

THE LEGITIMACY OF THE SYMBOLIC POWER IN COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Any means of communication has its own symbolic code without which it is impossible to send and receive messages. In order for a message to be able to be received, the issuer and the receiver of the discourse have to work with the same code or with two codes that present common elements. Symbolic systems have their own strengths due to the fact that the strengths ratios that they express manifest only under unknown forms. Symbolic power does not lie only in the symbolic systems that are forcibly inoculated, but it can also be defined through a determined relationship between those who exert the power and those who feel it, meaning in the own structure of the field where conviction and belief is produced and reproduced. Symbolic violence is used especially by the political power, either within an institutionalized education system, or on the poll through the press. However, in order to be efficient, this form of violence has to become legitimate

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In the “*Dictionary of Psychology*”, which appeared at the “Univers Enciclopedic” Publishing House in 1996, Sillamy considers that symbol represents a constitutive element, rich in significance, which expresses in one way or the other the essence of the idea or of the thing represented. The writer Ivan Evseev considers that the symbol is the bearer of a profound life experience, which addresses reason and conscience and even further, in in terms of sensitivity and unconsciousness (EVSEEV, 1983).

The ability of the symbol to capture the features of “thing in itself” is accomplished with the help of the signifier, meaning the visible half of the symbol which is expressed by the gesture, graphic image or sound. In the case of the signifier, the symbol synthesizes numerous meanings, condensing the whole cosmic, religious, psychic and social experience of the archaic man, as Traian D. Stănciulescu states in the volume “*The myths of creation*” which appeared at the “Performantica” publishing house in Iasi, in 1995.

According to *Dictionnaire encyclopédique des science du langage*, which appeared at the “Édition du Seuil” publishing house in Paris, in 1972, symbolization represents an association between two entities that belong to the content plan. From this perspective, Traian D. Stănciulescu makes a clarification of the types of symbolization, used by the individual in the communication process (STĂNCIULESCU, 1995):

- intrinsic symbolization, of an image/mental representation, (quasi) individual, specific to the profound symbolic code;
- archetypal symbolization, intrinsic, trans-individual, of an image/motivated psychological representations type, specific to the cultural code of “the collective unconsciously;”
- (quasi)motivated symbolization, extrinsic, collective, belonging to the mythical-symbolic archaic code (verbal);
- Unmotivated symbolization, extrinsic, arbitrated, of a collective type, engaging the mythical-metaphoric code.

These symbolization levels correspond to the same number of resonances or symbolic consonance that the academician Ștefan Odoșleja defines as “the challenge or facilitation of a consonance between the two images: the symbol and the symbolized” (ODOȘLEJA, 1982). Traian D. Stănciulescu states that the symbol is the equivalent of the symbolized, it is the perceptible sign which is substituted to the memory, the evocative sensation, the broadcasting resonator. The symbolized represents the image evoked, the idea to be evoked or the memory that should be kept.

Every means of communication has its own symbolic code without which it is impossible to send and receive messages. In order for a message to be able to be kept, the sender and the receiver of the discourse have to work with two codes

that have common elements. Therefore, "coding the message, through which the sender selects and establishes some connections between the certain meanings with the right signifiers, can be then decoded by the receiver, through a process of reverse reading (STĂNCIULESCU, 1995)."

Therefore, the symbol represents a fine tuner which facilitates the passage from the inner to the exterior world, achieves an agreement between the manifested reality and the latent one.

If the symbol can be defined as an ensemble of concrete representations and of social relations acceptable within a well-determined social formation, then the symbolic power represents that power which manages to impose significations, meanings and it imposes them as being legitimate, though hiding the power relations which represent the fundament of its strengths. Therefore, a double arbitrary imposing process acts: it is an arbitrary power as it is based on the force relationships among the groups or building classes of a social formation; it is an arbitrary-cultural power since it objectively delimits the meanings that are considered worth to be impose and reproduces in a legitimate form, excluding the others.

According to the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, symbolic power represents a building power of the reality that tends to stabilize a gnoseological order: the immediate meaning of the world and especially of the social world is what Durkheim calls "the logical conformism," in other words, "a homogenous conception of time, space, number, and cause which restates the possible agreement among intelligences (DURKHEIM, 2003)".

Besides all this, Durkheim has the merit of explaining the social function, in the sense that the functional structure of symbolism, a politically authentic function, cannot be reduced only to the function of structural communication. The symbols are mainly tools of "social integration": similar to a knowledge and communication tool, symbols facilitate the consensus regarding a certain meaning of the social world which fundamentally contributes to social reproduction; the "logical" integration represents the condition of "moral" integration.

The Marxist tradition privileges the political functions of symbolic systems to the detriment

of their logical structure and of the gnoseological function; this functionalism facilitates symbolic production in relation to the interests of the dominant class.

Symbolic violence is used especially by the political power, either within an institutionalized education system, or on the voters by means of mass-media. However, in order to be efficient, this form of violence has to be legitimized.

It is considered legitimate an institution, action or dominant object, but ignored as such and one that is tacitly acknowledged.

Authority and legitimacy are the two facets of the political power. Authority represents a stable relationship from top to bottom, between the owner of the authority and the subject of authority in relationship to the field of authority.

Authority can be:

- epistemic, the authority of the technocrat, of the specialist in his field; the expert has epistemic authority in the field in which he works and expresses an opinion;
- deontic, the authority of the one who gives order and which has to be acknowledged/legitimated by the subject of authority; deontic authority can be negotiated, it has to be legitimated and it can be delegated.

The means used to acknowledge deontic authority may be:

- persuasive (they include the agreement that the subject of the authority gives in order to be persuaded);
- coercive: the violent threat (appeal to a violent/aggressive physical behaviour).

Legitimizing authority has to establish an agreement between the interests of the minority group which holds the power and the general interests. By legitimating, the principle that imposes and allows to exert the political power, which makes the connection practical, one can establish the functionality between the ones who govern and the ones who are governed and this legitimacy is imposed by persuasion and not by force.

Legitimacy on behalf of those who hold the power has never been acquired against those dominated, once and for all. This legitimacy has to be imposed periodically using different rituals.

The German economist and sociologist Max Weber identified the following types of legitimacy (WEBER, 1998):

1. traditional legitimacy, through which the political power is determined in the virtue of tradition. In this case power is exerted by the monarchs, consecrated by tradition;
2. charismatic legitimacy is founded on the exceptional qualities of the one who holds the power and it is based on emotional communication. Charismatic authority can be exerted by demagogues, religious leaders or the head of the political party. Such a charismatic legitimacy can be imposed especially during the economic, political or social crisis;
3. the rational-legal legitimacy assumes that the domination relationship is regulated by abstract laws, accepted by the ones who are dominated and imposed through persuasive means that do not imply physical or verbal violence. The success of this type of legitimacy is based on accepting and respecting the legal rules in force.

Law represents the symbol of the power that it creates. Recognizing and imposing authority form the rule of law of the state. It is essential that the power preserves the order and offers peace to the society and the reality of the leadership must conform to the symbolic values.

Isabelle Sommiere, professor at the Political Research Centre in Sorbonne, proves in her paper *La dialectique, violence physique/ violences symboliques* the fact that the reduction of physical violence is always followed by a self-control mechanism of it which manifests itself on the subject exposed to violence by strengthening external constraints and pressures, which are more and more dangerous as emotions are better mastered. Therefore, the relationship between physical and symbolic violence can be resembled to the principle of the interconnecting vessels: when one declines the other one rises.

From here one can notice that physical and symbolic violence, far from excluding each other, continue to coexist within the same violence. And this happens because physical violence incorporated behavioural rules congruent to symbolic violence and diminished its potential

of disorder without jeopardizing the process of institutionalization.

The political scientist Isabelle Sommier speaks about a new meaning that symbolic violence gains: "soft" violence (SOMMIERE, n.d.), nowadays used in labour conflicts and which is far from the wrestling previously exerted on various groups of labourers.

By engrossing the state's legitimate violence, the behaviours and attitudes are imposed by the upper classes, from top to bottom, according to the social hierarchy. Therefore, the elimination process of physical violence can only be followed by an increase in social control using symbolic violence. It is exerted firstly in unilateral agreement with existing rights. These social rights impose the logic of a conflict regulation.

According to Isabelle Sommier, coding the conflicts that take place represents, as any codification, an operation which disposes or preserves a certain symbolic order. It offers the conflict a format which is defined in an acceptable manner and establishes a set of rejection rules using correlative means, as being illegitimate and illegal, of the toughest expressions. Through a magic effect, the asperities are sent towards another register, that of deviation. There is no doubt that this codification has a disciplinary function.

Codifying the conflict neutralises it and we can even talk about a so-called consensus regarding the rules of the game or the introduction of a representation or delegation principle. In the case of labour conflicts, this codification is useful to order and the establishment of the dominant values. By codifying, this space of acknowledged conflict expression transcends from a personalized, physical field to a symbolic, impersonal field, such as meetings. Therefore, establishing some conflict resolution models and some political norms in the field of competition does not mean anything else but a delay in the direct expression of aggressiveness in order to sublimate it in some symbolic forms, dominated by self-control. Wrestling was substituted with face to face confrontation.

Symbolic violence can be successfully used by those who want to dominate in one way or the other and it manages to impose itself whenever

a break occurs. Therefore, Jean – Pierre Desaulniers and Philippe Sohet, two well-known professors of Communication Sciences at The University of Quebec from Montreal, speak about, in *Mine de rien, note sur la violence symbolique*, published at The Albert Saint Martin Publishing House from Montreal, in 1982, the symbolic forms of resistance of “the small culture” which represents a deaf violence used by ordinary people in order to resist the pressure imposed by “the model culture.”

Also, the French sociologist, Jean Baudrillard claims that the power of the masses lies precisely in their silence (BAUDRILLIARD, 2005). And then we ask ourselves how does the individual resist, what is the individual resistance capacity through culture to social oppression. Although abundant and extremely varied, the cultural product market is exposed to an unequal fight against mass production, and manufacturers focus on marketability and not on product quality.

According to Desaulnier and Sohet, “the small culture” can resist only as long as it takes on the form that it expresses. It is always a return towards the self, a subjective bricolage which has no intention of affirming itself.

In this type of culture there is however the force of making itself known, of affirming itself, but it is always relative and restrained. In other words, we deal with a silent resistance of the small culture in its clash against the violence of model culture. In conclusion, this “small culture,” about which we cannot say that it does not have a certain relevance in itself, silently endures the pernicious attack of the great culture, often achieved by means of the media, and especially, of television.

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