GLOBALIZATION AND THE INFORMATION SOCIETY: ROMANIAN SOCIETY AND THE CULTURE OF CONSUMPTION

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Rezumat: *Conform teoreticienilor postmodernismului, am fi tentaţi (din punct de vedere politic) să ne întrebăm dacă are cu adevărat sens acest efort de situare în modernitate sau în postmodernitate. Răspunsul filosofiei la această problemă politică ţine de apelul la moştenirile proxime şi negarea a ceea ce se acceptă ca fiind structuri stabile ale fiinţei.*
La ora actuală, în ciuda globalizării şi a efectelor sale, resimţite în efortul comun de a construi un spaţiu social, economic, politic nou, traversăm o perioadă de insecuritate şi de defulare a megalothimiei în democraţiile liberale contemporane. Cele trei tipuri postmoderne menţionate în acest studiu (Subdezvoltatul-Supradezvoltatul; Claustratul; Clona sau Automatul) creează, în realitatea românească, o imagine filmată plasată în extazul comunicării. În ciuda lipsei energiei şi a iluziilor, am dorit să regăsim în reţeaua comunicării româneşti un anume spaţiu critic şi o imanenţă a sacrilegiului asupra semnului!

Abstract: *According to the theoreticians of postmodernism, we would be (politically) tempted to find a reason for the effort of taking a stand in modernism – postmodernism. From the political philosophy point of view, the answer to this (political) matter is connected to the proximal inheritance and to denying what is considered stable structures of the human being. Despite globalization and its effects that were felt in the common effort to build a new social, economic, political sphere, we are going through a time of insecurity and of dissolution of megalothymy in contemporary liberal democracies. The three postmodern types mentioned in this study (Overabundance-Shortage; The Hostage; Clone or the automaton) create, in the Romanian reality, a filmed image placed in the ecstasy of communication. Despite the lack of energy and illusion effects from the Romanian communications network, we wanted to find a particular critical area and the immanence of sacrilegious upon the sign!*

Key words: globalization, information society, culture of consumption, hybridization, cybernetic society

Romanian society, which exited the Soviet insulation processes and its specific protection abuses, has attempted to diminish the impact between the Romanian democratization phenomenon and the global one. Most of the Romanian political parties meet the political and social dissatisfactions, offering some guidelines capable of diminishing the differentiation. We remind, in this respect, Durkheim's sociological theories, mostly on what concerns the difference between the notion of work and that of spare time, religion, home, etc.

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Thus, Romanian public life is also, at its turn, distinguished from the private life, sometimes even leading to rationalized forms of public and private life, in Max Weber's terms.

The concept of *great break* proposed by Francis Fukuyama[1] is an all-heal meant to help us in the "deciphering of the rules of the game" practiced in a "sliding", postindustrial world.

According to Leford[2], the political aspect is, first of all, the embodiment of social coexistence. It transforms itself in institutions, norms, rules that are able to administrate the "social plurality" and to ensure the relative cohesion of groups. But the political aspect also represents the "stage" of social coexistence. Such an operation has the role of inducing a "system of representations close to the theatrical sense of the term, through which it displays itself on the same scene with its activators." The political power does not cease to affirm itself, within the principles that sustain the social order, in a spectacular way. And last but not least, the political aspect stands for the instantiations of social coexistence, in the sense that there is no society which is not subject to some inherent discrimination: justice/injustice; truth/untruth; legitimacy/illegitimacy perceived as such by its members. Thus, each society is, in Leford's words, a realm that needs understanding, an understanding that would be appropriate to delimit, and that, as Baudoin[3] demonstrates, has first of all to be evaluated.

It seems that, according to the author of *Postmodern Ethics*[4]*,* we are involved in a new worldwide disorder or, in other words, in a game of reorganizing the world. It is the rule of a political puzzle in which the potential of disagreement and dissonance between spheres (moral, political, minority groups, sexual) "never totally halted, erupts and comes to light." Bauman's conviction restricts to the fact that there is no efficient centralized control that could offer to the unsafe area, continuously reproduced, a naturalness appearance. Indeed, as Foucault[5] had noticed and argued, "the fight for power and the endless war" are the only safe foundation of an organized abode.

At this moment, despite globalization and its effects that were felt in the common effort to build a new social, economic, political sphere, we are going through a time of insecurity and of dissolution of *megalothymy*[6] in contemporary liberal

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[1]Fukuyama, Francis, **Marea Ruptură**. *Natura umană şi reconstituirea ordinii sociale*, Humanitas, Bucureşti, 2003.

[2]Leford, Claude, *L'Invention démocratique*, Paris, Fayard, 1981.

[3]Baudoin, Jean, *Introduction à la sociologie politique,* Seuil, 1998.

[4]Bauman, Zygmund, *Postmodern Ethics,* Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1993.

[5]Foucault, Michel, *A supraveghea şi a pedepsi*, Editura Univers, Bucureşti, 1996.

[6]We are, in Fukuyama's words, *free and unequal*. Thus, the liberal democracy could be overthrown whether by the excess of *megalothymy*, whether by that of *izothymy*, that is of the

democracies.

The *postmodern break* that Zygmund Bauman speaks of can be identified in the fact that the Romanian state, in its version after December 1989, does not claim anymore the capacity, the need and the desire to dominate, which led to setting the anti-structural forces of sociability free (unwillingly or on purpose).

From this perspective, the fact that by the end of the 1960s (if we were to consider just the political effects of the well-known year 1968), the European world (and not only it!) engaged in passing through a series of visible changes becomes more explicit. These changes were so strong that despite of the "dropped curtains", they could be experienced everywhere, from the Eastern reserved, communist World to the Islamic one, from the authoritative political regime to the open-minded societies, having the image of a world where interdependent phenomena could be felt simultaneously. These are the steps that led to the joining of the new type of international communities that Marshall McLuhan called *planetary village*.

Both communist and socialist Governments and the liberal-conservative ones connected their speeches to the progressive perspective centered round the development of new types of technology: genetic, of studying robots, spatial and, especially, electronic one. All these changed the industrial world, illustrative of the late economic modernism, into a postindustrial one. Thus, the image of a more dynamic, more transitive, more anarchical, more colorful world appeared (as a proof the writings of some "prophets" of the 1960s[1]) reminding of the motley "fortress" from Platon's *Republic*.

According to the theoreticians of postmodernism, we would (politically) be tempted to find a reason for this effort of taking a stand in modernism – postmodernism. From the political philosophy point of view, the answer to this (political) matter is connected to the proximal inheritance and to denying what is considered stable structures of the human being[2]. According to Bauman, the *society with risks* remains a reflexive stage of modernism!

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fanatic desire of equal recognition. The only forms of megalothymy that are not allowed in contemporary societies are those which lead to political tyranny. The difference between these societies and the aristocratic ones preceding them is that *megalothymy* has not been chased away, but left to manifest itself subterranean. The democratic societies start from the premise that all persons are created equal, and that their predominant ethos is that of equality. Thus, those manifestations of *megalothymy* that survived in modern democracies are somehow opposed to the ideals that society publicly sustains.

[1]See Toffler, Alvin, *Future's Shock,* McLuhan, Marshall, *The Guttenberg Galaxy,* Marcuse, Herbert, *The Liberation from the Society of Richness* etc. etc.
[2]Manolache, Viorella, *The Romanian Postmodernism Between Ontological Experience and Political Necessity*, *Lucian Blaga* University Press, Sibiu, 2004

The postmodernist preference for *hybridization* presupposes a boundless availability in which the ruling word is, in one of Guy Scarpetta's terms, *impurity*[1]. As a result of a comparison to the aggression of the *hybrids' empire* from the postindustrial world, in the central east-European area we can also notice the presence of other options plunged into ecology. *Transpolitics*[2] – as a Romanian variation of wandering in relation to a state of things (about which one no longer knows if they form systems of real causes and effects) supports three types of *consuming anomalies*:

1. Overabundance- Shortage

The main character of this sociological-political story is not the modern period's worker anymore, but its consumer, as Bauman says. Consumer's behavior becomes the mark of the cognitive and moral accent of life, the way in which people are integrated in society, as well as their connection to the systematic management.

Meaning that seeing urbanity as a scene, Bauman underlined the fusing between merchandise and client, between buying and being the result of buying. The special commercial spaces built for this game offers to Bauman's "loiterers" a true paradise. The historical connection between the game of these "loiterers" and the modern/postmodern consumerism, between observing and changing the observer in the object of observation, between buying and being bought, was done through creating some social prototypes, as consumers and object of consuming.

Such a theorizing of the distinct philosophical-political spaces launches the effective difference between *communitas* and *societas*. Taking over such a dichotomy from Victor W. Turner, Bauman considers that it becomes functional only in well-structured society, every time an individual or a group passes by or it is moves from one structure into another, in fact from a structure into an anti-structure.

If *societas* is characterized by heterogeneousness, inequality, the statutes' differentiation or nominal system, *communitas* is marked by homogeneousness, equality, the absence of statutes, anonymity: "in other words, *communitas* destroys what *societas* tries very hard to create and use. Or *societas* adapts and changes everything that in *communitas* is liquid and shapeless"[3].

According to Kellner[4], the global society is *colonized* by media culture. The media culture is an industrial culture, organized on the model of mass production,

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[1]Scarpett Guy, *Elogiu cosmopolitismului*, Editura Polirom, Iaşi, 1998.

[2]Baudrillard, Jean, *Strategii fatale,* Editura Polirom, Iaşi, 1998.

[3]Bauman, Zygmund, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003.

[4]Kellner, Douglas, *Cultura media*, Institutul European, Iaşi, 2001.

a form of commercial culture; its products are commodities that attempt to attract private profit produced by giant corporations interested in the accumulation of capital.

2. The Hostage

Adopting terms like "stranger" and "settled" from Norbert Elias, Bauman considers that this pair of words represents one kind of social structure in which two existing groups face one another within a conflict of border delimitation, and yet they are connected to each other through the mutual services that they do for the identity quest.

Bauman applies these concepts to modernism with the consideration that the dichotomy "settled" and "strangers" has been grounded through "the asymmetry/disproportion of power like it was imposed in the administration of shaping the social area", in striving to share the social field after "the cognitive map promoted by managers/administrators".

Like Bauman used to note, the powerful men were the first to express their need to maintain the borders, therefore, it's reasonably to presume that the roots of division/separation must be sought in the issues of those in charged with the development of social field that is in the issues raised by the definitive uncertain process of creating the social field.

Unlike the *sedentary*, the *nomads/migrants* keep moving. They go around a well structured territory with firm and attributed bearing to each fragment. A trait that separates them from the *pilgrims* is that *nomads* don't have a final destination to mark their itinerary beforehand, and no stopping is favored but all crossing places to be just halting points. They move from one place to another in a strictly normal sequence, following rather the order of things than inventing the order, dismantling it when they leave. Between *nomads* and *drifter/wanderer*, the latter conveys a suited metaphor for that what Bauman calls "humans belonging to the post modern condition".[1]

Drifters require no destination; they are pushed ahead by an unfulfilled desire, hope, because the drifter is a pilgrim without destination, a nomad with no itinerary. The drifter travels in a shapeless space, whereas every consecutive establishment is local, temporary, and episodic.

Like the *drifter*, the *tourist* has its own biographical time and answers only to the flexible experience of space. According to Bauman, exactly the tourist's esthetic capacity, the curiosity, the need of amusement, his desire and ability to live new experiences can be called an absolute freedom of organizing the space from the

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[1]Bauman, Zygmund, *Etica postmodernă*, Editura Amarcord, Timişoara, 2000, p.261.

tourist's world; the kind of freedom that the *drifter* can only dream about. Just as the *drifter*, the *tourist* is extraterritorial, living outside the territory like a privileged, like an independent, as a right given to be free to choose in a world called by Bauman, the *tourist's shell*.

Both the *drifter* and the *tourist* move around places where other people live who can deal with the settlements of these delimitations; the *drifter* and the *tourist* having only a brief and formal encounter with them (hypocritical meetings). According to Bauman "this is the life formula of the drifter and the tourist, physically close, and spiritually far".[1]

In the post modern era the *drifter* and the *tourist* are no longer insignificant types. They turn into patterns destined to dominate/control and mould the entirety of life and the whole day by day, into stereotypes that all practice is measured, because social field represents to Bauman a source of energy and that esthetic represents a play field.

According to Whillock[2], the film (along with television and computer) changes the concept of *reality*, because we live in a world where images proliferate independently of the existence of references to the real world.

One of the primary facts that the film is easily placing in the minds of viewers, is the ability to convince that the images of reality are produced artificially. Illusory quality of the film facilitates the identification of the viewer with the images on the screen, perceiving alternate realities, including the identities/temporary opportunities that may be adopted.

Take for example the case Romanian short film, *Megatron*, where the story is chosen from the immediate reality, from Salonta. Starting from an apparently real sequence, Marian Crişan decides to transpose in images a slice of life, choosing at the formal start to a sudden and a final cut.

Scenario of Marian Crişan is situated halfway between the source and flow, as the characters motivations are only partially resolved in a sideslip and stereotypic cutting: mother and son left by the husband/father, frustration and tension, effort and sacrifice to brighten child's life, desired toy.

Switching from one plan to another, the space is marked by abandon: rural casings were left along. In the train, technology assaults: Maxim has an electronic game and his mother's mobile phone rings! Megatron's itself – the Happy Meal toy Maxim wanted, misses not only from the McDonald's stock, but also from the movie! The McDonald's seller has no Megatron only a Biotron!

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[1]*Ibidem.,* p. 263.
[2]Whilloch David, *Digital Democracy*. In Denton, Robert E. (Ed.), *The 2000 Presidential Campaign: A Communication Perspective*, Praeger Publishers, 2002.

3. Clone or the automaton

For Baudrillard[1], the universe is not dialectical: it moves toward the extremes, devoted to a radical antagonism and not to reconciliation or to synthesis. In an inexorable manner, the progress, the advanced step in this world seem to be entropic, a viable thing for the "natural evolution" and for "the cosmological development" as for the social-historical increase. Any propagation seems to be accompanied by a lessening/shortage of substance, by an abolishment of latency and by a blockage of options. The laying of an entropic silence is delayed by the power of a reactionary nature of the second effects and by the stubborn regression of the reality, confirmed by the reaction of some communitarian gestures.

The new, global society brings along the victory of the object: humanity becomes more like things, like objects, and divest ourselves of the illusion and hubris of subjectivity.

Bauman's remembrance of postmodern divorce is recognized in the fact that the polity doesn't reclaim the capacity, the need and the desire of supremacy, on purpose or involuntary, getting rid of the anti structural forces of society. According to Bauman, these are the result of prevalence, in the power of settlement and coercive order of day by day life won by the state through the mixture of supremacy over the fellow's crucial dimensions.

That's way the economic part of the governments generally diminishes at keeping some attractive local conditions, after Bauman's appreciations: controlled work, little dues/charges, good hotels, exciting night-life. It is not allowed even the credibility in a posthumous myth to the cultural sovereignty due to the conveniences of the cultural industry and that of cultures' makers imposed by the traditional boundaries of the state.

Donna Haraway[2] proposes the alternative of a *cyber society*[3]. In this attempt at an epistemological and political position, Donna Haraway sketches a frame of possible unity, a picture indebted to socialist and feminist principles of design. The frame is set by the extent and importance of (re)arrangements in world-wide social relations tied to science and technology. Simultaneously material and ideological, the dichotomies may be expressed in the chart of transitions from the comfortable old

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[1]Baudrillard, Jean, *Strategii fatale,* Editura Polirom, Iaşi, 1998.

[2]Haraway, Donna, A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century, in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York; Routledge, 1991).

[3]A *cyborg* is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, a world-changing fiction. The *cyborg* is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century!

hierarchical dominations to the new networks, using the *versus* rule:

Representation	vs.	*Simulation*
Organism	vs.	*Biotic Component*
Biology as clinical practice	vs.	*Biology as inscription*
Small group	vs.	*Subsystem*
Eugenics	vs.	*Population Control*
Decadence, *Magic Mountain*	vs.	*Obsolescence*
Future Shock; *Hygiene*	vs.	*Stress Management*
Organic division of labor	vs.	*Ergonomics/cybernetics of labor*
Functional specialization	vs.	*Modular construction*
Scientific management in home/factory	vs.	*Global factory/Electronic cottage*
Public/Private	vs.	*Cyborg citizenship*

According to Donna Haraway's sketch, any objects or persons can be reasonably thought of in terms of disassembly and reassembly; no "natural" architectures constrain system design. These are the marks of a *cyber semiology*!

Concluding, the three types mentioned above (*Overabundance-Shortage*; *The Hostage*; and *Clone or the automaton*) create, within the Romanian reality, a "filmed" image placed in the ecstasy of communication. Despite the lack of energy and illusion effects from the Romanian communications network, we wanted to find a particular critical area and the immanence of sacrilegious upon the sign.

The hypothesis on which my study is built restricts to the fact that Romanian postmodernity is assumed primarily as a "means of communication society". In this world, the place of the ideal of emancipation (modeled after the self-conscience of the one who knows how things are going – Hegel's Absolute Spirit or Camus's or Marx' Man of Revolt) is subjected to erosion, oscillation and plurality.

The new aspect of Romanian localities best illustrates the bent towards the culture of consumption. Where in the past there were only mix stores, food stores, butcher's shops, joineries, tailor's shops etc., now there appeared the new forms of stimulating the consumption: fast-food, shops with technical outfit, computers, all dominated by the attractive image of banks, associations or travel agencies ready to offer their customers all sorts of facilities. These marks of the Romanian postmodernism are, naturally, associated with a society in which the consumer's life style, mass consumption, dominate its members' conscious life.

This is a society in which fashion and taste are eclectic, "opportunities" seem numberless, and the search of new market segments seems constant. The services and industries mainly offer entertainment.

On the one hand, in its canonic sense, the term *nation-state* used to imply, beside its juridical nature, (in this sense, as a set of norms that euphemize and dissolve forces and interests within some legitimating illusions) a civic nature, as a system of force rapports. Yet, on the other hand, the *nation-state* gives way to the prerogatives of the *wealth-state*. This represents an attempt to mobilize the economic interests as a means of setting free the political calculation from moral restraints.

However, the effects of urbanism are best felt in the "lewd economics," a concept launched by J. F. Lyotard. Indeed, urbanism is dependent on what Marx named "power of production."

The axiom according to which each political economy is lewd starts from the conviction that there is no reference to external reality. In Michel Foucault's words, urbanism, psychiatry, criminalities, sexology etc. – all this knowledge constitutes the "legitimacy" and a new way of applying the power. "The power" is everywhere. The sovereignty of the state, as juridical-reflexive frame, or the domination of a minority, are not in this sense some initial attributes, but the "ending forms" within the series of representations of power.

Thus, Romanian television as well functions as a machine of *the consumption civilization*, in the sense that it is no longer a stage for the manifestation of life style. The pretentions and the power of absorption of the message by each category of population guide those who finance, for instance, the political advertising.

The fundamental values acknowledged by this "average man" ("the common Romanian person") are those of friendship, of solidarity, of his acceptance by a whole community. The commercials for cleaning products, beer etc., represent only the action that overbid the common Romanian person's tendency to relate to previous experience, which determines especially the people from the countryside to be perceived as "keepers of old and traditional customs".

On the other hand, the attention is also directed towards the new "blue jeans" generation, the "Pepsi and Orbit generation" that esteems the "unity of the group" constituted beyond any social prejudice. The politics of altruism, of lacking any sense of identity, the politics that blurred the outlines of personality, up to its total absorption in the group is addressed precisely to this category.

All these raw ingredients (no allusion to the Cătălin Avramescu's "raw" philosopher!) are masked, in the form of ecstatic transgression, and in an extremely autochthonous form of *potlatch*, too.

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