



THE CONCEPT OF “IMPOSSIBLE COMMUNITIES” IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF EXPENDITURE AND ECSTASY

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The article is devoted to the analysis of “impossible community”. The author describes some variants of this socially-philosophical model, in particular, heterogeneous society of Georges Bataille, Vyacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov’s mystical community and imaginary community of the zombies (as an image of pop culture). The article considers orientation of modern philosophy on “direct communication” which resists discourse, language, rationality, production. Life in an “impossible society” is impossible, however, some thinkers persistently design it as radical alternative to work, utility and calculation. It is a question of paradoxical communities, from which the objectivization mechanisms (first of all, language and production) are eliminated.

Keywords: cancellation of society, ecstasy, dionysic mysteries, direct communication, impossible community, heterogeneous society, living dead, unproductive expenditure.

Introduction

The modern thought at times designs objects which we would designate “impossible communities”. They are models of such societies in which the basic social mechanisms are eliminated: practical utility, economics, consciousness, language and so on.

Examples of these communities are societies of unproductive expenditure described by Bataille, community of the orgiastic type, created in mysteries and ritual actions (for example, the Russian poet and philosopher Ivanov wrote about it), fantastic “Living dead” community (characters from horror-movies).

Society of unproductive expenditure

The person, living in an absolutely necessary society, aspires to an impossible society. *Potlatch*, cultural practice of the North American Indians, described by Marcel Mauss, can be a good example: we will explain it from the sociological point of view. It can be viewed as practice, bringing benefit, having a socially-friendly aim (e.g., establishment of social communications), but Bataille believes that Negativity, which underlies this practice, expresses essence of the Man in general, not a casual deviation.

Thus it is possible to think about society in which the utility and ratio are eliminated, and the person operates, proceeding not from rational principles.

According to Bataille, negativity implicitly defines human existence: "<...> the Man <...> has in his soul insuperable aspiration to negation of all that under the name of reason, utility and order is put as the base of the existence of mankind <...>. In us there lives this thirst of destruction, desire to burn our resources, and in general ability to have satisfaction from destruction and burning defined as divine, sacred" (Bataj 1992: 97–99).

The Man is life that destroys itself. Of course, poets of the Spanish baroque (for example, Francisco Gómez de Quevedo) say "We start to die with the birth", but it is passive destruction of life, characteristic of animals. On the contrary, active destruction of life is exclusively human characteristic: actually, human death can only be violent and voluntary, which is unnatural. Alexandre Kojève, interpreting one of places of *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, wrote: "<...> the human death is always to a certain extent premature and violent – in contrast to "natural" death of an animal or a plant which only finishes a cycle of their development" (Kozhev 1998: 166–167). Bataille follows the same course of thought.

There, where the Man touches destruction, his life is intensified. Bataille writes about it in connection with Marquis de Sade: "<...> life reaches the highest level of intensity in the monstrous negation of its own basis" (Bataj 1992: 92). He tells about it also in the preface to *Madame Edwarda*. Bataille connects the destructive principle with the sphere of the Sacred: Divine is Negative, it is the human negativity taken in its aloof aspect. It is characteristic that Bataille often uses fire metaphor (flame, burn, etc.) in relation to the "Sacred".

Speaking about "cruel and destructive aspect of Divine" this French philosopher refers to numerous examples of religious "cruelty" – whether it be bloody cults of Aztecs or sacrifice by the Semitic people, – treating them as the brightest displays of Negativity. Speaking in *The Accursed Share* about Aztec rituals, Bataille writes that "in the cruel ceremonies the Man first of all is focused on searches of the lost secrecy. The religion is also this long effort, this disturbing search: speech always goes about escaping from an order of Real, from poverty of things to come back to an order of Divine <...> (Bataj 2003: 51). (Let us notice that the concept "Sacred" is detailed by Bataille's friend Roger Caillois – in his book *Man and the Sacred* (1939)).

In similar rituals based on unproductive expenditure (that is "non-benefit consumption of something that could remain in sequence of useful affairs"), the Man establishes sacral dialogue with the world. We can consider these rituals as border between Sacred and Profane: Man temporarily cancels in ritual the profane world of everyday life, approving his own Negativity which is manifestation of Sacred, of destructive Epiphany. Thus, expenditure, according to Bataille, in all kinds belongs to an order of the Sacred, it is not connected with the benefit, not involved in production. According to Martin Heidegger, "production" means that something is extracted and given, that production means benefit ("The Question Concerning Technology") (Heidegger 1977). Expenditure is pure loss: something leaves the life area; this is destroyed as real, becoming not-real.

The Man is created by productive work, but in reality the definition of the Man is destruction. This paradox can be formulated in another way: the Man rising over animal immanence to the Nature, finds himself as working being, but simultaneously the Man is a being interrupting himself, destroying himself. The Man, thus, is not only the unique being, questioning about himself (Heidegger), but also the unique being, risking himself as being.

Here it will be pertinent to remember Heraclitus: “The way up down one and the same” (fr. 60 DK: “ὁδὸς ἄνω κάτω μία και ὠυτή [Der Weg auf und ab ist ein und derselbe]”) (Diels 1906: 70). If we distract from cosmological sense which doxographs put in this phrase and treat it exclusively from the point of view of dialectics, it is quite applicable to the characteristic of Bataille’s paradox. We will agree to consider that “the way down” is the negative way of Work pulling out the Man from natural immanence by means of creating activity and forming it as the subject, and “the way upwards” is a negative way of the Sovereignty denying any creation and spraying subject in unproductive expenditure. Thus, Negativity is uniform, bifurcating in work and expenditure which nevertheless converge in it, denying each other.

According to Bataille, “the world of things” is desacralized, utilitarian reality is created in the process of formation of the Man as a subject, in the process of useful industrial activity. As theorists of the Frankfurt school would tell, the world of things is constituted during the statement of instrumental reason. Bataille called this world of production and technology “a homogeneous reality” opposing it “a heterogeneous reality”: “At the heart of social uniformity there is production. The homogeneous society is productive, i.e. useful society. Any useless element is excluded – not from the society as a whole, but from its homogeneous part <...>. The Alien World <...> includes all set of results of unproductive expenditure <...>. In other words, it includes everything that the homogeneous society rejects either as waste or as transcendental to its supreme value” (Bataille 1995: 80, 85).

Heterogeneity provokes “affective reactions of various intensity”, it is a certain higher source of destructive energy. This characteristic of a heterogeneous reality is stressed by Bataille in his writings of the 1930s years (“The Notion of Expenditure”, “The Problem of State”, “The Psychological Structure of Fascism”). Jean-Michel Heimonet in the article “Habermas and Bataille” characterizes this program in the following way: “<...> social energy should be liberated for fertilisation of total Revolution, and not in the terms of orthodox Marxism – as transition of means of production in proletariat hands, – but in the perspective of true apocalypse <...>. The communication is represented by Bataille in vitalistic and organic terms: as transfer of the magnetic stream into the social body, as formation of some kind of collective unconsciousness that is unreceptive to calculation and premeditation” (Khejmonet 1994: 206).

Thus, Bataille suggests to count on “spontaneous dynamics of people forces”, offers the new forms of a sociality which are based, as Heimonet says, on “direct communication” which resists to discourse, language, rationality, production. It is obvious that in this new society there is no place for the subject in its traditional sense.

It is known that Bataille showed certain interest in fascism: according to Habermas, it "excites, fascinates" him (Khabermas 2008: 227). Bataille thinks of the type of communication which is specific to fascism. In its basis there is a myth interpreted as powerful socially-psychological means of mobilization accumulating energy of human Negativity.

It is necessary to mention that the problem of social function of myths in modern societies arouses interest of many researchers (for example, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy published the small report "Nazi myth" (Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy 1991)).

Mythological formations are a specific form of identification and have ambivalent character: the creative principle which is obvious in them, as a result appears absorbed by forces of destruction. Certainly, the myth creates something: mass political movement, religious sect or something can be a product of this creation. Nevertheless, destructive character of all these products made by a myth is clearly found out and can be explicated in various variants:

- firstly, as self-destruction of the individual in aspiration to merge with the masses which is "background" for a social mimicry; in other words, as destruction of own separate life dissolving in orgiastic "dancing" and,
- secondly, as renunciation of life, renunciation of the existence and formation of specific complex "constant readiness for death" instead of it. (This complex is distinctly shown in various mass phenomena; moreover, the idea "renunciation of life" is the major ideologema of movements of fascist type).

Caillois in the book *Myth and the Man* writes that the myth carries out the function similar to function of a mimicry of insects: "One [insects – *A. S.*] has behavior, others [people – *A. S.*] have a mythology" (Kajua 2003: 73). Creation of myths, according to Caillois, is only one of the forms of universal natural laws connected with aspiration of a matter to an equilibrium state, that is a celebration of an instinct of death: "<...> the live being suffers from a difference of levels between it and environment", or, Sigmund Freud's words: "The purpose, to which any life is led, is death because the individuum, owing to the internal reasons, wishes rest, <...> insensibility, unconsciousness and death" (Kajua 2003: 73). (In our opinion, interpretation of the Freudian article "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" as socially-philosophical (or even sociological) treatise still can have an advantage: it is necessary to apply its categories to social problematics, instead of individually-psychological problematics.)

So, we ascertain that the *myth* is a phenomenon of a negative order, an absolute antithesis to the *contract*. However, any replacement of destructive-affective impulses made by modern social mechanisms, cannot achieve the purpose.

It is obvious that the heterogeneous society described by Bataille is "impossible" – more precisely, it becomes possible in the sphere of thought only because it resists and denies homogeneous society. It is difficult to imagine an exclusively heterogeneous reality. However, these chaotic streams of Negativity which are made out in a myth, according to Bataille, are the major element of human being.

Community of ecstasy

The impossible society, designed by Bataille, is in a certain way similar to the community of mysterial ecstasy which was described by the Russian poet and philosopher Ivanov. Ivanov studied an ancient cult of Dionysus and has applied results of this research to the modern society. Search of new religious-social synthesis meant for Ivanov a negation of the old forms of social life. Dionysic dancing was for Ivanov a metaphor of true human existence which overcomes a *principium individuationis*. In the article “Nietzsche and Dionysus” Ivanov wrote:

“Dances of silvan satyrs and motionless silence of maenad that lost in internal contemplation and sensation of God are equally dionysic. But the human soul can be dionysic only under condition of an exit from the frames of empirical ‘I’, under condition of familiarizing with unity of universal ‘I’ in his will and suffering, completeness and rupture, breath and lamentation. In this orgiastic self-forgetfulness we distinguish a condition of blissful overflow to a flour, sensation of wonderful power, <...> consciousness of impersonal and weak-willed spontaneity, horror and delight of loss in chaos and new finding in God” (Ivanov 1994a: 29).

Ecstasy (in Greek *έκστασις*) is a person’s exit out of its own limits, and a society as the system of useful production cannot function in absence of the person. Individuals merge together in the ritual, but this community is out of an order of advantage, work and personal action.

The idea of social construction of reality is based, finally, on the recognition of an adaptive character of my subjective interpretations of the world which I am compelled to coordinate with interpretations of other people reaching conventions in the field of inter-subjectivity.

Hence, communication and understanding are connected with our requirements, our desire of effective coexistence with Others, consequently, with the language taken in aspect of achievement of mutual advantage.

The concept “the impossible community” eliminates language and advantage from communication, leaving only almost mystical act of direct merge of individuals which overcomes separateness of the “I” and abolishes mediating forms of communication (language).

In other words, concept of “impossible communities” is used for a negation of pragmatic interpretation of human behavior in the world. Erotic ecstasy, ritual ecstasy, etc. are not represented in language. They eliminate the opposition “I” – “Another I” and even – “Individual” – “Society”. All these phenomena destroy border between separate individuals, providing transgression and merge in ecstatic unity (here it is possible to remember rituals of Russian sect that is named as “*khlysti*”. This ritual is called “*radeniye*”). Empirical “I” is eliminated in an orgy, being replaced by “We”, which can be considered as collective “I”, identical to the suffering Deity, whose *pathos* eliminates all personal (Selfness), all human, leaving only sensation of participation to a common lot.

The content of ritual, according to Ivanov, is not a convention, but a creation of religious national spirit which is then fixed by means of social mechanisms (including

language). Certainly, to know about Dionysus it is necessary to hear the narrative (myth) about it, i.e. language is necessary. But language is not necessary to incorporate to Dionysus – for this purpose only sacred madness, sacred intoxication is necessary. Dionysus eternally perishes and eternally revives. He is not fixed as something steady.

The following objection is possible: ritual practice, religious establishments, theatrical actions are social structures and they work only when the person has already interpreted for itself their importance. But, according to considered authors, the paradox consists that these structures are created not by forces of the Eros, but by forces of Thanatos and they conduct to self-damage of the “normal” society designed for an adaptation, i.e. these structures accumulate antisocial energy of society, denying it as a result.

According to Ivanov, the core of the future social updating is religious-art synthesis, whose higher form should become the updated theater. The theater “should cease to be ‘theater’ in the sense of being only show <...>. The Spectator should be the actor <...>. Crowd of spectators should merge into a choral body similar to a mystical community ancient ‘orgies’ and ‘mysteries’” (Ivanov 1994a: 44).

Moreover, according to Ivanov, the theater understood in mysterial sense should become a source of updating of social life: “Theatres of choral tragedies, comedies and mysteries should become the centers creative <...> people self-determination <...>. Drama becomes not a show that is offered from the outside, but an internal act of national community” (Ivanov 1994b: 50).

The Russian philosopher considered that ecstatic and cathartic unity of people in the religious-art action has also political value. He declares it directly and categorically: “<...> the real political freedom will be carried out only when the choral voice of such communities becomes an original referendum of national will” (Ivanov 1994b: 50).

Living deads’ community as figure of philosophic thought

We find one more variant of impossible community not in philosophy or religious studies but in modern popular culture. One of very popular genres of horror films is zombie-movies. The “living dead” is impossible *par excellence*, it is an awful oxymoron. If Bataille’s heterogeneous communities and Ivanov’s orgiastic dancings are empirically possible (at least as exclusive and short practice) the living dead is an extreme expression of impossibility. The “living deads” cannot have society, but in some films living deads create groups operating in common. This brings forth a question: what sense does the figure of “living dead” have?

If a myth (as expression of a “heterogeneous part of a society”) and also ecstatic community need language or at least an image, the “living dead” is completely excluded from objectivity, excluded from inter-subjective environments. It has no consciousness in general though outwardly it seems that he behaves definitely. But this is the false conclusion.

Life / death is a fundamental border, it concerns the natural attitude, it is one of the basic ideas of daily existence. Intrusion of the irrational “living dead” arouses fear as it breaks the basic way of perception of the world. The “living dead” is impossible, the society of “living deads” is improbable too. However, this motive constantly arises in modern culture and even more often becomes a theme for philosophical discussions (for example, the book *The Undead and Philosophy: Chicken Soup for the Soulless* (2006), article of Dmitry Golyenko-Volfson “Century of living dead: 20th century in the eyes of the zombies. About philosophy, ethics and the biopolitics of the zombies” (Golyenko-Volfson 2008).

The living deads are out of communication, they cannot make production, though they consume, their consumption is absolutely irrational, out of economic categories, it is absurd. The living dead wants to devour human flesh (well-known Lucio Fulci’s film is called “Flesh Eaters”), it is the unique object of its consumption. Why? We have no answer to this question. The living dead does not have digestion, it does not need food, however aspires to flesh eating. The song of the American rock group *Autopsy* in simple words describes this absurdity (“Necrocannibalistic Vomitorium” from album “Acts Of The Unspeakable”, released by Peaceville Rec., UK, 1992):

Zombies raised up from the dead

To feed upon the living

Drinking blood and eating flesh

.....

Gluttonously ripping flesh

With ancient rotten teeth

Mindless hunger

Gorging on the bloody human feast

Rotten bowels decayed and split

No escape for food

Regurgitation now begins

Zombies puke

Pools of rotten entrails

Flesh and blood spew on the ground

Consumption of the zombie is out of utility, it is not motivated by practical benefit (anyway, in classical films of George A. Romero, Lucio Fulci, Andrea Bianchi, etc.). The food is not necessary for the zombie; consuming it they can’t stop disintegration of the bodies. It is pseudo-food, a food simulacrum.

Zombies cannot be described in terms of economy, politics, ethics because their actions contradict the bases of these spheres of a society. Sometimes zombies unite in groups, but these groups cannot become an object of sociological research. The living dead is non-subject, it cannot generate inter-subjective field, it does not use language.

Edmund Husserl writes: “<...> continuously operating in awake life, we operate as well together-with-other, we together-with-other take into consideration the general pre-given objects, we together-with-other think, estimate, intend, operate” (Gusserl 2002). Living deads have no language and consciousness, they cannot create values

and senses, they are not capable to play other roles except a role of flesh eater. Their actions are initiated by instinct of flesh eating and when zombies operate together at the same time these actions not coordinate among themselves as a continuous action field together-with-other.

Conclusions

It is interesting that the motive of "cancellation of society" is characteristic of the philosophy of the 20th century. More often such situations are connected with the crash of language communication, as language cannot execute objectivization function. The idea of "social construction of reality" is based, first of all, on it. As Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann wrote, the general objectivization of the everyday life is supported mainly by means of linguistic designations. Besides, the everyday life is life which I share with others by means of language.

Ritual ecstasy, aimless and senseless expenditure, horror of the "living dead", – these situations cannot be shared with others by means of language. Here we come back to a situation of corporal contact by face-to-face from which any reflection, all schemes of typification are eliminated.

We cannot establish communications with the "living dead", we cannot create with him a common intersubjective world, but the "living dead" is not a thing, not an animal, therefore, this situation causes horror. Similarly, we cannot establish communication with the person in the condition of ecstasy or ritual frenzy.

According to Berger and Luckmann, human existence is placed in the context of order, however, in these situations we find out absolute cancellation of this context.

Thus, it is a question not only of the problematization of the Man as subject, but also of the problematization of societies which is created by subjective interpretations. Neither routine, nor crisis, nor other types of maintenance of the reality act in the models mentioned above.

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„NEĮMANOMŲ BENDRUOMENIŲ“ SAMPRATA ŠVAISTYMO IR EKSTAZĖS PERSPEKTYVOJE

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Santrauka

Straipsnis skirtas „neįmanomos bendruomenės“ analizei. Autorius aprašo tam tikrus šio socialiai filosofinio modelio variantus, ypač George'o Bataille'aus heterogenišką visuomenę, Vyacheslavo Ivanovichiaus Ivanovo misterinę bendruomenę ir įsivaizduojamą zombių bendruomenę (kaip popkultūros įvaizdį). Straipsnyje nagrinėjama moderniosios filosofijos orientacija į „tiesioginę komunikaciją“, besipriešinančią diskursui, kalbai, racionalumui, gamybai. Nors gyvenimas „neįmanomoje visuomenėje“ yra neįmanomas, tačiau, kad ir kaip būtų, kai kurie mąstytojai atkakliai projektuoja jį kaip radikalią alternatyvą darbui, naudai ir kalkuliacijai. Tai paradoksalių bendruomenių, kuriose panaiškinti objektyvizacijos mechanizmai (visų pirma kalba ir gamyba), klausimas.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: visuomenės panaikinimas, ekstazė, dionisiškosios misterijos, tiesioginė komunikacija, neįmanoma bendruomenė, gyvasis mirusysis, neproduktyvus švaistymas.

Received 29 March 2012; accepted 6 June 2012