

## **A DIFFICULT PROCESS – CREATIVE ASSUMPTION OF LIBERTY**

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*The presentation focuses upon the value of the concept of liberty (its semantic value and its practical approach in the Romanian art after the disintegration of the socialist camp). I considered the case of the Romanian art relevant – like any other particular case – for the East-European culture, for the differences and similitudes characterizing the assumption of the topic imposed by the passage of this historical moment which was officially stopping a universal domination whose functional attribute was anyway losing its value. The universal characteristics, abusively extended upon an oriental Europe, made up of cultures/identities with sensibly different identities, reacted differently during the five decades of forced integration, by opposing to the culturally extended political ideology after the dissolution of the system too. The article represents not only a comparative study of these differences which supported the originality of the East-European cultures, but also an analysis of the relationship between the post-war Romanian culture and the disidentifying pressure of the imposed aesthetic ideology, with the convergent solutions of disimplication, submination and alternative behaviours, sustaining differently a conflictual condition with a similar orientation at the level of contents, language, context and artistic behaviour. These cultural pressures and conflicts are generated by the different ways of liberty assumption, as political attitude or creative premise, as approach of some specific thematics, as an opening towards cosmopolitanism.*

Key words:

*liberty, aesthetic ideologies, language, strategy, generation*

The transition of a period of slow conflicts, indirect oppositions, or careful delimitations - given the presence of a culture structured by a foreign ideology, whose expansion concentrates on morphologies, syntactic schemes, and sets of

foreign signification- , creates behavioral stereotypes, circumstance convergencies between attitudes and discourse solutions, which are essentially different, and aspirations characterizing the given historical situation. (This situation is also featured by more superficial appropriation forms or by the integral adherence to the programme formulated by the official aestheticism).

While giving up the case, the given culture hardly adopts liberty without oppositional strategies, liberty as independence, as an authoritarian reference to the problems of its personal context, as an approach full of original offers (investigations, solutions, behaviours). The strategies of the self-protective practice, of the historical duration of external pressures, no longer find their motivation yet, once disaffected, they facilitate the creation of a great potential, the necessity to express yourself in the violence of a conflict which was not consumed till the end, which is consumed now, within the personal and internal area.

On the other hand, we can still speak about the need to compare the fact to the authority of an important culture (of a group of culture which is homogeneous as dynamics). In the deep structure of these stereotypes of comparisons, there is the need of adherence to an ideology, the problematization of the conflict (or, in the most relaxed alternative), the dialectics between rival ideologies.

This was the situation of the Romanian culture at the beginning of the 10th decade last century, when the disintegration of the socialist camp (with its cultural coherence regardless of the strategies which are specific to any area involved), the violent elimination of the native totalitarianism, disaffected both the premises of official art and the convergence of some directions with motivations, stylistic solutions, and different ways of approaching. The most relevant paradoxical convergence, based on the simple mechanics concerning the exigencies of the socialist realism or the “ideal” realism of the ninth decade, emphasizes the direction which adopts, as the solution for the historical crisis, the transcendence of the historical time itself through a religious reconsideration of the real, and the radically critical, cosmopolitan, neo-avantgarde groups, eager to feel media innovation and behavior challenge.

We consider here the non-Orthodox group “Prolog” and the neo-avant-garde group “subReal”; yet, the most complex artist, who assumed the paradox integrally, is still Ion Grigorescu, who is an artist of innovation, forcing the limits of the experience marked by social, political, media, and existential pressure, engaged into an authentic and consequent religious experience and conscious of the ideological dominant of his attitude.

Immediately after the enthusiasm created by the rupture with the past and the structure of strategies motivated by the historical reality which had just been suspended, the ideological condition, the ideologic profile of these directions were more highlighted, and their diplomatic alliance inevitably transformed into a conflict led by Sorin Dumitreacu (the theoretical ideologist of neo-orthodoxism defined as a program), Călin Dan (the theoretician of the subReal group, the director of the CSAC) and by Erwin Kesler (the art critic engaged in the first wave concerned with the demolition of the non-convergent ideologies of the pro-occidental program). The conflict between different sub-groups within both directions dispersed without attenuating its polemical character. Regarding the theological identification, there were several groups characterized by religious references or, sacred elements: the group centred by the Catacomba gallery, run greatly from the cultural point of view by the painter and theoretician Sorin Dumitrescu, and the group from Pucioasa, run by sculptor Marian Zidaru, an artist frequently selected and integrated into the collections of contemporary European art, monopolized by the radical theological debates, the organizer of a phalanster with religious coherence.

There is also the other wing, of the options for the occidental cosmopolitanism, settled as ideology, in which one might notice the pressure and polemical situations which replaced at first coherence of opinions, motivated by similar aspirations towards technoculture, for the political debate and the dramatic or ironic feeling of provincialism or native poverty. (One of the most recent pressures emerged around the National Museum of Contemporary Art, deals not only with the problem related to the gap between curatorial programs or patrimonial selections and the productions of traditional genres, the promotion of the creations dependent on the new technology and supported by the communication of new media means, but also with the discrimination within the sphere of these forms of art, and especially around the political context accused by the whole ensemble of problems concerning placement, curatorial programs, international promotions of the Romanian art, promotional strategies and selective relationships with the public – the formation of a juvenile public through forms of seduction at the border between the cultural program and contemporary sub-culture, and an adult public which is well-informed, cultivated and elitist.

At the surface level, there are problems analyzing the social reference of art, with the opposition between populism and elitism, and between traditionalism and innovation which are more or less susceptible of originality, and the recent pressure between the global opening and the need of identification. This packet of problems which gets consumed, even when we refer to the media option under the political sign, is supplied with a pressure (a false one, like in the case of

more conflicts which are prolonged beyond their historical actuality, or adopted without any real support), a distance between generations, motivated either by a reciprocal ignorance of the authentic cultural contribution, an understanding of the manifestation of the generations developed under the old regime, as irrelevantly protestatory, a judgement under the stereotype of political values. On the other hand, there were even people of culture, artists, who, before the last decade of last century, did not show any interest in the innovative side regarding the new media supports, they brought innovations within the traditional frames or experimenting the support matter, while reflecting upon the temporal condition of the work of art/cultural event, they extended their interest towards the new technology, breaking the suspicion of the beginner artists. This suspicion - motivated by a utilization, which was not characterizing the video or digital image specifically, integrated into a more complex discourse, or resumed, by means of these narrative alternatives, the temporal condensation of the experiments typical to personal studios, - produced hybrid forms whose complexity was shadowed in the enthusiasm of participations in the universe of technoculture, which was becoming a certification proving the surpassing of a condition of zonal culture perceived as the main dimension of the captivity in marginality and provincialism. Artists such as Horia Bernea, Marian Zidaru, Șerbana Drăgoescu, or Alexandru Chira, had practised the conjuncture because of the necessity of an integral discourse, the videofilm. Other artists, especially those belonging to the dynamic generation of the 80s (Marilena Preda Sânc, Olimpiu Bandalac, Teodor Graur, Romelo Pervolovici, Alexandru Antik, Dan Mihălțianu, Nicolae Onucsan, Lazslo Ujvarosy, Lia Perjovschi, Roxana Trestioreanu), adopted the offer of the new media supports, yet without entirely abandoning the traditional forms of expression, while frequently passing (like in the case of ceramist Antik, or sculptor Pervolovici, through the intermediary phase of the performance or installation. Artists belonging to previous generations, to the first experimental-avant-garde wave of the 7th and 8th decades, such as Doru Tulcan, Geta Brătescu, Ion Grigorescu, or Ștefan Bertalan, who practised the film (8 and 16 mm) continued the natural practice of all the expressive modalities approached by traditional and innovative practices. Probably one of the most interesting cases is represented by an artist emphasizing the first wave of the Romanian experimentalism, Constantin Flondor, who, after his film experiments within the well-known Sigma Group, returned, according to an assumed program, to painting.

The preference for a context of communication became, at the same time with the reconfiguration of dissipant cultural policies, if not rivals, then a criterion, if not value, then a signal of political adherence in a system of codifying intra-cultural pressure and the de-placement of the artist's condition. It is exactly this slide of

free practice, without any prejudice, of the whole field of technical availability, of referential horizons, and stylistic formulations accessible in the present semantic reconsideration, which offered place to the ideologization of option.

Thus, the 90s are specific for the evolution of underground art forms – performance, body art, installation at the border between land art and street art, towards the condition of official art. There are many festivals and series of manifestations in this sense: “Condition without any Name”, Timișoara, 1992, curators Simona Nuțiu, followed in the same town under the organization of art critic Ileana Pintilie, and dedicated to performance arts, installations and video projections, in their relationship with the action between 1993 and 1996, the Festival of Young Artists, Oradea, organized by CIAC, the “Periphery” festival started from 1997, in Iași, curator Matei Băjenaru, the “Ephemeral” festival, 1999, 2000, Bucharest, curator Alexandra Titu. While these manifestations were including, besides the art forms which involved the artist and the compositions of objects, the real space and time absorbed by cultural metaphors, the temporal games of the video art, the program favouring these typologies of multimedia creation, video or digital, promoted by the Soros Centre for Contemporary Art through its annual exhibitions organized between 1993 and 1998, they provoked the tendency to make this segment of creation official, accepted as the most actual and capable to promote the Romanian artists and art, in its hypostases, open to globalization through the participation in the borderless communication.

We witness a phenomenon of transforming the original signification of innovation and prospecting, as a phenomenon exclusively depending on scientific prospecting, on the change of epistemological paradigm, by using political signification, like two and a half decade ago when experimentalism and abstract styles used to borrow the political function of the submination of dominant cultural systems. Before functioning through their contents, which anyway favour rhetorics and the manipulation manoeuvres of the public opinion through temporal discourses, the alternative arts, especially in the techno and media variants, imposed a political hierarchy, and the participation in the electronic universe became an ideology. The art universities necessarily developed departments of artistic photo and video (The National Art University, Bucharest, and the Theatre and Film Academy, Bucharest, The Art University Iasi, The Art University Cluj, The Art Faculty of the West University, Timișoara, The Tibiscus University, Timișoara). This decision imposed a series of changes in the educational strategies or, at least, they should have demanded that, if we understand that the educational function is part of a system of convergent functions defining the social practice in which the media pressure became a decisive term. The professors, who are integrated into this university system, belong to those generations, professionally marked by

Doru Tulcan, a former member of the Sigma group, Sorin Vreme, Stelian Acea, Timișoara, Roxana Trestioreanu, Iosif Kiraly, former member of the subReal group, Radu Igozsag, Alexandru Patatics, Bucharest, Nicolae Onucsan, Dorel Găină, Cluj, Matei Băjenaru, Bogdan Teodorescu, Iași, Lazslo Ujvarosy, Oradea. The young artists of the 90s are integrated into the systems of museums and galleries, participating in the promotional policy of these forms of art – the most coherent team is the one of the National Museum of Contemporary Art. They had initiatives of communication such as “happy Sundays”, relaxed meetings with D.G. and V.G., known with bands of rock music, jazz, and with the works of some media artists, forming a public reacting to the cultural message, to the cultural event, even to the debates proposed within the museum, on artistic and cultural policy topics, meetings with curators from the whole European area. There are artists educated in the art universities who practise the new media means without any prejudice, assuming, without any political views, the condition of artists belonging to the global context, either by approaching the problems of the world actuality, such as Mircea Cantor, an artist from the photo-video section of the Art University Cluj, present in the great museums of the world (Beaubourg, Guggenheim), or through their preoccupation with the native social issues such as the nomadic performance on the semi-official labour market, or the precarious aesthetic condition of the workers’ districts such as Matei Băjenaru, one of the most interesting Romanian contemporary artists for whom the social implication (social activism) and the problem of post-production are not simple fashionable slogans, whereas the political implication is not consumed in retrospective disputes with the former communist regime, but with the challenges of the most acute actuality. He makes the transition between the activism of the 80s, attentive to the exigency of the successive actualities of the native and East European space (Marilena Preda Sânc, in “Remapping the World”, Teodor Graur in “Romanians are Sedentary Navigators” or “Food for Art, Art for Food”) and the generation whose formation also marks artists such as Alexandru Bodea (“The Town”), Andrei Fărcășanu (“Vote Art”), Alexandru Nancă (“Flags”), Lucian Spătaru and Dorel Olteanu (“Exercise of Responsibility”), the members of the Multimedia Centre “Theatre ‘74” in Târgu Mureș („Dolly Lamb”), Bogdan Petrescu, (“An Exercise to Adapt to the European Civilization”), Genoveva Roxana Coza (“Young Age, A Status of Integration/Dispersion”), Carmen Parii (“Little Chicken”), - and many more examples can be offered. The artists’ interest in the social, political and cultural policy problems, as well as the feeling of responsibility concerning their own future, are stimulated by manifestations such as the Biennial of the Young Artists organized in Bucharest by the META Foundation, (director Romelo Pervolovici), in 2006 at the second edition, by the “Contemporary Utopia” Festival (a grant of the Art Faculty of the West University Timișoara, director Alexandra Titu, curators Adriana Lucaciu, Mirela Dăuceanu, Andreea

Flondor, coordinator of external public relations Margareta Tasi), in 2007 at the third edition, based on the assumption of the condition regarding the social experience mediated artistically – each edition launches a challenge concept: “Ethical Ecology”, 2005, “Social Challenges, Responsibility and Game”, 2006, and “The Ethics of the Living”, 2007) and the programs of the International Centre of Contemporary Art, Bucharest, the most recent project “Eurobarometer” being currently developed.

Yet the attitude of the young artists towards the pressure of a changing society, in economic, cultural, social segments, pressured by surface political conflicts and the dogmatic ideology of the relationships with the personal context perceived or imagined in the flux of the European and global integrative absorptions, reacts and refuses the forced responsibility and especially the “politization” of artistic creation or liberty, in its conceptual dimension, as cultural and existential experience. Like the artists of the 60s and 70s, who were searching for liberty within the political frame in the abstract formulations and in the studio experiment, the generation formed in the second part of the 10th decade and during the years of the 1st decade of the new millenium also takes distance, either in the pure exercise which integrates the scientific laboratory (Ștefan Kelemen “Vibration, Form, Symbol”), or in the exploration of solitary intimacy or couples, the intimacy of the studio conceived not as a laboratory but as a space of reverie, in the intimacy of distance communication, the paradoxical but available intimacy of the network (the members of the former group “Rostopasca”), even in the frivolity of publicity in the universe of fashion and top models, the “industrialization of beauty” (Doru Popescu, Mihaela Tarhună and Velisar Manea). Their program underlines an art experience as a reality itself, not in the elitist meaning of the avant-garde which used to “politicize” aesthetic autonomy, but as a mediator of the others’ intimacy, as a way towards the assumption of this intimacy as a strategy approached in the definition of identity, as a strategy of social relaxation, as a social connection which is more efficient than the one concerning the “politization” of differences and stratifications which keep the limited or extended communities in tension.

In 2001, the exhibition called “Intimacy” (curator Mălina Prut, painter of generation 2000) formulated this option in order to free the approach to the problems consumed within the area of contemporary art from the competition between the genres and the latest technological and traditional contexts, from cultural heritage, and the forms of their values, from the conflicts of rival ideologies, and the desire to ideologize any culture. The young generations cope with all the problems imposed by the current context (political, social, economic, ecologic, cultural, technological and scientific) which is not less confusing than history shows when illustrating any of its temporal levels or geographical site.

Their answer is not and must not be encouraged to be the one subordinated to a unique perspective upon the function of art. It must not be manipulated, but supported in identifying the dense contents of the concept of liberty.

## TEŽAK PROCES -- KREATIVNO PRISVAJANJE SLOBODE

*Rezime*

*Ovo izlaganje fokusirano je na vrednost koncepta slobode (njegovu semantičku vrednost i praktični pristup u rumunskoj umetnosti nakon dezintegracije socijalističkog bloka). Slučaj rumunske umetnosti smatramo relevantnim – baš kao i bilo koji drugi pojedinačni slučaj -- za istočnoevropsku kulturu, to jest za razlike i sličnosti koje karakterišu pitanje slobode, nametnute konkretnim istorijskim trenutkom; univerzalna dominacija slobode zvanično je bila zaustavljena, dok je njeno funkcionalno svojstvo u svakom slučaju gubilo svoju vrednost. Ove univerzalne karakteristike, uvredljivo proširene na orijentalnu Evropu, sačinjenu od prilično različitih kultura i identiteta, reagovale su različito tokom pet dekada nametnute integracije, suprotstavljajući se političkoj ideologiji koja se širila na domen kulture i nakon raspada političkog sistema.*

*Ovaj rad predstavlja ne samo komparativnu studiju razlika koje podržavaju originalnost istočnoevropskih kultura, već takođe i analizu odnosa između posleratne rumunske kulture i obezličujućeg pritiska nametnute estetičke ideologije, sa konvergentnim rešenjima raspleta, subminacije i alternativnih ponašanja, održavajući na različite načine jedno konfiktualno stanje sa sličnom orijentacijom na nivou sadržaja, jezika, konteksta i umetničkog ponašanja.*

*Ovaj očigledno opozicioni mono vektor već je ukazao na tenzije između rešenja kasnog modernizma i medijskih eksperimenata i sadržajnih opcija za neovizantijske vrednosti osme i devete dekade ovog veka i neorealističnih i neoavangardnih formi, u vezi sa debatom o stanju slika u okcidentalnom postmodernizmu.*

*U desetoj dekadi, strategijska konvergencija eksplodira u konflikte koji su izvirali iz širokog spektra različitih stavova, generišući plodne debate među teoretičarima, kustosima i menadžerima, i takođe među umetnicima sa radikalno različitim stavovima, koji su se spram tipova konteksta odnosili kao prema dragocnim elementima (performativni diskursi u desetoj dekadi prošlog veka), uz ispoljavanje tenzija između pristalica radikalizma konteksta i umetnika koji koriste bilo koji kontekst slobodno, dakle bez dogmatske diskriminacije. Ovi kulturni pritisci i konflikti proistekli su iz različitih načina uzimanja slobode, kao političkog stava ili kreativne premise, kao pristupa nekim specifičnim tematikama, kao neke vrste otvaranja prema kosmopolitizmu*