Towards a Pragma-Semiotics of Ritual(ized) Gesture and Performance[1]

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Abstract. This paper analyzes some ritual and performing phenomena from different cultures, by using a unifying pragma-semiotics approach, especially the speech acts theory. Claude Lévi-Strauss (1995) refers to the rites as a "paralanguage". In our opinion, his taxonomy of ritual *praxis* is reducible to the dichotomy *constative/performative* introduced by John L. Austin (1962), that he later reconsiders and transforms into the trichotomy *locutionary/illocutionary/perlocutionary*. In Austin's opinion, the speech acts theory is part of a theory of action. We aim to explain that this is confirmed not only in the very linguistic act of utterance, but also in the multimodal expression (movement, gesture, word, incantation, costumes, accessories) specific to some ritual(ized) social contexts, particularly ritual performances. Like verbal performative utterances, ritual(ized) gesture and movement may have real and immediate efficiency, which means that it may produce a real-world change, from the participant's viewpoint. Without a ritual context, the choreo-dramatic expression loses its pragmatic function – that of "modification" of the real (Lévi-Strauss, 1995). However, it manifests a different one, essentially "aesthetic". From our point of view, the illocutionary ritual act is thus replaced by a "fictional act", a category which was previously described by both John R. Searle (1982) and Gérard Genette (1991).
Keywords: Ritual; gesture; performance; pragmatics; semiotics.

[es] Hacia una pragma-semiótica del gesto y del acto ritual(izado)

Resumen. Este artículo analiza algunos rituales y fenómenos performativos de diferentes culturas usando un enfoque unificador pragma-semiótico, especialmente la teoría de los actos del habla. Claude Lévi-Strauss (1995) hace referencia a los ritos como un "paralenguaje". En nuestra opinión, su taxonomía de la praxis del ritual se puede reducir a la dicotomía *constatativo/performativo* presentado por John L. Austin (1962), que luego reconsidera y transforma en la tricotomía *locucionario/ ilocucionario/perlocucionario*. Según la opinión de Austin, la teoría de los acto del habla es parte de la teoría de la acción. Nuestro objetivo es explicar que esto se confirma no solo en el acto lingüístico de la expresión, sino también en la expresión multimodal (movimiento, gesto, palabra, hechizo, disfraces, accesorios) específica de algunos contextos sociales rituales o ritualizados, particularmente las performances rituales. Como expresiones verbales performativas, los gestos y movimientos rituales o ritualizados pueden tener una eficiencia real e inmediata, lo que significa que pueden producir un cambio en el mundo real, desde el punto de vista del participante. Sin un contexto ritual, la expresión coreodramática pierde su función pragmática –la de "modificación" de lo real (Lévi-Strauss, 1995). Sin embargo, manifiesta otra diferente, esencialmente "estética". Desde nuestro punto de vista, el acto ritual ilocucionario es así reemplazado por un "acto ficticio", una categoría que fue previamente descrita por John R. Searle (1982) y Gérard Genette (1991).
Palabras clave: Ritual; gesto; performance; pragmática; semiótica.

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1. Introduction. The Performative Value of Ritual(ized) Gesture and Movement

Regardless of the form they took in different cultures, the "political gesture", the "liturgical gesture" (Schmitt, 1998), the daily gesture committed in public or private space have an important performative value, which the ritual always activates. Therefore, we propose an approach to "body techniques" (Mauss, 1950) – through which corpor(e)ality is codified in cultural terms – from a pragma-semiotics perspective. Particularly, "speech acts come in a variety of types": by means of "acoustical blasts, I make a statement or ask a question, I give an order or I make a request", that is, I perform an illocutionary act which is the "minimal complete unit of human linguistic communication" (Searle, 1999). In our opinion, the same convergence between the physical level of kinetic articulation and the symbolic investment of bodily expression, including its illocutionary component, is manifested in the cultural codification of gesture and movement from all over the world, as exemplified below. Highly performative, the symbolic gesture is able to determine the reconfiguration of the social landscape, of the inter-human relations, or of the relation between the sacred and the profane, like in magical and religious rituals.

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1995) refers to the rites as a "paralanguage". In our opinion, his taxonomy of ritual *praxis* is reducible to the dichotomy *constative/performative* introduced by John L. Austin, that he later reconsiders and transforms into the trichotomy *locutionary/illocutionary/perlocutionary* (1962; 1970). Whereas the constative utterance merely describes a fact or state of affairs, the performative utterance not only says, but actually performs something (Austin, 1962). As understood by Lévi-Strauss, ritual practice seems to closely follow Austin's dichotomy: "simultaneously or alternatively, rites gives man the means to either change a practical situation or designate and describe it". Most often, functions "overlap" or recover "two complementary aspects of the same process" (Lévi-Strauss, 1995, p. 410). When the rite aims to "change" a practical aspect, the ritual expression – multi and intersemiotic (gestures, words, musical and visual rhythms, costumes and accessories, etc.) – is, in our opinion, essentially *performative*. But, if the ritual utterance only "describes" or "designates" a certain aspect, then it is *constative*. We believe that the third possibility mentioned by Lévi-Strauss (1995) – where functions "overlap" "two complementary aspects of the same process" – is comparable to another aspect highlighted by Austin: the dichotomy constative/performative, trenchantly established at the theoretical level, is not as firmly validated in practice, as long as all utterances are, in fact, performative (Austin, 1970; Récanati, 1970; Popa Blanariu, 2012; Popa Blanariu, 2013a).

In the logic of "wild thought" (*la pensée sauvage*), a "logic of the sensitive" (Lévi-Strauss, 1962; Lévi-Strauss, 1970), the myth refers to an essential nonfictional truth, despite its fabulous appearance (Eliade, 1978; Cassirer, 1972). The tabooisation of this truth underlies all the anthropological theory of the "living myth" – an account of actions committed by sacred beings. In the societies that produced them, myths are considered "true histories", as opposed to fictional "false histories" (Eliade, 1978). The opposition true *vs.* false is thus equivalent to real *vs.* fictional. Ojibwa Indians believe that myths are "beings endowed with consciousness able to think and act" (Lévi-Strauss, 1995). From our point of view, this means that myths – in their original form, inextricably linked to rites – involve both a cognitive dimension of *Weltanschauung* and a pragmatic one, of *praxis*. From the perspective of the practitioner, the storytelling or the ritual performance leads the narrator or actor and his audience in the middle of the mythical facts (Eliade, 1978; Cassirer, 1972). This is an eminently pragmatic effect of the mythical expression, of the order of "to do". Thus, the performative ability of the myth validate, as a particular case, the general theory of speech acts. In such circumstances, the mythical *logos* is a form of action. (We do not here refer to its late, functionally modified aspect which is the literary myth).

Not only the word but the entire ritual expression – movement, gesture, incantation, costumes and accessories – may be, in the logic of "wild thought", a way of influencing the world. The rites aim to achieve a certain effect concerning the human life. Ritual drama lies "in an act of presence towards the invisible" and imposes some constraints related to "our body, posture, pose, gestuality": dress requirements, raising hands or kneeling, a certain orientation and position in space. "The presence in front of the invisible" "essentially implies acts through which the supplicant expresses his desires, thoughts, needs, love and repentance in front of God or gods" (Chrétien, 1996, p. 37-75; Popa Blanariu, 2008, p. 322-323; Popa Blanariu, 2013b, p. 35-46).

The typology of illocutionary acts performed by ritual expression covers the entire taxonomic configuration proposed by Searle, following in the footsteps of Austin. In our opinion, a statement by Searle on the relation between illocutionary force (which belongs to a universal *langue*, thus transcending boundaries between particular languages) and illocutionary verbs (language-specific) could be generalized. Searle considers that illocutionary acts are part of *language* (*langue* in a Saussurian sense), they belong to a quasi-universal linguistic pattern. Illocutionary verbs are, however, always connected to a particular language: French, English, Spanish, etc. The differences between illocutionary verbs are a good guide, but never an infallible guide for establishing differences between illocutionary acts (Searle, 1972; Searle, 1982; Searle, 2000; Searle&Vanderveken, 1985; Vanderveken, 1990; Vanderveken, 2005). By developing a theory of relevance, based on the critique of the classical theory of speech acts, Sperber and Wilson (1986) also note the universal character of acts such as "to say that", "to tell somebody to", "to ask whether". By this they differ from "institutional" language acts that vary according to culture and language, moreover some acts do not even exist in certain cultures (see also Moeschler & Reboul, 1999; Alston, 2000; Tsohatzidis *et alii*, 1994). The generalization to which we referred is considering not only the *transidiomatic* nature of illocutionary categories, but rather their *transverbal* character. By this, we mean that different illocutionary values can

be achieved both by verbal and non-verbal utterances – particularly through kinetic ritual expression.

2. Performative Gesture: "practical" and "mythical"

The performance dimension of gestuality is an evidence: under the circumstances of the current interaction (Gofmann, 1974), in secular rituals – such as the ceremony of investiture in a social-political function or the customs of politeness, specific to different cultures – and in magico-religious practices (Gennep, 1996; Maisonneuve, 1988; Kertzer, 1989; Rivière, 1995; Rivière, 1998; Lardellier, 2003). The societies where writing is little or not at all spread, such as the European Middle Ages, increase the performative value of gesture and corporality, for the ratification of agreements, alliances, political-military relations of the vassal type, relations between secular and religious power, between the figures of authority and the common people, within the ecclesiastical hierarchy or the family etc. (Le Goff, 1986; Schmitt, 1998).

Performative gestuality involves the dissociation of two levels – "practical" and "mythical" (Greimas, 1975, p. 83) – of perceiving corpor(e)ality. At the "practical" level, tilting one's head is a simple kinetic articulation, a change in the position of the head towards the verticality of the body. At the "mythical" level, the same movement manifests an act of greeting, homage, respect, humility, etc. A double physical and symbolic valence also belongs to another ritual gesture, *de terra tollere*, encountered at several peoples: the ancient Romans, Italians, Scandinavians, Germans, Japanese, etc. It consists in raising the child by the father in recognition of and assumption of paternity (Eliade, 1992). Thus, the symbolic gesture, highly performative, is able to (re)configure the inter-human relations.

Similarly, the medieval European ritual of entry into the vassal relationship includes several kinesic sequences with great performative force, through which verbal expression is either strengthened or even replaced: *immixtio manuum*, *osculum*, *osculatio manuum* and the handing over of an object designating, through a metonymic symbolism, the feud given by the senior to the vassal (Le Goff, 1986). These symbolic gestures correspond to the stages of entry into vassalage: *hominium* (the homage in which the future vassal declares his intention to become the "senior man"), *fides* (the oath of faith), and, ultimately, the taking over of the feud. The latter marks the new connection created between the vassal and the senior, through mutual rights and duties: the faith and submission of one, the protection and authority of the other. The performance of an *immixtio manuum* establishes the relationship of dual dependence: "the vassal puts his hands together between those of the senior who covers them with his own". A similar function is that of the vassal *osculum*, "a mutual ritual kiss", "*ore ad os*" (Le Goff, 1986). The chronicle of Richer, a monk from Reims, reports another relevant situation for the great performative efficiency of medieval gestuality. During the meeting in Rome, in 981, between Emperor Otto II and Duke Hugo Capet, the future King of France, the bishop who accompanied the duke, prevented him from carrying the sword of the Emperor. The weapon had been forgotten on a chair, so the duke, out of courtesy, had to pick it up and return it to the possessor. In the medieval code, giving the sword to someone else is a gesture of losing sovereignty, of assuming a vassal role (Schmitt, 1998). But the future king of France could not compromise the future of his country through an

imprudent violation of customs and by disregarding the highly performative value of the symbolic gesture. To give the sword to the Emperor, to sit beside him, and other similar behaviors "are not just label issues", but actually "*make* people what they are" (Schmitt, 1998, p. 22), in a performative fashion *à la* Austin. The gesture is also able to "call God into the world", to "sacralize", to "prepare the place and the moment for theophany", to bless (Duțu, 1998, p. 12).

Moreover, in Bertolt Brecht's theatrical poetry, *gestus* calls for a whole social context, a generic humanity, through the very performative force of the actor's verbal and bodily expression. It captures "a certain way of social or professional behavior". *Gestus* is, at the same time, "action and character": as "action", it depicts an emblematic character for a certain "social *praxis*"; in terms of character, it returns "an ensemble of features specific to an individual" (Pavis, 2012, p. 169). Therefore, the "body techniques" (Mauss, 1950) – the cultural codification of corpor(e)ality – could be the object of the pragma-semiotics approach.

3. Phenomenology of the Sacred: A Corpus of Ritual Kinetic Expressions

The magical-religious practice participates in a stabilization or reconstruction of reality. It contributes to settling an agreement between reality and a social project. Even when holding an aesthetic valence, ritual kinetics still evades the imperative of gratuitousness, and assumes a well-defined pragmatic function. Thus, many ritual themes reflect human major anxieties and concerns: to obtain food, placate the ghosts, gods, forces of nature, to have abundance and success in fighting or hunting, to heal the body or the soul, to celebrate crucial moments of life, in some rites of passage (Eliade, 1964). This enables encoded correlations between the kinetic expression and its function. Thus, apotropaic gestures protect against negative influences (Bourcier, 1994; Delavaud-Roux, 1993; Delavaud-Roux, 1995; Popa Blanariu, 2013b). Some choreographic figures have a *porte-bonheur* function, such as the dance performed with the members in "symmetrical angular opposition" which seems to be a sign addressed to gods to get their attention (Bourcier, 1994, p. 12). The meaning of leaps in the warrior dance of the Kouretes, in a Cretan archaic ritual, is revealed by an inscription discovered at Paleokastro, among the ruins of a temple: "(Leap for us), to fill our pitchers,/ Leap for the beautiful wool of our sheep!/ (And on the furrow) for corn to grow high, leap/ (...) and for our cities and our sailing ships, leap./ Also, leap for the new citizens and for Themis" (Delavaud-Roux, 1993, p. 51).The god is summoned to epiphanically join the ritual dancers, their movement is an invocation of the divinity and its beneficial effects on the community.

A function of invoking divinity is also performed by the "limping dance", called *epoklazontes* in the *Septuagint, oklasma* by the Greeks and *Pisseah* by the Jews (Bourcier, 1994, p. 21-22). This is performed with semi-kneeling, changing each time the support leg by a leap which leaves the dancer kneeling. It was widespread in the ancient oriental cultures of the Mediterranean (Bourcier, 1994). Particularly, this is the dance that Baal's prophets perform in vain, challenged by the prophet Elijah to summon their god to light up their sacrificial pyre (*Kings III*, 18; Bourcier, 1994). This episode of the *Old Testament* parallels two scenarios of a special kind of communication acts having as protagonists divinity and its worshipers: on the one hand, Elijah and his usurped God, whom he tries to restore to power, and on

the other hand, Baal and his priests. The act concerning Baal has failed. The other one, initiated by the prophet Elijah, succeeds. Substituted to the invocative word, the kinetic figures (*oklasma*) perform an illocutionary (directive) act that becomes the symptom of an act of faith. The crisis of the word – failure to call divinity through words – is the context of the idolater's appeal to the alternative manifestation of illocutionary intentionality through a kinetic statement (*oklasma*).

The expressive value of ritual dance (as homage and thanksgiving) is explicited in a medieval invocation. Believers uttered it while dancing in the cathedral of Limoges at the Vespers that ended the Feast of St. Martial: "Holy Saint Martial, pray for us/ And we'll dance for you" (Bourcier, 1994, p. 53). A thanksgiving dance is King David's dance before the Ark of the Covenant, as he himself explains to Michal (2 Samuel 6). Lucian also mentions the expressive value of danced greeting, as well as the perlocutionary intentionality associated to this: at dawn, Indians welcome the sun by dancing, thus imitating the dance of the god himself. In this manner, they placate their god (Lucian of Samosata, 2014).

The ritual performer often imitates a god or a mythical hero. By his mimetic aspect – due to props and movement, exhibition of clothes marks and kinetic-posture of divinity –, he not only "describes" the appearance of the god or the hero, but actually causes a "change of the practical circumstances" (Lévi-Strauss, 1995, p. 410): he brings divinity in the middle of the community. Apparently purely imitative, "constative", his role is eminently performative. The dance(acto)r has been invested, authorized by the community to assume this role, he "declares" that the sacred being – which he embodies – is present among the participants. Assuming the emblems of the god actually transform the dance(acto)r. His human condition is thus improved, enriched, even transcended. Pantomimic dance is intended to transform the dancer into any kind of demon, god or earthly existence that he performs (Cassirer, 1972; Zimmer, 1994). According to a New Guinea practice, "when a captain goes to sea, he personifies the mythical hero Aori", he "wears the costume which Aori is supposed to have worn, with a blackened face", "the same kind of *love* in his hair which Aori plucked from Iviri's head. He dances on the platform and extends his arms like Aori's wings and dances on the platform, opening his arms like Aori would stretch his wings". Similarly, when hunting for fish, with his bow and arrow, someone else would consider himself Kivavia. "He did not implore for Kivavia's favor and help. He identified himself with the mythical hero" (F. E. Williams qtd. in Eliade, 1964, p. 32-36). To bring rain and abundance, dancers also mimic the gods of vegetation, sexuality and rain (Cassirer, 1972; Zimmer, 1994). Inaugurated as trans-figuration (in the proper sense, a change of the image, of the apparent figure through role and props), the dance(acto)r's transformation ultimately means "transubstantiation" (Cassirer, 1972, p. 60-62; Popa Blanariu, 2008, p. 326-329; Popa Blanariu 2015b), a change of essence. The phenomenon occurs from the perspective of *intra muros,* that of the mythical community, but not from the viewpoint of the detached observer, outside the group.

In some cosmogonies, the world is created through the force of the demiurgic performative utterance. *Fiat lux!* is such a "supernatural declarative" (Searle, 1982) in the *Old Testament* scenario. However, the Indian tradition brings a choreographic alternative to this. The Indian demiurge, patronizing the ends and rebirths of the Universes, is god Shiva, the "Cosmic Dancer". His movements (*nrityamurti*) make "Eternal Energy" manifest itself, "nature and all its creatures" being "the effects

of his eternal dance" (Zimmer, 1994, p. 145). In the Austinian sense, this mythical dance is an "act of creation" (Zimmer, 1994, p. 146; Cassirer, 1972, p. 60-62). It has a "cosmological function", awakening dormant energies which can subsequently shape the world (Zimmer, 1994, p. 145).

Briefly, in such mythical and ritual scenarios, the performative value of kinesics is manifested either as an act of god – of the creation of the world, as in Shiva's dance –, or as one of re-creation of the world by reconnecting it with primordial energies. It becomes possible just through ritual remembrance of the founding myths (Eliade, 1978). Like verbal performative utterances, kinetic expression may have real and immediate efficiency. In relation to the participants, it may produce a change in reality. Through the ritual actor, authorized to represent him, god himself or the archetype manifests. The performative function of the mimetic rite is thus fullfiled by changing the essence of the dance(acto)r during the ceremonies (Popa Blanariu, 2015b).

4. A Semiotics of Deliberate Ambiguity: the Rite of *Hobby Horses* (the *Căluşari*)

One aspect specific to the mythical mode of existence is that the efficiency of human action is conditioned by the continuous reiteration of an archetypal act, committed *in illo tempore* by a god, an ancestor or a cultural hero (Eliade, 1964). Ritual dances always imitate an archetypal gesture or commemorate a mythical moment. The ritual scenario is not just a show. It is not a simple "staging" that *imitates* an event (archetypal, exemplary), but *drômenon* (the event itself, real and effective). We find this trait of mythical practice everywhere, from the primitive expression of the magical view upon the world to the most elaborate and late manifestations of various religions and spiritual traditions. Different ritual dances are performed for magical purposes. The efficiency of the sign is at its peak in magical practices, whose purpose is to obtain a change of reality, namely the *real*-isation of the magical referent (otherwise said, its transposition into reality).

The "dialectic" (Cassirer, 1972) relationship between sacred and profane organizes the entire system of ritual. Mircea Eliade formulated his well-known principle of "camouflaging the sacred into the profane" (Eliade, 1965). It requires a reconsideration of the dichotomy proposed by Greimas when analysing the "symbolic system of gestuality": "practical/ mythical" (Greimas, 1975, p. 83). For the mythical man, the practical connotes the mythical and the profane carries ("camouflages") the sacred. The poles between which there are built the oppositions practical/mythical (Greimas, 1975), sacred/profane (Cassirer, 1972; Eliade, 1965) are only theoretically distinct levels of organizing the world. In reality, in the practice of the "mythical" man, they always slide towards each other. This convergence characterizes a "dialectic" of "mythical consciousness" (Cassirer, 1972, p. 98).

The ritual of Romanian Hobby Horses (the *Căluşari*) is a very ancient pre-Christian practice (Buhociu, 1957; Pop, 1975; Kligman, 2000; Eliade, 2000; Giurchescu and Bloland, 1995). It may be interpreted like a semiotics of *ambiguity* built on the isotopies of the *limit* (*threshold*) with mythical fundamentals and magical function (Popa Blanariu, 2008). The scenario of the *Căluşari* is based on a mythical archaic system, able to support the triple pragmatic valence of the ritual: therapeutic, initiation, fertilizing. The magical function is assumed by the

Călușari each year, during a period that is traditionally marked as a critical time: the interval between Ascension and Pentecost (Mesnil, 1997). To elucidate the particular significance of this interval in most European folk environments, we propose the opposition *ordinary/critical* time. It corresponds to the oppositions *stable/unstable*, *order/entropy* (Popa Blanariu, 2008). This mode of polarization of the category of temporality is based on ancient superstitions according to which the respective period is a dangerous one: the Genii (or Demons) of time, the souls of the dead, the spirits from the other world can now travel without hindrance throughout the world of the living and in the other world (Mesnil, 1997). Once released, they cross the threshold of death/life, which is usually forbidden to them, and endanger people's lives and health. In our opinion, the critical time also involves a de-structuring of the symbolic space. From a heterogeneous, bipolar space, symmetrically structured in relation to a threshold accessible in one direction (from life to death), the ritual space becomes a homogeneous and chaotic one, enabling the endangering of life values: health, longevity, fecundity. Thus, there are two series of oppositions able to structure the categories of space and time: *ordinary/critical* time, and *structured/deconstructed* space (i.e., *bipolar/chaotic* space) (Popa Blanariu, 2008). Space is divided by the the *limit* (threshold) which enables the establishment of oppositions: this/the other world, natural/spiritual realm, human/superhuman beings and powers. These oppositions function as isotopies of spatial order. Critical time and chaotic space are isotopies of disorder. The transitory state (the crisis of the world prey to hostile forces coming from the other realm) could be expressed by the semiotic equation of a critical chronotope.

On the other hand, the ritual of the Călușari follows the scheme of the passing rites, formulated by Arnold von Genep (Genep, 1996), as a ternary structure involving:

a) A stage of segregation, marked by the isolation of the novice or the group. It coincides, in the case of Călușari, to temporary leaving the home, solidarity with their spiritual "brothers" and isolation of the group most often in the wood. The consecration of the group as a solidary formation is achieved through swearing and establishment of the collective label, the flag.

b) An intermediary, *ambivalent*, liminal stage which novices cover by fulfilling magical practices for their own protection and for that of the community. At this stage, the group of Călușari act like a martial formation, whose function is to provide protection against the *Rusalii (Pentecost Fairies)*. These are evil feminine spirits that, in the critical time of the year (between Ascension and Pentecost) are more dangerous than ever. During this interval, the group of Călușari practice rites of purification, expulsion of evil spirits, healing of the sick whose suffering had been caused by the Rusalii, according to popular beliefs. The applied therapy is a choreo-musical one. The gestures, postures, movements, positions in space, the clothes and accessories of the cathartic dance(acto)rs are selected in order to be aimed at the success of the magical action.

c) A stage of aggregation, integrating the group of "cathartic" (Eliade, 2000, p. 608-610) dancers into the community. This is the stage of "breaking" the Călușari dance, symmetrically opposed to the segregation from the beginning. The most important event of this stage is the flag "burial". Once the group of Călușari has overcome this critical period, it is "undone" until next spring. The circle closes by returning to everyday occupations: the dance(acto)rs resume their former status within the community.

In our opinion, a code that allows us to understand the ritual of the Călușari is the symbolism of the critical and prohibited limit – that is, the symbolism of the space-between-the-two-worlds. It comprises several levels (Popa Blanariu, 2008). Of these, we shall examine one that we find to be full of meaning: the relationships between the cathartic dancers (Călușari) and the creatures of the air that patronize them (the Rusalii). (The latter are also known as Evil Nymphs, Them Fairies or Stormy Fairies). If the dominant figure of the symbolic space is that of the threshold, the *Călușari* are the guardians of the threshold. During the "critical period", they ensure that the meeting between the two worlds does not disrupt the human community. If this happens, however, the Călușari make sure that the victims of the Rusalii are healed by applying magical choreo-musical therapies. From our point of view, the relation Călușari - Rusalii is a case of deliberate ambiguity (Popa Blanariu, 2008). It first seems one of *contradiction*: protection/aggression, bringer of good/bad luck, healing/harmful, wisdom/madness. At the same time, it is however one of *identity,* in terms of the exceptional nature of the two categories. We believe that it is precisely the essence identity that enables a differential function: by means of ritual white magic, the Călușari can cure the evil caused by the Rusalii. In order to remove evil, the dancers apparently identify with its cause. Therefore, they acquire three types of marks specific to the Rusalii: *denominative*; *spatial* marks*,* static and dynamic (how they travel and organize their symbolic space); and finally, *clothing*. In our opinion, each of these types manifests the same ritual ambiguity.

a) Each dancer of the Călușari group carries the name of the Pentecost Fairy that he represents. (In some regions, the patroness of the Rusalii is called Herodiada.)

b) The ambiguity of the relation identity/rivalry leads to reading the real space as a highly symbolic topography. It is believed that the Rusalii stop especially at the waters' edge, near hills, at crossroads. Therefore, when the dancers cross a stream, a bridge (isotopy spaces of the critical limit), they twist on one leg, looking around as if they want to see whether they are followed by the Rusalii. Moreover, the Călușari's choreography contains figures with magical efficacy: movements of the body launched in vertical leaps; circular movements, either closed or not, performed horizontally. Through their leaps Călușari imitate the flight of the Rusalii that cross the heavens dancing. The "aerial" dance of the Călușari, consisting of high leaps, iconically evokes the complex movements (circular, horizontal and vertical) of whirlwinds (Eliade, 2000, p. 608-610). The protective spirits of these whirlwinds are the Rusalii themselves. The height of the dancers' leaps is a mimetic double of the Rusalii' movements who dance without touching the earth, rising higher and higher like the gusts of wind. Horizontal circularity connotes a defensive attitude. The circle is generally attributed magical powers of protection, from the circle formed by animals to protect themselves to the alchemist's magic circle. The circle of dancers can be open or closed (Eliade, 2000, p. 609; Kligman, p. 153-154).

The kinetic figures traced vertically and horizontally by the Călușari during the dance may be seen as forms of mimetism that strengthen the ambiguity of the opposition: *identification*/*difference*, *mask*/*role*. Similar to the Rusalii in their mimicked behaviours, the dancers are in fact the only ones able to cancel the effect of Rusalii's action. Thus, similarity hides difference. The same essence – superhuman – covers two different functional roles: harming people (which is the function of the Rusalii) / being useful to human beings (the role of the Călușari).

c) In general, the attitudes and props of the Călușari are male-specific. However, a book from the 18th century – *Descriptio Moldaviae* – written by the Romanian Prince Dimitrie Cantemir, describes an unusual and archaic version of the Călușari: the dancers dress, adorn themselves and talk like women, covering their faces with a white veil. Anyone who dares to unravel or pull the veil off forcibly from the face of a Călușar is doomed to death (Cantemir, 1973). We believe that this situation has its explanation in the rites of passage. Initiation involves a switch towards another social group and age. Before the ritual initiation, the social identity of the young man is equated with that of the mother and the female group where he was raised. The dichotomy male/female is not yet socially relevant. The absence of this opposition characterizes, in the system of the Călușari, the liminal (ambiguous, unstable, transient) state.

Briefly, how can we explain the attachment of a masculine and warrior-like group to a typically feminine way of being? We may give an explanation directly related to the three codes that converge in the ritual of the Călușari: warrior, initiation, fertilizer. In the *warrior* code, disguise must deceive evil spirits (which are feminine creatures, the *Rusalii*) with regard to the true identities of the disguised dancers. In the *initiation* code, the feminine attire evokes the old identity that needs to be abandoned by the teenager who has made his entry into the male group. In the code of primordial *elements* and fertility, the feminine appearance of the Călușari (who also dance for abundance) reminds of the chthonian Great Goddess, worshiped as the source of life. It is about a magical practice for vitality and fecundity. Summarizing, we find the marks of the liminal state at several levels of the ritual of the Călușari: the spatial and temporal context (critical chronotope); mimetic kinetics (imitation of the evil which must be removed); the props of the cathartic dancers. The figures of liminality have a magical function in this case.

5. Conclusions. From the Sacred to the Aesthetic: "Fictional act" and "Speech act"

Narrated or performed, the myth may lose its original ritual function. Without a ritual context, the choreo-dramatic expression loses its pragmatic function – that of "modification" of the real (Lévi-Strauss, 1995). However, it manifests a different one, essentially "aesthetic". From our point of view, the illocutionary ritual act is thus replaced by a "fictional act", a category which was previously described by both John R. Searle (1982) and Gérard Genette (1991).

Regarding this process of desemantization through "aestheticization", Lévi-Strauss points out that: "Where the domination of magical thinking tends to weaken and when rites acquire the character of vestige, the second function survives the former" (Lévi-Strauss, 1995, p. 410). In a way, the "constative" function survives the "performative" one, in Austin's terms. This does not mean that "aesthetic" and "fictional" expression does not perform any illocutionary acts. But, they have a "fictional" character (Searle, 1982; Genette, 1991), and the pragmatic value of the fictional differs from that of the rite. The illocutionary acts performed in a show (*ludus aestheticus*) are "real" acts manifested in a fictional universe, assumed as such by the actors. However, the illocutionary ritual acts (*ludus sacer*) are perceived by the respective community as real acts in a real world (Eliade, 1964; Eliade, 1965; Eliade,

1994; Popa Blanariu, 2015b; Popa Blanariu, 2017). From the perspective of the ritual protagonist (whose illocutionary act of supplication, thanksgiving or homage is directed towards the sacred), rite is not fiction, fabulous action, but "real" action, aimed at attracting certain pragmatic effects in the order of the real. The reality of the ritual fact is traditionally stated: for the archaic world, the myth is "real", because it tells of the manifestations of "true reality": the sacred (Eliade, 1994). *Ludus sacer* may however become *ludus aestheticus* (Popa Blanariu, 2008). The illocutionary ritual act is thus replaced by a "fictional act" (Searle, 1982; Genette, 1991), manifested by the art's means of expression. The status specific to the "aesthetic" – "fictional" – speech act comes from its nature of "simulacrum" (Searle, 1982, p. 111-113). Herein lies the "essential rule" of the fictional discourse, its illocutionary "goal". But, the ritual actor summons the magic forces that he experiences – like the rest of the practicing community – as being "real", able to truly change the world around them. The force of the rite, circulated through the illocutionary force of the ritual statement, verbal or non-verbal, relies on the practitioners' faith in its full objectivity and efficiency.

The "artist" (the protagonist of a *ludus aestheticus*, functionally different from *ludus sacer*) assumes its subjectivity, the fictionality of his own discourse. This is the rule of the game art, a game of illusion. If he accepts it, the spectator participates in the fictional game. Unlike the ritual act, whose "reality" is traditionally postulated, the fictional act gives an alternative to the real. The fictional game builds a fantastic world – this is its illocutionary purpose –, but no less viable (albeit unlikely) for those who accept the game. "Master of a universe which he amends", the artist "creates forces, summons invisible presences, that are yet tangible for him" (Robinson, 1981, p. 48). The spectacular act "thus achieves a density that gives it authenticity and fullness" (Robinson, 1981, p. 49). "Authenticity" and "fullness" are indicators of the "success" of the fictional act, to the extent in which it manifests as an act of god – creating a para-real (fictional) universe with its own laws and conventions, alternative to those from reality.

The inaugural *logos* of any fictional work is either directive or declarative act. This hesitation is also visible at Genette (1991). Implicitly or explicitly, fiction informs the spectator that he enters – or is invited to enter – a universe other than "real" world. The simulated illocutionary acts which constitute a work of fiction are made possible by the existence of a set of conventions that suspend the usual role of rules linking illocutionary acts and the world (Searle, 1982). The author of fiction "pretends to perform some illocutionary acts", but "does not accomplish them in reality" (Searle, 1982). It is true that the author of a fictional discourse (in particular, the actor or dancer on the stage) simulates the achievement of illocutionary acts. But, based on this structure of simulacra, (s)he performs a specific illocutionary act: the fictional act – distinct from any other and constitutive of a good part of the manifestations of creativity. In a work of fiction, as Searle (1982) postulates, the illocutionary act is simulated, but the act of enunciation is real. The illocutionary act is simulated, which means that the normal illocutionary commitments of the enunciation are suspended (Searle, 1982).

If the illocutionary acts of the fiction writer are generally simulated, if the illocutionary acts of the characters are "real" within the frames of the fictional universe (the actors pretending to be the characters), in one respect at least, the author complies with the "sincerity condition" of the illocutionary act: when he admits to be an author of fiction (Searle, 1982, p. 111). His fictional act (i.e., an act of producing a

fiction) is honest, "real", to the extent that it is recommended as an attempt to found a para(-)real, a fictional world. The fictional act may be interpreted as a directive. It tries – this is its essential rule, its illocutionary goal – to determine the speaker, reader or spectator, to do a certain thing: to accept the conventions of the fictional and, with them, the status of fictionality that is neither truth nor a mere "lie" but, as Searle says, "much more sophisticated than lying" (Searle, 1982, p. 111). The specific difference of the fictional act, compared to the other directive acts, consists, on the one hand, in the fact of subordinating a number of other illocutionary acts (whose set constitutes the fictional work) and, on the other hand, in the fact that it does not articulate the real with the real, but the real with the para-real, the real world with the fictional universe. The fictional game is not entirely different from that primordial demiurgic *fiat*, manifested through the Word, like in the biblical tradition, or through dance, like in the Indian myth about the god Shiva who creates the world by dancing. *Simulacrum* is a key term for how Searle defines the "fictional act" (Searle, 1982).

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