

## Gellu Naum in Heterotopia

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**Abstract:** *The paper relates the concept of heterotopia, created by Michel Foucault, with Avant-garde, surrealist poetry, and with Gellu Naum's poetry in particular. Michel Foucault's concept provides a means of approaching the avant-garde literature from outside the literary ground, rejected by the Avant-garde writers. Transferred to literature, this concept makes it possible for the Avant-garde to preserve its particular characteristics, opening new, interesting perspectives for the analysis of these obscure texts.*

**Key words:** *heterotopia, Avant-garde, Surrealism.*

In an article published in 1984, reproducing the text of a conference in 1967, *Of Other Spaces*, which was translated in Romanian by Bogdan Ghiu, Michael Foucault – philosopher, literary analyst, historian and sociologist, formulates and proposes the concept of heterotopia. Discussing the obsessions that mark the collective mentality, Michael Foucault affirms that the epoch we live in is an “epoch of space”, just as the nineteenth century belonged to history. “We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment. I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.” The author underlines the fact that the concept of space does not represent an innovation, but it has a history of its own, and he gives as an example the case of the Middle Ages – period in which space was regarded as “a hierarchic ensemble of places: sacred places and profane places: protected places and open, exposed places: urban places and rural places (all these concern the real life of men). In cosmological theory, there were the supercelestial places as opposed to the celestial, and the celestial place was in its turn opposed to the terrestrial place. There were places where things had been put because they had been violently displaced, and then on the contrary places where things found their natural ground and stability.” Unlike the concept of time „contemporary space is perhaps still not entirely desanctified (apparently unlike time, it would seem, which was detached from the sacred in the nineteenth century)”, as there still are a number of oppositions „that our institutions and practices have not yet dared to break down. These are oppositions that we regard as simple givens: for example between private space and public space, between family space and social space, between cultural space and useful space, between the space of leisure and that of work. All these are still nurtured by the hidden presence of the sacred.” The author shows interest in those spaces „that have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect. He divides these spaces into two main types: utopias – that are fundamentally unreal, and heterotopias – „real places - places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.” Foucault divides heterotopias into two categories: “crisis heterotopias” („there are privileged, sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis”) and “deviation heterotopias” („those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed”). An important characteristic of heterotopias is that they begin to function “when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time”. Heterotopias are dual spaces that “presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable,” so that one can enter a heterotopia only with a “certain permission” or after one has performed “certain gestures”.

“Moreover, there are even heterotopias that are entirely consecrated to these activities of purification -purification that is partly religious and partly hygienic, such as the hammin of the Moslems, or else purification that appears to be purely hygienic, as in Scandinavian saunas.” The term of heterotopia was assimilated by the postmodernist school in relation to themes such as *identity* and *difference* in the more complex domain of *multiculturalism*, thus heterotopias becoming also *spaces of the other*.

Through analogy, if we transfer the concepts to the literary imaginary one could notice a similar situation. There is a perpetual drive in the dynamics of the literary movements. Being forcedly introduced among these movements, the Avant-garde has preserved at all levels its heterotopic character. One of the main elements through which the movement places itself outside the artistic and literary categories is represented by the overt, violent, noisy rejection of the concepts of art and literature, all its forms being defined as states of spirit rather than literary schools. (T. Tzara: “Dada is not a literary school.”) The volatile and ineffable essence of the state of spirit pushes the movement into an area of absolute relativism, that accompanies any manifestation or expression of the Avant-garde spirit. The ostensive assumption of marginalization, through the refusal of all conventions and social and aesthetic codes, through repudiation of all hierarchies represents a confirmation of the isolation and setting up a new space of manifestation. This space is created through break, term used by the majority of exegets as a starting point in the attempts to establish a set of principles that define the Avant-garde “doctrine.” It is significant that the same term is used by Michael Foucault to describe the nature of heterotopias: “Heterotopia begins to function when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time.” The profoundly ambiguous situation of the Avant-garde is generated not only by the process that is initiated to literature and art, but also by the projection into an unspecific territory – life itself, aspiring towards a “poetic behavior” and “living the poetry”, as opposed to “literature-poetry.” Preserving its status, poetics becomes ethics, situation associated with the particularity of heterotopic spaces of being simultaneously open and overt, which isolates and makes them permeable at the same time. Adrian Marino underlines the occult-like behavior of the Avant-garde movements: “The Avant-garde flourishes in closed spaces, with predisposition to dogmatism and tendencies of sectarian psychology.” There is a consciousness of a closed group, a typical Avant-garde solidarity, which isolates and exalts the mind, up to the limit of the most implacable intolerance...” Proclaiming absolute freedom as the only condition of the creation, the poetic behavior is submitted to an asceticism necessary in order to attain purity and poetic vision. Rigor is closely related to Avant-garde ethics, which has determined, especially in the case of Surrealism, the famous exclusions from the group. We can speak of a real deontology, of a code resembling the code of knights, the role of which confirms the heterotopic behavior, by establishing a new order and isolating its territory. Michael Foucault has identified two types of heterotopias, “crisis heterotopias” and “deviation heterotopias”, terms that form the very basis of the Avant-garde revolution – becoming conscious of the moment of *crisis* of the concepts of art and literature, the artists avoid the alienating conventions through *deviation*. The process of deviation implies deconstruction, decomposition, disorder, defiance, shock, “*cretinisation* of the language” – all formulas of “projecting the poetic experience into irrational”, in order to gain creative freedom from intellectualism and logic. This attitude is reflected into the predilection for primitivism, alienation, infantile means of expression, coagulated in formulas like “«Dadaist idiot», surrealist «somniloquence», «paranoiac» art and other means of mental alienation practiced by the Avant-garde, up to the theory of «schizoid vision» of the *Novissimi*.” Among the numerous techniques of exploiting from this point of view, the fertile areas of reality, like the unconscious, the dream, the invisible world, there are the automatic dictation, hazard, collage, inventing new languages (zaum – Hlebnikov, leoparda – V. Teodorescu, maori – T. Tzara), cadaver exquis, the objectively offered object, which are not only unspecific, but mostly a-literary. In

order to preserve the dynamism and avoid the threat of dogmatization the artists institute a real cult of failure, the accent being moved from result to process. Thus it has been spoken of "an aesthetics of imperfection," and moreover through the exaltation of failure, unsuccess, perpetual debut, the avant-garde intended to abolish the very label of "aesthetics". In the name of the same principle the Avant-garde artists refuse recognition, and sometimes arriving to the odd exclusions, assassinations, demissions, self-negations. It suffices to mention the case of Ion Vinea, the assassination of the review *unu*, in order to "preserve its youth", Tzara's resignation. All these facts are related to the Avant-garde specific and cannot be ignored, moreover, I think they should constitute the main elements one should initiate an analytic or critical approach concerning this phenomenon. It is naïve to think that the representatives of Avant-garde movement did not realize the threat of dogmatization; it is more likely that it was the very source of a sentiment of a perpetual threat, from which arose their nihilism, self-negation, self-destruction, the inclination towards suicide, which some of the artists considered sterile and overcame it through a gesture of reorientation that was interpreted as a betrayal by the others. It is the case of Marcel Iancu, Ion Vinea, as well as of some writers who would become academicians, renouncing their former beliefs, like Geo Bogza or Virgil Teodorescu. "The utopian dream of the Avant-garde of escaping a formula without entering another convention" is resolved into heterotopia. From the principles it promoted and the avant-garde attitude and ethics, to the creations that break all boundaries, dissolving all distinctions (we speak of "literature of manifestos", of "poetry against literature"), the avant-garde creates a spaces of its own "regarded as an autonomous world, independent from any exterior, living in itself and for itself."

As an expression of the Avant-garde, the Surrealism deepens the delimitation, draws firmer borders between its realm and reality. The term "Surrealism" designates a median area which makes possible the reconciliation of the contraries: "dream and reality – two such contradictory states can be resolved in a sort of absolute reality, in surreality", "surreality – supreme meeting point between high and low, past and future, real and imaginary, dynamic synthesis of the subjective energies and external impulses." As it can be seen surreality represents a meeting point, a conjunction point of the farthest realities, realizing the primary unity of the being. Surrealism is a new means of knowledge, essentially subjective, with the purpose of gaining absolute freedom, as "only by acting into the realm of invisible through poetic means one can revolutionary act upon the visible" in order to "change life." If this idea may have seemed utopian, Sarane Alexandrian clarifies this issue in an interview taken by Petre Răileanu. Alexandrian states that the term utopian is used with a derogatory meaning, in the sense of losing contact with reality, while "surrealists... have proved to be profoundly anchored in reality. The surrealists have been the only ones that have looked into the depths of reality, that have got into its finest details. Breton in *Communicant vessels* or in *Nadja*, Aragon in *The Peasant in Paris*, were capable of seeing reality into its smallest details, in a way in which even Zola wasn't capable of. Zola has systematically realized a «catalogue of observations», but had no direct contact with reality, as surrealists had." The surrealists, perhaps more evidently than any of the Avant-garde representatives, build for themselves a heterotopia.

Dumitru Micu considers that "Gellu Naum has produced Surrealism only when he avoided the canon," noticing that when he did apply the canon "he stepped exactly into the trap he was trying to break: «poetry»,," while his authentic poetry "must be looked for in the volumes that appeared after the disappearance of Surrealism as a movement: *Athamor* (1968), *The Animal-tree* (1971), *My Tired Father* (1972), *Selected Poems* (1974), *The Description of the Tower* (1975), *The Other Side* (1980)," as they illustrate "the normative principle of Surrealism – the search of miraculous into everyday reality, into the immediate reality." The stereotype procedures which, in Dumitru Micu's opinion, make the young Gellu Naum a poet of "regimentation into series," and not of "difference," such as "the

fracture of words, with or without keeping the second part into the next line, unfinished phrases, the transformation of nouns into adjectives or of adjectives into nouns, creating new words, elimination of punctuation, aberrant spelling, violation of topics and grammar, play on words, simulating delirium, occultation of sense, selecting titles with no connection with the poems" pass into secondary plan, with the option for "children's heroic aggressiveness." The presence of a mutation is unquestionable, but it is as evident the unity of Gellu Naum's creation in the sense of "poetry as a network" or as a "poetic fractal object", as seen by Simona Popescu. It is at the conjugation of these perspectives that a unifying vision arises. Gellu Naum's poetic matter gets through a process of crystallization and purification, the "incendiary rider" being nothing less than a starter of the alchemic fire. Remaining identical with itself the poetic matter is transfigured, together with the attitude and the ego itself, heading towards the "serenity" which shelters the ego in *The Way of the Snake*, serenity corresponding to the "miracle of the unity", to the coincidence of the opposites, to the point in which "all those that are underneath are the same with those that are above." Gellu Naum's entire work contains hints of circumscribing a heterotopic space, mazy, figured in the image of the "circle with the centre everywhere," a space that is anchored in reality, but open towards the infinite, in which the poet travels searching for the "point de mire", the point in which one knows "how to escape mortality without being immortal." The essence of Avant-garde and of surrealism is represented by the aspiration to preserve a medial status, of appurtenance and non-appurtenance, of connection and break in relation to literature and reality. Gellu Naum takes this desideratum to its last consequences.

*The Way of the Snake* may be considered "point de mire" of Gellu Naum's work. It is a text that unfolds and hides at the same time: "I hide nothing from you: the curtain is pinned by your own eyelids." Through this book Gellu Naum leaves surrealism in order to rehabilitate, if not to reinvent it. From the point of view of this text, inside the imaginary it is instituted the heterotopic territory towards which the Avant-garde, and especially surrealism, aspires. It is not only the fragments of an original "cosmology" that the poet realizes in the *The Situation of the World* – "Maybe Emerson knew something, but then he also knew to carefully hide it.", "Einstein gropes. It is more simple and more complicated at the same time." – but also the fact that this book becomes poetry as it is foreign to literature: "Get it out of your head that you are reading poems. Remember that we have spoken about prophets, about free men, even about you." This text is a wisdom book in which the ego-leader guides the person that reads (not the reader!) towards the center. This path is healing, bringing freedom from the "malady of the conscious" – "The neurasthenic is ill, terribly ill, if he's not helped. / He is though less ill than (excluding physical suffering) the intelligent.", as "initiation is beyond conscious understanding." The poet speaks about the "gesture-word", ("The force of my gestures (acts) is enormous. The famous VERB of which all the theologians speak is gesture (act).") through which poetry becomes life, real, freeing man. Poetry is healing as it becomes act, ritual, understanding coincides with action: "You have not understood anything until these words have become your gestures." It is not a recipe: "Do not change a machine with another, I mean, don't make it a dogma.": "This is why I refuse to give you a precise key of gestures and symbols and not in order to hide anything.", "You are not looking for a foreign procedure, you are looking for yourself and you are in yourself, be sure of it, suffocated, repressed, your ritual is your own, no matter how hard to believe it may seem.", "I'm not hiding anything from what I want to tell you, and what seems hidden is suppressed in your own head." It is a discover of the self, everyone's journey is unique, although they follow the same path. The symbols in the text – the snake, the eagle, the dog, the cat, the owl, the elephant only partially keep their significance, receiving at the same time a personal semantic addition and forming an individual mythology. The ego-prophet sets the lines of a new dimension of reality: "There is only the eternity, in which life is only a form, an accident.", "... wait until you understand well, until you forget the gold of the dogs, to understand the philosophic

stone otherwise than those with furnaces.” The person who reads, who understands that “Everything lies in purity, in serenity,” that “the essence of miracle, serenity” transgresses the limitations of the matter, the multiplicity of forms represented by the superposition of skin layers, realizing transmutation – the matter is sublimated: “Now it is about a new skin.” The recuperation of the original unity of man and universe is possible through love: “Don’t forget love. I precisely speak about the love for a single woman. / Make it a ritual. It is the hardest part, the traps of the conscious are numerous.” Love is the unifying force, the regenerative force, the love between a man a woman being projected at macrocosmic level, as an element that abolishes the duality of the world: “Respect is solar love. / This is my star. / And I don’t forget the moon, for my beloved.”, “You have succeeded in unifying the sun and the moon.”, “In the dream from a few nights ago the sun was united with the moon.”, “It is only now that what is above is the same with what is underneath.”

The literary intention is absent, organizing the text in sentences with gnomic character, in “verses,” the language does not give in the “poetic” temptation, abandoning all the elements of surrealist inventory: “Don’t let yourself be intoxicated with discourses, especially our own. Here lies another trap...”, a trap that Gellu Naum manages to avoid, leading those who read, through the language that re-discovers its initiating function, towards a heterotopia with a single inhabitant. Understanding Gellu Naum’s poetry starts by getting over the “possible confusion”: “it is true that everything I say has no poetry and it is useless / I’d better not talk rather than shut up like this but / there’s no other way / and it is the only way when you have lived every thrill / of an unknown immense whisper in which everything is possible.”

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