

THE MELANCHOLY OF RESISTANCE WITH MIRCEA NEDELCIU AND LÁSZLÓ KRASZNAHORKAI: SYMBOLIC IMAGES OF COMMUNITY UNDER COMMUNISM AND ALTERNATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF MORAL IDENTITY

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Abstract: Starting from a comparative analysis of the symbolic representations of community in the works of two major Eastern European fiction writers of the 1980s (nationally praised Romanian prose writer Mircea Nedelciu and internationally acclaimed Hungarian novelist László Krasznahorkai), the present contribution brings together their fundamentally similar perspectives on community disaggregation under communist totalitarianism. The two authors' aesthetic (re)constructions of community – favouring fantasy-like approaches and a poetics of absence often turning into actual representations of "spectrality" (in the Derridean sense of the term) – are meant to be read as (underlying) ethical standpoint(s) on the distortion of the moral component of personal and group identity under totalitarianism. Moreover, both writers are interested in exploring the possibilities (and limits) of marginal moral resistance (i.e. the possibility of moral resistance with socially marginalised individuals, marginal/uncharted communities etc.) as alternative moral identity (re)construction model(s). Nedelciu and Krasznahorkai's "fabulatory" ways of exploring socio-cultural reality and political imagery could hereby be associated with theoretical viewpoints such as André Petitat's approach on "secret" and social forms, Tadeusz Buksiński's concept of "covert passive resistance", Jacques Derrida's take on "spectrality" or with the more general discussions concerning the concept of "moral identity", while also proposing a particular and plausible relationship between "aesthetics and mimesis" (as recently re-defined by Beljah Mehdi-Kacem).

Keywords: community, moral identity, totalitarianism, marginality, resistance, freedom of thought

1. THE "MORAL IDENTITY" OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND OF THE COMMUNITY UNDER EASTERN-EUROPEAN COMMUNIST REGIMES; LITERARY REFLECTIONS

Morality as a concept is more and more often regarded in contemporary context (especially since Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, published in 1989) not only as a matter of (individual or collective) action (i.e. by normatively establishing or judging "do-s" and "don't-s"), but rather as part of a complex and flexible cultural process of identity construction, i.e. an existential option, a way of "being" in the world (Taylor, 1989:79). More recent studies – as well as reference works such as the fourth edition of Monique Canto-Sperber's *Dictionnaire d'éthique et de philosophie morale* – acknowledge the concept of "moral identity" as part of a person's or a group's "essential identity". In what concerns the latter, it can be mainly defined as a group of "characteristics enabling the identification"

of an individual or a group "as being essentially" that person or community, "in such a way that if those characteristics were altered", the given entity "would become a different one, in spite of the fact that" he, she or it "may still be differentiated and re-identified as being the same person" or collectivity (Rorty, *apud* Montefiore, 2004:885)¹. Moreover, the "essential", as well as the "moral" identity of the individual is considered to be closely linked to that of the group, through a convoluted mechanics negotiating appurtenance under various social and historical conditions (Montefiore, 2004:885-886). Consequently, as the idea of morally "belonging" doesn't always forcefully imply homogeneity among the persons affiliated to a certain group or community, and as the

¹ Original fragment: "Quels types de caractéristiques permettent d'identifier une personne comme étant *par essence* la même personne qu'elle est, de sorte que si ces caractéristiques changeaient, elle serait une personne très différente, bien qu'elle puisse encore être différenciée et ré-identifiée comme étant la même personne?"

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“individuals have little or no control over the behaviour of the group they belong to or over the roles they might play” (Montefiore, 2004:889)², an individual or a small group of people may very well “morally” de-solidarise or abandon the moral identity of his/her/their community and acknowledge the values of another, thus becoming a bearer of value, a *locus* of “dignity” (Kant, *apud* Taylor, 1989:83-84) and “responsibility” (Rorty, *apud* Montefiore, 2004:883-885). The “moral identity” of the person can thus be defined as

a deep commitment to certain values – an engagement manifesting itself both by means of practical dispositions and observable behaviour, on the one hand, and by means of what we say (or tell ourselves) explicitly or not [...], a feature in the absence of which we would be unrecognisable as being the same person «in the morally complete sense of the term» (Montefiore, 2004: 890)³.

Much as that of the individual, the “moral identity” of groups or communities will be defined as

their specific adhesions to certain values, such as those of a laic domain open to everyone or those specific to the beliefs or the social practices typical of a certain religion [...] (Montefiore, 2004: 890)⁴.

In this sense, a particular type of individual (or marginal) moral disengagement occurred under the totalitarian communist regimes in Eastern Europe. The term “covert passive resistance”, coined by contemporary Polish philosopher Tadeusz Buksiński, and defined as a resultant of

² Original fragment: “[...] en tant qu’individus, ils n’ont souvent que peu ou pas de contrôle sur le comportement des groupes auxquels ils appartiennent ou sur les rôles qu’ils se trouvent jouer [...]”.

³ Original fragment: “Mais un profond engagement en faveur de certaines valeurs – un engagement qui se manifeste autant dans les dispositions pratiques et le comportement observable que dans ce qu’on dit (ou ne dit pas) explicitement à soi-même et aux autres – peut certainement former une caractéristique centrale du caractère, au point de constituer ce qu’on peut tout à fait considérer comme l’identité morale, une caractéristique en l’absence de laquelle on ne serait plus reconnaissable comme la même personne au «plein sens moral du terme»”.

⁴ Original fragment: “Mais les groupes, autant que les individus, peuvent avoir leur propre identité morale – faite de leur adhésion caractéristique à certaines valeurs, celles d’un domaine publique laïque ouvert à tous, par exemple, ou celles qui s’attachent aux croyances et pratiques sociales d’une religion donnée”.

“utilitarian” calculations an “traditional morality”, as “a partly open cooperation with the regime, and at the same time, taking actions which weakened or liberalized the system” (Buksiński, 2011:40), as well as the concept of “overt non-violent protest”, understood as “evident individual opposition or dissidence”, as individual explicit establishment of “*non possum*”-s which “delimited the effective identity of [...] individuals, groups, communities and institutions” – i.e. the things that “we cannot yield any more” without “jeopardizing” our “spiritual identity” (Buksiński, 2011: 41) – are a terminology corresponding to such particular forms of disengagement and obviously imply an irreducible moral coordinate. In addition, various (composite) types of non-violent resistance also find literary reflections in 1980s and 1990s Eastern European fiction – such as in the fictional productions of Mircea Nedelciu in Romania, László Krasznahorkai or Péter Esterházy in Hungary, Sergei Dovlatov in Russia or Andrzej Stasiuk in Poland – and in different testimonials regarding the last decades of communism in the Eastern Bloc.

It is this kind of covert, unspoken tension between the moral configuration of collective and personal identities that are depicted and presented in the works of Mircea Nedelciu and László Krasznahorkai, the two fiction writers of the 1980s that will make the main object of this study. The nowadays canonical Romanian author Mircea Nedelciu wrote his four tomes of short stories – *Aventuri într-o curte interioară* [*Adventures in an Interior Courtyard*]⁵ (1979); *Efectul de ecou controlat* [*The Well-Controlled Echo Effect*] (1981); *Amendament la instinctual proprietății* [*The Property Instinct Amended*] (1983); *Și ieri va fi o zi* [*And Yesterday will Be a Day, Too*] (1989) – and three of his four novels: *Zmeura de câmpie* [*Plain Strawberries*] (1984), *Tratament fabulatoriu* [*Fabulatory Treatment*] (1986), *Femeia în Roșu* [*The Woman in Red*] (1989) and *Zodia scafandrului* [*Under the Diver’s Sign*] (2000), under Ceaușescu’s regime (except for his unfinished, posthumously published novel *Zodia...*, still conceived before 1990, but continued afterwards).

Hungarian novelist László Krasznahorkai is still literarily active and has reached worldwide

⁵ All the English translations from Romanian and French quoted in the paper belong to the author of the article.

literary recognition after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc; since his 1980s masterpieces, *Satantango* (1985) and *The Melancholy of Resistance* (1989), and after the publication of *War and War* (1999), he gradually achieved national, then international success and has collaborated (as a screenwriter) with cinema director Béla Tarr. The latter worked almost exclusively with Krasznahorkai and turned *Satantango* (in 1994) and *Werkmeister Harmonies* (in 2001) into feature films. However, I will mainly restrict here to his first two novels – written and published under Hungarian communism –, since after 1990 Krasznahorkai changes what Romanian critic Nicolae Manolescu would call the “hinterland” of his stories, i.e. the real, actual world model inspiring fictional representations of reality (Manolescu, 1998:33-34).

The ethical standpoints in Nedelciu’s and Krasznahorkai’s works concerning the moral identity of the community and its disaggregation under communism are basically translated within the literary text(s) by means of two primary mechanisms, namely: the fictional construction of space, relying on the recurrent presence of spectral, haunting sceneries and marginal geographies, on the one hand; and the critical presence of the morally disengaged, marginal individual as counterpart for the ethical decadence of the group, on the other.

2. SPECTRAL SCENERY AND MARGINAL GEOGRAPHIES

The fictional construction of anthropologic space with the two authors very often coincides not only when it comes to selecting pertinent “hinterlands” or fractions of reality, but also when it comes to the symbolic representations of cultural space (in the broadest sense of the term). Their specific or preferential *topoi* are marginal (social or cultural) geographies. With Krasznahorkai, the depiction of rural communities, off-road spaces and phantomatic ruins is almost exclusive; with Nedelciu, the predilection for rural isolated communities and “on-the-road” places – or “non-places”, in Marc Augé’s terms (Augé, 1992) – is also completed by urban, if still mainly marginal, alienating landscapes (student housing facilities, motels, parking spaces, airports, derelict suburbs).

The two writers’ recurrent representation of marginal places already becomes evident as an ethical option. The most obvious moral significance of the margin as omnipresence is the suggested idea of community disarticulation: in a

society in which such values as cooperation or mutual trust become generally problematic, the visible effect is anthropologic disintegration of well-centred, well-managed and well-balanced space into infinite wastelands. The apocalyptic depictions of desolation and insalubrity as effects of poor local community management; the typical unendingly flat marsh-like sceneries suffocating human settlements in Krasznahorkai’s *Satantango* and *The Melancholy of resistance* are doubled in Nedelciu’s case by the extremely similar descriptions of pauper, almost lost countryside settlements in the Romanian Plain, sinking (and occasionally disappearing completely) under colossal amounts of snow or between unseen, phantasmal Möbius-like “fractures” or “folds” of the landscape (e.g. in the short story *O căutare în zăpadă* [*A Pursuit in the Snow*] – where a village is completely covered by the 1954 colossal snowfalls –, in *Tratament fabulatoriu* or in *Zodia scafandrului*, where entire settlements disappear under the treacherous curves of the scenery and people’s lives are lost under abundant snowfalls or endangered by invisible snow pits).

Another typical feature of anthropologic space – again, with both authors – is its powerful, almost unbearable spectrality. Phantom buildings and settlements haunt the rural scenery and lurk in every corner: ruins of abandoned buildings or agricultural co-operatives, dishevelled mansions once having belonged to local dignitaries or eccentric cultural personalities (such as the recurring *topos* of Mateiu Caragiale’s⁶ mansion in Nedelciu’s *Tratament Fabulatoriu* and *Zodia scafandrului* or the ruined mansion in *Satantango* where the ancient colonists hope to re-build their community), half-dead remainders of abandoned work colonies and outlandish clandestine “phalansteries” (e.g. the colony in Krasznahorkai’s *Satantango* or the Forierist phalanstery in Nedelciu’s *Tratament fabulatoriu*) – are all over-present elements generating a crushing, suffocating and ambiguously disturbing overall atmosphere. The anthropologic space thus described acquires a ghostly, menacing aura, melancholically and silently reminding everyone not only of the present decay of the community’s cultural and socio-economic patrimony, but also of the fall of all common moral values –and perhaps the most

⁶ Mateiu Caragiale, son of Ion Luca Caragiale, was a dandy-like, eccentric Romanian novelist of the early decades of the 1900s, who seemingly inhabited during the last part of his life a mansion near Nedelciu’s village of origin, Fundulea.

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symbolic representation of such axiological decay is the mummified dead whale become a circus exhibit in Krasznahorkai's *Melancholy of Resistance*.

The landscape and the anthropological space depicted by the two authors are thus highly symbolically charged with moral and political meaning. The apocalyptic abnormal/ paranormal/ fantastic features of the geography, surpassing all possible human control and understanding, may very well be read as allegories of the totalitarian communist Superstructure (dystopically) described – and Nedelciu literally does several times (in *Călătorie în vederea negației* or *Zodia scafandrului*), while Krasznahorkai aesthetically implies the same in *The Melancholy of Resistance* – as monstrosity, catastrophe, disorder or calamity, as a super-human, secular – if ever as dreadful – embodiment of Evil. It is this same uncontrollable power that manifests its adversity under the form of inimical atmospheric, climatic and geologic conditions, such as massive snowfalls or terrible earthquakes with Nedelciu (who significantly exploits real catastrophic natural phenomena having occurred since the installation of the communist regime in Romania, e.g. the massive snowfalls of 1954 or the disastrous earthquake in 1977); and as improbable, sudden windstorms or gloomy rainfalls (almost literally choking people and settlements in mud, isolating them further) with Krasznahorkai.

Everything in these descriptions of space thus converges towards a negative poetics of absence, as spectrality becomes both a sense of Evil disguised as apocalyptic (un-)natural calamity and a Derridean, melancholic presence of “the non-present”, of a “being-there of an absent or a departed one” that “de-synchronises”, “recalls to anachrony” and is “unnameable” (Derrida, 1994:6-7). A poetics of absence describing not only the community's broken historical and anthropological legacy, but the loss of its possibility to morally regroup and rejuvenate, or...resurrect/ return from the dead. Another (secondary) dimension of the moral significance of the Margin as omnipresence, applying to both Nedelciu and Krasznahorkai, and which is closely linked to its primary symbolic function (that of describing the decay of the community's essential identity), is the perception of the Margin as a space (or a zone) where a certain freedom should (theoretically) be possible. Most evident with Nedelciu – who often hints in his stories and novels at cultural theorists having studied the problematic nature of the “government

of [cultural] margins” (or of culturally marginal territories), such as Fernand Braudel or Michel Foucault –, this conception that the Margin is a space where the Centre's (i.e. the totalitarian power's) control is difficult and therefore relative is also visible in the common fictional representation of space – and so does with Krasznahorkai. On-the-road places often offer (with both authors) relative, momentary security, escape and the possibility of guarding secrecy (the secrecy of one's identity, of one's refusal to collaborate with the regime, a refuge from the “long arm of the law” as in *Satantango* and in most of Nedelciu's stories (e.g. *Partida de «Taxi-Sauvage»* [*The Game of «Taxi-Sauvage»*], *Amendament la instinctul proprietății*, *Acțiunea romanului «Black Money»* [*The case of the (novel) «Black Money»*] etc., in *Zmeura de câmpie* and in *Tratament fabulatoriu*). However, if the individual may find temporary refuge by constantly moving across marginal spaces, by becoming a sort of a runaway disguised as a drifter, community reconstruction remains utterly impossible with Krasznahorkai – where the *status quo* unfailingly wins over renewal tendencies. With Nedelciu, revival remains mainly impossible, too: the moral identity of remote, isolated communities can only be savaged if it stays forever out of the regime's reach. This is also applicable to Nedelciu's small, imaginary utopian communities in *Tratament fabulatoriu* or *Călătorie în vederea negației* [*Journeying Towards Negation*]. Since they can only function in secrecy, the slightest contact with the system contaminates them and seals their fate, vowing them to (apparent) self-destruction.

The dystopian character of space (symbolically representing the moral decay of the community) thus remains mainly unaltered with both authors: and if escape is occasionally possible by perpetual running away and or hiding, it is also extremely fragile, relative and eventually alienating. Since all frontiers are closed, any such attempt is bound to become a trap in itself or to move on a closed (and eventually finite) circuit... just as with the saloon flies in Krasznahorkai's *Satantango*, destined to (desperately) float around in infinite circles around the light bulbs in order to (temporarily) avoid being prayed upon by the ever-hungry spiders lurking in the darkness. And as the *perpetuum mobile* is an actual (physical) impossibility, no escape is ever final or even (completely) possible – except for death.

3. INDIVIDUAL VS. COLLECTIVE CHARACTER CONSTRUCTION

Another way of fictionally representing community degradation is, with both Nedelciu and Krasznahorkai, their respective collective and individual character construction techniques and the particular descriptions of underlying tensions between persons and social groups in the narrative. Precisely, as the moral identity of the local community or society in general disintegrates, Nedelciu's and Krasznahorkai's favourite protagonists settle on de-solidarisation/disengagement in relation to the negative tendencies of their communities. They generally opt for (auto-)marginalisation – even if this refusal of appurtenance usually attracts dramatic consequences – and for various forms of resistance and/or opposition. Dystopically constructed, the two fictional world models we are facing feature negative models of community countered by atypical, positive individual prototypes.

With László Krasznahorkai, the moral dissolution of community is almost parabolic as narrative rendition. Bestiality and moral decay rule over the collective characters in *Satantango* and *The Melancholy of Resistance*. Both communities (significantly not bearing names) are eaten from within by corruption, defeatism, petty hidden enmities and animalisation. Leaders – like Mrs Eszter or the monstrous master of the dead whale in *The Melancholy of Resistance*, or like Irimiás and Petrina in *Satantango*) are usually extremely morally debased, non-empathic compromisers, animated by nothing but personal interest. A vast number of morally decomposed, almost subhuman identities populates the community, from child abusers, thugs, tricksters and scoundrels of all sorts to sordid, promiscuous (slightly faded) local beauty queens and ridiculously conservative old maids. In spite of their ethical dishevelment, however, a common dream of moral resurrection haunts both the commoners in *Satantango* and *The Melancholy of Resistance*: as seemingly un-natural danger emerges, these collective characters attempt to regroup around their treacherous leaders and make a difference. Of course, the phantasies of the unknowledgeable crowd are always sort-lived, as it only manages to get abused and manipulated over and over again. Key-scenes or episodes like Irimiás' speech in *Satantango* or Mrs Eszter's in *The Melancholy of Resistance* are highly symbolic: they both occur in the aftermath of violence and death, as the crowd is celebrating the death of a

community member (Estike's and respectively Mrs Pflaum's) and are in fact funeral discourses. While the collective character is tricked into hoping that salvation may come from the outside, i.e. from the leader (who actually uses their mistakes and vague sentiments of guilt against them), the leader himself (ab)uses everyone (dead or alive) in order to gain power and attain his or her selfish goals. The community thus actually dies (morally) along with its last moral inhabitant (in *Satantango*) or actually becomes (symbolically speaking) its (posthumously) honoured, rotting dead member (in *The Melancholy of Resistance*).

Moral existence is only possible in Krasznahorkai's novels through extreme personal dis-engagement. By differentiating oneself and escaping to fantasy worlds (as with Estike in *Satantango* and Valuska in *The Melancholy of Resistance*), or on the contrary, by being over-aware and pessimistic (like Futaki or Mr Eszter), one attracts the others' suspicions and unjust judgements (e.g. Valuska and Estike are both the so-called "madmen of the town"), or embraces isolation (e.g. Futaki and Mr Eszter). Moreover, personal differentiation eventually draws tragic consequences: Estike's suicide, Valuska's insanity, Futaki and Eszter's definitive (self-) exclusion and their resignation before the impossibility to improve (themselves or the group). The ethic decomposition of the community thus inevitably attracts the annihilation or the alienation of the individual and vice-versa.

Krasznahorkai's viewpoint is therefore a rather abstract, parabolic, and highly symbolic one. In his case, character construction (and deconstruction – if we only think of the sequence describing the slow decomposition of Mrs Pflaum's corpse that closes *The Melancholy of Resistance*) is almost entirely poetic in nature.

With Mircea Nedelciu, on the other hand character construction is more realistic and relativized, even though poetic constructions are far from missing entirely (if we were only to consider the colonists inhabiting *Valea Plânșii* in *Tratament fabulatoriu* or the parabolic suicide/lethal accident/transformation of O[vid] P[etreanu] in *Călătorie în vederea negației*). In fact, the Romanian author creates his own particular mix of realism and parabolic/symbolic construction: immediate, familiar reality occasionally and (seemingly) randomly grows into unsettling, bizarre, ambiguous existential patterns.

Communitary dystopia is commonly suggested in Nedelciu's stories through the

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(individual and collective) figures of moral decay – especially in leaders, bosses and agents of the “Securitate” (like Primotei in *Acțiunea...*, Fatache and Bencu in *Efectul de ecou...* or Alexandru Sava in *Zodia...* – and moral annihilation – of the commoners (i.e. conformity/ lack of resistance leading to complete alienation, as with the “invisible” proletarian in *Cât timp ești invizibil [As Long As You’re Invisible]* or the “grey hats” in *Buzunare cu pumni, buzunare cu bomboane [Pocketfuls of Fists, Pocketfuls of Candies]*). The critical description of urbanization and its malfunctioning institutions (from the Postal Service or public cultural services to the Police and the so-called “national security” organisms) and the depiction of its *panopticum*-like sites (student hostels, orphanages, blocks of flats) is also a fictional construction with underlying ethical significance. The personnel in these institutions and its specific immoral or sub-moral behaviours also stand for the subtle disintegration of societal values (corruption and lust for power, trickery and hidden enmity, intolerance towards the other/ the commoner/ the different, intolerance etc.).

However, if society as macro-community is often described as a super-structural monstrosity (as in *Zodia scafandrului, Călătorie în vederea negației* or in *8006 de la Obor la Dâlga [8006 from Obor to Dâlga]*) – or perceived as malfunctioning and absurd by most of the protagonists –, local/ rural communities, on the other hand, silently disintegrate, and they do so rather out of a constitutional lack of self-awareness than by moral corruption. As forced urbanisation and industrialisation proceed, rural communities are silently overthrown into the void left behind by communist modernisation: they lose the practical perception of (and their adherence to) the fast-moving realities of the epoch (e.g. the community in *Cocoșul de cărămidă [The Brick Rooster]*). Trapped in their autistic and alienated conservatism, such communities usually accept their demise stoically and quietly. They seem to lose their names (they are often symbolised by a single letter like “B.”, for instance; they have ambiguously interchangeable names etc.) or to forget all about their own histories (like Boroana in *Zodia scafandrului*, Fuica-Temenia in *Tratament fabulatoriu* or B. in *Zmeura de câmpie*), in a general attitude of (unconscious and unproblematic) acceptance of demise as a horrible, yet irrefutable turn of “fate”. Of course, there are figures of corruption occasionally appearing

among villagers too, especially among the leaders or the well-respected members of the community (such as teacher Popescu in *Zmeura de câmpie* or the community leaders in *Dansul cocoșului [The Dance of the Mountain Rooster]* etc.) - but they are not dominant in Nedelciu’s stories. Much more usual are the collective profiles of resigned and ignorant peasants (e.g. the peasants in *Zmeura de câmpie* or the collective narrator in *Cocoșul de cărămidă*).

Other than that, a special type of community representation with Nedelciu is a fictional construction I would call “communitary utopian dystopia”, referring to the imaginary construction of fabulous, utopian, uncharted (or non-existent?) settlements like the Fourierist colony/ phalanstery of Valea Plânșii (in *Tratament fabulatoriu*) or the unmapped work colonies in *Călătorie în vederea negației*. These are spectral, clandestine settlements hidden in the scenery, accommodating secret communities. Their status in the narrative is however unclear: they seem to be real for an instant and disappear (like collective utopian hallucinations) in the next (as Valea Plânșii does in *Tratament...*), or seem to have no actual existence at all (like in *Călătorie...*), thus marking the illusionary character of any common salutary dream –within the given frames of totalitarian superstructure – and of any stable escape whatsoever.

Moreover, the phalanstery in *Tratament...* also seems to dissolve internally, as its leaders gradually and secretly seem to accept moral compromise with the “outer world”. Trust in one another weakens and the colony is seemingly swept away with no resistance by a band of gipsy intruders. Permeability to the values of the totalitarian system outside and the utopian delusions of grandeur thus apparently destroy the enterprise, but the phantomatic settlement seems to reappear in the end of the novel as someone (else, i.e. other than the protagonist of the novel) goes searching for it. Like the colonies in *Călătorie...*, on the other hand, the phalanstery in *Tratament...* may also symbolise the good will and intentions of the commoners (of the first communists or even Ceaușescu’s?) in trying to building a better, more righteous society and their failure to do. Thus, there are mainly three types of communities (and corresponding dissolutions) in Mircea Nedelciu’s fiction: the morally downfallen macro-community or super-structure (the entire totalitarian social system), the annihilated rural communities with

fading identities (exhibiting a sort of collective “overt non-aggressive protest”), and the experimental utopian communities (displaying a collective “overt non-aggressive resistance”).

Obviously, Buksiński’s categories taken as such become insufficient when trying to describe Nedelciu’s intricate fictional representations – but, as the Polish philosopher himself warns us, “those who opposed totalitarianism did not choose one of several clear-cut options” (Buksiński, 2011:43). This same observation is applicable to Nedelciu’s construction of individual positive models: his protagonists are generally young people who (consciously or intuitively) refuse to take part in the superstructure and practice one form or another of moral disengagement. In compensation, they feel rather (covertly) attached to another, transnational (counter-) cultural community: that of the Western *hippie* subculture, as a transnational anti-establishment movement. Just like their Western congeners, they are generally drifters, dreamers or (self-made) marginal individuals who avoid social or personal engagement and realisation for fear of regimentation. They attempt to re-construct their personal identities by mimicking the cultural identity of their foreign peers, not only by wearing long hair, blue-jeans and rock&roll t-shirts (all offenses *per se* at the time), but by also trying to imitate a certain freedom of thought and behaviour. They avoid, of course, “civil disobedience” or socially coherent (and criminally punishable) political action – a few exceptions are the groups of youngsters practicing a sort of “guerrilla” street theatre in *Claustrofobie [Claustrophobia]* and *O zi ca o proză scurtă [A Day Resembling a Short Story]* or the group of armed resisters in *Fabula rasa*). However, they generally try to decide for themselves and remain unattached – which obviously either eventually fails or gravely alienates them.

Nedelciu’s antagonists – when they are impersonated, because the foe (“the monster”) is usually “faceless” (Nedelciu, 2003: 54) and acts like an impersonal power that be – are either those who prefer social conformity or the corrupt/ the representatives of power. “Covert passive resistance” as described by Buksiński thus has an ambiguous moral status with Nedelciu: it can be positively connotated (as illegal traffics are, for instance, in *Partida de «Taxi-Sauvage»* or in *Amendament...*) or negatively perceived (as with Daldea’s corrupt father in *Amendament...* or with Marcel’s parents in *Crizantemele de tundră*

[*Tundra Crisanthems*], with Fatache in *Efectul de ecou controlat* etc.). The difference is made, in fact, on a rather pertinent criterion: that of the doer’s intimate motivations: selfish reasons or the will of power do not excuse such acts; on the contrary, the will of being free and independent does. And the writer also marks a visible difference between those obeying or profiting from the regime and those trying to resist or oppose it (among other more subtle techniques) by generally making protagonists out of the latter and secondary, collective characters or antagonists out of the former.

Nedelciu’s depictions of marginal individuals thus form a symbolic category which bears positive moral significance as opposed to the central, ideologised and conformist (or non-resistant/ non-oppositional) identity models. Their way of countering the totalitarian system could thus be described as a sort of “overt-covert passive protest or resistance”, a middle way between overt dissidence and Buksiński’s “covert passive resistance” model.

Unlike Krasznahorkai’s resisters, they generally manage not to get “caught” in the “spider’s web”. However, they too have to pay a dear price for their inner freedom and “secret”, transgressive or “reversible” convictions (Petitat, 2003:139): not belonging anywhere, not being able to attach to anything completely, they usually experience silent (but no less painful) forms of alienation and frustration and become socially and personally de-realised. This is, in fact, the actual meaning of Ovid Petreanu’s (self-)“negation”, of his tragic vanishing act: it stands for a moral decision involving a quiet, a secret personal annihilation, a definitive self-exclusion from society or a permanent dis-engagement in relation to the macro-social group he is assumed to “belong” to.

The essential identity of the group (or community) under communist totalitarian regimes is generally symbolically depicted as dismembered and morally decomposed (or not assumable) by individuals “without jeopardizing their spiritual identity” (Buksiński 2011: 41). From the destructive antagonism (or tension) between the ethically “sane” individual and the “corrupted” identity of the group ensues the tragic conflictual condition of personal and collective identities functioning under totalitarian oppression, just as well as the presence of the morally positive is meant to emphasize the disintegration of the community’s “imagined” moral representations.

4. CLOSING REMARKS

With Nedelciu and Krasznahorkai, community is obviously essentially defined as an (ultimately) imaginary space of symbolic representation, just as with contemporary theorists Benedict Anderson or André Petitat. And it is the “secret” “reversibility” of symbolic representation (Petitat, 2003) that the totalitarian power is ultimately seeking to suppress.

The message the two writers are trying to (covertly) convey is that secret, individual resistance to oppression should never be given up – otherwise, devastating consequences on the identity of persons and communities will ensue. Personal and group identities are thus closely linked in a self-perpetuating and inter-related continuum, having axiological and moral choices at its core. The main *locus* of responsibility resides in the person, whose attitude towards community and national politics should be first of all based on integrity and perpetual awareness.

What troubles most both writers is actually not the left-wing orientation of the regimes they covertly oppose – but their totalitarian dimension. What they long most of all is freedom of expression, freedom of thought and restoration of the Kantian “dignity” of the person as moral subject. Being in fact liberal left-wing thinkers, rather neo-marxist in their ideological option(s), they actually align to an entire Eastern European dissident line of thought criticizing Eastern European regimes “from within”, i.e. in terms of infidel applications of the basic Marxist principles. Well-known expert in Eastern-European communism Vladimir Tismăneanu notices that most opposition to communist totalitarianism in Eastern Europe was mainly formulated in the essentially Marxist terms of the Frankfurt School, rather than in outright right-wing vocabulary (Tismăneanu, 2001); and in this sense, literary opposition or resistance – like Nedelciu’s or Krasznahorkai’s – is no exception to the rule.

Nevertheless, works of fiction are seldom regarded as such – i.e. as “counter-cultural” discourse in a broad sense of the term (Dobrescu, 2001:52-66). This happens partly because such opposition is considered to be “covert passive resistance” (in Buksiński’s terms): a sort of half-speculative, half-subversive collaboration with the regime, said to have hardly reached its transgressive purposes at all; and partly, because fictional discourse generally tends to be considered strictly aesthetic, i.e. an a-political, a-social,

essentially individual and – to a certain extent – a culturally less relevant enterprise.

It goes without saying that the actual social effect of such (fictional) discourses is difficult (if not impossible) to quantify, especially since writers like Nedelciu and Krasznahorkai had their own (rather considerable) audience(s)... and both lived to see the Soviet Block fall by the hand of their own generation. But most important of all, such literary discourses should perhaps be taken into account when investigating around the idea of resistance against totalitarianism, as they are obviously highly social and political in their symbolic representations of the world and enact a poetics of spectrality (or absence) conveying strong cultural and ethical messages.

In this sense, it would be perhaps useful to bear in mind that some of the most influential theoretical discussions having recently (re)opened the case of the relationship between aesthetics and ideology tend to re-instate literary and artistic discourse as social and political *logos* in its own right – a definition suiting very well the works (hereby analysed) of Nedelciu and Krasznahorkai. This kind of association and understanding could not only underline the effective pertinence of Nedelciu’s or Krasznahorkai’s particular solution(s) against oppression – i.e. the particular “fabulatory treatment” of the political applied –, but could also actually improve the nowadays (rather marginal) cultural status of fictional, literary and artistic practices in general.

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