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Cultural Narcissism and Popular Culture from the United States to Post-Communist Romania

Abstract: Interest in narcissism as a clinical disorder began in Europe at the turn of the 20th century, particularly through Sigmund Freud's article "On Narcissism", however, it is mainly in the United States that the concept has been developed further and caught on, especially through the popularization of certain psychoanalysts, such as Heinz Kohut and Otto Kernberg in the 1960s and 1970s. It is also in the U.S. that narcissism has begun to be used extensively to depict and evaluate cultural phenomena, starting in 1976 with Tom Wolfe's essay *The 'Me' Decade and the Third Great Awakening* and culminating in 2009 with the conclusion, supported by empirical evidence, that there is a true narcissism epidemic in the American society (Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell). Given the multifarious influence of the United States on the international scene, it is very likely that American ways of life may be transferred and adopted by people worldwide, including the former communist societies. The article looks at the characteristics of American cultural narcissism, as defined by a few landmark books, particularly Christopher Lasch's *Culture of Narcissism*, and its possible clout around the world, focusing mainly on the case of post-communist Romania.

Keywords: self, culture, psychology, narcissism, post-communism, influence.

1. America and Cultural Narcissism

According to Oxford Dictionary, narcissism means "excessive interest in or admiration of oneself and one's physical appearance." In psychology, it means "selfishness, involving a sense of entitlement, a lack of empathy, and a need for admiration, as characterizing a personality type", whereas in psychoanalysis it is "self-centredness arising from failure to distinguish the self from external objects, either in very young babies or as a feature of mental disorder". (Oxford University Press (OUP), 2019. Lexico.com). Thus, *a narcissistic culture is a culture that fosters selfishness, grandiosity, a sense of entitlement, a lack of empathy, and a need for admiration, whereas cultural narcissism is the result of such a culture.* Moreover, the phenomenon of cultural narcissism includes dependence on, or conversely, disregard of others, when they do

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not fulfill the narcissists' desires; expecting others to do what one wants because they are seen as extensions of his or her own being; far-fetched dependence on professionals and therapeutic cures; acute awareness of one's and others' being and of events through media, which leads to a lack of spontaneity of feeling and, as a consequence, authenticity; a tendency for simulacrum or falsehood, for shunning or obscuring the truth (see the proliferation of fake news as the most recent example, as well as post-truth philosophy and conspiracy theories).

The American liberalization of moral life after the Second World War is defined as a real portrayal of growing narcissism. This perspective drove Tom Wolfe to write about the rising narcissism in the American culture in his essay, "The 'Me' Decade and the Third Great Awakening", published in 1976 in *New York* magazine. He posited that the 1970s were characterized by "a considerable narcissism which was later known or named as 'the Me Decade'" (Wolfe 1977, 114, 116). This notion was equally echoed by other historians like Bruce Schulman, who noted that the Seventies' was the era of narcissism, selfishness, of personal rather than political awareness" (Wolfe 1977, 145).

Wolfe thinks that the rise of narcissism could be largely attributed to the postwar economic boom. He explains how ordinary people now have enough money and surplus at their disposal, taking their possessions around and running off, altering their life circumstances and creating new, individual roles for themselves (Wolfe 1977, 119, 126). The surplus in wealth is the beginning of narcissism in America and has created the favorable conditions for egotism.

Wolfe sees the "shallow, infantile, and self-important narcissist" as the post-modern cultural narcissist. His main concern is self-liberation, together with the emerging trend of freedom, or civil rights movements like black power and the new wave of feminism, explaining the new American culture from the lens of self-awareness and consciousness and reconstructing American popular culture as totally narcissistic. Thus, the various manifestations of individual freedom, including cultural and ethnic freedom, feminism, civil liberties are seen as partial constructs of this very new American culture of self-, centeredness, and self-consciousness, which can be defined as postmodernist narcissism.

Wolfe is concerned with how the rise of this new form of narcissism is undermining the traditional institutions, including marriage and family. Furthermore, he is worried about the serious implications this new culture has on the breakdown of shared national ideals and conceptions. His perspective was adopted by Christopher Lasch, who commended him for exploring how the nation has turned into "Narcissist America."

The *Culture of Narcissism: the American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, published by Lasch in 1979, focuses on America's trend towards

"unprecedented narcissistic individualism". In his book, he draws a lot from psychoanalytic literature and even incorporates the works of the likes of Freud, Kernberg, and Kohut to pinpoint how the structural changes in capitalism are reshaping Americans' personalities (Lasch 1993, 2).

Lasch pays attention to the new American narcissist and describes this character as having an "ethic of hedonism, leisure, and self-fulfillment" (Lasch 1993, 182, 221). He finds this narcissist as living entirely in the present, demanding instant gratification, being sexually perverse and permissive, as well as exhibiting limited morals. He describes the same narcissist as a personality that seeks and fears competition altogether, disregards emotional attachment, is afraid of aging and is prone to emptiness, anxiety, depression, inadequacy, boredom, low self-esteem, and self-aggrandizement. As a counterbalance, Lasch suggests that the positive cultural aspects are those attached to the patriarchal family. He says that civilization should be channeled through patriarchal family because failure to do so can lead to the disruption of the existing or established culture (Lasch 1993, 221). Lasch asserts that perverse male sexuality, when not repressed through a paternally imposed ego during childhood, keeps the resulting adult personality within the narcissistic development phase. Therefore, Lasch presumes that the rising new American culture is because of the failure of the new generations to incorporate the authoritarian ego ideology.

Thus, the new culture of narcissism is defined by a different understanding of personal relations. Lasch argues that "personal relations founded on reflected glory, on the need to admire and be admired, prove fleeting and insubstantial", yet they are what many people are looking for now (Lasch 1993, 23). Unlike Wolfe who focuses on narcissism as a new culture illustrating an outburst of vitality or explaining America's new age of individualism, Lasch sees this as a defiance of age-tested values. He considers that these radical changes in economic and social arrangements dramatically affect the individual. His argument is based on Marx's conviction about economic forces shaping individual character and is connected with Freud's bourgeois mind. Lasch uses this in grounding or informing his assertion about the new culture of narcissism, which he sees as a type of pathology representative for the postmodern times, just as psychological repression was representative for Freud's time. (Lasch 1993, 41)

Lasch links the new form of cultural narcissism to Freud's secondary or pathological narcissism, which is, in fact, a regression in adulthood to the primary stage of narcissism. This secondary narcissism entails incorporating grandiose object images to be used as a defense against guilty and anxiety. He underlines that the new culture of narcissism is breeding a great number of people who are dissatisfied with their lives and focuses on the modern borderline patient who is confronting the psychiatrist with diffuse dissatisfaction (Lasch 1993, 37).

The new cultural narcissist experiences a feeling of emptiness, has self-esteem issues and has a greater inability of getting along with others. Hence, Lasch argues that "he gains a sense of heightened self-esteem only by attaching himself to strong, admired figures, whose acceptance he craves and by whom he needs to feel supported" (Lasch 1993, 37). This describes the narcissist culture in general, which is a culture strongly attached to celebrity figures, with common people wanting to act and behave like the public role-models and superstars they worship and seeking admiration from others. And when they are not paid attention or given admiration, they suffer from self-esteem issues. This does not mean that narcissistic people do not carry on with their daily lives, achieve real distinction and enjoy themselves, it only means that deep down they are eluded by happiness (Lasch 1993, 37).

Lasch as well highlights mass consumerism as a trait of the new cultural narcissism. Fundamentally, the new popular culture is defined by the modern manufacturer educating the masses about the need for mass consumption. This is a response to mass commodity production needing more mass market for absorbing its products. Expressly, Lasch notes that "the masses must learn to behave like human beings in a mass production world… they must achieve not mere literacy, but culture" (Lasch 1993, 72). The modern manufacturer is educating the masses about why they need a culture of consumption. Moreover, Lasch mentions how the American economy, given its peak, technological advancement and possibility to satisfy basic material needs, is now being used in creating new consumer demands. The new culture is also dependent on mass media whereby advertising creates the desire for having better things. This has led to a new American society, where people focus on appearances, or in Lasch's terms, to "the society of the spectacle" (Lasch 1993, 72). Essentially, people are ushered into a new culture of materialism where the exchange value that a commodity contains is the basis for gaining prestige.

In the same vein but more recently, Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell explore cultural narcissism by discussing the Americanization of narcissism. They describe it as a psycho-cultural affliction because of the emphasis on self-promotion and self-esteem learned from modern media and parenting. Twenge and Campbell argue that, at a certain point, 9.4% of Americans in their twenties have suffered from Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) (Twenge and Campbell 2010, 36). The emergence of digital technology like the internet further reinforces these values which have driven the modern generation into the need for ego-enhancement and admiration. The concern raised by these authors is that new technologies, especially mass media, foster Americans' obsession with self and, in reality, the new American narcissists think that being famous for nothing has become a right. Twenge and Campbell noted that

43% of the middle school girls said they wanted to become a celebrity personal assistant, twice as many chose "the president of a great university like Harvard or Yale, three times more chose United States Senator" and four times more than "chief of a major company like General Motors" (Twenge and Campbell 2010, 94).

Therefore, they mean that being close or related to a celebrity is viewed as desirable in comparison to serving as a public servant, a university president, or a successful businessman.

Twenge and Campbell have noted how celebrities are teaching children to get accustomed to consumerism, leading the younger generation into "plastic surgery, Botox, and white teeth" (Twenge and Campbell 2010, 152). The focus on physical appearance as a characteristic of the narcissist society is stressed, with television teaching the current generation about the importance of good looks, "looking hot" becoming a major goal in life. Besides, the overspending among adults is a manifestation of cultural narcissism and this could have been the reason for the recent mortgage and financial crises. Narcissism, therefore, is deeply embedded in American society in various fields of activity, including work, college, environment, and religion. As far as spirituality is concerned, Twenge and Campbell are complaining about the fact that narcissism in America is "the first food of the soul" (Twenge and Campbell 2010, 259). They also complain about technology and its role in the new culture of narcissism. The authors believe that social networking sites provide avenues for those who keenly seek attention, fame, and self-promotion, with blogs which give the chance to write thoughts in vile language as well as personal attacks through slang. Thus, another manifestation of the culture of narcissism is incivility, the American social environment turning fast into a climate of violence and aggression (Twenge and Campbell 2010, 201).

Twenge and Campbell debate about the modern American generation as materialistic and connect the problem to how narcissists are prone to talking about high-value stuff (Twenge and Campbell 2010, 161). They notice that the new narcissists have the feeling of entitlement of material possession because "when given the choice of topics to discuss, narcissists were more likely to talk about their material possessions, especially with people who were high in status and of the opposite sex" (Twenge and Campbell 2010, 161). Hence, the idea that the new materialism is driven by egocentric personalities and changes even people who have not been narcissistic by nature, if they want to adapt and survive in the world because material possessions have always been a sign of prosperity and ensure a feeling of superiority. The postmodern American life is characterized by slogans like "Living your life to the fullest", focusing on self-reward, thereby reducing the guilt that the society once had for desiring luxury goods. Public

influencers are providing their audience with lifestyles and fashion that emulate and endorse products for the individuals to buy. It is a luxury revolution with business models promoting upscale products in everything (Twenge and Campbell 2010, 161). Furthermore, Twinge and Campbell complain about advertising slogans promoting materialistic entitlement as a virtue. Materialism, as promoted by mass media in the wake of new cultural narcissism, encourages the masses to buy unnecessary things. Equally, the authors contend that striving for financial success drives people into misery as, with examples of alcohol and drug use, headaches, backaches and sore throat (Twenge and Campbell 2010, 176).

In her book, the *Americanization of Narcissism*, Elizabeth Lunbeck provides another perspective on cultural narcissism as the modern collective ill facing America and emphasizes the appropriation of the term by the American public. Her book contrasts Kernberg and Kohut and highlights, for instance, how Lasch and Kernberg have missed the concept of healthy narcissism as suggested by Kohut (Lunbeck 2014, 25). Much of her work describes how the United States has offered the world the hopeful vision of self-liberation and transformation.

Despite the fact that American narcissistic culture is viewed negatively from the perspective of critical ideologies, Lunbeck argues that this new culture actually creates a situation in society where people discuss whom they are and what they value both collectively and as individuals (Lunbeck 2014, 7). She provides examples of the positive attributes of narcissism, especially emotional and self-support for children and successful leadership. Lunbeck gives the example of Steve Jobs, an individual endowed with healthy narcissism, which in essence, combines the egotistic and altruistic characteristics. Citing Michael Maccoby, Lunbeck considers Steve Jobs to be a good illustration of a healthy, successful narcissist, "a visionary leader in whom the irresistibly charismatic and brutally exploitative are fused" (Lunbeck 2014, 255). Thus, she dismisses some of the conflicts among the earlier psychoanalysts regarding the extent of self-indulgence, self-esteem, and self-love in narcissistic personalities, by saying that all of this should be regarded and considered as desirable and normal (Lunbeck 2014, 30). Her book supports Kohut in focusing on normal narcissism, which is the wellspring of creativity, ambition, and even empathy among people.

Lunbeck says that although Americans are criticized for an increasingly inflated self-esteem or for promoting shallow materialism, a lot has changed since the 1970s narcissism and, as such, grandiosity should be taken as a way of life in America (Lunbeck 2014, 254). Her book suggests that there is actually a need for grandiosity and healthy narcissism, which can guide people into success. In this respect, Lunbeck supports Kohut's healthy narcissism and shows that this is an important and necessary human feeling that can be used for sustaining different forms and areas of both public and

private life, improving professional and personal development (Lunbeck 2014, 254).

2. Transfer of cultural narcissism from the U.S. to other countries and Romania by means of globalization

The influence and transfer of American cultural narcissism to the outside world can be explored from its origin, which was the cultural shift in the 1970s, when people redirected their attention towards self-admiration. Tom Wolfe and Christopher Lasch have explained this paradigm shift in their earlier essays. However, what is evident is that three decades down the line, there has been a wide spread of narcissism. The cultural narcissism is mainly portrayed through the American culture, however, there is a strong shift towards this kind of culture throughout the world under American influence. American reality TV shows, popular music, cinema and news are sowing the seeds of narcissistic ideologies, with more and more people indulging in parenting, overspending and celebrity worship. All of these elements and attributes are basically represented and encouraged through pop culture.

There are many ways through which American popular culture has spread to other countries. For instance, the scholarly emphasis has focused on outlining how digital life, a product of globalization, has increased connectivity among individuals, especially the Millenials (Tomlinson 2001, 19). Media remains one of the significant forces influencing modern life. Another area of consideration is that the American civilization within the contemporary world is defined by sophisticated information technology. The culture industry is characterized by large numbers of people who are exposed to "symbols of the capitalistic market economy, including images found in films, movies, and texts in advertisements" (Tomlinson 2001, 19). Furthermore, in the modern world, postmodern cultural manifestations mostly uncritically focus on the forms and not the context in which these elements have become commodified, that is mass media and globalization, (Taylor 2010, 20).

How globalization has led to the transfer of American culture of narcissism is best investigated from its contribution towards the surfacing of novel political, social, and economic models that promote interactions of businesses, governments, and people (Friedman 2007, 48). Again, mass media has played an immense role in the globalization process as a platform where cultures are diffused. In particular, mass media has had a contributory effect on creating or developing a global consciousness as people now have the opportunities for comparing how other people live (McQuail 2010, 52). Therefore, mass media, whereby pop culture is disseminated, has been crucial in fuelling the globalization of narcissism. For example, mass media

and information dependent on globalization promote a "vast expression of access to information, networked communities and internet centrality" (Hassan 2008, 27) with an evident loss for the real community and an increase in egocentrism.

The concept of "millennials" is similarly a construct or a term coined from globalization. These individuals have their own identities and personalities, regardless of their citizenship or nationality, which feature traits of character such as liberal, self-expressive, open to change and upbeat (Taylor and Keeter, 2010). In retrospect, the millennial generation is, to a great extent, a reflection of the contemporary (real or imagined) American culture, using technology for self-expression and showing a clear attachment to social networking sites.

Globalization, as the pathway through which American culture is transferred to other cultures, has brought about a "new kind of individualism" (Moore 2005, 359). This new individualism is portrayed by individuals who are experimenting, risk-taking and keen on showing off but also who are burdened with new forms of anxiety, anguish, and apprehension (Moore 2005, 360). Since every individual is attached to or consuming media in the capitalistic society, the specialist discussions apparently focus on how such consumerism impacts the individual's sexuality, identity, and family life. For example, the United States of America, as the hub of the new media culture, has its sexuality regulated and framed through information, advertising and mass media culture (Levin and Kilbourne 2008, 162) and, by means of globalization, it is bringing about a new American attitude towards sexuality, sex, and individual identity all over the world. American media has been regarded as the most sexually suggestive within the Western Hemisphere and American pop culture as extremely focused on portraying messages about sex. Different media including films, fashion, video games, advertising, magazines, as well as music are all but attuned to the concepts of sexuality and sexual relationships (Levin and Kilbourne 2008, 162). Almost inevitably, American pop culture has been transferred through mass media and is teaching other cultures about the sexualization of women and other values of self-assertion.

Also, many new American identities created within pop culture concentrate on self-destructive behaviors. Studies have shown how mass media or pop culture consumption impacts adolescents in such areas as drinking, violence, obesity, sexual risk-taking, and smoking. Furthermore, they show the direct link between alcohol taking among the youths and TV or movie contents advertising alcohol use (Escobar-Chaves and Anderson 2008, 162). Higher exposure to cultural expressions of individualism mediates narcissism. For instance, Twenge and Campbell argue that positive and inflated regard of the 'self', a condition defining narcissism, is apparently on the rise in the American society or culture especially due to the presence of new media

in everybody's life at any given moment (Escobar-Chaves and Anderson 2008, 24).

How globalization leads to the spread of American narcissism to other countries has similarly been explored from the viewpoint of the implications of social media and internet use on the youth. Through a literature review, Malikhao and Jan reported how western society adolescents are using social networking sites and what the impacts on their identity development are. The central argument of this analysis is that social networking sites have led to "new practices, values, and meanings for interpersonal relatedness along with personal autonomy" (Malikhao and Jan 2011, 2). In this case, adolescents and younger adults have to negotiate their new roles or identities and use electronically-customized sociality and virtual media to manage their relationships or engagements in real life. Nevertheless, using these tools in managing self-autonomy shows the extent to which social networking sites are fostering reliance on others for validating their identity value and self-worth.

Emotional or social attachment to favorite celebrities further links grandiose narcissism to fame appeal and celebrity interest. The findings of a regression analysis confirmed the relationship between such attachments with narcissism (Greenwood et al. 2018, 238). The same approach to understanding the connection between celebrity attachment and narcissistic behavior has been addressed in studies focusing on the globalized American popular culture. For instance, focusing on mainland China, Gries et al. assessed the indirect implications of being exposed to American pop culture through globalization. Resorting to experimental studies, the authors reported that parasocial engagement with American celebrities has a significant impact on how the Chinese perceive America. In conclusion, they showed how globalization is bringing about subconscious engagement or contact with American culture, through mass media platforms like magazine covers, and it alters the Chinese people's perception of America and of themselves (Gries et al. 2015, 1).

The situation in Romania can be best understood by first focusing on how the globalization of media has brought about changes in Eastern Europe. A lot of concern has been about how the link between television and national identity has been impacted by the infiltration of cultural trends from the Western Hemisphere (Havens, Anikó and Katalin 2012, 47). The collapse of socialism ushered in a new era of cultural transformation with foreign television imports, mostly from the USA as well as Western Europe, changing the capacity that the national televisions had in producing strong national identities, cultures, and narratives. Romania too, as one of the Eastern Europe countries, had been looking westward for cultural, political, and economic models and replacing those models which were affected or

extensively collapsed with the USSR (Havens, Anikó and Katalin 2012, 54). Therefore, the changes going on in Romania after the fall of communism have created room for the American narcissistic culture to infiltrate in music, television, movies and every-day life.

Romania's pop culture has emerged after the liberation from excessive state control, when the influence of American culture was limited and restricted. Speaking of past behaviors and cultural customs and their link to the present times, Alina Pohrib focuses on the "latchkey kids", a Romanian dubbed term for many children left uncared for as their parents went to work during the communist regime. For her, latchkey explains self-responsibility and self-reliance (Pohrib 2017, 1). While using this concept, most Romanian former youths have currently taken to Facebook and other social media platforms to relieve those bad experiences of being actually left alone and now promote the sense or conception of self-reliance, in a similar manner to many Americans but for different reasons. At the same time, the impact of mass media through globalization shows the diffusion and transference of the American culture of self-reliance to the generations born after the fall of communism, whereas the pervasive American pop culture teaches or conveys the messages of individual autonomy and independence. The American culture of promoting narcissistic feminism has equally found its way into Romanian pop culture. For instance, in consumerist advertisement and television programs, Romanians have incorporated the ideals of a free and independent woman from the American perspective. There have been talk shows, including *De trei ori femeie* (*Three Times A woman*), *Femeia la putere* (*Women in Power*), all designed and targeted at the feminine audience (Ursa 2015, 79). Particularly, these shows define or reflect what Tom Wolfe describes in his the "Me Decade" article as the free and independent woman, who has a job to run, is recovering from divorce, and enjoying the benefits of being free. The shows in question equally highlight the narcissistic American woman in the popular culture concerned with her image more than anything else because, as Christopher Lasch puts it, "Nothing succeeds like the appearance of success" (Lasch 1993, 59).

The age of communication has changed and transformed Romanians especially in terms of how they see people from outside the world and how they construct their identities. For example, in the 1990s, Atomic TV, targeted at the youth audience, borrowed the same concept from MTV, featuring a fusion of both Romanian and Western styles (Berry 2017, 125). This TV station was the arena of fusing traditional and modern attitudes in a time when individuals strongly experienced conflicts of cultural identities. Atomic TV in Romania showed and promoted images akin to the American popular culture, which conservative Romanians regarded as destructive and

that could produce deviant behaviors. In this context, the TV station mentioned above was equated to teenage magazines, gay culture, and women fashion magazines, all of which identified as affecting subjective and collective socialization processes (Berry 2017, 125). At the same time, Atomic TV and other similar mass media, together with the popularity of MTV, were argued to bring about changes in the youth and make a popular culture to dominate, stimulate, as well as promote cultural difference (Berry 2017, 125). Many times these changes were singled out to threaten the traditional Romanian values adopted by the church and former mainstream political ideologies. The musical forms and styles in Romania, which adopted the American cultural context of production, taught young men to gain women through wealth accumulation or even and sent narcissistic messages of unlimited freedom, self-centeredness and not feeling guilty of one's actions or words (Berry 2017, 125).

In *The Romanian Mass Media and Cultural Development* David Berry discusses the further embodiment of the influence that the American pop culture has had on Romanian culture through the content analysis of the *Big Brother* and Reality TV (Berry 2017, 131). In fact, the overall rise in celebrity culture in Romania is attributed to this show, with its introduction in 2003. Just like in other countries, Romanians got the opportunity to become celebrities and this implied the American narcissistic culture of power, fame and celebrity status carried out within the Romanian context. The *Big Brother* reality program showed how consumerism surpassed active political citizenry. A huge number of people applied to get listed in the program as the winning contestants were to take home the $50,000 price. At the time, the show attracted uproar from the National Peasants Party calling it immoral and saying that would definitely bring about negative implications or ramifications on children (Berry 2017, 131).

Berry goes on to say that American-style television, as such, has been argued to be promoting the postmodern popular culture, a culture that is contrary to the traditions of Romanian people, subverting and threatening the deeply-rooted social ideals of the society.

3. Conclusions

The expression of a culture of narcissism was made popular by Christopher Lasch, who considers that pathology is a "heightened version of normality" and every society reproduces its culture in the individual, in the form of personality (Lasch 1993, 32 - 34), narcissism being the pathology specific to postmodernism and postmodern societies just like hysteria and obsessional neurosis in Freud's time (Michael Beldoc cited in Lasch 1993, 42). His

book, the *Culture of Narcissism*, which is largely based on psychoanalytical references, has given rise to a wide range of interpretations until today. Despite some critics (Aline Vater, Ken Tucker, Andrew Treno, Jason Russell, etc.) who have manifested their opposition to the application of specialized terminology from the field of psychology in order to define cultural aspects, the fact that a plethora of sociologists, psychologists, art critics and philosophers (J.D. Miller, Keith W. Twenge, Keith Campbell, Elisabeth Lunbeck, Giles Lipovestsky, E. T. Sokolova, Eduard Laruelle, for example) have delved into the issue of cultural narcissism testifies to its currency and importance in the cultural analysis of today's societies. In this contentious context, Bernadette Grubner (Grubner 2017, 50) concludes that "Theories that criticize society because it supposedly fosters narcissistic personalities prove to be unconvincing. Approaches that use the notion of narcissism in a broader, metaphorical sense, however, have the potential to cast a new light on certain developments in culture", even if Lasch himself was against the "metaphorization" of narcissism:

> The emergence of character disorders as the most prominent form of psychiatric pathology, however, together with the change in personality structure this development reflects, derives from quite specific changes in our society and culture-from bureaucracy, the proliferation of images, therapeutic ideologies, the rationalization of the inner life, the cult of consumption, and in the last analysis from changes in family life and from changing patterns of socialization. All this disappears from sight if narcissism becomes simply the metaphor of the human condition... (Lasch 1991, 33)

Here, Lasch actually seems to warn about the confinement of the concept of narcissism only to an interpretation of arts, culture and literature, suggesting its utility in finding practical solutions to real psychological and social problems. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, the concept has been widely embraced as an instrument of analysis by various fields of inquiry, from psychology, sociology, or even economics to philosophy, arts and cultural studies.

On the other hand, the American culture has been identified by certain critics among the main factors that undermined the Romanian character during the period of transition from communism to capitalism, corrupting the traditional culture and contributing to the loss of interest in opera, literature, art, and ballet, which had always been perceived as superior in their cultural contexts and had been traditionally attributed to the assemblage of Romanian culture (Berry 2017, 131).

All in all, the idea of star system and the nonconformist messages incorporated in the American mass media or popular culture were perceived, conceptualized and internalized in the post-communist period by young

Romanians particularly, who used them to forge new cultural identities for themselves in the fledgling consumer society, since "new cultural forms and the beginnings of new traditions emerge in the dialectical process of production and consumption" (Berry 2017, 131). In this respect, for example, David Berry's discussions about Romanian mass media and culture confirm how cultural narcissism, or the new American culture, illustrated by egocentric personalities, has infiltrated the Romanian society through pop culture.

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