FROM THE LIMITS OF AUTHENTICITY TO THE CRISIS OF COMMUNICATION

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Created by the inter-war generation, the notion of *authenticity* will witness a fulminating career along time, drawing the attention of both men-of-letters, on one side, and of philosophers, historians, theologists, diplomats, etc., on the other. Nothing of the effervescent substance of this concept will remain outside the interest of the intellectuals actively involved in a genuine competition of ideas.

If, in a first *literary* acception, promoted especially by our men-of-letters famous in the 30'ies (Camil Petrescu, Mircea Eliade, Mihail Sebastian, Anton Holban), authenticity is understood as the strive for investigating one's own inward nature, for rendering real life in its very progress, for expressing the existentialist thrill in itself, as well as for imposing the deliberatedly naked expression of the subject and of one's manner of living deliberatedly through one's own subjectivity, thus representing a sort of "essence of lived life", an idea to be converted by the poets of the 80'ies into the *authenticity of writing*, a *philosophical* interpretation of this notion refers to the completness of the human being, to be possibly experienced only by leaving behind one's everyday condition. The concept expresses renouncing one's " non-authenticity" when faced with extreme situations and their full and deliberate experiencing. Accordingly, authenticity might be attained only when confronted with death, dispear, guilt, etc., being experienced as a result of crisis, unrest, inner void. In the opinion of Heidegger, and also of other existentialist philosophers, the daily life of people is not authentic living, as everybody acts *as the others act*. Consequently, authentic thinking springs from the relation established with *a wholly different, absolutely dissimilar thing*.

It has a metaphysical content, as it urges us to go beyond our own Self-same. This is the only way permitting one to establish an authentic relation with himself.

At the same time, the concept of authenticity lies at the basis of the whole Western culture, where it is organically kindred with the authority of the normative and fundamental texts, in the two main domains represented by *law* and *religion*. It grants the authority of a text, without affecting its significance. As an interdependent notion, non-authenticity aims exclusively at a deliberate distortion or erroneous copying of the authentic text. The Italian *Quattrocento* transformed this notion into a secularized concept, transferring to reasoning the capacity of setting up the marks of authenticity, thus permitting its entering the – by then - newly-emerging domains of philology and historiography.

The Greek term ἀνεθύης, synonymous with αὑιοχειρ, expresses first *the one who makes something with his own hands*, extended in time to that of *the holder of authority*. With this last meaning it is resumed by the Roman culture, which integrates it in the normative domain of law: an "authentic decree" (*authenticus*) may be issued by a person invested with authority. In this way, authenticity appears as a characteristic associated to textual acts, issued by a lawful authority. In the canonic right, taken over by the Western Christian church from the Roman law, viewed as authentic are the written documents providing proofs, the authority of which cannot be challenged by either Justice or theological regulations and norms. Therefore, from the very beginning, the term is related to the foundations of the human community and of its institutions[1].

In this historical phase of the idea of authenticity, such an attribute was exclusively available to the *Bible* and to the biblical writers, unique holders – according to a typically mediaeval acception - of the irrefutable religious "truth". As early as the IInd century, Christian apologets used to make distinctions between biblical writers, the only authentic ones, and the pagan ones, naming Christian writings *apomneumoneumata*[2], unlike the "illusory" ones, issued by pagans. In the same context, Sidonius Apollinarius made his own classification, distinguishing between the *autenthic*, namely the biblical writers, and *disputatores*, the authors of theological works. The important part played by the concept of authenticity along both early Middle Age and Middle Age in Western Europe brings into discussion its antonym, the notion of non-authenticity, and the idea of falseness. The abundance of false concepts, a characteristic of the epoch, especially in the VIIIth century, in the field of canonic law and, generally, in that of religious rites, calls for a most rigorous elaboration of marks and criteria for defining authenticity, some of them of material nature (seals, stamps, signatures), others only of stylistic type (formulas).

During the Renaissance, the concept of authenticity gets enlarged by delegating its authority towards critical reasoning, expected to be exercised from the moment in which the dogmatic texts under discussion involve human actors. Following the Renaissance, the meaning of the term suffers numerous alterations and deviations with its utilization in the everyday practice of the Western society, loosing its primary meaning and acquiring new significations, generally related to the ideas of *truth*[3] and *physical* or *moral quality*, sometimes gaining even an *ontological value*. Analysis of such approximate utilizations of the here discussed concept leads to some specific observations. First of all, the notion of *authenticity* has been correctly employed in the study of texts, by the disciplines based on reasoning, such as philology, diplomacy and historiography, which associated it with specific semiologal notions. Mention should be nevertheless made of the fact that, prior to the invention of the typographical art, the texts of classical antiquity could not be

declared philologically authentic, as long as in neither of the cases the original manuscript (of Platon, Aristotel, Lucretius) was available. The art of printing transformed the texts of the modern authors into abstract writings, permitting an entitled and correct utilization of the adjective *authentic* with reference to their books, thus eliminating the intricate problems imposed by their copies.

In a different approach, transposition of the concept of authenticity to the domain of material objects – firstly by the antiquarians who believed that, unlike texts, they cannot lie, then by archaeologists and art historians – gave birth to several difficulties, as an object of this type does not possess the literal permanence of a text. "It suffers the action of time. Its identification creates a logical circle: to be recognized, the authenticity of an object should have been previously defined. However, the advance of the dating techniques, as well as the progress of morphological analysis finally permit a relative legitimation of objects as historical documents, in other words, they give a relative functional value to the concept of authenticity in the field of archaeology and art history" as Françoise Choay[4] observed.

Launched by a rapid publicistic career, once made known, the term is further on capable of acquiring a large range of different interpretations and approaches. Any pretention of exhaustive approach is nevertheless impossible in the case of a concept with a success largely distributed both in spatial and temporal perspective, such as that of *auhtenticity*. Researchers have different opinions on the features on which the definition of this notion is based, whereas the accidental characteristics come to frequently dominate the fundamental ones. The history of the term actually illustrates the *traps and limits* imposed by authenticity, which is now risking to become a stereotypical characterization, wholly devoid of its former meaning[5].

The condition of authenticity in art will be accepted by aestheticians on the basis of certain factors, defined and systematized as early as the XIXth century. First of all, a literary work is considered as "authentic" when it provides *documents* of any type, *existentialistic files*, *slices of life*, *small, insignificant events*, whose logical chaining creates an atmosphere of *authenticity*,

liable to be identified as *truth*. Traditionally, this principle will come to be identified with certainty, accepted by imagination, expressed by truthful situations. The idea of "truth", reformulated by classical aesthetics as *verisimilar*, will be finally redefined, hypothetically, as projection of a possible world - a real existence at artistic level. As authenticity is quite a difficult to define concept, the term *verisimilitude* is frequently employed, even if, actually, it remains equally relative. Considering the extent of adequacy of truth to the exigency of the confessive language, authenticity might indeed substitute the notion of *verisimilitude*, as suggested by Barthes. If the authenticity of a subjective story cannot be measured, in the absence of reliable criteria, the only possibility left is intuition of its verisimilitude, and, on this basis, issuing of a correct judgement. A confessive text is verisimilar or not in relation with its data and, once verisimilar, it may be authentic.

Equally, authenticity represents the triumph of nature upon *culture* and *civilization*. However, several opinions of the epoch claimed that authenticity can but jeopardize the meaning of culture, once considered that authenticity involves "throwing away the whole set of conventions characterizing human life, reducing to their *natural* expression all manifestations of the social life, refusal of recognizing to life any other meaning, apart from the pragmatic one, and accepting the only mistics of vitalism". Expecting authenticity from one's part means to consequently oblige him to give up his specific human traits, as long as "authentic, according to the deep meaning of the word – in the opinion of Constantin Micu – is only the animal, while the human being is essentially a non-authentic creature"[6]. By its very nature, human spirituality denies the authentic world of nature, preferring a conventional, cultural one. Man's own background of existence is not nature, but culture, which does not represent authenticity, once it is created not according to the image of objective reality, but according to the subjective pattern of human sensitivity. Or, "culture is the expression of man's *aspiration towards perfection*, of his *striving towards the absolute*, being therefore defined *in opposition* with reality, and not *conformably to* it"[7]. Authenticity excludes neither "culture" nor the "influences", as long as they are assimilated and integrated to our own nature. Representing, by its nature, a spontaneous energy, authenticity can be but imperious and exigent with itself. "Authentic in art – it is asserted -, in the literary art, is only what you cannot but do because you feel that, otherwise, you would die"[8]. That is why, authenticity appears as an inexorable *must*, as an inner, irresistible passion, representing the very condition of creation.

In the works of Eugen Ionescu, the formula of authenticity is shaped by the tense relation between culture (a world coordinated by transparency) and mere existence, more exactly by the "reciprocal rejection of the two types of living: the cultural and the individual one"[9]. Accordingly, non-authenticity is grasped as "a product of culture (whose mechanism is belief), which restricts authentic life by imposing external criteria".[10] The project of existentialistic authenticity should be doubled by another one, capable of assuring *cultural authenticity*, which leads to the concept of a non-differentiated, concomitantly existentialistic and cultural authenticity.

Harboured by spontaneity and heartfelt confession, by sincerity and inner consistency, faith and truthfullness, the essence of authenticity is equally defined by culture, which it assimilates and integrates in its own inner identity. That is why, authenticity appears as an inexorable necessity, as an irrepressible passion, representing the very condition of art.

Viewed as a conception according to which art and literature are expected to deliever the direct, counterfeited expression of life, giving up any artificial means – be it of aesthetic, moral or social nature - that might alter such perceptions, authenticity is rather the direct effect of broken up illusions, of the faith in the traditionally-established norms, dening the individual, naive beliefs in the supremacy of ideals, of the moral and intellectual values of art. Literature strives to eliminate such false ideas, leaving aside its "literaturity", its counterfeited elements, giving credit to the direct, crude, brutal expression of the individual, of his experience and inner turmoils. Accordingly, one of the main constants of the European literature will be exactly this

permanent balancing between literature and anti-literature, among baroque, manierism, aesthetism, artistical idealization, on one sied, and "truth", "mimesis", "realism", "authenticity", on the other. In this respect, the literary discourse will register several important consequences of such an attitude, namely: *repugnance of style and of elaborated phrases, bombastic aesthetism and "artistic writing", falseness for obtaining effects; rejection of composition and skill*, and, consequently, *installation and consolidation of a an openly declared antiliterary spiritual attitude*, which will finally generate the crisis of communication.

Exploration of authenticity will bring forward older issues, such as those related to the ability of the word to express the emotional and ideatic content. Once this point reached, to accuse literature, more exactly, its rhetoric and poetic conventions, of having altered reality, was simply at hand, an action decisively taken by vanguardistis. Very soon, many of them will realize that refusal of the old conventions will inevitably lead them towards others, as long as any communication is basically founded on conventions. By its general character, such a reaction to "literature" risks to fail, once art assumes a direct contact with the originary, anticonventional energies only in an ideal manner. However, to exist, art needs and accepts the servitude of convention. Accordingly, the fight against convention should be understood as "a fight against some – inadequate, obsolete, void – conventions and not against conventionalism itself. The final rebellion against Literature and Art is a fake, once expressing of naked energies is not possible, so that the insurgents had to immediately establish other conventions"[11]. In time, defying of the old agreements wil create "a new convention, namely a rhetoric of defy"[12]. The vanguardists themselves, whose main fear was "to fail in conventionalism", and whose utopic dream – "leaving aside convention and never entering another", will end by *producing literature,* therefore by making concessions to conventions. Therefore, setting free from literature appears as impossible even to vanguardists. Ultimately, they will create works, even if negative ones, defined as antiliterature or antiart, yet accepted on the basis of certain literary criteria. Gelu Naum, who

confessed himself on "the profound melancholy of the poets who, along all their lives, made efforts not to produce literature, finally [...] having to sadly accept that they had produced nothing else but literature", feels himself "infected by literature", striving to "get rid of poetry by creating poetry". The radical solution for avoiding literary communication would be *giving up art, silence*. Some of the supporters of vanguardism hastily adopted the idea: for example, Ţaşcu Gheorghiu will finally console himself to produce wonderful translations from other poets (Lautréamont), thus avoiding to betray himself.

In the last analysis, prasticing authenticity might correspond to an artistic failure: "extreme authenticity, wholly immersed into life, kills the art, which is the transfiguration, reflection, projection, significance of life"[13]. Even if art demands a significant coefficient of spontaneity, feeling, sincerity and freedom of spirit, the abuse of "sincerity", the total acceptance of the theory of "document", the disregard of any composition rule and style will finally kill it. Adrian Marino was right when he defined this as a paradoxical situation: "undoubtedly, art requires authenticity, yet the excess of authenticity risks to destroy it"[14]. The solution will be found by postmodernists, who will impose two polar terms, *textualism* and *authenticism*, forcing them to cohabit, without annihilating or compromising each other. Consequently, beginning with the poets of the '80ies, a re-evaluation of the authenticity criterion will occur, a mirage continuing to influence both the modern and the postmodern literary world.

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Endnotes

1. Cf. Choay, Françoise, Alegoria patrimoniului, Bucureşti, Simetria Publishing House, 1998, p. 197.
2. The term apomneumoneumata appears for the first time at Xenofon who, on Socrate's death in Corynth, writes a series of notes, meant at describing the events he had witnessed as authentically as possible, calling them Apomneumoneumata.
3. The notion of truth, with which that of authenticity is identified, has had, since Antiquity up to our days, numerous interpretations. According to modern thinking, starting with Descartes, there exist only scientific truths, the notion of truth being reconsidered only in late modernity, mainly by Heidegger, the new approaches subverting the initial meaning of this concept, recommending the return to the antique notion of alétheia. For Aristotel, alétheia expresses the things in themselves, the act of living as such, characterized by its specific manner of disclosing itself. Consequently, truth is what shows itself, namely uncovering, disclosure. According to the assertions of Homer and Hesiod, alétheia would mean "the exactness which does not hide, the unvcovered, unveiled reality of all that exists, of existence, the undeceiving corectness which does not forget, the truthfulness of the human being, of its character" (Arman, Mircea, Poezia ca adevăr şi autenticitate, o cercetare fenomenologică, Cluj-Napoca, Grinta Publishing House, 2002, p. 79). This interpretation also implies that authenticity signifies reality itself, real existence, while also involving total committment, and a perfect transparency - namely un-hidding and complete unveiling.
4. Choay, Françoise, op. cit., p. 199.
5. In the opinion of Andrei Pleşu, nowadays, the expression "to be authentic" is appreciated as a compliment, as it refers to the actions of "an individual who does not utter non-sense, who is neither false or double-dealer". Cf. Pleşu, Andrei, Autenticitate, in „Dilema", 2010, 7-13 October, p. 3.
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7. Idem, p. 36-37.
8. Paraschivescu, M. R., Jurnal, in „România literară", nr. 48, 1969, p. 4.
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10. Ibidem, p. 246
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14. Idem, p. 176.