Marius CONKAN

Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University

Cluj-Napoca, Romania

marius.conkan@ubbcluj.ro

THE RHIZOMATIC: A SPATIAL FORM IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN POETRY

Abstract: Using geocritical methods and exploring the spatiality of texts, this study aims to demonstrate that the rhizomatic, the well-known Deleuzian concept, constitutes one of the spatial forms in contemporary Romanian poetry. In this sense, rhizomatic poetics transgress unitary semantics through interferences, disorders and (constantly rearranged) connections of forms and images to ultimately signal new perceptions of reality. As global meanings are pulverized, within some networks that capitalize mainly on the trace and the semantic transgressivity, these poetics end up generating a continuous reassembly of real elements, akin to a system which, through juxtaposition, multiplicity and nomadism, creates its own formal and affective space.

Keywords: geocriticism, rhizome, space, contemporary poetry, Romanian poetry

Analyzing especially mimetic literature, geocriticism explores, through its leading representatives such as Bertrand Westphal, Robert T. Tally Jr. and Franco Moretti, "the socio-cultural dynamics of the relationship between space in literature and literature in space" (Conkan and Gârdan 6). From this point of view, the purpose of geocriticism in general is to investigate, in a socio-poetic and ideological sense, both the spatial representations in literature and the mechanisms by which real geography shapes productions and aesthetic forms. "Literary texts represent social spaces, but social space shapes literary forms" (Thacker 34) – this dialectic mobilizes all geocritical methods, whether we refer to those which are quantitative or to the practices proposed by Tally

Jr., Westphal or Marc Brosseau. In fact, Andrew Thacker defines, in a manifesto-article, the main premises that legitimize and render necessary the practice of a critical literary geography:

> a critical literary geography offers a more self-reflexively theorized criticism revolving around a triumvirate of materiality, history, and power. Critical literary geography brings texts, in a variety of fashions, back to the materiality of socially produced spaces: the "where" of texts is variously located in the historical matter of social space. (…) To think geographically about literary and cultural texts means to understand them in material locations, locations that can and should be examined historically and with an awareness of how diverse spaces can reflect, produce, or resist forms of power. This then explains the idea of a critical literary geography: to stress the distance from an effortless mapping of represented landscapes in literary texts, and to raise more complex questions about space and power, and how space and geography affect literary forms and styles (Thacker 33).

Spatial materiality, ideology, forms of power, socio-spatial dialectics, chronotopology, geovisualization: such elements invoked by Thacker can always be the basis of a coherent geocritical approach articulated and meant to explore the dynamics between "the textuality of space and the spatiality of texts" (Thacker 28), between "geospace" (or real space, according to Barbara Piatti) and literary productions. What we are essentially being offered is to shift the emphasis from the classical textual analysis (of poetics and of the imaginary) to the analysis of the geographical and ideological context (the generator of aesthetic forms), thus onto the relocation of literary theory from its comfort zone in a transdisciplinary framework. Especially since, as Marc Brosseau reminds us:

> authors are neither extraordinary creators articulating universal truth about the human condition, nor simple producers conditioned by their positions in an overarching social structure; they are embodied social subjects articulating their positionality (in terms of class, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality) within broader socio-spatial contexts (Brosseau 11).

This observation could ultimately be the postulate of any analysis of space in literature and of literature in space, starting precisely from an adequate and precise contextual positioning.

As for the geocritical study of poetry, it is considered by Westphal as a potential socio-spatial practice, although he acknowledges that in his projects he was more interested in literally mapping (and not metaphorically, as is sometimes applied) mimetic literature and contemporary art (Conkan and Modoc 2020). Indeed, over the past decade and a half, there have been several spatial analyses of poetry, such as Ian Davidson's *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry* (2007), Tom Bristow's *The Anthropocene Lyric: An Affective Geography of Poetry, Person, Place* (2015), and Heather H. Yeung's *Spatial Engagement with Poetry* (2015). Because it produces intense geospatial distortions and defamiliarizations, poetry reflects less cartographically representative geographies, making it more difficult to interpret geocritically by methods that have been successfully tested for the novel and other forms of (non)mimetic discourse. For example, in an article published in *Caietele Echinox* (2020), I investigated certain transgressive spaces configured in contemporary Romanian poetry, showing the extent to which post-communist chronotopographies persist and are subversive to certain representations of power.

Continuing this process of mapping poetic spatiality, I will attempt to demonstrate that one of the structural models for recent Romanian poetry is the rhizome, the well-known concept theorized by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. They define, in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), certain rhizome-specific principles of connection, heterogeneity, and multiplicity: "any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything else, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order. (...) There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root" (Deleuze and Guattari 7-8). In Ian Davidson's interpretation, which identifies such spatial structures in poetry, the rhizome:

> is without beginning or end, but is always a middle, like a plateau, and between places. If it is like a map, it is a map that is always in the process of production. (...) The rhizomatic is

therefore always in the process of construction, and never settled, and contains within itself the possibilities of its own liberation (Davidson 41).

In fact, these rhizomatic principles were the starting point for what Pierre Joris defines as "nomad poetics", understood as "a war machine, always on the move, always changing, morphing, moving through languages, cultures, terrains, times without stopping" (Joris 26). Starting from such a spatial model based on the idea of heterogeneity, multiplicity, and interstitiality, we can identify some elements that are representative of contemporary Romanian poetry.

If tree-type poetics (taking over the Deleuzian dichotomy between tree and rhizome) are created by authors who emphasize, formally and imagistically, the articulation of global meanings, meant to configure a homogeneous stylistic construct, rhizome-type poetics produce opposite movements, and the fragmentation of forms and images becomes one of its basic principles. The rhizomatic type can be considered, therefore, poetics that transgress unitary semantics (as an effect of stylistic cohesion and clarity), using interferences, disorders and (constantly rearranged) connections of form and meaning to ultimately signal new perceptions of reality, which are often unusual. Rhizomatic poetics are thus characterized by the nomadic circulation of images, a process that transposes a poly- and hypersensory reality, felt at the level of reception by interference flashes. Such paradigmatic changes may have their source in the retraction of cultural geography and the relationship between identity and space according to mechanisms that shape multi-layered, heterogeneous and hybrid realities. As global meanings are pulverized, within some connections/networks that capitalize mainly on the trace and the semantic transgressivity, these poetics end up generating a continuous reassembly of real elements.

Therefore, some Romanian authors have configured, by instrumentalizing the rhizome, one of the *spatial forms* of recent poetry, creating "a nomadic language of affects" (Joris 7). In Joseph Frank's view,

> modern literature, exemplified by such writers as T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Marcel Proust, and James Joyce, is moving in the direction of spatial form. This means that the reader is

intended to apprehend their work spatially, in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence (Frank 225).

In other words, the spatial form:

> refers to the ways that the formal characteristic of works of modern or postmodern literature register a distinct spatiality from or in addition to the temporality of narrative. For example, by establishing a simultaneity of events through the use of juxtaposition or back-and-forth cross-cutting, a narrative may elude its temporal progression and mark its spatiality (Tally Jr. 159).

Given these characteristics, the concept of spatial form can be transferred to the analysis of rhizomatic poetry written by several Romanian authors, as it relies, in a formal sense, on the idea of juxtaposition, multiplicity and nomadism of images and meanings, akin to a "system that produces its own space" (Davidson 39).

In his poetry book *Instalația* [Installation] (2016), Alex Văsieș creates in a complex way a rhizomatic type of poetics, contributing to the paradigmatic mutations in the Romanian poetry of the last decade. The very first poem of the book, programmatically entitled *Installation*, relies on a permanent semantic and sensory transfer between images and states, capable of producing hybridizations, reconnections and new levels of perception within corporeal dimensions:

> Installation with blue lights, I see it at night before
> falling asleep, it is stronger than me.
> It will resist me. I lock it in the cellar for a hundred years and it
> it will still light up. I see it in the evening when I look up.
> I will not light anymore up on the inside.
> ....
> Because I look at the power cords
> and I don't touch them, so that snow won't fall on them.
>
> A stream of snow that would melt, disappearing
> without traces, not very far away. Here, almost,

in another world. Which I also entered into a little

when I applied to college and the college was wrong (Văsieș 9).[1]

However, the installation, which in art induces a unique perception of space-time (not only in the formalist sense of estrangement or defamiliarization), by staging objects and narratives, has its equivalent in this type of poetic installation, network or connection of spatial and affective elements, which make up, in a fractal sense, new versions of reality. Each poem is constructed through a *mise en abyme* of existential fragments, which come to contain and multiply each other, depending on how light "crosses" the space of memory and perception – and this is essentially the spectral, poetic installation.

Such a perspective on reality, with a strong defamiliarization effect, is achieved through procedures that describe the rhizomatic nature of the poems, at the level of the construction of hybrid meanings and images. Alex Văsieș opts, for example, for a non-linear composition, in which the text is constantly cracked, either by cuts meant to delay its structural coherence or by the gradual decoupling of the poem from its emotional and semantic background. In other words, the poetry in *Installation* avoids global meanings at all costs, as these would make it a prisoner of a strictly thematic interpretation. On the contrary, the author often evokes a state, an existential sequence, or a pivotal image, only to "betray" it later as the poetic discourse takes on an unprecedented, unpredictable turn (as in "Pastorala Alemană" [German Pastoral] or "Copilul vine de departe" [The Child Comes from Afar]). However, the traces within the text are constantly (re)connected, even when such connections deepen its ambiguous semantics, to the point where poetry becomes spectral, invaded from all angles by a magnetism of image and affect, visible in such verses:

Return with me to the dark objects in your box.
(The fissure deepens with each passing day,
makes connections in morning walks.)

---

[1] "Instalația cu lumini albastre, o văd seara înainte/ să adorm, e mai puternică decât mine./ Îmi va rezista. O închid în beci o sută de ani și ea/ tot va lumina. Eu o văd seara cînd mă uit în sus./ Eu nu voi mai lumina din persoana mea./.../ Pentru că eu mă uit la cablurile de curent/ și nu le ating, să nu cadă zăpada de pe ele.// Firișor de zăpadă care s-ar topi, dispărînd/ fără urme, nu foarte departe. Aici, aproape,/ într-o altă lume. În care puțin am intrat și eu// cînd am dat la facultate și facultatea a greșit" (my translation).

Go to the dam where you see bright and expensive power.

At the sadness of the few types of shadow

that the sun allows us,

of the girls with violent gestures, at the panel with secret buttons (Văsieș 51).[2]

Gabi Eftimie also operates with a similar type of interferential poetics, thus grounding such spatial forms in recent Romanian lyric poetry. With her volume *Nordul e o stare de spirit* [The North is a State of Mind] (2014), the author inaugurated a poetic language capable of mapping infra-real and heterotopic territories (Foucault 1988), located at the intersection of poetry and photography. In fact, due to her predilection for structural and stylistic hybridizations, the author practically foreshadowed the rhizomatic constructions that are involved in many current Romanian poetics. The volume *Sputnik în grădină* [Sputnik in the Garden] (2020), continues this type of affective mapping and stratifies, through photo-poetic configurations, an acute spatial experience, developed on several semantic and visual planes.

Consisting of three parts suggestively entitled "Spații verzi" [Green Spaces], "Vară verde-albastră" [Green-Blue Summer] and "Playlist de toamnă" [Autumn Playlist], the volume captures, in a pluriperspective and polyphonic manner, the relationship between nature, objects and the "human form" (Eftimie 23). Gabi Eftimie attempts, especially in her "environmental" poems, to visualize what D. H. Lawrence would call "the spirit of place" and theorists in geocriticism "the sense of place", meaning the images and cognitive-affective representations released by a certain space/place or a specific geography (Alexander). The result is a spatial assemblage with a profound sensory transgression (or even synesthesic transgression), through which we witness the reconstruction of meanings and geographical images that, excellently anchored from a photographic standpoint, are able to defamiliarize an entire cultural universe.

I chose a spot in the middle of the sun

emerald bug,

---

[2] "Întoarce-te cu mine la obiectele întunecate din cutia ta./ (Fisura se adîncește pe zi ce trece,/ face legături în plimbări dimineața.)/ Du-te la baraj unde vezi tu putere luminoasă și scumpă./ La tristețea puținelor tipuri de umbră/ pe care soarele ni le îngăduie nouă,/ fetițelor cu gesturi violente, la panoul cu butoane secrete" (my translation).

shard of glass on my arm,
a woman dry as a plum
crocheting in front of me,
quarreling.

Because of myopia, Monet. Manet? Leave it. Yellowish, reddish, greenish-blue.
The metallic chorus of the roosters returns in spring
echoes in every enchanted valley (Eftimie 16).[3]

But what are the strategies of this reading and mapping of spaces in *Sputnik în grădină*? First of all, we can identify a sort of poetic impressionism (Monet himself is evoked at one point), visible in the way the author explores and describes the sensations caused by certain "microphenomena" (especially natural). It is worth mentioning here the transgressions at the level of perception (rhizomatic anyway) and the spatial frames reproduced according to the projection of light or the superimposed perspectives (in the poem *bănuiesc lacul* [i suspect the lake]). Thus, spectral, immersive spaces, created by multifocalization, predominate in the volume, in which a posthuman or, on the contrary, mythological sensibility is actualized (as in "pădurea cu troli" [the forest with trolls], "fragi" [strawberries], "supă săpun mîntuire" [salvation soap soup]). Not infrequently, the author relies on the construction of spectacular ecosystems, which circumscribe the human in an evanescent way, or on a stroll in the "green spaces" (Eftmie 17), of the simulacrum type, of the city.

Along with the visualization of polymorphic representations, infra-real phenomena are explored depending on the movement of light and multifocal frames/objects (see "microfenomene observate acasă" [microphenomena observed at home]). All this is transposed by the impersonalization of the poetic voice, which is, paradoxically, tender-glacial, given "at a minimum" (Eftimie 29), being sometimes a correlative of simulated landscapes, touched by a non-affective light: "When did we begin to seem so strange in natural light?/ Since when are we no longer part of the

---

[3] "Am ales un loc în mijlocul soarelui/ gîză de smaragd,/ ciob de sticlă pe braț,/ femeie uscată ca o prună/ croșetează în fața mea,/ se ceartă.// Din cauza miopiei, Monet. Manet? Las' așa./ Gălbui, roșiatic, verzui-albăstrui./ Corul metalic al cocorilor se întoarce primăvara/ răsună cu ecou în fiecare vale fermecată" (my translation).

human species?" (Eftimie 24). On the other hand, the technique of "molding" the traces left by bodies, objects and phenomena defines for this volume, reflecting the specific spectrality of these poetic cartographies:

> The coldness of the things around is so exact, no unforgiving, so that when I pull myself out of the landscape,
> I will leave a mold in the air, a void in a human for (Eftimie 23);

> From the train, something like
> a sun dissolved in the air,
> fog carried by the wind like a veil,
> limbs still heavy,
> graceless after the winter,
> I leave a mold in the seat's sponginess (Eftimie 15).[4]

In addition to the cartographic reading and writing of (micro) phenomena with strong emotional impact, another semantic plan of the volume is provided by sci-fi registers, in which the "machinery of nature" (Eftimie 25) and the cosmos become performative spaces, interfering with the digital. Immersion into the posthuman is thus inevitable: classic/fixed identities are erased, and a new sensitivity, of the android type, originates (see "roboto mono"). A special note is, in this sense, that of the ecocritical dimensions of the volume, in which the junction between nature (as energetic space), the human and technology is rendered heterotopically, as an assembly of organic and inorganic textures (see "fluturi în paranteză" [butterflies in parentheses], "pădure portocalie" [orange forest], "se vede soarele prin mine" [the sun can be seen through me]). To these is added photographic performativity (see "beau din același pahar cu un bondar" [drinking from the same glass with a bumblebee]), reverberated by a silent and quasi-descriptive voice, in constant contrast with the sound-organic landscapes (see "simt cu muzica iar" [i feel with music again]). In fact, the entire volume is marked by constant ambiguity, as the naturalness of the landscapes and their digital, photographic simulation (see "piscine

---

[4] "Răceala lucrurilor din jur e atît de exactă, atît de nemiloasă, încît simt că atunci cînd mă extrag din peisaj,/ o să las un mulaj în aer, un gol în formă umană"; "Din tren, ceva ca/ un soare dizolvat în aer,/ ceață purtată de vînt ca un voal,/ cu membrele încă grele,/ lipsite de grație după iarnă,/ las un mulaj în buretele spătarului" (my translation).

fumegînde" [smoking pools], "tehnofosile" [technofossils]) seem to be, on a discursive and visual level, interchangeable, an aspect that proves once again the unusual rhizomatic structure of these space assemblies.

Beyond the stylistic complexity presupposed by such a stratified and multifocused cartography, Gabi Eftimie's volume proposes a real aesthetic adventure, which we can define, in Michel de Certeau's terms, as a "spatial practice" (Certeau). Not only do the actual texts manage to create a state of continuous immersion in a hypersensory environment, but also the photographs (belonging to Rick Bakker, Cecilia Tofterö and the author) ingeniously integrated in the volume, where the "thirdspace" of the aesthetic experience is created, in which, according to Edward Soja, "subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious" (Soja 56-57) intertwine.

A rhizomatic poetics also articulated in a posthumanist sense is that created by Mihók Tamás. In the volume *Biocharia. Ritual ecolatru* ["Biochiara: Ecolatric Ritual"] (2020), the author maps, in an ecopoetic and ecocritical approach, syncretic, human (in)organic territories, instrumenting spatial perceptions of an assembly type and using a variety of registers (from calophilic and hermetic style to a non-background affectivity of poems) meant to decouple the global meanings from a politics of representation dominated by egocentric or (auto)biographical perspectives. Thus, Mihók Tamás's poems manage to create an ontologically significant area for the non-hierarchical relationship between human, animal, vegetable, and the inorganic. By virtue of the trans- and posthumanist cartography made by the author, *Biochiara: Ecolatric Ritual* explores a *more-than-human world* (Bristow 2015), highlighting various forms of transgression, whether we are talking about hybrid bio-spatial configurations or about the new conditions of anthropocene sensibility, all of which are transposed impersonally or, more precisely, through poetic voices that are decoupled from the common circuit of emotion and affectation.

In fact, most of the texts in the volume are fed, in their cartographic and interferential structure, by a non-emotional flow, meant to record the sci-fi, vitalistic, post-geographical and post-identity narratives of some "carbonized civilizations" (Mihók 26). On the other hand, Mihók Tamás's poetry rejects linearity, the gradual

disposition of meanings and the classical effect of tropes, relying exclusively on hybrid, rhizomatic and liminal structures, but also on a functional hermeticism in the design of the heterarchical connection between human and non-human. Such rhizomatic and nomadic constructions are defining features for the "ecosystems" of *Biochiara: Ecolatric Ritual*, especially in poems in which the author heterotopically overlaps spatial perceptions, images, and polysensory sequences, in order to permanently multiply the semantic circuits, as can be seen in the following passage:

> on the water's surface
> rhizomatic shimmers
> subliminal scenes
> on the bottom
>
> someone winds their poles
>
> whale bodies
> delimit
> the sunbed area
>
> fir cones with crispy
> protective sauce
>
> nausea
> on the soles
> catches a crust (Mihók 54).[5]

Such rhizomatic texts are able, finally, to stratigraphically map the geospace, filtered through the lens of a silent and scattered biography.

In the volume *Alwarda* (2020), written by Ruxandra Novac, the transition from a poetic-manifesto is apparent, sanguine and funereal in its socio-identity representations (through verses already famous such as "seen in the dogged sunset light/ Bucharest

---

[5] "pe suprafaţa apei/ străluciri rizomatice/ scene subliminale/ pe fund// cineva îşi vântură-n poli// corpuri de balenă/ delimitează/ zona de şezlonguri// conuri de brad cu crispy/ sos protector// greaţa mării/ pe tălpi/ prinde crustă" (my translation).

seems a dead rat,"[6] from the volume *ecograffiti* (Novac, *ecograffiti* 14), to a poetics of spectrality, of perceptual diffusion, of postmodern flâneurism (through an acute radiography of globality), but also of a materialism that constantly anchors states in physical and objective processes:

> On the edge of America, the brain numbed by water, like in a *safe* car, the safest car in the world, the most heavily armored, that is, simply sealed, I don't know how to say, that's how it should be, cold, crushing, something to keep you intact, pulsing under the membranes (Novac, *Alwarda* 22).[7]

From this point of view, *Alwarda* is, first of all, a spatio-affective assembly meant to permanently transgress standard images and representations about fear, violence, vulnerability, (self-)destruction, fragility, and cloistering. Ruxandra Novac maps an interstitial, corporal-geographical area, under the sign of destructuring or even chemical-organic implosion. It is, therefore, about a spatial assembly based on the idea of transgression and identity reconstruction (or at least assuming idiosyncrasy towards social codifications), as evidenced by the geographical anchoring of the volume in closed, residual, repetitive spaces, in "flatlands," in liminal, border type spaces, as well as in urban, post-industrial and desolate spaces, or in euphorically energized natural frames. Above them hovers the space of speed, combustion, rapidly dislocated force, visible aspect in the architecture of the volume that contains a gradual increase in emotional intensity, to the point where some texts are built by reducing the essence of language and poetic form, signaling the impossibility to communicate other than through symbolic enumerations or syntactic contractions that transpose, in David Harvey's terms, a "time-space compression" (1990):

> Deathvalley oldwest. Desert tourism. Disaster tourism. A person who doesn't exist. Language swallowing itself (ie physically, not French philology, physically, with clenched teeth and no saliva) Games that are not done. Unorthodox reactions. The

---

[6] "privit în lumina vînătă a asfinţitului/ Bucureştiul pare un şobolan mort" (my translation).

[7] "La marginea americii, cu creierul amorţit de apă, ca într-o maşină sigură, cea mai sigură maşină din lume. Cea mai puternic blindată, adică pur şi simplu etanşă, nu ştiu cum să spun, aşa ar trebui să fie, rece, zdrobitoare, ceva să te ţină intact, pulsînd sub membrane" (my translation).

problem of puberty. Unknown maps. Modes which are lost. All that is, and that which does not work (Novac, *Alwarda* 56).[8]

Whether we are talking about the diffuse conjunction between real, virtual and imagination (reflected in many poems), about the critique of capitalism through scenarios of non-belonging, alienation and outraged intimacy, about the condition of women in a chaotic world (themes that subtly accompany the texts, starting with the motifs of Levenkron and Thompson) – such aspects are transposed by the author through compositions that become telling precisely through the mixture of registers meant to outline a unique "cognitive mapping" of global space. Such mapping facilitates precisely "a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole" (Jameson 51).

Through an approach that involves, in turn, the idea of hybrid, stratigraphic and "polichronic" globalization (Westphal xiv), Svetlana Cârstean explores, in the volume *sînt alta* [I am another] (2020), a geography of identity mapped in a palimpsest and performative sense, starting from various interstitial projections (of being between worlds and of permanently transgressing them), meant to mobilize an entire confessional rhetoric. At a thematic level, the author juxtaposes several cultural spaces, focused by their contradictory dynamism, which is the basis of itineraries and cognitive and affective maps, able to defamiliarize images of non-belonging, anxiety and fear.

Definitive for these poems that update the famous Rimbaldian *Je est un autre* is precisely the process of deterritorialization and ontological defamiliarization, illustrated by the initiatory route from Romania to Tel Aviv, as a source of hybrid self-reconstruction. It is a reconstruction visualized by numerous *lines of flight* meant to mark a performative act, in which the identity and its traces can no longer be circumscribed in the essentialist way, but only as a polymorphic, heterotopic and participatory projection:

---

[8] "Deathvalley oldwest. Turism în deșert. Turism de catastrofe. Persoană care nu există. Limbaj care se înghite (adică fizic, nu filologie franceză, fizic, cu dinții strînși și fără salivă). Jocuri care nu se fac. Reacții deturnate. Pubertate în cap. Distrugere în corp. Hărți necunoscute. Substanțe care nu funcționează. Modalități care se pierd. Toate cîte sunt, și care nu merg" (my translation).

You are under my effect.

 You are the effect itself.

You are in danger of hearing my voice.

If you reach for the text.

You are in danger of touching my hair.

You have come so close (Cârstean 79);

This is not a love story.
You are like him.
You are him in this story.
She is another.
I am another (Cârstean 72).[9]

On the other hand, the author often conceives her poetry as a political act of "archiving" and confessing trauma/anxiety, without resorting to excessively solipsistic or metaphorizing rhetoric. In the mirror of these performative scenarios of identity and socio-cultural angst, one of the mottos of the volume should be read, namely that from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: "how do you know I'm mad? said Alice. You must be, said the Cat, or you wouldn't have come here." Like Wonderland, which is chaotically and entropically liberated by the schizophrenic characters that populate it, the worlds mapped by Svetlana Cârstean are on the verge of ontological collapse, either by blurring the erotic horizon of utopia (gradually internalized as chimera and disillusionment) or by the impossibility of intelligible self-reading, either by opening another horizon, that of dystopia imposed by fear and war: "The enemy looks at you unexpectedly through the window.// The enemy is born in the middle of the greatest love, like a nervous lamb on a patch of straw in the middle of the field"

---

[9] "Eşti sub efectul meu.// Eşti efectul însuşi.// Eşti în pericol să-mi auzi vocea.// Dacă întinzi mâna spre text.// Eşti în pericol să-mi atingi părul.// Atît de aproape ai ajuns"; "Aceasta nu este o poveste de dragoste./ Tu îi semeni./ Tu eşti el în această poveste./ Ea este alta./ Eu sînt alta" (my translation).

(Cârstean 58).[10] So, located in the interstitial area of these overlapping worlds, the poetic voice of another is forced to assume the condition of its identity, to the impact with a Wonderland reconfigured in a socio-political sense:

> at the end of the day
> madness is the only good thing you have
> your only property that no one can take from you
> a corner stone with which you break all the windows
> on either side of the road
> while heading home (Cârstean 31).[11]

In the volume *Civilizații* [Civilizations] (2020), the poetic cartography proposed by Olga Ştefan reflects a mixture of everyday and autobiographical frames, body language, interpreted memories and dreams, object focus, chromatics and social textures (often by exploring conformity and taboos), all under the control of an epic verve. "Polysensoriality" manifested transgressively, "multifocalization" of social-ontological contexts, scattered and overlapping spatio-temporalities, often subversive "referentiality" (transferring to a poetic area the principles of Bertrand Westphal's geocriticism) – through such stylistic strategies Olga Ştefan tries to explore the (post)human "civilizations", profiled on the horizon of the (urban, social and erotic) simulacrum, of dystopia and institutionalized alienation, of spectrality and nostalgia:

> dark in july. with you.
> everyone has gone
> off on vacation
> which transform them.
> i can't afford anything beyond this bad state.
> these islands. these cutting
> endearments. postponements and a timid claw

---

[10] "Inamicul se uită la tine pe neașteptate pe fereastră.// Inamicul se naște în mijlocul celei mai mari iubiri, ca un/ miel nervos pe o mînă de paie în mijlocul cîmpului" (my translation).

[11] "la sfîrșitul zilei/ nebunia e singurul lucru bun pe care îl ai/ singura ta proprietate pe care nu ți-o poate lua nimeni/ o piatră colțuroasă cu care spargi toate geamurile/ de-o parte și de alta a drumului/ în timp ce te îndrepți către casă" (my translation).

in you – to which so many cling.

to stay here, to reinvent and
what was the color to pass (Ștefan 10).[12]

Telling is, in this sense, the way in which the poet maps the environment of immersion in neurosis, failure and disappointment, simultaneously activating the utopian "machines" of desire and solarity, an aspect meant to distance her style from a *noir* tradition so fertile in Romanian literature. In other words, Olga Ștefan overcomes the convulsive and self-worshiping language regarding trauma, opting for a spectacular and diverse socio-corporeal iconography, in which ecstasy and despair, nightmare and daydreaming, cohesion and chaos, redundancy, and the unusual converge in a heterotopic sense. It is worth mentioning here the linguistic diversity specific to this poem that dynamites the cliché and proposes a real semantic and imagistic adventure, as evidenced by the unpredictable nature of identity narratives. In fact, in the case of *Civilizations* we can mention a pseudo-biographical poetry, in the sense that personal history is simultaneously erased and rewritten, real and projected in virtual, authenticated and "played", as a construct of (self)subversive memory, shouting only in interstices or through the cleavage of symbolic-existential registers

you hoped
to be the queen of the ball.
mohair,
astrakhan, lipstick and hairspay,
the black woman
at the end of the weapon,
the tiara is only an evolved form
of intangibility.

but that evening was

---

[12] "întuneric în iulie. cu tine./ omul în care mă-ncred.// toți au plecat/ în vacanțe/ care-i transformă.// eu nu-mi permit decât acest râu./ aceste insule. aceste alinturi/ tăioase. amânări și o gheară timidă/ în tine – de care atâția se-agață.// să stau aici, să reinventez și/ ce era culoare să treacă" (my translation).

only a gathering of people

who worked in construction (Ștefan 81).[13]

What are they and what do Olga Ștefan's *Civilizations* really mean? The answer contains an ambivalent dimension. The idea of "civilization", therefore of integration and assumption of socio-cultural norms, the hypostases of "civilized woman," constrained and subjected to institutional mechanisms, of "civilized child," built by the same mechanisms, of "civilized" girlfriend and poet, which does not deviate from the perspectives already imposed on love and poetry – such aspects are directly or allusively problematized by the author. This first type of "civilization" corresponds, in the Deleuzian sense, to a striated space, orderly and annihilating, thus a deeply hierarchical and strategic space, numerous poems radiographing the dystopian "aura" of today's society:

the last time I edited my resume

was in 2016. I hid my failed plans,

as well as the dream of writing history

(soon buried in the sealed womb

of his 19-year-old mother);

but

I didn't make a secret of

my great tenacity,

my infernal passion,

my stare that tears everything (Ștefan 66).[14]

However, another meaning of "civilization" is evident in the volume, namely that of civilization of nomads, interstitials, euphorics and illusionists, subversive poets and those who oppose systematization, poetry assumed identity and liberated by constraints. Or, especially towards this second meaning of civilization Olga Ștefan leans in poems

---

[13] "ai sperat/ să fii regina balului./ mohair,/ astrahan, ruj și hairspay,/ femeia neagră/ de la capătul armei,/ tiara nu e decât o formă evoluată/ de intangibilitate.// dar seara aia n-a fost/ decât o adunare de oameni/ care munceau în construcții" (my translation).

[14] "ultima dată mi-am modificat cv-ul/ în 2016. am ascuns planurile mele eșuate,/ precum și visul de-a scrie istorie/ (curând îngropat în uterul cu sigiliu/ al mamei lui de 19 ani);// însă/ n-am făcut un secret din/ marea mea tenacitate,/ pasiunea mea infernală,/ privirea mea care sfâșie totul" (my translation).

that talk about non-belonging and identity fluidity, about the possibilities of beauty and self-reconstruction:

> humiliating me again and again
> with your forbidden beauty
> from ten years ago
>
> which still flows on my fingers
>
> like lava.
>
> like honey.
> like honey.
> like lava
> like honey (Ștefan 24).[15]

In the volume *Industria liniştirii adulţilor* [The Industry of Calming Adults] (2019), Anastasia Gavrilovici integrates almost all the dominant dimensions of Romanian poetry today: social criticism, posthuman immersion, exploration of the simulacrum (including the digital), technical-discursive strangeness, alternation between affectivity and non-affect, on the background of rhizomatic circuits/itineraries meant to reconfigure the simultaneous real and imagined space of the contemporary experience. In fact, Anastasia Gavrilovici's poetry contains a strong ideological dimension, manifested in the mixture of registers that verbalize dramas and social traumas. In this sense, the author uses a whole poetic arsenal of subversion and opposition, which she molds over the new sensibilities and representations of "post-sincerity."

In the logic of this aesthetic of synthesis, revolt is combined with distance and detachment, viscerality with the epidermis, the organic with digital and artificial effusion. And the perimeter of this interference is the "thirdspace" of poetry, reflecting real and imagined geographies (see poems about Berlin and Istanbul), socio-cultural assemblies in an anti-capitalist spirit (see the poems "Chestionar" or "Natural Born

---

[15] "umilindu-mă iar și iar/ cu frumuseţea ta interzisă/ de acum zece ani// care îmi curge încă pe degete// ca lava.// ca mierea./ ca mierea./ ca lava/ ca mierea" (my translation).

Digitals"), and the gradual transgression of the concrete and the (auto)biographical towards an affective infra-reality. On the other hand, *The Industry of Calming Adults* is fueled by a stratigraphic polysensory, visible in the way the author maps various (post)human regimes. Whether we are talking about the contrasting sounds of eroticism, about spatial and "muscular" memory (Gavrilovici 35), about organic and inorganic materiality, about the symptoms of abjection (according to Julia Kristeva) or about the key posthumanist conjunction between animate and inanimate, between human and animal – all these stratigraphic constructions, which articulate a "biography" reassembled by multifocalization, are under the sign of what Anastasia Gavrilovici calls "the geography of bodies" (Gavrilovici 35), many poems being illustrative in this sense:

> from radiation the hair on the hands has stopped growing blood has aromas
> identical natural oil and rust and we eat each other at home
> fast food each other you have already learned
> where the weaknesses are the places where God forgot his little shovels (Gavrilovici 10);

> It's not depression, not even a little, not even by mistake, even though I have
> a Camembert heart and, stuck in it, the flag of a Habsburg capital
> to which I never want to return (Gavrilovici 15);

> "In the middle of the night the music of the mineral water in the glass stops
> together with the music of the digestive processes the tectonic plates
> in your head have stopped colliding at this hour
> it is finally quiet (Gavrilovici 38);

> "Bodies are touchscreens in which the mosquitoes
> of carbonized instinct struggle (Gavrilovici 43).[16]

---

[16] "de la radiaţii părul de pe mâini a încetat să mai crească sângele are arome/ identic naturale de petrol şi rugină iar acasă ne mâncăm/ fastfood unii pe alţii tu deja ai învăţat/ punctele slabe locurile unde dumnezeu şi-a uitat lopăţelele"; "nu e depresie, nici măcar un pic, nici măcar din greşeală, deşi am/ o inimă de camembert şi, înfipt în ea, steguleţul unei capitale habsburgice/ în care nu mai vreau să mă întorc niciodată"; "în mijlocul nopţii muzica apei minerale din pahar se opreşte/ odată cu muzica proceselor digestive plăcile tectonice/ din capul tău au încetat să se mai ciocnească la ora asta/ e în sfârşit

It is, thus, a geography of the body, fragmentary and self-topographically configured, at the intersection of memory, space, perspectives and textures of materiality, to the point where the world created by the author becomes a transgressive location, in which emotional movements and counter-movements, positions of vulnerability and existential collapse are performed in an unusual way, but as are moments when a certain splendor still hovers over the (post)human environment.

Through an approach aimed at the analysis of space in literature, I have shown, therefore, that rhizomatic forms are specific to the textuality of current Romanian poetry. However, in the future it is necessary to map *poetry in space*, meant to clarify the way in which social geographies, in the sense of Henri Lefebvre (1991), have stylistically and ideologically shaped different poetic forms in Romania in recent decades. For example, the identification of spatial practices, representations of space and representational spaces (defined by Lefebvre as a trialectics of social space), which generated poetic discourses in Romanian post-communism, it could overcome the thematic and generational critique, which is often in a methodological impasse.

References:

Alexander, Neal. "Senses of Place." *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*, edited by Robert T. Tally Jr., Routledge, 2017, pp. 29-49.

Bristow, Tom. *The Anthropocene Lyric: An Affective Geography of Poetry, Person, Place*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Cârstean, Svetlana. *Sînt alta*. Nemira, 2020.

Brosseau, Marc. "In, of, out, with, and through: new perspectives in literary geography." *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*, edited by Robert T. Tally Jr., Routledge, 2017, pp. 9-27.

---

linişte"; "corpurile sunt nişte ecrane touch screen în care se zbat musculiţele/ carbonizate ale instinctului" (my translation).

Conkan, Marius, and Daiana Gârdan. "Space in Literature and Literature in Space. Introduction." *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2020, pp. 5-15.

Conkan, Marius, and Emanuel Modoc. "Literature Helps Worlding the World – A Conversation with Bertrand Westphal." *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2020, pp. 16-27.

Conkan, Marius. "Transgressive Spaces in Contemporary Romanian Poetry: A Geocritical Approach." *Caietele Echinox*, vol. 38, 2020, pp. 138-148.

Davidson, Ian. *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, 1984.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

Eftimie, Gabi. *Sputnik în grădină*. OMG, 2020.

Flatley, Jonathan. *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*. Harvard University Press, 2008.

Foucault, Michel. "Different Spaces." *Essential Works of Foucault (Vol. II): Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, edited by James D. Faubion, translated by Robert Hurley and others, The New Press, 1988.

Frank, Joseph. "Spatial Form in Modern Literature." *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 53, no. 2, 1945, pp. 221-240.

Gavrilovici, Anastasia. *Industria liniştirii adulţilor*. Casa de Editură Max Blecher, 2019.

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Blackwell, 1990.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke UP, 1991.

Joris, Pierre. *A Nomad Poetics*. Wesleyan University Press, 2003.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell, 1991.

Mihók, Tamás. *Biocharia. Ritual ecolatru*. frACTalia, 2020.

Moretti, Franco. *Atlas of the European Novel (1800-1900)*. Verso, 1998.

Novac, Ruxandra. *Alwarda*. Pandora M, 2020.

--- *ecograffiti*. Vinea, 2003.

Soja, Edward W. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Blackwell, 1996.

Ştefan, Olga. *Civilizaţii*. Paralela 45, 2020.

Tally Jr., Robert T. *Spatiality*. Routledge, 2013.

Thacker, Andrew. "Critical Literary Geography." *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*, edited by Robert T. Tally Jr., Routledge, 2017, pp. 28-38.

Văsieş, Alex. *Instalaţia*. Cartea Românească, 2016.

Westphal, Bertrand. *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

---. "Foreword." *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies*, edited by Robert T. Tally Jr., Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. ix-xv.

Yeung, Heather H. *Spatial Engagement with Poetry*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.