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Oneness and Otherness in Florin Manolescu's Romanian-German Diary – *Cu ochii pe mine / Watching myself*

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Abstract

Florin Manolescu's diary published in 2010, *Cu ochii pe mine / Watching myself*, is representative for the post-totalitarian Eastern traveler to the West as it can be defined as a memoir writing coping with the great totalitarian History and its autobiographical fictionalization instrumented by *the uprooted* authorial mask. The conflictive relationship between oneness and otherness lies at the core of the diarist narrative, focusing now on identity re-negotiation as the Romanian writer experiences the Western adventure during his stay in Germany.

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After the fall of the totalitarian regimes, the 'peripheral' literature from Eastern Europe experiences a *re-identification* process by use of the mediating confessing discourses which, under the diarist formula, convey a special type of *lived History* now re-written by the authors who have confronted the West in the post-totalitarian age. It is the case of the Romanian writers who have left the communist enclave after December 1989 and 'lived the European dream' embedded into a self-reflexive narrative. Through the autobiographical writing, they relate to the totalitarian epoch carried out by their own personal memory as well as by the memory of the Text itself, thus making up the interiorized facet of the Great history now re-lived within the writing act. These types of texts are symptomatic for the need of overpassing the complex of *the dominated / tortured* marking the literary productions emerging from the ex-communist cultures. The concept of *cultural frontier*, as Monica Spiridon points out, defines an 'elementary spatial structure, serving as geopolitical discontinuity and as marker, landmark, operating in three registers: real, symbolic and imaginary' (our translation) (Spiridon, 2006). The diarist writing functions as an interface of inter-mingling cultural frontiers, the writer finding himself caught between two different fictionalised projections - the native culture displaying traces of Memory empowerment (the ghost of the omnipotent ideological Centre) and the newly-experienced Western culture which generates identity-focused re-definition. Thus, the

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Romanian post-totalitarian diary displays the characteristic features of *hybridization* and *cultural de-spacing* (as it is convergent to the contemporary transcultural search of otherness as cultural difference), of 'cultural decentralization and identity palimpsest' mediated by 'hybridizing migrational practices' (see Jésus Martin-Barbero, 2009). Thus, the approach on identity reconstruction mediated by memoir writings in which the ego seen as *multiple identity* (see Neumann, 2001) lies at the core of self-legitimizing fictions represents the most suitable reading grid applied to the Romanian post-totalitarian diaries speaking about the inherent mechanisms of reflecting identity multiplicity anchored in experiencing *foreignness* as alterity, about the space of *self-recognition* in relation to the Other. Carrying out ego-graphic traits within the identity discourses which invalidate the Eurocentric impact of personal experience facing the cultural adherence to 'the other world' in favour of the transnational opening to cultural otherness, the memoir writing of the post-totalitarian Romanian literature re-shapes the status of the (post)exiled who plays the most important role in the *egocentric narrative* which uses scriptural mechanisms of autofictionalization and self-delusion. Within these specific types of discourse, the issue of identity is called to provide solutions for the present complex situations that appeared as a direct consequence of the disequilibrium occurred within the traditional relation between the Centre and Margin, the periphery rightfully claiming an equal status, on almost all levels, with the one of the previous nucleus of power. Counterbalancing the identity-cultural illusions (as the ones defined by Jean-François Bayart in his book, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*), the Romanian Victor Neumann (in his study *Perspective comparative asupra filozofiei multiculturale / Comparative Perspectives on Multicultural Philosophy*, published in 2001) proposes, the concept of *multiple identity*, perceived as 'a flexible concept regarding the identity of the person and of the groups', suitable to capture the identity disarticulations experienced by those who have two or more cultural roots or by the persons who 'being born while passing from one culture to another are confronted with all kinds of uncertainties, thus, risking to live in a state of psychological discomfort created by the supposedly cultural identities.' (our translation) (Neumann, 2001) This concept can be re-shaped when approaching the Romanian memoir writing published after December 1989, as it represents the basic status of the Eastern traveller caught between two worlds (the East and the West) and grasps the inner polymorphous changes of the self as the ex-totalitarian captive begins his identity quest within the larger transcultural frame (see Mary Louise Pratt, 1993, Alina Crihana, 2013 and Simona Antofi, 2013). If identity emerges from the process of negotiating the image of self in relation to both the constructed images of others and the mirror-type representation the others have of the individual who defines itself, the diarist autobiographical narrative represents an *identity option* which reflects both the matters of trans-culturality and restitutive memory (because the reading of the present presupposes an hermeneutical operation whose purpose is to render meaning to History and to make it accessible).

These theoretical premises lie at the basis of our analysis focusing Florin Manolescu's diary, *Cu ochii pe mine / Watching myself*, published in 2010 and conveying the experience of *the uprooted* and its inner des / re-identification forms during 1995 in Germany. His teaching activity of 15 years at Ruhr University represents the starting point of the identity adventure in which East and West are intermingling counter-parts guiding the internal quest for identity, Florin Manolescu's case being representative for the Romanian writers who migrated after 1989 and converted their stored creative energy and dissatisfactions gathered in their native country in compensating narrative representations of the self. From this standpoint, Ricoeur's *narrative identity* may be brought into discussion, as it successfully reunites the identity transformations suffered by a certain person's self image, and the frame narrative structure which allows a character, between an initial and a final situation, to follow a path of successive (re)construction or (re)constructions. In this way, *the life story of the 'migrant'*—considering a character to be a narrative category which performs actions – overlaps the narrative of the self who makes a confession and, by doing so, he constantly brings into discussion his self image. In other words, the *narrative identity* produced by a confessional writing is born in the interval between the *idem* pole and the ulterior becoming of the *ipse* pole. (Paul Ricoeur, 1990). The meta-history (the fictionalisation of History) and the historisation of fiction ('the reality effect') or, in other words, the permanent vascillation between the great and small personal history become narrative strategies of fictional resistance against the totalitarian memory of the communist past. These 'narrative configurations' (Ricoeur) are the covert stages involving identity game, as 'un individu éprouve, de temps à autre, le besoin de récapituler son existence, de raconter sa vie, de lui donner une cohérence: jeu entre la *distentio* et l'*intentio* de l'esprit partagé entre mémoire, attention et attente, pour reprendre les termes augustinien commentés par Ricoeur, ou, plus simplement, entre la *discordance* des temps singuliers et la *concordance* attendue de leur réconciliation dans des récits à plusieurs voix.' (Augé, 1998: 60) The Romanian migrant to Germany writes down his identity-focused fiction, legitimating his quest / inner toutments as 'toute *image de soi* que propose le sujet est

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