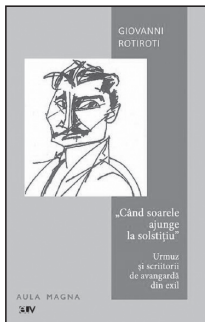


Giovanni Rotiroti,  
 „Când soarele  
 ajunge la solstițiu” –  
 Urmuz și scriitorii  
 de avangardă din exil,  
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## INADEQUACY ON THE CENTURY'S SCENE

The twentieth century's reevaluation of our relationship with language and symbolic representation did not create forms or anti-forms of expression that were just instruments in the hands of artists foreshadowing an ideology's outcomes or resisting the pressures of their time. The multi-layered crisis of history, imaginary and language was not staged "in" art. It was elaborately lived and felt though the particular incarnated dislocations of the individual self. There are many hermeneutical approaches which divert our attention away from this entanglement of individual alienation or pain and an artistic legacy that cannot bear witness to the refractory mutilation of the self. Giovanni Rotiroti's book, "*Când soarele ajunge la solstițiu*" – *Urmuz și scriitorii de avangardă din exil*, about the historically divergent forces and drives behind the surrealist legacy in the broader Romanian landscape, manages to conduct a different type of search for the human refractory at the core of Urmuz's works. The long and short distances Rotiroti sews between the individual self, history and writing display an interesting, complex inter-subjective system inside which the surrealists' precursor's "face" is painted with outlasting pieces and traces.

Urmuz's texts can be addressed using psychoanalytical concepts, post-structuralist ideas, inter-textual analysis, etc. Rotiroti's book integrates a variety of perspectives, situating Urmuz in-between the possibility of reading his writing as a political act or as the limit of individual destiny inside history. Urmuz develops a chain of signifiers that is made up of cultural

rests, symbolic remains of discourses and out-of-joint desires conveying the revolutionary language of a future generation that lived at the intersection of truth's phantasms and nonsense's glued reality. In his book, Rotiroti reassesses this language from the point of view of what latter on Gilles Deleuze would name "the production of the unconscious." When analyzing the works of Kafka through the concept of "minor literature," Deleuze notices that art's undermining means of expression in relation to the dominant culture are not declarative and manifested, but instead they are inbuilt and internalized, turning the geography of the text into a rhizome. A "minor literature" is understood as a text that functions by turning individualities into collectivities, intensifying or neutralizing distinctions or building the infrastructure of a mechanical desire that is always hijacked. These ideas also apply to the works of Urmuz, in which language does not reflect the depths of hermeneutics, but the flat surface of coexistence and dissimulation.

Our half-realities cannot be completely processed by a language that can only ethically disengage with the usual structures of meaning that fall prey to ideology. Given the historical background in Romania and the antisemitic, right-wing orientation of some of Urmuz's contemporaries, one of the ethical responses is to find a different way of inhabiting language, overthrowing the usual relationship between signifier and signified. As Corin Braga observes in his study, Urmuz's creative method relies on "a deliberate semiotic amnesia" (Corin Braga, *Psihobiografii*, Polirom, Iași, 2011, p. 32) which makes it impossible to distinguish between the signifier and the

signified. Thus, as Braga shows, Urmuz's allegories should not simply be read in connection to their capacity of denouncing the world, but they should be viewed as cathartic and regressive stagings of the world's misery inside the escapist shelter of a fairy-tale. This interpretation helps us understand Urmuz's texts as a battlefield of symbolic reflexes, cut off from reality so that they can witness its ruin from the point of view of an infantile sarcastic reconstruction. Rotiroti also asks us to build a different way of reading Urmuz, leaving aside certain available interpretations and instead facing "the brute force of his writing" (Giovanni Rotiroti, „*Când soarele ajunge la solstițiu*" – *Urmuz și scriitorii de avangardă din exil*, Editura Universității de Vest, Timișoara, 2020, p. 138). Both readings become part of the ethics of a sealed discourse that keeps its reader at the level of a demystifying and discomforting zone of inadequacy and inhuman excess.

The way in which Alain Badiou understands the avant-gardes, in his book *The Century*, might shed some light on how the twentieth century's "passion for the real" also functions in Urmuz's texts. For Badiou, the century overturns mimesis, destroying representation in its attempt to find the real in the blanks and voids of our symbolic reality. Artistic forms are placed "at the edge of the void" and excess is necessary in order to experience the transmutation of signs that no longer fit into reality. The type of anti-representational "real" that Urmuz explores is the raw, undigested and intimate bare mechanism of desire that breaks behavior into automatic pieces laying bare the relationship between intentions and the way in which they are socially symbolized. Objective reality can

only be staged through the inter-play of surface effects which displace the comfortable place of phantasms as they also challenge the uninhabitable structures of language. What Badiou calls the “inhuman at the core of the human” becomes visible as the lines between the human and non-human shapes of our drives, affects, power relations, etc. are not so clear anymore. Thus, the real, in Urmuz’s texts, is experienced also as an impossibility of drawing subjective and inter-human limits inside our conventional cultural and symbolic geography that is seen as a linguistic dissimulation of phantasm.

Rotiroti takes into account the varied interpretations surrounding Urmuz texts and, at the same time, his book re-arranges the complex, puzzle-finding new ways of integrating Urmuz’s literary gestures into the larger picture of avant-garde negativism throughout the twentieth century. What makes Rotiroti’s approach interesting is the effort to understand Urmuz’s writing not just through the lenses of nihilism and contempt in relation to the human condition or in regard to historical context. Urmuz’s “cruelty” is also seen as an act of assuming pain from inside a psychological life that does not deny the complex spectrum of human emotions (anger, humiliation, anguish, etc.). Following Terry Eagleton’s interpretation of the functions of humour, Rotiroti emphasizes that Urmuz’s laughter or sarcasm is not the denial of pain but the actual possibility of experiencing it outside the traditional categories of witnessing trauma. Language is no longer bearing witness to the inner subjective world, but it becomes an effective means of performing desire, violence or the will to power. Through psychoanalytical lenses,

Rotiroti interprets Urmuz’s texts as a *mis en scene* of “the endless dialectics of desire” (*Ibid.*, p. 88.) or “the desire for the other’s desire.” This particular understanding of desire is also linked to “a void in the structure of meaning— a void that is not a deficiency, but virtually the opposite, an absolute condition of meaning” (Charles Shepherdson, *Lacan and the Limits of Language*, Fordham University Press, New York, p. 3). Urmuz’s texts expose this central void by a different way of investing reference and by creating characters that perform the body through its incarnation of lack. “The unlimited free play of the signifier,” as Derrida shows, is also created around the empty place of a lacking center which generates the inter-play of meaning as a desire for a specified center. The annulment of the “center” in Urmuz’s text and the undermining of the oedipal desire are seen as forging the path of a distinct alphabet that opposes the right-wing extremism in Romania with a literary extremism.

In Urmuz’s texts, the act of knowing or observing the world is no longer a privileged power position outside subjective desire or delirium. That is why the intra-textual gaze upon the world is not embedded into an extra-textual perspective that guarantees representational coherence. There is an autonomous reassembling of the limit and purpose of words in the self-excluded dimension of writing as a revolutionary and emancipatory act. We can no longer talk about a possibility of knowing the world or naming the event, but only about the ethical need of a constant repositioning inside the symbolic order, through rest and excess. As Rotiroti argues, Urmuz’s characters are an embodiment of inhuman excess that reflects “the inadequacy of desire.”

They are also seen as a simulation of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic and the mutually inter-subjective impossible recognition. The struggle for recognition itself seems to be one of the main topics in Urmuz's text, where "empty" characters end up consuming each other as their identities are re-structured through failed inter-human redemptive acts. The subject in the text is not an inner voice, but, as Rotiroti argues following Marin Mincu's interpretation, the writing "self" becomes a disappearing subject. The sacrificed subjectivity in Urmuz's text, which cannot accommodate inner depth or identity, generates a different type of scattered knowledge that can be trans-formative and revolutionary (Giovanni Rotiroti, *op. cit.*, p. 172). Moreover, the always incomplete amorphous perspective does not create (for the reader) any piece of solid ground, forcing us to be constantly in the midst of Action, falling in-between interpretations and experiencing the intensity of displacement:

To produce an unknown intensity against a backdrop of suffering, through the always improbable intersection of a formula and an instant: this was the century's desire. Which explains why, despite its multifaceted cruelty, it managed – through its artists, scientists, militants and lovers – to be Action itself. (Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. By Alberto Toscano, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2007, p. 147)

Rotiroti's book also paints the complex picture of the counter-ideological backstage of a distinct relation with the possibility of understanding the act of writing and with the displaced position of

the subject in relation to representation, which emerged in the Interwar period and was inherited, negotiated and filtered throughout the entire century, becoming more than an artistic statement. This way, Rotiroti analyzes Urmuz inside this broader historical and inter-textual dimension which unearths the direct and indirect dialogue between Kafka, Arghezi, Urmuz, Ionesco, Paul Celan, Gerasim Luca, Tristan Tzara, Dumitru Tepeneag, etc. In most cases, this unfinished dialogue is an attempt to find a new language that would manifest its disengagement with "the language of the other" and at the same time expose the discontinuities and voids at the core of our shared discourses.