

## THE ROLE OF CONFESSION IN SOCIAL COMMUNICATION. A FEW ASPECTS

Nicoleta DABIJA<sup>1</sup>

1. Lecturer, Ph.D., "Apollonia" University of Iași, Romania  
Corresponding author: nicoleta.dabija@yahoo.com

### Abstract

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The 20th century was dominated by mass culture, and individualization has become dominant. The present paper tries to formulate some of "weaknesses" of the present day society on the social, psychological, spiritual level, weaknesses which are detrimental to privacy of the self and mars real communication between people. We have also tried to outline a number of aspects and points of view expressed by some important thinkers of the last century in order to surpass the difficulties confronting the dialogue by various philosophical solutions. Out of these, the "confidential conversation" has developed and come to the foreground, as Hans-Georg Gadamer named it in his work "Truth and Method", the role of confession in communication or the way in which the self solves its problems in privacy, in order to move successfully to a relationship, to a real communication with the other one.

**Keywords:** *confession, communication, technique, privacy.*

Today, it is no longer a surprise that the 20<sup>th</sup> century was dominated by the mass culture, somehow associated with the illusion of the individual's freedom, with maintaining his impression that he has not lost his distinctive feature from other people. Although, at a first glance, focusing on leveling and affirmation of individualism may appear to be contradictory concepts, the power of the first one and the utopia of the second one get on together fairly well and for a long time. The condition of history may seem a serious matter only for the one who pays too much attention to the human values, to the spirituality by which, as it is said, a person goes beyond any other form of life. Such a man is confused and disappointed in finding out how the one who should be like him becomes more and more the opposite to a subject, a weak self and unaware of the real conditions of his existence, who wanders about without stability, without an aim, without specific features.<sup>1</sup>

Quite often, a man has come to identify himself with an image. He forgets that life means also

privacy, that the real way of living implies privacy. He has transformed himself into somebody placed under the curious eye of the public, used to being somebody only in the service of this public. Thus, his desire to remain alone with himself diminishes and the profound beliefs of existence do not tell him too much. The real individual neglects the fact that, finally, each person has to accept himself, with the beauties he nourishes and with his personal frustrations, to make peace with himself after having made his own choices, with the meanness and goodness he transmits. Nobody can escape from himself, no matter how unconsciously and deeply absorbed he may be by his image, by his celebrity. There will come, without doubt, some sporadic moments to become conscious, to draw the balance sheet of regrets, remorse, joys, fulfillment etc.

I come back to say that everything that is the most precious in a man's life are the singular beliefs, the values nourished and the private experiences. "To be" and "to have". "To be" is linked to privacy and quality, "to have" refers to the public space and quantity. Celebrity could be understood as a "to have" which replaces "to be". Quite often, a person does not know any more that he has become an image, that he fails to live in favour of mimicking living. Existence should be placed under a question mark when "the outside" has the tendency to replace the inside, when the privacy of the spirit with itself is no longer a need or has changed into something unknown, when, from the point of view of value, there is no distinction between quality and quantity, when the hollow individual is cultivated and not the person, a substantial existence which takes care of the spirit.

Celebrity is looked for, is desired, envied by others, it is a fashion of the present time, although

its greatest risk is to miss the really important things. Being concerned to polish your own image, you forget that you take care of an image and that any image is a limitation to the spiritual power. The few ones who value the profound ego of privacy, with its crucial, extreme experiences, for whom there is no distance between theory and practice, who make an effort to live in agreement with what they are thinking, being perfectly aware that only in this way they are honest to themselves and to the life given to them, on the other hand, they dedicate themselves to a troublesome and continuous struggle.

It is much harder to be your own person or to be dominated by the understanding and mentality of the masses than to be yourself, to evaluate yourself consciously, to endeavor with honesty to improve your ego, to simply follow your destiny according to your own singular beliefs. Neither intelligence nor culture can relevantly serve you if you have not previously assumed the freedom and the courage to be yourself in spite of anything else.

Nevertheless, the tendency existing in society to leveling people's tastes, sticking to a certain fashion are in a close interdependence with the creation of the illusion of individual freedom<sup>2</sup>. There is a kind of diversity of the world of objects, which apparently increases human freedom, understood as a possibility of choosing between several alternatives. Each person considers himself to be special because he can choose and collect other objects than those around him. But, it is this dependence on the means available, invented for a consumer society, which maintains conformism. One lives in an environment created by possible tastes. Society has given birth to modalities of living in common, transforming the individual into an automaton, who reacts in the way required by a programmed world<sup>3</sup>.

On a psychological level, there occurs an inner fissure when the individual rejects a familiar pattern, assuming for himself singular qualities, without having real knowledge about his own self, adopting them in a somehow normative sense. It could be possible to reach a real understanding of one's self, if awareness of impulses and actions originating in the unconscious would become a natural condition. But, it is easier to abandon yourself to the concrete development of society, to accept it,

although, having the illusion that you are special. Freedom in the middle of the world of objects being so great, using things as such occurs as a rout. An utopian character is created, who has the world at his disposal, but a real reflexive consciousness is lost. The "depressive" individual of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is unable to find his way in diversity, he has no reason for the choices he has to make. At his turn, the psychologist (or the psychotherapist) prescribes medicines which can heal any disease, but only to an anonymous with a condition previously identified<sup>4</sup>.

Therefore, even the society on the whole can create alienation - this seems to me to be a really worrying problem of the last decades - understanding that a barrier occurs before the confession and the necessity of communication. The present day "depressive" society, which has the tendency to turn people into objects, does not accept the terms of guilt, privacy, guilty conscience, hidden desires, the unconscious. Acting according to a narcissist logic, at the same time, it takes a distance from subjectivity. It makes the individual limit himself to the inventory of his successes, and the suffering subject is considered to be a victim of history<sup>5</sup>. This psychoanalytical view implies that confession is a disease of the person who cannot adapt himself to the development of society, thus communication to the outside becomes embarrassing, it is a recognition of his "failure" related to the mentality of the present day. Society may be a serious obstacle which transforms man's need for confession into an element of his maladjustment to life and history.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the condition of an individual may be interpreted as being absurd also due to his own crisis, generated by the necessity to adjust to the present stage of the development of technique. It is to be noted that man is changing gradually from the "first motor" of the whole system of technique into a mere function of a machine; by means of the acts of his concrete existence he discovers that he supports the verb "to have", that he serves more or less consciously the natural sense of property. The most terrible result of the technique development may, perhaps, result in creating the impression that everything becomes possible. The easy access to information, the speed with which technical devices can explore what is new, the

ever increasing performance in developing the internal structures of the invented machinery, all these create and maintain the illusion of having achieved superiority in the quality of life<sup>6</sup>.

The famous thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, like Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Mircea Eliade insist on the necessity of recovering the human spirit. Man creates the technique, which apparently may seem a happy result, the fruit of human inspiration and inventive spirit. But this is something doubtful and worrying when it manages to estrange man from his spiritual preoccupation, from his self cognition, from cultivating his potential. Constantin Noica is of the opinion that we are more and more tempted to consider the outside of our life to be the "inner side", to take the inner side for the possessed objects<sup>7</sup>. Our diminishing tendency to enrich our spirit is doubled by the awareness that everything is available to us, which is a foolish act proper to the one abandoning himself to living the present<sup>8</sup>.

The majority of individuals cannot "fill up" their days without making use of technology, without letting themselves being dominated by the objects provided by it. Now, we live almost exclusively in a technical space, there has occurred a profound change, which can even be a "mutation" like an "ontological falling down" from "to be" to "to have", man turning his back to God and nature, that is, to realities to which he used to relate himself in a natural way<sup>9</sup>. This resulting distance can be rendered in the following terms: nature represents a different reality for man, and God a reality beyond the man, but both these forces used to bring about a sense of existence; with their energy a person gained the necessary force to maintain himself at the height of "to be", a fact which the technical system cannot have<sup>10</sup>. Technique cannot give a sense, thus, the individual loses his importance, remains secluded in a social solitude, blind to the wonders of nature and to the divine signs<sup>11</sup>.

The world opened by technique is a space created by man, therefore, a "home" for him, which, at the same time, remains a foreign space because we do not really know how this space functions, although we have the ability to manipulate it<sup>12</sup>. It is "non problematic", as Alexandru Dragomir asserts, as it is totally made by man, and it is "non interpretable" because

machines can be only described and explained. Therefore, the present day environment in which we live is accessible to any man, it is available to anyone. Technique is the same everywhere, it is generally human and evenly distributed<sup>13</sup>. Even a skeptical spirit "with a sick identity" in the same way as Emil Cioran admits his belonging to crowds by the simple fact that he uses a means of common transport: "je fais partie du lot, de cette folie. Je ne peux pas faire autrement. Je prends aussi le metro. Je fais tout ce qui font les autres"<sup>14</sup>. Inevitably, we abandon ourselves to the idea that the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the century of the masses, that they are integrating themselves influencing the cultural life and that the individual gains relevance by his multiple possibilities of living in reality<sup>15</sup>.

Therefore, when the need for confession on the social level assumes the characteristics of a disease, weakness, an increased difficulty of finding a soul capable of listening to you without judging you is created. Then, the written confession may occur as a marginal expression, but, also, as an escape from the tensions accumulated inside<sup>16</sup>. That is so because it addresses to an abstract reader, but with the explicit hope that somebody, somebody like you, who might be tormented by the same questions, will understand your thoughts, that you cannot dare to unveil in a different way, to transmit them in a direct way.

"Taking care of yourself", an essential and positive preoccupation with the ancients, becomes for the present day person an expression of egocentrism, resulting from his non adjustment to the world, from an evident incapacity for an authentic dialogue with the other one. Michel Foucault reveals the negative meaning acquired by the "preoccupation for yourself" at present, with the author's inability to participate in a collective morality<sup>17</sup>. As such, the confession writings, having as a specific condition the retreat in one's own self, in solitude, can be interpreted as a manifestation of frustration, aggression, revenge, in spite of a world which seems to be "built" in a different way, unable to understand yourself and share your values. But, the desire for communication is maintained even in the space of the assumed solitude. If the others do not answer your way of feeling and thinking, you turn to yourself, to find yourself again from

the unrest coming from the outside world by writing, justifying yourself and to make, later on, a new trial to connect with the other ones, this time, with your possible readers.

Jaspers explains that communication becomes a problem when the divine expectation is lost. For him, the presence of God in this world is an obligatory condition for a good relationship between people<sup>18</sup>. The capacity of Providence to become manifest from the spiritual spheres to the common expressions of every day life creates an indestructible connection in the community, materialized mainly in the prayer. The prayer becomes the last chance for communication; when no conversation is possible, it provides another bridge. And, today, when we cannot even pray together, we must be aware of the necessity of communication, to understand the imperative need for positive relationships<sup>19</sup>.

The German philosopher also identifies some conditions which must be fulfilled in order to maintain communication. The first refers to the individual's interest in historical alterity, without his being disloyal, in this case, to his own historicity. Then, it should be ignored, or placed between parentheses, the objectivity of those recognized as generally valid, for the man to be able to have a subjective view, without neglecting the existence of some concrete knowledge. The third requirement refers to giving up the exclusiveness of one's own belief in order to be able to pay attention to other beliefs or to those of somebody else, but without neglecting the unconditional aspect of his existence<sup>20</sup>.

Beside the requirements on which communication in present day historical conditions depends, people start from the idea that they themselves represent a problem, that inside themselves the incapacity of communication develops and, therefore, everyone has to surpass this inner obstacle. Communication is not the result of a personal choice, it is neither a "caprice" of the human being; it represents an elementary need, an exigency. And for the one who has faith in philosophy, the necessity of communication should become, even more, a fundamental will<sup>21</sup>. It is not some knowledge which gives birth to the desire to express oneself to the other one. Communication is decision. The way for the human being to live in dialogue is not something

utopian, it is guided by faith. The one who becomes aware of his poor condition, a situation determined by his personal, historical, social crisis, should become aware of the act of communication as being a primordial mission as well, which needs the illumination provided by philosophy<sup>22</sup>.

Born in solitude and expressing its own privacy, confession does not allege to cover the entire space of communication, because not any communication can be interpreted as a self confession. Regarding its covering area, communication is larger as it represents submission to both the private and the public space. Confession is often induced by the need for expressing oneself, which you can write down with the illusion that later on it creates a relationship, which follows own self understanding. By its formulae of confession, communication exhibits its preference for the private space. Some other times, confession can be interpreted as one's limitation to having the ability for dialogue.

The game of interpretations and their relationships can go on. You can transmit someone something that has no private connection with you, as for example, describing some exterior event which you have accidentally witnessed. In such a case, you do not confess. You use your language as a mere instrument. As it is the case when you just greet a person you know. In fact, following Gadamer's idea, the ability for dialogue implies a natural inclination. Nevertheless, the 20<sup>th</sup> century is characterized as not having the ability for a genuine conversation, the only one which touches the soul, which transforms and magnifies qualities<sup>23</sup>.

There are at least two interpretations of the mentioned effect suggested by Gadamer. The first consists in the fact that you have a poor capacity to listen to the other one or to find a common language with him, being prone to blame the interlocutor, reproaching him for not knowing or not being willing to follow your thoughts. In the second interpretation the "limitation" in conversation may be increased by an essential difference in relation with the man of the epoch, a fact which is less stressed by the German philosopher. (The main idea in his perspective would be for the individual not to

deny his ability for a conversation with the other one, because only meeting alterity brings about the truth about yourself).

In the first situation, the problem is if you yourself are open enough to experience alterity, and in the second situation, if it is really necessary for the ego to reduce itself to himself, to the reflection to his own destiny. The ability of communication should never be excluded. You should repeat to yourself to resist to your "unsuitability to the world" as being because there is another spirit destined to solitude. Or, there may be a text from where a spirit wishing to change you may respond.

In other words, the dialogue should remain open, in spite of the despair overwhelming a person when authenticity loses its meaning, a situation occurring especially when communication has in view a crowd, a large public. With each such an experience the feeling of loneliness comes back, at its utmost, in the absence of reciprocity in conversation. It is not accidental or to be neglected the meaning of Foucault's assertion: "In France, the group effect makes any real discussion impossible. And, as there is no communication channel in the reverse sense, the action becomes theatrical. I have a relationship with the audience in a hall as if I were an actor or an acrobat. And, when I have finished speaking, a feeling of total loneliness..."<sup>24</sup>

Following the distinctions made by Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, there could be distinguished four types of conversation<sup>25</sup>. Communication is not possible in the case of the pedagogical conversation, which takes place with several people at the same time. The conversation of negotiation may stress upon reciprocity, but cannot be a personal hypostasis, because it is based on common interests. In the third type, the psychoanalytical conversation, the inability for a dialogue functions as a starting point in relearning the dialogue. The patient should become aware of his inability. But, it is this fact that represents the main obstacle in the real communication, which means denying the capacity to open a dialogue.

Finally, the confidential conversation, as it is named by Gadamer, becomes possible, if you start from understanding the other one, without considering yourself to lack completely the necessary quality for a live, genuine dialogue, but, leaving a "small gate" for communication,

listening and enriching yourself with the other one's experience. The confession itself must be written in the hope of reaching the spirits worth of understanding it. The dialogue with your own self may represent a way of meditation, taking a temporary distance from participating to the world, a kind of recovering yourself for a future real conversation.

Starting frequently from a poor relationship between individual-society, man-world, the confession, but mostly the private diary may often become a proper communication formula. The retreat in solitude is its real condition of existence. Without generalizing, the diary is born out of a troubled self, which requires peace by means of more or less private notes, but, out of which the author's ego comes out, its personality in the "core" and within its "edges", the "drop of blood" of an existence. The daily news clarifies, brings agreement, gathers up the human being. And self understanding leads gradually to a relationship of connection with the others.

Beside the therapeutic component which defines the role of the diary, or its crowning, the importance of the private diary resides in its capacity of expressing life. The impact of revealing some aspects from the real existence becomes the more impressive the more it renders man with his weaknesses and his qualities in daily preoccupations, which he has brought out of anonymity transforming them into ideas and beliefs, into a metaphysics.

Confession, in general, starts with a retreat into one's self, but keeps as its aim, even if unconsciously, the desire for communication. You withdraw into yourself to become free of complexes, to get rid of personal weaknesses, to become aware of your mistakes, and what you should do, first of all, to clarify your personal distinction and how to put it into agreement with the social world, but all these with the hope to become open to communication. The confession is a process of relearning the dialogue, an initiating and therapeutic experience by means of which the unadjusted self undergoes a self-analysis, a self-culpability, gets partial freedom from frustrations and complexes in order to go back to the world, later on, being healed. The diary, in particular, is first a refuge, but page after page it works to heal the wound inflicted by the Other one, to encourage for a new trial.

Confession often betrays inability for dialogue, a personal inability in the social world, a disagreement between yourself and the others. On the other hand, it has the aim, by self-analysis, to going beyond exactly this inability, inadequacy, disagreement. Succumbed into yourself, putting too much stress on your personal difference represent obstacles in communication. But, at the same time, the decision to write down in a diary, which, at first, may be only a choice to nourish one's own difference, in time, it will look for the way to reestablish the contact with the outer world. Although, there will always be a distance with variable dimensions from one case to the other one, between what confession is and what it pretends to be, between its initial premises and the final aim, in the same way as, on the level of confession, There is always identified a difference between what the self is and what it pretends to be, between its real status and its ideal one, between the private self and the public one.

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## Endnotes

1. Cf. Maria Zambrano, *Confesiunea - gen literar*, Timișoara: Amarcord Publishing House, 2001, p. 77.
2. Philippe Ariés and Georges Duby coord., *Istoria vieții private*, vol. IX, București: Meridiane Publishing House, 1997, p. 118.
3. Constantin Noica, *Eseuri de Duminică*, București: Humanitas Publishing House, 1992, pp. 108, 109.
4. Elisabeth Roudinesco, *La ce bun psihanaliza?*, București: TREI Publishing House, 2002, p. 13.
5. Ibidem, ed. cit., p. 42.
6. E. M. Cioran, *Étrentiens*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1995, p. 110.
7. Constantin Noica, *Eseuri de Duminică*, ed. cit., p. 77.
8. Heidegger is of the same opinion in his volume *Correspondence (1918-1969)*, which includes the epistolary exchange between the philosopher and Elisabeth Boehmann, translation by Ileana Snagoveanu-Spiegelberg, Humanitas Publishing House, 2006, p. 75.
9. Aurel Codoban speaks about the existence of a third ontological model in postmodernity, which follows the platonician and the modern one, characterized by the fact that it does not recognize anything as being transcendent or transcendental, which means that nothing exists above as value and nothing at the origins. "It is rather the model of the of the significant surface, where everything is given in simultaneity, and we can discover something in knowledge rather by selecting than approaching a transcendent or transcendental model. This is rather the model of mass media, be it the cinema screen which reflects the light, be it that of the TV through the light penetrates" ( in the interveiw which opens „Communication builds up the reality”. Aurel Codoban at his 60th anniversary, a volume coordinated by Timotei Nadasan, Idea Design&Print Publishing House, Cluj, 2009, p. 15).
10. Mihai Șora, *Despre toate și ceva în plus (de vorbă cu Leonid Dragomir)*, Pitești: Paralela 45 Publishing House, 2006, p. 64.
11. Alexandru Dragomir, *Cinci plecări din prezent. Exerciții fenomenologice*, București: Humanitas Publishing House, 2005, pp. 311, 312.
12. Ibidem, p. 312.
13. Ibidem, pp. 332, 333.
14. E. M. Cioran, *Étrentiens*: „fac parte din lot, din această nebulie. Nu pot să fac altfel. Iau și eu metrourl. Fac tot ce fac ceilalți” (ed. cit., p. 169). I belong to this group, to this madness. I cannot do anything else. I get on the tube. I do whatever the other ones do.
15. Ute Frevert and H.-G. Haupt coord., *Omul secolului XX*, Iași: Polirom Publishing House, 2002, pp. 7, 8.
16. Cf. Mircea Mihăieș, *Cărțile crude: Jurnalul intim și sinuciderea*, Iași: Polirom Publishing House, 2005, p. 103.

17. Michel Foucault, *Hermeneutica subiectului. Cursuri la Collège de France (1981-1982)*, Iași: Polirom Publishing House, 2004, p. 8.
18. Karl Jaspers, *Texte filosofice*, București: Politica Publishing House, 1986, p. 144.
19. Ibidem, Having this in view, the domination of technique and science in the present time only seems to solve the problem of communication, but, in fact, it maintains it. Jaspers considers the technical means to be the real medium of communication, but, at the same time, they create a struggle, a retreat of humanity, of the real man in front of an abstract general consciousness (p.144).
20. Ibidem, p. 144.
21. Ibidem, p. 146.
22. Ibidem, p. 146.
23. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Adevăr și metodă*, București: Teora Publishing House, pp. 512-514.
24. Michel Foucault, *Hermeneutica subiectului. Cursuri la Collège de France (1981-1982)*, ed. cit., p. 8.
25. Cf. *Adevăr și metodă*, ed. cit., pp. 514-517.