

PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY CEREMONIALISM

Review of the volume

Dalla quotidianità alla cerimonia. Fondamenti sociologici e antropologici della cerimonialità by Mariselda Tessarolo, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2018

Adrian LESENCIUC

“Henri Coandă” Air Force Academy, Braşov, Romania

DOI: 10.19062/1842-9238.2018.16.1.14

Abstract: *The topic of the present analysis is Mariselda Tessarolo’s book Dalla quotidianità alla cerimonia. Fondamenti sociologici e antropologici della cerimonialità. This book deals with the fine intersection between the horizontal dimension of daily social life and the vertical dimension of ceremonialism, highlighting history traditions, values, and rituals. By analysing ceremonialism in daily life, Professor Mariselda Tessarolo brings additional sociological and anthropological insight to this very delicate research area which includes military ceremonialism.*

Keywords: *daily social life; ceremony; communication; military.*

1. MARISELDA TESSAROLO: OPERA OMNIA



FIG.1. Mariselda Tessarolo, *Dalla quotidianità alla cerimonia. Fondamenti sociologici e antropologici della cerimonialità*. Front cover.

Mariselda Tessarolo is a Senior Scholar of Padua University, a renowned professor teaching the Sociology of Cultural and Communicative Processes. Prior to this position, she has worked as a professor at the Faculty of Sociology in Trento, then at the Faculties of Political Science and Communication Science in Trieste. From the very beginning, her research interests focused on the symbolic construction of culture, on cultural aspects of communication, on interpersonal communication.

Then, from the same symbolic interactionist perspective, professor Tessarolo gained expertise on artistic communication and published *L'espressione musicale e le sue funzioni* [Musical expression and its functions] (1983, Giuffrè); *La poesia tra individuo e società* [Poetry between the individual and society] (2003, Unipress); *L'arte contemporanea e il suo pubblico* [Contemporary art and its public] (2009, FrancoAngeli).

In the area of communication studies, she published *Minoranze linguistiche e immagine della lingua* [Linguistic minorities and the image of the language] (1990, FrancoAngeli); *Divismo vecchio e nuovo* [Old and new stardom] (1998, Cleup); *Moda e comunicazione* [Fashion and communication] (2001/2004, Il poligrafo); *La comunicazione interpersonale* [Interpersonal communication] (2007/2012, Laterza). In addition to the prestigious Italian publishing houses, mentioned so far, here is a series of international publishing houses having included her works: Springer (“The last ‘touch’ turns into an user”, in A. Scarinzi, ed., *In Aesthetics and the Embodied Mind*, 2015) or Cambridge Scholar Publishing (“Seriality and globalization of fairy tale narratives in postmodern culture”, in E. Polyudova, ed., *Once Upon a Time in the Contemporary Word*, 2016). Professor Tessarolo founded the journal *Metis* in 1994 (Cleup, Padua), and is still the scientific director of this publication today; she is also included in the scientific board of many other publications, from Italy and abroad, including the prestigious *Interdisciplinary Journal of Family Studies* (Padua University Press) and the present scientific journal, *Review of the Air Force Academy*. She is also a member of numerous national and international associations (IAEA, ICP, AIS) and the director of the *Centro Interdipartimentale di Ricerca sulla Famiglia* [Interdepartmental Center of Family Research] (CIRF).

Dalla quotidianità alla cerimonia. Fondamenti sociologici e antropologici della cerimonialità is the latest work of the highly-regarded professor of the sociology of communication. The study basically focuses on the institutional formality required to express identity: “L’argomento trattato riguarda la cerimonialità che verrà analizzata partendo dalla vita quotidiana [...] e la formalità istituzionale socialmente condivisa” (Tessarolo, 2018:7).

2. CEREMONIES IN EVERYDAY SOCIAL LIFE

2.1 The structure of the study. Professor Mariselda Tessarolo’s book is a balanced study, articulated by three major pillars (three chapters dealing with ceremonial activity as a social need, the processes of social differentiation in ceremonial activities and the evolution of ceremonialism, respectively): ‘Il cerimoniale come necessità sociale’; ‘I processi di differenziazione sociale e il cerimoniale’ and ‘Il cerimoniale in corso’. Starting from the individual and opening the discussion toward society, the particular actor of social acts (who exhibits his or her own life organized in clusters separated by interstices in which the expression of interpersonal relationships is realized), as a ‘collective subject’ (*soggetto collettivo*), is the actual depositary of cultural values, and sees his or her daily interaction with society as a fertile ground for social innovation. In a synchronic analysis, social life (i.e., the entire range of everyday activities) is therefore perceived as a dimension of existence that conveys particular ways or styles of thought and action. Everyday life involves routine facts and contributes to the expression of personality and personal identity, thus encompassing Ervin Goffman’s theory on the staging of daily life). Inserted into everyday life, ceremonies are considered to be short-term social hypostases, with a solid symbolic ground, and are thought to express a person’s own identity based on its historical depth.

Starting from these two levels– the relationships between the individual and society in a (synchronic) due to the temporal section of everyday facts, and the dimension of ceremonials, spotlighting the behavioural codes and ritual forms which express identity through continuity (diachronic analysis) – Mariselda Tessarolo proposes a complex and up-to-date approach. Her work is all the more important as ceremonial forms are constantly eroded in postmodern societies in which systems of values in general tend to progressively weaken.

The Italian scholar's book highlights the individual statuses in society and the roles implied in an updated understanding of the individual /vs./ society relationships in the light of contemporary ceremonialism. From a communicative perspective, the book deals with the issues related to maintaining the communication channels opened, which also recalls the classical phatic (or empathic) function of communication in Roman Jakobson's model. The subject of analysis is the ceremonial repertoire of community, including different forms of ceremony, good manners and courtesies, forms of recognition of a position or status, assigned or acquired, in a society where the inter-individual relationships are becoming more dynamic and more superficial than before.

2.2 Ceremonies as a social necessity. The analysis of ceremonies as a social necessity stems from a deep understanding of daily ceremonialism (in specialized or official language), which helps people provide an adequate image, and thus transmits an institutional message with a predominantly phatic function:

Nel cerimoniale tutto è 'adequato' e preparato per sottolineare ogni comportamento sia esso parola, movenza, gestualità o presenza 'corporale' che comprende abbigliamento, aspetto esteriore, fino alla presentazione dei partecipanti secondo l'ordine e il grado (Tessarolo, 2018:14).

Under the analytical magnifying glass, taking into account one of the fundamental dimensions of the organizational or national culture in Geert Hofstede's model, individualism vs. collectivism, the necessity of everyday ceremonialism brings the institutions to the forefront. They protect the society from unpredictability, and stop the acute manifestations of deepened individualism: „per 'frenare' l'individualità e per 'proteggere' all'interno della comunità". Institutions become the apparatus able to develop a society and serve public interest. Ceremonialism concerns institutions, and institutions are legitimized by ceremonies, through which they receive legal validity; in addition, the modern state itself (understood from an institutional point of view) is based on legal-rational legitimacy (Poggi, 2004).

Rituals are frequent, regular, prescriptive and traditional forms of public behavior that are meant to draw attention to values or beliefs by symbolizing. Rituals (both public and religious) bring the past to the present and, through their cyclic character, configure the calendar of a society's everyday life. This calendar has an important symbolic dimension, and so does the whole ritual: „Il rituale ha come finalità intrinseca la ricostruzione di un ordine simbolico sempre in divenire" (Tessarolo, 2018:30). Rites have an extraordinary emotional force, manifested at the scale of an entire community. They are useful for both institutions and organizations through their power of legitimating, of establishing a symbolic order. Together, rituals and rites compete for the formation or integration of the cultural models.

Through the perpetuation of the forms of ceremonial communication, a certain tradition is highlighted and valued. Tradition is a structural element in any society not because it brings multiple, cyclical replications of a perspective from the past, but because it provides continuity:

La tradizione è importante per capire la necessità del cerimoniale: trasmettere qualcosa a qualcuno ha importanza in sé e non perché è una replica del passato (Tessarolo, 2018:39).

Under these conditions, in fluid times, characterized by an accelerated (postmodern) dynamics, the ceremony itself evolves with the flow, serving social groups, and the social life as a whole, but also the nation:

La cerimonia in quanto momento ufficiale dovrebbe essere la parte più rappresentativa non solo della vita sociale di un gruppo, ma di quella di un'intera nazione (Tessarolo, 2018:41).

In the chapter dedicated to the processes of social differentiation in what concerns/through their ceremonies, Mariselda Tessarolo distinctly analyzes the historical roots of behavioural codes, the relationship between common sense and routine, the ability to perpetuate a society's cultural heritage through language, but also the forms of status translatable through communicative actions characterized by the prevalence of the phatic function. The nonverbal dimension of those aspects is distinctly analysed: visual contact, greetings, clothing and other elements related to a person's exterior countenance, olfactory aspects etc.

3. CURRENT CEREMONIALISM. CEREMONIAL FORMS IN MILITARY ACTIVITY

The typical daily ceremony does not greatly differ from its previous forms, as established by institutions in their role of 'generalized interlocutors', meant to control individual behaviour for the benefit of individuals themselves (this time, considered as citizens):

Le istituzioni sono 'interlocutori generalizzati, un vero e proprio meccanismo di controllo dei comportamenti individuale: l'individuo si comporta come gli altri pensano mettendo in atto quelle aspettative ha introiettato nella sua vita sociale. Sotto questo profilo la cerimonia non si differenzia di molto dalla quotidianità. [...].

Si può affermare che gran parte delle cerimonie sono realizzate favore dei cittadini (Tessarolo, 2018:85).

The ceremony aims at taking into account the possibility of perfect action, for the distinct emphasizing of each symbolic element that has a distinct content and for the legitimation of social connections at a different level than that of daily routine activities. Bringing along nearly five thousand years old cultural tradition, the ceremony as a set of written rules regulating action has been used for the same purposes. The rules of ceremonials contribute to the creation of a common language or code of behaviour. Under the terms of denouncing the great narratives, postmodernity sees contemporary ceremonies in a different light (Tessarolo, 2018:91). However, contemporary rituals do not produce a new sense of time – the flow of time is just a constant and a norm that does not correspond to the restraints proposed by postmodernity as it reinterprets the history.

Under these circumstances, the protocol is self-established as a rule governing particular forms of prefigured action. Not everything is written in the ceremony. That is why the ceremony is based on the implementation of the protocol rules – and this aspect is clearly and meticulously analysed by professor Tessarolo. From the diplomatic protocol to the protocol which functions as a constitutive element of some institutions that benefit from their own ceremonies (and adjacent rules, symbols, gestures, forms, rituals etc.) such as the military or the church, it evolves into its double quality: diplomatic and extended. The last one refers to the general rules of public relations: „il protocollo è l'insieme delle consuetudini, degli usi e delle norme che hanno disciplinato e che disciplinano tuttora la vita di relazione pubblica” (Tessarolo, 2018:93).

Moreover, the distinction between ceremony and protocol is eloquently highlighted:

Il protocollo è l'applicazione del cerimoniale: si può fare un parallelo tra ciò che è la legge (cerimoniale) e i suoi decreti applicativi (protocollo) (Tessarolo, 2018:93-94).

With regard to the ceremonial dimension of military institutions, the elements of protocol are prescribed. The normalization of this protocol (explained by an indirect reference to the Romanian military regulations) regarding the non-verbal communication is important and consistent:

Nei vari regolamenti scritti o in parte consuetudinari, tutto ciò che riguarda il comportamento non verbale è descritto comunque in forma verbale e si evidenzia nell'insieme del contesto. Il comportamento non verbale è un comportamento prescritto e complementare alla comunicazione verbale in modo di disciplinare per esempio: l'allineamento di base dei soldati, gli ordini di „attenti!” o „riposo!”, „fianco destr!”, tipi di corsa ecc.). In pratica gli ordini comprendono la posizione del corpo, delle gambe, della testa e anche degli occhi (Lesenciuc, Saghin, 2015) (Tessarolo, 2018:94).

The organization of ceremonies, including military ceremonies, implies a deep understanding of the rules of ceremonialism, but also of those rules which relate to the sense of belonging to a certain community. Linguistic and relational skills, organizational and communicative competencies are also mandatory requirements for a good organization of the ceremony.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The Italian scholar Mariselda Tessarolo's book *Dalla quotidianità alla cerimonia. Fondamenti sociologici e antropologici della cerimonialità* is a reference work in the apparently more and more restricted research area studying ceremonialism in the contemporary world. Spotlighting the society instead of individualism (that erodes interpersonal connections), ceremonialism reorganizes and fortifies the communicative functions of society and institutions. By debating the two dimensions: the horizontal of daily life, and the vertical of ceremonialism, that explores the history in order to bring practices, traditions, or values belonging to a certain society closer to the present, Mariselda Tessarolo proposes a complex analysis of an area that did not receive sufficient attention from sociological or anthropological perspectives before. Through this analysis, the panoply of representative works approaching communication from the perspective of symbolic interactions is diversified. Moreover, a distinct area or sector of activity, rather dealt with by means of applicative prescriptions, is now analysed with scientific tools, and within the limits of epistemological neutrality.

REFERENCES

- [1] Lesenciuc, A. & Saghin, C. (2015). General Military Regulations – Nonverbal Communication Handbooks? The Prescriptive Nonverbal Profile of Romanian Soldiers. *Redefining Community in Intercultural Context*. Vol.4, no.1. 65-86;
- [2] Poggi, G. (2004). *Weber*. Bologna: Il Mulino;
- [3] Tessarolo, Mariselda. (2018). *Dalla quotidianità alla cerimonia. Fondamenti sociologici e antropologici della cerimonialità*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.