

THE COMMUNIST MOLOCH: COMMUNITY AS DIALOGIC DYSTOPIA IN MIRCEA NEDELCIU'S FICTION

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Abstract: The paper focuses on the impact of the Western "Sixties" Counterculture on the dystopian representations of community and group identities in Mircea Nedelciu's fiction, since the Romanian writer frequently uses covert intercultural dialogue as one of his most prominent de-ideologising fictional strategies. His stories and novels actually displace and (re)contextualise the counter-cultural symbolic discourse, the value system and the moral code(s) of the Western "Sixties", strategically adapting them to the Romanian totalitarian context of the 1980s. Nedelciu's fictional reconstruction of the dystopian nature of reality is thus essentially built on a particular type of inter-cultural dialogue: one which replaces the impossible (forbidden) exchanges between different Central cultural paradigms with a secret „traffic” between marginal subcultures (or counter-cultures). The cultural identity of the social group (especially its moral dimension and implied value system) thus goes beyond local/ national/ regional definition and becomes the result of a dialogic, globalised socio-cultural enterprise. Nedelciu's viewpoint on community and its possible, plural identity configuration(s) thus corresponds to such theories as those regarding the "imagined" (and therefore socially re-configurable) nature of communitary identities, the idea of intercultural discourse as bearer of *différance* and the theories related to "moral identity" as negotiable, responsible construction, while simultaneously illustrating the essential role of intercultural dialogue in the process of group identity construction in a globalised world.

Keywords: *dystopia, identity, communism, community, "Sixties" Counterculture*

Romanian writer of the 1980s Mircea Nedelciu frequently uses covert intercultural dialogue as a prominent de-ideologising fictional strategy – or as alternative ideological background. Apparently, the particular symbolic political imagery he recurrently uses in this process can be traced back to that of the Western "Sixties" Counterculture and the related imaginary representations it encompasses¹. Quite rightly, researchers like Caius Dobrescu speak of an (in a sense) downright (i.e. visible/ legible) "counter-cultural" intention with the entire generation of "1980s" Romanian writers Nedelciu belongs to, an urge to propose a literarily expressed "radical criticism of their culture"² going against the "establishment" of totalitarian, rigid cultural models like those imposed by Ceaușescu's regime. This subversive purpose of literature as (counter-)cultural action is also confirmed several times by various statements made by Nedelciu himself before and after 1990. For instance, the (covert) "translation" of Adorno's theoretical standpoint on the essentially emancipatory function of literature is easily recognizable behind the idea of the "anthropogenetic" role of fiction (courageously) outlined by Nedelciu in 1988 as follows:

"[...] the action of writing is a type of anthropogenesis. The purpose of writing would be the transformation of man, the techniques and methods through which the reader can be actually engaged in the work of art. I am not at all sorry for having «researched» the subject. I found

¹ I am especially referring to the key anti-establishment images created by the "Beat generation" taken over by the hippie culture.

² Caius Dobrescu, *Generația '80 ca fenomen de contracultură*, in Caius Dobrescu, *Inamicul impersonal*, Editura „Paralela 45”, Pitești, 2001, pp. 52-66. Original fragment: "critică radicală a culturii". My translation, R.H.

out many things about the manipulative functions of art, functions often exploited by forces that are extraneous to literature. I was also able to determine that art can strengthen one's soul and one's mind against all kinds of manipulation. [...] What I mean is that man is a wonder of the universe as he is. He knows how to educate himself and to resist manipulation on his own. Literature can only do as much as stimulate self-awareness and that is no trifle to begin with"³.

Nevertheless, when it comes to the actual "translation" of symbolic political images, it is important to note that Mircea Nedelciu doesn't simply „copy” or transfer as such (unaltered) a different, foreign *weltanschauung*, nor does he succumb to downright, unproblematic imitation. The mechanism he uses would be more properly described as thorough "decontextualisation" in the Derridean sense of the term⁴: that of transcendence (through re-writing or "translation") of the original context in which the original meaning was produced, achieving (a certain) distancing or *différance*⁵ able to produce new meaning (and new "traces" in the initial "text"). Such an effort of "decontextualisation" (and recontextualisation) affects the (stereo)typical models and representations supplied by the *hippie* culture he uses as cultural (hypo)text⁶, or more precisely the ones he actually needed in order to construct an adapted, re-located, ultimately efficient counter-cultural discourse. And a rather pertinent illustration of this premise (just like any other possible analysis concerning Nedelciu's dialogic cultural translation enterprises, in fact) is the comparative exploration of his dystopian discourse and its *topoi*.

Of course, dystopia with Nedelciu is primarily a direct reflection of the real (negative) world model he lives in and chooses to represent, that of Ceaușescu's totalitarian Romania. The rather covert, implied fictional form it takes is primarily a matter of self-preservation (of the author and his works, as well as his politically transgressive visions and message). However, another important factor in the (de- and re-) construction of *sixty-eight*-like imagery with Nedelciu is the supposed (secret) commonness of "code"⁷ between him and the intended reader as sole receiver of the (deep structure) message: in order to avoid censorship and/or punishment, the writer uses representations that were (or had been) available to the public

³ Mircea Nedelciu, „Nu cred în solitudinea absolută a celui care scrie”, interviu de Gabriela Hurezean, în *Scânteia tineretului. Supliment literar-artistic*, București, anul VIII, nr. 14 (341), sâmbătă, 9 aprilie 1988, p.3. Original fragment: “Până nu demult poziția mea de lucru presupunea că acțiunea de a scrie este un fel de antropogenie. Scopul scrisului ar fi transformarea omului, tehnicile și metodele de implicare a cititorului în operă și controlul efectelor asupra conștiințelor și afectivității. Nu-mi pare deloc rău că am «cercetat» în această direcție. Am aflat multe despre funcțiile de manipulare pe care arta le poate avea și care sunt adesea exploatare de forțe din afara literaturii. Am putut să observ și că arta poate întări sufletul și mintea împotriva manipularilor de tot felul. În ultima vreme cred cu tot mai multă convingere că totuși literatura este o căutare individuală de adevăr despre om, iar funcția asta „antropogenetică” este colaterală. Vreau să spun că omul este o minune a universului așa cum este el. Știe singur să se formeze și să reziste manipularii. Literatura poate, cel mult, să stimuleze autocunoașterea și asta nu e puțin lucru”. My translation, R.H.

⁴ See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Différance*, in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 17.

⁶ The concepts of "hypertext" and "hypertext" belong to Gérard Genette. See *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, University of Nebraska Press, 1997.

⁷ Roman Jakobson, *Closing statements: Linguistics and Poetics*, T.A. Sebeok, New-York, 1960.

during the short period of “ideological defrost”⁸ at the beginning of Ceaușescu’s regime – not by naming them, but rather by describing them in such a way as to be recognizable (decodable) not by the politically orthodox and/or by the (1980s rather rudimentary and superficial) representatives of censorship, but by the largest possible number of “ideal” readers, i.e. of readers (relatively or possibly) permeable to alternative cultural discourse. In order to reach the maximal range of such (possible) readers, Nedelciu uses every kind of element at hand: from genuinely pop culture *topoi* – such as fashion items (long hair, blue-jeans, rock t-shirts or accessories), musical and cinematographic references (“The Rolling Stones”, “Pink Floyd”, Antonioni, Pasolini) –, to literary *topoi* – such as those used mainly by the head writers of the *Beat* generation (recontextualized themselves by the ulterior *Sixties* subculture), like Ginsberg’s Moloch or Kerouac’s drifters –, and finally to highly theoretical (mainly neo-marxist) imagery – such as Foucault’s take on such ideas as Bentham’s *panopticon*⁹, heterotopia/“other spaces”¹⁰ or madness¹¹, Fernand Braudel’s viewpoint on the Margin¹², Fourier’s Phalansteries¹³ etc.

As elements in the macro-fictional mechanisms of Nedelciu’s literary project, some of these *topoi* are used in order to create the dystopian “world model”¹⁴ – or image of community – against which positive (alternative, generally individual) existential variants could be opposed. It is a pattern of representing corruption (in the most general sense of the term, i.e. degradation, dismantlement) generally corresponding to realistic fiction – and Nedelciu’s prose does have a (quasi- or neo-) realistic countenance to a certain extent. However, the realist cohesion of the fictional universe is often interrupted or disturbed by apparently fantastic inserts or backlashes – most of which, in reality, can be very well read (or interpreted) as poetical representations bearing political symbolism and dystopian (counter-cultural, critical) significance. And many of these representations are (again) intercultural and dialogic, as they relate to the political and socio-cultural imagery produced or metabolised by the Western Sixties.

One of the broadest “translated” dystopian representations is the Moloch: the “system” or the cultural (socio-political, axiological, moral) “establishment” described in monstrous, catastrophic or morbid terms. Of course, the original image in Ginsberg’s *Howl*¹⁵ (1956) was generally interpreted as a metaphor of capitalism perceived as a sort of totalitarian, super-structural terror. However, Nedelciu’s “de-contextualised” transposition functions in a duplicitous, apparently treacherous and/or contradictory way. On the one hand, the unwanted reader (i.e. the censor) is tricked into believing that the symbolism behind such Moloch-like

⁸ A period of relative liberalisation having occurred approximately between 1965 and 1971 in Romania.

⁹ See Michel Foucault, *A supraveghea și a pedepsi*, Editura „Paralela 45”, Pitești, 2005.

¹⁰ See Michel Foucault, *Altfel de spații* in *Theatrum Philosophicum*, Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de știință, 2001.

¹¹ See Michel Foucault, *Lumea e un mare azil. Studii despre putere*, Editura „Idea Design&Print”, Cluj-Napoca, 2005.

¹² See Fernand Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme: XV^e-XVIII^e siècle*, Éditions „Armand Colin”, Paris, 1967.

¹³ See Charles Fourier, *Design for Utopia: Selected Writings. Studies in the Libertarian and Utopian Tradition*, Schocken New York, 1971.

¹⁴ Caius Dobrescu, *Dea Munera: Despre analogie, agenție, glisare și incertitudine. O circumscriere tipologică a reprezentărilor literare ale corupției*, in Caius Dobrescu, Ovidiu Moceanu (eds.), *Dea munera: reprezentări asupra corupției în modernitatea intelectuală și literară românească*, Brașov, Editura Universității „Transilvania” din Brașov, Brașov, 2006, pp. 26-27.

¹⁵ Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems*, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1956.

representations is the original one (i.e. capitalism) and may not take offense – or in any case, the image can be defended as such if need be; on the other hand, the intended reader will (intuitively or not) understand that below the surface of the metaphor, an adapted meaning is suggested or conveyed. In other words, the intended receiver will recognise the original, radically critical ethical judgement present in the original discourse, but will associate it (or reassign it automatically) to what he or she notices in the immediate reality of his or her own existence, i.e. the dystopian, Moloch-like character of Romanian communism. The relocation of the original thus produces new, different meaning and implicitly opens a dialogue on the possibility of resemantising or reassigning the original “signifier” to another “signified”¹⁶ meaning. This kind of shift in the signified is meant to be decoded by the reader through judgements like “this description would suit communist totalitarianism better than American capitalism”, or through the broadening of the signifier’s descriptive possibilities to its proximal genre (“totalitarianism in general, be it capitalist or communist, might be essentially similar”). But let us see what Nedelciu’s “communist Moloch” looks like and how it is fictionalised in its Eastern European variant.

In the short story *8006 de la Obor la Dâlga* [8006 from Obor to Dâlga], published in 1979, the two young protagonists – Ovid Petreanu and Gioni Scarabeul – seem to perceive and acknowledge the invisible pressure of an inimical, super-structural entity they call “the monster”¹⁷. Presented in the story as an initial delirious phantasm of Gioni’s new roommate Ovid Petreanu, the faceless monster is a hallucination that ends up obsessing both of them, described as follows by Ovid:

“We will have to go on travelling across this plain in order to meet this monster we have to crush and with whom the reunion will take place in a cordial atmosphere. [...] the monster nestles everywhere, including on this table (a simple fiberboard table placed in their room in Regie student hostel) represented (on this table, that is) by a key and a garlic conch or, more precisely, by my tendency to take these objects for signs of that something or someone I call the monster. Everything must be reorganised, rebuilt from scratch, let’s be radical then [...]. You are not a monster, you are an enemy like any other, if I call you monster everything’s all right: I have found a name and a form for you, to my mind you are finite, you do possess a head and a tail, therefore I will get the better of you, I can even crush you. This way, look how easy it is for the cordiality adjective to be exposed, this qualifier determining the noun denominating the atmosphere, that is to say the air we breathe. This noun forever deprived of any active meaning. Calmly bearing to witness so many things”¹⁸.

¹⁶ The concepts of “signified” and “signifier” belong to Ferdinand de Saussure. Cited here from Ferdinand de Saussure, *Curs de lingvistică generală*, Editura „Polirom”, Iași, 1998.

¹⁷ Mircea Nedelciu, *8006 de la Obor la Dâlga*, vol. *Aventuri într-o curte interioară* (1979), in Mircea Nedelciu, *Proză scurtă*, Editura „Compania”, București, 2003, p.54.

¹⁸ Original fragment: “Pe această câmpie va trebui multă vreme să continuăm a merge, în întâmpinarea acestui monstru pe care trebuie să-l zdrobim și cu care întrevederea noastră va decurge într-o atmosferă cordială. [...] monstrul se află cuibărit pretutindeni, inclusiv pe această masă (e vorba de o masă simplă din p.f.l. care se află în camera lor din căminul studentesc Regie) reprezentat (pe această masă deci) printr-o cheie și o căpățână de usturoi sau, mai exact, prin tendința mea de a lua aceste obiecte drept semne a ceva sau a cuiva care este monstrul. Totul trebuie reorganizat, refăcut din temelii, să fim radicali deci [...]. Nu ești un monstru, ești un dușman ca toți alții, dacă eu te numesc monstru totul e în regulă: ți-am găsit o formă și un nume, în mintea mea ești o finitudine, ai o coadă și un cap, deci te voi învinge fără efort, te voi strivi chiar. Și atunci, iată cât de ușor iese la iveală calificativul de cordialitate care poate să apară pe lângă substantivul ce denumește atmosfera, adică

Moreover, the same (apparently) delirious Ovid justifies having revealed his secret knowledge of the existence of the monster to Gioni this way: “I acutely question his mental sanity. [...] It is impossible, I convince myself, for him, for Scarabeul to be sane, perfectly mentally sane. I would interpret his mental sanity as a sign of his ignorance. The most condemnable of all deeds”¹⁹ and gladly concludes that “The monsters will still persist, and not in the darkness this time, but in the newfound light of your mind”²⁰. Apparently diabolical, Ovid seems to be nevertheless very much respected and cared for by Gioni, who actually suffers a positive identity change by the end of the story (from a trickster and a gambler he becomes a university student and manages to find true love). The fable thus becomes ambiguous and seemingly incoherent – if the reader is unable to see through the apparent madness of Ovid’s (genuinely!) philosophical teachings.

The key simply lies, in fact, with the correct interpretation (or reinterpretation) of the “monster”. Starting from the description(s) cited above, there are certain attributes that hint to the politically symbolic essence of the metaphor: the so-called monster is something that artificially binds together the lock of keys and the garlic on the table (i.e. forced industrial, *panopticum*-like urbanism and respectively sheer, possibly superstitious, traditional/pre-modern ruralism); it is also an entity with no face and no stable individual incarnation (or no factual reality whatsoever), i.e. a cultural entity; it is spectrally²¹ omnipresent (just like Ginsberg’s Moloch or Orwell’s Big Brother): it’s on the table of the student hostel room, on the 8006 train – where it shows on the dismantled faces of the young peasants (commuters) become – like Gioni himself – industrial workers over night – and in Gioni’s nightmares after he suffers a terrible work accident at the factory, almost causing him to become blind. And most important of all: the monster relies on the so-called “cordiality” of this enmity, on the “calmness” with which people “bear to witness so many things”, on their “inactivity” and on the “ignorance” which safely prevents them from going insane – like Gioni and Ovid – when confronted to this unbearable “newfound light of the mind”. The ability of the majority to quietly abide and avoid “seeing” is actually considered morally condemnable by Ovid – a rather radical judgment that gains a pertinent, if burdensome ethical significance through reinterpretation. The implied “riddle” regarding the monster becomes quite readable from such a perspective, from which the entire fable starts to take shape and make sense. The metaphor of the “monster”, this “noun” to which the “cordiality adjective” so surprisingly relates to, a noun “denominating the atmosphere, that is to say the air we breathe” obviously refer to the regime, the totalitarian communist societal model (or cultural model, in the broad sense of the term) of the ‘70s and ‘80s and to the macro-community’s (cowardly) ability to tolerate it.

aerul în care trăim. Acest substantiv lipsit pentru totdeauna de vreo nuanță activă. Calm suportând sub privire atâtea lucruri”. Mircea Nedelciu, *8006 de la Obor la Dilga*, vol. *Aventuri într-o curte interioară* (1979), ed.cit., p.54. My translation, R.H.

¹⁹ Original fragment: “Îmi pun acut problema sănătății lui psihice. [...] Este imposibil, îmi spun, ca el, Scarabeul, să fie sănătos, perfect sănătos psihic. Sănătatea lui psihică ar fi pentru mine un semn al ignoranței lui. Cel mai condamnabil dintre fapte”. Mircea Nedelciu, *8006 de la Obor la Dilga*, vol. *Aventuri într-o curte interioară* (1979), in Mircea Nedelciu, *Proză scurtă* ed.cit., p.55. My translation, R.H.

²⁰ Original fragment: “Monștrii vor persista însă, și nu în întuneric ci în noua lumină a minții tale, de data aceasta”. *Ibidem*, p. 53. My translation, R.H.

²¹ In the Derridean sense of the term. See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Routledge, New York and London, 1994.

This interpretation of the “monster” is also hinted to in another key-story in Nedelciu’s literary project (a project forming an ensemble or a network of symbolic representations that should be read holistically): *Călătorie în vederea negației* [*A Journey Towards Denial*] published in 1979 and having the same Ovid Petreanu as a (sole) protagonist. Older now – having just graduated from university (where he studied Romanian literature) –, Ovid questions his own real potential contribution to society and concludes that the best attitude in his case is not participation (equalling regimentation and moral compromise), but “self-denial”, disappearance, escape, social auto-marginalization and/or (auto-)annihilation. It is, in fact, a decision in which he explicitly (and consciously) sees the (only possible) stand of an entire generation – his own²². Refusing his (forcefully) assigned job in a Danubian village (Topolog, department of Tulcea) and fleeing/ disappearing/ (apparently) committing suicide or meeting his death during a trip to the mountains (on Parângu Mare Peak), Ovid actually attempts to achieve the radical personal *tabula rasa* he was mentioning in 8006... and have an existential (and morally) fresh start: as he seemingly disappears on Parângu Mare Peak (never to be found again), he is presumed dead by those who look for him and are (significantly) unable to see that “a new trace – someone else’s” was actually starting right where Ovid’s old one stopped²³. Thus, “[o]f course nobody followed the new trace to Petrimanu, for instance (but what is Petrimanu, however? Petrimanu is a work colony on the roof of the mountain [...]), or Vidra (and what on Earth is Vidra? Another work colony [...]), to Voineasa, or in the small mountain villages nearby. Nobody actually went looking for him there”²⁴.

A rather overt (and courageous) motivation for this (again, apparently) unmotivated and awkward decision – an explanation which is very similar, in fact (and adds) to Ovid’s theory of the monster (obviously hinting in the meantime to it if the two stories are linked together) – is to be found in his musings about the “new”/ “modern” (insane) “order of things”. Here is Ovid’s justification, relying again on the metaphor of the invisible, “impersonal foe”²⁵ (and let us note that the highlighting of all underlined words in the fragment belongs to Nedelciu):

“The purpose of his journey is a denial. So there are journeys having denial as their ultimate purpose. Such journeys have existed since the dawn of time. Hannibal’s journey across the Alps, the elephants and all the rest had as their goal a denial, the annihilation of the adversary. The 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 wouldn’t he be able to do the same? In fact, a 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

²² See Mircea Nedelciu, *Călătorie în vederea negației*, vol. *Aventuri într-o curte interioară* (1979), in Mircea Nedelciu, *Proză scurtă* ed.cit., p.172.

²³ Original fragment: “o urmă nouă, a altcuiva”. *Ibidem*, p.174. My translation, R.H.

²⁴ Original fragment: “Bineînțeles că, după urma cea nouă, nimeni n-a mers la Petrimanu, spre exemplu (dar ce e la Petrimanu? Petrimanu e o colonie muncitorească în creierii munților. [...]), sau la Vidra (dar la Vidra ce e? O altă colonie muncitorească [...]), la Voineasa sau în satele mici de munte. Acolo nu l-a căutat nimeni”. Mircea Nedelciu, *ibidem*, p.174. My translation, R.H.

²⁵ Caius Dobrescu significantly uses the same metaphoric term describing the regime in his book of academic essays *Inamicul impersonal*, ed.cit.

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”²⁶.

There is, of course, the primary sense of the “denial” as an official (indeed, rather popular) paper specific to the “Ceaușescu era”, a paper confirming that a person is unable to take over a (forcefully) assigned work placement (such as the work placements nationally assigned to university graduates). But then again, obviously, the “modern” order of things, “denying” (i.e. annihilating, just like Ginsberg’s all-present Moloch) all the personal attributes or qualities of the individual with socially creative potential, this “modernity” acting like an invisible enemy is (again) the totalitarian regime.

This particular interpretation is ultimately (and definitively, overtly) de-conspired by Nedelciu as an answer to (all former such) riddle(s) in the novel *Zodia scafandrului* [*Under the Diver’s Sign*], his unfinished masterpiece posthumously published in 2000. Unequivocal phrases and explanations, retrospectively exposing most of the allusions recurrently (and symbolically) present in his earlier stories are to be found in this last novel (started before 1990 and continued after) that could have never been present (as such) before the fall of the Eastern Bloc – or at least not if the book was to be published and reach its ideal reader. Here are some fragments in which the narrative voice refers to the regime as “monster”/ “demon”:

“the faceless demon ruling over all Romanians in those years, exerting, that is, a pressure upon them, seemed to be a demon who assumed, whoever you were, that you were a woman, that you were gay – to make a long story short, he assumed you couldn’t possibly be a man. How else could it commit such abuse while still demanding to be admired, praised, adored, and applauded?”²⁷;

or, again, on the next page:

“So the dictatorship – and there is no other word that could more accurately describe the state of things at that time – first makes sure by all means that all possible fighters are discouraged,

²⁶ Original fragment: “Scopul călătoriei sale este negația. Există deci călătorii care au ca scop o negație. Astfel de călătorii au existat din cele mai vechi timpuri. Călătoria lui Hanibal peste Alpi, elefanții și toate celelalte aveau ca scop o negație, o aneantizare a adversarului. Timpurile moderne au evoluat și au schimbat ceva în ordinea lucrurilor. Călătoria lui Ovid Petreanu cu *Antonov 24* peste Dunăre are ca scop **propria** negație [s.a., M.N.]. Nu există adversar, dar există negație. Nu e nimic ciudat în asta, totul este în ordinea **modernă** [s.a., M.N.] a lucrurilor. Mai mulți prieteni de-ai lui Ovid au și reușit acum un an să obțină, în urma unei călătorii asemănătoare, o negație. De ce n-ar obține-o și el? De altfel, o probă clară că totul este normal în această călătorie este și faptul că, dacă cel care o întreprinde nu obține negația, el se consideră înfrânt. Iar negația trebuie să fie totală, absolută. [...] De asta are nevoie, de o negație cât mai concludentă și, dacă se poate, scrisă pe o bucată de hârtie cu antet și ștampilă. Studiile sale, încheiate cu media 9,24, trebuiesc negate. Orice calitate a sa, pedagogică sau de alt fel, trebuie, cel puțin pentru o scurtă perioadă de timp, să fie negate”. Mircea Nedelciu, *Călătorie în vederea negației*, ed.cit, p.165. My translation, R.H.

²⁷ Original fragment: “[...] demonul fără chip, care-i domina în acei ani pe toți românii, exercita deci o presiune asupra lor părea, să fie un demon care-și închipuia despre tine, oricine ai fi fost, că ești femeie, că ești homosexual – pe scurt, că nu ești bărbat. altfel cum și-ar fi permis toate abuzurile pretinzând în același timp să fie admirat, lăudat adulat, aplaudat?”. Mircea Nedelciu, *Zodia scafandrului*, București, Compania, 2000, p. 67. My translation, R.H.

then closes the frontiers and no one is allowed to escape. During the next phase, the individuals become soft, inhibited and lethargic in the grip of the little genialoid monster”²⁸.

In the same line of thought and using the same metaphor, one of the central characters in the novel – Zare Popescu, who was also one of the three heroes (and somewhat of a *porte-parole*) in Nedelciu’s first novel, *Zmeura de câmpie* [*Plain Strawberries*], published in 1984) –, confesses to his friend Diogene Sava (the protagonist in *Zodia...*):

“We’re nothing but mere worms, Mr Dio, if we find it natural to hurry and rat about some joke made by one or the other of our saloon-mates to the “Securitate”, hoping that we would gain the master’s benevolence, a preferment, a trip or a raise. What can one expect from such a people? Everything’s gone to hell! And this has been so from the day following that 23rd August, when we started this Fanariot self-adjustment to the occupational regime. If we had acted differently back then, maybe we could have achieved something against it, don’t you think?”²⁹.

Similar or equivalent imagery also haunts Diogene’s mind: “the incarnation of Fright”³⁰, for instance, a faceless and ambiguous anguish constantly reminding Dio about “the world’s state of folly”³¹, a state in which “the world had gone crazy, it was abnormal” and then, “as a logical deduction”, “being «different»” as an individual “actually meant being normal”³². Another “illness” frequently associated with community under the Romanian communist totalitarianism is (generalized) amnesia (with the older generation of the World War II fighters) in *Zmeura de câmpie*, where all the elders of rural communities seem to live exclusively in their scattered memories of the past – as if history had stopped during or before the war – or go crazy.

It is also important to note that all the main (allegorically) critical vocabulary connecting to the idea of the regime as Moloch are “translations” themselves. Andrada Fătu Tutoveanu notices, in a study on the imaginary of the Western “Sixties” movement, that such morbid descriptors of society like “illness”, “abnormality”, “folly” are proper to the *weltanschauung* of the (Western) sixty-eighters³³; Ștefan Borbely, Adrian Matus and the same

²⁸ Original fragment: “Dictatura deci – și nu există alt cuvânt mai precis pentru starea din acea vreme – își ia mai întâi toate măsurile pentru a-i descuraja pe luptători, închide apoi granițele și nu lasă pe nimeni să fugă. În faza imediat următoare, indivizii cad moi, inhibați și letargici în gheara micului monstru genialoid”. *Ibidem*, pp.67-68. My translation, R.H.

²⁹ Original fragment: “Suntem niște viermi, dom’ Dio, dacă ni se pare normal să dăm fuga la Secu și să povestim orice banc spus de un coleg în cârciumă în speranța că vom beneficia în schimb de o bunăvoință a monstrului, de o avansare, de o excursie, de o mărire de salariu. Ce să mai aștepți de la un astfel de popor? S-a dus dracului totul! Și asta de multă vreme, din prima zi de după 23 August, am început această adaptare fanariotă la regimul de ocupație. Atunci, dacă n-am fi fost așa, încă s-ar mai fi putut face ceva, nu crezi?”. *Ibidem*, p.126. My translation, R.H.

³⁰ Original term: “făptura Spaimei”. *Ibidem*, p.143. My translation, R.H.

³¹ Original term: “starea de raznă a lumii”. *Ibidem*, p.61. My translation, R.H.

³² Original fragment: „a fi «altfel» înseamnă, de fapt, a fi normal. Și asta ca o deducție logică: pentru că lumea toată o luase razna, era anormală”. *Ibidem*, p.60. My translation, R.H.

³³ Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu, „Generația Beat: halucinogene, cultură și Contracultură”, în *Vatra*, Serie nouă, Anul XLII, octombrie-noiembrie 2012, nr. 10-11(499-500): „Contracultura anilor ’60 și reflexele sale”, 2012, pp. 48-55.

Andrada Fătu Tutoveanu, in their 2012 articles concerning the symbolic images of the 1960s³⁴, as well as Terry H. Anderson³⁵ also talk about emasculation, cowardice (see, for instance, the *topos* of the father as “chicken”), about indifference and disengagement (of the generation of the parents in relation to the generation of the “sons”, i.e. the so-called “Generation X”) and about political quietism as typical descriptors, in the “sixty-eighters” vocabulary, of the former generation – the generation of World War II – who are, from the youngsters’ point of view, “to blame” for being conformists, for accepting the “social lie” of the American dream and for the “generation gap” desolidarising society against the system.

All these images are present in the minds of Nedelciu’s typical protagonists as well, as they are, in more than one way, a sort of Eastern *hippies* themselves. The idea of the father’s „loss of dignity”, or of his morally compromising (usually corrupt) behaviour, the parents’ conformity and seemingly autistic acceptance of the communist establishment are mercilessly judged by such key-protagonists as Pictoru, Zare Popescu or Alexandru Daldea as being false:

“And still, in what way could you actually criticise your parents? They are still leading their bourgeois little old lives. They are still pretending not to notice all the change. And what can you do? How can you get even? By running away from them and going to live with the boys who were raised in orphanages and who are indeed accustomed to the idea of leading collective lives – this is the only way. I cannot see any other”³⁶.

In other cases, they are found “guilty” of not having stopped the communist instauration, as with Zare’s explicit theory of the “guilt of the former generation”³⁷.

The possible examples in Nedelciu’s short stories and novels are countless. A sort of communist-style *generation gap* thus generally separates the (relatively) emancipated and rebellious sons from their fathers. The restoration of the youngsters’ male identity is being achieved the same way as with their Western congeners: through what Oana Demeter would call “sexistentialism”³⁸ (with a term referring to the effects of the Sixties “sexual revolution”), i.e. through an erotic behaviour exhibiting quantitative “sexual performance”, “sexual frenzy” and “lack of inhibition”³⁹.

The most sensitive, perceptive and usually educated among Nedelciu’s typical protagonists (like Pictoru, Ovid Petreanu, Alexandru Daldea, Americanu) also grasp the tragedy lurking behind this failure to communicate with the Other – with the Majority, with

³⁴ Ștefan Borbely, „Rebel Without a Cause”, în *Vatra*, Serie nouă, Anul XLII, octombrie-noiemrie 2012, nr. 10-11 (499-500): „Contracultura anilor ’60 și reflexele sale”, pp. 87-91; Adrian Matus, „Contextul istoric și social al Contraculturii americane”, în *Vatra*, Serie nouă, Anul XLII, octombrie-noiemrie 2012, nr. 10-11 (499-500): „Contracultura anilor ’60 și reflexele sale”, pp.41-48; Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu, *op.cit.*

³⁵ See Terry H. Anderson, *The Sixties*, (3rd edition), Pearson Longman, New York, 2007, 120-121 *et al.*

³⁶ Original fragment: “Și totuși, în ce fel ai putea să-ți critici părinții? Ei încă mai duc un trai mic-burghez. Ei încă se prefac că nu știi de multele schimbări. Iar tu ce poți face? Cum te poți răzbuna? Numai așa, plecând de la ei și trăind cu băieții de la casele de copii, crescuți în orfelinate, deprinși din vreme cu ideea și cu viața de colectiv. Altfel nu văd cum”. Mircea Nedelciu, *Aventuri într-o curte interioară*, vol. *Aventuri într-o curte interioară* (1979), în Mircea Nedelciu, *Proză scurtă*, ed.cit, pp.22-23. My translation, R.H.

³⁷ Original term: “teoria [...] vinovăției generației anterioare”. Mircea Nedelciu, *Zodia...*, ed. cit., p. 126.

³⁸ Demeter, Oana, «*Sexistentialism*» sau *câte ceva despre existențialismul hip*, in *Vatra*, Serie nouă, Anul XLII, octombrie-noiemrie 2012, nr. 10-11 (499-500): „Contracultura anilor ’60 și reflexele sale”, pp. 95-106.

³⁹ All three terms belong to Nedelciu. Original concepts: “performanță sexuală”, “frenzie sexuală”, “dezinhibare”. In *Zodia*, ed.cit, pp. 62, 72, 68.

one's own community – impersonated in the Father. Perhaps the clearest in this sense is Pictoru's refrain about de-solidarisation and the fracture isolating the "moral identity" of the individual and that of the group⁴⁰ in *Aventuri într-o curte interioară* [*Adventures in an Interior Courtyard*], his first fictional appearance⁴¹. As Pictoru decides to run away from home (to become a bastard son) at the age of eighteen – i.e. the very moment he reaches the age of majority – Pictoru obsessively repeats (and hurtfully experiences) this observation: "Nobody believes in a common language anymore"⁴². The actual "imagined community" made out of common visions and sets of values⁴³ lying behind any functional, sane real-life societal model – no longer exists; authentic communication is broken and social collaboration – impossible. Community thus becomes the "monster", the "Moloch", the faceless demon itself: one against which individual or marginal de-solidarisation seems to be the only moral gesture possible (while avoiding corporal punishment and/or physical annihilation).

It is also relevant to notice two other details here. The first would be that *Aventuri...* is Nedelciu's inaugural story: it actually opens his first volume of short stories (published in 1979) and gives it its name – a probably "well-controlled", meaningful "coincidence"⁴⁴. The second is that the group of young orphans in the story (the one Pictoru is just planning to join) feels extremely interested in the events of 1968 in France, and – as the first person narrator covertly, but legibly confesses – they feel affiliated to their western congeners' actions and way of thinking:

"It's a genuinely wonderful thing for us that we happened to reached the age on majority and were given the right to vote in 1968 A.D. [...] it was precisely then that in Paris, the ideas of a certain H.Marcuse, like some other things that cannot be blamed, had gotten the Sorboniqueurs out on the streets and made them write on the walls. [...] The world was proving to be less rectangular than we had ever imagined"⁴⁵.

Nedelciu thus perceives (existentially and subjectively, too) the subtle moral identity transfer (or dialogue) between the Romanian and the Western "X Generation(s)". In addition to that, he also fictionally problematizes and exploits the ideological thinking behind the *hippie* movements of the "Sixties".

We have seen that society as macro-community is represented as an "Eastern Moloch" – i.e. by means of a (morally) negatively connotated, destructive communautary "essential identity"

⁴⁰ As defined by Allan Montefiore in Monique Canto-Sperber, *Dictionnaire d'éthique et de philosophie morale*, 4^e édition, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2004, art. „Identité morale”.

⁴¹ Pictoru will afterwards return in other short stories such as *O excursie la camp* [*A trip in the Fileds*] (1979) or *Efectul de ecou controlat* [*The Well-Controlled Echo effect*] (1981).

⁴² Original fragment: "Nimeni nu mai crede într-o limbă comună". Mircea Nedelciu, *Aventuri...*, ed.cit., pp. 21, 25 et al. My translation, R.H.

⁴³ The concept of "imagined community" belongs to Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso, London, 1983.

⁴⁴I am alluding to the short story *Efectul de ecou controlat* [*The Well-Controlled Echo Effect*] in Nedelcius second, homonymous volume of short stories published in 1981 – featuring Pictoru again, but as a secondary character, and to Zare Popescu's obsession about the meaning of any coincidence in *Zmeura de câmpie*.

⁴⁵ Original fragment: "tocmai atunci la Paris ideile unui anume H. Marcuse, ca și alte lucruri pe care nu se poate da vina, îi scosese pe sorboniști în stradă și-i făcuseră să scrie pe ziduri. [...] Lumea se dovedea mai puțin rectangulară decât o crezusem până atunci". Mircea Nedelciu, *Aventuri într-o curte interioară*, vol. *Aventuri într-o curte interioară* (1979), in Mircea Nedelciu, *Proză scurtă*, ed.cit, pp.30-31. My translation, R.H.

often described by means of the sixty-eighties' ideologised imaginary vocabulary of "illness" and "folly". Simultaneously, smaller, local work colonies or rural communities usually repeat the model of (and are characterised in) neo-Marxist theoretical metaphors. Carceral, "heterotopic" places and settlements such as student hostels, orphanages, prisons, hospitals, experimental and meteorological stations (re)compose a general *panopticum*-like perception of anthropological space. Community under communist totalitarianism is thus mainly perceived as moral dystopia. The occasional utopian (alternative) representations of community – like the work colonies mentioned in *Călătorie în vederea negației* or the Fourierist phalanstery in *Tratament fabulatoriu* – are marginal and transgressive fictional community constructions that have (recognizable) *hippie* profiles and structures and are mainly employed by Nedelciu in order to emphasise the ethical negativity of the dystopian, real-life communitary models they oppose.

Thus, the (relatively) utopian, positive representations responding to the macro-dystopian structure are in their turn fictionally described through imaginary "translations" or "decontextualisations" of the Western "Sixties" repertoire; moreover, they carry the original, fundamental counter-cultural message of the "Sixties" as well (and are meant to convey it to the Romanian reader) – a message mainly (and ultimately) referring to the possible ethical resistance of the citizen to political abuse through what the Western sixty-eighters called (via Thoreau) "civil disobedience"⁴⁶. It is in fact a message trying to re-instate the person as "locus of [full ethical] responsibility"⁴⁷, as opposed to the communist representation of society/community as being the origin of all morality. While the essential moral identity of the group is perceived as corrupted and oppressive, individual or marginal non-conformity, disengagement, refusal of appurtenance become positive. This is a general system of reversed representations of the world, based on the logical principle of asserting by double negation: against the essentially dystopian (or antagonistic) societal / macro-communitary model, marginal transgression, opposition, refusal and social negativity in general form an assertive, positive counter-point.

This is in fact a literary mechanism by means of which Nedelciu actually fictionally enacts what sociologist André Petiat calls the "secret" "reversibility" of the symbolic social value system⁴⁸, i.e. the possibility of the person (citizen) to negotiate/ change/ assume or deny the ethical representations of his or her community. In this sense, Nedelciu's "resistants" choose to "secretly" refuse, in their inner world, the value system (i.e. the essential identity) of the community they belong to (a community that has become aggressive and tyrannical). In compensation, they (mentally/ intellectually) attempt to join another cultural community, one to which they feel closer to (or attracted to) in the given context: the *hippie* culture, an (other) "imagined community" perceived as a supra-national communion of Marginals, of the disinherited and the oppressed. Identity definition thus becomes with Nedelciu a properly dialogic phenomenon, whose intercultural character is strengthened by the civilizational era of the media, the so-called "Marconi era"⁴⁹: ideas cannot be stopped from circulating (not even

⁴⁶ Henry David Thoreau, *Resistance to Civil Government/Civil Disobedience*, 1849, disponibil online la adresa <http://thoreau.eserver.org/civil.html> (9.05.2015).

⁴⁷ See Allan Montefiore in Monique Canto-Sperber, *op.cit.*, „Les Personnes”, pp.883-885.

⁴⁸ See André Petiat, *Secret și forme sociale*, trad. Dana Lungu și Dan Lungu, Editura „Polirom”, Iași, 2003, p. 139.

⁴⁹ The concept belongs to Marshall McLuhan, in *Galaxia Gutenberg: omul și era tiparului*, trad. Luiza și Petre Năvodaru, Editura Politică, București, 1975. McLuhan's work is recurrently cited or referred to in Nedelciu's fiction and theoretical standpoints.

from penetrating the enclosures of the totalitarian state), and the idea of society is being (re)defined – and therefore fictionalised – as an “imagined community” of dialogue, of cultural, symbolic exchanges, one for which the flexibility of its axiological basic identity, constant adaptation to contextual issues, tolerance and attention to difference are vital.

However, Nedelciu’s utopian and dystopian imagery stands for more than an unproblematic shift from one “imagined community” (the societal macro-group) to another (the trans-national, anti-establishment hyper-group). The “good” and the “evil” are and are not the same for the Westerners and the Eastern-Europeans: there is oppression, intolerance, perhaps, with both “establishments” – but their Western variants are lighter, more liberal and rather right-wing based models, while the Romanian one is a totalitarian, dictatorial, nationally traditional and left-winged regime; there is possible alternative marginality in both systems, but rebellion is not as simple or probable with the “Eastern” *hippies* as it is with their original, Western model. A certain bifocal⁵⁰ identity of the Margin, as well as a bifocal symbolic significance of the dystopian representations of community, imposed by the context, are always present in Nedelciu’s “translations” of such symbolic content, generating new meaning as well as a direct and pertinent participation to the intercultural dialogue they engage.

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⁵⁰ Dan Țăranu, *Toposul marginalității în romanul românesc. Dimensiuni ale marginalității*, Muzeul Literaturii Române, București, 2013.

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