THE WIDENESS OF NARROWNESS: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF THE TENSIONS BETWEEN MODERN AND PRE-MODERN MODES OF LIVING

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ABSTRACT

This is a project in the field of autobiographical writing, addressing the existing tensions between modern or urban living and pre-modern or rural living. I am arguing that modernity has been unable to entirely replace pre-modernity. The tensions between the two modes of living are internalized in the self and lead to confusion, which is the modern condition of man, unable to reconcile the two tendencies. As a result, the internalized cultural tensions are destructive to both modern and pre-modern modes of living.

To demonstrate the internalization of the conflict, I am using first person narrative voice, and a combination of personal recollections and discreet theoretical references. The objective is to present a convincing picture of modern and pre-modern structures, and the cultural clash between them in the same time. The focus is on the individual, since I argue that the tensions are internalized in the self.

Neither form of living is entirely positive, or entirely negative. The cultural clash occurs when modernity penetrates into pre-modern life. Pre-modernity resists the influence of modernity. In an urban situation, 'high culture' suffers from the impact of pre-modern residues. In a rural situation, modernity destroys communal responsibility for well-being. Individually, the most one can do is to be aware of the tensions, yet, it is impossible to make a clear choice: instead, there is longing for the city when in the country, and for the country, when in the city.

The final objective is not to find solutions, but to raise questions about the conflicting and competing tendencies faced by the individual. If pre-modernity is clearly hierarchically structured, well-known, xenophobic, and stable, modernity has hidden hierarchies, it is vague, transient, and permits social mobility. Communication is most important in pre-modernity, but in modernity the highest importance is placed on information. Oral storytelling characterizes pre-modernity, but in modernity autobiographical writing replaces storytelling, emerging from the need for finding the 'self', justifying one's existence, and longing to reach to others. However, there is always the suspicion that a person transforms his/her modern life into fiction or into interpretation.

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Vesselin Vesselinov

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I am a modern man, forty-five years old. I am alienated, confused, solitary, and unhappy. I am not at peace with myself. I am longing for something, not knowing what it is. In my distress, I depend on habit and uncertainty, both at the same time. This is my modern human condition. Thus, I know myself. I am too old to embrace post-modern compartmentalization and too young to be comfortable in pre-modern traditions. I inherited silence. My life is not unusual, but mediocre, similar to so many other modern lives. It is a life without a story, yet, full of memories, recollections, analyses of the past - all of them hardly communicative. 'He, who wants to escape the world translates it', wrote Henri Michaux, and this is what I am doing[1]. A translation remains individualistic to the point of not making sense to others. The escape, it seems to me, can be only in the world of letters - an investigative narrative, slightly theoretical, and heavily personal, all at once. I am not hoping for answers; I only hope to raise questions. Aware of my modern limitations, I am intending only to present questioning, to display tensions and conflicts.

Modernity arrived and challenged whatever pre-modern modes of living existed. From the distance of years, it may be said that the modernity won and annihilated the traditional life, a great victory of urban living and egalitarian equality. Modernity is impersonal in its institutions and their relations to the individual. That is how the individual lost his life-story: impersonal equality does not permit uniqueness of the person; every uniqueness is already an inequality. The self is challenged: 'Who am I?' is a tormenting question, when personification is not allowed. A curious shift of interests followed: the interest in autobiographies, the strange attempt to restore personality in the intolerant modern human situation. However, modernity never won anything, not fully,

[1]. Michaux, Henri: *Selected Writings*, New Directions, New York, 1968. P. xvii of the

not completely - a hidden battle has taken and takes place. Pre-modernity resisted. The tensions between modernity and pre-modernity are still strong - apart from the conflict between urban and rural modes of living, the tensions are internalized in the self. I have been living in both rural and urban settings and have been unable to reconcile the two. Nor have I been able to embrace completely one mode of living over the other - instead, there is a longing for the city whenever I am in the country, and for the country when I am in the city. The cultural clash is embedded in myself and I do not see a better way of presenting the clash I claim to exist than narrating a personal story of city and country, which is personal only as a voice. I place myself somewhat in between – intending not an account of my life, but rather episodes of urbanity and rurality and their relations to myself. Thus, I hope to illustrate my claim that the tensions between modern and pre-modern modes of living must end up being destructive of both.

I arrived in the city of Sofia, the Bulgarian capital, in 1965, when I was six years old. I 'arrived' not because this was my first travel to Sofia, but because there was finality in this trip: I was to attend school, a permanent move to my parent's apartment. Until then I had been living in the small town of Koprivshtitza with my paternal Grandfather and his youngest sister. Entering a city is always strange. There is the skyline on the horizon at first, staying motionless 'somewhere there' - more like a promise, rather than reality. The expectation of marvels immediately vaporizes when the city actually begins. Instead of glamorous buildings and all kinds of street miracles and bright people, one slowly meanders through suburbs, adjoined villages, industrial complexes, wasteland and garbage hills. The myth, created by the skyline is the first to fall - it exists and can be

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'Introduction'.

preserved only at a distance. The ugliness, so uninviting, stretches for a long, long time, until the train stops at the Central Station. A streetcar delivered me and my father 'home'. It was in the centre of the city.

The city proper is in the middle, focusing into the central zone at the end. What is a great skyline from afar is real only here. Tall buildings, almost no individual houses, heavy traffic, both motorized and pedestrian, stores, theatres - the goods of the city, forcing one to move here from the country, pursuing the myth of a better life. Most city dwellers do not live in the centre, however, but in distant outskirts, in the slums seen from the train at arrival. My family lived in the centre. When I arrived 'home', it was an apartment building. Upon entering the apartment door was shut and bolted immediately and I found myself inside a limited space, occupied by adults. I was no longer free to come and go as I chose; I had to comply with strict rules. Without knowing it, I arrived at the modern condition. I only realized years later the meaning of this arrival: the outskirts of the city were and are the battlegrounds of modernity and pre-modernity, where the result is inconclusive destruction, manifested by the utter ugliness.

In the centre modernity ruled - the clock, not the season - organized human activities; man was alone, without friends and surrounded by enemies; there was no past and no future - only the present; there was no knowledge of the surroundings, yet, one can exist; the narratives become incomprehensible for everyone, except for a small group of likely souls, traversing an invisible 'private' map. Still, there was no sense of belonging. The city is transient. It changes constantly, leaving no trace of the past and thereby challenging personal memories and narratives. At the moment I went to school, all of the above forced me to become a city boy, a modern boy. I didn't like it, I didn't

like any aspect of the new life, yet, I embraced it and it became mine, it became myself. I became an explorer and interpreter - a creator of maps and accounts, impenetrable and even meaningless to others. A personal story I do not possess, exactly because my maps, accounts, memories are so individualistic, they do not make sense and are therefore met with disbelief.

What I felt unable to understand and articulate when I was six years old - and what I just narrated - is a tautology, a copy of another strikingly similar narrative. '[W]andering through the night of the years in the land of oblivion where each one is the first man, where he had to bring himself up, without a father, having never known those moments when a father would call his son, after waiting for him to reach the age of listening, to tell him the family's secret, or a sorrow of long ago, or the experience of his life ... and he had to learn by himself, to grow alone, in fortitude, in strength, find his own morality and truth, at last to be born as a man ... try to learn to live without roots and without faith ... had to learn how to live in relation to others, to the immense host of conquerors, now dispossessed, who had preceded [him] on this land and in whom [he] now had to recognize the brotherhood of ... destiny'. Thus Albert Camus in *The First Man*[2]. Like him, like many others, I was the first man - the only option given by modernity - and also the last one: the next 'first man' relegates me to dust by his solitary discovery, or creation, or interpretation, or translation of the modern world. In this sense, there is no personal story – only an oppressive silence: mine and his. The silent recognition of common destiny is the dubious, mute brotherhood of modernity.

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[2] . Camus, Albert: *The First Man*, Penguin, New York, 1996, p.152.

The silence... There is another silence I know, the pre-modern one, and how different it is. It comes from the rural life and its organization. It is not a silence of a defeatist recognition of the existence of my modern 'brother', but a continuation, slowly unfolding to one through objects, observations, mimesis, repetitions. It is not a real silence - it appears to be a silence, because words and their meaning are understood only by the initiated. It is a silence in a sense that no pre-modern man is going to display his 'individual' story - he would consider it obvious enough, if his audience is familiar with the hierarchies and the past of the locality. Storytelling looms large in pre-modernity, transmitting local knowledge and preserving the way of life. One is not alone, but an integral part of an extended family, a village, the past, the present and the future, in a universe, which is small, but very well known, and resisting entropy. It is a world of concrete, personal relations, very stable, to the point of stubbornness. It is a restrictive and undemocratic world, ruled invisibly, impenetrable to outsiders. It is a xenophobic world, mistrustful of the outside. But it is a silent world only to an outsider. To the insiders, it speaks volumes - as opposed to modernity, which is silent precisely to the insiders.

Which world knows me better, the modern or the pre-modern one? Just because I organized a literary competition and occasionally publish literary criticism in Bulgaria, I constantly receive various manuscripts from that country, their authors wrongly thinking I am a prosperous publisher in North America. At the same time, the inhabitants of the rural Koprivshtitza do not need even to see me in order to assess where I am in terms of prosperity: they know that no new house has been built in place of the ancient one; they confirm daily that I did not make it big. It is a laughable story: the 'modern' men react

with anger when their illusions are confronted. Whenever I explain that I am not a publisher at all, the reaction is disbelief - people think I do not want to help them. With Koprivshtenites it is much easier: they will disbelieve me only if I tell them that I am a rich man, for there is no concrete evidence of my fairy tale. It may be easier, it is but not a better or a more tolerable judgment: the pre-modern social organization ignores me as a human being - I am a person in between, neither local, nor an outsider. I am excluded from the local interest, I cannot expect help or empathy, I have no place in the local economy. The locals are not friends of mine - they will be the first to point at the distance and preserve it. There is a line not to be crossed at any occasion. An invisible line, which I must be reminded of every time I set foot in the town.

I appeared in Koprivshtitza when I was one year of age, due to family circumstances closely related to the Communist totalitarian state. My bohemian Grandfather, born in the small town in the late 19th century, but living in big cities for most of his active life, felt disgusted after the arrival of the Communist regime and when he retired in the early 1950s he returned to his birthplace to live in self-exile, hardly an unusual decision. He rarely visited Sofia and his wife - my Grandmother - never visited Koprivshtitza. During the Second World War she had been evacuated there for a while, felt miserable, and vowed never to go to the town again. Because of the separate lives of my grandparents, I did not realize that they were husband and wife until I was ten years of age.

My Grandfather lived in isolation, tending his garden, taking long hikes in the mountains in the summer and reading books from the large family library in the evenings. He was reluctant to answer my questions about his life in the past, grumpily dismissing

them with 'What is there to tell? Living is difficult.' Slowly and from tidbits of information, I learned that he had fought in four wars as a soldier, artillery officer, and reservist officer; that he had studied in the Law School of Sofia University - whether he graduated or not was unclear, but he never practiced law, following instead a bohemian path of life. He remembered a lot, yet, he was very reluctant to speak of his life and the past - when I became an adult, I came to the conclusion that Grandpa was aware of his modern condition: he had a story lacking references and instructiveness for a listener. By not telling me anything, he prepared me for my modern life - I had to be 'the first man', so to speak, and to discover, shape, misunderstand, interpret, imagine, and distort the past in any way I decided to do so. I suspect he knew that his own narrative would be entirely useless to me and he was right - the moralistic lectures of my father were so much at odds with reality, that I never found anything but dismissable contradictions in them. The wisdom of Grandpa was in not lecturing me about anything, but letting me observe and make my own conclusions. No matter how I scrutinize the years spent with Grandpa, I found them happy and strangely instructive years.

Both of my parents have been blacklisted - my father because of his political activism in the late 1940s, and my mother because of the resistance to the collectivization of her father's estate. They both were placed to work in a small Northern town - he a lawyer, and she a pharmacist in one of the biggest Bulgarian psychiatric hospitals. They met in this small town, called Byala, married, and I was born there. Father was forbidden to practice in Sofia and his Sisyphean effort to return to his hometown called for long-term strategy: as a part of it, I was tucked in Koprivshtitza when I was one year of age. Due to these circumstances, I rarely saw my parents in my early childhood: my mother

moved to Sofia in the early 1960s and my sister was born there. My father, however, was unable to return to Sofia until 1966 or 1968. The family was scattered in three different areas of the country, with my father visiting me a few times during the year and occasionally taking me to Sofia for brief visits. Most of the time I was in Koprivshtitza.

Koprivshtitza is a small, picturesque, isolated mountain town, which today does not differ from Koprivshtitza twenty, or fifty, or hundred years ago. It is a tourist destination and a town with a special status because of its role in Bulgarian history – in particular its role in the so-called 'Bulgarian Revival' of the first half of the 19th century. The abortive revolution for Bulgarian independence began there on April 20, 1876. A long string of prominent Bulgarians came from the city, including politicians, revolutionaries, writers, and scholars. Almost every house and almost every family was linked to historic figures, whose grandchildren still live in the town. My family is not an exception: our house is an historic monument, because those who started the revolt for independence in 1876 swore for 'freedom or death' in the very room I played as a child. The local pride is quiet, however: everybody knows their historic heritage, but no one would indulge curious questions - answers, if any, would be deliberately dull.

Koprivshtitza was declared 'a national architectural preserve of international standing' in 1978, having 388 architectural monuments, 15 architectural sites of national significance, six museums, and about 4000 inhabitants (and I am tempted to declare them a kind of an exhibit as well). The city is pretty as a post card and new buildings must conform to the established architectural norms for preserving the character of the town. In the past, one could not settle in town without special permission - again, in order of preserving the uniqueness of the 'museum-town'. During the Ottoman Empire

Koprivshtitza had been a prosperous place and its interactions with the outside world made it different from traditional village culture: that is my reason for insisting on the term 'pre-modern' - it had been not only a dynamic and wealthy place, but also urban, economically important, embracing new ideas, articulating them, and putting them in practice.

Yet, the city never became a cradle of modernity - instead of adapting to modern ideas and changing in accord with them, the city digested modern ideas in its own way. The city used only those parts of the modernity which fitted its own traditions, not changing itself, but the ideas, transforming them to fit the old reality of imperial living. The city never embraced the impersonality of the modern state: non-personal relations are pure abstractions for the local population, lacking practicality, and therefore ignored stubbornly.

The great decline of the town came after 1878, when Bulgaria became an independent state. The city remains a closed culture, more like a villages than a modern urban center, relatively self-sufficient, impoverished and debilitated, preserving its own pre-modern ways and constantly sabotaging modernity. Its structure, its organization of life is carefully hidden from outsiders - and 'outsiders' is the literal translation of the word the xenophobic locals use to describe all who are not from the town. The universe is very small there: it begins with the town and ends at the end of fields, pastures, and forests, belonging to the town. Beyond that the world ends - what is outside, who lives in the outside - the locals do not care to know at all. The outside is negatively viewed: it is bad by definition, weird, most likely insane. The outside must be avoided by any means; the outside is not beneficial or instructive. The outside has nothing to do with local life.

Hence, the outside is an abstraction – the nation state, its law, its institutions, its representatives are nothing. International events and problems are less than nothing. Knowing one's neighbours, their place in the local hierarchy, their usefulness or insignificance, the time they slaughter their pigs and distil their rakiya - this is everything, this is of immense importance.

In terms of modernity, the town is a failure - one more unsuccessful modern assault on traditional living. Modernity left the town in a stupor, immobile, incapable, as if asleep. From a modern viewpoint, the traditional life and the old moral economy had been annihilated. Such a judgement is, however, a bit misleading: Koprivshtitza is a victim, but a willing one. Disagreeable people live there, refusing anything not originating from themselves. There never had been the rosy picture anthropologists tend to present of primitive societies. This locality has been cold and selfish in its existence, beginning and ending with its own self-interest. Rigid local rules are the only way of sustaining the coexistence of the locals. It is a complex hierarchical system of utility and status, conformist in its core, perpetually reproducing the same behavior. To an outsider, this kind of life appears like traditional patriarchy. That is what the locals want an outsider to see and to think. What an outsider sees is a decoy. The locals surround themselves with literal and invisible walls, behind which the real life is hidden. No outsider has any place in it. The locals fight modernity daily and it is hard to say conclusively who is winning: modernity, seemingly relegating traditional life to insignificance, is subjected to destruction by the pre-modern in a wickedly mundane way. The city is a battleground, so different from the wastelands of urban outskirts - there is no

confusion in how to live. There is clarity, stability, and a smooth continuation of past, present, and future.

Walking up the cobblestone street, I am met by a local person, idly staying outside his housegate, like a spider patiently waiting for his prey. Sooner or later a fly will be caught, this is inevitable. 'How is Vesko?', the spider asks me with a voice modulation hinting disinterest and mockery. His facial expression, however, suggests nothing - it is as cold as stone. I am always irritated by the Koprivshtenite indirect greeting in third person, as if they are asking not you, but about somebody else. Yet, I always resist the temptation to answer in kind. Instead, I answer in a way proper for my situation 'I am fine'. This is the answer assigned for persons-in-between - neither fully local, nor entirely outsiders. An outsider would not be addressed with this question; he most likely would not be greeted at all. I am obliged to respond and only with 'I am fine', for, according to my peculiar position in the local hierarchy, I am of little interest: recognized, checked for propriety, and left alone. Checking up on me is the only important meaning of the brief exchange of words: the local confirms that I do remember and indeed do conform to my social position. If I answer differently, I am doomed: nothing will happen right away, but slowly, by elaborate moves my reputation will be destroyed.

Locals address each other with the same question, but the answer is entirely different: the proper answer is 'Ey go na', literally meaning 'Here he is'. It must be pronounced with a slightly surprised indifference and the hint of a glance around - the responding person includes by this expression the whole universe and himself in one great familiar unity in which nothing special happened and probably will never happen.

Everything is the same, normal, no need of mentioning. The question and the answer are just the opening of a conversation more similar to a game of chess. The answer acknowledges the opening of the game, and now it is again a time for the first speaker to make his next verbal move. On occasion a different response can be given, indicating a clear refusal to play the verbal game this time and no conversation follows.

There is a lot of strategy involved in local conversations: an invasion of privacy is the prime concern. Conversing is a risky affair - one may want to chat, but showing an interest in conversing means invading the privacy of another and, unfortunately, leaves one exposed to intrusion in his own privacy. Negotiating the violence of privacy makes the conversations guarded, constantly calculating how much violation of his own privacy one can endure. Limits of personal participation are considered at the beginning and the whole effort is to sustain the verbal game in the desired limits. Just like in chess different openings and responses channel the development and the result of the game, a conversation is channeled by its opening exchange of words. Among the many possibilities, the players reach only one in which there is still a chance of winning - extracting a useful bit of information from the opponent without providing much information about yourself - but, once started in a particular way, no possibility for radical change by interrupting the nonsense and going to the most important topic exists. Instead, the verbal game will be finished today, whatever the result, and a new one will start tomorrow.

This self-preserving cautiousness in conversing often leads to weird and unsatisfactory results: the conversants may want to talk about something really important, yet, in trying to interpret intentions and the goals of the other, to divert them in a

personally favorable direction, they never reach the important topic - the opening of the conversation channeled it into banal exchange of opinions about the weather. In a sense, the game ended in a draw - luckily, there is always tomorrow, a conversation started anew, perhaps with a different opening, and the next time they may reach the important topic. On no occasion would a local dare to ask bluntly another local about important issues - blunt questions, outrageously blunt questions are reserved for conversing with outsiders, creatures, who, in the local mind, are not fully human and may be asked anything, mostly for the sake of laughing at them. The locals surround xenophobic and misanthropic individualism with high linguistic walls.

Apart from verbal walls, there are real walls, half a meter wide and two meters high, built from stone. Two- winged yard gates, massive and strong, three meters high, so that ox-driven carts loaded with hay are able to enter freely. These are the entries to private properties. They are made from oak and reinforced with iron. Into one of the heavy wings a smaller door is carved for daily human and animal traffic. From outside, the impression is one of a fortified castle, uninviting, exclusive, and ready to defend itself from any form of intrusion. There are historic reasons for such fortified properties coming from Ottoman times, but I am concerned with something else: the individualism penetrating into words and action. Koprivshtitza is a mini-version of the Hobbesian Leviathan.

Interactions with others are heavily ritualized in both speech and action. Everybody tries to preserve privacy; yet, everybody needs to know a lot about others in order for the small society to be able to function at all. Private properties are uninviting, yet, to confuse the matter, neither house doors, nor yard gates are locked, regardless of

the presence or the absence of the owners. In theory, anyone can enter freely. In practice, only old women and small children can gain access unconditionally - curiously, those are the most dangerous people to a household, for they spy, gather, and disseminate unfavorable news outside the household. Children often are invited to visit and use households in the absence of the original owners. Old women, by the virtue of their status, do not need any permission to visit - and they do visit often to collect information about the household. Apart from these two groups, everybody else follows a self-restraining ritual upon entering another household.

First, one announces his arrival from the street by shouting the name of the person he wants to meet. It is not a loud, heroic shout, and to describe it is difficult. It is an unnatural, somewhat muffled voice, quite different from the usual voice of the person; it is shouting as if not shouted. There are urgency and fear in it. With time, there is noticeable panic in the tone. There is something timid in the posture of the visitor when he shouts outside the gates. If there is a response, the visitor is relieved and restores the natural timber of his voice. However, often there is no response to his calls. A hide and seek game follows, in which the visitor is at a disadvantage: he is visible, he is exposed to many eyes and ears. As for the host - he is paralyzed hiding in his house and waiting the visitor's nerves to break down and the intruder to beat a hasty retreat. By and large, the natives greatly prefer to meet each other on neutral public grounds - on the streets, in the pubs - where no one has initial advantage or disadvantage.

So overwhelming is the problem of negotiating the limits of privacy, that words become equal to action, they are action-words. Ideally, equality in terms of preserving privacy is achievable by not exchanging anything with anybody. Yet, the economy and the social

structure require exchanges - and every exchange is problematic: Is it fair? Am I giving up too much? How is tone to achieve some profit from the exchange? Negotiating the simplest thing, such as borrowing a hammer is protracted for days, while more important negotiations drag on for months. If one wants to build a new house next summer and needs helpers, he should start negotiating the previous winter. A standard contract and hired hands are out of the question: this violates the status structure, giving too much power to the employer, and, most important, limits the options for creating obligations and extracting useful information about somebody else. Money is never part of the bargain, but a person finally giving a promise to help somebody else does not automatically help: he gave too much already - his word - and to his mind this is enough. Thus, words replace action: every insistence for actual fulfillment of the promise challenges personal integrity, it is a manifestation of disrespect and mistrust. To keep one's integrity intact, one must evade the fulfillment of his promise. And at the same time, a promise must be fulfilled - if not, a reputation will be tainted, one will become a liar, and his status will be lowered. The solution for this paradoxical situation is in procrastination and faint hopes that the counterpart will carelessly place himself in disadvantage, canceling the deal. If the helper finally arrives to do the job, but the person needing help tells him that nothing could be done today because of unexpected circumstance, this is the end of the deal. 'I was true to my word, I was there to help. You are the one who is not serious'. If the helper is still needed - a brand new negotiation must begin, for the next year, not for tomorrow.

But all of the above is between locals. Outsiders cannot get any deal. People in between are entirely on the mercy of the locals - not being a vital part of the local

economy and social structure, they hardly get anything done. Their helpers will start replacing the roof of the house at the end of the summer, and abandon work for the next year as soon as they dismantle the roof, leaving the building open to the elements for the whole winter. If a person then hires outside workers, he will never be forgiven - he will be branded uncooperative and be degraded to an outsider. The town will be closed to him; he will never get even the most simple things done there. The rigid and oppressive nature of the local ways is invisible to outsiders - the most outsiders can sense is either local hostility or the disinterest of a slow, traditional environment. It may be even seen as a romantic, idyllic environment, in which people act communally. Such views are wrong. Local relations are slow because they are very complex, temporal, spatial, and hierarchical relations between individuals, but individuals in an uncommon sense. Past, present, and future are equally important and extended family history plays a large role. Animated and inanimate objects are part and parcel of the personalities. One's place in the social hierarchy is partly predetermined, partly dependent on one's own behavior and the consistency of it, and partly on the behavior of his household and more distant relatives. The centre of power is carefully hidden from the eyes of observers - it is not simply one hierarchical pyramid, but rather a combination of different hierarchies, like a Russian doll, where every doll hides inside another, which hides another, which hides yet another, and so on. The real rulers of this pre-modern life are invisible, yet, tremendously powerful.

At 5:30 p.m. the church bell rings announcing the time, as it ever did. The custom has more of a secular than religious meaning, a possible relic of medieval life, when city gates were shut down for the night. In general, the bell announces the arrival of the

evening, the switch from work to leisure. People in the fields away from town hear the bell and know it is time to go home. But the biggest significance of the bell is in something else: the time for the congregation of the old women has come. One after another, they come and sit on the long bench, strategically built at the corner of the small plaza where four streets meet. Every neighbourhood has such a bench and every day the women get together in the ritual of uniting past, present, and future. The women bring their grandchildren under ten years of age, who play in the plaza until dusk and, without noticing, are introduced to the eternal rules of local life. In the 1960s, I was brought to play in front of the bench and learned the real importance of those great evenings. I realized years later - when I was in my twenties – that this was the time of initiation and introduction, delivered by the rulers of the town: the old women.

Women over 50 years old get together and spend the time until complete darkness and enjoy the simple entertainment of watching passers-by, gossiping, and looking after their grandchildren. That is what an outsider sees, or rather, that is what an outsider is led to believe he sees. Simple entertainment actually plays a very small role. What is really going on is a gathering and assessing of information, and every tiny detail is immensely important. Every new fact is juxtaposed to the old information, elaborately discussed, and conclusions are made for the future. The opinions expressed on the bench are not of equal value - some are dismissed at once, others have a heavy weight and consequences. The bench itself is hierarchical - age and other factors determine positions. The collective opinion of the bench is to be feared, but, in reality, the collective opinion is the opinion of just the middle part of the bench. The core of the structure is built on status and utility.

In general, younger women sit at the ends and the older ones in the middle of the bench. Yet, there are discrepancies - those without a chance of getting a promotion to the centre sit at the ends, regardless of how old they are. An occasional younger woman, already possessing very high status and utility, sits in the middle. The less important are an odd mix - there is a man, old and mentally weak, who is regarded as a woman rather than a man because of his limited faculties. He is permitted to listen the conversations, yet, his wife, sitting next to him is listened to by the others, not he. There is an adopted Russian woman of lowly status and no utility to speak of. She speaks Bulgarian badly, cooks foreign food no one is curious to learn about, and dresses differently - the bench never pays attention to what she says. She is merely tolerated. Next sits a shabbily dressed woman of unknown age - she may be 50 or may be 70 - nobody can tell. She comes from the poorest shack up the street and for all appearances is a widow - there is no adult man in her household, yet, many children of various ages. The gruesome poverty she displays suggests extremely low status and no utility whatsoever, yet her relegation is hardly a result of the poverty itself - she never brings her children to play with others and not only that: every kid in the neighbourhood is vigilantly discouraged to play or even speak with the children from the woman's household. After many years, I finally realized the reason - there was incest in the family. Everybody knew, but never a word was said.

Those three are the lowest and have no chance of moving to the centre of the bench. They are permitted and tolerated, but no one needs their opinions, they are just listeners. Next to them sit 'younger' women - between 50 and 70 years old - who are 'apprentices', either too young to have high status or handicapped by family background. Their opinions are listened to, and, most often dismissed as 'green ones'. But the very

fact of listening to their words suggests that, depending on their wisdom, some of them will sit in the centre of the bench when an opportunity, usually the death of an important woman, arrives. They have no equal chances, of course - our next door neighbour, for instance, is quite old, yet, still far away from the centre. Her advance is painfully slow and there is reason for that: she is lazy, messy, stupid, and the whole family has a reputation for thievery. True, no crime has been committed in town, but two of her sons and a son-in-law are frequent visitors to prisons. The woman's grandchildren are permitted to play with the rest of kids, but are not encouraged to do so - if their grandma brings them along, they can play; if she forgets to bring them, as is often the case, the kids are not missed by anybody. This woman could reach the centre only if a natural disaster strikes the bench and all from the centre die simultaneously. Since such a disaster is unlikely, the woman may never take the coveted central place, constantly passed over by younger recruits.

At the very centre of the bench sit the high priestesses: the oldest women, with wrinkled, severe faces and diminutive dry bodies, all dressed in black. They are fragile and yet incredibly strong: their memories are intact; their eyes and ears never miss a thing; their judgments are harsh and disapproving; their minds - hawkish. They have no leader, but comprise a collective body, which most of the time delivers a single verdict. They speak rarely and monosyllabically - much of the communications between them are actually nonverbal, consisting of tiny gestures and facial expressions. They have no fixed places on the bench and are the only women free to follow their whims. The sister of my grandfather, for example, prefers not to sit in the middle at all - her oddity is beyond questioning, because her status and utility are one of the highest - and not only in the

neighbourhood, but on town scale. She keeps a vast network of informers, visits them daily, collects an enormous amount of information, and is always ready to confront every opinion with fresh data. She also is the one inspecting the rest of the old crows and from her short verdicts, more sounds than words, depend advancement on the bench.

The qualities and the importance of each individual woman are so deeply hidden, no one knows them, but only the high priestesses themselves. One can guess to a certain degree what are the status and the utility of a particular high priestess, by learning her family history, by the order of her household, or by the amount of fear she generates in others. But complete knowledge is impossible: only the old women know what makes a particular woman important and another - not at all. This is the deepest secret, never revealed to anyone. Here, on the bench, they rule over the realm: no man or beast escapes their wrinkled eyes, and every single creature is judged mercilessly in connection with their extended family. Decisions about the future are made and carried on. This is the very centre of the pre-modern culture, the kingdom of storytelling.

The hierarchies of the pre-modern world are revealed, if one knows the doings of the bench. Outsiders are of little interest - they are observed with open astonishment and hostility. Their looks, their dress, their speech, their postures, their very existence is commented upon scornfully in front of the children. Thus, children grasp from early age the fundamental structure of the universe: local is good by definition as opposed to ultimate badness - the outside world. There is no further interest in outsiders. People in between, like my grandfather, are also of little interest: if they have high status or some utility, greetings are exchanged, but no conversation follows, unless the person in between decides to chat a little. In general, people in between are either a source for

increasing the collective status of the neighbourhood, or a source for dealings with the outside world. They play a negligible, if any, a role in the local economy. Their influence is next to nothing; they do not attract followers, do not interfere in the local ways, and are considered not a threat to the local status quo. It is good to know them and to show off some connection to them, but that is all. It is the local creatures the bench focuses its interest on and here treatment depends on age and sex.

There is no positive comment on anybody, man or beast: everybody and everything are judged negatively, at least in front of the object of the bench's interest. Tiny details are observed: are the passing animals well or poorly fed; who is coming and when; is the person in view coming late or early? Most of the collected observations confirm the established patterns of the individual. Everything unusual, as small as it could be – like a new hat – is spotted at once and discussed at length. Irregularities trigger great interest: in the following days investigators visit the household of the irregular person to gather more information on the subject. Nothing, however simple to explain, leads to an immediate conclusion – immediacy would be only premature and wrong. Only a thorough investigation of all possible sources leads to uncovering the real situation. If evidence of significant change is detected in the household of interest, depending on the nature of the changes, the bench may deliver a positive or negative verdict by which the status, or the utility, or both, of the investigated household may be diminished or increased. Sometimes changes are found incidental and excusable – then the interest ceases (but the irregularity is not forgotten – it is stored, as is every other bit of information, in the great collective memory bank of the bench – it may become useful sometime in the future). Sometimes changes are found out of step, untimely, or

pretentious – if that is the case, the change must be stopped and preventive measures are taken.

Individuals are placed in a larger frame, their actions are considered not only in terms of the particular person, but also against the background of his family, in terms of the whole household, his more distant relatives, the possessions of the household and the care taken of them – thus, the whole story of a person and his complete genealogy is recalled, narrated, new elements are added, and finally the bench shapes the story in accord with its judgement of the new evidence. The degrees of interest depend on this vast knowledge: a regular drunk, coming from a family with history of drunkenness, is of little interest - he behaves according to what is known about him; his status is lowly and he has no chance of increasing it. An appearance of a sober person, who is known as a drunkard will attract livelier interest, especially if he shows some consistency in his new behavior. Women are treated better than men; young children – better than women; and teenagers and unmarried young adults are the pariahs and the constant victims of the bench.

The bench, as a rule, is highly negative and critical of everybody falling in its field of observation. If the bench detects something fishy prior the appearance of a passerby, he/she may be treated coldly. If greetings are not returned and the bench does not engage in conversation - these are clear signs that the individual and his/her household are in deep trouble. But they are in even bigger trouble if the bench engages them in extra-polite conversation, full of flatteries and open praises.

Men, an open and a slightly boring book to the old women, are rarely interrogated in length; women are. Women must display for inspection whatever they bring home

from the market and deliver whatever news and gossip they learned during the day. Their information is compared to other sources and stored in the minds of the bench. The greater interest in women is important in one respect, the younger women in effect attending a training school; they are scrutinized and examined on how they have learned their lessons so far and new lessons are given to them. The pedagogical method is harsh criticism. Only occasionally will a younger woman scores high marks - either by bringing high quality rare good information from the market or important and undetected news. At such a moment the bench becomes very animated, yet ignores the messenger entirely - outright approval may bring a wrong impression to the mind of 'green' woman and she might conclude that she knows it all. The bench uses silence to prevent such wrong conclusions, ignoring the woman. By this treatment, however, the woman knows she scored high and has been elevated by the bench to a higher status, and from this moment on she will be judged - and disapproved of - only by the standards of her newly achieved status. Only years of timid apprenticeship shape a high priestess. But high priestesses are mortal and have to carefully build their replacement in the form of exact copies of themselves in order to preserve the elaborate balance of local relations. Otherwise, the local customs will be corrupted and a pre-modern structure cannot afford that. Keepers and reproducers of tradition, the old women must be watchful and never present even a hint of loosening their iron grip on local affairs.

The strict control of the old women is evident in their treatment of their favorite victims: the group of young adults as a whole and selected older individuals of both sexes. They comprise the primary entropic danger for the community, by their attempts at deviation and the introduction of novelties. Young adults are suspected of harboring – or

of a possibility of harboring - sexual desires. Sexual desires, if left unchecked, lead to chaos. The stupid youngsters may frivolously mix with wrong people. In sexual relations, the bench recognizes only marriage. The bench also knows who should marry whom and when. Hence, young people are tested day after day. By torturous interrogation about their plans for the evening the bench tries to discover sexual intentions in their latent state and to break them at this stage. Usually, the bench succeeds by vigilance, spying, diverting the interests of the victim and other devious methods. In rare occasions when the bench is not successful in preventing undue sexual relations, the result is very bad for the guilty youngsters. They are married at once but their reputations are tainted and their advance in status blocked. Other nonconformist people are singled out and ruined by vicious schemes, custom made to fit the offense by the bench.

The actions of the bench are clandestine and unexpected - the bench is not a simple, conservative keeper of tradition. The bench rules with the combined power of past, present, and future, but rarely executes directly its unquestionable decisions and verdicts. The bench decides, mobilizes, assigns tasks, and leaves the execution to others, most often men. The bench is viciously generous - it leads people to believe that they are not following orders and acting on the designs of the old women, but have reached the decisions and enforced them on their own. That tradition is used to divert attention from the real holders of power: men are led to believe that their freedom in the pubs, where no woman is allowed to enter, is the place to decide the destiny of the town. If the communal herder is bitten by the drunken men, because he neglected the animals entrusted to his care, it is not as it appears - that the men, in a patriarchal manner, distributed justice. They executed a verdict of the bench - the old women carefully and slowly planted the

idea, indirectly, by hints, by complaints, by fuss, until the men grasped it, got enraged, and 'spontaneously' took the matter in their hands. The bench does not mind such usurpation of its power - on the contrary, this is the best way to hold power: when no one suspects that he is a pawn, depending on unknown decisions.

The bench acts like fate itself. The status of individuals may be increased, but painfully slowly; more often the status is decreased, slowly again. Sometimes the bench suspends a change of status - and suspension may last for years, regardless of consistent approvable behavior of the individual. Then suddenly the individual fails and his status finally is changed - with a lower one. It is impossible to tell what the old women sensed, what kind of collective gut feeling led them to disregard positive evidence for so long and to wait patiently the truth to reveal itself. They disregarded a thousand facts until a single one confirmed their suspicions. They are never wrong, they do not know defeat - only victories. Rebelliousness is paid dearly by the offender. On the bench, there is not a single movement: nothing shakes the bench; the women sit in their black dresses chatting quietly among themselves, as if nothing happened, as if nothing ever happens, as if they are just waiting for the night to fall and time for sleep to come. There is no way for an observer to guess that in about two ours many lives have been processed, assessed, and designed. Even the observer's life may have been decided upon.

I listened to the women, when playing in front of them. Thus, I have been introduced to the local life and prepared for my own place in it. It was a lowly one - a person in between, with a high status and no utility whatsoever. Koprivshtitza has treated me as such ever since the brief, confirmative manifestation of my hierarchical place. I was about ten years of age, visiting during spring vacation. At the middle of the soccer

game with the kids of the neighbourhood, one of my teammates suddenly dropped down my sweatpants. Everybody laughed at my 'girlish' white briefs - the locals wore 'manly' black boxers. Only outsiders were known for wearing 'sissy' underwear. It was not a simple boyish prank, although it looked like one - everybody laughed at me for a minute and then the game continued. They were showing me my place 'in between' - I was different, I was like the outsiders, not one of the locals. But no outsider's kid was ever allowed to play with the locals - but I was. A person in between. Nothing was explained - the locals and I had been initiated by the bench - we all understood. Positions once established were never to be changed. The rigid, conformist, traditional culture repeats itself. Everybody dressed the same, acted the same, and becomes a copy of his or hers predecessors. My childhood friends grew up and took the status and the utilities of their parents. They even took the same chairs in the pubs. However, a hierarchical pre-modern social structure is also surprisingly tolerant and accommodative to misfits, the mentally ill, criminals, and idiosyncratic - they have a place in the structure; they are not excluded. Their places are lowly and they are not respected, but they are allowed to be. There is no fear from or avoidance of X, who just came out of jail, serving a sentence for murder - people greet him on the streets, they have a drink with him in the pub, nobody panics, because there is a murderer living in town. For the townsfolk, X is not a criminal; he is simply X. The story of his crime is taken into account, however, and everybody, including X, knows that. His status is greatly diminished and many opportunities are closed to him. Most likely, he will never marry. Most likely, he will never get a respectful job. His crime does not endanger the status quo - the only danger is for him: he will not be able to restore his status. Nor will his children, if he has any.

The same with other misfits - as long as they do not present an entropic tendency, they are tolerated at the bottom of the hierarchy. Rebels are in this group too. As long they keep their rebelliousness to their private life and not try to change the local structure, they are regarded as eccentrics and nothing happens. One recognizes the misfits by their difference in appearance: the general population is uniform, but here and there a colourful creature can be seen, a man with shoulder length long hair, or with yellow trousers, or playing an electric guitar. In every other way, however, they behave like everybody else. Their freedom of difference in appearance or action is limited to only those revealed discrepancies - their freedom is balanced by the restrictions imposed by their lowly status. They are accommodated, but not at the expense of the town's balance.

An outright nonconformism, however, is not tolerated. The girl, who came back from University in the 1960s, dressed in blue jeans, smoking filtered cigarettes, and entered the pub to have a drink was immediately punished by the benches. Seen as an entropic threat, she was branded a whore and isolated. No family permitted marriageable sons to mingle with her. Her status was decreased to the very bottom. She was placed in a poorly paid, time-consuming low utility job. As she passed thirty years of age, she lost her good looks and became unmarriageable by traditional standards, but the benches never forgot her offence - she is to be kept at the social bottom until she dies. Yet, she did not receive the highest punishment, for she was still useful for the town - useful as one horrible example what happens if one does not behave. A daily reminder to scare the wits out of anybody entertaining rebellious thoughts.

In the pre-modern structure the highest punishment is banishment, exile, the problem of Socrates, which is so difficult to understand by a modern man. Exile is worse

than death. One loses his life story, becomes a nobody, and will be unable to restore it. A life story in pre-modern terms is not just the experiences or the misfortunes of a single individual, but consists of genealogy, the past of the family, the living and the dead, one's possessions, the extended family's possessions, inherited stories and events, status, shaped by the past and his own present, his usefulness, authority, and the way the rest of society sees him and has opinions about him. Socrates may have been a lowly creature in his society, but possessed a life story. When he 'forgot himself' and acted - or at least the others thought he acted - as an entropic force, he was sentenced to death or exile. He chose death, a proper pre-modern decision, since, in exile, he would be not a part of the new place and its 'universe', but an outsider - less than nothing. The 'new world' is not going to reveal its secret structure to him, thus not making a place for him.

A friend of mine had been banished from Koprivshtitza in the early 1980s, a rare event, for usually nonconformist people find local life so oppressive and restrictive, they leave early and never return. But these are private decisions, unforced by the town. My friend was forced to leave. He came from a 'good' family, laboriously increasing its status. A bright kid and a good student, he was assessed favourably by the bench, and it was predicted that his status will surpass the accumulated family status, itself still rising. After the end of his military service, he was given a well-placed job. By all accounts, he was doing very well. But then he 'forgot himself'. He became greedy, too arrogant, too much 'in everybody's face', too disrespectful. He acted outrageously, from a local point of view - and for a local person, he indeed was reckless. In short, he acted in violation of his status - as if his status was higher. Also, he acted as if he was an outsider, not a local. He presented himself as an entropic force, endangering the status quo with disruptive

change and his days were numbered. He was warned - including by myself, so obvious were his violations - and yet he did not correct himself. At one point, very likely the old women designed something devious to help him escalate his outrageousness to the point beyond tolerance.

The whole town waited for him to make the last step and he did. He created a sexual scandal and that was the end. A great store of evidence was unloaded upon him - most of his acts were criminal offences, but that was not of local concern. This evidence was used as the device for execution of the banishment. The particularities of his offences are perhaps unimportant. It is sufficient to say that they amounted to a reason for ultimate local punishment. His boss took him to his office and told him that he would not alert the police about the crimes, if he resigned from the job. In the evasive local speech, that was not the real meaning: the real meaning was that my friend lost his status and never would recover even a small part of it. He lost friends, connections, his place, his life story was reshaped. He had no future. If he stayed, he would be relegated to the lowest possible status, heavily restricted in terms of marriage, and tormented to his last day. My friend resigned and left town - there was no other option. A grand master of obfuscation, the town exiled him, yet, the verdict did not come directly from the town - my friend had to sentence himself, a twisted cruelty, in a sense. But this was not the end of his punishment: the status of his parents was immediately decreased beyond recovery; his younger brother's status followed the fall. The punishment of the whole family immediately led to family quarrels - thus, the whole family was shattered and destroyed. They lost their story, as a family and individually - the punishment of pre-modern life. Yet, the punishment was necessary - by destroying the whole family, the local structure

annihilated the danger of the entropic force; a cruel punishment, but preserving the whole.

My friend, bitter, unforgiving, and nostalgic made a new mistake: he came back in the middle of 1990s. A successful businessman in Sofia, he bought property in Koprivshtitza, built a flashy house, and began visiting regularly, arriving with his new Mercedes for the weekend. He was and is met with disrespect and ridicule. He has no friends. People flatly refuse to talk to him, which means they talk to him as they talk to outsiders. No one refuses to accept a free drink from him, but only in the pubs, without returning the gesture and silently. My friend is a nonentity in his hometown and will remain a nonentity. His mistake was huge - he confused pre-modern building of status by returning from the outside with a new life story with his situation of a person expelled. Pre-modern life, if not entirely built on, at least depends on the story of exit and return to some degree. It does not apply to exiles, though.

Koprivshtitza used to be a wealthy town in the 19th century, but the wealth had not been generated there. It had been built on tax-farming and trade, located in the capital of the Ottoman Empire - Istanbul. Geographic remoteness and scarce natural resources prevented the city from developing a local economy and becoming a major centre. In its best days, the city owned a total of 200 000 sheep, yet the animals never appeared in the vicinity of the town - they were fattened near the Danube River delta in the summer and on the Aegean Sea's shore during the winter. Nor did the Koprivshtenites see the meat, the milk, or the wool of their sheep - everything went to the Imperial capital. Back home, caravans loaded with money and foreign goods came - the fruits of the labour of the merchants. The town itself was protected by a 'ferman', dating from 15th century, never

revoked or amended, and granting special privileges to the town: for instance, no Turk was permitted to settle in town and Turks were forbidden from entering the town on horseback. They had to dismount and cross the town on foot. Thus, the place became unattractive for the Turks, who avoided the humiliation of walking when the infidels were riding and, in general, Turkish rule was hardly felt. In a medieval manner, the town did have a special, personal relation with the crown. This is perhaps the most important reason for the peculiar development of Koprivshtitza and, in part, the reason I avoid terms like 'primitive', 'peasant community', 'traditional', preferring 'pre-modern' instead.

Fortunes had been built by exiting the world, going to the great 'outside', and returning back with a new personal story and material evidence - the actual wealth confirming the story. It could be said that people, unhappy with their established status and limited by restricted utility, went out, intending to change their local position and make a great leap ahead, quickly achieving higher status. Not everybody dared to exit the familiarity of the town, and of those who took the risk only few were successful, often after a great many years of absence. Some never succeeded on the outside - and among them, some never returned, feeling humiliated. With time, permanent businesses and offices had been established in Istanbul and other major centres, and the wealthiest Koprivshtenites divided the year between their families in town and their enterprises far away. The second wave of fortune seekers was largely employed by their wealthier countrymen, making the central offices of the businesses outposts of Koprivshtitza, small, closed colonies, similar to the ancient colonies of the Greek city-states scattered around the Black Sea. It was only very rarely that Koprivshtenites moved their families to the

new location, settled in it, and never returned home. The reason for that, I think, lays in the privileged situation of town in relation to the Ottoman rule: the absence of Turks made it safe for the locals and dealing only among themselves, their status and wealth were never endangered by arbitrary interventions of foreign, yet, powerful people. Only at home were they able to enjoy to the fullest their wealth and authority - the rich people, after all, are few and well respected in a small community, unlike the situation in a big capital, where there are always many wealthier and more powerful individuals. It was the security and the power the Koprivshtenites enjoyed at home - and it was a pure, unchallenged power, for they did not conduct business in their hometown, and therefore, did not depend locally on traders' fate, in which a bad deal may ruin not only one's wealth, but social position and influence as well.

With time, the caravans brought many foreign goods, both practical and luxurious. With time, new professions and ideas were brought from the outside world by returnees, and even the humblest among the locals became affected - as a child, I was surrounded by various foreign-made objects: silver spoons made in England, chairs from Austria-Hungary, Chinese and Japanese plates and china, all of them from 19th century. Every home in town possessed similar objects. I was puzzled by this oddity: the casual use of foreign-made objects did not fit the open xenophobia of the locals and their harsh and final disapproval of anything coming from outside. Even more difficult was figuring out how the town came to be the cradle of the Bulgarian Revival, introduced so many cultural and political innovations, and became a birthplace of nationalistic revolution. The conservative, closed, traditional town I knew did not permit girls to wear blue jeans

and enter a coffee house, and this same town a hundred and fifty years ago opened the first school for women in Bulgaria. How was that?

It was not only the first female school: in the first half of 19th century the city opened a string of modern schools, employing the best educators available. It had Western trained doctors and pharmacists, young people were routinely sent to study in the West or in Russia, foreign affairs were discussed in coffee houses displaying the latest newspapers from Istanbul and Vienna, civic societies and modern institutions were organized, including a public library, a theatre, a 'chitalishte' or community centre, women's society and club, men's societies, both political and cultural. All of these were organized following Western models. There is no aspect of modern Bulgarian history in which Koprivshtitza is not present as a major contributor or originator: foundational scholars and educators, major politicians, major writers, revolutionaries. Hardly a backwater place, yet, the place I knew did not suggest any such activities. Worse, reading the works of the local writers of the 19th century about their hometown and the attitudes of their countrymen, I was seeing a confirmation not of a history book, but of the surrounding reality: Koprivshtenites in the 19th century were the same as the present day Koprivshtenites; they did not suffer degradation - they were always the same. There was a major contradiction between achievements and behavior. The people were not modern at all, yet, they somehow advanced modern views to the whole country.

A statement by Hannah Arendt in *Between Past and Future* is the key, I think, for understanding the paradox of Koprivshtitza. The statement reads: '"The destructive distortions of the tradition were all caused by men who had experienced something new

which they tried almost instantaneously to overcome and resolve into something old" [3]. Arendt speaks of modernity and its destructive effect on tradition. As it is, the statement does not explain Koprivshtitza, but a reverse reading of it helps: 'Tradition is preserved by men who had experienced something new which they overcome and resolve into something old'. In other words, tradition distorted modernity. It is a quality of pre-modern life, which is sophisticated enough to face modernity and defeat it (not completely, of course), unlike rural or primitive life, which when faced by modernity is shattered and destroyed. Perhaps, the dynamics of the initial encounter are the crucial point: if modernity invades the rural and the primitive life and the battle takes place on the turf of the invaded, the pre-modern meets modernity either on modern territory or on neutral ground. It is not the whole pre-modern community meeting modernity, but only a small group, a group of scouts if you like, who test different reality and encounter new ideas. These scouts, from the point of view of modernity, are transient people, who do not attract major attention, they remain too insignificant to present an entropic danger. From the point of view of the scouts, their xenophobia cannot be enforced, it must be temporarily suspended in order not to attract attention to themselves. They submit to the order of the different life and follow its rules, for this 'other' mode of living is overwhelming and too powerful to be confronted directly. By submitting to its rules, the scouts discover practical benefits. When the scouts return home, modernity is already transformed: it becomes a personal story, supported by useful material evidence (objects or profession), which elevates the status of the possessor of the new personal story. But this is what transforms the modern (or the foreign, in a larger sense): the modern is no

[3] Arendt, Hannah: *Between Past and Future*, Penguin, New York, 1968, p. 29.

longer some abstraction; it is personified by the story of the individual, it becomes understandable to the pre-modern community in its own terms - it becomes utility.

Thus, modern education becomes useful in local practical terms and the town builds a modern school. It is reasonable to hire the best educators, for this way maximum practical advantage can be extracted from this new tool, and if the town can afford the price of the best, it hires the best. The modernity is tamed, it is transformed, it becomes local, traditional, for it is adjusted to the existing structure based on status and utility. Most important, modernity is personified, and internalized in individual stories. Education is not a universal, abstract good as the modern nation state sees, but instead for pre-modern society it is concrete: education for Tom, Joe, and Harry. All our boys. They can increase their status and utility, unless Tom continues the stupidity typical for his family and abstains from schooling: if that is the case, Tom will continue the tradition of his family and become a lowly servant, but Joe, taking full advantage of the new tool, will become a doctor and change his inherited status. Again, in practical terms, the whole community will benefit from having a doctor, everybody, including stupid Tom. The process of adapting the new is slow, however, and not at all spontaneous, nor could it be introduced from people of lowly status. Only people from the top of the local hierarchy can introduce new ideas, and then only when the new ideas are carefully transformed into something concrete and practical.

There is a laughable example of such a taming of modernity (or the foreign) I can recall from the 1960s; some 'outsiders' were spotted making fruit compotes in Koprivshtitza. The town so far was making only traditional jams and when the curious news was delivered, the benches dispatched observers, who interrogated the outsiders

about the strange preserves, carefully tasted samples, and reported back to the benches whatever they learned. At first the benches dismissed the innovation entirely - it must be tasteless, not lasting, clearly a waste of fruit, only stupid outsiders would do such a useless thing. Discussions lasted about two years before a trial of local making took place - it was done in secret by the old women, who discussed the results and fussed about. During this two years the compotes were constantly talked about and slowly the topic became so familiar and local, that when finally local production was unleashed, the compote theme was already incorporated in the body of local storytelling. When everybody began making compotes, it was as if they had always been making compotes, it was a local thing, invented by locals in time immemorial. Not a trace of the original foreignness remained, it was transformed, domesticated.

Every new idea, every new object is transformed in similar way, however absurd it may look. The roots of its transformation - and the corresponding slowness of adaptation – are done in fear of entropy. Sudden change is entropic, for it shakes the established balance. Since future consequences are unknown if the new is suddenly introduced, there may be dangerous consequences. Until the new is thoroughly checked, and the certainty of practical benefits is established, and the new is tamed to the point of being neutral to the established hierarchical structure, then the new is hidden from sight. Again, it is an absurd situation from an outside point of view - the sister of my grandfather drove my parents to despair: no gifts, even things she asked to be bought for her, were accepted straightforwardly. There was always a fuss, the thing was not right in any way, it was useless, she refused even to touch it. At the end, she took the object and hid it at the bottom of her chest, buried there, obviously never to be taken out again. After

four or five years, suddenly (to us) the 'outrageous' object reappeared and was used - the old lady 'domesticated' it; she got used to its presence, assured herself that no disturbance of the established equilibrium would happen, the thing became part of the past, part of her story.

The whole town acts in this way: a brand new automobile stays in the garage for years before it is driven; a TV set is immediately locked in a dark drawer and stays there uselessly. Everything new must become old first and used only then, for when it is old, it cannot possibly be foreign, or dangerous, or abstractly unattached from the life story of its possessor. In that way Koprivshtitza adapted so many progressive ideas and practices in the 19th century – and became by default a significant part of the modern history of Bulgaria - all ideas and practices were stripped of their newness and progressiveness, they were reshaped into something old and not progressive at all, and incorporated into the local tradition only if they were useful. Whatever did not possess practical characteristics was abandoned. For instance, the Karavelov brothers were much respected in their hometown when they lobbied the Ottoman and Romanian governments for rights and benefits which directly served concrete Koprivshtenite interests. When Bulgaria became independent, the same politicians became useless - they spoke of universal rights, not of individualized privileges, and Koprivshtenites did not see any utility in such abstract talk and withdrew their previously unconditional support to 'our Karavelov' (in all honesty, the support was never very strong or unconditional - it was a tactical declaration of support, the town 'supported' only acts beneficial to itself.)

The pre-modern condition reminds one of the Platonic simile of the Cave (or the Myth of the Cave): people are chained in their hierarchical position and have no idea of

the outside. Plato argues, as a supposition, one has to be dragged out of the Cave to the sunlight – in the same sense, one is dragged out of his pre-modern place, the goal being a quick change of status; the outside by itself is not interesting. The person who exits keeps the cave in mind and his return is vital. Thus, when he returns with a new story, it is complimented by the distortion of the outside: the light is changed into new shadows, which are incorporated into the body of the existing shadows in the cave. Plato says a returnee from the outside would be disbelieved, and he is right: a story lacking practicality is merely fantastic or lunatic - to be believed, it must be narrated in the terms of the Cave. If a returnee acts otherwise, he will be relegated to the small group of local fools. Perhaps that is the reason why nonconformists do not return at all - and that has been the case in modern times, when pre-modern enclaves are constantly drained of their brightest minds - young people aiming at modern professions and modern ways of living rarely return. Only conformists return. The exiles, on the other hand, better not return at all: they are heavily burdened by their past offence, which overwhelms their new personal story and invalidates it.

In pre-modern time small places had not been problematic, but in modernity there is a cultural clash which can often tend to erode modernity and its institutions. In the late 1960s and the early 1970s long hairs, rock'n'roll, and hippies were outlawed in Bulgaria. There was a heavy-handed campaign against 'western influences', carried on mostly by the police on national scale. Longhaired individuals were apprehended on the streets and various punishments followed. During that time Koprivshtitza acted differently: there were three men, fitting the description for arrest, yet they were never arrested. One was a young 'outsider', a painter, who hid in town until the prohibition ended, working as a

restorer in the local church. It was highly unlikely he was employed to do that: most likely he tricked the fool of a local priest into believing that he was performing a restoration sanctioned by the office of the Patriarch. The other two offenders were local guys. None of them was ever touched by the local Police and it was not at all because of sympathy: the local Chief of the Police, one Major Garbev (ominously meaning 'Hunchback') was a dedicated Communist and a sadist on the top of it. However, he was also a local man, and his pre-modernity prevented him from carrying out a thoroughly Communist doctrine.

The initial problem was that a national policy, in entirely modern terms, is general and abstract, not personal and concrete. Since it was not addressed specifically to Koprivshtitza, to Major Garbev, and the specific offenders, the policy became incomprehensible. To be acted upon, the three offenders had to be named, but the state was not aware of their existence and could not name them. Not having orders to arrest those three, Major Garbev became selectively blind in a rather absurd way: transient outsiders were arrested, but not those three. To him, they had not offended his locality, they were just eccentrics. One was the local idiot, a half-crazy treasure hunter, easily accommodated by the local hierarchy. The second was a valuable employee, a skilled factory worker, who had high utility. Apart from the long hair, these local boys conformed to the local way of life in every important respect. The third one, the outsider, was not entirely a local concern: as an outsider, he was a nobody. If he was anybody's concern, it was the state's concern, so let the state deal with him.

Orders are orders, however, and if they cannot be nullified, at least they can be inverted in a suitable way: the 'outsider' was on the streets only in the evenings, when he

ventured out of his hiding place in the church to shop for food and play soccer. The other two were also on the streets mostly in the evenings, in full view of Major Garbev. Yet, he did not do anything. During the day he literally did not see the offenders, for they were not present - being at work. In the evenings - it was after hours, Major Garbev was not at work then. In all honesty, if asked, the major would have said he never saw them when on duty and that was that. It was a thorough copy of old Ottoman practices, when 'rebellious' komitas (highwaymen or robbers would be closer to the truth) - my Great-great Grandfather included - were the most wanted men during the summer, when they were active, but untouched in the winter, when they were at their homes, not hiding at all - their whereabouts were perfectly known to the Ottoman police and it would have been a child's game to go and arrest them, yet, they were not, for in the winter they were not committing any crimes.

This absurdity, from a modern perspective, is a normal pre-modern situation: everything is personal and concrete - one is guilty only when acting in offensive ways; otherwise, he is just a member of the community. The remnants of this old practice were strong in rural places, constantly sabotaging modernity. In the rural areas, after the initial Communist attempts at change from the late 1940s and the 1950s, the system settled again into its pre-modern hierarchical structure. A new top of the hierarchy replaced the previous one, but nothing really changed. The Communists were quickly tamed and persuaded to conform by the processes of personalization and concreteness, and thus became entangled in co-dependency, for the hierarchical structure never gives an absolute power, but only a balance of power. Thus, a local Party Secretary cannot push a neighbour very hard, who did not care to attend meetings dedicated to some form of

indoctrination – the neighbour may be a lowly person, but he distils the rakiya, and where would be the Secretary if he did not distil some for him? Both the neighbour and the Secretary knew that distilling rakiya was illegal, but they both love to drink it. The said Major Garbev acted not with negligence, but in strict accord with pre-modern structure of his town - and failed to perform his modern duty, because it lacked the pre-modern essence of personification.

Personification is the blessing and the curse of pre-modern life. In February 1985, I was in Koprivshtitza for the weekend and I happened to meet friends from Sofia. We went to the pub. The outside stairs, covered with ice, led to the washrooms. Going down the stairs, I slipped on the ice and that is the last thing I remember - the moment of falling. The next day, voices shouting my name woke me up, and at first I did not know where I was. To my surprise, I was at home in my bed. I got up and went to see who was shouting. It was a pair of cops. We walked to the Police station, where some of my belongings were. The cops at first were not chatty, but as soon as they realized I had no idea about the night before, they informed me of some details. The whole story was never reconstructed fully.

Falling on the stairs, I immediately lost consciousness from a concussion. My fall was observed by the pub's cloakroom attendant, who phoned the police. The police in their turn called the town's doctor. People, who knew me, came and carried me to the clinic. I recovered consciousness, or so it seemed, and insisted on being left alone. My helpers refused. Then I started shouting juicy antigovernment tirades at the top of my voice, and declared that I wanted to die for there was no life under Communism anyway. I struggled to fulfill my wish, and to keep me in their hands, my helpers had to beat me

up a little. Once in the clinic, I still insisted on dying and started a fight with the doctor, trashing the clinic. The helpers had to beat me mercilessly just to exhaust my unusual strength and keep me in one place long enough for the doctor to perform his job. In the silent night, the cops had heard every antigovernment word I had cried out, and what they did not hear – they had been informed at once. They did not interfere during the night, but the next day they took me to the Police station.

At the station I was informed with menacing intonation about the consequences of my antigovernment rants - as I knew well enough, it was a criminal offence. However, no documents were produced for me to sign, and I was not under arrest. Instead, I was told to go to the doctor and try to apologize to him. The policemen said that he might bring charges against me. None of my belongings were given back - the police wanted me to return for them after visiting the doctor: not a good sign. The doctor accepted my apology, but clearly wanted me out of his life, and I went back to the police. The policemen employed an obscure way of talking to me: half lecture, half threats, but it did not last long. They gave me my IDs, and let me go, wishing me a nice time in prison. Outside the police station I saw one of my helpers from the night before, who told me that after my swinish performance he did not want to know me any longer. And that was all. I got a severe concussion and was hospitalized for a month in Sofia. Nothing else happened.

Thinking about the event, I realized that despite my alienation, it was clear that I benefited from the weird local traditions. The local police knew me personally, but they decided to be 'blind' not because of kindness, but for different reason. It was their job to arrest me for antigovernment 'propaganda' or, at least, for pettier crimes - destruction of

government property, attacking a government employee when he was performing his duty, getting into a fight - a string of criminal offences. The local mentality did not see much in all of that, however: to apply some abstract government law was a headache - it was never good to have a political case, since antigovernment activities should be prevented before they take place. Sensing trouble for themselves with representatives of the 'outside' world, the local cops preferred inaction. Pettier crimes were no go either: the clinic, as a government property, was not a local concern - let the government deals with it. The doctor was an outsider, a nonentity, so who cares about him? Fights were a normal part of Saturday night local 'fun' and the policemen did not envision any offence in that. I myself was just a person-in-between in the local structure, not interesting in any way. In the policemen's minds, there was nothing specifically local to justify their interference. Just to make sure they themselves were safe from outside interest, they put a little fright on me and possibly on the doctor.

After this event I realized that I could not live in pre-modern condition: the narrow horizons generate only local interests. An outsider has no friends and no just cause. The law would not be served, unless it serves something local. One can easily be placed in a corner by the unmovable low status of the local fool. No anonymity is ever possible, and at the same time, life is restrictively dull. I realized I have nothing in common with the local people. I was hopelessly modern and therefore, dangerous to their status quo. I felt vulnerable: the pre-modern community did not care for Communism - it was neither in support, nor in opposition - and an anti-Communist would perish there, where everything is known about everybody, not for political reasons but for some obscure, petty local reasons. One single, careless nonconformist step and the furious

revenge of the whole town would be unleashed. In the cave, in the world of shadows, the light was dangerous - any light, any potential change. No matter was it the 'right' or was it the 'wrong' light. The pre-modern people did not choose to live in the cave but because it was the only place they knew how to live in, they became the guardians of the cave, the guardians of themselves. Not a negative quality, yet, not a positive either, just an old, established equilibrium.

Pre-modern life as organized is unfit for modernity: it is focused on people, who are seen as concrete individuals hierarchically placed, and every relation is personal. The spatial organization is stable, bringing a firm knowledge of place and establishes clarity and self-knowledge. Time is unified and uninterrupted: past, present, and future are tightly connected in continuous flow, sustained by extended stories and story telling. The small dimension of the universe and the deep division between the local and the outside obscures local life from uninitiated outside observers, but speaks volumes to an insider the result is a lack of internal conflict in the individual, who knows perfectly well his own place in the structure, the place of the other members of the community, their privileges and responsibilities, his own privileges and responsibilities, the limitations, and the stories based on past family history and material achievements. One rarely narrates his own story, but one's story is constantly narrated in the community. The map of pre-modern community is the only one, shared and understood by the whole community. Modernity is just the opposite of all that: it is focused on universal institutions, which replace individuals with documents, and insist on impersonal relations. The spatial organization is transient and relatively unknown because of constant changes, and replaces knowledge with various illusions. Instead of clarity about one's social place and

the place of others, the individual is confused, and constantly searches for at least some self-knowledge. There is no individual story and no story telling, but rather constant painful attempts at discovering a personal story, usually narrated as an autobiography and taking the form of a written investigative document. It is no longer verbal, but written; it is not carried by the community, but is launched to an indifferent multitude by its possessor, hoping to shatter his impersonality. Time is disrupted – the past plays no role in the life of the individual and the modern community, the future is non-predictable, and only the present counts. Instead of an extended family history, there is only the history of the individual preserved in various documents, often unknown to the person himself. And the documents are often contradictory. One does not know his place in the community because the hierarchies are hidden not just from outsiders, but from the insiders as well. Modern life is mute to the individual, leaving him in uncertainty.

If the individual is publicly known in pre-modern life, he is entirely anonymous in modernity. Instead of one map, there are many maps, overlapping, but rarely meeting each other; maps, which make sense only for the small groups, who created them - modernity is burdened by mythological, not real markers, references are not transmittable. Modernity is a phantasmagoria, insisting to be taken as the 'real thing', yet, constantly confronting itself with narratives negating other competing narratives. If in pre-modernity there is never a first man, in modernity an individual is always the first man, and also - the last one. The individual is lost, he has no story and struggles internally not to build, but to discover one, to find some clarity. Modernity is plagued by embedded obsoleteness.

The city promises a lot, but gives little. I often go out late at night and take a look at the long streets: there is one long string of glowing lights, ending in a shiny dot at the horizon. I hear music and cheerful human voices, coming from somewhere. But around me there is only a dead, silent nothingness. Everything is closed, no people, no life, garbage under my feet. That is here, but there, at the shining horizon, surely there is life, people, fun, glory, something dazzling and interesting. I go to the 'horizon' - nothing is there, but the same empty silence. Now, when I look back, I see on the horizon the flickering, magical promise of the place I already left because I thought it was dead. I still hear the music and noises of a party like before, yet, I never find this place. These are the illusionary, false promises of the city. There was no promise in the country: the night is just a night, dark and closed. After ten p.m. everybody is asleep and there are no flickering lights, music, or illusions. Only night, loudly telling that it is a time for rest; everything will be alive again in the morning, in the proper time.

Sofia confused me as soon as I arrived to live there permanently. It was and is a gray city - I am unable to describe it in any other way. I never liked the city, but became accustomed to it, created a habit of urban living, and, like a drug addict, I am unable to break the habit. I need the city, cannot stand abstinence for long, cannot even imagine living outside the city. The very thought horrifies me. This is now, but when I arrived, I was barely six years old, used to freedom, used to being surrounded by old folks, used to be involved in adult work, used to unruptured time and stable spatial references. Suddenly I was locked in an apartment - going out was only permitted with a supervising adult and only when the supervisor was free from other engagements. There were no more 'mornings', followed by lunch when 'the sun is high enough', and 'afternoons'.

Instead, the clock was introduced: I was to be at school not sometime in the morning, but between 8:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. I was to go home immediately, so to have lunch before 1:00 p.m. I had to do homework until 4:00 or 5:00 p.m. and only after that, and only if there was an adult willing to take me out, I was to go out for about one hour. Time suddenly became a large and problematic factor - I had a strict schedule, but it was not connected to the schedules of others. Adults followed their own schedules, in which I hardly fitted and I could not insist on imposing my schedule on them: 'It is my time to go to the park' was more often met by irritated 'Don't you see I am busy now? Go to your desk and be quiet; don't disturb me!' I felt I was a pariah in this new life governed by the clock.

Not only time was problematic - space became problematic too. Neighbours were not to be visited on just any occasion. No playing in the building stairways. No running around in the apartment. No making noise. There was a little corner, where I was to be and study or play quietly. Even in the park there were areas out of bounds and heavy restrictions: no walking on the grass, no going away, out of adult's sight. I was to be around the bench, where my tired supervisor chose to sit. No playing with water; no playing in the sand or in the mud; and under no circumstances I was to try to involve the supervisor in my game. At home I was always inconveniently in somebody else's way: I was not to help in preparing dinner, not to speak to adults when they were working, and so on. It was so unlike the country, where the adults were happy to involve me in their activities - they knew that I am pretty much useless as a cook or as a gardener, yet, they never excluded me, they were not pressed by the clock to finish this or that, and my 'help' was a non-problematic introduction to the adult life in the form of play. Nor had

they been concerned with my whereabouts, even if I was absent for the whole day - they quickly guessed or were informed by neighbours where I was and they knew I was to return when I got hungry. There was no competition for space.

From the tormenting confusion of a new temporal and spatial organization, another followed - confusion about the place of the people. Old people had no importance, and were as much pariahs as the children - they had no place of their own; they were excluded from the economy of modern life; they had no authority. Grandma had been an elementary school teacher, yet, she was unable to help with my studies - school programs and educational methods had changed and she had not a clue what I was studying. The same was the case with my parents -they were also at a loss if I asked them to explain something to me. The neighbours were entirely unknown people, without any importance or consequences in the life of the family. To preserve the equilibrium of anonymity, a child must be quiet and 'invisible' - noisy behaviour brought complaints from neighbours, complaints viewed unfavourably by the adults, because their convenient disinterested anonymity was suddenly shattered. Instead of being in contact with neighbours and distant relatives, city people were in touch with friends scattered around the town, who popped out in the evenings to visit, taking the little time a kid expects to spend with his parents. I soon learned that every single member of the family had different networks of friends, often unimportant or even disliked by the other family members: Grandma's friends had nothing to do with my parents, nor did my mother's friends have much to do with father and his friends. As for my and my sister's own friends - they were highly undesirable and their visits were heavily restricted. It was a

typical urban situation - other homes were organized in the same way; I was an undesirable visitor to friends' homes as much as they were in visiting me.

Personal relations took a very different meaning: back in the country practicality governed - people were mostly interested in their immediate neighbours, negotiating various concrete acts which only a concrete individual can perform in accord with his status and utility. Even in the pubs people shared drinks with neighbours and not with friends. Friendship was reserved for meetings on the streets, a daily occurrence in any case, so no special arrangements were needed and friends were not missed. In the city one does not meet friends daily - they live far away, they have jobs and schedules, which do not intersect. Friendship was something different, for friends no longer shared a similar life, similar time, and similar geography. To a large degree, friends were not even useful to each other: most of my parents' friends were medical doctors. The general practitioners were helpful, if you catch a cold, but a specialist in forensic medicine, or a brain surgeon, or a medical theoretician - they were not helpful. Not only that, but their professions were incomprehensible to lay people outside their professional field. The same was the case with my parents - what they were doing professionally was outside the scope of their friends' knowledge. Professional talks never took place - instead, friends complained about life under Communism, occasionally shared unprofessional interests and hobbies, and mostly just partied together.

In terms of knowledge and co-dependency, there was very little, if anything, to share with or be useful to others. From a pre-modern perspective, such interactions stripped of any practicality were meaningless, just a waste of time. What good would a friend and his chatter be if you need to hire an unknown plumber to fix the drains? From

the pre-modern perspective, friends took up too much time and space: they come to your home and prevent you from doing whatever it is you should be doing; they come unannounced, they stay late. In the pre-modern life, encounters with friends take place in public - on the streets, in the pubs, not in your private space. In the modern city one meets friends mostly in the private sphere, in the secluded homes, not in public view. Friendship is no longer publicly displayed, it is truly private and takes precedence over practical encounters, which are transformed into strictly business transactions, remaining accidental and anonymous contractual encounters. Personification becomes problematic, and the attempt is to be avoided by annihilating the past, any past.

Pre-modern life knows that disasters come from forces beyond local control, such as natural disasters or foreign invasions. Only when facing them, only when something extraordinary and overwhelming happens, does pre-modern society becomes a mass. Modernity, however, is full of masses and mobs. Modernity does not know disasters - only catastrophes, if Jean Baudrillard is to be trusted[4]. Unlike disasters in pre-modernity, modern catastrophes are not triggered by overwhelming powers, but from mundane, small happenings, which result most often in negative and unrepairable consequences in areas of life having nothing to do with the original mundane event. The chain of causes and effects is broken. A city bus arriving five minutes early or late at the bus stop by itself is inconvenient, an unimportant event. But if one is late for a fixed appointment because of the bus, a catastrophe occurs: very likely one misses an opportunity of a lifetime and a life is shaped differently because of that. The institution scheduling the appointment has nothing to do with late busses and a lot to do with timing: being

impersonal and universal, the institution announced, say, 5:00 p.m. deadline. Buses are irrelevant to the deadline, not at all in its orbit.

I met a university friend and we went to the nearest pub to have a drink. In the pub we noticed with irritation funeral music was coming from the loudspeakers. We voiced a protest. The waiters ignored our protest silently. We commented even louder about the stupid music. A burly man heard us from a nearby table and wanted to know what kind of comments we were making: anti-Communist comments perhaps? In time like that? What was with the time, we wanted to know, it was winter, but so what? The fellow became angrier. Meantime, the establishment was closing down early. By chance we overheard exiting patrons saying that Andropov has died that day. We paid and hurriedly went away - by a chance, we avoided a catastrophe. The Soviet leader has died, three days of national mourning has been announced on radio and TV, but we did not hear it. Since the information was disseminated in the modern way - universally and impersonally, nobody from the pub staff thought of informing total strangers what was going on. Our comments may have been catastrophic to us: we appeared to be implying that Communism was a 'winter' and the death of Andropov - worth celebrating and cheering. It would have cost us dearly - at least expulsion from the university. We barely avoided a modern catastrophe, which falls on unsuspecting individuals and has no remedy.

The catastrophes the depersonalized individual suffers in modernity lead to desperate attempts at establishing some identity, something which can be recognized by others and it is in the mob, in the crowd, in the mass where identification and recognition

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[4] Baudrillard, Jean: *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, SAGE Publications, London, 1998,

emerge. Perhaps Louis Ferdinand Celine provides the best description of the feelings inside a crowd, the comfortable melting into the mass and the temporary aggressive clarity of vision in black and white: we and them[5]. We - good; they - bad. We will teach them a lesson, so they will remember us forever. The sheer destructive force of the mass, the modern phenomenon, born out of impersonal universality and universal anonymity. Walking on one of the major streets in Sofia in the spring of 2000, I noticed the arrival of the riot Police, closing the street and directing traffic elsewhere. 'What is going on?', I asked a nearby policeman. 'Soccer. The 'Blues' and the 'Reds' play today.' The arch-rivals derby. The 'Blue' fans were to travel through this street to the stadium. Other streets were closed, designated for the 'Red' fans. The two masses were not to meet, so major fights between them could be prevented. The Police were just trying to ensure that. I stayed for a while to see what would happen. An absurd modern event soon followed: masses of 'Blue' fans marched in. They were somewhat thin, but compensated for their small numbers with extreme aggressiveness. Boys and girls, predominantly under legal age, obviously drunk and drugged, and shouting barbarous slogans and songs were advancing smashing everything on their way - windows, cars, city buses. They constantly tried to attack the riot Police, who did not respond to the provocations. After the last idiot passed by, I went home and watched the game on TV, wanting to see the continuation.

I was not disappointed: the game itself was evidently not important to the fans of either team. Traditionally, each group occupies an opposite sector of the stadium, so they do not get directly in contact during the game, satisfied with shouting obscene abuses.

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pp. 160-161.

[5]. Celine, Louis- Ferdinand: *Death on the Installment Plan*, New Directions, New York, 1971, pp. 307-310.

The intermission came and the 'Blue' fans suddenly began breaking the plastic seats of their sector and put them on fire. Riot Police came out and surrounded the Blue' sector, ready for action. The appearance of the Police made the crowd mad and the police were showered with broken pieces of plastic. The public attempted to attack the Police and was turned back.

I lost interest at this point and did not watch any longer. In the evening, on the TV news, it was announced that after the game a man sitting in a cafe far away from the stadium was killed by homemade bomb, hurled by a group of 'Blue' fans, chasing 'Red' fans. Two boys were arrested. One of them was so stoned, he could not legally have been charged with anything, and was released. The second was identified as the possible perpetrator and made a full confession. It was an idiotic one: he did not mean to kill anybody, he just wanted to beat some 'Red' fans and that was that. Nothing personal, nothing malicious, he was just throwing his firecrackers inside public establishments out of excitement. Yes, he knew homemade bombs were illegal, but so what? He did not mean any harm, he did not understand all the fuss. Somebody died, too bad, but what did he have to do with it[6]?

A modern catastrophe with multiple aspects occurred this day. The city was placed under siege in a sense: a city of a million and a half population was taken hostage by no more than 5000 hooligans (the recorded number of fans on the stadium, according to ticket sales). Traffic was blocked and inconveniently diverted for hours, so the barbarians could reach their destination. Why should the whole city accommodate itself to a small number of idiots? Because they are a mass, a mob, and the only way of

[6] . In February, 2004, the boy was cleared from the charges against him.

preventing bigger catastrophes is to accommodate the mob at the expense of everybody else. But the mob is not easily satisfied - the mob is not happy without opposition and opposition is everybody who is not in the mob. Hence, the smashed windows and the trashed automobiles. Entirely impersonal: the mob is not aiming at anybody in particular, it is attacking whatever comes its way. The Police do not interfere - partly, to avoid more damage; partly - to avoid accusations of Police brutality, for unlike the mob, the Police are an identifiable institution. The mob is not an institution at all and can be neither identified, nor held responsible.

Primordial unrestrained eruptions of violence occurred at the stadium - ironically, it is an entirely modern and very distant institution which regulations made the stadium particularly convenient for burning. The requirements from FIFA, the world soccer federation, dictate that stadiums have easy to break and burn plastic seats. Years ago stadiums had heavy wooden benches - less convenient for sitting, but very difficult to break and use for weapons. Unsatisfied by the initial results of their assault on objects, the crowd went searching for human targets - fan groups chased and fought each other on the streets of the whole city. As a side result, an innocent man is killed. A personal catastrophe, and not only personal - the whole modern city suffered from its modernity, incapable of preventing or dealing with catastrophic events. No one is guilty, no one is responsible, no one is to be blamed. It may be your own co-worker who 'impersonally' broke your head, or your own son the one who smashed the windows of your store - but that was yesterday and yesterday has nothing to do with today. You have just been just a victim of violent pranks, your life is changed as a result, but the best option is 'to give it up' and not try to understand. You are left alone - you and your 'problems'.

The modern emphasis on impersonal universal institutionalization affects all aspect of existence. Reality is constantly obscured and becomes fiction. One cannot depend on it. Reality is constantly confronted by conflicting narratives. A modern city is transient - it preserves a fairly stable skyline, but under it nothing from yesterday remains. The shops, the pubs, the coffee houses of my childhood were gone so long ago I cannot remember all that used to be. It is meaningless to try telling my sister's daughters what used to be in the neighbourhood - the markers are gone, there are new ones now. The past does not make sense, it is not instructive, educational, useful. It breaks communications. There are competing narratives and maps. My father still irritates me when referring to some places in Sofia by businesses and names gone so long ago. I do not understand what he has in mind. I am no better than him, though - whenever I use slang, and mention the names my own crowd used, he has no idea what I am referring to. A simple task like establishing an address becomes a conflict: we make no sense to each other, cannot establish anything and get on each other's nerves. And very soon we realize how much we hate each other, for none is really an authority to the other, but both challenges endanger each other's personal narratives - we invalidate them, we compete for recognition, for our personal story, which we both denied. We share nothing. Even pain is individual and is faced with cold indifference.

The disrupted time is probably best presented in the tiny parable by Franz Kafka 'Give It Up!'[7] In it, a man suddenly discovers that his watch shows a different time the town clock. As a result, the man loses his way, cannot find the road to the train station and negative consequences are hinted, all stemming from his 'lateness'. He asks a

[7] . Kafka, Franz: *The Basic Kafka*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1979, p.157.

policeman about the way to the station and is told to 'give it up'. It is a parable of the modern human condition not just because of the description of modern phenomena - the wrist watch, the train station - but because of the relation: the man asked an institution, represented by the policeman, the only reliable source of information. The man is nameless, an anonymous citizen, conversing with an authoritative institution - the only permitted, proper way of seeking contact. The citizen is met with indifference: to the institution the individual does not matter at all. Yet, was it possible for the institution to provide a meaningful answer? A positive answer is doubtful - to preserve its universal authority, the institution must deny responsibility, obscure answers, and brush the individual out of its sight. Dealing with time becomes a part of the obfuscation.

Back in pre-modern Koprivshtitza, time was 'long' and generous. It was seasonal time, stretched during the year. Correspondingly, everything moved slowly, irritatingly slowly if you needed something to be done 'right now'. But the slowness was helpful in grasping reality, in understanding it, and clarifying it. The 'long' time helped tremendously in avoiding conflicts with spatial arrangements. The only clear sign of time was the church bell at 5:30 p.m. Once a day the time was 'told' - as a confirmation that time existed and it was one and the same for all. There were no 'weekends' - the same daily activities were continued in the officially non-working days. Even the hopeless drunks were at bed by 10:00 p.m. Modern state holidays were most often attached to old holidays and interpreted as such. Rest, and festivities were mostly in the winter, the least active agricultural season. In this 'long' time one rarely made an appointment for '9 a.m.' - people scheduled appointments by saying 'come in the morning'. When exactly did not matter, there was no big competition for the hours. Of course, outsiders were not

accommodated - they would go the government office during working hours and find it closed, the clerk absent.

One night we received a telegram in Sofia from the sister of my Grandfather - Grandpa had a stroke this day, she informed us, and the whole family hurriedly went to the small town. Grandpa had recovered somewhat in the meantime. We arrived after midnight and found him well enough to express strong displeasure about our panic. He refused to go to a hospital. In the heat of the moment, the telegram escaped attention and its unusualness came to me much later: post offices did not work after 5:00 p.m. How was it possible for this telegram to be sent at night? Certainly, in a big city it would not have been possible - the institution prescribed a strict, universal schedule, and did not recognize any individual strokes. In the small town it was simple: the old lady went to the house of the post master, talked to him, and he or she did her a personal favour. The actual time did not matter at all in the realm of personal relations.

In the city time is everything and nothing. One must be at school or at work by 8:00 a.m. Every lateness is severely punished. But which clock is right? The time announced on the radio every hour? The personal wrist watch? This or that public clock? The clock in the school or in the office? They often show different times, they are not synchronized, there is no established primacy of one clock over the other, regardless what the institution dealing with universal public time prescribes. Time is obscured by competing information, all of which claims universal authority, yet, there is only one authoritative time, often unknown to the person who has to be in accord with it. Here the past becomes irrelevant: only yesterday my watch was synchronized with the clock at work. There is no way I am to be late today, but I am late. Unknown to me, there was a

power shortage during the night, the electric clock at work had stopped for ten minutes, then started again. Or, the clock runs too quickly. Neither discrepancy is beneficial for me: if I arrive early, I am just wasting time, for my arrival does not count for anything. If I am late, then I am punished.

Modern time is problematic, because it is compressed time, short time. It is a year, shortened to a day, or, at most to a week. Seasons do not matter in modernity - instead of seasonal activities, one repeats the same tasks day after day. However, the compressed time is more wasteful than the seasonal 'long' time: I can hardly be late for a rural appointment 'tomorrow morning', but if I am to be punctual for a city appointment 'at 10:00 a.m. sharp', I better arrive early with nothing to do but waiting, for I am never sure which clock is the authoritative one for this appointment. Anger builds during the wasted time, which cannot find a proper outlet - no one is guilty, so unlike the country, where person who wastes time will suffer retaliation and afterwards the stability of relations will be restored. In the modern situation, it is only my time wasted, and my anger eventually is vented out in ways which do not bring any satisfaction or balance.

The compressed modern time replaces the leisurely, festive winter, with the evening and the weekend. The weekend plays little role in the pre-modern setting, and the evening only looks alike a city evening. Rural men, sitting in the pubs, are neither given to extremes, nor are they really restive - pubs are their evening sanctuaries, where they conduct mostly private business by negotiating deals slowly with each other. Keeping an eye on tomorrow, they do not stay after ten p.m. Modernity takes the evening as an entirely different and extreme time - one forgets completely about work, meets friends and parties. At last it is a private time, when one becomes a person, an individual, and is

taken as such by the small circle of friends. Tomorrow matters little - one sees friends rarely, and without even noticing, abandons himself in the joy of the personal meeting. Soon it is 3:00 a.m., one is hopelessly drunk, and it is already the dreaded tomorrow - one sleeps 'quickly', is rudely awakened by the alarm clock, and suffering from hangover rushes to work. Work does not care about yesterday and hangovers, it has to be done by the cursing wretch pressed by the 'short' modern time.

But there is another scenario of modern life in which one is tempted by the promises of the city. One, in all honesty, is in the city because there are so many interesting things to do - the libraries, the art galleries, the theatres, the cinemas, the stadiums, the thousand opportunities for diversity. Unlike in the country, one is not restricted to the dullness of repetition, or going to be bored by the same people, the same conversations, the same place. For most of the time though, it is an illusory promise of the city - one is too tired after work and does not go to the thousand entertainments at one's disposal. It is the mere knowledge of existing opportunities which sustains the city's illusion, and it remains an illusion as long as it is not practiced.

Suddenly one evening the modern man decides to explore the opportunities and finds them closed to him: he wants to see a particular movie and there are no available tickets; a particular play, but it was not being performed that night; he wants to get drunk and there are no available seats in the pub; he wants to party with friends and everybody is busy. The extremes of the modern evenings are always conflicting, inconvenient - one's expectations are not only not satisfied, but often are entirely negative from the perspective of someone else. My friend and I wanted to party on the day Andropov died but there was no that could happen. On many summer occasions police came by to stop

parties organized in my back yard because we were too noisy, the neighbours complaining that they had to sleep and be at work in the morning. My favourite afternoon naps had been ruined by a drummer living across the street, practicing every day. It was the universality and impersonality of the modern city, which satisfied no one and led to impotent anger and rage.

The biggest inconvenience proved to be the weekend - one of the highest achievements of modern life. The universal rest time. The family time. The time one dreams of during the week. Finally everybody is at home and stepping on everybody else's tows. True Sofians greatly preferred to spend the weekend behind doors - they were tired of the crowds, of the rush, of everything. Staying at home led to vicious family scandals - during the week, everybody had a different schedule and the family met only in the evening. To spend a whole day together was inconvenient, the lack of privacy making grandparents and children superfluous and in the way. One family member wants to spend the weekend sleeping, but another wants to do a thorough vacuum cleaning of the house. One wants to organize the library, another has invited guests for coffee and the library cannot be used until the guests are gone, but it is evening by then and there is no more time for the library. Accustomed to independence and solitude during the week, the members of the family cannot stand each other. Very often time is wasted in wondering what to do, for unlike the week days, there are no scheduled tasks and deadlines in the weekend - time has to be organized in an unfamiliar way. And finally, the thought that Monday is coming makes everybody grumpy.

Hard core Sofians in general partied on the weekend nights and slept during the days. My own family was not an exception from these patterns and ever since childhood I

greatly prefer to work during the weekends and to have days off during the week, when everybody else is at work and out of the way. Weekends are quite restrictive and oppressive to the solitary modern man - the pretence of family weekends, at least at home, was abandoned by mid-1970s. Instead every member organized his or her weekend individually. Plans were rarely announced to the rest of the family, so people had to deduce what was happening: if my father was not at home for dinner Friday evening, it meant he was most likely gone to Koprivshtitza - which meant freedom for the rest of us. I was at a night long party - my mother was relieved because she would have some peaceful time without loud rock'n'roll music. My mother went to a party - my sister was happy since with no one home, she could invite friends. My sister went to a party somewhere else and the neighbours were relieved.

In the temporal unity of pre-modern life, everyday objects lack modern interpretations in terms of intellectual signifiers and signs, they are concrete objects with mundane meaning, fully understood by everybody - a chair is a chair and nothing but a chair. It belongs to a household, it has only practicality, and is an incorporated part of the family story. A chair serves a long time as a place for sitting and nobody makes any fuss about it. When the chair finally shows signs of decay, there is no panic by the owner of the chair, suddenly surprised by a new development. A decaying chair is quietly replaced by a new one, which had been planned long time ago and money has been reserved or accumulated for the purchase. A chair cannot present any surprise, cannot disturb the flow of life, it is simply replaced, yet, it is as if it was not replaced, for the new chair is a simple continuation of the unity of time and space, and of the family story. This is not the

case in modern life: objects belong to particular individuals and nobody else. They have built in obsoleteness and no story.

Grandma was a typical modern example: her professional knowledge was useless, her cultural knowledge was useless, and finally her material belongings were useless. Ironically, Grandma was a much more 'liberated' woman than my mother: she was a modern woman, but in already obsolete way - she was not into taking care of grandchildren, in part because as a true Sofian, she used to employ a 'domestic worker' to take care of the house chores and her own children. Correspondingly, she was not into cooking, cleaning house, any of the daily household duties. My sister and I mostly fought with Grandma over space - one of the reasons my sister still hates the apartment of our childhood and currently never goes to it. By and large, Grandma had a separate, individual existence, conflicting with my parents in terms of food and guests - she never cooked and her friends were people my parents did not wish to congregate with. Cooking, however, was deeply connected with the obsoleteness of things modern: in the past there were no electric or gas stoves with ovens. We, however, had an electric stove and mother cooked in it, but not Grandma - she used the neighbourhood bakeries, which existed until the end of the 1960s, places designed specifically for modern women without electric stoves. One prepares her stew at home, brings it to the bakery, tells the baker how she wants it done; the baker tells her when the stew will be ready, the woman goes away to attend to other errands or visit friends. When she comes back after two hours the stew is done and she brings it home. Those bakeries did not bake anything else, but food for private homes. Grandma used them for most of her life and correspondingly she possessed various large dishes suitable for the said bakeries. But when electric ovens

came in vogue, the bakeries were closed, and the dishes for them became useless, unfit for the smaller and differently shaped electric ovens in the home. The same was the case with other objects belonging to Grandma.

The old objects lost their meaning and their usefulness, and with them Grandma's life story became obsolete in cultural terms: it was not only her topographic references disappeared, but, most important, there was nothing Grandma would teach my mother. Unlike Grandma, mother had to cook at home, take care of the house, and take care of her children - of all of that Grandma knew very little. She knew a lot about choosing and hiring a 'domestic worker', but there were no more domestic workers. Grandma knew a lot about organizing free time, as was proper for a bourgeois woman. There were no more bourgeois women, however - my mother had to have a full time job, as prescribed by the law of the land. When Grandma passed away, her belongings had to go - even father, who was devoted to Grandma, was unable to find a way of preserving mementos of her life: almost all of her belongings, with the exception of photographs and few vases, were hopelessly useless. They were only taking up space and the family got rid of them quickly. Thus, nothing remained from Grandma's life. It was modern and untransmittable.

When I was a child, my friends and I discovered the obsolete past by discovering the topography of the neighbourhood. Hiding from unsympathetic adults, we organized expeditions in the basements of the buildings at first and later in the more difficult to penetrate attics. Both storage areas were a giant collection of the useless past: objects who nobody remembered anymore or cared for. Old clothes, books, photographs, furniture, bottles with medicine - the attics and the basements were the graveyards of

things. Who they belonged to originally was impossible to guess, but it was possible to see their obsoleteness. One discovers a slightly old textbook on architecture and realizes that somebody studied from this book not long ago, but the it was already outdated and useless. Was the knowledge of the former student, now a professional architect, useless too, since it was knowledge acquired from this book? Was the building, hiding the old book, also outdated and obsolete, since it was built by even older knowledge, long before the book was written? Well, in some ways, yes: the basements were, as a rule, disasters. Water ran through the concrete foundations, flooding the basements and old, broken electrical wires threatened the explorers with instant electrocutions. There were bomb shelters, after all - and there was no war, so they were truly obsolete but not abandoned and destroyed.

In contrast the dead objects were really abandoned. They were often were in perfect shape, stored and forgotten. Those objects presented the strangest of modern paradoxes: there is a fine library waiting in the attic, but in the apartment the owner complains of having nothing to read; there is a fine coat above - below the owner of the coat is troubled by having nothing to wear. But the paradox only looks like a paradox - the owner is not the real owner; the real owner died and his things died with him. Or, the more mundane modern problem – that of constant change. Things went out of fashion and that moment was the end of them; they had to be replaced forever. Those objects were story-less, just like their owners. Those objects were things heavily assaulted by modernity and defeated for good.

There was occasional resistance to the modern assault, with particularly disastrous effects: apartments transformed into museums by owners, desperately trying to sustain

the validity of their past, to maintain some sense of self. In those attempts the things were obviously dead, entirely useless. Vigilant owners forbade visitors from touching, moving, or sitting on their furniture. Uncomfortably, one walked on tiptoes and spoke in whispers. Cold order rules such apartments, everything has a proper place, out of human reach, just like in a museum. There is no life in such places, no comfort, no friendliness. This is preservation at the expense of living, preservation of the past by taking the present a hostage; a mummified existence of both people and things in a shrine dedicated to ghosts. Friends, growing up in such households, hated their homes and could hardly wait for grandparents and parents to die and the museum destroyed. Usually, total chaos replaced the museums, an unconscious, miserable victory of modern life, successfully annihilating the past.

Modernity has no use for objects that belong to somebody else. When the grandfather of a friend of mine died, my friend sold his library. I asked him why and he explained: 'We have three libraries at home - Grandpa's, Dad's, and mine. Grandpa was an historian, father is a doctor, and I am an engineer. Most of Grandpa's books are useless to my father and to myself, we have no professional interest in Grandpa's field. There is no justification for keeping Grandps's books, they only take up space.' Most of my own library and my archive suffered the same fate when I emigrated from Bulgaria - either redundant books, or books of interest to no one but me. A small remaining part lays abandoned in the basement, along with part of the vast archive of my father. His archive is so huge, it cannot even be organized. Even father rarely touches it, so it is predictable that it will go to the garbage bin when he departs this world. By and large, modern objects are mute and useless to others.

The whole modern city is like the objects hidden in it. I look at the map of Sofia and the only way I can grasp the wholeness, or so I think. After living for nearly 30 years in Sofia, after exploring it, after pretending of being a 'native' and not at all an ignorant newcomer, I hardly know the city. Most of it is entirely unknown to me, never was there. Probably there was not any reason to know it all, perhaps the parts I never visited were nor worth visiting. It is likely so, yet the simple fact remains - unlike pre-modern Koprivshtitza, I know very little about Sofia and its inhabitants. Modernity is largely ignorant, competing narratives invalidating each other, memories are assaulted by transience and knowledge is evasive, incomplete, relative. The pre-modern town has one and only one map, firmly known to everybody while the modern city has many maps, all of them invalid. My map of the neighbourhood is not the map of my father, who grew up there too. Both maps compete with each other, and although they are both confirmed by the consistency of the general topography, they are false - they are not helpful to the other, not informative and based on entirely different narratives. There is no agreement between our maps, and they are far from having been the only maps - other maps exist, unknown and unsuspected by neither my father, nor me.

The city changes all the time, annihilating its own past, and with it - the personal stories of the moderns inhabiting it. By a chance I remember Grandpa's personal map - when in Sofia, he took long walks in an older part of the city, finally reaching the vast 'King Boris Garden' park, connecting the centre of Sofia with the neighbouring Vitosha mountain. It was a private map, as much as I can guess, but I couldn't find what the map was referring to - was Grandpa nostalgic for his past life and revisiting it by walking on a tiny route related to past years, people, habits? Or was this route connected to his habit of

taking long hikes in the mountains? He never told me why he always took me on this route; we talked about so many other things, but not about this route. I am still fond of this route - it is my memory of Grandpa. I am also thankful to him for introducing me to parts of the city which I may not have known otherwise, but there is no story making his map significant and transmittable. Not knowing what this map meant to him, I can only repeat his steps visiting the mausoleum of my own past. Nothing else. Anonymity.

My own past became obsolete when the neighbourhood was transformed in 1980. Remnants of the past of Sofia were preserved there until the change: at the beginning of Twentieth Century the area was still outside the city limits, unpopulated land, divided into public and private field properties. The 6th Sofia Infantry Regiment of Bulgarian army was permanently stationed there, away from the city. It was the barracks of the Regiment which existed until 1980, but meantime this "outside" not only became "inside", but became part of the central zone of Sofia, a downtown area. My father grew up there in the 1930s. Earlier, the end of 19th Century Grandpa was a superintendent of a vast property, belonging to friends of his. It had been an extravagant job - nothing was grown on the land. It was preserved wild, so the owners could go hunting on weekends. Grandpa was to keep the shack ready and supplied for a weekend hunt. Apart from that, he went hunting with the owners and partied with them. Later he bought a piece of property pretty much where the hunting grounds had been and built a small house. Even later I went to live in the same house. Three generations of my family were a part of the same place and, in this way, a part of the invisible history of Sofia.

The old regimental grounds had changed little during all the years: there were still some military barracks and a little army unit stationed there. It remained the military jail

of Sofia, but most of the old barracks had been converted into apartments, rented by the families of petty officers. The sobering station for drunks, run by the Police was also there. The simple monuments - just two high walls covered with metal plaques with inscripted names - of the soldiers from the regiment killed in the wars of the first half of 20th century, were there. The rest of the military ground was converted into various sport utilities - soccer fields and such. In the 1960s a summer theatre was built providing free entertainment for the citizens. The plan was changed or abandoned, as modern projects often are, pretty much at the moment the theatre was completed. The open theatre, forgotten by the city hall, became a favourite gathering place for gamblers and high school students - it was a hidden place and it was almost impossible to surprise people there: they see you before you see them. That was why teenagers and gamblers loved it - the theatre became commonly known as 'Monte Carlo'. My teenage years were spent mostly at Monte Carlo. Next to the former military grounds was a small cooperative market at the end of the plaza 'St. Nedelya', much beloved by Sofians and named after a medieval benefactress of Sofia, canonized by the Church. At the far end of the soccer grounds was the little commercial train station 'Pioneer', one of the stops of the circular line serving various businesses and industries. The neighbourhood bought their Christmas trees and coal for heating in the winter from the station's market. In this area boys and girls learned some sense of belonging to their city, for it was still a place with a story, connecting the past with the present.

By 1980 there was no more Monte Carlo, plaza, and train station - there was a giant pit instead and in two years the state erected the huge, concrete and marble atrocity, named 'People's Palace of Culture'. Our memories were annihilated. There were no more

references, no familiar surroundings, no place to go and quietly visit the past. My generation hated the intruder - a classmate vowed never to put a foot on the territory of the 'People's Palace', a rather ridiculous promise, doomed to fail. There was not much culture in the monster, but many a pub, and soon enough the area became a favorite gathering place for people from the whole city. It was the end of the neighbourhood and the end of personal stories - and not just any stories, but our own. The new people created new narratives for a new topology. No one remembers 'St. Nedelya' plaza, the commemorative monuments, the old barracks - younger generations do not understand what we were talking about; the newcomers were entirely ignorant as well, and our story and memories died with it. It was a painful exercise of modernity, of anonymity, and muteness, resulting only in anxiety. The modern city constantly betrays and abandons its own children, making lost strangers out of them.

I made a wrong turn and was immediately lost. I had an appointment at fairly easy to find an address, yet, I turned in a wrong street and appeared in an unknown area. Most likely the large 'bedroom' complex did not even exist when I left the country in 1989. After ten minutes walk, I realized that I could neither find the address nor return back. I had no idea where I was. It was an inhospitable area, so similar to all new housing complexes in the periphery of a modern city having too many inhabitants and running out of the ability to accommodate them. It was hopeless - there were no people on the streets, no taxi cabs, no businesses, no schools, no restaurants, no stores, no pubs. Only thick dust and endless ugly panel buildings, all the same. My only desire was to find a public phone and call the person waiting for my arrival, apologize, explain my situation, and ask for directions.

Phones were hard to find, but finally I discovered three of them. And in front of the phones my unreadiness, my ignorance of the city hit me - once upon a time, one had to insert a coin in the pay phone and dial the number. Not anymore - I was stupidly looking at three phones, belonging to three different phone companies and could not use any. They did not take coins, but required different phone cards for each company. I did not know where to buy a card, and if I did know - there was not a single store as far as could see. I cursed myself - who else - and continued walking in the dust. After an hour of steady walking there was a bus stop crowded with people. I went to them. 'Excuse me, I am lost and need some directions', I approached a man looking approachable. 'Get out of here', he answered, 'Go beg money somewhere else'. 'But I don't need money - I am trying to find an address', I protested. 'Yeah, right. You guys always say that', he retorted and ignored me. I pleaded to the multitude. One woman responded. She had read about the name of the street I was looking for, but had no idea where it could be.

The reason the name was familiar to her was the recent renaming of some streets in the city. She was sure only that the street was not around here. As for the old name, no one knew anything - entirely an unknown street in this part of town. The bus the people were waiting was going to another place unknown to me, and I continued walking until I entered a familiar region, spotted a familiar bus number, took it and returned to civilization, where I was able to find the needed address. I lost two hours. I wasted two hours of the time of the person I had an appointment with. I acquired no new knowledge of the city, for I never learned where I had been - on the city map, it was a faceless new housing complex. I realized I was a foreigner in my hometown. I don't know it, and never will. It will change again and again, always one step ahead of me, always making

mockery of my memories, always annihilating my past and challenging me with an incomprehensible present. It was not a city hostile specifically to me - it was hostile to everybody, indiscriminately. At least I was returning to the centre, to the city proper, but I pitied the people on the bus stop, the inhabitants of the complex - the city will never be their friend. It gave them nothing. No wonder they felt alienated and disrespectful of the city.

I understand the soccer boys and girls thrashing everything in their way. I understand them, but cannot sympathize with them. They are storyless people from the complexes. They are anonymous. They are abandoned. They have no personality. They encounter only institutions. They retaliate not even in pre-modern, but in a primitive way - brutally sabotaging modernity, destroying it, killing it. They are tribal, belonging to the colour of the tribe, and act only as a tribe. Only in this way do they achieve a faint, momentary identity. A simulacrum of identity. They are angry and unpredictable. They have nothing to lose, they spend aimless hours in obscure city buses, in neighbourhoods worse than a village, facing enormous modern emptiness. Their names are stolen by the institutions and attached to documents, documents having more life than the living human beings. They retaliate by abandoning their documented names and adopting barbarous nicknames. They assault the city, using its own rules - anonymity and transience. They invade the city briefly and announce their presence, their mere existence to it by spraying graffiti on its walls. Then they run away, back to the complexes, in the wasteland of nothingness. Baudrillard seems right on this, for to some degree I am

repeating his insights from 'Symbolic Exchange and Death'[8]. I understand the soccer hooligans to this degree.

I am unsympathetic to them not because of the violence, but because of their cowardice and impotence. They unleash their violence on people similar to themselves, on the rest of the anonymous, powerless, memoryless, storyless citizens. To the state and its institutions they do nothing: the state is unmoved by their actions, even when they kill people. The state is unmoved, because the modern status quo of established impersonality is not threatened at all - it does not matter for the state is it ridiculous to put the whole city to a standstill, because 2000 idiots may traverse the streets. Not dealing with individual persons, the state cannot be really troubled - the state distributed universality: now the idiots are permitted to do something at the expense of everybody else; later the situation is reversed. Keep moving and changing, but remain in a state of shock. Stick to the illusions of the present, do not compare them to the past. The young hooligans are not aware of their hopeless condition as pawns. Their destructive power effectively serves the modern annihilation of the past and the triumph of the changing present - the hooligans simply clear obstacles, simply clear space for the ever present newness. They destroy obsolete things - a car is burnt, so a new car will be bought; windows are smashed - new windows will be installed; a man is killed... in the eyes of modernity, perhaps he too was already obsolete. It is the end of authority, at the bottom, for authority is personality, and addresses one personally. Pre-modernity and modernity clash in the city's outskirts, in the housing complexes, in the incorporated villages, in suburbia - in this clash there is no

[8] . Baudrillard, Jean: *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, SAGE Publications, London, 1998, Chapter 'The Order of Simulacra', particularly pp.76-84.

winner, there is only life ground to dust and piles of monstrous garbage, the remnants of the battlefield.

Hierarchical pre-modern structures are oppressive and undemocratic, but not for all: most pre-modern people accept the structure unproblematically, because there is clarity. One knows one's position, the positions of others, the limits of his own power and the power of others over him. Obligations and privileges are balanced – no one has an absolute power, no one is entirely powerless. Knowing the structure, one knows how to act in every moment, how and whom to address in any given situation. The universal democratic structure, based on impersonality only obscures hierarchies - they still exist, but they are unknown to people and are never mentioned officially. The hierarchies reveal themselves to a person only in problematic, if not outright catastrophic, situations. Precautions are taken in order to minimize dangerous encounters, yet, at the same time everybody needs recognition, a sign of respect from the others, something confirming his personality.

The attempts at achieving recognition become grotesque. Not knowing the real structural position of his encounters, one is possessed by fear of and disrespect for others at the same time, for no one is really an authority. The tribal soccer fans represent the 'in-your-face' form of the attempt for recognition - the recognition of the group. It is a misguided attempt, for the group consists of unknown, anonymous individuals - they become distinguished individuals only when the criminal law takes an interest in them, a recognition indeed, but an entirely negative one. Most attempts at achieving recognition are more sophisticated, depending to a large degree on the unequal distribution of information - whoever has more information then others, has a better chance.

In the early 1970s father took me to a soccer game - the 'Whites' were playing against the 'Reds', the former was the much hated government-sponsored team, representing the army. Unknown to me there was a client of my father with us, a supporter of the 'Whites'. The game developed badly - the 'Reds' were unable to score and were helped by the referee, determined to provide them with a win. The 'White' supporters whistled with displeasure; the 'Red' supporters were somewhat embarrassed and silent. Suddenly the referee gave a penalty shot to the 'Red', so obviously unjust that the public just laughed. However, the 'White' players protested, there was a little dispute on the field, one of the players kicked the ball into the referee and was sent off. The whole team decided to leave and abandon the game; officials went on the field to convince the 'Whites' to continue. It was tense. The client of my father went berserk at this moment: he stood up, madly shouting obscenities mixed with something dangerously sounding like anti-government rant. He called the 'Reds' by the commonly used derogatory nickname - 'Soup' - itself borrowed from the traditional nickname for army petty officers, but in his speech everything he said had quite obvious anti-Communist overtones.

Two army Colonels were sitting in front of us and at one point they could not take the abuse any longer: in uniforms, they had to act - otherwise, the rest of the public would think they were agreeing with the abuser. They turned to him and sternly told him to shut up. But the man grinned: 'Or yeah?', he said somewhat happily, 'And what exactly you are gonna do, soupsters? Let's go out and see what you are gonna do!' The Colonels avoided the challenge, even when they were degraded to petty officers. They thought

quickly - they did not know the man, his position, his power, nothing. They judged him dangerous, for he was fearless, and decided not to pursue the matter further.

After the game, at home, I expressed my appreciation to my father - the man was obviously brave, how come? Father smiled mischievously: 'He is a Colonel from State Security'. The Secret Police, the sister institution of the Soviet KGB. The army Colonels did not know who he was, seeing only a civilian, but he knew who they were seeing their uniforms and had a great advantage by this knowledge. And the advantage was even greater in keeping the situation unresolved - the SS man did not tell who he was and the army men never knew what danger they were near to. Keeping hierarchies hidden is the modern way: many actions and reactions are performed completely unknown to the receiver of the consequences. It is one of the ways of modern transformations of ordinary events into catastrophes - suddenly, without warning, without ever knowing who and why triggered them, a person receives heavy blows and his life is changed.

I went to a party, organized by a former schoolmate and was introduced to a young man, who happened to be one of the highest activists of Young Communist Organization of the Law School, which I was attending. I did not know him - he was a third or a fourth year student; I was beginning my second; I had nothing to do with activists. We were total strangers to each other. During the night, this man told me casually that a year ago he tried to find me and expel me from the University, because an acquaintance of his, working briefly under my management, complaint to him from me. It has been unofficial complaint, delivered at a party. I listened to this story, trying not to betray any emotions, but turning to ice inside: this guy had been serious, he had tried to expel me, but because of incomplete documents could not establish my existence and that

was what had saved me. I was completely ignorant of the danger. I asked him whether he was he intending to investigate the matter properly then - to hear my side of the story, for example. No, he said, he never thought of doing that. He planned just to expel me without any investigations and fuss.

His casual, matter of fact, impersonal narrative got to me. Well, a year ago I was about to be cooked, but now the situation was reversed. I knew who he was, but he did not know I had a friend in the highest ranks of his own organization. A vicious friend, the head of the Control Section of the Central Committee of the Young Communists. A man, who was always on the alert to find irregularities and crush offenders, guided by hatred for 'opportunists, abusing the system, and because of whose abuse ordinary people do not believe in Communism.' So the next day I called my powerful friend and he promised to make a small inquiry. The results of the inquiry were favourable: the guy from the Law School had limited protection, well below the level of my friend. Further, this guy was in charge of the finances of the faculty Young Communists and very vulnerable - there were certain misused funds and a cover-up documents, an easy prey for my friend, for that was exactly his job. 'I can conduct an audit, beginning tomorrow. Nobody will know until then, so he would not be prepared at all, and the result of the audit will be the end of him', said my friend, 'Do you want me to do it?' I said 'no'. Not yet. I reserved this opportunity for a rainy day. The potential victim never learned what was plotted against him, just like I did not learn what he did plot against me.

What such clandestine operations amount to is pathetic: an attempt at discovering existing hidden hierarchies, acting upon them, and faintly hoping to assert some self-importance and recognition. There was nothing personal in the original situation, nothing

going on between this man and myself; I was not a particular goal of his, I was incidental. This guy met a girl at a party, and decided to impress her in order to take her to bed. She happened to work under me previously, had some grudge, and learning he had some power in the institution I belonged to, complained about me. The guy promised to crush me just in the hope of sleeping with the girl. I had no idea who she was - even asking for her name was meaningless: I managed 400 people at the time and knew few. It was also impossible to establish how I had offended her. A whole year had passed, but the nature of the original offence, if there had been one, did not have anything to do with the later developments. But sexual desires did and even they were irrelevant to my case. It was a catastrophe, developing from entirely unrelated accidents. Perhaps the awareness of the catastrophic nature of our accidental encounter led me to choose a course of retaliation by catastrophic means. Information was the essential weapon, I collected more information than my opposition and had therefore an advantage over him. That is, I think, the modern situation of man acting like a god - the misguided, ill-informed, and utterly immoral pretence of omnipotence. A usurper's hooliganism, achieving only the annihilation of authority and of communications.

The modern conflict between fathers and sons also does deeper than the usual generational gap. The generational gap existed in the pre-modern structure: sons and father differed in many opinions and often fought, yet, they never broke communications - in the pre-modern economy of life they depended on each other whenever practicality was concerned. Thus, the generational gap existed in nonessential aspects - politics, fashion, certain habits - but when essential aspects of life were present - building and sustaining a story, transmitting practical knowledge - then the authority of the old was

unchallenged. A father and a son in the country may have hated each other's guts, and, yet, they brewed rakiya together and built a new house together - the son had to learn from his father, if he wanted to live at all. There was nothing to learn from fathers in the modern city.

The complete breakdown of communications became clear in relation to the events of May 1968 in Paris, and the occupation of Czechoslovakia in August. The similarity of signs - young people on the streets, hippies with long hair dressed like butterflies and listening to rock music - signified different things to fathers and sons. Paris was obviously red - red flags, posters with fists, revolution, workers and students. Prague placed red flags and swastikas together and resisted revolution, the proletarian one, represented by the armies of the Warsaw Pact. It was a confusing picture - seemingly Paris and Prague represented opposing ideas, but there was a predominant similarity as well - the life style of the young was similar, their music was similar, their anti-establishment stance was similar.

The fathers were scared. The conflict took place at home: for my father my generation was clearly destructive - against culture, against order, against decency, against morality. My generation was for him the same as the Communists - a destructive force. From my perspective, my father allied himself with the Communists - he wanted to preserve their culture, their order, their indecency, their immorality, by suppressing me. He did not trust me at all and I did not trust him either. We stopped communicating, separated by silence. Neither was to be taken seriously; neither was to be recognized as an authority. We had no common goals, no common past, and common understanding of anything: I was dangerous to him; he was dangerous to me. In my long hair father saw a

red flag; in his dislike of my hair I saw a red flag. For each of us talking to the other became like talking to a Party Secretary, so we stopped talking at all, enveloping ourselves in lies, evasive double-talk, and occasional accusations.

To some degree modern fathers are the generation originating the conflict: they desperately searched for a restoration of their past, blind to the fact that an anonymous past does not mean a thing to the present. They were true believers in modernity, yet, not in modernity as it was, but as it should have been, as fiction: modernity without mass culture. I cannot blame them for this wrong belief: for them, Communism obscured the arrival of mass culture. They thought that the vulgar mass culture they saw was an element of Communism, and naively thought that with the fall of Communism vulgarity would disappear - the rock stars, the garbage on the streets, the parvenus, the 'elites', the crime, the meaningless jobs, the pollution, the shortage of water, Freud, Kafka, long hair, short skirts, all the offensive and corrupted, in their view, deviations in life will disappear.

My generation was less naive - we saw all of the above as modern phenomena. We wanted to resist Communism precisely by being modern, therefore, not uniform. We misunderstood and miscalculated the destructive potential of mass culture, I would say, and as a result, we fell in the same trap as our fathers - we made fiction out of life. We decided to live an underground life. By refusing to participate in Communist life, we opposed it by inactivity, but at the same time we did not stop consuming, we did not reject mass culture, and remained modern men through and through. We only decided to live by the 'no', in slightly Nietzschean terms, and never learned how to live by the 'yes'. When Communism crumbled and fell, and my generation came to power, our deficiency

became painfully clear - we knew how to destroy, but not how to build. By refusing to accept any authority, we became unable to be authority. No wonder post-Communist melancholy covered Eastern Europe, to use a mild term. Is the West best? Or is it the same fiction? I and my father both looked to the West for guidance - and we failed. Silence and no story.

Underground was the place for resisting modernity by using its own concepts. The underground is not possible in pre-modern life. The impersonality, universality, and the changeability of the modern city are the perfect place for being underground. Nobody knows you, nobody can be sure who are you. A counterculture establishes itself by just moving in the opposite direction of the general flow. Everybody goes to the centre - you go to the outskirts; everybody wants recognition - you become marginal. Modern life permits that - most of time. Modern institutions are either unaware of or disinterested in deviants. The underground created its own language, its own maps of the city, its own markers, its own occupations and entertainments, and they remained unnoticed in the great coexistent narratives of the city. The state was relatively unaware just like it was unaware of the other city narratives. Unless there was a rebellion, the narratives that were anonymous, non-transmittable, and meaningless to others were restricted by their own deficiencies. There was no open rebellion and the underground existed. It was a comfortable place for a nonconformist and even secure to some degree - certainly more secure than the pre-modern situation, but not completely safe. The underground felt that freedom existed only in invisible opposition, by a conscious self-limitation of giving up a career, social advancement, and material possessions. It was a heavy price to be paid, but at least it was an individual choice, restoring some self-dignity, self-respect, and even

creating something like a personal story and a set of personal relations. It was saying goodbye to illusions and creating the last illusion: the illusion of not having illusions. Thus, freedom arrived.

Freedom? What freedom? One cannot escape modernity. A subpoena waits for me in the mail box. I am required to appear in the office of such and such police investigator. The state suddenly remembered me, but I don't know what the nature of this unhealthy interest could be. I search my memories and find nothing helpful there. I try to prepare myself for a meeting where, no doubt, I will be accused of something anti-governmental, with strong criminal overtones. The totalitarian state long ago stopped charging people outright with political crimes - it was more convenient to dump unsolved crimes on the political offender and sentence him for them. Then West did not make an inconvenient fuss then and the offender's credibility was destroyed, making it impossible for him to collect followers and disciples. I cannot outline any strategy in advance, for I have not a clue what the police's intentions could be, what they know, what they want from me. In a desperate attempt to discover something I phone the investigator, pretending to try to confirm the date - I cannot ask more, afraid that I may trigger some new dangerous hypothesis in the inquisitive mind of the police.

A cheery voice answers my call - it turns out, the Police were trying to hire me. They had a housing shortage and to solve the problem wanted to hire Sofianites, who had their own accommodations instead of homeless people from the provinces. The Police got a list from the Law School with the names of the prospective Sofian graduates of this year and contacted them. As for the subpoena - the Police simply did not have any other kind of formal blanks for summoning people. Relief! No trouble!

No trouble? How was I to refuse the offer? Any outright refusal may trigger a real investigation - what motivates my refusal? A political motivation, perhaps? And if so suspected the police might pressure me by trumped up criminal charges and present me with an option - jail or employment. To hire a political opponent is a crowning achievement: he can be kept in constant suspense and fear, developing self-hatred from his professional obligation to betray, spy, and investigate fellow unreliables. And who can better know the deviants, their whereabouts, and the ways of getting into their slippery minds than someone from their own lot? Luckily, I was not to graduate this year - I was behind my cohorts, but the sloppy office of the Registrar had not updated their own records. I explained my situation to the cop, he was sorry to hear that, but it was objective circumstance and he accepted it. He suggested giving him a call next year, for they needed people just like me, I promised without a blink in the eye, and that was that.

A mistake. A mechanical error. Wrong information. Lack of proper documents. Nothing personal. Omnipotent modernity extended a claw to grab me, but suddenly lost interest and let me go. A real interest? A faint interest? A warning? A joke? An accident? What was that? Did they check their own dossier on me from the time when they really wanted to jail me, or did they forget to check? If they did, what was the probability of summoning me again? And summoning me for what? To conduct a new investigation on me or to offer me a job in a way I could not refuse? There was no way to find out what really happened in modernity, the constant pendulum between the sacred and the profane. No escape, only postponement. An accident, leaving no trace, no knowledge, no wisdom, no story, better to be forgotten. An accident, bringing also hope - next time I may be entirely lost to them, hidden between other names, or by an absent document - lost to

them thanks to the impersonality, lost in the vast, anonymous multitude of people and documents. I had equal chances of experiencing a positive or a negative accident - 50:50.

I felt a foreigner, I feel a foreigner. I understand Grandpa better and better: his silence speaks volumes to me now. It is a monologue, though: I interpret his silence. It does not matter whether I am wrong or right - there is no listener, I speak to myself, as Grandpa did for years. This is 'The Heart of Darkness', our world... Marlow and Kurtz never really talked to each other, there was no communication. Marlow says he understood Kurtz better and better when Kurtz was no longer alive. Marlow is the one telling Kurtz's story. Marlow's translation of Kurtz is the truth about Kurtz. Marlow's translation merges him and Kurtz into one, it is Marlow's world, Marlow's life... A life without a story of its own, so a translation of Kurtz's story is everything Marlow can say about himself. He devours Kurtz in order to create his self. It is fiction. Everything that we can listen to is disengaged fiction, even our own life is fiction, as if we speak about something else or a puppet. Desperately I miss the clarity of hierarchical country life, yet, I dislike it. Desperately I cling to urban life, yet, I am dissatisfied. The two modes of living fight inside myself, none is winning, but both destroy each other.

APPENDIX

The narrative voice typical for autobiographical writing, namely, first person, singular, presented a problem with the materials, which informed my writing. The dominance of personal experience heavily restricted the use of references, quotations, and academic argumentation. As a result, references and arguments are discreet, save for a few occasions, where direct quotations have been possible. Here I will try to explain the purpose of the used literature. I am aware that such an explanation could be only minimal and even cryptic, unless the reader decides to read the bibliographical sources. Nevertheless, I will try to outline the informative and the argumentative reasons for the bibliographical material.

The first problem to be addressed here is concerned with the narrative voice. It has two aspects: the first is the question to what degree may an autobiography be trusted? The second is the temporal position of the narrator – it is a distant to the narrated event position. The first aspect is questionable: presenting a personal view, an autobiography is hardly a truth and often is easily confronted by concurrent information. *The Confessions* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau is an interesting example: it is often understood or misunderstood to be a 'call for a return to nature'. However, there is very little, if anything, in Rousseau's autobiography, supporting such a proposition. At the best, Rousseau gives an impression for his desire to have a simple life, yet, such a life obviously is not appealing enough, because Rousseau, even in the rural environment, remains an urban man of letters, concerned with urban opinions about him, and follows the conventions of the urban life. I do relate to Rousseau's confused view of himself,

because it seems to me a prime example of the unreconciable tensions between modern and pre-modern modes of living.

The second aspect is directly concerned with style: what could be the proper expression of autobiographical material? In my view fiction is more plausible than autobiography proper. Yet, in fiction the writer is distant, not the same person as the fictional narrator or character. The options vary and depend on the writer's choice and ability: Andrei Makine uses a mature voice when telling the story of the child Makine in *Once Upon the River Love*, but Peter Nadas employs different technique. *The End of a Family Story* is narrated as if a child tells it: it is inconsistent, the subject matter changes constantly and is difficult to follow. Nadas succeeds in presenting a narrative, faithful to the age and to the voice of his character, yet, the book demands too much from the reader. From academic standpoint, Makine's technique seems to be more coherent. To a certain point, I am using both techniques: the narrative style changes, when moving from rural to urban descriptions, but more will be said later, when modernity is discussed.

The unusual term 'pre-modern' needs clarification. The more common terms – 'primitive' and 'traditional' – do not fit the rural mode of living described. Some anthropologists tend to paint a rather rosy picture of primitive societies in the attempt to critique contemporary society. The negative aspects of primitive life are often downplayed in order of emphasizing the negative aspects of modern life and what we have lost. Henri Michaux tells a different story, however: there is not much really 'lost', if customs such as '... [two brothers] were fighting each other to the death [in a village square full of people watching]' (*Selected Writings*, p. 129) are considered. Michaux's ironic narratives seem to point at the modern selectivity when praising primitive life – the

sheer violence of many rituals is downplayed; the spirituality is over emphasized. But the problem is more practical than theoretical: modern social organization has no room for a primitive man, unless we are prepared to create 'reservations' once again. There is only one small step between a reservation and a concentration camp, however. In terms of my own writing, I simply do not know any 'primitives' – the people I have met were culturally knocking at the door of modernity. Stanley Diamond in *In Search of the Primitive* and particularly Marianna Torgovnick in *Gone Primitive. Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* are not convincing in my view: the effort to reconcile the primitive with modernity questions the political structure of modern life, based on prescribed by law individual rights and responsibilities. 'Modern primitivism' seems to lead to relativity – picking and choosing lifestyles, shielded by the concept of 'rights', but negating responsibilities, viewed as infringement of individual rights (in other words, lifestyles ultimately depending on modern convention).

'Traditional' is also a problematic term. Tradition is easily understandable, when speaking of rural life, but not so in urban setting. In *Between Past and Future* Hannah Arendt argues that tradition is destroyed by modernity, particularly pointing at the destruction of authority, an essential feature of the 'traditional'. An opposing and rather positivist view present Edward Shils in *Tradition* and, to a certain point, Raymond Aron in *Progress and Disillusion.* The argument is that new traditions are constantly created, replacing the disappearing ones. This argument is questionable: longevity is a main characteristic of tradition. Some features and expressions do change with time, but not the instructive and the authoritative core of the tradition. Modern life is transient, constantly changing. In urban setting, the 'new traditions' Shils speaks of are hardly all

embracing. More likely they belong to particular segments of society, to the sub-cultures, and are not instructive or authoritative to anybody else. Unlike the rural or the pre-modern society, the 'traditions' in modern urbanity are hardly known outside the sub-group who practice them. I do agree with Hannah Arendt and prefer the term 'pre-modern', describing a mode of living heavily based on tradition, but presently assaulted by modernity.

Raina Kableshkova and Lyuben Karavelov have been valuable source of historic information about the particular town I describe. Both authors present a sophisticated life, documented at least since 1840s. The introduction of modern institutions has been particularly interesting: the pre-modern mode of living seems to absorb modern features, but not in modern terms. To some degree, this approach leads to the relations with the outside world, to the Other: there is 'blindness' to the Other, if not outright xenophobia. This led me to consider *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* by Bartolome de Las Casas – the 'blind' conquest of the Americas, in the early phase of which, settlement seems not to be the goal. A return to Spain with a 'new life story', supported by newly acquired wealth, seems to be the goal of the Conquistadors – similarly, Koprivshtenites went to the Outside not to learn, not to understand, not to 'blend', but only to acquire higher status in their homeplace. Similar is also Sindbad the Sailor in *Thousand and One Nights*. In a long term, resistance to modernity followed, which is typical for pre-modernity in my view.

For my purposes, modernity is largely represented by urban life. A number of issues have to be clarified here. The very first is style – the more settled, slow, consistent, and personified narration of pre-modern life changes to choppy, frantic, suddenly

changing, and depersonified narration of the city. The tempo, although not intended originally, follows the contrasting differences between pre-modernity and modernity, affecting the narration. Milan Kundera in *Slowness* points out at the different tempo of life in the 18th and 20th centuries. Peter Nadas also presents a 'choppy' modern style.

Personification seems to be typical for pre-modernity. Lyuben Karavelov provides detailed descriptions of his characters, even the minor one. This tendency I follow when writing about Koprivshtenites. However, personification disappears when describing Sofia. Eugene Zamyatin in *We*, Franz Kafka, and Daniil Kharms present depersonalized modern characters – nameless, featureless, and insignificant as individuals. Henry Michaux goes a step further: an anonymous observer tells about more or less anonymous landscape, where humans appear like objects. The alienation of the observer is quite clear and the impression is that the narrator observes something like moving pictures, not really a life requiring participation. Probably Walter Benjamin achieves the most refined modern narration: humans are absent altogether in the entirely urban environment, which is no longer contrasted to alternative environments. Whenever people are mentioned, they are not even a sideshow, but more like unanimated objects. The impression of the singularity of modern man is very strong, but it also shows the inability of modern man to describe others with distinct features.

The eruptions of violence, seemingly without a cause, is visible in Daniil Kharms and Henri Michaux – both suggest eruption of primitive violence in modern setting, which makes the violence misplaced contextually: modernity pretends to be rational, but the violence lacks rational motivation, it is like coming from another time, like imposing another, refuted order to the order of modernity. The modern phenomenon of the 'mass'

or the 'crowd' is interesting here: as a whole, the 'mass' is thoroughly modern, because it is a manifestation of universal depersonalization. The individual, however, once inside the 'mass', gets individualization, acknowledgement, personality, distinctiveness, and sense of belonging. The 'mass' becomes a 'cozy' place and is highly attractive. Louis-Ferdinand Celine provides perhaps the best description of the individual inside the 'mass', the change of behavior into comfortable submission of the individual, and the sheer aggressiveness of the 'mass'. The question is whether one 'lives' inside the 'mass'? Jean Baudrillard seems to answer this question with his notion of simulacra: at its best, modern living is a simulacrum of living.

Contrasted to the 'mass', which seems to be always a temporary gathering, is the solitary individual, the 'first man'. Kafka is insightful about the existential singularity of modern man, and his constant victimization. However, Albert Camus in his autobiographical novel *The First Man* describes the modern human condition in clearer defining terms. A question coming out from Kafka and Camus via Arendt is about the situation of the human-made objects in modernity. Are they informative for one's life or are they just a meaningless, further alienating landscape? Walter Benjamin attempts to create a new meaning to objects, in accord with modernity. In my view, his attempt is a failure. George Konrad in *The City Builder* seems to confirm this failure. Jean Baudrillard introduces an addition to the failure: (post)modern man is no longer searching for meaning, but is concerned mostly with leaving signs of his presence, referential only to himself or to his subculture group at best. His signs of 'presence' are undecipherable to others, to outsiders. To a large degree, modernity becomes mute to man and modern man becomes mute to another man. From a narrative perspective, 'muteness' is

unrepresentative: a blank page represents silence best, however, by default, silence must be represented by narration and the task becomes easily unconvincing. One of the problems a reader of Walter Benjamin encounters is in his argument that a new meaning for established object is needed – a proletarian meaning. But what is or could be the new meaning and how could be the new meaning universally accepted in modernity? It seems that pre-modernity provides established meaning to society, but modernity creates only conflicting meanings, leading to communicative tensions and lack of references.

The last point leads to the tensions between pre-modenity and modernity, embedded in the self. In *Waiting for the Weekend* Witold Rybczynski narrates the history and the manifestations of the entirely modern phenomenon – the weekend. It seems that the weekend represents the most visible and active part of the tensions between modern and pre-modern. The need to escape to another reality, entirely different from the modern everydayness, supports the notion of internal conflict: the modern individual apparently needs a place where to be, to be personified, to be taken as a human being, no more a simulacrum of existence. If so, Rousseau should be considered once again, but this time in relation to Joseph Conrad. Living in the country, but constantly interested in how the urbanity views him, Rousseau seems to propose a compromise. Conrad, however, refutes this compromise somewhat: in the *Heart of Darkness* Marlow gradually borrows the 'skin' of Kurtz. Kurtz's life story becomes more important to Marlow than his own and both stories somewhat blend into one. Marlow, to a large degree, becomes a carrier of Kurtz's story. However, it is only an interpretation of Kurtz's life – Marlow is not telling the truth to Kurtz's wife. It is the wife's words, which in my view illuminate the situation: 'I want – I want – something – something – to – to live with." (*Heart of*

Darkness, p.79). Marlow, in order of having something to live with himself, tells her a lie. As far as Marlow is concerned here, he interprets his life by his interpretation of Kurtz's life. A life becoming a fiction. The same suggests Henri Michaux.

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