

AGAINST CAPITALISM: AN UNFINISHED ARCHAEOLOGICAL MANIFESTO¹

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Abstract: This text is a manifesto for a critical study of the material dimension of capitalism (*i.e.* neo-liberalism) in Romania, in all its aspects: pro-capitalist types of discourse; the restructuring of the discipline in accordance with the values of contemporary capitalist ideology; the material culture of everyday life, public space and economic projects in the capitalist society; the material dimension of legitimation and promotion of capitalist ideology; the material apparatus of the military system mobilized to defend and export capitalism to Eastern Europe; etc. We argue that, conceived this way, archaeology needs to become a form of resistance to and action against capitalist ideology.

Rezumat: Textul de față este un manifest pentru studierea critică a dimensiunii materiale a capitalismului (*i.e.* neoliberalismului) din România, sub toate aspectele sale: forme de discurs procapitaliste; restructurarea disciplinei în conformitate cu valorile ideologiei capitaliste de astăzi; cultura materială asociată vieții cotidiene, spațiului public și proiectelor economice în societatea capitalistă; materialitatea acțiunilor de legitimare și promovare a ideologiei capitaliste; resursele materiale ale sistemului militar mobilizat pentru apărarea capitalismului și exportarea sa în Europa de Est; etc. Susținem că o astfel de arheologie trebuie să se constituie într-o formă de rezistență și de acțiune împotriva ideologiei capitaliste.

"You feel that it would require a great deal of eternal spiritual resistance and denial not to succumb, not to surrender to the impression, not to bow down to fact, and not to idolize Baal, that is, not to accept what is as your ideal."²

The archaeology of the recent and contemporary past is a very well individualized research field of the discipline, proof being the many and very diverse papers published, and the 2014 first issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology*. In Romania, the archaeology of the recent and contemporary past has covered almost

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¹ This manifesto is an extended version of a text published in Romanian: Dragoman, Oanță-Marghitu 2014b.

² Dostoevsky 1997, p. 37.

exclusively the theme of repression and resistance during the Communist Era.³ Even a research institute was founded with the goal of producing the necessary documentation needed for an official trial for the prosecution of the political offences committed during the communist regime and, as a result, of communism itself – The Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes in Romania, renamed in 2009 The Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (IICCMER), under the authority of the Romanian Government. The IICCMER has mostly undertaken forensic archaeology cases, with some exceptions, such as the archaeological excavations made by the authors in the former communist forced labour camp at Galeșu (in 2014 and 2015).⁴ In IICCMER's projects, the archaeology was attached to a judicial and political action of prosecuting communism and used as a simple and useful means for gathering "evidence". In other words, rather than following the role of material culture in the existence of repression and resistance and in that of what we call "communism" in general, rather than casting light on the aspects omitted or silenced by the historical or political discourse, the research philosophy of the IICCMER has transformed archaeology into a simple extension of the official policy of the state institutions.⁵

Moreover, in contrast with the condemnation of communist crimes by a presidential commission in 2007,⁶ the genocidal character of capitalism has been officially ignored so far. Following herein an (Orthodox) Christian perspective, we consider that capitalism has built its palaces on seas of blood and mountains of corpses, while reserving some liberties to the privileged social classes – to paraphrase the words of Archimandrite Sophrony.⁷ However, no institution was founded in order to research capitalism, including in an archaeological manner. For example, in the Romanian Academy there is a National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism, but there is none that studies capitalism. Speaking of archaeology in particular, even if there are calls for bringing Romanian archaeological research at the same standards as the international ones, there are no Romanian publications dedicated to capitalism like those existing in the western world (*e.g.* see the series Contributions to Global Historical Archaeology). In order to study the capitalist system in Romania from an archaeological perspective, one does not have to wait for it to become definitively, irrevocably *past*. In this regard, we mention the attitude of some South-American archaeologists that decided in

³ *E.g.* Dragoman 2015.

⁴ Dragoman *et alii* 2016.

⁵ Dragoman, Oanță-Marghitu 2014a.

⁶ Tismăneanu *et alii* 2007.

⁷ Sofronie 2015, p. 103.

the 1970s to build a social archaeology, inevitably critical towards the dominant ideology of their present – the neo-colonialism of North-America and of transnational companies – some of them taking serious risks considering that they did not have freedom of speech in their countries.⁸

Intellectuals claim that they have practiced “resistance through culture” during the communist regime. Afterwards, the political context allowed them to metamorphose into “elites” and now, from this high position achieved through an aristocratic plucking from amidst the masses, they are the jury of the projects and the very ones who decide without fail that only capitalism must be “implemented”. Most of them consider capitalism as merely a high-performance machine that must only be exported and assembled. Capitalism has indeed managed to occupy the Romanian public space in a neoliberal way. Comfortably seated in the ergonomic chair of power and domination, capitalism skilfully pours the new alloy of objects and words in the moulds designed by the best experts, shapes the competent face of reality on long term, globally and profitably simplifies our sighting to a few pen strokes that are verified by the market. It has become a life style, a collective way of thinking and living. It has turned into a religion. Say “poverty” and what you will get in reply will be “populism”; “the poor” – “the socially assisted”; “social measures” – “electoral bribes”; “faith” – “the Middle Ages”; “Orthodox Christianity” – “regress”; “equality, emancipation, respect” – “communism”. The improvised specialists tell us that the industrial ruins in Romania are proof of communism’s failure, while the same sad industrial ruins in the West are enthusiastically pictured as progressive traits left behind by the “natural” process of “deindustrialization”. The rightist employers and employees, power and opposition, newspapers and televisions, intellectuals and poets send pious bursts of the word “investment” – a word that defines the assisted character of capitalism in Romania. The choir of experts, technocrats, analysts and “opinion-makers” assures us that nothing better than capitalism can follow, except for dangerous utopias. The critique and the protest should follow the stock exchange in order not to upset the normal course of the market. They are good only if they do not disturb too much and only if they sell well, as nowadays everything has become a commodity. In Romania, even postmodernism, that once signalled the demise of great stories, metamorphosed into an ode for a single meta-narrative, in which democracy saw it fit to mingle with “relativism”, “informational revolution” and “hedonism”, “nihilism” and “anarchy”, “sexual revolution” and “market economy”.⁹

⁸ *Reunión* 1976.

⁹ Cărtărescu 2010.

In 1900, Ivan Alekseyevich Bunin wrote:

“Вот новые люди стали появляться на степи. Все чаще приходят они по дороге из города и располагаются станом у деревни. Ночью они жгут костры, разгоняя темноту, и тени далеко убегают от них по дорогам. С рассветом они выходят в поле и длинными буравами сверлят землю. Вся окрестность чернеет кучами, точно могильными холмами. Люди без сожаления топчут редкую рожь, еще вырастающую кое-где без сева, без сожаления закидывают ее землею, потому что ищут они источников нового счастья, – ищут их уже в недрах земли, где таятся талисманы будущего...”

Руда! Может быть, скоро задымят здесь трубы заводов, лягут крепкие железные пути на месте старой дороги и поднимется город на месте дикой деревушки. И то, что освящало здесь старую жизнь, – серый, упавший на землю крест будет забыт всеми... Чемто освятят новые люди свою новую жизнь? Чье благословение призовут они на свой бодрый и шумный труд?”¹⁰

Capitalism does not only become “implemented”, but is a becoming. Capitalism destroys, it is built, reproduced and polished every day. Not only do strangers drill our land, but we ourselves are forced to trample on our oats. Yet we have to go beyond the words, and the materials will show us a reality which is completely different from the land of milk and honey that propaganda constantly pours into our ears. Following Bjørnar Olsen¹¹ among others, we start by assuming that in order to understand Romanian capitalism, written sources – whatever they are – and oral ones are not enough and that it is absolutely necessary to study the physical dimensions, the material dimensions of it. One can appeal to many histories of capitalism or socio-political perspectives of it, but the stories of the material culture elements that compose capitalism are missing. In other words, we suggest going further than the discursive, anthropocentric level of viewing capitalism and we plead for the introduction of materiality in its study. This way, one could study the (process of) becoming of capitalism.

We say: archaeology must research the “graves” of communism and of capitalism, the drills and the wounded landscape, the quarries and the mines, the oil platforms and the oil fields, the industrial stockpiles, the ruins and the landfills, the barren mountains and hills, the clogged valleys and the dried-out rivers, the design of products, the architecture of buildings and the monuments that celebrate capitalism one way or another.

¹⁰ Бунин 2001 [1900].

¹¹ E.g. Olsen 2010.

Through materiality we will understand the grandeur of utopias, the worldliness in the desires of eternity that ideologies have. It is not unsuccessful deviations from the path of progress that we will find in the ruins, but only ruins deprived of the talismans and precious stones once promised and dreamed of. We will read the changing face of this secular, eternally unfinished project that dreams of ruin as the foundation of new utopias, the prophecy of “the Apocalypse fulfilled before your very eyes”.¹²

The new city does the same thing it did in the Communist Era – it rises an aluminium sun over the ruins of inter-war architecture, and the Ceaușescu blocks of flats and stores, the streets and the boulevards and even our lives, all of them acquire meaning only when adorned with advertising and ATMs and only if they are mirrored in the glass of the monuments dedicated to capitalism that transform everything, in a continuous, fairy-tale-like, ecstatic, and abundant present.

We say: one has to analyse the mass consumer goods, from beer cans, mobile phones and cars to ballpoint pens and caps. The archaeological point of view must rest on the new urban architecture: banks, office buildings, signboards, supermarkets and hypermarkets. Archaeology must analyse the world of products created as a result of projects financed by institutions, foundations or NGOs that promote capitalist and globalist values: the design, the quality and the technological chain of production of books, diplomas, billboards, websites etc. Archaeology must strip all the frippery off the buildings and objects, the messages and the virtual happiness that live like parasites in our public space. In order to do so it is enough to describe in all details the country-roads of our depopulated villages and the old people who beg in front of the temples of consumption.

In the capitalist society, only exotic, fashionable news are presented about the world of the rich, about the upper class – a mixture of business men, media owners, politicians, members of the aristocracy, great fashion designers, showbiz stars, artistic and cultural celebrities. Magazines and associated events will not stop showing off the richness, beauty, self-content and the everlasting-youth of this closed and privileged world made up of a whole universe of objects – from perfumes and clothes, to yachts and luxuriant houses. On the other side, the materiality of the world of the poor often remains anonymous, despite its ubiquity. There are no magazines and events dedicated to poorness and misery. Capitalist policies have caused enormous social gaps in the country and massive emigrations to the West, with the hope of a better life, financially speaking. Seduced by images of comfort and wealth offered by the capitalist ideology, a lot of Romanians dream of getting or have already went

to the “Great Western Psychiatric Hospital” – to use the title of a book written by Eduard Limonov¹³ – and this has very bad consequences for their lives and the lives of those remaining home.

We say: placed at a distance that cannot be covered in the “living life” (cf. Varlam Shalamov), the worlds of the “1%” and the “99%” are yet to be explored and investigated in order to see what is their material reality, beyond images and discourses, in daylight, not under neon lights.

Capitalism has become a religion in Romania, while various pamphleteers are trying to convince us on television in funny ways that religion is a mental retard. The rows of pilgrims in front of the monasteries are presented as proof of medieval regress, whereas the crowds in supermarkets before Christmas should be taken as a promising sign of civilization. The humanist intellectuals, the fashionable politicians and the disinterestedly financed NGOs are asking that religion should be banished from schools and sent to the private space but at the same time we send our children at the state kindergarten “dressed up for Halloween”, a celebration of connection to Western values. Icons are thrown out of schools and one could say that the main concern is to encourage critical thinking in people starting from childhood, to make them think, not believe.

We say: it is exactly different! The archaeological point of view should see exactly the intention of ideology to be born as a new religion, to build a new space, a new time, even a New Human, with new beliefs and rituals, all through words and materiality, in different versions, as these tries fail one after the other and new buildings are erected continuously on top of the ruins.

Capitalism is protected and exported through an entire military system that is expensively directed towards any threat posed to the god Profit and his precepts. Partially independent journalists popularize in a warlike way the words that cannot yet be said officially and prepare us for the heroic protection of the “strategic alliance”. Editors, commentators and paid internet trolls subtly describe alcoholism, decadence, hyper-mortality and all the other sins of the enemies that should show the obvious inferiority written in their genetic code.¹⁴ In the repressive vocabulary of the communist machinery, terms like “opponent”, “bandit”, “legionary”, or “server of Anglo-Americans” were synonyms. Today, the dictionary of central intellectuality translates “opponent” through “communist” or “Orthodox Christian fundamentalist”, while the national virtual space is wandered by “Putinists” and “people sold to the Russians”.

We say: archaeology must bring to contemporary

¹² Dostoevsky 1997, p. 37.

¹³ Limonov 2016.

¹⁴ For a critique of some of those discourses, see Dogaru 2015.

sight the materiality of conflicts that have globally solved the crises of modernity: the traces, the fingerprints and the ruins that contradict the triumphal and heroic notes in discourses, history lessons and books. Archaeology must expose the industrial strokes of bunkers that were once waiting in vain for invasions,¹⁵ the circular terror of cannon shot pits and the heaviness of the splinters found in their filling, that testify for the fragility of life when confronted to death that was technologically expanded. Just as the soviet military bases from Cuba are being archaeologically researched today,¹⁶ so should the abandoned (post-) communist military bases, currently free from real estate interests, be researched. Until the American bases will be under investigation, we must research the physiognomy and the anatomy of the weapons, the style of the uniform, the architecture and the rituals associated with military parades, the national monuments that commemorate the wars fought by the allies (most of the times even against Romania) and the materiality of war propaganda.

Archaeology has also been transformed by the new ideology. Language has operationally been adorned so as to construct a performing reality. Ernst Jünger wrote: “Um Mekka zu zerstören, genügt ein Telegrafendraht”.¹⁷ The keywords of the new “wooden” language erase the alterity of the past and the differences between periods and epochs. In the archaeological text, the past is operationally organized, the objectives and the phases of research become main characters, and the archaeological sites are hierarchically arranged into different categories of importance that determine the “prioritization” of their research and the “capitalization of the results”. The past is split into “projects” that must be made “visible” both to the “general public” and to the “contractors of infrastructure projects”. The space, the landscapes and the heritage are meaningful only if they are transformed in goods and serve as advertisement for the policies of tourist attraction.

We say: archaeology has an important role to the extent that, through constant renewal of its approaches, it produces interpretations of the past’s alterity that cannot be manipulated by ideological discourses. Archaeological writing must recycle linguistic waste and transform it into jewels with the explicit purpose of making them laughable. We also say that archaeology finds trustworthy allies in poetry and metaphor and uses them in order to accurately describe the mystery of the meeting between present and past.

Archaeological exhibitions – the material embodiments of texts – are a palpable expression of erasing the alterity of the past.

We say: exhibitions must be interpreted as any other archaeological context. Archaeology must measure the distance between the violence with which objects were ripped off from their original constellation full of meaning – from ruins, pits, houses and graves – and the rigidity of their sole significance mortified behind the glasses of the showcases. And this is how we will precisely describe the stage on which objects of the past are tamed and used in order to tell the truths of today’s utopia and we will dissemble that ideologically checked machinery that spreads around the idea that these must be legitimate precisely because they have always existed.

The space and time in which archaeological practice is being carried out are programmed by capitalism. The new activists preach that institutes and museums should be rebuilt on entrepreneurial fundaments. The institutes and museums are far from becoming communities of knowledge and transformed into a field of hierarchic pyramids where everybody has a well-established place. We become words that fill the blank columns of the SWOT analyses made by managers, we become “strengths” and “weaknesses”, “jaded and lacking authority” or “with deficiencies in taking responsibility” or misfits of “the efficiency requirements and the mobility essential for our era”.¹⁸ Some wish, using a language that recalls American gangster movies, a work legislation that allows “the punishment or even the disposal of the persons with a reduced level of professional competence and initiative”.¹⁹ We are blamed for not participating in “projects”. We are encouraged to compete, we are motivated to try to reach the top as quickly as possible and we are told that we should wish for a “career” as successful as possible. A new kind of censorship is taking the lead through “implementing” the moral and integrity codes. The employees must positively promote the “image” of the institution and of the country. Critical articles and reviews are nicely decorated with bureaucratic stamps and sent to the judicial office in order to be sanctioned.

We say: our institutions are public; they are not corporations. Archaeology is a space of critique. Whoever is not happy with this is free to go away. Archaeology must reach past the optimist crystal globe of legislation and past the apparent order established through managers, in the mundane context of bureaucracy that daily builds the power and the domination, docility and obedience. Nothing must be omitted: working agendas and interpretations, scholarships and grants, decisions and resolutions, requests and substantiation notes, standards

¹⁵ Dragoman 2013.

¹⁶ E.g. Burström *et alii* 2009; 2013.

¹⁷ Jünger 1979, p. 490.

¹⁸ Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2013, p. 199.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, *loc.cit.*

and procedures, monthly, biannual and annual activity reports, research plans, operative meetings and internal managerial control meetings, exhibitions and all the ritual means through which managers reproduce capitalism with words and gestures, they naturalize and legitimize their position and utter and spread the words of the new wooden language that mutilates our lives. Besides, the things that are omitted in the archaeological discourse should also be mentioned: employment chances, financial sources, power relationships, wages and work conditions – both for archaeologist and for the workers hired for excavations. And then we will understand that we live and we build daily a capitalism that is very different from the nicely packed product found on the market of appropriate ideologies.

Research is mathematically counted, while debate is disguised in scandal clothes. Publications no longer talk about ideas, they talk about their authors. Critique is fiercely rejected and angry answers omit bringing arguments and immediately make use of words like: “incompetent”, “impostor”, “hung-up”, “frustrated”, “opportunist”. Archaeologists that are stuck in this network are analysing perspectives, are making live interpretations and are popularizing the same dressed up ideas until they make them obedient. Here, transatlantic treaties (that can make a processual determination of your political orientation only by reading your bibliography) are sweetly mixing with virtuous solos that medically recommend the ideas that are beneficial until 30 years and how you should think at the mature age you have reached. Here, the low notes – that were once biblically shaking the archaeological sites found on the highways of the motherland – are now admonishing you as a mother would do. Here one has the wish of becoming a classic even when being still alive; here people say “I have written that myself”; here one celebrates the foreign English character of the financial language; here gravity and neo-liberalism are both as natural.

We say: good-bye! The time for debates is gone. We will get the words down from the clear sky of propaganda and self-explanatory things. We will bring the words to the measuring devices found in the dust of the roads and we will politely measure the volume of their servitude to the domination. The time for debate is gone. It is now time for confession.

We believe that our responsibility towards our fellow men consists exactly in a scientific, critical approach of the dominant ideology. Zahar Prilepin, a well-known contemporary Russian writer, father of four children, very much devoted to family values, a man that has taken the status of illegal party member of an anti-capitalist, nationalist political party that also militates against Putin, said: “I’m engaging into politics exclusively because of fear for the future of my children. What kind of a country will be the one in which they will

live? This is my concern. I wish that this country would be a normal one”.²⁰ What do we understand through “a normal country”? A country that doesn’t have the vanity of those who believe they are “the great” and “the elite”, a country where people serve other people, where they do not wait and do not expect to be served, a country where the citizens take care of those who are too small, feed the hungry, give the thirsty something to drink, welcome the strangers, dress the naked, search for the sick, visit the imprisoned.²¹ A country with people that love not only their fellow men, whoever they may be, but also the entire Creation and all creatures, as small as they may be, and objects too.

“Notre position est d’affirmer l’idée qu’on doit absolument refuser la propension à surpasser où à dominer qui que ce soit ou de posséder des richesses matérielles: sinon on perd le droit de communiquer avec les humiliés et offensés. Mieux vaut la pauvreté volontaire que l’enrichissement obtenu par la violence faite à son frère. Mieux vaut mourir dans «l’insignifiance sociale» que de devenir célèbre en écrasant les «petits». Mieux vaut ne pas laisser son nom dans l’Histoire que l’inscrire avec le sang de nos frères. Pour protéger notre petite liberté, nous suivons un principe: n’attenter à la liberté de personne.”²²

Bibliographical abbreviations:

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²⁰ Zahar Prilepin in Ernu 2012, pp. 265-266.

²¹ Matthew, 20:25-28; 24:31-46.

²² Sophrony 2013, p. 106.

- Dogaru 2015 – C. Dogaru, *Presa sub arme: între ură și apel democratic la cenzură*, URL://www.criticatac.ro/27593/presa-arme-intre-ur-apel-democratic-la-cenzur/ (accessed: 23 April 2015).
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