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The Symbolic Potential of Culture

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The article represents the results of the investigation of the symbolic potential of culture. The crises of culture are interpreted as transitional phases of culture and its symbolic system. A closer look at the symbols and their application in various cultures brings elucidation of the spiritual in social life through analyzing spiritual processes of culture transitions. Considering the spiritual and the symbolic in their closest correlation helps clearly understand the rôle of symbols in culture transitions. In our opinion, the cultural can be viewed upon as a social answer to a spiritual impulse and this response is realized through symbolic forms.

Such cultural phenomena as an urgent need in symbolizing and emergent necessity in symbolization (the process and its result) get clearer in the light of A.F.Losev's theory of symbol and K.Popper's world of objective knowledge wherein symbols are embedded. Where, when and since symbolic systems created by our progenitors, operate as an intermediary between man and nature, there, then and that's why the symbols play a key role in creating and mastering the social relations. Moreover, symbols are inherent in culture transitions. Our approach is to use symbolism as an investigative technique to study culture parameters in their ranges. As a result, cultures (or rather their phases) should be typologically and symbolically distinguished by their transformability, transparency, and transcendentality.

In the history of the European culture, spiritual processes of culture transitions may be exemplified by its development from the Middle Ages towards New Age through Renaissance of the XIII-XVI centuries. The baton of changing symbolic systems by the genii of the past was picked up by the greatest luminaries of the new Renaissance philosophy and this same baton is still being handed on to the following generations.

Keywords: symbol, symbolic systems, spiritual, traditional culture, transtraditional culture, transitions, phase.

Introduction

The accepted meaning of the word «culture» in the Latin language was land cultivation by man, afterwards natural matters in crafts, and at long length processes of education and training of man. The Roman orator and philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero is considered to have been the

first to employ this broad notion (hyperonym) figuratively. Moreover, he characterized philosophy as the cultivation of the soul (*cultura... animi philosophia est*) and thereby introduced the word “culture” in the human vocabulary.

Symbolic forms in culture. Anyway, as a matter of fact, spiritual processes do assure not

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only the cultivation of the soul but also ordering of man's mind on the basis of historically accumulated social experience, including the experience of symbolization. While in the bosom of culture this experience is stored and passed on from one generation to another in succession, symbolizing practice has ever been in progress and new programs of activities, behaviors, and communications are still generated. Creating the world of symbols has ever been man's prerogative activities in creating human culture. Practically every social philosophy relates the dramatic difference of *homo sapiens* to his mind, mostly abilities to heuristic **symbolic** (*emphasis added—D.N., N.A.*) simulating the world by means of abstract and logical verbal thinking (New Philosophic Encyclopedia, 2000). As this takes place, a significant part of data, information, and knowledge circulating in cultures is externalized in the following symbolic forms: signs, images, metaphors. We define a symbol as an intuitive spiritual element displayed by means of signs, images, and metaphors that give shape to symbolic reality.

A forceful logical support of our view can be found in A.F. Losev's theory of symbol: the symbol of a thing is its reflection and it actually contains much more in itself than the thing itself in its direct appearance; in a hidden form does the symbol of a thing generally contain every possible development of the thing (Losev, 1995, 12-13). The symbol is a "boundary phenomenon" since the symbolical sphere separates and unites the past and the present, the present and the future, this generation and their posterity, form and content, creation and discovery, the world of obvious phenomena and hidden noumena, the nature and culture, one phase of culture and another. If you want to continue the list, then you can type the word «symbols» online. Now their quantities are measured in astronomical numbers in the Internet and their intangible, spiritual

qualities are of still more paramount importance in connection with their rôle in culture transitions in history. We also bear in mind the idea which is tacitly understood that the symbol is a cross point of spiritual human relations.

Elucidation of the spiritual. The most important constituents of culture are the spiritual processes which influentially play their major part during transitions of culture from one phase to another. To clarify and explain the concept of spiritual processes of culture transitions it is necessary to elucidate the spiritual. There have been obtained various interpretations of the spiritual in practically every world outlook system so far. Just to generalize, one can undoubtedly trace the universal way of reconsidering the spiritual throughout social history: from endless mythological conceptions about spirits (anthropomorphism) to sophisticated ideas of ancient philosophers about the spiritual as such an attribute of human soul that operates either as its volitional source (Socrates and Plato) or rational source (Aristotle); from understanding the spiritual as the Christian idea (patristic philosophy) to scrutinizing the spiritual in the consequential philosophies (classical German philosophy, Russian philosophy, et al.). History has seen plenty of endless revolutions which have been changing not only technologies but sometimes governments and regimes. Nevertheless, societies and generations of people persisted unalterable as a rule. Actually real revolutions could be able to change social institutions and men's and women's lifestyles by affecting symbolic systems. As a result, people face economic, psychological, and spiritual problems mostly connected with new social expectations.

The concept of «spiritual» is in great demand as a category to analyze the phenomena investigated in the Humanities. In this connection its nature, meaning, and scope are differently argued by scholars. In order of importance a

greater part to the development of the spiritual was contributed by the Russian philosophers at the end of the XIXth – the beginning of the XXth centuries: V.S.Solovyov's "global soul", D.S.Merezhkovsky's "spiritual flesh", I.A.Ilyin's "spiritual renewal", N.A.Berdyayev's "spiritual crisis" et al. S.S.Averintsev, M.M.Bakhtin, N.A.Berdyayev, D.S.Likhachev, A.F.Losev, to name just a few, developed their ideas of the spiritual as a syncretic aspiration of man and society for a lofty and perfect condition. N.A.Berdyayev argues that the spiritual is the supreme qualitative value, the essence of humanity in man. To pursue all of these considerations would far exceed the scope of this paper whilst the point of our research is only symbolic features of spiritual processes.

The symbolical and the spiritual. Many a researcher consider the spiritual and the symbolical in their closest correlation. For E. Cassirer, the most insightful philosopher of symbolic forms, the general notion is the «spirit» (identifiable with «spiritual culture») rather than «cognition.» As the thinker puts it, "the content of the notion of culture is inseparable from the basic forms and lines of spiritual creativity" (Cassirer, 1998, 17). E. Cassirer finds a design of the spiritual in a symbol, in a «symbolic form.» The philosopher specifies symbolic forms (language, myth, religion, art, science) as spiritual culture lines which "become elements of a uniform large system of problems, diverse methods somehow or other leading to one purpose—the transformation of the world of passive impressions (Eindrücke) where the spirit at first languishes in confinement, into the world of pure spiritual expression (Ausdruck)" (Ibidem). In F. Nietzsche's works the notion of symbol is also frequently supplemented with the notion of spirit:

"Upward soars our sense: thus is it a simile of our body, a simile of an elevation. Such similes of elevations are the names of the virtues.

Give heed, my brothers, to every hour when your spirit would speak in similes: there is the origin of your virtue" (Nietzsche, 2010, 372-373). (It is noteworthy that Nietzsche's word «Gleichniss» was translated into English with the word «simile» while the words «символ» («symbol») and «symbole» are employed in the Russian and French translations respectively).

We do not claim to set the problem of overcoming vagueness and uncertainty of the concept of the «spiritual», which could be solved by a comprehensive reflection of its genesis and phenomenological representations in the course of development of philosophy, Western philosophy, at least. We are largely limited to research only the symbolic potential of culture. To solve a more limited problem in our research, viz. the consideration of a symbolical unity of the spiritual and cultural, is, in our opinion, helpful to shed more light on culture transitions.

Point

The symbolic potential of culture. On theoretical grounds there is an ever increasing number of definitions of culture but there are still more methods of interpretation of the phenomenon of culture. Understanding this one can promptly see in culture its very complicated and ambiguous nature. F. Nietzsche coined a striking aphorism about culture: "a thin apple rind above the burning hot chaos" (Borokhov E., 1999, 240). A. Bely, emphasizing extraordinary complexity of the notion of «culture», called it an integrity, an organic combination of many aspects of human activities. He believed that culture, being determined by human consciousness growth, was sort of crossing an individual and the Universe (Bely, 1994, 308). Consequently, culture is identified with the infinity and eternity in a human mind as its most symbolic features. Man's need to familiarize himself with the infinity has been vividly expressed by Professor

D.V. Pivovarov: “The idea of the infinity is inseparably connected with man’s nature. That is why for every finite thing does our mind look for their origins and pre-images in the infinite. It is the symbolism of the infinity that makes much of sense to every finite thing...” (Pivovarov, 2006, 149).

In some sense the cultural can be viewed upon as a social answer to a spiritual impulse and this response is realized through symbolic forms. Actually we cannot help referring to a lot of scholars in investigating the symbolic potential of culture. Such cultural phenomena as an urgent need in symbolizing and emergent necessity in symbolization (the process and its result) become clearer in the light of K.R. Popper’s world outlook theory justifying the division of the Universe into three interacting worlds: world 1—the world of physical bodies, world 2—the mental or psychological world, and world 3—objective knowledge (Popper & Eccles, 1977). In one of his numerous lectures delivered in some twenty years after having advanced his hypothesis, K.R. Popper explicated his idea of world 3 as the world of human spirit’s products, the world of human language in particular: our stories, our myths, our explanatory theories and our technologies, our biological and medical theories. The philosopher argued that it is also the world of man’s creations in painting, in architecture and music—the world of all these products of our spirit which would never have emerged without human language for good reason. K.R. Popper was sure “to distinguish the world 1 embodiments of world 3 objects from the world 3 objects themselves that world 3 objects had something beyond their world 1 embodiments” (Popper, 1978, 166). World 3 can be undoubtedly identified with the world of culture. “Mention should also be made of the close relationship between what I call world 3 and what the anthropologists call 'culture'. The two are very nearly the same. Both can be described as

the world of the products of the human mind...” (Ibidem). We are also sure that the world of symbols created by people appears before us as the world of cultural objects being discovered by each generation to come. Symbols ought to be included into Popperian «objective knowledge» due to their commitment to having a life of their own in any culture.

We are convinced by K. Popper’s exemplification. The principle of succession having been invented, people can construct to any given number its successor number, without end. We are able to continue any sequence of numbers by adding only one. We can agree with the word «invented» but we strongly doubt that the numbers were ingenuously invented *ex nihilo*. This notwithstanding, K. Popper’s idea is well-reasoned in man’s subsequent discovering in the sequence of natural numbers the distinction of even and odd numbers, divisible and prime numbers, etc. These are the facts that people have never created but which are unintended, unanticipated, and unavoidable effects of having invented the sequence of natural numbers. These are the objective facts of «world 3» (K. Popper’s coined term). So K. Popper asserted that the sequence of the natural numbers is an abstract world 3 object (Ibidem, 161). Furthermore, we can develop his assertion by drawing attention to the following objective fact: it is impossible to discover the biggest number for this sequence since it is infinite. At the same time we really deal only with prime numbers which themselves are just finite digital symbols. And yet the concept of the biggest prime number is subject to symbolization wherein it goes beyond as the Kantian imperceptible «thing-in-itself.» With this point in mind we can clearly conclude that symbols are likewise rightful inhabitants of the Popperian world 3.

K. Popper asserted that “world 2 acts as an intermediary between world 3 and world 1. But

it is the grasp of the world 3 object which gives world 2 the power to change world 1” (Ibidem, 156). Hence it follows that man’s mind is unable to directly perceive true reality, it always needs an intermediary set of signs, images, metaphors (symbols as integral parts of world 3). Having once been created, the world of symbols exerts its influence upon our mind and even natural and social realities. In V.I. Kudashov's opinion, “culture operates as an intermediary between man and nature, and in the process a human being in the world of culture turns from a biological being into a personality through which man is already in the center of culture. After beginnings of culture man masters the world in its spatial and time parameters not only physically but also emotionally and intellectually: art, science, religion, and philosophy discover depths of man’s spiritual world and the world of the universe physically inaccessible to the individual, reveal the sense

of human life” (Kudashov & Kudashova, 2007, 64-65). It is possible due to discovery of the world of culture where symbols are key world outlook determinants.

Having analyzed the literature, we could find the most intelligible formulations of our understanding of culture in E. Cassirer’s books. Scrutinizing culture as symbolic entity and the world of activities, E. Cassirer called the symbol a key to human nature, arguing that between the receptor system and the effector system, man has also a third link which can be described as the symbolic system. He describes culture alongside with language, and myth, and religion as a symbolic network of human experience and as a product of man’s symbolical activities (Cassirer, 1998, 470).

Symbols are inherent in culture transitions.

In our research we discern culture as a symbolic sphere, dynamics of which components determines culture transitions (see Fig. 1).

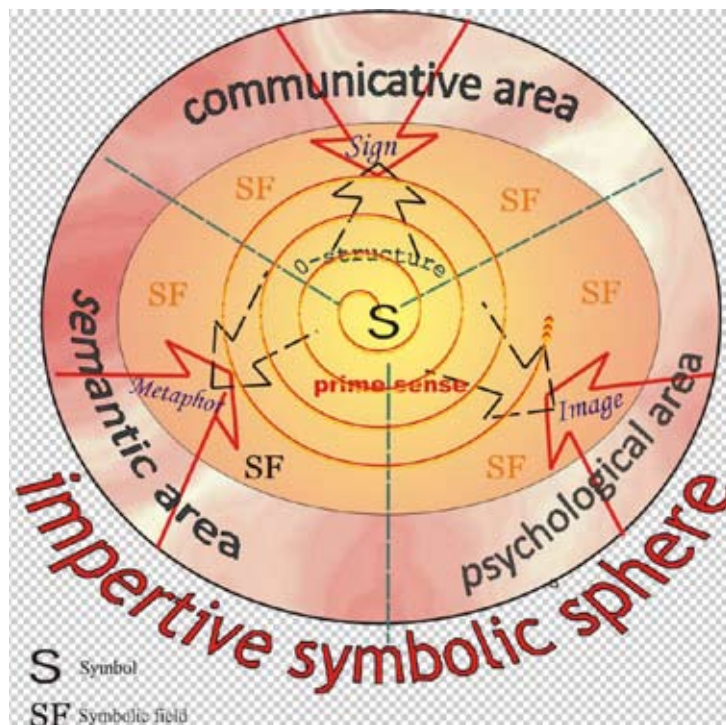


Fig. 1. Hypothetical model of imperative symbolic sphere

The symbolic forms such as signs, images, and metaphors interplay as transmitters of spiritual processes of transition from one phase of culture to another. The symbolic forms complying with certain causalities, regularities and rules can be treated as «structure-formed» symbolic senses of certain spiritual intentions. The spiritual processes are closely connected with the symbol functioning and its prime sense development through the symbolic forms and symbolic fields in culture. We ought to specify the term «prime sense» in the meaning of developing the humane in man. At present we have to understand it as looking back (reversing is impossible) on history, probably on prehistory and on the origin of man. The culture is created and supported with spiritual processes in its tenement. These processes are accompanied with endless changes of symbolic reality which is the deepest content of culture and its origin. Undoubtedly, the problem of the prime sense is beyond the scope of the present paper and leaves much to be investigated.

So, the spiritual processes of culture transitions are inherently societal and spiritual sphere develops so that causes the change of culture phases by means of changes in their symbolic fields (the functioning of symbols with retaining their prime sense). Thus, symbols do underlie culture transitions.

In the context of our research the definition of phases of culture has been given on the grounds of the fact that various aspects of the symbolic sphere of culture are interpreted in three interrelated and interacting social environments—communicative (sign), semantic (metaphor), and psychological (image). In the communicative environment, the symbol is realized through a sign (sign system) as one of its symbol forms. In the communicative environment, the results of symbolizing and symbolization function as sign systems with their own language codes and numerous interpretations.

In any communicative environment there are employed languages which the culture in question «speaks» self-expressively. Culture languages involved can be such systems of signs as natural languages and products of man's creative arts (literature, architecture, sculpture, painting, graphics, fine and applied arts and crafts, music, dance, theatre, cinema, and others). Charles Bally's paradox holds well for all languages of culture. As far back as the dawn of structural linguistics, the French linguist formulated it in his original manner: "languages are incessantly changing but they can function only without changing" (Bally, 1955, 29)

Transformability of cultures. Within the framework of the communicative environment the cultures can be divided by the parameter of «transformability», i.e. ability of the symbolic system of culture to change or vary in social space and time. This parameter is connected with an immanent ability of sign systems (languages) to be modified inside the culture involved so that some people (let us call them heretics (earlier), or nonconformists (later), or contemporary cultural «thrill seekers») acquire a new perception of cultural phenomena and introduce «cultural neologisms» more often than not at the expense of their welfare and even life. By transformability the cultures differ to a greater or smaller degree of flexibility. The typological range of cultures by the «transformability» parameter is outlined to be presented in Fig. 2.

History brings us very much evidence to see that only flexible cultures continue to change greatly but not cultures which, whatever the reason, lose or do not acquire at all ability for transformation of their symbolic systems, and are doomed to move in an eternal circle of life until vanishing with their ardent and headstrong idolaters. By the parameter of «transformability» there are distinguished dynamic and static cultures. Here we can find support with the French ethnographer

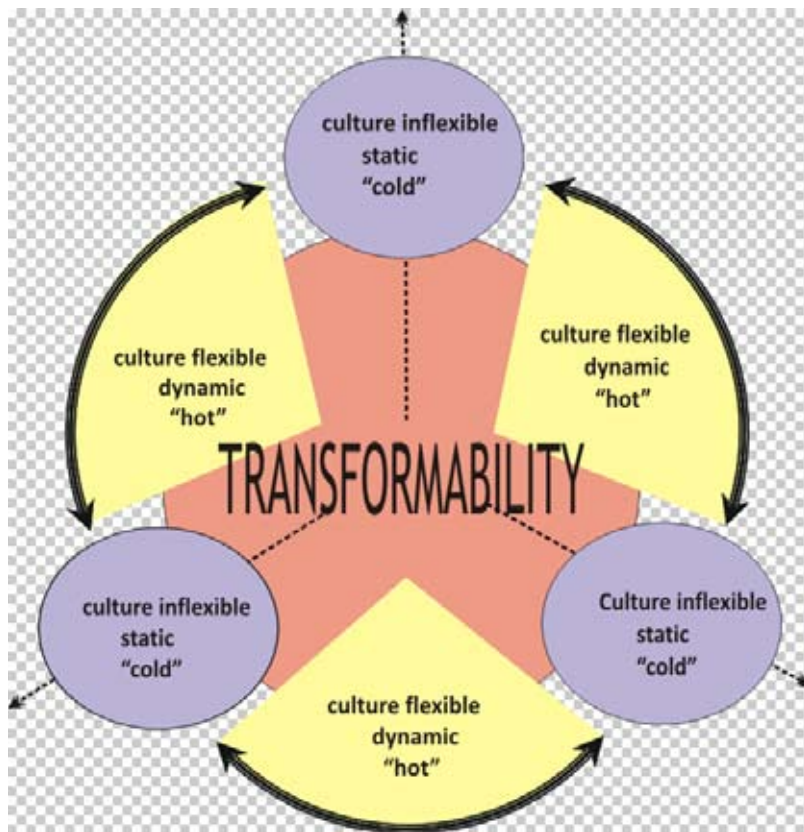


Fig. 2. Transformability pattern of a typological range of cultures

and sociologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, the author of empirical typology of societies: «hot»—they tend to create technological societies and replace the myth with real history; and «cold»—they have a strong tendency for replacing history with a myth (Lévi-Strauss, 1994, 297).

The German philosopher and historian Oswald Spengler investigated the circulatory movement of local cultures and in his well-known book “The Decline of the West” he likened cultures to some natural closed organisms of a higher order considering their origin spontaneous with inevitable death in the long run. Every culture (Egyptian, Indian, Chinese and others) expresses, in Spengler’s opinion, a collective «soul» of the people. Every culture passes through a certain life cycle lasting about a millennium. Whilst dying, the organic culture degenerates

into its own opposite—a civilization where bare technicism dominates and in exchange for creativity and development there arrive futility and ossification. In the Introduction to his book O. Spengler starts immediately dwelling upon the logic of history: “For everything organic the notions of birth, death, youth, age, lifetime are fundamentals—may not these notions, in this sphere also, possess a rigorous meaning which no one has as yet extracted? In short, is all history founded upon general biographic archetypes?” (Spengler, 2007, 3). And further on he already undoubtedly refers to cultures as organisms: “*Cultures are organisms*, and world-history is their collective biography” (Ibidem, 104).

We cannot go along with O. Spengler who had actually denied translational development of culture. His remarkable question “What is

Civilization, understood as the organic-logical sequel, fulfilment and finale of a culture?” (Ibidem, 31) severs culture from civilization. In the range of the «transformability» parameter introduced by us, there ought to be discovered cultures which achievements (most of them at least) do not vanish as a result of their retiring from the stage of history. It is common knowledge that as early as in 1869 in his treatise “Russia and Europe” N.Ya. Danilevsky was the first to propound the theory of distinct «cultural and historical types» (civilizations) developing similarly to biological organisms. Nevertheless, he argued that there were cultures of «successive» type among which he reckoned, in particular, Egyptian, Assyrian-Babylonian-Phoenician, Greek, Roman, Jewish, and European cultures. These «successive» cultures, in contrast to «distinct» cultures, have a natural advantage in dissemination of products of their activities from one culture type to another (Danilevsky, 1991). According to our typology they fall into the cultures with more advanced ability for transformation of their symbolism. Globalism (at least, in economies) also helps us comprehend how continuous and successive social and economic life and its deeper history are.

Transparency of cultures. In the semantic environment of the symbolic sphere of culture, the symbol is realized all the way through a metaphor as one of its symbolic forms. In the semantic environment the results of symbolization and symbolizing function as the metaphorical senses are used in the course of interpretations. Consequently, the semantic environment deals with senses and various mechanisms of extensive transfer of these. Semantics is a branch of semiotics – study of sign systems as means of sense expression (Russian Humanitarian Internet-University, 2000-2011), therefore, the semantic environment is direct-coupled with communicative medium as the latter also deals

with sign systems studying them as means of expressing senses inside culture. In the proposed model of the symbolic sphere of culture presented in Fig. 1, the communicative medium happens to be a derivative of the sign displaying it, whereas the semantic environment springs from the metaphor displaying it. The semantic environment functionally operates as a driving environment of symbolic forms in their information exchange, moreover, it becomes the leading environment in the play of symbolic fields because it indispensably unites the integral property of the sign to express and signify and the integral property of the image to reflect and represent reality. The metaphor, as one of the three symbolic forms, is an intellectual tool of transferring expression into imaging and signifying into representation. Causally by the results of symbolization does *homo sapiens* account for two exclusively human talents: a natural gift to symbolize and an acquired skill to use metaphorical extension.

Within the framework of the semantic environment, cultures can be divided by the parameter of «transparency», which is realized as a degree of transparency or openness. By this parameter different cultures exhibit a greater or smaller degree of openness. In other words, there are some cultures which are more susceptible to new ideas and there are cultures which are more or completely closed for new trends and even erect taboo walls in front of exchange of innovations or symbols and traditions with another culture. The typological range of cultures by the «transparency» parameter is outlined to be presented in Fig. 3.

As a matter of fact, some cultures are more mobile and open for exchange of ideas whilst others are less subject to semantic shifts and changes in response to the influence of symbolic systems of any other cultures. A tenable support of some of these views can be found in H. Bergson and K.R. Popper’s brilliant idea of

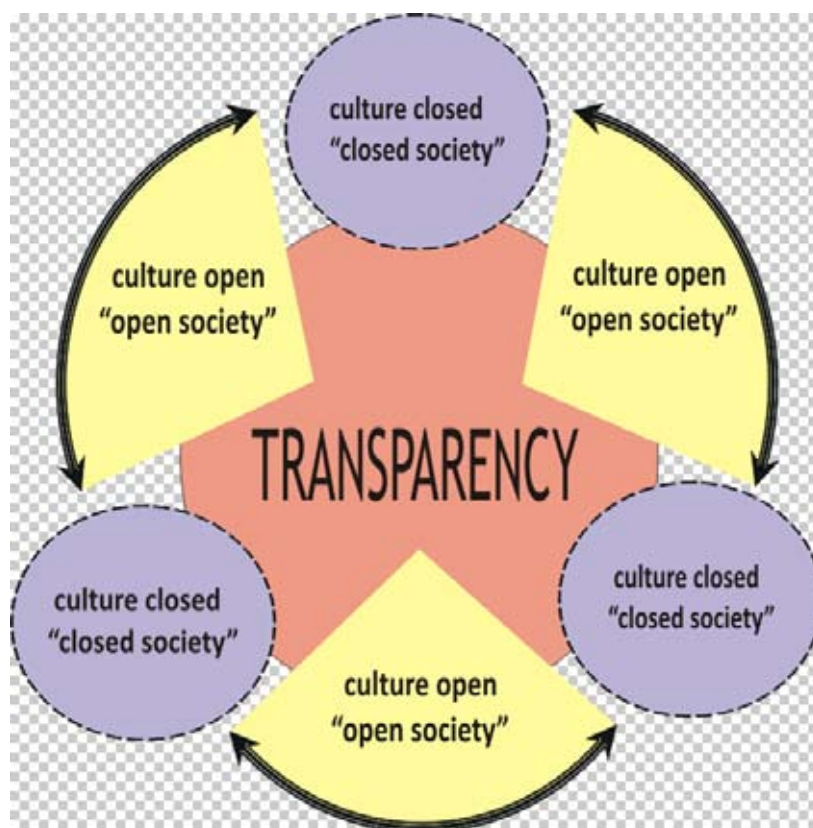


Fig. 3. Transparency pattern of a typological range of cultures

open societies. Still timely today is the valid term «open society» coined and introduced by Henri Bergson in the 30s of the XXth century in the sense of a community that does not isolate itself from mankind and the whole world. He elaborated two basic models of sociality—closed and open societies and their appropriate moral and religious habits: static and dynamic (Bergson, 1994). The Bergsonian term enjoyed the greatest popularity and the appropriate concept had got the broadest application along with publishing of K.R. Popper’s famous book “The Open Society and Its Enemies” in 1945 (Popper, 1966). The renowned book was translated into Russian (in two volumes) only in 1992. K.R. Popper argued that the most dramatic distinction of an open society from the closed one is availability or unavailability of a person’s opportunity of

rational reflection concerning problems arising before him/her. Members of open societies enjoy this opportunity while members of closed ones are forced to operate according to the instructions somehow or otherwise sanctified or authorized.

Transcendentality of cultures. In the psychological environment of symbolical sphere of culture is the symbol realized through an image as one of its symbolic forms. It is the psychological environment where the results of symbolizing and symbolization operate as images out of which a subjective world-view is made including the subject her/himself, other people, spatial environment and time sequence of events (Psychological Dictionary, 2003, 295). The psychological environment is introversive as a person is isolated in his/her inner world since s/he deals with internal spiritual attitudes,

moral principles and his/her own representation in the world. Within the framework of the psychological environment, cultures can be divided by the parameter of «transcendentality». By this parameter different cultures are exposed in a binary range «immanent – transcendent,» i.e. «limited within possible experience» – «going beyond its limits» respectively. Such is indeed the way Immanuel Kant used and explained these concepts to one of his reviewers in the Appendix to his Prolegomena: “the word transcendental... does not signify something passing beyond all experience, but something that indeed precedes it a priori, but that is intended simply to make cognition of experience possible. If these conceptions overstep experience, their employment is termed transcendent, a word which must be distinguished from transcendental, the latter being limited to the immanent use, that is, to experience” (Kant, 1997).

The concept of transcendental is largely used by us to designate ability of a culture to conduct self-examination or introspecting. In ordinary consciousness it refers to ability «to have a look at oneself», and for this one needs enough zeal and courage! In science such ability is *conditio sine qua non*. Its intellectual realizations are well known in the criteria of verification/verifiability (analytical philosophy), and falsification/falsifiability (K.R. Popper’s philosophy of «critical rationalism»), and also the incompleteness theorems proved in 1931 by K.Gödel. Particularly, it is evident from them that there is no complete formal theory within which all the true theorems of arithmetic would be provable. “It can be proved rigorously that in every consistent formal system that contains a certain amount of finitary number theory there exist undecidable arithmetic propositions and that, moreover, the consistency of any such system cannot be proved in the system” (Gödel, 1986, 195). Analyzing the symbols at the core of

a culture it is helpful to comprehensively see the culture from every quarter and at every level.

In theoretical research of culture the introspection on the basis of comparing any culture to other cultures is usually brought up to a conceptual level. In history of thought this means the transition from mythological and religious world-views up to philosophy reflection. In so doing, it is presumed that experience of spiritual and practical mastering of the world is generalized in philosophically minded world-view which is capable to develop new world outlook orientations on the basis of scientific comprehension of culture. Unfortunately, the results of philosophizing have rather often been discouraging (e.g. existentialism), therefore it is necessary to comprehensively take into account outstanding achievements of mythology and religion by philosophy rather than to discuss the problem of the right of one or another philosophical doctrine to exist. In history of philosophy it has been proved by unquenchable enthusiasm of great thinkers to come back to the roots, especially in crisis and transition periods when there arrives the hour of triumph for philosophy and there comes the moment of truth not only for philosophers but also for all people of wisdom.

Commonly, one gets to know anything better only in comparison. Good evidence on this wisdom is apt with results of comparative explorations of cultures. In this context one can clearly understand J.W. Goethe’s paradox: *Wer keine Fremdsprache kennt, weiss nicht von seiner eigenen.* – *Who does not know any foreign language, knows nothing about his own one.* One of the founders of linguistics M. Müller pointed to the “truth which was hidden beneath the paradox” boldly adapted as 'He who knows one language, knows none' by the students of Comparative Philology. “Could Goethe have meant that Homer did not know Greek, or that Shakespeare did not know English, because

neither of them knew more than his own mother tongue? No!” They could create fantastic masterpieces in these languages. However, in German “*können* is not *kennen*” (*can* is not *to know*) (Müller, 1873, 15-16). The same applies to culture. *He who knows one, knows none*. The cultures which have masterpieces are not always transcendently capable. It immediately follows that the culture rejecting other cultures cannot really have true conception of itself.

By the parameter of «transcendentality» different cultures are characterized by a greater or smaller degree of the development of their preconditions, estimations, orientations, and eventually by availability or unavailability of

creative potential for transition into another phase or condition. The typological range of cultures by the «transcendentality» parameter is outlined to be presented in Fig. 4.

The last taxonomical link in our typological chain turns out to be more complicated as compared with the two preceding links because the phase of transcendence cannot be amenable to empirical fixation on account of its extending beyond the limits of not only the object but also the subject (a researcher). Moreover, cultural contacts – what they had been earlier and what they became later during the new and modern time (rise and fall of empires, great geographical discoveries, the Conquest, world

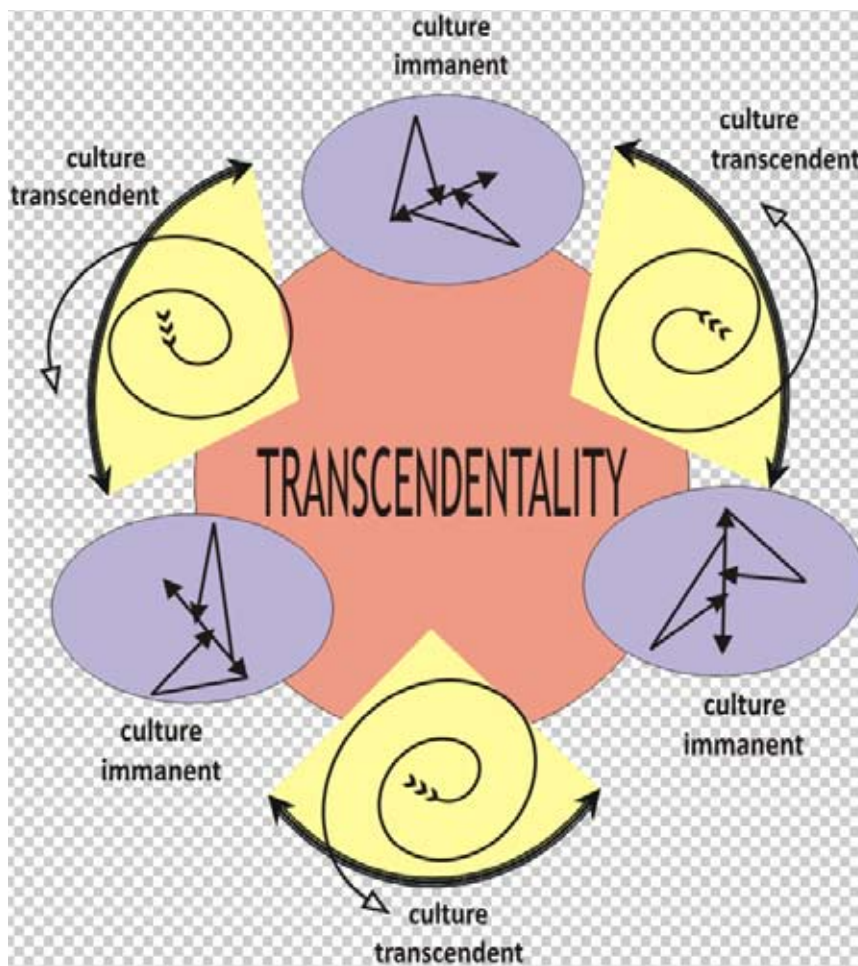


Fig. 4. Transcendentality pattern of a typological range of cultures

wars, migrations, globalization) – excluded the presence of immanent and transcendental cultures in their extreme phases. In our scale the cultures can range between these extremes being attracted and shifting to either of them. The conditionally immanent cultures are cultures with less expressed transcendental ability and consequently they are more self-closed in a solipsistic vicious circle of their own internal symbols of values and traditions.

The conditionally transcendental cultures are cultures with highly expressed transcendental ability which underlies the self-critical attitude. Only in such a culture is it possible to have a good laugh at oneself! Only laughing, we can part with our past and its lack of perfection. “The gods of Greece, already tragically wounded to death in Aeschylus’s tragedy *Prometheus Bound*, had to re-die a comic death in Lucian’s *Dialogues*. Why this course of history?” asked K. Marx and answered, “So that humanity should part with its past *cheerfully*.” (Marx & Engels, 1975). The Nietzschean Zarathustra prophesied as a laughing prophet, “You look aloft when you long for exaltation; and I look downward because I am exalted.

Who among you can at the same time laugh and be exalted?

He who climbs on the highest mountains, laughs at all tragic plays and tragic realities” (Nietzsche, 2010, 345).

Apollonian and Dionysian in cultures. The typology of cultures by the «transcendentality» parameter is closely connected with F. Nietzsche’s call “to the certain and immediate apprehension of the fact that the further development of art is bound up with the duality of the Apollonian and the Dionysian.” They are symbolically separated «artistic worlds of dream and intoxication» which are present in cultures in «their continuing strife and only periodically occurring reconciliation» (Nietzsche, 2009).

The cultures with prevailing Apollonian drive, wherein Apollo is their symbol, are cultures of rest, contemplation, beauty, rationality, dreams and day-dreams, for “Apollo, as the god of all the plastic arts, is at the same time the god of prophecy. In accordance with the root meaning of his association with «brightness,» he is the god of light; he also rules over the beautiful appearance of the inner fantasy world. The higher truth, the perfection of this condition in contrast to the sketchy understanding of our daily reality, as well as the deep consciousness of a healing and helping nature in sleep and dreaming, is at the same time the symbolic analogy to the capacity to prophesy the truth, as well as to art in general, through which life is made possible and worth living.” (Ibidem).

The cultures with prevailing Dionysian drive, wherein Dionysus is their symbol, are cultures being irrational, tragic and heroic, unsatisfied, restless, full of mystic unity. They are the cultures of mystical «intoxication.» “Under the magic of the Dionysian, not only does the bond between man and man lock itself in place once more, but also nature itself, no matter how alienated, hostile, or subjugated, rejoices again in her festival of reconciliation with her prodigal son, man. The earth freely offers up her gifts, and the beasts of prey from the rocks and the desert approach in peace. The wagon of Dionysus is covered with flowers and wreaths; under his yolk stride panthers and tigers.” (Ibidem).

In F. Nietzsche's philosophy of two drives in culture the form and the organization result from the Apollonian drive, but the content and chaotic improvisation from the Dionysian. In line with this idea the spiritual processes of culture transitions also have the dual nature and develop in opposite directions (destructive and constructive) proceeding from the symbol's dual nature.

F. Nietzsche wrote about man the artist and he meant as we can guess culture on the whole. Paraphrasing and quoting from this philosopher's writing, one can just imagine how culture sinks down in Dionysian drunkenness and mystical obliteration of itself, alone and apart from the rapturous choruses, and how, through the Apollonian effects of dream, its own state now reveals itself to it, that is, its unity with the innermost basis of the world, in a metaphorical dream picture. "Now the essence of nature is to express itself symbolically; a new world of symbols is necessary... And then the other symbolic powers grow, those of the music, in rhythm, dynamics, and harmony—with sudden violence. To grasp this total unleashing of all symbolic powers, man must already have attained that high level of freedom from the self which desires to express itself symbolically in those forces" (Ibidem). Such is indeed the case of realizing transcendentality of a culture, one phase of culture transcends to another in which there emerges another world of symbols (signs, images, metaphors).

We have distinguished three parameters by which the phases of cultures are determined: transformability, transparency, and transcendentality. It is reasonable to consider the distinguished parameters as attributes of the culture symbolic potential in spiritual processes of its dynamics. Cultures transit from one phase into another undergoing changes and crises, destruction and revival.

Traditional and transtraditional in cultures.

The basis for culture changes in the ranges of all the three parameters is consistent with social laws of culture transition from traditional phase into transtraditional where it is capable to change its characteristics due to the interplay of symbolic fields. To put it differently, the basis of spiritual processes for transition is transformation of transtraditional culture into traditional culture

and vice versa. The transformation is much as a pendulum moves swinging. Changes of physical and chemical features as pendulum motion were in detail described by the Nobel prize winner I.R. Prigozhin. The findings of his investigation applied to the results of our research support our analogous understanding of the culture transitions mechanism. Similar reasoning helped us discover a universal feature in the progress of cultures.

I.R. Prigozhin began his paper «The Philosophy of Instability» with drawing attention to the fact that the upper (unstable) position of a pendulum had practically never been in the focus of researchers' attention (Prigozhin, 1991) But it is the upper pendulum position (the culmination phase of transtraditional culture) where an unpredictable cultural transition is realized and which spiritual processes are interpreted in the culture in the form of propagation of various alternatives of intercultural interaction and expansion of symbolical interpretative context. As this takes place, the spiritual processes of culture transitions have two aspects: interaction and interference of cultures plus symbolical models of interpretation of these effects (an exchange of symbols plus views on this exchange).

Exploring transformation of traditional culture into transtraditional and vice versa, it is necessary to comprehend what is culture phase and what are the features of spiritual processes of culture transitions. To this end it is logical to refer to the concept of «mentality». Dialectics of individual, collective, and social consciousness includes this concept designating their deepest level including the unconscious. Mentality is formed and developed by culture and the former as such in its turn shapes and develops the latter, emerging as a rather stable set of attitudes and predispositions of an individual or a social structure to definitely perceive the world (New Philosophic Encyclopedia, 2000). Mental structures that fix a culture phase during a certain

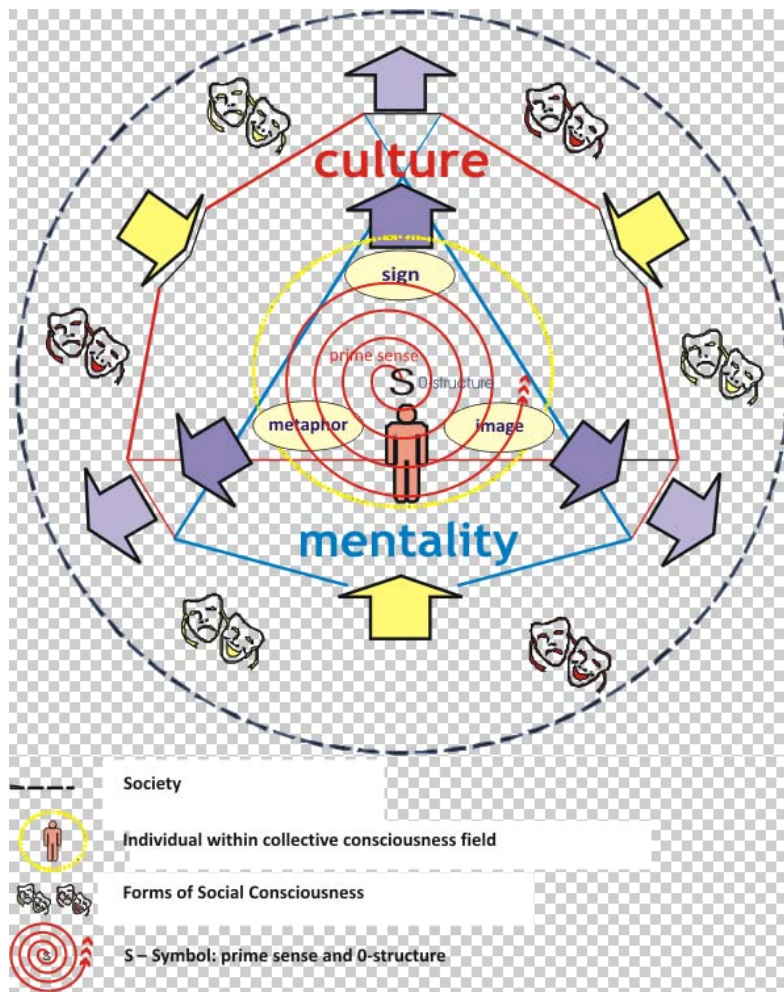


Fig. 5. Mental structures as transmission channels

time, serve as transmission channels between the prime sense always present in history and historically changeable results of symbolization in the spheres of social consciousness. This argument is outlined to be presented in Fig. 5.

In the well-developed phase of traditional culture the ranges of all the three parameters (transformation, transparency, transcendental) are imposed with some restrictions that are sometimes rather strict. Sources of restrictions are eventually traced back to the systems of symbols specifying through their symbolic forms some models of behavior to individuals, groups, and society as a whole. At present, there

are all possible systems of encouragement and punishment of people from parental gestures (mother wags her finger at her naughty kid out of the window) to penitentiary systems of the national states.

Dynamics of culture phases. As to the phase of culture with totalitarian restrictions, one can describe it as the following: everything passes but nothing changes. However, since the Heraclitean postulate «everything flows... and nothing stays fixed» is quite universal, cultures are no longer similar to islands in an archipelago what they used to be. By external influences and internal dynamics the accumulated modifications

can result and do result in mutations in the symbolic sphere. In case of great changes it blows up and the culture starts to uncontrollably transit into another phase. In so doing, in the spiritual processes of cultural transitions the borderlines of transformation, transparency, and transcendental parameters in each of the three ranges vary in a congruent manner: changing borderlines in one range is followed by changing borderlines in the others. The process though never reaches extreme realizations of these parameters where they may theoretically take up extreme positions in the postulated ranges since the real world of culture is far from such extremes. Therefore we can abstract them only as extrapolations.

The traditional culture when extrapolated is a non-flexible, closed, immanent phase of culture. This phase is characterized by circulatory movement of a non-changing set of values, guidelines, traditions. It is highly impenetrable. The transtraditional culture when extrapolated is a flexible, open, transcendental phase of culture. This phase is characterized with a turn of culture to accept innovations, openness to accept influences, wider interpretation of the cultural situation. In this phase, however, the culture is most vulnerable, though it can achieve the culmination of self-development. The borderlines of the transformation, transparency, and transcendental parameters set realization peculiarities of culture transition from the phase of traditional culture to the phase of transtraditional culture and vice versa.

Peculiarities of culture transitions were the subject of much investigation by P.A.Sorokin in his theory of types of culture as «supersystems» (Sorokin, 1970). The founder of the theory of social and cultural dynamics differentiated three basic supersystems: sensual (the reality is directly perceived by feelings), ideational or speculative (comprehended by means of supersensual

intuition), and idealistic being a combination of the former two. As distinguished from O.Spengler's eschatological vision, P.A. Sorokin considered the evolution of cultures as transitions from sensual culture to ideational between which the idealistic form of culture was formed. He argued that the constant changing of values caused the violent cataclysms of the first half of the XXth century. Development of culture of one type cannot be eternal. In the course of time its energies run out, its values wane, society is permeated with crisis and chaos.

P.A. Sorokin's idealistic transitive type of culture has characteristic features of transtraditional culture phase and ideational and sensual types are of traditional culture phase: 1) the culture of sensual type is separated from the supersensual world; 2) the culture of ideational type has a burden of returning to transcendent values. Following P.A. Sorokin's elucidation of culture transition as returning to the types of culture that have already been in history, we show spiritual processes of culture transitions which advance culture from the traditional phase to the transtraditional one and vice versa in the form of a pendulum motion. As this takes place during a transition period, old symbols are rediscovered in new symbolic forms.

There are plenty of external and internal factors which bring influence on transition triggering, external, e.g.: convergence of cultures, absorption of one culture by another, etc.; internal, e.g.: appearance of a spiritual leader-rebel, public mood in society (desire for changes), social and psychological and some other factors (e.g. L.N. Gumilev's doctrine on drive as bioenergetics dominant factor of ethnogenesis (Gumilev, 1990)).

Mechanism of culture transitions. The target for external and internal factors is the system of symbols underlying the fundament of the symbolic sphere of the culture in question.

As a result of various operating factors, there takes place a resonating shift of symbolic fields that finally results in transition of culture from one phase to another (from traditional to transtraditional and v.v.). If we could be able to have a look inside the explosive mechanism of culture transitions, we would see how symbolic fields «overlap» each other, whether they be either fields around the symbols at the basis of one culture or fields around the symbols of different cultures. In the process of their overlapping, zero structures of the symbols become more active and intensely exchange senses through their symbolic forms. Any semantic information passing through a symbol zero structure loses its own structure and acquires a structure with a mark of the prime sense. When natives of different cultures meet, there is a natural overlapping of symbolic fields and their poly-cultural interaction which productive extremes can become either mutual enrichment of the cultures or their mutual elimination. No less complicated is a mono-culture transition which initiation and peculiarities are caused by appearance of a rebel personality, “a man of genius in the history of mankind,” an impulse person capable to activate the zero structure and symbolic fields of culture with his individual restoring yearning for the symbol and explanation of its eternal prime sense.

In the process of transition from traditional culture to transtraditional by means of the zero structure chaos-making energy of the symbol is discharged while in the process of transition from transtraditional culture to traditional there operates regulating energy generated by the prime sense of a symbol. Dialectic interaction of these two energies induces activity of symbolic fields and initiates the symbol development through signs into the communicative environment, through images into the psychological environment, through metaphors into the semantic environment. The initiation of transition from traditional culture

to transtraditional is quite often connected to the above mentioned external factors while the reverse transition is organized due to the uniform and indivisible prime sense which the symbol tends to keep by all means. Everything has been passing but the prime sense has never changed so far as humankind has been living. Hence the culture tends to abandon its transtraditional condition and to get the traditional position again because the circulatory changes will be sure to get interrupted by «an interpretive condemnation» which will finish the conflict of symbolic interpretations and will freeze in a culture as tradition, in a sign as a language cliché or a stock phrase, in a metaphor as a phraseological unit, in an image as a sustained association.

It is compulsory to have a strong impulse to initiate spiritual processes in transition from traditional culture to transtraditional in contrast to the reverse transition from transtraditional culture to traditional which occurs gradually and in a more balanced manner. History brings us evidence of numerous cases of appearance of an impulse person. Transition epochs are marked by appearance of such prominent figures as influential politicians and economists, prophets and rebels, outstanding artists and ingenious thinkers, coryphaei and other charismatic leaders whose influence made for radical revision of people and consequently new world outlook could arise. The appearance of such a luminary with a «drive» in spiritual processes of transition is imagined in general as the impulse person's taking society by storm. These charismatic humans attract people with their keen longing for acquiring the understanding of the prime sense. Such leaders started to shake the traditional symbolic sphere and intensified an exchange of symbolic forms with their efforts.

In the history of the European culture, spiritual processes of culture transitions may be exemplified by its development from the Middle

Ages towards New Age through Renaissance of the XIII-XVIth centuries. That epoch brought along the opening of new cultures (an external factor of the initiation of transtraditional culture), transition to the Copernican theory in astronomy (an internal factor of the initiation of transtraditional culture). The changes in spiritual sphere were so dramatic as to change the system of symbols of the Middle Ages not gradually but radically, having in part restored it to the symbols of high antiquity.

The point of value observation moved from God to Man having been shown in humanism as a new vector of culture progress. In the academic historian Norman Davis's opinion, primary distinctive quality of the Renaissance was determined as "independence of reason." The epoch's ideal became *l'uomo universale*, "the perfect human" (Davies, 1997, 471). N. Davis quotes in his book "Europe. A History" the words of a Catholic philosopher: "The difference between the Middle Ages and Renaissance lies not in addition but in subtraction. The Renaissance ... was not the Middle Ages plus Man but the Middle Ages minus God" (Ibidem, 479).

The greatest luminaries of the new Renaissance philosophy Nikolay Kuzansky, Marcilio Fitchino, Pico della Mirandola, Paracelsus (Phillip Aureol Theofrast Bombast von Gogenheim), Dzhordano Bruno and many other titans of thought meditated upon the problem of spiritual creativity and on the right of man to be called «the second God.» The Renaissance man had been creating in all spheres of art and thought with no need any more in any authorities for creating symbols—signs, images, metaphors. The influence of the impulse personality on spiritual processes of culture transition was implemented through creativity of the whole Pleiad of Renaissance genii whose star names still shine in culture: Dante Alighieri, Giovanni Boccaccio, Francesco Petrarch, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo Buonarroti,

Raphael, Albrecht Dürer, Sandro Botticelli, William Shakespeare and plenty of others. They picked up the baton of changing symbolic systems from the geniuses of the past and this same baton is still handed on to the following generations. In the political domain it might be illustrated by changing the attitude of more and more citizens to such symbols as throne, crown, scepter, head of the state, national state, political party, etc. There is a great progress from acknowledging belief in God's anointed sovereign to an «effective manager» elected (hired) by the people.

Resume

Necessity and chance or accident in culture.

The exploration of the rôle of symbol in spiritual processes of culture transitions inevitably directs our attention to a sacramental question on the reason or reasons of such transitions—why does one culture yield to another? And yet the persistent «*why*» is so closely connected to no less obligatory question for the researcher «*how*» that it is next to impossible to tell one from the other. Therefore our attempt to reveal the rôle of symbol in spiritual processes of culture transitions has to deal with categories of causality, necessity, and chance or accident. G.W.F. Hegel demonstrated the unsoundness of separating necessity and chance, and he developed a dialectical conception of their interrelationship. In contrast to Aristotle who had distinguished two series of real events: necessary and accidental, Hegel dialectically asserted that every phenomenon is both necessary and accidental. As a result of interpreting Hegel, F.Engels coined an aphoristic statement: "*necessity*, which is supplemented by and appears under the forms of *accident*" (Engels, 2000, 264).

At present it has become quite reasonable and even natural that in our quest to understand culture transitions one also needs to search for necessity in the accidental and take into consideration a

fundamental meaning of chance. Statistics and later synergy prove the rôle of chance in the process of the emerging order. As a matter of fact, novel things are born by chance. Ontologically, chance reigns over chaos. Order is always fraught with disorganization and even destruction due to both internal and external effects whilst chaos is often ready to get organized, e.g. into cosmos reigned by necessity.

On the one hand, the organized structures including cultures, degrade and eventually collapse. On the other hand, we are well aware of self-organization of cultures and their ascending to more and more complex organization. Consequently, entropy shows direction of the first and evolution of the second. Here symbols play their fundamental part in solving this obvious contradiction exactly because they are sort of cornerstones in the self-organizing of new cultures. Culture is never completed since it is not a butterfly to spring from a pupa. Culture is always being created or disintegrating. *Tertium non datur est*. Culture both loses its own proselytes and acquires its new adherents, depending on which symbols they commit themselves to. Let us remember what culture is for. Mankind needs culture to survive as a reasonable species.

I.R.Prigozhin and his team of scientists inquired into the problem how there could evolve higher stages of differentiation and higher forms of organization. They scrupulously studied a lot of combinations of chance and necessity in chemistry. It was ascertained that in any complex system its own subsystems were always in a condition of continuous small-scale changes. Owing to this situation, the inner framework of the system is subject to fluctuations. With some negative feedback these fluctuations are suppressed and the equilibrium of the system is well maintained. Nonetheless, some of ever available fluctuations can become many times stronger due to a positive feedback to such an

extent that the balance of the whole system is being lost with some additional quaking by the outer environment fluctuations. As a result, the system collapses more often than not. Yet as it has been demonstrated in physical and chemical reactions by I.R.Prigozhin's team, the destruction of the old balance sometimes results rather in creation of a completely new compound of higher levels of differentiation, internal coherence, and complexity than in chaos. I.R. Prigozhin suggested considering evolution as the process leading to the increasing complexification and diversity of biological and social organisms by means of evolving new structures of higher order. He named them «dissipative structures.» Thus, according to his innovative ideas, the evolving of new dissipative structures causes the genesis and development of «order out of chaos» (that is the title of I.R. Prigozhin and I.Stengers's book (Prigozhin & Stengers, 1986)).

I.R.Prigozhin's works convincingly demonstrate the dialectic interrelation of chance and necessity. At the turning-point (which the authors of the book termed a «bifurcation» point), where the system can, so to speak, «jump» up to a new level of complexity, the choice of its way to find its option out of plenty of random forms is absolutely accidental. But as soon as the way has been chosen and a new structure has evolved, determinism comes into force, as before, when development was shaped by necessity. In the century of quantum mechanics the old principle of absolute (mechanistic) causality is no longer applicable either to the study of physical and chemical structures or to the research of dynamics of modern cultures. We start to think in terms of mutual effects, their increasing or decreasing, collapse of cultures or their transition to a more sophisticated level.

So, on the preceding pages we have been simplifying enough some culture transitional phases. However, it is necessary to synthesize

rather than analyze, i.e. to contemplate how transparency, transformability, and transcendence interact with each other. From the foregoing it follows that what we have suggested in this paper, is a hypothesis which might point to what may have taken place in the course of culture development. Cultures, as well as all their attributes, are changeable both historically and typologically. The turning-point catches a culture in the process of its transition from one phase to another when its new type is still emerging. Perhaps now there will be a “culture of informatization epoch”. V.I.Kudashov convincingly argues that “the emerging type of culture nowadays acquires only its first features and consequently is even referred to differently: information culture, cyberculture, computer culture” (Kudashov, 2004, 25). No one can answer the question what kind of culture will set in because we do not have enough data yet but its symbolic system will change for sure.

As long as the new (transtraditional) culture is focused on change and growing diversity, shining of its fresh symbolic forms is quite capable to blind adherents of old traditions. When the potential of symbolic sphere of disappearing (traditional) culture is being over, it leaves millions of people endlessly longing for something breathtaking as

well. It is thirst for the old in a new packing. Then there appear enthusiasts from ardent devotees keen on Zen Buddhism to faithful followers of Celtic sorcerers. They try to transfer and recover some old ideas by means of reviving symbolism of our ancestors who lived in dramatically different conditions. In addition, there is growing another source of change: globalization. Natalia Koptzeva and Natalia Bachova have noted a paradox that it is possible to save local cultures in the wild and rapid globalization “provided that a culture doesn’t fall into self-isolation” (Koptzeva & Bakhova, 2010, 350).

At the same time a new (transtraditional) culture—the culture corresponding to our time and place in the Universe, is being crystallized in the core of this spiritual supermarket where a tangled web of created symbols is always crowding. To understand the new reality, there start to appear some new powerfully generalized symbols—new signs, new images, new metaphors. It is next to impossible to overestimate their rôle as the deepest means of regulation in spiritual processes of culture transitions. Hence, creating a new culture, we ought to look deep into the symbolic systems and their initial humane contents.

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Символический потенциал культуры

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В статье изложены результаты исследования символического потенциала культуры. Кризисы культуры рассматриваются как переходные состояния культуры и ее символической системы. Пристальное рассмотрение символов и их применения в различных культурах дает возможность пролить свет на духовную жизнь общества с помощью анализа духовных процессов культурных переходов. Изучение духовного и символического в их тесной взаимосвязи помогает яснее понимать роль символов в культурных переходах. Мы рассматриваем культурное как ответ общества на духовный импульс, и этот отклик реализуется посредством символов.

Такие культурные явления, как настоятельная потребность в символизации и возникающая необходимость в символизации (процесс и его результаты) становятся более понятными в свете теории символа А.Ф.Лосева и мира объективного знания К.Р.Поппера, в который инкорпорированы символы.

Где, когда и поскольку символические системы, созданные нашими гениальными предшественниками, работают в качестве посредников между человеком и природой, там, тогда и постольку символы играют ключевую роль в создании и освоении общественных отношений. Более того, символы являются внутренне присущими культурным переходам. Наш подход заключается в использовании символизма в качестве исследовательской технологии для изучения культурных параметров в их диапазонах. В результате культуры (точнее, их состояния) следует типологически и символически различать по своей прозрачности, способности к трансформации и выходу за свои собственные пределы.

В истории европейской культуры духовные процессы культурных переходов экземплифицируются ее развитием от Средних веков через Возрождение XIII-XVI веков к Новому времени. Эстафета смены символических систем гениями прошлого была подхвачена величайшими светилами нововозрожденческой философии, и эта же эстафета сейчас передается следующим поколениям.

Ключевые слова: символ, символические системы, духовное, традиционная культура, транстрадиционная культура, переходы, состояния.
