

# MARTOR



---

Title: "Surviving communism. Escape from underground"

Author: Mihai Gheorghiu

How to cite this article: Gheorghiu, Mihai. 2012. "Surviving communism. Escape from underground". *Martor* 17: 19-38.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: <http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/revista-martor-nr-17-din-2012/>

---

*Martor* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant Anthropology Review) is a peer-reviewed academic journal established in 1996, with a focus on cultural and visual anthropology, ethnology, museum studies and the dialogue among these disciplines. *Martor* review is published by the Museum of the Romanian Peasant. Its aim is to provide, as widely as possible, a rich content at the highest academic and editorial standards for scientific, educational and (in)formational goals. Any use aside from these purposes and without mentioning the source of the article(s) is prohibited and will be considered an infringement of copyright.

*Martor* (Revue d'Anthropologie du Musée du Paysan Roumain) est un journal académique en système *peer-review* fondé en 1996, qui se concentre sur l'anthropologie visuelle et culturelle, l'ethnologie, la muséologie et sur le dialogue entre ces disciplines. La revue *Martor* est publiée par le Musée du Paysan Roumain. Son aspiration est de généraliser l'accès vers un riche contenu au plus haut niveau du point de vue académique et éditorial pour des objectifs scientifiques, éducatifs et informationnels. Toute utilisation au-delà de ces buts et sans mentionner la source des articles est interdite et sera considérée une violation des droits de l'auteur.

*Martor* is indexed by EBSCO and CEEOL.

# Surviving communism. Escape from underground

## Mihai Gheorghiu

*Dr. Mihai Gheorghiu is a lead researcher at the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, where he also holds the position of deputy director. He obtained his title of doctor from the University of Bucharest for his thesis on Mircea Eliade.*

### ABSTRACT

This essay seeks to provide a phenomenological description of the conscience's particular quest to free itself from servitude. Trapped in the mechanism of a world that dictates and imposes totalitarian mechanisms of control and "production" of social and personal conscience, man begins his search for the paths of freedom and liberation from this prison-like mechanism. This quest of the conscience is also possible in this society of total human alienation, and even here it is an event of everyday life, of the practice of survival, and not an event of great histories and great confrontations. The human conscience is most definitely the conscience of freedom, of transcendence towards the centre of a freedom that remains an integral part of the human being, at least as a trace or a secret propensity of the socially and politically annihilated being. Communism can therefore be interpreted as an immense challenge to the individual, the human person, as well as the community: the ultimate challenge of seeking and finding freedom. Designated for total annihilation, the human conscience rediscovers through this quest for the centre, for self-definition, its true ontological status. The escape from communism should also be defined as the conscience's quest for freedom, and not only as a political and economic act of dismantling the command structures of the old regime. Liberation from servitude is first and foremost an inner liberation from the condition of servitude, the transition beyond, towards a new human condition, even where this condition is one of fragility and transience.

### KEYWORDS

Communism, revolution, freedom, humanism, transcendence.

”Gentlemen, God is dead.  
– Jean Paul Sartre

### Incipit

Communism was a colossal force of human self-destruction, of total annihilation. The barbarism of communism is Europe's hidden barbarism, its latent potential for destruction, which is called into play throughout history. Communism is the manifestation of a kind of impulse of death – a phenomenon of darkness.

No one in Romania was prepared to face up to contemporary history, neither the political parties nor the utopian dispensers of justice. Our Levantine democracy, unrepentant phanariotism, was unable to rescue the Ro-

manian country from disaster, to endow it with the political, economic and cultural strength necessary to withstand the maelstrom of events. Romania's decline placed in the hands of the enemy a country that was ridden with contempt for any kind of utopia and in the grip of a frenzy of institutionalised crime and plunder. The oriental tameness of Little Paris should not deceive the eye set on uncovering the roots of a country's decline. It is true that communism not only represents our own defeat; it also represents the defeat of the whole of Europe as well as being a disastrous phenomenon of human civilisation. Berdyaev was entirely right: communism is a metaphysical phenomenon, not economic or purely political. Dostoyevsky was the first to grasp the substance of the communist revolutionary project, providing a memorable description of

it in *The Devils*.

The failure of Europe in this tenebrous Russian endeavour is first and foremost the failure of the history of European Christianity in the face of nihilism as a historical force of civilisation. Communism's penetration of man's deepest tissues represents the failure of the Church as well as all other forms of dogma or metaphysics. This leaves man himself defeated, crawling in the mud. And it renders the blindness of much of the western intelligentsia, starting with J. P. Satre, all the more repugnant.

Returning to Romania's quest, there is no way to explain the teratological experience of so many Romanian communists and the forced resignations of the intellectual elite at a time when thousands of other Romanians were taking to the mountains in a desperate attempt at resistance and a recourse to basic human dignity. This serves only to demonstrate the weakness of any noble gesture by the Romanian intellectual.

What was astonishing about Romanian communism was the incredible level of organisation, of bureaucratisation, of cynicism and crime. Local tradition had only reached the stage of blood-soaked buffoonery characterised by frequent interruption and a certain, typically-oriental detachment. Even Carol II had a touch of the Robin Hood in his congenital vileness. Bolshevism triggers an immense unleashing of demonism, institutionalising it,

rendering it effective and consistent. The oriental charm of terror and crime gives way to a different form of aberration, a mechanism, a machine of organised crime. Wallachia was transforming...

The defining feature of communism is the biological exercise of survival and the social function of labour. Nowhere else does labour fulfil such a "metaphysical" role as it does in communism. The party's first call is the call to labour. Labour engenders a feeling of life and humanity as well as solidarity. The working nation is a sovereign nation, a historically redeemed nation. This represents the creation of supreme slavery. The west associates labour with profit, and therefore with power. Stalin views it as generalised form of slavery, an optimum form of submission, of defeat. In communism labour is a sustained experience of bankruptcy – but no less useful for it. Labour is constantly producing slaves to feed the enormous ideological lie. The irresponsible fiction of unlimited development and progress acts as a religion of salvation of the glorious transition to the new man. Labour is the instrument of this transformation, the asceticism required of a new, planned humanity.

Communism's main preoccupation was essentially the reduction of man to a thing, to the objectual existence of the instrument<sup>1</sup>. This reduction is achieved by all available means, most commonly the use of unrestrained violence. Confronted with the monolithic, cellular, power of the force that generates violence in a seemingly legitimate way, society dissolves into the crowd. And the crowd is the eternal malformation of man, the crowd is always an object. Being an object, the crowd can only occupy the weak position in the equation of power and will thus always be deceived. The categorical imperative of communism is falsification. Instating falsehood and maintaining it always implies the resort to violence. Political deceit and crime represent different intensities of violence. In order to perpetuate the lie you must always be able to exercise violence – ideological violence, political violence and, finally, also physical vio-

1) See André Scrima, *Ortodoxia și încercarea comunismului*, *Simple reflectii despre comunism*, pp. 153-198, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2008, coordinated by Vlad Alexandrescu.



photo©Vlad Columbeanu

lence.

The historical use of violence against one's own society, against the entire society, was something new to the Romanian historical experience at the end of the Second World War. Romania was therefore an easy target<sup>2</sup>.

Caragiale and Ceaușescu are the two pillars of Romanianness of the 20th century. They are symbols of modern Romania, milestones of Romanian contemporary experience: the acid wit of the former and the dictatorship of the latter's delusions. Between Caragiale and Ceaușescu there exists an entire nation of good-for-nothing "Miticăs" and proletarians continually hailing the achievement of nothingness. Under communism Caragiale was all but useless. You cannot satirise crime; it remains in itself an absolute. Caragiale's acid wit could not burn through the iron logic of terror. Yet Caragiale showed us the beginning of our modest history as a modern state and, in particular, he reproduced the genome of the Wallachian species. Because of him we know how we really are, we no longer harbour any illusions about ourselves. The end of communism brought Caragiale back to the fore; having

come in from the cold, our old face is once again recognisable.

The dictator, in this case Ceaușescu, is a creator of fictions. The fiction of a world run according to the algebraic calculation of orders. Orders create the fiction of order. But order cannot exist in reality, for man is a disorderly being, a being who, even in the obedience imposed through terror, retains a minimum freedom of rebellion, of life. That said, dictatorship is paradoxical in that it is a realised fiction.

Ceaușescu the revolutionary knew one thing very well: the battle must go on, hour after hour, and be strong. Politics in its element, that is war, means nothing more than the defeat of one side by the other. The people are split into two camps: my people and their people. He also realised that the public speech is an excellent political weapon, being used to win over and, at the end of the day, to hoodwink the masses, selling them the illusion, the belief, in the political action of the revolutionary. He later understood that individual power is the natural consequence of all bellicose forms of politics. In 1968 he presented himself

2) On Romanian communism, see in particular: Victor Frunză (1990) *Istoria stalinismului în România*, Humanitas, Bucharest; Vladimir Tismăneanu (2005) *Stalinism pentru eternitate. O istorie politică a comunismului românesc*, Polirom; Vlad Georgescu (1991) *Politica și istorie. Cazul comuniștilor români, 1944-1977*, Humanitas, Bucharest; Denis Deletant (1999) *Communist Terror in Romania: Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State*, New York, St. Martin's Press; Stelian Tănase (1998) *Elite și societate. Guvernarea Gheorghiu-Dej*, Humanitas, Bucharest.



photo©Vlad Columbeanu



photo©Vlad Columbeanu

as the father of the nation, declaring what he wanted to be the start of a “national revolution”, after the “social revolution” had come to an end. The great crimes accompanying the installation of communism were committed by the old guard, to whom he lent his unconditional support until he became Secretary General and changed tack; he switched Stalinism for Ceaușescuism, that is, a fusion of “national revolutionary energies” under his personal leadership. At heart he was convinced it was his calling to provide the much-needed peace and that the country should become an autarchic power; he probably dreamt of a Romania that defied its own history, a Romania in harmony with universal destiny. Interestingly, during his “trial” he attacked the phanariotism inherent to Romanian political history at the beginning of the modern era and stemming from the original historical phanariotism of the 18th century. Communist ideology contains the elements of “heroic fury” typical of any revolution. Ceaușescu undoubtedly also relied on the dynamic, heroic “new man”, the initiator of new historical paths. Ideology is nothing more than

a circle ruthlessly closing in on the others, those who must present the gift of delegated will; ideology is a form of submission and, at the same time, a filter for those whose energy or whose good will is too great. A tool for battle as well as defence, ideology is fundamental to any political system. However, every leader is above ideology, for his actions must be free and sovereign. The fanatic, a kind of extremist idealist who ends up believing ideology to the letter, is sidelined, whether violently or not. This is a principle also adhered to by Hitler.

Having consolidated his political power (probably after 1968), Ceaușescu turned enthusiastically to the great work of national building projects: industrialisation, militarisation and education. Industrialisation under Ceaușescu was the result of a deficient formamentis; Ceaușescu was never able to understand, despite using it to the point of saturation, the term and phenomenon of “scientific revolution”, that leap forwards of western science and technology – and by the time he appeared to have grasped its significance, it was too late, the ruin was total. A thick layer of communist mafia ensured everything came to

nothing. What is also interesting is Ceaușescu's relationship with his own "class". Originating from among their ranks, but with an authentic revolutionary energy, he despised them, using them in every way as simple executors.

In fact, "Ceaușescu" meant the clique, probably small but very powerful, who held all the important posts in the Securitate, the party and the army. The others carried out the orders they received and thus ensured their survival. In this silent struggle between the leader and the nomenclature, it was the latter that emerged victorious. Ceaușescu couldn't possibly condemn his own instruments (he was no longer able nor had the time to replace them), and the latter paralysed the entire external machine, leaving only the internal Romanian Communist Party, which was a mafia and nothing more. In a strange sense, therefore, Ceaușescu was a misunderstood figure, the visionary who is ignored and betrayed. His trial clearly showed how he believed he had been betrayed and, at the same time, the country had been betrayed. His country.

Ceaușescuism was meant to be a form of Romanian communism, the national version of an imported revolution imposed by force. Our tragedy stems from the fact that Ceaușescuism existed, lived, was successful; a great number of people set to work with the thought in their minds that one day everything would come true. Some began making lathes, others wrote history and literature, etc. Certain patriots believed that the idea of Romanianism could also be served under and even by Ceaușescu himself. The placing of Ceaușescu among the ranks of the voivodes was their work, their excuse being that it was only in this way that the other names could be mentioned, too. Worse still is the fact that they never considered any resistance or opposition to the barbarism and crimes. Did thousands of Romanians die in camps and prisons only that Romanianism could be expressed by Ceaușescu and through Ceaușescuism?!

Ceaușescu led the "national wing" of the communists and finally won the argument for

good in 1968. He eliminated the Cominternists, the KGB agents and the Stalinists; he cleaned things up, he gave a "green light" to self-criticism and even criticism; he tried to become popular and even succeeded in a world that was reconciled to the mantra of "moving forwards" and the whirlwind of history – and among people whose memories had been annihilated and who were free to examine the mass graves (something they could have done but didn't). An entire generation held an unflinching belief in communism and tried to live entirely normal lives.

Yet history played a terrible trick on him; he was to be killed by the very people he created and led. He was convinced, right until the end, that the workers were on his side, the side of he who had provided them with food, work, drink, every day and every night; he who had turned Romania into a major player on the international stage. He entered, through a gate of his own making, the absolute paradox of absolute power, which has always had missionary pretensions: he began building a strong (industrialised) Romania, while at the same time also digging its grave. A demented figure, at one point he passed as an element of positive, national energy, but he couldn't have been any less national and any more anti-national. Without a doubt Ceaușescu played a determining role for us; his madness was no accident and is also not something that should be forgotten or hidden. Romanians should assume responsibility for Ceaușescu. Without being a matter of fate, he served as a lesson, a dead-end we paid for so dearly that we must understand it and learn from it. We must learn how far we can go with patience, suffering, with the apathy of the soul and the mind, with fear, with submission and with violence.

So many people staked their entire lives on the system without looking ahead in their lives or beyond the unflinching will of a tyrant. These are people for whom compromise and duality became their substance, people no longer able to defend themselves, people no longer able to defend anything.

The absence of memory is itself a form of

3) On the different types of intellectuals during communism, see the classic work by Czesław Miłosz (1996) *Gândirea captivă, Eseu despre Iogocrațiile populare*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1996.

4) On the entire procession of crimes committed by international communism, see: Stéphane Courtois, Nicolas Werth, Jean-Louis Panné, Andrzej Paczkowski, Karel Bartošek, Jean-Louis Margolin (1998) (eds.) *Cartea neagră a comunismului. Crime, teroare, represiune* (Humanitas, Fundația Academia Civică: Bucharest).

5) See Etienne de La Boétie, *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude, or the Anti-Dictator* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942)

betrayal and suicide. The intellectuals should have retained the memory of the sacrifices, the crimes, the instated absurdity; but they remembered nothing but the crude farce of the “obsessive decade”, the bait of false compensation, of the comedy of errors and of self-criticism. In the end they had given up almost everything, memory, truth, future... There was no way to live a normal life except through guilt, but then guilt is also a form of destiny. If the truth is to be told, and if the task of speaking the truth falls to the intellectuals, then truth has never been told in Romania<sup>3</sup>.

What is occurring today is astonishing. The entire experience of the communist ordeal has simply been forgotten, is never mentioned, our memory no longer wishing to be filled with the things that happened in the past, as if forgetting could save us retroactively. Not to remember is tantamount to not existing. The teratological experience of communism must be taken into account if we are to have a clear picture of the man of our agonised modernity. For this man, who emerged from underground, is a different man, a corrupted, malaised man who carries a double conscience and is shadowed by a tenebrous double of his own self. His existence is divided, incapable of rebirth. This abused and tortured being is a ruin of its own survival<sup>4</sup>.

• • • • •

### **Reason, nihilism and voluntary servitude**

Communism meant for each of us living a life underground, in servitude and falsity. The captive freedom of the underground may have given the impression of an existence, but this was only a pseudo-existence, a surrogate existence, the existence of the obedient slave<sup>5</sup>.

We were able to live our lives; we were able to be the actors of minimal freedoms, of a daily existence under the control of the mechanism of habit and survival. The major paradox, and at the same time the condition for the existence of any society alienated by terror, is

the creation of a simulacrum of what it is annihilating. The original, existence as such, succumbs to the simulacrum. Life subsists biologically and conventionally in the simulacrum of freedom, which is the essence of personal existence. The simulacrum is the impersonal, it is the faceless visage of an existence dominated by servitude and falsity, and deprived of freedom, that is, of purpose. For he who subsists in servitude is always the same, a vicious circle of his own human existence, the continuous impossibility of becoming. Voluntary and individual servitude is an act of impotence or deviation; the general servitude imposed by terror is a political act, a perverse imposition of power. This power crushes the human being, my own being, until it becomes the smallest of traces; man thus becomes his own trace, the feeble trace of a former presence, whether the presence of weakness, of deviation, or of rectitude, but a human presence nonetheless. Through the imposition of a perverse power – perverse because it is not human, that is, it is no longer responsible for humanity – man disappears, is suppressed and marked as an absence; he no longer responds, his self has dissolved. His name becomes the name of an absence. What empties him of his own self is not money, capital or the knout of primal or circumstantial violence, but “everything”, that is, the tangible and abstract immensity of the total imposition of a mechanism for the reproduction of everything that exists, a continual and complete production of falsity and error. A machine of lies, a machine for the fabrication of simulacra, including the simulacrum itself, the double perfected as an object. In this context, anything is possible against his existence as a person, against his freedom. Assigned to the world of objects by the authority of power through terror, man is left with no choice other than that of simply being, while no longer existing, being with the power to be a thing and nothing more. This taking control of your being, of any being, is the much-more-than political way in which power acts. Communism leaves politics to one side and resorts to basic terror.

What you feel when you are faced with this unleashed and implacable mechanism is not fear, which you leave behind, but the feeling of terror before an all encompassing demonism, before immaculate destruction. An unleashing that also annihilates time, for time is human, it belongs to man and represents the subsistence of hope and possibility. Through its massive presence this unleashing first and foremost suppresses hope itself, leaving in its wake a terrified, petrified sense of astonishment at the presence and efficiency of evil, which becomes mechanised, becomes the mechanism and basis of social existence. What was most terrifying during communism was its efficiency and capacity to appropriate life. A machine that comes to life. Through communism we all experienced collective death. The terror of history, as an alienating destiny, manifested itself strongly through communism, with the ultimate proof of the extreme devouring power of uprooted man thrown into the abyss of self-devouring reason. If the hubris of reason is the transformation of the world into an object, the instrumentalisation of the world for the subject man who no longer deciphers anything, but only utilises and submits through a project increasingly beyond interrogation, then communism represents total reason, the exacerbation of all the presuppositions of the European metaphysics involved in the project of human liberation that forgets its subject in order to suppress it. In this case 1789 is the full expression of rationality, while the Bolshevik revolution is instated humanism. Robespierre and his equally sinister double, Lenin, thus represent both sides of the man who instates the era of absolute and, therefore, paradisiacal freedom, bringing an end to history as deviation or progress, for time and history only exist as deviation and war, and the free, fulfilled man is beyond history, is liberated from history. Only in this way can man discover himself, find fulfilment, abolishing history and his own unhappy conscience. If it is reason that discovers or produces truth, then reason must re-produce man, that is, his liberation from unhappiness

and struggle, his liberation from original sin and the absolute master who pushed him into history as the substance of sin. The reason that re-produces man must also produce his purpose, while society must become the paradise on earth of history fulfilled. Only now does man become human as the exigent and ultimate product of reason. But man becomes human as master of the world, as the ultimate authority that abolishes mystery, impotence, unhappiness and finitude. Only in this way is man fully rational, fully free, with no past and no future, living in the pure present of the fulfilled and purifying exercise of reason which has become the reason of the world, the universal law, concept transformed into substance. Transcendence now fully reveals its uselessness; there is nothing beyond except the void of reason, the progression of evil as ignorance. Thus, reason ends with Christian "nihilism", according to which this world means nothing and the world beyond means everything. Man steps out of this nothingness created by empty transcendence towards the paradisiacal immanence of his presence fulfilled in and through reason. The world ceases to be the realm of the transcendental presence and becomes the letter of reason and fulfilled, accomplished discourse. The world is no longer presence and tremour, but the text of reason it never stops producing. If the empire of reason is the empire of truth, then man must fight for it, truth must be let be, must be unleashed through revolution. The revolution is the final threshold of history, the final ordeal of reason, purgatory on earth. The master, the slave, the bourgeois and the proletarian must each die in the revolution, while the citizen, the new man, the man emerging from the desert of deviation and struggle must be born. He is the master of the world, the undivided universal conscience who put an end to history, transcendence and mystery. But alas, instead of the human man his puppet emerges, and the world of the puppet becomes the machine of the world, a system that functions. And what best functions here? Reason itself and the man it produces.



Revolution, both that of 1789 and that of 1917<sup>6</sup>, is conveyed through discourse, and therefore history, as the fulfilment and accomplishment of reason, as a projection of the human essence of man<sup>7</sup>. The revolution is the accomplished project of reason, a reason which styles itself as fulfilment and is as such the end, the abolition of time and history seen as an intrinsic possibility of deviation. Reason, which designs and calculates man, which allows him to exist only as a structured project of its own and nothing more, takes over history and abolishes it. Man who puts reason at stake ends up merely being put himself at stake by reason. Reason itself is the game. Man becomes his rational and machine-like double, for he decides that freedom has been discovered, rediscovered or created. His rational and logical double is nothing but his fantasy double, just as reason conceived of Christian man as nothing more than the fantasy double of man and therefore not free to display the force of his reason. A force of reason which turns out to be the force of the illusion of sending man back to paradise, as the privileged home of reason that finds what it searches for. But what is it that reason looks for and finds? Always itself, in fact. The eternal return of the one and the same. The essential purpose of reason is to humanise the world according to the measure of the human subject which abolishes its object. To humanise the world also means to suppress it, to suppress the world as otherness, as mystery, as ex nihilo creation. The world thus becomes thing and instrument. In this sense the political revolution and the technical revolution of the man dominated by reason are one and the same thing. Freedom is understood in this case as liberation from the tyranny of God, of the master and of nature. The rational subject, who frees himself from these historical and ontological bonds, receives in exchange the bondage of sufficient reason as the highest non-personal authority. But man still conquers himself as an object in the era of reason and not as an autonomous subject of freedom. The myth of reason ends in revolution, that is self-destroying itself as a

myth of liberation, for the revolution turns out to mean abolition of every form of construction and terror a rigorous but self-destructive logical machine. Thus, reason again makes room for history and therefore deviation.

Communism is rational when it defines itself as revolution and revolutionary when it defines itself as reason<sup>8</sup>. Thus, within this totalising dialectics, which is supposed to be the very production of the world and of man, all meaning is exhausted, for freedom, as fulfilled reason, emerges as fundamental meaning and puts an end to individual discourses and meanings, which come to be defined as singular, self-serving and factual. Any other movement of thought, any other positioning of the human being is and must be understood as an error, a guilty deviation or, at best, ignorance. Under these circumstances, reason becomes the guardian of thought, of the spirit, of any other form of man's establishment of a different relationship with himself, a relationship which lays the foundations for a new project, a new form of human freedom and therefore a new truth. Reason cannot be weak or friable, cannot be one determination among many others; it can only be conceived of as temporal and temporary non-fulfilment; it remains the only path by which to achieve the perfection of foundation, it reaffirms itself as complete and unique foundation, as an encapsulation of the essence, an essence which offers itself to the human being in the form of a return of the same and the rediscovery of the identical. Thus human reason, as a probe sent into the abyss of existence, suppresses ontic difference and brings back the meaning of existence, unravelling the mystery of the explored abyss. Human reason rediscovers itself as the reason of the world, as the revealed logos of the being. The world becomes exclusively human. Paradoxically, it therefore falls to scientific knowledge to grasp the infiniteness, the otherness and the manifestation of the universe as unfathomable mystery, as an abyss of reason. Yet science continues in rational terms to place man in a self-sufficient position, eliminating any relationship between man and the infin-

6) Revolution is the eschatological myth par excellence of communism: everything is related to communism for revolution is the return of truth to itself, the re-discovery of the humanity of man in the truth of decisive historical action. Revolution is the re-conquering of humanity alienated by a history which itself must again become the history of man and therefore the history of liberation and de-alienation. Revolution is thus a political and metaphysical lesson in the sense in which metaphysics for Marx is precisely the history created by the proletariat for the entire human species. The communist revolution is the movement towards truth. See here also the seminal work by V. I. Lenin, *Statul și revoluția, Învățătura marxismului despre stat și sarcinile proletariatului în revoluție*, 4th edition, Editura Politică, Bucharest, 1960. Of particular interest for the deciphering of the "hidden text" of the French Revolution as a founding event of modernity is *Cartea neagră a Revoluției franceze*, Grinta, Cluj-Napoca, 2010 (*Les Éditions du Cerf*, 2008); see also François Furet (1992), *Reflecții asupra Revoluției franceze*, Humanitas, Bucharest; Pierre Gaxotte (1928) *La Révolution Française*, Arthème Fayard, Paris; Alexis de Tocqueville (1988) *L'ancien régime et la révolution*, GF-Flammarion.

7) For a definition of rationalism and reason in politics, see Michael Oakeshott (1991) *Rationalism in politics and other essays*, Liberty Fund.



photo©Vlad Columbeanu

ity of a manifestation of transcendence that reveals itself in the immensity of a presence, in the presence of “something” understood as an absence of nothing. “Calculating thought” (and communism is more than thought that calculates, even if its goal is the paradisiacal liberation of the human species from any form of metaphysical and political bondage) understood as reason is in its essence revealed, it is atheism, negation and abolition of transcendence; it not only desires things, the fragmentary existences of the world, but the being itself of existence, which it conceives of as the production of its own presence as logos, as the identity of its own manifestation, as reason itself. Reason does not wish to know that the “being” can neither be an object of calculation nor rediscovered identity but pure transcendence that reveals itself through presence, through the mystery of this presence that “makes” the world exist. The man that is the product of this form of thought is the man who fails in revolution, progress and technology. For him, the freedom of reason becomes the freedom to explore the underground. Communism is precisely this captive freedom

of the underground, the free, decentred exploration of the underground.

Faced with the revealed ideological text of Marxism, communism is nihilism, a decision in favour of tabula rasa. At this point, reason become nihilism, that is the reason of unfoundedness, the thought that projects everything and nothing. “What is nihilism? The fact that the highest values are devalued. There is no purpose. There is no answer to the question of “Why?” Nietzsche thus declares the end of the Enlightenment and any subsequent theory (i.e. also communism) as well as Christianity and any form of theism, any foundation in transcendence. As for the man of modernity, Nietzsche is right, he does end up in nihilism, in a state of fatigue vis-à-vis any form of foundation; it thus seems nothing can bring him back to the centre. Man and world become decentred, lose all foundation and become a hall of mirrors that endlessly reflect each other, a string of meaningless images without a story. The world becomes lost in the reflection of these multiple and diverging images<sup>9</sup>.

While in theory communism was for-

8) One of Marx's definitions of communism was: “Communism as the positive transcendence of private property, or human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e., human) being – a return become conscious, and accomplished within the entire wealth of previous development. This communism, as fully-developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully-developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man – the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution.” K. Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, in The Marx-Engels Reader, Second Edition, W. W. Norton & Company, p.84

9) A highly interesting “introduction” to the intellectual adventure of the 19th century is Heinrich Heine's *Contribuții la istoria religiei și a filozofiei în Germania* (1834), Humanitas, Bucharest, 1996.

mally opposed to every kind of nihilism, in practice, it fulfils the nihilistic “destiny” of contemporary man. The communist underground represents the full exploration of the nihilistic vicious circle. The lack of fundament creates the lack of purpose and meaning of human existence, which, for its part, points to the lack of fundament of existence itself. Man is thus trapped, becomes a prisoner of the logical machine set into motion by reason. In this case, man no longer even has access to despair and anxiety, understood as suffering caused by the presentiment that meaning and foundation do exist but cannot be regained. This resignation to slavery and the mechanical extension of its duration is the consequence of the palpable historical existence of communism. Besides his resignation to internally accepted servitude, it remains for the man of the communist underground to accept the challenge in terms of defying the death threat, which is in fact the essence of the threat of all terror organised as a political regime. It is in this presentiment of death and the welcoming thereof that the meaning of survival is to be found. To survive non-sense, the humiliation of the bondage of the predestined victim, to survive in order to save yourself and not simply to prolong a prison-like experience<sup>10</sup>. This extreme threat can give rise to the task of re-discovering the meaning and dignity of human existence. Death is not only the threat of the absolute ending, but also the total lack of meaning, the impossibility of finding an answer to a question about the grounds and purpose of a life.

The threat inherent to communism, as in all forms of nihilism, is not only the threat to private individual existence; it is also the threat to human existence as humanity, as the history of the discovery of the human fundament itself. Communism sets in motion the prison-like circularity of the lack of fundament, of the human exercise as a mere decentred existence within the circular production of domination with the help of the technology of political power. Communism annihilates man in that it abolishes any form of interrogation and any

form of answer, for in producing itself as an answer and absolute knowledge it eliminates the possibility of an answer. The fundament in this case is the will of power as a totalitarian practice.

As a form of political organisation, communism represents the exacerbation of this technological reasoning; it seeks to build a world with no residue, without the “insubstantiality” of the freedom of the irreconcilable, of the weakness of reason and confusion. What’s most frightening about communism is its success, the fact that the utopia has been built, the experiment has been successful, and that its history is now part of the history of man. Communism is a phenomenon of the absurd, and as such it is ferocious in its movement, in the fact that it acts with an immense material force within an immense territory of denial and destruction. What modernity brings to the decentring of the human being is the immense force of negativity – self-destruction as a historical process that transcends the mere deviation of thought and brings about the radical process of the possibility of generalised and total destruction of man and humanity. The emergence of this possibility is not simply the consequence of the technological process, the propagation of an error, but the ontological fulfilment of man’s power of denial and self-denial. This possibility is a metaphysical event in the sense in which the original sin is also a metaphysical event – of course, not in the sense in that it is the event of any given metaphysics. This event originates neither in communism nor in capitalism, but in the technological reason that sets both in motion. Man himself finds self-fulfilment in the process of this self-destruction. It’s true that he fulfils himself as negation, as a spirit of denial, as the reason of domination in the perfect circularity of captivity. In essence, this man says the world is an apparition and an appearance of nothingness. Entertaining no theist illusions, abhorring Christianity as a cancer of thought and being, he frees himself in the simulacrum of his own abstraction. Man, we are taught, finally becomes “human”. The paradox is that he

10) The most powerful account in Romanian culture and literature of the path to salvation from terror and servitude is Jurnalul fericiiiri by Nicolae Steinhardt, published by Dacia, Cluj, 1991. In another register but equally powerful in terms of the existential dimension: Ion D. Sârbu, Jurnalul unui jurnalist fără jurnal, 2 vol., Craiova, Scrisul românesc, 1996.

becomes “human” at the very moment his entire power of negation and self-negation becomes an act, the reality of his own power. He is the apocalyptic technocrat who in the end becomes “human”, strong and alone, liberated from the alienation of transcendence, exploitation and nature; however, he remains master in an abstract and empty universe that might well be tantamount to the inferno. Thus, the adventure of the self-awareness of the western man becomes trapped in the circular repetition of “God is dead”, the archetype of Enlightenment thinking, the philosophy of German idealism and the French Revolution. The 20th century appears to be nothing other than an experiment of this “founding” thought, its fulfilment as history, its production as the “revealed” meaning of the world. 20th-century communism is nothing but a stage in this reproduction of the world and in this respect communism should not be a surprise but the fulfilment of an expectation.

Having lived through communism, I already know that it is neither freedom, nor meaning, but the experience of imprisonment and the omnipotence of the absence of meaning. It is the underground of existence. Returning to the surface of existence, to the power and dignity of free existence is no easy task – on the contrary. There is no such thing as the fatality of freedom, just as there is no such thing as being doomed to servitude; our substance is our internal freedom, the ability to become aware of our enslavement or ignorance and to make a choice. The indestructible simplicity of our own presence already leads us down the path of making a judgment and a choice. Regardless of where we are deposited in time, in history, regardless of how and where we become shipwrecked, we can follow Robinson Crusoe’s example by rebuilding – not the world – but ourselves or the world in ourselves. There is no external force that can enslave us and turn freedom into opposition, the struggle with the other, but we ourselves represent our own threat to ourselves through confusion and ignorance. We are as free as we ourselves can be if we can truly abandon the

underground and not carry it with us as an already assimilated poison.

.....

### Freedom and transcendence

What remains not entrapped in this circular mechanism, this apocalyptic scenario? What is left beyond the abyss of the underground? Transcendence in the sense of an indestructible fundament of man, his essential freedom that is permanently offered, given to him as the fundament of the essence of existence<sup>11</sup>. This freedom comes in the form of time, not chronological time, but a time of choice, rediscovery and foundation. This is why human freedom is not only the act of liberation, labour or struggle, but also the simple rediscovery of transcendence, the openness towards the eternity of a presence<sup>12</sup>. The “weak” presence of God, his immensity which transpires as silence, as absence and as “nothing”, God that does not exist nor is, must be found again. The reason why God exists is not because everything else exists, for in this case the world becomes the absence of God, the absence of all fundament, a cold coagulation of objects and objective presences. Man thus discovers the world as an object and not as creation. The world wraps itself in the simulacra of its own presence, becoming what human reason allows it to be, whether instrument or image, labour, struggle or an empty gaze. It is no longer a sign and a presence of transcendence, but a hieroglyph of reason. This world becomes absurdity and man the absurd product of this absurdity. Human freedom becomes the prison of this absurdity, the decentred drifting of the being into nothingness. In this captivity man proclaims himself master of the world, a world which becomes his possession, otherness suppressed as “something” of his own. Possession thus becomes the sign of any relationship, including that between people. For the man of the absurd this is the only way in which the world ceases to be absurd, suppressed as otherness, as unknown,

11) “We have lived, since the coming of Christ, in a fissured world”, Gabriel Marcel, *Omni problematic*, Biblioteca Apostrof, Cluj, 1998, p. 97.

12) “God is nowhere for those who see with bodily eyes, for He is invisible. But for those who think spiritually He is everywhere; for He is present, being in everything and yet outside everything. He is in everything and close to those who fear Him (Ps. LXXXIV, 10), but salvation is far from those that sin (Ps. CXVIII, 155).” Saint Symeon the New Theologian, *Cele 225 capete teologice și practice*, in *Filocalia*, vol. 6, translation, introduction and notes by Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1997.

as a threat. Possessed as an object, it is subdued and made rational. The world becomes mundus and not lumen. This possession of the world has to do with technology, and the relationship of possession becomes a technological relationship. Communism forms part of this relationship, which explains the adoption and the hypostatising of the technological optimism of the industrial revolution. For communism, the world and the human presence are tantamount to industry. Human existence becomes an equation that needs to be solved through production and distribution, while production offers freedom by means of the technological process, itself a form of practical reason, the reason of industry. The materiality of the world becomes an object through industry and, at the same time, materiality is reduced to matter and non-human limitation by practical reason, which humanises the world in the empire of absolute knowledge and absolute possession defined as the true empire of freedom. This is the Marxist meaning of human development as acquired freedom – which is again to say that man, through his historical actions in keeping with the

essence of his (practical) rationality, abolishes the old world of alienation and generalised slavery, as a source of human non-freedom, as the limit of human destiny. Naturally, neither Marxism nor communism is a historical option today; however, as a historical experience, they remain the signs of a technological rationality that still represents the foundation of western thought.

What is there in the underground to prepare me for freedom? Suffering, which becomes the only proof of my freedom, because not to suffer is already to become a slave. All that happens there, including fear, threat, submission, perversion and death, is suffering, becomes suffering. Even when complicity with the power behind this underground is complete in the sense of submission, when I accept freedom only as biology, when I want to forget that I suffer, I still suffer. I know the world has been turned upside down, I know that I am someone else, that the society in which I live is dominated by submission and the banality of the routine of silence, but I at least try to rescue the intimate, an intimate, however, which is not the personal. But then here I also know



photo©Vlad Columbeanu

I am trapped, that the intimate has been expelled from intimacy, that what I wish to retain falls apart because the lie penetrates even this corner, the lie as fear and the social “pedagogy” of perversion; and then I know that I cannot in fact save anything. I know that what I see as social mechanics imposing the regularity of submission as the only convention that allows me to survive, to exist in some way, no matter how, are no longer the mechanics of society, of the others, but my intimate self, my internal make-up which has turned into a mechanism of submission, convention and survival. And then I become another, I become the possession of this mechanism, a part thereof, and I am no longer the radical otherness of opposition, of the victim who does not wish to confess, to allow himself to be seduced by his own tormentors, but their accomplice, their task being thus accomplished, the accomplished existence of their power to dominate. And this awareness implies suffering and at the same time a fear of suffering. It is the suffering of defeat and submission, as well as the accumulated fear of exploding this relationship of subjugation, which would require opposition and thus defiance, and later struggle. However, the fear of the suffering of this form of liberation is paralyzing. I am afraid of being free, I am afraid of extracting myself from this comforting form of captivity which I share with everybody else, waiting together with the others for the mechanism to be blunted through contact with the stone of deadly indifference and time which, through its passing, abolishes not only freedom but also the frightened submission in a blur of agony and dissolution. Whether master or slave, we all face the same deadly risks of destructive time. In the master, time kills the terror of domination itself, while in the slave it eliminates the measured slowness of submission. We die together, I, the slave, and he, the master, each dying his own separate death but all the same dying for each other. In me, the slave disappears for him, while he disappears as a master to me, and therefore our common history disappears itself, abolished by time.

But this is only a way for me to avoid my human responsibility and delegate it to an authority that flattens everything in the blur of continuous ending. The fear of personal choice makes me choose the impersonal process of temporal dissolution. The time meant to destroy everything, first of all the history of this shameful and disastrous submission, is not the time of man, the substance of his freedom, but pure destruction and the action of nothingness. In waiting for the end, for the irrevocable that is due both to me and to him, I do nothing but betray my faith in nothingness; “I can’t do anything, I wait for an end to all” is the underlying principle of this transfer. I try to dissolve my freedom into this principle and thus resist the temptation of trying to become free. I try to induce history as a terrible fatality that leaves me with no chance. I try, in fact, to escape from the possibility of suffering born of opposition in forgetting and complicity. But even this fear of suffering is nothing but suffering, awareness of the precarious situation maintained as a form of survival, the essential precariousness of the man afraid of his own image, who suffers the grotesque terror of servitude. Although I seem prepared to accept, and I do in fact accept the more or less blind subjugation, there is something in me, far more profound than the cynical acceptance proclaimed by my cowardice, that rebels and suffers a perversion. My intrinsic freedom does not roll with me towards the edge of acceptance and “wisdom”. This something, which is my intimate essence and makes my being really be, remains stable in suffering and rebellion; this “I” knows that their lie cannot possibility become my life and that this lie will be thrown into the platitude of a history, haunted by the inability to defeat the human despite the fact that the appearance of this force is frightening. With communism, as with Nazism, the issue is not the loss of freedom (political in this case), but the loss of humanity pure and simple. My suffering in this captivity is not related to my not being able to vote or be voted for, but to the reality of the will of quasi-total annihilation, the generic fiction of

the simulacrum being all that is to be left of me: a labour force and agent of reproduction. However, as a human being, I reject this transformation, despite all the social and personal bondages that make me accept it. More intimately than my reason and will, I am determined by my intrinsic freedom, which represents my given, offered essence, the necessity of my constitution as a human being. I am already in my freedom, conforming myself to the necessity which is my “good”, my fulfilled and yet secret being. I can destroy this constitution through forgetting, but it will always represent the fundament of my being, albeit a forgotten, invisible fundament. I am this freedom; freedom is not a state, it is not something I possess; I myself am freedom. What others annihilate is not my freedom but myself. Man is the only free being in the universe and he is created as pure freedom. My being, understood as something completely different than the world, different from things and different from animality, is freedom, the freedom to be something else. My humanity is freedom and my freedom is humanity. Freedom is the fundamental structure of man and reason a function of this fundamental structure. Freedom is not a creation of reason, of thought in general, of historical praxis, but a fundamental given. “Given” means offering. God alone can give man his humanity. Man is the creation of God, the expression and the gift of his power. Man could not have created himself, he cannot create his own fundamental humanity, man is pre-given from the very beginning, from the origin to the end. Man does not become human at the end of history, but is human from primordial times, he is human, fully human, from the beginning of history. This humanity which is given to me suffers during my temporal enslavement, my self-forgettingfulness and the aggression of others towards me<sup>13</sup>.

How can it be possible to forget freedom, to hide one’s fundamental structure? Because I am man, I am permanently subject to this risk, this defiance of my nature, I am permanently subject to my own internal dissolution,

the sin of forgetting and forgetting myself, insisting instead on the univocal existence of the quotidian which itself “forgets me” and through the violence of the other against me, which is the will to annihilate, the pure expression of the will to dominate. And so I fall, revealing my divided human condition and the extreme “friability” of my own existence. Faced with this inability, it is not the truth that escapes me, the rational awareness of this truth, but the existential exercising thereof, the ability to propose it as an experience and not as a defeated theoretical conscience. Man’s moral conscience, which is the conscience of truth, the adoption of the truth of actions and relations, the relationship with the other, is always the conscience of paradox because it is aware that it is a conscience of freedom, for example, but accepts being defeated, the conscience of defeat and submission. He who is able to transform this duality into tension, into the consciousness of agony, can retrace the path to his own humanity, his own freedom, can free himself.

Thanks to the demonic genius of communism, rebellion – the result of this division and an act of responsibility for oneself and one’s peers, a sign of liberation, the adoption of one’s own humanity and the humanity of the other – is annihilated by means of a rigorous mechanism, by means of threat and repression. Rebellion thus becomes a feeling in lieu of action and solidarity, openness in the fight for meaning and not entrapment in terror and the mechanics of fear. The multitude of frightened approvals/acceptances around you, their promotion as humanity, as history, simply as existence, frighten you and reduce you to the dimension of an unusual gestuality and on these grounds is predicable as guilty or futile. The paradox of a terrorised world is that it subsists, biology and the economy allow it to continue to exist in the form of a society, albeit society itself has been abolished. And this paradox, human or inhuman, is a living paradox, a quotidian paradox, an event that allows existence to consume itself and, through this, even allows of the possibility of exploitation at

13) St. Augustine (2006) *Confesiuni*, Book X, pp. 204-247, Nemira, Bucharest, translated by Eugen Munteanu.

some point in terms of rebellion or victory.

Rebellion is transformed into hope.

The humanity “produced” by communism is a frightened humanity, a disastrous mass that secretes the sage cowardice of survival. A nation is mutilated by this experience, even if this features resistance or opposition, the force of this machine being far too strong and devouring. All the same, the moral order of individuals slips through the net and manages in places to become ethos. In these amorphous dialectics of the living, the faces of the people, although gloomy, manage to see and respond to each other. It is neither a solution nor a victory, but simply what happens. Man subsists miraculously even in disaster, and communism is disaster and decomposition.

The rebellion, the consequence of agony, is an inner act that seeks a gesture, the gesture being my message for the other, the visible acknowledgment of his presence in the realm of my freedom. Rebellion is the desire to co-opt the other in the openness of solidarity in order to reclaim freedom together, that is to return together to the existence of good, my recognition and that of the other as the tension of the return to the fundament of existence. In this establishment of an essential relationship, in this relating of one to the other in order together to return from the deviation from good, the ethical relationship also reappears through the ability to rediscover the face of the other, not as another form of threat and captivity, but as joy and the certainty of a presence that certifies good. Living in fear and under pressure I forget the other, as in the annihilating abundance of mere materiality. The other becomes an abstraction, a self devoid of humanity, a non-self and non-presence. This makes it possible to instate and maintain terror, the loss of my humanity being at the same time also the stripping of meaning and presence of the other. The world becomes a vacuum, a space in which objects are manipulated and nothing more, a space of realised fictions, of objectualised fictions. In the vacuum of my fear, impotence, lack of solidarity and dissolution of the other’s presence appears the absurd and

the implacable mechanics of my reduction to a thing by the political powers that be, which thus become the arbiters of an imminent destiny. Politics and the state are no longer instruments but irreconcilable absurd and ruinous forces of fate which crush me and countless lives besides. And this phenomenon is terrifying both in the form of manifest and instantaneously destructive violence and the social mechanisation and uniformisation, for having crushed all resistance it holds a monopoly over social control. Irrespective of the victim’s response – opposition, resistance, neutrality, acceptance – the phenomenon is frightening and pushes man to the limits of his condition as a being.

In the very realisation of this absurd outburst of evil as a nothingness that congeals time, space and consciences or non-consciences, the pain of an essential question appears and is maintained as tension: “How can I remain human until the end?” Here there appears the fear of the end of my own humanity, which is different from the fear for my own life. But what is this humanity which I realise I may risk losing, ending? This fear itself is my undefeatable humanity, this ability to fear and to question my moral limits, how I relate to myself in terms of the fear of the end, of agony, of the absence of God, represents my humanity, my human character. Therefore fear, in terms of relating to myself, to my own humanity and the humanity of others, is the transcendence of the self, my transcendence to fundamentals and purposes. But to what am I able to transcend, if this transcendence exists? Only to my origin, which is also my fundament, to what is eternally the origin of the world and being. My thinking always remains behind this transcendence, despite conceiving of it and recognising it.

Thought itself forms parts of this surpassing, this transcendence. Paradoxically, what founds man is the non-human, God himself, and the paradox of this transcendence is that it “ends” in mystery, in the abyss. “How can I remain human until the end?” receives the only possible answer: by a founding in faith, in



transcendence, in the indemonstrable, in the unthinkable of the abyss that brings the being back to the light, turning it into light. There is no other “sufficient reason” for not turning existence into calculation or possession<sup>14</sup>.

What is freedom? To go beyond. But beyond where? Beyond what? Beyond the lie, beyond the “image of the world”, beyond the mathematical proof of the absurd, the captivity of existence trapped in the system, in the despair of the mechanisms that function, the civilisation that civilises and the reason that rationalises. To be beyond suffering through suffering, beyond beauty through beauty. Man himself is a beyond, he is the only one who through his being is beyond the world, nature, fate, and only in this way is his freedom the permanent realisation of his own essence of being beyond. But beyond is not protection, illusion and fiction, but correspondence, seeking and finding of the fundament. Beyond is not creation or self-creation, it is not the fulfilled history of victorious humanity. Man is that transition beyond, for this beyond is and gives humanity and also gives itself to humanity. The transition beyond by the human encounters transcendence at the origins because man is creation. This encounter is not a figure of speech, but a mystery of the origin, of creation. A mystery of creation and a mystery of freedom because man is beyond evil, but also beyond good. Man is able to choose to be beyond, in the nothingness of total absence, in the nothingness of self-annihilation, and as such he is beyond himself and beyond God, God in this case being “nothingness”.

Suffering as fear and dread is the vehicle of liberation, of return to oneself. The suffering is the experience of the absence of beyond, the experience of captivity and the pain of not being able to overcome it. The malaise of the underground is the absence of suffering from captivity, is reconciliation with the enslavement caused by the departure from oneself, the forgetting of oneself. With the malaise of the underground existence becomes the plenitude of falsity of forgetting. Inexplicable to reason, the Gospel refers to man, to myself as

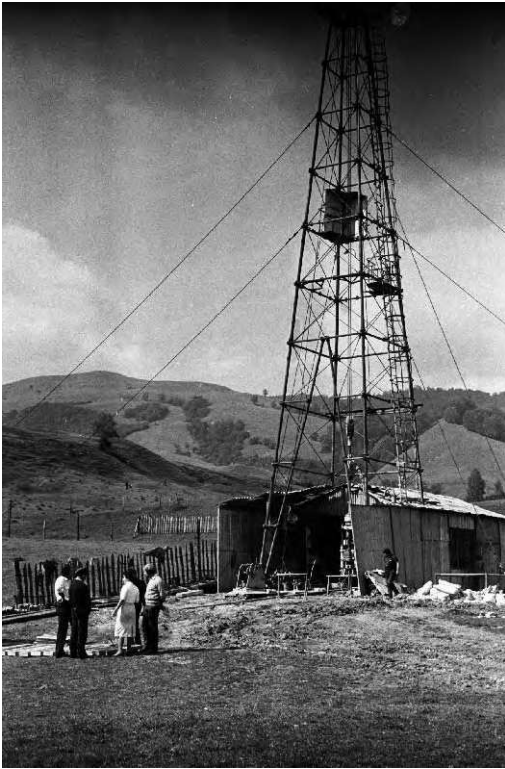
a man of the underground. From out of the underground I am called to pass beyond, and this is why the Gospel is suffering, the plenitude of the suffering of man and the world, but also liberation, transition beyond, acceptance of the gift, the unveiling of the face, contemplation of presence. This beyond is therefore not a space or a place, but simply the fulfilment of plenitude, the presence of light that irradiates the being, for creation is nothing but “condensed light”. In the mystery of his own presence, man is able to recognise the plenitude of what it means to be beyond, for here nothing can make him a being, here he is futile, a scandal to the world, a permanent defiance and a permanent threat.

.....

### **Solidarity, identity and difference**

The world and the other are beyond me. Beyond, in my relative proximity. The presence of the other is pure otherness in the first instance, a sign of reality and opposition. The other is my opposite but also my peer, a being existing beyond me but together with me here, enduring the ordeal of self-becoming, of presence as history. I and the other as another; the time separating us implies the creation and perpetuation of history. My relationship with myself inexorably passes through the other, his presence becomes substantial, irrevocable, my humanity is discovery together with the other, a shared being in opposition and struggle. The other is able to become my solitude, my annihilation or my freedom. I, the individual, the unique, am divided, my humanity is directly reflected in the face of the other. I am, but I am with him, be it as part of a historical co-presence or in a relationship of historical becoming. Naturally, there exists something irreducible in me, my own personal face, but the irreducible in me is at the same time communion, vision of the other, the initiation of the relationship. Through myself, my inner self, I see and conceive of the other; he exists through me and I exist through him, and the

14) See Marx's text on atheism and socialism in Manuscripts: "Atheism, as a denial of this inessentiality, has no longer any meaning for atheism is a negation of God, and postulates the existence of man through this negation; but socialism as socialism no longer stands in any need of such a mediation. It proceeds from the practically and theoretically sensuous consciousness of man and of nature as the essence. Socialism is man's positive self-consciousness no longer mediated through the annulment of religion, just as real life is man's positive reality, no longer mediated through the annulment of the private property, through communism.", op.cit. pp. 92-93.



photo©Vlad Columbeanu

place of our reflection is the place of our freedom.

What we share is not only the being of humanity, but also the becoming in time, the terror of history. In the underground of our freedom we are one and the same, confined not to the irreducible but to repetition, to the similarity of eradication and absence. We are both the same simulacrum of the agonised man, the fake currency of history, the mortar for the bricks of fiction. In this communion of slavery and the underground we are, however, responsible for truth and freedom, not for victory or changing the world or man, but for maintaining the possibility of being human. My ultimate response is my ultimate word before God, but until that moment I live ultimately, and in being aware of transcendence my daily response is an exercise of this brief burst of light. On a daily basis my relationship to the other can be described in terms of tension, indifference, aggression or reflection, but this relationship does exist and is essential – it says

something about both of us and something to both us. The experience of the underground is that this relationship subsists, but only as a degradation, for freedom itself disappears, having been transformed into survival and the fear of freedom. If I am able to suffer for this relationship, if I laugh at my disfigured face and realise that it is my disfigured face in his face, and if the fear of the end is greater than the fear of freedom, then I can retrace my steps and the underground is left behind me as a trace left by me on earth. This is when the other becomes presence and the necessity of freedom, the beginning of the authenticity of the good. The other may at any time discover me, and I can see myself again in the other, just as I can hide or deny myself in the other. The other can be either my inferno or my freedom. This is why any society is essentially all about the relationship with the other, the establishment of this relationship and its practice. Communism, like any form of nihilism, builds this relationship in terms of the tension of possession and degradation, which is precisely the formula for an underground, that is the lack of foundation as the retention of the origin and revelation of transcendence. Communist humanism is precisely a humanism, and this is not a paradox. Humanism is the “place” where the identity of man finds itself as identity rediscovered. Communism is not human, but it is humanism in the sense that the human defines and reconstructs itself as the rationality of all possibility, as rejection of transcendence and tradition, as annihilation of the homeland and as the productivity of the material plenitude of the world and humanity. Man is thus no longer weakness and the delicateness of creation, but the key principle of the total construction of complete rationality. Communism is quite justified in defining and building itself as humanism, for it wishes to free man, in the tradition of the Enlightenment, from the strongest form of enslavement, that of transcendence, that is from the “slavery” of questions about himself, the world and divinity. The Marxist idea can also be found in the early writings of Lenin and Stalin, and the

Marxist meaning of history is precisely this, the emancipation of man (the true and only humanism), the emancipation from transcendence, the only way in which man can become human. Historical communism served only to emancipate man from all foundation, all roots. The man of communist humanism is uprooted par excellence. He is the man whose face is so new that it no longer resembles anything, it is the face of the absolute producer, of the slave who rises through production to the privilege of domination<sup>15</sup>.

15) See Nikolai Berdyaev, *Originile și sensul comunismului* rus, Dacia, Cluj, 1994.

16) See Martin Heidegger (1988) *Scrisoare despre "umanism"*, in *Repere pe drumul gândirii*, Editura Politică, translation and introductory notes by Thomas Kleininger and Gabriel Liiceanu, pp.297-343.

• • • • •  
**Freedom, authenticity and existence in the tension of salvation**

The metaphysical error of modern man did not end with the fall of communism. This in no way implies that the fall of communism does not create an opening in our destinies and does not afford us the opportunity, not only historical, of moving towards ourselves. The political and economic violence of communism is unbearable, and the uprootedness of man is everywhere present and therefore also where political and economic freedom exists. But can you really be free in a world that turns all people into the utensils of a giant universal reproduction and replaces the world with a mechanical and fictional double? Here, humanism is in the last instance the same desire for power and desire for denial, the same immense desire for solitude of the emancipated man<sup>16</sup>. Only an understanding of the world as an epiphany can shield man from his complete transformation into an instance of universal reproduction, an instance of instrumentalisation. When the world becomes an object, its essence is defined as manoeuvrability, experience of instrumentalisation and manipulation of objects in the space and time of a productivity accomplished as freedom. What founds this productivity is the understanding of the world itself as the objectual materiality of an infinite reproduction, in the sense in which the world is the infinite appearance and disappearance of mat-

ter, infinite production and reproduction of matter. What modern science posits is precisely the capacity of man, through experiment and knowledge, through technology, to co-participate in this infinite continuum of production and reproduction. Man becomes increasingly human through his technicality, which becomes co-participation in the naturalness of the nature of the world, co-production and reproduction of nature. In this world, human par excellence, man can no longer free himself as we, but only as I, as an individual, as indissoluble uniqueness. This is a world in which we no longer transpires as meaning and existence, for there is no longer any foundation and therefore also no communion, but only organisation.

In the experience of the underground created by communism as ultimate and eternal humanism, as a true end of history and a genuine experience of the limit, I can still return to myself, for this suffering triggers searching and questioning. In this suffering I also seek the other and I can find him or we can find ourselves together as part of an experience that rebuilds communication. When I come to realise that what is suffering within me is not only my self, but also the person within me that "contains" my own irreducible self, my humanity, then I can turn to God and to the other; I am ready. My suffering, my agony, is also my openness, my breaking, as if of a vicious circle, of my definite identity; as of this moment, my identity is no longer strict and monadic, but processual and interrogative, I am no longer trapped in a definition of the others or of society, but seek my own face and an existential experience of freedom.

The political terror of communism dehumanises both the victim and the executioner, and may also be the paradoxical consequence of rediscovering freedom, as the experience of incarceration of so many people confirms. At the epicentre of terror you can perfect yourself as humanity, as a living presence of the plenitude of existence. And then freedom is not the freedom to vote, but the freedom to be human until the end, not to jump ship, to be irre-

ducible. Terror, which is absurdity, lack of meaning, is therefore rejected and annihilated through freedom and foundation in transcendence as being that which gives being, essence and meaning. In this freedom that rebels against terror and the underground man ceases to be the failed actor of history and a stranger to the being of this world, just as he ceases to be only the absolute master of a perpetually manoeuvrable existence with the aim of establishing a world limited to the object of a ceaseless action of making. Contemporary man, the absolute subject of modern history, is a subject of historical action, a subject who acts with no other foundation than the action that simply produces effects meant to solve an impossible equation of transformation, effects which fuse together to form a faceless world, a world of actions and effects, of production of any kind which establishes the absence of any meaning other than that of utility and vitality.

He who leaves the underground, making his way out, whether by his own action or as the mere “accident” of history, must be aware that utility or emancipation is not fulfilment and rediscovery of the human, but the auxiliary of an existence. This is not a matter of conceiving of a freedom outside of the historical world, that is, an illusion opposed to another illusion, but of simply showing (indicating) an experience and not a doctrine, and any experience is also a thought that knows, an existential exercise of the tension of interrogation. It is not a matter of turning one’s back on the firm universe of survival, of needs that must be met, of the bread that must be put on the table or shared, but rather, it is a matter of all that must be fulfilled as being human and the possibility to fulfil them as a man exercising his irreducible humanity. Commu-



photo©Vlad Columbeanu

nism itself began as a myth of the bread and capitalism is nothing but a technique to produce and save in order to invest with a view to acquiring comfort, profit and knowledge. Man must pass through the “systems” of the world or the world turned into a system so that he can live as much as possible in freedom and in the envisioned truth of the individual in order to defy constantly the terror of his being possessed as a thing by different powers. This implies permanently recasting the experience of tension between truth and falsehood, between freedom and slavery, between me and the other, between the world and transcendence, between here and beyond, between the world and Revelation.

## Bibliography

- Althusser, Louis (1970) *Citindu-l pe Marx, Editura Politică*, Bucharest.
- Berdyaev, Nikolai (1994) *Originile și sensul comunismului rus*, Dacia, Cluj.
- Berlin, Isaiah (2004) *Simțul realității*, Univers, Bucharest, 2004, pp. 106-209.
- Boétie, Etienne de la (1942) *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude, or the Anti-Dictator*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1942; Oeuvres Complètes d'Etienne de la Boétie, publié avec Notice biographique, Variantes, Notes et Index par Paul Bonnefon, 1892, Bordeaux, Paris.
- Dostoyevsky, Fyodor Mikhailovich (1968) *Însemnări din subterană*, Opere, vol. 4, Editura pentru Literatură Universală, Bucharest.
- Engels, Friedrich (1966) *Domnul Eugen Dühring revoluționează știința (Anti-Dühring)*, Editura Politică, Bucharest.
- Feuerbach, Ludwig (1961) *Esența creștinismului*, Editura Științifică, Bucharest, 1961.
- Furet, François (1996) *Trecutul unei iluzii. Eșeu despre ideea comunistă în secolul XX*, Humanitas, Bucharest.
- Hayek, Friedrich A. (1993) *Drumul către servitute*, Humanitas, Bucharest.
- Hegel, G. W. Fr. (1995) *Fenomenologia Spiritului*, translated by Virgil Bogdan, Editura IRI.
- Heidegger, Martin (1988) *Scrisoare despre „Umanism”*, in *Repere pe drumul gândirii*, Editura Politică, Bucharest.
- Kolakowski, Leszek (2009) *Principalele curente ale marxismului*, vol. I, Fondatorii, Curtea Veche, Bucharest.
- Lefort, Claude (2002) *Complicația. Recurs asupra comunismului*, Univers, Bucharest.
- Marcuse, Herbert (1964) *One-Dimensional Men: Studies in the Ideology of the Advanced Industrial Society*, Boston.
- Marx, Karl (1978) *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts from 1844* in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, second edition, edited by Robert C. Tucker, Princeton University, W.W. Norton & Company.
- Marx, Karl, Engels, Friedrich (1969) *Manifestul Partidului Comunist*, Editura Politică, Bucharest, 9th edition.
- Marx, Karl (1966) *Capitalul*, vol. I, in *Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Opere*, vol. 23, Editura Politică, Bucharest.
- Mises, Ludwig von (1957) *Theory and history, An interpretation of Social and Economic Evolution*, Yale University Press.
- Muravchik, Joshua (2004) *Raiul pe pământ. Mărirea și decăderea socialismului*, Brumar.
- Stalin, Joseph Vissarionovich (1951) *Despre Materialismul dialectic și materialismul istoric*, Editura Partidului Muncitoresc Român, Bucharest.
- Pipes, Richard (2003) *Communism: A History of the Intellectual and Political Movement*, Phoenix Press, Great Britain.
- Rothbard, Murray N. (1990) *Karl Marx: Communist as Religious Eschatologist*, *The Review of Austrian Economics*, vol 4, 1990:123-179.
- Schmitt, Carl (1996) *Teologia politică*, Editura Universal Dalsi.
- Sombart, Werner (1934) *Socialismul german*, Editura Socec, Bucharest, f.a.
- Ulam, Adam B. (2009) *Bolșevicii. Triumful comunismului în Rusia: O istorie intelectuală și politică*, Corint, Bucharest.
- Yannaras, Christos (2000) *Foamea și setea*, Anastasia.
- Yannaras, Christos (2002) *Libertatea moralei*, Anastasia.
- Voegelin, Eric (1975) *From Enlightenment to Revolution*, Duke University Press, North Carolina.