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CAPTIVE MIND SYNDROME AND THE SOCIETY OF THE SPECTACLE

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Abstract

We live in a society of generalized and manipulative spectacle. But, repeated and prolonged exposure to misinformation and manipulation favors the occurrence of the phenomenon of the captive mind. Often perceived by many of us as a phenomenon that would not target us directly and personally, we are tempted to consider it banal and harmless (the uninvolved observer approach). Using the method of therapeutic self-reflexivity, this essay proposes a different approach: personalized exploration of the phenomenon of the captive mind and, implicitly, its reception as a syndrome at individual and collective level (the involved observer approach). Exploring captive mind syndrome by identifying and evaluating its symptoms is necessary and useful because, being fallible by our own nature, we can fall into the captivity of limits, illusions, and prejudices at any time. In these circumstances, assuming and converting the fallibility into effective actions are the first steps towards counteracting the syndrome of the captive mind and, implicitly, raising the cultural level of the society of the spectacle. Only the breaking of the vicious circle of the complicity of the captive mind with the voluntary servitude and the society of the generalized and manipulative spectacle could allow the glimpse of the horizons beyond the captive mind.

Keywords: captive mind syndrome; (in)voluntary servitude; society of the spectacle; human fallibility; therapeutic self-reflexivity

I. Introduction

In 1953, Czesław Miłosz - a Polish writer in exile - published in France a book with an attractive but strange title at the same time: *La pensée captive. Essai sur les logocraties populaire* (Miłosz, 1953/1988) . Translated into English in the same year (*The Captive Mind*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.), Czesław Miłosz's book soon became a reference document on communism in Eastern Europe (Miłosz, 1953). *The Captive Mind* is the testimony of an intellectual sometime captivated by a "huge phenomenon and really difficult to understand, the expansion of the messianic and eschatological faith in utopia" (Miłosz, 1999, p. 6). The Polish writer's book is also the confession of a creed of thought and feeling through which Czesław Miłosz joins George Orwell, Arthur Koestler, Leszek Kolakowski or Panait Istrati in a small but chosen spiritual family. This is the family of intellectuals attracted by the idealized and anti-plutocratic message of a romantic and cosmopolitan political left, but which -- disappointed by the distortion of moral values during the Stalinist dictatorship -- they had the courage to publicly assume their own mistakes and delusions. Appreciated by Karl Jaspers as "a document and at the same time a first-rate interpretation", the proof of "a justice that refuses any alibi" (Jaspers, *Préface*, French edition 1953/1988, p.9, 13), the Polish writer's book was immediately received as a superb lesson in awareness and decoding of the mechanisms of domination, misinformation and manipulation specific to the communist regime in Eastern Europe. But, Czesław Miłosz's book appears to us today as the revelation of a much more widespread phenomenon. Not coincidentally, Tony Judt would write later: "one hundred years after his birth, fifty-seven years after the publication of his seminal essay, Miłosz's indictment of the servile intellectual rings truer than ever: < his chief characteristic

is his fear of thinking for himself >" (Judt, 2010). And yet, *The Captive Mind* is not just a book ! The "captive mind" is a metaphor-warning, a call *beyond* the captive mind addressed to all those who, feeling the gravity of this phenomenon, realize the danger of diminished self-awareness and the risks of (in) voluntary servitude in contemporary society of the generalized and manipulative spectacle.

And now a specification of a terminological nature. In addition to the expression "the captive mind", in this essay I use two other terms - "the voluntary servitude" and "the society of the spectacle" - created by two authors from different eras. At the dawn of modernity, Étienne de la Boétie described in his famous *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* the insidious links between tyrannical political regimes and the voluntary servitude of the masses bought with "bread and circus" (Boétie de la, 1576/1975). Four hundred years later, in an anti-system book called *The Society of the Spectacle*, the writer Guy Debord, one of the theorists of the West protest movements in the 1960s, critically analyzed the manipulative political-media strategies of the society of the spectacle (Debord, 1967/2009). But, things connect. *The captive mind, (in)voluntary servitude and society of spectacle come to coexist in the vicious circle of complicity and mediocrity*. Maintaining (in)voluntary servitude in the society of the generalized spectacle through slogans and a stereotypical language supposes the weakening of the mental activity and the falling asleep of the moral conscience. In the world of generalized and manipulative spectacle, the illusions and temptations, prejudices and prides maintained through the propagandistic apparatus and the manipulative politico-media strategies configure in the minds of many of us a pseudo-reality superimposed on objective reality, in other words, it configures a *fictional surreality*. This blocks a series of self-corrective psychocognitive mechanisms such as: *imaginative-lateral thinking* (de Bono, 1990), *realistic-pragmatic thinking* (McCullough, 1992), *critical-constructive thinking* (Chatfield, 2017), *dialogical-creative thinking* (Carpinschi, 2020). Thus, the activation of innovative mental processes that should inspire the sectorial public policies is missed.

II. The captive mind: phenomenon and syndrome. The approach of the observer involved

But let's take a closer look. Generated by socio-educational deficiencies and/or by deviations from the principles and values of ethics, the phenomenon of the captive mind can be researched from a double perspective: as a *phenomenon outside of our own mental activity*, a phenomenon which does not affect us directly and personally. This is the *approach of the observer not involved*. On the other hand, *perceived inside our own mental activity*, the phenomenon of the captive mind becomes a *syndrome that directly and personally affects us*. This is the *approach of the observer involved*. Descriptive and impersonal, the approach of the non-involved observer can provide, from a distance, a series of objective and useful references about the phenomenon of the captive mind. Based on a solid documentation, we can elaborate, for example, a scenario regarding a series of aspects of illiteracy in the case of failed states in Africa or another scenario about the school absenteeism and functional illiteracy in some areas of Romanian society. We could also recompose the retro-scenario of communication dysfunctions and mental blockage of the crowned heads of the Austro-Hungarian, German and Russian empires before and during the First World War. There is also in the specialized bibliography and in the international press a series of scenarios about the dysfunctions of captive minds, from the dictators of totalitarian regimes to a number of mediocre politicians.

The phenomenon of the captive mind, however, proves to be much more insidious in everyday life. So insidious that, it can become imperceptibly an individually and collectively syndrome. Unable to always be sufficiently informed and attentive, we can easily become pawns in the games of different political forces and interest groups more or less known. It can

happen to us, for example, to fall into the trap of propaganda promises or to be deceived by the populist discourses of demagogic politicians. It happens to us, and not infrequently, that we do not become aware of the blockage in our own prejudices and errors, not to realize that we are addicted to illusions and temptations, or that we cannot free ourselves from misinformations and manipulations. It happens quite often to us that we are blinded by the importance of our own person, to do not have the power to recognize the other or to assume our own limits and mistakes. Limited in our capacity of knowledge and understanding, vulnerable and sometimes guilty in our behaviors and actions, we thus present in public and private life, more than once, the syndrome of the captive mind. Often manipulated through social networks and the political-media spectacle of a dubious quality, the human mind fallen into prejudices and stereotypes is directed towards unconditional listening. But, unconditional listening induces various forms of involuntary and voluntary servitude. Worse, the man of the captive mind often does not realize that his mind no longer belongs to him, that his mind is no longer, in fact, his mind, that words spoken and repeated are not, in fact, his thoughts and words. The man of the captive mind can live, more or less satisfied, such states for shorter or longer periods, sometimes even for a lifetime. Dissipated throughout life, the potential and insidious danger of the captive mind constantly threatens us all.

In these circumstances, I propose a change of perspective in approaching the phenomenon of the captive mind: the *transition from the uninvolved observer approach to the involved observer approach*, in other words, transition from the *objectivist-positivist approach from the outside of the phenomenon of the captive mind* to the *therapeutic-reflexive approach from the inside of the syndrome of the captive mind*. I therefore start from the idea that a *series of objective aspects of the phenomenon of the captive mind can be perceived and experienced through the captive mind syndrome*. Exploring and evaluating the captive mind syndrome thus brings us closer to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of the captive mind. Focused on exploring one's own existential experiences, this approach - which I call the *therapeutic self-reflexivity* - can be used as a way to research and expand one's mind's horizons in the exercise of thinking. Starting from the appearance of things in the horizon of consciousness, the therapeutic self-reflexivity penetrates the *personalized experiential interiority of the mind in the act of thinking*. We enter, therefore, into the mental correlate of the real world, a world thought and lived in the mind through the experiential states of self-consciousness. "Updating the lived experience" self-awareness offers each of us the opportunity to incorporate a "model of the world in which our own experiences are arranged (...), to be conscious means to have a personal model of the world" (Ey, 1983, p.61, 60). The configuration of the personal model of the world is impossible in the absence of the cooperation, in the horizon of consciousness, of the *manifest ego* and the *deep self*. The encounter of the manifest ego with the deep self confers on the human being -- by experiencing the state of identity -- authenticity and personal consistency. By relating to the deeply perceived self as a major fact in the construction of identity, self-referentiality also allows the manifest ego to relate to the other and orient itself in the world. Responding to the demands of guidance in the world, the self-reflexive approach proposes a way to perceive and learn from life experiences and, implicitly, to design strategies and reflexive-therapeutic scenarios.

In conclusion, captive mind syndrome occurs when a person or group of people *does not want or cannot, for various reasons, realize that they are dependent on other people, interest groups and centers of influence, but also by their own limits, prejudices and illusions*. We enter the state of the captive mind when (in)voluntary servitude to other people, interest groups and centers of influence is combined with the inability to overcome our own limits, prejudices and illusions. The captive mind is, therefore, the *syndrome of not finding self-awareness and, implicitly, of the (in) voluntary servitude in both public and private life*.

These two defining aspects of captive mind syndrome intertwine because the non-finding of self-awareness can be explained by the (in)voluntary servitude and, in turn, the (in)voluntary servitude can be explained by not finding of self-awareness. Once here, new questions arise: how does captive mind syndrome manifest itself? What are its symptoms?

III. Captive mind syndrome. An outline of its symptoms

Like any syndrome, captive mind syndrome can be studied by exploring its symptoms. In the following I will make, from the perspective of the observer involved, an outline of the symptoms of the captive mind. One of the first symptoms of the captive mind is *ignorance*. But the mind in the captivity of ignorance can take on different forms depending on the nature of ignorance. When Socrates confessed "I know that I know nothing, and I don't even know that", he was referring, in fact, to the natural cognitive limits of the human being. When the symptoms of the captive mind express the natural cognitive limits, bio-genetic, between which we evolve as a *Homo Sapiens* species, what I call the *liminal* ignorance manifests. But, the awareness of ignorance as a natural fact expressing the *liminality* of human knowledge gave the great philosopher the power to believe in the capacity of *self-overcoming* of human knowledge, because he also said the following: "I know that I know nothing, but I know I can know more than I know". Promethean will to overcome the natural limits of ignorance remains the existential challenge for human knowledge.

On the other hand, we face a *conjunctural* ignorance generated by socio-educational deficiencies, especially when we are part of a disadvantaged population, easy to misinform and manipulate by spreading slogans and maintaining political, religious, ethnic, racial, gender prejudices. Against the background of socio-economic underdevelopment, disadvantaged population groups can become a captive and maneuverable mass through various forms of electoral bribery and social assistance that encourage corruption and unemployment. In the society of generalized and mediocre spectacle, the ideological and emotional manipulation of the social body contributes, as we know, to increasing of individual and collective dependence to underworld groups and mafia networks of influence and power.

Another symptom of the captive mind, the *dogmatic* one, appears when we automatically accept the message of some radical political movements and the aberrant orders of some leaders. Disciplined and reproductive, inertial and ritualistic, incapable of initiative and creativity, the dogmatic mind is the mind of the robot-executor, incapable to ask questions, to judge or to assume certain responsibilities. Subjected from an early age to a systematic treatment of dogmatization and forced indoctrination, my generation faced, from primary school to university, the aggressiveness of the Stalinist political-pedagogy centered on the creation of the "new man", *Homo Sovieticus*. I remember even now the special hours of communist education in which collective readings were made from the works of the "classic" of Stalinist pedagogy, Anton Semionovich Makarenko. After that, we watched propaganda films in which young Soviets worked enthusiastically while singing hymns of praise to the great leader, the Generalissimus Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin. Organized in re-education camps through work, constantly supervised, the young people were thus deprived of the free time for personality formation and the cultivation of the autonomous spirit. Systematically applied since childhood, this pedagogical recipe for "brainwashing" had no other purpose than to dogmatize the young generation by atomizing the person into an amorphous mass of faithful executors of Communist Party policy.

But, the multiplication of the symptoms of the captive mind does not stop here. We are often amazed at the rapid and dramatic metamorphosis of the dogmatic into a *fanatic*. The most dogmatic individuals become, overnight, the most fanatical actors. The unconditional submission proper to the dogmatic quickly turns into the self-sufficiency, intolerance and lack

of discernment proper to the fanatic. Considering himself the depository of the unique truth, the fanatic acts automatically and relentlessly. If we admit with Amos Oz that the fanaticism is “a ubiquitous component of human nature, a malignant gene” (Oz, 2016), I find it quite hard to believe that the remedies proposed by the famous writer - imagination and literature - could give results. As for the sense of humor, I would be a little more confident, but unfortunately, fanatics are immune to any manifestation of humor, whether it's the healthy laughter or fine irony. I can't imagine, for example, how the director of our high school from the city at the gates of the Danube Delta, a small guy, full of importance and ultra-zealous in reading the communist party documents at the megaphone in the school yard could have been amused by a joke whispered by a braver colleague.

Between the platitude of the dogmatists and the zeal of the fanatics, another symptom of the captive mind appears. From the need to survive and, often, from the desire to reach the privileges, a combination of opportunism and arrivism appears in the banal and harmful form of the *duplicity*. Apparently mobile compared to dogmatics and fanatics individuals, profiteering and cunning, the duplicitous individuals move with skill between groups, interests and slogans. But, the agitation of duplicitous individuals in the vicious circle of compromises and arrangements does not offer real solutions to a political stalemate or constructive solutions for public policies. Fallen into the captivity of duplicitous behaviors centered on simulation and concealment, the captive mind bears the marks of the hypocrisy of opportunists and of the ambition of arrivists. Opportunists and arrivists, the duplicitous individuals seek by all means to occupy an advantageous position in parties, ministries, departments, embassies, universities, even through matrimonial alliances and profitable family combinations.

Coming from the millennial depths of ethnogenesis and the formation of mentalities, the duplicity is a relatively common phenomenon in the Romanian public and private space. When I make such a serious statement, I think of a series of factors that have shaped the cultural profile of the Romanian people over time. I have in mind, therefore, historical-political factors such as: the need of the local population to survive in a geopolitical space exposed -- after the withdrawal of the Roman imperial administration (271-274 AD) -- to invasions of migrator peoples; the politico-military conflicts for the autonomy of the historical provinces Moldova, Muntenia, and Transylvania in their rapports with the Ottoman, Habsburgic, and Tsarist Emperies during the Middle Ages and the modern era; the multiseular absence in the Carpatho-Danubian-Pontic area of a coherent administrative-state practice and culture; the late coagulation of a modern nation-state; the Soviet occupation and the imposition of totalitarian communist dictatorship for half a century after the disaster of World War II; the meanders of a delayed post-communist transition. Accumulation of these factors over a long period of time has left deep traces not only in the behavior of people over generations, but also in the functioning of society and institutions. To pretend to be something else or to present yourself as someone other than you actually are, to claim non-existent merits, to hide or beautify your political past, for example that of communist servitude, marks many personal destinies and political careers in post-communist Romania. Thus, many leaders and activists from the communist period metamorphosed, overnight, into ministers, senators, deputies, councilors and businessmen of the post-communist transition. Driven by a duplicitous behavior and arrivism, many deputies, senators, mayors, county, municipal and communal councilors have passed in the last thirty years through all parties, whether they were crypto-communist, pseudo-socialist, nationalist-populist, vaguely liberal or purportedly ecological. In these circumstances, the ideological-political affiliation has become today only a false label, obviously duplicitous and this one.

Concluding, ignorance, dogmatism, fanaticism, duplicity are, in my view, symptoms of captive mind syndrome. But, these symptoms only shape the visible face of the captive

mind. A comprehensive understanding of captive mind syndrome involves a deepening of this exploration.

IV. What is hidden behind captive mind symptoms ? About fear and guilt

The symptoms of the captive mind are numerous and circumstantial, but from the perspective of the observer involved, I believe that *fear* and *guilt* are the two major feelings that can provide a more comprehensive explanation of captive mind syndrome. Concerning the feeling of fear, life experiences, individual and collective psychologies, multiple and controversial social histories generate a variety of motivations and reactions. We live in a state of ignorance, confusion and fear, coming from different areas of human existence: the infinity of the unknown, the fear of death, the fragility of human civilization, but also from the difficulties of keeping the job, misinformation and manipulation maintained by some media trusts, the low level of personal and interpersonal security, etc. Of course, life is too rich and diverse to be lived only as fear. And yet, paralyzing fear remains an experience as such and, at the same time, a theme of reflection that always challenges us. Why do fears and anxieties always return in our minds? Probably, because the different forms and manifestations of fear accumulated during our development as a species accompanies us from prehistory. The instinctual fear genetically accumulated has thus become a deep and comprehensive fear: the *existential fear*.

Could this complex of emotionally reflexes, known as fear, be managed? I start from the idea that, in the circumstances of human activity, it is important to increase the *ability to live in the vicinity of fear*. Learning to face it, fear will not follow us with the same intensity all our lives. Referring to the fear for political reasons, I would say that the education of the ability to live in the vicinity of fear is not foreign to those who lived a part of their life during the communist dictatorship. I often wonder how the ability to live in the vicinity of fear was shaped in my mind. I lived the first shock of a terrible fear in the sixth grade of elementary school at the age of 12, when the director of the high school accompanied by three strangers in civilian clothes and two militiamen entered untimely in the middle of the Romanian language class. The teacher woman abruptly interrupted her lesson, we were immediately searched, then taken out of class, and our books, notebooks, and bags were rigorously checked. This show of strength lasted for over two hours. Scared, we didn't know anything, we didn't understand what was happening to us. The next day there was a special meeting in the school yard where we were told in a severe and threatening tone that three colleagues in our class had written and scattered manifestos hostile to the politics of our democratic party and state. The initiator of the protest, one of the best students in the class allegedly attracted two other colleagues in this subversive action directed against the revolutionary conquests of the working people under the wise guidance of the Communist Party. The parents of the three colleagues were summoned to the Prosecutor's Office for explanations and intimidation, and the three colleagues were eliminated for one year from all schools in the country. Experiencing such a shock at such an early age left a deep mark on me. Thus, I began to understand that, in addition to dogmatization and fanaticism through the propaganda machine, one of the ingredients of power in a dictatorship is the insemination of fear in all the cells of the human being since childhood.

Is there a vaccine against the fear virus? Growing up, I always looked for him. A memorable moment happened in the middle of the summer of 1964, when I saw on the Danube quay, in Tulcea, a large silent crowd of men with a very short haircut and shabby dressed waiting to be boarded. In the hours that followed, on the ship and then on the night road by train through the Moldavian plateau, I took courage and talked to some of them. I understood that they had been released from the Periprava extermination camp after many years of hard work where cutting reeds in the Danube Delta. They were young, middle-aged,

but even older peasants whose fault was that they had opposed the taking of the land and machinery from their small family households. I had before my eyes the victims of what was presented to us at school under a pompous and false headline, "the socialist collectivization of agriculture under the wise leadership of our party and state". I understood then, that in our country there was a political resistance to the forced collectivization of agriculture. There were people and not a few who, desperate to lose the few hectares of land and their way of life, overcame their fear. So, it is possible!

But fear is not the only pathological experience of the captive mind. Over the instinctive substratum of fear, *Homo sapiens* built over time with the help of cultural-spiritual principles and values a system of ordering his life in the community and in relation with Transcendence. Incapable most of the time of producing a moral judgment, the mind in the captivity of guilt denies or, at least, relativizes the principles and cultural-spiritual values. A huge wave of negative emotions and resentments pours over the guilty mind: emotional poverty, moral and intellectual mediocrity in the case of ignorant and dogmatic people; envy, hatred, anger, cynicism, cruelty in the case of fanatics; selfishness, greed, arivism on the background of a land amoralism in the case of duplicitous individuals.

The mind in the captivity of guilt is a fact. But, *what is the state of the mind that has not (yet) become a captive mind?* Is this a mind that can declare itself apart from all guilt and all sin? Can we say with certainty that the free, critical, and creative human mind is a mind forever free from greater or lesser errors and sins? Looking at things from an *ontological-anthropological* perspective - that of *the way of being of man* - I believe that our fallible nature does not exclude the legal principle of the presumption of innocence, but at the same time the legal principle of the presumption of innocence cannot exclude the ontological-anthropological principle of fallibility, intrinsic to human nature. The fact that we are naturally fallible does not immediately and irreparably throw us into error and sinful guilt. The fact that we are vulnerable and exposed to error does not automatically make us guilty, guilty without guilt. The presumption of innocence tells us that there is not always and automatically a guilt, an incriminating material act for which a person must be judged and penalized. On the other hand, the much invoked legal principle of the presumption of innocence cannot exclude the ontologico-anthropological principle of fallibility. Invoking the principle of the presumption of innocence in a particular case does not mean that the person concerned could not be guilty in another case. Of course, according to the law and the judicial proceedings the person concerned must be proved guilty by rational arguments and unequivocal evidence. But even if a person is, at some point, innocent, this does not mean that the person will be guaranteed innocent for the rest of his life. Even if we have not made a mistake yet, this does not mean that we cannot make a mistake at any time because, being fallible, we can fall at any time under the incidence of guilt in the legal plan and, especially, in the ethical and spiritual-religious one. Can we be so invulnerable and self-confident that we declare ourselves infallible at any moment of our lives!?

There is, therefore, a permanent risk of falling into the captivity of guilt and sin, in other words, there is a permanent risk of falling into the captivity of the "devil's side" inside us. When I say that the captive mind is the mind in the captivity of the "devil's side" inside us, I mean that the devil is not a haunted ghost, it is not a distant ghostly appearance. On the contrary, the devil is inside us, more precisely, there is in the human being a part of the devil in which we often fall captive. The problem for the honest man - the man able to assume his fallibility - is to identify in his own person the "devil's side" and apply the most suitable reflexive therapies to counteract its harmful effects. "To reveal the reality of the devil in this world of ours", wrote Denis de Rougemont in a famous essay on this torturous problem, "is not to increase our fear of the devil, but to discover his true face. (...). The devil is the anti-model par excellence, its essence being precisely the disguise, the usurpation of appearances,

the shameless or subtle forcing of nuances (...). The first trick of the devil is the incognito after which he hides. While God said to Moses, < I am that I am >, the devil, always jealous and eager to imitate God, even upside down, tells us, as Odysseus had told to the Cyclop: < My name is Nobody, there is no somebody here. Why would you be afraid ? Do you tremble in the face of the non-existent ? >" (De Rougemont, 1994, p.7, 11). Hence the cunning of the devil who, pretending not to exist, becomes invisible in the midst of the mistakes and temptations he has sown in us. The captive mind thus becomes - sometimes with our science and will, other times without knowing and wanting - the accomplice of the "devil's part" from us.

Multiplied by the mass of individuals, this evil appears in the previously identified captive mind symptoms: the ignorance, dogmatism, fanaticism, duplicity. In the circumstances of a major crisis of civil society and the dissolution of rational public opinion, the evil from our minds -- the so-called *banal* evil -- is materialized by the public rise of adventurers and opportunists who quickly institutionalize the *political* evil. In turn, the political evil maintains and encourages the proliferation and perpetuation of its accomplice, the banal evil in our minds and lives. Under certain favorable circumstances, the political evil paid for with great losses and sufferings may disappear, but the banal evil from the captive mind of the ignorant, dogmatic, fanatical, duplicitous persons remains and, in critical circumstances, again favors the rise of political evil.

In conclusion, the phenomenology of captive mind symptoms shows us that the syndrome of the fallen mind in the captivity of illusions and temptations, prejudices and pride maintained through the manipulative strategies of the society of the spectacle has a negative impact on public and private life with strong reverberations in political life. How is this syndrome explained ? What is the nature of captive mind syndrome ?

V. The captive mind: a syndrome of unassumed human fallibility

The phenomenology of captive mind symptoms paves the way for a more comprehensive explanation of the captive mind syndrome. According to the hypothesis from which I start, the *defining characteristics of captive mind syndrome - not finding of the self-awareness and, implicitly, the (un) voluntary servitude - appear against the background of the fallibility of human nature perceived as a deficit of being*. Cognitive limitations and moral deviations are the expression of our own fallibility. To prove this hypothesis, I resort to a certain interpretation of Martin Heidegger's conception of "ontological difference", the difference between the concept of *being* and the concept of *existence* (Heidegger, 2003). Unlike the concept of being by which I understand the *fact of being as such*, an *universal, unconditional and infallible fact*, the concept of existence refers to the *different conjunctural, conditioned and fallible ways of being*. One of these is the *human way of being*. Therefore, from an *ontological-anthropological* perspective, the fallibility could be defined as a *deficit of being perceived as natural finitude and moral guilt*. Natural finitude refers to the involuntary aspect of fallibility, first of all, the finite character of our existence, the fact that we are mortal, also the other cognitive limits between which we evolve. Moral guilt, on the other hand, concerns us directly and personally, because the mistakes and guilt of conduct and character are the result of our voluntary activity, of the evils and errors consciously done.

Following the thread of this demonstration, I believe that the finitude and guilts of the human existence, in other words, the limits of our knowledge associated with moral vulnerability form the *ontological-anthropological framework* of captive mind syndrome. The *human mind is captive in its own unassumed fallibility*. Before being captive and manipulated ideologically and politically, we are captive in our own limitations and weaknesses. Or, in a memorable expression belonging to Paul Ricoeur, fallibility is "the possibility of moral evil inscribed in the human constitution" (Ricoeur, 1988, p.149).

Therefore, the *origin of human fallibility can be found in the deficit of our way of being, expressed through the cognitive limits and moral guilt*. Manifesting itself as an existential state of the finite and guilty man by his nature, the deficit of being induces an important practical consequence: the impossibility of its eradication and, implicitly, the persistence of a structural deficit felt in a personal way by each of us. Diffuse fear, existential anxiety, fear of death, distrust of others, fears of strangers and trials of life, pressures of public life and problems of private life are as many phenomenalizations of the deficit of being perceived during the human evolution. The different life experiences, complex individual and collective psychologies, multiple and controversial social histories generate a diversity of existential choices, motivations and reactions. The way each of us lives own life, perceives the world around us, relates to sacredness and divinity is as different as it is personal, but the fallibility as a deficit of being and security always accompanies us.

In these circumstances, I ask myself some questions concerning the exploratory perspectives for therapeutic self-reflexivity. Being fallible, are we destined to always remain "captive minds"? What should we do to counteract the symptoms of the captive mind in public and private life? More precisely, living in the society of the spectacle, to what extent can we still think with our own minds?

VI. Again about "The Truman Show". To what extent can we still think with our own minds in the society of the spectacle?

Nominated in *Popular Mechanics* as one of the 10 most prophetic science fiction films, "The Truman Show" is the perfect example of the construction of falsity in so-called "reality television". Truman Burbank, the main character of the film, is unknowingly the star of a reality TV show watched by billions of people around the world. Thousands of hidden video cameras follow, during the 30 years of the show, the life of the character 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Truman begins to notice at some point that certain aspects of his perfectly counterfeit world seem wrong. Becoming suspicious, our hero sets out in search of the truth about his life. As Eric Sofge remarked, "Truman simply lives, and the show's popularity is his direct voyeurism. And, like Big Brother, Survivor and any other reality shows on the air, none of his environment is actually real." (Sofge, 2008). In his turn, Ronald Bishop made the following comment: "Films like Truman are created by entertainment companies as a means to exploit, and at the same time to dissipate, our desire to engage in genuine media criticism. In the end, the power of the media is affirmed rather than challenged. In the spirit of Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, these films and television programs co-opt our enchantment (and disenchantment) with the media and sell it back to us." (Bishop, 2000). Indeed, in the spirit of the hegemony exercised through the so-called "reality show", the controlled captivation of the public becomes a financially and politically profitable mega-business. "The Truman Show" succeeds to partially transform media criticism into a SF comedy and a big commercial success. Starting from this eloquent example, we realize once again how much we live in the world of generalized and manipulative spectacle.

The spectacle as such is nothing new and not a bad thing. New and worrying in the era of the information revolution and digital communication is the multiplication of its perverse effects. Politics perverted largely in a mediatic show of dubious quality. The fake news broadcast through social networks consumes more and more time and nerves, especially in the case of those who are too easily seduced and manipulated. We constantly consume every day not only material goods delivered through advertisements, but also ideologically prefabricated media-political products, propagandistically packaged. We risk becoming, in these circumstances, captive minds manipulable by older and newer propaganda-media techniques. Living in the world of the spectacle at any cost, of the spectacle that often hides and distorts the real problems, we live, in fact, our own alienation against the background of

an increasingly captivating unrealism. Thinking with one's own mind in a troubled world sometimes appears as a strangeness, a madness, "the madness of thinking with your mind" (Liiceanu, 2016). Transformed into a product of mass consumption, the spectacle of sensational and derisory becomes through the practice of cheap entertainment the drug of the captive mind, the instrument of mental laziness, manipulation and servitude.

Living in the society of the generalized and manipulative spectacle, to what extent can we still think with our own minds? I start from the postulate that, *personal thinking is encouraged in social environments conducive to creative development*. Formed in the spirit of lifelong learning and cultural development (Knowles, 1980, 1990; Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 1998), social environments conducive to creative development work on the basis of *dialogical-creative thinking*. Living cognitive, affective, volitional experiences in different contexts, assessing situations and finding solutions through practicing both the inner dialogue but also of the interpersonal one encourages the emergence and development of dialogical-creative thinking. We could say that dialogical-creative thinking is *creative thinking shaped by the inner dialogue with one's own consciousness but also through the interpersonal dialogue in the private and public space*. Exploring consciousness through the inner dialogue allows the deepening of self-knowledge and the configuration of one's own personality profile. On the other hand, the encounter with the other triggers the interpersonal dialogue that allows a better orientation of the person in the world. By meeting the other, the self has the opportunity not only to know the neighbor, but also to test his own capacity for understanding, recognition and collaboration. Monitoring the reflexive experiences through awareness of mental states in different cultural environments and situational contexts allows exploring self-awareness and increasing self-confidence. Through the experience of meeting, collaborating and living together in multiethnic, multicultural, multireligious environments, the dialogical-creative thinking can verify the authenticity and depth of one's own choices, states and experiences. Thus, dialogical-creative thinking becomes a *vector* of social environments conducive to creative development and these, in turn, can function as *cultural filters* for media platforms and social networks in the society of the spectacle.

But someone engaged in cultivating personal thinking feels the need for some *exploratory directions*. I think of: assuming one's own fallibility and convert it in effective actions through cultivating the mind; living existential experiences in the spirit of rational realism and of practical testing; comparing and evaluating multiple sources of information; identifying personal and group interests behind political discourses and propaganda apparatus; counteracting ideological manipulations by revealing the reasons and methods of misinformation; freeing from obscurantisms and prejudices through education and capitalizing on the progress of scientific knowledge; research of states of consciousness through the study of neuro-cerebral processes; deepening philosophical reflections on the problem of the mind and the science of knowledge. Beyond the somewhat normative enumeration of these exploratory directions, cultivating personal thinking against the background of creative development requires a sustained intellectual effort, communication skills and a strong motivation aimed at breaking the vicious circle of the captive mind, (in) voluntary servitude and society of the spectacle.

VII. Instead of conclusions

At the end of this essay, we ask ourselves the question once again: to what extent could the interpersonal network for creative development be activated in the world we live in, a world troubled by a devastating crisis of authority and the dissolution of values? At the end of his famous book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, Samuel P. Huntington concluded: "In the emerging era, clashes of civilizations are the greatest threat to world peace, and an international order based on civilizations is the surest safe guard

against world war" (Huntington, 1996, p.321). In resonance with the statement of the American professor, I believe that, despite the impossibility of guaranteeing success, *the stake of releasing the captive mind legitimizes the reflexive-therapeutic scenario* advanced in this essay. In a world unfavorable to thinking with one's own mind, contemplating the horizons beyond the captive mind by rediscovering self-awareness is not only possible, but necessary !

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