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Summary of PhD Thesis

Prisons of the 20th Century: Fictional Representations of the Carceral Space

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CONTENT

In his famous novel, *Anna Karenina*, Lev Tolstoy claims that "All the variety, all the charm, all the beauty of life is made up of light and shadow." (Tolstoi, 2007: 15). Steering a midway between shadow and light, the present study sets out to analyze the topos of the prison space and some of its representations in twentieth-century literature under the lights and shadows of different political, cultural and social ideologies that marked the darker side of human existence.

How does literature map out human existence by creating and revealing the complexity of the connection between the real and the imaginary dimensions? How does the human being cast into literary characters manage to relate to an existence which is alien to its own identity? How can the true identity of the human being be subjected to and yet survive a process that shuts it up in a multitude of prisons, both physically and psychologically? What are the types of prison space tailored to the spirit of the political ideology of totalitarian systems? What are the effects of these types of space and how does the human being manage to survive them? These are the main questions to which this study aims to find answers.

Our approach falls within the theoretical field of space studies, the prison being defined as a heterotope (Michel Foucault), a dis-topos or as a non-space (Marc Augé). In the beginning of Paul Goma's novel *Gherla*, for instance, we hear depersonalized, disembodied voices, suggesting that the prisoners have lost their way, have gone out of historical time. These voices are no longer attributed to individuals with a certain social status, or whose identity can be established in terms of the marital status register, career indices or membership in social institutions and divisions. They are a choir of anonymous and invisible people whose identity marks have been removed. What happens to those who end up in such a place, which can be real or figurative, but, anyway, an anomaly, because a prison is for criminals, not for those guilty of thought crimes or even guilty simply because they exist at all; a prison, however can also be the feeling of those alienated by a bureaucratic regime, victims of social absurdity, even if their movement in physical space is not restricted. The prison regime or sentiment was experienced to an unprecedented extent in the twentieth century, whether one has in mind the literature of the absurd, the political prisons of extremist power systems, rightist or leftist, sometimes operating alternately, as was the case in Spain, or the closed and ideologized space on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain.

Therefore, prison is seen, from the point of view of the idea of freedom, as a source that involves the individual's deprivation thereof through various forms and means. Michel Foucault claims that "criminal imprisonment has covered, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, both deprivation of liberty and the technical transformation of individuals."(Foucault, 2005: 294) However, the notion of "prison" as a source of deprivation of human freedom in all aspects must be seen as a conglomeration of elements that constitute it and that grind it to the finite form of unique reality. The uniqueness of this reality is rendered by the uniqueness of individuals who are enticed by various means to take part in the whole process that underlies this notion. The premise from which this study starts has its origins in Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy on identity. Sartre argues in his work, *Being and Nothingness*, that existence precedes essence (Sartre, 2001: 594) which means that the human being is a result of all its experiences. In this way, the body of the individual represents a universal, omnipotent space, in which any modulation of reality is manifested: ideology, history, power, culture or time. The present study focuses on the way the identity of the human being is tailored to its experiences in a certain type of space dictated politically, ideologically, culturally or socially. In terms of theories related to space and spatiality, our study also draws on Michel Foucault's theory of *Other Spaces* ("Des espace autres"), a 1967 conference, the triad of spatiality defined by Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*, as well as that proposed by Edward W. Soja in *Thirdspace-Journey to Los Angeles and Other-Real-or-Imagined Places*. Finally, suggestions also came from the concept of space in a hybrid culture evolved by Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994).

The exploration of the typology and comparative aspects of literary texts, which construct different types of prison space, a backward look at the concepts of space and power is needed. In the "Preliminaries", divided into two subchapters, a brief history of the concept of spatiality takes us to the ancient world. We are tracking its main articulation down to the present day in relation to the concept of power. From our point of view, the two concepts are mutually dependent. Space acquires meaning and is shaped by power relations that are established at different historical moments and in different social contexts. As far as the theories on the concept of power are concerned, we found Michel Foucault's approach to it in *Discipline and Punish*: *The Birth of the Prison* (*Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison*, 1975) particularly relevant. This is a book in which the researcher identifies several types of power. Our study appealed especially to the concepts of disciplinary power and biopower. We appropriated the differentiated approaches of the two concepts because, although similar, they differ from several points of view. If the disciplinary power operates at the level of the individual using strategies that create "a network of relationships from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent, from

bottom to top and laterally; this network ‹‹holds›› the whole together and traverses in its entirely with effects of power that derive from one another: supervisors perpetually supervised."(Hoffman, 2011: 31) biopower, on the other hand, changes the power-individual relationship and becomes biopower-population so "many of the same tactics will be employed under biopower as under disciplinary power, the focus will now be on the population rather than the individual."(Taylor, 2011: 44) The individual is absorbed into a group, becomes a general entity. Power no longer controls only the individual, but the whole system of which he is a part. This process is an exercise in control over the masses and society in general, because "biopower is a power over bios or life, and lives may be managed on both an individual and a group basis. While at one level disciplinary institutions such as schools, workshops, prisons and psychiatric hospitals target individual bodies as they deviate from norms, at another level the state is concerned with knowing and administering the norms of the population as a whole". (Taylor, 2011: 44). In other words, disciplinary power targets the individual as a unique identity, and biopower targets society as a group of individuals. In this sense, disciplinary power creates biopowers. Through this process the human being is caught in a continuous exchange of identity as a result of its placement in different typologies of space.

The second chapter of the study, entitled "Absurdist literature and the imprisonment of the human being" explores the relationships of the concepts of space and power in the literature of the absurd and existentialist literature. The texts under analysis are the fictional worlds of Franz Kafka, Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. The chapter is divided into two subchapters: "The Prison World: Franz Kafka" and "Prison as a Privileged Figurative Space of the Existentialist Path to Self: Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre." The first subchapter sets out to define the concept of the absurd and the literature of the absurd, as well as the theory related to bureaucracy and the bureaucratic state. Writing on the literature of the absurd (*Literature of the Absurd*, 2000), Nicolae Balotă served as the main theoretical source. The absurd can be described from two perspectives: as a phenomenon that defines the existing state of the world and as a phenomenon that projects the state of the world at the level of the individual's senses, inducing a sense of alienation: "the confusion of the alienated man springs from the axiological nihilism either by their devaluation or by brutal upheavals".(Balotă, 2000: 15) Therefore, man is forced into the position of integrating himself in a world that no longer retains its familiar elements, spiraling down into a mess which the individual can no longer cope with. His own beliefs and values are destabilized, and society is no longer a matrix of values for him, but a means of alienation, because "the decomposition of axiological consciousness leads to a deterioration of the sense of reality. Reality degrades for the one who has lost its meaning.

Everything becomes false for the man who, losing his reality (not the shadow, like Chamisso's hero), becomes the negative shadow of his own reality."(Balotă, 2000: 15) The alienation of the individual in a world foreign to his own identity is due, in the case of Kafka's literature, to the exacerbated bureaucratization of society. Bureaucracy is, in the Kafkaesque universe, a form of imprisonment that repeats itself endlessly. This permanence is due to the evolution of bureaucracy in modern society. The modern bureaucratic state has been subjected to a strict analysis by the sociologist Max Weber. He identified several principles on which the modern bureaucratic system operates. This is how Weber defines the basis of the modern bureaucratic system: "there is the principle of fixed and jurisdictional areas, which are generally ordered by rules, that is by laws or administrative regulations."(Gerth and Wright, 1946: 196) Therefore, the modern bureaucratic system is built on the basis of very well established administrative rules and laws, distributed: "in a fixed way as official duties" (Gerth and Wright, 1946: 196). This aspect can characterize modern bureaucracy as a linear system, based on a legal path that leaves no room for interpretation. The whole activity is unidirectional through rules and laws. Following the coordinates of the alienation of the individual in an absurd bureaucratic world, Franz Kafka's fictional texts were analyzed and it was observed that the Kafkaesque prison space is represented by the prison of bureaucratic society. On the other hand, in the second subchapter, following the same trajectory of the literature of the absurd, the fictional universe of Camus and Sartre are found out to highlight the reverse of Kafka's prison. The alienated human in an absurd world is shut up within himself, yet embarked upon the continuous journey of an existentialist path toward the itself. For Camus, the absurdity of the world has its roots in thinking, in the awareness of the direction of human existence, because: "to start thinking means to start being bitten on the inside. Society has little to do with this beginning. The worm is in the very heart of man. That's where you have to look.

This deadly game that leads from lucidity in the face of existence to evasion out of light must be followed and understood". (Camus, 1969: 9) The submission of the existence of a process of thought sends the human being into a universe of the absurd by realizing that there is no escape from death and that the conventional universe is nothing but a false existence. For Sartre, existence is linear rather than circular. The human being cannot return to start his life again, following a direction towards other meaningless moments. Existence represents the placement of the individual in different places and in different situations that determine his existence for itself, that is, within the horizon of consciousness, of essence.

In Camus, the individual is punished for mistaking his own identity, for his inability to disguise, the sincerity of his mode of existence, while for Sartre the prison is represented by the

multitude of masks he must wear in front of the world to hide his true identity. In both cases, the research follows the existentialist path to the prison of the self and the way in which the individual experiences the clash with the absurdity of the physical reality.

The third chapter, entitled "From one prison space to another: Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu", looks at how the physical placement of the individual in various spaces deprived of liberty actually leads to the loss of identity. This chapter follows the context of the continuous placement of the individual in different prison spaces dictated from the point of view of the social context represented by the establishment of totalitarian systems that had as direction the incarceration of the human being and its ideological and disciplinary training to shape a new foldable identity. The chapter is divided into two subchapters: "Totalitarianism-contextualization" and "Hour 25-The end of man in the context of the Matrioska prison space." The first subchapter addresses the contextualization of the totalitarian system and the main mechanisms represented by the dissemination of terror, fear, distrust and anxiety through which the human being was disciplined and trained to become a site of the manifestation of the system's power and ideology. The second subchapter is dedicated to the analysis of the text *Ora 25 (The 25th Hour)* by Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu, a text in which the prison space takes another form of manifestation called by us the Matrioska prison space, a space that represents a context of social policies and ideology of the totalitarian system. What makes Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu unique in the landscape of the absurdist and existentialist literature of the middle of the last century is the intuition of the impending transformation of man into a product of the biotechnologies of power, as the French philosopher Michel Foucault would call the phenomenon a few years later. The social mechanisms, built on the ruins of the First World War, created, within some totalitarian or beurocratic regimes, the possibility to annihilate and transform the individual into what Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu calls a "technical slave"

through the voice of his character, Traian Korugă, referring to that useful body of a servant who does us thousands of services every day. He pushes our car, turns on the light, pours water on our hands when we wash, massages us, tells us things that amuse us ... " (Gheoghiu, 1991: 50) Society, through its movements under the influence of history, becomes a mechanism that transforms the human being into a participatory tool, but not necessarily through human valence but through what can become under the influence of this absurd mechanism. Unlike the absurdity of the world of Kafka, Sartre or Camus, the absurdity of Gheorghiu's world impresses through the authenticity of the reality that is glimpsed by the individual. The absurd is seen as the antithesis of the identity manifestations of the human being. The authenticity of Mortitz and Traian Korugă represent antitheses of the absurdity of the continuity of the manifestations of the

prison space. Ultimately, the prison space revealed by the narrative of the text is a space built by a schizoid identity. This space demonstrates what should not exist in the human being by representing elements outside it that, in the absence of conscious control, will succeed in controlling it. The same direction is followed by the narrative strategy. The narrative oscillates depending on the valences of the cause-effect process. The cause is determined confessively by the observations of different characters, while the effect is demonstrated by the experience of the character Moritz who becomes the reification of a theory, a materialization of a philosophical vision. History is judged and exemplified at the narrative, fictional level, by the continuous oscillation between the abstract theorizing of some concepts related to the philosophy of existence in a context of social and historical modulations and the practice of theory through the actions undertaken by the characters.

The fourth chapter, entitled "The totalitarian Gulag as a Foucaultian space of discipline and punishment", continues the typological analysis of the prison space focusing on how the prison space of the totalitarian Gulag is built. This chapter represents a complex approach to totalitarian space and is divided into four subchapters: "The space of the socialist regime as a dystopian universe", "The socialist-space gulag of anthropological dystopia in the Gulag Archipelago" by Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, " " The communist gulag-heterotopic space in Gherla's novels Ostinato by Paul Goma" and "Another dystopian vision of totalitarian space: George Orwell and AE Baconsky ". On the one hand, the totalitarian space is analyzed as a dystopian reality, defining the main concepts related to the totalitarian anti-utopia and the way in which it was conceptualized. Gregory Claeys' study, *Dystopia - A Natural History, A Study of Modern Despotism. Its Antecedents and Its Literary Diffractions,* represent the starting point of our research into the main mechanisms of the construction of the totalitarian dystopian space. According to Gregory Claeys, dystopia follows three directions: "the political dystopia; the environmental dystopia and finally the technological dystopia, where science and technology ultimately threaten to dominate or destroy humanity. Amongst these types, it is the totalitarian political dystopia which is chiefly associated with the failure of utopian aspirations, and which has received the greatest historical attention. "(Claeys. 2017: 4)

In conclusion, most of what we associate with 'dystopia' is thus a modern phenomenon steeped in secular pessimism. The word is derived from two Greek words, *dus* and *topo*s, meaning a diseased, bad, faulty, or unfavourable place". (Claeys. 2017: 4) In the same context of modern terminology, "most commonly, from both literary and historical viewpoints, dystopia is identified with the 'failed utopia' of twentieth-century totalitarianism. Here it typically means an regime defined by extreme coercion, inequality, imprisonment, and slavery". (Claeys, 2017:

5)   In the subchapter "The socialist-space Gulag of anthropological dystopia in the Gulag Archipelago by Alexander Solzhenitsyn" arguments are put forward in support of the idea that this book by Solzhenitsyn does not so much bring to the fore a common dystopian image of the totalitarian system, as it outlines an image of a space of anthropological dystopia. The socialist Gulag represents, in our vision, such a space. The individual is reduced to his animal value, a process of involution is imprinted on him that goes down to zero-degree dehumanization. At this point, all the promises of the system of equality and a balanced utopian universe are turned upside down. The universe of the human being is turned upside down, we are witnessing the establishment of an anthropological dystopia created right in the heart of the socialist Gulag by the socialist methods themselves projected as utopian. The concern of the individual is now survival at any cost, because, "Your mind is subjugated by petty calculations, which today obscure your sky, so that tomorrow you will find that you no longer do as much as a frozen onion. You hate work - work is your biggest enemy. You hate those around you, your rivals in life and death. You live under the empire of a devouring feeling of envy and alarm: right now behind you is a bread that could have been yours, somewhere, behind that wall, a potato is being fished from the boiler that could otherwise hit your can "(Solzhenitsyn, 2008: 482).The individual is destabilized and destroyed by the attack on the defining elements of the human, it becomes a body trained to survive at any cost, and "everything else passes as unimportant. Freedom, love, a sense of solidarity, respect, philosophy, can all be removed as useless trifles since they cannot fill the stomach. It can be rightly said that such a person lives only for bread". (Solzhenitsyn, 2008: 482) The dystopian analysis is continued in the subchapter The Communist Gulag - heterotopic space in the novels *Gherla* and *Ostinato* by Paul Goma. The two texts represent examples of the totalitarian dystopian space in Romanian literature. Unlike the socialist Gulag presented by Solzhenitsyn, the communist gulag from Goma's perspective is a space for the discipline and punishment of the human being through torture. Torture is manifested in two dimensions. On the one hand, there was physical torture and, on the other hand, mental torture. At this rate, the human being was dominated and disciplined in such a way that it became a means of manifesting disciplinary biopower. In both *Gherla* and *Ostinato*, Paul Goma portrays the image of the detainee nearing release. On the one hand, the detainee from Gherla is subjected to physical imprisonment, and, on the other hand, the detainee from *Ostinato* goes through an exhausting psychological process. In the first case, we can speak about a symbolic heterotopic space, while in *Ostinato* we are dealing with an archetypal heterotopic space. In the last subchapter, we focus on "Another dystopian vision on the totalitarian space - George Orwell and A.E. Baconsky ". In Orwell's case, in a world where "War is peace, Freedom is slavery,

Ignorance is power,"(Orwell, 2012: 34) the individual "lives like a man in interstellar space, who has no way of knowing if he is upside down." (Orwell, 2012: 219) The rupture between the individual and reality determines him to live in a space of permanent rewriting of his own existence. This third space, as Homi Bhabha has called it, is an identity space that is constantly rewritten and interpreted on the basis of disciplining the conscience of the individual, because "you have power when you break human consciousness into pieces and rearrange them at your own choosing"(Orwell, 2012: 34) Baconsky's novel constructs the image of a negative utopia different from Orwell's approach by realizing the connection between the human being - sacredness, and, respectively, natural-artificial. Taking into account the Christian approach to human existence as a body-soul, sacred-profane duality, Baconsky's novel demonstrates how the totalitarian system destroyed this human duality by transforming man into a place of manifestation of multi-identities resulting from the location of the human body in a certain spatial context, manipulated by power. In this sense, power reaches demiurgic values, encroaching upon the individual continuously and determining him to behave in his image and likeness. Beyond these mechanisms, the individual remains a strategy of returning to true identity through the communion between himself and nature.

Chapter five, entitled "Post-totalitarian prison: prisoners of hybrid space, cyberspace", addresses the end of the twentieth century which launches on the individual another form of imprisonment in a new system of ideological and technological organization: hybrid space, cyberspace. The chapter is divided into two subchapters: "Cyberspace - a form of identity hybridization in *Neuromancer* by William Gibson" and "Virtual space as a means of manipulation and control of individual life in After Sodom by Alexandru Ecovoiu". Among the most famous writers who created fictional correspondences of a new space - the cyber-generated one -, which has always meant new narrative strategies, is the writer William Gibson with his science fiction novel, in the cyberpunk version, *Neuromancer* (1984). Whereas the prison spaces approached in the previous chapters could exist also after the individual left those spaces, being was released either by death, or by access to a secure space of his individuality or in a form of manifestation of physical space, cyberspace is related to the human being. It receives meaning through its use by it. The first subchapter, entitled "Cyberspace - a form of identity hybridization in William Gibson's Neuromancer", looks at how the identity of the human beings is hybridized by their access to cyberspace. Cyberspace is a universe that arises within a very well-organized computer system and uses the human body either as a means of access or as a model for the artificial intelligence that populates this space. It promises the individual to overcome all the limits imposed by real physical spaces. It is provided with a hybrid form of identity, a compound

between the natural being and the hyper-technological being through which the latter accesses an unlimited space, a space that goes beyond temporality and history. The appearance of this model of space represents the promise of a universe in which the natural being is dominated by his own creation. Ultimately, cyberspace and all the computer devices through which it is accessed cannot exist independently of the human being, because they create all necessary means to access it. Cyberspace represents an indissoluble fusion between creator and creation, and, at the same time, an image of a reversal of the relationship between these entities. Normally, the creator should be superior to the creation and have full control over it. In the case of cyberspace, the creator can coordinate and be superior to the means of access, but not to cyberspace itself. Once in that world, the mind is controlled by the multitude of data and devices that ensure a continuous transition into different spaces, a virtual journey into real spaces hybridized by technology starts. In this entire context, the human being is captive of his own creation over which he has no control. By ensuring imaginary absolute control, cyberspace enchants the human being and determines him to use any means to access it, becoming able to accept the genetic modification of his own body or other beings to serve the interests induced by the biopower of cyberspace. This universe proves once again that in and through the human being can be created and recreated into infinite worlds, be they real or imaginary. In the second subchapter, entitled "Virtual space as a means of manipulation and control of individual life in After Sodom by Alexandru Ecovoiu", we complete the paradigm of spatiality proposed by us following our research. In concluding the paradigm of this study on the comparative and typological analysis of different forms of space and spatiality, we analyze the evolution of space today as a virtual phenomenon that includes absolute control over information and communication of individuals in different contexts and environments. If in Gibson's case we noticed how the virtual environment is materialized in the form of cyberspace, a universe of real non-space in which perception is sovereign and the beings that access it are hybrid beings, a mixture between technology and humanity, in Ecovoiu's case we notice how virtual space influences the lives of real individuals and how this virtual space is accessed by individuals who have no counterpart in the hybrid world of genetically modified bodies. In this process dehumanization takes place too, but this dehumanization is a result of the effects of virtual space on the individual.

The five chapters follow the narrative trajectory of the characters who perish in different systems of social organization constrained more or less from the point of view of social policies and ideologies identifiable in each case. The study follows the way in which the individual is the beginning and the end of any ideology and any social policy, because both space

and time seek their manifestation in and through the human being. The analyzed fictions demonstrate, from the point of view of the approached narrative strategies, the presence of the marks of the social context in which they were made and demonstrate, at the same time, that the literary work cannot be analyzed independently of the epoch and social context in which it was written.

Starting from Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy of identity through which Sartre argues in his work *Being and Nothingness* that existence precedes essence, which means that the human being is a result of all his experiences, this study shows that the body of the individual is a universal, omnipotent space, in which any modulation of reality is manifested: ideology, history, power, culture or time. At the same time, the research demonstrates the way in which the identity of the human being is tailored according to his experiences in a certain type of space dictated politically, ideologically, culturally or socially. The comparative and typological analysis of the different models of space realizes a connection between literature, ideology and history, the twentieth century being marked by continuous shifts in the definition of these concepts. By commenting on the novel *After Sodom* by Alexandru Ecovoiu, a novel which belongs to the 21st century, the present study leaves open the research on the valences of spatiality in the context of the present age. Out study aims at the anthropological approach to the concept of spatiality by analyzing how the human being was invested with identity with its placement in different types of space and, at the same time, how the human being in turn symbolizes the spaces in which it was placed.

The defining feature of all models of spatiality addressed in research is the deprivation of liberty. As far as the human being is concerned, freedom can be seen from the double perspective of the human being: body and soul. On the one hand, the freedom of the human being can be approached from the perspective of how it relates to the physical space. Taking into account these aspects, the study follows the different spaces that have imprisoned the human being along the last century. In Franz Kafka's case, the individual was psychologically imprisoned by the bureaucratic world, a world in which the individual was no longer able to manifest the identity of his own being. On the other hand, the world as a carceral space is also examined in reference to writers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. In their case, the world proved to be a prison space of the absurd, proven either by the impossibility of the human being to manifest itself, its authenticity being restricted by social conventions and stereotypes, or by the awareness of the lack of authenticity in both the material world and the human world. the individual being forced to disguise his own individuality. Our reading of Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu's novel demonstrates that the power relations in a totalitarian system marked by the

obsession of control and discipline has led to an endless path of identity investments in the human being, investments that led to the technological transformation of the individual into a social mechanism similar to a machine that works because it is programmed and driven. The same obsessions of the totalitarian system are identified in the study of the Gulag space, a space in which a process of double investiture takes place. On the one hand, the individual continued his journey inside an identity vacuum, and, on the other hand, it symbolized this model of space that proved to be a dystopian space of dehumanization and existential nightmare. When we turn to the space in Gheorghiu's novel, as well as the Gulag approaches, we see that the individual is emptied out of his essence, of specific attributes. His body was imprisoned and his spirit destroyed and subjugated by a system aligned with the slavery model. The human being had no chance before the mechanisms of power that acted on all its dimensions. With the emergence of the notion of cyberspace, the human being has been imprisoned by other means of manipulation and control represented by the illusion of absolute power. In this case too, the human being is imprisoned both physically and mentally, once again is it invested with new identity marks.

Following the narrative trajectories of the characters in these novels we can bring round the paradigm of our research to a complete configuration by claiming that since the beginning of his existence the individual has been both a goal and a means of imprisonment in his own creation, because in none of our approaches to the prison world has this proved a natural one, but an artificial continuum created by himself.

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