

Utopia, Dystopia and Gnostic

Călina BORA
Babeş-Bolyai University

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E-mail: calinabora@gmail.com

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Have you ever wondered why Cinderella has glass shoes? The challenge is launched by researcher Ştefan Borbély, on the cover of his fourth novel *Civilizatii de sticla. Utopie, distopie, urbanism* (Glass Civilisations: Utopia, dystopia, town planning), published in Cluj-Napoca in 2013 by Limes Publishing (ISBN13: 978-973-726-797-2, 264p).

For a start, Ştefan Borbély in his scientific demarche assigns to the glass the principle of transparency. In fact the whole volume discusses this primary sense of glass, for which reason the first part of the novel brings into discussion city architecture. Therefore, there are discussions about the Victorian city of Dickens, the type of city proposed by Le Corbusier, the garden-city of Ebenezer Howard and other urban structures specific to modern town planning. Initiating this architectural analysis, Ştefan Borbély aims, in fact, at an Apollonian (organised) – Dinoysian (chaotic) structure.

Then, what is at stake in this research?

Establishing differences between the chaotic town and the well-organized one; namely, establishing the difference between the gloomy and the transparent.

What does Ştefan Borbély mean then, in these conditions, by “glass civilisations”? First of all, he refers to a sort of bright, solar hedonism, and second, to the desire of total dematerialisation through transcending the telluric. This desire is Gnostic, implying in itself the desire of liberating the light from the straps of the matter (soma).

This desire, or accession towards the light, involves not only the liberation from the matter but also calls forth the actual “transparency” seized by the author, the unchaining from the darkness, the achievement of a different evolution level. Only a society which had become transparent can be very well supervised, controlled, unlike the modern chaotic urban structure where everything is unpredictable, active and alive, and where the perimeters (rural and urban) merge one into the other.

Once the trajectory of the analysis is established, Ştefan Borbély reaches the idea that a transparent society is also a totalitarian one: “If there are no dystopias – a society of complete transparency is, as well, a society of generalized control”.

The interdisciplinarity of the volume does not account for the complexity of the research – which, I think, is done very cautiously – but the complexity and richness of this research are given by the scrupulousness with which Ştefan Borbély captures the detail of the societies, alleged in his discourse. “Years after years I was collecting, inside little thematic boxes made by the pattern of the ones Thomas Mann used, information and bibliographic references about translucid worlds, transparent societies, white

metropolis, buildings, towns and monuments made in glass, hoping that they would coagulate someday as an overview”.

Beyond the aspect of transparency, the glass also represents an “infinite combinatory game”. Related to this problem, the author brings into question the cyborg. Of course, what is really important is not necessarily how its body is prosthesized (inside or outside), but the fact that through that prosthesis it is able to access programmes and to become a part of the programmes it accesses.

Being a part of those programmes, the cyborg actually has access to a wide platform of infinite combinations. Analyzing Donna Haraway's discourse from the “Cyborg Manifesto” (leaving aside its feminist side, as the researcher draws attention) and the pattern of the worlds proposed by Karl Popper, Ștefan Borbély concludes that through the infinite combinatory game “the mind objectifies itself as infinity” (p. 83), obtaining, under these circumstances, “a great amount of programmes and scenarios infinitely reproducible” (p. 84).

Through statements like: “Forgiven be the author for the weakness of these pages” (p. 62), “While talking I forgot, nevertheless, to tell you about” (p.58), “I was indebted to tell you what it means” (p. 24) or through small comments such as: “Dystopias can be funny, generating smiles” (p. 62) made with an overflowing genuineness, Ștefan Borbély seduces the reader into yielding at the first pages.

Thus, what makes the delight of this volume is not necessarily related to its scientific nature, but it is connected to the human and playful nature of the researcher, Ștefan Borbély's book being accessible not only to philologists or other intellectuals, but also to the large public.