

THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF METAPHOR AND ITS DISCREET CHARM

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Starting from the rhetorical reference to the novel of Milan Kundera and the famous film directed by Buñuel, the author analyzes the usage of metaphor in the works by Zygmunt Bauman, especially Bauman's application of the concept of rites of passage and liminality to post-communist societies. He points out the partial adequacy of Bauman's metaphor, but at the same time defends the interpretative power and charm of metaphors in scientific practice.

The title of my essay associates openly, on the one hand, with the book of Milan Kundera on the human condition, and, on the other, with the movie directed by Luis Buñuel on the light and shadows of bourgeois life. The life of the hero of the novel *Unbearable Lightness of Being*, an 'internal émigré' in his native country who happened to have loved both one person and had a lot of love affairs, turns into a source of despair. His existence appears to be as light as it becomes unbearable. In the movie *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* we can witness something that, in the jargon of social sciences, can be described as a presentation of a leisure class lifestyle. Buñuel's perspective, always ironic and shocking, makes the imagined advantages of this life highly dubious.

Of course, my reference to the novel and the movie is rhetorical here. The subject of my essay is the usage of metaphor in the works by Zygmunt Bauman. Readers of the texts by this prominent sociologist are impressed by the richness of this rhetorical figure, the mastery of its usage, and the magic power it has on our imagination. In fact, this should not be surprising with an author who is a commentator of the postmodern era. The metaphor in Bauman's text plays not only the role of a stylistic figure; it is not reduced to incidental formulations or vanishing associations. The poetry of the text, fascinating in itself, has a secondary significance for me. I am more interested in the metaphor which can be called *intellectual* or *cognitive*. This kind of metaphor can be defined as a usage of concepts or even theories that were primarily worked out for specific types of phenomena, or applied in a delineated cultural and historical context, to a totally different type of phenomena or context. Cognitive metaphor, as its poetic prototype, ignites the imagination and allows for unconventional associations. At the same time, however, it is meant to play a descriptive and interpretive function in perceived events and facts. In other words, it has an intellectual or, as one wishes, interpretive importance.

A typical example of cognitive metaphor which appears in Bauman's texts is a translation or, rather, application of the concept of *rites de passage* to the systemic transformation which has taken place in Poland and other countries of Central Europe since 1989. This metaphor is the subject of my detailed analysis here. In this sense, it is a case study. To the anthropologist, the metaphor of a rite of passage is intriguing for at least two reasons. Firstly, it shows that anthropological concepts can be applied to various types of societies and processes. Ethnological hypotheses are not confined merely to the so-called tribal societies. Secondly, for an explorer of a contemporary culture, as many of today's anthropologists are, it shows that mass social transmutations can also be analyzed within a category applied initially to a particular social context and ritual domain.

Even for just these reasons the metaphor of a rite of passage has its reticent attraction. This charm gives rise to many questions and doubts. It entices one to deeper reflection and this is a further point which indicates the merits of this metaphor. At the same time, a lecture on Bauman's works gives birth to some kind of an impression of lightness, one is tempted to say, an unbearable lightness of metaphor. This lightness makes the reader both fascinated, exasperated and embarrassed. One can say that this essay is about ambivalence; about how far the metaphor of the rite of passage as applied to the systemic transformation in Central Europe is insightful, and to what degree it is unbearable; whether it is adequate and can be fruitfully utilized.

In order to explore these issues I will use a twofold method. On the one hand, I will consider the question of the adequacy of this metaphor in its 'literal' sense. During this exercise I will deliberate, in detail, analogies between ensuing points in the rites of passage, their liminal period, and systemic transformation. On the other hand, I will try to develop its implicit interpretive power. In this way, I would like to join two kinds of critique as recognized by Leszek Kolakowski (1992:1–2), i.e. police and guardianship. In a police critique one is looking for lacunas in an argument in order to ridicule someone, and in a guardianship critique one wants to find, even in things criticized, something positive.

Rite of passage

The concept of rites of passage was put forward by Arnold van Gennep, a French ethnologist of Flemish origin, in 1909. In its original version it applied to individuals whose life "... in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another. (...) Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence..." (van Gennep 1960:2–3). Any change in a socially defined situation is accompanied by special rituals, particular to a given culture, which according to their purpose are called rites of passage. Although van Gennep's passages relate mainly to an individual's life cycle, the concept also covers the calendar cycle.

Van Gennep also defined the structure of a typical rite of passage. It is composed of three principal elements: *rites de separation*, *rites de marge* and *rites de aggregation*. They are accompanied by similar terms of preliminal, liminal and postliminal phases, which also appear in van Gennep's work and apply first of all to the aspects of space and time in the ritual (cf. Turner 1969:166–167).

The structural feature and liminal phase in the rite of passage have played a special role in the history of anthropology. They have provided a theoretical framework for many ethnographies and inspired several theories on social relations. There is no room for discussing them at this time.¹ However, I would like to emphasize here, in a concise manner, several features van Gennep and his followers connected with the concept of rites of passage and the liminal period.

It is assumed that, in their classical form, rites of passage appear in tribal societies. Rituals observed there show most features considered as

¹ There are several works on this topic and some of them should be named here: Gluckman 1962; Turner 1967, 1969; Douglas 1970; Leach 1976; Buchowski 1990, 1993.

principal for them and ones that make them rites of passage *per se*. Let us start with the feature of *performativity*. This means that participation in the ritual is considered a must if a given person wants to pass from one social position to another. To say the same thing in yet another way; a ritual has creative power for social relations, of course, as delineated by culture.

Together with a conviction about the performative character of a ritual goes the belief that it is related directly to the supranatural sphere. Ritual acts are, at the same time, *sacred* acts. The earthly power of a ritual by which new social facts are created, can be realized thanks to sacred intervention. The sacred *legitimizes* ritual and provides it with meaning. One can say that a distinction between sacred and profane spheres does not really exist in societies where a kind of magico-religious world view dominates. In any case, the perception of the world is different from that in Weber's modern European culture after its 'second disenchantment'. In effect, ritual acts for native people are *simultaneously* pragmatic and symbolic.

According to the logic of magico-religious thought, a ritual is also a condition *sine qua non* for a change of social status. The unification of pragmatic and symbolic spheres and the pervasive presence of the sacred causes ritual to be necessary for making any desired changes. An individual cannot acquire his/her new status without undergoing a ritual. Submission to prescribed acts enables individuals not only to change their status, but also to precipitate a substantial change of their personality, altering their person into a new being.

I think that all these features, which mainly address the cultural context and consciousness of those involved in the ritual, are the most important in the anthropological characteristic of the concept of a rite of passage. This does not mean, however, that scholars did not refer to this category when they were giving us accounts of societies differing from tribal ones. In descriptions of the latter type, they utilized mostly the structural aspect of van Gennep's triad. Anthropologists paid attention to the fact that the originally immanent sacred element gradually evaporated from rituals. In this way rituals, instead of being religious, have evolved in modern societies into desacralized ceremonies fulfilling social and communicative functions. Nevertheless, they still have their ritual dimension.

Students paid special attention to the liminal period of the rite of passage. During this period an individual is, as Turner called it, betwixt and between. Those involved in the ritual are symbolically separated from their previous status e.g. that of being a single bride or bridegroom, and are not yet aggregated into a new status e.g. that of married person. They are, to put it into colloquial speech, neither fish nor fowl. Rite of

separation symbols refer to death, sleep and isolation, and future neophytes are separated from their social group, treated as polluted by the sacred, dangerous. Neophytes can undergo procedures which may look brutal to an external observer; they are often ridiculed, deprecated, disparaged. Rituals of aggregation are symbolized by a reversal of the rituals of separation. Individuals are born to a new life, awakened, returned to their social group, cease to be dangerous, they become ordinary members of a community, acquire the privileges and duties ascribed to a new status.

As I said before, Bauman utilizes the concept of the rites of passage and liminality in his analysis of a situation in Central and Eastern Europe in the period after the collapse of the Berlin Wall.² Considering the above characteristic one can say that, taken literally, this comparison does not make sense. Liminality in its traditionally anthropological understanding applies to a ritual context, particularly in native societies. The concept itself implies deep world view beliefs among participants in these cultures. It is also closely connected with internal group relationships and symbolically defines the position of an individual in a society. In its message, despite the appearance of disorder caused by the ritual and a symbolic turning upside down of the world when the last are elevated to the first, and the first degraded to the last, the ritual strengthens an existing social order. Participation in the ritual is paradoxically both free and necessary, and what will happen is known in advance to those subjected to ritual procedure, the social position they will gain.

Bauman's application of the concept of rites of passage and liminality to post-communist societies diverges from classical anthropological thought in many essential points. Above all, the social context is totally different from that which anthropology identified among magico-religious societies. The ritual is not an immanent institution and force which creates and rules certain social facts. In Bauman's case, we deal no longer with a ritual context, but with transformation involving whole complex societies. Changes affect all aspects of social life and not merely the ritual sphere. Strict religious beliefs, which through reference to supranatural power should legitimize changes, do not come into play here. The transformation period is not perceived as a ritual, but as a change of a political and economic system. The transformation touches not upon chosen individuals or groups but on whole national or even pan-national social organisms.

² Of course, a metaphor of passage is evoked quite often. Bauman also utilizes it in many contexts and not only in the paper to which I often refer here (Bauman 1992a). For example, it also appears in his paper written in German (cf. Bauman 1993).

There are further, maybe even more important reasons for our skepticism towards application of the metaphor of a rite of passage to the situation in certain contemporary European societies. Political changes that take place here are meant, at least in theory, to *destroy* the previous order in a complex way. This transformation should not, for example, just shake up the existing social structure for a while, but rebuild it entirely. In Bauman's own words, this is to be not only a political but a systemic revolution.³ According to transformation assumptions, there is no return to former structures. However, as indicated above, a rite of passage in its original context fortified the existing social and cultural order. The Individuals passed through liminality in order to find themselves in a new but already known, established and anticipated place in a hierarchy within the group. Persons involved also submitted totally to the authority of tradition and the group elders. The function and goal of the rite was exactly *reverse* in relation to ones assumed in the systemic transformation.

In the abyss of liminality

Of course, I am not suggesting that Bauman does not realize the limits of his metaphor. He writes that: "'Rites of passage' assume a person moving between fixed 'structures; mobility is invested with meaning by the fixity of the existing positions. No such assumption can be made if the 'passage' is performed by society. (...) The old structure does not survive the movement and the new one is not 'fixed' before the movements starts - its 'fixity' is but a sediment of mobility" (1992a:114). It is obvious that Bauman recognizes a dissimilarity between cyclic passages within the group and the transformation of a whole social system.

However, he is interested more in the fact of why and how previously communist societies remain in the realm of liminality. As in the rites of passage, these societies are 'hanging' in between old and new structures. As Bauman puts it, "... in systemic revolutions there is no direct road leading 'from the dismantling' to the 'aggregation' stage. (...) The moment society is sunk in the liminal condition, there is no way of

³ History teaches that political revolution is only a starting point for possible systemic change. "All political revolutions involved a change in the way in which the style of political rule affected the politically administered social system. (...) Ideally-typically, revolution is 'merely political'.., in so far as it 'shakes off' a political regime dysfunctional in relation to a fully fledged socio-economic system from its political constraints." Meanwhile "systemic revolutions, in addition, entailed a transformation of the system itself; a contrived, government-managed or at least government-initiated change of socio-economic structure, which took off at a moment when the political revolution had been completed" (1992:156). Many factors show that "recent anti-communist revolutions have been *systemic* revolutions: they face the task of *dismantling* the extant system and *constructing* one to replace it." (1992:157).

predicting things to come" (1992b:115). As previously mentioned, in pre industrial societies the social condition to which initiated persons head is commonly known and strictly defined. The dynamic of a rite of passage is fully controlled and directed. The dynamic of a systemic transformation is spontaneous and events themselves create new structures. One can say that both the 'ritual' of systemic change and the order generated by it are big mysteries *in statu nascendi*.

Features connected with a liminal period seems to be the most conspicuous common points uniting Bauman's metaphor with the anthropological concept. There is an attribute of being a 'shapeless magma' after the deconstruction of a previous system and before the establishment of solid foundations of a new order. This is a period in which ties with the recent past are broken and the earlier guise rejected in order to be born again to a new form of existence. In this stage several perturbations of passage emerge, such as uncertainty, a fear of not fully recognized powers independent of people and their intentions. The major difference boils down to whether or not an ultimate configuration to which those interested are heading is known.

An extension of the idea of liminality to something other than rituals can already be found in the writings of Victor Turner. Talking about "relatively fixed or stable conditions" in between which the *rite de marge* stretches, he describes them not merely as social statuses or offices but as something much more. "The term 'state' may also be applied to ecological conditions, or to physical, mental or emotional conditions in which a person or group may be found at a particular time" (Turner 1967:93–94). In this sense a society can be, for example, in a state of war, of affluence, or in the state of passage. It is even better, according to Turner, to treat passage "as a process, a becoming, and in the case of *rites de passage* even a transformation" (Turner 1967:94). The latter term means something more than passage itself since it is a kind of substantial change similar to that when "a pupa [is] changing from grub to moth" (Turner 1967:94) or a tadpole into a frog.

A systemic transformation

The above remarks show that the application of Bauman's metaphor of the rite of passage and liminality to Central Europe has to be strictly circumscribed and explicated in details. In social sciences understanding this application has adaptive and structural character. Adaptive, because the cultural and historic context from which the original concept was invented, and in which it found its points of reference, is omitted. The common core consists mainly of the structural concurrence of a triadic

scheme: separation - liminality - aggregation. Some formal and emotional analogies that appear in a liminal period, both in a ritual and systemic passage, can be added. This corrected and circumscribed status of a metaphor of passage should be kept in mind whenever we talk about a rite of passage in post-communist societies. In this sense, Bauman's metaphor has its immanent seeds of worrying lightness.

My comments also make it clear, however, that several aspects encompassing important features of a systemic revolution are ingrained in the discussed cognitive metaphor. Without this metaphor these events would not be so insightfully described. The power and charm of this rhetoric device seems to lie both in its problematic status and the fact that it captures something that otherwise would have passed unnoticed. Maybe it is because of a combination of these contradictory qualities that the metaphor of a rite of passage entices us to follow a trope indicated by it, to correct and develop divergent trails and, finally, to relate these findings to the current situation of societies in Central Europe.

Let us start by marking the difference between a passage and a transformation. In the structural sense, Central European countries seem to be undergoing a specific rite of passage. One can speak about a passage from a planned economy to a free market; from authoritarian rule to democracy; from a centralized system to self-government; from hierarchically-controlled society to civil society. A category of *transgression* applies here, which in relation to rituals refers to the belief that during the ritualistic act "the individuals move from one social status to another equally arbitrarily defined" (Buchowski 1993:141). In the Central European context such acts decide about the quality of transgression as, for example, rejection of one communist party monopoly for democratic elections; opening of markets for internal and external competition; freeing societies from Soviet domination; opening the borders for a free movement of people; respecting human rights; accepting throngs of Western consultants instead of those coming from the East; respecting advice from international economic and banking institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, NATO, the European Union, etc. instead of orders coming from the Kremlin, Commecon Office or Warsaw Pact Headquarters. However, if we reduce the changes merely to this dimension of passage then the events of autumn 1989, sometimes called 'Nations' Fall', would have been simply a political revolution in which, as we remember, "a change in the way in which the style of political rule affected the politically administered social system" (Bauman 1992:156; see also note 2).

Reforms initiated in 1989 were meant to instate changes much deeper than those just enumerated. They should have brought a total

modification of the system, societies and mentalities of individuals. In an 'ontological' sense this was meant to be a *transformation*, which in a ritual context means such effects "where socially determined subjective convictions of the actors cause substantial ('ontological') changes of the subjects of these acts; according to the world view of the participants of a ritual, a kind of 'mutation' of the subject takes place" (Buchowski 1993:141). Understood in this way, the concept of transformation converges with Bauman's notion of a systemic revolution which, let me state it again, means not only a political revolt but also "... a transformation of the system itself; a contrived, government-managed or at least government-initiated change of socio-economic structure, which takes off at the moment when the political revolution has been completed" (Bauman 1992:156). A transformation of Poland, East Germany, the Czech Republic and other Central European countries implies a kind of 'transubstantiation'. Although Bauman does not put his ideas about a systemic revolution in these particular terms applied to rites of passage, one can see a deep relationship between them, and they can be connected.

Together with passage, transformation and a state of being in between two poles, both in ritual and in situation, the post-communist countries also share several further properties which until now have passed unnoticed. In the state of social equilibrium, legal relations and a certain hierarchy within the group are established with restricted links between its segments. As Turner underscores: "In the liminal period such distinctions and gradations tend to be eliminated" (1967:99). A similar process can be observed in the Central European societies. The political revolution is at the same time a systemic revolution. The old structure of power and domination has been toppled or seriously undermined. Old formalized groups, for example the *nomenklatura*, have vanished, and new political, economic and professional classes have appeared e.g. the business class.⁴ Formal state legislation is also undergoing rapid changes. A byproduct of this are the many gaps in a legal system which allows for, among other things, the formation of semi-legal systems of connections and organized crime. In short, the legislative situation is to some extent destabilized. Law and social relations are, as in the rite of passage, reduced, disrupted and dynamic.

The above issue engenders a question as to whether those subjected to a 'passage' recognize any authority. In traditional societies, very often it was the elders who incarnated sacred and firm tradition. "The authority of

⁴I am not saying that 'old classes' have disappeared totally. For example, it is commonly held in Poland that the former *nomenklatura* infiltrated the new class of business people. They, in a sense, 'privatized' national assets into their own hands and exchanged political power for economic power.

the elders is absolute, because it represents the absolute, the axiomatic values of society in which are expressed the 'common good' and the common interest" (Turner 1967:100). Of course, the elders of the old system, dropped into a dustbin of history, could not become authorities in the process of systemic transformation. It is understandable that it was rather the other way around and, initially, they were condemned for all possible crimes. Former dissidents, persecuted oppositionists in the old system, initiated revolution and became the authorities at the beginning of the transformation. They were also treated as apostles of a new mythicized image of the capitalist system. To people from behind the Iron Curtain, Western democracies appeared as an oasis of prosperity. The introduction of a democratic system was supposed, after a short rite of passage and ordeal, to bring goods to stores and an affluent society. A 'dictatorship over needs' was to be quickly replaced by a consumer society.⁵ Consumerism should have immediately supplanted communism. Many elements of this belief are reminiscent of Melanesian 'cargo cults'. Former rebels played the role of 'tribe elders', and western democracies the role of an imported absolute tradition identified with the common interest.

Meanwhile, the West regards post-communist societies undergoing rites of passage with detached reserve, as they do any objects which cannot easily be classified. Those initiated in the ritual also rouse fear since they are polluted with the sacred, are neither us, nor them, in a sense are nonexistent. "The unclear is the unclean" (Turner 1967:97). It is perhaps this culturally biased preference for things which can easily be classified into existing categories which is the source of the Westerners to those in the liminal sphere, aspiring to enter directly into democratic society structures. Economic and political demands and barriers imposed by the West recall maturity tests set for novices to pass, if they want to find themselves in privileged clubs.

As we already know, those initiated should obey tribal elders. Nobody can assure this kind of submission in the case of revolutions on a mass scale. If we assume that there was a kind of consensus about the main goals of the transformation at its dawn, then it has to be admitted that it was successively contested by various social groups. As the 'elders' of transformation were not typical by ritual standards, so also was the behavior of the novices untypical. Self-liberalizing societies also do not share "the passivity of the neophytes to their instructors" (Turner 1967:101), a submission to all procedures and ordeals of the rite. It is hard to consider as such, those workers going on strike, the people voting for

⁵The term 'dictatorship over needs' was used by Ferenc Feher, Agnes Heller and Gyorgy Markus in their book *Dictatorship Over Needs*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1986. Cf. Bauman 1988:86.

direct heirs to the old parties associated in their minds with those 'good old bad times', or ignoring the privileges of democracy by simply not voting at all.

"If complete obedience characterizes the relationship of neophyte to elders, complete equality usually characterizes the relationship of neophyte to neophyte..." (Turner 1967:100). It seems rather obvious that we should look at the phenomenon of 'friendship' differently in relation to people and groups involved in the ritual of transformation in Central Europe. This remark applies equally to individual, class, regional and national levels. Maybe only the very moment of inception of the rite of passage can be considered as fully permeated with solidarity. Swayed by the idea of overturning the system, the nations were united. The same pertains to social groups and the individuals within them. However, this solidarity was quickly replaced by a rivalry between sections. Individuals, groups and nations are more preoccupied by the idea of having competitive advantage over others and a fulfillment of their own interests, than in helping each other during times of affliction.

In relation to the foregoing, a question about liminality and an associated state of *communitas* can be posed. The latter notion was initially tied by Turner solely with the *rite de marge* and a feeling of community which it arouses among those gathered together. This kind of community is based on direct, often mystically fortified relations; its is spontaneous and emotional. It does not refer to any social structure, and even negates it. Later Turner and many other anthropologists recognized *communitas* as a model for interpersonal relations occurring outside a ritual context. In this latter sense the concept can be used as a metaphor for a systemic transformation. Nevertheless, in this case one can also speak about any analogy to a classical anthropological concept of the *communitas* only at the time of the stormy inception of revolutions in 1989. The atmosphere of the first semi-free elections to the *Sejm* (Lower Chamber) and Senate in Poland, of mass gatherings of people in Budapest, Prague, Bratislava, Berlin, Leipzig and Sophia or the bloody rebellion in Bucharest, are reminiscent somehow of an emotional and spontaneous *communitas*. Further attributes of these events were a sweeping destruction of the old structure; a turning upside down of the world, when those formerly persecuted became heroes of the crowds and were put on a pedestal. These traits also include such symbolic behavior as torch light marches, ringing and jangling with keys, destruction of monuments and, in an extreme case, physical annihilation of a hated embodiment of an old regime, as in the

case of Ceausescu.⁶ Symbols again showed their pragmatic and morally uniting power. It was an important fact that people gathered at meetings and mass gatherings, that remind one of a symbolically tense time of rituals, and were united at this holy time during which they expressed their feelings and desires.

Let us repeat, however, that the result of these gatherings was not the strengthening of an existing structure, but its overthrow. But *communitas*, by its definition, cannot last too long. At the time the political revolution was over, a systemic revolution triggered a natural process of freezing newly born structures and hierarchies: a time of emotional community of those who, as in millenaristic religions, "feel themselves to be deprived" (Leach 1982:71). As in all millenaristic movements which lasted for longer than the same period of rebellion, a new hierarchy is established and stabilizes. "In the long run the heirs of the preachers of heresy are likely to end up as the mouthpieces of an established orthodoxy upon which the political regime leans for support" (Leach 1982:71).

Preachers of transformation in their fight for power quickly break up into small caucuses that ultimately lead to parricide in a former revolutionary camp. The hierarchy of a new religion of liberalism, at a symbolic level initially widely accepted, was soon perceived as an equally cold-hearted and egoistic structure as the previous one.⁷ Mental and behavioral habits connected with a patronage state cause many to miss the old system. Among many, a kind of 'pagan return' has occurred. A post-communist reaction have elevated to the top many who seemed to be destined to be humiliated forever.

Post scriptum

Metaphors of the rite of passage, liminality and *communitas* can rouse mixed feelings when applied to the current situation in Central Europe. On the one hand, one can have doubts flowing from unsubstantiated analogies resulting from the fact that totally different social contexts are involved in the concept's original and metaphorical usage. On the other hand, several interpretive possibilities open up which allow for a better anthropological

⁶ A good example of an analysis of an ethnological analysis of turning a world upside down, carried out in Mikhail Bakhtin's terms, is a paper written by Czeslaw Robotycki (1990) on workers' strikes in the Gdansk shipyard in August 1980.

⁷ An opinion poll on whether politicians are mostly interested in fulfilling their private interests is instructive here. In 1991 i.e. already some time after the revolutionary events, half of those asked thought that politicians were honest, and the other half not. In 1994 this proportion changed respectively to 13 percent and 77 percent (10 percent could not decide and chosen the answer 'it is hard to say'). See *Interesowni* 1994.

understanding of the processes taking place around us. I have tried to throw light on both these aspects.

Events that have so quickly brought back to power, in whatever guise, heir of the former communist system in so many countries, may give rise to objections about the same fact of transformation. Is it not a return to the former structure? Referring to the above mentioned categories one can characterize the whole situation in Poland and, I think, also in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia, as follows:

In the framework of an existing political and economic system a large part of systemic transformation has already been completed. There is no 'natural' i.e. political and peaceful, return to the principles of the working of the previous order, of a one-party monopoly in politics, economy and ideology. At the same time, the transformation is not a full one and, in many respects, does not coincide with what the 'elders' of the transformation, both internal i.e. former dissidents, and external i.e. Western experts, envisaged. In this sense, the rite of passage has not yet been fulfilled. Its consummation would be full membership of the countries interested in the political, economic and military structures of the West. Meanwhile they are only partially tied to them, again having the status of 'neither fish, nor fowl', living in danger of slipping into the misty 'grey areas'. The paradox of this situation lies in the fact that the apostles of change have been degraded in so many cases, and the representatives of the old pre-transition regime elevated.

A systemic change has its false bottom. As I mentioned, we can apply it not only to a social and political order but also to individuals. Transformations in thinking and behavior mean adaptation of social roles tied with the new order. People have to accept novel, unknown in the past, mechanisms of everyday life, social inequalities, the individualism of self-made persons and their careers, an abandonment of the image of common or collective material and consumption needs. The metamorphosis of individuals at the same time means an acceptance of new identities, of a capitalistic way of life which permeates social life and is perceived by people as 'natural' and their own. A syndrome of unfulfillment is also visible in this individual perspective. Habits of the past are rooted in consciousness and everyday practice, and diverge from an imagined routine of the West (cf. Koralewicz and Ziolkowski 1990; Buchowski 1994; Cuthcher-Gershenfeld, Sterniczuk and Chalyakoff 1993). In the eyes of representatives of western culture, the Poles, and other nations in the region, loom as restive neophytes who still have difficulties with assimilation of new and 'proper' game rules. This implies that these novices have not matured enough to belong to the new and sophisticated world. Cohorts of experts and teachers - anthropologists

among them - flood those countries in order to induce new cultural patterns, support, accelerate and oversee the rite of passage. However, the endorsement by the people of all these changes is not so evident, and several forms of protest can be witnessed. In the case of many individuals we should talk rather about transgression, a formal acceptance for some rules connected with a free market and democracy, than about transition, which would mean an internalization of the capitalist system values complex. And, as we remember, transgression does not equal transition. Socially significant change of individuals' attitudes is slower than anticipated by wishfully thinking social engineers.

In a social perspective, one can say that a liminal phase and a linked state of *communitas* are just history. But in many respects Central European countries remain 'betwixt and between' the starting point and the assumed goals. In this sense, they are still undergoing *rite de marge*. This state can be interpreted as natural in the permanent process of social becoming where, as Auguste Comte already noticed, we always deal with continuity and change. In the case of processes discussed we just have to wrestle intellectually with changes intensified so rapidly and deeply that they appear to us as radical transformation.

Many people treat the rule of post-communists as a kind of perpetuation of a *status quo*, a half-way state which post-Solidarity governments in Poland, and their counterparts in the other countries in the region, have managed to achieve. It is said, for example, that the centralized philosophy of governing is coming back and privatization processes are being obliterated. If this is 'true' and currently ruling political forces stay in power for a long period, then we can say that a hybrid between the former system and an idealized envisaged future system, a period of the rite of passage, *limen, marge*, will turn out to be a relatively durable state. This would mean that, again the models of philosophers, sociologists, economists and political scientists would not fit social reality. A nagging question returns of, whether we should change the models, imagined reality, or both.

All this means that the partial adequacy of Bauman's metaphor is not unique in itself. Any description of the world we perceive is only an interpretation, able to grasp only some of its features and relations, resulting merely in partial paraphrase. We cannot forget that, at the same time, these metaphors shape our world. This is where their earthly power, poetic lightness and humanly charm lie.

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NEPODNOŠLJIVA LAKOĆA METAFORE I NJEZIN DISKRETNİ ŠARM

SAŽETAK

U raščlambi suvremenih društvenih, kulturnih i gospodarskih procesa u postkomunističkome svijetu, osobito u Poljskoj, Češkoj i drugim srednjoeuropskim zemljama autor primjenjuje metafore dobro poznate u etnologiji i antropologiji (unutar teorije o obredima prijelaza).

Kako se van Gennepova i Turnerova teorija temelje na istraživanjima plemenskih društava i rituala, Buchowski temeljito propituje doseg metafora obreda separacije, liminalnosti i agregacije, da bi provjerio mogućnost primjene spomenutih teorija u proučavanju suvremene svakodnevice na razini cijelih nacija. U tom se poslu osvrće na rad znamenitoga poljskog kulturologa Zygmunta Baūmana, koji se u jednom svom članku bavi sudbinom društava u poslijekomunističkom razdoblju.

Razvijajući svoju analizu između priklanjanja "diskretnom šarmu metafore" i skepse spram vjerodostojnosti znanstvenih modela i znanstvenih prognoza u odnosu na njihovo ostvarenje u praksi, Buchowski je napisao zanimljiv i posve izvoran tekst, koji i hrvatskoga čitatelja - etnologa može potaknuti na sličnu analizu i slična propitivanja hrvatskoga materijala.