

BOOK REVIEW

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Ștefan Ungurean, *Eseuri sociologice [Sociological Essays]* (2022), Art Soleil Publishing House, Ghimbav; 2 volumes

Recently, a double volume of essays by sociologist Ștefan Ungurean appeared at Art Soleil Publishing House, until recently working as an academic at the Faculty of Sociology and Communication, Transilvania University of Brașov. Ștefan Ungurean's personality is a special one through the diversity of professional interests (television, company management in the field of business and human resources) as well as academic, but especially through the style, verve and intensity of the writing. Many research and analysis topics are already familiar to Romanian sociologists because Ștefan Ungurean has always had the openness to send for years articles and essays written directly, by email, to all those interested, all of which are part of the texts that the author has published since 2016 in a series symbolically entitled *Deleuzian Romania* (see also on the romanasocială.ro website).

Born in 1952, Ștefan Ungurean graduated in Sociology at the University of Bucharest in 1975, and in 1999 he completed his doctoral studies at the same university (on a topic of conflict theory). Between 1975 and 1982 the author of the essays was a sociologist at the *Project* Institute in Brasov (within the urbanism collective). The life and scientific experience of this institute is presented in the opening of the first volume of *Essays* in an autobiographical text written with talent, sociological verve and humour (a fragment also appeared in *Rev. Social Psychology*, no. 45/2020, pp. 145-156, presentation belonging to Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu). The author of these memories is distinguished by a special style: any significant event is narrated and then analyzed from a sociological perspective with valuable/novel personal contributions. I will give just one example here. As is known, before 1989 (a period called by the author *the Old Regime*), graduates of higher education received a state assignment for a certain job (the idea of the government at that time was that any young person who is eighteen years old or completes his studies must have a job). After all, says the author, the state imposed on a productive collective a position (here we are talking about that of a

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sociologist), a position that had to be implicitly accepted (through a *sui generis* translation from meritocracy to a relational mechanism - possibly corrupt - because there was no solid economic justification for imposing that post). The reaction of the receiving team is judged by Stefan Ungurean in the key of M. Weber ("If participants expect the admission of others to lead to improvement of their situation, an improvement in degree, kind, security or value of satisfaction, their interests will be to keep the relationship open"; *Economy and Society*, 1978, p. 43). Similarly, the author's speech swings between memoir notations (in which we discover a real talent as a storyteller) and appropriate explanatory sociological theory.

Following the academic path of the author, let us mention that in 1982 Stefan Ungurean begins his academic career at „Transilvania University” in Braşov, ending it in the position of associate professor. The disciplines in which he was assistant and then, with the emergence of the faculty of Brasov (co-initiator of this institutional project) he coordinated/developed were very diverse: industrial sociology, political science, philosophy, political economy, enterprise organization, and then general sociology, history of sociology, urban sociology, sociological paradigms, sociology of organizations, organizational development. All these academic themes justify the broad fields that appear as early as the next chapter of Vol I of the *Essays*, the chapter entitled *Readings*. Here are devoted substantial essayistic pages to L. Tolstoy (*The Death of Ivan Ilyich*), Edgar Lee Master (*Spoon River Anthology*), A. Tocqueville (*On Democracy in America*), P.A. Chekhov (*The Student*), J.L. Borges (*The Gospel According to Mark*), The Marquis de Custine (*Letters from Russia. Russia in 1839*), Z. Rostás, T. E. Văcărescu coord. (*In honorem Sanda Golopenția*), L. Rebreanu (*Uprising*). It is difficult to make even a summary presentation of these essays. However, I note their ideational density, the author being at the same time sociologist, philosopher, literary critic, and anthropologist, in each case with remarkable mobility of the sources used. The next chapter of vol. I am an essay *On Mercy*. This time Stefan Ungurean starts from Dostoevsky's idea that „compassion is the main, maybe even the only law of existence for all humanity”. The author resorts to a tortuous path to develop his ideas by appealing in turn to the authority of the Bible or of some Fr. Dolto, N. Steinhardt, J. Donne, etc., developing at the same time an eloquent typology according to several dimensions: mercy and sufferings of conscience, mercy and forgiveness, mercy as a gracious state, the last hope: mercy of God, mercy face to face with the Law, mercy enemy of the state, mercy and responsibility, saving mercy, mercy and faith, mercy as an opposition force, etc. All these elements are supported by literary, religious, philosophical, sociological sources, etc. in an attempt to finally demonstrate the human dimension of a particularly complex concept advanced as a universal principle by Dostoevsky.

The last part of the first volume of essays has a surprising title: *About the Child, the one who goes to the Future with the Past on his shoulders* is an essay, about childhood, about parenthood having again unique and surprising bibliographic resources.

The fourth essay entitled *Human Ages* opens the second volume signed by Stefan Ungurean. This essay is the result of long qualitative oral history research and the research universe was made up of rural elders. The interview guide included several thematic axes from a longitudinal perspective: childhood, adolescence, youth, adult life and old age. These 'stories of life' refer stylistically and thematically to the volumes of Z. Rostás, who built a true tradition of recording oral histories, imposing the urgency of recovering social memory, otherwise endangered. The essay *On Birds and Animals* brings into debate an increasingly visible issue in contemporary social research, from the analysis of people's relationships with the animal world to animal-assisted therapies. The author resorts to various sources to illustrate the presence of animals at the forefront of social, philosophical or political thought. The author then transgresses this theme into a genuine sociological analysis with a starting point in JJ Rousseau ("What to hunt: the deer or the rabbit?"; concerning game theory), Machiavelli (elites as representations of animals) or various fables (animals as representations of human ethics and morals). The author annotates while opening new vanishing lines (as he likes to remember).

A consistent chapter entitled *Socio-humanities* contains a series of essays with more marked sociological themes: *On Justice* (in which a sequence in which certain justice bodies facilitate injustice and legalize it is critically presented, as well as a warning: do not enter in such institutions unaccompanied!), *Roma drama (sections I-III)* [in which the author starts from various concrete situations in which minorities/Roma are exposed to reach reflections of social philosophy], *About Schools of thought* (starting from the dichotomy 'faith in' and 'his faith' highlighted by Martin Buber), *About care and suffering* (in which the author recalls the personal transition into field research, from the 'functionalist paradigm' to the qualitivist one through the use of *oral history* and exemplified by the dramatic confessions of a former survivor of the massacre of Romanian civilians by the Soviet army at the White Fountain). One of the best essays written by Stefan Ungurean is entitled *On Trauma and Domination*. This report is analyzed by the author starting from a story narrated by L. Wolff in vol. *The Invention of Eastern Europe-Map of Civilizations in the Age of Enlightenment*, Humanitas Publishing House, 2000). The meeting in 1784 between a French diplomat, a Turkish officer and an old leader of a village in Moldova from whom he tries to get help (a situation solved by violence) gives Stefan Ungurean a subtle analysis of East-West differences, differences visible even today in what we call the „European project”. The second volume continues with other essays: *About the gift* (with an analysis of the gift 'as a proof of being and as a problem of the relationship'), *About friendship* ('friendship as salvation in the essential'), essays with a strong philosophical imprint (in fact, in one place Stefan Ungurean draws attention to the fact that 'it is not a sociologist who does not have philosophical sense!').

Finally, we will recommend future readers to read other interesting essays at the end of the second volume that we review here. We also recommend the use of these physical volumes for reading, having the advantage of a selection and

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ordering that the author has imposed. Otherwise, the volume of essays can be accessed using the Internet address of the Research Institute for Quality of Life, the domain being the library of the institute in question. In the same virtual space, we are waiting for a third (promised) volume of essays!