationality. Rather, the idea of levels of articulation would save our system of multi-level culture from such over-rationalisations i.e. by admitting that a new articulation is possible at any level of culture.

Nature

Anyway, the idea of organic processes stems from the concept of nature. Even Greimas had the notion of *le monde naturel* but there is nothing natural about it; it was, rather, nature as opposed to culture but already completely semi-otized. I have dealt with this problem elsewhere. However, the historian of ideas, Arthur Lovejoy, once made a list of what “nature” as a concept contained, finding 19 different cases of nature; in fact, all cultural concepts: 1) nature as objects to be imitated by art; 2) nature as empirical reality; 3) human nature, i.e. ordinary human behaviour with its passions; 4) connections among facts, cause and effect seen as natural; 5) nature as a Platonic idea which is realized incompletely as empirical reality; 6) nature as general type excluding particular traits of species; 7) nature as average or statistical type; 8) nature as antithetic to man as his works, i.e. that part of empirical reality to be touched by human art (= culture, we could add here); 9) “nature” as a system of evident truths, of properties of essences; 10) intuitively felt as principles of taste or standards as statements on what is objectively and

essentially beautiful; 11) nature as cosmic order, whole or half personified (mythologized) force, *natura naturans*; 12) such attributes as uniformity, simplicity, economic use of means, regularity, nature as geometrizing, irregularity, savagery, completeness, the richness of and manifoldness of content; 13) continuous development; 14) naturality as a quality of an artist; 15) self expression without self consciousness; 16) qualities which appear in “primitive” art; 17) nature manifesting in the artist’s public; 18) universality and then unchangeable art in thought, feeling and taste: what is always felt, what all understand immediately; and 19) familiar and close, natural as something which any individual can directly enjoy.³⁶

This list in fact constitutes a negative definition of culture: culture is anything that is not natural. This shares with our existential approach the point that these categories are those used by subjects in real situations, and thus nature is not pushed back into the status of some mystic unity. The list can show which kind of concepts are leading our behaviour.

Rhizome

Yet there are other theories which are perhaps less conspicuously based on the nature metaphor, like the one by Deleuze and Guattari and their famous “rhizome” model.³⁷ Their idea was to make a vehement attack against the organic tree model proposed by Chomsky. The tree model as binary thinking was adopted by linguistics as its basic image, and this was a mistake: a tree is not a rhetoric “image” but just a “structure”; Deleuze himself regards all his concepts as images and metaphors. For Deleuze, the tree image is totally wrong, since then the idea of multiplicity is ignored. “Chomsky’s system has never reached understanding of multiplicity”.³⁸ A system of multiplicity is a rhizome; a rhizome as a subterranean stem is totally different from roots and radicles... Chomsky’s linguistic models still begin at a point S and proceed by dichotomy... semiotic modes of coding (biological, political, economic etc.) bring into play not only different regimes of signs but also states of things of different status; in Chomsky’s grammar, the categorical symbol S that dominates every sentence is more fundamentally a marker of power than a syntactic marker. Our criticism of the linguistic models is not that they are too abstract but that they are not abstract enough, that they do not reach the abstract machine that connects a language to the semantic and pragmatic contents of statement... “A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organization of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social

³⁶ Arthur Lovejoy, *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1948).

³⁷ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis – London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

struggles... There is no ideal speaker-listener, any more than there is a homogeneous linguistic community... There is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language".³⁹

Deleuze's reasoning has great fascination since it has a prophetic and declarative tone, but what is a "semiotic chain"? What is mother tongue? Certainly not S2/S1 i.e., social praxis but something between M2/S2, it is half on the side of Moi, unlike other languages learned later. Deleuze swears by multiplicity. There are no points or positions in a rhizome — so the theory of "subject positions" is also denied here! — such as those in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines. What would Kandinsky have said (*Punkt und Linie zu Fläche*)? We do not have units, only multiplicities.⁴⁰ There is deterritorialisation insofar as multiplicities are defined from outside. A rhizome may be shattered at a given spot but it will start again. The rhizome makes a reference to DNA whose evolutionary schemas would no longer follow models of arborescent descent. There is thus a metaphorical link to biology, one might nowadays even speak of nanotechnology whose most fervent defenders see it as a new universal system for resolving all the problems of mankind, from technology to ecology. Another cultural object which Deleuze "rhizomizes" is the book. The book means deterritorialisation of the world, but the world then reterritorializes the book. Follow the plants, Deleuze's sermon goes on: "Write, form a rhizome, increase your territory by deterritorialisation...".⁴¹ Could this be also a political slogan, as has been shown by the recent events in Europe? Make a map, not a tracing! This advice was once followed by a semiotician trying to reach the Imatra semiotic congress by train from Helsinki. He forgot to change mid-way and then called from other side of the country to the congress. "Why are you there and not here?", he was asked. "The map was wrong", he answered.

Let us now ask how this would be linked to the existential theory of culture. It is hard to believe that any subject would at all times live in his or her culture as if it were a rhizome. Very quickly, even when moved to a totally strange environment, a subject constitutes his own *Umwelt* by identifying small signs around him, by gradually creating his own territory. The first cultural act is to occupy a space, says Corbusier. It is impossible to make a theory of ego, Moi/Soi, subjectivity, based upon such a rhizomatic experience. It certainly reflects a quite postmodern anguish amidst the multiplicity of "choices" at an American supermarket, or in a market-oriented, consumption- and media-driven, internet society in general. All is available and at the same time nothing, since without orientation by a transcendental ego providing the concrete subject with the criteria of selection, judgement, evaluation and comparison, one is indeed lost in a rhizomatic desert amidst our globalized world.

³⁹ Ibid., 6–7.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁴¹ Ibid., 11.

Yet even Deleuze has an aspiration towards that deeper level while talking about machining assemblages, making the unfolding of semiotic chains possible. However, this theory is certainly not existential in that it denies the subject any possibility of agency as proposed in the British theory. Deleuze states: "A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo... Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions".⁴² If such fundamental questions are forbidden in his model, we cannot take his theory as a model for an existential theory of culture. Rather, it reflects the feeling of being lost amidst a huge metropolis, something like a Western traveller in Tokyo, without any knowledge of their mother tongue, without any map, without any familiar signs.

Nevertheless, later Deleuze has the courage to borrow unscrupulously from linguistics the idea of articulation, particularly double articulation, and he claims that the entire organism must be considered in relation to double articulation.⁴³ Then his system even reaches theology: "A stratum always has a dimension of the expressible... to express is always to sing the glory of God. Every stratum is a judgement of God; not only do plants and animals ...sign or express themselves, but so do rocks and even rivers, every stratified on earth. The first articulation concerns content, the second expression".⁴⁴ Thank God there is no mistake here regarding the theory of André Martinet, and this may contain echoes of Lévi-Strauss who shared with Deleuze the same belief in the stratification of reality: geology, Marxism and psychoanalysis, all of these portrayed stratified entities. Otherwise this view is not far from that of Oswald Spengler. So at least on the discursive level, the return of the speculative theory seems possible in contemporary debates!

Zemic/Zetic

Now we might go further and ponder whether our Zemic model with its internal shift from *Moi* to *Soi* would mean the same as the shift from biology to psychology, and, moreover, to sociology and then to anthropology, or simply from nature to culture. To what extent is the Zemic model a model of an "organism", organic growth, *Bildung*, culture in the sense of cultivation? To what extent does it involve the Ruskinian idea of education or the principle of *Kultur* in the sense of *Kunsterziehung* proposed by J. Langbehn, one of the founders of the aesthetic education movement, a long time ago (1897)? There have been efforts to apply it also to communities — for example, by Markku Sormunen — but to what extent could we take "culture" as just a more extensive Zemic construction?

⁴² *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

If yes, what could it mean to talk about M1, or the “body’s” primal corporeality, the kinetic movement of a social group or collectivity — except in Wagnerian operas where the chorus expresses this aspect magnificently — I refer, for instance, to the chorus in *Mastersingers* or in *Parsifal*. In the latter when the “bodies” of the knights have enjoyed their wine and bread, they are refreshed and believe again in their community, and turn again to being courageous. To what extent can we speak of the identity of a group? With certainty and without artistic metaphors? Within the Durkheimian organic or mechanical solidarity, to what extent can we talk about the social practices of a group? And to do so even better than when talking about an individual subject? And to what extent are there collective values and norms, even better than for single persons? Yet immediately other challenges rise up, such as the question: what is the relationship of these two Zemic models? Or is the collective Zemic rather a Zetic, i.e. external, model to a single subject? Is the subject always to be considered outside of his group, clan, tribe, sect, nation, community? How does an individual Zemic entity communicate with its collective Zemic group? If the collective Zemic group sends a message dealing with values and norms, i.e. S1, in which mode does the individual Zemic react? By his body? By his person? By his profession and role? By his individual values which may differ from the group values? All combinations are possible. Could these communications or shifts among the modes be portrayed, for instance, by modal analysis in the Greimasian sense, as “will, know, can”, etc. For instance, when a subject is unable to realize a rule in his M1 or M2 because he is lacking the modalities of “know” and “can”?

However, we may also note here that between the individual Zemic and the collective Zemic there is a mediation, namely the dialogue between two individual Zemic subjects. This is the theory proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin, in his ideas on dialogue. Every subject grows, lives and develops in dialogues with other members of the group Zemic class. What happens at this level? Lévi-Strauss claims: *Qui dit homme dit langage et qui dit langage dit société*. Thus we may again adopt the Saussurean model of dialogue, of two Zemic worlds encountering each other: Mr. A transmitting signs to Mr. B and the latter responding. Then we might say that the theory of culture, as well as the existential one, must include this aspect of communality and step out of its solipsistic framework.

Transfer

The dialogue model could also function well on the cultural level. This becomes clear when we deal with so-called cultural transfers among different cultures, i.e. two collective Zemic units. A fine study about such an issue is the one by Michel Espagne, *Les transferts culturels franco-allemands*.⁴⁵ It is based on the

⁴⁵ Michel Espagne, *Les transferts culturels franco-allemands* (Paris: PUF, 1999).

idea of national culture: France and Germany had to have first the idea of their almost organic nature as cultures before any exchange, in any form, was possible. In this sense there had to exist what Benedict Anderson has called “Imagined communities”. For his theory the national culture is a typical case of an imaginary collectivity which does not exist anywhere else than in the minds of certain groups. This was made possible in Europe technically by printing books. By reading books one could be in touch with huge communities without ever meeting them face to face. In a certain sense, then, the nation is a “transcendental entity”; it is something which is absent but present in our minds. This principal absence does not exclude its strong emotional impact and force when ideas such as brotherhood etc., are linked. People are then ready to die for it, as one can still see on any TV news in our time. The nation thus would appear to be a typical cultural Zetic formation, i.e. it is never Zemic as such, but can of course become Zemic any time when it is actualized in the *Dasein* of the members of a group. Yet, in the case discussed by Michel Espagne, that of France-Germany, the claim made is that the easiest model for studying such transfers is the model of communication. However, here we need to point out as a commentary the view expressed by Jaan Valsiner who, when talking about cultural transfers, argues that the unidirectional scheme should be replaced by a bi- or multidirectional or mutually constructive scheme. All participants of the cultural transfer actively transform the cultural message. Thus France influences Germany, Germany influences France, and even “third” members are included, such as England or Russia.⁴⁶

However, in the chapter *Au-delà du comparatisme* Espagne discusses several principles of such issues which are interesting when juxtaposing two collective Zemic entities, such as European neighbour nations.⁴⁷ First among them is that comparison presupposes cultural areas close enough to enable one to pass over the specificities by applying abstract categories. The main problem is then, as pointed out by Espagne, who does the observing! Very often one only compares oneself to others. For instance, the notion of *Bildung* in education has, for Germans, almost a metaphysical meaning, whereas Frenchmen and Englishmen do not even understand what is involved. Often comparison takes place between the synchronic parallels of two cultures, without noting their chronologies. History is easily forgotten. Comparatism opposes social groups (i.e., two S2's) instead of emphasizing acculturation mechanisms. Comparisons are for grounding territories. They concern objects (Zetic units) thought to express identities, for instance national anthems. Comparison can exaggerate differences instead of convergences. Very often a scholar's comparison of two nations only strengthens their nationalisms. I have earlier, in my postcolonial theory, noted that nationalism emerges as a reaction against a threat from another nation, perhaps imagined, i.e. a reaction

⁴⁶ Valsiner, *Culture*, 36.

⁴⁷ Espagne, *Les transferts*, 35–49.

against an attempt at subordination and colonization. Then such an imagined community might have only a negative role and not be considered an authentic phenomenon growing from the S1 values of a group as such.

For instance, a nation may need to defend some totally physical qualities of M1. To give an example, oriental people cannot stand the smell of soured milk while Westerners do not notice such a smell because they use milk products. Someone said that he can immediately distinguish a Finn in a Parisian street by how he walks. When I wore a fur cap in the winter of Minnesota people admired it but thought it was sign of being a Russian. In such a case a Zetic sign represents the culture. Music, food, clothes, all these of course belong to such markers. Yet some Zetic units and behaviours are elevated to such a high status of their culture that they are called **cultural heritages**. They constitute foregrounded, linguistically marked, cultural Zetic units which have to be remembered, preserved, maintained, fostered, in some cases even renewed. The carriers of such heritages again apply their Zemic profiles to do so.

Alien-psyhic

It is now time to return once again to transcendence. This ambiguous concept undoubtedly also has a social interpretation, such as that by Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann in their *The Structures of the Life-World*,⁴⁸ representing the so-called understanding sociology, *Verstehende Soziologie*. They give the notion quite an empirical and colloquial meaning by distinguishing three types of "transcendencies": small, middle and major. "Transcendental" simply means anything which is absent. However, Alfred Schütz presents quite profound views on the notion in his treatise *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*.⁴⁹ He deals there with the philosophical problem of alien-psyhic or *Fremdseelig*. In this view, the only certain thing is my own stream of consciousness, *Erlebnisstrom*. He distinguishes two types of intentional experiences or acts: those whose intentional objects are within the same stream of experiences as oneself. So we might say - such intentional acts which take place within our Zemic model - let us say, when one's M1 addresses M2 or S1 is "talking" to M2 or S2. In semiotics, this would be called autocommunication. On the other hand, those intentional experiences which are not there are transcendently directed, for instance acts directed towards intentional experiences of other "Ich's" or "I's". Not only are transcendences intentional acts directed to others, but transcendent are, rather, all experiences of the bodies of other egos, and even of my own body. So, what kinds of acts are those directed towards the other's experiences? It means that one Zemic subject

⁴⁸ Alfred Schütz, *Strukturen der Lebenswelt. Band I* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994).

⁴⁹ Schütz, *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993).

listens to another, and receives that person's signs and messages, leading us into quite "existential" questions.

Arno Münster has noted in his study *Le principe dialogique: De la réflexion monologique vers la pro-flexion intersubjective*,⁵⁰ that, quoting Martin Buber: "Only You, only the discovery of You, leads me to take consciousness of myself". So it is in encountering the alien-psychic that we become existential subjects ourselves. As Schütz puts it: "this means that You and Me exist simultaneously, we coexist". And coexistence means co-temporaneity, participating to the same duration. We share the same Bergsonian *temps de durée*, one might add. Nowhere else does this become so clear as when playing together with other musicians. An ensemble of three, four, five or more musicians "bodies" must become like one Zemic entity in order to be able to produce in a certain spatiotemporal network a cultural artifact which is a composition, i.e. a particular Zetic entity, by reacting to and interpreting its embedded M1, M2, S2 and S1 modes.

Conclusion

Next we have to turn back and ask ourselves whether we were able to answer the questions posed at the beginning. Has such a thing as an "existential semiotic cultural theory" emerged from the previous observations and reflections? We might at least gather here the essential principles of such an ambitious enterprise:

- 1) The new notion which the ESC theory tries to launch is **transcendence**;
- 2) The ESC theory is an attempt to see and analyse issues from the inside, using a model called **Zemic** which refers to four modes of Being;
- 3) Agency: behind the theory is the idea of a subject as a transcendental ego, who is capable of pursuing acts, making choices and enjoying freedom;
- 4) The theory of ESC can be tested by empirical cases of cultural life and history such as studies in cultural heritage;
- 5) The theory is non-deterministic;
- 6) There is a "linguistic turn", in the sense that a new metalanguage is elaborated to deal with transcultural, supra-rational and metacultural issues;
- 7) Formal language is used to some extent, stemming from the semiotic square, deontic logic and the grammar of modalities;
- 8) The appropriate philosophical style is that of the continental and speculative theory, yet the ESC theory is not a regress in the history of philosophy;
- 9) ESC theory is non-reductionist, i.e. it emphasizes the phenomena as such.

⁵⁰ Arno Münster, *Le principe dialogique. De la réflexion monologique vers la pro-flexion intersubjective* (Paris: Kimé, 1997), 39.

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