

**Adela Kvasničková (ed.): Paradigmy sociológie kultúry (Paradigms of the Sociology of Culture)**

Bratislava, Katedra sociológie FF UK, 2003, 135 s.

Although the conference with the same title happened in the fall of 2002, the collection with the publishing year 2003 was printed in 2004, which certainly allowed reviewer sufficient time to read and review it. However to the time, there is no original Slovak study on the issue of multiculturalism.

In the sociology of culture one draws on the understanding of culture formulated in social and cultural anthropology at the turn of the century. This understanding is indirectly linked to Herder's Enlightenment thoughts. Herder claimed that although we know societies and nations with a different level of culture, this culture is a universal sign of humanity and therefore it is not possible to talk about non-cultural nations at all. In his *Confessions*, J.J. Rousseau also pointed to many aspects of the unacceptable indifference towards other cultures different from our own. As E. Gellner shows, the same ideas were also familiar to R. Descartes. Anthropological research in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (starting with E. B. Tylor) had to take into account the differences in the social and cultural development of societies that were empirically recorded in their original forms. These findings lead to a separation from a value-laden understanding of culture, which had been developed mainly in philosophy, to an unbiased understanding. This is because anthropologists, in their generalisations, had to take the life style of a society into consideration without privileging or suppressing some more or less significant elements (R. Linton). As A. L. Kroeber claimed in his classificatory work, no culture is better than another, because each culture has to be evaluated within its own development context. Without going into details, it is clear that this methodological approach can also be applied today in the studies of minorities.

On the other hand, this understanding of culture also raises many questions because it encompasses everything that has been created by society. Therefore, the borders between culture and other spheres of human activity, as they have been differentiated over time, are disappearing. This is without noting the veritable verbal fog of some expressions, such as "the culture of dependence, consumption culture, vomiting culture, beer culture", or even "the culture of culture", or "the uncultured nature of culture" as A. Kvasničková - the editor - in the introduction mentions, which reminds one of some kind of overgrowth. As the editor adds, the concept and problem of culture is overused. Overuse of certain terms is not a new phenomenon. The terms and categories that had originated in one sphere were applied also in other spheres and created redundant expressions. For example, the term "philosophy" nowadays refers to almost everything as did in the past terms

such as "individual" or "system." However, as such a redundancy becomes more widespread, the promotion of requirements on the use of logic-analytical procedures applied in science in general as well as in the issue of culture in particular becomes more intensive. We can remember either Occam's well-known advice on how to avoid the accumulation of too many new and unnecessary words and phrases or Gercen's texts on the amateurishness in science. Besides these critical comments about the state and situation of the issue of culture, Kvasničková, in her introduction "About the Multiparadigmality of the Sociology of Culture", analyses the concepts of civilisation and culture as they were defined in the French and German tradition. This clarification is important in a Slovak context for an understanding of the Slovak revival process, in which the Hungarian orientation to French tradition and the Slovak orientation to German tradition were confronted. At present, according to the author, these two approaches represent two archetypes of the concept of the culture: universalism and particularism. These two concepts create a basis for „two ways of understanding culture: the universality and the plurality of cultures“.

In an overview of the most important theories of the sociology of culture, which includes an outline of their development in anthropology, the author points out that since the beginning of the 1960's, structural functionalism has also penetrated the Marxist model of research and culture in spite of their different theoretical positions. As regards the Frankfurt school of the critical analysis of culture, she focuses on its critique of mass media and cultural industry as a cause of the creation of a mass culture and the manipulation of the individual. Among English authors, she emphasises M. Arnold and his suggestion that it is possible to believe in the universal value of culture without turning to a faith in ethnocentrism. She also addresses the genesis and thematisation of cultural identity, subcultures, or club culture. Thematising relativisation of culture, post-modern "bricolage" of culture, inspirations for culture drawing on natural sciences, this overview mainly provides a kind of orientation to these problems. A separated elaboration of these very problems would contribute to the establishment of the sociology of culture as one of the fields of sociology.

The study by D. Alijeva, "Paradigm of an Imaginary in French Social Science", is the profiling text in the collection. Although her interpretation covers the imaginary in French social science, this study fulfils the function of an original introduction to the problem. Thus far we have encountered the imaginary mainly in psychology and also, although less, in epistemology in relation to imagination, perception, images, and sense knowledge.

In connection with increased work on the imaginary in France, D. Alijeva poses the question as to whether it is not merely "a pure French thought extravagance" that is not handled so unequivocally in other sociological

approaches. She draws on the understanding of the imaginary in philosophy (H. Bergson, J. P. Sartre, G. Bachelard) and from Sartre's devotion, she arrives at his final distance from this topic. More space is dedicated to Bachelard and his new understanding of scientific rationality, which he, as a philosopher of science, had deduced from its historical development. After fundamental discoveries at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the attitude towards "eternal" truths had also changed in science and other alternatives are allowed. This meant a certain rehabilitation of sense in knowledge as a contrary to rationality. The author uses Bachelard as an example of the attempt of modern epistemology to connect scientism with its original pre-scientific sources of imagination that today are reproduced in it by "mitochondrial" imprints. The author mentions Bachelard's follower G. Durand, who had legitimised the imaginary as supra-real, in connection with the analysis of a myth and his terms myth-critique and myth-analysis. She points out the pitfalls of his sociologisation of the imaginary that are connected with the vagueness of the subject of sociology as such. She notes that the subject "is never given objectively". She opens up several topics that are manifested in cultural studies discourse, such as the ideology of scientific progressivism and its critique as a critique of material civilisation on the one hand and of mythologizing of the progression on the other - the topic of the eternal dispute on evolutionism, of the progress in theory of civilisations and their development as a circulation. Her standpoint towards the sociology of the imaginary is concentrated in this part. After analysing M. Maffesoli's opinions, the final part is devoted to C. Castoriadis. This section has an unconcealable appeal for the evolution of the theoretical and ideological resentments of Slovak post-Marxist milieu.

D. Alijeva's study is a very thick, literally, study text that certainly also promotes imagination and imaginativeness as a part of "the terminology of social sciences". In her analysis of Durand, we also notice that a broad understanding of culture and its contexts neither specifies nor improves the position of culture.

The next four articles are relatively short. They can be considered as notes to the given topics. S. Capíková in her text on "C.W. Mills about Culture" explains his system through some basic terms, while culture is mentioned two or three times. It is clear that he understands culture as a result of human activity, as a product of creation and as an output that is in the context appraised as the culture of art, the culture of creation. In her article "Gender deconstruction as a means to explore culture", B. Holubová's aim was to rehabilitate deconstruction as a means of knowledge. Deconstruction may not need rehabilitation but rather a method of application, because some results are problematic ("The Muslim ...world sees democracy as the best form of governance"). In the M. Minichová's text "Culture in the Work of Ladislav Hanus", taking Hanus as a sociologist is already questionable. It is understandable that this important figure of catholic thinking

and the catholic philosophy of culture attracts attention because of his life, which was concealed from the public. However, alike in the monograph *The History of Philosophy in Slovakia in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, some concepts are suddenly chosen and compared without explaining their origin, development and context, a basic explication of concepts, categories and an understanding of culture in the context of Hanus' thinking is missing. This cannot be a random commentary and selection of topics. It is not difficult for me to understand the measure and agenda of anthropological and sociological thematisation of particular problems in his cultural studies and philosophical work. However, a systematic and complex analysis of the whole concept of culture should not be missing. The great thematic diversity of the collection is proved also by the text by E. Mistrík, "The Paradigm of the Circle (Tutanchamon's Pillow)". It is a coherent, although short, axiological text.

In her article "Cultural Aspects of Social Change in Humanistic Sociology", M. Suríková clarifies this orientation using Polish authors. She develops certain basic categories, such as cultural heritage and cultural canon, as well as defining their function. Through the category of cultural heritage and changes, she explains P. Sztompka's theory of "becoming" and his understanding of time, including past, present and future, within this theory. She reminds us that in the current humanistic sociology, there is a strong tendency to understand sociological theory in connection to social practice (B. Misztal). She suggests that ongoing, deep and rapid changes in society also change sociological reflection upon them, paying attention to Sztompka's discourse of progress, crisis and trauma. His concept of trauma is very inventive in its depiction of the consequences of deep social changes. In the end, the author develops a thesis that traumatic changes have always had a great impact on people and that culture reacts most sensitively to them.

The last study, C. Szaló's "About the Connection between Identity and Legitimacy", is also a text, which is worthwhile to come back to, although the reader may sometimes feel the need to simplify the topic. For example, the relation of identity to the concept of gentility – yes, I understand that it is the concept of elitism which the author is sceptical about – but also of honour and venerability which leads to polarisation in the sense that it reminds us that we may be closer to opposite societies in the whole social fundament. Not that these concepts are not used. They are, but with different connotations. Also, the democracy established in our society has worn more a plebeian shirt than an elite coat in the last decades. Despite this note, I will doubtless read the study again because it is theoretically and bibliographically well outlined and composed.

The collection as a whole provides many stimuli for thinking about culture, although it is mainly for those who are interested in discursive thinking. It

contains a lot of new information that cannot be absent from an orientation in this problem. In its theoretical and methodological frame, it indirectly points to the problems of a broad understanding of culture, when even production on the topic of culture becomes merely an indefinable mass of individual opinions, approaches and theories. The historical integration of topics should be remembered because otherwise we can create the impression that a certain topic or problem is ahistorical, and has appeared only in the present.

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