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*Cultural identity as a hermeneutical problem*

**PHD THESIS**

**SUMMARY**

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### ***Keywords***

Dialectics, “anachronism”, existential ontology, hermeneutics, destruction, deconstruction, method-destruction, method-deconstruction, identity, the culture of selfness, intercultural, de-culture, cultural identity, existential character, Dasein, unity, sameness, speculativity, otherness, difference, diversification, game, dialogicity, belonging, in-betweenness, Bildung, experience, finiteness, openness, revelation, historicity, the principle of historically effected consciousness, temporal distance, periodicity, trace, context, batch, postmodernism, crisis-awareness, paradigm shift.

### ***Cultural identity as a hermeneutical problem***

#### **Abstract**

The thesis aims at presenting an interpretation of the problem of cultural identity by means of studying the two components of this conceptual combination. These concepts are primarily thematized as philosophical problems, the study being focused on *philosophical hermeneutics* and *deconstructivist* approaches. Thus the horizon of my research topic is located within the domain of philosophy due to the *hermeneutical* and *deconstructivist* „attitude”, however, its *interdisciplinary* character is also shown, as the problems of identity, culture and cultural identity belong to the interface of philosophical and scientific researches. Consequently, various theoretic works deal with this topic in the fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology, socio-psychology, culturology, communication theory, political sciences, etc. Besides these, the research topic is closely related to some philosophical theories characterized by the tendency of gradually becoming independent sciences, such as phenomenological sociology or philosophical anthropology.

When turning to the problematics of identity, culture and cultural identity, we can observe that these concepts and terms become the “object” of inquiry of the researches aiming at conceiving and developing them based on the evidence that in the field of social sciences

there is no systematized and unique theory of identity. Identity and culture as well as cultural identity are becoming more and more timely research areas, however, no generally accepted definition and terminology is available regarding the questions: what is identity, what is culture and what is cultural identity? This is partially due to the fact that these are relevant problems in several scientific domains, and these domains can provide different definitions of these concepts; additionally, these concepts get more and more destructed and deconstructed in Postmodernism, thus they become fragmented and differentiated.

Some authors (for example, Pataki) point out that the concept of identity had become trendy in the domain of social sciences – as a buzzword – sooner than it could have been subject to a systematic research. One of the consequences of this is that the use of the term *identity* as an operational concept, presupposedly covering meanings like that of *culture* and *cultural identity*, seems almost natural today. Despite the terminological ambiguities and uncertainties related to identity, culture and cultural identity, these concepts are presented as basic terms of social interpretational and communicational processes integrated in the discourse of socio-cultural, legal, political, ethical sciences and humanities. Thus, the question arises: at the interfaces of the different cultural self-definitions and their various interpretation patterns, amid the destruction and deconstruction of identity and cultural identity in the Modern and Postmodern ages, how should these concepts be used in the medium of postmodern re-structuring?

The present thesis distances itself from the traditional identity and culture concepts of humanities and from the detailed discussion of sociological, anthropological, culturological, phenomenological and sociological phenomenology approaches. The thesis focuses on the opposite stream of *difference-philosophy (the philosophy of difference)* marked by Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Derrida and Lyotard, as it concentrates on philosophical hermeneutics and deconstruction, with their correlations, and on the relation of destruction and deconstruction. The thesis problematizes the research topic based on the following approaches: „anachronism” (as an intent of redundantizing the metaphysical tradition that began with Nietzsche), Heidegger’s existential hermeneutics, Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics and Derrida’s deconstructive approaches. In his „anachronistic” works, Nietzsche focuses on deformation and on the affirmation of deformation, while Heidegger emphasizes the impossibility of the  $a = a$  sameness theorem of identity, his existential hermeneutics being comprehensible as the staggering of identity and oneness. The works of Heidegger and Gadamer introduce a new direction of philosophical attitude and

problematization. By means of their critical concepts, they point out the controversial nature of identity and the staggering of its oneness.

When dealing with the idea of cultural identity, one can relate the approach of hermeneutics and that of deconstruction in many respects. As hermeneutical deconstruction also lifts the dialectic unity in Hegelian terms through its concepts of game, in-betweenness, “inter” and other hermeneutical concepts, as the poles get replaced by the in-betweenness itself, a basic turn – from the poles towards the gaming field between them – takes place in hermeneutics. This lifts all categories and the categorial way of thinking, as it does not allow for previous solid concepts to be settled. All in all, deconstruction in fact carries forward the thoughts of the lack of origins and centre, the Dasein-critique, the passing of oppositions and the redundantization of unity and oneness presented by Derrida in his works. Both destruction and deconstruction include such existential and socio-cultural opening possibilities that instanciate essential perspective and attitude shifts regarding self-view, the view of otherness, interpersonal and intercultural communication. The mentioned approaches require certain terminological and conceptual redundantizations, destructions and deconstructions, specifically the redundantization of the ideas of unity and oneness of identity, culture and cultural identity. At the same time, this is also the critique of identificational conceptual thinking which is accompanied by the pretension of redundantizing a set of concepts (e.g. communication, understanding, authority, human–political rights, consensus, etc.).

Accordingly, the thesis does not aim at adding a new description, definition and term to the range of the existing terminology of social sciences concerning identity, culture and cultural identity. Thus the aim is *not the re-formulation* of the problem, but its destruction and deconstruction, respectively the weakening and redundantization of traditional perspectives. Only the destruction and deconstruction of the formulated questions can lead us to both theoretically and practically understand interpersonal, intercultural, interdisciplinary or any other type of communication, existing in a way of “unfinished understanding”. This, however, requires a whole new attitude and sensitivity, moreover, we could even state that it requires a whole new paradigm.

The problems discussed in the thesis are treated as follows: the question of cultural identity is raised based on the destruction and deconstruction of the two concepts referred to by this combination of expressions, i.e. that of identity and that of culture, adopting first logical, then ontological, hermeneutical and deconstructive perspectives. Aside from the first *introductory* chapter setting the basis of the discussion of problem, and the last chapter

presenting the *summary* and the *conclusions* of the discussion, the line of thought of the thesis is structured into four main units, which are presented by the second, third, fourth and fifth chapters.

The second chapter entitled *The philosophical dimensions of the identity-problem* begins with introducing the logical problems related to the question of identity (2.1. *The logical issues of identity*). The logical studies in the domain point out the inherent controversies of identity and sameness. In the logical approach, the problems of the *relativity* of identity-affirmations and relative identities emerge: identity as interchangeableness, the identity of content; at the same time, the question of *difference* in other respects (e.g. the difference in meaning) is also raised. Identity is primarily thematized as a *relation*, this being exactly the relation through which a relative identity assumed in some respect can be revealed. Moreover, it may be observed that the *undifferentiated* nature of logical existence, *the obscurity of the way of existence and the existential character* of identity and the *linguistic ambiguity* of the concept have a concealing property. The logical issues show us the essential problem related to the question of identity: the problem of the way of existence and the existential character of identity. Various logical approaches point out the problematical and controversial nature of identity, however, in terms of Derrida, identity is neither identity, nor Dasein, nor actuality, and nor is it assumable, consequently the creation of the “new logic of replacement” is still pending. Derrida radically transcends the ideas formulated by traditional identity systems by his intent of redundantizing the illusory Dasein-ideas of logic–metaphysics, by promoting the deconstruction of the logos and by the pretension of a new logic of replacement. Therefore nothing is barely a sign anymore, but rather *a trace, a trace of traces*. The logical inquiry of sameness and identity appeals to the inherent controversies of sameness, on the ambiguity of the copula, on the logical–metaphysical deconstruction of the logos promoted by Derrida and on the creation of the new logic of replacement.

Logic operates with the sign of equality, while ontological, hermeneutical and deconstructive approaches question, destruct and deconstruct identity which “holds” for things, beings, or for the relation of a thing or a being to itself. The logical problem of identity, way of existence, the question of logical existence extends to the ontological, hermeneutical and deconstructive researches on identity and the way of existence of selfness. The questions (which are related to the way of existence and the existential character) raised in the logical part of the thesis turns into the question of the *substantiality* of identity and selfness, as pre-ontological, hermeneutical and deconstructive appaches and conceptual

systems, respectively “batch” systems tend to differentiate, destruct and deconstruct more and more the sameness-centricity of the discussions concerning identity.

Subchapter 2.2. entitled *The substantiality of identity* focuses on the concept of belonging and the question of the existential character of selfness in the horizon of Hegelian dialectics, Heideggerian existential ontology and Gadamerian hermeneutics. The discussion presented in this subchapter starts from the dialectic attitude (oneness, sameness, speculativity, the unity of differentness and non-differentness), and extends towards pre-ontological (pre-ontology, pre-identity) and hermeneutical approaches and concepts (the structure of belonging, reflection), through which the abstract identity systems seem to be differentiated and destructed in regard to identity. The question becomes how we can or must formulate the question related to the existential character of identity and selfness. The concept of belonging in Hegelian dialectics, Heideggerian existential ontology and Gadamerian hermeneutics brings into focus the question related to the existential character of identity and selfness.

The following subchapter (2.3. *The possibilities of existence of selfness*) points out the inherently differentiated nature of selfness through the following Heideggerian concepts: the *distance between me and myself*, *prior structure*, *self-passing-ness*, *self-giving* and *self-earning*, *not-being-a-whole*, *not-yet-ness*, the *possibilities of existence and freedom of selfness*, *virtualness* and *non-virtualness*, the *ownmost potentiality-of-being*, *self-enforcement*, *situation* and *finiteness*, *self-surceasing*.

In the third chapter – *Identity as a hermeneutical experience* – we can observe the destruction and deconstruction of identity through hermeneutical, existential-ontological and deconstructive concepts and „batches”, through Nietzsche’s, Heidegger’s, Gadamer’s and Derrida’s works, concepts and „batches”. By all these, reference is being made to the methodological, perspectivic and problematizitional „turn”, more specifically to the destruction and deconstruction that has intensely appeared in hermeneutics and deconstruction. This outline focuses not only on certain concepts’ weakening, becoming impossible and becoming a „batch”, but also on the destruction and deconstruction of the questions related to the existential character of identity.

Subchapter 3.1. (*The concept of hermeneutical experience and the experience of identity*) concentrates on the hermeneutical method-destruction, then problematizes the specificity of the identity-experience from the perspective of the *dialectics*, *openness*, *finiteness* and *historicity* of the experience. The following subchapter, entitled *Approaching*



*identity and selfness from a game-perspective* reveals the philosophical and hermeneutical problematization of the *game*, and – in relation to analyzing the concepts of *the way of existence of the artwork, revelation, re-recognition* and *repetition* – the hermeneutical destruction of the way of existence, the existential character and specifically the way of existence of identity. This is followed by subchapter 3.3. (*The identity-problem between hermeneutics and deconstruction*) which begins with the method-deconstruction brought up by Derrida. Then the deconstructionist approach (diversification, game, the traces of traces) is revealed, which is radically different from the sameness-centered interpretations of identity, and which presents the deconstruction of identity and its way of existence, respectively the deconstruction of the problematization itself.

After the analysis of the question of identity, the thesis focuses on the concept of culture. Chapter 4, *Culture and its (de)construction*, starts from the traditional approaches to culture and follows up the destruction and deconstruction of culture. The subchapter entitled *Culture-concepts – culture-definitions* (4.1.) presents the basic scientific approaches, concepts and definitions of culture. These basic scientific approaches focus on *origins, the opposition of nature and culture, occupancy and ethnographic descriptions* when dealing with culture. References are made to the tendency of scientific approaches towards the direction of hermeneutics, then the discussion turns to culture and *historicity, the principle of historically effected consciousness vagy wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein, finiteness and temporal distance, game, dialogicity, historicity and periodicity*, and finally to the Nietzschean–Derridean critique of historicity. After all this, the thesis presents the directions of critical culture-research.

The following subchapter (4.2. *Hermeneutical perspectives*) discusses the destructive side of culture based on Gadamerian hermeneutics, through the problematics of *game, Bildung, formation, in-betweenness* and „*inter*“, which opens the way towards the deconstructive idea of culture, where culture appears as *de-culture*, as a batch, as a trace of traces and as diversification. Finally, in subchapter 4.3. (*Culture between destruction and deconstruction*) the hermeneutical destruction of culture gets thematized as „*inter*“, interculture, then culture is discussed from a deconstructive perspective as *de-culture*.

Chapter 5. discusses *The postmodern horizon(s) of cultural identity*. The introduction of the topic begins with the subchapter entitled *The legacy of modernity* (5.1), which brings into focus the relation of language, conversation and identity in the context of totalitarianism. Subchapter 5.2. (*Postmodern egression (experiments)*) and 5.3. (*Identity-crisis and paradigm*

*shift*) emphasizes the questionable nature of the definition, status, „existence” and „identity” of Postmodernism. Postmodernism functions here as the expansion of the disintegration of unity, sameness, identity and Dasein, where the fragmentation and diversification of identity, culture and that of the whole conceptual terminology is emphasized. After this, the discussion turns to the problem of crisis-awareness associated with Postmodernism. In relation to the restructuring brought by Postmodernism, different directions of quests for answers are introduced based on the arguments of Adorno, Habermas, Lyotard and Rorty. All this serves as a basis of getting from *the concept of cultural identity* to *the batch of de-cultural diversification*.

The destruction and deconstruction of the two conceptual factors of cultural identity lead to the separate and joint revealment of the irrelevance of the two conceptual factors and their combination. We cannot assign a specific, rigid meaning to identity, culture and, consequently, to cultural identity neither, and we cannot give them identity or origins. The conceptual language use arbitrarily completes this concept with Dasein, origins, oneness, sameness, fixed meaning, discourses, thus it „brings it to life”. The destruction and deconstruction of cultural identity becomes important instead of its re-formulation. Hermeneutically the „inter” reveals the destruction of the traditional belief in the existent, the destruction of the existence-centered system of ideas and the destruction of the way of existence. Deconstruction, on the other hand, means that we deal with and provide rights to *diversification*, to *non-finiteness*, to *procrastination* and to *the passing of oppositions*. We do not let the samenesses of „cultural identity” as the sameness of culture, as the sameness and oneness of identity be settled, neither separately, nor jointly; we do not endow it with an illusory centre, with Dasein or with a specific, rigid meaning. According to all this, the deconstruction of destruction (also interpreted as radicalization) is brought into focus, however, deconstruction did/can not achieve its aim, not only because it is aimless, but also because it is an „unfinished movement”, it cannot rest in one identity, it does not settle for one Dasein, it cannot be associated with a static meaning, it cannot be deduced to one origin, it does not have one centre, it is not a method, practice, operation or an established technique, it does not lead to a clear result or a so-called “truth”, but it always remains in an intermediate place between formation and „being finished”.

Following Derrida’s approach, the so-called „cultural identity” can be conceived exactly from the perspective of this diversification, in which culture is *invalid* and identity is *invalid*. Culture and cultural identities appear as *diversifications* and *traces of traces*. The unsettleable

Dasein, the universally and particularly conceptualized cultural and other type of originlessness, the lack of a centre, non-existent and non-present amongst identities and cultures, all in all, the being-in-the-game and the procrastination of all types of settlement creates a situation in which the assumed unity, homogeneity and sameness gets stretched out. This not only means that identity cannot be identity, or that culture is not (or not as a unity) culture, nor only that this cultural identity joint together in this conceptual scheme is diversified even from itself. Both cultural and national unity indicate the illusion of the modernist, where the unity of differences and diversities appear as conceivable. This assumed unity, sameness, homogenization, ideologically marked illusion bursts itself from the inside, similarly to Modernism. There is no unique collective experience, symmetric Dasein, homogeneous unity, nor is there a unity of multitude. This sameness cannot be set aright as Hegel thought.

All this leads not only to the questioning of cultural identity, but also to the impossibility and gradual disintegration of its standard interpretation. Both identity and culture are *diversifications, traces of traces*. The fact that we are in one context and that contexts themselves are multiplying reveals that „cultural identity” and its two conceptual components, the diversification, multiplication, unsettledness of contexts and their property of not-identifying-into-Dasein are always unfinished and lack Dasein, thus these are not concepts anymore but *batches*. Cultural identity with its two conceptual components is an assumed, ideologically constructed, modern conceptual word-combination. This way, *de-cultural („identity”) diversification* is more and more becoming an inter- and trans-de-cultural diversification, a trace of traces, a batch lacking origins, centre, Dasein, sameness and unity.

The thesis reveals that identity, culture as well as cultural identity – until now – seemed to be substantial things, things that are present, thus they have rarely been approached from the perspective of their inherent differentiatedness, their *diversification*, from the perspective of all factors that do not allow for the use of the expressions: unity, sameness, identity, culture, cultural identity. It becomes more and more obvious that these old-time concepts and, in this case, „batches” are diversifications, traces of traces, contexts of contexts, multiplications caused by diversifications and continuous diversifications. Neither identity, nor culture „exists” and, foremost, they are not „themselves”, they are never „ready”, their „origin” has become illusory and unreconstructable. After the redundantization of the two conceptual components of cultural identity, its deconstruction is obvious: it is not a linear process, *its elaboration is itself a context*.

Traditional conceptual schemes implicate the trap of the perspective of unity. The traditional definitions and problematizations of humanities and sciences are mostly formulated within this framework. The different critical endeavors that try to surpass this often fall into this trap of conceptual systems, as – in regard to their frameworks – they also operate within these conceptual and terminological schemes. „From here” one can only refer to the necessity of deconstructing these concepts and conceptual systems, one can only delineate it, but conceptual and terminological deconstruction are also processes, unachieved series of development in the critical attempts to break through. The concepts of identity, culture and cultural identity *circulate*. The concepts need to be deconstructed but, until then, it is inevitable for us to retain them as means of discussion, however we can delineate the limits of their use. Nevertheless, it is not possible to assign unconditional, rigid meanings or even truth values to them – we have to apply them within the limits of their feasibility, or in some cases give them up. Deconstruction does not eliminate these concepts – as it would not be possible – but it dismantles them. From this perspective, identity, culture and cultural identity are still available within the frameworks of the so-called „untenable” conceptual schemes, because our discourses would become impossible, unrealizable without them, given the fact that the authority of established conceptual systems still holds.

Even Derrida himself does not think that he got rid or we could have got rid of the language of metaphysics; deconstruction itself operates within the language of metaphysics, however, *it deconstructs it at the same time*. We may suggest the untenability of conceptual structures, but we cannot arbitrarily create a whole new language/terminology, thus the deconstruction of the conceptual language has to be brought into focus. Deconstruction reveals the traps and the untenability of concepts and conceptual systems with a pretension of surpassing origins, centre, unity, sameness, Dasein and oppositions. This way, deconstruction does not only have an effect on humanities, but it also aims at getting a politically active role. Through destruction and deconstruction, the dominant approaches and attitudes of research, the problems of morals, ethics, rights, democracy, communication, understanding, methods, systems, truth, objectivity get radically questioned, thus it increasingly seems like we are perceiving the destruction and deconstruction of a *paradigm*.

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