Cătălin CONSTANTINESCU

Iassy University
E-mail: catalin.m.constantinescu@gmail.com

POSTMODERN READINGS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPACE AND IDENTITY

Abstract: Our study investigates the possible ways of discussing the functions of the identity in fictional work. As point of departure we have chosen the novel *Jacob se hotărăşte să iubească* (*Jacob beschließt zu lieben*, C.H. Beck, 2011) by Cătălin Dorian Florescu. Identity is multilayered, having being formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems, as Stuart Hall (1992, 1997) stressed out. The approach is heavily influenced by postcolonial and postmodern sociological theories of identity, that are referring to identity in the general framework of terms as society, power, self and imagined communities. Identity and space are intertwined, hence they are complex phenomena, that can more adequately be examined from the vantage point of postmodernism.

Keywords: *space*, *identity*, *literary representation*, *power*, *negotiation*, *social dimension*

At first reading, Cătălin Dorian Florescu's novel suggests a huge potential to be turned into a movie, as narration employs consistent and original spatial developments. We could speak about productive spatiality by means of which the author – without giving in to flat landscape descriptions – creates an actual space in terms of visual, movie-wise possibilities.

In Florescu's novel, the double meaning of space stands out: on the one hand, Banat defines the main character (Jacob Obertin), on the other hand Banat defines itself as multicultural space (hence our tendency to use in the present research definite elements and hypotheses formulated by postmodern and postcolonial theories of identity involving multiculturalism). Certainly, the reader might wonder if this is not a historical rewrite of the space known under the name

of Banat. Throughout the reading, we have found that the space matter is closely related to identity, with potential epistemological openings (involving contributions from the fields of anthropology, sociology and philosophy).

The belief that the reading of the novel from *reader-response criticism* perspectives is altogether possible is consolidated by accessing the website of Heimatortsgemeinschaft (HOG) Triebswetter; on their website - *Triebswetter Geschichtliches -*, we may read a special section dedicated to the novel *Jacob se hotărăşte să iubească.* This is proof, once again, that literary fiction, when addressing the identity matter, can lead to massive discharge of energy and significance. Florescu's novel stirred violent reactions from the local community in Triebswetter, immigrants in Germany, who projected themselves in the reading of the fictional space to the point of questioning the author and his editor, criticizing as follows[1]:

> A Romanian describes Triebswetter as a village in Banat where he never lived and imputes external habits to the German residents. He describes them as dirty, smelly, drunk murderers, gypsy chasers, arsonists, hostage-takers and uses names of existing persons and their ancestors in negatively revamped stories from Triebswetter's family register with a powerfully eloquent, excellently formed writing masterstroke. He really made an effort to falsify our identity and history. Here, one finds out what the unsuspecting reader should know and everything the novel's promotion conceals with deliberate vehemence.
>
> This is not a history novel of Banat Swabians, this is not a family epic of the Triebswetter family Obertin, this is a criminalization of our ancestors and forefathers of Lorraine, this is a falsification of the Banat Swabians' identity, this is a lampoon against the Triebswetter people in particular and Banat Swabians in general.
>
> The actual name Triebswetter and all actually existing family names being adopted from Triebswetter's family register with their short-stories, negatively revamped, must not be a subject for a novel, that doesn't distinguish between reality and fiction.

---

[1] http://www.balzer-franz.de/hog-trw/Roman-English.htm.

> From my point of view, the fact that Jakob (with a "k", the German spelling) is the bad and evil one and Jacob (with "c", the Romanian spelling) is the nice and good one, reveals everything. The author plays with identities, he can change with one letter (see Thüringer Allgemeine).
>
> This is an insult to, a humiliation and a discrimination of the Romanian communist DICTATORSHIP'S VICTIMS!

The interpretation game could endlessly continue with multiple objections and identity interpretations ethnically assumed: the responses could continue on the part of the Romanian ethnics and so on. All these despite the fact that the author gave enough testimony regarding the stake of this novel.[2]

Certainly, it can be considered an actual and extreme example of interpretive community, as Stanley Fish formulated. He used the theoretic meaning of the collocation to indicate that the significance of a text is built without it, according to hypotheses and cultural options that refer to interpretation. Fish considered that the way a person acts is related to their belonging to interpretive communities – which extends a certain type of interpretation and conveys a particular meaning to interpretation. It is impossible to know whether an individual belongs to our community, because any act of communication we would involve in to understand if we belong to that community would be interpreted. All this happens because we are unaware of the limits of interpretation and therefore cannot evade the community we belong to. The

---

[2] According to Cătălin Dorian Florescu, *Jacob se hotărăşte să iubească* is a novel about the search for the right place, about fulfilling one's destiny and about finding love and happiness (interview by Virginia Costeschi for *bookmag.ro*, 2.11.2012). According to Florescu, the novel should be built around a tragic human story and "it should reflect the tragedy of the entire humankind (just like a seed contains the plant)," a tragic story told under the sign of realism and magic realism, as the novel announced itself with its first sentence: "*In any storm there hides a devil*". According to the author, it took him more than ten months to get all the information for the book. He started from a few original reports about Tomnatic and then about the colonists from Alsace and Lorraine. In fact, it is all about one person that survives out of thousands. ("There is always the one who, despite all obstacles, manages to make a life for themselves. In my novel, that one is Jacob. This is the great tragedy of human existence, enclosed in Jacob's small scale tragedy. He is the one who, with the help of love, manages to escape all dangers".)

aesthetics of reception and *reader-response criticism* laid emphasis on the reader as complementary part in the literary process.

The phenomena of identity and literary representation are closely related. In literature, representation denotes diverse moments and processes of the literary act: the production of the text, especially the vision upon and relation to reality, the connection to the reader, etc. The literary studies of the past decades nourish the hypothesis that literature is a means to know man (the human model), to emphasize its existential dimension and to analyze the literary text as hypothetical anthropologic document (Daniel-Henri Pageaux). According to Santa Cordoş, literature can be more and more decisively defined as a *representation of identity*, as an *identitarian representation*, keeping the dynamics between individual and communitarianism (Cordoş 2012).

In the universe created by Florescu, there are multiple factual aspects of space that can be met. The enumeration follows to the discursive chronology of the novel *Jacob se hotărăşte să iubească*:

1) The open space of the field;

2) The enclosed space of the stable;

3) The mediating space (the inn, the street) of meetings: Seppl's inn (note that all innkeepers throughout history were called Seppl);

4) The space where identity is outlined (Lorraine first, as nucleus of the Obertin genealogy, then Triebswetter).

Equally fruitful and open to comment stands the original assignment of profound meanings to space, beyond the concrete imagery: for Jacob, *the cemetery* (hiding place) is a palce of *redemption* and also *revelation* (loss of identity as son, in favour of the character Sarelo)[3]:

---

[3]„Mi-am adunat tot curajul de care eram în stare, am împins placa de pe mormînt şi am scos capul. Nu ningea şi se potolise şi vîntul. Cavourile şi pietrele de mormînt erau acoperite cu un strat alb, gros. Nu se mai vedea bine nici măcar gardul care despărţea cimitirul de cîmp. M-am întins, m-am scuturat şi am simţit cum mîinile şi picioarele amorţite mi se trezeau iar la viaţă. M-am strecurat spre poarta cimitirului pe cărările abia vizibile.
[...] M-am întors în ascunzătoarea mea şi eram convins că în curînd vor pleca şi ultimii ruşi şi că voi fi adus înapoi acasă. Am aţipit, cînd brusc, am auzit nişte glasuri care se apropiau de cimitir, dar nu mi-am dat seama în ce limbă vorbeau. Printr-o crăpătură am văzut lumina mai multor lămpi cu petrol, oamenii păreau să se sfătuiască între ei. Apoi au luat-o spre cavoul familiei Damas. Acum auzeam limpede şi limba care îmi era cunoscută de mai multe zile, de la Timişoara, de cînd ruşii căutaseră rachiu la noi.
Soarta vorbea ruseşte, dar cînd s-a oprit apoi în faţa cavoului, am auzit un glas cunoscut: «Ieşi, băiete. S-a terminat», mi-a cerut tata. Am împins placa la o parte, apoi lumina intensă a unei lămpi m-a făcut să-mi acopăr ochii cu braţul. Am simţit două mîini puternice care m-au tras afară, fără ca eu să măpot împotrivi.

" I gathered all the courage I could find in myself, pushed the tombstone open and looked out. It was not snowing and the wind had calmed down. The charnel houses and tombstones were covered with a white, thick layer of snow. I couldn't even see the fence that separated the cemetery from the field. I stretched myself, I shook and I could feel my numb hands and feet come back to life. I crept towards the gate following barely visible paths. [...] I went back into my hiding place and I was convinced that soon the last Russians would leave and I would be taken back home. I snoozed for a while, then suddenly I heard voices coming closer to the cemetery, but could not understand their language. Through a crack I saw the light of a few gaslamps, the people seemed to deliberate. Then they headed for the Damas family charnel house. At that point I could clearly hear the language I had become familiar with for a while, since Timişoara, since the Russians searched for liquor in our house.

Fate spoke Russian, but when it stopped in front of the charnel I could hear a familiar voice: «Come out, boy. It's over», my father said. I pushed the stone to one side, then the bright light of a lamp made me cover my eyes with my arm. I felt two strong hands pulling me out and I couldn't resist. The first figure I perceived was Sarelo's, the second was my father's. He said: «I'm sorry, boy. They thought you were Sarelo and wanted to take him away from me. The priest himself couldn't convince them. You, I can forsake, but not him.»." (My translation)

Similarly, we could say Timişoara's concert space is invested with two meanings: space of education (during Jacob's childhood) and hostile space at the age of maturity (as space of betrayal and condemnation)[4]:

Prima siluetă pe care am observat-o a fost aceea a lui Sarelo, a doua a tatei, care a zis: «Îmi pare rău, băiete. Au crezut că eşti Sarelo şi au vrut să mi-l ia. Nici preotul n-a putut să-i convingă. La tine pot să renunţ, dar la el nu»." (Florescu 2014: 186)

[4] „La urma urmei, eram un evadat, care sigur nu avea voie să umble liber pe străzi. Oraşul acela care mă primise în copilărie, care fusese bun cu mine, în care rîul nu mă dorise – oraşul acela devenise acum sumbru şi ameninţător, ca un răufăcător care voia să mă înghesuie pe o stradă întunecată şi să-mi smulgă inima din piept. Deja îmi părea rău că mă întorsesem la Timişoara. Mă simţeam iarăşi trădat, lăsat în voia sorţii, dar de data asta nu din cauza unei întinderi insuportabil de pustii, ci din pricina strîmtorii la fel de insuportabile, din cauza multelor trupuri care mi se puneau în cale, răuvoitoare şi înveninate.

În spatele fiecărui chip bănuiam un denunţător, deşi ceilalţi se temeau, probabil, ca şi mine. Fiecare era pentru celălalt un posibil denunţător. Cînd mă simţeam neobservat, mă uitam la

"After all, I was a fugitive, I clearly couldn't wander the streets freely. The city that had welcomed me in my childhood, had been good to me, with the river that never wanted me, that city was now somber and menacing, like a criminal who would jostle me to a darker street and take my heart out of my chest. I already regretted I hadn't gone back to Timişoara. I felt betrayed once again, left to my fate, but this time not because of an unbearably desert vastness, but because an equally unbearable tightness, because of the numerous bodies that stood in my way, malicious and poisonous.

Behind any face I suspected a denouncer, although they were probably as afraid as I was. Everyone was a possible informer in the eyes of someone else. Whenever I felt unseen, I would look at people and I was sure I couldn't trust any of them, I was sure they had undergone the deepest and the least visible reversal. This time it was an opportunistic hunger." (My translation)

The meaning Jacob sought for was associated to the house in Timişoara, but also to the one in Triebswetter. The search for a new meaning was defined by the confrontation with his family, with his father, at first view an „Oedipus' cliché" become classic, but pragmatic and visible in the context of Jacob Obertin's life story (having been deprived of the son status and inheritance), as the house in Triebswetter was actually the place that defined Jacob's (the assumed Jakob) father the most. As for individual identities, it must be said that the identities of Jakob, of his father and of his mother, Elsa Obertin (the surname he takes after marriage) are *settled* from the beginning of the novel. The collective history contained in this novel can be better understood in the context of the foundation of the Triebswetter community by the settlers coming from Lorraine[5]:

"The rain stopped for a while, as if the master's words had to be heard by everybody as clearly as possible. In his shabby clothes, Frederick felt awkward

---

oameni şi eram sigur că n-aş fi putut avea încredere în nici unul, că în ei se petrecuse cea mai profundă, cea mai puţin vizibilă răsturnare. De data asta era o foame oportunistă." (Florescu 2014: 262-263)

[5] „Ploaia s-a oprit puţin, ca şi cum vorbele stăpînului trebuiau să fie auzite de toţi cît se poate de clar. În hainele lui sărăcăcioase, Frederick se simţea nelalocul lui lîngă domnii aceia, care fuseseră căraţi în spate pînă la platformă, ca să nu-şi murdărească cizmele.
«Frederick Obertin, vă numesc judecător al satului... » Baronul s-a întrerupt, apoi s-a uitat neajutorat într-o parte şi a întrebat în şoaptă: «Avem deja un nume pentru sat?». Toţi au ridicat din umeri, nici la asta nu se gîndise nimeni pînă atunci.
«Pe asemenea vreme tulbure, excelenţă, nu se poate numi decît Trübswetter», a şoptit la rîndul lui Frederick." (Florescu 2014: 220)

near those gentlemen, who had been back carried to the platform so they wouldn't get dirt on their boots.

«Frederick Obertin, I name you judge of the village... » The baron paused, looked helplessly to one side and whispered: «Do we have a name for the village yet?». Everybody raised their shoulders, this was yet another matter no one had thought of before.

«In such a troubled weather, Your-excellency, it could only be called Trübswetter», Frederick whispered back." (My translation)

The construction of identity is a social practice meant to convey the possibility of identification *with* or *in opposition with* other individuals' or collectivities' identity during the process of social interaction. The construction of identity is a continuous process that takes the form of action and reaction in a social context. To examine the expression of identity in a certain process of interaction can contribute to the understanding of motivations for expressing that identity and thus it can explain interaction and the processes through which individuals and collectivities chose to settle their identity at one point in history. Also, the construction of identity implies debate on the topic of community and belonging.

Identity can be multiple, fractured or mixed in the context of reformulations brought by psychoanalysis, structuralism, post-structuralism or feminist criticism. Some interpretations state that the interest in identity and the politics of identity can be considered a consequence of the relation between marginalization (associated to the politics of resilience) and affirmative construction of identity (associated with the politics of difference).

Literature is a typical case of "convention," if we were to borrow terminology from postcolonial studies of anthropology: Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1997, 2001) talk about "convenient fiction," that is, a type of fiction everybody has agreed upon and that became a convention itself. The agreed-upon fiction that sets culture in specific spaces occupied by certain peoples is a type of fiction that does not apply to the present-day world and probably never has.

The two authors (Gupta, Ferguson 2001: 33-51) challenge the classic anthropological hypothesis according to which cultural identity is coherent with space or place. The term "culture" is multidimensional, progressive, and disputable rather than essentialist – culture would never be given, but always negotiated. Foucault's discourse on the relation between knowledge and power shouldn't go ignored in the debate on identity. When they drew up the cultural maps with the purpose of compressing and organizing the world, anthropologists described cultures as being essentialist. According to Gupta and Ferguson, the world is made up of "hierarchically interconnected" and not inherently fragmented spaces. Instead of assuming that each space has an autonomous identity directly connected to a community, Gupta and Ferguson look into hierarchical power relations of interconnected spaces that create the fixed identities. From this perspective, it can be considered that the process that leads to the idea of fixed identity belongs to colonial history (Edward Said states the same in *Orientalism*).

In order to maintain the hierarchical relation between spaces, it is crucial to strengthen the importance of the idea of collective identity that is different from other communities – in a hierarchical order though. A collective identity is always based on its being different from others. In order to maintain the superiority of the colonizer's space, the identity of the colonized is constantly undermined to the point of turning weaker compared to the colonizer's. Similar to Edward Said's orientalism, Gupta and Ferguson explore the historic processes to construct difference by forcing the reconsideration of "convenient-fiction." According to Gupta and Ferguson, the relation between identity and space sheds (a different) light on the construction of the subject (the individual) and leads to the reflection of another correlated phenomenon: the resilience. The emotional structure that allows the significant relationship to the particular places established and experimented in a personal, specific manner implies the imperative designation of the "self" and "the other" (*ego* and *alter*), by means of identifying with larger collectivities. Gupta and Ferguson borrowed the term "resilience" from theorists such as Sherry Ortner (1995), Lila Abu-Lughod (1990), Martha Kaplan and John Kelly (1994), but the fundamental significance of the term belongs to Michel Foucault (*The Subject and Power*, 1983). A few clarifications become necessary:

1) The subject, in Foucault's vision, is possible and belongs to someone by means of control and addiction. The subject is linked to its own identity through conscience and self-knowledge.

2) Power means a complex strategic situation in a certain society. According to Foucault, power can only exist when integrated in a disparate field of possibilities and it is not necessarily the natural result of a consensus.

3) Resilience becomes relevant when related to "the strategies of power," and these strategies are mobile, multiple and changing.

Gupta and Ferguson regard resilience as an experience that constructs and reconstructs the identity of the subject. As form of experience, the effect of resilience on the identity of the subject can be transforming and can also lead to the reconfirmation or invigoration of the existing identities, ironically contributing to their dominion. Resilience, as part of the identity equation, can be met in Michel de Certeau's work (*L'Invention du Quotidien*, 1980; *The Practice of Everyday*, 1984), as Kevin Hetherington (1998) pointed out.

Going back to Foucault, identities can be understood only as relations of separation from others – seen as category entities. For the experience of resilience to produce change within the subject, it must be able to be connected to some forms of practice of collectivity. Here, representation plays and important part. The representation of resilience is conclusive in the process of legitimation that takes place in the context of identity authentication.

At the level of emotional structuring that we mentioned earlier, the most special characteristic of the "structure of feeling" (Raymond Williams) must be underlined in the context of the debate on identity: "the opportunity" (Schmitt, 1986), to which another dimension adds: identity and identification are tightly related to delicate matters, such as belonging and exclusion.

The social space and the affirmation of identity are deeply interdependent. The construction of identity seen as a process of identification is a process of cultural space awareness (Hetherington, 2011: 17). This process leads to the creation of symbolic spaces rather than the adoption of an existing one. Identity is

not acquired only by identifying with groups of individuals who share the same beliefs, but by use of apparent, expressive and integrated performative repertoires.

Earlier on we asserted that places, spaces are viewed from the angle of the structure of feeling. Within micro-societies, rituals involving transgressions can take place without menacing the order of those societies; the low level of social differentiation implies the fact that these transformations, acting as ritual processes, serve rather to reproduce the everyday life of those societies then to endanger them. Foucault (1986) calls such spaces "heterotopias." Their purpose is to provide a precise location where social structures are challenged by "egalitarian communities" that develop affective social forms with the purpose of restoring or multiplying structures of rules, norms, social identities. The space of identity, also space of resilience or change can produce alternative social orders.

The supposed isomorphism of space, place and culture contributes to the fiction of culture as an objective phenomenon associated with a determined space, creating problems when it comes to the cultures of a multicultural space. As we know, the term multiculturalism was produced with the desire to subordinate the plurality of cultures in a certain frame of national identity. And the term "sub-cultures" attempts to justify the preservation of different cultures in relation to the dominant culture in a common geographic space. Postcolonial studies (Gupta, Ferguson 2001: 35) sought to explain whether the phenomenon of colonization leads to the creation of a "new culture" both for the colonizers and the colonized and whether it might undermine the idea that nation and culture are isomorphic. The relation between space and culture is a central theme in postcolonial studies. Social change and cultural transformation are situated and analyzed in interconnected spaces. Inherently fragmented spaces assumed by the definition of anthropology as study of cultures (plural) should be taken into consideration under the aspect of natural separation, and not as being hierarchically interconnected. This is the reason why cultures and social mutations become an element of the phenomenon of differentiation through contact, not of cultural contact (Gupta, Ferguson 2001: 35). Basically, these two authors suggest shifting emphasis from the dialogic relation of geographically separated societies to exploring the processes of production of "cultural differences" in a world that brings together interconnected, interdependent, cultural, social, and economic spaces.

As can be noticed, the representation of space in social sciences is dependent and in close correlation to images of rupture and disjunction. As Gupta and Ferguson noticed, the discontinuity premise represents the real starting point in the theorization of the contact between cultures and societies. And today it is quite accepted the idea that the identity of a place occurs when it has a specific contribution in a system of hierarchically organized spaces and cultural construction, as a community.

According to Hetherington, identity is a phenomenon that can be absorbed by the debate on identification and organization, and, of course, spatialization. To a certain extent, it can mean identification to a certain place, a particular, special place either at local or national level. It can also mean a place, a space for the affirmation of identity. Hetherington integrated
Michel Maffesoli's (1996), Raymond Williams' (1965) and partially Carl Schmitt's (1986, 1988) theories, attesting that expressivity is of utmost importance when the process of expressive construction of identity and the politics of identity are taken into consideration (literature is a beneficial field for such constructions).

With regard to the identity theme, life story structures are viewed as less firm and certain, whereas the possibilities to write conventional narratives on family, work or space diminish (Hetherington 2011: 23). Literature (including fictional biographies) would not be possible outside the reality of the human beings inventing their own stories through subjectivity, apart from their identity. Hetherington explored the role that expressive forms of collective identity play in the development of individual identity. The purpose is to constitute an adequate environment for the study of identity, adopting the anthropologic approaches of identity construction, associated to symbolism and expression.
Fundamentally, identity is based on belonging, expression and expressing, public and practical assuming, identification and conscience.

In their introductory study ("Introduction: Framing and Reframing Land and Identity") to *Land and Identity* (2012), Christine Beberich, Neil Campbell, and Robert Hudson noticed that the idea of territory served for a long time as

foundation for the idea of nation and state, as expression of identity and populated land. The territory, the home, the identity come across as themes resuscitated and redefined by cultural studies and postcolonial criticism, under the influence of Henri Lefebvre, who asserted that "the production of space" owes to the fact that space has been populated and used by all the theories in the past, so now it may seem neuter, being still so ideological and political. Edward Soja confirms Lefebvre's idea (and he cites him), according to which space is literally filled with ideologies: "Space is not a scientific object removed from ideology and politics [...] Space has been shaped and molded from historical and natural elements, but this has been a political process. Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies". (Soja 1989: 80)

In reference to the negotiation and interpretation involved in the process of space identification, it has been affirmed (Beberich, Campbell, Hudson 2012: 35) that *landscape* – as describable territory in all narratives, be they fictional or not – is that complex, multiple territory of experiences that are going to be read, felt, imagined, used. Beberich, Campbell, and Hudson state that Henri Lefebvre and Homi K. Bhabha transformed the meaning of territoriality (through criticism of the idea of neutrality), justifying the land is contested and marked by ideological fights first and foremost, to the detriment of the meaning of political, poetic, and even physical territoriality.

In fact, Edward Soja emphasized that the term "spatial" (unlike adjectives such as "social," "political," "economic," and even "historical" – which suggest human activities) indicate rather a physical or geometric image, outside of the social context or social action, as part of the *environment*, of the social structure, instead of formative structure of society. To Soja, *spatiality* means "socially-produced space," which he favors over the imprecise alternation "human geography"/"social space". (Soja1989: 80)

What else can a human settlement like the Obertins' Triebswetter in *Jacob se hotărăşte să iubească* be? The given space is different from the "*socially-based spatiality,*" that is, the space of social production and organizing. The perfect example: *Florescu's Triebswetter constitutes "spatiality" and not simply "space"*. Space itself can have a primordial character, but the organization and significance of space is a product of social shift, transformation, and experience. (Soja 1989: 79-80)

In our view, the most pertinent analysis model is Stuart Hall's *(The Question of Cultural Identity*, 1992, second edition in 1997). He shows that cultural identity is both a phenomenon of becoming and a state of being. Identity is subject in a game played by history, culture, and power. In fact, for us to understand identity, Hall suggests the distinction among three types of identity (Hall 1992: 597):

1) subject of Enlightenment discourse,

2) sociological subject,

3) postmodern subject.

The Enlightenment subject of identity took into consideration the concept of individual, unique human being, fully centered, rational and conscientious. The essential center of the self was the identity of the person.

The sociological subject of identity confirms that the essence of the (human) subject is not autonomous anymore and that it is formed in relation to *the significant Other*, mediating values, significance, and symbols (that is, culture). This interactive definition belongs to George Herbert Mead or Charles Horton Cooley, labeled "symbolic interactionism," following the footsteps of Scottish moral philosophy (Ferguson, 1792; Smith, 1759) which advanced a theory of identity preoccupied by the nature of the self.

"Structural symbolic interactionism" comes from Sheldon Stryker (*Symbolic Interactionism: A Social Structural Version*, 1980) and designates a set of ideas on the nature of the individual and the relations between individual and society. Symbolic interactionism is essentially a construction of social reality: when the reality of a situation is defined, that situation becomes a significant reality.

The postmodern subject is represented as not having a fixed identity. Therefore we think it is very appropriate to include national identity in the larger frame of cultural identities. According to Hall, the national culture we are born within is one of the basic sources of cultural identity. (Hall 1997: 611)

National identity is not something one is born with, but a reality obviously formed and transformed in relation to *representation*. Nation is not just a political entity;

it is something that produces significance, that is, a system of cultural *representation*. The individuals are participants to the idea of nation as it is represented in its national culture. And a nation is a symbolic community. (Hall 1997: 612) National cultures are modern creations. By means of national education systems and standardization of one single vernacular language inside a nation, national cultures have become a key-factor of industrialization and a stimulus of modernity.

A national culture implies symbols and representations, being – primarily – a discourse, in other words, a way of constructing significances that influence and organize both our societies and our conception about communities. National culture constructs identities producing significances related to the nation we can identify to – an imagined community (Benedict Anderson), especially at the level of discourse. And the discourse of national culture is not as modern as it may seem. According to Hall, this discourse constructs identities ambiguously placed at the border between past and future. He cites Immanuel Wallerstein and emphasizes his observation: the nationalist ideologies of the modern world are ambiguous expressions of the desire to be universally assimilated and, simultaneously, to turn to the particular, reinventing differences. To conclude, national culture works as a source of cultural significance, as axis of identity and as system of representation. Hall adopts Ernest Renan's formula referring to the constitutive elements of national unity: *the memory* of the past, *the desire* to live together, the perpetuation of *heritage*. (Hall 1997: 616) We should preferably refer to the elements of a *discursive mechanism* and not to unified national cultures. As there are profound divisions and differences, they are unified by means of exercising different forms of cultural power.

The sociological theory of identity elaborated by Peter Burke and Jan E. Stets (2009) lays emphasis on correlated significance of identities and behaviours, inspired by William Powers and the idea of perceptual control. The concept of identity can be developed inside territories of symbolic interaction, but to Burke the control of perceptions is more important than the control of behaviour, which Powers considers dominant. For Burke and Stets, identities can be related to key-concepts of structural symbolic interaction.

Identity would represent a set of significances which define the individual when either of them plays an important part in society, belongs to a certain group

or assumes particular traits and characteristics which lead to their identification as unique human beings. (Burke, Stets 2009: 3) Human individuals have multiple identities because they play multiple parts, belong to several groups and assume multiple personal traits; the significances of these identities are shared by the members of society. The theory of identity aims to describe and to explain the specific significances of multiple identities that individuals claim, the way identities influence behaviour, thinking and emotional life, the way identities keep us connected to society. Sociologists are interested to understand the nature of social structures, of forms and their models, the way they develop and transform.

Social interaction appears between identities (or roles), not necessarily between persons. According to Burke and Stets, interaction also means the meeting point of two perspectives: agents and structure. To understand it, we need to keep in mind the two levels: individual and society. The examination of social action and especially interaction highlights two different realities: the use of symbols and the use of signs. Ever since Herbert Blumer (1962), it has been considered that individuals use symbols (words, language, and things designation) within symbolic interaction in order to eliminate the chaos in the world.
Symbols offer significances for the designated objects and categories. Also, they constitute the foundation of behaviour expectations for those involved in the process of social interaction. In their turn, these behaviours are symbolic and subject to convention. Inside social interaction, it is not behaviours themselves who prevail, but their significances. This is why Blumer referred to *symbolic interaction* while Stryker underlined where these interactions take place (in society) and the fact that they depend on structures: *symbolic social interaction.*

Identity can be either personal or social. The social one is based on the individual's being part in a group; the personal one is based on the consciousness of the individual who sees himself different, unique in relation to other individuals. Role identity is based on the individual's social structural position. In the theory of role identity, significance is derived partly from culture, partly from distinct interpretation of role by individuals.

Individual identity would be derived from undertaking the other's role in a situation, thus responding to their expectations; collective identity is derived from cognitive processes, such as group classification – when someone sees themselves as embodiment of the prototype inside the group –, and group evaluation – when someone evaluates positively the members of the group but negatively the people outside it. Collective identities cultivate conformity, associated to a group. (Burke, Stets 2009: 121-122)

Yet, the distinction between role identity and social identity is primarily analytic, because in reality role identities and social identities are often mixed. When social identity activates itself in a certain situation, we witness a process of depersonalization, through a shift of perspective: from unique individual to member of the group, from "I" to "we", so that personal identity and social identity represent exclusive and mutual bases of self-definition.

We think that in the analysis of identity at both literary and cultural level, the most applicable approach takes into consideration the postmodern concept of identity, as the postmodern subject of identity is one of fragmentation. In literature we come across contradictory, unpaired, multiple identities, as they are defined by Stuart Hall: „Identity becomes a 'moveable feast': formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround you." (Hall, 1992: 277)

To conclude, the perspective of postmodernism is the one bringing a more nuanced and articulate understanding of the complex phenomenon of identity construction.

References:

Berberich, Christine, Campbell, Neil, Hudson Robert (eds.) (2012). Land and Identity. Theory, Memory and Practice, Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi

Burke, Peter J., Stets, Jan E. (2009). Identity Theory, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Cordoş, Sanda (2012). *Lumi din cuvinte. Reprezentări şi identităţi în literatura română postbelică*, Bucureşti: Cartea Românească

Costeschi, Virginia (2012). „*Cătălin Dorian Florescu: 'Vreau să văd puhoiul acela de oameni care să meargă la un eveniment literar ca la un meci de fotbal: cu mare pasiune'"*, in: *bookmag*: http://bookmag.eu/catalin-dorian-florescu-interviu/, accesed on 08.01.2015.

Eichmann-Lautenegger, Beatrice (2011). „Rückkehr aus der Totenwelt", Rezension, in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*: http://www.nzz.ch/rueckkehr-aus-der-totenwelt-1.9749774, accessed on 09.01.2015

Florescu, Cătălin Dorian (2014). Jacob se hotărăşte să iubească, traducere de Mariana Bărbulescu, Iaşi: Polirom

Foucault, Michel (1983). *"The Subject and Power"*, in: H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 208-226

Hall, Stuart (1992). „The Question of Cultural Identity", in: Stuart Hall, David Held, Anthony McGrew, *Modernity and its Futures*, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 596-631

Hall, Stuart, Held, David, McGrew, Anthony (1992) (eds.), *Modernity and its Futures*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Hall, Stuart, Held, David, Hubert, Don, Thompson, Kenneth (eds.), (1995). *Modernity. An Introduction to Modern Societies*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers

Hetherington, Kevin (1998). *Expressions of Identity: Space, Performance, Politics*, London: Sage Publications

Heimatortsgemeinschaft (HOG) Triebswetter: http://www.balzer-franz.de/hog-trw/Roman-Salut.htm., accessed on 09.08.2015

Oyserman, Daphna, Elmore, Kristen, Smith, George (2012). „Self, Self-Concept and Identity", in: Mark R. Leary and June Price Tangney (eds.), *Handbook of Self and Identity*, New York: The Guildford Press: pp. 69-104

Soja, Edward W. (1989). *Postmodern Geographies. The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, New York, London: Verso

Gupta, Akhil, Ferguson, James (1997/2001) „Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the politcs of Difference", in: Akhil Gupta, James Ferguson (eds.), *Culture, Power, Place. Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, Duke University Press, pp. 33-51