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Georgina Oana Gabor, *The Autopsy of a Dream*

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**Descrierea CIP a Bibliotecii Naționale a
GABOR, GEORGINA OANA**

**The Autopsy of a Dream: About How We Construct
Worlds with Our Words** / Georgina Oana Gabor. - Iași :
Institutul European, 2022
ISBN 978-606-24-0342-3

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Printed in ROMANIA

Georgina Oana Gabor

The Autopsy of a Dream
About How We Construct Worlds
with Our Words

INSTITUTUL EUROPEAN
2022

To Dr. Liana Ștefan,
this impossible return of her sovereign gift

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Motto:

You are beautiful, but you are empty [...] One could not die for you. To be sure, an ordinary passerby would think that my rose looked just like you—the rose that belongs to me. But in herself alone she is more important than all the hundreds of you other roses: because it is she that I have watered; because it is she that I have put under the glass globe; because it is she that I have sheltered behind the screen; because it is for her that I have killed the caterpillars (except the two or three that we saved to become butterflies); because it is she that I have listened to, when she grumbled, or boasted, or ever sometimes when she said nothing. Because she is my rose.

(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry)

Motivation

It has been almost half a year since I left my story where I could no longer imagine it: in the heyday of tomorrow. Tomorrow has passed over and over again since that day and now I have come to know the story that has been written itself for me better than I know myself. This new essay endeavors to pick the story up from where I left it off and see where it leads. Somewhere, buried inside it, there is a shade of me which begs for decryption. If I shall perform the autopsy of my former dream in writing, as the promise of a previous title prescribed that I should always be able to do, perhaps, with a bit of luck, my lines would offer the clear cut and the accurate distance from where the anatomy of once a living body may be looked at. If you manage the perspective, please take a look.

The possibility that I should find the way out of the deadlock I am now facing is small, however I will give it a shot. As I write these lines, I look at the landscape of the time that has passed since my last discursive intervention as a *montagne russe* which I dared trying, yet shortly after getting on, I wanted to leave it, but could not get off anymore. Until it stopped. Now it has stopped, and what I feel is dizziness and confusion, nausea and despair, fear and anger. Bottom line, I want to scream, like I should have like normal people do when riding a *montagne russe*. Instead, I kept my screams inside and now, in the end of my adventure, they all come back to me and haunt me until I decide to transform them into something with meaning. So, given

that I failed to scream when the time was right, I am now taking the alternative approach of a symbolic return to the events that followed the episodes in *Writing as Performance: A diagnosis of an educational system* and *That Leviathan, the Public Mind: A personal construction of reality* (both published by the European Institute, Iași, in 2021) to confer them *my meanings*. It is the choice I am making for myself and you, and as always, I hope my choices do you no harm.

For those of you who do not know my story, that is no end of the world. Either you pick up the books, or you pick up as you go along. Primarily, my ongoing intention in writing these books is to bring communication down in the *agora*, so to speak; to make it part of our everyday lives and point to it as the privileged relational praxis available to all of us for use or abuse, depending on our possibilities. There is no better or clearer truth, and yet no one dares to tell it. In academia, people approach communication from all possible angles *except* as the one thing that is essential to being, nothing short of our daily bread as the prayer says. Someone told me once that I will indeed be a professional in communication when I will manage my closest relationships with artistry, instead of clumsiness or the trial and error approach. Ever since I became aware of her advice, I meant to prove it a wrong lead and failed. At this point, I am ready to confess that in communication with the closest people, we all take our ultimate test in humanity and attained wisdom. *Homo creatus sit ut communicate. Homo communicate*. What that means is that we all construct our worlds with and through our words.

The social construction of reality is a rather old idea with philosophical roots which are not the focus of my attention in this instance. I reckon it would be like

swimming against the current to track the theoretical foundations of communication studies at this point in time. I will leave that for another, better day. What I will however try and focus on – for the sole purpose of illustrating the point that communication is indeed the agency in all social actors' acts of constructing reality as both scene and purpose (in Kenneth Burke's terms) – is an episode of my life which weighs heavily on me right now. It is too overwhelming to ignore. In my ongoing narrative, this episode is revealing in the same sense in which a specific, random fragment of a modern literature text gives the reader access to the wholeness of the piece. It illustrates its structure on a small scale, while indicating the directions which may be followed in interpretation for best, accurate results. The procedure (called *myse-en-abyme* in French) stems from armory, and it reflects a principle of construction wherein a larger image contains itself at a smaller scale, which means the smaller image contains another instance of itself, only once again downsized until the human eye cannot follow, yet the human mind gets the principle in its entirety.

This is what I mean by giving directions: My present story, or rather this episode which will be the primary focus of this book is nothing short of a *myse-en-abyme* of the larger picture of my discursive being, which in itself illustrates the principle of social construction of reality through communication seen as a relational praxis rather than a set of empty theories whom no one really uses except as contexts for literature review or ego bolsters in private conversations. Guided by the armory principle, I invite you to take this journey not with your eyes, but with your minds. In doing so, you

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 will use your thoughts to formulate questions and propose possible answers to those questions. Throughout your brainstorming, you will or will not relate to the events themselves which prompted me to write again, rather than not. The meanings that are readily available throughout my narrative may thus become your meanings, as soon as you pick them up from their most visible context and take them into places that the eye may not see. I hope you take my meanings to mind and take up your own journey as you leave this story behind. When building worlds with words, no social actor is unnecessary or does not have a voice. The only thing that some of us may miss is awareness. My essay aims to bring awareness of our shared vulnerability in handling communication legitimately onto the social scene wherein by principle no one should be left behind.

A-Plot¹

On Mon, Jan 25, 2021, 08:30 Georgina Gabor <g ... r@e-uvt.ro> wrote:

Dear Colleagues,

Good morning. I am drawing your attention today to the following issue that concerns – as much as we may deny it – everyone’s lives: how to carry out our teaching activity in the second semester of the academic year 2020-2021.

You do remember, I think, that I asked, last Monday at this time, a simple question, namely whether the extraordinary mobilization – in all senses – of our colleagues at the University to schedule all those who chose to be vaccinated means that we could return to classrooms in the next semester, when those already vaccinated will have the antibodies needed to stop being a public danger or a potential victim.

Well, without going into such details then, I proposed that in the absence of an answer from those entitled to give it, I assume that it is so. Unfortunately, I cannot afford the assumption, given that we completely lack the community of consensus on the PRINCIPLES by which we guide our conduct of any kind, including or

¹ An *A-Plot* is a cinema and television term referring to the plotline that drives the story. This does not necessarily mean it is the most important, but rather the one that forces most of the action.

especially the academic one. This letter seeks to create – to continue to create – the necessary conditions for such a consensus. Yet not also the sufficient ones. The sufficient conditions for a consensus between us, dear colleagues, are in your hands.

On the same day, Monday, January 18, we received at a late hour, via the Director of the department, the address of the Vice-President on academic strategy who invites, once again in less time than I can personally endure, to a kind of clandestine voting game on an issue that, I insist and come back with new arguments, is not suitable for such an approach. I can assume, this time for obvious reasons, of coordination between us, that you have been challenged in the same way in the meantime and that you have responded according to your best skill and in good faith. And now, I invite you to take a moment of critical and reflective return to our own symbolic actions.

Dear colleagues, the management of the University puts us all in an ungrateful position, in which I at least choose not to be put. Like last time – in the summer and fall of 2020, when I “had to” vote again – I have now expressed my refusal to play this game, which is essentially about collective dispensation of responsibility. In other words, and please correct me if my reasoning is wrong, we are dealing with the following situation created by the management of the University, to which, in one way or another, we must answer. Not answering was not an option for any of us. All the better!

If the current state of the pandemic allows a discussion about a return to face-to-face teaching, which is the case – essentially different from the one before last

semester, precisely because of the possibility of immunization – then let’s have it in terms of responsibility, rather than any other terms. I don’t think I’m wrong in making this public proposal. After all, who takes responsibility for the conduct of each of us in this unique situation in which we find ourselves? I can identify several possibilities, to which I invite you to add the ones you see and I miss.

One, the responsibility for the decision to return to face-to-face education belongs to the Ministry of Education. If this is the case, it is the simplest: the ministry says yes, everyone returns to institutions, physically speaking, and then “we, the WUT” execute, young and old, as we have no choice. Or it says no, and then we stay home.

In the second case, the ministry prescribes the issue of the decision to educational institutions, which by virtue of autonomy (now valid for all, not only for the university system) decide their conduct on how to carry out teaching activities. If I’m not mistaken, this is the real scenario. Well, how we handle this scenario is my problem of understanding and acceptance. I invite you to relate as I talk about issues of interest to you.

What does the autonomy of the West University of Timișoara mean? On what kind of principles is it based? Can we talk about institutional autonomy in correlation with individual autonomy? In each case, it’s better to know – rather than not – what we’re dealing with.

Let’s say that this autonomy refers to the institutions’ act of taking responsibility for certain decisions regarding their own norms of professional conduct, in the context of course in which moral conduct is a given. We have not emerged from nothing and do not live –

even as an institution – on a desert island. So who makes these decisions? This is the question!

Case one: the decisions are taken by the management of our University (because we are talking about it). Then, to return or not to return to the classrooms is a matter that, although it concerns me directly, deprives me of responsibility. Someone else, namely the management of the University, has made the decision for me to return or not to return to my classroom, and, if I still want to stay in the University as its employee, I just have to execute. But I am not responsible for this decision because I did not make it. As you remember, I believe, from that lecture I sent last November 13, of Professor Robert Doron Reisz, once thus constrained, my decision to execute the order (to return or not to return to my classroom) is a pseudo-decision, having no moral dimension. I was simply constrained, and so morally I do not exist as a person in the position of making a decision.

And then, with this reasoning behind us – because, obviously, we are not, thank God, in this scenario either, and the proof of that is Mr. Bunoiu's address – we have finally reached the situation we are in, namely, not being the decision of the management of the University (how to carry out our activities this semester), because, fortunately, it does not assume the responsibility for such a constraint, the decision becomes ours, in other words, of each of us.

So far, are you still with me? Good. Now we are going to reflect together on the following aspect: what should such a “collective decision” look like? The ad hoc proposal (my theory is that we do things the way we know, not the way we don't know, in every situation)

was, as before, to offer a point of view, on collectives, on faculties. And we all came into the game and offered or will offer a point of view. However, before a sum of these points of view is validated by the Senate, so not later, it is appropriate to reflect once again on the implications of this game of collective deciding.

Dear colleagues, what we actually do, getting to play this game, is to decide on behalf of the colleague next to us. If I were in a conference room, I would urge you to look to your left and right. To the people next to you. And accept that, playing this game, you have decided for her or him, and it really does not matter in what way. Can anyone say, with one hand on their heart, that this is morally correct? Can anyone assume that the person next to you is not able to make a decision for themselves? I don't think that's the case.

Therefore, I invite you to take responsibility. Please take responsibility, which means in short, start each with yourself, and decide whether your decision and therefore your responsibility can legitimately go beyond the reference to your own person. Specifically, if the answer is no, congratulations. But if the answer is yes, I invite you to do the following exercise and I will arrest my case: what would it be like for your colleague to decide on your vaccination? How would you feel?

Well, I denounce how I feel in this situation as an abuse of my moral, professional and material integrity. Without giving you evidence of the suffering, I hope that you take my word for it and that you will support my effort to put things in their natural order, according to which the way of carrying out teaching activities in the second semester, (only) under the possibility of immunization, is the decision of each of us. This responsibility take over is therefore a step for everyone.

I would like to do it together, rather than end up hating or at least despising each other because our choices are – naturally! – different.

Personally, I want to return to my classroom in the second semester as soon as my physical condition (vaccine-induced immunity) allows me. If this freedom is not guaranteed to me, I will not be vaccinated according to the institutionally made schedule, but I will choose the moment when I will do it, I have time until autumn ... or not at all, right? I know it's an argument that can be easily attacked. But before attacking it, think about what generated it!

I wish you all the best.

Regards,

Georgina Gabor

Ps. I have to add that I wrote this letter in the institutional e-mail because, despite my best efforts, I failed in my attempt to convince my department Director and Dean that they were there to represent me, and nothing else.

Denouement²

On Thu, Apr 22, 2021, 12:24 gabor oana <o ... 2@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Professor,

Good morning. Finally the time has come that I may sit down and write to you. Don't think I wasn't looking forward to it. But I noticed that in vain I try to speed things up, that everything happens in its own time.

I want to tell you leisurely what happened after I informed you over the weekend through those messages about the state of affairs. First of all, as a reaction to my last letter, Claudiu Mesaroş called me. I had no expectation that he would be willing to make the public confession I had suggested to him (first of all to him, given that I have no hope when it comes to men like Bunoiu, Vasile Popovici, Moşiu, Trăilescu, the current President of the Senate, who replaced the distinguished Viorel Negru, who forcibly retired on time), because by evening he could very well have done it, instead of calling me. I knew what he wanted to tell me, so when I heard him stressed out on the phone, I told him to relax, because he's talking to me. And then he apologized to me (in other words, he said forgive me for betraying you). Of course I forgave him. How can I not forgive someone who asks for forgi-

² A *denouement* is the final part of a play, film, or narrative in which the strands of the plot are drawn together and matters are explained or resolved.