

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE
FAKULTA HUMANITNÍCH STUDIÍ
Katedra Elektronické kultury a sémiotiky

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***“Peacefulness Through a Bowl of Tea”*: The way of tea as a Medium of Transformation**

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Barbora is an extremely brilliant, cultivated, focused and passionate student, and her Diploma thesis perfectly reflects these qualities of hers.

Starting from her personal interest in the ceremony of tea, she brought herself in the proposal of developing around this topic her Diploma thesis, where she would have taken this cultural phenomenon as a philosophical and semiotic object. Aware of the challenges involved by the lack of existing literature and by the consequent cultural gap, and despite all this possible risks, the candidate succeeded in providing both a solid sketch of her object from the anthropologic framework she sets along the argumentation, and a sensitive analysis of the ethics involved but the communicational set of rituals she observes.

To do so the candidate starts from the hypothesis, brilliantly developed on the course of her work, that the ceremony of tea can be understood as a form of gift, which allows her to cast on the phenomenon she observes from quite an analytic point of view but with the help of several historical and cultural data, the light of the nowadays “classical” conceptual tools provided by philosophical and anthropologic literature. If the reference to Mauss seems to be unavoidable, the reader of this work will discover, possibly not without surprise, that Derrida’s theories are discussed, quite bravely one must say, on the base of some counter-analysis of several *excerpta* taken from the Gospel and more widely from the Bible. Even more bravely, the candidate suggests some limits in Derrida’s point of view on the (im)possibility of a real gift. If the reference to the Scriptures might sound surprising at a first reading, the argumentation given is certainly grounded and solid, and we must also consider that precisely this spectrum of references can be found as a source of inspiration in a large part of contemporary

continental philosophy, which acts not far from Derrida precisely (the case of Giorgio Agamben's work on Paul is certainly the first that comes to the mind of the reader).

The candidate certainly shows great and even surprising capacities non only in providing close readings of her sources, but also in employing them in the purpose of her demonstration and, moreover, to achieve to what seems to be the real focus of this thesis: that of sketching, through a semiotic analysis of an inter-subjective cultural practice, some elements for an ethic model of communication. The fact of grounding this sketch of a possible ethic of communication in the analysis of a traditional phenomenon, allows the candidate to formulate it avoiding to incur in a prescriptive approach that would sound nowadays difficult to defend. Undertaking precisely the opposite way, the candidate shows somehow that a semiotic understanding of behaviours we already experience and which are traditionally encoded in some rituals, can provide awareness in the creation of new modes for reciprocal respect.

For all these reasons, I cannot so far but recommend the highest mark for this excellent thesis work.