

BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY  
FACULTY OF LETTERS  
DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

---

1

---

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

The Historical and Political Phenomenality of the Blood  
Within the Contemporary Cultural Milieu

**SUMMARY**

FLORINA CODREANU

Scientific supervisor:  
Prof. Dr. ȘTEFAN BORBÉLY

CLUJ-NAPOCA

2011

## **1. Introduction to blood culture**

### 1.1. Thematic disambiguation

#### 1.1.1. Medical imaginary: symptoms of mythological blood vs. scientific blood

#### 1.1.2. Blood between medical and political anthropology

#### 1.1.3. The sociology of the presence of blood

#### 1.1.4. The last history of blood

### 1.2. The first researchers of blood

#### 1.2.1. French milieu

#### 1.2.2. Anglo-Saxon milieu

#### 1.2.3. German milieu

## **2. Cultural preliminaries to the phenomenon of blood-related alterity**

### 2.1. Alterity and blood within the biblical text

### 2.2. Present traces of alterity from anthropological perspective

### 2.3. Postmodern alterity

### 2.4. Alteritary intersections in literature

## **3. The literature of violences**

### 3.1. The category of evil between philosophy and literature

### 3.2. Theories of violence in the recent history of culture

### 3.3. The prose of violence

### 3.4. The dramaturgy of violence

## **4. Blood within the dynamics of art**

### 4.1. The visibility of blood in art

#### 4.1.1. Historical preliminaries

#### 4.1.2. Blood representation in the modern art

#### 4.1.3. Case-study: Frida Kahlo

### 4.2. Blood experimentation in the contemporary art

#### 4.2.1. Nitsch phenomenon

- 4.2.2. Feminine art with blood
- 4.2.3. The exhibition in Frankfurt

## **5. Conclusions**

- 5.1. Alphabetical index
- 5.2. Selected bibliography
- 5.3. Acknowledgments

### **Argument**

To initiate a dialogue with an eclectic literature, on the basis of an utterly broad culture of the blood, wherein the only ordering and selective line belongs to the author, could be at the same time a toilsome task and a risky one, of constant delay and update of the final conclusions. From the cognitive commitment to the theme up to the emergence of it at the level of conception, the implied set of ideas, arguments and key theories has changed its *de facto* position following the course given by reading, analysis and synthesis. Opting for bibliographical sources mostly formal, picked out from the French, Anglo-Saxon and German cultural milieu, the present proposal has developed at the interdisciplinary confluence of history of ideas, comparative literature and art history.

Along the research the blood discourse settled out at a descriptive level in terms of medical and magic history, presenting a divided destiny in favour of mythology over science and at a conceptual level resonated with variations of the debatable concepts of *alterity*, *violence* and *representation*.

Set as a reaction against closed researches that escape any cultural dialogue, of ideas and images, which are self-oriented and carried on idealistically and impassibly beyond the channels of knowledge, the present project aims first and foremost to separate the excess of information from comprehension, general ideas from contextual ones, the accumulation of fields with all the characteristic jargons from the contents of cultural history, and in the next place to loosen the fusion and divergence of horizons in order to extract the discursive dominants of contemporary sanguinity.

On the supposition that “*blood has no such easy course*”<sup>1</sup>, that its placing within the body was at no times a strictly functional one, but preponderantly social, cultural and political, that the lesson on the science of life proposed and delivered by blood is unbounded, the general objective of the research propagates against the verdancy of a taxonomic systematization; as a matter of fact it would be an extremely dubious objective from scientific point of view to catalogue all the sanguine occurrences within the contemporary milieu. Since medical history has admitted its dependency upon imaginary and imagination, any exhaustive approach of bringing to light all the sanguine connotations is beside the point.

Blood hermeneutics is triggered by the determination of a restrictive knowledge in which the pre-modern time persists, due to a lack of differentiation between scientific thought and magic command. William Harvey lives in this mentality and he is amongst the first who consider blood quantitatively, not qualitatively as his predecessors. Although he discovers blood circulation, the leap in imagination would be too high to foresee the purpose of this circulation, oscillating between the nourishment and the body heating. Today we know with certainty the purpose is manifold.

The content development reveals a tripartite historical approach of the existence caught in relation, of settling an equation between blood and the issue of alterity from the position of history of ideas, of the existence as a violent expression, of handling the casuistry of violence within the literary perimeter from the position of comparative literature and the sanguine existence as representation and experimentation in the contemporary art from the position of art history.

i. Within the field of cultural ideas, the tackling of sanguinity bears a relation with the phenomenon of alterity – until now explored just preferentially by pulling along an excluded Other, wherein the *Arian* blood on the channel of extreme nationalism and *infected* one, from the pseudo-scientificity of anti-Semitism to the psychosis of world-wide pandemics, represents the greatest generator of debate and sense producer.

With a baffling history, not conceptually, but mostly dialectically, the issue of otherness entails the need for differentiation between essential alterity and relational or contextual alterity. The persistence of the phenomena of racism, nationalism, tribalism and intolerance, proves how weak the alterity becomes in dialectic rapport with the centrality of identity. In the study *Life in common: an essay in general anthropology* (2001) the historian Tzvetan

---

<sup>1</sup> Bernard Seeman: *The River of Life. The Story of Man's Blood from Magic to Science*. Museum Press Limited, London, 1962, p. 167

Todorov bands this dialectics to the permutations of the levels on which human being can be found: cosmic (to be), animal (to live) and social (to exist). Against the intersubjective anthropology, of appreciation for alterity, which has appeared only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and it is going to be promoted consistently in the present-day by Buber, Bahtin, Lévinas or Habermas, the individual anthropology has a long tradition over two thousand years. Aristotle superposed the emergence of society over the individual weakness, in the Greek philosophy the Other not even being thematized but rather confounded with the natural environment of the individual. Machiavelli, Hobbes and on their track Girard bared into the Other a rival or an obstacle, the relation developed with him being socially regulated of which in fact the individual is not in lack of. At the beginning of his studies Freud epitomized the existence of the Other through the sexual instinct, and Sade based his entire aesthetic advocacy on the denial principle of the fellow creature. More recently, Bataille observes that the Other arises from a reaction in the face of difficulty.

Going through all the ontological assays and generating epistemological distance, alterity in connection to sanguinity is marked by the biblical legacy of the blood shedder, in whose blood according to divine legislation resides the life of the body. Dependent on the blood covenant with the divinity, Eucharistic in Christianity and circumcision in Judaism, the individual is accepted or rejected by the community. In addition, the gender categories develop consonant to the bloodshed, voluntary or involuntary, on the one hand public and masculine, on the other private and feminine. Among the theories questioning the origin of man, sacrificed alterity from the Girardian system or the genealogical one from the Freudian system mirror two fundamental contemporary attitudes towards property, one of indifference and social recycling and the other of retention and power transfer. In the postmodern culture the existence of the other obscures in the context of spectacular bloodshed from video games and popular low literature.

ii. Secondly, in the field of literary ideas, the meagreness of a theoretical approach on violence as theme and structural element, except some representative studies on tragic authors, Homer, Shakespeare, moderns such as Baudelaire or American novel, gave forth the need for an open research on contemporary literature, wherein the poetics of violence would cement a proper self-contained status.

The re-entry into discussion of the traditional oppositions between real life and authentic life, between sociality and solitude, by favouring the latter terms, prepares the setting for a debate on literature and its necessary bonds with history and the present society, reaching

the conclusion that literature cannot express unpleasant truths about man and human violences if it designates only itself. The anathematising of moral and the canonization of aesthetic within art fall into risible in the light of the discourse autonomy illusion which by nominating ends by excluding. Entering and leaving the aesthetic, without any turn back to the image of violence from reality and its proper identification, the purest aesthetic of language prevails and it doesn't arrest reader's attention except during the reading process. The critical effect left by the literature of violences is supposed to be one of formative and moral vigilance, far from the impressionistic effect, of one type of violence replaced by another one.

The dialectics of exercising and representing violence confers literature a specific and intermediary role, of symbolization, wherein even though the blood doesn't signals the violence as such it doesn't identifies with it, but with the socio-cultural images that we have on blood and which in the process of writing reveal their true violences. The didactic lesson of violence in literature opens out with its plural causality and infinity, goes through the general hidden status of possible concealment of a high violence under a smaller one, and invariably engages relations with the dominant systems of power and knowledge, such as the over-medicalization of madness in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* or the socio-biologization of murder in *A Clockwork Orange*.

The bare negative connotation of violence by placing it outside humanity, feelings or mind, as if thought could not be violent, loses sight of the fact that the artistic response, of narrative strategy and depth, annihilates the violent response, thematic and superficial.

iii. At last, in the field of artistic ideas, the representation of violence with or without blood is most pregnant, so much at a programmatic level (manifested violence), as at a creative level (structural violence), given the well-known pioneering of art in history. Within this final approach, by investigating the way in which blood is experimented inside the dynamics of art the clarification of the visual grammar of blood and the configuration of the language of wounds are aimed at as main objectives, with an inherent reference to the aesthetics of blood and the bound concept of liquid body.

The contemporary repudiation of representation, powerfully pronounced in the theatre of images and the arts of intersection, from installation to performance, underlines the mutation produced in the contemporary art that is faster than a glimpse, namely the understanding of internalness through exteriority, of the spirit and soul through body. Not anymore a trans-historical entity, but trenchantly a fragmented and contextual one, the body becomes a site of

knowledge, an instrument of measuring the world (from phenomenological, social, religious and moral perspective) and capturing the historical and aesthetic ruptures. The conceptualization of the body in accordance to the corporal art that uses blood bestows at the centre a language of wounds that defines itself as a political marker, of transcribing the inner into surface and registering the shift within the skin memory.

How far can get the art of blood by replacing the studio with the biological laboratory and the artistic genius with documentation depend mainly upon the scientific advancement, for which art has become a control lever. Taking into account the long-running cohabitation of blood physiology with religion and philosophy, the present cohabitation of biological science with art is not awkward, nor inconclusive. Art proves out that it reflects more than ever on the world in which we all live, that in the absence of imaginary exploration knowledge remains unchanged, that the exercises of imagination cannot change the input anymore, but they can for sure multiply the output.

What motivates the hermeneutic approach in general is not exactly the span or the many-sided theme, but the scientific conviction that there are enough shortcomings and dead ends of interpretation that should be reassessed and placed within contemporary context, beside the matters undertaken at length for the first time. Despite the methodological shortage due to a multitude of argumentation lines, what keeps astir the structure of the thesis is the idea that the pre-existent blood discourse founded on historical stereotypes and disposed of through ideological channels, is unilateral and generalized; however, in every framing of cultural history is liable to different formulations and surprising deformations, and then the study is not of history of mentalities, but of cultural history. More by token, even if the history of mentalities is implied, the final objective doesn't imply the circumscribing of the pulse of any epoch, the optic and psychology of one community or specific individuality, but the insertion of these data into the proximal cultural history, respectively in literatures and arts. Thus, it would be a study of cultural history based in contemporaneity, wherein the interpretive catalysts are as diverse as the possible methods of investigation borrowed from more humanistic sciences.

Finally, the chief quality of such an exploratory research is provided by the sustained dialogue, the way in which the multi-faced phenomenality of the blood presents and plays its case along, from the round-up of the opening studies to their contribution in the incommensurable sphere of blood hermeneutics. The management horizon of the fore project, like any other study of cultural history, combines critically the re-reading of the past

pushed towards present, the questioning of cultural forms, the identification of the main tendencies of ideas in which these forms are carried out and of representative personalities that usher the blood culture.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction to blood culture**

*Blood culture consists of the assembly partially investigated of blood values that are compromised from spiritual and material point of view, through ideologization and politisation, and which develop along the centuries in an anachronic and often remote fashion.*

### **1.1. Thematic disambiguation**

Alongside the visible structure of contents, in the economy of the thesis gathers way a structure of depth that correlates the historical thought – which follows the phases of evolution and human development, with the political thought – which monitors the entire duration through diverse materializations of power, legislative promulgations and ideological sanctions. The consequences and tensions of this correlation are reflected without doubt in the mirror of the spiritual and material totality which is the culture on the whole, without the demonstration of cultural unity, but of the relevance and of the value principles that dominate a false unity. The (re)contextualization is a primary strategy in use to settle out extensively the significances. One theory examined in the light of another theory doesn't mystify itself, but affirms more intensively its cause and needs. For instance, the umoral theory doesn't fully acknowledge the action of leverage but in the light of emergence and confirmation of the theory of continuous circulation, in the point in which metaphysics comes across the implacable proof of the experiment.

The interest for the acquaintanceship with the sanguine phenomenon is not a game in itself, descriptive and occurrential, but a game that identifies through confrontation within a post-positivistic paradigm based on understanding the phenomenon in the detriment of finding the sum of its occurrences. Since it lays the account on the context, it is wide of the objective and neutral imperative that is specific to positivistic research and really close to an area of subjectivism, which in spite of the fact it grows rich with the exact data provided by medicine, it doesn't make a fortune on their behalf. The ingeneration and promotion of



theoretical and interpretative positions being privileged over the confirmation or denial of the already existing theories, demands generally subjective but rich material, a limited applicability by the production of qualitative data in prejudice of the statistic data and a narrow reliability compensated by a higher validity. Eventually, the approach falls under the incidence of ambivalence, ethnographic and documentary in the figure of impersonal observer, and at the same time experimental and thematic or case-study.

The construction of the blood discourse cannot be followed without a sensitive eye to interdisciplinarity that doesn't disavow the mediations of the meaning through moregnoseological bearings, where each bearing is not valued *stricto sensu*, towards the end, by coming to terms easily and playing the part of one discipline. In other words, the thesis resonates with more cultural openings, not statically, but processually, following the cultural, literary and artistic trajectory, peculiar to the contemporary world until its dissipation in hypothetical. The mediations belong to imaginary, semiotics and anthropology on the one hand, and sociology, phenomenology and philosophy on the other.

Therein the medical imaginary entails the necessary confrontation of mythology with science, of the blood in its double role from magic essence to organic fluid; sociology denounces the sanguine control and the individual moulding with social stake, therefore any bleeding, natural or produced, that jeopardizes the corporal integrity, is in direct connection with the social integrity. As far as concerns semiotics, the sign as individual, aesthetic, religious, social and theoretical phenomenon reveals its ascendancy in Saussurean conception by token of the fact difference and its repetition creates the culture of blood, and in the wake of phenomenology, in thwart of its claim of ahistoricity, the knowledge embodied by the empirical science is more plausible than the supposed knowledge of psychologism. Faced with medical and political anthropology, philosophy balances the discourse by proposing ethical instances and extrapolations.

### **1.1.1. Medical imaginary: symptoms of mythological blood vs. scientific blood**

Given its controversial history, from divine essence to a mere organic fluid, blood has been at the heart of various theories, approaches and rituals since ancient times, engendering both fascination and fear. Subject to professionalized medicine, it was also subject to manipulation and exploitation according to needs, and therefore in danger of becoming the provider of scientific opportunism and at times abuse. Until the scientific revolution huge

quantities of blood were thought to be produced and destroyed daily within the human body (Galen). Despite the discovery of blood flow (Harvey), the science of blood didn't instantly become a domain of its own, but played the game of mythology by using the same type of mystification. Confusion over the territory of each still prevails nowadays and if their intergrowth is necessary in the general stream of history or not represent the analytical stake of this subchapter.

### **1.1.2. Blood between medical and political anthropology**

At the border between philosophy and humanistic sciences, anthropology as theory on man rejoices over the privilege of opposing monism in its recent researches, so that the human body investigated by medical and political anthropology is caught within the dynamic assembly of power relations (bio-politics) that signals the dislocation of the traditional blood symbolism and its actual settlement as merchantable and exchange product. The incoming of life under the rights of medical politics decries life by exaggerating it. Blood determinism as sovereign support for life is noticeable in human dependence on the saving medical institutions and blood banks, and in the masked control of biological ideologies, too.

### **1.1.3. The sociology of the presence of blood**

Rather a figurative presence than a factual one, blood – contrary to the social and philosophical reformism that generically characterizes sociology, brings to the fore its idiosyncrasies and metaphoric stagnations, the solely tolerated transformation being the one of disorder and chaos (Sade, Bataille). Between the convention that culturally filed away blood for more than two millennia and the contemporary genetic advance that cuts out from the rationalization scheme the blood symbolism in favour of a blood map, the sociology of blood remains in a constant crisis of recognition. If the society of blood shared the character of pure blood in a stable and clear manner from socio-political point of view, the liberal society would enter devalued blood prerogatives in a phantasmal and accidental manner.

#### **1.1.4. The last history of blood**

Under the influence of the new scientific relativism, recent history unfolds more and more insistently its synthetical and analytical limits. Less a chronicle about the past and more a story about the working metamorphoses, dependent on the structures of imaginary and the action of ideologies, the last history of blood is a history of multiplicity and a history of histories that builds up the last decades. Between the purest traditionalism (Romanian milieu) and the most exuberant and innovatory status (British milieu), there are intermediate positions that recognize the power of the social in the deconstruction and manipulation of the blood. In the Japanese anthropology the need creates the last representation of the blood, as the lack of need doesn't disrupt tradition or the excess of need may spurn innovation barren areas. There isn't any terminus point to sanguine history, but definitely there is a growing capacity of versatility and self-disorientation.

#### **1.2. The first researchers of blood**

*The school of blood is an elevated formulary under which advocates from different fields of research, from physicians and historians to anthropologists and writers, gather empirically to fathom and popularize the cultural morphology of the blood on a theoretical basis in expansion.*

##### **1.2.1. French milieu; 1.2.2. Anglo-saxon milieu; 1.2.3. German milieu.**

### **Chapter 2: Cultural preliminaries to the phenomenon of blood-related alterity**

*Sanguine alterity represents the existence in difference that takes shape at the limit of univocal and dual blood discourses, beginning with the recapture of the biblical text and finishing with the postmodern texts, and differentiates itself from sanguinary alterity that defines exclusively through bloodshed and blood loss.*

## **2.1. Alterity and blood within the biblical text**

Without operating the religious distinction Jew/ Christian in the light of rabbinic/ patristic interpretations, this subchapter analyzes the categories of alterity within the biblical narratives in relation with the prevalence of a blood imaginary. Due to the differentiation between blood and flesh set up by Leviticus (“*For the life of the flesh is in the blood*”) there are many divine prescriptions, interdictions and taboos. By being acknowledged as a powerful substance, blood entails the potential of acceptance or exclusion of the human being in and from the community. The Other is altogether the one that shed blood or made use of its power against the divine order and legislation.

## **2.2. Present traces of alterity from anthropological perspective**

Anthropological alterity can not define itself without the valuation of the great theories concerning the origin of man, proposed in this case by the thinkers Sigmund Freud and René Girard. The way in which the two refer to blood society is definite for the actual economic relation in the sense there are two ambivalent attitudes towards property: one indifferent to property and based on the social preservation in the detriment of sacrificial alterity (Girard), and the other focusing on property and on blood power transfer by privileging a genealogical alterity (Freud). Analysed apart from the position of exemplarity, these attitudes explain the manipulation and sublimation of original violence, with openings towards the evolution of species, without considering the biological variability of man. The comparison doesn't aim at reciprocal avoidance, due to schematism and inadvertence to historical reality, but to clarify the role held by the alteritary existence in the blood anthropology before and after the entry of man into history.

## **2.3. Postmodern alterity**

In the most pessimistic theories of postmodernism, especially the ones signed by the French critic Jean Baudrillard, the concept of alterity tests its theoretical and referential impossibility. Blood representations from present video literature and commercial one confirm this impossibility in a neutral or pathetic manner; turning the representation of alterity into the last wrecked ship of postmodernism. The analysis of ideas through reference

to modernity proposes clarifying the general issue of alterity, including the sanguine alterity, in the contemporary age.

#### **2.4. Alteritary intersections in literature**

Sorted out from two novels, one of modernist persuasion (*The Blood of Others*), the other one contemporary (*Without Blood*), the issue of alterity illustrates itself in terms of the war theme as transition from the anguish of the Other – the urged and generic alterity of modernity, to the loss of the Other – the provisional identity of contemporaneity, wherein there is no alterity except by accident. The critical impression laid by the two literary texts analysed comparatively is that alterity build up on blood along the modernity and marked by the experience of war, in the present loses its alteritary significance and although blood remains engaged in representation puts aside the spell of difference, requiring the discovery of some circumstantial solutions of being.

### **Chapter 3: The literature of violences**

*Blood literature includes the literature that explores the forms of violence and the category of evil as spiritual adjuvant, in order to express an urgent human matter where blood functions thematically and dialectically, metaphorically and symbolically.*

#### **3.1. The category of evil between philosophy and literature**

In the philosophical investigations signed by Luigi Pareyson, Paul Ricoeur, Étienne Borne, Daryl Koehn, Alain Badiou and other contemporary thinkers, the category of evil presents its web of apparently disparate properties in a preferred relation with the category of good. Both philosophy and theology have confirmed the resistance to definition of a historical category on which the humanistic research cannot align with partially, or definitively. A possible reconciliation on the idea of interdisciplinary cohabitation comes of the domain of history, thanks to Michel Faucheux who makes the necessary connection between philosophically debated evil and the visibly applied one in the literary field. The historical foray is meant to bring to the fore the fundamental distinction theorized by Georges Bataille: creative evil having an open character, expressed through blood, opposes

the good and the closed character of labour. Exemplifying, the European prose (G. Bataille) and the American one (John Berendt) lay face to face two types of evil, one of immediate pleasure and against discontinuity, and a factual one, which by feeding the discontinuity produces the reviving evil on known bases. In the end, the indecision of evil (Martin Buber) from philosophy equates with its infinite possibilities from literature.

### **3.2. Theories of violence in the recent history of culture**

At a close survey upon the theories of violence from the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries issued within the field of socio-humanistic sciences, there are at work three theoretical fundamental attitudes: a.) with a structuralist disposition the theory is more important than violence itself (Girard, Burkert, Maffesoli); b.) on principle less categorical, the theory takes to violence analytically and dialectically (Arendt, Benjamin, Aron, Fromm etc.); c.) the resistance to theory and detheorization of violence in the contemporary context of case-studies. Without leaving the theory, literature – through its own phenomenalizations of violence, would prove out an insufficiently explored cultural source for the expansion of theory, already entered in the banality and repetition of the research object.

### **3.3. The prose of violence**

The critical approach concerning the analysis of violence in contemporary literature highlights the growing gap between the theory of violence and the literature of violence. The former spins in a predictable circle, focusing and reacting alertly only to history and ideology, whilst the latter overruns history, sometimes it overpowers history and exhausts its sense, at other times it runs through it in search of lost or unexplored meanings. Currently theory should take on as much wide-range as possible the literary and artistic effort and bring it to its own rights, by illuminating and consolidate the poetics of violence.

### **3.4. The dramaturgy of violence**

With a precedent in antique and Elizabethan theatre impossible to summarize briefly, the dramaturgy of violence in contemporaneity benefits from the intellectual experience of the surrealism of the twenties and thirties that with the influence of psychoanalytical background starts to think violence. The play *The Maids* (1947) by Jean Genet is such a

literary exercise of intellectual approach of violence. Inspired, also, from the sphere of life facts, the tragedy *Blood Wedding* (1932) by Lorca or the play of mysteries *Blood Relations* (1980) by Sharon Pollock, both put forward examples of literary commitment to the exploration of criminal violence. The modernist shift from the blood imagery (of props) to blood imaginary (of interpretation) is the most visible in the avant garde theatre of Antonin Artaud or more recently in the experimental theatre of Jan Fabre, each trying to carry out theatre away its established line.

## **Chapter 4: Blood within the dynamics of art**

*Blood art is the art that represents and experiments by visual support the multiple valences of blood, both in the aesthetic frames acknowledged by modernism, and anti-aesthetically, politically and socially, in the contemporary artistic forms.*

### **4.1. The visibility of blood in art**

#### **4.1.1. Historical preliminaries**

Long before blood would show its artistic function of representation object, it tests its visibility in the pre-historical parietal art, afterwards in the religious and historical painting – of warlike and military genre, with a predilection for decapitations. The history of blood figurations is interdependent on the social organization: pre-historical of hunting, medieval of Christian dogma, pre-modern of the revolution for installing the civilian power and so on. Even if it is based mainly on the principle of fidelity to the social order and the collective mentality, blood art from those epochs of civilization reflects its first creative initiatives that transcend the horizon of expectations and model the critical eye for the alternative representations along the modernity.

#### **4.1.2. Blood representation in the modern art**

Hardly up to modernity is the thematic and experimental status of blood well-defined within the field of art, which in the past was just historical and vital from socio-cultural point of view. Without an incursion into the relevant material, of turning point, supplied by Expressionism (Gert H. Wollheim, M. Oppenheimer) and Surrealism (Magritte), by the

innovators Chaim Soutine and Francis Bacon caught in inexhaustible exuberance of the flesh, and also by the case-study illustrative of the pioneerdom of feminine art (Kahlo), the contemporary art won't be able to demonstrate its stake and triggers. More than a subsequent comparison of modern art with the contemporary art, the intentionality of this subchapter relies on the affirmation and introduction of the newest artistic production, which in the absence of modernity would be deprived of legitimacy and emasculated of meaning. Therefore, a diachronic approach is indispensable, against a strictly synchronic perspective, limited contextually to the steak of time of the present project, which wouldn't be able to explain the phenomenon of blood art without a high dose of partiality.

#### 4.1.3. The dynamics of blood in Frida Kahlo's creation and existence

##### (a.) In picturam

Frida Kahlo is one of the first feminine blazes on the masculine stage of painting. Until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, female artists were associated with water colours, thus Kahlo is a pioneer of oil painting. Moreover, her personalized style gathers elements in a surprising combination that wasn't experienced by art before. One of these elements is blood and its attributes – national, familial, Christian, uterine, malign, sacrificial, exposed and so on, in a vibrant relation with the idea of staginess and mask. An invitation to the never-ending carnival, Frida Kahlo's work doesn't conceive inner transformation, but only interchangeable settings and props. From this point of view her art materializes the dynamics of death.

##### (b.) The fictionalization of artistic biography

The majority of Kahlo's critics are using biography to trivialise the creation produced by a woman and dismiss it firmly to the domestic space (David Lomas). This tendency is valid also as far as concern the biographers that present the artist's life as a catalogue of personal misfortunes devoid of ampler socio-political significances. Beyond the lachrymose story of a life built and motivated around the figure of mater dolorosa, the writers J-M. G. Le Clézio (*Diego and Frida*) and Bárbara Mujica (*Frida*) give forth two novel fictional versions against the biographic wave, which manage to tone down and expand the colour yield in which Frida Kahlo is rendered.



## **4.2. Blood experimentation in the contemporary art**

(a.) Photography; (b.) Painting; (c.) Sculpture; (d.) Performance; (e.) Consequences.

### **4.2.1. Nitsch phenomenon**

Brought into fame by the circle of Viennese actionism, together with Otto Muehl, Günter Brus and Rudolf Schwarzkogler, the daredevil Hermann Nitsch dedicated his life to extreme performance embodied by the chief concept of “theatre of orgies and mysteries“, on the strength of which he proposes the re-conceptualization of the sacred outside the borders of organized religion, in neo-pagan terms with an artistic and ritual approach and existential consequences. Against the modernism turned into museum, Nitsch’s art – which on its turn makes the archaeology of blood and entrails, is faced by the predictable question of becoming and its transformation into contemporary relic of vitalist propaganda in the post-war age.

### **4.2.2. Feminine art with blood**

Beginning with the second wave of feminism from the sixties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women gain on their bodies from the exclusive masculine representation. The artistic revolution doesn’t guarantee, though, a distinctive voice to woman in the artistic field that by the dawn of modernity was controlled by man. With violence and passion for blood exposition, including the menstrual one, contemporary feminine art seems to align to the practice of performance belonging to masculine art, exceeding very often the shock value of that one by coupling the essentialism (the inborn femininity) with power (the inherited masculinity). If the art created by man placed woman more often within the nude representation, forbidden as practice to women, the corporal art conceived by woman place her within the obscure zone of extreme representation (that keeps hold of nudity), whence the understanding and bringing out of femininity is a controversial issue.

### **4.2.3. The exhibition in Frankfurt**

Much more than an artistic event, an exhibition is a media and social event, of arresting the public attention on a state of facts. Accompanied by the German Red Cross and a van for

blood donation in exchange for a free exhibition ticket, the exhibition in Frankfurt (2001) about blood art, power, politics and pathology, delivers an unprecedented challenge through its thematic vastness. Creating a coherent whole from a multitude of disparate pieces could be a hazardous attempt, whose red line may get at times mislaid at the exhibitional level, but it is found for good in the material remnant represented by the exhibition catalogue, edited by the Anglo-Canadian museologist James M. Bradburne.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions

The reconstruction of a cultural range of action following the discursive orders proposed by a literature of speciality that doesn't totalize itself in a disciplinary manner, from part to whole, but it conglomerates itself in all its blind parts, ignoring the totality to which it belongs to naturally, is more than a critical exercise, being an exercise of surviving and only at last a ludic exercise, of animated detachment within the capture of the final effect. Keeping a necessary fidelity to the present paradigm of interdependence, vouched politically and from the point of view of the discipline of study, the discursive abundance and the intersection of more theoretical bearings becomes foreground *modus vivendi*, namely the natural track of knowledge that installs the subjective standard of historical capture.

The existence of sanguine knowledge is first of all historical and just by scientific approach it becomes thematic. The pre-existence of history in the face of any thematism influences the destiny of the questions that build up the theme and subject them to a discursive predestination that imposes as primary method of research the discourse-based anthropological method. Thus, the recovery and appropriation of the Classical discourses in contemporaneity aims not at the circumscription of the literary inherent qualities and their indisputable oddity, but at the rummage of a cultural legacy that has impinged upon the actual age. Blood hermeneutics has its critical start in the discovery of a range of rhetorics, of philosophical, magic and religious inspiration, amongst which the most prominent – due to its omnipresence and authority, seems to be the rhetoric of control.

The blood rhetoric holds a searching map so mazy that leads the searcher through all the meanings of life and through all the historical experiences, without providing him with the conscious satisfaction that he has found what he was searching for, the complicate foundation and evolution of his status of *homo sanguinolentus* (Lat. bloody, full of blood), at the very most it provides him with the feeling of super-eminence in front of the foregoing

generations that is fitted from socio-cultural point of view and that the others won't search forward to discover exactly the opposite.

Combining the description and analysis of the historical phenomena in an ethnographic approach that emphasizes bibliography (medical, artistic, philosophical, sociological and literary) and museography (thematic visits to various museums) with the empirical and exploratory interrogation of the same phenomena in a casuistic approach, the research of blood discourse generates a couple of fundamental questions: 1. Why a study of the cultural history of blood is useful in contemporaneity, 2. How does it develop the sanguine discourse along the history, 3. Which are the main blood domains and researchers, 4. What role have the arts in the phenomenality of the blood, 5. Could be laid down a contemporary paradigm of cultural sanguinity. To all those questions the present project intends to answer as broadly as possible, avoiding the finalist conceptions.

1.) The first question can be answered to in two manners, on the line of traditional essentialism that would consider such a study as vital, urgent and inevitable, of which the research can't close an eye to due to its abundant presence and visibility, and very close to our intention on the line of an ample case-study of historical basis, fusing the phenomenon with the context (contemporary and non-contemporary), which concludes that blood is the cultural mediator of more discourses.

2.) In point of the second question, the sanguine discourse develops in a mosaical manner through a pronounced rhetoric of control that imbues all the socio-cultural realities, starting with the paradigm of the transcendental that works with the intangible univocity of imperial and Christic blood in the pre-modern era, going through the system of binary oppositions from modernity that decides the duality *per se* of blood as pure-impure, healthy-malefic, life giving-death generator and so on, reaching during the contemporary epoch an open system of sanguine multiplicity that creates proper conditions for an artistic plurivocity.

3.) There isn't any humanistic domain not to be touched or preoccupied with the instances of blood: from religion and anthropology, to philosophy and sociology, climaxing with the medical history and art, the circle of researches extends from one day to another. The French cultural milieu does possess a certain primacy through the studies of Jean Bernard, Jean-Paul Roux, Jacques-Louis Binet, Jean-Paul Bourre, Michèle Cros, Véronique Moulinié, Jean-Marie Auby, and Marie-Angèle Hermitte. The Anglo-Saxon cultural milieu doesn't lack scientific authorities embodied in the person of Steve Jones, Roy Porter, Arthur

Ernest Mourant, Earle Hackett, James M. Bradburne, Brian Sykes, Reay Tannahill and A.D. Farr. As regards the German cultural milieu Uli Linke, Christina von Braun, Christoph Wulf and Bettina M. Bildhauer come to the fore. The Italian Piero Camporesi and the Austrian Maxwell Myer Wintrobe complement the European milieu. With a more recent school David Biale, Douglas Starr, Melissa M. Meyer, Bernard Seeman, Peggy McCracken, Caroline Walker Bynum, Melbourne Tapper, Susan Resnik and Pete Moore adhere to by its sustained contribution the American milieu.

4.) By assuming the phenomenality of the blood, the literature and arts, remove the pre-existent blood as source of inspiration from the unilateral and ambivalent discourses, thereby internalizing a political role, of subversive and deconstructivist engagement with the dominant politisation of life. The literary and artistic contemporary confrontation with the theme of violence is not prevalingly fictional, in jeopardy of becoming spiritual entertainment, but is flush with the personal and world history. Moreover, the process of violence doesn't stay in blood, but in the types of politics that decide it and in the cultural metaphors that profile it. These would make up the second element of a relation to which the arts own an exclusively moral function. .

5.) The contemporary cultural sanguinity states the paradigm of false unity that asks for permanent reinvestment, debate and completion. Against the old socio-political unities such as noble blood from monarchic regimes, Arian and pure blood from the nationalist politics, excluded blood from blood libel attached to Jews, the inferior blood reserved to antique and medieval femininity from the phallogentric social politics, the infected blood from the disciplinary schemes and so on, the actual paradigm refers to the political implications of culture, to the circuit of control and manipulation of the value.

## **5.1. Alphabetical index**

## **5.2. Selected bibliography**

1. *Affaires de sang*. Présenté par Arlette Farge. Editions Imago, Paris, 1988, 156 p.
2. Auby, Jean-Marie: *Le sang humain et le droit*. Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1997, 128 p.
3. BBC Radio 4: *Blood Is Thicker than Water*. A radio series by Steve Jones. Wellcome Trust 210 Euston Road, London, 2003

4. Bernard, Jean: *La légende du sang*. Flammarion, Paris, 1992, 288 p.
5. Bernard, Jean: *Le sang des hommes*. Édition Buchet Chastel, 1982, 224 p.
6. Bernard, Jean: *Le sang des poètes*. Éditions Odile Jacob, Paris, 1996, 344 p.
7. Bernard, Jean: *Le sang et l'histoire*. France Loisirs, Paris, 1985, 158 p.
8. Bernard, Jean: *Le sang*. Flammarion, Paris, 1995, 128 p.
9. Bernard, Jean; Bessis, Marcel; Binet, Jacques-Louis: *Histoire illustrée de l'hématologie de l'Antiquité à nos jours*. Les Éditions Roger Dacosta, Paris, 1992, 282 p.
10. Biale, David: *Blood and Belief – the Circulation of a Symbol between Jews and Christians*. University of California Press, Berkeley • Los Angeles • London, 2007, 300 p.
11. Bildhauer, Bettina: *Medieval Blood*. University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2006, 246 p.
12. Binet, Jacques-Louis: *Le sang et les hommes*. Découvertes Gallimard, France, 2001, 128 p.
13. *Blood* [Videorecording]. PMT Video. Produced by Conscient INC for Radio-Québec with the Participation of Téléfilm Canada and Le Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Science, Québec, 1990
14. *Blood and Data: Ethical, Legal and Social Aspects of Human Genetic Databases*. Edited by Gardar Árnason, Salvör Nordal, and Villyálmur Árnason. University of Iceland Press and Centre for Ethics, Reykjavík, 2004, 352 p.
15. *Blood Feuds: AIDS, Blood, and the Politics of Medical Disaster*. Edited by Eric A. Feldman, Ronald Bayer. Oxford University Press, New York · Oxford, 1999, 376 p.
16. *Blood in History and Blood Histories*. Edited by Marciacarla Gadebusch Bondio. Sismel: Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze, 2005, 386 p.
17. *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation*. Edited, with an Introduction by Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb. University of California Press, Berkeley • Los Angeles • London, 1988, 326 p.
18. *Blood Orgies. Hermann Nitsch in America*. Edited and introduced by Aaron Levy. Slought Books, Philadelphia, 2008, 230 p.
19. *Blood: Art, Power, Politics and Pathology*. Edited by James M. Bradburne. Prestel Verlag, Munich • London • New York, 2001, 272 p.
20. *Blood: Bearer of Life and Death*. A Report from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, 1993, 60 p.
21. Blood history: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blood>
22. Borowitz, Albert: *Blood and Ink. An International Guide to Fact-Based Crime Literature*. The Kent State University Press, Kent and London, 2002, 524 p.

23. Bourre, Jean-Paul: *Le Sang, La Mort et Le Diable*. Éditions Henri Veyrier, Paris, 1985, 183 p.
24. Camporesi, Piero: *Juice of Life – The Symbolic and Magic Significance of Blood*. Foreword by Umberto Eco. Translated by Robert R. Barr. Continuum, New York, 1995, 140 p.
25. Codreanu, Florina: *Existențele sângelui. Eseu despre curgerea sângelui*. Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2009, 120 p.
26. Cros, Michèle: *Anthropologie du Sang en Afrique*. Préface de Jean Bernard de l'Académie française. Éditions L'Harmattan, Paris, 1990, 298 p.
27. Dreyfus, Camille: *Some Milestones in the History of Hematology*. Greene & Stratton Inc., New York and London, 1957, 88 p.
28. Exhibition Blood: Perspectives on Art, Power, Politics and Pathology (November 11, 2001- January 27, 2002): [http://automatist.org/blood/exhibition\\_en.html](http://automatist.org/blood/exhibition_en.html)
29. Farr, A.D.: *God, Blood and Society*. Impulse Books, Aberdeen Scotland, 1972, 120 p.
30. Hackett, Earle: *Blood. The Paramount Humour*. Jonathan Cape Thirty Bedford Square, London, 1973, 288 p.
31. Hayes, Bill: *Five Quarts. A Personal and Natural History of Blood*. Ballantine Books, New York, 2005, 291 p
32. Hermitte, Marie-Angèle: *Le sang et le droit. Essai sur la transfusion sanguine*. Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1996, 478 p.
33. Hoffman, Lawrence A.: *Covenant of Blood. Circumcision and Gender in Rabbinic Judaism*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1996, 256 p.
34. Jones, Steve: *In the Blood – God, Genes and Destiny*. Flamingo – An Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, London, 1997, 302 p.
35. *L'ABCdaire du sang*. Collectif. Flammarion, Paris, 1999, 120 p.
36. *Le Sang au Moyen Âge*. Actes du quatrième colloque international de Montpellier Université Paul-Valéry (27-29 novembre 1997), Les Cahiers du C.R.I.S.I.M.A. Nr. 4, 1999, 476 p.
37. Linke, Uli: *Blood and Nation – The European Aesthetics of Race*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1999, 332 p.
38. Meyer, Melissa L.: *Thicker than Water – The Origins of Blood as Symbol and Ritual*. Routledge, New York and London, 2005, 264 p.
39. Moore, Pete: *Blood and Justice. The seventeenth-century Parisian doctor who made blood transfusion history*. John Wiley & Sons Ltd, England, 2003, 224 p.

40. Moulinié, Véronique: *La Chirurgie des Âge – Corps, sexualité et représentations du sang*. Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, Paris, 1996, 324 p.
41. Mourant, Arthur Ernest: *Blood Relations. Blood Groups and Anthropology*. Oxford University Press, 1983, 146 p.
42. *Mythen des Blutes*. Christina von Braun, Christoph Wulf (Hg.) Campus Verlag, Frankfurt • New York, 2007, 370 p.
43. Page, Jake: *Blood – The River of Life*. U.S. News Books, Washington D.C., 1981, 164 p
44. Porter, Roy: *Blood and Guts. A Short History of Medicine*. W. W. Norton & Company, New York • London, 2003, 200 p.
45. *Power in the Blood: a Handbook on AIDS, Politics, and Communication*. Edited by William N. Elwood. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, Mahwah, New Jersey • London, 1999, 442 p.
46. Red Gold – the epic story of blood: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/redgold/history/index.html>
47. *Red Gold: The Epic Story of Blood* [Videorecording]. Episode 1. Magic to Medicine. Episode 3. Tainted Blood.
48. Resnik, Susan: *Blood Saga. Hemophilia, AIDS, and the Survival of a Community*. University of California Press, Berkeley • Los Angeles • London, 1999, 292 p.
49. Roux, Jean-Paul: *Le sang. Mythes, symboles et réalités*. Librairie Arthème Fayard, Paris, 1988, 408 p.
50. Sandeman, Anna: *Your Body Blood*. Watts Books, London • Sydney, 1996, 32 p.
51. Schele, Linda; Miller, Mary Ellen: *The Blood of Kings – Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art*. Photographs by Justin Kerr. George Braziller INC, New York in association with the Kimbell Art Museum, Forth North, 1986, 336 p.
52. Seeman, Bernard: *The River of Life. The Story of Man's Blood from Magic to Science*. Museum Press Limited, London, 1962, 256 p.
53. Starr, Douglas: *Blood. An Epic History of Medicine and Commerce*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1998, 446 p.
54. Sykes, Bryan: *Blood of the Isles. Exploring the Genetic Roots of Our Tribal History*. Bantam Press, London • Toronto • Sydney • Auckland • Johannesburg, 2006, 306 p.
55. Tannahill, Reay: *Flesh and Blood – A History of the Cannibal Complex*. Abacus Books, London, 1996, 310 p.
56. Tapper, Melbourne: *In the blood. Sickle Cell Anemia and the Politics of Race*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1999, 164 p.

57. Walker Bynum, Caroline: *Wonderful Blood. Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2007, 402 p.
58. *William Harvey and the Circulation of Blood* [Videorecording]. Royal College of Physicians, London, 1978
59. Wintrobe, Maxwell M.: *Blood, Pure and Eloquent. A Story of Discovery, of People, and of Ideas*. McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York to Toronto, 1980, 772 p.
60. Zaoui, Amin: *La culture du sang – Fatwas, femmes, tabous et pouvoirs*, Le Serpent à Plumes, Paris, 2003, 156 p.

### **5.3. Acknowledgments**