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**MEDIA COMMUNICATION AND THE POLITICS OF THE SYMBOLIC
CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY**

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Abstract: The modern world, described by theorists of various fields as being subject to a continuous secularization process, is increasingly being perceived as the keeper of a mythical fund. The anthropological analysis of modernity invites to a new way of discussing and using myth, ritual, the sacred, religion in order to describe a significant modern experience. This experience typical to the modern man is mediated, and often even created by the mass media. Such an experience would not be perceptible outside the lay context of the modern world, characterized by the presence of a weak transcendence. This favors the development of a mass culture, with various subcultures, as well as various professional cultures, in which a search for authenticity opens a wide space for the cohabitation of traditional religions and the weak forms of experience and manifestation of the sacred. In order to have this discussion I have chosen one of the most representative Romanian authors in the field of mass media anthropology. His analyses persuade us that the mass media is, among others, an instrument of symbolic construction of reality, and plays in the modern society the same part that myth used to play in traditional societies.

Key Words: mass media, communication, politics of symbol, symbolic construction of reality, myth, ritual, weak transcendence, minimal ethics, Mihai Coman

A special academic experience is the one provided by the challenging questions arising in a professional field. They become inciting to those who pay attention to them, whether they reach personal reflections or not, and get to generate a creative boost to the professional culture. I found one of the most challenging questions in a paper on communication. It is a question used as a subtitle of a chapter: "Does modern man think wild?" It is obvious that the term "wild" carries the significance provided by the whole anthropological charge contributed by the history of debate on prelogical thinking¹, wild thinking², magical thinking being considered to be the salt of any culture³, the symbolic thinking of *homo religiosus* as a model of any human existence.⁴ The question is raised by Mihai Coman, the most representative theorist of the mass media phenomenon in Romania,⁵ in a paper aimed at providing an anthropological analysis of the mass media: *Mass media, myth and ritual. An anthropological perspective* (2003). The paper brings, among others, an impressive introduction to the "numerous studies devoted to the ritual, mythological or religious dimensions of mass communication, diffusion phenomena and cultural resistance associated with mass communication, the processes of the creation of a special identity through the production and consumption of mass media messages."⁶

Towards a "wild thinking?"

To respond to the question whether modern man thinks wild, Mihai Coman opens a background of the relationship between the skeptical perspectives and the ones of total enthusiasm in stating the presence of mythical, symbolic, ritualistic structures in the language of the media. We thus note a polarization: those who believe there is a too wide cultural distance between mythical language and media language, and those who opine that everything in mass media may be associated to myth and mythology.⁷ We also note that a way to link myth to mass media is that of a mediating instance. Thus, in searching the place taken by myth in the contemporary media culture, "researchers approaching the mythical dimensions of the mass media sought *mediating cultural forms*, capable to show the channels by which myth sneaked in, from the old days to the present, and to explain the continuity of such symbolic constructs."⁸ Anthropological approaches of the mass media are becoming an increasingly important concern both for the classical forms of media communication, and for the new media.⁹

Assuming the holistic vocation of anthropology, Mihai Coman proves a special capacity to set to work the tools and structures of the anthropological universe in his quest for the issue of media communication. In this respect, he is faithful to one of the principles enunciated in his works: the anthropological analysis of modern society ought to be at the interface of the routine and the significant, the known

and the exotic, the close-by and the far-off.¹⁰ In a persuasive and inciting manner, the author applies this principle of the anthropological game in his investigations of the relationship between myth and journalists' reporting.¹¹ From the center of modern cultural creation typical of the mass media, Coman uses the terms myth, ritual, magic, religion, sacred, to describe a significant modern experience. To open access for us to this experience, the author proposes a familiarization with the use of these notions that belong to the conceptual tools of symbolic forms anthropology in the study of informing messages disseminated by mass media.¹²

In order to illustrate this, Mihai Coman creates a framework in which the two great trends in anthropological interpretation of the media meet: the ritualistic interpretation and the mythological interpretation. Thus, we note that the ritualistic interpretation views the press either as a component of ritual manifestations that make ample and increase the symbolic force of some public ceremonies, or as a ritual agent that gets to a production of rituals typical of modernity. This production targets both the capacity to influence the daily life pace of certain groups or social mobilization, and the elements for the standardization of professional life that the author places at the interference with magic behavior.¹³ Mythological interpretation aims for at least two aspects: on the one hand the fact that a mythical charge persists in media messages, and may be exploited by journalists to transmit messages easy to assimilate by the public, and on the other the fact that the journalistic discourse and the mass media texts play in modern society the same part that myth used to play in archaic societies, that of delimiting the are of the real, of securing order and significance for the real.¹⁴

Examining these interpretations, Mihai Coman notes that they are based on a series of *analogous* transfers:

“Analogies at the base of the transfer of anthropological terms start from the premise that the social and cultural manifestations of modernity are not radically different from those or exotic archaic societies; this means that the unknown in a system may be explained by the known elements of the other system. The transfer of terms linked to certain cultural situations, in order to define and interpret phenomena of other periods and places, feeds on what is the axiom of social science: the unity of human condition.”¹⁵

The modern man, who is said to have abandoned the grand narratives at the foundation of his/her spiritual life, keeps a natural inclination towards myth, ritual and the meaningful constructions of the imaginary. The modern man cannot ignore them, whether accepting or

not their presence as elements that influence directly human existence as part of a modernity built on rationality. A very interesting aspect noted by the author is that contemporary man can easily accept that there are elements of continuity with archaic societies as regards rituals, ritual behavior, ritualization, but can hardly accept that myth is a real presence in modern life. Therefore, while ceremonies may be assimilated to a continuity with premodern life,

“myth and mythical thinking, evident expressions of a different logic from the discursive logic of modernity, may hardly be accepted as a functional extension of ‘tradition’; consequently, they are thrown away as a ‘relic’, to the reservations that modern thinking built for the (still) exotic worlds – art, mass culture, ludic manifestations, expressions of the unconscious.”¹⁶

Sacred regained or how the sacred is communicated to us

We cannot but wonder: what is the way in which the mode of thinking, perception and reality construction typical to humanity in archaic societies may be regained under the circumstances of modern society? We often think that modern man does not keep sufficient interest even in theological formulas in the constant effort for a theological rationalization of revelation and of the way of life it proposes. So we expect even less the modern to relate significantly to narratives that seem cut from an alien, too remote landscape, like the one of the mythical world inhabited by archaic societies. At the same time, multiple analyses may show that despite the less importance attributed to institutionalized religious forms, there is a constant interest of modern humanity in alternative forms of religiousness, spirituality, and symbolic construction of reality. They seem to be part of the very logic of modernity, and even of the stage that some thinkers defined as the end of modernity. The extended rationality of modernity left sufficient room for the manifestation of the irrational, the religious, ritual behavior or symbolic constructions that function according to another logic than the one we think typical of modern rationality.

A symbolic construction that maintained a determining role in modern man’s perception of reality is culture, including what we call mass culture. The significance of culture for modern man in the way the symbolic conscience of the world is construed may be revealed with the help of two definitions provided by Geertz for religion and culture. Thus, on the one hand culture may be defined in anthropological terms as “a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and

attitudes toward life". On the other hand, religion may be defined as "(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."¹⁷

The two definitions overlap at the level of the cultivation of world's symbolic construction apparently lost, at the same time with modernity, but always regained by man seeking the meaning of existence that empowers a continuous reconstruction of the world. The symbolic conscience of the world institutes a kind of transcendence inherent in the majority of symbolic constructions achieved by the human being. They seem to belong to the very human condition. They constitute a kind of continuity of the individual with those preceding him/her and with those we can imagine as being part of what we conventionally call 'future.' It is about a weak transcendence that leaves room for every individual to participate in the symbolic construction. The individual engages in a common activity for the configuration of a space of continuity between the individual and the community the individual is part of. Also, the individual triggers an extrapolation towards all communities configuring under the form of multiple continuities as interdependent structures with his/her world. This weak transcendence makes possible the encounter in a common reality of religion and culture. The encounter may be explained in various ways. What I think is essential here is the fact that we may find a special type of convergence that makes possible the discussion on religion as a cultural system. Consequently, if we bring up the subject of religion (and also of myth, ritual, spirituality etc) it may be viewed as a cultural phenomenon, or, in a different perspective, as an essential part of any culture.

Therefore, in an implicit anthropological perspective, religion is no longer viewed in the context of religious faith based on ethical monotheism or on the authority of understanding religion from the perspective of faith in a living God related to whom we think all ethical or other regulations, all the articulations of the human world or those that make them possible or consistent. If we wish to remain within the perimeter of faith, religion regulates the system of faith, action, feelings around the idea of the ultimate reality. Whether it is about expressions of personal or community engagement, in the discussion on religion, ritual, mythological, experiential, ethical, doctrinal, social, etc. dimensions should be present.¹⁸

Whatever plastic and suggestive the statement "religions is the dream of the human spirit"¹⁹, we do not go so far as to state that religion is only an imaginative construction. We hold on here, however, to the possibility to view the anthropological analysis of religion as a mode of reading the elements of representation through the elements of reality

camouflaged in religious representations. The transfer of signification may be made in a reverse way by revealing what is camouflaged as an ultimate reality in the field of reality and behaviors resulting from its representation.

So, if we try to illustrate the first perspective, we may resort to the attempt to re-establish religion anthropologically, as proposed by Feuerbach, with a great impact upon the criticism of the religious discourse and upon the understanding of religion in the long period of Romanian culture dominated by the Marxist ideology.²⁰ As regards the second perspective, we may recall, among others, Mircea Eliade with his theory on the camouflage of the sacred into the profane, and the entire effort to discuss the ways in which the sacred may be found in the most usual things, hardly associated with the religious world for a conscience used to the theological model of religious discourse.²¹ Mihai Coman benefits from this tradition in the interpretation of religion, myth and ritual when he discusses myth and ritual in the mass media. All the other bibliographical sources that he uses are just complementary and help us establish clearly the way in which Mihai Coman may be regarded as a significant representative of this trend of interpreting the presence of myth and ritual in the modern world. The mode in which he converts this kind of analysis into an anthropological perspective, distinguishes him in this major trend of the cultural interpretation of religion.

A significant personal contribution to the development of media theories in the Romanian context is brought by Mihai Coman through his studies of myths and mythologies present in journalism. In this respect, he points out to the challenges of media analysis in the sense that in the field of media information there are symbolic constructions for which we can establish complex relationships with the construction mode of significance in the mythical universe. In the mass media anthropology he proposes, an important aspect is that research and the philosophy of communication should highlight the ritual dimension of communication. This focuses not on the simple transmission of information, but also on the construction of a vision of reality based on the dissemination of values, on the creation of cultural values and familiarization with new cultural universes.²² A revelatory analysis is the one focusing on the mythical functions of modern communication. In this context, the relationship between the mythic discourse and the journalistic one aims at the possibility of several thinking and behavior frames, that should be in historical continuity and should be significant from the point of view of the human condition.²³ Coman attributes a special status and role to journalists, seeing in them the only category of intellectual elites that provides narrative definitions of the immediate world. The use of narratives to provide meaning to the immediate world is explained by the marked dependence of journalists on their audience, while the large audience “has never ceased telling stories and trusting the power of the

story to take possession of and signify the real.”²⁴ We are in the presence of a form of symbolic thinking accessible to the modern man due to a form of transcendence that brings along the media discourse, even if the features of this transcendence do not become familiar through the traditional forms in which we imagine it.

It is important to understand this weak transcendence as a presence typical of modernity, because it leaves an open space to plural modes of recovering the transcendence. We also encounter this situation as regards the relationship between the monist morals of the Western world and the possibility of theorizing ethical pluralism, beyond any ethical relativism. We have in that situation too a weak ethics that makes possible the reconstruction of ethics in a pluralist manner. Consequently, this is not about eliminating ethics, but about restating it beyond any absolutism. The tendency to absolutize is an intrinsic component with any type of ethics as well as with any type of religion. Freeing ethics from the pressure of its own absolutism enables ethics to reassert itself as an increased requirement of the contemporary world. Most visible is the manifestation of this thing in the life of organizations. In addition to the fact that they constantly call on ethical counseling, they institute their own professional ethics codes. Moreover, they create a system aimed at the institutionalization of ethics²⁵ that brings back to an ethical pluralism environment the ethical pressure which may be associated to the traditional way, with the hard meaning of ethics. Behind it, one may note even a form of transcendence in which the community and the individuals belonging to the respective professional community may find themselves and their own values. These values become part of the professional culture and of the ethical system assumed by the members of the respective profession.

As weak ethics opens towards a perspective in which relativism and absolutism are in a balance, so does weak transcendence provide the possibility to reconstruct the experience of the sacred in the most diverse forms, in the given conditions of contemporary individual. It supposes a camouflage of the sacred and its continuous revelation, ignoring the sacred and continuously experiencing it. In this context, that of a sacred that escapes theologies, without openly contradicting them, the anthropological analysis game may highlight the new modes in which the sacred is assumed, sometimes unconsciously, in a permanent search of an authentic experience. This continuous search of awaited authenticity situates modern man in an experience similar to the quest for transcendence in traditional manner. Even when it is lived as a minimal experience, the search of authenticity is associated to the need for meaning, and this cannot be found but in relationship with something thought of as the ultimate reality. One locus for the manifestation of this weak transcendence is what we generically call mass culture. Examining this phenomenon, Nicu Gavriluță discloses the fact that mass culture is a

market culture, of which we must think that it is subject to the law of offer and demand. It is merchandise delivered via techniques typical of the mass media: print press, radio-TV, Internet. Mass media as a carrier of mass culture supplies those sub cultural products that may be associated to an experience that provide the mass culture man “a false reverie and a sweet dreaming, a facile, mediocre ‘catharsis’, and a doubtful evasion from the grey-white of daily life”.²⁶ Contributing to the understanding of this type of culture is the distinction between the products of classical culture and those of mass culture. Among the latter, a wholly special product is the kitsch. Revelatory for our discussion is the fact that “kitsch appears to the regular people as something relaxing, pleasant, and comforting. In fact, kitsch tries to endlessly dissimulate a fear of void, of desert soul and mind. The huge emptiness of the spirit is not filled with authentic cultural texts, read, meditated upon and long internalized, but with truly facile subproducts.”²⁷ Often this type of product is associated by culture theorists with the cultural products provided by the mass media.

Thus, the question arises: from this perspective, who is the character who embodies mass culture today? Nicu Gavriluță describes an individual that may be labeled “regular citizen” or “democratic man”. This individual’s features appear in a clearer shape considering the indifference manifested toward classical culture; mass culture man separates from the cultural tradition and is no longer impressed with the classical forms of transcendence, feeling comfortable only with the commercial values disseminated by the mass media.²⁸ The journalist cannot ignore this culture of commercial values. Journalists have to find always a balance between public interest and the things the public is interested in.²⁹ Moreover, journalists “are products of their culture and because they write (they must write) in terms and explanatory frameworks accessible and acceptable for their audience”.³⁰ In this effort to create mass culture, we note in terms of symbolic anthropology, the media universe, as the environment of mass culture development, is characterized by the presence of mythical, symbolic, ritualistic structures, including the presence of a great diversity of perception and manifestation of religiousness. Both from the studies by Nicu Gavriluță and by Mihai Coman we grasp the idea that these elements are important in view of mass culture and the understanding of professional culture.

Mass media as a cultural system

Mass media is not simply a channel that communicates values or directs preferences and actions. In Mihai Coman’s view, mass media is a cultural system constructing reality with the instruments typical of symbolic rationality. Mass media is no longer just an instrument for mediating and mediatizing cultural constructs, but is placed

“in the center of the social construction of reality process, as an institution generating a discourse and a specific logic; the products incorporating these values are distributed to the public and assumed by the latter as clarifying images about the world, self-understood, in accord with its expectations, norms, hopes and fears.”³¹

This way, mass media plays an important part in the construction of an ethical community, and also in the cohesion of the community given the participation to common values and a common identity generated by assuming symbolic structures familiar to the community in case. Consequently, mass media practically takes over a series of functions held in traditional societies by the institutionalization of myth and ritual, or by the mechanisms set to play by various theologies. Thus, mass media has a higher importance as regards political culture, the spiritual culture of a community, as well as the symbolic construction of society. Not accidentally we are told that

“The transmission of values through mass media contributes to achieving social stability and to the maintenance in time of cultural structures. Promoting various patterns of behavior, the press provides a set of social rules and a symbolic vocabulary; facing these messages that respond to the needs of for models and reference terms, the public has the possibility to choose or reject, alter or negotiate, debate or reassess the common values and roles.”³²

Naturally, Mihai Coman wonders whether the mass media as a whole is a “symbolic instance” or only certain mass media provide mythical products. The answers belong to two major types of explanations. On the one hand, the explanatory model according to which the mass media took over the functions of those institutions in premodern societies with a role in preserving, transmitting and creating myths. On the other hand, the explanatory model that associates the mythical dimension only with certain media situations and products, placing mythical notes outside journalistic discourse.

Mihai Coman opines that in addition to the usual messages, journalists provide messages of a special nature in two situations: when they communicate during crises and when they cover ceremonies. In a convincing way, Mihai Coman argues that journalists call on the symbolic resources in different ways: in crisis situations they use mythical thinking structures, while in ceremonial situations they activate symbolic mechanisms typical of the logic of rites. Therefore, we may speak of a differentiated process of mythologization and ritualization.³³

If we follow the presence of myth and mythologization, we note that from the start we hit the ambiguity of these terms. Neither anthropology nor other fields that approached myth succeeded in delineating a new concept or a definition that would be widely accepted by those who operate myth analysis or mythical thinking. Mihai Coman finds it difficult to define myth for three reasons: firstly, the multiple definitions generating diverse perspectives on myth and all related diverse approaches, ambiguity of concepts and sometimes contradicting conceptualizations. Secondly, determining are the interplaying cultural segments, of great heterogeneity, involving exotic cultures, perished cultures, popular cultures, etc. Thirdly, is the diversity of fields of study that naturally bring different and sometimes contradictory perspectives due to the different methodologies and theoretical perspectives they suppose.³⁴

The world of myth and the effort to conceptualize myth were a constant concern in Mihai Coman's works. In one of these, he introduces ten features of myth that he distinguishes based on ten constants of the mythical universe:

1. Social-cultural framework – archaic
2. Form of manifestation – narrativized constructions
3. Transmittal mode – oral
4. Content – fabulous
5. Function – cumulative: cognitive, social, psychological
6. Semantic values and signification values – hidden meaning
7. Attitude toward myth – privileged position within a culture
8. Immediate cultural context – association with multiple ceremonies
9. Dynamics – cultural reality in permanent move and transformation
10. Cultural existence – liminality as a typical, encompassing feature.³⁵

It is obvious that if we use for an interpretation grid the picture containing the elements above, we have an adequate understanding of myth but are in the impossibility to apply this myth vision to the mythologization process in the mass media. This picture cannot reveal the essence of myth or constitute an ideal model to help us identify the presence of myth and mythologization in the mass media. Perfectly aware of this fact, after examining a large variety of definitions of myth in specialized literature, Mihai Coman notes that we can significantly reduce the features that make possible a delineation of myth:

“1) form of expression (narration, performed and transmitted usually in oral form), 2) content (referring to a “beginning” placed in an anhistorical past, a beginning associated with the sacred for the presence of divinities or characters of supernatural powers, in fabulous places and by extra-ordinary

deeds) and 3) relationship to society (provides models for institutions and behaviors, it is believed to be the absolute truth, has numerous social functions, is associated with ceremonies).”³⁶

Even in such a reduced version that highlights the family features of myth, we have to prove a lot of flexibility if we want to understand the way we may find myth present in the mass media.

Mihai Coman notes that if we try to use a rigid interpretation grid resulting from such a mode of myth delineation, even in its minimal version, it is difficult to assert that there are myths in the mass media. What we may find are analogical structures, mythical sequences, functions similar to those of certain mythical structures, or even a logic resembling the logic of mythical thinking. However, if we prove flexible in our use of the interpretation grid and we accept that a series of attributes typical of myth may be present and others may not, then it is clear that the mass media is impregnated with similar elements as the ones that the world of myth brings to us.

Referring to the studies of Claude Levi-Strauss, the author ponders on myth construction and the mythologization processes. In this context of the discussion on mythologization, Mihai Coman notes that using the bricolage method,³⁷ journalists respond to the challenges of their world, especially in crisis situations, through the same bricolage methods used by *myth-makers* in the cultures based on mythical thinking. In this respect, it is important to note the specific meaning of mythologization:

“by mythologization I understand more than the simple transposition of certain occurrences into the matrix of the topoi inspired from or transmitted by ancient mythologies – even if such processes may take place. Mythologization is more than a simple mechanic overlap of epic-symbolic patterns; it is a bricolage process, never ending, with all the units in the cultural vocabulary, a bricolage that produces successive narrative sets open to interpretations, negotiations, and shaping in the social dialog space.”³⁸

The anthropological analysis of the mass media is important as it adds to the understanding of the way myth proves its efficiency in solving crisis situations. We note that in that context, mythologization

“uses a story (about the deeds in question) in order to bring into discussion, by way of the symbolic “re-construction” of these deeds, the values, institutions, expectations and fears of society. The story thus made provides an

understanding grid (an acceptable meaning in the system of codes typical of a collectivity) for the respective crisis.”³⁹

We have to mention that Mihai Coman shares the conviction of the authors who believe that often the transformation occurring in a society, especially in the societies transiting towards democracy, like the Romanian society, is not determined only by economic or institutional factors, but also by cultural factors.⁴⁰

Being interested in an anthropological analysis of the news dissemination processes, Mihai Coman shows that news provides knowledge anchored in narrative models and symbolic structures, which is especially important from the perspective of the relationship between press and political life and public space.⁴¹ In such a reading, communication is “an instrument of control in the hands of political and economic authorities, allowing through cultural industries and generalized public relations to impose patterns of behavior and preestablished social representations.”⁴² In this respect, once more the idea that mass media constitutes a forum of ideas debate, opinion shaping and decision orientation is justified. This way, reiterated is the idea that journalists are not only mediators but also discourse creators. From the point of view of the mass media anthropology one should point out that in the condition of mass culture “the creation of these discourses – often dominated by mythologization elements – takes place in the space of a popular culture, a culture characterized among others through the role of the imaginary, of the symbolic and of the narrative.”⁴³ In this discursive space, mythological structures typical of mass culture meet with those of professional culture.

An important part of Mihai Coman’s writings seeks ways to improve professional standards and cultivate the prestige of the journalist profession.⁴⁴ An element which should be paid special attention to is the presence of myth in the professional culture of journalists. Symbolic structures brought by the presence of myth and ritual in the professional life of journalists are perceived as symbolic constructions important for sharing a special professional identity:

“professional identity is construed as a pendulum oscillating between the two poles: symbolic representations focused on the irrational – talent, innate vocation, luck, intuition etc. – and symbolic representations from the sphere of professionalism that bring forth the values of rationality: professional responsibility, observance of ethical standards, use of abilities acquired in a slow and reflexive formation process etc.”⁴⁵

In such analyses we may note that both the ritualization elements of professional activity and the mythologization ones are a presence that may be found easily. A mythologization form present in the mass media and theorized by Mihai Coman is that of the heroization of journalists that act in special situations. It is based on a series of symbolic constructions that function in the profession. Special correspondents are described by Coman as a category of professionals that seems predestined to self-heroization due to their involvement in situations often presented as limit-situations, charged with the fabulous, the extraordinary, often broadcasting from exotic spots in which the ineffable and the credible intertwine and produce narratives rich in symbolic content. This category benefits from all that is favorable as individuals that act in exceptional situations, being often perceived as models of professional exceptionalism.⁴⁶

Instead of conclusions

Symbolic constructions of reality typical of modern man provide the possibility for us to think back to man in archaic societies, that, we may say, had a “wild thinking” in the sense that it was based on a logic of symbols that differs from rational thinking. This reveals modern man’s need for the sacred in spite of tendencies to restrain its force in the cultural practices of modernity. Philosophical, phenomenological, social-anthropological analyses show to a growing extent that “the phantasms and irrational elements dominating the individual and collective imaginary of modern man may manifest in the most unexpected places and in various modes. This demonstrates that symbolic imagination is a human constant.”⁴⁷ Symbolic thinking is an essential component of modern man’s mental outlook. Within it, myth manifests with so much force that some authors believe undoubtedly man cannot live without myths, so that man often needs to invent them.⁴⁸ Mass media plays an important part both with respect to mythical creation and its function, which in archaic societies was fulfilled by mythical communication instances. Considering the accepted fact that media is “an indicator of democracy, it is very important to study its role in setting people daily agenda considering how it is able to maintain and create trends merely through recurrent messages”.⁴⁹ It is important to understand its action also along the line of the symbolic construction of reality. This way, increasingly evident is the importance that mass media has in the construction of identity and in the way plural identities meet in the public space. The symbolic construction of identity is important both as regards mass culture and professional culture. It is an important part in the process of the social construction of reality. This anthropological interpretation is important for the way Mihai Coman understands public space: freed from any homogenous or limiting nature, being conceived in

the form of intersections of several public spaces related to different cultural identities that contribute in a specific way to a generalized public space.⁵⁰ This unlimited space of communication becomes functional due to the fact that symbolic thinking may be assumed by modern man under the circumstances of a minimal ethics and in the presence of a weak transcendence. The camouflage of the sacred in the structures of daily life and in those of the professional life is an indicator of the need for meaning, mythologization and ritualization felt by man in modern society. Mass media valorizes myth as an ethical mode of responding to human needs that are always forgotten, always postponed, but pertain to the human condition and its protection. In this context, mass media is responsible for the elaboration and implementation of politics of symbolic construction of reality, both at the level of mass culture and of very elaborate professional culture.

Notes:

¹ Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*, 9e éd., (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951).

² Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Gîndirea sălbatică*, (Bucureşti: Ed. Ştiinţifică, 1970).

³ Lucian Blaga, *Despre gîndirea magică*, (Bucureşti: Fundaţia regală pentru literatură şi artă, 1941).

⁴ Mircea Eliade, *Tratat de istorie a religiilor*, (Bucureşti: Ed. Humanitas, 1992): 399-418. A very important approach in Mihaela Paraschivescu, "Mircea Eliade and the Quest for Religious Meaning", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, Vol. 9, No. 25 (2010): 59-68. See also Aurel Codoban, *Exerciţii de interpretare*, (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia XXI, 2011), 122-134.

⁵ Significant views on the ideas in Mihai Coman's writings to be found, among others, in Ion Şeuleanu, "Elemente de mitologie românească", *Steaua*, Anul XL, Nr. 4, (1989): 6; Ştefan Bratosin, "Mihai Coman, Pour une anthropologie des medias", *Sciences de la Société*, No. 61, (fév. 2004), <http://w3.scsoc.univ-tlse2.fr/61/nl.html#COMA2003>; Maria Pourchet, "Mihai Coman, Pour une anthropologie des médias", *Question de communication*, No. 7 (2005): 421-423. About the volume on the presence of myth and ritual in mass media, which is the starting point of this article, we can say what Ion Zubaşcu stated about the book *Sora soarelui* (1983) signed by Mihai Coman: "The book is a true show of research, it quivers, it is alive, has the pulse of a living tissue." See: Ion Zubascu, "Un spirit deschis, imprevizibil", *Tribuna*, Anul XVIII, Nr. 32, (1984): 7.

⁶ Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit şi ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, (Iaşi: Polirom, 2003), 25.

⁷ Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit şi ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, 105.

⁸ Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit şi ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, 106. An interesting type of mediation that Mihai Coman only partially elaborates on is the process of "metaphoric mediation" by which metaphors become instruments of communication, mediation and world foundation", a process similar to mythologization. Such an approach is present in Mihaela Alexandra Ionescu Tudor, Ştefan Bratosin, "Langage, communication et médiation : déplacements

métaphoriques”, *Revista română de comunicare și relații publice*, vol. 11., no. 3 (17) (2009): 68. Also a symbolic interpretation of organizational communication is to be found in Ștefan Bratosin, Mihaela Alexandra Ionescu Tudor, “Apports des sciences de la culture dans la recherche en communication des organisations”, *Cultura. International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology*, vol. VI, no 2 (12) (2009): 7-19.

⁹ S. M. Wilson, L. C. Peterson, “The anthropology of online communities”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 31 (2002): 449-467. A series of transformations that Romanian press has been going through in the past years under the pressure of new media, with the passage from the traditional forms of press to the electronic culture of communication may be found in I. Maxim Danciu, Andreea Mogos, “La presse écrite roumaine post-transition: Structurations institutionnelles et discursives”, *Transylvanian Review*, Vol. XIX, No.4 (2010): 141-147. It is important to understand “how much these new forms of online communication contribute to the formation of new community identities and how these new identity and community spaces can contribute to the growth of the civil spirit as an essential value of participation in democratic societies.” Ioan Hosu, „Community and Communication” în Delia Cristina Balaban, Ioan Hosu (eds.), *PR trend. Society and Communication*, (Hochschulverlag Mittweida, Germany, 2009), 27. However, one of the most important contributions to the media theories in the Romanian context, and to media communication “not only as a support for rational deliberation (information and opinion), but also as a symbolic space, as a field where narratives, images, values and myths are confronted in a search for meanings, worldviews and identity” is summed up in Mihai Coman, “Developments in Journalism Theory About Media ‘Transition’ in Central and Eastern Europe 1990–99”, *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2000): 35–56.

¹⁰ Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit și ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, 106.

¹¹ Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit și ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, 20. The importance as well as the limits of such interpretations are suggested in Rebekah Sobel, “Media Anthropology”, *Visual Anthropology Review*, Vol. 26 No. 1 (Spring 2010): 42-44

¹² Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit și ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, 29

¹³ Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit și ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, 29-31.

¹⁴ Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit și ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, 31-32.

¹⁵ Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit și ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, 32.

¹⁶ Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit și ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, 33. For a few analyses of the importance of myth in the modern world see Vattimo, Gianni, *Societatea transparentă*, (Constanța: Ed. Pontica, 1995), 34-51; Caillois, Roger, *Mitul și omul*, (București, Ed. Nemira, 2000).

¹⁷ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York: FontanaPress, 1993): 87-125.

¹⁸ Ninian Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 27-70.

¹⁹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Esența Creștinismului*, (București: Ed. Științifică, 1961), 21.

²⁰ “The divine being is nothing but the human being or better said: human being separated from the limits of the individual man, that is real, corporal, objectified, that is intuited and venerated as another proper being different from him; all the determining of the divine being is for that reason determining of the human being,” we may read in Ludwig Feuerbach, *Esența Creștinismului*, 45.

²¹ A valorization of Mircea Eliade's perspective on symbolic thinking in the context of modernity, see in Sandu Frunză, "Identitate și religie. Aspecte ale construcției simbolice a identității", *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Philosophia*, XLVII, 2, (2002): 131-144.

²² Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit și ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, 85

²³ Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit și ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, 99

²⁴ Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit și ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, 48. In addition to Mircea Eliade's works, this dialectic of the sacred may be found in works like Wunenburger, Jean-Jacques, *Sacral*, translated by Mihaela Frunză, (Cluj: Dacia, 2000); Judith Fox, *Secularization* în Hinnels, John R., *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, (London: Routledge, 2005), 291-305

²⁵ Valentin Mureșan, *Managementul eticii în organizații*, (București: Editura Universității din București, 2009). For the way in which ethics is constituted and functions in the professional field, see Sandu Frunză, "Ethical Responsibility and Social Responsibility of Organizations Involved in the Public Health System", *Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială*, Vol. 32 (2011): 156-157. See also Sandu Frunză, "On the Need for a Model of Social Responsibility and Public Action as an Ethical Base for Adequate, Ethical and Efficient Resource Allocation in the Public Health System of Romania", *Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială*, vol. 33 (2011): 178-196.

²⁶ Nicu Gavriluță, *Antropologie socială și culturală*, (Iași: Polirom, 2009), 192.

²⁷ Nicu Gavriluță, *Antropologie socială și culturală*, 192.

²⁸ Nicu Gavriluță, *Antropologie socială și culturală*, 184.

²⁹ Sandu Frunză, *Comunicare etică și responsabilitate socială* (București: Ed. Tritonic, 2011), 134.

³⁰ Mihai Coman, "Education for the Media and for the Culture of Peace and Tolerance", *The Global Network / Le reseau global* No. 14, (2000): 26.

³¹ Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit și ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, 34.

³² Mihai Coman, *Introducere în sistemul mass-media*, (Iași: Polirom, 2007), 122.

³³ Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit și ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, 38.

³⁴ Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit și ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, 89.

³⁵ Mihai Coman, *Mitos și epos. Studii asupra transformărilor narative*, (București: Cartea Românească, 1985), 95-96.

³⁶ Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit și ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, 91.

³⁷ Mihai Coman, *Une approche symbolique de l'espace public*, in Bernard Mieghe, Gaetan Tremblay (ed), « 2001 Bogues: globalisme et pluralisme », vol 1 (« TIC et societe »), (Laval, Les Presses Universitaires de Laval, 2003).

³⁸ Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit și ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, 118.

³⁹ Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit și ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, 116.

⁴⁰ Mihai Coman, „Postfață”, în Peter Gross, *Mass media și democrația în țările Europei de Est*, (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 226.

⁴¹ On the important place of the imaginary and symbolic thinking in political communication and public debate, see also Camelia Beciu, „Politicul, arenele mediatice și practicile de dezbatere”, *Sfera Politicii*, Anul XVII Nr. 135, (mai 2009): 3-7. Also, for the cultural mediation performed by the media, especially by televisions, in a "media focused democracy" see Caludiu Coman, "Modern media innovation in electoral campaigns", *Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială*, vol. 31 (2010): 45-53. Let us note that regarding political communication and action, Mihai Coman proposes for Romania "a model of post-communist transition with

the source in the ritual type of transformation, in which the mass media plays the same part as myths in traditional societies, expressing, organizing and confronting the new significance". Vezi Mihai Coman, *Mass media în România post-comunistă*, (Iași: Polirom, 2003), 49

⁴² Mihai Coman, „Prefață”, în Bernard Mieghe, *Societatea cucerită de comunicare*, (Iași: Polirom, 2000), 8.

⁴³ Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit și ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, 126.

⁴⁴ The efforts made for the development of a system of professional communication studies may be found in Mihai Coman, *Patterns and Experiences: Journalism Education in Romania*, in Hans Bohrmann, Elisabeth Klaus, Marcel Machill (eds.): *Media Industry, Journalism Culture und Communication Policies in Europe (Festschrift for Professor Dr. Gerd G. Kopper)*, (Vistas, Berlin, 2007), 187-205. On the risks brought about by the unprecedented development of journalism schools, often ignoring the requirements of professional education both in terms of theoretical studies and practical abilities and skills that graduates should have, see Mihai Coman, “Public Relations, Advertising, and Even Some Propaganda: Romanian Private Higher Education Institutions and Their Communication Campaigns”, *Higher Education in Europe*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 4, (December 2003): 409-419. See also Mihai Coman, “Starea mass-media în România” in Mihai Coman (coord.), *Manual de journalism. Tehnici fundamentale de redactare*, (Iași: Polirom, 1997), 211-226.

⁴⁵ Mihai Coman, *Introducere în sistemul mass-media*, (Iași: Polirom, 2007), 331.

⁴⁶ Mihai Coman, *Introducere în sistemul mass-media*, 260-262. A special perspective on the cultivation of the journalist profession prestige may be found in the interesting distinction from the view of the symbolic construction of this profession, a distinction that Ilie Rad proposes as regards journalism as art and science, in Ilie Rad (coord.), *Schimbări în Europa, schimbări în mass-media*, (Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2004), viii.

⁴⁷ Cristina Gavriluță, Nicu Gavriluță, *Sociologia sportului. Teorii, metode, aplicații*, (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2010), 169.

⁴⁸ Cristina Gavriluță, *Socioantropologia fenomenului religios*, (Iași: Editura Fundației AXIS, 2003), 176.

⁴⁹ Cătălin Baba, Răzvan M. Cherecheș, Olimpia Moșteanu, “The Mass Media Influence on the Impact of Health Policy”, *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, 19 E/2007: 15-20

⁵⁰ Mihai Coman, *Mass media, mit și ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, 126.

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