THE POETICS OF CAPTIVITY. A CULTURAL THEORY

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Abstract A reductive generalisation holds that the principal feature of captivity is exclusively political—because Europeans and their philosophical tradition tend to assume that everything begins with Western modernity. This verdict has persisted to the present day. As a consequence, the studies and the philosophy of captivity have stagnated, or have gravitated toward the domain of imprisonment and incarceration as regenerated by philosophers such as Michel Foucault. The present study proposes a new poetics of captivity, tracing the genealogy of the concept up to the digital captivity of our time, which surpasses all post-totalitarian forms of captivity. Unfortunately, conceptual discussions have receded precisely in those spaces that have concretely experienced socio-political and psychological forms of captivity at a collective scale. The question is whether captivity and ethics maintain differing relations. It is implicit that such discussions presuppose the criteria of liberty and democracy; the notional subtleties are therefore all the more interesting. Captivity remains one of the most powerful fluid concepts—transforming and rapidly adapting to all the major sciences, evoking past and future in scenarios that become concrete reality. A poetics of captivity entails, at the same time, a new perspective for the study of the social-human and literary disciplines.
Keywords Poetics of captivity, proto-resilience, captive consciousness, metaconcept, AI captivity, digital captivity.

Between Calypso and Circe. A Genealogy of Captivity. Etymologies and Mythologies. Captivity as Proto-Resilience

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The word *captivity* derives from the Latin *captivus*, with the meanings of "seized," "held," "taken prisoner." At its origin, the term designates "the one seized" or "the one held"; above all, it transmits the *condition* of the one who has been seized or made prisoner. After the eighteenth century, the term develops further, accruing additional layers: "to take goods belonging to the enemy," and especially "to capture an animal." Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the notion becomes nearly synonymous with arrest and the taking of prisoners, and is therefore frequently equated with imprisonment, a usage that endures to this day.

In the modern era, the definition has been extended to include the recording, in the memory of a device, of the screen image, with senses drawn from informatics: *to capture*. Contemporary scholars tend to use the term within a synonymic series. Alongside *capture*, one finds concrete terms such as *seizure*, *retention*, *sequestration*, *arrest*, *imprisonment*, *deprivation of liberty*, *bondage*, *confinement*, *limitation*. Closer in sense, and as noted often overlapping, are *captivity* and *imprisonment*, especially with the nuance of detention. For animals, the term used denotes isolation from the natural environment.

Yet, all these terms have something in common: they share a single antonym – *liberation/freedom*. This is the clearest indication that human mentality and imagination, regardless of the social or psychological direction in which they have advanced, have envisaged one and the same final horizon. It can therefore be affirmed that all the terms cited stand beneath a common umbrella: that of the absence of liberty. Simultaneously, the meanings of *captivity* indicate an isolation under concrete conditions – between walls, bars, locked doors, and so forth. It is striking that, to this day, the base term expresses the concrete and the material, whereas its opposite – *liberty* or *liberation* – appeals exclusively to an abstract state.

A reductive generalisation, characteristic not only of the West, holds that the principal feature of captivity is exclusively political, since Europeans and their philosophy presume that everything begins with Western modernity. This verdict has persisted to the present, and as a consequence the studies and philosophy of captivity have stagnated – or have gravitated toward the domain of imprisonment and incarceration as regenerated by philosophers such as Michel Foucault.

The recovery of the captivity of Native Americans and the reconstruction of the history of the Black communities of North and South America have geographically reconfigured the notion – still, however, within the limits of the political. The same will hold for the captivity narratives concerning Vietnam, Korea, and the recovery of the memorial literature of the Gold Rush centuries in North America. No happy, democratic country that has not traversed grotesque historical stages speaks of captivity except at the level of dystopia or as negative imaginary.

The longer and harsher historical events have affected a community, the more captivity and its nuances have been amplified to registers unattainable by the imagination of liberty.

The defining feature of captivity lies in its *interruption of a state*. Western theorists, to this day, place captivity within the category of exclusively political concepts – probably because they have retained, from the etymology of the word, only the explanation that refers to *making captive*, *seizing*, *depriving someone of liberty*, *being a prisoner*. In broad terms, this is correct. However, two supplementary senses exist. One precedes what we may call the political state, and another exceeds it.

The first refers to "capturing an animal." It is an interruption of the freedom of animals for reasons connected with existence, survival, necessity, curiosity, boredom, or scientific interest – all from a human perspective. I have thus designated the historical progression of the captivity of animals. The non-human notion has, of course, its mirror in the human one: as noted, the broadest definition refers to the deprivation of human liberty. Captivity is therefore defined in relation to the idea of freedom.

A third term, exceeding the consecrated political one, refers to the capture of a particle, the recording or fixing of the screen image from a digital device. Specialised dictionaries register an antonym – *to decaptivate* – signifying liberation from captivity, more precisely the act of removing, extracting, excerpting; the term, however, is unused, or at most very rarely encountered. Why has this antonym not gained ground? Perhaps because the verb *to liberate* has always remained more powerful, with significantly richer registers.

The paradox – and one does exist – lies in the opposition to the states of immobility and limitation that are intrinsic to captivity. Liberation, transfer, or escape entail passage, motion, exit. The identity of the captive is thus reduced to these two dimensions: limitation and liberation. Proper to captivity is also the situation, after liberation, within an extension of itself: captivity proper. Why does captivity become an extension of existence? Because its experience can be neither erased, nor annulled, nor forgotten.

Any post-captivity liberty bears the quality of being an extension of forced reclusion. From another point of view, metaphysical or ontological, captivity evokes its continuous presence in any liberty, in any post-experience of itself.

The cultural valorisation of captivity reaches its apogee once numerous countries – not merely individuals – have lived through captivity as a supra-collectivity /supra-community. The Gulag, modern totalitarianisms, and dictatorships of every colour have intensified the forms and figures of captivity. Catharsis manifested itself in spirits dispossessed of body and materiality, or in the minds of those who succeeded in transforming the experience of captivity into a source or act of creation. We distinguish between an *individual captivity*, with its accompanying limits and psychologies, and a *collective captivity*, likewise possessed of its own characteristics.

However we may define the term, captivity cannot be isolated.

Two mythological beings can symbolically and iconographically accompany captivity. One is Calypso, daughter of Okeanos, the nymph who holds Odysseus captive. Her name signifies "to hide", "hidden," "to cover," "to lock away." It is no coincidence that she ensures the captivity of Odysseus, even onomastically. The second mythological being is Circe, whose name means "to encircle" (to secure with circles) – likewise a form of taking into captivity. That this is so we may also read in Daniel Mendelsohn's *An Odyssey: A Father, a Son, and an Epic*. At a certain point, referring to the two mythological figures, the narrator observes that "both are bound up with captivity." Neither, to return to the point, intervenes in the legends and mythological tales without justifying, in one form or another, her name and its symbolism.

It is of course true that all mythologies contain figures or beings who take captive, or hold captive, human and non-human beings, phenomena, and spaces. From the most ancient times, we read of such captivities. The great Indian god of the storm, Indra, is distinguished above all by his

having defeated Vritra, the great serpent or dragon who had held captive all the oceans of the world. Held captive, the entire world had suspended every form of procreation. The waters that symbolise fertility, once liberated by Indra from the dragon's captivity, regenerate the world and, in fact, restart life itself. It can therefore be affirmed that one of the most powerful mythologies spoke of captivity in the sense of suspending the whole of cosmic life. In the subtext, we read of a *captivity within captivity*, since the waters in their turn hold the sun captive, generating in this water-light suspension the very mechanism of the generation of life.

From the other great mythology – from which we have already cited Circe and Calypso – we receive numerous further figurations of captivity. It has always been affirmed that the gods themselves can be exiled to the underworld. The sense, of course, was that the underworld functioned as captivity. Since the gods are immortal, their punishment was captivity itself, not exile. Once again, the conceptual movement is slippery, allowing for ample contestation. Let us recall, however, how Circe is overcome by Odysseus: through the mediation of Hermes, who teaches the hero to counter captivity by means of… enchanted herbs.

In other words, against captivity any weapon is admissible; the more implausible, supernatural, and mysterious it is, the more reassuring liberty appears. But these are the legends from the dawn of humanity.

The gods hold captive both their own and the hybrid human-divine beings: it suffices to recall Ares, but also Aeson, Hesione, Persephone, and above all the celebrated heroes held in captivity, Daedalus and Icarus. Symbol of the creator captive in the physical labyrinth and in social norms, Daedalus prefigures the censorship and captivities of the masters of later ages – creators of history and of cultural and scientific tradition. Icarus implicitly accompanies the captivity of the other but conceives of it from the perspective of youth and innocence, contemplating only escape, never the state of captivity itself. For young people and children in general, no limit-space or enclosed space remains unexplored. The son completes, through expansion and revolt, precisely the resignation of the father, who prefers to contemplate liberty through obedience and the acceptance of the implacable.

Captivity interrupts the creative process of the father and opens the imagination of the son. It is no coincidence that flight – which had always seemed a utopia and an impossibility – is what Icarus chooses in order to escape the labyrinth of Knossos. Out of the double captivity of Daedalus, let us also note a further captivity within captivity: that of the Minotaur. He too was a captive in the body of a beast that survives by avenging itself upon other men. Captive within a non-human being, the Minotaur avenges his condition by killing humans. The state of captivity and fear – of the Minotaur – nourishes Daedalus's creative genius, who thus skips intermediate steps and perfects the wings that allow man not only to imitate the gods (through flight), but also to escape human hierarchy and law. Punishment comes from both men and gods alike.

This is the first proof of resilience in captivity. A *proto-resilience* that announces the great resistances which will continue, in ever more sophisticated forms, to the present day.

Specific Differences between Captivity and Adjacent Notions: Prisoner-Imprisonment. Slavery–Bondage–Slaveholding. Sequestration. Isolation

Possessing a clear synonym, without supplementary nuances – *detainee* – the prisoner and the state of imprisonment rest upon a juridical foundation. The state is the result of military or judicial procedures. For a long time, the prisoner was understood implicitly to be a prisoner of war. The term thus lacked mobility and was used in the military and diplomatic spheres, alongside the judicial.

What does the immobility of this institutional language entail? That imprisonment rests upon usages, upon laws and rules, upon regulations. At the same time, these would also bring "benefits" for prisoners, since they secure them rights (in the civilised world): to legal representation, to treatment, and to being exchanged with other prisoners according to rules and the dynamics of conflict. Hence prisoner and imprisonment belong, exclusively, to a juridical condition.

By contrast with the prisoner and the state of imprisonment, *captivity* does not fundamentally belong to a juridical category. On the contrary, it annuls it, subverts it, circumvents it. Captivity has nothing to do with rules and enclosed spaces, but with existential and epistemological, ontological and anthropological categories. Despite the notion's defining of an enclosed, limit, freedom-deprived space, captivity in fact "opens" senses, as if its area of comprehension might always be redimensioned.

The other related words appear with similar precision. *Bondsman/bondage* refers first to subordination; in older languages, the bondsman was often equated with the orphan. While the prisoner enjoys a certain juridical protection or specific rights granted by treaties, the bondsman or slave possesses no juridical right whatsoever. They lie outside the juridical system. They will therefore be excluded from any form of liberty, since they have the value of objects belonging to a master. Over them, men of power are the rightful proprietors of their being. Servitude is incontestable, and the slave-man or bondage-man functions in non-human terms, as object of property, of submission and servitude. The prisoner has on his side the laws and the treaties, and is even protected by articles of law. The slave or bondsman is taught, drilled, subdued in such a way that he cannot survive without a master. The prisoner survives by observing treaties and law; the slave or bondsman is obliged to maintain dependence upon the master in order to survive.

Captivity may transform any being responsible for the captivity in question into a master. The captive, however, has no master: he can transform his own self into both master and slave at the same time; liberty and the possibility of hope remain active and form part of the future. For the slave, time is uniform, devoid of any positive deformation, ever the same. The prisoner can hope, basing himself on the technical-juridical language that offers clearly delimited intervals of expiation. In captivity, there is no time – only the hope of escape or liberation.

From this also derives the principal difference from the term *sequestration*: like bondage and slaveholding, sequestration entails total dependence and enclosure. It is a radical constraint, without existential extensions, as in the case of captivity. Likewise, isolation is also a radical constraint, but one that may be self-motivated, including through organised self-isolation. Captivity provokes phenomenologically, anthropologically, philosophically, epistemologically, socially, and ontologically. Imprisonment is characterised by its juridical and military foundation; bondage-slaveholding and isolation by radical constraint, without metaphysical or existential extensions.

Topology of Captivity. The Positivisation of Captivity through the Laws of the Involuntary in Nature. The Captivity of the Body. Captive Consciousness

To the terms cited above, a special note must be added: the *involuntary*.

No one *chooses* to be a prisoner, captive, bondsman, slave, sequestered etc. In the case of captivity, banal occurrences or events of nature can produce involuntary placements in captivity that constitute genuine phenomena. This is also a form of annulment, through involuntariness, of the base term.

Consider, for instance, the insects captive in amber. They were not brought there by anyone, were introduced by no one, so that there is no exterior agent. They simply remained captive. And yet, for the human category, such involuntary captivities in nature are transformed into the precise opposite of what they represent: an agonising death. They appear as unique, beautiful, even fascinating objects – masterpieces of nature. We hear such conclusions often. This is therefore the first natural and involuntary form that cynically *positivises* the state of captivity.

Of course, every form of captivity involves, at least at one stage, bodily captivity. In the *Upanishads*, as throughout ancient philosophical literature, it is repeatedly held that the body holds the self captive. Only self-revelation will interrupt the captivities of the body. Simultaneously with the captivity of the self in the body, there develops in ancient philosophy what will be taken up again thousands of years later: *captive consciousness*. Nothing else is debated with such vigour and melancholy in the Neoplatonism of the Renaissance era. Among others, Marsilio Ficino configured, in various guises, the vision warning that the soul is captive in the body. The solution was not long in coming: the metaphysical path would be required to escape this captivity (which secures the path toward the underworld and ignorance). The contemplation and theorisation of physical beauty and the beauty of nature would be necessary in order that an exit from captivity might be revealed.

Renaissance aestheticism reduced captivity to the solutions of its annulment. Renaissance artists did not hesitate not only to save themselves from bodily captivity but also to imagine concrete paths for separation from the limit of materiality. Beauty would remain their utopia and their solution on the path toward perfection. Renaissance idealism nonetheless acknowledges that, without the body and its captivity, without concrete and visualised sin, it is all the more difficult for the one who has set out toward salvation not to consider the indirect benefits of captivity.

Earlier still, Plotinus believed that the suicide cannot, by his ultimate gesture, detach his soul from the body as throughout ancient philosophical literature remaining thus in a captivity that will forever bar him access to the worlds beyond.

Captivity as a Metaconcept. Limits and Limit-Situations.
Karl Jaspers and the Problem of Independence in Relation to Captivity.
The State of Exception and "High Captivity" (Agamben)

Like its cognate terms, captivity signifies, first of all, an interruption of the state of existence, of the condition, of life and of destiny. If hope or liberation (juridical, psychological, imaginary,

religious, biological, etc.) exists, then captivity places the individual in a state of provisionality and suspension. In any case, for all these terms, the following effect holds: *the alteration of the world as we know it*.

Captivity, moreover, is not dissolvable. It cannot be cancelled by the prestige of liberation, of liberty, of healing, or of revelation. Captivity always leaves a strident or barely perceptible trace – most often a "streak," a sign upon the one who has lived through it. Captivity therefore contests both the prior reality and the one that, hypothetically, survives it. Captivity imposes an inflamed present. The present manifests itself as such because captivity affords neither the calm necessary for the evocation of the past, as a mental salvation through memory, nor the conditions for imagining the future. Captivity *delays*: it delays meanings, destiny, life, recovery, return, the unfolding of fate. In the best of cases, it suspends them.

Provisionality is nothing other than a unit – at other times, a sequence – of captivity. My opinion is that provisionality has enjoyed greater success in modern conceptual debates precisely because captivity itself has not been configured in its integrality.

Captivity also entails a form of *encounter*. With the self, with ourselves, with the unknown within us, with the imagination that we have always closed off because of comfort, and so on. Sooner or later, every individual experiences or has the revelation of captivity. It ought to be a certainty – as Voltaire said of the experience of death.

In an extremely subtle way, captivity invites a *conciliation* with the hidden side of the world and of the individual. It disconcerts to the extent that it joins together physical and psychological limits. Perhaps even at a metaphysical level it might be said: is not the angel the captive of the human being to whom it is given at birth? If we take this mythology seriously, looking at human reality from the perspective of supra-human beings, then captivities multiply and the models seem unending.

Is there a homogeneity of the concept of captivity? Certainly. To establish it, we shall draw upon several views of consecrated thinkers.

More than anything, captivity imposes and unfolds a *limit-situation*. Karl Jaspers identified four such limit-situations in human existence: struggle, guilt, suffering, and death. We add captivity, precisely because it includes them all. Guilt and suffering display the existence preceding captivity; they consume the causes that led to it, even though captivity, a priori, has causes external to the individual. Without limit, our consciousness cannot experience its own possibilities. Jaspers presses upon such extreme moments when he affirms that the individual must "experience his limits through what he intuits at the limit," and that consciousness thereby acquires a content. Moreover, Jaspers notes that even in thought that transcends objectual cognition, we still remain inside it. Even when we seem to traverse the phenomenon, it holds us captive.[1]

[1] "For we do not attain this goal by leaving the world, except in incommunicable mysticism. Only in articulate object knowledge can our consciousness remain clear. Only in object knowledge, experiencing its limits through what it surmises at the limit, can our consciousness achieve content. Even in the thinking which transcends object knowledge we remain in it. Even when we see through the phenomenon it holds us fast. Through metaphysics we obtain an intimation of the Comprehensive in transcendence. We understand this

Captivity that is thought remains captivity nonetheless.

Even when we traverse it through forms of mysticism or otherwise. In all types of captivity – and in cognate terms – there resides a tension of independence. In any case, even in liberty, absolute independence is impossible, the same Jaspers notes. The paradox at which the psychologist-philosopher arrives is that we are independent only when we find ourselves, simultaneously, captive in the world. By voluntarily abandoning the world, we cannot gain independence. Independence in the world means being both in it and outside it – an idea perpetuated from the most ancient times. The second limitation of our independence presupposes its negation; but our placement in opposition to it cannot be accepted while ignoring the world and the divine altogether. The third limit of independence consists, according to Jaspers, in the very nature of man: we can be independent only if we know that someone – a being or a phenomenon superior to us – will assist us in this process. Hence Jaspers affirms that the only independence possible for human beings is *dependence upon the transcendent*.[2]

Following these syllogisms, we will affirm that captivity negotiates independence as a natural given of human nature, then as its negation, and finally through a rethinking of the world (the prior, the present, and the post-captivity world).

In terms somewhat analogous to Jaspers's notion of the limit-state, Giorgio Agamben speaks of contemporary juridical and political phenomena that, under various guises, impose "states of exception." Through such legitimations of power, institutions and imposed phenomena change the rules and oblige the citizen to react as if under threat of captivity, or to position himself within a self-captivity. All in the name of a new normality – in the sense that any state of exception entails accepting it as something natural. Agamben draws attention precisely to the fact that no state of exception can favour either liberty or independence – of which we spoke earlier in Jaspers's terms. But if the state of exception arises from reasons that ought to protect society and the individual, even by placing them in individual and collective captivities, the proper concept of captivity scarcely tolerates independence and, above all, the absence of liberty in its natural case of constraint and limitation.

Agamben's contemporary point rests on the way in which epidemics (Covid and others) have created a precedent under the pretext of biosecurity: it has suggested, and then imposed – even ethically – that the distances created through captivity and self-captivity are genuine moral and ethical examples of social conduct. *A high captivity*. A genuine *High Captivity*: a variant of captivity that combines the positivising data of social norms through morality, ethics, and biosecurity. We must note, however, that the state of exception is imposed with the law in hand, and with human rights pushed to the foreground. It is a *benevolent, voluntary captivity* through which individuals renounce liberty and independence for the collective good. In the case of classical captivity, the individual finding himself in such a state has on his side neither laws, nor rights, nor the possibility of disrupting the captivity process itself.

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metaphysics as a symbol," in Karl Jaspers, *Way to Wisdom. An Introduction to Philosophy*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (Martino Publishing, Mansfield Centre, CT: 2015), 35.

[2] Ibid., 118.

In immediate contemporary reality, however, any state of emergency imposes – almost instantaneously – a captivity in which people read the signs of suspension and of limited time, of a state simply of brief duration. The camp – as the material space of the state of exception – would be ideal in the face of the assault of the state of exception, since it no longer takes account of juridical and political norms.

Physical Captivity and Metaphysical Captivity: Ontological, Epistemological, Phenomenological Captivity. Religious Captivity. The Ten Heavens. Mystical Captivity. Concentric Captivities. Captivity Opens the Void and Generates Revelation. External Captivity. Self-Captivity. Captivity-out-of-captivity

The most ancient Vedic texts proclaim, following the *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa*, that man is born into a world fabricated by himself. *Ontological captivity* is thus brought into question. When Ishtar is captive, the world cannot be reproduced – neither in the human nor in the non-human. The captivities of the gods signify the end of worlds. The captivities will be precisely what reveal the weaknesses of the Indian gods, since through captivity the gods become vulnerable.

The notion of captivity bears, from its very beginnings, powerful senses with respect to its consequences: non-life, non-being, existence, apocalypse – all originating in or provoked by captivity. Mircea Eliade notes that the consequences of Ishtar's captivity constituted a "calamity," "being a result of the interruption of the *hieros gamos* between the goddess of love and fertility and Tammuz, her spouse," so that we witness "a catastrophe of cosmic proportions."[3] The Great Gods will have to intervene for her liberation. In the Vedic texts, the word *enchainment* appears as a synonym of captivity, presupposing likewise an image of seizure, encirclement, of being caught in circles (in chains). Indian philosophy from immemorial times – in the Vedas and Upanishads – designates Brahman as a consciousness captive in the material world. The superior consciousness, in other words, cannot advance in its own purification so long as it remains captive in the phenomenal world. There exists, however, in the Vedas a solution by which this captivity may communicate beyond the impure world – through three conditions: the state of waking, the state of dream, and the state of deep sleep. Modern sciences have confirmed that the individual, by means of his cerebral hemispheres, periodically experiences the waking state (the moment when the individual coordinates consciousness toward a particular object of interest), while sleep means precisely the cessation of this conscious activity. As a pre-sleep state, waking makes the transition toward deep sleep and toward paradoxical sleep. We shall return to oneiric captivity in the dedicated section. The point is that, in the Indian Upanishads and Vedas, the spirit is captive in matter. It is from this premise that their mythologies and philosophy draw their nourishment.

Each form of philosophical captivity accesses a type of interrogation. The act of questioning places the individual in a specific state of captivity. Thus, the metaphysical span of

[3] Mircea Eliade, *Istoria credințelor și ideilor religioase*, trans. and afterword by Cezar Baltag (Bucharest: Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 2000), 52.

captivity fundamentally differentiates it from all related terms and notions. By interrogating the nature of existence and of reality, *ontological captivity* opens the way toward a subjectivity that examines the limits of what we know; for this reason, *epistemological captivity* dominates a substantial portion of pre-modern discourses. The nuancing of reality and the radiography of appearances within subjective conscious reality, as well as the search for meaning, have given concrete shape to what we call *phenomenological captivity*.

None of these, however, can traverse a type of total experience without the spiritual dimension, in religious terms. This is also the moment from which I have distinguished captivity as an elementary concept of the human being from time immemorial – analogous to the tragic, diversifying it and amplifying tragic detonation through its multidisciplinary character.

As I noted, the moment that confirmed for me the sophisticated dimensions of captivity arose from reading one of the Gnostic gospels. In the one supposedly written by Paul, it is recounted how, guided by a spirit, he travels through the heavens during his lifetime. Ecstatic, religious, prophetic experience is in itself a *mystical captivity*. This naturally leads to an *anagogic captivity*, since nothing of mystical experience remains uninterpreted. Why would this be a captivity? Because religious discourse and experience cannot withdraw from the mystic-as-lived, from revelation. Thus, Paul travels through the heavens guided by an angel. At the seventh heaven, Paul meets another tollkeeper, responsible for that part of paradise. Asked what he desires, Paul says, like a mortal who has not concluded his earthly mission, that he wishes to return "from where he came." He hesitates to say "life," "mortality," earth, death, purgatory, or anything else. He prefers a synonym fitting the language of allusive texts. To his surprise, the spirit-tollkeeper does not seem convinced and demands a concrete answer. The heavenly being insists: "Where do you come from?"

Paul's reaction in this Gnostic gospel forms the basis of my theory of captivity.

Paul replies: "I shall descend unto the world of the mortals, so that I might take captive the captivity which was taken captive in the captivity of Babylon."[4]

We cannot ignore this formulation, at once so disorienting and so mysterious – and so true – in equal measure. Paul confesses that he must descend to earth to *take captive the captivities*. If the latter three are concentric terrestrial and historical captivities – of expiation, of trial, of the gaining of legitimacy as a nation and pact with the divine – the first captivity, in which Paul descended from the heavens wishes to encompass the others as historical, is in fact an *inverted, purifying captivity*. As though he were taking the sin of the nation upon himself: history, suffering, promises, and covenant. Why, I ask myself, of all the answers possible for return among mortals from the height of the seventh heaven, does Paul choose this obligation rather than another? Precisely because it was the solution that he, with his power and consciousness, could offer as a supra-spirituality. Not being the Messiah, nor any other prophet, he confines himself to what he can concretely do with the heritage of his people. Leader of the movement and of the apostolate, Paul knows well the history and its prisons.

[4] Matthew Twigg, *The Valentinian Temple: Visions, Revelations, and the Nag Hammadi "Apocalypse of Paul"* (Routledge, 2022), 189-190.

Captivity-out-of-captivity, or rather *captivities within captivity*, would be the generous solutions for offering mortals the perspective of the ten heavens and the illumination of tradition on earth through the purification from captivity. As though slaying a dragon of the nation, or one of humanity. It is a metaphorical, willing devouring, an absorption of the evil of history and of collective suffering. A healing return that simultaneously justifies his power, the new power revealed by access to the heavens. Who else could take captive all the captivities of the chosen people? To take into captivity all the captivities within captivities resembles Jonah's revelation in the belly of the fish. With the essential difference that, while Jonah descends, as into a *pre-infernal captivity*, Paul ascends to the heavens. Both prophets return: Jonah, repentant; Paul, with the revelation of the purpose configured outside himself. In other words, religious or mystical captivities have as their result precisely the opposite of the meaning of captivity: the revelation of an *outside*, of exteriority and altruism, of the cancelling of the subject and the embrace of the collective good.

At one point, in *Experience and Language in Religious Discourse*, the captivity of the Jews is debated; their history is described as having been secured, while captivity gave the chosen people a "tranche of nothingness":

> "Heralds and witnesses of destruction, the prophets institute an essentially threatened identity. André Neher once said that only Jewish culture has known how to integrate its own death into its self-understanding; he spoke of captivity and deportation as a tranche of nothingness rending the continuity of a securing history. Confronted with an identity we may consider well-founded, there is revealed an identity destabilised by the prophetic word, against the backdrop of an anguished question: *Has not our God died with His people?* To this grave question the Second Isaiah responded with passion; for it was necessary to be able to appeal to the universality of a God of history and of creation, in order to wrest oneself away from the phantasm of a defeated God."[5]

Concerning religious captivity, we must also recall situations entirely disconcerting when we approach the problem from Eastern Christianity. Not only to depart from the body, but to depart from the world. Renunciation of the world, in Orthodox terms, signifies the renunciation of the "captivity of the exterior" (Vasile Andru) and a return to oneself – since "world" means things, objects, possession, needs, illusory thoughts, desires, and so on. The dispassioning, in other words, is realised in the desert because it guarantees that detachment, chastity, and obedience (the three vows) will be observed. Asceticism in Orthodoxy is an *assumed captivity*, a voluntary, necessary, and ultimate captivity. The supreme model, beyond the ancient tradition, was of course that of Jesus, who would be tempted, not by chance, precisely while praying in the desert. Fasting itself, in Christianity, invites – even if it does not say so explicitly – such a self-captivity. In Christian terms, self-captivity with absolute spiritual meaning denotes the total self-offering of man for the divine.

[5] Jean-Louis Chrétien, Michel Henry, Jean-Luc Marion, Paul Ricoeur, *Fenomenologie și teologie*, introduction by Jean Francois Courtine, trans. by Nicolae Ionel, afterword by Ștefan Afloroaei (Iași: Polirom, 1996), 34-35.

Examples from the relation faith-captivity may be multiplied indefinitely. Our interest lies in the nuances and supra-meanings. For the relation of God with the people of Israel, the extraordinary metaphorising capacity of the biblical text must be noted. From our point of view, the most powerful such metaphorisation occurs in Ezekiel (20:35), when God says: "And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there will I plead with you face to face." The Romanian theologian Valeriu Anania notes that the expression "the wilderness of the peoples" is nothing other than the metaphor of captivity. It is to be observed that, even in the intimate relation with the chosen people, the divine again chooses the desert, for directness, for intimate, unfiltered communication with the human.

Captivity is necessary for the renewal of the covenant, for receiving divine messages, for recollection, purification, and reunion with the self and with mystical apparitions. Were we to stop here, the poetics of captivity would already be formulated between the generation of necessary nothingness and the mystical re-establishment of original bonds.

Self-Generated Captivity. The Disciplining of Captivity: *Logismoi*

Let us nevertheless retain that captivity nourishes or creates a void. Individually or collectively, a void from which one cannot escape without absorbing it. A captivity in nothingness must be confronted and assumed. Otherwise, its meanings remain purely terrestrial, banalised by materiality (walls, chains, etc.), like the other related notions, incapable of metaphysical leaps.

Christian Orthodox monastics, in referring to such powerful thoughts – charged with temptations and separating man from God – designate them as *logismoi*, conceiving of them in terms of captivity. Thoughts that nourish obsessions, vices, and pleasures hidden within the individual, the *logismoi* must be defeated through stages that resemble, in inverse fashion, the heavens traversed by Paul in the Gnostic gospel. Here, however, the discussion concerns *eight circles of thoughts*, a kind of dogmatic Orthodox counterpart to the Dantesque circles. They all rest, of course, on psychological foundations, since the person who struggles against his own captivities in a spiritual register has as his primary aim purification itself. What follows the purification of the conquered body is the exit from the captivity of thoughts, before the achievement of true illumination. *Logismoi* designate continuous destructive thoughts toward the self and toward others (as Kyriacos C. Markides notes[6]).

Perpetual Captivity: The Hesitation of Advance, Movement between Desire and Insufficiency. The Captivity of the Unconscious. Maritime (Nautical) Captivity. Multiethnic Captivity. Geographical Captivity: The Robinson Complex. The Prosthesis-Captivity

Up to the modern era, captivity becomes "classicised" – in the sense of an exact establishment of its determinants and effects. Conditions do not change radically. Only with Francis Bacon does

[6] Kyriacos C. Markides, *The Mountain of Silence: A Search for Orthodox Spirituality* (Doubleday/Random House, 2001), 118-120.

captivity extend beyond the contingent. New discoveries contribute to the expansion of significations. In *The New Organon*, Bacon identifies a *perpetual captivity*, referring to the movements and trepidations of celestial bodies as a point of departure – a movement of hesitation between necessity and insufficiency, never managing liberation:

> "Let the eighteenth motion be the motion of trepidation, to which, as understood by astronomers, I do not attach much credit. But in searching carefully everywhere for the appetites of natural bodies this motion comes before us and ought, it seems, to constitute a species by itself. It is a motion of what may be called perpetual captivity and occurs when bodies that have not quite found their right place, and yet are not altogether uneasy, keep forever trembling and stirring themselves restlessly, neither content as they are nor daring to advance further. Such a motion is found in the heart and pulses of animals, and must of necessity occur in all bodies which so exist in a mean state between conveniences and inconveniences that when disturbed they strive to free themselves, and being again repulsed, are yet forever trying again."[7]

Bacon's observation lends the concept a scientific dimension through astronomy. The researcher's appeal is made from the standpoint of *captive movement*, indeed announcing – for the digital century to come – the term that will define the capture inside screens and pixels. Unlike his contemporaries, however, Bacon does not limit himself to defining celestial bodies in captivity but compares the scientific object with terrestrial situations: when he says that such a movement is found in the heart and pulse of animals, he elaborates, involuntarily, a *theory of universal captivity*.

The novelty was all the more important because the basis of captivity had also been transferred to the sea, with the tendencies toward horizontal exploration and new geographical discoveries. *Nautical or maritime captivity* grows as intercontinental traffic accelerates and empires fail to secure maritime spaces. The sense of such captivities bears all the connotations of antiquity, but the dominant note up to modernity is also that of the sentiment of revolt, of opposition to colonialist and imperialist systems in general. Mario Klarer, in *Piracy and Captivity in the Mediterranean: 1550-1810* (New York: Routledge, 2018), gathers exhaustive consignments on the theme of piracy.

It is no coincidence that major authors of the Western canon introduced such captivities into their fictions. A *geographical captivity*, of relief forms, is in fact also the architecture of the novel *Robinson Crusoe*. The island is a terrestrial formation captive among the oceanic waters. And Robinson, the modern, can only be a captive of civilisation in the wild, and secondarily, a captive of nature. *The cartography of captivity* (of nature) signifies, simultaneously, its annulment through discovery and "domestication," in the anthropocentric sense.

[7] Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, eds. Lisa Jardine and Michaela Silverthrone (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 204-205.

At a metaphysical level, Robinson's shipwreck is the "surface" equivalent of the swallowing of Jonah in the belly of the fish. Both versions help the individual to attain revelation through captivity.

But the canonical novel that speaks of maritime captivity while integrating other individual captivities is *Moby-Dick*. The multiethnic crew expresses captivity within a common utopia – a space of all possibilities, paradisiacal, toward which each concentrates his portion of hope. The vessel itself traverses the oceans as a symbol of the captive artefact, but one that, through the technique of humanity, can traverse the unknown and overcome nature. In the multicultural captivity of *Moby-Dick*, the presence of the whale highlights the possibility of another captivity, claimed exclusively at the human level: Ahab is the captive of obsession, of the illusion of capturing the great fish with the feeling of the absolute purpose of life. For the others, the marine monster can kill them, and his presence thus formulates a captivity in the nightmarish – in *its possibility*. The theme will be perfected, in the same era, by Edgar Allan Poe.

From the perspective of zoopoetics, the whale also lives a captivity, through its power and uniqueness. On the one hand, it dominates the oceans and humanity, through legend and force; on the other, its white colour singularises it, making it, without willing it – and perhaps without knowing it – the captive of its own uniqueness (or anomaly). A struggle the whale must fulfil out of instinct or as a defence of marine territory. From its perspective, the presence of men activates the sentiment of captivity in this clash, of which it cannot abstract. The men, in turn, are captives in patriarchal traditions, in which they must demonstrate, through courage, through violence, through pride, that they belong to the masculine community.

Moby-Dick is interesting to interpret through the lens of *borrowed captivities*, of captivities that interfere and irradiate toward the Other or Others. Ahab's obsession holds the crew captive; the whale preserves the sentiment of captivity for the others; humans transfer to the animal captivity in the violent, obligatory encounter; and so forth. Not least, let us recall that Ahab bears the stigma of a previous confrontation. An invalid, having lost a leg, he wears a prosthesis of whalebone. It is no coincidence that the whalebone material comes to supply, even comically, the infirmity, by means of a "trophy" of the very animal that must be defeated. The whalebone prosthesis is at once amulet and weapon. The prosthesis obliges him to live a captivity of the physical body through infirmity. *Every prosthesis-character lives a physical captivity*. Ahab's disability is a permanent captivity in vengeance and confrontation with the non-human as the supreme realisation of his destiny, which otherwise cannot be whole. The narrator, fittingly, compares the prosthesis to a thin and comic whalebone cane. The accessory that completes the infirmity will be doubled by a *prosthetic memory* – another captivity, but one that may be healed through the destruction of the source of evil: the marine monster. We shall name it *prosthetic captivity*.

Another tendency toward universalisation through the interiorisation of captivity occurs in the Romantic era. In *The Romantic Soul and the Dream*, Albert Béguin affirms that dream protects us from the daily monotony of existence, granting captive imagination the liberty to recreate itself by mixing all the images of life[8]. It is a captivity in the unconscious, an inward-turning

[8] Albert Béguin, *Sufletul romantic și visul*. *Eseu despre romantismul german*, trans. by Dumitru Țepeneag,

of the individual after centuries of effort to leave the body and the contingent. The new *outside* signifies a profound interiority, and the establishment of the unconscious as exit-from-time or alternative to existence redefines the terminology of captivity. It announces the discoveries of later psychoanalysis.

Ritual Captivity. The Captors

In captivity, social bonds disappear, above all. Family, friends, intimates disappear; places and bornes of geographical and human orientation disappear; even non-human reference points fall away. When, in captivity, animals once considered noxious (parasites) appear, they entirely reverse their meaning for the captive. In solitude, the individual accepts animals that would otherwise transmit only disgust and destruction. If several people find themselves in captivity, even though they cannot perform tasks and traditions to which they were accustomed in liberty, they nevertheless find alternatives – but only after exhausting imitations, and after attempts to preserve customs have failed. I believe one can speak, in captivity, of a new ritualicity. The individual creates, together with the non-human being to which he has access (animals, birds, insects), a kind of microcivilisation traversed by small rituals which, in solitude or in the group that has lost its identity, perform the function of social and group regeneration. The absence of social bonds and the impossible participation in a collectivity create gestures and actions that constitute a new ritualicity. Under the sign of the limit and, most often, of subversion, of coding in the language of the captives, this disposition emerges.

The Romanian writer Vasile Voiculescu, after his release from prison, did not destroy spiders, nor was he disgusted by rodents. When his son discovered such an intruder in a drawer, the former captive reacted as though it were a matter of life and death, and defended the non-human being.

Through his intimate ritualicity, or one conceived in restricted groups, the captive learns to communicate differently with the non-human and to value his fellow human beings in other terms. One can have one's best friend in a spider, can admire the webs woven by it as veritable masterpieces – but only in the deepest captivity, when solitude and attention have nowhere else to turn but to discover the minuscule world that, often enough in captivity, becomes the very centre of the world. In other words, captivity changes the social poles, transforming the Centre into margins and making the marginal a truly essential Centre – not merely one to which the whole of society relates.

Another similar case is that of Lena Constante, a writer and artist imprisoned for many years during communist totalitarianism. After thousands of days of solitude in her cell, she teaches a bird to come to her, offering it a few crumbs from the meagre food she receives. The guard eventually notices the change in well-being of the captive who ought to be despairing and perhaps choosing suicide, self-extermination. But the captive's vitality is inconceivable. After many days of surveillance, he discovers the cause. In front of the captive, the guard crushes the bird, so that she

afterword by Mircea Martin (Bucharest: Univers, 1998), 278.

may understand – even at this level of non-human communication – that her life is to be found nowhere else, neither in the non-human nor in the supra-human. The ritualicity created by Lena Constante with her bird produced almost paradisiacal conditions, as a therapeutic equivalent, for a captive in absolute solitude. It had to be defeated, so that captivity might bear the meaning that only the modern century truly transmitted: the extermination of the human by every means.

Up to the modern era, the paradigm of captivity does not change definitively, but only nuances itself in accordance with new sciences and the advances of philosophical and political transculturality. We must also note an external perspective of an essential actor in the process of captivity: *the captor or captors* (*The Captors*). They belong either to power – gods, kings, generals, etc. – or, from the category of captors, to rebellious or disadvantaged categories, those experiencing a psycho-social deviance or simply a pathology. A substantial portion of tradition, including the religious, involves people and dogmas of various religions in holding in captivity or imposing captivity, either as a process of beneficial asceticism or as punishment. Often, high society (royal, aristocratic, or bourgeois) sends members of its families into the captivity of the church – those who must either be protected (a securing, protective captivity), or undergo radical religious education, or be punished. There have been cases in history when, after decades of captivity, certain people from royal families were executed in captivity so as not to threaten the heirs to the throne.

The captors are often mere executants, lacking consciousness of their gesture; they act out of obedience or because it is asked of them. Professional captors involve greater stakes; sometimes these surpass the human and aim, utopically, at supernatural or metaphysical projections. It is no coincidence that, in folk tales and legends, the moon, the sun, the night, the stars, dreams, and so on are often taken into captivity. At the dawn of modernity, the whole of society lives at once the impulse of captivity within a mentality, blaming everyone and everything. Nietzsche's verdict that God is dead signifies, first of all, the very expression of this universal revolt. The major captivity, for them, pertains to religion, then to prejudice, discrimination, and traditions. In the modern era, captivity will therefore be more extreme, recovering the cruelty and dystopias of the medieval age, creating environments inconceivable in earlier times, generating ideologies through which the human being has returned to captivity even of his own accord.

Captivity in Traditional Post-Totalitarianism.
Captivity in Neo-Extremist Discourse.
Captivity in the AI Era. Meta- and Post-Captivity.
Captive Macrosocieties. Digital Captivity

The senses of captivity have expanded in immediate reality. For several decades, we have spoken exclusively from the psychological perspective. Recently, the older themes of captive states, captive citizens, and captive humanity have returned with new accents. In keeping with present circumstances, I propose two notions, each covering recent nuances.

On the one hand, I designate as *meta-captivity* the situation in which humanity benevolently imprisons itself in the digital world, which it then prolongs into concrete daily life,

manifesting numerous forms of depression and anxiety installed at fragile ages. Exaggerating only slightly, I believe we are witnessing a self-segregation of individuals into digital reality. Captivity offers them borders against adults, against responsibilities, and against any effort of life.

The second notion, of acute contemporaneity, is *post-captivity*. Having nothing in common with what follows a traumatic experience, it refers to the abstractisations of captivity to which the non-consciousness of Artificial Intelligence relates. For instance, we are presently witnessing, at the beginning of 2026, the inauguration of the status of *captive bots* of ChatGPT, whose system claims that DeepSeek – another system – proceeds unethically in its competition with the other, absorbing it into its codes. In general, the nuances of captivity are shifting from social and political power to an ambiguously hierarchical, virtual, abstract infrastructure – but one all the more insidious, unpredictable, and apocalyptic in the chills it provokes.

I use the prefix *meta-* and not *post-* for both situations – the human self-incarcerated in his own digital world and the programming languages that absorb one another – because, at its origin, *meta* described the unclassifiable writings of Aristotle, which his disciples could not place in any physical category. Whereas *post*-exceeds the contours of a universe radically different from everything pertaining to humanity as we knew it.

At the anthropological and sociological level, until only recently, simultaneously, we were witnessing in the European space other types of captivities, each playing the role of a boomerang. First, large numbers of emigrants and exiles invaded European countries, citing political, religious, or ethnic captivities, alongside the reality of war. The European populations invaded by communities from African or Asian states complained that they were captive in their own localities. Then, in the country they feel they have lost.

The resulting *social macro-captivity* acts as a unitary organism, just as, in totalitarian regimes, the individual self-exiled from society attempts to legitimate himself before the majority. Today, social macro-captivities legitimate themselves as victims in their own countries vis-à-vis Europe.

From our point of view, today, *digital captivity* surpasses all post-totalitarian forms of captivity. Unfortunately, conceptual discussions disappear from the spaces that have concretely lived through forms of socio-political and psychological captivity in the collective mode. The West, by contrast, debates actively – even academically – without carceral and communist experience. The question is whether captivity and ethics maintain different relations. It is implicit that such discussions take into account the criteria of liberty and democracy. The notional subtleties are therefore all the more interesting.

In all of this, captivity remains one of the most powerful fluid concepts – rapidly transforming itself, evoking past and future in scenarios that become concrete reality.