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ABSTRACT

I. The Problem-Environment

In its introductory segment, the thesis reconstructs the intellectual atmosphere of the 1980s, the epoch of my academic formation. It contains a short survey of the evolution of literary thought, from essentialist, dominantly linguistic models, partial to the fields of poetics and stylistics, conceived in a semiotic manner, towards an ever larger opening, on multiple levels and affecting the very conception of the essence (or, for that matter, lack of essence) of literature, towards the sciences of society and culture.

This reconstruction (at the same time, an inescapable evocation of the formal and informal hubs, i.e. students' circles, of humanistic education and debate of that age) could not ignore the ideological pressures exercised by the Communist state. But in my understanding, besides their massively detrimental role and the serious deformities they inflicted on intellectual life, such as breaking the contact with the international networks of knowledge, these pressures also speeded up and deepened the process of redefining literary sciences, from their self-understanding as sciences of the text, to their self-understanding as sciences of society, culture, and mind-sets.

The notion of "problem-environment" expresses the relative convergence of alternative theoretical and philosophical perspectives and interpretations, within a coagulated system of options, and on the other hand, the deep internalization of the focal and "canonical" questions that generate the said system of options.

II. The Concept of "Change" in Society and Culture: the Beginnings

This chapter succinctly renders the leading ideas of my "diploma thesis" (at that time, the Romanian university system did not distinguish between B.A. and M.A.). These ideas are presented as starting points of some of the major lines of

thought and argument followed by my entire scientific career. The title of my thesis, defended in 1988 and sponsored by the prestigious phenomenologist, professor Mircea Martin, was: "Modernism towards postmodernism: an internal and external model of change".

This approach was inspired not only by the theories that redefined the nature and function of literature through successive re-categorizations (as "system of signs", "communication medium", "discourse"), but also my direct experience with the alternative literary and intellectual milieu of the 1980s. The frequentation of the underground directly revealed to me the fact that practising and theorizing literature were a natural part of a much larger reflection on society. I had first hand evidence of the fact that literary imagination, as an expression of a collective mind, can become the field of spectacular, as well as consistent mental experiments with distinct social relevance. The underground literature of that period was actually testing life styles, while anticipating – and thereby, to a certain measure, bringing closer – social transformation and emancipation.

The presentation stresses the double value I ascribed (and still do) to the qualification "internal": on the one hand, it carries the meaning of an evolution of literary expressiveness understood as a program capable of learning and self-restructuring; on the other hand, it points out the evolutions of and the interconnections within the literary field, seen as distinct and relatively autonomous with respect to society at large.

In this first large-scale academic undertaking, I tried to prove (to myself, among other things) that a taxonomic approach, based on classification, on categories that cover the object of study with a subtle network of mutual conceptual positionings, is not necessarily a scholastically sterile operation. On the contrary, constructing a typology implies creativity and conceptual acumen at their highest, and mobilizes analytical intelligence concomitantly with (and actually in an intimate chemistry with) intuition and visionary spirit.

The major theme of my BA/MA thesis, which I resumed in many forms in my subsequent research work, is the intertwinement between social and cultural change. The concentration on this problem hub was the result of my distancing from the volitionist vision of change, which imagines the course of history as directed by the most powerful and articulated human projects; from a subversive-elusive vision of transformation, as practiced by the trends that today I would identify as post-

structuralist; but also from the influential thought of the domestic Heideggerian Constantin Noica who, in my view, used the notion of "becoming" as a fetish, without any conceptual articulation whatsoever.

The significant intuition contained in the "internal and external model of change" was that a state of uncertainty of consciousness, and a condition of doubt in general, is a value to itself. Starting from here, I dissociated between two poetics of doubt, both essential to the understanding of literary and intellectual evolutions associated with postmodernism. On the one hand, the essentially cognitive doubt, affecting the most basic data of perception, our representations of the surrounding world, of "reality", a form of doubt central to the postbellum literature of continental Europe. On the other hand, the moral doubt, aiming primarily at the ethics of responsibility with respect to the sources and mechanisms of fictions/fantasies, central to the English language literature of the same period, and especially of the 1960s, the epoch when postmodern novel actually hatched out.

III. Literary Theory as Social and Cultural Theory

In this chapter I presented the consistency structures of the research I have been undertaking up to this point, with respect to its theoretical system of reference and, in close connection to this, with respect to its methodological orientation and explorations.

In the subchapter "Negative Dialectics and Critical Theory of Culture" I presented my theoretical and methodological interest (though not devoid of critical distancing) for the intellectual heritage of the Frankfurt School, seen as the attitude of boldly declining to bring irreconcilables in an artificial condition of harmony.

Consequently I presented another theoretical milestone of my research work: the public-private dynamics and, especially, the condition of literature as a presumably strategic mediator between these levels of self-consciousness. In other words, literature, understood as a cluster of ways of transferring (or translating): on the one hand, fragilities and tensions of the private (or intimate) space in the volitional-cohesive (also including the cohesion-through-conflict) symbolism of public space; on the other hand, the strong structures of public space (itself, let us not forget it, and imaginary space, or a space with an essential imaginary dimension), into the vibrating uncertainties of private space.

In the subchapter "The Person as a Formative Mould of Cultural Processes" I

exposed my conception on the relations between concepts as person-potentiality-plurality, central in my research on the modern and postmodern transformations of Europe, of Romania, and of the world. I based this presentation on a study I dedicated to the philosophical personalims.

With what right – be it formal or customary – can a poet claim public attention? The answers I gave to this question in my studies constitutes the substance of the subchapter "Legitimation of Literature: Epistemic and/or Ethic".

In the subchapter "Literature, Power, and Ideology: An Extended Theory of Totalitarianism" I discussed my studies related to the implication of a significant part of avant-garde and modernist literature in a dynamics of thought and sensibility that I defined as totalitarian.

In the subchapter "Indetermination and uncertainty" I displayed the hermeneutical philosophy of many of my research projects, a philosophy based on the ultimate consequences of the famous Cartesian ontological judgment: I doubt, therefore I think; I think, therefore I am. Starting from here, we should infer with necessity: I doubt, therefore I am. The analytical instrumentalization of the concept of uncertainty brought me to provoking extrapolations and interdisciplinary forms of cooperation (e.g. the study I co-author with professor Sorin Adam Matei, from Purdue University - „Wikipedia's „Neutral Point of View": Settling Conflict Through Ambiguity", *The Information Society*, 27/2011).

In the last segment of this chapter, titled "Reinventing Typology", I presented my personal development of the method of the "ideal type" (*Idealtypus*) devised by Max Weber, towards what I called "taxonomic and matricial intuitionism".

IV. The Study of Literature, As Cultural Theory

This chapter renders the research I conducted during the preparation of my doctoral dissertation. The resulting book was published in 2008, titled *Revoluţia radială. O critică a conceptului de „postmodernism" dinspre înţelegerea plurală şi deschisă a culturii burgheze – Radial Revolution: A Critique of the Concept of Postmodernism From a Plural and Open Understanding of Bourgeois Culture* (Transylvania University Press, Braşov). But before this I concentrated and, to an important extent restructured the main argument of my dissertation in the study *Semizei şi rentieri. Despre identitatea burgheziei moderne – Demigods and Rent-Seekers: On the Identity of Modern Bourgeoisie* (Nemira, Bucureşti, 1999).

In both shapes of this enterprise, I analyze four patterns of meaning, closely related and though clearly distinct, which transmogrify the symbolism of the "center" into the notion of "middle class." These four patterns are: the pyramid, which opposes the social "peak" and "basis"; the vertical axis, which superimposes on the spatial opposition up/down the ontological opposition spiritual/material; the horizontal axis absorbing in the "natural" polarity left/right opposing social forces and conflicting moralities; and the center of the circle, symbolizing a charismatic self-confidence, as well as a skeptical equidistance in the cognitive appropriation of the world. These four structures of spatial symbolism convene to generate, in different shapes and manners, the essential tension between alternative sets of values, which, in my understanding, constitutes the distinctive feature of the bourgeois spirit.

V. Comparing Forms of Knowledge

This chapter explains my understanding of comparative literary and cultural studies. It opens with a discussion of the philosophical principles that guide my activity within these vast disciplinary areas (i.e.: relativism equates neither arbitrariness, nor anomy; universal validity does not equate absolute value; skepticism both can and cannot equate relativism). Consequently, as an illustration of the actual application of such principles, I offer a résumé of my monographic study *Plăcerea de a gândi. Moştenirea intelectuală a criticii literare româneşti (1960-1989), ca expresie identitară într-un tablou global al culturilor cognitive* – The Pleasure of Thinking: The Intellectual Heritage of Romanian Literary Criticism (1960-1989), as an Expression of Identity Within a Global Overview of Cognitive Cultures (Editura Muzeului Literaturii Române, Bucureşti, 2013).

The aim of this research was to redefine the status of literary criticism, as a network of skills implying not only interdisciplinarity, but also an intersection of cognitive faculties – a redefinition that starts from a Romanian case study, concentrated on the time span specified in the subtitle (i.e. 1960-1989), but which opens towards a much broader multi- and intercultural global perspective.

The innovation of this approach resides in shifting the focus of comparative meaningful investigation from the literary works as such, to the critical and cognitive cultures that actually underpin and support them.

In order to emphasize the conceptual and methodological relevance of this approach for the field of cultural studies, I point to the relation, carefully identified

and analyzed in this volume, between literary criticism, the culture(s) of politeness, and the modern, virtualized avatars of the Enlightenment *salons*.

VI. Romanian Cultural Studies

This chapter is structured in three parts, covering distinct topical areas.

The first subchapter deals with my contributions to the interdisciplinary study of nationalism. I make special reference to my study "Conflict and Diversity in East European Nationalism, on the Basis of a Romanian Case Study" (*East European Politics and Societies* (3(17)/2003). This research identifies three major sources of differentiation and diversifying of Romanian nationalist discourse. The first one is the *historical-regional*: the different early modernizations of Wallachia and Moldova, as provinces under Ottoman rule, on the one hand, and of Transylvania and the Banat, as Habsburg provinces, on the other, induced different patterns of national identity building. The second source of differentiation is *social-cultural*: I distinguish between a nationalism of the aristocratic elite, and a nationalism of the middle class and the intelligentsia. Last but not least, the differences in representing the nation are derived from such assumably unsolvable antinomies of modernity as: freedom vs. equality, responsibility vs. solidarity, cooperation vs. competition, deliberation vs mobilization, innovation vs. conservation, facts vs. values, teleology vs, skepticism, relativism vs. fundamentalism, individualism vs. statism, etc.

The conclusion of my study is an analogy of East European nationalism with Cromwellian pluralism. In spite of its limitations, the system of public liberties created by the English Revolution represented the foundation of modern democracies. It also allowed for a rather quick transition to a more complex and tolerant kind of political order, which was possible because the apparently homogeneous political Protestantism was in fact irreducibly divided, tensional, and plural. The selective character of this type of democracy did not and could not prevent the public polemics from being carried to their ultimate consequences, with an intensity that is hard to find in many systems of nonlimited political pluralism. The variety of radically conflicting options that became manifest through such public debates functioned as an engine of social transformation so powerful that it made the original political and religious limitations appear as meaningless.

In other studies I explored the complementary possibility of overall-structures that homogenized the social and political imagination of Romanian modernizing

elites. On this line I collaborated extensively with my colleague Sorin Adam Matei, from the Communication Studies Department of Purdue University, Indiana, USA. In the habilitation thesis I gave different example of our fruitful scientific exchanges, among which I would make a special mention of "Latent Crusaders: Narrative Strategies of Survival in The Early Modern Danubian Principalities, 1550-1750", (*Journal of Global Initiatives* 2/ 2011).

The second subchapter is dedicated to my contributions to the study of the work of Romania's national poet, Mihai Eminescu (1850-1889). The central part of the exposé is reserved to my two-fold monographic volume *Mihai Eminescu. Imaginarul spaţiului privat/ Imaginarul spaţiului public - Mihai Eminescu. The Imaginary of the Private Space/ The Imaginary of the Public Space* (Aula, Braşov, 2004). I present the manner in which the theoretical ideas on the public-private dynamics, detailed in the third chapter of the thesis, can be made to act as premises of a significant change of perception on Eminescu's work – a change nurtured by methodological approaches coming from new historicism, cultural sciences, contextualist intellectual history.

As an example of the manner in which the literary sciences can perform cultural and intellectual mediation, I reproduce in the thesis fragments form the Romanian version, never published as yet, of the entry on the work of Mihai Eminescu that I authored for *Kindlers Literatur Lexikon,* vol. 3., edited by Heinz Ludwig Arnold (Stuttgart/Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler 2009). The German translation of the said text was provided by Gerhardt Csejka, a distinguished expert on Romanian literature and culture.

The third subchapter concisely renders my different attempts at rethinking the concept of "counterculture" and applying it to the Romanian cultural context, both in a typological manner (e.g. with respect to the minority, but culturally salient Greek-Catholic tradition), but especially in its actual historical meaning, which denotes the original *Zeitgeist* of the 1960s. Among the later kind of contributions, I would especially mention the study "The Phoenix That Couldn't Rise. Politics And Rock Culture In Romania, 1960-1989" (*East Central Europe* 2-3/2011).

VII. Cultural Studies and the Design of Public Policies

This chapter extends the already-displayed vision on the interconditioning of imagination and society, towards areas of pragmatic action. I present research projects

that raised such stakes to whose conception and implementation I have been instrumental.

The projects I surveyed strech over four domains akin to public policy-making.

The first one has to do with curricular reform in Romanian public education system. The projects in which I participated addressed the literary curricula not so much with respect to their function of transmitting information, but essentially with respect to training critical thinking and conveying the values of liberal democracy (e.g. Caius Dobrescu, Andrei Bodiu (eds.), *Literatură şi civilizaţie. Scriitorii români canonici şi reforma curriculară* – Literature and Civilization: Canonical Romanian Writers and the Curricular Reform, 2 vol., Editura Universităţii Transilvania, Braşov, 2008).

The second domain has to do with cultural communication policies, more specifically with the promotion of a Romanian symbolic identity in Europe (e.g. „De la marginalitate la excentricitate. Politici de euroinsolitare a identităţii româneşti" – From Marginality to Eccentricity. Politics of Euro-Fashioning of Romanian Identity, in: Vasile Boari, Ştefan Borbély, Radu Murea (eds.): *Identitatea românească în context european: coordonate istorice şi culturale* – Romanian Identity in European Context: Historical and Cultural Landmarks, Risoprint, Cluj-Napoca, 2009).

The third interface with the public agenda has to do with rethinking and re-designing cultural tourism policies (e.g. „Spaţiul urban ca mitologie seculară, auto-transgresiune ficţională şi «lume a lumilor»: Trei abordări teoretice" – Urban Space as Secular Mythology, Fictional Self-Transgression, and 'World of the Worlds' ", *Euphorion* 7-8/ 2007).

Last but not least of my theoretical-pragmatic interests presented in this chapter are connected to understanding the cultural dimension that underpins corruption processes, but also their prophylaxis through education (e.g. „Despre analogie, agenţie, glisare şi incertitudine. O circumscriere tipologică a reprezentărilor literare ale corupţiei" – On Analogy, Agency, Sliding, and Uncertainty. A Typological Survey of Literary Representations of Corruption, in Caius Dobrescu, Ovidiu Moceanu, (eds.), *Dea Munera. Reprezentări ale corupţiei în modernitatea literară şi intelectuală românească - Dea Munera. Representing Corruption in Romanian Literary and Intellectual Modernity*, Editura Universităţii „Transilvania", Braşov, 2005: 7-63).

VIII. Projects for the Future. Theoretical, methodological, and Thematic Perspectives

The first project described in this chapter refers to concluding the research I initiated as a Fulbright scholar associated in 2002 with the Committee on Social Thought of the University of Chicago. My research still bears its initial title, "Tolerance and Support for Political Violence in the Public Discourse of Intellectual Elites: 1968 to the Present" and aims at investigating the support gained by political violence from a diffusely-tolerant and ambiguously-empathetic intellectual milieu. My program is to follow the gradual emergence of a positive valuation of explicit acts of violence across three different and though profoundly analogous cultural-political contexts: the mounting dissatisfaction of local *intelligentsia* with French colonial wars, culminating in open praise of Algerian terrorism; the creation of terrorist organizations in the aftermath of 1968 movement in Germany - especially the famous Rote Armee Faktion (RAF); the construction of the glorious image and the whole mythical epic of the Black Panthers within the American Counterculture.

The second project described in the habilitation thesis is called "Aristocracy: A Sphere of Ambiguities and Imaginary Projections." This research aims at deconstructing, at a Romanian but also European level of reference, the compound of the fictional, imaginary, "dreamed" aristocracy in its basic ideological components, more often than not surprisingly incompatible. On this line, I expect my analysis to bring to light the intimacy, often verging on osmosis, between attitudes that could comfortably count as ethical premises of liberal democracy (loyalty, dignity, valor), with radically anti-democratic and illiberal myths of blood and land, of a racial purity distilled in elites that have been allegedly selected through an immemorial process of social evolution.

The third research project presented in this final chapter is provisionally titled "Reason, Belief, and the Globalization of Modernity" and proposes an understanding of cultural modernity as a space in which logically-possible solution of the reason-belief tension come to a sequential or simultaneous actuality. The solutions considered are: the irrational, non-conditional, religious belief in reason; the rational, systematic demonstration of the irrational essence of existence; the rationalization of religious belief; skepticism, religious or secular; stoic agnosticism.

The final subchapter is titled "Towards New Theoretical-Applicative Horizons: Visual Image as Object of Cultural Studies", and displays scientific and teaching projects that could be integrated in the curricula and in the research agenda of the Doctoral School in Cultural Sciences to be developed by the Center of Excellence for Studying the Image (CESI), affiliated to the Faculty of Letters of the University of Bucharest. The segment opens with an exposition of the grounds on which I intend to extend my interests toward the theory and practice of visual image. Intuitively, I invoke the seminal importance of image to the type of culture in which we live, but I also confess my intention to adapt to the specific objectives of the CESI project, which I consider one of the most innovative and original in the Romanian (and not only Romanian) field of cultural studies. I also substantiate the interest for the study of the visual image through the opportunities it creates for the extension of the scope of my comparative undertakings to cultural areas which raise the problem of severe linguistic barriers.

Consequently, I describe the manner in which this extension of my object of study brings a significant contribution to the three research projects already described (and to other projects, mentioned in other places in the thesis – e.g. the study of cultural tourism from the perspective of the cultural study of the image). My intention ist o configure thereby a topical area, convergent with the CESI objectives and values, for the doctoral research projects I would supervise in the future. In its last part, the subchapter advances a couple of actual proposals for courses I could deliver within the CESI curriculum: the construction of the aesthetic category of the "moronesque" and its application the contemporary audio-visual culture; the analysis of visual representations of sexuality and eroticism as codified expression of connections between emotional and intellectual faculties, within an extended understanding of philo-sophia; the dynamics of conceptual elaborations in the field of art theory in the 20th century.