

ON RITUALS OF HURTING AND KILLING PEOPLE

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SOME AGGRESSIVE RITUAL PRACTICES OCCURRING IN CULTURES
AND CULT MOVIES

РИТУАЛИ СВЪРЗАНИ С НАРАНЯВАНЕ И УМЪРТВЯВАНЕ НА ХОРА

РАЗГЛЕЖДАНЕ ЗНАЧЕНИЕТО НА НЯКОИ АГРЕСИВНИ РИТУАЛНИ ПРАКТИКИ,
ПРОЯВЯВАЩИ СЕ В РАЗЛИЧНИ КУЛТУРИ И КУЛТОВИ ФИЛМИ

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Abstract

Rituals are an integrated and important part of common life in societies (even the most complex ones), in fact, they are an essential part of culture as mechanism of sharing information and meaning between its members by means of words, gestures, roles and performances. What makes them different and crucial are first of all their extraordinariness and the enduring imprint they leave on the community consciousness. We could encounter them in different kinds and formats, woven into the texture of life and cultures, as sacred practices, games, parts of narratives (mythological and/or pop-cultural). The following pages are dedicated not especially to the nature of ritual itself but more accurately to those rituals existing across cultures and familiar texts in which human aggression and deadly violence participate as a main element. Furthermore, emphasis is put on the acts of killing or maiming other men in which efficacy goes beyond the brutal murder. The efforts and the tools devoted to the topic are interdisciplinary and probably they would not be fruitful if we examined the ritual from one perspective only. The paper takes two samples from different cultures in which we could observe violent acts not as damaging the community but as sanctioned by. In addition, ritual representations in popular movies are analyzed such as *The Godfather*, *Pulp Fiction* and *The Passion of the Christ* as case studies. The latter are very useful examples uncovering the characteristics and structure of the initiation and/or transformational rituals which includes use of violence and even killing(s).

Key words: rituals, violence, movies, transformation, efficacy.

Note: This article is complete and exact translation from the original one published in Bulgarian, made by the author.

EVERYDAY ACTS AND RITUALS

This paper aims not to go deeper into the concepts of ritual and aggression as such, but rather to relate them together by clarifying the aggression in rituals as a cultural (and) symbolic construct. A second aim is to bring out the basis units of meaning and efficacy of some rituals by connecting existing violent acts, observed by anthropologists in different cultures around the world, with scenes and narrative schemas extracted from several so called “cult movies”. In what follows I discuss the claim that the aggressive behavior demonstrated from man to man displaying in ritual format, no matter if it is visible in a classic movie or in a small size tribe in Africa, has a common base. Sometimes its efficacy is committed to local religion and a particular meaningful relation with a “superior” agency but in most cases it is an unusual manner for man to communicate with a “superior” entity which is, in fact, the community. But may be frequently rituals create a communication circle which includes both deities and society because we could find the roots of ritual in the historical periods when the two have an unbreakable connection.

In a sense, exactly as everything could be a sign because it could stand for something else, almost every act from our everyday life, not only a religious one, could be ritualized and obtain a different meaning from the initial one. This forces us to postulate that most of the rituals are very special connotations of the quotidian acts and performances. There is a significant distinction between the two in semiotic and sociological point of view since the purpose and functions of given ritual are different from everyday routine, and socially and culturally crucial (Elchinova 2008: 46-47).

The next question that we should have always in mind is who the meaning (let us say *message*) of ritual addresses? And, is it possible for us to describe some repeating act(s) by an individual as a “ritual” in the widespread anthropological sense or we should treat as “ritual” only socially relevant performances (state ceremonies, weddings, Olympics)? In the former case we have the significance of the particular body movement(s) or utterance(s) which addresses its subject and in the latter we have a message aiming at the rest of the community. Thus we can distinguish between the “implosion” and “explosion” of the signification and the efficacy¹ in ritual. Actually, the efficacy of several sacred or non-sacred actions does not include “meaning” in the literal meaning of the word but the participation of the right group of community members (Staal 1979; Arno 2003).

¹ The team Sax, Quack and Weinhold (2010) questions the correlation between the notion of “ritual” and the notion of “efficacy” since they indicate several cases when rituals have no symbolicity, practical purpose or effectiveness.

Ritual is a point of interest for many directions in the humanities such as anthropology, sociology, theology since the late decades of 19th century. Naturally, the elements of ritual such as specific acts, behavior, speaking and its overall content and meaning completely fit well with the light of the semiotic study. There is no mistaking that the symbol creation and use during given ritual is the main reason almost every of the scholarly discipline mentioned to resort to the services of semiotics but because of the influence of the cultural context the symbolism itself is too narrow and semiotics can help with explaining structures, invariants and universal practices, linguistic analyses, and so on.

At the very outset, it would be very helpful if we consider Jeffrey Alexander's definition (2004: 527) which hits the bull's eye considering ritual as a socio-semiotic phenomenon and more precisely as a communication tool existing at the heart of culture. He generalizes the task and significance of ritual in this way:

Rituals are episodes of repeated and simplified cultural communication in which the direct partners to a social interaction, and those observing it, share a mutual belief in the descriptive and prescriptive validity of the communication's symbolic contents and accept the authenticity of one another's intentions. It is because of this shared understanding of intention and content, and the intrinsic validity of the interaction, that rituals have their effect and affect. Ritual effectiveness energizes the participants and attaches them to each other, increases their identification with the symbolic objects of communication, and intensifies the connection of the participants and the symbolic objects with the observing audience, the relevant "community" at large.

What is impressive in this passage and what we could underline are the words "communication", "interaction" and "connection". The author fully patronizes the assertion that rituals are part of a whole social communication system, create and distribute important symbols, they are means for sharing existential myths and in practice, nobody has a passive role during their implementation. Namely the rituals appear to be the keys that allow anthropologists to interpret the large questions as order (power), aesthetics (particular performance), identity (marking affiliations), and community in human society (Arno 2003: 809).

Some other attempts of formulating what is "ritual" come from the Canadian-born sociologist Erving Goffman, who sees it as a mechanism of mutual focused emotions and

attention, which produces momentary shared reality that generates solidarity and symbols of group membership (in Collins 2004: 7), and Émil Durkheim, who considers rituals as nodes of social structure serving for the group to create its symbols (ibid.: 26; Elchinova 2008: 47). Their colleague and ritual specialist Roy Rappaport avoids the religious and even human nuances and defines rituals as performances consisting almost “invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers” (1999: 24). With this formula he cast suspicion on its symbolic nature² as well and underlies the sensible features rather than functional ones (what it is *about* or *for*) (ibid.: 26).

AGRESSION AND RITUALS AMONG CULTURES

As to aggression and its place among the important human rituals, we could follow the descriptions collected by Erich Fromm in his study on the topic - *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973). The approach in it is a historical and anthropological and tries to draw some conclusions from social psychology related to acts of violence, hurting and even eating someone else from your own kind. As we could see in the violent rituals has nothing extraordinary and they accompany our cultures since the beginning and during the epochs most of them have been transformed from lethal to symbolic but their meaning still remains. For instance, about the blood shedding as a sacred activity Fromm specifies that in our deepest archaic levels “blood is a very peculiar substance (...) it has been equated with life and life-force, and is one of the three sacred substances [along with semen and milk – auth. note] that emanate from the body.” “Blood – he continues – transcends the difference between male and female. In the deepest layers of experience, one magically seizes upon the life-force itself by shedding blood” (ibid.: 268).

In his ethnological field work among the agricultural, illiterate people of Surma in Ethiopia, Jon Abbink (1999) analyzes one polysemantic ritual based on male aggression. It is called *sagine* and is a male stick-dueling; it has a rich gender, cultural, societal and even political significance despite of its quite painful effects on the contestants. The ritual is a form of domesticated violence organized two-three times a year, which has at least two goals - a social performance of young unmarried men before the girls (inward) and a demonstration of military strength before the potential outside enemies (outward), i.e. it is something like an advertisement, “15 minutes of glory” for the fighters mainly with sexual-

² Founding on the Ch. S. Pierce works, Rappaport argues that the sign systems of ritual may be different. For instance, so called “canonical” messages, which are not connected with things from the present time and space but with abstract ones, use *only* symbols, although they could use icons and rarely indices (1999: 54). In the case of “self-referential” messages we observe predominantly indexical signs (ibid.: 56).

reproductive purpose.³ For the insiders, however, the participation in *sagine* is a tool for collective identification as Surma (or Suri) against all non-Surma (mainly neighbors).

The duel opposes two youngsters from different local clans and village communities equipped with very long slender wooden poles with phallic-shaped tips (ibid.: 230-231). The boys are supervised by older married men, there are strict rules and a death of the contestant is prohibited and unacceptable. Usually the contestants wear armors but despite of it there are deaths and these tragedies unlock a mechanism of homicide compensation payment. The author of the study, however, demonstrates that there is no relation between the number of the victories in the dueling and the social prosperity and/or success among the ladies, which makes *sagine* highly violent but simply symbolic fight and the scars remain the only reward for the fighter.

Face scars are among elements typical for a ritual in 19th-century Greece studied by Thomas Gallant (2000). He rereads various literary sources as well as police records to describe what historians and ethnographers slightly consider as “an interpersonal violence” among the peasant population but, in reality, the violent event in question is a knife-dueling, a male honor refunding ritual. According to the author, the assertion that Greece is a paradigmatic example of an “honor culture” with higher rate of aggressive acts is disputable in spite of commentaries as this of the U.S. consul during the 1860s that in this country the knife is as quick “as the tongue” (ibid.: 360-361).

The ritual takes place in wine shop or tavern and has its own rules – the onlookers are not allowed to interfere and the fighter aim not to kill but to maim his opponent’s face. Usually for *causae belli* serve an affronts by sexual words, a theft accusation or a slurring the reputation of someone’s female relation (branding him as a cuckold) (ibid.: 363). At the end of dueling the victor seals his triumph humiliating the opponent, spitting on him or wiping the blood from the knife with neckerchief. As we see the most important point is the social message of the event. Honor losing is socially unacceptable for individual, like slap in the face, and then he must restore it in public (in man’s social space – wine shop), in front of the audience of other mature men. Maiming the opponent’s face is a repayment for his own “dishonored face” or in the reverse case –position protection.

³ In fact, every man of the Surma population in his twenties must participate at least few times (ibid.: 232).

HURTING AND KILLING PEOPLE RITUALS IN MOVIES

What follows is a selection of art works which consider one basic ritual repeating through the times and cultures because its significance has a great importance both in personal and social perspective. This is the ritual of initiation through which we gain access to different parts of society as an integral structure (age groups, professional and sub-cultural hierarchies and so on) and as constructed by various strictures. It is a process including one stage “before” and “after”, but as we will see, there is a stage “between”, without which the other two lose their meaning.

The first example is the first part of the trilogy *The Godfather*⁴, its plot has reverberated throughout audiences from different generations and countries. The fact that the movie is based on a novel makes it easy for analysis and it is clear as a narrative schema. But the question of interest to us is the ritual which the story itself represents. Even the title of the movie supposes that we are going to see how the mafia boss will be constructed as such but it does not explicitly designate who is the exact character. Although the figure of Don Vito Corleone (Marlon Brando) appears on the poster, actually in the story he *is* already a Godfather whereas the plot little by little leads us to the end and sifts out the new Don. The movie is not about the life and death of Don Vito, it is not a biographical sketch, but it depicts very typical and realistic ritual of initiation; it is about the youngest son of the Don - Michael Corleone (Al Pacino), who passes through several stages (transformation) of qualification (in terms of A. Greimasian trajectory and VI. Propp formal structure) *to become* head of his family. Obviously there is interweaving and analogy between the two figures – the old and the young capo, but Vito is not the central character in the story and it turns out that he just takes on the role of the helper in the narrative.

With regard to the above said, the most important moment in the story is the meeting between (harmless at that moment) Michael, and the drug-dealing mob capo Virgil Sollozzo, who is responsible for the attack against his father earlier. In the quiet family restaurant “Louis” they are supposed to negotiate the new rules of the underground business, “guarded” by the corrupt police chief – captain McCluskey. But in fact the place is previously known to the Corleone brothers and the encounter becomes a real ambush. In

⁴ A classical epic a movie (Paramount Pictures, 1972), based on the novel by Mario Puzo and directed by Francis Ford Coppola; starring Marlon Brando, Al Pacino, Robert Duvall. The plot represents the life of the organized crime in New York in the middle of the last century, and more precisely depicts the story of the father and sons in the Corleone family (source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Godfather <Accessed 12/10/2011>).

this situation the task of Michael is not to talk with but to eliminate the other two characters by revolver hidden in the men's room. As we are already loaded with information from the previous stages of the story, Michael is the "good" son, the one who stands aside from the family business, a WWII hero, a man who as if has connections with his father's organization only „by chance". Precisely before the killing in the restaurant we come across particular markers which aim to confirm the Michael's status in question – in a few minutes the policeman, who searches him for weapon, twice announces that young Corleone is "clean". But the external addressee - the audience - already knows that Michael has entered the stage of self-motivation, stimulated by the troubles in the family.

So, in this scene we have two levels of signification, two messages created and aimed at different participants simultaneously in and out of the text. The first message circulates inside the story and is threefold – 1. the Corleone family does not surrender (does not take the blackmail), 2. one of the most dangerous competitors is out of the emulation, and 3. there is new important figure emerged. The second message addresses the reader (the audience) of the narrative because it concerns the overall meaning of the story. Michael's killing of the enemy opens the door for the *liminality* as Scottish anthropologist Victor Turner defines the position between two cultural stages⁵ (1991). The author points out that the liminal persons or "threshold people" are "ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there... (...) As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. Thus, liminality is frequently linked to death, to being in a womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wildness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon." (ibid: 95).

Certainly the young Corleone becomes "invisible" in time and space by leaving United States and hiding in Sicily. Also, his stay in Vito's homeland is an important part of the ritual because he gets back to the roots of the family and assumes the role of the "neophyte" who waits to grow up and to become a mature man, in this case – a Don. In unison with Turner's description, Michael goes around the region wearing a light shirt (and looks like a local), unarmed, and silently and humbly stands in his passive position. He

⁵ Turner uses Arnold van Gennep's idea, from the beginning of the century that in rituals of transition/transformation (mainly connected with the age groups), which exist in all of the cultures, there is a state and respectively – period of time when the social roles and order are turned upside down in order to maintain or re-verify the existing order in community; sometimes it concerns only one individual but there are instances when the whole community participates (Turner 1991; also Elchinova 2008: 51); *limen* from Latin – "threshold".

lives a parallel life, different from the one he used to do; he is neither the previous peace-loving American citizen nor integrated part of the Italian mafia. The ritual continues after Michael's home-coming, but even there he does not leave the liminal stage for a little while. The true moment of change, of maturity, comes when Michael became godfather to his sister's (Connie) son while in the same day his hit men kill all betrayers and direct rivals threatening his business and family. The old Vito and the senior brother Sonny are buried and the battle becomes personal for Michael; ordering the killing is in fact his social baptism. This part of the trilogy ends by closing the door of the Michael's office where he meets his associates as a capo. Symbolically this final scene closes this exact chapter of the narrative and ends the ritual itself – he officially takes his father's place; for us in such a way the transformation of the character is completed by reaching the stage of attestation or “being”. In this process of self-transformation the acts of violence – killings take an immanent part, especially when we are talking about gangs (Collins 2008).

Further, we will pay attention on a more familiar narrative which is set on the same schema but in more concentrated form. *The Passion of the Christ*⁶ depicts the last day of Jesus life based on the stories from *the New Testament*, predominantly according to the Gospels of Mark, John and Luke. Its director Mel Gibson - deliberately or not – represents⁷ a period of a typical initiation process with corresponding “threshold” stage. It is build by two parts: from “Hossana” to “Crucify him!” so to speak, and the second one - from the Crucifixion to the Resurrection. The movie puts the stress somewhere in the middle illustrating many of the characteristics of the ritual as Victor Turner describes them when he considers the moments of status elevation (1991: 170-172). The person changing his/her position in society becomes the target of verbal offences, humiliation and often of physical injuries by the other member of the group (Fig.1). These activities are not different even for the situations when in some cultures leader (king, chieftain) is chosen. Turner himself refers to the Jesus case, even if it is not that clear as that St. Francis or Ghandi, comparing him with Buddha as a religious founder who switch status (ibid.: 196). Although, according to Matthew and Luke, the son of Joseph and Maria has to descend from the legendary King David, *the New Testament* and the Christian theosophy prefer to present him as “a man of the people” (ibid.). In that historical period the importance and status of the carpenter is relatively high but as we could see Jesus surrounds himself with a group which members

⁶ A drama movie by 20th Century Fox Company, 2004 (source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Passion_of_the_Christ <Accessed 21/09/2011>).

⁷ Critics found the means of expression and some non-Biblical materials very controversial.

come from the poorest strata, for instance fishermen. It is a significant part of the pre-history of Jesus path to spiritual raising, reflecting his religious message which is lacking political or social-economic claims. It would be very difficult for the symbolism and confidence in God's son to be sustained if he were born in the state center – the town of Jerusalem in rich and/or powerful family. His coming from “out” (Galilee) to “into” (the political capital) appears to be final stage in which Jesus declares his leading position and challenges the status quo.

In the movie, Jesus (Jim Caviezel) is physically tortured by the Roman soldiers who protect the political presence of the Empire and spiritually tortured by the Pharisees who feel their religious influence endangered. The crowd also humiliates and throws things at him which corresponds to the instances that Turner studies and points out as intentional violence against the future leader – the one suffering silently “down here” to be the king “up there”. Thus, we set apart two levels of efficacy of the status changing ritual – the first one is the social-political and the second is the spiritual one. These two directions are respectively signified by the two designation of the Christ – “(Judean) king” and “messiah (which means “anointed”, the Savior of the human kind)”. The division of the two is overt when we take into account the attempts of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate (Hristo Shopov) as a law representative to decline using his power over Jesus and to submit the case as a local problem that has no political dimensions. The religious authorities in Jerusalem, on the other hand, try to present the man from Nazareth to the Romans as a rebel and enemy of the state (worse than the criminal Barabbas). Their trump-card turns out to be the crowd and its discontent because killing Jesus by their own is impossible.

Fig.1⁸



⁸ All of the frames in this paper are snapshots from the movies mentioned; they are made by the author (D.T.) and serve only for the purpose of illustration.

Pilate's famous hands-washing just before the crucifixion sentence has a special place in current analysis (Fig.2). It is an intentional act of purification which has become a figure of speech; it is grounded on the properties of water to clean physically as well as symbolically. At this point we could reach a conclusion that one ritual is available during the other ritual implementation. However, the two are connected since without it, putting Jesus on the cross would be a political execution and the meaning of the narrative would continue in a quite different direction. Paradoxically, namely Pilate's power (hands) kills Jesus but the symbolical meaning of the hands-washing inverts the reasons of the latter's death. The Crucifixion is produced by the words of the Pharisees, but exactly this condition is the cornerstone which overturns the torture and death of Jesus in a path toward spiritual transformation and diminishes the political and human dimensions. Afterwards, he is left with nothing, wearing only a band – a typical liminal situation, and just before the Resurrection he is placed into a tomb which symbolizes a womb. Physical dead (in most cases only symbolical) is an infeasible part for the spiritual rebirth.

Fig.2



The third case which is worth noting here represents another stage of personal transformation but in not that open manner. It is the Quentin Tarantino's movie *Pulp Fiction*⁹ in which a character named Jules Winnfield (Samuel L. Jackson) - a Los Angeles mob hit man - takes the role of a preacher and uses a quotation from *the Holy Bible* just

⁹ An American crime movie (Miramax Films, 1994), written and directed by Quentin Tarantino, which blending several genres – action, drama, and black comedy; cast includes a large number of Hollywood stars and the director himself. The reel is an ironic mix of humor, bad language and violence, an overt parody of a cheap novel. The original story and the untraditional chronological sequence of the scenes make the critics to point the movie as a perfect example of postmodern film (source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pulp_Fiction <Accessed 12/12/2011>).

before killing someone.¹⁰ First and foremost, Tarantino shows himself as a script-writer and director who uses ritualization of everyday actions, it is very typical for his works and underlies his style as well as irony and swearing. Moreover, the meaningless (at first sight) close-ups of some characters' acts presented in almost every movie of his make them important and inseparable parts of the plot. And while this concerns a cutting, the preaching activities of Jules concern the co-experience of inner conflict of the character. The audience is involved in the ritual listening to the speech for the first time when the character prepares himself for killing a young man who had robbed his boss:

*Ezekiel 25:17¹¹: The path of the righteous man is beset on all sides by the inequities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men. Blessed is he who, in the name of charity and good will, shepherds the weak through the valley of darkness, for he is truly his brother's keeper and the finder of lost children. And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who attempt to poison and destroy my brothers. And you will know my name is The Lord when I lay my vengeance upon thee.*¹²

As we could see, it is not a simple passage but a complete liturgy. In fact, only the last part of it is a real reference to *the Old Testament*, since Ez. 25:17 comprises only the last two sentences, but the content itself is not the main subject here. The act in question is a ritual because it repeats with a special purpose and carries a spiritual intensity. Also, it does not lose its ritual characteristics because of the known fact that Jules is not a real clergyman, as John Austin would note (1962)¹³, but, quite conversely, exactly this is the reason on according of which the audience perceives the quasi-religious speech as a (part of) ritual. Unlike *the Godfather*, where we have the opportunity to follow the transformation of Michael Corleone and it is the message of the movie, in the case of *Pulp Fiction* we meet the hit man in the middle of an action and understand by his own explanation that what he does before killing is something that he has been doing regularly

¹⁰ The influence of the movie in question and precisely of the scenes analyzed is very strong. For example, among the large number of references in various film productions since 1994, just recently it was recreated in popular Bulgarian TV series *Under cover* with quite overt analogy.

¹¹ Source: http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Pulp_Fiction <Accessed 12/10/2011>.

¹² The quotation is compared with the digital issue of *The Holy Bible. Old Testament. Authorized King James Version* (1996), Albany, USA: AGES Software, p. 1758.

¹³ In this case the character does not fulfill at least one of the necessary conditions of the smooth *performative* (pp.14-15).

(i.e. we complete the ellipsis in retrospect). He speaks to unlock the transition ritual before the reader/spectator and then speaks again to close it. The ritual and its message are based on words and not on a particular performance.

If we draw a parallel between the well-known ascertainment by Anton Chekhov saying that if there is a gun available at the begging of the story, it will certainly fire later on, and, on the other hand, *the Holy Bible* reference made by Jules, we could see that the second scene when he repeats the speech is something that we should expect. It happens when the hit man quotes the passage before Ringo (Tim Roth), who is in the middle of robbing him (an ironic situation of role changing, but also typical for the liminal stages as mentioned above), then Jules does not shoot the other man as usually does but explains in details his insights about the meaning of the passage. In its first use, the quote serves as a spell for someone else's transformation, and in the second use, it serves as a self-transformational spell. In the former it sounds like a punishment, but in the latter – like absolution (for Ringo too). Between these two scenes a man with a big revolver suddenly appears and shoots at Jules and his “colleague” (John Travolta) but nothing happens, nobody gets hurt, and in this moment the character realizes that he is in the liminal position. The utterance of the quote is something out of everyday standards, something not typical for a gang member and killer, and, what is more, these two scenes lead the character from the state of “wish-to-change” to other ontological state. This is what elevates Jules's act to the ritual degree where killing is a key part of the process, since it is the reason for its opening. What brings out this ritual (repetition of some quasi-religious quotation in certain circumstances) from the personal sphere and puts it into social stage as a ritual of transformation (status changing) is sympathy and cooperation of the audience. Finally, if we give credits to the meaning of the passage itself, it is obvious that its content is filled with aggression which reflects the profession of the character, but the hesitation in his mind is which side of the violence he belongs to.

THRILLER AS A CATHARSIS

There is no lack of commentary on killing presented in various art genres. As a philologist and folklore specialist prof. Tomislav Diakov dedicates part of his latest monograph *Diachronic Relations in Culture* (2009) to the violence and execution in pop-culture in terms of ritual. He underlines that thriller consists of completely mythical, symbolic and figurative elements, “and probably has rather pragmatic functions in

society”¹⁴ (ibid.: 508). Moreover, according to the author, killings in those cases are pure rituals because they have a special purpose and it is demonstrated in front of the audience by the exactness, logic and orderliness of the killer, as if s/he makes it regularly and looks for it because his own transformation. Murders address the reader-spectator offering him/her to become acquainted with violence and death by peaceful manner¹⁵, and in the context of the whole narrative killing is not yet brutal homicide but a personal catharsis and social rebirth (ibid.: 518, 520)¹⁶. Diankov interprets it in this way: “Rituality exists in exactly those elements which “outgrow” the killing, exceed its “normality” (which itself is non-normality). Thus, the act and the result do not just destroy the humaneness but brightly demonstrates its non-human nature” (ibid.: 510).

Evidently the movie *Seven*¹⁷ perfectly illustrates the last inference. Its basic idea is to hyperbolize, to show the most extreme face of the murder, it is detail oriented, ties down the Christian ritual with its absolute opposition – a sacrifice of innocent human beings, bringing to light not only the antisocial comprehension and interpretation of the values of the most popular religion but also the antihuman nature of the seven deadly sins which are added later to the doctrine anyway. What affects the audience the most is the intelligence of the killer (Kevin Spacey) and his act’s strict succession; and all this put together is justified by religious arguments. The author of the executions fails in the *transition zone* as well, in the stage between life and dead, between bad (human evil) and good (deity), he has no identity and challenges the social and confessional order. The audience is informed in the middle of the plot that the killer has injured the tips of his fingers and that is why the police is unable to find any prints of his, and in the end it turns out that the killer has prepared carefully his own death in order to evade simultaneously justice and suicide commission which is forbidden by the Church. Without all those effects the reel would be just another crime fiction but instead, nowadays it is a standard of the style. The striking performance, the original screenplay, and the excellent actors’ acts do not dilute the cathartic effect which the reel has over the audience. Everything what prof. Diakov writes about is namely related with socio-communication function of a thriller, at which, due to the media and the

¹⁴ The translations in this paragraph are made by the author of the currant paper.

¹⁵ In a sense thrillers are substitution of the public executions in history.

¹⁶ It is something that Tarantino intentionally tries to avoid by means of irony and “levity” of the *Pulp Fiction* plot.

¹⁷ A classical thriller movie (New Line Cinema, 1995), directed by David Fincher, starring Brat Pitt, Morgan Freeman and Kevin Spacey; depicts crimes of an unknown serial killer who executes his victims by unusual cruelty and ingenuity in accordance with the seven deadly sins (source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_\(film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_(film)) <Accessed 12/10/2011>);

artifacts of the popular culture, is possible ritual and mass co-experience of given fears, and values sharing by means of disavowal of the worst in the human nature.

CONCLUSION

Generalization in the area of rituals is risky and it is not needed. In a sense, rituals are like myths - they try to explain and interpret the world, to bring man nearer the sacred, and to bring out the everyday life to another, higher level changing it and enriching its meaning. Sometimes they have explicit symbolicity and efficacy, sometimes they don't. Violence (irrespective if self-destructive or towards other man) is not exception but a part of rituals; it shifts from cannibalism to symbolic, battle-like scenes.

The above presented instances are different "languages" of a widespread ritual – the one of initiation - with overt emphasis upon liminal stage which usually is the most interesting and affluent part of it. The movies interpret this theme in a way which makes the ritual significant narrative with strong response among the audience depicting change in characters' spiritual modalities. Killings and violence are essential elements of the "language" and perform an *entrance* and *exit* of the threshold stage; they are unacceptable from the ethical point of view but basic for the efficacy.

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