

Sebastian Ștefănuță

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Foreword*

As specified in the last number (Ștefănuță, 2016b: 5, footnote 2), the third edition of the *Anuarul societății prahovene de antropologie generală / Yearbook of Prahova County Society for General Anthropology* represents a thematic number, dedicated to the *diary*. A generous theme, if we take into consideration the vast types of diaries: intimate, voyage, scientific, etc. This is why we were expecting varied and multiple contributions, with a direct or indirect connection to the suggested theme, and this actually occurred: the reader will discover that, among those eighteen contributions¹ to the present yearbook, twelve are thematic contributions, most of them with a direct approach, all these making the first part of the yearbook. The second part reunites the contributions that had an indirect approach of the theme and a lot of texts on different themes, their order in the annual being closely related to their main theme contiguity. All in a balanced combination of “academic” and “non-academic”, proving once again that when epistemic curiosities are led till the end with commitment and honesty, these “borders” disappear on their own.

The number of contributions, as well as the number of their authors, is above the numbers of the previous volumes. We consider this to be a signal of the interest that this magazine has managed to rise among the possible contributors, activated maybe by the generosity of the theme. If some engagements remained unsettled, this happened based on some day to day duties that are importunate also time and energy consuming, which determined the practical impossibility of honouring these engagements.

In what concerns the authors, the majority are those that, through links of different natures, are related to the Prahova County. This is obvious, as we are talking about a “Prahova

* Translation from Romanian by Ana Cristina Trăistaru (Ploiești).

¹ Twenty-one, if we take into consideration the fact that three of them have an English version too.

yearbook”. But the number of members of the Prahova informal group for general anthropology² is enhanced with new authors both from other cities of our country³, and from beyond Romanian borders too (by the contributions of Eleni Grombanopoulou from Greece, of Silvia-Diana Šolkotović from Serbia and of Jonathan Hemmings from England). We hope that in the future the afflux of members from other states (mostly corresponding to the Balkan area) to be more and more intense.

We will try to make a short description of the two parts so, even from the preface, the reader to have a general image above all the contributions, which will simplify the effort in choosing the texts to read.

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As mentioned, the direct contributions to the theme of the diary are put together in the first of the two parts which constitutes the structure of the present yearbook. As we are talking about a magazine in which the interest for knowledge prevail, seems natural to ask the question concerning the cognitive value of the texts that are grouped in this first part. The texts, excepting the first one, can also be divided in two categories: first three, making the first category, subsequently written and using ethnographic field notes, and the next six, as being real diaries. No matter how they are elaborated, we consider that they have a *para-scientific* cognitive value (*idem*, 2015: 11). Nevertheless, if we were to take into account only the socio-cultural anthropology and some of its tendencies that actually nullify the distance between the subject and the object of knowledge (Geană, 1997: 77-79), the cognitive value of diaristic writings would highly overcome the para-scientific border. The complexity of the relation between subject and object in the knowledge of man, the impossibility of laying down some receipts of scientific objectivity in this attempt, has brought the anthropology from the last decades close to

² Membership to this group, as we repeat every time, does not create any rights or obligations in the jural meaning of the word, the group itself not having a juridical status. A purely honorific affiliation, one based on some common preoccupations and that is all. Is it possible to start a sort of tendency or school in the Romanian culture, governed by the anthropological spirit? As we were expressing our opinion at the launch of the first edition of the *Anuarul societății prahovene de antropologie generală* (Ștefănuță, 2016a: 22), signs show is not possible. Although we could say without doubts that an antropological spirit hovers for a long time over Ploiești, the tendecies, both at the institutions’ level and of the people, are (still) centrifugal.

³ If we keep our reference to the county, as an administrative division.

phenomenology. Maybe that lecturing some diaries or some related writings will convince us more of the inevitability of such approach. Through this, gaining the certainty that diaristic writing overcomes the para-scientific approach. By reading the texts from the first section will be enough to support this epistemic impression.

As an opening text, Serenela Ghițeanu's reflections concerning the *ontology* of the intimate diary seem to be the most appropriate. It is about the origin, object, motifs, social contexts and future of this type of writing regarding a registration of private life. It is sure that the moving of the intimate diary into the virtual space, under the forms of *blogs* (or *facebook*), takes the form of an ontological mutation, as "other times destined to some acquaintances, the diary tends to become, through blog, its *contrary*, meaning a place of exposure / personal exhibition" (*our italics*, S. Ș).

The three texts that follow belong to the category of *post-factum* writings, which have as a source field notes belonging to a research done maybe years ago (as it is the case of Marin Constantin's text). The comparison that comes to our mind is to Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose volume of anthropological memoirs, *Tristes tropiques*, had been written long after the Brazilian expedition (Lévi-Strauss, 1968: 19). For Ioana-Ruxandra Fruntelată and Corina Matei's texts the comparison is total,⁴ both by searching of literary effects, and by the nature of reflexion on the real activity developed by the field researcher that, if it were to be revealed as such in the research reports, it would have as a result the lack of credibility of the anthropological endeavour (Okely, 2014: ix). Even so, we consider that is normal for the field reality to be different from the one suggested inside the research institutions; the *man* is not an object of passive research that impatiently awaits to be turned on all sides.⁵ The attention of the reader is cached by the empathic exercise practiced by both authors, and also by their effort in maintaining epistemic neutrality, reminding – this time – by Sigfried F. Nadel. According to the Austrian researcher, empathic capacities represent personality traits essential for an anthropologist, but not until the point in which he is to "impressionable" (Nadel, 1956: 19). In the case of Marin Constantin's text, the comparison is only partial, preoccupied as he is – in the beginning and end – by the theoretic-methodological relevance of the ethnographic diary, and by the exposure – in the intermediary

⁴ The title of Corina Matei's text – "Comice triste / Sad comics" – fully sustains the comparison.

⁵ This does not happen even in situations in which the power balance between the researcher / researched is totally in the favour of the first. Although Bronislaw Malinowski had on his side all the colonial power features, his participation to *Kula* – inter-island expedition having as purpose a ceremonial exchange – has been denied by the locals of Trobriand archipelago (Malinowski 1987 [1922]: 479; 1989 [1967]: 253).

parts – of the concrete details of the deployment of a field research in Tilișca village, from the ethnographical area of Mărginimea Sibiului (Romania), having as purpose to draw up the genealogies corresponding to this village. As in any ethnographic diary, even being rebuilt, we find references to “*imponderabilia of actual life and typical behaviour*” (Malinowski, 1987 [1922]: 20), in the good Malinowskian tradition.

Next six texts are diaries or fragments of literally diaries, that is, diaries written closely related to the events happening. Among these, the first four are diaries that correspond to the fieldwork (better said, fieldworks) of one one single research. It is about a research in which the main objective is that of establishing the significance of the place of origin in the ethnicity of some Balkan populations with a past that was submerged to the population changes between states from this region in the first half of the twentieth century. The first diary (of Anișoara Ștefănuță) can be characterised as a *context diary*, the second (of Sebastian Ștefănuță) as *thematic diary*, while the next two texts represent field diaries to the free will of the author, the two authors (Elena Dudău and Cristina-Ioana Gherghe) being involved in this research with the goal of deepening the formative paths in ethnology. By this, we intend to initiate a method of registering and first arranging of anthropo / ethnological field data, well adapted to small team work, respectively to *write some alternative journals*, having as a main support the thematic and context diaries.

The fifth text of the second category reveals one of the two contributions – next to the following text – without which the list of diaristic writings from this volume would have been incomplete: contributions to the subcategory of *intimate diary*. Bogdan-Costin Georgescu selects from a vast writing those pages on which the anthropological mark is obvious. The result? A mini-treaty of theological-Christian anthropology, another “expedition in searching the Arche-Face”, if we were to paraphrase the title of another diary published in the volume not long ago by the author (Georgescu, 2012).

The section ends with diary fragments (auto)biographically selected and exposed for the first time by Gheorghiușă Geană. The reader will immediately observe that it is not only a text with anthropologic features, but a description with a document value for the history of Romanian social and cultural anthropology, science to which the author dedicated almost his entire professional career. It is about an anthropology that in the same time with the participation of the author to the first conferences of the European Association of Social Anthropologists has made its definite entrance in the international anthropological area. An entrance that was not comfortable, if we were to judge reading the journal that corresponds to the Prague conference.

The conditions of this integration seem to be experienced by other socio-cultural specialists too, coming from countries that were released by the communist burden (Podoba, 2007: 28-29). Documentary value also have the fragments about daily convulsions of some events like the commemoration of Mircea Eliade, or about meetings with Constantin Noica, Edgar Papu, Zoe Dumitrescu-Buşulenga – some names that for the today’s reader are to be found only by searching them into the pantheon of our national cultural history.

Regardless of the impression gained by the reader after lecturing the diaristic writings from the first part regarding their cognitive value, we can notice one thing: there is no resemblance between them. This diversity has as a source not only the type of diaristic writing aimed by the author; even in the same type, the differences are considerable, due to the fact that every writing of this type carries the mark of the author’s *personality*. Trying to banish this mark would mean to actually destroy its ontic foundation. Regarding this, there is a question if it is not the case that *any* writing – even the “scientific” ones –, impregnated more or less by the author’s personality, is indeed a diaristic writing. Vice-versa, understanding this personality based on its proper way of writing, diaristic, can have a large meaning in understanding properly an opera, scientific, artistic or of any other nature. This, because “while the personality of a scientist may not necessarily have a direct bearing upon his selection and treatment of problems, it must influence his work in other more subtle ways” (Firth, 1989 [1967]: xi). With the conviction that “through this knowledge of that man as he lived and felt, one is often brought into a closer contact and a greater comprehension of his work”,⁶ Valleta Malinowska (1989 [1967]: ix) decided to publish the intimate diary that B. Malinowski held during its field campaigns in the eastern extremity of New Guinea and in the near islands between 1914-1918. A decision made regardless the controversies which she was aware that the publishing of the diary will raise.

Taking into consideration the observations from the previous fragment, we can characterise this number of the Prahova yearbook as being a number of the *anthropology of the journal*. A theme that we might return in the future, especially that, strictly related to socio-cultural anthropology, exploiting the advantages of this veritable *instrument* of research is still in a primary stage. An unthinkable phenomenon, thinking that there is no other appropriate way of recovering in the cabinet the field in its integrity. Still an explicable phenomenon, tempted as we are by the mermaid’s voice of the theory, only this way the knowing reason finding its peace. But

⁶ Or, moreover, as we read in some of the journal’s fragments exposed in this volume (p. 151) by Gheorghită Geană, “... there are personalities whose work and life integrates so well to a scientific discipline, that one cannot master that discipline without knowing that personality”, alluding to Francisc I. Rainer.

forgetting about the field, in its particularity, means forgetting about people that would mean to develop a science from which the main object is chased. A science positioned continually in the horizon of “should have been” (Noica, 1978: 34-37).

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Miscellanea, in the second part, contain not only texts on various themes, but also with diverse discursive styles: scientific article, essay, report, etc. Actually, as many perspectives from which the object of a “science of the man” can be properly approached, without outwork it. It would not be possible either, this meaning trying to outwork the object of a “veritable empire of knowledge”, as anthropology was rightly characterised (Geană, 2006: 211).

In the beginning of the second part we notice the contributions of two researchers from the “Francisc I. Rainer” Anthropology Institute of the Romanian Academy, institute that closely collaborates with the Prahova yearbook if we take into account both the current number contributions, and the previous ones too. First of it, “*Annuaire Roumain d’Anthropologie*: about the thematic universe of a Romanian anthropology magazine”, signed by Marin Constantin, instantiates a general look over a magazine that exceeded half of a century, being a synthesis-magazine for the past fifty years of this institute. An institute organised on three departments, paleoanthropology, biomedical anthropology and socio-cultural and theoretical anthropology⁷. Inspired is the addition of a vast biography, from which the reader can achieve a quick image over multiple concerns over the research from this time. The second contribution, by Adina Baci, “Aspects of Bucharest biomedical anthropology”, represents a report related to the activities and actual projects from the Department of biomedical anthropology, a form under which the physical anthropology is developing today in the frame of mentioned institute. The research area of this department is fascinating: diseases, nutrition, addiction, aging, health and way of living etc., actually research and trying to come up with solutions to ameliorate some problems that contemporary man, as bio-psycho-cultural organism, is confronting.

Next is Marian Nuțu Cîrpa’s article, “Gypsies, a social category ethnical non-homogenous”, one of the contributions that touch indirectly the suggested theme. F. G. Laurençon’s observations, a French and Latin professor in Bucharest in the third decade of

⁷ Missing only the linguistic department of anthropology in having an organization based on the American traditional model (Silverman, 2005: 257).

nineteenth century, combined with observations from a famous traveller in Romanian countries, Paul of Aleppo, inspire the author to make a historical exegesis, drawing at the end the conclusion that “in the slavery stage called *gipsydom*” – proper to the middle age but also to the beginning of Romanian modernity – would have been not only gypsies, but also other groups of diverse ethnical origin, especially those on which the racial aspect was a justification through an association to a biblical curse of this state.

Silvia-Diana Šolkotović makes a short review of “Ethnographic researches in Serbian Timok”, meaning, of course, the Romanian population from that area. The area, with a richness and special ethnographic characteristic, has not benefited from an adequate research, with the consequence that the ethnographic-folkloric pearls disappear without a trace every day. Language barriers, nationalism and Serbian communism are some of the causes of this situation. On this base, inventorying the personalities that did researches in this region and some of the studies can not only but be welcomed.

Stelu Șerban’s article, “Hidden minorities and modernization in South East Europe”, represents a contribution to the long debated theme of nation’s models (Smith, 1986: 135-138). The author is preoccupied of the way of assuming these models in South East of Europe, or of the counter-reaction to them – both the models and the counter-reaction promoted by the elites from capital states – to the level of *common people*, referring by this term especially to the peasant masses. On this circumstance, he treats the special case of populations that failed in the national project. Labelling them as “national minority” would be a confirmation of this failure. More suitable would be the use of the concept of “discrete minority”, disseminated among *common people*, with whom it shares the same silent dismissal of “the modernization projects imposed by political elites of the cities”. At the author’s request, the English version of this chapter is also included in the yearbook.

The main features that folklore as a science has along the nineteenth century and half of the next century in occidental Europe (especially Germany) and Greece are exposed by Eleni Ghrobanopulu (“Grompanopoulou”, for the English version). The founders of Greek folklore are inspired by German model, so called *Volkskunde*⁸, without imitating it completely. In establishing

⁸ A model that was also followed by other provinces and countries from the area. Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as provinces of the Austrian Empire, Serbia, later Albania etc. they all follow the Austrian and German models in their attempt to discover the unique material and spiritual heritage of preindustrial peasantry. (Hann, 2013: 7).

the “science of the nation”, they were searching not so much the origin of eternal substance of “nation’s soul” – considered already known, in the Greek antiquity –, but those “survivals” from Greek rural areas that would certify its continuity along history. An epistemic paradigm, then, that combines the romantic and evolutionist trends. The text “The historical formation of folklore studies in the 19th century – mid. 20th century in Europe and Greece” is doubled by the English version.

A real cultural phenomenon took place (and, under other forms, still continues) for three decades in Ploiești, with the theatrical experiment entitled “Equinox Theatre”, process put in evidence on the pages of this yearbook by Dragoș Grigorescu. “A cultural destiny” points both to the theatre, but also to Mihai Vasile, the producer, artist and man of theatrical theory, with whom the theatre is one and the same. Interesting is that by searching *authenticity, purity, freedom and simplicity* this theatre merges out of the artistic canons, placing itself in the same time out of every political and social context, inevitably always disadvantageous. Actually some anthropological strings are touched, this touch being explicitly assumed both by unrolling a project of “Romanian mythology theatre”, also by theoretical researches of Mihai Vasile. Researches that, beyond the author’s restraints, we want them eventually materialized in an anthropology of theatrical theory volume.

The last text is a speech told by a close person to many members of Prahova society for general anthropology, Jonathan Hemmings, orthodox priest in Lancaster, England, with the occasion of releasing the volume *Izvoare în deșert / Fountains in the Desert* in Ploiești. As a sign of highly appreciation of this closeness, the English version of this speech is also presented.

As in the previous number, the current number of the *Anuarul societății prahovene de antropologie generală* contains also a contribution under the form of a video documentary on DVD attached to the back cover – by this answering also to the requirements of *visual anthropology*. The movie *Încondeierea ouălor la Filipeștii de Pădure / Painting eggs at Filipeștii de Pădure*, realized by Anișoara Ștefănuță, represents a ethnographic description of egg painting in one of the few places of attestation of this custom in Prahova county. The anthropological approach is obvious; the author does not stop only to the description of the painting stages. Discussions held with the interlocutor during these stages try to reconstruct the entire context in which the custom develops. The viewer will get the impression of a meeting with the Other, far not in space, but in time (Čapo and Gulin Zrnić, 2014: 96). But this egg painting past seems to have been atypical to an entire community and more related to some individual initiatives, thereof

the fragility of the custom. It could be said that this custom is about to disappear, the moment of filming representing one of its last appearances.

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By reading this “Foreword” one has been noticed that privileged are the contributions from the scientific area of anthropology. To the extent that this magazine is opened to all types of anthropological speech, it might appear the impression of discursive unbalance. Even if this risk exists, it must be mentioned that the final result is, in the end, a product of a coincidence. We cannot exclude the possibility that – again a product of coincidence – in one of the future numbers the majority of contributions to be from other fields of reflection of man upon itself.

In conclusion, we want to thank to the contributors for their effort, which was voluntary and without meaning in building their professional carriers⁹, the magazine not benefiting from a scientific rating or of any other nature.¹⁰ Even so, we have the conviction that this number of the Prahova anthropological yearbook reaches a level of quality compatible with that of magazines having this type of rating. We give special thanks to host institutions, Mythos Publishing House, Prahova County Cultural Centre and Prahova County Council, being subordinate. Without the receptivity manifested by these institutions, the issue of this yearbook would have been delayed a long time.

For the completion of the following numbers, your contributions are awaited with much interest. Sending these contributions or announcing this intention can be made to the known addresses.¹¹ This being said, we wish our readers a wealthy, enjoyable and educative reading!

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⁹ References to the professional formations and institutional anchoring of the authors are being included in texts only by an asterisk note strictly at their request.

¹⁰ We do not exclude this to happen in the future.

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