

**CULTURAL DISCOURSES IN CEAUȘIST  
ROMANIA: THE HERO-MIRROR  
MECHANISM**

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## ABSTRACT

### Cultural discourses in Ceaușist Romania: The Hero-Mirror Mechanism

This thesis is concerned with main cultural discourses of the second phase of Communism in Romania (1964-1989), period largely identical with that of Ceaușescu's rule. A secondary aim of the thesis is to look at the post-1989 continuations of these publicly influential discourses with the aim of understanding how the educational system (HE, in particular) is positioned in relation to the cultural domain. With regard to the Communist period, the main assertion of the thesis is that analysis of these discourses reveals an underlying cultural mechanism equivalent with a central mode of governance employed by the Communist party. According to this assertion, the mission of this cultural mechanism, with origins in Lenin's drastic distinction between the party and the proletariat and in the idea that the party must bestow consciousness on the proletariat, is to create and regulate positive avatars (heroes imbued with the best of humanity) for each social category so as to fulfill and safeguard the aims of the Party. For this reason, this device has been entitled the hero-mirror mechanism. The device has also been linked with religion and theology. This perspective has found that the mirror-mechanism corresponds to the notion of "imago Dei," and its axes to the notions of "kenosis" and "imitatio Dei." The assessment of these cultural discourses via the mirror-mechanism results in three dimensions of research, each with its own universes of investigation, and each with its own findings. In the first dimension, the mirror-mechanism deals with discourses as identity, and thus with the deconstruction of Romanian identity. If, as observed, the mirror-mechanism receives its first major blow in the 1980s and begins to crumble after 1989, what has replaced it since and with what implications for Romanian identity? The second dimension views the same discourses as mainly intellectual. Here, the notion of 'inner utopia' is highlighted as a dominant and recurring theme, and, therefore, as possibly the dominant feature of the Romanian cultural/political scene during and after Communism. If, because of the notion of 'inner utopia,' 'true education' is viewed as lying outside the provinces of formal institutions, what then is the educational role ascribed to the public space in relation to the HE system? Finally, the third dimension assesses these discourses in terms of their claims for anti-Communist resistance while providing a typology for elucidating such claims.

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**In memory of the scholar that would have been Daniela Pălășan.**

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# CHAPTER 10

# *The Anti-Protochronists? The Noica School and the Legend of the Cultural Hero*

## **Setting the Issue: The Noica School as a ‘Humanist’ School in the middle of ‘Socialist Humanism’**

In her book, “National Ideology under Communism,” Katherine Verdery identifies “the Noica School,” probably quite monolithically, as the most potent form of resistance to official discourse and, indirectly, to the ideology of protochronism. In the description of Verdery (1991, p.294), the merits of the ‘Noica School’ derive from a number of features amounting to “a form of cultural reproduction different from the official one in both its institutions and practices.” In short, the ‘Noica School’ is credited with establishing a different form of communication, one aiming at sincerity and openness in the face of duplicity and ambiguity (and, hence, to a new sense of ethics). Its abstract but accessible language, Verdery argues (*idem*), democratized exposure “to philosophy and to a particular form of culture”, thus successfully promoting the freedom of individual conscience<sup>1</sup> for the wider public. Its writings, Verdery (p.293) finally observes, produced a wider “alliance among certain philosophers and certain artists, critics, and writers” in which “pluralism was being philosophically theorized in explicit opposition to political centralization” and which saw ethics as a concern of everyday life.

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<sup>1</sup> “For culture was not a simple school exercise, it did not aim at the fact of ‘becoming cultured’, but rather it represented a formation and a transformation in depth, it was **Bildung, paideia**, birth of the self, of individuality, of autonomous thinking, which broke away from the world of forced and planned imbecility” (Liiceanu 1983, p.8).

More recent assessments (Antohei 1989, Marino 1992, Dobrescu 2001i, Martin 2003i, Adameşteanu 2003, Antohei 2007, Tomiţă 2007i, Petreu 2009, Marino 2010, Karnoouh 2011), however, have seen even former anti-protocronist figures [Grigurcu (2003), Monica Lovinescu and Zigu Ornea - see examples given in Grigurcu (2003), (Martin 2003i) and Petreu (2009)] criticize to different degrees Noica's ambivalence and compliance with regard to the nationalist orientation of the regime.

Why, it should be asked, however, have the post-1989 attempts to critically reconstruct and reconfigure Noica's status in Romanian culture been limited to the nationalist dimension? If his views on national culture can be taken to have lent support to the official discourse of the regime, why would the humanistic orientation, essential to his whole project, be spared of such suspicions in relation to socialist humanism? After all, as will be argued later, in Noica's case the first set of concerns (national culture) was always defined in relation to the second set (humanism).

The Noica School, in fact, could easily have been called 'the Humanist School' and, whether by chance or not, this association is rightfully reflected in the name of the publishing house later established by his main disciples: "Humanitas." For this school sought to recapture, in the 70s and the 80s (the period of autochthonous, autarchic nationalism), the great tradition of Western culture and scholarship. It attempted to do so through arduous study of philosophers stretching from Plato, Aristotle, and St. Augustine to later modernity philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Wittgenstein, all with the aim of reformulating Reason in the tradition of the great

metaphysical-system philosophers. Thus, while in the West, figures like Foucault and Derrida were rising to prominence by deconstructing Western reason and Logocentrism, in Romania, Constantin Noica (1909-1987), a philosopher “specialized in logic, ontology and the philosophy of language” (Martin 2003, ¶ 7), and a former student of Heidegger in the early 1940s, was finely completing his own philosophical system in 1981, under the title “Devenirea întru ființă” (“Becoming within Being”). The school inspired by Noica’s philosophy, therefore, can be understood as the recuperation, thirty years later, of the cultural continuity Romania had shared with Europe.<sup>2</sup> That this double feat (a metaphysical or ontological system and the cultural formation of a generation that could take over from that of the interwar intellectuals) had been achieved mainly through the efforts of one thinker, and one who had spent nine years in ‘forced domicile’ (1949-1958), six years in prison (1958-1964) and another fourteen (1975-1987) in self-imposed isolation, makes Noica an unusual philosopher, as unusual and unconventional as his “school” has also been.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> “We had learnt to think and to write by ourselves and we were becoming more and more conscious that we represented the generation destined to take over Romanian culture from the interwar period, meaning, from the place that preceded the disaster” (Liiceanu 1983, p.7).

<sup>3</sup> “In the last days of his life (he died in December 1987), Constantin Noica had become a veritable national institution (true, closely supervised by the Security), having behind him few dozens of students he had formed directly and another few thousand he had formed through the spirit of his books” (Liiceanu, 1983, p.9).

## Noica's Ontology for Beginners<sup>4</sup>

“I dream of a school where nothing is taught... such a school can transmit you states of spirit, not contents, or advice, or education” is what Noica had said in 1944 in his “Philosophical Journal” (p.7), while actually on the look-out for such a physical location around Bucharest (p.19). Before looking at the meaning of such a statement it would help to picture Noica as a thinker deeply entrenched in the Idealist tradition of Western Philosophy, and one who has formed his own philosophical system by integrating those of Plato, Kant, Hegel and Heidegger around a particular axis. In the introduction to “De Caelo,” one of his first writings, Noica (1937) discusses the different interpretations given to the sky from the Pre-Socratic Greeks to modern day science, concluding that from the physical, natural structure imagined as a sort of circular cage, the sky had been de-substantialized to the point to which the blue of the sky is now taken to stand for nothing else than mathematical formulas. If external nature, that is, the sky, means nothing to us, if it tells us nothing, then it means that conscience should be looking to grasp realities of a different kind. If our process of knowledge is limited by our own forms and conditions of thinking, then ‘fact’ is not anymore an external, positivist reality, but rather a specific meeting and creation influenced by the structure of our consciousness, a problem the spirit of our conscience formulates in the moment of engagement with reality. If facts, and external nature are, in fact, problems, or illuminations formulated by our spirit, for our conscience simultaneously alters things while attempting to know them thus giving them a specific formulation, then it follows

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<sup>4</sup> This title refers to the fact that the ontology of Noica has been presented via the concept selected by Noica and also Liiceanu (in Liiceanu 1983) for describing his philosophical system in a manner accessible to a wider audience (idem), namely, that of the Platonic Ideas.



that our spirit awakes the world around by raising problems. It follows, then, that inasmuch as external reality is a creation of our spirit, the structures and phases or states of our spirit are essential, and should constitute the true object of education. From this discussion we can distinguish that, as Vasiliu-Scraba (1992, 2000) has observed, Noica's philosophy draws on the Hegelian idea of the spirit as embodied in man, but in a way which sees spirit defined, in Kantian terms, as the universal which is to be obtained through the a priori categories of the mind: "Just that, for Noica, 'the spirit', which occupies the place given to the 'universal', would be, following a Kantian line derived through own interpretation, 'the universal given by thinking', 'the meaning' with which man puts his stamp on the world around him" (2000, ¶ 10). In other words, having posited the unity of the subject or of conscience in Kant's 'synthetic unity of apperception' (Bowie 2003, p.22) Noica proceeds to give the categories of Kant "an ontological meaning" (Noica 1981, p.36). At this point, however, Noica's philosophy seems to operate another synthesis by affirming that the Kantian categories, which the intellect employs to grasp the universals of things, do not, in fact, grasp abstract realities, but rather engage with and partake of those ontological realities, those forms, which Plato had called Ideas. And still, Noica refuses here the modern tendency to interpret the Platonic Ideas as "logical concepts or psychological abstractions, detached through the analytic of the process of thoughts" (Liiceanu 1983, p.60), instead arguing that they should be understood as "values" such as courage or friendship, which are stronger ontological realities than us because they can be distributed without being divided: "Friendship, while shared by all, do we not find it still intact?" (p.61). Ideas, in short, are stronger ontological realities which form the larger context of our becoming, our "larger self" (p.63). These Ideas cannot be seen, but they are 'living creatures' and they can be

exemplified through each of us, as individual cases (p.61). Defined this way, the self becomes “a moving horizon, in which man is being authenticated” (Vasiliu-Scraba 2000, ¶ 21): “This way of ours of being presupposes the fact that we permanently find ourselves beyond ourselves. We are always ahead of ourselves, in the planned step, in the dreamed form, in the desired milestone. We live in the ray of will, desire, decision, of freedom. We live within this bundle of rays, within this fascicle which precedes us, which pulls us out of ourselves, asking us to travel across its space of light” (Liiceanu 1994, p.24). Nevertheless, despite his emphasis on ‘Being,’ Noica is not concerned, like Heidegger, with “Dasein’s ‘average everydayness,’” or the specific ‘entities’ that “are ‘in being,’ like animals, rocks, chemicals or whatever” (Bowie 2003, p.207), but rather with “fundamental ontological compounds” (Giulea 2005, p.17) which span different possibilities between chaos and full Being. These ‘ontological compounds’ are formed through different kinds of interaction between three ontological elements that only together form Being: “The General, the Individual and Determinations represent the true heterogeneity of Being (which also appeared provisionally at the beginning as temporality, spatiality, field), and in their triplicity they would express the Being in things” (Noica 2009, p.251). According to Giulea (2005, p.18) the ‘ontological compounds’ derived from the I-D-G scheme of Being put forward by Noica fall into two classes:

“(1) Real triplets of the type individual-determinations-general concrete; schematically I-D-G. The individual, determinations and the general cannot exist separately, do not have reality on their own, but only through their composition. The composition of all the

three terms (I-D-G) denotes a reality which has ‘full being,’ meaning a reality which has saturated (fulfilled) the ontological model.

(2) Precariously real couples, in process towards the fulfilling of the model, constituted through the composition of two of the terms. These can have one of the schemes: I-D, D-G, G-I, I-G, G-D or D-I. Realities thus schematically rendered are precarious because they have not fulfilled yet the project of to be (in Noicist language, they have ‘not saturated the ontological model’).”

It is obvious here that rather than seeing Being as a fixed essence - and so as only the G, or as solely contained in the subject (phenomenology) or in specific ‘entities’ (Dasein) - and thus, only as the I, the key element in Noica’s philosophy and the axis around which he integrates the philosophies of Plato, Kant, Hegel and Heidegger is given by his middle term: “And nevertheless *not even altogether* [The General, the Individual and the Determinations] do they express it [‘the Being in things’] in themselves. For, indeed, what are the Determinations, which have appeared as manifestations of the thing that takes on Being? Of which are they: of the General? Of the Individual? And *when* are they Determinations of Being? Let us henceforward reply that, although coupled together, the General and the Individual each have their own Determinations and that the entire problem of Being will be: the positive encounter between the Determinations of the Individual and those of the General” (Noica 2009, p.251). Indeed, having reached this understanding, one can immediately see how the works of Noica, be they concerned with the categories of Plato, Aristotle and Kant (Noica 1969ii), the six maladies of the spirit resulting from incomplete combinations of the I-D-G scheme (Noica 2012), or

with the Romanian archetypes, feelings and modulations of being (Noica 1996), center around the same category: that of the Determinations.

It follows then from this synthesis of Plato, Kant and Hegel that the self is, in Noica's view, always becoming into something larger by embodying the "universal" of Kant, or in other terms, by knowing the different states of the "spirit" described by Hegel or by partaking in different forms of the Platonic Idea. And here Noica makes an important distinction between the general and the universal, suggesting that the Ideas are not of the order of generality but rather universals that apply to each individual uniquely and at specific points in time:

"I start from a logical distinction. I distinguish the universal from the general. The universal is extensive, it concerns the totality of cases, while the general belongs to the order of the species: while the general concerns all **at the same time** and has a subsistence without consistence, like language or like objective spirit, the universal does not always have the general in it, thus being left with concerning all not at the same time, but all thought **as each in part** and in a determined moment. Death, for example is a universal, it belongs to each and not to all at the same time. The image of the death with the scythe is false, I say. Rather death must be imagined carrying a knife, like the death in the story "Youth without age and life without death"<sup>5</sup>, which awaits for Prince-Charming as death **of him** and which, living in the delay of the other, is under threat of dying itself. Like death, also wisdom, I sustain, she is each one's: it, too is not a reality of the order of generality. And precisely because of this, it cannot be taught, only awakened" (Noica, cited in Liiceanu 1983, p.84).

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<sup>5</sup> For the actual fairy-tale, see Anon. (1885).

This also explains what Noica might have meant by sentences such as “I am still waiting for the Idea to visit me” or “you must be looking for your own Idea” and why he believed that any philosopher must find that one idea (concept), the cornerstone of any metaphysical system<sup>6</sup>, that makes all things ascend and connect together: “However, the stage of the concept belongs to those who let themselves overtaken by a supra-individual instance, by a ‘wild beast,’ like Mr. Noica would say. A judgment you affirm, but the concept, you let it permeate you, it affirms you” (idem, p.82).

To look at it the other way around, if meeting the Idea is equivalent with grasping the Universal or becoming Spirit, this implies the becoming of the self into something much larger, and, in fact, the attainment, not only of a universal type of knowledge, but also of a form of unification with the totality of reality. Which means that, since the life of the self into Spirit or towards the Idea takes place in the realm of culture (the human mind’s interrogation of itself and reality), the philosopher will reach the Idea (which nevertheless will always elude philosophers because becoming is endless) when he has found that “concept,” “element” or “syllogism” (idea) which can connect all things into one philosophy.

Moreover, it is then, when consciousness has embraced all existence becoming something much larger than itself, that the status of existence, or Being, is obtained:

“In truth, what is it that **I wanted** all throughout my life? And I will answer: I wanted what anyone wanted and all I did was to say what we all want, maybe without knowing.

I wanted to embrace him who embraces me, to embrace the encompassing that

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<sup>6</sup> It can now be stated here that Noica’s philosophy is arguably more an ontology that tries to capture all the diverse determinations the individual being can receive, than a traditional system of philosophy (Vasiliu-Scraba 1992, Vieru 2002, Giulea 2005, Lavric 2005, Pamfil 2007, Niță 2009).

encompasses me.... Such an aspiration towards totality manifests itself as a tendency to incorporate the medium, to absorb it in yourself: I call it the passing of the external medium into the internal medium...The passing of the external medium into the internal medium is, it would seem, exactly the entrance into the condition of <to be>...This passing, which is a fulfilment in the sphere of <to be>, is exactly the miracle of man and culture. You cannot be a poet without wanting to be poetry itself; you cannot be a philosopher without wanting, like Hegel, to be philosophy itself” (Noica, cited in Liiceanu 1983, pp.90-91).

### **Noica’s Ontology as a Non-Explicit but All-Pervading Ethics**

Sorin Vieru (2002), a former disciple of Noica, points out that while potentially there is an ethics in Noica’s work, this has not been spelled out in the form of a system, for he had not codified or systematized it. This, for Vianu, is equivalent with saying that Noica did not have an ethics because he had not written one in the form of a philosophical treatise. His ethics, Vieru (2002, ¶ 20) thus argues, is a “virtual or implicit ethics,” “an ethics which is not,” but which “admits embodiments!” It would be wrong, then, to assume a dissociation between ontology and ethics in Noica’s philosophy, for this would be equivalent with imagining Ideas as external realities or logical concepts and not as ontological realities which invest us (interpretation which Noica detested when it was applied to Plato, and which, most likely, he would not have applied to his own work). However, it should be observed that, by affirming that ethics is not outside us but an integral part of our becoming, that ethics happens to us as we partake of the Idea which

is also the Universal and the Spirit, the ethical dimension is emphasized to its utmost. For this interpretation, instead of promoting a specific code of values seen as external, demands nothing less than the interiorization of all the values of humanity, seen not only as values but as living Ideas or states of spirit.<sup>7</sup> If man is to search and become the Idea, his unfolding quest is already an utmost ethical adventure. For how can you search for and partake of Justice or Wisdom without becoming just or wise? After all, Christ did not seem to have a codified system of ethics, but can anybody argue that, because of this, in his case ethics was less emphasized or present? His ethics, implicit or not, many would argue, has become foundational to the very definition of humanity. And it is in this strong Humanistic tradition derived out of Christianity that Noica's philosophy stands. For ultimately, for Noica, "passing into the world of <to be>," or becoming a philosopher, in his case, is equivalent with embracing the whole of humanity, namely, of the condition of being human in all its universality<sup>8</sup>: "And I believe that this transformation of the external medium into the internal medium is the good sense of the infinite, of the infinite inside the finite. Why is Jesus called <Son of Man> and not <Son of God>? Precisely because he has made from humanity, from the entire humanity, his

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<sup>7</sup> In other words, if the General G needs the Individual I to become full being (and the reverse applies to I) the greatest ethical requirement is an ontological one, i.e., the search for and the movement towards the Determinations of G through the giving of own Determinations. This is extremely well captured by Pamfil 2007 (pp.195-196) who observes that the only divine "command" Noica acknowledges for the individual is that of "giving meaning to things, of putting meanings into the world: 'Do not forget that God has sent you into the world to replace him, to give meanings, to create, to carry your beginning forward.'" Pamfil (p.211) is also right to point out that for Noica, since all things are attracted to being, "what is coincides with what should be," meaning, "the order of the ethical coincides with the order of Being itself." Noica refuses, thus, a morality of external rules that could never sustain the diversity of the human individual and his Determinations ["The moral man of Kant is ridiculous," (Noica 1934, cited in idem, p.213)] for an ethics of aspiration towards the Ideas through either love or the pursuit of knowledge.

<sup>8</sup> Which includes both the whole potential lying in the condition of being a human being, and its manifold expressions as humankind.

internal medium. And divinity is the sense of this totality that has become an interior dimension” (Noica, cited in Liiceanu 1983, p.92).

If this exposition is a very schematic description of Noica’s ontology and ethics as a philosophical construction in the Humanistic tradition, what then is the learning that takes place in a school that ‘transmits states of spirit,’ and what kind of cultural implications can all of these conjure up in a Communist society?

### **Noica School as Paideia and its Notion of the Cultural Hero**

As mentioned before, if external and internal reality are created through the human mind in the process of understanding itself, or if as Noica (1937, p.26) says, “what governs the world are laws; what governs the laws is the mind; what else is the world except the mind in its own exercise?,” then it follows that the life of the self into Spirit or towards the Idea takes place in the realm of culture: “because for man culture is not some fluky ornament, but, in fact, the medium of his existence, like water is for fish and air for birds” (Liiceanu 1983, p.9). The fulfilment of man, is thus for Noica, equivalent with his fulfilment in culture. Therefore, man must find his destiny in the realm of culture. And this is where Noica turns around and applies a magnificent Ju-jitsu<sup>9</sup> move to the model of the Humanistic hero promoted by the Communist regime and its archetypes. The true Humanistic hero, Noica seems to be saying, is not the Communist hero or the national hero, or at least, not through the representations these have received in official discourse. Rather, the true hero is first and foremost a cultural hero, like Plato, Kant and Hegel,

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<sup>9</sup> I have used here a metaphor employed by Pleșu (1988, mins: 6-6.34) to describe a certain type of ethical stance of Noica.



who managed to embody Philosophy and make it accessible to the rest of humankind: “God as One is distributed in his Only Son, and only after, the latter is distributed into all. The ultimate miracle of philosophy is the ultimate miracle of spirit itself, which as One is not diffused into many, but still in one, leaving it for the second instance to truly be multiplied. ...Hegel was distributed into Marx, and Marx into the whole world” (Noica, cited in Liiceanu 1983, p.136).

While this cultural hero is a hero for the whole humanity, his presence is essential to the life of a nation (or civilization) for, as Noica sees it, a nation’s survival and development is guaranteed not through political contest but through culture. Therefore, Noica feels the following statement captures all there is to be said in terms of a fundamental critique of Communism and its discourses, such as protochronism: “The Hittites perished and all the nations that did not rise to culture perished. Those who make false culture risk perishing. You do not play with fire” (Noica, cited in idem, p.148). In light of this, Noica and his school can be seen to represent the attempt, within Communism, to fashion cultural heroes out of nothing, ‘from zeroes to heroes’ it could be said, by taking ownership of the hero mirror-mechanism employed by the Party. But how can cultural heroes be created out of nothing and, also, during the time of the Communist regime? The answer sees two new modalities of employing the mirror-mechanism device resulting in the formation of the “Noica School.” The first presupposes the institution of a “cultural coach” who can look out for and spot the existing talent, and then attract those identified as worthy ‘students’ to mirror the cultural attributes of their spiritual mentor. Linked with the first, the second demands that ‘the students’ come to identify

with great Classical figures of philosophy by studying their writings in the original and according to a gruelling plan of study agreed upon with their “cultural coach.”<sup>10</sup>

The combined method of one’s identification with main Humanistic cultural figures through assiduous study of their writings and concepts while engaged in a continuous Socratic like dialogue with a cultural mentor is meant to offer, in Noica’s perception, a schooling that does not teach realities, “a school that in fact teaches nothing” (Noica 1944, p.7) but which nevertheless awakens such realities as states of spirit. “Can courage or wisdom be taught?,” Noica asks at some point. “No, but courage or wisdom,” he asserts, “can be awakened” (Noica cited in Liiceanu 1983, p.84). The wider assumption working here is that culture is the natural medium leading both to the development of the human spirit and also to its healing, the main thing needed being the courage and the will to jump into its realm, looking for the Idea. This centrality of culture, of hard-core devotion to high culture (which in the Humanistic tradition is, unlike forms of modernism or postmodernism, a lot more compatible with Communism) as an essential medium, is the basis of Noica’s alternative project to the discourses of the Communist regime: “Constantin Noica (1909-1987), the main character of the ‘Diary’ of Gabriel Liiceanu, represents the other major reaction to the Sovietization of Romanian culture and education: the subversive reproduction of high-culture...” (Antohei 2007, pp.51-52).

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<sup>10</sup> Such a plan often included the study of the Presocratics, Plato, Aristotle, the post-Aristotelian philosophers, Plotinus, St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Spinoza, Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Heidegger.

## **The Noica School as the Ju-Jitsu applied to Socialist Humanism**

“In what we have learned from Noica?,” Andrei Pleșu (1988, mins: 7-7.37) mentions as one important factor Noica’s assertion that “it is not good to attack things frontally, that you do not understand well a problem if you approach it directly, without patiently drawing circles around it, without intermediary stages.” Moreover, Pleșu (1988, mins: 6-6.34) continues, Noica had taught him how to make the best out of the negative, of the obstacle, of the limit: “it was characteristic of him, this technique of not putting forward resistance uselessly, of absorbing the energy of the adversary like in Ju-jitsu where you win not by opposition but by using the offensive force of the attacker.” My argument here is to claim that the divergent views about Noica’s relationship to the Communist regime stem primarily from the fact that Noica engaged with the nationalist discourse of the Communist regime, and indeed with the whole discourse of socialist humanism, through a certain culturally derived Ju-jitsu technique. Where official discourse created Communist and Nationalist archetypes of the Humanistic hero and affirmed autochthonism, Noica responded by essentially high-jacking these models and changing their features through emphasis on the Humanistic hero as a Cultural hero in the Humanistic tradition. Furthermore, his non-ostensive capture of the humanistic elements of Communist ethics through emphasis on an authentic form of humanistic ethics rightfully created the powerful impression within the population that Noica represented the myth of internal dissidence.

Where official discourse pushed forward an exaggerated discourse about the nation, Noica captured that dimension arguing for an authentic national culture (through the

example of his writings<sup>11</sup>), to be forged, however, not in isolation from the West, but based on the European cultural model.<sup>12</sup> It is true that, here, Noica allowed for his discourse on the nation to be perceived as legitimating the nationalist orientation of the Communist regime, his ambivalence resulting in him being equally invoked by both protochronists and anti-protochronists (Martin 2003i). This has been remarked upon even by Liiceanu (1983, p.138) and, on this point, one would probably have to side more with Tomiță's documented analysis (2007i, pp.230-231) than with Verdery's (1991) assertion that the "Noica School" had represented a central form of resistance to the ideology of protochronism: "Although opponents of the nationalism and the cultural autochthonism of the country, the Noicists were not, however, anti-protochronists per se; the dispute between them and the partisans of autarchy concerned especially the pretensions of the latter group at annexing Constantin Noica for themselves." Nevertheless, this does not take away from the fact that his discourse on the nation was elevated in contrast with that of Communist ideology, that it came within the larger context of universalism and its deep affiliation with Western culture, and ultimately, that it served as a practical application of his ontology to the realm of national culture via the medium of language – where based on Heidegger, Noica had tried to demonstrate that

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<sup>11</sup> For example, "The Romanian Sense of Being" (Sentimentul românesc al ființei), "The Romanian Philosophical Utterance" (Rostirea filozofică românească), "Creation and Beauty in Romanian Utterance" (Creație și frumos în rostirea românească), "The Romanian spirit in the balance of time" (Spiritul românesc în cumpătul vremii) and "Eminescu or Thoughts on the Complete Man of Romanian Culture" (Eminescu sau omul deplin al culturii românești).

<sup>12</sup> "You do not tell this to humanity, you do not affirm the appearance, 1500 years ago, of a European culture which permeated, exploited, it is true, but also educated with its values the rest of humanity; that thus everything that is happening now on the globe, and will happen tomorrow even in Cosmos, carries the seal of Europe, not matter how much ethnographers and historians who discover other worlds, in fact, in order to lift them from lethargy, and to rob them of their spiritual treasures, would pretend otherwise. We continue to be pirates, conquistadors and corsairs, but now we are corsairs of the spirit – and that changes everything. Since you are not saying it, should it be said by us, the marginals?" (Noica 1993, p.7)

Romania, like any other important civilization, also had a language embedding unique philosophical terms<sup>13</sup> that could translate into a metaphysical system<sup>14</sup>.

In order to relate to how Noica integrates the nation within the universal, it is important to understand the special creative potential with which Noica endows the particular in relation to the universal. For Noica, the Idea is not only a living creature, a supra-individual instance, ‘a wild beast’ which overtakes the individual, but also a horizon to which the individual adds to through his specificity: “We exist in the horizon of the Idea, and each Idea is enhanced through each individual who appears and exists into (“înttru”) it” (Liiceanu 1983, p.58). In another of his works, Noica (1996i, pp.9-11) expresses this thought by wishing that the specificity of Romanian national culture could enhance the horizon of universal culture. Noica’s assumption at work here is that “the access to universality is conditioned by national specificity” (Martin 2003i, ¶ 24): “I belong to the ‘old’ position of obtaining the universal through the idiomatic; through the national (...) Reaching the universal from the positions of the idiomatic is truly the principle of spirit” (Noica cited in Liiceanu 1983, p.150). Nevertheless, at the same time, for Noica the whole idea of Romanian-ness or Romanian being only makes sense as one specific formulation of a general ontology, of the universal. Thus, as Martin (2003i, ¶ 25)

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<sup>13</sup> Noica (1996, p.5) would thus establish his “concept” or “idea” in relation to the Romanian word “înttru” which simultaneously means ‘in,’ ‘into’ and ‘towards,’ suggesting the idea of development and becoming: “If a nourishing plant, that we can not find elsewhere, would grow on the Romanian soil, we should have to answer for it. If words and meanings that can enrich man's soul appeared in our language, but they did not appear in the speech or thought of others, we should also have to answer for them. Such a word is *înttru*; such a meaning appears to be that of being. Actually, our peculiar understanding of being is, maybe, the result of the peculiar meanings of *înttru*, that came to seemingly express the beingness from within, suggesting that «to be» means «to be into /*înttru*/ something», that is to be, but not fully, in something, to rest but also to aspire, to close oneself but also to open oneself. In this way the being was pulled out from stillness and shook. But if it would not be shaking, would it still be, truly? What kind of being is the one that has no place for either a vibration, or for becoming?”

<sup>14</sup> “It could be, in the case of Noica, that what we have [in comparison with a ‘will to power’] is only the generous thought of enriching our culture with a ‘true’ metaphysical system” (Liiceanu 1992 p.44).

observes, we should not read Noica's general ontology as derived from his thoughts on Romanian-ness or Romanian being, but rather understand his Romanian ontology as a specific application given to his general ontological model: "rather, the other way around, to see in 'The Romanian Sense of Being' an application of the 'Becoming with Being.'" This raises complicated questions about how Noica views the relationship between the individual, national specificity and the obtainment of a general ontology/universal. Liiceanu (1983, p.166), one of his main disciples, suggests that Noica himself had not been able to fully integrate the two main directions of his thinking: "the construction of a system, of an original vision and personal hermeneutics" and "the obsession to define a national spiritual profile." Inescapably, this unresolved tension between the idiomatic (national) and the universal stands at the root of his ambivalence with regard to the nationalist discourse of the Communist regime. Undoubtedly, this has much to do with the fact that, through his intellectual formation, Noica seems to draw on the profoundly nationalistic and anti-Western political ideology of the Right specific to the Romanian interwar period, shared by the great Romanian intellectuals known as 'The 1927 Generation' (to which he belongs) and which draws on "the utopia of a Romanian spiritual-political isolationism typical of the thought of Nae Ionescu" (Marino 1996, pp.91-92). That this interwar legacy, continued through the model of Noica's school and his disciples, is still dominant, though in attenuated form, in the post-communist cultural field, has been hinted at through Benjamin's concept of the 'aura' (Dobrescu 2001i), and more explicitly argued through the Platonic notion of 'inner utopia'<sup>15</sup> (Şerban 2010) and through a delineation of the features<sup>16</sup> through which

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<sup>15</sup> The Platonic idea that knowing oneself should form the basis of political organization, as opposed to the model of 'representative democracy' which "stops at the limit of the private spaces of the citizens"

the cultural interwar model has subsided in a current ‘neo-interbellum’ one (Șiulea 2005). The matter deserves more recognition<sup>17</sup> as does the ambivalent manner in which Noica’s thought operates with the concepts of nation and ethnicity in relation to the official Communist discourse.

While rightfully contested by some anti-protocronists, this ambivalent positioning nevertheless allowed Noica the space for certain maneuvers. Firstly, it allowed him to attract the attention of the masses and intellectuals by capturing the effects of the nationalist discourse widely promoted by the Party into the direction of culture.

Secondly, it enabled him to obtain some legitimacy, enough to allow for his own and his disciples’ writings to be published, and for his informal ‘school’ to continue its existence. This permitted the writings of his disciples to function as the main way to attract a large audience toward his “Paideia”, namely, toward his pedagogical model aimed at the creation of cultural heroes. Thirdly, it provided the possibility for an attempt to promote, or even impose, his cultural project on the Communist regime, to the point of him being able to try to persuade the authorities they should invest not only in athletic performance but also in “cultural performance,” if ever they wanted to create national geniuses like Eminescu.

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(Șerban 2010, p.132).

<sup>16</sup> These are listed in the following order: ‘the primacy of the spiritual,’ contempt for politics and democracy, ‘elitism,’ ‘exceptional individualism,’ ‘orthodoxism/mysticism/fundamentalism,’ a demagogical anti-Leftist attitude and ‘the critique of modernity and of nowadays ‘decadence’ (Șiulea 2005). Both ‘the primacy of the spiritual’ with and as contempt for politics and democracy or the notion of ‘inner utopia,’ for example, apply extremely well to the younger Noica that transpires from the articles he wrote in support of the ‘Legion,’ (the Romanian ‘Iron Guard’) where he described the movement as a revolution of the values of the spirit and one which governs people not through the decreeing of laws but through grace (Niță 2009, pp.167-168).

<sup>17</sup> In this, the hermeneutics of suspicion transparent in the examples above would benefit from a hermeneutic of recovery like that manifested by Călinescu (2001) or Petre (2003) in relation to the theme of the “1927 Generation.”

With this last request eventually refused by the regime, which possibly felt threatened by this initiative according to Secret Services notes<sup>18</sup>, the isolated philosopher Constanting Noica chose to develop his project alone. As a result, he fashioned himself both as a “cultural coach” looking to find 22 geniuses<sup>19</sup> or cultural heroes and, also, as a Socratic like “institution” aimed to train prospective cultural heroes but which also functioned as an alternative to public state education and culture.

### **The Noica School and the Hero-Mirror Mechanism**

To recapitulate, the above discussion has served to distinguish three features through which Noica’s cultural project can be seen to hijack and take over the Socialist Humanistic device of the hero-mirror mechanism.

First to be remarked is an ontology which synthesizes Western philosophy in the Humanistic tradition of the great metaphysical-system philosophers and which constructs the true Humanistic hero as first and foremost a cultural hero (Being as Culture). Few words should be said here. There is no doubt that the model for this cultural hero is represented by the figure of Christ, albeit as “Son of Man” who “has made ... from the entire humanity, his internal medium,” and not as “Son of God”

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<sup>18</sup> For example, the notes of the Security Inspectorate from Sibiu, dating from 7.02.1986, suggest that the Security took an active concern in Noica’s project for “cultural performance”. Entitled “Plato” the project initiated by Noica in 1981 was closely monitored by the Security, which also kept tabs both on the personalities it had identified as “cultural coaches” - Liviu Antonesei, Liviu Morar, Buhociu Iuliu, Papahagi Marian, Lăzărescu Mircea-Doru, and on those it had singled out as students - Mihăeș Mircea, Gherghel Valeriu, Hossu Andrei, Pîrvu Dan, Stamp Hans-Otto, Popovici Vasile, Codoban Aurel, Ica Ioan (Anisescu 2006, ¶ 36).

<sup>19</sup> “If in Romania today there are 22 million inhabitants, then, one youth in a million probably has genius. But for these geniuses we need coaches” (Noica cited in Liiceanu 1983, p.122).



(Noica, cited in Liiceanu 1983, p.92). It has also been discussed that this notion of Christ as fullness of humanity or being reflects the central ontological model of the Individual – the Determinations – the General (or I-D-G) in its entirety. To this extent, it has been shown that the notion of Christ, as well as the ontology of Noica, emphasize the meeting point between “the Determinations of the Individual and those of the General” (Noica 2009, p.251), that is, that middle level between the human and the divine, inhabited in religious terms, by the notion of a Divine-human agent such as the Christian Logos, Word of God, or Sophia; in mythological terms, by the notion of the archetype; and in philosophical terms, by the categories of Plato, Aristotle and Kant.<sup>20</sup> The ontological scheme of I-D-G, therefore, like the hero-mirror mechanism, reflects the ontology of the Divine-Human Agent, or of the Trinity (Pamfil 2007, p.26).<sup>21</sup> As Giulea (2005, p.202) remarks, this connection has been acknowledged by Noica himself and could, therefore, constitute a main avenue for interpreting his oeuvre: “In his vision, the spirit is always

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<sup>20</sup> An interesting comparison can be made here between the intermediate type of structures Noica reveals at the juncture of the Determinations of the Individual with those of Being, (that is, his notion that Ideas only exist as inscribed into man, and that man is trapped and determined only by the horizon of the Idea), and the types of structures Foucault seeks to uncover as the disconnected instances of a historically and materially generated form of rationality that transcends, subjects and inscribes the knower but which also originates and subsists at any moment through the operations of human reason (such as that of the episteme or of the discursive practice). If suspending the principle of continuity and the notion of transcendence or ontological being that Noica operates with, the ‘universals’ he puts forward are not that terribly far removed from the ‘universals’ of Foucault. Similarly, had Noica employed the notion and methodology of the Determinations in relation to an analysis of the Communist regime, this could have probably resulted in something relating, at a phenomenological level, to Foucault’s work on discursive practices and, in particular, to his work on ethics and discourses about the self. Having said that, Noica operates with the Phenomenological notion that the unity of individual consciousness functions as the sovereign subject of knowledge, while Foucault emphasizes specific historical practices as determining the subject in endlessly discontinuous and dissipating a manner (although this changes more towards Phenomenology in his third phase). To suggest a similarity between Noica and postmodernism such as Niță (2009, pp.179-190) does, however, is outlandish and reminiscent of protochronism. To link and compare Noica’s thought with process philosophy (see Giulea 2005) is a much more fruitful and indeed commendable enterprise (especially for what it reveals about Noica), but even here Noica’s distaste for the notion of History (or his Hegelian view of it), and Whitehead’s more Aristotelian than Platonic concept of God’s role in existence, announce significant limitations.

<sup>21</sup> For an interesting discussion on how the I-D-G terms derive from or relate to Kant and Hegel’s triad of universal-particular-individual, see Lavric (2005, pp.108-120)

incorporated into concrete matter and has no sense otherwise. That is why, an idea such as the Christian one of the incarnation of the Divine Logos (and thus, the G-I connection) could provide the exact key for the decrypting of the Noicist philosophical vision: ‘Incarnation (G-I) is the center of our world. Philosophy is Christological. I know not another divine than Jesus Christ. He gives both the truth of history and that of speculative thought.’ [Noica 1991, p.223] This Noicist acknowledgment makes evident the fact that the idea of the incarnation of the divine into humanity (the G-I connection) was considered by Noica to be essential to human thought in general and, by necessity, productive in philosophy.” It should also be remarked here that the word Noica uses for ‘incarnation’ is “întruchipare,” formed of the philosophically essential preposition „întru” and the word „chip,” composite term in relation to which Noica (1996i, pp.375-381) develops a wonderful linguistic analysis. Noica shows that the term corresponds almost in totality to the Greek notion of “eidos,” for which another but poorer translation would be the word “form” (‘formă’) (p.376). Thus, Noica (idem) defines “chip” as “form, exterior aspect, countenance, species, type” and notes that at its most basic level it refers to “the countenance of a person or of an object,” from painted icon to statue or the scheme of a building. Other more complex usages, however, see the term described as also the appearance of “internal nature,” as “character,” as “prototype” and finally, as “symbol” and “image” (p.377). Next, Noica (p.379) defines “întruchipare” in three ways: as receiving ‘chip,’ as catching ‘chip,’ or as giving ‘chip.’ We could translate this as to give, catch or receive “form” or as to give, catch or receive “image.” No better term, one would think, could be found for describing the Determinations of the I-D-G scheme, whether as stemming from I or from G. However, as Noica (p.377) observes, the terms has an additional meaning here. It also means “to make in one form or one

appearance,” or, “to put together” (based on the construction ‘intr-un,’ which would meant ‘into one,’ and the word ‘chip’ as ‘image’ or ‘form’). In these two last meanings, therefore, “intruchipare” describes perfectly that point where the Determinations of the Individual and the Determinations of Being meet each-other. Noica (idem) does not refer to the I-G-D scheme or its terms but emphasizes that, in this last definition, “intruchipare” refers to the process of creativity, “to give being to a thing...to devise, to design.” Finally, this corresponds in an interesting way to the mirror-mechanism. If the notion of incarnation, or the term “intruchipare,” defined as to give, catch or receive “form” or “image,” or as “to make in one form or one appearance,” is posited as central to the I-D-G ontological scheme of Noica, does this not reflect well the key notion of “imago Dei” out of which the hero-mirror mechanism unfolds (with its axes of “imitatio Dei” and “kenosis”)?

The second noteworthy aspect is an implied Humanistic ethics which, instead of promoting a specific code of values, seen as external, demands nothing less than the interiorization of all the values of humanity, seen not only as values but as ‘living Ideas’ or ‘states of spirit’. It is easy to see how this corresponds extremely well to the second axis of the mirror-mechanism, i.e., ‘the myth of the pure-hearted individual who seeks to actively internalize the Good.’ This definition of ethics also corresponds well to the notion of ‘imitatio Dei,’ despite Noica’s efforts to present Christ as only ‘the Son of Man.’ After all, his ethics needs Christ as a central reference point or model as much as the Christian notion of ‘imitatio Dei’ does.

Finally, the third aspect is a gruelling<sup>22</sup> pedagogical project which employs the Humanistic device of the mirror-mechanism in order to allow students to reflect the cultural attributes of their spiritual mentor and (through him) of other great cultural personalities ('heroes') by means of identification with their written work in the original<sup>23</sup> language. The Foucauldian model of 'pastorship' is fully at work in this project, which is clearly based on the master-disciple relationship and on a certain notion of ascesis that involves renouncing the lower plane of ordinary existence (particularly, of history and of politics) for that of "cultural super-reality" (Liiceanu, cited in Marino 1996, p.88). This element of "pastoral power" is hinted at in the comparison Antohi (2007, pp.46-47) makes between the 'Castalia' of Hesse and the Noica School. It figures more prominently, however, in how Patapievici (2002)<sup>24</sup> eulogistically describes Noica's influence on his own generation as primarily occurring through the experience of his "personality" and "charisma" rather than through his written work. However, this example might have been occasioned more by Patapievici's subversive intention, in

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<sup>22</sup> "I stay behind with Andrei [Pleșu] and we make a reading plan for the first 15 big moments from the history of philosophy, lasting a year and a half-two. Skipping over Plato and halting before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we will read in combined manner the Pre-Socratics, Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, Thomas, Spinoza, Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche. With the exception of Aristotle, Kant and Hegel, a month is ascribed for each moment. For those three – two months each. I am not concerned with the problem of failure; I believe I have overcome the phase of empty projects. In the case of the ancients, we will go with Greek terminology. After a year and a half, the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the Orient. Tomorrow we will discuss the project with Noica" (Liiceanu 1983, pp.28-29).

<sup>23</sup> "He talked to us first about the instruments of philosophy and made our future meetings conditional on the learning of the Greek, Latin and German languages" (Liiceanu 1983, p.6).

<sup>24</sup> "Here we must distinguish between two aspects: the system of Noica and his education (paideia). I am not discussing the first, inasmuch as the influence Noica has had over our generation, although made through the influence of his books, has impacted more on the existential options, on the reasons for living. In an incult and aggressive age, Noica has preached the religious retreat ['hermitage-ization' in the original] of culture. The finesse of his manner, the grace of his tongue, the solidity of his reference, all these have made of him an example that subordinates, at least for the time being, his work. Like any good sage, Noica does not teach you what life is, but how to make use of it. ... The philosopher does not extract his legitimacy from the verified exactness of his manner, but rather from his own charisma. The value of a doctrine rests in the power of the personality that sustains it. In this sense: words are ordered by a light which is not expressed in them, but which their succession indicates. The authority of Noica rests on this continuous presence from behind the text" (Patapievici 2002, pp.115-116).

relation to Noica's project, of revealing a (transcendental) layer more important than culture in man, (and even in the person of Noica). Whatever the case, the model of pastorship as the self-examination of conscience in front of a master is present, at every page, in the 1983 'Păltiniș Diary' which established Noica as a mass-phenomenon in the 80s. And, indeed, was it not the explicit aim of this publication to promote such self-examination of conscience in the population at large through the dissemination of the model of pastorship represented by Noica? Was it not its intention to establish a "quasi-religious" "cult of Culture," which Dobrescu (2001, pp.149-152) rightfully sees as an attempt at the "reification of culture" similar to that represented by the lyrical Orphism of the 60s, and this precisely in order to save from extinction<sup>25</sup> a certain domain or tradition of culture? It was and in this it has been successful: "He [Noica] directed and stimulated, together with P. Creția, the Plato edition, constantly urged the youth to learn Greek, Latin, German. To make, and especially, in any conditions and at any price (the utopian note reappears), 'culture.' This asceticism and cultural fanaticism have impressed many youth, if not in depth and through acts of consistency and continuity, at least at the surface and publicity-wise/'propagandistically.' A parallel cultural program, in full Ceaușism, had constituted an event which the cultural history of the epoch will certainly retain" (Marino 1996, p.96).<sup>26</sup>

It can be concluded, thus, that through the master-disciple relationship and the self-examination of conscience, through the retreat from history into 'cultural super-reality,' through its forms of asceticism and character of "purificatio spiritualis" and "soteriology"

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<sup>25</sup> Particularly at the level of the human hearts and in the imagination of each man, if not in the institutional domain.

<sup>26</sup> It should be said mentioned here that Marino, himself deeply concerned with the notions of resistance and cultural resistance in Communism, does not use the terms of 'parallel culture' or 'parallel cultural program' in a general or more airy sense but with clear reference to Havel.

(Liiceanu 1983, p.168), the paideia of Noica resembles both the Christian apparatus of pastoral power described by Foucault and the first axis of the mirror mechanism (that is, that of 'kenosis' in Christian terms): 'the myth of the hero ready to sacrifice everything for something greater than himself.'

### **The Noica School as Resistance**

Where, then, does this confirmation of the fact that Noica's cultural project (at the three levels of ontology, ethics and paideia), constitutes a specific reflection of the hero-mirror mechanism and one which hijacks, in ju-jitsu style, the configurations ascribed to it by the Communist regime, leave us with regards to the question of resistance?

The discussion must commence with the notion of the cultural hijack or ju-jitsu and its usage. It must also start, as Marino (1996, pp.79, 102) insists, with the fact that Noica was firstly a victim of the Communist regime and an intellectual personality which the regime constantly sought to exploit. It must also begin with the acknowledgment that, because of its emphasis on the soteriological value of culture (which goes beyond the notion of 'art for art's sake'), the Noica School must be seen as one of the most advanced forms of that type of 'cultural resistance' referred to, in the literary field, as 'the autonomy of the aesthetical.' Or, in more negative terms, that the Noica case is most illustrative of how the Romanian intellectual had to engage with a space of 'compromise' or "cultural collaboration" imposed upon him by the Communist regime, as the basic condition for his creative act (Marino 1996, p.102).

The use of the mirror-mechanism has shown that Noica's 'paideia' seeks to hijack the Socialist Humanist discourse of the party through two main features: nationalism and humanism. Both combine in the ju-jitsu method through which the notion of the national-Communist hero is suddenly transformed into that of the Humanistic cultural hero of the nation.

### **The Nationalistic Orientation**

The limitations of Noica's perspective on nationalism and ethnicity are well outlined in Karnoouh (2011) and will not be rehearsed here. Some of Noica's works are essential descriptions of Romanian language and philosophy and as such, they ascribe unique and important meanings to the question of national identity, which are bound to become more appreciated with the passing of time. No doubt, Noica also deliberately operated with the concept of the nation so as to increase the autonomy of the cultural domain and garner support for his own project. In this modality, his discourse was definitely aimed at the Communist elites. To what extent this discourse as nationalist orientation worked it is hard to ascertain. What is easier is to describe where it did not succeed.

First and foremost, by "attributing a transcendental-metaphysical objectivity" to the idea of 'ethno-linguistic nationalism" (Karnoouh 2011, p.235) Noica directly legitimated the concept of the socialist-nation put forward by the regime. Similarly, whatever its elevated nature, his idea that the nation is an entity with a spiritual destiny (that is, an Individual which needs to find its own Determinations in relation to the General or the Absolute) and whose survival depends entirely on its role in the creation of culture,

mirrored exactly the central tenet of protochronism. The distortion produced, however, was in the idea that each common individual could and should seek to pursue the realm of culture as high-culture and, thus, undertake to carry forward the cultural tradition of his nation. This is, indeed, where Noica's nationalist idea proved extremely attractive but there were severe limitations. The notion did not help in anyway with deconstructing the nationalist discourse of the party or with questioning, in any significant manner, the official culture of Communism. On the contrary, the Communist state had already reified culture in light of the idea of the nation (Dobrescu 2001, p.149), and now seemed to incorporate Noica's own project. Otherwise said, the attempt to hijack the official discourse through this nationalistic dimension worked for Noica only halfway at best. Where this sought to liberate the individual through culture, it also strengthened the hold of the larger cultural discourse of the party on the individual. Moreover, where Noica had tried to assimilate the official discourse of the party into his own, protochronism and the party now pressed to annex both Noica and his potential or current disciples. Finally, the program of cultural liberation proposed by Noica required that the individual could successfully and almost single-handedly engage with high-culture over a prolonged period of time. In other words, despite being offered to each and all, the program was elitist. It aimed at the social reproduction of a certain intellectual elite. One had to reach quite a level of intellectual sophistication in order to distinguish in Noica's 1986 "Letters on the Logic of Hermes," for example, "a logic of insubordination of the individual in the face of the general on the basis of purely formal criteria" that could be used against the regime (Pamfil 2007, p.231). Still, what must be admired is Noica's desire to open the road towards culture and an alternative educational project for all those associated with the nationalistic regime, especially his oppressors. In this, Noica relied, as



remarked by Petreu (2009), on the Hegelian ethic of ‘recognition.’ This principle posited that any human being needed to find his “human essence or identity” recognized in another human being (idem, p.479). An important corollary of this was that the victim should treat the oppressor with compassion, exposing him thus, to a humanity which he had lost, the assumption being that at some point the oppressor would come to recognize his own humanity in the other. This movement of ‘recognition,’ which Noica also identifies with the parable of the prodigal son and with his own ontological circle (Pamfil 2007, p.219), is clearly what informs Noica’s notion of ‘cultural resistance.’ In other words, the tactic of ju-jitsu is not just some random technique, but one which derives from his ontology. It is a tactic that relies not on power and opposition, but on the notion that powerlessness, love and forgiveness allow for the operation (or “întruchipare”) of a higher spirit that can ‘awaken’ consciousness. In this, the model of ‘cultural resistance’ put forward by Noica clearly reflects the model of the crucifixion. It assumes that the spirit of culture is more powerful, in the long run at least, than political power or the mechanism of the state. To the extent that such a technique would never work against the power of the Communist apparatus, Noica indeed deserves to be identified as an idealistic Don Quixote (Pamfil 2007, Petreu 2009) pursuing his cultural Dulcinea at any cost. Tragically, occasions of such major failure are exemplified by Petreu (2009). Of particular mention is Noica’s attempt to recover Mircea Eliade for the Communist regime so as to have him return to Romania to join a commonly led nationwide paideic project. Nonetheless, Noica can also be described as a realistic Sancho Panza calculating the best ways in which Don Quixote could salvage a certain territory of culture (the severely restricted and almost dismantled discipline of philosophy) and a perishing intellectual tradition of the inter-war period, adventure in which he has been

successful. That these aims were his original target points to the fact that Noica's entire paideic program falls within the category of 'cultural resistance' as a form of survival. It also shows that his 'nationalistic' orientation was strategically and successfully deployed in a manner that exemplifies the Romanian intellectuals' dominant notion of resistance: "Cultural resistance, in our case, has meant a program of personal salvation for the intellectual elite" (Dobrescu 2001, 185). After 1989, this Noicist notion that the salvation of the nation depended on an intellectual elite and its implementation of a 'purificatio spiritualis' at the level of collective consciousness found its continuation in the attempts of the Păltiniș School to reconstruct the Romanian social body through the purificatory discourse of 'anti-communism.' In its own way, it can thus also be said, Noica's nationalist orientation was safeguarding or preparing such an elite: "Secondly, I remind you that for me life and culture are the problematic of a long race, where the final end matters" (Noica, cited in Liiceanu 1992, p.45).

### **The Humanistic Orientation**

At this point, we can turn to the second ju-jitsu feature of Humanism. It shall be remarked here that for too long the tendency has been to unequivocally equate the humanistic orientation of Noica's discourse with the phenomenon of cultural resistance against the Communist regime. Such assessment is being offered by even one of the strongest critics of Noica and his School: "And this parallel culture, through the fact that it was not official, not centrally-directed, did not cultivate at all the Marxist-Ceaușist

propagandistic values, but those classical, fundamental, humanistic, was, indirectly, both one of opposition and even of resistance” (Marino 1996, p.94).

Let us start with the observation that, in a regime obsessed with the creation of endless chains of heroes across different domains and based on a humanistic model, the attempt to hijack them via a humanistic notion of the cultural hero, no matter how much more inspiring, substantial or more authentic, is bound to be problematic. Unless it can deconstruct or point to the falsity of the Communist avatars, such a notion becomes just another parallel and resembling image, soon to be lost and overtaken in the chains of association through which these avatars are constantly recombined and inscribed in daily existence. Moreover, even were it for such an apt notion to actually appear, the underlying system in operation would still remain unaffected and humanistic, meaning, in some form of human control of its set of ideal human avatars. Therefore, it must be posited that hijacking the hero-mirror mechanism can never constitute a working solution, and what would be prescribed, unless for the very remote possibility of it being taken over by some descended form of Divine Logos, would be its destruction, fragmentation or in other words, displacement from the center of power. This option is ruled out by the Noica School, which relies explicitly on the same mechanism, but in altered form. Also ruled out is the option of not contributing with another hero-image to the circuit of avatars operated by the official discourse. Heroes, particularly the cultural ones constructed by the Noicist discourse, come with unifying concepts, with universals, totalities, and essences and, most importantly, with a notion of harmonious order maintained by a center which is also the center of truth. Unless somehow directly opposed to it, they give legitimacy to the order that is already there, in this case to the

Party and its ideological claim that “the center of power is identical with the center of truth” (Havel 1985, pp.129-130). At this level, then, the newly constructed hero already fails to clear a basic milestone: “The primary excusatory function of ideology, therefore, is to provide people, both as victims and pillars of the post-totalitarian system, with the illusion that the system is in harmony with the human order and the order of the universe” (idem, p.133). This is a matter of primordial importance. For without the ability to distort this primary function of ideology, the cult of the cultural hero only reinforces the cult of the Leader and its corresponding cult of Culture, and in other words, the state. Evidently, this is even more so in those cases where the reification of culture has been an ongoing pursuit of the state. Interestingly, Dobrescu (2001i, p.134) expresses a similar thought when discussing Walter Benjamin’s definition of fascism through the notion of the ‘aura’: “‘fascism’ essentially means the sacrifice of the critical dimension of creation and reflection, as guarantees of intellectual freedom, in favour of a politics of the Arts and Culture which emulates religious feeling. The Artist or Philosopher reunites in his effigy the features of the Saint or of the Hero, receiving his legitimation from – and, at the same time, legitimating – *the aura of the Art-Work.*”

The main problem with the cultural hero of Noica, therefore, is that, in the manner of the “solar lyricism” of the 60s, it targets an interior realm of consciousness at the expense of the realm of existence<sup>27</sup>: “‘exterior’ freedom is in objective manner lacking sense, only the ‘interior’ one matters” (Dobrescu 2001, p.151). In other words, the same notion of “inner utopia” (Șerban 2010), which structured the nation into an entity with an internal

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<sup>27</sup> “How clear it is to me that limits are internal. Every time sometimes complains to me about exterior limits I pity them for not knowing about the interior ones” (Noica 1991, cited in Marino 1996, pp.86-87). “Do not tell me that the world in which you live is guilty for your failure. If it exists, the misery exists primarily in you, in your interior limits” (Noica cited in Liiceanu 1983, p.94).

soul or consciousness in the nationalistic orientation, is now present in the notion of the individual as full humanity and as “the infinite inside the finite” (Noica cited in Liiceanu 1983, p.92). If this is the case, the notion of the cultural hero proposed by Noica emphasizes the level of universals but not that of the concrete human being. Without the ability to relate to the concrete, then, this concept of cultural hero cannot oppose, deconstruct, or reveal as false the avatars of the party. In these conditions, the new image of the hero only adds to the legitimacy of official ideology, for “as long as appearance is not confronted with reality, it does not seem to be appearance” (Havel 1985, p.147). Furthermore, because it fails to meet the basic requirement of ‘living within the truth,’ the type of resistance based on such a notion of the cultural hero does not deserve the title of “parallel culture” in the acceptance given to it by Havel (1985, p.179): “The first conclusion to be drawn, then, is that the original and most important sphere of activity, one that predetermines all the others, is simply an attempt to create and support the independent life of society as an articulated expression of living within the truth.” At this level of the notion of the cultural hero, therefore, Noica’s project appears as a structure that both parallels and overlaps with that of the Communist system, but which does not constitute a form of resistance. Possibly, then, this could be a reason for why the somewhat delayed ideology of anti-communism in Romania has appeared to be so passionate and still caught up in absolute binaries of good and evil.

At the level of humanistic ethics, an argument could be made that in general, the great values of Noica’s humanism are the same great values of Socialist humanism. There is wide consensus that the members of the Noica School upheld well these central virtues and that Noica, in particular, had almost a ‘spiritual’ effect on many of those who met

him. Moreover, constructed as an informal association of student-disciples that visited him in the isolated location of Păltiniș, Noica's School almost fulfils that criterion of "independent social self-organization" reflective of a certain stage of "living within the truth": "the independent life of society" (Havel 1991, p.177). In both cases (biographical and social), however, what can be discerned is the model of pastorship<sup>28</sup> with its mentor-disciple form of social relationships. Such an evaluative observation is not meant to belittle the influence or character of the Noica School. On the contrary, it assumes that fulfilling the elevated criteria of the model of pastorship in one's character, or at the level of biography, is a remarkable feat. In this, this perspective justifies the insistence of Liiceanu, Pleșu and Patapieviici that the person and the biography of Noica should be seen as more important than his written work: "What is exemplary is precisely Noica's biography. His opus is merely important in a certain academic sense" (Pleșu 1985, cited in Verdery 1991, p.285). If this is the case, however, the influence of the Noica School falls mostly on those with which there was renewed personal contact, which again points to a limited audience, and, to a sort of elitism.

Where the Noica School clearly develops forms of 'the independent life of society,' however, is in Liiceanu's attempt to unify "a field of opposition (philosophy, literary criticism and ethics)" around a notion of "pluralism" that could challenge the centralizing ideology of the state (Verdery 1991, pp.287-290), attempt expressed in his 1988 publication ("Letters") of a diverse collection of letters or exchanges between intellectuals. This, together with the late 1980s decision of both Liiceanu and Pleșu to

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<sup>28</sup> An argument could be made here, like Liiceanu (1983, p.235) and Verdery (1991, p.286) do, in favour of a more dominant Socratic model, which could then be used to describe a more direct form of cultural resistance through the opposition brought to Communism by the interrogation of reason. However, through my reading of the mirror-mechanism, and my interpretation of Foucault's technologies of self, this model appears as subordinate to that of the Christian apparatus of pastorship.

enter the public arena, challenge protochronism and, thus, embrace engagement with the concrete reality around, must count as the beginnings of that form of ‘independent life of society’ which was to fully blossom, immediately after 1989, in that delayed (but so was the demise of Communism) but, still spectacular (at that time) type of dissident movement, or civil society, known as GDS (Group for Social Dialogue). Finally, that in order to enter the public arena and establish forms of ‘the independent life of society’ disciples such as Pleșu and Liiceanu had to break up with “Noica’s model of public conduct” (Verdery 1991, p.290), go against his direct advice and, thus, part company with the model of pastorship reveals an interesting aspect of Noica’s model of ‘living in the truth.’ Noica, it could be said, wanted to hold his disciples away from entering ‘the independent life of society.’ He wanted to keep the manifestations of ‘living in the truth’ (the expression of Humanistic values) at that level where “modest expression of moral or individual revolt have no visible political impact except ‘as a part of a social climate or mood,’” that is, as contained in “the hidden sphere of society” (Havel 1991, p.176). In this, he cannot be blamed, as the decision was never an easy one to make: “What do you prefer? A fulfilled cultural destiny? Or one that breaks under the sublime of a demonstration lasting a single moment?” (Noica to Andrei Pleșu, in Liiceanu1983, cited in Marino 1996, p.100).

In this light, a more precise assessment of Noica’s project (at the level of humanistic ethics) can be made in relation to the notion of ‘cultural resistance’ or ‘parallel culture.’ The stages of ‘living within the truth’ described by Havel (1991) in ascending order of complexity are: 1) the hidden sphere of society, 2) the independent life of society, 3) dissident movements, 3) parallel structures, 4) parallel polis or anti-political politics

(which reflect anti-utopianism). According to this taxonomy, it can thus be concluded, Noica's humanistic project would seem to fall in either one or both of the first two categories, or more likely, somewhere in between. Whether or not, or to what extent, this satisfies the general label of 'cultural resistance' or 'parallel culture' (or indeed, of a successful ju-jitsu move on the regime) is a matter of individual interpretation.

Finally, at the level of Noica's 'paideia' two issues must be emphasized. The first is that through the model of pastorship, Noica gave, or rather resurrected (from the inter-war period) as new, an old technology of self. It is maybe a bit ironic that a Christian model of pastorship and self-examination of conscience was resurrected as a mode of resistance against a Communist system centered also on a Christian apparatus of pastoral power. Nevertheless, it is hard to argue what other strategy would have been more sustainable given the Romanian Communist context of the time. Noica's strategy was clearly successful in setting up a form of 'alternative culture' based on personal relationships, and which figures at the first two levels of 'living in the truth.' That this was successfully aimed at the social reproduction of an intellectual elite, there is no doubt. That, judging by the post-1989 history of Romania, this project also resulted in a meaningful civil society movement and quasi-forms of dissidence is also clear. At this level, it would seem then, the gamble of Noica, or his ju-jitsu move, clearly paid off, although his disciples have had to renounce the domain of philosophy for the role of public-intellectuals in the process. As it stands, it must be posited that the postcommunist cultural space has been profoundly affected by the Noicist form of 'alternative culture.' Also through it, the cultural field has retained as dominant a notion of intellectual formation that relies on a "personalised model for transmitting culture,"



(Verdery 1991, p.286) meaning, on social networks based on “the intense personalization of relations in the cultural field” (Dobrescu 2001, p.192). More importantly and less noticed, through it, the tradition of seeing intellectual formation as occurring mainly outside the domain of public education has also been strengthened and continued [in this sense Dobrescu’s (2006) use of the term “the invisible university” for Noica’s School is very apt]: “Despite some enormous differences between the educational system and pedagogical doctrines of Romania during the XX century, there is a shocking similarity: many elite intellectuals share an anti-institutional *hybris*, being in favour of small groups, even of one-to-one, which they consider to be the ideal solution for the dissemination of knowledge” (Antohti 2007, p.50).<sup>29</sup>

Last but not least, the issue of the type of language formulated by the exponents of the Noica School should be briefly touched upon. A language that mediates between everyday words and metaphysical concepts, between irony and feeling, seriousness and philosophical discipline, the archaic and the modern, and between the elites and the masses, is a language that should deservedly rank as one of the group’s highest achievements.<sup>30</sup> It constitutes the reason for its wide audience, and also the reason why its members have been so successful at the level of public discourse. It points to an intellectual formation that is truly based on conversation first, and then, on writing.

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<sup>29</sup> In relation to Noica (1944, pp.7, 9) and his dream of “a school where nothing is taught” and which would “transmit you states of spirit, not contents, or advice, or education,” Antohti (2007, p.55) thus asks: “Was this a reaction to the ‘symbolic violence’ of Nae [Ionescu] or was it a rejection of the standard professor in favour of a ‘guru’?”

<sup>30</sup> This language is clearly derived from his ontology, or more precisely to serve or accurately account for his middle ontological level of the Determinations. Liiceanu (1992, p. 43) rightfully describes therefore as a “rising-descending hermeneutics,” extending the idea downward to the sensible and elevating the sensible to the idea.

However, in the context of socialist humanism, this language, like the image of the cultural-hero, is caught up in a succession of discourses which are also idealistic and humanistic, and which oftentimes operate with exactly the same key concepts but in a manner that is ideologically driven. Through solely the medium of Noica's language, therefore, the public audience can escape Communism only to the same extent as through the medium of his notion of the cultural-hero or through his exhortations for a higher sense of self. Here, Noica's emphasis on the general (and the abstract) as the best way to understand specificity, and as the way to relate to history and lived reality, must also be factored in. While this emphasis helped concentrate public attention on the domain of authentic values, re-infusing an enthusiasm for ethical ideals, the Noicist project stopped there. Without being offered the language needed to relate those high ideals (and the idea of life as an interior dimension) to the specificity of everyday life, namely, the tools to deconstruct and engage with the concrete reality around, one was left to wander like Plato's caveman, only perpetually into the blinding light.

And still, Noica's almost quasi-institutional project to create historical-universal heroes in the field of culture that could give an almost ontological direction to the life of the nation in the manner in which Jesus Christ or the Prophet Muhammad created or reformulated culture, must rank as one of the most remarkable, if Don Quixotical, attempts of resistance thrown (in ju-jitsu style) at Communism anywhere (and also as one which reveals interesting connections, though from very different ideological positions, with the Russian-avantgarde and, in particular, with the Sophiological theurgy of Solov'ev).

# CHAPTER 11

# *The “Flacăra” Cenacle or The Humanist Counter-Culture*

## **Introduction**

Due to lack of academic sources on this topic, this section relies heavily on an earlier article<sup>31</sup> written by the now recognized literary critic Paul Cernat. The article appears as part of a larger collective project (*Explorări in Comunismul Românesc*, I, II, and III), without affiliation to any school of thought or academic group, to establish the field of post-communist cultural studies in Romania. Developed in 2004 by Paul Cernat, Ion Manolescu, Angelo Mitchievici and Ioan Stanomir, this attempt to found an ‘archaeology’ of cultural productions characteristic of the Communist Era remains quite unique on the Romanian academic scene. Before continuing, it is important to acknowledge that in having to rely on this single academic source, the following presentation of the “Flacăra Cenacle” will be limited to the view of the literary critic. At the same time, while this view seems to reflect existing consensus within the literary field about the roles of Păunescu and of the “Flacăra Cenacle,” it must be specified that

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<sup>31</sup> I have also relied here on the 1983 documentary film (prohibited at the time of its release) of Cornel Diaconu “Cenaclul Flacăra – Te salut, generație în blugi” (‘I welcome you, generation in jeans’). After the death of Mr. Păunescu in 2010 more articles have appeared on this topic and these have been included for consideration in the section entitled “**The Reassessments of Păunescu after his Death: a New Debate.**”

its assertions, bordering on the polemical<sup>32</sup>, lack the backing of a missing sociological analysis of the phenomenon.

To start with, the “Flacăra” Cenacle (1973-1985) can be best described as a complex series of cultural-social manifestations revolving around the figure of Adrian Păunescu. “How do you become a national poet in the Ceaușescu Era?” observes Paul Cernat (2004i, p.343), is a question to which the activity of Adrian Păunescu might provide an answer. Having had his debut as a poet in 1965, Păunescu would later emerge as “a public institution with national coverage” (idem, p.341) adeptly mixing the multiple roles of journalist, TV moderator, propagandist, hymnographer and mythographer with those of politician, adulator, detractor, lyricist and performer, political commentator and even sports columnist (idem). Reflecting the “symbolic power of the Poet as a national institution in Ceaușist Communism” (idem, p.370), this remarkable expansion shows what could have been achieved during Communism by the poet ready “to commit, with his poetry, the political act” (Păunescu, cited in Cernat 2004i, p.343). While conditioned by a system in which the artist derived his power from that of the Party and its Leader, Păunescu’s megalomaniac ascension not only as “Ceaușescu’s court poet,<sup>33</sup>” but also as “national or state poet,” ultimately reveals a strategy through which poetic talent can gradually secure a position of maximum power in a dictatorial regime (Gallagher 2000)<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> As a confirmation, after Păunescu’s passing away in November 2010 from pulmonary edema, Cernat’s (2010, Cîteva opinii din reviste și bloguri) reassessment of his former articles (including this one) finds that if these could be criticized for something, it would be for their “polemical partiality.”

<sup>33</sup> The phrase “Ceausescu’s court poet” is not one unchallenged or without need for nuances. Karnoouh (2010, ¶ 8), for example, is right to observe that even in the context of a popular democracy that is totalitarian, “the court poet is, in fact, a mass-media poet, who addresses the masses.”

<sup>34</sup> According to Paul Cernat, during 1976-1985 Adrian Păunescu had been the fourth in rank in terms of public influence, after the presidential couple and their son Nicu (2004i, p.341).

“The Păunescian game,” as this strategy has been dubbed by Cernat (2004i, p.345), involves the appearance of a poet who ‘tells things as they are,’ in fact, a poet who targets contentious issues in order to show he can move back and forth between feigned dissidence and eulogy depending on how the regime rewards him: “<You had, in conclusion, great influence in relation to Ceaușescu>...<I had manufactured a great influence, I did not have it. I had created a certain regime, of a man, who, based on truth, could support diverse causes>” (Păunescu 2007, Aveati, in concluzie, o mare trecere la Ceausescu). More essential than this capacity to negotiate within the needs/expectations of the regime the space for specific agendas, however, is the mechanism through which this can be amplified. Simply put, without this mechanism, being “Ceaușescu’s court poet” would never have had the impact it had. What must be highlighted here, then, is the unique ability of formulating and operating a mass-media device that could simultaneously fulfill a double relaying role: that of making the discourse/propaganda of the regime appealing to the masses through some form of involved participation, while at the same time, opening this discourse up to publicly expressed personal or mass responses, and thus to some form of potential modification in response. In other words, Păunescu’s status as ‘national poet’ must be seen to derive, not so much from his willingness to have praised or collaborated with the dictator and his regime, but from the ability to have imposed himself as a sought-after medium/mediator between the masses and the regime, whatever the demagoguery or the grandiloquent encomiums: “The orphic ‘tamer’ of Socialist Romania wished himself to be the human/humanizing interface of the System, reintegrating, amongst others, the values ‘with problems’, in the spirit of that unifying new deal of august 1968” (Cernat 2010i, Poate fi spus „adevărul integral“?).

This ability, then, to successfully pendulate between the masses and the regime, simultaneously offering to both what each side needed from the other<sup>35</sup> – being a mouthpiece for their voices, a resonance box for their hidden wishes and aspirations, a generator of fictions of concomitant individual freedom and support for the regime – this is what essentially constituted the “Păunescian game”: “Adrian Păunescu had been a passionate manipulator of illusions...” (Cernat 2010, „Șaman“, terapeut al durerilor nației, superstar și „DJ“). Key elements to this game were the type of discourse and language employed and the mass-media vehicles available, the most important of which, by far, was “The Flacăra Cenacle.”

A secretary of the UTC (Organization of Young Communists) since 1967 and a member of the Romanian Communist Party since 1968 (when Ceaușescu publicly opposed the invasion of Czechoslovakia) Păunescu rose to fame by assuming the public profile of the romantic revolutionary defending the humanistic and nationalistic revolution promised by Ceaușescu.

Seemingly promoting the liberty to question the dogmatism of the regime from this newly founded position, Păunescu’s “non-conformism”, while appealing to the masses, served generally to “consolidate the ‘beneficent’ regime”<sup>36</sup> (Cernat 2004i, p.350).

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<sup>35</sup> “Adroit and glandlike, ‘the phenomenal’ Adrian Păunescu found his place halfway of the road between what the party wanted and what the people wanted” (Palade 2010).

<sup>36</sup> The pattern would continue after 1989: “<Still your texts were very pompous. Was this the only way one could write to him?...You were telling him: ‘You have done for Romania and for the world more than all the Brezhnevs, all the Carters and all the Reagans have achieved together’> <You want me to tell you why? Ceaușescu was the most daring and most listened to leader in the East. ... Ceaușescu not only had done more than the three I mentioned, but he had done things the other way. They were conducting a politics of oppression, of isolation of the small countries for subsequent delivery to the U.S.S.R., he was conducting a politics of openness” (Păunescu 2007).

In 1972, Păunescu publicly converted to the cause of the Party and its leader, lending his full support to the same July Theses he had opposed, apparently just for show, in 1971. By 1973, the print quotas of his books of poems started to exceed those of the most successful novels of the time and Păunescu entered both the Central Committee of the Party and its Great National Assembly. It is in this context that, in 1973, Păunescu was granted the leadership of the magazine “Flacăra” and was given permission to establish the “Flacăra Cenacle.” These circumstances suggest that beyond the support from the Central Committee of the Union of Communist Youth (Hentea 2010, Grupul „Vouă“: „Fiecare gură de om va fi prevăzută cu un post de grănicer“), the Flacăra Cenacle had also gained approval from the Central Committee of the Party, leaving Ioniță (2010, ¶ 3) to comment: “The Flacăra movement has been a *flower power* pastiche, but without flower, without power and without the smallest intention of rebellion or of breaking the canons – let’s be serious, it also wasn’t really possible to -, but sufficient to give a romanticizing generation the impression that it was moving, that it was different and subversive, **when, in fact, they were some hippies with permission from the party**” [my emphasis].

### **The Flacăra Cenacle: its activity and its discursive features**

Before focusing on the Flacăra Cenacle it is important to acknowledge four contextual factors that combine to shape the formation and activity of the Cenacle.

Firstly, as a poet trying to follow in the footsteps of the 60s generation, Păunescu draws strongly on the lyricist tradition. This tradition combines a mythicizing, orphic and



ritualistic poetry with patriotic feelings (and the themes of parents and tradition), at the same time essentially reformulating the poetic act as a very subjective account of personal becoming.

Secondly, as a public figure in support of Ceaușescu's new regime, Păunescu adopts the notions of 'the humane Communist' and 'humaneness' present in official discourse: "The propagandist clings on, sophisticatedly, to any detail, real or imagined, in order to justify – grotesquely – the "humaneness" of the Ceaușescu regime" (Cernat 2004i, p.354).

Thirdly, as a supporter of the nationalist turn, Păunescu also emerges as one of the significant figures<sup>37</sup> of protochronism, an ardent advocate, in times of economic crisis, of conspiracy theories involving the Great Powers and their hostility towards the developing nations (idem, p.351).

Last but not least, as part of a delegation of Romanian writers visiting universities in the United States between 1970 and 1971, Păunescu comes under the influence of U.S. based Leftist counter-culture movements. The poet remains particularly impressed with the post-Woodstock flower power youth movement, from which he would later borrow three elements: the idea of a 'live education' being organized within stadiums, "the force of 'participation' and of 'direct communion' with the public", and "the 'magic' syncretism of anti-establishment uprisings" (idem, p.346).

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<sup>37</sup> Until 1972 he occupies a leading role at the protochronist magazine "Luceafărul." As noted by Tomiță (2007, p.131): "The "Flacăra" magazine, led by Adrian Păunescu, organizes between the years 1977-1978 a lengthy press campaign meant to bring out of anonymity, and onto the global scene, a multitude of Romanian pioneer projects, especially in the medical-pharmaceutical domain."

The Flacăra Cenacle, it can thus be said as a sort of introduction into the topic, gets formed at the meeting point of these four discourses: the lyrical discourse of the 60s, the humanistic discourse of the regime, the nationalist-communist (protochronist) discourse and the discourse of the hippie movement. At this junction, then, lies the greatest innovation of the Păunescian game: the fashioning of a discourse able to promote a kitsch<sup>38</sup> mass-culture appealing to both the Party/Party leader and the masses. Cernat (2010) analyzes the modes of transformation through which such a discourse could have been constituted. Firstly, we have the adoption of the “winning” strategy of Ceaușescu from 1968: “the taking over by the Communist regime of the agenda belonging to the nationalist, anti-Soviet, liberalizing opposition, following the line of a ‘kingly’ [allusion to historical figures of heroic kings] paternalism and of a unifying-pacifying mythology, in which the Marxist-Leninist vulgate fused with the legitimacy of the posteminescian [from the poet Eminescu] ideology.” Secondly, we have the ability to mix an orphic, mythicizing lyricism with the identity themes of national-Communism (or of protochronism): “Shaman, therapist of the sufferings of the nation, superstar, and ‘DJ,’ Adrian Păunescu has always felt his public, as a true artist of the agora, and has kept it, affectionately, close, proffering it a lyrical mythology, sometimes rudimentary, but ‘essential,’ an identity, belonging and pride, mixing history with the slogan and prayer with the reportage, manipulation with divertissement and education” (idem). Thirdly, we have the hippie inspired adoption of “the folk-rock movement in Romania, through the medium of which he has promoted not only elite popular cultures, but also the top poetry

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<sup>38</sup> “Communism itself was nothing else than a big and tragic social kitsch, but with his flair for personal branding, Păunescu knew how to break the wooden propaganda tradition of the party and to create another, truly sellable to the masses, especially those young and educated” (Ioniță 2010, ¶3).

of the time, great contemporaneous poets being brought in flesh and bones onto the stage” (idem). Fourthly and finally, we have Păunescu’s role as “the annexationist of authentic and non-conformist values, benefitting the credibility of ‘socialist humanism’” (idem).

This hybrid discourse is coupled with a language that targets not only the peasants and the urbanites – “with an insolence half rural, half urban in the style, of something ... which in Romanian is called ‘mahala’ [the suburb/the suburbia]” (Karnouh 2010, ¶ 2), but also different social subcategories. Therefore, Cernat’s opinion (2010i, „Cultura tranzitivă”) that Păunescu had made a conscious choice in designing a special discourse and language for approaching the masses seems quite justified: “We can ask ourselves what had made this undoubtedly talented writer, intelligent and cultivated, apprehender of the newest tendencies in world poetry (**even in ‘Ultrasentimente’ some texts activate the prose-like ‘biographism’ of American poetry**) to adopt more and more archaic and populist forms. A readily accessible answer: the need for total communication with the masses through a poetry as much as possible according to their taste and understanding, reduced to hymns, prayers, carols, manifests, proclamations, slogans, versifications identity-mobilizing or occasional, and folk-rock lyrics.” A self-proclaimed advocate of ‘Culture’ [“Let us pay homage to eternal Romania. Let us say that we are the sons of this country and that we will consider culture a front on which we are indebted to fight more than a weekend, so to say, once every millennium” (Diaconu 1983, mins.52-53)], Păunescu, and this is the secret to his long-lasting success even during post-communism, has managed to connect art and culture with the masses like no one else has done before or after him (Cernat 2010i, Șiulea 2010, Karnouh 2010). Of

course, in his discursive cocktails, “elite poetry” mixed together with hippie culture and “the support of official propaganda,” but this symbiosis also “realized, in full Ceaușism, the postmodern utopia of the fusion between high and popular/mass culture”:

“sometimes bringing down the first and always bringing up the second, acting as ‘the teacher of Romanian literature for his people,’ but also politically detouring an authentic mass phenomenon, as a form of ‘gratefulness’ towards the regime and a maximal leader, who ‘had made it possible’ (Cernat 2010i, „Cultura tranzitivă“).

Moving into the substance of the matter, what then exactly, was the Flacăra Cenacle?

One way to describe it is via a phrase coined by Cernat (2004i, p.361): “a Woodstock for the Romanian Socialist Republic.”

In fact, the Flacăra Cenacle consisted of a series of public shows, which, as popularity increased, were gradually relocated from the space of high-schools, sports halls and syndicate halls to that of huge arenas and stadiums. Sometimes lasting even 12 or 14 hours, these shows were highly publicized and impressive in their frequency. It is estimated, for example, that between 1973 and 1985, 1.615 such festivals of poetry and music had taken place (Wikipedia, “Cenaclul Flacăra”). With a live audience of over 6 million spectators, not to include the millions of TV viewers and radio listeners, the Flacăra Cenacle had a massive impact on the overall population, particularly on those born between 1945 and 1970 (‘the flower power generation’) (Cernat 2004i, p.365). Present on its scene were not only artists, musicians and poets, but also, writers, critics, essayists and other men of science and culture (idem). Cernat (p.367) describes these ‘performances’ as magical-ritualistic sessions where the “tribe wizard” Păunescu

presided at megaphone as a sort of “DJ Culture<sup>39</sup>,” introducing artists, poems, songs, speeches and discourses while, at the same time, ordering the youth “what, how and how long for to sloganeer, to move in unison, to applaud frenetically with their hands above their heads, to be sentimental, to make love...in spring, after the season’s rituals.” Thus, the typical “Flacăra” show included recitations, at megaphones, from poets<sup>40</sup> such as Mihai Beniuc, Nichita Stănescu, Marin Sorescu, Geo Dumitrescu, Stefan Aug. Doinaş, Leonid Dimov, Cezar Ivănescu, folk and rock recitals of Păunescu’s own verses, popular traditional music and dances, debates about the ‘peasant problem’ or about critical aspects of the regime – always resulting in collective adherence to party policy and to the leader who allowed for such demonstrations of freedom; to be followed by sentimental odes to parents, populist eulogies of national poets, motivational songs for all social categories (peasants, workers, women) and regions, ecological planetary concerns, affirmations of world peace, celebrations of love (for country, poetry, of women, for the Party, and for the Leader) and mentions of the “great achievements” of the regime etc. (idem, pp.365-372).

Through the “americanization of the cult of personality and nationalist-Communist propaganda”, as Cernat (p.362) observes, the Flacăra Cenacle resulted in promoting “a paradoxical alternative official culture.” This symbiosis, it can be ascertained, took place along the dimension of authentic humanism present both in the hippie movement and in the socialist humanist discourse of the regime: “On the other hand, the pacifist and ‘humanist’ ideology of the hippie counter-culture has been, everywhere, anti-capitalist

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<sup>39</sup> To get a sense of what this means one would have to see footage (like that captured by Diaconu 1983) of the actual sessions of the Flacăra Cenacle.

<sup>40</sup> Representatives of the 60s and 70s generations in poetry.

and close to the totalitarianisms of the extreme Left, in the name of the ‘authenticity’ which the apterous and mercantilist bourgeoisie had allegedly denied humanity. Nevertheless, if in the Occident, the flower-power movement was a counter-culture oriented towards the System, towards the Establishment, in the case of the Flacăra Cenacle we are dealing with a counter-culture administered by the System, however, sharing the same common enemy of the Western hippies: ‘the Moloch’ of Capitalism” (p.364).

As an “instrument of ‘Enlightenment’ pedagogy,” Cernat (p.364) thus states, “the Flacăra Cenacle was a powerful instrument for indoctrination through seduction and for mythologizing popularization of the ‘*nationalist, humanist-revolutionary culture*’ until the last hamlet in the country [my emphasis].” Not surprisingly then, the resulting ‘hippie humanist socialist discourse’ seems to have unfolded around 3 major humanistic values/ideals: love, freedom and peace.

To wars, the Cenacle opposed the ideal of world peace. It did so by rallying forces around the visionary and “humane” politics of “the Hero of Peace,” seen as a model soon to be followed by the rest of the planet (pp.355, 366). The connection with love was made apparent through Păunescu’s recycling of the hippie slogan “Make love, not war” into “Iubiți-vă pe tunuri” (“Make love on cannons”). Used “as a lubricant and supreme alibi, meant to maintain the *flame* of revolution” and to engage eroticism, passion and emotion in the construction of socialism, love (for country, poetry, women, the Party, and for the Leader) was presented as the cure to the diseases of politics, nature, humanity, and most importantly, to the diseases of the Communist regime (pp.366). Last but not least, as the literary historian Eugen Negrici (1999, cited in

Gallagher 2000, *Negligent Attitudes*, para. 5) has pointed out, the main projection in the show paradoxically involved also a magical sense of freedom:

“...the young audience who came to his shows in meeting halls, squares or stadiums would go into some strange sort of frenzy. Coming out of the bleak daily environment they were forced to live in, they thought they were taking part in an epoch-making, magical event.

...Special light effects were... used, alongside group suggestion exercises (choruses and smoke effects) producing a fake total freedom during the rite, signs and symbols (such as the triad: Light, Fight, Freedom).

In his capacity of great Priest and Prophet, Adrian Păunescu never forgot to remind the aroused audience that they owed the Supreme Leader (whose message he carried) their love and submission...”

### **The Flacăra Cenacle as Cultural Resistance or Alternative Discourse**

This introduction into the activities of the “Flacăra Cenacle” and its discursive contents paves the way for a consideration of the Cenacle’s functions within the Communist system, specifically testing claims made about its potential for resistance.

As Cernat (2004i, p.364) observes, the Cenacle served to subordinate all independent creativity to a single center of State and Party power. As the sole institution promoting and validating folk and rock ‘talents,’ the Cenacle specialized not only in the discovery of new artistic talent, but also in defining the canon of poetic and musical popularity in

the “Ceașescu Era” (pp.364-365). The functions of the Cenacle, however, extended way beyond this array of artistic concerns. Cernat (p.364), for example, describes the institution as an amazing experimental propaganda machine, which derived feedback from initiating and then overseeing and spying on youth/artistic activities. Designed to keep youth and artists under the surveillance of the Secret Police, the Cenacle functioned, he argues (p.364), “as a way to take their political ‘pulse’, to test, homoeopathically, their expectations, their reactions to different stimuli, their potentials for adaptation, discontentment and revolt.” Operating, at the same time, as a valve for the controlled release of the youths’ libido (p.365) and as an organized setting for the collective but guided expression of subconscious thoughts, feelings and desires (p.364), this mechanism successfully combined the task of surveillance with that of indoctrination. For, more than just “a locus for the collective eroticization of propaganda,” (p.365) the Cenacle also acted as a most efficient sounding board for the ‘messages’ propelled by the regime (p.366).

Viewed then, as an intricate propaganda machine, the Cenacle can thus be defined as the state’s successful attempt to strengthen its position by orchestrating and governing its own ‘alternative culture’ (p.370).<sup>41</sup> Not surprisingly, this view resonates with Negrici’s assessment of the overall role of the Flacăra Cenacle:

“In exchange for his services, Adrian Păunescu, a name on everyone’s lips, became indispensable and powerful in the Propaganda hierarchy... However, one cannot forget that he pushed the youths’ innocent souls into the trap of propaganda, and thus managed

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<sup>41</sup> Here, Cernat (2004i, p.370) employs the terminology of Culianu from “Eros and Magic in the Renaissance” in order to suggest that for the brief period of the Flacăra Cenacle the regime had been able to achieve a synthesis between “the Magician-state” (able to project its own ‘alternative culture’) and the “Police-state” (only able to act through force).



to misuse their explosive energy for the survival of a hideous regime. From this perspective, one may argue that the ban on the Flacăra Tour after several young people died during a 'performance' was one of the greatest mistakes the propaganda division of the Communist Party ever made" (Negrici 1999, cited in Gallagher 2000, *Negligent Attitudes*, para. 5).

Exactly why the Communist Party had decided to put an end to the activity of the Flacăra Cenacle in June 1985 it remains a mystery. Cernat (2004i, p.367) argues that the Cenacle was dissolved by the Party in the context in which economic problems had severely damaged the Leader's internal credibility, and also because the megalomania (but also the popularity) of Păunescu had started to compete with that of Ceaușescu himself. This last view finds some support in Deletant's observation that Păunescu's dismissal had been accompanied by an official inquiry into his personal earnings. However, in the opinion of Deletant (1998, p.190), the Cenacle's demise was triggered by the exhortations to celebrate the rituals of the season, which taken ad litteram, had degenerated into manifestations of libertinism.

To this, Păunescu (2007, *In pofida relatiei bune cu Ceaușescu, incepind cu 1985 ati fost marginalizat. Cum se explica?*), in his own polemical style, offers a different explanation: "I am tired of the shitheads, the demented, and the scumbags that say all sorts of foolish things about me. I was kicked out from 'Flacăra' because it had become the pulpit of the discontent, of those who do not respect the laws and policy of the party."

Where the actual truth is in all this, and to what extent the views presented are somehow reflecting it, it remains uncertain. What is for certain, however, is that the Western

nostalgia with the hippie movement of the 60s is paralleled in a unique way by the attachment shown by many Romanians, particularly the generation born between 1945-1970, for the period, personalities and cultural products of the Flacăra Cenacle.<sup>42</sup> In a sense, it is almost undeniable that there was more quality in the lyrics and music of the Cenacle artists than in much of the current, consumerist, TV-based Romanian musical scene (Karnoouh 2010). At the same time, as a counter-culture movement, even if organized or supervised by the state, the Cenacle had a certain potential for active resistance that cannot be denied. If, as Cernat (2004i, p.365) argues, the Cenacle served as an organized setting for the collective expression of repressed thoughts, feelings and desires, it can also be imagined that, and indeed participants in the Cenacle emphasize this aspect, things were at times hanging ‘on the edge,’ that the poetic non-conformism of the hippie youth was in some instances, ‘ready to explode’ into the streets. From this perspective (and without further sociological studies), it is impossible to assess what revolutionary value, if any, can be ascribed to a controlled setting which allowed for relative dissatisfaction with the regime, but only in terms of providing a collective mental space for highly symbolical poetic expressivity of a certain kind – all of it looping back into the official discourse of the regime. Păunescu, for example, has recently argued that elements of this collective mental space of poetically expressed dissatisfaction played a significant role during the 1989 revolution: “I believe that some of the things that have been said and done at the time of the Revolution have been said previously in the Flacăra Cenacle” (Păunescu 2007, *A venit Revoluția. Ce ați făcut atunci?*).

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<sup>42</sup> To such an extent that between November 2005 and July 2008 Intercont Music together with the National Journal newspaper have re-launched 7 albums of songs from the Flacăra Cenacle period, to meet projected customer demand (all still currently available on the market).

It is possible that some of the slogans manufactured by Păunescu and that songs launched at the Cenacle's sessions re-emerged at the Revolution and later in 1990 when students and intellectuals protested in Piața Universității against the 'neo-communism' of the Iliescu regime. It is even more probable that the style of music and the manner of collective mobilization characteristic of the Cenacle became somehow creatively associated, during and after 1989, with student protest movements.<sup>43</sup> However, even if this were the case, it would not be so because the Flacăra Cenacle had previously epitomized the revolutionary spirit, but rather, because it had defined the meaning of 'cool' for the youth/young adult culture of the time. There are a number of things that I want to communicate through this affirmation. Firstly, that the Cenacle brought the culture of 'cool' to Communist Romania, where 'cool' was defined both as the celebration of group difference (gender, regions, ethnicities), and, most importantly, as what was acceptable, in terms of adolescent rebelliousness or non-conformism (or in other words, marked by the limits of positive, constructive criticism of the regime). Secondly, that the non-conformism of the Cenacle could only reflect the engaged non-conformism of Păunescu (2007), that is, the rebelliousness of someone who even today professes his love for Ceaușescu ("<There is no room for comparison between that formula and what you were writing: 'I loved you, I love you and I will love you'>" <Well, I loved him and I love him even today. Did I prove that I swear at him

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<sup>43</sup> For example, the unofficial anthem of the 1990 Piața Universității student protest, 'Imnul Golanilor' ("The Hooligan's Hymn") by Cristian Pațurcă, is similar to musical material typical of the Cenacle, while Pațurcă was both a member of former Flacăra Cenacle and of the new "Totuși iubirea" Cenacle established by Păunescu after 1989 (EVZ.ro. 16-06-07).

undeservedly? What I said then that was negative I say today. >”); in other words, a non-conformism circumscribed to the system and functioning to consolidate the regime.<sup>44</sup>

### **The Flacăra Cenacle and Socialist Humanism (an illustration)**

One good example of the type of ‘resistance’ claimed to have been evinced by the Flacăra Cenacle is the song “Free Man”, identified by Păunescu as a protest song. The song was interdicted in 1983 after being awarded a prize by Nicu Ceaușescu himself. These are the troublesome lyrics of the song:

“We defy violence and everything that ugly is

Of fools we are today full up to the neck

Nothing can be made with man as a role/roll

Forced love is called rape.

.....

Chorus:

Patience, patience, oh hurriedly you

For what you keep forcing will return unto you

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<sup>44</sup> That this was so is proven by the close affiliation of the Cenacle with Nicu Ceaușescu (deemed by Ceaușescu as his eventual successor in power), in the words of Păunescu “a lover of authentic youthful music and good poetry, who liked the protest songs” (Păunescu 2007).

Nature entire a rhythm has in it

We defy violence of bullet or belt.

Stupidity is violence's motivation

But the whip, in the world educational is not

The same way the graft carefully develops on tree

Long live the power to believe in man

We will never live according

To the dogmas of the dogmatic fools

With chains at mouth, soul and hands

We believe that in the real our own masters we are

And our walk also

Is not the forced march

But the dream which we entered willingly

I remove dogmatists from their cynical role

Human nature is essentially free.

We believe in the road on which we have walked

A Renaissance man in the universe

We love the discipline the cold rigors

But for eternity the soul in us is free.” [My translation] (Tabulaturi.ro, 2009)

According to Păunescu (2007), the lyrics were addressed to the overzealous Communists in official structures who, after one of the Cenacle’s performances, tried to manufacture evidence incriminating him and the youth in the audience. Obvious here is the criticism of the “dogmatic” Communist who employs violence in order to force ‘man’ to conform to existent dogmas. Instead, Păunescu calls for a regime of power that treats man more humanely: “Long live the power to believe in man.” By assuming the discourse of the “humane Communist” Păunescu is here still within acceptable limits. Furthermore, through appeal to the lyrical discourse of the 60s, the author is able to relatively safely end the poem by promoting the general ideal of freedom: “Human nature is essentially free/...But for eternity the soul in us is free.” The theme of freedom is acceptable here, (although the word itself must have elicited suspicion at the time) because freedom is presented 1) as an essential attribute of human nature, and 2) as an intrinsic part of that ‘road’ of ‘humaneness’ the Ceaușescu regime had committed to, after 1965, in order to develop man in all his universal potential. The poet is siding here with the humanistic

revolution of the Ceaușescu regime: “We believe in the road on which we have walked/A Renaissance man in the universe.” For, as discussed before in another chapter, the construction of the ‘multilaterally developed socialist man’ requires human beings to be perceived as ends and not as means, which, in itself, presupposes conditions of freedom. Therefore, it can be concluded that, in terms of the substance of the poem, Păunescu does not step outside the official Communist discourse prevalent at the time.

What effectively counts as him crossing the line, however, is the branding of “dogmatic” Communists as “stupid” (violence comes from stupidity the argument goes), followed by the strong assertion: “I remove dogmatists from their cynical role.” Nevertheless, even so, these assertions<sup>45</sup> apply to the non-humane Communist activists, thus acting as

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<sup>45</sup> Another famous poem that was denied publication by the regime, “To the Analphabets” (1979), enacts a similar type of trenchant [basically accusing “party activists” of being illiterate and unread, in other words, stupid; according to Criș (2010) Ceaușescu himself thought he had been targeted as an ‘analphabet’ through allusion to his defect of hearing] but circumscribed critique (the ideals invoked already being accepted themes in the official discourse of the time). This time, however, from a standpoint that decries a lack of adherence not only to the ideal of humaneness, but also to that of culture (and to the ideal of the intellectual), so as to demand appreciation for artists, music and poetry:

“.....  
I told you the times have changed  
And that the situation is more complex  
Servant - the intellectual is not  
Culture is not something like an annex

I told you not to fetishize Marx,  
In medicinal alcohol his teaching not to hold  
And continuously without reading him  
You mention him until your mouth hurts

I told you that the battle for man  
Does not forgive today any desertion  
And you have decorated yourselves by yourselves  
When the fight is still unfolding

I told you music is not a microbe  
Threatening civilizations  
It’s man’s for man to be better  
I told you: something that he would like give him

a sort of critique from within the side of Communism recognizing and respecting the ideal of humaneness<sup>46</sup> (which did represent the official side of the regime).

In conclusion, what we have here is a protest from a socialist humanist perspective, that is, from the perspective of the language and human ideals characteristic of Communist official discourse. Criticism of the dogmatic Communist, the centrality of humanistic values, the ideal of the Renaissance man, these are all basic features of official discourse. Moreover, statements like “The same way the graft carefully develops on tree/Long live the power to believe in man”, “And our walk also/Is not the forced march/But the dream which we entered willingly” and “We love the discipline of cold rigours” are meant to emphasize that the poet, and those in the name of which he speaks, are “disciplined,” “willing” participants in the regime’s power, freely receiving its careful “grafting.”

‘The protest’ consists therefore, not so much in the discourse advanced, but in daring to mention the word “freedom,” in the branding of dogmatic officials as stupid, and in their symbolic “removal” from positions of supervisory control.

Ultimately, it was this “daring” or non-conformism from within and in the name of the system that gave the humanistic discourse of the *Cenacle Flacăra* its “cool,” thus revitalizing official discourse. In conclusion, when added to the discourse of the

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I told you analphabetic co-inhabitants  
To pay attention and to remember  
But did not know you were also born deaf  
And take to arms when you see words.”

<sup>46</sup> This perspective is fully contained in one of Păunescu’s aphorisms: “You know, it is not a bad thing to have a function, it’s bad if you forget your function as man, when you are with a function [in Romanian the word function referred to a job in the administrative hierarchy of the regime]” (Diaconu 1983, mins: 16-17).



“humane Communist”, the lyrical discourse of the 60s, and the humanistic discourse of the Noica School, the discourse of the Flacăra Cenacle, it can thus be stated, served mainly to further cement Socialist Humanism.

### **The Reassessments of Păunescu after his Death: a New Debate**

After the death of Păunescu in 2010, a three pronged debate emerged in the media about the overall merits of Păunescu and of the Flacăra Cenacle. As large crowds of supporters gathered to manifest their appreciation for Păunescu in public, the view began to be heard (particularly in the mass-media) that Păunescu should be accepted as a genius poet only second to Eminescu; and that the Flacăra Cenacle had indeed constituted a form of resistance (and a manifestation of freedom) against the regime. This was immediately decried by the ‘anti-communists’ (largely gathered around the Păltiniș Group) who “saw in Păunescu a collaborator, someone who had placed his talent, as much as it had been, if it had been, in the service of a regime proven as ‘illegitimate and criminal,’ contributing, through the brainwashing of some generations full of youth, to its perpetuation and its ‘naturalisation’” (Poenaru 2010, *Centrul emoțional al anti-comunismului*, para. 1).<sup>47</sup>

In this context, the funeral ceremony of Păunescu quickly became the central point of a media contest with political implications. To start with, television stations like Realitatea TV and Antena (1, 2 and 3) chose to emphasize “the spectacle” of the funeral proceedings, and the heroic figure of Păunescu, reinforcing a patriotic-nationalist

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<sup>47</sup> All citations provided in this section appear in my own translation from Romanian to English.

discourse reminiscent of Communist times: “The two stations ... competed even, in the most indecent and most airy of glorifications. It was established: Adrian Păunescu is greater than Eminescu. As it is also given as certain that today’s dead is the greatest Romanian. To be understood, as the greatest dissident” (Palade 2010; see also Căruntu 2010). In response, the main public channel TVR1 chose not to transmit live the funeral proceedings, organizing instead a series of analyses and discussions critical of Păunescu, the most critical of which was that of Andrei Cornea (also member of the Păltiniș Group): “He was a mediocre poet, but he had a genius, the histrionic, malefic genius of a mass-manipulator, he had instituted the cult of the leader, had instilled this cult with a mysticism and a nationalist delirium which caught, becoming a surrogate mysticism in a country in which everything was surrogate” (inpolitics.ro 2010). The next day, Victor Ponta (cited in Rogozanu 2010) accused Cornea and TVR1 of committing “an anti-Romanian act” and “an act of political subservience” by denigrating the memory of Păunescu. Ponta, the leader of the Social Democratic Party (PSD), then followed this by lodging a complaint against TVR1 with the Cultural Commission of the Senate (idem). Defending himself, Cornea (cited in Libertatea.ro 2010) invoked the necessity of presenting an alternative viewpoint at a time where a singular interpretation had dominated the media, arguing that his gesture had been “pro-Romanian” and not “anti-Romanian,” classification which could not be applied to Păunescu: “Adrian Păunescu was not a patriot, he loved his country, but he was not a patriot. To support a terrible dictator and to brainwash a whole generation is not an act of patriotism.” In addition to this, historian Zoe Petre (Libertatea.ro 2010i) interpreted Victor Ponta’s official complaint as a move designed “to win the hearts of those non-PSD people who cry after ... after Păunescu.”

Soon, the political implications of the whole media contest began to be spelled out from a third position, that of those favoring a more specific, nuanced form of anti-Communism, namely, critics of what they themselves have coined as ‘the anti-Communist ideology.’ Exemplary here, Rogozanu (2010) argued that by choosing to focus solely on whether or not Păunescu had been a compromised figure in relation to the regime TVR1 had, in fact, unfolded “a new type of propaganda.” The media contest, therefore, had been nothing more but a polarized affair in which a new, “anti-Communist” and “pro-Bănescu” type of propaganda tried to fight off a “more powerful, older type of propaganda, that of the Flacăra Cenacle kind:” “Practically, the pop-Ceaușist sectarian culture had fought with a pop-anti-Communist sectarian culture” (idem).

With this introduction, the features of the ‘anti-Communist’ discourse in relation to Păunescu, and their critique by the opponents of ‘the anti-Communist ideology,’ effectively the last phase of the media contest around the funeral ceremonies of Păunescu, can now be given a quick overview. In my view, the more recent ‘anti-Communist’ critiques of Păunescu reveal a number of important similarities:

To start with, Păunescu is presented not so much as a poet [when he is, he is a “mediocre poet” (Cornea, cited in inpolitics.ro 2010)], but as a “versifier,” (Cornea, cited in inpolitics.ro 2010; Palade 2010) a “colossal turbine for producing words in verses” (Ungureanu 2010).

Secondly, far from being associated with ‘acts of dissidence,’ Păunescu is described as having embodied “the most important and most efficient propaganda engine of the

Communist propaganda apparatus” (Ungureanu 2010).<sup>48</sup> “He was one of the architects of the Ceaușist utopia, he was, himself, an institution in that dictatorship” maintains, also, Tismăneanu (2010). From this perspective then, the activity of Păunescu (and that of the Cenacle Flacăra) is evaluated as the “brainwashing,” (Palade 2010; Căruntu 2010; Cornea, cited in Libertatea.ro 2010) and “collective indoctrination” (Ungureanu 2010) carried out by the “malefic genius of a mass-manipulator” (Cornea, cited in inpolitics.ro 2010): “The toxicity of Păunescu can be measured in the curvature which bends, even today, the common thinking of millions of Romanians, directing it towards provincialism, mediocrity and kitsch. The fall of these people, and together with it, the backwardness of Romania, are the direct culpa of Păunescu. For in fact, Păunescu had asked for them, and they had been delivered to him. Magistrate and educator of multitudes, Păunescu has marred at least one generation. There where souls and minds still fresh were asking for an alphabet of at least minimal sincerity, Păunescu had poured cisterns of provincialism, pro-Communist patriotism, pride for the industrial rust of Ceaușism and anti-modernist mysticism. In this whole operation of collective indoctrination Păunescu had played the role of a sentimental pivot. Păunescu has the reputation of a great poet, but this myth is nothing else but the full reflex of an epoch of cultural degradation energetically guided by exactly the Păunescu factory of rhymes” (Ungureanu 2010).

Next, a third view asserts that the Păunescu type of propaganda was based on generating the illusion of freedom through culture: “The cenacles carried by Păunescu from one end

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<sup>48</sup> “No one has brought a greater service to the propaganda and the regime of Ceaușescu” (The Final Report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania 2006, cited in Tismăneanu 2010).

of the country to the other had given an enormous mass of youth the illusion of a free culture” (Ungureanu 2010). This type of freedom,” Ungureanu (2010) adds, had the effect “a mouthful of air or a package of food has in a jailhouse dormitory.” Căruntu (2010) is even more emphatic: “This is how Adrian Păunescu loved his country: by painting, every day, the chains holding it a slave in the Communist camp.”

The end result of this propaganda, a fourth view then maintains, has been the formation of “the new man” in a large stratum of the population, with effects which are still dominant today: “Filming tens of thousands of naive spectators, unknowing, afraid, cold, hungry, indoctrinated, lacking hope, arriving out of their own will and not through being forced by anyone in the packed stands of the stadiums without night lighting installations but illuminated by us (the filming crew) with a hundred thousand watts, the shows prolonging until dawn, I was really amazed to see how in these people, found in a trance almost, was born something truly of the essence of the corrupted soul of the new man” (Ilieşiu 2010). “Tireless in his effort to make himself useful to N. Ceauşescu’s project of creating the NEW MAN,” (Tismăneanu 2010) Păunescu is, thus, one of the reasons why “...we haven’t exited Communism earlier, like Poland or Hungary” (Căruntu 2010) and also why Romanian society is still largely supportive of Communist values, discourses and ideology (as manifested during the funeral proceedings of Păunescu): “Henceforth, the grotesque media spectacle of the Funeral functions with military pomp from the Bellu Cemetery in the Capital, nearby the resting place of Mihai Eminescu, which it would like to leech on if not able to occlude it, emphasizes especially the division existent between the two Romanias, one of the new, resentful, revengeful, combative new man, and the other of the survivors of Communism, hesitant

between the febrile aspirations of European redemption and the deep fears arriving from the years in which Păunescu seemed unstoppable” (Tismăneanu 2010).

This leads to a fifth and final view. Only in a society where the totalitarian reflexes of the Communist era are still very active Tapalagă (2010) estimates, could the memory of “a false political benchmark and false model” such as Păunescu be honoured with such pomp and affection. And only in such a society, where the scale of values has been turned upside down, can the passing away of true exemplars of dissidence and culture such as Monica Lovinescu (in 2008) and Virgil Ierunca (in 2006) meet with no appreciation by comparison: “If Păunescu had been the one now portrayed as a knight of justice, it means that people such as Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca are being excluded from the pantheon of national dignity” (Tismăneanu 2010). And again: “[w]ithout them, we would be ashamed that in the past of our parents we find so few luminous figures. But notice that the true martyrs, we celebrate them in whisper on their journey toward history. In their place, the nation has invented false heroes [direct allusion to Păunescu], has consumed unfathomable reservoirs of tears in order to cry for them abundantly and oily” (Tapalagă 2010).

While these five points comprise the essence of the ‘anti-Communist’ critiques levelled at Păunescu, each of them has been called into question. Together these counter-critiques serve as an indication of why certain intellectuals<sup>49</sup> have condemned the ‘anti-Communist’ project for being too utopian and ideologically-driven, namely, for operating with “conformist symmetrical totalitarian-antitotalitarian schemes” according

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<sup>49</sup> Most of these intellectuals employ a Leftist type of critique; for this reason but mainly also for others, some of these intellectuals will be later included in the grouping I refer to as the New (intellectual) Left, a group generally highly critical of the anti-Communist camp developed around the Păltiniș Group.

to which whatever is closer to power is bad and whatever is farther away from it is good (Karnoouh 2010).

According to the first counter-critique, Păunescu was a talented poet, aware of latest trends in poetry, but one who chose an “archaic and populist” form of poetry in order to establish “communication with the masses through a type of poetry as much as possible according to their taste and understanding” (Cernat 2010i).

As for the second counter-critique, it states that it is an exaggeration and wrong to identify Păunescu as the main engine of the Communist propaganda machine (Poenaru 2010, *De la subcultură la subalternitate... și înapoi*, para. 1) and “to unequivocally expedite him under the badge of the personality cult of the leader” (Cioroianu 2010).

While true that Păunescu had been “a court poet” (Karnoouh 2010), “a pillar of the cult of personality” (Cernat 2010) and a “Ceaușist animator” (Cernat 2010i), his portrayal as “a tool of repression” (Cernat 2010) and as someone directly affiliated with the criminal dictator and his regime is widely off the mark (Cernat 2010, 2010i; Karnoouh 2010).

Firstly, paying lip-service to the regime and its leader was common practice amongst artists, poets and writers (intellectuals), while confronting the system directly was dared only by a handful of individuals (Horasangian 2010). From this perspective, the conduct of Păunescu as someone simultaneously playing in favour of the regime while also evincing phases of not exactly disinterested protest can only constitute a starting point for a much needed meditation: one about the effects which “the dependence on the Leader and the political Power (totalitarian or not)” has “on the autochthonous public intellectual” (Cernat 2010i „Cultura tranzitivă“).

Secondly, exaggeration of the role of Păunescu proves that the emotional “nostalgia” for the Communist past is oppositely matched by an emotiveness structuring the Anti-Communist discourse essentially as a “rhetoric of passion”<sup>50</sup>:

“The emotional accent placed on victims, terror, suffering and wants, although undisputedly justified with regard to certain contexts, cannot substitute, however, a whole array of experiences of the past and in relation to it. Operating with an abstraction of emotions and experiences, anti-Communism becomes trapped in a rhetoric of compensating through exacerbation, sacrificing entirely the historical context. It could thus be observed how Păunescu suddenly became a gigantic figure of the Ceaușescu regime, an institution by itself and for itself, capable to influence the course of history and of the country – evidently, exactly the same type of rhetoric, with inverted sign, however, of the admirers of Păunescu claiming exactly the same thing. We are thus witnessing not only a hyper-personalization of political power and of history, but especially, a total loss of the historical dimension. The whole institutional, political and ideological context of the ‘epoch’ in which Păunescu activated has been, therefore, sacrificed in the view of his post-mortem stigmatization (or of course, adulation)” (Poenaru 2010, *Centrul emoțional al anti-comunismului*, para. 3).

Thirdly, rather than just a mouthpiece for the propaganda of the regime and a most effective instrument for brainwashing and mass-indoctrination, Păunescu must be more complexly envisaged as the “human/humanizing interface of the System” “ – between

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<sup>50</sup> This opinion is also voiced by Cernat (2010i, Poate fi spus „adevărul integral“?): “What characterizes the main anti-Păunescu positions is the quasi-absence of systematization and the substitution of critical spirit through the apodictic line of argument and the excessive emotionality of the justiciary discourse.”



Power and the ‘resistance,’ between protochronists and anti-protochronists, between popular culture and elite culture” (Cernat 2010i, Poate fi spus „adevărul integral“?, para. 1). Not a “court poet” or “scribe,” neither a “dissident,” Păunescu would thus more accurately figure as a “negotiator” or ‘intermediary” (idem). Overall, despite it being ‘detoured towards the regime,’ the kitsch mass-culture invented and promoted by Păunescu had at least four features that can explain its appeal in ways other than through brainwashing: a) that of connecting art and high culture with the masses, b) that of filling the gap existing between the elites and the masses, c) that of discovering and promoting authentic local talent in the arts [through establishment of a “consistent autochthonous folk movement” (Cernat 2010i)] d) that of establishing a style of versification and rhetoric so influent that it has permeated capitalist publicizing and has been used even by his critics (Dumitrescu 2010). Not surprising then, that someone like Șiualea (2010) would talk in reverse about ‘the elitist brainwashing’ which has seen elites continue to maintain “the enormous social, political and cultural gap” existing between the elites and the masses.

Next, a third counter-critique claims that if the discourse/movement promoted by Păunescu was based on generating the illusion of freedom through culture the same can also be said about Noica and his Păltiniș School. Whether through “an elite culture,” or through “mass-culture,” both Noica and Păunescu “legitimized the new post-Stalinist nationalism in the same measure as, also, ‘resistance through culture’” (Cernat 2010i). That “Păunescu and Noica were saying at the same time, similar things, however, in a somewhat different manner” is also emphasized by Poenaru (2010, *De la subcultură la subalternitate... și înapoi*, para. 2): “Otherwise said, the Flacăra Cenacle (part, after all,

of *Cântarea României*) has ultimately been nothing else but this: a singing in pop-folk key of the exceptionalness of Romanian culture and creation, autonomous both in relation to the eastern-Communist values, as well as in relation to those western-decadent. Sounding familiar? All too much. The ideas and rhetoric present in the frame of the *Flacăra Cenacle* are only marginally different from the ideas and rhetoric present in, let us say, *‘Rostire filozofică românească’* or *‘Sentimentul românesc al ființei,’* books of the Păltiniș School’s philosopher, Constantin Noica.” Essentially, then, in Poenaru’s acceptation, the “Romanian nationalism” of both the *Flacăra Cenacle* and the Noica School constituted a “reactive, accommodating and self-compensatory” substitute to the nationalism of the decolonization movements – the best answer Romania could provide to its “position of subaltern in the system of global colonial relations” (idem, para. 4): “Thus, it represented an authentic form of avoiding a fight for emancipation in favor of the erotic conservation and self-contemplation of a presupposed form of cultural and spiritual exceptionality, expressible, how else, especially aesthetically.” Following a portrayal also applicable to Noica, Păunescu should then be accepted as “one of us: a popular expert of local aesthetical self-fictionalization” (idem). For, in the context of a “new form of colonialism,” the anti-Communism of today focuses, in similar manner, on the ‘moral-justificatory music of the suffering from the past’ (idem).

Finally, the last three counter-critiques develop against what Șiulea identifies as a general bias in the anti-Communist intellectuals. The copious amounts of adulation displayed at his funeral had left intellectuals wondering why the figure of Păunescu still held “so much power over people’s imagination” Șiulea (2010) observes. Such “affinity toward Păunescu”, the anti-Communist intellectuals had agreed, could only be explained

through the “inculture and ‘the lack of values’ of the masses” (idem) – themselves remnants of the brainwashing and mass-indoctrination through which Păunescu had attempted to fashion ‘the new man.’ If anything, according to them, Păunescu’s funeral ceremonies had proven, once again, that the transplant of the ‘new man’ in the body of the masses had succeeded. “Again,” it seemed to be implied by the elites, “the people are wrong, and they must be corrected,” must be made aware of the trauma and criminal nature of the Communist regime and of the difference between good and evil (Șiulea 2010). Șiulea (2010) taxed this view for its “arrogance” and for the foolish belief that such change could be accomplished from an assumed position of “supreme superiority.” Next to him, Cernat (2010i, Poate fi spus „adevărul integral“?, para. 2) warned that such an anti-Communist discourse risked to attempt, once again, the fashioning of a ‘new man’: “a national pedagogy, arrogant and exclusivist, instrumented for its [the public] anti-Communist ‘enlightenment’ risks to become a new form of propaganda, without adherence to the experience and needs of these people lacking a horizon.” From this standpoint, three alternative explanations (that is, the final three counter-critiques) emerge to contest the anti-Communist interpretation given for the public’s effusive outpour of attachment at Păunescu’s death. The first one (Ioniță 2010) attributes the emotional response of the masses and the media to “the triumph of the marginal, bombastic and kitsch mass-culture, which both Păunescu and Ceaușescu had aspired for...” The second one (Șiulea 2010) identifies the public affection for Păunescu as caused by his success in narrowing the wide gap existing between the masses and the elites: “The Păunescu phenomenon and the Flacăra Cenacle have already been explained pretty well...I would just like to observe (simplifying a lot, of course) that, practically, all of Romania’s big problems are reducible to only one, the enormous social rupture

between the masses and the elites, between the inertia of the masses and the autism and egotism of the elites. In this situation, almost anything which puts in touch the masses with the elites has, by necessity, also something positive.” From this second perspective, Şiulea (2010) blames the intelligentsia for having adhered to an elitist discourse, that of anti-Communism, which, from the very beginning, had no relevance for the current social-economical and political condition of the country (and no impact in reducing the gap between the elites and the masses). In addition, perceived at the forefront of anti-Communism, Liiceanu’s contribution to society is deemed as comparable with that of Păunescu, and in fact, as even more damaging. For, by ensuring a public space “dominated by ridiculous maxims, advisory platitudes and dubious moralisms” (referred to by Şiulea as “the silence disguised as civic action” approach) Liiceanu had blocked, for more than 20 years, “the possibility of elaborating” a “coherent societal project” for Romania. Finally, the third perspective (Horasangian 2010) interprets the mass-adulation of Păunescu as a clear sign that the trial of Communism attempted through the official condemnation of Communism has little to no public support, which renders it meaningless: “...the Romanian people does not want it and does not accept it. ... You cannot kick the Romanian people out of Romania because they do not accept the condemnation of Communism, because they like Păunescu... When thousands of people are tearful and remember with nostalgia the spectacles of the Flacăra Cenacles and their youth in jeans and trainers (...) of which condemnation of Communism are we still talking in Romania?” In a society in which “only a handful of people” have dared to stand up and talk the truth to the regime, “the act of condemning the Communist regime – no matter how correctly constituted theoretically and hypothetically put down on paper – remains without effects,” “a spectacle of few hours” at best (idem). What is needed,

then, is for a “de facto national reconciliation” to follow upon the “de jure condemnation of Communism” (idem).

To conclude with here, in the absence of a sociological study, when taken together, the arguments of the anti-Communists and the criticisms set against them offer a good and balanced introductory account into the role of Păunescu and of the Flacăra Cenacle.

However, the issue of the Flacăra Cenacle cannot be settled with any preciseness as long as other questions remain unanswered. These concern not only sociological<sup>51</sup> aspects regarding the nature and impact of the Flacăra Cenacle, but especially issues of a historical, whether institutional or biographical, nature. What is, for example, the relationship between the July Theses from 1971 – emphasizing “the large promotion in the masses of the ideology of our party” (Wikisource, “Tezele din iulie”) and the formation of the Flacăra Cenacle in 1973? Or, in other words, what is the connection between the Flacăra Cenacle and the ‘cultural revolution’ of Ceaușescu? What was the relationship, if any, between Dumitru Popescu<sup>52</sup> becoming the head of the Council for Socialist Culture and Education in 1971 and the founding of the Flacăra Cenacle through Păunescu in 1973<sup>53</sup>? Essentially, what type of causative links, if any, exist between “the artistic brigades of agitation” (mentioned in the July Theses), the Flacăra Cenacle, and the establishment of the “National Festival ‘Cântarea României’” in 1976? Did any of these institutions function as a model for any of the others? Did the Flacăra Cenacle

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<sup>51</sup> Cernat (2004) suggests also a study of the connection between the success achieved by Păunescu and his ability to cultivate contacts and relationships with important figures and inner circles of the nomenklatura.

<sup>52</sup> Main ideologue of the Party, with huge influence over all matters relating to culture and cultural/mass-media censorship, nicknamed “Dumnezeu” (“God”).

<sup>53</sup> How is it that the idea for Păunescu to run, between 1977 and 1981, Romanian Television shows aimed at discovering and fulfilling national creative talent came from Dumitru Popescu? Did Păunescu act as a personal literary councillor for Popescu between 1970 and 1980? (Vasile 2011)

function as a sort of institutional experiment, allowing for the emergence of the festival “Cântarea României” – into which it would later be reabsorbed, or did the three institutions mentioned above carry significantly different roles? How much sense does it make to argue that the Flacăra Cenacle copied the Western, hippie model of Woodstock, while Cântarea României’ copied the “gigantic propaganda spectacles” of Phenian? (Hentea 2010) Only after such sociological and historical questions have been answered, can the nature of the ties between Păunescu and the regime, and between Păunescu and the masses, be determined with more specificity and accuracy.

### **The Flacăra Cenacle and the Mirror Mechanism**

The mirror mechanism has been previously defined as ‘a device that operates a Communist-humanistic discourse which it adjusts in order to govern the possibilities of the mind to imagine reality,’ its mission being that of creating and regulating ‘positive avatars (heroes imbued with the best of humanity) for every social category.’<sup>54</sup> Such a device, it was then stated, could rely on employing any type of discourse, from Marxist to nationalist, pastoral, imperialist, or even ecological or Orthodox Christian and so on.

#### **Discourses**

The peculiarity of the Flacăra Cenacle is that it sought to create an alternative to the official discourse of the regime by promoting a reflection of it that seemed more real

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<sup>54</sup> See subsection, “The logic behind the Mirror-Mechanism.”

than the original. In my view, the discursive reasons for the configuration of such “a paradoxical alternative official culture” (Cernat 2004i, p.362) are threefold. Firstly, Păunescu’s stance as “the annexationist of authentic and non-conformist values, benefitting the credibility of ‘socialist humanism’”<sup>55</sup> (Cernat 2010) claimed the possibility of an alternative discourse. Secondly, his emphasis on the primacy of culture, seemed, like in the case of Noica, somewhat capable to hijack official discourse (although through a form of mass-culture and not through that of an elite-culture like in the case of Noica). Thirdly, the borrowing of elements from the hippie movement discourse gave the impression of a new and liberating youth culture. However, these three directions of discourse, and herein lies the amazing mystification of Păunescu, can be subsumed entirely within the official discourse of the regime. In the end, whether these discourses challenge or support the official discourse of the regime depends on how they have been brought together into one discursive blend (because it would be hard to speak of a unitary, master discourse in the case of Păunescu). Here we come to an analysis of how Păunescu has employed the mirror mechanism of official discourse to deliver the complex discursive mix of the Flacăra Cenacle. One innovation of Păunescu has been to employ in quick succession a number of discourses already central to the Communist period (and which have been described in this document as part of the period or phase of the mirror-mechanism referred to as ‘Socialist Humanism’). In their order these have been: the nationalist-Communist discourse (whose origins are described in the section “The Turn to Nationalism” and whose more emphasized forms are depicted in the section on “Protochronism”), the lyrical discourse of the ’60 (presented

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<sup>55</sup> “The great defeat of the poet was to believe in ‘Communism with a human face’” (Tudoran 2010, ¶ 5).

in section “‘Solar Lyricism’ and the Recuperation of the ‘Inner Space’”) and the humanist discourse of the regime (discussed in the consecutive sections: “Social Realism as the First Period/Discourse of the Mirror Mechanism,” “Socialist Humanism as the Second Period/Discourse of the Mirror Mechanism” and “The Turn to Nationalism”), alongside which was fitted, through recourse to the common theme of ‘authentic humanism,’ the hippie discourse of the West. As a consequence of this blending of discourses, the essential character of the Flacăra Cenacle has been judged differently according to the perspective adopted. Thus, while Karnoouh has interpreted the Flacăra Cenacle as primarily attempting to connect Communist Romania with the hippie movement in the West, Poenaru (2010, *De la subcultură la subalternitate... și înapoi*) has explicitly dismissed this interpretation, arguing that the Flacăra Cenacle had represented nothing else but “a form of ultra-nationalist kitsch, resonating perfectly with the regime’s ideology of praising the Romanian genius, the exceptional Romanian culture, its millenary values...” At the same time, Tudoran (2010, ¶ 5) has interpreted the activity of Păunescu as centred on the illusory notion that he could “not only sell to Romanians the idea of communism with a social face and the humanized figure of the dictator, but also “influence the dictator to not be a dictator.” Where does the truth lie then? An explanation, in my opinion, must be searched for not in the valuing of one discourse as more essential than the others, but in the manner in which these blended discourses have been delivered via the mirror mechanism. Therefore, the following discussion would move from an analysis of discourses to one of their mode of delivery, highlighting the innovations brought to the device of the mirror-mechanism by Păunescu.



## **The Mirror-Mechanism**

Typically, the mirror-mechanism employed by the official discourse of the regime had been based on the idea of reflection at distance, by imagining or creating ideal realities, which subjects could identify with via individual reasoning or via a sort of reflex-based type of imitation that copied social behaviour of a certain kind. At no point did the images or the avatars of the mirror-mechanism really become identified with, or become expressed, directly in the soul of the subjects. This type of projection was only possible through the type of collective mental space created during the sessions of the Flacăra Cenacle. By adopting, from the hippie movement, the elements of a ‘live education’ being organized within stadiums, “the force of ‘participation’ and of ‘direct communion’ with the public”, and “the ‘magic’ syncretism of anti-establishment uprisings” (Cernat 2004i, p.346), Păunescu was able to construct a device which could project not only in the written dimension, or on a screen, but directly in the consciousness of individuals. The question of course, is what has been projected through this device. Clearly the type of medium has conditioned the type of message being sent. We cannot speak here of highly elaborated discourses because the messages sent must have been engaged with by the public almost instantly and intuitively. Henceforth, we are talking about a device that operates not with the discourses mentioned above but with surrogates or simulacra of such discourses. A device which projects not in the written dimension but in the collective unconscious by transforming fragments of existent discourses in lived experience through accessible art. These fragments of discourses, in my opinion, reproduce main themes and codes of the collective belief system of Romanians under

Communism. Thus, by selectively conjuring up these themes/codes, Păunescu is able to unveil from within existent discourses a mythological map, a “grammar of the mind” (Pentikäinen 1995, cited in Dana 2004, p.18), which the public can recognize as its own at that point in time. This suspension or rendition, in the imaginary of the public, of a map or essential grammar of its collective mind or identity (culture), while accompanied by the suggestion of a link with transcendence, is what ultimately confirms Păunescu as a modern shaman.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, by projecting, in the imaginary, a mental map of themes of youth culture, Păunescu creates a shared illusion, a virtual reality and a collective performance in which each participant can reflect the artist-hero embodying all the other heroes of all other discourses. Youth-hero, artist-hero, socialist-hero, rebel-hero, hero of love, of peace, of the environment, the hero-parent, the hero-child, the hero of/for every social group – the whole point is to live through and experience the sensations and states of mind associated with being, invoking, praising and assuming the special identity of such heroes, from cultural heroes, to national heroes, to the mirroring of abstract values (humanistic heroes). The substance of this phenomenon is, thus, not as much discourse as the partaking of a fictional identity which becomes embedded as an ideal.

Consequently, the mental space constructed by the Flacăra Cenacle can be best described as a form of collective “aesthetical self-fictionalization” (Poenaru 2010, *De la subcultură la subalternitate... și înapoi*, para. 4), led by Păunescu. For this reason,

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<sup>56</sup> I borrowed this concept from Cernat (2004i, pp.342, 374) who describes Păunescu as a “deft manipulator of feelings, symbols and identity phantasms,” reminiscent of “traditional shamanism”: “Shaman, therapist of the sufferings of the nation, superstar, and ‘DJ,’ Adrian Păunescu has always felt his public, as a true artist of the agora, and has kept it, affectionately, close, proffering it a lyrical mythology, sometimes rudimentary, but ‘essential,’ an identity, belonging and pride, mixing history with the slogan and prayer with the reportage, manipulation with divertissement and education” (Cernat 2010). Amusedly, Cernat (2004i, p.374) also mentions that Mircea Eliade had reproached Păunescu for not having read his book on shamanism.

Păunescu is portrayed by Cernat (2010) as a “passionate manipulator of illusions,” and as “[s]haman, therapist of the sufferings of the nation.” For acting as a generator of collective fictions, Păunescu is able to project an illusory space of fantasy in which the audience finds itself mirrored in an ideal way and which it instantly internalizes. This single change constitutes, in fact, the greatest improvement brought to the mirror-mechanism employed by the official discourse of the regime. For while the official regime had used the mirror-mechanism to deliver stories that could provide individual role-models for individuals and social groups from distance (and passively), Păunescu had employed it to create an imaginary space in which the public could partake of a complex collective fictional identity almost instantly (and actively). The mechanism that had been used to project, as if on a wall, stories and heroes which individuals could reflect in their own lives, had now become an instrument coaxing the community to simultaneously reflect and project itself into the imaginary space ‘controlled’ for it by Păunescu. It is here that the second innovation brought to the mirror mechanism becomes apparent. For by having the community express itself within the projection of a controlled imaginary space, a sort of response/alterity is introduced into the original projection of the mirror mechanism. It is for this reason that Cernat (2004i, p.364) highlights the possibility of the Flacăra Cenacle having functioned as an institution of surveillance/propaganda monitoring the reactions of youth to different stimuli. More importantly, this attribute also explains how, through the Flacăra Cenacle, the mirror-mechanism was able to function as an interface between the Communist elites and the masses, simultaneously projecting, in the same imaginary space, the wishes and aspirations of both. From this second innovation, it is now discernible, stems the confusion regarding the potential of the Flacăra Cenacle for resistance, and also the

ongoing ardent debates regarding the type of influence this has had as a form of mass-culture.

### **The Flacăra Cenacle as Kitsch**

Nevertheless, to what extent can we talk about the Flacăra Cenacle as a space of resistance, considering that despite the innovations, which actually perfect the mirror-mechanism of the official regime, no real change has occurred at the discursive level? To what extent can we envisage the gathering together of simulacra of main strands of official discourse – only so as to form a locus of common themes everyone could identify with, as an alternative culture or one of resistance? Furthermore, can the Flacăra Cenacle really be considered to have promoted a hippie discourse, and more than that, one capable of overwhelming the other strands of official discourse contained in its discursive mix? This type of superficial mirroring of fragments of existent discourses, this mixing of surrogates of main official discourses so as to project, as simulation, an essential grammar of the collective mind for all Romanians (both elites and masses) – all in the name of culture, the nation, the Leader, the Party and humanity, how else could this be summarized if not as a form of kitsch? In fact, could the discursive mix of the Flacăra Cenacle be better described through any other notion than that of kitsch?

While the notion of kitsch has been frequently invoked in relation to the Flacăra Cenacle (particularly in the debates at the death of Păunescu in 2010), no study has yet explored this link substantially. Despite this, in the interpretation given to it by Călinescu (1987), the notion of kitsch seems to apply quite well to the discursive mix of the Flacăra

Cenacle. Firstly, the definition of kitsch as a concept which “for all its diversity – suggests repetition, banality, triteness” (idem, p.226) is reflected by the discursive mix of Flacăra Cenacle in its superficial repetition of fragments from multiple official discourses. Secondly, with its incongruity between “formal qualities” (anti-establishment hippie movement, authentic culture) and “cultural content” (official discourses of the regime, propaganda for the regime) the Flacăra Cenacle is also validated as kitsch through the “law of aesthetical inadequacy” (idem, p.236). Thirdly, the warning that kitsch can sometimes assume “the appearance of avant-gardism,” when the unconventionalities of avant-garde art have been stereotyped and, thus, the risk taken reduced,<sup>57</sup> seems to account quite well for the anti-establishment non-conformism of the Flacăra Cenacle (idem, p.231). Fourthly, while Călinescu (1987, p.236) distinguishes between the kitsch carrying a propagandistic aim and the kitsch produced for entertainment, he also acknowledges that the divide line between them can become sometimes blurred, as, indeed, it seems to be the case with the Flacăra Cenacle:

“propaganda can masquerade as ‘cultural’ entertainment and, conversely, entertainment can be directed toward subtle manipulative goals.” Last but not least, “both an imitation and a negation” – just like the elusive contents of the discursive mix of the Flacăra Cenacle – “kitsch cannot be defined from a single vantage point” (idem, p.232).

If, in light of these observations, the notion of kitsch is accepted as applicable to the Flacăra Cenacle, then certain conclusions could be derived from it. The power of kitsch “to satisfy not only the easiest and most widespread popular aesthetic nostalgias but also the middle class’s vague ideal of beauty” (idem, p.230) could seem to explain the

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<sup>57</sup> “For kitsch, by its very nature, is incapable of taking the risk involved in any true avant-gardism” (Călinescu 1987, p.231).

widespread appeal of the Flacăra Cenacle amongst the Communist elites and the masses. Even more specifically, this appeal could then be located in what constitutes the essence of kitsch – “its open-ended indeterminacy, its vague ‘hallucinatory’ power, its spurious dreaminess, its promise of an easy ‘catharsis’” (idem, p.228). For, as Călinescu (1987, p.237) asserts it: “perhaps the main reason for the wide appeal of kitsch” is “the desire to escape from adverse or simply dull reality.” The notion of kitsch as “a pleasurable escape from the drabness of modern quotidian life” (pp.228-229) could thus constitute a solid basis for explaining the attractiveness of the festival. This possibility is, in fact, confirmed by Petrescu’s (2004) account of the atmosphere created in the stadiums: “The message of the ‘Flacăra Cenacle’ was that communism and a sort of alternative culture could coexist. Young people were allowed to remain until the small hours of the morning at stadiums throughout the country where they could sing, dance, smoke, consume some alcohol, and make love. In many respects, the atmosphere in the stadiums where the ‘Flacăra Cenacle’ performed was more pleasant than what the system could offer in terms of leisure opportunities, especially in the early 1980s” (Petrescu 2004, Cultural Reproduction, para. 11). However, and finally, since “the whole concept of kitsch clearly centers around such questions as imitation, forgery, counterfeit, and what we may call the aesthetics of deception and self-deception” (Călinescu 1987, p.222), it would follow that the Flacăra Cenacle (from the imaginary space of its discourses to its actual physical structure) had represented, at best, only a form of “aesthetical escapism” (idem, p.237).

## Conclusion

An aesthetical escape, an illusion of freedom, an evasion from the aggressiveness and boredom of everyday reality under the regime, a type of ‘easy catharsis,’ a form of entertainment cohabiting with propaganda, a collective performance in which each participant could reflect the artist-hero embodying all other heroes of other discourses of the regime,<sup>58</sup> a miming of non-conformism and of alternative discourse – all these through the construction of an imaginary mental space via a mix of discourses of the official regime, process best described as a form of collective “aesthetical self-fictionalization” led by shaman and “alternative Communist”<sup>59</sup> Păunescu – this is how the character of the Flacăra Cenacle is finally judged through the mirror mechanism. No wonder then, that like in the cases of environmentalism, pacifism, and the hippie movement, the copying and blending together of “superficial and benign aspects” (Ioniță 2010) of different discourses would have, beyond the aesthetics associated with a collective’s self-contemplation of its cultural exceptionality (Poenaru 2010, *De la subcultură la subalternitate... și înapoi*, para. 4), no direct impact upon reality: “The poet warned, pathetically and hollow, about the health of the planet, as an Al Gore avant la lettre, because the theme started to be in fashion. But it somehow ensued that at fault was an imperialist conspiracy, not a drama unfolding at Baia Mare or Copșa Mică, the most polluted cities of Europe, or in the Danube’s Delta, which the loony Ceaușescu wanted to transform in a cornfield. As in the definition above, the correspondence with

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<sup>58</sup> “Too many times it has been lied in the history book with which we have been endowed by diverse imperia for our human/humane generation not to have the right to feel its heroes” (Păunescu, featured in Diaconu 1983, mins 6-7).

<sup>59</sup> Designation applied to Păunescu by Cernat (2004i, p.351): “His friendly and ‘constructive’ critiques, are meant to help consolidate the system, by drawing attention to the bureaucracy, to the sabotages and internal abuses, by branding internal ‘denigrators’...”

reality lacked entirely. It was never clear what the versified effusions referred to, what was the problem and what could be done” (Ioniță 2010).

Considering this above description of the Flacăra Cenacle, it comes as no surprise that while some have chosen to associate the festival with a sense of freedom and even dissidence, others have read in it exactly the denial of the possibility of meaningful resistance:

“But, what fascinated me most were the states I experienced alongside friends on the stadiums, singing with them superb pieces which gave us **the sensation of freedom within the soul**, in contrast to the heavy restrictions of the Communist system” [my emphasis] (Banta 2008, Copilăria, para. 4).

“From 1973 until its demise in June 1985, the ‘Flacăra Cenacle’ succeeded in confiscating the natural rebelliousness of the young generation and in transforming or directing it toward patriotic stances. By channelling the energy of a generation that did not yet perceive the system as utterly bad, the ‘Flacăra Cenacle’ obstructed the development of a genuine counterculture and thus contributed to hampering the appearance and the structuring of a dissident movement in Romania” (Petrescu 2004, Cultural Reproduction, para. 11).

While both of these viewpoints (each partly justified, depending on the perspective taken) represent extremes of interpretation, this is not surprising considering the phenomenon under investigation is confined to an aesthetical and imaginary collective space quite far removed from social and political reality. The question that must be asked instead, however, is this: would Romania have been better off with or without the



Flacăra Cenacle, especially in the likely circumstances that a dissident movement was never going to materialize? One of the positive aspects of kitsch is that it can play an educational role, ensuring progression from basic/false to more complex/authentic forms of art and understanding. However, can we say that this has been the case with the Flacăra Cenacle and, if so, to what extent? The fact that the themes and styles of Păunescu and the Flacăra Cenacle still dominate (in almost unchanged form) the collective psyche of Romanian people suggests a negative answer. More worryingly, this also implies that, despite the passing of more than 20 years, Romanian post-communism has not yet witnessed better options in terms of collective identity discourses (be this because of the lack of discourses, or, as suggested in the case of ‘anti-Communism,’ because the discourses promoted have been elitist and unable to engage the masses). From this point of view, and here one must reflect on the “tribal (the political shaman),” “patriarchal” model embodied by the leader of the Flacăra Cenacle, what remains is the tragic and worrisome conclusion that “the Păunescu case reveals the deficit of modernity characteristic of Romanian mentality and society” (Cernat 2004i, p.373), amidst a deficit of discourses about social identity.

# CHAPTER 12

# “Generația 80” or “The Generation of the *Eighties*”<sup>60</sup>

## Introduction

“Generația 80” (from here on subsequently referred to as G80) is described by Oțoiu (2003, p.87) as “an informal literary group who made their debut in the mid-1980s, and whose experiment in prose and poetry was to alter Romania’s literary landscape in the decade to come.” Cărtărescu<sup>61</sup> (1999) mentions that the G80 moment represented for Romania what 1968 had meant for the West, and particularly for the United States. Seen as responsible for this late synchronization<sup>62</sup> with the West, the G80 is thus defined by Cărtărescu (1999, p.153) as “the first sign of massive entry within postmodernity<sup>63</sup> of Romanian culture”: “Let us name the world of the 50s and 60s, in fact, not different enough from that of the interwar period, *modernity*, and the one that followed after ‘68<sup>64</sup> in the Occident and with a delay of 10-15 years in Eastern Europe, *postmodernity*. It

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<sup>60</sup> I have borrowed the translation of the term and its acronym (G80) from Oțoiu (2003).

<sup>61</sup> A very important poet and writer of the G80, Mircea Cărtărescu is considered by literary critic Adrian Bodi (2001, ¶ 3), the only G80 poet that “fully corresponds” to a postmodernist model.

<sup>62</sup> More than just a term, “synchronism” is a complex concept in Romanian cultural discourse, reflecting an essential aspect of modernization. This has been discussed in more detail in the chapter on protochronism.

<sup>63</sup> For Cărtărescu (1999, p.79) the terms postmodernism and postmodernity are not synonymous: “Postmodernism is the cultural, artistic, and ultimately, literary epiphenomenon, of postmodernity.”

<sup>64</sup> It is true that to some extent Cărtărescu (1999) identifies the hippie, counter-culture, ‘flower power,’ New Age movements of ‘68 with postmodernism because of the simultaneity with the larger phenomenon of postmodernity. However, for Cărtărescu, these movements are postmodernist because of epiphenomenal, aesthetical criteria. The best example here is the Beat generation of American writers and poets, considered postmodernists and the forerunners of the ‘68 hippie movement by Cărtărescu (p.152).

becomes clear that the G80s are the biological generation, nationally pervasive, with which begins, for us, the change of the world” (p.366).

Despite this, however, the G80 is not the only Romanian cultural front to claim a connection with the 1968 movements. In relation to the Flacăra Cenacle, Cernat (2004i, p.378) observes that while Păunescu and the G80 define themselves in opposition to each other, their cultural sources stem from the same model, that of the “hippie counter-culture.” Thus, if Păunescu had made hippie counter-culture autochthonous and had annexed it to national-communist propaganda through a Woodstock-inspired series of public performances, the more ‘underground’ G80 had responded to the hippie revolution by trying to “‘americanize’ and liberalize, in the aesthetical domain, Romanian prose and poetry” (idem). Ultimately, this difference in character as well as political stance between the two movements is what accounts for their inherent terms of opposition on the cultural scene<sup>65</sup>: “The propagandistic, maximalist and totalitarian solemnity came into contradiction with the demythologizing minimalism and the cosmopolitan subversiveness of the *underground* spirit” (idem). To conclude with, the impact (as ‘counter-cultures’) these movements had before ’89 (and even after) was conditioned by the media means available (to be read as ‘political status in the cultural world’) and by the type of audience reached. While Păunescu, an imposing figure in the realm of popular (and official) culture, commanded the allegiance of the extra-literary public, the field of aesthetical criticism and the literary public sided mostly with the G80

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<sup>65</sup> As Cernat (2004i, p.378) correctly observes, the G80’s literary cenacles can be seen as opposite structures (no practice of censorship, irony, democratic participation, the importance of the individual, subversion, deep theoretical and literary grounding, engagement) in relation to the functioning of the Flacăra Cenacle.

underground literary group, perceived as significant to the internal evolution of Romanian literature (idem).

### **Setting the Agenda: Four Claims About the G80**

In the section above, several claims have been advanced about the G80 that will require further investigation. The first, the assertion that the G80 represents the true embodiment of the '68 hippie counter-culture, has already come under some scrutiny. As discussed, while seemingly validated from a literary perspective, this claim must be nuanced when approached from the view of popular culture. As for the second claim, when judging which movement acted more as a 'counter-culture' to official Communist discourse, the odds seem to heavily favour the G80 over the Flacăra Cenacle. This line of argument is so strong, in fact, that another claim (to be later analysed in this section) locates the G80, at least at the level of suggestions, as the only truly dissident cultural movement from within Communist Romania. Last but not least, we have the somewhat *unstable consensus* regarding the postmodernist nature of the G80. I employ this phrase, because although the G80 has quite successfully imposed itself, before and after '89, as the main exponent of postmodernism within Romania, the issue is still contentious. Literary critic Andrei Bodiū<sup>66</sup> (2001), for example, has argued that there are three entirely different

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<sup>66</sup> Andrei Bodiū is also a poet and former member of the "Braşov Group" together with Simona Popescu, Caius Dobrescu and Marius Oprea (Muşina 2002, p.109, Bodiū 2002); all members being considered part of the G80 (Muşina 2002). The Braşov group was formed through the activity of "Cenacle 19", organized by Alexandru Muşina, after the model of the "Monday Cenacle" in Bucharest - of which he had himself been a member. Technically, Bodiū should be seen as a direct descendent of one of the original groups that formed the G80 ('The Monday Cenacle'), and not as an original member. Nevertheless, Bodiū (2002) agrees with his inclusion in the G80 group and his own words seem to support such an option: "I believe I put into practice, even more than they have done it, the theoretical ideas of the G80ists, who have fixed at the core of poetry the concepts of reality and biography. In what regards me I am continuously fascinated

perspectives in relation to how members of the G80 relate their movement to postmodernism.<sup>67</sup> This is my rendition of how Bodiū describes each perspective. The first one, advocated by Ion Bogdan Lefter, unequivocally establishes the G80 as “the first postmodernist generation.” This comes as little surprise considering postmodernism is defined by Lefter as “an integrative current” comprising “all tendencies and directions manifest in Romanian literature since 1980 until today” (idem). The second perspective, put forward by Mircea Cărtărescu, is more nuanced. In his view, the G80 is constituted of different strands with multiple orientations, but the defining feature remains the postmodernist one. Finally, from the other side of the spectrum, Alexandru Mușina (1988, p.441) argues that “the poets and writers of G80 are not, in their large majority, postmodernists” and that such a classification actually precludes a correct appraisal of the G80’s innovative role in Romanian literature<sup>68</sup>.

Clearly, opinion is divided within the G80 regarding this topic and the issue merits consideration. Moreover, this theme is of great interest to the current study because it concerns the actual discursive nature of the G80 and its relation to official Communist discourse. In order to uncover it, a survey of the G80’s history and of the main

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by reality, by everyday reality and I believe that the big themes, the Great Truths, can be discovered in this reality.”

<sup>67</sup> Bodiū’s (2001) own opinion, based on starting from the study of texts in order to define and develop a general theoretic model, is that postmodernism is not more important for the G80 than other tendencies, such as, for example, neoexpressionism: “...I would say that the reading of poetry in relation to the poetics of the authors has proven to me that to define 80ism [“optzecismul”] as postmodernist is inexact” (2000, p.34). For this reason, and believing that the G80 has created its own, unique paradigm, Bodiū (2001) chooses to refer to the general orientation of the G80 not as ‘postmodernism,’ but rather, as ‘optzecism’ [80ism].

<sup>68</sup> Of the same opinion are also literary critic Monica Spiridon (1986, cited in Diaconu 2011, ¶ 4) -“I do not believe we have a postmodernist literature and even less a <generation> of postmodern writers (not to upset the young writers from the 80s)” and critic and essayist Ciprian Șiulea (2003, p.216) - “In what regards the generation ’80, I find (and I am not the only one) that its reduction to postmodernism and that, a distorted one, deprives it of aesthetical and cultural valences and strategies which grant it, in fact, the power of fascination.”

aesthetical concepts employed to define its literary orientation will be undertaken next. This is expected to pave the way for a discussion of the G80 in relation to Socialist Humanism in the concluding stages.

## **The Discursive Nature of the G80 and its Relation to Official Communist Discourse**

### **The History of G80<sup>69</sup> and the Question of Dissidence**

Due to the nature of the Communist regime, both Lefter<sup>70</sup> (Bodiu 2000, p.10) and Cărtărescu (1999, pp.127-133) concur, Romanian literature has passed through the phase of modernity twice. First, during the interwar period, and second time, during the 60s, when proletcultism had made way for an enthusiastic return to the modernism of the pre-Communist era: “Interwar modernism, rediscovered with enthusiasm, seemed indeed very modern after the dullness of the ‘proletcultist’ art. It was, in fact, authentic poetry, authentic music, authentic painting; the return to modernism has been unanimously hailed, by the critics of the time, as a ‘reconnection with the tradition’ of Romanian art” (Cărtărescu 1999, pp.131-132).

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<sup>69</sup> This section relies primarily on material from the PhD dissertation of Mircea Cărtărescu, “Romanian Postmodernism.” My selection of Cărtărescu (1999) stems from the fact that his nuanced perspective allows for a historical treatment of different orientations within the G80 and, also, for awareness of their particular aesthetical features.

<sup>70</sup> Bodiu (2000, p.10) notes that in his 1999 PhD dissertation, (“Structurile criticii române moderne”) Ion Bogdan Lefter proposes the following sequencing of the history of Romanian literature: “modernism” between 1890-1900 and 1947, “proletcultism” between 1948 and 1960, “neo-modernism” between 1960-1965 and 1980, and “postmodernism” starting with 1980.

“Outmoded and discredited in the Occident,” and “contemporaneous with phenomena of counter-culture, neo-avant-gardes, psychedelic art and postmodernism from other meridians” (Cărtărescu 1999, p.132), modernism quickly established itself as the only paradigm in Romanian literature. Considered the exponents of the only type of literature possible, the modernists were eventually validated by the cultural apparatus of the Party (p.137), leading, in the case of the G60 (generation of poets from the 60s), to almost a mythical status (p.141). The regime’s acceptance of literary modernism came, however, at the expense of continuous pressure for the field to emphasize national-Communism. These tensions resulted in the great cultural battle of the 70s between the ‘modernists’ and the ‘protochronists.’ What was a dramatic battle then, Cărtărescu (1999, p.133) muses, appears today to have been a contest, “obsolete and without purpose,” between two outdated positions: “protochronism belongs to the line of traditional Romanian nationalism - The Transylvanian School-Eminescu-Pârvan-Iorga-the Criterionist Generation of the 30s - ...while the modernism sustained by the group of those ‘resisting through culture’ is, pure and simple, the interwar modernism, coloured, at most, avant-gardist...or surrealist. Not a single new concept of artistic or literary theory emerges in this period.” With the protochronist/modernist contest ongoing, with the literary generation of the 70s “more pronouncedly aesthetical” and more reluctant to indoctrination, and with cultural (literary movements like ‘Onirism’) and political scandals (dissidents) affecting the literary world, the status of writers deteriorates significantly, leading, from 1980, to the effective “enclavization’ of literature” (pp.140-141).



G80, Cărtărescu argues then, emerges as part of “the underground artistic phenomena” (p.141) generated by this new condition of literature within the regime. “Their social marginality,” Cărtărescu (p.142) states, “is absolute.” Not allowed university teaching positions or the opportunity of a doctorate, the G80 members cannot join editorial boards and in fact, find it extremely hard to publish anywhere. Denied teaching positions in the large cities, most of them begin as teachers travelling to rural areas (p.142), with some having to assume a social marginality reminiscent of American biographies (Bodiu 2000, p.18). This position of “semi-illegality”<sup>71</sup> (idem, p.17) has a direct impact on the structure and artistic orientation of the G80. For example, the adoption of the

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<sup>71</sup> The ‘semi-illegality’ and ‘social marginality’ of the G80 have been more recently confirmed by Macrea-Toma’s (2009) sociological analysis of the literary field during Communism. In a cultural field in which the status of a writer/poet depends almost entirely on the support (in a lot of cases much more complex than just financial and also considerable) and recognition received from the Writers’ Union of Romania, the G80 appears as a group with a marginal status both in relation to the Writers’ Union and in relation to the literary field as a whole (idem, pp.85-96), which effectively ensures its social marginality. Of the 45 writers of which it is not known whether they had been members of the Writers’ Union or not, 15 are G80 members (idem, p.72). For those making their publishing debut in the ‘80s “the difference between the medium age for debuting in volume and the medium age for debuting in a magazine” is of approximately 15 years. This is double the difference characteristic of those having made their debut in the first 15 years of the regime (idem, p.225), which emphasizes the difficulties faced by G80 members in emerging on the literary scene. At the same time, only 27 members of the G80 manage to receive a national award from the Union, while only three members manage to receive more than just one award (at the highest end only 2 members manage to receive as much as 3 awards, one of them being prose-writer Mircea Nedelciu - who eventually obtains an editorial post at the Union after having worked as a touristic guide, teacher and librarian). Additionally, “more than half do not work in the cultural press as editors (they are primary or high-school teachers), and, consequently, do not benefit of the *remunerated free time* and of the relational capital characteristic of wage-earners in the cultural press” (idem, p.94). Last but not least, as “the restrictions...imposed on the literary field” are “always pushed towards the basis of the system”, the G80s experience in full the toughening of censorship and the increased activities of the Securitate characteristic of the late ‘70s and of the ‘80s (idem, pp.222-223). To conclude with, however, for Macrea-Toma the marginalization of the G80s is caused by more than just the actions of an oppressive regime, be these the specific activities of the Securitate or the more general forces of censorship. The ‘drama’ of the G80, she maintains, emerges out of a “constellation of structural-institutional factors...and of political factors, situational, personal and of interventionism...” (p.221). The economic crisis (of printing paper and of print-runs), the decentralization of censorship (resulting in an increased “vigilantism” on behalf of editors and cultural administrators but also in a chaotic quest for economic efficiency which has distorting, uncontrolled results), the “political paranoia” that some dissident group is about to emerge (leading to the Securitate agents making sure certain writers do not get published), the competition for resources within the cultural world (which sees the protochronist and ‘autochtonist’ faction fiercely opposing the pro-European, ‘aesthetical’ one) and, essentially, “the mode of inertial professional reproduction based on the cumulation of symbolic-temporal capital (inside the bosom of the writers’ institution)” which sees the G80 relegated to a narrow role within the Writers’ Union and the cultural field, these are some of the main factors Macrea-Toma (2009, p.221) sees as determinant of the G80s’ marginal status.

underground institution<sup>72</sup> of the Cenacle as a literary common space for the sharing of poetry, writing and literary critique, namely, as their primary means for public expression, is directly linked with the G80's emphasis on oral expression, with their amazing solidarity as a generation (Bodiu, pp.20-21), and with their preference for being published collectively. Most importantly, despite the heterogeneity of the G80 writers, the Cenacles<sup>73</sup> are a faithful indicator of the main orientations within the G80 current. However, if the Cenacles, later under interdiction and eventually disbanded,<sup>74</sup> acted as legitimate "manifestations of civil society"<sup>75</sup>, where people could join in freely, in an atmosphere lacking ideological and aesthetical control, and most importantly, lacking censorship (Cărtărescu 1999, p.149), what does that tell us about the subversive character of G80? Can the G80 be considered to represent that one dissident movement Communist Romania seems to have been, in fact, lacking?

Andrei Bodiu (2000) seems to suggest that the G80 was potentially very close to developing into such a movement. In his estimation, the Cenacles were allowed to function only until their consolidation began to pose a threat (p.21). Had the Cenacles continued their existence, Bodiu (pp.13, 17) credits here the suggestions of Doru Mureșan and Alexandru Mușina, they would have probably led to dissidence, although

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<sup>72</sup> "The literary cenacle is in itself a type of underground manifestation, especially when it is not supported by a magazine. This has been the case for the Cenacles through which the G80ists emerged on the scene, out of which "Junimea", and especially "the Monday Cenacle," the Bucharest-based nucleus of the G80, became soon well-known" (Cărtărescu 1999, p.144).

<sup>73</sup> The Cenacles can be thought of as organic social structures acting as "schools of thought" but also as a "form of communicating literature": "A cenacle, like an organism, if once disbanded, cannot be remade anymore" (Bodiu 2000, p.21.)

<sup>74</sup> "The Monday Cenacle," for example, ceases to exist in 1983 (Bodiu 2000, p.17).

<sup>75</sup> "The atmosphere from the 'Monday Cenacle' was sensational. At the second participation I think there were around a hundred people. Looking back, I cannot help observe that the Cenacle was not anymore a cenacle, but had become, on a model characteristic of our history, an alternative form to the more and more demented dictatorship of Ceaușescu" (Bodiu, 2002).

this is not for certain: “The attempt to feel free in a world which was, evidently, a jail with limits at national level – of which Doru Mareş had spoken, could have led, maybe, to dissidence” (p.13). From Bodiş’s point of view then, the G80’s main form of resistance developed primarily as an “aesthetical option” (p.20), direct action against the regime occurring before ’89 only as solitary attempts (Mariana Marin or Liviu Ioan Stoiciu, for example). The ‘aesthetical option,’ however, is invested by Lefter (2000, cited in Şiulea 2003, p.206) with considerable importance, for, in his interpretation, the pre-1989 literature of the G80 counts as “the only amply articulated opposition” to the Communist regime.

Cărtărescu (1999, p.145) adopts a more cautious and less optimistic point of view: “Political dissidence, like the direct attacks, addressed, in writing, to the system, was very rare between G80ists. The most important thing for them was *to impose, through their writing, a zone of normality and interior liberty [my emphasis]*, fact which inscribes them in the general current of ‘resistance through culture’ promoted by their mentors, and, on the other hand, to map the recent history at its micro-structural level. The price, very heavy, was de-politicization.” The de-politicization of the G80ists is linked by Cărtărescu (p.145) with the influence of the mature literary personalities acting as their mentors (such as Nicolae Manolescu, Eugen Simion, Ovidiu Crohmălniceanu, Mircea Martin etc.): “Due to the tutelage under which they permanently found themselves in the first decade, the G80ists have neither the spirit of organization nor that of power (in the cultural or political spheres). The natural state of this generation is one of *dreamy anarchy* [my emphasis]. It is the reason why, after December 1989, most of

all their attempts, irrespective of the field (and in fact, very few) have resulted in failure.”

This opinion is somehow echoed by Borbely (2005) who argues that the aversion for the Establishment, which the G80 sought to express through aesthetical means, was prolonged into the Post-Communist period, leaving the G80 as the only important generation entirely missing from the Romanian political scene (and the only one not being essentially involved in creating civil society institutions): “The G80ists brought into this evolutionary scheme, the structural aversion for the Powers of the Day, towards the Establishment, and the decision to respond to an outrageous political provocation through aesthetical means, with a commonsensical result, which was postmodernism....The predilection shown for the aesthetic as a biographical and cultural form of existence represents, I believe, the reason why the G80ists have never been integrated into the political game after the December 1989 Revolution....Right now...a sort of abyss – an empty place, a flat field, exists between the representatives of the G70...and those of G90: The Revolution has ‘jumped’ over the Generation of the Eighties, this socio-cultural phenomenon being one of the most troubling of the current state of events in Romania.”

Interestingly enough, neither Katherine Verdery, in her book (1991) on identity and cultural politics in Ceaușescu’s Romania, nor Dennis Deletant (1998), in his study about dissent in Romania between 1965 and 1989, mention the G80 in their works. In all fairness, Deletant (1998, p.197) mentions Ion Simuț’s general classification of literature between 1945-1989 into four currents (opportunist, subversive, dissident, aesthetic), with the only G80 member present, Mircea Cărtărescu, consigned to the aesthetical

orientation, de facto a form of “interior exile.” More surprisingly, the G80 is also absent in discussions about “resistance through culture,” where both authors prefer to single out the members of the Noica school, Gabriel Liiceanu and Andrei Pleșu, as exemplary models (Deletant, p.196), or, in the case of Verdery (1991), as associated with the most potent alternative discourse.

A contrasting opinion to those of Bodiu, Cărtărescu and Borbely is offered by well-established literary critic Eugen Negrici. First of all, Negrici (2008, p.175) states that, rather than ‘resisting through culture’ the G80ists had, in fact, sought refuge in literature, living, while sheltered by their cultural environment/mentors, “on a bizarre island of normality.” Secondly, in Negrici’s view, their citing of the real, of the daily life - “which had always been a source of irritation for the authorities”, represented not “political courage”, but rather “an aesthetical audacity, that of approaching a zone which had been ignored in poetry (and even prose) for too long.” In other words, for Negrici, the aesthetical orientation of the G80 does not constitute primarily a form of “cultural resistance” but rather, an attempt to annex new territories for literature. At a general level, this observation fits with the wider cautionary note sounded by Macrea-Toma (2009, p.252) that “it is difficult in general to disengage the subversively camouflaged voluntary discourse (with its accompanying stratagems) from the poetic discourse specific to a generation or context.”

So far, it has been shown that appreciations about the subversive character of G80 stem from non-inclusion (Verdery, Deletant), to considering their aesthetical position as primarily a form of retreat and a by-product of the literary annexation of new territories (Negrici), then shifting to an acceptance of their “cultural resistance,” as a form of de-

politicization and “dreamy anarchy” (Cărtărescu), as an aesthetically expressed “structural aversion towards the Establishment” (Borbely), or even as a phenomenon very close to evolving into a dissident movement (Bodiu and Mușina).

Although, according to Bodiu (2002), the need for a study regarding the political level of engagement of the G80 has been recognized by both Andrei Bodiu and Nicolae Manolescu from before 1994, no such study exists at present. In its absence and the absence of any other relevant information, the G80 can be potentially linked only with the problematic notion of “cultural resistance” (and not with dissidence). Here, two types of arguments have been invoked which stand out. The first is the emergence of the G80, in the wave of recent verdicts<sup>76</sup> by CNSAS<sup>77</sup> about famous literary personalities<sup>78</sup> having acted as informers, such as Nicolae Breban, Ioan Es Pop, Ion Groșan, Ion Caraion, Andrei Brezianu, Dan Ciachir, Eugen Uricaru, Alexandru Paleologu, Augustin Buzura and Ștefan Augustin Doinaș [the last three listed in Deletant’s book (1998, pp.189-191,197) as exemplary intellectuals actively resisting the regime] as the only generation that, overall<sup>79</sup>, did not compromise with the Communist regime<sup>80</sup>:

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<sup>76</sup> See for example, Ziare.com (2011), Cornea (2005i), Dumitru (2011), Lazlo (2011), Cotidianul (2007) and Muntenus (2011). For a good example of how these issues have been responded to by literary critics see the debate entitled “Scriitorii si Securitatea” in Observator cultural, Nr. 316 / 12-18 mai 2011, and, in particular, Cernat (2011).

<sup>77</sup> “The National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives” or CNSAS is a government-funded agency established in 2000 with the aim of identifying former Security members, whether officers or informers.

<sup>78</sup> To this list should be also be included the recent scandals surrounding the possible collaborations of also Adrian Marino and Mihai Botez.

<sup>79</sup> To the best of my knowledge, from those receiving verdicts of collaboration from CNSAS only controversial and well-known intellectual Sorin Antohi had been affiliated with the G80. However, Antohi is not a writer or poet and is rather seen as an erudite, „about the only scholar from the generation ’80,” according to Cistelean (2011).

<sup>80</sup> “No important poet of the G80 is known to have entered into agreement with Ceaușescu’s regime” (Bodiu 2000, p.45).

“The systematic and ostentatious refusal of compromise and involvement in the political deceit promoted by the Communist ideology, as well as the independence – towards the cultural canon of the moment, as well as towards the ‘line’ promoted by party propaganda – characterizes the public attitude of the majority of G80 writers” (Muşat 2000, cited in Bodi 2000, p.16).

The second factor concerns the actual type of literature produced by the G80, and in particular, its subversive potential. A proper evaluation of how the G80 discourse differed from previous resistant discourses and mainly, from existent official discourse, is dependent on an analysis of its main concepts and features. Therefore, such an exercise will be attempted next. Before proceeding, however, the promise of something different and subversive from the G80 literary discourse is potentially transparent from fragments such as these:

“We are quite bored, let us admit it, with oracular poetry. The gods in the name of which it pretends to speak do not exist. We are bored with mercenary poetry, with the poetry of the fakes who sing the peasant and the field of wheat from the coffeehouses and press-offices of Bucharest, with the poetry of the frauds who ride in a Mercedes, but who declaim that they know how big the 100 lei note is [allusion to Adrian Păunescu], with the ‘hermetic’ poetry, product of the incapacity to feel and express emotion, as well as with that of the ‘proletcultists converted’ (definitively, actually?) in order to maintain themselves, to some extent, within literary actuality. A senile poetry, that had become a presence token or a shiny bagatelle, in exchange for which all the earth’s riches are being demanded, a poetry in which, beyond the translucent membrane of words, does

not pulsate the blood of our day to day life” (Alexandru Muşina, *The Quotidian Poetry*, 1981)<sup>81</sup>.

“I think of you/lost through those cities of Europe/which I will never reach/The Revolution did not start this year either/But we continue to wait for it/Decembrists all of us/ Because in this December we lacked in snow/Like we lacked in so many others...You know I can despise/and can adore the bag of skin/in which I carry to the end my death/But if what I have found/ is that I will never be/a free human/What will you do with me?/How will you be able to caress me? (Mariana Marin, *Letter to Emil*, 1982)<sup>82</sup>

### **G80: Cenacles, Concepts and Features**

As Oţoiu (2003) has indicated, the G80 consisted of both “a group centre” and of “fringe zones” including “marginal or provincial figures”, “<lost stars>”, “unaffiliated figures”, and “older mavericks that the group annexed as ‘precursors of G80’” (p.87). Despite this heterogeneity, different attempts have been made to ascribe essential common features to the group’s writings. Out of these, Cărtărescu’s approach constitutes a good guide, for it links literary orientations and concepts with the historical development of the Cenacles.

While admitting that the cenacles of university cities such as Cluj, Iaşi and Timişoara were important in the formation of G80, Cărtărescu argues that the main direction of the movement was established in the Bucharest cenacles. Thus, Cărtărescu (1999, p.146)

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<sup>81</sup> Reproduced in Bodi (2000, p.196).

<sup>82</sup> Reproduced in Muşina (2002, pp.186-189).



credits the Junimea Cenacle and the Monday Cenacle with giving the G80 its main orientations: one “textualist”, and the other, “(micro)realist and biographical.”

Founded at the beginning of the 70s, the Junimea Cenacle included writers such as Mircea Nedelciu, Gheorghe Iova, Gheorghe Crăciun and Gheorghe Ene. Influenced by the 70s French left-wing intellectuals, the group advanced a prose which showed direct links with structuralism, the Tel Quel movement<sup>83</sup>, and “le nouveau roman.” Adopting the notion of intertextuality<sup>84</sup> launched by Kristeva, the members of the Junimea Cenacle showed an extreme interest in literary theory and saw themselves as “textualists” even though the precise meaning of that label fluctuated. Concretely, these writers dissolved genres<sup>85</sup> and practiced literature in common; they employed intertextuality<sup>86</sup>, metatextuality<sup>87</sup> and metafiction,<sup>88</sup> and tended towards narrative fragmentation, prolonged description, the ramification of narrative lines, and the use of more engaging viewpoints, such as that of second person narrative (Cărtărescu 1999, pp.147-148). At

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<sup>83</sup> A poststructuralist group formed around the French avant-garde journal for literature - Tel Quel, and which included personalities such as Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Phillippe Sollers. The Tel Quel group embraced Saussure’s structuralist semiotics (the notions of sign, text etc.) to suggest that social reality can be reduced to discourse theory or textuality (that a text is always without definite borders, irreducibly functioning as part of other texts, etc.), namely, that “it is language, signs, images, codes, and signifying systems which organize the psyche, society, and everyday life” (Best and Kellner 1991, 1.2.2 The Postmodern Turn, para.4).

<sup>84</sup> “Kristeva referred to texts in terms of two axes: a horizontal axis connecting the author and reader of a text, and a vertical axis, which connects the text to other texts (Kristeva 1980, 69). Uniting these two axes are shared codes: every text and every reading depends on prior codes. Kristeva declared that ‘every text is from the outset under the jurisdiction of other discourses which impose a universe on it’ (cited in Culler 1981, 105). She argued that rather than confining our attention to the structure of a text we should study its ‘structuration’ (how the structure came into being). This involved sitting it ‘within the totality of previous or synchronic texts’ of which it was a ‘transformation’ (Le texte du roman, cited by Coward & Ellis 1977, 52)” (Chandler 2003, ¶ 1).

<sup>85</sup> In ways reminding of the “constrained writing” (Wikipedia, Oulipo) techniques of the French literary group Oulipo (Cărtărescu 1999, p.146).

<sup>86</sup> For example, through the use of quotation, plagiarism and allusion (Chandler 2003).

<sup>87</sup> “Explicit or implicit critical commentary of one text on another text” (Chandler 2003).

<sup>88</sup> “Metafiction is a type of fiction that self-consciously addresses the devices of fiction. It can be compared to presentational theatre, which does not let the audience forget they are viewing a play; metafiction does not let the reader forget he or she is reading a fictional work” (Wikipedia, Metafiction).

the time, Cărtărescu (p.148) recounts, the concept of “textualism” became as widespread as to be mistaken for the emblem of the postmodernist G80. Nevertheless, because of the mystical and metaphysical character ascribed to the act of writing, as well as the insistence that reality could be reduced to textuality (which also presupposes that there is an objective reality to be studied or decoded, thus positing a sort of realism), “textualism” is, as one of the most important directions of the G80, in fact “(neo)modernist” (Cărtărescu, p.148).

The truly postmodern strand of the G80, Cărtărescu (pp.148-149) maintains instead, is given by the main direction of the Monday Cenacle, with which the textualists eventually merged at the beginning of the 80s. Founded in 1977 under the leadership of literary critic Nicolae Manolescu, and initially representing only the poetry wing of the G80 (Traian T. Coșovei, Magdalena Ghica, Ion Stratan, Florin Iaru, Romulus Bucur, Mircea Cărtărescu), the Monday Cenacle functioned as the main stronghold of the group until 1983 when it was disbanded. A centre point of literary resistance against the national-communist attacks launched by the literary magazine “Săptămâna,” the Cenacle managed, before its demise, to effectively launch the G80 in print through collective volumes of both poetry<sup>89</sup> and prose<sup>90</sup> (idem). This is how Cărtărescu (p.151) describes the theoretical orientation of the Monday Cenacle:

“The ‘Monday’ wing of the generation is, in comparison with the ‘textualist’ one, programmatically oriented not towards the text, but towards *reality*. Countless declarations from its main representatives attest the effort to escape the sphere of modernist abstraction and objectivity, for an attitude more pragmatic, more direct in

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<sup>89</sup> “Aer cu Diamante” (“Air and Diamonds”) in 1982 and “Cinci” (“Five”) in 1983.

<sup>90</sup> “Desant ‘83” in 1983.

relation to a real at a human scale. ...Reality appears in them [poems] twisted by an unlimited subjectivity, marked by the colloquial, the derisory, the sordid. The 'activist' character of the new poetry is suggested through another trademark, oftentimes utilized: 'the descent of poetry into the streets'. We recognize in all these an influence acknowledged by all the members of the principal nucleus in Bucharest, that of post-war American poetry, and primarily, that of the San Francisco School, known under the appellation 'the Beat Generation.'"

It is interesting that, while arguing that the main strand of the G80 is a postmodernist one, Cărtărescu concedes that the influence of the initial Beat generation<sup>91</sup> (Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg etc.) and of the San Francisco School (Lawrence Ferlinghetti in particular) was more in the avant-garde and Surrealist traditions. In other words, he seems to admit that the influence of these cultural movements was not exactly postmodern. Faced with this incongruity, Cărtărescu's solution is to treat both the French neo-avant-garde 'textualist' movement and the influence of the early Beat Generation as instances of a "soft postmodernism," also defined as "a postmodernism without postmodernity" (p.171). In the case of the most theoretically advanced poets, Cărtărescu (p.154) then adds, this "soft postmodernism" makes way, after 1985, for a hard version of postmodernism ("the actual biographical postmodernism"), mainly through the influence of the New York School figures such as John Berryman, Kenneth Koch and Frank O'Hara. In particular, O'Hara's "personism,"<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> In contradistinction from the textualists, who identify with the Leftist French avant-garde movements, the poets of the Monday Cenacle rely on American cultural sources like the Beat Generation, but without adopting their leftist political viewpoints (Cărtărescu 1999, p.153).

<sup>92</sup> "Abstraction (in poetry, not in painting) involves personal removal by the poet...Personism, a movement which I recently founded and which nobody knows about, interests me a great deal, being so totally opposed to this kind of abstract removal that it is verging on a true abstraction for the first time, really, in

is identified by Cărtărescu (p.154) as a principal source for G80's "biographical postmodernism":

"[i]n 1951/52 O'Hara developed his own literary style. Without consideration of meter, he quickly wrote down allied impressions. Memories, fictions, and impressions from the immediate environment – O'Hara frequently worked as his workplace, the bookstore of the Museum of Modern Art (1951-1955) blend together. Following reports of imagined or actual occurrences – this cannot be differentiated by the reader – in the imperfect or perfect tense, are descriptions in the present tense, and vice versa. Names and expressions from the various fields of art and from public life receive the same relative importance in the poetic process of association as the first names of friends. The significance of names is not explained within the work itself. Even with foreknowledge, the reader can recognize the difference between art-internal, public, and private only with difficulty. The artistic ego is not clearly recognizable as an individual dissociated from the outer world, following principles independent of situation. The border between the freely associated and the disintegrating subject – between the constitution and the dissociation of the ego – becomes fluid. Experiences and conceptions receive their own relative importance in the stream of association of the act of writing, which is related to

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the history of poetry.... Personism has nothing to do with philosophy, it's all art. It does not have to do with personality or intimacy, far from it! But to give you a vague idea, one of its minimal aspects is to address itself to one person (other than the poet himself), thus evoking overtones of love without destroying love's life—giving vulgarity, and sustaining the poet's feelings towards the poem while preventing love from distracting him into feeling about the person. That's part of Personism. It was founded by me after lunch with LeRoi Jones on August 27, 1959, a day in which I was in love with someone (not Roi, by the way, a blond). I went back to work and wrote a poem for this person. While I was writing it I was realizing that if I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing the poem, and so Personism was born. It's a very exciting movement which will undoubtedly have lots of adherents. It puts the poem squarely between the poet and the person, Lucky Pierre style, and the poem is correspondingly gratified. The poem is at last between two persons instead of two pages. In all modesty, I confess that it may be the death of literature as we know it" (O'Hara 1959).

‘Action Painting’: In verse, the poet is like Jackson Pollock, who literally (works)... in the painting. As a result of their cubist syntax (Perloff) with temporal and spatial displacements, the reader can no longer reconstruct the author’s stream of thoughts in O’Hara’s poems. The reader can use the poem only as a multiply-refracted framework for his or her own associations. By means of the multiplicity and intricacy of the references which make the poem possible and leave it open at the same time, the impressions which arise during its reading become at least as significant as that which is read” (Dreher 1992, O’HARA’S POETIC FORM).

The explanation given by Cărtărescu (1999) seems to suggest that the “*(micro)realist and biographical*” orientation of the Monday Cenacle stemmed from the combined influence of **1) the early Beat Generation (“realism”)** [“The rhetorical realism, oral and visionary, of distant Whitmanian ancestry, characteristic of the San Francisco School, is probably the most important ingredient of standard G80 poetry, as it had manifested itself in the underground, poetical student movement of the beginning of the 80s” (p.153).] and **2) that of O’Hara’s “personism”** – term adopted by the G80ists under the Romanian equivalent of “*biografism*.”<sup>93</sup>

However, and it is here that the unitary image of the G80’s orientation begins to shatter, or at least to show its complexity, for alongside “*personism*,” other important sources for the postmodernist “*biografism*” of the G80 must be considered (p.154). These include 1) “the narrative character, concreteness and immanence” of the non-modernist interwar and post-war Romanian poetry (Bacovia, Arghezi, “The Albatross” poets, Mircea

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<sup>93</sup> This fragment from Cărtărescu (1987, p.121) suggests an informal definition of “*biografism*”: “To try to transform life, your unique, individual, unrepeatable life, in poetry, with each of its corners, with each needle and each sun you have ever seen in reality, or in dream, with every thought and every sensation. To say **everything**, confession, avowal, and creation simultaneously.”

Ivănescu and Leonid Dimov), 2) “the minimalist poetry” resembling “late modernism and abstract and non-figurative types of neo-avant-garde” (The G80ists Petru Romoșan, Ion Bogdan Lefter, Bogdan Ghiu, Matei Vișniec sau Elena Ștefoi are mentioned here by Cărtărescu as “abstract, cerebral, parabolic, elliptical” poets) and 3) the Neo-Expressionist direction “preoccupied with an ethical and metaphysical problematic,” but “in which, even if the aggressiveness of language leads many times to effects of a hallucinatory concreteness connected to themes of suffering, abjection, madness and death, its sense remains after all, one impersonal and transcendent, specific to modernism” (from Bertholt Brecht to the “subjectivist poetry” of the German poets in Romania, namely, Franz Hodjak, Richard Wagner, Rolf Bossert, Werner Sollner, Johann Lippet etc., to the following G80ists: Emil Hurezeanu, Ion Mureșan, Marta Petreu, Nichita Danilov and Mariana Marin) (pp.155-158).

At the end of this exercise, Cărtărescu (1999) finds himself tracing the postmodernism of the G80 poets alongside the dimensions of “*(micro)realism*” and “*biografism*,” while having to, nonetheless, admit of significant sources which expand outside the influence of the Beat Generation, such as non-modernist Romanian poetry (concreteness, immanence), the minimalist (late-modernist) poetry and that of Neo-Expressionist orientation (concreteness, subjectivism). It is important to notice here that Cărtărescu’s argument posits primarily that the orientation of the G80 poetry is (micro)realist and biographical, and only secondly, that any such orientation is or would necessarily lead to postmodernist forms. In other words, on the one hand, Cărtărescu associates literary postmodernism with “*(micro)realism*” and “*personism*,” (although the literature of the

Beat generation and of the San Francisco School, and even that of Frank O'Hara,<sup>94</sup> is, generally, not considered postmodern) and on the other, it assumes that any form of Romanian literature with such an orientation either is, or would evolve towards, postmodernism.<sup>95</sup>

This sort of problematic perspective is also maintained in relation to the prose wing of the G80. The trademark of the G80 literature, which brings it closer to the ideology of the G80 poetry and towards an implicit postmodernism, is described by Cărtărescu (1999) as an “inextricably mix of *social hyper-realism* with *textual sophistication* [my emphasis] (p.169):”

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<sup>94</sup> In fact, even the New York School poets (including Frank O'Hara), whose influence is credited by Cărtărescu with the G80's transition from soft-postmodernism to actual postmodernism are mostly considered by critics as *avante-garde* poets; and more precisely, as poets stylistically identified with the “abstract expressionist” theory or program of the New York Painting School (see for example, the 2009 Encyclopedia of the New York School Poets by Terrence Diggory, pp.vii,2). Thus, for example, Lehman (1998) describes the New York School of poets as “the last authentic *avant-garde* movement that we have had in American poetry.” A similar position is maintained by Diggory (2003, ¶ 3-4) in a review of Hazel Smith's (2000) book on Frank O'Hara: “Instead, recirculating ‘a wide range of post-structuralist theory’ (2), Smith presents O'Hara as a forerunner of postmodernism. How we are supposed to evaluate the importance of this view remains an open question. To be postmodern is clearly as important to Smith as to be modern was to Rimbaud, but Smith's historical sense is keen enough to recognize that O'Hara was merely headed for postmodernism without having actually reached the promised land. His openness to popular culture, for instance, never equalled his passion for high art, as Smith demonstrates (31–33) in her discussion of ‘The Day Lady Died’ (1959). If O'Hara thus falls short of postmodernism as the standard of artistic and cultural value that Smith upholds, does the importance of O'Hara lie in his historical value as a forerunner? This would be the case if, for instance, the success of O'Hara's practice helped to validate trends that developed later, or, alternatively, if O'Hara's example contained certain postmodern seeds that still await cultivation by contemporary artists. However, Smith's view of history is too linear to encourage inquiry into the latter possibility. In her account, the arrival of postmodernism appears to have been inevitable, and it appears to have arrived as a complete package. One would have thought a theorist of hypertext would have been more open to a view of history as a set of branching paths requiring choices, and to the critical potential of such a view.”

This is not to say that Frank O'Hara has not been considered a postmodernist by other critics. But the consensus is so that even such critics have highlighted the fact that “[m]any readers and critics refer to O'Hara as typically *avante-garde*” (Tursi 1998, ¶ 7) and that he should be regarded, at best, as a forerunner of postmodernism. In the defence of Cărtărescu, however, it must be said that Romanian literary critic Matei Călinescu (1987, pp.286-287) identifies the writings not only of the New York School, but also of the Black Mountain group, the Beat poets and the School from San Francisco, as forming the established “corpus of postmodern writings (or, more correctly said, of writings usually perceived as postmodern)”; similarly, Călinescu (pp.145, 147) applies the combined term ‘new, postmodernist *avant-garde*’ to the French writers of the ‘*nouveau roman*,’ to the ‘*Tel Quel*’ group and to the Beat generation.

<sup>95</sup> A feeling, in fact shared by many of the G80ists, who sooner or later came to identify, expressly, with postmodernism.

“The ‘Desant’ [G80] writers are not so interested, generally, in the philosophy of history, they do not theorize anymore and do not believe in the “truth” of things. On the contrary, in their prose proliferates a small, marginal and extremely concrete world, chosen from new mediums, made possible by the Communist experience and, until then, never accessed by novelists. Truck-drivers, migrant workers, coiffeuses, swindlers, students, gypsies, occupants of “non-familial housing,” each with his own language (captured as in real life) and with his own social micro-habitat (apprehended through hyper-realist descriptions), show, within the prose of the Desant writers, the humanity and power to resist a sombre and mutilating epoch. The sordid and grey of everyday life, the total lack of idealism and lack of horizons of the Communist world, appear in this prose more eloquently than in any other intellectualist analysis. Over the preoccupation with microtome-like analysis of the social, the typical G80 prose overlays a very sophisticated textualist machinery, capable to slice, assemble and twist reality, to create self-referential loops and narrative bifurcations, to intervene at an infra-textual level (pagination, punctuation, rhyme, wordplays, citations and paraphrases), with the prose turning, eventually, into advanced literary experiments, constructed on the bases of a genuine form of ‘textual engineering’” (pp.159-160).

Like in the case of the poetry wing, the postmodernist combination of *hyper-realism* with *textualism* (truly achieved only by few writers, such as Mircea Nedelciu, according to Cărtărescu) corresponds to a division within the G80 between the writers “whose realism reaches only sporadically to true postmodernity” (Sorin Preda, Cristian Teodorescu, Constantin Stan, Alexandru Vlad, Nicolae Iliescu, etc.) and the textualist group which, despite relying on postmodernist sources, appears, primarily, as neo-



modernist (Cărtărescu 1999, p.160).

In these conditions, with so many strands present but with only one possibly considered more out-rightly postmodern (“personism”/“biografism”),<sup>96</sup> it is not surprising that the postmodernist nature of the G80 has been questioned, from within, by important figures of the G80 (Andrei Bodi, Alexandru Mușina, Mircea Nedelciu etc.):

“the poets and writers of the G80 are not, in their large majority, postmodernists”  
(Mușina 1988, p.441).

“To a postmodern model corresponds, in my opinion, only one poet, Mircea Cărtărescu”  
(Bodi 2001).

Aware of these arguments, Cărtărescu insists for a nuanced view<sup>97</sup> which recognizes the different realist/biographical/textualist/neo-existentialist and non-modernist orientations, but which ultimately identifies the binary “(micro)realism/biographical” (or “hyperrealism/textualism” in prose) with the main direction of the G80. On this, the majority of the G80 seems to find itself in agreement: for example, while Bodi (2000, p.29) and Ion Bogdan Lefter (2000, p.64) see the defining features of G80’s poetry in terms of “realism” and “the biographical,” Oțoiu (2003, p.87) emphasizes, within the G80’s prose, the somewhat similar duality of “textualism”/“authenticism.”

Disagreement sets in between the G80ists, however, with the arrival of Cărtărescu’s

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<sup>96</sup> Although even this could be called into question – see footnote 37.

<sup>97</sup> “From whatever point we look at it, as a literary phenomenon, the 80ism [of G80] remains a mixtum compositum, a chimera, but one that is stable and full of sense” (Cărtărescu 1999, p.148).

appraisal that the two orientations, “realism”/“biographical” in poetry, or “realism”/“textualism” in prose, are pre-postmodernist or postmodernist in nature.

### **G80 and Postmodernism: The Three Arguments of Cărtărescu**

The following represents my attempt to give a fair treatment to the theme of G80’s postmodernism by including the diverging arguments structuring the debate. It should be said that despite the continuous existence of debate lines, the tendency within the Romanian literary world has been to quite rigidly identify the G80 with postmodernism. By adopting a more nuanced approach, Cărtărescu (1999) has, at the least, corrected some of the mistakes of the past, which saw a fuzzy concept of postmodernism being applied indiscriminately. It is my opinion that no serious treatment of the relationship between the G80 and postmodernism can ignore three of the arguments put forward by Cărtărescu.

To start with, Cărtărescu is the first one to admit that, “exactly in the period 1983-1984, when the concept of postmodernism appears in the conscience of authors and that of [literary] criticism, the history of the G80, as a live and progressive phenomenon, practically comes to an end” (p.185). Thus, as Cărtărescu (idem) himself indicates, “the G80 style is, in fact, fixed, both in poetry and in prose, before the appearance of a postmodern conscience among the G80ists, so that, paradoxically, the most ‘postmodern’ artistic grouping of contemporaneous Romania finds itself, in fact, *on the road to postmodernism*” (p.185). The difficulty clearly manifested in identifying the nature of the relation between the G80 and postmodernism seems to stem, therefore,

from the ambiguity characterizing the advent of any new and original artistic movement: “The fault line between modernity and postmodernity, today strikingly clear, was not as visible 20 or 30 years ago, when the new technology and the new feeling of the world were only about to be constituted. The artists to which I have referred lived change in a confused manner and directed themselves toward “something else” rather intuitively, groping the dark terrain ahead of them, advancing and retreating, but leaving it mapped for those coming after them” (p.367).

In conclusion then, the first argument of Cărtărescu (1999) suggests that the G80ists are the heralds of postmodernism in Romania (themselves “on the road to postmodernism”) for whom “the appearance, in the Romanian space, of the concept of postmodernism was, therefore, a shock, acting as a catalyst for their artistic identity” and also as a coherent interpretative paradigm (p.185).

The second argument put forward by Cărtărescu concerns the correspondence between the “realism”/“biographical” orientation of the G80 and postmodernism. Both Mușina (1988, p.441) and Bodiș (2000) have argued that such a view is untenable inasmuch as the majority of the G80 poets do not seem to have been directly influenced by the Beat Generation in terms of their writing. While this counter-argument is an important observation it does not do enough to undermine Cărtărescu's position, according to which the realist/biographical orientation stemmed, almost subconsciously, from many different literary sources. Moreover, it is clear, in fact, that the style of poetry promoted by the G80 has much in common with the American poetry of the 60s. Thus, it could be assumed that, even where poets were not directly inspired by the Beat Generation, the

characteristic of oral expression associated with the G80's Cenacles guaranteed that the American influence, which bore heavily on important members, filtered through.

The third argument presented by Cărtărescu (1999) is probably the most difficult to deal with. In its simple form it states that because the G80 has largely embraced postmodernism after '84, militating for its acceptance, the movement should be deemed postmodernist. Cărtărescu is right to emphasize here that the G80 has succeeded both in imposing postmodernism as an important, if not the dominant literary concept of the 90s, and in reconfiguring the existing literary canon (p.156). Finally, that the G90 appears described as a generation continuing and fully developing the postmodernist lines initially uncovered by the G80 (p.165) only serves to strengthen this argument.

### **G80 and Postmodernism: Three Counter-Arguments (and Socialist Humanism)**

The notion of G80's postmodernism has been attacked mainly from three types of positions. Despite the exclusivity associated with these views, I believe that two of them can be sensibly interlinked with Cărtărescu's own account to provide a more complex picture of both the G80 phenomenon and of Romanian postmodernism.

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Counter-Argument**

The first position has been one of refusal of postmodernism, primarily, because of its lack of a totalizing narrative. Cărtărescu (1999, p.174) argues that the attitude of the members of the Noica group, such as Andrei Pleșu, who have generally rejected

postmodernism for its lack of a unifying metaphysics, epitomizes the way in which postmodernism has been received by “the Romanian intellectual establishment.” The suggestion here is that members of the textualist group such as Alexandru Mușina have rejected postmodernism, and therefore, the G80-postmodernism association, for a similar reason, namely, because of the “jigsaw puzzle fallacy” (p.198). Coined by Matei Călinescu, the term is described by Cărtărescu (p.198) as “the illusion that there exists an objective reality of phenomena which theory must faithfully follow - the same way one arranging a puzzle guides himself after the image on the box.” In the case of Mușina and other G80ists (and also in the case of modernist literary critics such as Ion Negoițescu, Nicolae Manolescu, Laurențiu Ulici and Alex. Ștefănescu), Cărtărescu (p.213) thus suggests, postmodernism, with its playful and ironic take on reality, and with its dislike for metanarratives, proved incompatible with their quest to identify and concretely reproduce the totality of reality (and with their “illusion that an objective literary reality exists, which their writings faithfully reflect”). In addition, that members of the textualist group saw postmodernism as a decadent, hedonistic and superficial form of modernity comes as little surprise considering that, unlike the Monday Cenacle, the textualist group had been deeply influenced by the French Left of the 70s.

Having described some of the G80ists’ dissatisfaction with postmodernism’s refusal of totalizing narratives, it is important to analyze the type of grand-narrative these G80ists might have sought to promote.

*The 1<sup>st</sup> Metanarrative of the G80: Realism as the Minute Description of Everything*

As already mentioned, the first major axis of the G80 - as a literary phenomenon, describes a “realist” [*(micro)realism/biografism*’ in poetry and ‘*hyperrealism/textualism*’ in prose] orientation. This orientation and the problem of sustaining it without falling back into essential forms of modernism are very imaginatively discussed in a 1987 article by Caius Dobrescu entitled “The Little Hopes.”

According to Caius Dobrescu (1987, pp.138), the modernist poet is ‘integrated’ into industrial society, living, together with his work, “in full safety,” while being “cultivated, promoted, honoured” by his “social system.” This social insertion of the modernist poet is triggered by the existence of an industrial culture that is based on “bureaucratic divisions” and “hyper-specialization,” and which is obsessed with “efficiency.” In such a system, the poet ‘is called upon to study the optimal functioning of language,’ and is “isolated in his laboratory, in order to do research at the top.” His intricate results are then passed on to “the man on the street, who does not read poetry,” through a circuit of “technicians (popular culture writers, advertising specialists, political orators, pedagogues)” (idem). In the end, the price of this social insertion of the modernist poet is dire. The isolation of the poet in the laboratory where poetry is being investigated as the core level of reality and perceived as constituting a separate, metaphysical realm, and where the “‘science’ of writing verses” is being mastered as a narrow but specialized competence, leads both to poetic “sterility” [for the “themes, subject, motifs and the ethics of the poem” lose their “initial (vital) impulse”] and to an isolation from the social world which ensures the preservation of the “social status-quo” (pp.138-139).

The postmodernist poet, on the other hand, risks his social standing and tries to connect as much as possible with “the image about the world of ‘the man on the street,’” with the aim of grasping “the central themes of the culture” he lives in. These are not the “big literary themes” of “Death, Love, Creation, the Connection between man and nature” but themes that relate to the “concrete” ways “in which a society or a group posits for itself fundamental problems (p.140).” At this level, Cărtărescu (idem) adds, the social function of poetry changes for “poetry enters into competition with all the other forms of social discourse, which try either to express, or to hide, these fundamental themes.”

It is in this context that the introduction of “‘the personal data’ of the poet within his lyrics,” namely, of his biography, becomes essential. For only through immersing in the diversity of the world with his concrete self can the postmodernist poet develop a personality able to attempt to reflect/assume/resolve the fundamental problems of his community. To put it differently, answers in relation to the central themes of a community lie in the particular ways in which an individual personality can integrate with the open diversity of the world around. In such an investigation, the individual personality holds important answers or an essential experience, and it is this concretely engaged personality that must be expressed to others. ‘Biografism’ and ‘(micro)realism’ become essential to the postmodernist poet because the drama of a community is being rehearsed at the level of individual personality. Personality<sup>98</sup> now constitutes the

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<sup>98</sup> The term ‘personality’ has a special significance in these discussions. Cărtărescu (1987, pp.122-123) refers it back to T. S. Eliot’s vision of a poetry which is ‘impersonal’ and ‘objective,’ a sort of metaphysical level of reality from which revelation (the poem) can descend into the receptive, neutral mind that has put aside ‘any trace of personal feeling, of biography of the author.’ Modern poetry, Cărtărescu suggests by invoking the words of T.S. Eliot (1922), demands the depersonalization of the author: “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality (T.S. Eliot 1922, cited in Cărtărescu 1987i, p.123). Or in his

substance of communication, and the language most concretely expressing personality becomes the medium for it: “What I feel, what I see, what I think in the usual circumstances of my life as common man, form the content of poetry, which becomes preponderate in importance over form. The character is me, without a mask, wagering not on stylistic veils, but on what is truly interesting (if there is anything) in my *personality*” [my emphasis] (Cărtărescu 1987, pp.124).

“The problematic of the poet,” Dobrescu (1987, p.145) thus affirms, “is to suggestively express the orientation of his conscience within the fundamental diversity, within the lack of homogeneity and within the uncontrollable of the world he lives in.” “[W]hen this technique becomes inflationist, . . . -meaning, when it attempts the serious, minute description of the **entire**, infinite diversity, of **Everything** – then,” Dobrescu admonishes his G80 colleagues, “we are dealing with a utopia amendable not so much for its obvious modernist extraction, but for its **inadequacy** and ‘ingenuous’ **pomposity**” (145). The confusion is explainable, Caius Dobrescu finally states, for the younger G80 poets, “growing in the shadow of modernism,” have tended to introduce their everyday experience, street-talk and other features of the new poetry, within a narrow, modernist format (p.146). The first G80 metanarrative, it can thus be concluded, relates to the inflation of the realist axis according to a modernist totalizing project, and namely, to the utopian aspiration that ‘minute’ descriptions of the ‘entire’ world, ‘of Everything,’ can or would exhaust reality.

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own words: “Everything that relates to the life of the writer is repugnant to the modernist reader and critic, for whom the text is everything” (p.123).



*The 2<sup>nd</sup> Metanarrative of the G80: 'Biografism' as a new Humanism*

In my estimation, the second axis, fact noticed by some of those analyzing the G80, also concerns the notion of “humanism,” which, it has been discussed before, is a discursive feature extremely characteristic of the Communist period. Somewhat paradoxically, the G80 movement has been hailed as a “new humanism<sup>99</sup>” by both advocates and detractors of the movement’s affiliation with postmodernism.<sup>100</sup> In a very reductionist way, the simpler explanation for this is that the notion of “humanism” oscillates, among the G80ists, between biographical “personism” and the larger ideal of a perfect humanity so common to Communist discourse. While for some, the expansion from ‘personism’ to a ‘new humanism’ seems postmodernist (Ion Bogdan Lefter, Simona Popescu etc.) for others (Muşina, Mircea Nedelciu, etc.), the ambiguous, ironic, playful and fragmentary nature of postmodernism seems incongruous with the emerging Enlightenment-agenda of a ‘new humanism’:

“Rediscovering the concrete existence ignored by the purist [and] ‘dehumanizing’ utopianism of modernism, postmodernity tries to reconstruct a complex, ‘totalizing’ human model, refusing to put anymore into brackets the “‘lower,’ biographical, everyday, sentimental, sensorial, much too easily despised stratum, when in fact, it is from it that any generalization about [the human] being should start” (Lefter 2000, p.55).

“My conviction is that, after modernism, we (should) witness a return towards the ‘human’ – as modernism has been a ‘dehumanization’ – towards a new “‘Classicism,” a

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<sup>99</sup> “In the last years, poetry gives signals that it is approaching more and more the world with another attitude, ‘humanistic’ and integrative” (Popescu 1987, p.177).

<sup>100</sup> The incompatibility between postmodernism and humanism has been emphasized by Şiulea (2003) in a chapter suggestively entitled Postmodernismul Iluminist „The Enlightenment Postmodernism” and, also previously, by “Monica Spiridon, Mihaela Ursu or Mircea Martin,” according to Şiulea (2003, p. 202).

new anthropocentrism. ... Postmodernism is, maybe, a **literary project**, but, not, in any case, an **existentialist project**. ...the new anthropocentrism concerns exactly this **existentialist project**. ...It proposes the revaluing, the re-signification of **here and now**, the **re-centring of man**, ‘pulverized’ by technologies, languages, cultural and ideological codes, the reconstitution in (and through) writing of a reality at the centre of which man is, nonetheless, to be found” (Muşina 1988, pp.439-440).

“Because I am interested in ‘remodelling’ and anthropogeny, etc., I do not want to be postmodernist...” (Nedelciu, in Nedelciu and Muşina 1987)

In relation to these assertions Şiulea (2003, p.201) correctly observes that while signalling a movement “from the transcendent to the immanent and from the abstract to the concrete,” ‘the biographical and the quotidian’ – as central features of the G80 and of postmodernism, cannot be assumed to imply essentialist discourses such as “humanism or anthropocentrism.” This delimitation of terms, Şiulea (2003) also notices, appears most spectacularly neglected in the “ideological vision” of Ion Bogdan Lefter: “In this ‘hot’ spot, one can identify the defining opposition towards modernism: in the space of the latter, the attitude of the self was one of disengagement, of ‘purification’, of projection in the surreal, of dehumanization...; while, in postmodernism, essential is the reorientation of the self towards real existence, the ‘re-humanization’, ‘re-personalization’ and ‘biographical re-positioning’ of the psychological and social being, which discovers its wholesomeness and deserts the utopian isolation in language” (Lefter 2000, p.65). Most transparently, then, in the G80 grand-narrative promulgated by Lefter (p.64), advancing into reality triggers by itself the achievement of true humanity and the other way around: “I ask rhetorically, because the main significance of the new

poetry, prose, criticism is exactly the openness for the real, for the most complex, 'total' reality, for the authenticity of existence, of the concrete, biographical being, a voluptuousness (which can be grave, bitter, tragic) of the return of the authorial self into the 'human' world, into 'true' existence."

In Lefter's defence, it must be said that for the G80 the issue of re-humanization seems to fall on a continuum between, on the one hand, personism and the biographical, and on the other, the return to full Being. Şiulea's (2003, p.200) assertion (and somewhat of an artificial division) that the G80 paradigm is constituted of both elements that have been left behind by postmodernism, such as "realism-message-authenticity-anthropocentrism," and by elements which are in tune with it, such as "the biographical and the quotidian," is a partial confirmation of this. The other confirmation comes from explanatory texts such as this<sup>101</sup>, which highlight the aspirations of the G80 model: "Then, what is the 'zone,' the specific difference of this 'noisy' realism? Oh well, no zone that is specific and with exclusivity. Neither puerile enthusiasm in the face of technological civilization, nor refusal, ultimately similarly naive. Neither suffocation in the description adherent to details and particulars until the voiding of sense, nor isolation in the nothingness of pure concepts and of "secondary," transcendent language, in fact, similarly unbreathable. But a bit of something, or everything, from all of them. Nothing put aside as meaningless, ridiculous, or, on the contrary, as imagined, unreal, from all that is human. The biological man, and the biographical man, and the social man, and the ideal, transfigured man. The small, individual self, and the vast, trans-personal self.

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<sup>101</sup> Or such as this: "The writer himself has 'humanized' in the sense that he no longer is an unreachable, omniscient, unnoticeable instance, but has transformed into a live presence in the text. He does not only get into the skin of a narrative character, but intervenes playing, discreetly, his own role as a writer" (Popescu 1987i, p.247).

Things from the perspective of the human, but also the human from the perspective of the world and of the universe ... Their thirst of the real is then a thirst for a live and expansive totality, which wants to maintain its fragments and phenomenalism from which the multitude of determinants is born, is a thirst that wants to rise to the Absolute with the earth too, with the world too, with the whole universe. Even if this Absolute is **imaginary**. This is maybe the fiction which fits in/inside a poem” (Cârnelci 1988, pp.131-132).

In conclusion, the following presentation has explained how G80 members (Muşina, Nedelciu) have rejected the label of postmodernism because of it being ascribed a fundamental incompatibility with a ‘humanist’ project, namely, with that of a ‘new humanism.’ At the same time, however, the account has revealed how other G80 members (Lefter), starting from the notion of the biographical, have themselves defined their postmodernism in terms of a “humanistic” and “true realism” agenda, that is, in terms of a similar grand-narrative. While, on the one hand, this uncovers the G80’s dependence on discursive categories of modernism (and also of the Communist Era), on the other hand, it raises significant questions about the authenticity of the movement’s postmodernist orientation. For, ultimately, can the biographical orientation fully account for the G80’s postmodernism (even when incipient) when the metaphysical dimension associated with it appears to be profoundly non-postmodernist? Şiulea’s critique is more than edifying here: “Humanism postulates the existence of a human essence whose fulfilment (predominantly cultural, social or political) it preaches; but, postmodernism is incompatible with both essentialism and the emancipatory optimism of the Enlightenment” (2003, p.201).

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Counter-argument

The second position from which G80's postmodernism has been challenged concerns the diversity of orientations and the particular nature of the G80 movement. While this position usually appears linked up with the first, it deserves mention separately.

The simple argument here is that, despite its postmodernist orientation, the G80 should be taken to represent "a new poetic model, with its own identity" (Muşina 1988, Bodiou 2001, Şiulea 2003). The reasons given for this are twofold. Firstly, it is ascertained that the diversity of orientations within the G80 precludes the definition of the movement as primarily postmodernist (*idem*). This is to suggest that, rather than labelling the phenomenon as postmodernist in order to grasp its dimensions, a more appropriate method would be to start with the actual poetic texts of the movement and, from there on, to develop generalizations leading to an interpretative paradigm (Bodiou 2000, 2001). From this position, as Bodiou and Muşina make explicit, an overemphasis on postmodernism would be, in fact, equivalent with a negation of the specificity and uniqueness of the G80: "Moreover, if we declare the G80 as postmodernist, then what did it bring that was truly new in poetry?" (Bodiou, 2001)

Secondly, despite external literary influences or similarities, the G80, the argument goes, must be accounted for as a movement formed within a specific historical, social, and literary context:

"The features which we discover in the texts of many of the writers who are still young, even though some (parody, self-referencing, meta-language, intertextuality) justify the nearness towards what is being approximated through the word, not yet clearly defined,

of ‘postmodernism,’ and others (the autonomy of the text, the temptation of non-referencing, criticism through competition) can lead the critic’s thinking towards ‘textualism,’ are, nevertheless, springing from the reality of transformations within our society, springing from the real and recent historical development of Romanian literature, from the reality of the relations between this literature and the society in which it appears and writes itself. Therefore, the causes of these features (which, only at a superficial glance, look like those from other contemporaneous literatures) are often different from the causes that led to their appearance in the cultural spaces in which the terms ‘textualism’ and ‘postmodernism’ operate” (Nedelciu 1987i, p.245).

In conclusion, while this perspective demands a more complex analysis of the G80, both in terms of the writings of the movement and in terms of its historical, social and literary context, the tendency, so far, has been to identify the same features, “realism,” “textualism” and “the biographical,” as the main interpretative paradigm of the movement. The only true displacement here has been to reject the label of postmodernism in the name of maintaining the group’s emblem. In its specificity, the argument has been that the G80 movement corresponds only to a G80 paradigm.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Counter-argument

The third position from which the relation between the G80 and postmodernism has received criticism is, ironically, a postmodernist one.<sup>102</sup> From this perspective, mainly advocated by G80 writer Petru Cimpoeșu (2008), the G80 stands accused of having

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<sup>102</sup> “I am a postmodernist who combats postmodernism” (Cimpoeșu, 2008).

monopolized the notion of “postmodernism” in order to increase its status.

“Postmodernism,” Cimpoeșu argues, is not anymore a concept or a cultural phenomenon, but an “institution of expression” used to impose values which assert the G80 as a centre of power. Furthermore, Cimpoeșu (2008) surprisingly declares, postmodernism in Romania is not postmodernist enough:

“We have arrived at the contradictory term of ‘Romanian postmodernism’ which defines more readily an institution that manages expression...than a real cultural phenomenon. It is an exclusivist institution which works through intimidation. At an analysis, no matter how hurried, ‘Romanian postmodernism’ proves to be in flagrant contradiction with the postmodernist mentality, a sectarian postmodernism, with small-bourgeois preoccupations, intolerant, atheistic and overall all, elitist.”

Cimpoeșu’s main contribution here, then, is to suggest that “postmodernism” has been defined in a reductionist manner as the equivalent of the G80. Not only that “postmodernism” is not “G80” but what has been flaunted as “Romanian postmodernism” departs from the original meaning of postmodernism (*idem*). For this reason, Cimpoeșu maintains, the artificial “Romanian postmodernism” is limited to the field of literature, lacking communication with other disciplines, which remain unengaged with the concept.

Until now, the three arguments of Cărtărescu for a postmodernist G80 have been matched with three types of arguments set against it. The overall picture is a complex one, but, in my opinion, one that cannot be denied a certain coherence.<sup>103</sup> The G80, it

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<sup>103</sup> What I am trying to say here is that these features actually fit together into a coherent whole, and that, possibly, the entire story should be looked at as a whole, where different opposing scales move up and

can be accepted, has acted as both the herald and, over time, the agent of literary postmodernism within Romania (while also consolidating its position as a new artistic generation). The biographical-realist orientation testifies to the first part, at least to the extent to which the Beat Generation, the San Francisco School and the New York School can be accepted as postmodernist. At the same time, the second part – the role of promoting postmodernism, is somewhat confirmed by the postmodernism of the G90. However, there are also problems. Important voices claim that there is much more to the G80 than just postmodernism. That it would be fairer to refer to the paradigm of the G80 as G80ist ('optzecism') rather than use the term 'postmodernism.' The metaphysical dimension of the G80 is clearly also not fully postmodernist, at least not according to the meaning ascribed to the term in recent times. In fact, one would have to wonder if, without postmodernism, the G80 would ever have been able to move beyond its Enlightenment "humanism" discourse. Last but not least, an overemphasis on the G80 as a Romanian version of postmodernism or even as "Romanian postmodernism," has arguably led to a reductionist definition of postmodernism, while also restricting the term to the literary field.

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down on the same continuum. For example, if the G80 is only a herald, a forerunner of postmodernism, then it makes sense to treat it both as postmodernist and as a particular phenomenon which needs to be studied on its own. This partial postmodernism (with its soft but also hard components) would also explain why while being the agent of literary postmodernism, the G80 has also retained, sometimes confusedly, Enlightenment features like 'humanism,' or why its 'postmodernism' has been at times reductionist or restricting. And so on ..., the main thing being that, essentially, none of these themes contradict each-other. Overall, such a position would also fit with Oțoiu's (2003) concept of 'liminality' in relation to 'the generation of the eighties.'



## **G80 as Cultural Resistance or Alternative Discourse**

In the previous section on “dissidence”, the G80’s subversive potential has been qualified as embodying, at most, a form of “cultural resistance.” But what is it that the G80 has to offer which differs from previous resistant discourses, and more importantly, from the existent official discourse? The earlier introduction into the main concepts and themes of the G80 can now serve to provide for an assessment of its subversive potential.

The biographical strand, to commence with, affirmed “an emitting, contingent, subjectivity” (Popescu 1987, p.177), substituting a biographical being for the abstract and impersonal self of modernism, thus emphasizing the freedom of the individual. Bodi (2000, p.17) draws out the implications: “Apparently paradoxical, the G80ists have proven a solidary grouping in the affirmation of individuality, of identity. To talk about ‘I’, about ‘me,’ was, without a doubt, an implicit revolt towards the ideology which promulgated the idea of the country that is ‘one single body, one single will.’ This positioning, at the forefront of literature, of the individual, with his anxieties and fantasies, was a subversive action.”

Similarly, the G80 “realist” orientation, through its citing of the real, of the daily life, and through “the attention given to the man on the street and his everyday problems, to his incidence with this world” (Popescu 1987i, p.247) proved to be “a critical one, the reverse of what the propaganda apparatus would have desired” (Bodi 2000, p.20).

Next, this biographical/realist nucleus was only reinforced through the G80ist emphasis on “authenticity,” namely, “that the author guarantees the authenticity of his words with

his own social person” (Crăciun 1981, p.269). Derived from this concept, the “fidelity” and “sincerity” called for in recapturing reality demanded creators to be honest about what they put down on paper, which ultimately meant they could only describe their own, personal reality. In addition, however, ‘authenticity’ also implied that this honesty transcended the space of the page, acting not only as a code for writing but also as one for existence: “Or at least, that is how it should be, for authenticity to be an effect of existence, the written reflex of a total engagement with life, thought, culture and politics” (idem).

This ethical/creative code can be considered to have challenged, in ways reminiscent of the Noica School, the moral ambiguity and duplicity cultivated by the regime.

Nevertheless, in the medium of writing, this code translated differently, as “a poetry strongly connected to the social context into which it was born and which constitutes its main domain for exploration” (Bodiu 2000, p.32) and as a prose concerned with a “microtome-like analysis of the social” (Cărtărescu 1999, pp.159-160).

Bodiu (2000) seems right, then, to affirm that the “realism” of the G80 stemmed not so much from an aesthetical option derived from American postmodernism but rather, from the particularities of the surrounding social context which involved an existentialist agenda: “The G80ists want, in a world alienated by Communism, to remake the lost connections with the real” (Bodiu 2000, p.31). Following the same line of argument, one can similarly argue, however, that postmodernism appealed to the G80 precisely because it fitted with its realist/existentialist agenda: “Surprisingly for the Western reader, in Romania (as in many other Soviet satellites) postmodernism was regarded as a radical and anti-dogmatic term that undermined the stifling conventions of social realism. Its

pluralism, its openness, its gusto for hybridization, and its tendency to destabilise established norms by means of Bakhtinian carnivalesque reversals – all this had an extraordinarily subversive potential. This might explain why in the Eastern block the postmodern paradigm was seldom viewed as the sterile parlor game of endless self-referentiality that was deplored by some Western critics” (Oțoiu 2003, p.102).

The last main feature of the G80, “textualism” - usually a term deemed incompatible with “realism,” can also be understood, in the case of the G80, as an attempt to recover reality and reconstruct humanity. Mușina (1988, p.435), for example, describes “the textual engineering”<sup>104</sup> of Mircea Nedelciu as “a form of **participation to the/ construction of the human** through/with the aid of the text.” Nedelciu’s “textualism,” it is ascertained, teaches the reader how to deconstruct the texts/codes in the middle of which he lives. Ultimately, then, it is claimed, “textualism” offers the reader the tools for debunking “**manipulation**,” allowing him a way out of ‘alienation’ and enabling him to engage in “**self-construction**” (idem).

In one way or another, themes such as *individuality, realism/the biographical, authenticity* and *textualism* testify to a certain capacity for subversion on behalf of the G80. However, is this capacity not overshadowed by the metaphysical aspect of the G80, which, as discussed before, seems to reinforce official discourse through grand-narratives that emphasize a ‘total realism’ and a ‘new humanism’? Strangely enough, in the G80 case, the metaphysical concerns mentioned above seem to translate into something very different from official discourse when expressed in writing. Thus, the metaphysical ideal of the ‘new humanism,’ so common to Communist discourse, is

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<sup>104</sup> The name given by Mircea Nedelciu to his exercise of writing prose.

transmuted not into an idealistic account of what “the new man” should be like, but into a literature and poetry about dehumanization:

“Subsequently, the G80 writers will draw, sad-ironically, the transient grey of this world of dire misery [the world of the industrial sites and of the colonies of workers], promiscuous, bereft of perspectives and of any ideal” (Mitchieveci 2004, p.256).

“If it is true/ this country/has honey/on it/like you often said,/then, why, my dear,/are you being sold again/for tons of barbed wire/and ash?” (Marin 1982, p.158)

Through a strange reversal then, the ‘new humanism’/’total realism” translates into a concern with dehumanization which triggers almost an obsession with marginality and liminality:

“Many G80 stories are located in threshold spaces, in no man’s lands, their protagonists are either borderline personalities or deliberate déclassés self-relegated to the gray zones of society, caught in dilemmatic situations they prefer to leave unresolved. Moreover, the narrative strategies of these texts tend to disorient readers by placing them in the liminal spaces of indecision. The narrator’s position suggests a similar hesitation; as narrators alternatively strengthen and relax their control of their narrative, they are both insiders and outsiders in the stories they unfold, staying both visible and invisible” (Oțoiu 2003, p.88).

What was once the metaphysical ‘new humanism’ of the official discourse, is now, via a concern with dehumanization that leads to marginality and liminality, postmodernist writing. If this seems puzzling that is so because we are approaching the complexity characteristic of the true nature of the G80, which Oțoiu (2003) refers to as “liminality”:

“...everything about the Generation of the Eighties suggested liminality and its plethora of associations: ambiguity, hybridity, transgression” (p.88).

“My contention is that liminality may manifest itself at the discursive level whenever the narrator adopts a strategy of an ‘impossible’ location in the simultaneous spheres of *both/and* or *neither/nor*. Both outside and inside the narrative. Both objective and subjective. Neither familiar nor remote. Such a logically improbable position seems to be the secret dream expressed by many narrators of the G80 group” (p.97).

In fact, this should not be surprising. As Oțoiu (p.87) observes, the Generation of the Eighties, as “the last significant literary generation to be produced in Romania’s forty-year period of communist dictatorship and the first to confront the unsettling ambiguities of the postcommunist era,” is a generation caught in the reality of transition.<sup>105</sup>

## **G80 and the Mirror Mechanism**

This journey into the subversive potential of the main themes and into the nature of the G80 serves to introduce a final evaluation. When measured against the mirror-mechanism of the hero set up by official discourse, it can be discerned, the G80 registers important effects.

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<sup>105</sup> “Placed in a uniquely ambiguous place – in a country deeply rooted in the in-betweenness of the Balkans and the peripherality of Mitteleuropa – conditioned by an equivocal history and born at the threshold of two historical paradigms, the Generation of the Eighties has succeeded to turn all these circumstances to their advantage and produced a literature that feeds creatively from the very ambiguity that so many deplore as part of Romania’s handicap. They assumed their liminal condition in many ways, cultivating hybridity and double-codedness, and exploring the potential for ambiguity offered by the very nature of fictional narrative” (Oțoiu 2003, p.100).

First of all, the emphasis placed on dehumanization turns the mechanism completely upside-down. While, once, the mechanism was supposed to create avatars for each social category, the G80 transforms the avatars into dysfunctional entities that follow the Communist script into dehumanization. In addition, the emphasis on individuality leads to the fragmentation of the entire mechanism. The G80 does not challenge the hero-mechanism directly and, unlike the Noica School, it does not try to re-direct the device through the image of the cultural hero either. The fragmentation of the mechanism occurs simply because the G80 has posited the everyday individual – as the fashioner of his own personal and authentic reality - at the centre of the mechanism, thus creating as many avatars as individuals. In fact, the fragmentation occurs even at a deeper level, for the hybridity and ambiguity ascribed to individuals makes them incompatible with the idea of an avatar, that is, with something that can be mirrored: “And this because the accent falls on a ‘quotidian,’ pulverized human being” (Șiulea 2003, p.201). The relatively extensive discussion of typical G80 prose characters carried out by Oțoiu (2003, p.96) is extremely instructive in this sense:

“Liminal characters abound in the prose of the G80 group. Mircea Cărtărescu’s novellas are peopled with androgynes, twins, doppelgangers, narcissistic figures, and teenagers caught in the crisis of becoming adults. Some, like *REM* or *Travesty* read like ample rites of initiation, where the identity of the novice is suspended, and his relentless trial mixes opposites: tenderness and cruelty, divine pride and humiliation, bliss and horror. In *The Twins*, Andrei, a genialoid and recluse teenager, is tormented by an unrequited love-hate for the frivolous Gina, and their long-deferred exotic prelude, consumed in a backroom of the Antipa Museum of Natural History, generates an enormous amount of

energy that brings all the paleontologic exhibits back to a hallucinating life, while their final and apocalyptic love-making is sheer atomic fission that causes the two lovers to swap sexes; Andrei becoming Gina, and vice versa, with the reader eventually realizing that the ‘failed androgynous’ has long been inscribed in the very names of the heroes [Andrei + Gina=Andr(o)Gyn(e)].

Often such characters are inscribed as mediators between two worlds. Such a character in Petru Cimpoeșu’s recent novel *Simion Liftnicul* claims to be able to converse directly with God and, to the consternation of his neighbors, he decides to move both his place of worship and his home to the only location that enables him to physically depart the misery of a larval humanity, and that connects him with a higher entity: therefore he squats in the elevator.

The reader frequently encounters characters whose social status is uncertain – marginals, déclassés; these once secondary characters now occupy the focal point of the narratives. The marginalized elderly in Daniel Vighi’s novel *December at 10* live in the dilapidated blocks at the periphery and are suspicious of the other marginals (homeless, hobos, handicapped) or equivocal categories (the new farmers, *colons* of the suburbs). The typical marginal in Mircea Nedelciu’s prose is the orphan, a socially unfixed individual, oscillating between random part-time jobs. A curiously frequent presence is that of the voluntary déclassé (what I would call a *self-unmade man*), the individual who opts for a precarious existence, the enigmatic solitary who refuses to play by the rules; such characters are frequent in the fiction of Cristian Teodorescu, where they seem to extract some secret pleasure from their dishonor. Acvila Baldovin in G. Cusnarencu’s *Memory Tango* quits his family to become a philosophical tramp. A victim of intolerant

ideological watchdogs, the academic from “The Crystal Globe” by Răzvan Petrescu relishes his fall and explores the liminal space of imminent death. The inscrutable and reluctant George from *The Bodiless Beauty* by Gheorghe Crăciun – a university graduate who prefers to perform menial jobs – becomes the reader’s Vergil, a *stalker* between the real world and the fictional one.”

Last but not least, it can thus be concluded from what has been discussed above, through its emphasis on dehumanization, marginality, deviancy, transgression, and the dysfunctional etc. the G80 dispossesses the mirror-mechanism of its most important element: the hero.<sup>106</sup> In addition, it could be argued that the G80 proposes instead anti-heroes, possibly traceable in some way to the type described by Alexandru Monciu-Sudinski in the early 70s<sup>107</sup>: “The *anti-heroes* of Monciu-Sudinski are some suave beasts, engaged in the search of universal harmony. In a world in which God has been replaced with Party discipline, and individual values (starting with the soul and ending with the slice of bread) have been nationalized, collectivized and ticketed, they find their peace in alcohol, fighting, torture and, from time to time, the contemplation of the frozen Bărăgan [vast plains in Romania]” (Manolescu 2004, p.461).

In conclusion, the G80, while not engaging directly with the hero-mirror mechanism, manages to displace it more through its discourse than any other intellectual/cultural

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<sup>106</sup> An excellent example here is provided by Hărășan’s (2013, p.11) PhD dissertation on “Amoralism and Identity Quest in Mircea Nedelciu’s Fiction” where the marginal and deviant heroes of Nedelciu are described as “amoralists,” meaning “with identities ‘suspended,’ ‘frustrated,’ ‘prejudiced’ and who go in search of alternative modalities (i.e., again, nonconformist to Ceaușist models) of self-definition/construction/reconstruction.”

<sup>107</sup> According to Manolescu (2004, pp.453-490) Monciu-Sudinski’s writings seem to fully anticipate the G80 movement. His debut volume, in prose, was pulled out of bookshops by the State Committee for Culture and Art and sent to be burnt on 15<sup>th</sup> of July 1971 (p.458).



group of the Communist period. In fact, except for its grand-narrative that endorses a metaphysical belief in a new humanism, the G80 discourse shares almost nothing in common with Socialist Humanism – which cannot be said of antecedent cultural movements. As such, on the scale of discourse efficacy (and not popularity, for example) the G80 deserves, more than any other movement previously analyzed herein, to be considered an agent of “cultural resistance” during Communism. This might not mean that much, however, considering that despite the general support apparently lent to it by Romanian intellectuals, the concept of ‘cultural resistance’ is a much contested<sup>108</sup> term, and one whose application to the case of Romania is more than problematic.

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<sup>108</sup> See the last section of the Conclusion for an in-depth discussion of the use of the notion of ‘cultural resistance’ for the Romanian space and for the discourses analysed in this thesis.

# CHAPTER 13

## *Conclusion*

Towards the end of this thesis a choice had to be made between pursuing a research dimension that would have strengthened the notion of the hero-mirror mechanism (as a theoretical construct) or continuing with the analysis of cultural discourses until present days (new forms of protochronism, the Păltiniș Group, and the New Left would have been the intended target). The first course of action was taken and this has resulted in the subsection entitled “The Roots of the Mirror-Mechanism.” Unexpectedly, this might count now as one area where an original contribution has been made. The origin of the mirror-mechanism has been traced from marginal cultural productions in Ceaușist Romania, via Stalinist material culture, Lenin’s philosophy and the discourse of Russian socialist realism, to that of the Russian avant-garde, the philosophy of Solov’ev, and finally, to the domain of religion, where it found its most complete form as a theological structure. Thus, Voegelin’s general thesis that Communism should be viewed as a “political religion” has been renewed, arguably, on more specific grounds.<sup>109</sup> Although the similar notions of “gnosis” (‘dictatorship of the proletariat’) and of the “apocalypse” (Hobbes’s Leviathan) on which Voegelin (1952; 1938) builds his concept of a political religion correspond to the general notion of the mirror-mechanism as Logos (Manifestation of God, etc.), and therefore to the notion of Imago Dei, the hero mirror-mechanism has the advantage of being more specific (because of its two axes of Imitatio Dei and Kenosis) and with an origin more easily ascertained in only religion. In like

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<sup>109</sup> This thesis departs from Voegelin’s assumption that any secular political system is by necessity simply an altered (in fact, decaying) form of a religious system. Rather, the term ‘political religion’ is applied here for those political systems that seem to rely on the hero-mirror device (or on any other such religious device) as a central governing/cultural mechanism.

manner to Voegelin's concepts, however, the mirror-mechanism is also applicable to Fascist regimes, if judging from the 'Legion of Archangel Michael' example in Romania. The notion of Imago Dei is clearly reflected, for example, in the notion of charisma, which Cârstocea (2011, p.212) argues, determined leadership even at the level of the autonomous cells ('nests') of the Legion: "The leader of the nest was neither appointed nor elected, but derived his authority exclusively from his own charisma. This was in a clear parallel to the supreme leader of the Legion ...". Similarly, Cârstocea goes at lengths in describing the centrality of Legionary notions such as "asceticism," "renunciation, self-sacrifice and the cult of death" (pp.225), which correspond to the axis of kenosis, while at the same time highlighting the concern with "purity," "chastity," "prayer" (pp.231-232) and a "cleanliness ... meant to be primarily spiritual" (p.261), which match the axis of imitatio Dei. In the context in which Cârstocea seemingly extends the axis of kenosis by interpreting both "self-renunciation" and "assassinations" (or "asceticism" and "terrorism") as the same type of violence being directed either inwardly or outwardly, his portrayal of the Legionary "hero man" (p.236) eloquently summarizes the two axes of the mirror-mechanism: "**Ascetic and pure** he was also an avenger ever ready to punish – humble but powerful" [my emphasis] (p.237).

Nevertheless, the mirror-mechanism serves in this dissertation not only as an argument in favour of the concept of political religion, but also as a way of highlighting a certain humanistic scheme (both in terms of its replacing of the divine with an ideal humanity<sup>110</sup>, and in terms of its humanistic values) shaping not only official discourse

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<sup>110</sup> "Communism and Nazism are both versions of the same utopia of reunification of men into one substance – humanity – which would transcend the individual in order to confer him meaning" (Matei 2011, pp.56-57).

but also different forms of public (and intellectual) discourse within Communist Romania.<sup>111</sup> That such a scheme extends through discourses from politics, poetry and literature to history, philosophy and cinema, through what at times seems to be more an intrinsic rather than an extrinsic necessity, raises the question of how such discourses come into being. Discourses, it would seem, are not constituted through social practice alone, but also, through epistemological schemes of an archetypal nature, which can transcend disciplines, context and cultures without, however, being universal. That this happens at the border between the formation of knowledge<sup>112</sup> and of cultural identity (education/ethics) and political mobilization (manipulation) highlights the importance of such allegorical archetypes. Finally, that ontological, epistemological and anthropological frameworks can emerge (including Foucauldian apparatuses such as that of the Christian pastorate) from the matrix of an allegorical structure which in its most complete form is identical with the description of the nature of the Divine-human agent (Christology, the Manifestation of God, Logos, Holy Spirit etc.) underlines the need to reconceptualize the religious key concepts of the Divine (i.e., the Divine mediators) in terms of their historical effects on current forms of knowledge and social practice.

Since, at one point, the choice taken was to extend the thesis in the research direction described above, the discussion of what might have happened to the mirror-mechanism in post-communism has been on hold and will now take place here. This fits perfectly

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<sup>111</sup> Žižek's (2008, pp.211-215) argument that Stalinism had saved "the humanity of man" by discarding versions of the "biopolitical dream" such as "biomechanics" in favour of a return to the humanistic tradition, while exaggerated, nonetheless confirms the strong humanist element in Stalinism (and in Communism): "The Stalinist terror of the 1930s was a humanist terror: its adherence to a 'humanist' core was not what constrained its horror, it was what sustained it, it was its inherent condition of possibility." In contradistinction to Žižek then, this thesis argues that it had been Humanism that had supported Stalinism all along and not the other way around.

<sup>112</sup> See Plato, Abrams (1953) and Frye (1957) as discussed in this dissertation.

with the structure of the conclusion, which as stated in the introduction, is organized alongside the three dimensions of research accompanying the mirror-mechanism: discourses as identity discourses, as intellectual discourses, and as resistance discourses.

## **The Mirror Mechanism and Discourses as Identity Discourses**

### **Starting Point**

#### *Inner Utopia*

Two key aspects have emerged from the course of the study on this theme which must be mentioned here. The first is that the discourses studied operate together, with each other and against each other; they imply each other, and when they do not, the audience does that for them. To enter one discourse or to study it is to enter or study all the other. What one has to do, then, is to deal with this superimposition of discourses and try to gauge the overall effect. One way this has been achieved is through the notion of “inner utopia” which has been confirmed for each chapter (even in the case of the G80, through the ‘biografism’/the biographical as a ‘new humanism’ metanarrative). A discussion of this occurs at the end of Chapter 8 and will not be repeated here.

#### *The G80 and the Mirror Mechanism*

The second essential observation is that, most likely, the hero-mirror mechanism begins to meet its demise at the hands of the G80 generation in poetry (I am saying this because

I am of the opinion that the final blow comes from a group of poets at the end of the 90s). The question of how this happens is in a sense the question of the aesthetical identity or paradigm of the group and of how it has come into formation. The issue is far from resolved. Where Dobrescu (1998, pp.228-229) talks about how the poetry of the G80 members was actually motivated by the micro-politics of Foucault, which it then sought to apply to everyday life, Cărtărescu (1999) confesses that the “(micro)realist and biographical” orientation (the only one to be considered more outrightly postmodern) was only one of its many strands and not a dominant one. In addition, arguments that the realist/biographical orientation stemmed, almost subconsciously, from many different literary sources outside that of the Beat Generation (and the New York School) raises the question of what in fact had triggered the aesthetic of the G80 before 1984, and thus, their very different reaction to the mirror-mechanism. What is certain, however, is that the G80 had succeeded in dismantling the mirror-mechanism into pieces for personal use. To this extent, they are the heralds of postmodernism, whether or not they had been familiar with it at the time. Their use of the mirror-mechanism is remarkable. The mirror of the hero is not broken, in their case. It is simply brought down to earth and shared as the realization that everyone (and in the concrete body not as inner utopia) is a mirror so everyone can be reflected and/or reflect everyone else. How? By recording immediate life, via the biographical and micro-realist orientation, as poetry.

## **Delegitimizing the Mirror-Mechanism**

### *Fracturism*

Three examples will suffice to illustrate that the mirror-mechanism is truly displaced in post-communism, at least in the artistic sphere. In 1998 a group of young poets (Marius Ianuș, Dumitru Crudu, Ștefan Baștovoi, Mihai Vakulovski, Ruxandra Novac, Domnica Drumea, Sandu Vakulovski, Zvera Ion, Răzvan Țupa) issued a manifesto of their movement entitled “Fracturism.” The pieces constituting the manifesto were signed by Marius Ianuș, Dumitru Crudu and Ionuț Chiva. Fracturism subsisted only for a brief moment but its aesthetic endures through the works of what are now considered some talented individual poets. Briefly, I will describe some of the features the manifesto outlines, so as to give a sense of the concept. Fracturism is ‘post-postmodernist,’ it accuses the postmodernists of recording every-day reality inaccurately, through the sophisticated angle and language of culture, and of playing ‘aesthetical games’ with their poetry. Politically, the fracturist spirit corresponds to anarchism and their writings are called ‘fractures’ (Marius Ianuș). Whereas postmodernists recorded reality as if with a camera, the emphasis in fracturism is on interpreting reality at the level of personal reactions: **“To arrive to reality, the poet must decompose the object into an avalanche of personal reactions and irreducible sensations.** Because objects only exist to the extent to which they provoke us reactions. We all say: we are afraid, but our fears are so very different. The fear of a man in front of a hospital bed where his dad is agonizing is completely different from the fear of someone going to the dentist. They



really cannot be compared. Fracturism proposes that we discover and grasp the difference between our personal reactions. The uniqueness of a reaction cannot be obtained through a conceptual or usual language. When you say you are afraid, you say in fact nothing. You should find in fear only that which is characteristic of you only” (Dumitru Crudu) [my emphasis]. If we relate this to the mirror-mechanism we observe that its mirror is broken at each of its three levels. The high reality to be perceived, i.e., the avatar to be mirrored, is a broken or fissured reality, not an image of a whole: “Fracturism is more a state (even of things) provoked by the discordant messages of today’s world (bad movies, interrupted by horrible commercials, said the poets in their manifesto). We are talking of a world of informatization, and hence a world of pseudo (I would say) communication, a world which Mircea Cărtărescu sees kaleidoscopically, but this is a very optimistic vision. Fracturism sees rather a world digging into your head, giving birth to neuroses and, finally, to alienation” (Ionuț Chiva). In other words, where postmodernism sees diversity and complexity, that is, some kind of aesthetical order, fracturism sees or rather feels fracture.

At the same time, the sense of self of the poet, the mirror or apparatus which mirrors this fractured reality, is also broken: “Fracturist prose must be one of madness and/or of infantile innocence. The break between the self and the rest, between surrounded and surrounding, leads finally to the fracture of the self” (Ionuț Chiva). The third mirror, the poetic universe created through this process, would obviously be a fractured one as well. With this, it can really be concluded that the Fracturists are the ones who completely disintegrate the mirror-mechanism in a manner reminiscent of Braga’s (2003i, Anarhetipul, para. 3) notion of the “anarchetype”: “As the etymological combination

between anarchy and archetype suggests, the anarchetype would be a disintegrated archetype, an archetype in which the center of meaning/sense, the logos of the work of art, has been pulverized as in the manner of a supernova (the sun visible or invisible) which explodes in a galactic cloud of meanings/senses.”

However, even so, Fracturism retains that principle of the “authenticity” of the self and poetry, of “sincerity,” which permeates the ‘inner utopia’ dimension of the mirror-mechanism (and can be traced back to the G80 and the G60) and which shines out as an element of (socialist) humanism and as at least a form of minimalist ethics: “In fact the idea from which the need for authenticity which we constantly rotate about our heads starts is the following: you cannot determine the birth of a state [of feeling] without experiencing it or at least some related experience (even if only mentally, as obsessions, they must exist)” (Marius Ianuș).

*“Pe bune/pe invers” or what is reality/what is fiction*

Another example to be discussed more briefly is a novel published in 2004 by a member of the same cultural generation, and friend with some of the Fracturists, Adrian Schiop. What I will discuss here is not the novel, written as a sort of biographical account of everyday talk and experiences of a group of youth in interaction, but some of the motifs or commentaries the characters put forward, in what constitutes, overall, an ironic and extremely efficient critique of anything that could pass as (socialist) humanism, and hence, of the mirror-mechanism.

Schiop’s characters distinguish between ‘deflationary’ and ‘inflationary’ attitudes,

meaning, between a “de-metaphysicized attitude,’ and through extension, a critical attitude towards all the stories which have a speculative [as in contemplative speculation] point of origin” and between “inflationist’ stories which talk about ‘soul,’ ‘intuition,’ ‘unconscious,’ ‘creativity,’ ‘irreducible human’ etc.” (Schiop 2004, p.137). They differentiate between characters that are “salubrious” (that “try to change you, or make pedagogy with you” or “are not real’ or who ‘are not independent’ (complexes, affective deficiencies, frustrations, ‘Things’ in which they believe, etc.)” or “insalubrious” ones, “flexible, mobile, adaptable...” (pp.152, 165-167). They laugh at “Things” or “Kestii” (meaning “big things”) (p.85), which designate big ideas (ideals) such as, for example, “Being” in Heidegger (p.51). They laugh at the “humanitas culture,” viewed as a sort of youth trend or popular fashion built around the ideas of the Păltiniș Group. They emphasize alterity and ambiguity (we never find out if the author as main character is gay or not). And most importantly, they highlight ‘fiction’ as a mode of exiting the “quotidian’ into another order of the real” (p.27) through its demystifying/mystifying function. ‘Fiction’ is, thus, “a fissure in the real” (p.28). It is the capacity to make up and act out stories in the social and wait for the reactions that would emerge: “In short, when you play a role that implies a story in the background or you make up a fanciful story together with others is called ‘to make fictions’” (p.40).<sup>113</sup> This book (and its characters), as Rogozanu observes, attacks “all prejudices about high culture” (idem, p.7). But it does more than that. It is the first book that systematically and imaginatively deconstructs the “inner utopia” of the Ceaușist period, the discourse of the Păltiniș Group, the idea of essences, of Ideals, and replaces them with a calm and

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<sup>113</sup> In this the novel resembles and reminds one of the 1982 movie ‘Secvențe’ (Sequences) in which a group of actors enact such fictions in real life situations to reveal the character of people in their everyday life.

easy-going flexible type of resistance. The novel does not dismantle or dissipate the mirror-mechanism. It just disqualifies it with a dose of almost empathetic irony.

*“Police Adjective,” The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu, 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*

Three films from the Romanian New Wave have caught the attention of a global audience in recent years: *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* (2005), *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (2007) and *Police, Adjective* (2009). Again, my intention is not to analyze any of these movies but only to make some cursory remarks about their role in relation to the mirror-mechanism. In terms of the plot the movies can be described as a) the failure of an old man at the hands of the public health system, b) a woman’s challenges in helping her friend have an abortion during the pro-natalist policy regime of the Communist period, and c) the moral dilemma of a young police-man regarding the application of a law about to be rescinded. Mainly through their plot these movies have been generally interpreted as highlighting certain types of social problems, the way a social analysis or social study would do: the health system, reproductive policies and the senseless rule of law. These, I would argue, are not the primary subject of these movies. What is happening in all these movies, rather, is that through the elongation of time, through the continuous and almost intimate recording of all the gestures and habits of the main characters in their everyday life (from eating soup to getting annoyed about seemingly trivial things), through terseness of dialogue, or absence of language and minimal sound, the viewer is invited into the life of the character, or as close as possible to it. From this close proximity, the viewer has to face a tension that threatens to disintegrate this human

subject (tension resulting from an everyday event in life); and then, from there on, the movie makes the viewer accompany this subject, stage by stage, and side by side, to an impending conclusion. In all three movies, therefore, the motif of the journey is a key element.

The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu, I would argue, is as much a film about hospitals as about the dying of one man.<sup>114</sup> A man whose condition is deteriorating and approaching death, but whom no one (except his paramedic), for one reason or another, wants to assist medically. This gradual de-substantiation of being (both physical and as dignity), of death invoked both by illness and by the lack of care in the medical system, constitutes, in my opinion, the main theme of the film. And here is a common paradigm for all three movies: that dehumanization occurs through how the social construction of reality comes to bear upon the self. Not only physically, but primarily at that level of the ‘inner self,’ of ‘being,’ of consciousness. The same can be said about the heroine of ‘4, 3, 2’ who has to face the fear of trespassing an inhuman law, suffer sexual abuse and then travel in a dangerous area of the city all alone in order to dispose of her friend’s aborted baby (all in one day). ‘Police, adjective’ differs somewhat in that the trial is not also physical. The challenge there is at the level of consciousness and language, and through that, the result is also dehumanization: “The boss asks him to organize a sting, but the cop opposes him and explains: his conscience wouldn’t let him, he doesn’t want to destroy a man’s life [the man is a teenager and the law condemning him is soon to be abrogated]. And so follows the lesson applied to the naive, who has the temerity to believe that some things are so simple, so obvious, that they render any hermeneutics

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<sup>114</sup> In the end this gets postponed as finally one hospital accepts him for surgery, but with the doctor remarking that a successful operation will only allow his incurable liver disease to kill him later.

futile. He is asked to explain what is that a conscience, and, as he stammers, his superior invokes the authority of the DEX [The Romanian Language Explicatory Dictionary], which explains the terms under litigation – *conscience, law, police-man*, but in which the syntagm so needed for the clarification of things, the moral law, does not appear. And that which is not in the dictionary elaborated by the Romanian Academy does not exist” (Stoica 2009, ¶ 4).

‘Police, adjective,’ therefore, poses the question of language as the definition of reality and self. It shows how in everyday life every word a young policeman encounters can be seen as problematic, for it imposes a meaning and an intention presumed to be objective, but which does not necessarily fit with the reality around or that of one’s self. It shows that language is codified and structures our reality and that behind this process of codification lie institutions. The movie, in a sense, is about how a young policeman struggles with this network of imposed meanings that is present, though not easily discernible, in the structure of language. It shows that in everyday life we operate with certain words and not others, in certain ways and not others because that is how the Romanian Academy, or some other type of institution, has decreed.

It asks whether the conscience of the policeman will rise above the codification of language or will be subjected by it. It ends with the policeman drawing on a blackboard a scheme and symbols referring to how the sting will be staged, a hint at how language traps the soul, for both policeman and teenager: “In these conditions, the policeman cannot be a policeman any anymore, [he becomes] but a word from the dictionary. Not even a noun he can be, but only adjective, he no longer has the power to define a reality,

he is condemned to serve it, to be an attribute of it, following a trajectory of words and a hierarchy which are parallel with his own existence” (Stoica 2009 ¶ 8).

In all three movies, then, the key theme, I would argue, is the dehumanization or de-substantiation of being through how the social construction of reality (law, procedures, institutions, words, language) comes to bear upon the self (and to act through it), from both outside it and from within. They bring the mirror-mechanism from the level of ideals and ideal images of human nature to that of micropolitics, disciplinary regimes and a most basic humanity, impotent, overpowered, abused, that is to say, dehumanized. They reveal that ‘inner utopia’ is a matter of subjectivization.

With this, my discussion of how the hero-mirror mechanism seems to have been effectively delegitimized during the post-communist period has ended. However, to say that the mechanism has been delegitimized in the realm of arts and high-culture is not to say the same has happened in every sphere of life. At this point, two examples of the continuation of the hero-mirror mechanism into post-communism will be provided, followed by a third example that might seem to point to a similar problematic.

### **Protochronism in Postcommunism**

#### *Protochronism Continued?*

In what has been described as “the first substantial monograph dedicated to protochronism” (Cernat 2007, ¶ 3), Tomiță (2007) observes several changes in the nature of the concept during postcommunism (pp.296-316). After 1989, it is ascertained,

the concept of protochronism loses its original meaning: “These writings [post-1989 protochronist writings] bring no new applications of the concept, do not anymore reveal any autochthonous ‘precedence’” (p.297). Secondly, attempts<sup>115</sup> are made to recast the concept as a resistant discourse rather than as “the official ideology of Romanian Communism, under Ceaușescu” (view of Deletant criticized by Codreanu 2007, ¶ 1). Protochronism is, thus, redefined as an “organic nationalism” whose reduction to the “kitschy nationalism” of the Communist era threatens the very idea of the nation (Codreanu 2008, ¶ 1). As a consequence, protochronism, in its original meaning, “disappears from the rhetoric of the [protochronist] group” (Tomiță, 2007, p.305), being replaced with the more simple notion of “patriotic spirit” (p.304). This change in emphasis correlates with the protochronists’ move into politics after 1989. Regrouped under the “Greater Romania” publication, foundation and eventually, party, these return to the Romanian political and cultural scene, this time in the role of guardians, justiciars and probable Messiahs of a nation endangered by ever-increasing external and internal conspiracies (p.296-306).

While in general agreement with these observations, one cannot concur with Tomiță’s final assessment that “protochronism, a ‘revolutionary’ concept for Romanian culture and with soteriological implications for the whole of humanity has fallen into desuetude with the dissolution of the Ceaușist context and of the reasons that made it possible” (p.318). From this perspective, Tomiță’s focus on the narrow definition of the concept can be interpreted to represent the literati’s desire to deliver a final blow to a protochronism supposed to have disappeared almost twenty years ago. Protochronism,

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<sup>115</sup> Tendency also manifested in the post-communist writings of Mihai Ungheanu and Dan Zamfirescu. (Tomiță 2007, p.297).



as a cultural or literary concept that had produced only “paraliterature” and “exaltation,” is now, Tomiță (2008, 5/6) affirms, obsolete and derelict. This might be true, especially within the field of literary studies. However, a concept does not need to be academically relevant in order to be culturally effective. In other words, “paraliterature” and “exaltation” can sometimes offer more to the public conscience than academic exercise. In my opinion, protochronism, while no longer a dominant academic concept, continues to operate, during postcommunism, both as a form of cultural and political engagement (that of the protochronist group), and most importantly, as a ‘protean’ discourse (Grigurcu 2006, ¶ 3) largely dispersed within society. In fact, Tomiță (2007, p.300) too presents the protochronist group as still actively involved in cultural politics. What Tomiță (2007, 2008) does not explicitly mention, however, is that while less present on the academic scene, the protochronist group has continued its contest with the former ‘modernists,’ both in the space of public discourse and at the political level. Literary critics (Nicolae Manolescu, Eugen Simion), the intellectuals affiliated with the Noica School and those forming the “Group for Social Dialogue<sup>116</sup>” (Andrei Pleșu, Gabriel Liiceanu, Horia-Roman Patapievici, Stelian Tănase, Vladimir Tismăneanu) and members of the G80, such as Mircea Cărtărescu, have all come repeatedly under attack in the pages of the “Greater Romania” magazine.

At the political level, the dispute of the “Greater Romania” group (Corneliu Vadim Tudor, Dan Zamfirescu, Mihai Ungheanu etc.) with a more diverse alliance, gathered

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<sup>116</sup> “The Group for Social Dialogue (Romanian: Grupul pentru Dialog Social, GDS) is a Romanian non-governmental organization whose stated mission is to protect and promote democracy, human rights and civil liberties. It was founded in January 1990 and issues the weekly magazine *Revista 22*. The group pursues its goals mainly by engaging in dialogue with various society components, as well as the executive and legislative branches. The GDS is not a political organization, and stresses that it does not intend to become one” (Wikipedia, “Group for Social Dialogue”).

around the nucleus of the “Group for Social Dialogue” (Gabriel Liiceanu, Horia Roman Patapievici, Andrei Pleșu, Vladimir Tismăneanu, Stelian Tănase, Adrian Cioroianu, etc.) has been continuous and entrenched, reaching the boiling point at different times between 1989 and 2013. Thus, it would seem sensible to propose that instead of having become defunct, protochronism has gradually moved away from the academic space (where it had been supported largely in an artificial way before 1989) to the sphere of public discourse and onto the political scene.

My own estimation is that, despite its more obvious political manifestations, the discourse of protochronism subsists fragmented, dispersed, and hybridized, through a continuous re-circulation of old arguments which enter mass-media from a diversity of sources. Protochronists of the old and new, historians, members of the Secret Services, the Army or the Church, populist politicians, adherents to the extreme Left or to the extreme Right, Romanian emigrants and, at times, even cultural personalities and members of the Academia (sometimes exceedingly in certain university departments), all can be considered to constitute common exponents of a new, protean protochronism. For, with the current fragmentation, dispersion and re-circulation, the phenomenon itself has become difficult to quantify, the accent shifting from discursive sources (actors) to discourse content in terms of visibility. Ultimately, as the National Romanian Television’s 2006 campaign to identify the top 100 “Greatest Romanians”<sup>117</sup> has clearly

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<sup>117</sup>“In 2006, the Romanian Television (Televiziunea Română, TVR) conducted a vote to determine whom the general public considers the 100 greatest Romanians of all time, in a version of the British TV show 100 greatest Britons. The resulting series, ‘Great Romanians’ (“Mari Români”), included individual programmes on the top ten, with viewers having further opportunities to vote after each programme. It concluded with a debate. On October 21st, TVR announced that the “greatest Romanian of all time” according to the voting was Ștefan cel Mare (Stephen the Great)” (Wikipedia, 100 greatest Romanians).

illustrated, elements of protochronism can also find their way into public discourse via regular television programs or cultural campaigns. And although Corneliu Vadim Tudor was eventually excluded from the Greater Romania Party in July 2013, another figure, some would say of the same type and caliber, has emerged to give protochronism and especially, the hero-mirror mechanism, a most unexpected spin. His name is Gigi Becali and he brings something new to the hero-mirror device.

*The Superficial Protochronism of Mr. Becali (PNG<sup>118</sup>)*

It is the exceptional case of Mr. George Becali that pushes the discussion about protochronism on a level that is only partially discursive in the traditional sense. The reason for this is that Mr. Becali, as Bănică (2007, Populism și ‘Katerincă,’ para. 2) suggests, does not own an elaborate discourse or doctrine: “Outside the instinctive references to a politicized ‘orthodoxy’ and to the wild rules of the capitalism of transition (of the type ‘money talks’), the practice of bricolage and the use of improvisation seem to constitute the basic rule of his public appearances.”

Paradoxically, as Bănică (idem) further notices, “exactly this lack of program combined with the belief that anything is possible allows Gigi Becali a flexibility of discourse” with which “the ‘technocrats’ and the grey majority of Romanian politicians” have not been able to compete: “The New Generation Party has a centrist orientation, sometimes to the left, sometimes to the right, from case to case” (Becali, cited in Nomenclator, 2007).

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<sup>118</sup> In fact, the full acronym PNG-CD stands for “The Christian-Democrat New Generation Party”.

While Mr. Becali does not own a defined, elaborate discourse, it is my assertion that such a discourse in fact speaks through him. Mr. Becali, it is my argument, constitutes a most vivid manifestation of the protochronist discourse. Gigi Becali, as Bănică (2007, *Epilog-Rutinizarea Charismeii*, para. 2) seems to intuit, can be best represented as the hero of the protochronist discourse cast into the hero of wild capitalism: “We do not know how George Becali will evolve in the near future, but we do know with certainty that he is the typical product of an epoch of transition, in which the last traditional resources of a society in search of meaning and of a project for the future have combined explosively with the difficulties of the present and with the mirage of quick, non-ethical enrichment.”

The reason for such identification resides with Becali’s heroic qualities, through which he defines himself publicly, and with the aura of heroic success and wild optimism that he projects at all times. According to his own portrayal, Becali is a modern Saint (like Saint Peter or Saint Adrian, who allegedly brought Christianity to the ancient territory of Romania), an Archangel (connection with Christianity and the Legionary Movement<sup>119</sup>), none other than Michael the Brave (historical figure constructed as a main hero of the nation through Communist discourse), a Legionary hero [who during his political campaign adopted the old slogan of the interwar Iron Guard: “I want a Romania clean as the holy sun in the sky” (Cotidianul 2006, *Analiză și Profeție*, para. 1)] and, more surprisingly for the readers of Paulo Coelho, also “the Warrior of Light” himself - in all these hypostases, a spiritual/national hero engaged to find his own destiny [a “self-made

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<sup>119</sup> The Legionary Movement was, in fact, originally called “The Legion of Archangel Michael,” figure considered to represent “the Guardian of the Orthodox Faith and a fighter against heresies” (Wikipedia, “Archangel”).

man”] in “the transition.” These hero-identifications are essential not only in affirming the heroic qualities of the mirror-mechanism at the heart of the protochronist discourse, but also in testifying to the types of discourses that have shaped Gigi Becali and which he so comfortably collapses together: the consumerist protochronist productions of the Ceaușescu era (materials from the Sergiu Nicolaescu’s film “Michael the Brave” were in fact used during his political campaign), the Legionary Christian mythology (not necessarily a coherent discourse, but some disparate notions at least), Romanian best-sellers like the Coelho “Manual of the Warrior of Light” and so on. With such foundations, Becali’s protochronism is clearly one belonging to the realm of popular culture, and therefore, will be counted here as a superficial type of protochronism. Nevertheless, it is not the protochronist discourse as much as its mechanism that Mr. Becali embodies to great effect. For, while Becali seems to have diluted protochronism to a superficial discourse, his image has been in fact entirely replaced with, or constructed through, the whole apparatus of the hero-mirror mechanism of protochronism (and Socialist Humanism). In conclusion, while framed by superficial versions of protochronist discourse, Mr. Becali, more than a discourse, represents an image: the image of the protochronist hero fighting to become the hero of wild capitalism. In light of this conclusion, I do not agree with Bănică’s main thesis that Becali’s popularity is due to his charisma. After all, Becali is not even a coherent interlocutor, not to mention an orator who can impress multitudes, as is the case, for example, with Vadim Tudor. Becali represents an interesting story which captivates all of us (a ‘no-one’, a former shepherd fighting other “self-made men” of the transition and powerful political figures for different stakes - raising as high as the presidency) and a miraculous, heroic image with which marginal sectors of society can easily identify: “On

the other hand, he conquered those marginalized by the transition, being, in their eyes, the prototype of the successful man which knew how to make a profit from a change that had made so many into victims” (Bănică 2007, Populism si ‘Katerincă,’ para. 1).

For ultimately, it is nothing short of miraculous that a man such as Becali makes history as one of the most important men in Romania – once a noteworthy candidate for presidency<sup>120</sup>, thus transforming his own self-prophecies into reality:

“Me with my life, every morning, as soon as I get out of my bed, I make history” (Becali, cited in Nomenclator 2007).

And while Becali’s ‘superficial protochronism’ has been interrupted for a while, there is no doubt that because of its proteic nature, the discourse is bound to re-emerge in new forms. Possibly next, through New Age movements such as Neo-Paganism or Neo-Shamanism [or what László-Attila (2011, p.3) already refers to as “Ethno-Pagan<sup>121</sup> movements” in the cases of Romania and Hungary] or through any other forms of syncretic and re-imagined religiosity (either of new or of almost defunct traditions) which “seek to bring back a lost sacredness and self-esteem into the lives of many people in Romania and Hungary (and generally post-Communist Eastern Europe) – through an exaggerated counterbalancing of the dehumanizing, humiliating ideologies of the past century” (idem, p.9).

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<sup>120</sup> He was also a member of the Romanian Parliament between 2009-2012 and member of the European Parliament from 2012 until his sentence to three years in prison on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 2013 (Wikipedia, “Gigi Becali”). His influence has not diminished much and, as with protochronism, it is almost certain he will make a return at some point.

<sup>121</sup> Meaning that through them “the historical importance of the ‘ethnos’ is unnaturally swelled and sanctified” (László-Attila 2011, p.3).

### *The Păltiniș Group*

Referred to as the Păltiniș School, the Păltiniș Group<sup>122</sup> or the Humanitas Group,<sup>123</sup> this group represents in general lines the continuation of the Noica School. According to Patapievici (2004, ¶ 2) and Cornea (2004ii) a list of the more significant and faithful members of the school would include the following: Gabriel Liiceanu, Andrei Pleșu, Sorin Vieru, Radu Bercea, Andrei Cornea, Victor Stoichiță and Petru Creția. If viewed less as a school and more as a group this list would probably look more like the following: Gabriel Liiceanu, Andrei Pleșu, Andrei Cornea, Horia-Roman Patapievici (since 1995) and, to some extent, Vladimir Tismăneanu (possibly, since around 2005-2006). It should be emphasized here that the group only uses the term ‘the Păltiniș School’ as a reference to itself. The other terms have most likely been coined by members of G80 and used by members of G90 or of the New Left who had once been their students (For example, see the axis A. Mușina-C. Dobrescu/S. Matei-C. Șiulea).

Having established some working definition of the group, the focus can now turn to verifying whether the Păltiniș Group, like the Noica School, operates principally on the basis of the hero-mirror mechanism. A previous chapter has shown that the Noica School operated with the notion of the cultural hero (and one that implied that the salvation of the nation depended on an intellectual elite and its implementation of a

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<sup>122</sup> In particular, the term “Păltiniș Group” has been associated in the public space with the notion of a ‘prestige group’ (Matei 1997, 2004, 2004i; Dobrescu 2001ii, 2004, 2004i) able to dominate the cultural space through distortion of the marketplace of ideas. The concept has been severely contested by Patapievici (2004), Tănăsioiu (2004) and, most remarkably, by Cistelean (2006).

<sup>123</sup> In the first case, the term refers to a cultural model (Moraru 2003) that operates both as a form of high-culture (Cernat 2002) and as popular culture (Schiop 2004), and which stands associated with a humanistic culture. In the second case, the title given to the group seeks to emphasize the mass-media/civil society network (Rogozanu 2007) developed around the “Humanitas Publishing House” [for a description see Mihacea (2005)].

‘purificatio spiritualis’ at the level of collective consciousness), through a mechanism of social reproduction and pedagogical device resembling the Christian apparatus of pastoral power (and thus, based on the master-disciple relationship) and through the overlapping notions of ‘inner utopia’ (Șerban 2010) and the ‘primacy of the spiritual’ (Șiulea 2005). In all these features the Noica School was seen to confirm the mirror-mechanism.

Having entered the public arena in the late 80s Noica’s disciples became immediately involved in the public space after December 89, firstly, by founding the influential civil society GDS (Group for Social Dialogue), and secondly, by taking on the role of public intellectuals. Soon after, Pleșu entered the government and Liiceanu founded the Humanitas Publishing House with both becoming the exponents of an anti-Communist ideology which seemed to speak truth to power and for which they were widely appreciated in the first decade or so after the revolution. Somewhere around or after 2004-2005 the group began to more visibly side with president Băsescu and especially with his reforms of the Justice system, and from that point onward the members of the group can be perceived to have effectively entered the realm of power-politics. During 2005-2006, their espousal of neoliberal economic reforms and policies and still heavy promotion of the ideology of anti-Communism started attracting the critiques of a rising but fragile New Left, to which were added the negative attentions of forces opposite in the political field.

I cannot pretend to offer even an incipient evaluation of the group’s impact on Romanian politics and society, but their central role in the last 25 years must be



highlighted. It is with this background in mind that certain observations can be made about their ideology.

Firstly, it should be observed that the status of such public intellectuals was greatly enhanced by the fact that cultural resistance had been given, after 1989, an almost equivalent status with that of “militant anti-Communism” because of the inherited “cult of Culture” (Dobrescu 1998, pp.206-207). In this respect, it is likely that the members of the Păltiniș Group had benefitted from the notions of the cultural hero promoted by Noica but credit must be also given to their early anti-Communist stance. The important observation here is that, overall, the traditional role of intellectuals as “an alternative parliament” would also have been similarly strengthened (*idem*). At this point, the question that must be asked is whether the Păltiniș Group, upon entry into the public arena and also, in politics, had married the pastoral model inherited from Noica with the power of the state (and with their status as public intellectuals), or whether this model was left behind. There is enough evidence to suggest that the group retained the apparatus of pastoral power through which the master-disciple relation was extended not only to the individual but also to society. There is also enough evidence to suggest that especially in opposition to Communism, but not only, the group continued to attempt a process of the purification<sup>124</sup> of the collective self (and of themselves), not only through the example of charisma and their knowledge (books and mass-media presence), but through attempting to bear influence on policies and legislation spanning from anti-communism, to education, and to the Constitution. One of the key examples of this mix of pastoral and state power is the use of the ideology of anti-Communism and the push

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<sup>124</sup> In Chapter 11 the section entitled ‘The Reassessments of Păunescu after his Death’ offers almost a case-study on this.

for the government's public condemnation of the former Communist regime in the years 2006-2007. "Post-communist anti-communism," Tănăsioiu (2004, pp.97-98) remarks, is a public discourse "built upon a mythology of a purifying voyage which the society has to pursue in order to achieve spiritual resuscitation and healing from communism." The same process is described by Mark (2010, p.31) as follows: "More common were attempts to 'complete the revolution' by engineering fundamental shifts in the collective memory of the Communist past and the transition. Here, finishing the revolution meant the establishment of official bodies that could assist the dismantling of Communist mentalities through the state-sponsored propagation of new, liberal interpretations of the past. The latter could become the basis for a new democratic collective memory, in which the Communist regime was criminalized and liberal democracy celebrated as its political and moral inversion." His assessment of the role of the Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania led by Tismăneanu very clearly summarizes the continuation of the pastoral-model through and with the ideology of anti-Communism: "The central idea of the commission was the completion of a democratic revolution in collective memory which had not occurred in 1989" (Mark 2010, p.34). Furthermore, that "the Presidential Commission was a political top-down 'narrative-reshaping' institution, rather than an investigative truth commission"<sup>125</sup> (p.38) confirms that the apparatus of pastoral power had been combined with the powers of the state.

To fully determine that the Păltiniș Group continues to rely on the mirror-mechanism, however, the confirmation above must be supplanted with a confirmation at the

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<sup>125</sup> For a close examination of these issues see Ernu et al. (2008).

ideological level. For this reason I am introducing below, an analysis of how Patapievici's understanding of modernity reveals at its core exactly the notion of 'inner utopia.'

In the introduction to "Omul Recent" ("Recent Man"), Patapievici (2005) offers a basic epistemological scheme for understanding the changes of modernity, which also acts as a summary of the book. Modernity, we are told, has "two simple keys": a) "the transformation into temporality of all the essences instituted by the tradition before it" and b) "the application of the principle 'Gott ist tot' to any form of existence, be it ideal or material" (p.19). Its destiny, Patapievici continues, lies with "the exhaustion of all traditions and the placing of all the contents of life in a state of 'permanent revolution' through the involvement of all social ties in a movement – Bewegung – of the unique party, totalitarian kind" (idem). The following is my attempt at pulling the separate arguments put forward by Patapievici under different headings so as to capture a cohesiveness of argument missing in 'Omul Recent.'

With modernity, Nature becomes central not only in science but also in political philosophy, effectively replacing God as the new First Cause. With postmodernism, Temporality or Time decenters Nature and thus, destroys the last notion of the foundational. This would constitute the summary of principle b). In its expanded form, principle b) stands for several substitutions which the French Revolution applies to God. Firstly, the Church is substituted with the state. This allows the state the power to regulate "the functions of individual persons and of all constituted bodies" and also to impose any particular ideology on the totality of society (p.167). Secondly, Patapievici (p.110) blames the French Revolution for institutionalizing the belief that individual

reason can and should reinvent society solely through the imagination of ‘abstract ideas,’ and, thus, at the expense of all experience accumulated through tradition. Through recourse to Burke, this refers to: i) the state’s abstract metric as a principle for organizing the types of ties connecting a society (the dismantling of the intermediate social layers of autonomy and the atomization of the individual) (pp.110, 385), ii) the “imaginary rights” proclaimed by the French Revolution as the universal rights of man, which emphasize the ideal of individual unrestricted freedoms over those of virtue and civil society and which result in the modern social contract (pp.108-112), and iii) the issue of replacing natural right and the role of discernment with a process of law-making that descends, by necessity, into excessive legislation (pp.219-231). Finally, the third substitution sees “foundational reason” replaced with the only type of rationality that can receive validation in a world of moral relativism, namely, that of economic exchange (p.88).

Principle a), on the other hand, is equated with the investing of Becoming with the “strong” attributes of Being (associating certainty with instrumental knowledge only) (pp.28-51), with the formation of a modern individual self defined by private beliefs and privatized roots (based on private preferences) rather than by a “Sky” (religion/values) and an “Earth” (ancestral roots) (pp.327-331), and with Funkenstein’s notion of ‘knowledge by construction’ - resulting both in the priority of instrumental knowledge and the postmodernist theory of simulacra that “everything that exists is a construction of knowledge”<sup>126</sup> (pp.118-121). Most importantly, principle a) is equated by Patapievici (2005, p.148) with the notion of ‘liquidity,’ in fact a reconceptualization of the Marxist

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<sup>126</sup> In my opinion this is logically a flawed argument.

critique of capitalism and the bourgeoisie. The process, triggered by the French Revolution, of replacing ‘substantial property’<sup>127</sup> with ‘liquid property’<sup>128</sup> results, as Marx had foreseen (p.146), in the “‘melting’ of all ‘solidities,’ in the transformation of ‘earth’ into ‘sea’ and in the conversion of all substances of a spatial type into substances of a temporal type” (p.146).

This, in short, is the critique Patapievicu brings to modernity in ‘Omul Recent.’ How does Patapievicu respond to this attack of modernity? Firstly, by positing a return to the stable feudal model in which values and life are organized hierarchically according to the supreme values of God and tradition (p.158). Secondly, by relegating economical and political matters to the interaction between God and the level of individual “inner conscience” (Şerban 2010, p.137), that is, by activating the spiritual quality of ‘discernment’ (through the reconstitution of tradition). An intuitive infallibility bestowed by God (“a gift of God” to those with direct ‘faith’) to distinguish between good and evil, discernment also acts as a spiritual capacity that can differentiate between the market of religious values and that of economic values while still operating them as one (Patapievicu 2005. p.417).

Modernity, however, also has a good side. It presents the opportunity to refashion the manner in which believers relate to God, from a relation based on “palpable, consistent” visible essences such as that of the physical body (or “Names” and “Faces”) to one based on evanescence (“air,” “scents”, “nuances”), such as the reality of the Holy Spirit (p.439). Since the invisible reality of the Holy Spirit is taken to represent, until the end

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<sup>127</sup> That is, property which is concrete and material such as land.

<sup>128</sup> That is, “dematerialized” (Patapievicu, p.152), “soft” forms of property such as those “contained in notes, bonds, debentures and credit” (Nisbet 1986, p.62).

of time, the return of Christ, this shift from ‘space-substances’ to ‘time-substances’ can only herald, for Patapievici, humanity’s final return to God (p.444).

It is readily observable that Patapievici’s vision of hope does not square very well with his critique of modernity. For while Patapievici accepts the validity of the concept of liquidity of modernity for the spiritual, inner reality of man, and even for the mode of revelation of God, he rejects it in the political-economical, social, scientific and cultural domains. Interestingly, what transpires from all this is Patapievici’s reluctance to engage with questions of political order and change, except by transferring such political change and transformation only to the realm of inner consciousness. The implications are quite clear. Revolution is allowed, but only in the realm of the spirit, whether of God or of man. Outside that - in the political, social, cultural or scientific domains - revolution, change and subversion, i.e., ‘the temporalization of all essences,’ they are all forbidden.

### *Isomorphism in Romanian Higher Education*

Chapter 2 section 2 contains an evaluation of literature on the HE field in Romania. This analysis shows that very little research has been produced about the communist period of the HE system or about the real state of the HE system during the decades after 1989 (the recent present), with most contributions focusing on the adoption (and implementation) of programs of reform for the future, constructed via Western models, aid and expertise (the QA agenda of ‘diversity and diversification,’ presently). Reasons for this situation can be found in the strong isomorphism that, as Di Giacomo (2010, p.53) suggests, “manifests itself primarily as EU policy and a tendency to mimic aspects

of key Western education systems.” The only reason for which Di Giacomo ascribes to isomorphism in Romania a positive impact, however, is because of the country severely lacking a trained and experienced elite that could envision, lead and implement reform. This view is more than clearly confirmed by The World Bank’s Functional Review of the Romanian Higher Education Sector (2011). Throughout this research project I have refrained from attempting to apply the mirror-mechanism to policy-making for fear I had not yet correctly identified the plausible configuration or settings that could justify such expanded use<sup>129</sup>. However, one must wonder if this phenomenon of isomorphism – a clear instance in which the mirroring of a central image (in this case of a policy vision and its associated prescriptions) is so evidently present in Romania’s policy formulation and implementation (if only looking at the role attributed to the IEP program through the 2013 National Law of Education), does not somehow correspond to the hero-mirror mechanism. I am unable at this point to give an answer to this question, except than to emphasize as a necessary measure the development of capacity and expertise in the HE field, which in the current context, must involve a medium-long term plan with incentives for returning few of the many Romanian students and academics that are abroad. It might be the case that assuming a strong isomorphism is the necessary route to take, but this must be negotiated better than it has been (the recent and very strong classification of universities as research intensive, research and teaching was a stronger step than needed, and even more than required by the pressures of isomorphism) and it

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<sup>129</sup> At this point my thoughts are that a collective or policy-oriented dimension for the mirror-mechanism actually exists at the level of theological discourse in the notion of the Kingdom of God (or of Heaven), which the religious community constructed by the believers should reflect in this world: “nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is in your midst” (Luke 17:21). This corresponds well with Voegelin’s (1938; 1952) notions of ‘apocalypse’ and ‘gnosis’ and with Griffin’s concept of ‘palingenesis’ (Cârstocea 2011, p.194) but is still too general a notion at this point to be applicable to discourse analysis. In other words, it needs at least the same degree elaboration that had seen the notion of *Imago Dei* divided into the axes of *Kenosis* and *Imitatio Dei*.

can only start with developing the capacity to critically assess such ideologies and discourses as the ‘diversity and diversification’ one.

## **Conclusion**

With this last, possibly applicable, example of the persistence of the hero-mirror mechanism in post-communist culture, I must share that my view is that the mirror-mechanism as that central cultural and governing mechanism of the Communist period, has almost fully dissipated. If the dominant cultural mechanism, for better or worse a unifying force for the whole society and a stronghold for the notion of universal values, is no longer there, what has replaced it, and with what implications for Romanian identity? My analysis has been one of the Communist period and this question, I believe, concerns the cultural mechanisms typical of a capitalist society. This indicates another, even more appealing, universe of research, but one whose non-exploration curtails me from providing an answer.

## **The Mirror-Mechanism and Discourses as Intellectual Discourses**

Both from the perspective of competing intellectual groups (see, for example, the 2004 debates about elites and elitism in the 248 and 249 issues of *Observator Cultural*) and from the analysis of literature about the Romanian HE field in 2013 the main question of concern for Romanian culture and education is formulated the same way: how to create value in the fields of expertise and elites for society?



On the ground, the situation seems to favour a strange reality. Probably the most significant study on the state of the education system in Romania, an integrative study that focused on the state and reform of the Romanian education system as a whole, as judged against the needs of a society in transition (and particularly against, poverty and social inequality), Miroiu et al. (1998) concluded at the time that schools and universities cater mostly for themselves while failing to meet the needs of the majority of their students (particularly in the rural areas). The name given by Miroiu et al. (1998) to this type of school was that of the “self-sufficient school.” There are strong educational signs that not much has changed. Furthermore, this finding of Miroiu et al. (1998) seems to confirm a notion regularly found in the discourses of different intellectuals, that true education takes place outside the educational system. Antohi (2007, p.50) and indeed, the Noica School and, even the Păltiniș school, confirm this view at the level of practice: “Despite some enormous differences between the educational system and pedagogical doctrines of Romania during the XX century, there is a shocking similarity: many elite intellectuals share an anti-institutional *hybris*, being in favour of small groups, even of one-to-one, which they consider to be the ideal solution for the dissemination of knowledge.” Intellectual formation, it seems, still occurs on a master-disciple relationship, and on one that takes place in the cultural or public domain, rather than in the educational environment. When intellectual groups expand by admitting new members this happens again through interaction in the public space, according to certain networks or intellectual groups by which the intellectual field is structured and not through or in the spaces of the academia. There are other cultural aspects that suggest the same thing. In an analysis of the relationship between general culture and the underdevelopment of a specialty Patapievici (2007, p.9) finds that

Romania displays “a sort of hegemony of general culture, which prevents the formation of an authentic marketplace of ideas,” meaning, the formation of well-established academic disciplines. He also suggests that the university and academic institutions (two separate sectors in Romania) are “totally dissociated” from the cultural domain, which has a negative effect on both (p.23).

Finally, also confirmation is the fact that, within the cultural field, only two types of cultural models have been proposed for Romanian culture, with most intellectuals falling into the tradition of supporting either one or the other. The two models, publicly debated over nowadays by Matei and Momescu (2010) and Patapievici (2007), are those put down by Adrian Marino<sup>130</sup> and Constantin Noica. The first one emphasizes disciplinary specialization and the strengthening of the middle-classes, while the second one<sup>131</sup> underlines the essential role of general culture and of a cultural aristocracy. Together, they mirror perfectly the divide existing in society, although both share certain key features, like the central role given to the notion of the ‘marketplace of ideas’ (Ingber 1984) in the finding of a solution.

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<sup>130</sup> One of his key arguments is that Romania must complete the Enlightenment project started by the “Transylvanian School” in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (one of European integration in all its dimensions) if it wants to achieve modernization (Marino 1995, 2001). The biggest challenge against this, however, remains the fact that Romania continues to function at two levels: as a Romania that is “rural,” “ethnacist-nationalist” and “traditional,” and one that is “urban,” ‘pro-European’ and “modernist” (Marino 1996, p. 305). “The structure of today’s Romania,” Marino (1995, p.67) is keen to point out, “is still of rural essence, with all its negative phenomena.” For a pro-European Enlightenment project to succeed, therefore, the latter element must come to dominate the first through the rise and strengthening of an urban, as well as rural, middle class. Finally, as this transformation must apply not only to the political-economic and social spheres, but also to the field of culture, “a new political-social model, but one also cultural” is needed (Marino 1996, p.8). In relation to the cultural model, Marino makes several suggestions of particular interest to this discussion. Firstly, that the “value of the middle level of culture” in the country must be “of the highest level possible,” for it, and not “the geniuses,” has ensured the strength and quality of any great Western culture (idem, p.306). Moreover, resolving Romania’s chronic lack of specialist cadres in all fields depends exactly on such a transformation (idem, p.307).

<sup>131</sup> In practice this has seen the Păltiniș group push, through their backing of Minister of Education Funieru, for a ‘tougher’ and elitist national law of education in 2013 which clusters different universities into types, as research, research and teaching or teaching only, etc., their model being very compatible, if not similar, with a radical neoliberal model.

From the perspective of cultural discourses as intellectual discourses, this study proposes that it is essential to admit a great schism between the educational domain and the cultural domain (usually more tilted towards the public domain), where intellectual formation tends to occur more. Such an admission, however, must also be an admission that the role of culture, in spite of all its pastoral apparatuses, techniques and condemnations of Communism, has been essential (in the absence of a competent educational system) in the function of general education, and continues to be so. An essential requirement, then, is to safeguard the position of these generalist-encyclopedic intellectuals at all times, and precisely at a moment when the HE system is still in critical condition and in full process of reform. But the primary need remains, and I agree with Marino's cultural model on this, to develop specialists and also to make sure the 'value of middle level culture' is 'of the highest level possible.' I depart, however, from both Marino and Patapievicci in their suggestions that the key to the problem lies with reforming the cultural system, that is, the system of general culture, as a solution to the problems of the Higher Education system.

On this point, and this is my conclusion here, I fully side with Clark (2004, pp.169-170), believing that both the development of specialties and specialists as well as the strengthening of the university sector must be posed as the problematic of the development of departments and their traditions of research: "Since specialisms are anchoring points and matter a great deal, the department-discipline linkage becomes the source of strength and stability, and even steerage, in leading universities and would-be leading universities. Universities become strong on the backs of strong departments; they become great as they build great departments."

## **The Mirror-Mechanism and Cultural Discourses as Discourses of Resistance**

### *Romanian Definitions of Cultural Resistance*

On the Romanian intellectual scene, the term ‘cultural resistance’ covers a wide spectrum of contested meanings, stretching, for example, from ‘resistance as survival,’ to ‘passive resistance,’ to ‘reflexive resistance,’ to ‘tolerated culture,’ and to ‘active resistance’ [this is according to Cordoş et al. (2003), a Phantasma debate on which most of this subsection is based]. To start with, *resistance as survival* (also introduced under the term ‘resistance through literature’) refers to the capacity to physically and psychologically survive the misery/deprivation of every-day life in Communism by the reading, writing or just imagining of literature; this approach, represented in the writings of Sanda Cordoş, emphasizes “the existential,” “cathartic,” “therapeutic” function of culture (literature), but also the circulation of values which are different from what the regime had requested to be circulated (idem). *Passive resistance* [generally applying to someone who “is not actively opposed, but who, also, is not participating in an essential way to the system and its effects” (Țepeneag 1993 cited in Cordoş 2003, p.17)] is a term that can include at least three different interpretations: 1) maintaining professional standards in your work, 2) being unconcerned, detached from responsibilities, “leaving power to unfold as social stupidity/to be drowned in its own errors, abuses, anomalies” (I.D. Sârbu 2005, cited in Cordoş 2003, p.31), 3) taking the risk to maintain professional standards and some degree of institutional and personal autonomy in “the domains directly vulnerable to the ideological imperative” (Pleşu 2010, ¶ 2) – while also refusing to either make concessions to the regime (or follow its ideological imperatives) or to be

affiliated with it in public [however, while Andrei Pleșu (2010) views this as ‘cultural resistance,’ Adrian Marino, also describing himself through this, refuses the stronger terms ‘opposition, resistance, dissidence’ in favour of the weaker syntagm ‘active independence, of alternative reaction’; this, while Corin Braga (Cordoș et al. 2003) can only go as far as to accept the point under discussion as an instance of ‘resistance through survival’ and not more]. Another term, *reflexive resistance* is described as a form of placing oneself outside time and history through meditation or prayer (I.D. Sârbu, in Cordoș 2003, p.31). Next, Mircea Iorgulescu (1990, in Cordoș 2003, p.18) describes ‘*tolerated culture*’ not as parallel or alternative culture, but as a culture whose autonomy is, at the same time, both allowed and curtailed by the regime; a culture which aspires for freedom but which, in the long-term, leads to “asphyxiation.” Finally, *active resistance* is direct, public, even political, opposition/contestation/subversion which may or may not involve the formation of resistance groups or civil society. At this level, discourses which interrupt the existent political order and provide an alternative to official discourses can also count as active resistance [Marius Jucan, Horea Poenar, in Cordoș et al. (2003)]. Overall, because Communist Romania provides few if any cases of active resistance (mostly individual) and no examples of samizdat literature, “*cultural resistance*” has generally been equated with milder forms that can fall within any of these overlapping categories: ‘*resistance as survival*,’ ‘*passive resistance*’ (or ‘*the autonomy of the aesthetical*’ to use a much-invoked term), ‘*reflexive resistance*’ and the notion of ‘*tolerated culture*.’ As such, the notion of ‘*cultural resistance*’ has emerged in opposition to the notion of ‘*active resistance*,’ but seeking, from a parallel position, to claim for itself almost a similar amount of prestige (at times, even equating itself with the notion of ‘*active resistance*’). Whether or not the notion of “*cultural resistance*”

should incorporate a definition other than that of ‘*active resistance*’ still constitutes (after more than 20 years) a main issue of contention, as shown by the study of Macrea-Toma (2009).<sup>132</sup> In this debate, downgrading *cultural resistance* to categories such as

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<sup>132</sup> Macrea-Toma (2009, pp.282, 327) argues that despite the poor samizdat statistics (the Free Europe archives contain only 2 boxes of such documents for Romania as compared with 65 boxes for Poland) and very limited record of active opposition movements in comparison with the other EE countries [the Magyar samizdat, the Paul Goma protest, and the short-lived SLOMR (the Free Trade Union of the Working People of Romania)], Romania’s case is not an exceptional one and should not be interpreted as an instance of remarkable passivity on behalf of the Romanian intellectuals. The reason for this, as Macrea-Toma (p.329) argues, is that the professionalization of writers at the intersection between the literary field and the political field represents a general scheme that applies to all Communist countries, although the “different political, cultural and social traditions” of each country can introduce a great degree of variability into this scheme. Obviously in line with her Bourdieusian methodology, Macrea-Toma (p.329) assumes that the issues of cultural resistance are best interpreted through this general scheme, which derives from, and is almost identical with an analysis of the cultural field: “The professionalization of writers in Communism signifies their ideological oversight and integration into a statist regime of production, but also the concentration of their interests into a guild and the elevation of their social status.” This, then, is the perspective from which Macrea-Toma approaches the issue of cultural resistance, with her argument seeking to account both for the internal environment in Romania (the cultural field) and for the external EE context (via comparison).

In a move that transforms Poland and not Romania in an exceptional case, Macrea-Toma’s (pp.285, 329) analysis of the EE context suggests that Communist Romania lacked the essential external elements needed for developing an active opposition. For, without the support of a powerful Western lobby and of a pre-existent underground network connected with the West (such as in the case with Poland), a parallel circuit for the circulation of clandestine publications and for the promotion and defense of dissident intellectuals/movements was never likely to materialize in Romania. Even more so when considering “the excessive harshness of the regime” (precluding the formation of “social networks with public interests” that could have been developed by the intellectual and technical elites drawing on their “proximity with the political establishment”)(p.286), “the tardy modernization, the reduced immigration,” the lack of revisionist factions with a “pre-communist grounding in socialist doctrine,” (p.287) the relativist and decentralized censorship signaling the dissolution of official ideology and, through it, the increased difficulty of formulating an articulated oppositional stance (p.244), and last but not least, the external appreciation of Romania’s foreign policy because of its anti-Soviet stance (p.287). With this external environment, the conclusion arrives, Romanian writers (intellectuals) are left with no alternative but to choose between the profession of becoming a writer (an intellectual) and a resistance that could see them pushed outside the only available publication circuit and professional environment.

Furthermore, such an impossible choice is only enhanced in an internal environment in which enormous prestige and status are associated with the occupation of the writer (intellectual), and in which the profession itself stands identified with the promise of a quick path for social mobility (p.333) and with the highest forms of human achievement. What emerges as of particular importance out of this, therefore, is the ideal of becoming a writer, of publishing, of avoiding being a ‘no-one,’ ideal through which writers see the issue of their becoming (of their fulfillment as human beings) as more important than political opposition. Or as Macrea-Toma (p.136) aptly puts it, in what can be seen to count as her conclusion to the discussion about cultural resistance in Romania: “[p]olitical opposition in a civic variant makes way for the personal purgatory of becoming as a writer.”

In conclusion, then, Macrea-Toma seems to assert that Romanian intellectuals should not be blamed for choosing the professional route instead of a path of resistance inasmuch as this choice concerns their highest ideals of becoming in an environment both internally and externally very restricted (compared to most other EE countries). As she (p.282) argues: “the incrimination of the passivity or of the ‘authorized’ cultural resistance from the Romanian space or the compensatory establishing of ‘indexes’ of resistance remain simple exercises of ethical-factual history in the absence of correlations with an international

*passive resistance* has been denounced as a form of “self-mystification” (“It is the liberty of the utopian who refuses the reality present, deciding for the exile assumed in ‘an ideal castle’ of own production, refusing to see in this compensatory construction the seeds of self-extinction, the golden [jail] bars, which, nevertheless, remain bars...”) (Crihană 2007) and as a form of “self-pity” which provides moral overcompensation: “The risk is that, by declaring myself one who resisted through culture, when in fact I was just a survivor, I am hiding from myself and ennobling a cowardice of which I feel guilty” [Corin Braga, in Cordoş et al. (2003)]. In this work, therefore, I make use of the terms ‘*cultural resistance*’ and ‘*resistance*’ in a very specific way: as resistance towards an existent, official discourse. This is so because different movements and intellectual groupings have claimed these terms in various ways (some of which I have analysed here with a view to measuring such claims). Thus, when I employ the phrase ‘*resistant*

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cultural field which to unveil the real professional alternatives of the protesting writer.” And these ‘correlations,’ as far as Macrea-Toma’s (pp.17-18) above discussion of the internal and external contexts goes, point out in only one direction, namely, that “the equation dissidence versus opportunism” must be adjusted for “a more subtle one, which to summarize the real margin for freedom of action in Communist Romania: (relative) institutional autonomy (and thus professional) versus creative freedom (and professional marginality)”. In other words, that form of ‘cultural resistance’ “situated between belligerence and modus vivendi, between dissidence and officialdom” and defined by Ioulia Zaretskaia-Balsente as ‘integrated non-conformism’ and by Pierre Ansart as ‘consented orthodoxy’ (p.233), i.e., that stance of ‘authorized’ opposition, of critical political engagement that can never approach organized political protest for fear of subverting itself (p.78), that “aesthetic” criterion of “non-combative neutrality” (p.73) of “depoliticization” (p.78), of “apolitical escapism” or “literary evasion-ism” (in the words of Monica Lovinescu and Ion Simuţ) (p.250) through which “cultural resistance escapes the incidence of the soft variants of dissidence and forms a category apart, that of diffidence (state of abstaining, of timidity)” (pp.280-281) - this level of opposition represents, according to Macrea-Toma, the maximum of resistance the Romanian cultural field could have generated considering its internal and external environments. However, one important question remains here. The overall image of the Romanian intellectuals that Macrea-Toma (pp.323-337) portrays for the period of Communism is one generally associated with prestige, a privileged material and symbolic status, a concentrated focus on quick social mobility rather than on challenging the regime and a combative energy misspent in intra-elite quarrels and competition for scarce resources (rather than on resisting the regime), the dominant stance of these intellectuals being one of, at best, ‘integrated non-conformism’ in which limited resistance is both a political and commercial strategy and through which writers invest themselves with an elitist status that resembles a form of transcendental charisma (pp.323-337). Should this even be called ‘cultural resistance’? Macrea-Toma (2009) clearly thinks so, but as her concept of ‘cultural resistance’ spans from the hard to the soft variants of dissidence and even outside that, to the category of diffidence, the application of the term to the case of Romania is still bound to remain problematic.

*discourses*' I refer both to the claims that have been advanced about such discourses, and to the fact that some notion of '*resistance*' or subversion is considered in measuring the impact of such discourses. Overall, however, I agree with Ovidiu Mircean [in Cordoș et al. (2003)] that, in the case of Romania, it would make more sense to speak of *evading (or escaping) through culture* rather than of *resistance through culture*. From this perspective, I would prefer the Romanian term "*discursuri de evadare*" ("*discourses of escape*") to the term '*resistant discourses*'; this is also so because evading or escaping is something you might attempt, and then achieve or not (which more accurately describes the actual condition of these discourses). However, for reasons discussed, and because of their wide circulation (in comparison with a notion such as '*discourses of escape*') I have generally employed here the terms '*cultural resistance*' and '*resistant discourses*.'

#### *The Mirror-Mechanism as a Different Taxonomy of Cultural Resistance*

Two well-known taxonomies for evaluating anti-Communist resistance are the "Ketman" scheme developed by Milosz (2001/1953) and the "parallel polis" one developed by Havel (1991).<sup>133</sup> These schemes are very useful and inspiring (although the first one applies more to individual strategies or options), but there are problems with application when a case does not fall neatly into one category or another.<sup>134</sup> The mirror-mechanism functions as a third alternative, maybe not as precise (because it does not

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<sup>133</sup> Another important taxonomy, but which centers mostly on aesthetic categories directly applicable to literary works, is that of Dobrescu (2010ii).

<sup>134</sup> Havel's scheme has been partly applied in the case of the Noica School, at the end of that particular chapter.



have a set of general categories it works with), but more flexible. In what follows, I will briefly discuss its results for each discourse.

To start with, “Solar Lyricism” appears as the quintessential definition of cultural resistance for Romania, meaning, it constitutes the perfect example of a ‘discourse of escape’ (*discurs de evadare*): attempting to evade (or escape) through culture (into an imaginary zone of the inner self easily annexed by the party), rather than attempting to resist through it (for example, simultaneously diverting forms of counter-culture towards the mainstream forms advocated by the establishment while still allowing for some mild forms of resistance). The analysis of the poem by Nichita Stănescu in the same chapter is edifying on this theme: the author exchanges an initial impulse of adopting counter-culture forms for a highly abstract form of poetry, running away from the concrete and even language.

Protochronism, it is easy to see, because its exponents were always open about their support of the regime, falls within the category of no or least resistance.

On the other hand, Noica School is very interesting to analyze because of two features. Its attempt to ju-jitsu the regime with the notion of the cultural hero seemed largely Quixotean in its ideals and is still being derided at. However, this ju-jitsu tactic did achieve some results in terms of the social reproduction and continuation of a cultural elite and of an intellectual tradition, which, it has to also be said, did challenge the Communist regime after the 1989 revolution. I think this deserves some recognition so I would prefer the term “resistance as survival” – in the sense that something important that had been in peril was saved or preserved.

The Flacăra Cenacle, on the other hand, must be positioned in-between Protochronism and Solar Lyricism. It borrows from both discourses and it is both adulatory of the regime in the protochronist sense and expressing some (arguably) limited poetic ‘resistance’ in some instances. However, because of it being organized as a government sponsored anti-establishment movement, and because it uses poetry in the stadiums, in a shamanic type of way (which amplifies its effects on its audience), the Flacăra Cenacle deserves to be positioned closer to Protochronism in terms of its degree of resistance.

Finally, as it has already been discussed, the G80 discourse is the first to have deconstructed the mirror-mechanism, and most likely, not through the borrowing of influences from the Beat generation, but rather, through their own powers and inspiration. As such, they deserve to rise above the category of ‘discourses of escape’ and enter that of ‘cultural resistance’ – here implying discursive resistance or opposition to the official discourse of the regime not to be equated, however, with ‘active resistance’ per se.

With this, my thesis has reached its conclusion. In terms of further directions for research, several options might be available. The mirror-mechanism could potentially be used in the comparative study of religion, in the analysis of ‘political religions,’ or as a method for discourse analysis in the fields of popular culture, cultural studies and media or film studies. A preferred separate theme would be the analysis of the Romanian notions of public and private space responsible, due the concept of inner utopia, for the disconnect between the HE sector and the cultural domain in terms of intellectual formation. This would reflect this thesis’s general interest in examining the space between the domain of culture (and the public sphere) and that of higher education

where essential processes such as intellectual formation, identity-construction, and knowledge-production take place.

However, there are also clear limitations. An obvious weakness is that the dissertation lacks a material dimension because the methodology is not adjusted for research in the field. With that, important capabilities are lost, such as that of assessing political and cultural power and its operations. Another important limitation is the lack of an instrument that would make it applicable to the realm of policy. As for the limitations of the study itself, the main one stems from the attempt to connect so many areas without being highly specialized in them. Other significant limitations stem from the lack of a more clear definition and lack of support in other studies for the notion of socialist humanism. Similarly, the Communist official discourse is something I wished I could have defined better with the aid of other studies. Overall, the research process has showed me that knowledge should probably be best pursued in communities working on a similar project or projects as there is not enough time in one's life to proceed on bigger themes, such as that of the literary-centeredness of Romanian culture, alone.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Part of this has been a conscious choice to maintain neutrality by avoiding affiliation with any intellectual group under any scrutiny here, due to what I perceive to be a very tribal and contested Romanian cultural/academic scene in need of unity and dialogue.

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