SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS

THE EFFECTS OF CONSUMERISM ON SOCIETY AND FICTION

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The present PhD thesis, somehow intriguingly entitled *The Effects of Consumerism on Society and Fiction*, as the connection between the two notions seems rather far-fetched, is focusing on the mutual influence at work between the superficial and chaotic world of consumption from which, however, we cannot entirely stand aloof, and the ways in which the semiotic aesthetics of postmodernism has had to make room for pop culture forms as a consequence of their widespread networks of distribution and acceptance by a mass readership. We are not going to analyze the effects of consumerism in respect of marketing, but within the frame of the philosophy and sociology of culture.

On **choosing a theme of research** for my PhD project, I immediately focused my interest on the matter of consumerism, as I wanted to study and write about a palpable subject, of present interest. The **hypothesis I embraced at the beginning of my research** was that consumerism shapes and alters our way of being. Later on this subject proved to be very challenging and mind refreshing taking my work back to the 19th century and rendering it even more relevant in 2018.

The exegetic work on popular culture has swelled to unforeseeable dimensions if looked at from the point of view of the earlier half of the twentieth century, when F. L. Leavis, for instance, was defending the "great tradition" of intellectually, morally and stylistically enhanced writing, while Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer were vigorously resisting the rising cultural correlative (mass culture) of the first boom of consumerism. The first task of someone wishing to join in the ongoing debate is to clarify the meaning of his object of research. For discourse makers of the Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Baudrillard school, popular culture refers to artefacts of the consumerist society in the age of late capitalism which are embraced by the masses of people who seek in art merely entertainment or signs of consumerist affiliation (using certain brands of clothes, phones, reading aesthetically irrelevant texts and watching cheap performances of stand-up comedy, thrilling multi-sensory experience, or soap operas). In these cases, popular culture is demonized and made responsible for all the evils in present-day society, from the youngsters' apathy or shallow

ideals to outbreaks of violence. These cultural objects lie in-between the amorphous generation of copies without original (Baudrillard: simulacra) and the sleeping consciousness of consumers, mesmerized by the advertisements of the fashion industry and allowing these mass produced artefacts to be the only marks of their identity, for instance: living in a villa, instead of a flat, driving a luxury car, instead of a cheap one, going abroad for the summer break, instead of spending it in one's own country, etc. At the other end from the blacklisting of pop culture, there is an attempt to elevate it through links to folk art, that spontaneous and anonymous tradition of wisdom and generally human values.

Pop culture has been elevated to the status of the highest among disciplines, that is, of philosophy. At the turn of the new millennium Open Court Publishing Company, based in Chicago, Illinois, launched a series of books dedicated to Pop Culture and Philosophy, the editors specifying that they do not accept studies in the genre of pop culture but only approaches to specific samples of television shows, hit movies, music, books, video games, or other "icons of pop culture". Characterised by mass distribution, curtsey to mass taste, standardized content and form, these books rarely address metaphysical issues or try to reach truths of universal validity. Nevertheless, some of them are handling themes which rise above the level of a philosophy of entertainment probing into puzzles, concepts and dilemmas that accompany mankind's progress into a new era characterized by a fundamental change in the human condition which concerns both the body (becoming increasingly technological, actually, a mix of biology and technology) and the mind (inquiries into possibilities, not only of manipulating minds through the imposition of patterned conduct, but even of deciphering the processes of consciousness and of cloning minds). In other words, titles, such as *Superheroes and Philosophy: Truth, Justice, and the Socratic Way* by Tom Morris or *The Legend of Zelda and Philosophy: I Link Therefore I Am* by Luke Cuddy employ philosophical concepts in references to the respective movies as samples of pop culture emancipated to standards of mainstream culture, but not to the whole genre or even to low art which is no longer separated from high art by a clear and irreducible dividing line in postmodernism.

Stimulated by such audacious advances in genre theory, we address the issue of pop culture in a diachronic approach hoping that its ontology will clarify aspects of its social and aesthetic relevance.

As far as the **structure of the PhD thesis** is concerned, it is organized in three main chapters, each divided in specific subchapters, introduction, conclusion, references and web references.

The **first chapter**, *Theoretical Framing and Historical Context*, defines pop culture as a side effect of the rise of consumer society and of mass culture in postindustrial societies. The semiosis of pop culture is seen as the aestheticization of desires spurred by the fashion industry and by populist promotions in the sphere of advertising and of the hyperreal iconic culture.

The phenomenology of pop culture, undertaken in the **second chapter**, *The Facebook Generation and Chick Lit*, and the **third chapter**, *Towards a New Poetics/Politics of the Teen' Cultural Consumersim*, follows a tripartite scheme corresponding roughly to René Girard's concept of the triangulation of desire, especially in the revised form presented to Rebecca Adams in an interview published in *Religion and Literature* 25, no. 2 (1993), and republished in *The Girard Reader* (Williams 2000: 62-65). Girard distinguishes here among three forms of mimetic desire. The first, also in time, is desire generating mimetic rivalry, violence and attempted substitution: "desire that generates mimetic rivalry and, in turn, is generated by it" (Williams 2000: 63). Fashion is as competitive as people in flesh and blood, producers often employing cool hunters, alias marketing or advising consultants, endowed with a special flair for what's coming up in matters of public taste, what consumers will more gladly embrace next, although most often than not it is precisely fashion that generates taste rather than the other way round. Chick lit, the simulacra of the latest digital publishing, are very aggressive in their assumption that the models of behaviour and patterns of dressing they are disseminating are the only valid ones, those who do not follow them being ousted from socializing groups, school or university communities. Colonial desire characterizes the willing victims of fashion, people in the colonies or even in metropolitan centres who imitate what society validates as normative. There is a process of alienation whereby people live by proxy, allowing themselves to be colonized by desires and values cherished by the majority. In a famous chapter of *The Location of Culture* (1994), "Of mimicry and man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse", Homi Bhabha defines colonial desire (people in the colonies imitating the metropolitan culture) as a form of camouflage or partial presence, as the logic of normal historical evolution is replaced with the logic of a fetishistic culture: "Under cover of camouflage, mimicry, like the fetish, is a part-object that radically revalues the normative knowledges of the priority of race, writing, history" (Bhabha 1994: web).

Subchapter III.1. *Aestheticizing Mass Culture: Baudelaire and the Media* looks at the issue from the other end of the telescope: Charles Baudelaire was the first to discover

what he called the "heroism of modern" life, which included the earliest forms of a culture produced and enjoyed by the masses of people.

Subchapter III.2. *Critique of Mass Culture in Mainstrem Literature: Camil Petrescu and Evelyn Waugh* discusses two books written in response to the international fashion created in the modernist period after the model set by Ford's assembly line of the mass production of identical artefacts. Evelyn Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* and Camil Petrescu's *Patul lui Procust* are the fictional correlatives of Adorno and Horkheimer's social criticism, their protagonists striving desperately to fight back the shallow but aggressive invasion of fashion, consumer goods, cheap entertainment and mass produced artefacts deprived of the hallmarks of personal and national identity.

Subchapter III.3. *Emancipation of Pop Culture through the Rewriting of High Culture: Neil Gaiman's Coraline, or, Alice Through the Looking Glass of the New Millennium* is anchored in the present, recording attempts of emancipating pop genres, such as fantasy, through the re-writing of canonical texts: Gaiman's *Coraline* is a postmodernist remake of Carroll's Alice books. The desire to emulate high art fits into the third hypostasis of Girard's triangulation of desire: it is neither bent upon competitive displacement, nor imposed from without, but a personal drive towards values that can be shared with others in the intersubjective order of the community. Girard's example in the above-mentioned interview - I follow Christ who follows God – is a metaphor of our natural tendency to bond with others instead of isolating ourselves in ivory towers, while not giving up on our deep commitments or compromising our genuine identity which is shaped by social and historical contexts.

The survey of pop culture, from its beginnings to its embattled criticism and finally to its adoption by postmodernist artists dedicated to its emancipation to mainstream art ends up with a gloss on a multimedia form of art -**Subchapter III.4.** *The New Media Aesthetics and Young Bloggers*- which contemporary bloggers distribute through the worldwide net of interfaced computers, while remaining faithful to the aesthetic values of more traditional art forms.

In the following, I will elaborate on this sketchy presentation of the structure of the thesis.

Chapter **I**, *Theoretical Framing and Historical Context,* is a theoretical framing of our field of research, starting from defining terms and going on to a brief history of the topic.

This theoretical part was essential in our understanding of consumerism, helping us depict it in the following chapters in which we proceed from relevant theory to the practice of what might be called "consumerist poetics".
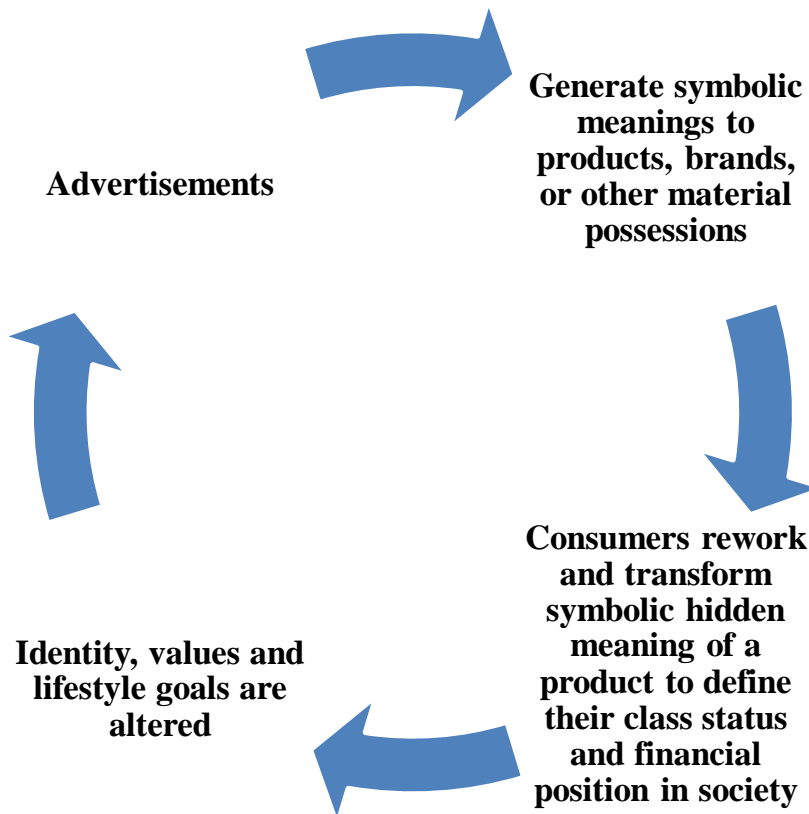
The main objective of the first chapter is to offer a proper theoretical and historical framing for the study of consumerism, from which the applied part of the thesis has been developed. Due to the dynamism and complexity of the issue consumerism had to be studied from an interdisciplinary angle, in relation to different domains. The investigation of consumerism was developed in a broad context, taking into consideration both the cultural and social aspect of our object of study.

This theoretical chapter is divided into three parts: **I.1.** *Defining and Clarifying Terminology*, **I.2.** *Genesis and Development of an Aesthetic and Existential Dilemma,* and **I.3.** *The Latest Hypostases of Culturally Relevant Consumerism*, which provided a solid background from where the applied part of research started.

Consumerism is the result of the link that capitalism succeeded in creating between commodities and people's desires, an aspect which we approached through the grids of Hyperreality Theory and Mimetic Theory.

A Consumption Cycle Diagram may be useful for the understanding of the links establishing between the symbolic manipulation of the advertising industry and the material effects symbolic meanings have in the real lives of consumers:

Generate symbolic meanings to products, brands, or other material possessions

Advertisements

Consumers rework and transform symbolic hidden meaning of a product to define their class status and financial position in society

Identity, values and lifestyle goals are altered

Girard's theory is also relevant in this context, as the concept of mimetic desire functions according to a "triangular structure of desire: self, other as mediator (later he would switch to "model"), and the object that the self or subject desires because he or she knows, imagines, or suspects the mediator desires it" (Williams 2000: 31):

SELF

THE DESIRED OBJECT   **MEDIATOR/THE MODEL**
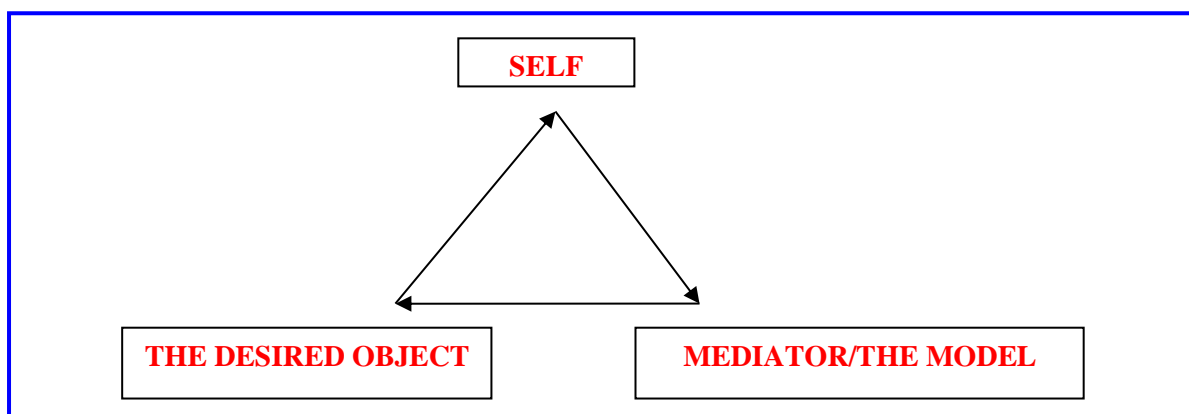
This triangle functions as "a systematic metaphor, systematically pursued" (Williams 2000: 33), explaining the way in which consumerism promotes a colonial desire. The self gradually loses its identity, being colonized by the non-values promoted by popular culture through the media, lit, homepages, and so on. We are victims of the triangular desire imposed by consumerism, whenever we give in to the tyranny of media stars.
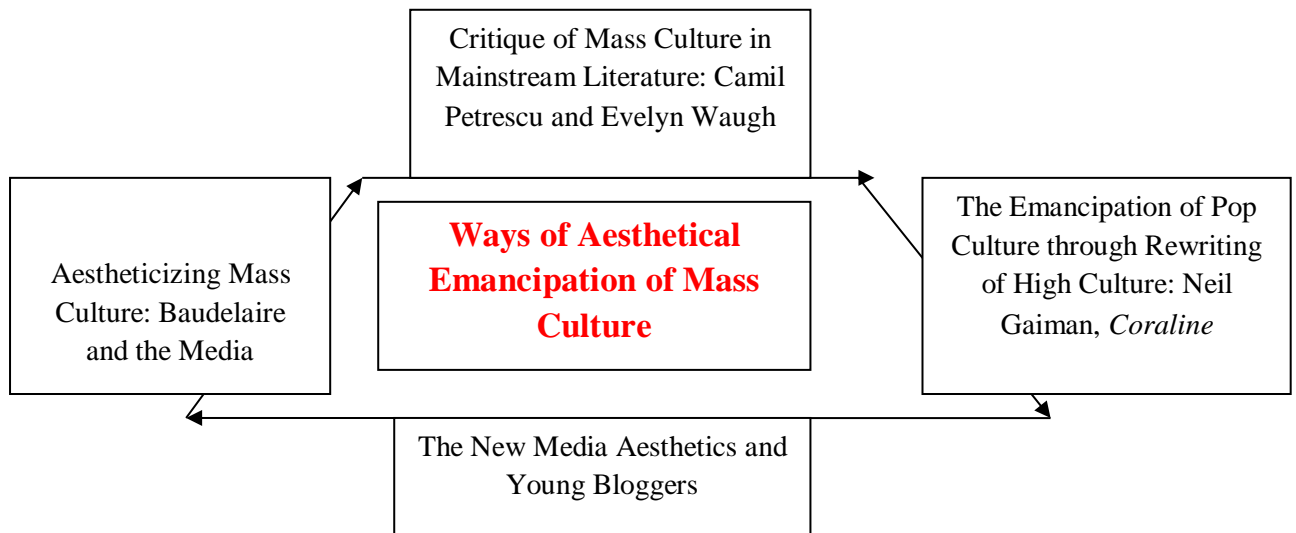
The second and the third chapter represent the applied part of our thesis, in which we have investigated consumerism in its low and high registers, for a proper understanding of the consumerist phenomenon.

Chapter II, *The Facebook Generation and Chick Lit,* divided into three subchapters, analyzes popular culture's artefacts under the umbrella of Consumer Culture Theory: **II.1.** *Setting the scene: The Facebook Generation and Chick Lit. Who and What are They?*, **II.2.** *The Poetics and Politics of Chick Lit* and **II.3.** *A New Politics of the Teens' Public Face: Personal Homepages.*

Probing deeper into literary affairs, we understood the fact that high-minded literature is almost vanishing under heaps of waste products launched into the market by the art and literature of consumption, which haunt the reader disguising themselves as the latest fashion and modern tendencies. The latter type of literature mentioned is a cheap show, superficial, written for the only purpose of being sold for profit. It usurps the status of genuine literature, revealing a total lack of aesthetic awareness. It attracts the reader through violence, eroticized bodies, exoticism and sex, creating in the mind of the reader all sorts of fake images and realities. Those waste products were the perfect samples in applying Consumer Culture Theory for investigating the interdependent link which capitalism managed to create between commodities and people's desires. By applying CCT, we demonstrate how consumerist fakes implant desires altering people's identity.

The gap between copies and originals is abolished and the readers consume illusions of reality and happiness. Readers' needs are manipulated in terms of profit of selling by the publishing houses and the writers who manufacture these types of books, whose unique epochal discovery is that money can be made through writing that creates certain reading appetites and tastes in their targeted victim, the reader, who, from an acculturated individual turns into an obedient consumer of textual litter.

Chapter III, *Towards a New Poetics/Politics of the Teens' Cultural Consumerism* is a comprehensive and complex chapter, which occupies half of the present thesis. In this chapter, we have tried to configure an aesthetic emancipation schemata of mass culture, through the analysis of different works of literature. Each component of the schemata represents a subchapter of this part of the thesis.

	Critique of Mass Culture in Mainstream Literature: Camil Petrescu and Evelyn Waugh	
Aestheticizing Mass Culture: Baudelaire and the Media	**Ways of Aesthetical Emancipation of Mass Culture**	The Emancipation of Pop Culture through Rewriting of High Culture: Neil Gaiman, *Coraline*
	The New Media Aesthetics and Young Bloggers	

The chapter aims to be a cultural journey from the 19th century to the present moment of the 21st century, accross Europe, in the attempt to understand the effects which consumerism has had on society and fiction along this time. Through the investigation of consumption in its natural surrounding of different epochs, in light of Consumer Culture Theory, a way out started to develop until it took a more precise shape.

This chapter suggests an alternative to the actual degradation of our young generation's culture studied previously in **Chapter II.** *The Facebook Generation and Chick Lit*, which focuses mainly on social media interaction, chick lit, raising empires for supermarkets and cinematographies, leaving aside the importance of imagination and uniqueness, qualities which may be achieved only through the consumption of real literature and art. In this part of the thesis, we have demonstarted that high culture has to be defended against the rise of consumer society and of mass culture.By understanding consumerism both in its high and low register, we found a way to escape it. This path is winding awaw from pop culture, kitch and all the ads and violent images which assault our intimacy on a daily basis.

This chapter is the part of the thesis in which we analyze consumerism in its high register. Through the writers we have mentioned and their literary works we investigate consumption, because they render "(…) the pulse of humankind and a mirror of cultural dynamics" (Fedorak 2009: web) in a certain period of time. These writers' wide addressability does not exclude high standards of aesthetic achievement, popular genre writings being accessible to the common reader. These writers opted for this wide addressability as a way to educate readers, regardless of class belonging and financial status.

Subchapter III.1, *Aestheticizing Mass Culture: Baudelaire and the Media,* evokes the 19th century's beginning of the mechanically produced images' intrusion in literature, in Paris, France, through Baudelaire's work. The French poet painted in his work the urbanized town invaded by rootless crowds of flâneurs, in an era when new media technologies appeared and invaded everyday life. Baudelaire incorporated in his work of art elements of cultural consumerism, as for example media technology and photographic techniques, weakening the important boundary between fiction and non-fiction. His poetic use of the new media is a proof of Girard's emulation side of desire, as "cultural imitation is a positive form of mimetic desire" (Apud Williams 2000: 64). Baudelaire's desire of the use of the new media models and their subtle insertion in his work of art, help him achieve originality and his own personal media aesthetics.

Although Baudelaire was aware of the negative effects that industrialization of the printing press and the rise of photography to the rank of art had on society and did not approve of these ideas, he still incorporated elements of media culture techniques in his works, in order to seduce the reader. Baudelaire was the artist who succeeded in infiltrating media culture into high literature, in a subtle and aesthetic manner, managing to create his personal media aesthetics. Thus, technology can have the power to limit originality by producing copies, but it may gain aesthetical beauty if it is poeticized with wisdom and taste. The new media technologies were just a small part of the puzzle in the development of visual culture.

Subchapter III.2, *Critique of Mass Culture in Mainstream Literature: Camil Petrescu and Evelyn Waugh* presents the response of two major writers to the early effects that consumerism had on society. Through their novels, both writers confess their inner trauma caused by the consumerist rush, which lead to depersonalization and alienation, making them suitable study cases for Girard's colonial desire. Being witnesses of the 20th

century world of mechanical reproduction, where the copy could no longer be separated from the original, and when values and identity were no longer treasured, they felt the urge to create literature with moralizing effect on the readers, as their novels were addressed to a wide audience. The two novels are fictional attempts to cure readers of superficial desires that consumerism had bred into them, without they even realizing it. These novels are the proof that popular culture is intermingling with high culture, as the boundary between them has been weakened.

Baudelaire, Petrescu, Waugh, thus France, Romania and England, criticize the notion of rootless flâneurs, which represent in fact the media's success in transforming the normal individual into a collective expression, by colonizing their desires. If we were to define the term *flâneur* in Baudrillard using postmodernist concepts, that would be a "signifier, without a signified, signifying itself" (Baudrillard 1988: 10), a pure simulacrum.

Subchapter III.3, *The Emancipation of Pop Culture through Rewriting of High Culture,* deals with Neil Gaiman's successful attempt *Coraline,* to aesthetically emancipate Pop Culture, through the use of the rewriting technique of a mainstream novel, Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There*. Publishing Houses' and writers' immense need for making money rapidly lead to the apparition of Pop Culture, and what target would be easier to seduce than children. Literature for children has been rapidly contaminated by clichéic prototypes, as for example the Disney Protagonist. By deliberately using the rewriting technique of a high-successful mainstream novel, Gaiman created a protagonist to whom 21st century children can relate, who, just like them, prefers eating junk food, watching T.V. and rebelling against parents. By inserting the fresh quotidian into the familiar background of the readers and by giving it a more intimate personal touch, as the novel is dedicated to his children, Gaiman created a more demanding piece of literature, which also has a moralizing effect upon children and not only, creating a story which links the fictional and magical realm of fairytales to the present moment.

Coraline, is Neil Gaiman's postmodernist attempt to adapt the 19th's century quest for identity to the 21st chaotic consumption, which altered identity more than ever. Coraline is a clear example of the fact that literature finds itself in a hypermimetic state because writers are trapped in a mimetic desire by aiming to create something new after canonic models, as René Girard's concept of mimetic desire emphasizes.

Subchapter III.4, *The New Media Aesthetics and Young Bloggers*, is a definite proof that imagination must be developed by any means and that media culture should be used in pedagogical purposes to achieve this, either by creating a multi-media collage, a personal homepage or blog, as a space where art can be promoted and commented upon. Consumer Culture Theory also reinforces this positive aspect of consumerism:

> CCT research has emphasized the productive aspect of consumption. Consumer culture theory explores how consumers actively rework and transform symbolic meanings encoded in advertisements, brands, retail settings, or material goods to manifest their particular personal and social circumstances and further their identity and lifestyle goals (Grayson and Martinec 2004; Holt 2002; Kozinets 2001, 2002; Mick and Buhl 1992; Penaloza 2000, 2001; Ritson and Elliott 1999; Scott 1994a).

> (Apud Arnould & Thompson 2005: 871)

By using the internet in cultural and pedagogical purposes, under a strict schedule and surveillance, children may shape an identity of active and educated consumers. Thus, the internet gains aesthetic value, surpassing its limits of a medium which promotes copy-paste technique and scrolling over photos, images and ready-made superficial news on social media. Ionuţ Caragea's literature, blog and personal site are an example in this respect, assessing the internet as a medium which promotes culture and imagination, if it is used wisely. Caragea is, as he himself admits, a "Google Product", who adapts his work of art to the new trends of Net Art. His desire to insert web language into his literature is a perfect example of imitation as a positive form (desire as emulation).

In the third chapter of the thesis, we focus on different ways of giving aesthetic value to popular culture. The better informed and educated a person is, the more chances he has to resist the consumerist society's turmoil. An individual who has set his aesthetic boundaries high from early childhood is harder to be seduced by consumerist illusions of prosperity and happiness.

The applied part of the thesis reinforces with examples Girard's Mimetic Theory coinages. The study of chick lit novels provides persuasive examples of mimetic rivalry, because through them we understood the terror and force of fashion and how it generates competition and violence. Desire as colonization is best reflected in social media usage, personal homepages examples and in the critique of consumerism in Camil Petrescu's and Evelyn Waugh's novels, taking into consideration the depersonalization of the individual who was feeling a sense of alienation due to the consumerists society in which he lived. Thirdly, desire as emulation could be depicted in the models that deserve prestige, through the

intelligent, poetic use of the new media. Baudelaire's masterpiece, Caragea's use of the web nowadays, and Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*-the rewriting of canonical works in popular genres-, are wonderful examples of desire for models that deserve appreciation.

Conclusion

As we have understood from the aesthetic emancipation schemata of mass culture presented in the third chapter of the PhD thesis, consumerism is here to stay. It can be traced back to the 19th century, and we can say that at the present moment it is still very dynamic. Consumerism is part of our everyday lives and our society is invaded by popular culture artefacts: advertisements, social media, Internet, personal homepages, chick lit novels and the list may continue for ever. The effects of industrialization have arrested the attention of social critics and philosophers' from the beginning of the 19th century. Thomas Carlyle's anxious reading of the "Signs of the Times" (1829) yielded a terrifying picture of man "grown mechanical in hand and in heart", while the beginning of the next century heard Oswald Spengler's prophecy of the doomed civilization of the West. In *The Decline of the West* (1918), Spengler foresees the cult of things in our age which have come to define our social stuatus: "Civilizations are the most external and artificial states of which a species of developed humanity is capable. They are a conclusion, the thing-become succeeding the thing-becoming, death following life, rigidity following expansion, intellectual age and the stone-built, petrifying world-city following mother-earth and the spiritual childhood of Doric and Gothic" (Spengler 2017: web). Spengler identified the heart of evil in contemporary society: "trivial and superficial tendency towards ideals of 'welfare'", while losing "the organic and symbolic meaning of its political, artistic, intellectual and social expression-forms" (Spengler 2017: web). Regression took the form of the passage from each people's attachment to home and the traditional values of an organic society to a civilization dominated by a few number of centres with everybody else on the planet imitating them:

> [...] three or four world-cities that have absorbed into themselves the whole content of History, while the old wide landscape of the Culture, become merely provincial, serves only to feed the cities with what remains of its higher mankind. World-city and province l — the two basic ideas of every civilization — bring up a wholly new form-problem of History, the very problem that we are living through to-day with hardly the remotest conception of its immensity. In place of a world, there is a city, a point, in which the whole life of broad regions is collecting while the rest dries up. In place of a type-true people, born of and grown on the soil, there is a new sort of nomad, cohering unstably in fluid masses, the parasitical city dweller, traditionless, utterly matter-of-fact, religionless, clever, unfruitful, deeply contemptuous of the countryman and

especially that highest form of countryman, the country gentleman. This is a very great stride towards the inorganic, towards the end [....]

(Spengler 2017: web)

We see our students aping modish conduct and addictions, losing touch with the native soil, traditions, national art, national history, looking sharply out for opportunities to settle in some other country. The importance of academic education abroad cannot be sufficiently estimated, and the Romanian intellectual elite of the earlier last century did not go over just for intellectual profit but making their own, appreciated contribution to humanity's thesuarus of knowledge. Spengler refers here to cheap materialistic pursuits and empty forms of worthless and slavish imitation, of which we can see an abundant display in our classes. The European Union politics encourages the preservation of the assets of each national culture in libraries and museums of the member states, and school curricular should make room for disciplines and contents which promote genuine values and organic forms of national identity, which should not be seen as an enemy of the cosmopolitan spirit, in the sense of being open to whatever has been created anywhere else.

In the first chapter of the thesis, *I. Theoretical Framing and Historical Context*, we found out that it was the Frankfurt School of Thought and then the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies that started paying attention to this issue in a scientific approach. By applying The Consumer Culture Theory and by studying consumption both from the cultural and social side of it, we succeeded in surpassing our initial objectives of the thesis, which were to demonstrate that consumerism is part of our daily lives and that it affects us constantly. As we went deeper into our area of research, we remarked the negative effects of consumerism which are discussed in the second chapter of the thesis, *II. The Facebook Generation and Chick Lit.*

The third chapter of the thesis, *III. Towards a New Poetics/Politics of the Teens' Cultural Consumerism*, discovers an alternative to the degradation of society brought up by the consumerist rush. Itcasts light on Baudelaire's ingenious use of the early stances of consumerism in an aesthetic manner, and on the critique of consumerism mounted by Camil Petrescu and Evelyn Waugh in the age of late modernism. As we return to our own time, we see pop culture emancipated to social critique through emulation and rewriting of tradition with Gaiman's *Coraline* as object lesson. Finally, young poet, novelist and blogger Ionuț Caragea raises pop culture channels of distribution and cyber topics to the level of mainstream literature, a process which Russian formalist Viktor Schklovsky defined as the emancipation

of the junior branch (a low art form becoming high art through aesthetic sophistication and deepening of subject matter).

At the present moment, neither the artist nor his work of art matter the most, as now the stress lays on the receiver, the user, that is, each and every one of us. In an era contaminated by computers and technology, an individual's respect for true values will guide him, helping him to avoid becoming a passive consumer who may easily fall into the trap called consumerist comfort, hyperreality citizenry, or illusions of a better world.

The world of images has grown a lot in importance, succeeding in reshaping both art and industry, the latter being subordinated to the mediation of meanings, desires, pleasures, beliefs and values for a society of global consumers. It is through images of positively assessed social values that the reader is seduced. The mechanism which René Girard famously defined as "triangulation of desire" signifies the individual's alienation into versions of himself shaped by society's arbitrary values imposed by the tyranny of fashionable images of prestige.

The change is here to stay and we must learn how to cope with it and how to educate ourselves and our children so that its negative effects will not alter their values, beliefs, identities and taste for imagination and uniqueness. Only in this way will art keep its aesthetic aura instead of getting lost among the dregs of popular entertainment and mass culture. One should keep in mind that only authentic "art is the great seducer and the great stimulus to life" (Huszar 1945: 264), and as such, as Kant says, will it perform its "liberating function" (Huszar 1945: 264).

As we have seen from our discussion of Brandon Blair Schneider's 2014 doctoral thesis, entitled *Berlusconi Between Politics and Popular Culture,* which shows the Italian politician's success dependent upon his charismatic construction in the culture of entertainment, such as soap operas, the impact of popular culture on society is far greater than the corruption of the aesthetic taste of the masses of people. It is a channel through which power can be lost and won or exerted upon a majority electorate of naive citizens who do not suspect that they are being manipulated. Whereas a straightforward political discourse is subject to the voters' critical examination, the modelling of a cunning politician on popular heroes of the digital culture may very well escape the citizens' awareness of their being influenced by subliminal advertising, messages or other stimuli.

The topic of popular culture being a site of political encounters capable to influence the very shaping of society has been as a very weighty issue, if we take into consideration the academic context in which it has been researched of late.

Having realized the importance of education in refining our tastes and aestheticizing our way of living, we should be capable to avoid falling into the traps of addictions generated by consumerism's artefacts. On the one hand, social media networks, chick lit books and other superficial ways of consumerist entertainment alter people's way of behaving and thinking, but, on the other hand, the readership too can encourage the production of these artefacts by consuming them and offering permanent feedback, creating thus a vicious cycle and an endless chains of errors. If parents and teachers team up in setting high standards of education to their children, the effects of consumerism can be diminished and aesthetic tastes and values developed.

Children, teenagers and adults can create aestheticized, educational and professional blogs, which can assist their cultural emancipation and provide models for others as well. Technology can be deftly inserted in a work of literature so as to spur originality, as we argue in our last chapter where we are looking for a solution. Technology, the computer world, the net have too much engaged the interest and admiration of the young ones to be censored in favour of the print culture and library space. The problem, however, with cheap (from the aesthetic point of view) artefacts is not the channel of their dissemination, but their poverty of form, ideas, finality. A digital culture of high standards is however possible, as we have emphatically argued in our thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philology, on condition educators become aware of the fact that it takes great courage, aesthetic taste and a lot of work in educating the mind and the soul of the young generation.

We would like to end our thesis by stressing the key role of education in a society's progress towards a refined civilization, as only through it can we limit the negative effects of consumerism.

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