

# Politics and Abyss

## Review

*Arthur Suciu, Simulacru și război. Discursul politic în postistorie, /  
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Horia Vicențiu PĂTRAȘCU

*Department of Training for Teaching Career and Socio-Human Sciences  
National University of Sciences and Technology Politehnica Bucharest  
horia.patrascu@upb.ro*

In his book *Simulacru și război*, published this year by the Litera Publishing House, Arthur Suciu brings up a very current problem: that of the lack of substantiation of the political discourse and the increasingly stifling presence of the simulacrum as a substitute for reality. The term simulacrum is taken from Jean Baudrillard who uses it in his book *Simulacra and simulation*, published in 1981. The concept has a longer history being used by atomist philosophy to explain the process of perception: the perceptual images are formed by “miniatures” of the external object penetrating the knowing subject. To a certain extent, Plato also talks about simulacra when he talks about the shadows and the appearances that tend to replace or to cover the true reality.

The strong meaning of the simulacrum emerges, however, only when it is no longer possible to talk about a true reality, about a world or an object that the image or the appearance hides or transports in the perceptive structures, when the place of the “real world” is taken by the abyss itself, by the groundlessness. Nietzsche’s role in the foundation of this “nihilism” is well-known: in a world from which essences have disappeared, the very concept of appearance loses its meaning! And yet the fundamental concern remains: that of discovering the generative source of the historical worlds as they present themselves one after the other, more and more rapidly in recent times, primarily because of technological developments. According to Nietzsche, the source can be sought in the differentiation of wills to power: a strong will to power wants to impose its own

value system, it substantiates a world where others will have to live. However, such a perspective remains tributary to the traditional metaphysics, as Heidegger notices, since it appeals to an ultimate substantiation, to an essential reality, to a “nature”, be it a psychological one: the will to power. The overcoming of this onto-theological thinking can only be done, according to Heidegger, by an exit from the state of oblivion of the being, that is, by restoring the being in the terms of nothingness, of the abyss, of the groundlessness. The rediscovery of the negativity of the being – as it had been several times understood by the philosophical and theological apophatism or, to some extent – sweetened by the logical systematization by Hegel – is Heidegger’s most original contribution, which would fuel the postmodern theories and philosophies.

By removing any Hegelian logic of becoming, for Heidegger the being discovers its meanings thus grounding historical worlds in a manner which is close to the total contingency, the randomness and the absolute unpredictability. The human being is at the same time a substitute for being but also for the nothingness, and he utters the meaning of beings, thus bringing them to their being, only because it experiences the abyss in the deepest and most authentic way, the groundlessness that is revealed to him, in anguish, as if enthroned in the midst or beyond the totality of beings. Only by starting from this transcendence of totality of beings into the abyss, in the “original” groundlessness, can man also actualize being, can he become an utterer of the being of beings. The transcendent – with Heidegger – becomes a completely empty “place”, but it generates through its total emptiness a knowledgeable, interrogative and researching attitude. In this reformulation of the problem of being, it becomes completely impossible to distinguish between the human “part” and the “part” of the being, as man is named by a word from which the name of the being can no longer be absent: *Dasein*. As it is difficult to have any other criterion of the true statement if anyone can claim that through his statements or works a meaning of being can be discovered.

Arthur Suciú scrutinizes this new world in which we have already been living for more than a century – which is confirmed, the author believes, even by those political constructions and those ideologies that aim to oppose nihilism, such as the Nazism and the Communism. The most impacted, as the author notices – who has extensive experience in the field of communication and institutional image – is the political discourse. The politician of this day and age feels the disappearance of an ultimate referential and he or she is discouraged to invoke it or even to think about it not only because of the resounding failure of the great political utopias, but also – because of it! – of the utterly intimidating triumph of

capitalism which, through its means of propaganda and censorship, it sanctions or it simply forbids the discussion of any alternative.

Capitalism is a world that rests on an abyss since no critical perspective upon it is possible. The capitalism claims self-sufficiency – there is no other viable economic and political system competing it, as – its followers claim – history itself has proven that through the bankruptcy of the communist system and the disasters produced by the fascist and the Nazi ideologies. The paradox is obvious: the competitive society refuses to be competed by any other society and it tries to unify the whole planet to a single economic and political model. Equally, the democratic and liberal society forbids questioning democracy and freedom. It is based on a few un-provable and indisputable postulates which, consequently, rest on an abyss, on nothing.

It is this very nothingness that the current politician, unable to be anything other than a puppet of the market, of the capitalist economic system, feels... to the fullest. Politics is totally subjugated to economics which it permanently reconfirms in a perfect circularity. Politicians who attempt to challenge the capitalist and competitive economy doom themselves to isolation, marginalization and ultimately to exclusion. Even the sovereigntist and nationalist movements do not dare to attack the foundations of the capitalist system, which remain completely unquestioned. Russia and China are the best examples thereof, with Russia reverting to pre-Bolshevik revolution oligarchy and plutocracy, and with China transplanting its communist head onto a huge capitalist body.

In this new world, “the best of possible worlds”, which no longer rests on anything and which has found a prophet to announce the “end of history”, that is, of the search for a better and more just world (Francis Fukuyama), the confrontation with the abyss remains a permanent threat. Capitalism has nothing left to fight against except the awareness of its founding abyss and which the individuals – not just political people – feel from time to time in their own lives. The boredom, the anguish, maybe even the anxiety derive from the feeling of suffocation that this perfectly closed, spherical world, this surrogate of the absolute, cannot help but evoke.

Beyond this world there is nothing – this is implied by all means of propaganda, but – moreover! – the individual is not allowed to face the lack of alternative and the frustration of being extirpated from one of his defining, almost vital functions: the interrogative, reflective and critical function. The capitalism does not allow one to see that its world is a closed world – opening within itself infinite avenues of entertainment, a labyrinth whose stake is always the self-loss. Capitalist entertainment is the hiding of capitalism’s groundlessness.

This proximity of the alternative ground is highly interesting because, Suciú believes, one can only talk about the ground of a world from the positions of another competing world – be it a purely fictional, ideal world. As long as such a discussion is impossible – capitalism remains another form of totalitarianism – it is indeed better than the others, but totalitarianism, nevertheless.

Despite the harbingers of its end, history proves that it continues its evolution – and Arthur Suciú identifies several convincing examples that the globalism has evolved from its first American posture to a multipolar structuring, that the nationalism and the capitalism find strange forms of symbiosis or that, in some countries such as Russia and China, private enterprises remain to a large extent inextricably linked to their respective states, while in others – such as the American companies such like McDonald's or Coca-Cola – they are more independent and therefore increasingly global in a more specific sense, although under given conditions they can align with the state policy, as it is the case with their withdrawal from Russia during the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

So, history moves on – altering even the structures and relationships once seen as defining for the capitalism. What is left for us to do? Shall we wait for this very movement to bring humanity before another world created from the accumulation of events, contingencies and chance – so that only then can one judge the foundations of the world that will have disappeared? This has happened before in history, and perhaps this is the very way history works: every historical world considers itself to be the last, to be total, to be definitive and unchanging. To question the relations between sovereign and subjects, between suzerains and vassals, between masters and slaves – was, for each form of government and regime, as unseemly and unimaginable as the debate about the justification of the capitalism is nowadays.

Every society is totalitarian in its own way, and we wonder if it is not global as well. Humanity seems to synchronize – obviously when there is contact between the parts of the world – and walk evenly, borrowing each other's ways and lifestyles until brought to some common denominator. The slave society was common to both the Persians and the Greeks, with all its peculiarities and its ideological confrontations between the two civilizations. We cannot say that there are radical temporal breaks between people's worlds – if these worlds communicate in one way or another. We can assume that the pre-Columbian America constituted a parallel history only if we accept the thesis of the total isolation from the Old World; otherwise – if united by roads, influences, travels – the humanity seems to have always shared a certain form of globalism.

So, shall we wait for the end of this historical world to truly judge it? Arthur Suciú is not satisfied with this solution, especially since the historical becoming itself, the end of an era or a historical world seems to be, at present, a simulation, something incomplete, a parody of the end. The simulation of the historical development, of its becoming, has long fallen to the task of technological evolution, the production of various *devices*, whose rapid moral wear fuels an entire industry of nostalgia.

We are rather nostalgic for the “time” of the pick-up or the black-and-white TV, of the landline; soon we will become nostalgic for I-phones – and this technological successor of the technological succession actually covers the immutability of the capitalist system. Technology becomes complicit in maintaining the illusion of movement and historical becoming, and so it is essential that the producers of technology create, at regular intervals, resounding innovations as they are equally producers of historical... time. The absence of social and political revolutions is well disguised by these technological “revolutions”.

Certainly, the technology in turn can change the deep structures of the society – imposing new ways of feeling, thinking and seeing – but the current capitalist technology, Arthur Suciú tells us, is captive to the electricity, it produces novelty only within the paradigm of the electric current; in other words it cannot really propose a radically different way of being, but only improvements and diversifications of the light bulb, screens and telecommunications. A true new technological era is supposed to emerge when the electricity gives way to a different energy breakthrough that will re-found the world of people and the relationships among them. It is not by chance that the current apocalyptic scenarios are linked to a universal black-out that would shut down all current technology. “The world no longer revolves around the sun, but around the bulb,” says the author, and elsewhere he adds that we no longer look at the sky except through a screen.

Since today’s world is so indisputable and undeniable, the escapist scenarios are much more easily created around populating other planets than around changing the capitalist system. It is not difficult to perceive the inherent difficulties of the latter which cause economic crises, social segregation and, ultimately, the prospect of a global catastrophe. Competitive society faces a well-known paradox: maintaining prosperity implies the continuous accumulation; it is by definition insatiable and it implies permanent development and expansion. In turn, the consumption-based economy destroys the natural resources, leading to severe

climate change and, ultimately, to the desolation of any form of life that does not allow itself to be industrialized.

Environmentalism is directly contradictory to capitalism because economic consumption destroys the very functioning mechanism of the consumer economy that lives on the very waste of food, on excess purchases and so on. Also, in a global world, the ecological measures cannot be applied only to a certain part of the world (as Europe is forced by the *Paris Agreement*) because it creates deep discrepancies and inequalities among economic agents facing each other in the global market. The Science Fiction utopias of populating other planets are, therefore, those that respond to man's need to find a solution to a seemingly insoluble problem unlike the social utopias based on a new... natural contract, on a new agreement with the surrounding nature.

*The de-demonizing of money. The Manelistic ethics and the spirit of the Romanian capitalism*

Consumerism is capitalism's counterpart and its way of responding to the Marxist criticism. For capitalism has realized that it can only survive by corrupting all souls, by devoting them to the pleasure of owning capital. More precisely, the ideal of liberal capitalism – anyone can become a business owner! – is implemented through *consumerism*, transformed into a physical sensation, be it a surrogate one.

For the consumer behaves like an enterprise owner who *buys* the labor power thanks to the capital he owns, as every consumer knows that behind any product there is a quantity of labor that he pays for by the act of purchase. Much of the compulsion to buy comes from this self-validation of the consumer as a patron, through which he endlessly reconfirms – through the consumption behavior itself – the current social model, in a circularity from which he can no longer escape.

We know well that modern society, capitalism, links its destiny to a prior de-demonizing of wealth, to an acceptance of usury under the more aseptic name of interest and under the institutional form of the bank. Romania, as Suciú shows, citing Alexandru Racu, did not benefit from a similar exemption of material possession, or at least not in a systematic and constant way, but fragmentary and syncopated. Even those who “adapted” to the market economy, becoming successful owners or investors, suffered, rightly or wrongly, from a certain social stigma: the mere fact of having more presupposes certain culpability. The responsibility for this resentful allergy to money and wealth, but also for the rooting of a sui-generis entrepreneurial attitude that deflates its sense of guilt through evasive and illicit behaviors, falls on the orthodoxy and the communism.

Practically, in the case of the latter, the denial of personal wealth in favor of a collective property, of everyone and no one, means the transposition of a monastic, ascetic ideal in the form of a state policy, secular and atheistic. There is a coenobitic communism perfectly similar to the political communism. The communist state is a huge monastery, extended to the dimensions of a people, of an entire world, where no one prays. With the exception of the prayer, mysticism and God, the monastic values, mainly the exaltation of the physical labor, the denouncing of the selfish individuality and the dispossession in all aspects are promoted by the communist social model.

Money cannot be lacking either in a monastery or in a communist state, but it is dealt with as a temptation, as “the eyes of the devil”, and its possession as an earthly and forgivable brotherhood with the devil (“befriend the devil ’till you pass the bridge”). As compensation, those who do join the free market game will be tributary to the same mentality and they will try to obtain its favors by bending the rules in force, by cheating the system, by being “tricksters”. Trickery is, one might say, a moral behavior as long as the world of money is, by definition, ruled by the Sly. Otherwise, to behave rightly towards what is fundamentally wrong, to be honest with what is flawed in its essence puts you not only in the category of “suckers”, but also in that of the most reprehensible sinners. On the contrary, to circumvent and trick, to deceive the absolute Deceiver is a model preferred by those in the Orthodox-communist space, as the most illustrative image is probably that of Ivan Turbincă.

In contrast, in Western countries, shaped by the Protestant ideal, corruption, although frequent, does not become a lifestyle, an ethos, or an ethics. To understand the Orthodox post-communist space means first of all to understand the profoundly negative valence of material possessions, in this case, the money. So, on the one hand, the poor (but honest), on the other hand, the “thieves”, who are hardly sanctioned by public morality. Although the poor majority has no doubts about the illegal sources of the wealth of the wealthy, it softens the thievery, even expressing a certain sympathy and understanding towards it, as long as terms such as “thief”, “trickster/slicker”, swindler, rogue (i.e. the one worth standing at the gallows) have an obviously positive connotation (see Marius Ghilezan, *Hoția la români*). The highwayman was rechristened, in traditional culture, as an outlaw (*haiduc*, a Robin Hood like character) and turned into the object of eulogy and folk epic.

A partial reconversion to the assumption of wealth as a moral value is achieved in post-communist Romania not thanks to a religious movement similar to Protestantism, nor to the entrepreneurial education carried out by opinion

leaders, but through... music, more precisely through a musical genre known as “manea”, exercised predominantly by musicians of Roma ethnicity. While the church and the intellectuals are silent on this matter, the “manele” start to be heard more and more often in Romanian households, familiarizing the former Orthodox-communist collectivists (but the legionnaires were also followers of collectivism) with the new values of the consumer society. What Protestantism represented for the Western capitalism is the “Manelism” for the Romanian capitalism.

When we say that Romania has become *manelized*<sup>1</sup> under the influence of this music genre, we must understand by this an internalization of financial values, an act of civilization - through a marginal minority with a much wider and freer onerous experience. The “Manelism” also suits the prior structures of the Romanian mind because the “money and wealth” promoted by the “Manelism” does not confirm the Western model (of Kantian duty), but that of “outlaw”, “thief”, trickster. The affluent Roma – living on the fringes of society and being forced to a certain defiance of its laws – becomes a model for the post-communist Romanian, for the young generations who thus express both their revolt against the system and their integration into the same system. Today the “manele” are listened to even by those young people who still call themselves Rock music fans.

This is the reason why Arthur Suciú pays attention to the figure of the *cocalar* (“thug”), a “proletarian” converted to the model of the market economy, this hybrid interested in politics, but only to the extent that it can validate him as such, as what he is. As man, unlike God, is nothing but what he does and what he has, the *cocalar* is defined by making money and owning money, just as the proletarian was once defined as the one who has numerous children.

### *The melting of Europe into the European Union*

This is a memorable saying that should be reflected on for a long time. Who would have thought that the European Union is actually the end of Europe, at least in its classical sense? Even if it is a fulfillment of the deepest ambitions of Europe, of its past ideals, this fulfillment is also an end, and the Romanian language knows how to show the connection between achievement, fulfillment and finishing, end and death. Moreover, apocalyptic discourses regarding the destiny of Europe proliferated after the creation and expansion of the European Union.

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1 The term manelization, used in Romanian society, reflects the spread of manele as a musical genre. At the same time, it also refers to the acquisition of much more relaxed attitudes regarding respect for others, the values of high culture, or the appropriation of vulgar epicureanism as a fundamental principle of life.



*Politics and Abyss (Review)*

If some while ago the Western powers, Germany, France, as well as Italy or Spain, represented poles of attraction for Eastern European countries, they also became, as important elements and centers of power within the EU, the object of Romanians' criticism and resentment and, in general, of the objections of the Eastern European nations. How can a Romanian still be a Francophile today in the way his ancestors were – after, from the height of the Élysée's armchair, he is reminded in certain contexts, that he should be silent or that he is part of the second category of European countries (Macron's Multi-speed Europe)?

Germany is, for its part, an economic power, increasingly irrelevant culturally, confirming C. Noica's providential words about its transformation into a land of butter. So, the other pole of attraction for the Romanian culture is also deactivated. The situation is as serious as possible if we consider that the formative influences of the Romanian culture are German and French. This is, then, a culture (which has recognized its mimetic vocation many times) outside of its once structuring axes. As he sensed this profound dis-alignment of Romanian society, Traian Băsescu, president of Romania for ten years, explicitly proposed a different axis to restructure the collective mind: the Washington-London-Bucharest axis.

This axis soon proved to be much shorter, as only the American influence was remarkable, both in general, through technology, digitalization, and in particular an active military presence, and through a strategic interest in the Black Sea area. Great Britain did not show interest in Romania almost at all, on the contrary, the reception of eastern countries in the EU was for the UK a decisive reason for Brexit. So, the old Europe is, from a Romanian viewpoint, melting into this simulacrum called the EU – while currently the Romanian is formatively heading towards America, a country from which it is separated not only by an ocean, but also by the requirement of visas. Curiously enough, this very country, which is closed and far away for most Romanians, constitutes the closest model, the strongest stimulus of our phantasmal apparatus.

However, the new political situation in America also threatens this existential, constitutive orientation of the Romanian society, leaving us exposed to the abyss, the groundlessness, the lack of foundation which, Arthur Suciú states, is ultimately the true reality, hidden in the invisible core of any political speech.

*The confessional panopticon*

Confession is generalized in the form of the virtual presence on social networks, although it radically changes its meaning and significance: its source is no longer the guilty conscience, but its very opposite, since the object of public "confession" in today's world is given by the virtues, and not by the vices of the

person concerned, by his or her successes, and not by his or her failures. As we have shown elsewhere, even today's confessional literature, with a few exceptions, is tributary to a narcissistic, positive vision of the self, with the narrator counting less and less on the therapeutic function of his presentation as an antihero. But who knows if it is not precisely the presumption of guilt that presses everywhere on everyone that does determine this confessional-positive counter reaction, as if everyone wants to prove it – through *selfies*, through the thoughts they express publicly, through the revelation of all events that make up his or her life – that he is alright as a person, a person credible and worthy of respect.

*In lieu of a conclusion...*

If I were asked what oracular source can give us the best answer regarding the things to come, I would say: A world, like a man, ends in caricature. The Roman Empire ended with some barbarian and illiterate emperors; the American Empire will end with a string of sleazy presidents. Do you want to know the future? Forget about political scientists, futurists, sci-fi writers in favor of humorists, satirists and buffoons. The men of old had the good habit of organizing collective anticipatory shows (saturnalia, carnivals, etc.) proving to us that they were wiser than we are today. They knew that the inexorable destiny of the present was the masquerade.

Arthur Suciú's book has the merit of not only being a deep, nuanced and erudite analysis of our world, but also of understanding it through a certain kind of amused detachment, through a piercing irony that allows him a visionary dimension that is otherwise difficult to reach. He often manages to look at the world – and at himself – with that “dead man's eye” he once spoke of.

**References:**

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