România Polifonică

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Abstract:

A photography project titled "ROMANIAS" as carried out in 2019 and then released as a three-volume album, and it was also presented as an exhibition in a splendid way in Bucharest. This Project is designed by the Bucharest-based Eidos Foundation and curated by Florian Ebner, chief curator of photography at the Center Pompidou, Paris. Cristian Movilă and Magnum Agency photographers, Bieke Depoorter, Thomas Dworzak, Paolo Pellegrin, Alec Soth, Newsha Tavakolian worked together on the project and each of them interpreted Romania in his/her own original way. Cristian Movilă is also founder of Eidos Foundation. The "ROMANIAS" project is historically very meaningful, as it coincides with the 100th anniversary of Romania's founding and the 30th anniversary of the end of Communism. In this study, post photography, the contemporary cultural functions of photojournalism, Magnum Photography Agency and related aesthetic strategies will be discussed; then The "ROMANIAS" project will be analyzed on selected examples using descriptive method in the context of photographic language and the styles of photographers.

Keywords: *ROMANIAS, Cristian Movilă, Eidos Foundation, UNFINISHED community, Magnum Agency.*

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Introduction

For now, the 21st century is a chaotic century in which life is generally defined with the prefixes post-, meta-, trans-, cyber-, uncertainty reigns, but radicalism rises. However, exist two human strategies that never lose their functionality and actuality: rhetoric and individual initiative. Rhetoric is the sophist's work and, individual initiative is the hero's principal characteristic. These issues, which are based on philosophical, epic and archetypal origins, are also human characteristics. According to Campbell (2017:25), the hero is a man or woman freed from historical constraints; He or she is "not from the existing, dissolving society and spirit, but from the inexhaustible source from which society is reborn". On the other hand, related this subject, Plato's Protagoras dialogue is a source book - like a Borgesian code book-; sophist and hero are together there.

In Protagoras dialogue, Socrates describes him, this first sophist (490-420 BC) as "the wisest of our generation" (Plato, 1952: 309-d; 94) with a great admiration; meanwhile Socrates believed that virtue cannot be taught, but according to Protagoras, virtue can be taught and he tells the story of Prometheus to explain his idea (Plato, 1952: 320-c; 126):"Prometheus arrived to examine his ((Prometheus' brother Epimetheus) distribution, and saw that whereas the other creatures were fully and suitably provided, man was naked, unshod, unbedded, unarmed…Then Prometheus, in his perplexity as to what preservation he could devise for man, stole from Hephaestus and Athena wisdom in the arts together with fire—since by no means without fire could it be acquired or helpfully used by any—and he handed it there and then as a gift to man" (Plato, 1952:321-c, 321-d;130-132).

Meanwhile, the individual initiative was formulated in Theaetetus dialogue; within this dialogue, for the definition of knowledge, Socrates explains what Protagoras thinks about it: "…Man, he says, is the measure of all things, of the existence of things that are, and of the non-existence of things that are not" (Plato, 2013: 152a). In Theaetetus dialogue, again, for definition of wisdom, Socrates conveys the relevant statement of Protagoras to Theaetetus: "For I declare that *The Truth* is as I have written, and that each of us is a measure of existence and of non-existence" (Plato, 2013:166d).

These classical values and strategies in question are also two basic communication mechanism components; rhetoric has been digitalized and individual initiative has become a self-expression model due to hypertext production. Thus, in cyberspace, the mythical and epic have become an everyday reality.

On the other hand, our age is the age of post-photography, and photojournalistic language is used also to a considerable extent in the context of conceptual photography through personalized projects.

The establishment of Eidos Fondation and Romanias, a publication and exhibition organization of this foundation, are individual initiative performances of Cristian Movilă. Movilă and his Magnum photographer friends, Bieke Depoorter, Thomas Dworzak, Paolo Pellegrin, Alec Soth, Newsha Tavakolian described Romania with their unique photo essays approaches resulting in a polyphonic rhetoric within historical, geographical, psychological and, cultural extensions.

Magnum Photos

There are many news agencies in the history of modern photojournalism. However, Magnum Photos has always an exceptional place among them. Magnum has been founded as a collective organization in 1947 by Robert Capa (1913- 1954), Henri

Cartier-Bresson (1908-2004), George Rodger (1908-1995) and David Seymour alias "Chim" (1911-1956). The establishment of the agency was developed in Paris as an idea and realized in New York (cited by Nair, 2020: 11). Actually Magnum Agency has offices in Paris –eventually- and in London and also in Tokyo.

Each of these founding members is legendary war photographer and photo-reporter. They participated in all the great wars of the first half of the 20thcentury like the Spanish Civil War or World War II .They became exceptional witnesses of the human condition. With their courage, their passionate involvement, distinguished intellectual personality, humanist interpretations, and unique aesthetic styles, they photographed, communicated and defined 20th century global environment in terms of actual and historical information. Moreover, they also contributed to the evolution of photo- language in both photojournalistic and artistic context.

Magnum Photos is not just an agency, but a great tradition of photojournalism at the same time. In this regard, perfection is the natural quality of Magnum Photos members in all circumstances, a Magnum photographer is always a humanist, an empathy master who turns into a natural element of every work environment and, an authentic social- realist but equally representing an independent vision. A Magnum photographer has an excellent Zeitgeist intuition. He or she represents photojournalist identity and artistic sensibility simultaneously producing direct information telling stories of local people and individuals for global society within an original style.

Magnum has also changed and been constantly renewing itself, parallel to the changing global conditions since 1947. Especially, with the arrival of postmodern times, Magnum Agency members have also changed and developed different creative strategies; they have even begun to use conceptual photography clichés: "As Magnum's photographers began to experiment with text and with book and exhibition design, their photographic language began to evolve as well" (Ritchin, 1997: par.13). Accordingly, they sometimes display photo essays as intertextual discourses with elements such as various texts and video records; they visualize storytelling techniques, and they develop individual projects using eventually actual conjuncture clichés; thus in this way, they directly represent the art of photography in the context of mass communication logic. Therefore, Magnum photographers design actual projects with social or individual content in all areas of life, as well as documenting wars, conflicts, social and political problematics in all around the world. "For today's younger generation of photographers, there is much less of a sense that simply reporting on an injustice is sufficient, and there is a much more complex awareness as to what is or is not possible to explain" (Ritchin, 1997: par.16). Actually, in both postmodern times and the Post-Truth Era, where subjectivity, relativism, collective mnemonic manipulation, and sometimes nihilism prevail, Magnum photographers seem still to maintain relatively Magnum principles.

Photo Essay

Photo Essay is a photojournalistic and documentary method and photo reportage form. The leading symbol of the Photo Essay in the History of Photography is Eugène Smith (1918-1978); is work also has the quality of humanistic reportage. (De Paz, 1088:259-260). Smith's photo essays entitled "Country Doctor" (1948), "Spanish Village" (1951), "Nurse Midwife" (1951), Albert Schweitzer (1954), Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. (1955), Minamata (1971) are cult works. According to him: "Journalism, idealism and photography are three elements that must be integrated into a whole before my work can be of complete satisfaction to me" (Cited by Thompson,

1951).

Smith is also a Magnum photographer. His photo essays were published in the legendary Life magazine (1936-1972). Life magazine's owner Henry Luce has written (1934) the program of magazine as following: "To see life; to see the world; to eyewitness great events; to watch the faces of the poor and the gestures of the proud; to see strange things — machines, armies, multitudes, shadows in the jungle and on the moon; to see man's work — his paintings, towers and discoveries; to see things thousands of miles away, things hidden behind walls and within rooms, things dangerous to come to; the women that men love and many children; to see and take pleasure in seeing; to see and be amazed; to see and be instructed" (Newhall, 1984:359). Smith's humanism and idealism is a perfect counterpart of Life's media politics. In addition, his professional dedication, his unique style of black and white aesthetic, high contrast dramatization and, chiaroscuro light orchestration has inspired generations of photojournalists- most likely including Cristian Movilă-.

Post Photography

The paradigm shifts that define the Weltgeist of the 21st century can be clearly observed in every field of photography, including photojournalism and documentary photography; according to this: History of Photography has become an algorithmic creative medium; despite the intensity of conventional postmodern anachronism, the "new", which is the basic concept of the new media and actually represents modernism, is directly fed by the original avant-garde movements and their universal cultural experiences (Manovich,1999:1-2); hyperrealist images of any reality can be produced through artificial intelligence and accordingly GAN (generative adversarial network);and, conventional mass media image production and communication are personalized in mobile phones, the Internet and social media environment.

As a result, Protagoras' statement "man is the measure of all things" has become a post-truth era motto. Thus, photography too has become a clearly subjective activity.

At this stage, the criteria of authenticity and originality of photographic production are the reasons and features of the related individual initiative.

Cristian Movilă

On the other hand, Cristian Movilă is a Romanian freelance photojournalist and a documentary photographer who was born in Bucharest (1983). He studied electronic engineering at the Polytechnic University in Bucharest, then in 2003 he became photographer: "over time he found himself increasingly concerned with social issues, and so he decided to become a photographer so he could capture the complexities of life "in a snapshot." (DarConte, 2012: par .1).

He has worked in many parts of the world including Gaza, Syria, Iran, Afghanistan, Georgia, USA, Russia, North Africa, and Europe and naturally in Romania focusing particularly on conflict areas and social problems. However, Cristian Movilă explains himself as such: "I'm not comfortable with the phrase "conflict photographer," but I cover a lot of conflicts. I'm trying to portray myself more as more of a visual artist. Lately, I'm focused on portraying my work as art, even if it's documentary" (Cited by Shavin, 2015:par.3). His photographs have been published in major media such as The New York Times, National Geographic, Time Magazine, Paris Match, Stern, Geo, Newsweek, and Esquire.

He has a dramatic photo style if defined in general terms.

Cristian Movilă's photographic performance also includes activist and philanthropist functions. In this regard, in 2005, he started a project titled "Unfinished dreams" about children affected by cancer who were treated at the Marie Curie Hospital in Bucharest, and then organized a campaign by opening exhibitions with project photographs, and he managed to collect millions of euros in aid in 2008 (n.a.,2019:par.2).

In 2020 Cristian Movilă, created a public art installation titled "Don't Take Them for Granted" with Swiss artist Capucine Gros, and British actor Benedict Cumberbatch using "70 hours documenting the fight against COVID-19, captured right in the heart of the intensive care units of Bucharest's main public hospitals". This project he participated in with his photographs was dedicated to medical staff, and organized by the UNFINISHED community of the Eidos foundation (Chirileasa, 2020:par.2).

Moreover, Movilă is also a Post- Communist Era photographer. He documented urban Romania, rural Romania or mystical Romania and naturally his own city Bucharest displaying a sharp realistic interpretation mixed with humanistic sensibility ; he displays generally a pathetic point of view on the pictures of poverty, addiction, loneliness, abandonment, illness, failure…. However, all these are not only current facts, but also residual issues connected with the ancient communist era.

He has a very energetic camera that approaches the subject from many different angles and he is a master of black and white photography aesthetic.

Eidos Foundation and UNFINISHED community

Cristian Movilă founded the Bucharest-based international Eidos Foundation in 2009. The main purpose of this non- profit foundation is to build cultural and artistic bridges among people, and to support artists and, to promote transdisciplinary artistic activities on international level. On the foundation's own website (https://eidosfoundation.org/about/) , the name of the foundation is explained as follows: "Inspired by the widely debated Greek philosophical term, EIDOS considers that the essence of life is in becoming and growing". Because of the subject is in the context of the photo, Roland Barthes's Camera Lucida (1980) comes to mind. This cult essay is also about the eidos (nature) of photography; Barthes tries to explore the nature of photography within the nature of man or the nature of himself. Nevertheless, this is an endless research like all eidos researches. In Chapter 24 of his book, Barthes (2000:60) explains this situation as follows: "Proceeding this way from photograph to photograph (to tell the truth, · all of them public ones, up to now) , I had perhaps learned how my desire worked, but I had not discovered the nature (the eidos) of Photography...I would have to descend deeper into myself to find the evidence of Photography, that thing which is seen by anyone looking at a photograph and which distinguishes it in his eyes from any other image. I would have to make my recantation, my palinode".

Eidos Foundation has an idealist perspective that was explained in this way: "Seeking to impact both consciousness and fundamentals, we focus above all on using culture, education, events and research as opportunities to experiment with new models of thinking and living."

On the other hand, as an initiative within the Eidos Foundation, the UNFINISHED community defines itself on its website (https://unfinished.ro/) in this way: "We are a vibrant community of global thinkers and makers. Part festival, part talks, part art, part undefined, it is an experience in constant evolution. The name UNFINISHED reflects our core belief: that making the world a more conscious

place is a continuous work in progress…" UNFINISHED community has also a manifesto that's a kind of high level intellectual map formed by components of contemporary philosophical, aesthetical and humanist vision.

ROMANIAS

The Eidos Foundation, besides its many cultural activities, developed a project titled ROMANIAS in 2018 and eventually opened an exhibition and released an album, under the same title. The project's curator is Florian Ebner; he is also chief curator of the Photography Department of the Paris Georges Pompidou Contemporary Art Museum. According to him, the aim of this project is discovering not only one Romania but different Romanias (Ebner, 2018: par: 2).The timing of the project is noteworthy, because 2018 was a very special year for Romania, namely 2018 is the 100th Anniversary of National Unity.2018 is also 30th Anniversary of the End of Communist Regime.

Cristian Movilă cooperated for the ROMANIAS project with five Magnum photographers who are Bieke Depoorter, Thomas Dworzak, Paolo Pellegrin, Alex Soth and , Nevsha Tavakolian. Each of these photographers traveled Romania in their own way, focusing on different historical or everyday realities, cultural characteristics, living environments; and the result was an impressive country panorama and a polyvalent visual discourse.

Eventually, there are so many photos in this project; however, we could to define the approaches of the photographers based on selected examples as noted below.

Bieke Depoorter

In creative magnum photos logic, the style of Bieke Depoorter is almost cinematographic that recalls Gregory Crewdson's film still compositions. One of her photographs included in this project, titled "August 18, 2018" is picture of a dark water cave lit with small amount of red light. There are male-female couples hugging each other in the water. This is an esoteric celebration scene that happens in a sensual and intimate environment. Another example is a picture of a claustrophobic interior that is probably a factory control room. Inside, a lone female employee looks at the factory operation chart on the wall. On the other side, there is an illuminated compartment with an old-model computer. This is a suspended moment for an indefinite *durée* of a surrealist scene in the Edward Hopper style.

Thomas Dworzak

The approach of Thomas Dworzak is pure mnemonic and historical. For example, he worked in Securitate Archive Popesti-Leordeni and in addition to the photographs he took in the archive, he also reproduced also an album of photos which were taken in front of US Library between1982-1988. However, this is not a conventional reproduction; this is a visual, conceptually fluid articulation formed by pictures of people who have been caught by surveillance of secret police agents.

Second example is photo of a concert audience that was taken in Athenaeum, Bucharest. The young and beautiful female spectator figure in the foreground on the right side of the photograph is almost an allegorical figure that represents Romania just like the female figures representing independent Romania in the 19th century romantic painting, or Athena in Athenaeum.

Paolo Pellegrin

Paolo Pellegrin's project approach can be described as sociological. For instance, he created a mini typology of Romanian society, taking portraits of people - woman, man, child- watching and listening to Ștefan Bănică's concert in at Sala Palatului, Bucharest (2018). Ștefan Bănică is one of Romania's most beloved artists. Moreover, this typology displays a conceptualized mass contemplation gesture that is loaded with local cultural connotations. Another example, there is a parked car on the edge of an immense natural landscape, and homemade food jars and fancy material offered for sale on small stalls in front of it. Pellegrin displays within this picture, nomadic economics initiatives with tenderness.

Alex Soth

The creative approach of Alex Soth is a conceptual one. He visualized the interiors sometimes as eerie environments with the people living there other times just with traces of them. He portrayed people in their intimacy with bizarre personal details. Within the project, for example, one of the individuals he photographed, a young man, Alex is lying in bed half-fetus position while at the same time his gaze is fixedly focused on a bunch of dried flowers in his hand. Is he lost, alienated, marginal or just eccentric, etc.? The subject is open to many speculations; but in the end it is an embodied ambiguity portrait beyond all possible definitions.

Another example from Soth's participation is photo of Irineu's Library, Giuriu (2018). This picture is designed as juxtaposition of two photos taken in the library. In the library, the shelves are filled with books, but at the same time many books including a red book on Marx on the left side are piled in a random, jumbled way in front of the shelves. In this fantastic library, where books are almost impossible to reach, Soth is actually building a surreal library installation.

Nevsha Tavakolian

Nevsha Tavakolian takes portraits of individually emancipated women no matter what politically and culturally difficult conditions they live in. She took portraits of many women also within the scope of this project. One of them is a picture of a young girl wearing a blouse with a red floral pattern, her back facing us. The young girl is holding in her hands a huge bowl with various flowers and herbs. Despite not perceived as such at first glance, this is a poetical still-life composition, not a simple portrait. Nevsha Tavakolian: "Whether she finds her subjects at the Gara de Nord or on Facebook, her resulting research offers a transversal view of Romanian society" (n.a. 2018: par.1). In this context, in the second example photograph, she portrays as follows: On a windy winter evening, a young woman watches the city from a high balcony. We see his face in profile, but a strand of wind-blown hair covers his eyes like a black censor tape. Thus her identity becomes utterly obscure, but this ambiguity has the potential of many untold stories or difficult stories to tell in other words, personal stories without stories.

Cristian Movilă

While describing Romania, Cristian Movilă took also group pictures of the clergy and believers. These photographs are in black and white and reflect a spiritual sensibility. In the photo of the believers: In the darkness, only the faces of the people attending the mass are bright. In this environment, Cristian Movilă visualized this divine light using the chiaroscuro technique. The title of the photo of priests and nuns is Deliverance. All these people are together and waiting; each of them has a different

facial expression. Therefore, it's almost a theological discourse about concept of deliverance.

Poliphony

Romanias has a polyphonic design- qualitative and quantitative-, six photographers, many people photographed, and many people working in the organization of the project within a rhizomatic, democratic and humanist philosophy and polyphonic aesthetics. The definition of literary polyphony of Mikhail Bakhtin can also be applied to other arts and of course to photography. In this context, according to Mikhail Bakhtin (1999:7): "Dostoevsky is the creator of the polyphonic novel" and he explain this polyphony as follows: "A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels…Dostoevsky's major heroes are, by the very nature of his creative design, not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse". Eventually, this definition of Dostoyevskian polyphony is as much a political code as it is an aesthetic code. Therefore, Romanias is an inspiring work for the studies to be done in this context.

Moreover, a different writer accompanied each photographer in this project and interaction between their texts and images connotatively multiplies the layers of meaning of the photographs.

Conclusion

Throughout the photographs in the Romanias project, people's gazes, looks, attitudes, poses, their immersion in the landscape, the traces of their abstract presence in the interiors, absurd or eerie details of daily life… all these are the multi-colored mosaic elements of the Romania. However, this does not mean a definitive result; on the contrary, this mosaic has a palpable and variable texture.

These photographs constitute a visual data source for Romania-studies, post-communism studies, memory-studies researches in general for now and towards the future. In addition, in photo-studies context, it may be revealed that new affects related to human nature are created with some of these photographs. These new affects could represent a new combination of love, symbolize a surprising political resistance, may express an unknown loneliness model or even an unfamiliar joy of life.

After all, *tempus omnia revelat.*

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