

BOOK REVIEWS

ANDI MIHALACHE, *Istoria eului cursiv: mărturii, identități, patrimonii* [The history of the cursive self: testimonies, identities, patrimonies] (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2019)

Andi Mihalache, a scientific researcher and a historian of culture living in Iași, converted in *Istoria eului cursiv: mărturii, identități, patrimonii* [The history of the cursive self: testimonies, identities, patrimonies], published by the Argonaut Publishing House in Cluj, opening a collection entitled *Anima Mundi*, the interrogation on what the past through which we define ourselves truly is. The work continues on a line of reflection that was also present in the author's previous publications – *Trecutul ca text: idei, tendințe, controverse* [The past as a text: ideas, tendencies, controversies] and *Timpul, obiectul, povestirea. Decoruri interioare în literatura autobiografică* [Time, the object, the story. Interior decorations in the autobiographical literature] (both published in 2017) – and different contributions to collective volumes, among which *Obiecte și urmele lor. Priviri istorice, povești antropologice* [Objects and their traces. Historical views, anthropological stories], coordinated by Cristina Bogdan and Silvia Marin-Barutcieff (2018). In all the aforementioned volumes, the central idea is that *the past is not the object*, but *the subject* of our researches and the best manner of approach is represented by an open *dialogue* with it. To whom does it reveal itself, were it to reveal itself at all, and how do we receive genealogical parcels from the past-subject?

The title of the present paper offers the suggestion of an answer: from the patrimonial/patrimonialised memory, the fluency of the story of our identity comes into being, an essential piece of “writing” that cannot be equated with reality itself, the reality known in each of our lives, but which, apparently paradoxically, it can perfectly substitute. One and the same object constitutes the point of intersection of the different memories it can trigger. From “the autopsy of the past”¹ through memoirs, since “the autobiographical literature is the «formaldehyde» of certain

¹ Andi Mihalache, *Istoria eului cursiv: mărturii, identități, patrimonii* [The history of the cursive self: testimonies, identities, patrimonies] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Argonaut, 2019), 23.

objectual ensembles,² to the (re)creation or establishment of the past through a certain narration, in a temporal perspective, under the lens of a certain manner of assigning a meaning to the objects recovered from oblivion, represent the virtually unlimited field of interest for the historian and anthropologist of culture. Considering the author's statement, according to which "the present text is part of the field of *heritage studies*, scrutinizing the variable semantics of certain interiors³" and the volume is "a plea for the study of the «small patrimonies»."⁴

The work contains two parts and a name index. The first six chapters refer to the mechanisms of remembering, analysed in an essayistic manner ("Reflexele trecutului, elipsele prezentului" [Reflexes of the past, ellipses of the present], "Bazarul poveștilor nespuse" [The bazaar of untold stories], "Naratori și logoscoopi" [Narrators and logoscopes], "Pe propriile urme" [On one's own track], "Cum ne apărăm de amintiri" [How we defend ourselves against memories], "Reminiscente și absențe" [Reminiscences and absences]). The second part contains studies of the history of culture: "*Post-scriptum*: spații adiacente în imaginarul benjaminian" [Post-scriptum: adjacent spaces in the Benjaminian imaginary], "De unde și până unde" [From where to where], "Estetica lui Gulliver" [Gulliver's aesthetics], "O țară pe nume Biedermeier" [A country named Biedermeier], "Amintiri evazive, uitări detaliate" [Evasive memories, detailed oblivion]. The unity of the book is given by the detailed, issue-raising perspective, focused on the unique angles of approaching the themes, relentlessly questioning out thought stereotypes and thus opening new horizons of reflection.

Andi Mihalache's discourse, a composition similar to that of the work of a painter or of a symphonist, requires the right reading keys. A focused reader can receive said keys from the author himself. For the first part of the volume, the key is located on page 18, where the author mentions "the pretext of this article: the objects". Thus, the objects around which everything seems to revolve, the objects that give the self of a diarist cursivity, "the reminiscent objects" for the authors under scrutiny and the objects that trigger the revolution of the phrases in the author's discourse are merely pretexts for a reflection on something else. On what? Or, better yet, on whom?

The "hard" vocabulary of each of the cultural specialisations in which so many of us, in Romania or abroad, on a local, national or international level practice as researchers is constructed by those (very few) who have the gift and/or the intelligence to create concepts – if we were to transpose Camil Petrescu's *seeing ideas* into the field of the philosophy and history of culture, a fair approximation would be that of *seeing concepts*. A long reflexive accumulation, together with the

² Ibid., 79.

³ Ibid., 38.

⁴ Ibid., 114.

fortunate positioning of the author in relation with his chosen theme and the superior literary talent trigger the precipitation of the concept. In Andi Mihalache's discourse, there are numerous such preconceptual "gems". Only to name a few: "reminiscent objects", defined as "inlets of time, filled only by the absence of the departed,"⁵ the objects that "become anthropomorphised, replacing the protagonists"⁶, "the synoptic object, from which imagination extracts an entire aesthetic and relational context,"⁷ "the semiotic object"⁸, the narrator as a "logoscope"⁹ capable of "objectophilia" and the "auctorial fingerprinting"¹⁰ of a composition aimed at the "cursivity of the self"¹¹. The list of examples could continue.

We must also note the memorable, percussive, synthetic expression of certain truths crystallised in textual "concentrates", prolonging its echo long after the book shuts: "memory is a state of aggregation of the past,"¹² "what does remembrance mean? A moment in which the present turns around so that it can interrupt the past for a moment,"¹³ "memoirs bring together different means of negotiating with time,"¹⁴ "today we invest a great deal in skepticism"¹⁵, "an eternal indecision rules the kingdom of the objects: is their identity, written in time, unfinished or unfinishable?,"¹⁶ "the genealogical purpose of photographs (...) a type of visual necropolis,"¹⁷ "the role played by the objects is that of validating their narratives; they are the «crutches» of remembrance,"¹⁸ "memory (...) feels more at home in the shadow of truth than within its yard,"¹⁹ "due to memory, history is an incurable disease, we never heal from past events."²⁰

A characteristic of Andi Mihalache's writing is the fact that the text itself and its footers are often equal, if not in an inversed proportion with that we are used to – in which case the footnotes encompass the text (as one can observe on pages 12, 22, 26, 31, 41, 69, 115, 120 etc.). There are two "levels" of the book page: the text (which can be read independently from the footers) and the ample footers,

⁵ Ibid., 11-12.

⁶ Ibid., 53.

⁷ Ibid., 67.

⁸ Ibid., 96.

⁹ Ibid., 30.

¹⁰ Ibid., 77.

¹¹ Ibid., 105.

¹² Ibid., 122.

¹³ Ibid., 9.

¹⁴ Ibid., 107.

¹⁵ Ibid., 13.

¹⁶ Ibid., 16.

¹⁷ Ibid., 29-30.

¹⁸ Ibid., 68.

¹⁹ Ibid., 100.

²⁰ Ibid., 122.

which can be read independently from the text which often represents the mere pretext for their existence. The motivations for amplifying the footers surely include the author's inclination to "dialogue" with his numerous bibliographical sources, even here. In all of Andi Mihalache's works, the bibliographies are impressive, up to date and focused on the international scholarly literature; extensive readings represent the basis of the author's reflection, so much so that the sources to which he related do not fit into a single text. The need to exemplify, to create reasonings, to develop collateral considerations determine the author to write, with an obvious intellectual voluptuousness, a second text in the footers of his own book. One of the reading keys given to the reader can be found here and it is thus accessible only to those who enter the game of the two discourses. Knowing the thoroughness with which Andi Mihalache finishes his works, we could say that the "double text" is also an actively cultivated compositional technique, a stylistic mark of his writing.

As a compositional recipe and an issue-raising thought instruction manual, a groundbreaking questioning of the preconceptions, epistemological commodities and the common places that often govern our reasoning tyrannically, a bibliographic dialogue, the volume *Istoria eului cursiv: mărturii, identități, patrimonii* [The history of the cursive self: testimonies, identities, patrimonies] is a small cultural jewel (the poche format contributed to the attractiveness of the read) that resembles the well-known game of glass beads whose nostalgia irresistibly envelops us in the intervals of meditation.

Translated from Romanian by Anca Chiorean

ASTRID CAMBOSE

astrid.iasi@yahoo.com

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