

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

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Rezumat. *În acord cu teoreticienii postmodernismului, (politic) am fi tentați să găsim motivația efortului de a ne poziționa pe dimensiunea traiectului modernism–postmodernism. Din perspectiva filosofiei politice, răspunsul la această problemă (politică) se poate plasa în relație cu proxima moștenire modernă și negând, aparent, ceea ce se consideră a fi structurile stabile ale ființei umane. În pofida globalizării și a efectelor resimțite în a crea o nouă sferă nouă socială, economică, politică, trecem printr-o perioadă de insecuritate și disoluție a megalothymiei în democrațiile liberale contemporane. Cele trei tipuri menționate în studiu (obezul; ostaticul; clona sau autonomul) creează, în realitatea română, o imagine filmică plasată în extazul comunicării. În ciuda lipsei de energie și a iluziilor, am dorit să regăsim în rețeaua comunicării românești, o imanență a sacrilegiului asupra semnului!*

Abstract. *According to the theoreticians of postmodernism, we would (politically) be 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!*

Keywords: globalization, informational society, culture of consumption, hybridization, cybernetic society

Romanian society, which has got out of the Soviet isolationism and protectionism, has tried to diminish the impact between the Romanian 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 call to mind, in this respect, Durkheim's sociological theories, mostly on the difference between the notion of work and that of spare time, religion, home, etc.

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

The concept of *great break* proposed by Francis Fukuyama¹ 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 Leford², 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 "staging" 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, in a spectacular way, the principles that sustain the social order.

And last but not least, the political aspect stands for the staging 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 of understanding that it would be appropriate to delimit, but that, as Baudoin³ demonstrates, it is not forbidden to evaluate.

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, 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 Foucault⁵ had demonstrated, "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

¹Francis Fukuyama, *Marea Ruptură. Natura umană și reconstituirea ordinii sociale*, Humanitas, București, 2003.

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

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

⁴Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1993.

⁵Michel Foucault, *A supraveghea și a pedepsi*, Editura Univers, București, 1996.

through a time of insecurity and of dissolution of *megalothymy*¹ in contemporary liberal democracies.

The postmodern culture institutionalizes the *melancholy* by the contempt towards ceremonies and rituals, fights against passions on the field of personal interests and against collective outburst of enthusiasm in the name of organization. It is a condition of *active indifference*, counterbalanced by promoting the national, protocron spirit, overbidding by left-right parties. The *postmodern break* that Zygmunt 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, setting the antistructural forces of sociability free, unwillingly or on purpose.

It is obvious 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. These were so strong that despite of the “dropped curtains”, they could be experienced 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 1960s²) 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

¹We 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 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 subterraneous. 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.

²see Alvin Toffler, *Future’s Shock*, Marshall McLuhan, *The Guttenberg Galaxy*, Herbert Marcuse, *The Liberation from the Society of Richness* etc. etc.

(political) matter is connected to the proximal inheritance and to denying what is considered stable structures of the human being¹. According to Bauman, the *society with risks* remains a reflexive stage of modernism!

Postmodernism is organized as a “system of objects”, a society marked by consumption, by hiding the means that assure the social prestige. By giving up the “fundament”, postmodernism implies the collapse of the hierarchies of knowledge, taste, opinion, a replacement of the real, living image with that created on the television screen, the migration of the words towards images, of speech towards person. New types of spreading and dividing (a world of pure semblance, models, codes, digital systems) are looking for identifying freedom in disorientation².

The postmodernist preference for *hybridization* presupposes a boundless availability in which the ruling word is, in one of Guy Scarpetta’s terms, *impurity*³. As compared 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*⁴ -as a Romanian variation of wandering in relation to a state of things (which no longer know 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

¹Viorella Manolache, *The Romanian Postmodernism Between Ontological Experience and Political Necessity*, Lucian Blaga University Press, Sibiu, 2004

²Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel.*, New York: Free Press, 1950.

³Guy Scarpetta, *Elogiu cosmopolitismului*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 1998.

⁴Jean Baudrillard, *Strategii fatale*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 1998.

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"¹.

According to Kellner², the global society is *colonized* by media culture. The media culture is an industrial culture, organized on the model of mass production, 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*

A term as *body-subject* becomes the *entre-deux* that inseparably intertwines the experience of mind and body and whose relational condition corresponds to a concept of space and time that is corporeally constituted. The context of embodiment implicates the issues of cultural identity and inscription: it is a lived context, whose inevitable and inescapable cultural, social, historical, gendered, and technological specificities always render the body multiple and unfinished.

According to Whilloch³, 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 Crișan decides to transpose in images a slice of life, choosing at the formal start to a sudden and a final cut. Scenario of Marian Crișan 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,

¹Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003.

²Douglas Kellner, *Cultura media*, Institutul European, Iasi, 2001.

³David Whilloch, *Digital Democracy*. In Robert E. Denton (Ed.), *The 2000 Presidential Campaign: A Communication Perspective*, Praeger Publishers, 2002.

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!

3. *Clone or the automaton*

For Baudrillard¹, the universe is not dialectical: it moves toward the extremes, and not towards equilibrium; it is devoted to a radical antagonisms and not to reconciliation or to synthesis. The individuals should surrender to the world of objects, learning their ruses and strategies, and should give up the project of sovereignty and control. 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. Despair, sadness, and nostalgia is thus one form of response that people have in the current era, and one response is to attempt to bring back those parts of the past that have been destroyed. This may be associated with a revival or earlier forms of spirituality (new age, fundamentalism, aboriginal), or a recycling of earlier cultural forms (earlier popular music), or outmoded institutional forms (earlier models of family values).

Donna Haraway² proposes the alternative of a *cyber society*³. Because, Technological determination is only one ideological space opened up by the reconceptions of machine and organism as coded texts through which we engage in the play of writing and reading the world.

From *One-Dimensional Man* (Marcuse, 1964) to *The Death of Nature* (Merchant, 1980), the analytic resources have insisted on the necessary domination of techniques and recalled us to an imagined organic body to integrate human resistance. 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 following chart of transitions from the comfortable old hierarchical dominations to the new networks, using the *versus* rule:

¹Jean Baudrillard, *Strategii fatale*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 1998.

²Donna Haraway, "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).

³A *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!

<i>Representation</i>	<i>Simulation</i>
Bourgeois novel, realism	Science fiction, postmodernism
Organism	Biotic Component
Depth, integrity	Surface, boundary
Heat	Noise
Biology as clinical practice	Biology as inscription
Physiology	Communications engineering
Small group	Subsystem
Perfection	Optimization
Eugenics	Population Control
Decadence, <i>Magic Mountain</i>	Obsolescence, <i>Future Shock</i>
Hygiene	Stress Management
Microbiology, tuberculosis	Immunology, AIDS
Organic division of labour	Ergonomics/cybernetics of labour
Functional specialization	Modular construction
Reproduction	Replication
Organic sex role specialization	Optimal genetic strategies
Biological determinism	Evolutionary inertia, constraints
Community ecology	Ecosystem
Racial chain of being	Neo-imperialism, United Nations humanism
Scientific management in home/ factory	Global factory/Electronic cottage
Family/Market/Factory	Women in the Integrated Circuit
Family wage	Comparable worth
Public/Private	Cyborg citizenship
Nature/Culture	fields of difference
Co-operation	Communications enhancement
Freud	Lacan
Sex	Genetic engineering
Labour	Robotics
Mind	Artificial Intelligence
Second World War	Star Wars
White Capitalist Patriarchy	Informatics of Domination

According to Donna Haraway's sketch, ideologies about human diversity have to be formulated in terms of frequencies of parameters, like blood groups or intelligence scores. At the level of ideology, the postmodern author proposes translations of racism and colonialism into languages of development and underdevelopment, rates and constraints of modernization. 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; 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. All these raw ingredients (no allusion to the Cătălin Avramescu's raw philosopher!) are masked in the form of ecstatic transgression, in a very (!) autochthon form of *potlatch*!

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