



LANGUAGE OF DIGNITY: SACRED BALANCE BETWEEN FEMININE AND MASCULINE

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Abstract - Language of Dignity: Sacred Balance between Feminine and Masculine

In this presentation, the author will present her research on holistic point of view as one of the basic characteristics of artistic creations in pre-historical and tribal cultures. She will discuss the purpose of art in ancient cultures as seen through the perspective of the development of the first forms of human expression and communication (language of rituals, Rock Art, sculptures, masks...). Their substance and purpose present the level of human consciousness of a certain society - its ability to comprehend and honor the co-existence of natural world, as well as other dimensional realities. Main symbol representing the co-existence of all life, all living beings, is the circle. It can be seen as one of the most important forms of archaic cultures from Neolithic times. In the presentation the author makes comparison to the symbolism of dome (cupola) as the oldest sign of humanity, found all over the world. As an example of living heritage of this symbol she explains the symbolism of the Sacred pipe, the most holiest ceremonial object of Lakota people. Author believes that the symbolism of the ancients hold an eternal value - a messages for us, people of the modern society, which is momentarily going through the major transformation. The symbol of the circle can be seen as a symbol of respectful communication between all the living beings, all the people and all the nations. At the same time it is interpreted as the symbol of dignified, healthy and balanced relationship between material and spiritual world, as well as between feminine and masculine principles.

Riassunto - Il linguaggio della dignità: l'equilibrio sacro fra maschile e femminile

Nel corso della relazione l'autore presenterà la sua ricerca sul punto di vista olistico, come una delle caratteristiche fondamentali della creazione artistica nelle culture preistoriche e tribali. Analizzerà la finalità dell'arte nelle culture antiche attraverso lo sviluppo delle prime forme di espressione e comunicazione umane (linguaggio dei riti, dell'arte rupestre, delle sculture, delle maschere...). La loro consistenza e la destinazione mostra il livello della coscienza umana di una certa società - la sua capacità di comprendere e onorare la coesistenza del mondo naturale e delle altre realtà dimensionali. Il simbolo principale che rappresenta la coesistenza di tutti gli esseri viventi è il cerchio, che potrebbe essere uno dei simboli più importanti presso le culture arcaiche dal Neolitico. Nella presentazione l'autore fa riferimento al simbolo della cupola come il più antico segno di umanità, diffuso in tutto il mondo.

Per illustrare il patrimonio vivente di questo simbolo, l'autore illustra il simbolismo della pipa sacra, l'oggetto cerimoniale più sacro del popolo Lakota: il simbolismo degli antichi contiene una valenza eterna, un messaggio per noi, uomini della società moderna, che stiamo attraversando un grande processo trasformazione. Il cerchio può essere considerato come il simbolo di una comunicazione rispettosa tra tutti gli esseri viventi, gli esseri umani e le nazioni. Allo stesso tempo, è interpretato come simbolo di una relazione dignitosa, sana ed equilibrata tra il mondo materiale e spirituale, così come tra il principio maschile e femminile.

Résumé - Langage de la dignité : équilibre sacré entre féminin et masculin

Au cours de cette présentation, je vais vous présenter ma recherche sur l'holisme, l'une des caractéristiques fondamentales des créations artistiques dans les cultures préhistoriques et tribales. Nous allons examiner le but de l'art dans les cultures anciennes à travers le développement des premières formes d'expression et de communication humaine (langage des rituels, de l'art rupestre, des sculptures, des masques...). Leur substance et leur but montrent le niveau de conscience humaine d'une certaine société - son habilité à comprendre et honorer la coexistence avec le monde naturel et avec d'autres réalités dimensionnelles. Le symbole principal qui représente la coexistence de tous les êtres vivants est le cercle. Il pourrait être l'une des formes les plus importantes des cultures archaïques des périodes néolithiques. Nous allons également établir une comparaison avec le symbolisme du dôme (coupole), plus vieux signe de l'humanité, que l'on retrouve aux quatre coins du monde. Pour illustrer l'héritage vivant de ce symbole, nous allons expliquer le symbolisme de la pipe sacrée, l'objet cérémoniel le plus sacré du peuple Lakota. Selon moi, le symbolisme des anciens contenait une valeur éternelle, un message pour nous, hommes de la société moderne, qui est en train de subir sa principale transformation. Le cercle peut être considéré comme le symbole d'une communication respectueuse entre tous les êtres vivants, tous les êtres humains et toutes les nations. En même temps, il est interprété comme étant le symbole d'une relation saine, équilibrée et pleine de dignité entre le monde matériel et spirituel, mais aussi entre les principes féminins et masculins.

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One of the most significant characteristics of an artistic creation is communication. Thus, with whom or what does this creation communicate, makes contact with? For whom or for what is its message designed? What is its purpose?

One of the most basic differences which can be noticed between the creativity of the so-called archaic cultures (as well as tribal societies) and modern society is exactly the difference in the purpose of expression, in the goal of communication. While a modern human limits his or her creativity to the partial experiencing of the world – from the perspective of an individual separated from the natural and spiritual world – the main purpose of the archaic or tribal human is to comprehend the wholeness of existence. Its aim was or is to communicate with the world from the position of being included in the wholeness or holiness of existence. This coexistence between the human and the natural world and the cosmos, or human-earth-sky, can be found in all ancient mythologies of the world.

A human being incorporated in the totality of the mythological image of the world assigned divine attributes to the world around her/him. Everything is sacred – the earth, the sun, rivers, trees, all nature. And everything is alive. The human communicates, cooperates with everything. His or her artistic activity – be it singing, dancing, creating rock art, weaving, modelling – is always a ritual act, an act referring to the sanctity of reality. According to Mircea Eliade, “rejection of profane perception of reality indicates peculiar metaphysic ‘valorization’ of human existence”.¹ Neither objects of the outer world nor human activities have real, autonomous value. They get value only when they enter the “greater” reality.² For that reason artistic creation is always communication with wholeness or the holiness: a prayer, a thanksgiving, a sacrifice or simply, which happens very often, an expression of joy, joy of being a part of this world, the celebration of life.

A human being is a part of the wholeness of the mythological world and as such is responsible for it. She/he feels responsible for maintaining balance between the material and spiritual world, between the earth and the sky, among elements of nature, between feminine and masculine principles. Art is devoted to this very purpose: artists know the ritual act is not only important but necessary for keeping up the continuity of the life stream, the continuity of the cosmic order of the world. They believe that their act of thanksgiving and sacrifice will make the spirit of the field bring fertility in return, that their sacred song and dance will help the sun to rise every morning, that the health and harmony of their families are dependent on their rituals, their prayers. The balance between material and spiritual dimensions, between profane and sacred, enables a happy and healthy life. God was not only up there in the heavens but also here, everything here on earth was considered sacred.

A human being with this level of consciousness is not passive but is a co-creator of the cosmic drama. He/she is not an insignificant factor compared with the magnificence of the monotheistic god which appears in later periods. This fact gives dignity to a human being. She/he is not a sinner who has to earn the benevolence of her/his god, but an equivalent part of the sacred circle of life. In certain tribal cultures, such as Native American, a circle is still in the present day the basic symbol of equivalence and all-connectedness. It represents respectfulness among all living beings, honouring nature as well as honouring the dignity of every human, every nation and every race. A circular concept was the basic model for many early societies before it was replaced by a pyramidal concept of hierarchy. When people sit in a circle, they are all in the same position: the role of everyone is unique but has the same importance for maintaining a society. In societies which cultivated respectfulness, the councils for making most important decisions were always held in a circle. We can see it also in some sacred ceremonies such as Inipi, sweat lodge, known in North America, Mongolia, and the Celtic tradition. The sacred sun dance ceremony, which is still practised in North America, is held in a circular form.

In different cultures, when people were expressing the joy of life, they danced in a circle. Still today this dance is called *oro* in Macedonia and *kolo* in many cultures of the Balkans, in the area of Neolithic southeast Europe, which was called “the civilization of Old Europe”³ by Maria Gimbutas. The Neolithic period is in fact the very time from which the form of a circle originates in Old Europe, the time of the invention of agriculture, the art of ceramics, weaving and the blossoming of religion, whose primordial deity was female. For the form of the circle implied by this context, traces of circular councils, particularly those of women, can also be found. Let me mention just one of many examples, one of the most characteristic rituals from ancient Greece: the festival of Demeter in Eleusis, Thesmophoria. The citizen-women form a council and decisions are voted by majority rule.⁴

1 Mircea Eliade, *Kozmos in zgodovina: Mit o večnem vračanju* (Cosmos and history: the myth of the eternal return), Ljubljana: Hieron, 1992, p.11.

2 Eliade, *Kozmos*, p. 16.

3 Maria Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe*, San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991.

4 Gimbutas, *Civilization of the Goddess*, p.344.

Another context from which a circular form emerges can also be noted, which is very important in many Neolithic as well as tribal cultures: the circle as a symbol of regeneration. It represents the regeneration of nature, the cycles of the seasons and the cycles of the moon, which reflect also the cycles of the body of a woman, a personification of nature; there are also important regeneration cyclical forms of birth, life and death. Death was not considered as the end but only a phase in the cyclicity of the regeneration pattern, which is followed by a new phase, the birth of life. Can we even imagine that in the Paleolithic and Neolithic cultures which nourished this understanding, according to Maria Gimbutas, for many millennia there are no remains of weapons found, no traces of fighting, war or torture?⁵

In prehistoric as well as in tribal cultures a very honouring attitude towards nature can be found. The famous message of Chief Seattle said:

Every part of this land is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods ... My people love this earth as the new-born loves its mother's heartbeat. The perfumed flowers are our sisters; the deer, the horse, the great eagle, these are our brothers. The shining water that moves in the streams and rivers is not just water but the blood of our ancestors. We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The earth is our mother ... All things are connected⁶.

Miodrag Pavlović, a Serbian writer, says in his book, *Poetics of a Sacrificial Ritual*:

It appears that ancient and so called primitive ancestors left something which is difficult to define: a message, a teaching, an experience, a model ... They had a living and fully present relationship with nature and with what it contains. A rocky wall was considered a living tissue, as well as a stone found in a stream. They were not as pragmatic as we are. Their recognition of motherhood in the earth and water is, by all means, a great invention and a long-term intelligent operation. Mesolithic human treated the elements with great elegance.⁷

This profound and deep reverence refers not only to the elements of nature but also to the sky, the cosmos. We can find rich evidence of that in rock art and ceramic art: designs of different star constellations such as Orion, Perseides and Pleiades. In the Neolithic and Copper Ages the celestial movements were observed in complex designed observatories, to name just a few: Stonehenge in England, Chaco Canyon in New Mexico, Mnajdra on Malta and to me personally the *Cocev kamen* (tsote's stone) in Macedonia, a recently discovered megalithic observatory which is also an extremely complex ritual centre of the goddess religion.

There is a ritual object from Native American Lakota tradition which in a very exact way explains the meaning of the natural balance between matter and spirit as well as the meaning of the circle. This is a sacred pipe, *chanupa*, which to the indigenous people of North America still in modern times represents the most sacred ritual object. The legend says the native people received it long ago from a holy woman called White Buffalo Woman, who taught them sacred ceremonies. One of them, which they still practise, is a sacred pipe ceremony.⁸

The sacred pipe represents the union between the earth and the sky, harmony between feminine and masculine. The lower part of the pipe is a cup which opens to the sky and represents a female womb. When we take a pinch of tobacco and put it in the cup, it means there is a place for the people, all people who are walking upon mother earth. Then we take another pinch for all animals, a pinch for trees and all the plants, and the waters, springs, streams, rivers, seas and oceans, for everything that is on the earth and for the earth itself, and all the other planets, stars and all the galaxies. And when the cup is full it will represent the great sacred circle of life to which we all belong. And because we are a part of the circle, each of us is holy as well: a sacred woman, a sacred man, now and here, on this sacred land. In this way, the pipe reminds us that we all belong together, we are all related, we are one family, so we need to respect each other. The wooden stem represents the connection between all the visible things and the invisible, the spirit, the great spirit, great mystery, great love, which is everywhere and also inside each of us. The pipe serves for the prayers. The smoke takes the prayers to Mother Earth and to the Great Spirit.

The form of the cup of the pipe which opens in a circular form towards the sky is actually shaped the same as the cupmark, the oldest and most frequent symbol of humanity. As Dusko Aleksovski, a discoverer of rock art in Macedonia explains: "Development of the world literacy begins with a cupmark. Those signs, coded messages from more than 30,000 years ago, were graved into rocks by nations all over the world, in all continents, without knowing one another."

5 Gimbutas, *Civilization of the Goddess*, p. x.

6 Pat Fleming, Joanna Macy and John Seed, *Thinking Like a Mountain: Towards a Council of All Beings*, Gabriola Island, BC: New Catalyst Books, 2007, pp. 68-70.

7 Miodrag Pavlovic *Poetika žrtvenog obreda*, Beograd: Nolit, 1987, pp. 57-8.

8 Medicine Brooke Eagle, *Buffalo Woman Comes Singing*, New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1991, p. 57.



Could we make an assertion that a cupmark can be interpreted as a symbol of matter, *ma-theria*, which opens towards the spirit to create balance, the wholeness of existence, the holiness of existence? Can we say it represents the material dimension integrating with spiritual? In my native language, Slovenian, *ma-theria* sound very like "*maternica*", which means the womb of a woman. There is another connotation which can be observed here, – the form of a cup is in fact the shape of the Holy Grail. We spoke of the holiness of a cup of the sacred pipe, and there is a strong medieval symbolism of the Holy Grail which some authors interpret as a sacred womb of a woman, the giver of life. So, from this context we could observe this prevalence of a cupmark symbol in different ways and periods of human existence as a symbol of the sanctity of matter, representing the sacred feminine opening to the sacred masculine and creating a balance between two basic principles.

If we look at the Lakota tradition, in which this symbolism contained in the sacred pipe is still today considered the most sacred, we can understand that the natural order of a human being from its very beginning is based on the dignified and balanced relationship between feminine and masculine.

Let us remember Miodrag Pavlović saying that our ancestors left a message, a teaching, a model that we need to receive. Maybe their wisdom wants to communicate to us. Maybe it wants to remind us of our natural state of being, of balance, harmony, happiness, seemingly the simplest things which we have forgotten. Their messages, left in many legends, writings on rock, ceramic figures and figurines, megaliths, etc, in traditions all over the world are not left accidentally. Some of them were carried on from generation to generation in oral tradition for more than 15,000 years, such as, for example, the interpretation of the Prophetic Stone from Oriabi in the Hopi land. In Neolithic times in the Balkans and other places, painted rock art is created with indestructible pigment, stone carvings are made in specially chosen rock. All this tells us that our ancestors consciously left them for us, their descendants.

According to the prophecies and astronomical calculations from different traditions, the time that we live in is the time of great transformation, re-balancing on many levels of existence. Wisdom-keepers from tribal societies say this is the time when a human being is going to become human in the real sense of this word, to discover her/his full spiritual potential. According to the white buffalo woman legend, this is the time when we are called on to remember that we are a part of the sacred cup of life – all people, all nations, all the races, all related as one family. My personal conviction is that the transformation is basically about embracing the awareness of the principle of respectfulness and cooperation: respect for each other and ourselves, respect for nature and the multidimensionality of life, all of which presents the understanding of a sacred union between matter and spirit, the feminine and masculine, which has been forgotten. This means also understanding the sanctity of sexual union, planting the seeds in the soil, the sanctity of giving birth, the time of menstruation, the sanctity of the human body, female and male, all forms and activities concerning material, all living beings born from a female womb, which used to be honoured as sacred and throughout millennia has become profane.

In the last few years we have witnessed many great changes. The old systems of power based on patriarchal predominance are falling apart, many natural catastrophes are happening. Maybe all this is nothing but re-establishing the balance which has been lost. Maybe life is meant to be beautiful and we are supposed to walk in beauty, as Navaho traditional song says. Maybe the earth is truly alive and the spiritual world that our prehistoric ancestors took very seriously truly exists and is calling us to remember, to decide which language we want to speak. Do we still choose the language of separation, or do we want to learn a new one, which is in fact very ancient, the language of the circle, the language of unity and dignity?

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