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TRAVELERS, TRANSCULTURAL IDENTITIES AND IDENTITARIAN RECONSTRUCTION IN MIRCEA NEDELCIU'S FICTION

Abstract: Having as a theoretical premise the idea that "essential personal identities" do not always synchronise with the essential identity of the group they are supposed to belong to, and that this de-synchronisation can have an ethical opposition at its core, the paper focuses on the way in which Mircea Nedelciu's typical protagonists – nomads, socially marginal individuals with confusing, "unaccomplished identities" – attempt to (culturally and morally) reconstruct their damaged personal identities by disengaging from their social and spatial appurtenance to the national macrogroup (dominated by the moral values, identity models and cultural stereotypes imposed by Ceauşescu's regime) and phantasmatically "relocating" their identities in the Western Counterculture of "the Sixties". This implicit refusal to belong can ultimately be read as an "ethics of reconnaissance", an anti-totalitarian counter-politics or negative politics of identity led by persons or small groups that thus become a (fictionally) "significant minority".

Key words: moral identity, counterculture, the Sixties, Romanian communism, ethics of reconnaissance

As topics for literary studies, travel and cultural transfer are (understandably) "located" in certain preferential areas of interest: they are typically and naturally associated more often than not with certain "zones" of literary production – such as colonial and exploration discourses, writings of different diasporas or transnational communities, travel literature and travelogues – in short, with those fictional or poetic productions overtly addressing the issue of cultural clashes or (ex)changes which come as a result of physical (i.e., geographical) dislocation and/or relocation, be it that of an individual or an entire community, permanent or temporary etc. Hence, it may seem a bit eccentric (or "out of place") to "move" the discussion "out" of these fertile "territories" and into such seemingly unfriendly, tightly (en)closed spaces as the totalitarian Romania of the 1970s and 80s, where – and about which – Mircea Nedelciu[1] wrote most of his fiction.

Nonetheless, there is a key phenomenon to consider that might put things into a different perspective, making this association appear less far-fetched: globalisation. Precisely, there are three inter-related facts concerning globalisation that should be taken into account. The first is, of course, the fact that it facilitates transcultural connectivity and influence through telecommunications, that is to say even when physical mobility does not occur.

The second is that even totalitarian spaces like Ceauşescu's Romania were not "leak-tight", absolute "globalisation-proof" territories: (at least some) information circulated secretively or simply undetected. There were subterraneous book exchanges and photocopies, there was the impact of Western popular culture on the

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[1] Mircea Nedelciu (1950-1999) is a contemporary canonical writer of the so-called "eighties generation", a group of experimental poets and novelists practicing subtle, anti-establishment literary discourses focused on every-day realities during the "Ceauşescu era". He has written four tomes of short stories: *Aventuri într-o curte interioară* [Adventures in an Inner Courtyard] (1979); *Efectul de ecou controlat* [The Controlled Echo Effect] (1981); *Amendament la instinctual proprietăţii* [The Property Instinct Amended] (1983); *Şi ieri va fi o zi* [And Yesterday Will Be Another Day] (1989), four novels: *Zmeura de câmpie* [Plain Strawberries] (1984), *Tratament fabulatoriu* [Fabulatory Treatment] (1986), *Femeia în roşu* [The Woman in Red] (with Adriana Babeţi and Mircea Mihăieş, 1990) and *Zodia scafandrului* [Under the Diver's Sign] (posthumous, unfinished, 2000), a postmodern transposition of Ion Creangă's pornographic short story *Povestea poveştilor [The Story of Stories]* (1999) and a few theoretic articles. Most of his works were written and published during the 1980s. My translations.

medias (cinemas, radios and television in the 1970s, the illegal reproduction of video cassettes in the 1980s; therefore, elements able to convey cultural meaning moved around and "spread the news" about foreign tendencies and trends. Moreover, Mircea Nedelciu (born in 1950), had the chance to study literature at the University in Bucharest precisely during the so-called period of "ideological defrost"[2], and made the most of it, reading Western literary and theoretical works available in Romanian translation or in original, getting in touch with the most recent artistic, literary, cinematic, dramatic and musical productions of the time. According to Adina Diniţoiu, Nedelciu tells Bogdan Rădulescu[3] that the French press could be read freely at the time in the university library (from *Le Nouvel Observateur* to specialised journals such as *Tel Quel, L'Infini, Communication* or even journals of psychoanalysis), and that capital authors had been translated during that period and were available for the general public – quoting Bulgakov (*The Master and Margarita*), Faulkner, Dos Passos and Salinger, some of his favourite authors. And again, many other readings are legibly reflected in his writing later on (the Frankfurt School philosophers, Foucault, Deleuze, Canetti, Moreno and many others).

The third key fact to be noted is that this short, but significant opening in Romanian culture where globalisation penetrated Ceauşescu's closed communist society coincidentally (and meaningfully) superposed with the peak of the so-called "Sixties" Counterculture, the 1968 moment. Of course, there were no notable civic reverberations of the Western (European or American) social movements in Romania, but the left-wing liberal discourse(s) and symbolic images related to the acknowledgement of human rights unavoidably reached (and in a sense, inspired) the public. Obviously, as Ştefan Borbély remembers in his introduction for an issue of *Vatra* magazine dedicated to the echoes of the Sixties in Romanian culture (Borbély 34-40), the young were the most visibly "affected" by the ideology of these counter-

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[2] Short interval of cultural liberalisation, historically placed approximately between 1965 (the beginning of Nicolae Ceauşescu's mandate) and 1971 (when Ceauşescu gives his restrictive "July theses", non-liberal regulations limiting, among other things, the circulation of information and freedom of speech).

[3] The author of a doctoral thesis in Geneva, entitled *Approche de l'éducation formelle et informelle en Roumanie de 1947 à 1989*, according to Adina Diniţoiu in "Mircea Nedelciu: istorie şi iluzie literară". *Observator cultural*, vol. 432/July, 2008.http://www.observatorcultural.ro/Mircea-Nedelciu-istorie-si-iluzie-literara*articleID_20122-articles_details.html.

cultural, anti-establishment movements. After all, they were the actual congeners of the Western sixty-eighters, a generation born in the 1950s that was maturing and completing its education just around the second half of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s:

> The Counterculture of the 60s is part of the forbidden beauty reservoir of our youth. We all tried to let our hair grow long […], we were all wearing the famous badge of the bombs encompassed by the liberating circle of the sun, we all were all listening to *The Beatles* (including *Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds*, the song whose title we weren't even allowed to mention), we were all Pink Floyd fans (*The Wall* had become a sort of illicit religion, adding to the sensation of seclusion imposed on us by the communist regime […]. We were all listening to psychedelic music; we were all erotically deluding ourselves with *Nights in White Satin* and secretly reading *Howl* or *On the Road*. (39)[4]

This is also, chronologically and culturally speaking, Mircea Nedelciu's generation, and (not accidentally so) a generation most of the protagonists in his short stories and novels belong to. Besides and beyond the fact that many of these central characters are inspired by Nedelciu's own biography and circle of friends (many of whom were aspiring writers and artists themselves, like his close friends Gheorghe Crăciun, Ion Dumitriu and Gheorghe Iova), it seems that he deliberately chooses to portray Romanian sixty-eighters as a generation marking a significant mentality shift, based on a curious and rather secret cultural transfer. A confuse, underlying but stringent feeling of (partial) cultural kinship to a transnational "imagined community"[5] seems to re-shape the identities and individual actions of these typical, recurring protagonists, a counter-cultural community of those who are marginal because they

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[4] Original fragment: „Contracultura anilor '60 face parte din rezervorul de frumuseţe interzisă al tinereţii noastre. Toţi am încercat să purtăm plete […], toţi purtam celebrul ecuson al bombelor învăluite în rotundul izbăvitor al Soarelui, toţi ascultam Beatles (inclusiv Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds, piesa despre care nu aveam voie să pomenim), toţi simpatizam cu Pink Floyd (The Wall devenind un soi de religie ilicită, suprapusă peste senzaţia de claustrare pe care ne-o impunea comunismul) […]. Toţi ascultam muzică psihedelică, ne amăgeam erotic cu Nights in White Satin şi citeam pe ascuns Howl sau On the Road […]". My translation.

[5] The concept belongs to Benedict Anderson and originally refers to national representations of community. See *Imagined Communities*, Verso, 2006.

refuse to take part in a given social system, to obey its (politically, maybe forcefully) established models and norms.

Reputed critical commentators of Nedelciu's work have noticed, as Sanda Cordoş does, that his regular protagonists have "confuse", "unaccomplished identities" (Cordoş 13-14), while others, like Adina Diniţoiu and Ionuţ Miloi, discuss their "nomadic" natures or extreme mobility (Diniţoiu 283-291, Miloi 56). And indeed, these young people (averaging in age between adolescence and young adulthood) who populate his fictional universe, sometimes coming back from one story and into the other as if seeking to create a social net of their own, do have particular (and problematic) profiles: apparently morally decentred, unable and/or stubbornly unwilling to fit into the "established" identity models imposed by the regime (e.g. the responsible employee or worker, the stable *pater familias*, the "good" son or the willing and efficient informant), these heroes deliberately assign themselves peripheral roles in society. Inside a system that overtly favoured those who participated steadily to the "development and growth" of the new (glorious) society, most of Nedelciu's favourite protagonists are professional or regular travellers (long-distance drivers, taxi drivers, commuters, tour guides, passionate trippers); or are "caught" travelling, usually from the centre (the city, their workplace, their school, their homes) towards the periphery (rural or unfrequented natural areas, unknown, marginal places) or towards no specific, final destination whatsoever. Others are students, aspiring artists, small-town or non-practising teachers permanently switching employments, generally preferring small, unstable and jobs in secluded places, and yet others engage in a wide range of clandestine activities (from gambling to "guerrilla" theatre[6] or again to petty crime such as smuggling or tax evasion). They repel (for no explicit reason) anything that is meant to stabilize them: families, stable relationships, carrier opportunities. In a word, they are alienated individuals (or small groups), experiencing a deep fracture in their essential relationship with the macro-

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[6] Guerrilla theatre is a form of political performance art originated in 1965 by the *San Francisco Mime Troupe*. In spirit of Che Guevara's writings, they performed in public places and their theatrical acts were committed to delivering strong, shocking revolutionary, anti-capitalist or pacifist messages. The group's performances contained nudity, profanity or other anti-taboo manifestations meant to disturb the general public.

community, quietly rebelling against the very idea of appurtenance, or any generally accepted (i.e., politically imposed) identitarian and cultural representations (traditional-socialist families, prototypes of personal and professional accomplishment, ready-made images of morality or citizenship). They don't seem to have any sense of belonging – on the contrary, they are constantly and obstinately avoiding such entanglements. They are always to be found "on the road"[7], in between "anthropological places"[8], moving centrifugally towards the limits of an enclosed world, running for the borders, as if permanently seeking for some kind of an indefinite transgression. Most of these fugitives are thus knowingly "voyaging towards (self-)denial"[9], towards their own social and identitarian annihilation. And there is more than poetics to their incomprehensible gesture.

Beyond the peculiar aesthetics of these indeterminate, but (all the more) striking enigmatically rendered dramas, the "identity troubles"[10] of these travellers are actually making an implicit moral statement regarding the society they disengage from, a "world in a state of folly" (Nedelciu 60-61), as Diogene Sava perceives in the novel *Zodia scafandrului [Under the Diver's Sign]*[11]. At a closer look, at the heart of their refusal to contribute to their community's welfare is the refusal of a set of moral behaviours and identity models which is being enforced on the common consciousness by the regime. Be it in the form of a rebellion against immoral role models (a father, mother, relative or protector who is a member of the communist nomenclature or of the repressive system), a disappointment triggered by a supposed row-model's quiet acceptance of the *status quo* (usually one's father), a refusal to collaborate in immoral actions (with a superior or with the State's coercive authorities), or different evasive manoeuvres meant to avoid attachment or

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[7] Allusion to Jack Kerouac's iconic novel *On the Road*.

[8] The concept belongs to Marc Augé. See *Non-lieux: Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*, Seuil, 1992.

[9] Allusion to the title of Mircea Nedelciu's story *Călătorie în vederea negaţiei [A Voyage Towards Denial]*, published in 1979.

[10] Allusion to the title of Mircea Nedelciu's story *Probleme cu identitatea [Identity Troubles]*, published in 1989.

[11] Original sequence : „lumea în stare de raz, nă". My translation.

engagement in a dysfunctional world (deeply rooting human relationships, definite career scopes, definite life plans in general), the origin of their confusing attitudes is ethical and has identitarian consequences. Nedelciu's typical protagonists have, in other words, "essentially moral identities", in Allan Montefiore's definition of the term, i.e. identities having a moral component at the core, a set of moral values, principles and/or convictions in the absence of which they would be (or feel) unrecognisable (Montefiore 883-891)[12].

Montefiore's synthetic dictionary article on moral identity is relevant here in more than one way. Firstly, because – following a philosophical direction (re)opened a few decades ago by Charles Taylor in *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* –, he understands morality not only as a matter of (individual or collective) action, 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 79). Secondly, because he acknowledges the concept as a possible part of a group or community's "essential identity" as well, i.e. its "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 890).

Moreover, in his perception the moral identity of the individual is closely linked to that of the group, through a complicated mechanics of negotiating appurtenance under various historical conditions (Montefiore 885-886). Thus, the idea of morally "belonging" to a community doesn't always imply individual homogeneity, and since "individuals have little or no control over the behaviour of the group they belong to or over the roles they might play" (Montefiore, 889)[13], a person may very well desolidarise and abandon the community's moral identity for another one's, whose values seem acceptable. This is one of the person's possible manifestations as a bearer of value, a *locus* of Kantian dignity responsibility, taking

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[12] Alan Montefiore uses Amélie Oksenberg Rorty's concept of personal "essential identity" in order to explain the concept of "moral identity", i.e. an identity whose essential component is moral, an identity essentially defined through a moral component.

[13] 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." My translation.

place by means of a cultural transfer that doesn't necessarily require geographic relocation.

In this sense, Nedelciu's typical main characters seem to illustrate a particular type of moral disengagement, specific for the last decades of the totalitarian communist regime in Romania: the urge to reconstruct oneself (one's moral identity) in accordance to the moral identity of another community – which in this case is usually that of the counter-cultural groups of the Sixties in Western societies (or of its Romanian perception). It is a special kind of alternative reconstruction of personality, implying a long-distance cultural transfer between individuals or groups and a transnational, imagined community, which – determined as it is by special local historical conditions – doesn't always succeed (or not completely): the Romanian "communist *hippie*" in Mircea Nedelciu's stories remains a partial and problematic, implicit but (intentionally) problematizing reconstruction of its original model.

But where exactly is this type of reconstruction hinted to in the narrative(s)? Where can it be pinpointed in the stories, considering that the Romanian eighties writer almost never straightforwardly mentions the *hippies*, the Counterculture, the social movements for human rights or any other elements that could directly trace this type of transcultural identitarian reconstruction back to its origin? An overview of the confluence points between the Western *hippie* and Nedelciu's fictional prototype of the "Eastern sixty-eighter" can be easily drawn if the (re)reading is done starting from the (reasonable) assumption that Nedelciu's fictional discourse is covert, avoiding explicit references in order to escape censorship.

There is one notable exception, though. A clear indication that could hardly be disregarded is to be found in his inaugural text, *Aventuri într-o curte interioară [Adventures in an Inner Courtyard]*[14] – the short story that opens and gives its title to his first tome of short stories, published in 1979. In this relevant episode, a group of orphan highschool students are celebrating the eighteenth birthday of a colleague –

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[14] Mircea Nedelciu, *Aveturi într-o curte interioară*, in Mircea Nedelciu, *Proză scurtă [Short Stories]*, Compania, Bucureşti, 2003. All short stories to be quoted further on will be cited from this edition, the complete anthology of Mircea Nedelciu's short prose. My translation.

surnamed Pictoru' [The Painter] – who has run away from home to join them for the winter holidays in a tent expedition far in the frosty Romanian plane. This is an essential moment of identity definition for Pictoru' (and for the small marginal group he is joining, which is redefining itself along with the integration of this new, non-orphan member): it is the celebration of his coming of age, the starting point of his maturity, of his manhood etc. As a parenthesis, let us also note that Pictoru's reasons for leaving his parents at such a crucial moment are typical for Nedelciu's "eastern sixty-eighters": Pictoru's parents avoid noticing the "many changes" in society their son has to face, constantly "pretending" to go on living autistic "bourgeois little old lives" (Nedelciu, Proză 23-23)[15], a "social lie" which severs communication between them and their son; and that the group is actually made out not only of prototypical protagonists, but also of characters who return in other stories and other tomes (Pictoru' himself, Americanu' [The American], the first person narrator). Closing this parenthesis and returning now to Pictoru's moment of grace in the story – the instant where he blows the candles on his birthday cake – here are the first person narrator's comments upon the issue:

> The fact that we've happened to come of age and earn our right to vote precisely in A.D. 1968 is a wonderful thing for us. The day after the moment when The Painter had blown the candles on the so-called birthday cake we had improvised for him […], in Paris, the ideas of a certain H. Marcuse, just like some other things that cannot be blamed, had gotten the sorbonards out on the streets and made them write on the walls. […] The world was proving to be less rectangular than we had ever imagined before. (Nedelciu, Proză 30-31)[16]

There is little room for interpretation here, other than what the narrator already tells: these highly representative, confuse and internally wounded young people, unable to find a place to call home at a time where everyone is preparing to spend Christmas

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[15] Original sequences : „se prefac că nu ştiu de multele schimbări", „un trai mic-burghez". My translations.

[16] Original fragment: „Este un lucru minunat pentru noi că am devenit majori şi am căpătat dreptul de vot în chiar A.D. 1968. A doua zi după ce Pictoru suflase în cele 18 lumînări ale aşa-zisului tort pe care i-l pregătisem (...), la Paris ideile unui anume H. Marcuse, ca şi alte lucruri pe care nu se poate da vina, îi scoseseră pe sorbonişti în stradă şi-i făcuseră să scrie pe ziduri. (...) Lumea se dovedea mai puţin rectangulară decît o crezusem pînă atunci." My translation.

and New Year's eve with their close ones, are looking for (and finding) a substitutive identity model to solidarize with and to fully acknowledge, somewhere far beyond their physical reach – the model of the French sixty-eighters – a Western and democratic identitarian ideal, if idealistic or utopian, and again one signifying rebellion.

But even without such legible textual indications, the narrative "clues" Nedelciu leaves for the (ideal) lector to identify usually surface with sufficient clarity. First of all, the socio-cultural exchange reflects in the tastes and preferences of these Romanian sixty-eighters: their thinking reasons with Marcuse or Lukács, they love Antonioni, Pasolini and Godard, some of them (like the group/s in *Claustrofobie [Claustrophobia]* and *O zi ca o proză scurtă [A Day Like a Short Story]*) practice a sort of *yuppie* "guerilla theatre" with definite social stakes, others listen to Rolling Stones or Pink Floyd – and these are some obvious examples of artistic or philosophical references hinting to the Sixties Counterculture and their underlying ideology (such as the philosophy of the Frankfurt School of thought) that can be found in Nedelciu's texts written and published before 1990.

Additionally, even if physical descriptions are commonly scarce with Nedelciu generally speaking, many of the existing ones seem to be made with the exact purpose of portraying these young "rebels" as mimicking Western, *hippie/Flower Power*/rocker looks: the most courageous of them usually have long hair (a legally forbidden thing in communist Romania), they wear jeans, leather jackets, t-shirts bearing the images of their rock idols, handmade rock accessories, overtly showing their appurtenance to a different cultural zone and sometimes intentionally indicating to their non-conformity to the prototypes imposed by the regime (e.g. in *Călătorie în vederea negaţiei [Voyage Towards Denial]*, Ovid Petreanu shows up in front of the authorities – including an airport officer – in such an array, deliberately hinting at the fact that in spite of his qualification, he is not suitable – or willing – to work as a language and literature teacher in Topolog village).

Besides such still rather legible references, there is also a subtler intercultural dialogue that can be deciphered between these eastern (anti-)communist sixty-eighters and their western congeners: a transfer of values, world representations and behavioural patterns converging towards a desire for emancipation. In terms of their attitude, these protagonists are sometimes (ironically) labelled by the narrator himself (in a mockery of the regime's wooden language) as "unruly"(Nedelciu, Proză 152), "nonchalant" (Nedelciu, Proză 392) or "cynical" (Nedelciu, Proză 324), and manage to get identified by the authorities as undesirable "elements" (Nedelciu, Proză 167) – a term which commonly described in political police terms possible opponents of the regime. Some of them even perform small civic clandestine acts of "rebellion", such as the youngsters in *O zi ca o proză scurtă* and *Claustrofobie*, who give on-street "guerilla teatre" representations (setting up alleged burglaries or kidnappings) in order to implicitly raise social awareness on *quietism*, or the group in *Fabula rasa*, hinting back to the early resistance fighters in the mountains who stood against communism. But generally, their protest remains limited to individual, inarticulate rebellion, from silent (if sometimes dramatic) gestures of refusal and self-alienation to small attitudinal problems.

Many (try hard to) seem cold, unaffectionate, disrespectful, just as true "rebels with(out) a cause" should seem, and most of them have authority issues (i.e., they tend to repel any form of authority, from bosses to parents and even to the legal regulations imposed by the State). A true "communist-style" *generation gap* defines (as with their western prototype) their relationship to their parents, especially fathers who are either part of the system of power – members of the nomenclature, secret agents, collaborators of the political police, informants – or perceived as quietist, emasculated, "guilty" victim prototypes. Sometimes the youngsters go as far as presenting themselves as orphans in informal contexts (like Alexandru Daldea does in *Amendament la instinctual proprietăţii [Amendment to the Property Instinct]*), running away from home (e.g. Pictoru'), refusing to acknowledge their lost parents (e.g. Zare Popescu in *Zmeura de câmpie [Plane Strawberries]*) or seeking to make their "guilty" parents suffer some consequence of their cowardly or immoral deeds (e.g. Marcel Rădulescu in *Crizantemele din tundră [Tundra Crysanthems]*).

143

Their erotic behaviour also (seeks to) follow(s) the libertarian patterns brought about by the sexual liberation, but their excessive sensuality turns to a veritable „sexual frenzy" (as Diogene Sava describes it in *Zodia Scafandrului [Under the Diver's Sign]*). Many of these protagonists demonstratively turn themselves into actual sexual "machines" (Nedelciu, Zodia 67-68), and do so not out of hedonism or a genuine need for freedom and exploration, but out of a disturbing feeling of insecurity and confusion (i.e., for fear of any commitment that would force them to take on social responsibilities). Most of Nedelciu's male characters are also perpetually (and almost belligerently) seeking conquest as a recognition and re-confirmation of their masculinity, usually hindered (at least in their own perception) by the weaknesses of their fathers – a critical explanation overtly put forth in *Zodia Scafandrului* (Nedelciu, Zodia 72)[17].

Last but not least, their permanent need to travel, to move around, to be "on the road" also partially fits the profile of the *beat* traveller. But even if essentially linked to the idea of liberty and freedom of action, the western *topos* of the wanderer also suffers some modifications with Nedelciu's heroes. While their American iconic archetypes move along straight unending trajectories, these eastern drifters travel in (closed) circles, not looking for anything but an escape they rarely find. They move "around their hometowns"[18], their temporary workplaces, birthplaces or childhood hometowns searching for self-denial for lack of a better solution. The poetics of their journey is not a song of freedom, but of incarceration. There is no real exit from their prison, even though a few manage in the end to find quiet, bucolic hiding places (small villages, mysterious Fourierist settlements concealed by treacherous scenery or clandestine former work colonies lost deep in the mountains) in which they don't usually settle, but rather disappear (like Ovid Petreanu does in *Călătorie în vederea*

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[17] I have extensively discussed sexuality with Nedelciu's male characters in another article. For further details, see Ramona Hărşan, "Guerrilla Male Libidos in Mircea Nedelciu's Fiction: from Gender to Genre in Eastern European Context", in *Bulletin of Transilvania University*, Series IV, Philology and Cultural Studies, Vol. 8 (57), No.1, 2015, pp. 91-102.
[18] Allusion to Mircea Nedelciu-s short story entitled *Călătorie în jurul satului natal [Voyage Around a Childhood Hometown]*.

negaţiei, or Luca the meteorologist almost does in *Tratament Fabulatoriu [Fabulatory treatment]*).

As one of the most philosophical and theoretically lucid characters of this kind, Ovid Petreanu is probably the protagonist who symbolically best describes the worldview, the "enemy" and the statement of what he calls "his generation" in three different key-moments in *8006 de la Obor la Dîlga [The 8006 Train from Obor to Dîlga]* and respectively in *Călătorie în vederea negaţiei*. The "invisible enemy" he lectures his younger friend about in *8006...* – in an apparent delirious state of mind – is a subtle correspondent of Ginsberg's Moloch: Ceauşescu's regime (never labelled as such by Ovid, but unequivocally decoded later, in *Zodia scafandrului*, by Zare Popescu) is seen as an ubiquitous, non-personal (or super-personal) nightmarish reality Ovid nicknames "the monster", an evil fed by the collective ability to "calmly abide so many things under your gaze" (Nedelciu, Proză 54). Against this terrifying opponent, he concludes –much like Diogene Sava in *Zodia* –, that (a certain type of) mental insanity is in fact a real indication of one's lack of "ignorance", "[t]he most despicable of deeds" (Nedelciu, Proză 55), and that in order to fight it one "must be radical" (Nedelciu, Proză 54)[19].

In *Călătorie...*, as he travels towards Parîngu Mare peak (where he is going to disappear, never to return again), he becomes obsessed by the idea that "his generation" lacks a statement of identity:

> These railway tunnels stand for the common vision and ideals of a generation. That generation will be called «Bumbeşti-Livezeni », and in its memory we will always have these tunnels. But how about us, what will they call us? We spend our summer holidays at Costineşti. Are we to be called the «Costineşti» generation? No, because in Constineşti we never set up more than a bunch of tents, and we even took them back home with us every time afterwards. Could we be called « the Central University Library

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19 Original fragments : „monstrul", „[c]alm suportând sub privire atâtea lucruri", „Sănătatea lui psihică ar fi pentru mine un semn al ignoranţei lui. Cel mai condamnabil dintre fapte." My translations.

generation »? Not even that, because we didn't bring anything there, either. [...] So, what will our generation be called? (Nedelciu, 172)[20]

His implicit answer may seem nihilistic: the only option he sees is self-denial, an "absolute" self-annulment, going hand in hand with a *tabula rasa* of all acquired knowledge and social recognitions:

Modern times have evolved and changed something in the ancient order of things. Ovid Petreanu's journey across the Danube aboard the Antonov 24 aircraft aims at self-denial.

There is no adversary, but there is a denial. There's nothing strange about that, really, everything lies with the modern order of things. Several of Ovid's friends have managed to accomplish a few years ago such a denial, as a result of a similar journey. Why would he not be able to do the same? In fact, clear evidence of the fact that everything about such a journey is actually quite normal is the fact that if the person who is having it doesn't get the denial he seeks, he considers himself vanquished. And the denial must be complete, absolute. [...] This is what he needs: a denial, as conclusive as it could be – it must be put down on sealed, letterhead paper, if possible. [...] Any quality he possesses – be it pedagogical or of any other nature – must be, at least for a short period of time, denied. (Nedelciu, 165)[21]

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[20] Original fragment : „Aceste tuneuri stau mărturie pentru unitatea de vederi şi de idealuri pe cre a avut-o o generaţie. Acea generaţie poate fi numită «generaţia Bunbeşti-Livezeni», iar pentru amintirea ei există aceste tuneluri. Noi, însă, cum vom fi numiţi?Noi ne petreceam vacanţele de vară la Costineşti. Vom putea fi numiţi «generaţia de la Costineşti?» Nu, pentru că la Costineşti noi n-am înălţat decât nişte corturi pe care le-am luat înapoi de fiecare dată. Vom putea fi numiţi atunci generaţia Bibliotecii centrale universitare? Nici măcar, pentru că noi n-am adus nimic acolo. [...] Cum se va numi, deci, generaţia noastră?" My translation.
[21] Original fragment: „Scopul călătoriei sale este negaţia. Există deci călătorii care au ca scop o negaţie. Astfel de călătorii au existat din cele mai vechi timpuri. Călătoria lui Hanibal peste Alpi, elefanţii şi toate celelalte aveau ca scop o negaţie, o aneantizare a adversarului. Timpurile moderne au evoluat şi au schimbat ceva în ordinea lucrurilor. Călătoria lui Ovid Petreanu cu Antonov 24 peste Dunăre are ca scop *propria* negaţie [s.a., M.N.]. Nu există adversar, dar există negaţie. Nu e nimic ciudat în asta, totul este în *ordinea modernă* [s.a., M.N.] a lucrurilor. Mai mulţi prieteni de-ai lui Ovid au şi reuşit acum un an să obţină, în urma unei călătorii asemănătoare, o negaţie. De ce n-ar obţine-o şi el? De altfel, o probă clară că totul este normal în această călătorie este şi faptul că, dacă cel care o întreprinde nu obţine negaţia, el se consideră înfrânt. Iar negaţia trebuie să fie totală, absolută. [...] De asta are nevoie, de o negaţie cât mai concludentă şi, dacă se poate, scrisă pe o bucată de hârtie cu antet şi ştampilă. [...]

Of course, the apparent meaning of the word "denial" here is that of an official paper, specific for the "Ceauşescu era", denying a university graduate's ability to take over a certain (forcefully assigned) workplace. But then again, obviously, there is a symbolic pun. The "modern order of things", requiring (just like Ginsberg's all-present Moloch) the "absolute, complete" denial of all the personal and professional attributes of an individual with socially creative potential, this "modernity" acting like an invisible enemy is the "monster", the totalitarian regime, an entity that suppresses any possible identitarian negotiation. This is why "vulnerability" remains "an uninterrupted surface of the body", and "resistance, likewise"[22], as the first person narrator concludes in *Acţiunea (romanului) «Black Money» [«Black Money» (a novel) – the Plot]*, musing about his best friend's arrest (Nedelciu, Proză 470).

The dystopian worldviews of these protagonists (whenever articulated and expressed) are often noticeably "translating", "displacing" and relocating – or recontextualising, in the Derridean sense of the term, that of a transgression (through re-writing) of the original context in which the original meaning was produced that achieves (a certain) distancing or "différance" able to produce new meaning[23] – some of the essential *topoi* and symbolic imagery of "the Sixties", thus setting up a common "code" between him and the intended reader as sole receiver of the (deep structure) message. Most of the main critical allegories in their vocabulary referring to the idea of the regime as Moloch are such "translations" themselves. Morbid descriptors of society like those belonging to the semantic field of "illness", "abnormality", "folly", the obsession of the emasculated father, the idea of the former generation's cowardice, "phony"-ness, "social lie", political quietism, the emergence of the *generation(al) gap*[24], are proper both to the *Weltanschauung* of Western sixty-eighters and to Nedelciu's typical protagonists.

Orice calitate a sa, pedagogică sau de alt fel, trebuie, cel puţin pentru o scurtă perioadă de timp, să fie negate". My translation.

[22] Original fragments: „vulnerabilitatea e o suprafaţă continuă a trupului", „rezistenţa aşişderi". My translation.

[23] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

[24] These elements belonging to the imagery of the eighties were collected from the observations made by Ştefan Borbely in „Rebel Without a Cause", *Vatra*, octombrie-noiemrie 2012, nr. 10-11 (499-500): „Contracultura anilor '60 şi reflexele sale", pp. 87-91; Adrian Matus, „Contextul istoric şi social al Contraculturii americane", Vatra 41-48; Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu, "Generaţia Beat: halucinogene,

The Romanian writer therefore perceives and fictionally emphasises on more than one level (from the most superficial to the most subtle) the (moral) identity transfer between the Romanian "sixty-eighters" and the Western "Generation X", fictionally problematizing and exploiting the ideological thinking behind the social movements of the Sixties. His typical protagonists are travellers in search for an acceptable identity, who tend to reconstruct their broken selves according to a liberal, occidental model. The fact that their trajectories sometimes intertwine, that some reappear from one book to another gives them somewhat of a Balzacian aura, making them look like a small, clandestine society living on the road. By placing them at the heart of his stories, Nedelciu turns these eastern sixty-eighters into a "significant minority" inside the fictional universe he constructs, that is to say, into a minority whose alternative, counter-hegemonic value system becomes articulated and whose voice is amplified[25]. Ultimately, this negative politics of identity – negative in the sense that the refusal to conform to fixed autochthone models seems to be more evident (and feasible) than the desired reconstruction of the self in accordance to an allogeneic model of their choice – become extreme manifestations of an "ethics of reconnaissance"[26] which cannot be actively expressed. In the absence of a real possibility to negotiate between an individual and his/her community, and again in the absence of the possibility to physically abandon this community for another, these significant characters attempt to create for themselves a particular form of exile: they try to become a diaspora of the mind, having the Sixties Counterculture as a source of "assertive" models to define possible alternative constructions of identity, while their mute, yet visible statement can be subsumed by the implied affirmation of their belief that freedom of thought cannot be suppressed.

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cultură şi Contracultură", Vatra 48-55; Terry H. Anderson, *The Sixties*, (3rd edition), Pearson Longman, New York, 2007, 120-121 et al.

[25] I am using the definition given to the term "significant minority" by Andy Bennett, in "Reappraising «Counterculture »", Volume !, vol. 9, no. 1, 2012, pp. 20-31.

[26] In the sense given to the term by Emmanuel Renault in *Mépris social. Éthique et politique de la reconnaissance*, Editions du Passant, Paris, 2004.

Extremely aware that the generalised use of new electronic media (radio, television, magnetic supports etc.) would eventually intensify the free and globalised circulation of ideas irrespective of the geopolitical or national barriers separating traditional communities, Nedelciu fictionally speculates on the effects of such tele-communicational cultural transfers (clandestine or not) over totalitarian societies and their extremely rigid value systems. According to his observation on the realities of the "Ceauşescu era" (and he is surely not a singular example of this kind in communist Europe), cultural transfer becomes much more fluid than before starting with the 1960s, and the possibility to travel mentally – or even "relocate" one's identity (when local conditions are extreme) – gains a different consistence, allowing subtler, if fragmentary, and hardly controllable cultural interference between distant spaces.

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