

Sorin Borza

SOCIETATEA PROCEDURALĂ:
ELEMENTE DE CRITICĂ A PUTERII DIGITALE

THE PROCEDURAL SOCIETY:
A CRITIQUE OF DIGITAL POWER

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PROCEDURAL
SOCIETY

a critique of digital power

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Aspects of the Social Contract in the Era of Epistocrats

„The procedural society responds to the anarchic trends of exercising individual rights through the technique of dividing and multiplying administrative obligations and through the artificial creation of needs.“

Sorin Borza

If the observation of the Colombian philosopher Nicolás Gómez Dávila, is correct that the modern world is worse by what it builds than by what it destroys, then we should take a thorough look at technology first of all, which is linked to all the significant changes that have taken place in societies over the last two centuries. The pace of technology development has regulated and still regulates the changes in the mode of industrial production, economy, finance, but also in the relations between institutions and population, between state and society. Beyond the practical field, technology modifies social psychology and leads to the new anthropological consecration of an archetype of competence and socio-professional prestige – the technocrat.

The denomination of „technocrat” works in the collective mind as a *mantra* of prestige, insinuating skills and knowledge, even quasi-magical forms of power. Often times, in situations of political crisis or in the act of

governing, the descent of technocrats as well as saving angels is expected. They have graduated from prestigious universities, they are highly qualified, are skilled, honest and efficient – this is their public image, an image that is overbought especially by contrast with politicians or *politruks*, who benefit from all the opposite attributes, which have become stigmata. The naive credit granted to technocrats is also explained by the Manichean, rudimentary polarization, in precarious societies such as the Romanian one, of the values of good and evil, thus: politicians are the *Evil*, and technocrats are the *Good*. Even if this perception has never been confirmed, it works as a collective truth, and crowd psychology tells us that a common belief, even if it has nothing to do with the truth, acts on its behalf and produces effects. The common perception of reality is rarely based on knowledge or expertise, and always on the media messages, in other words on forms of mass persuasion, which has been dealt with for some time by the press. Creating public beliefs is in fact a form of arming the society, endowing it with a strong arsenal of prejudices useful to public image strategists. The image works as a reality, which means that image engineers are the big stake in the games of power and public influence.

But, as everyone knows from Laurence J. Peter, from his famous principle, in any field of activity and in any hierarchical institution, officials are elevated to the degree of incompetence, from which they prove inefficient or interchangeable, for in reality „*the work is done by those employees who have not reached yet the level of their own incompetence.*” Who they are, how many they are, nobody evaluates them thoroughly and no institution keeps them and no one else but them, not to mention that in time,

those who are now competent will be subjected to the same process by which they will reach their own threshold of incompetence. Peter's corollary is very lucid, seemingly cynical: *in any institution things will go wrong sometimes because most of the employees will be incompetent*. So, with all their prestige unmatched by great professionals, technocrats are, for the most part, incompetent in their positions. We must start from this premise when we put our hopes in them, if we follow Peter, and we have no serious reason to doubt this truth. The efficiency of their work, of their skill, will not surpass, in the field in which they move, that of the Etruscan *soothsayers* in the field of prognosis or of the healers in the medical field.

Simulacrum and *mimetism* will in reality be their field of excellence, in other words they will function in a horizon of symbolic prestige in which the basic activity is of a semantic nature: they send signals to society about their value, their skill, and these signals are in reality their only effective action, behind which there is nothing useful. In short, professional excellence is replaced by communication, and this social trick is possible only because we live in an age of widespread, generalized communication. Communication is taken by performance itself, not as a simple means of conveying something that happens or occurs before or in its absence. The equation – *communicating means doing* – is the form of collective magic in which we have been living since the inauguration of the age of communication.

Once with the recent development of communication technologies, which has led to unprecedented success in the well-known history of the media, which the emergence of the Internet and smart devices is turning into an information network with a constant flow of information/

messages, fundamentally changes even the relationships between individuals, not only between them and institutions. The smart technology insinuates itself as a mediator, it becomes the *third party included* in interpersonal communication. On the one hand, it facilitates communication, especially distance communication, but on the other hand it depersonalizes and diverts interpersonal interest. Information, communication acquires, through technology, the new and absolutely honorable status of „power” in the state, more recently of global power. Therefore, as a result of these unexpected changes, for which in reality no society was prepared, we are witnessing the significant restructuring of the forms of power, as well as the foundations on which the individual's relationship with the state has always been based – i.e. the *social contract*.

The essence of the social contract, as we know from Rousseau and modern political philosophers – Hugo Grotius, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Samuel von Pufendorf, Immanuel Kant – constitutes the relationship between individual rights and freedoms, on the one hand, and civic obligations as of citizens of the state, on the other hand. Voluntary association of *free* and *rational* people presupposes consensus on the common good, i.e. freedom and social rights. The natural rights are not negotiable, they must be respected with holiness. The idea of the common will is born of this voluntary association, but from the moment the pact is adopted, each individual admits to being subject to that common will. From that moment on, the common will becomes sovereign, and the supreme institution, the state or the monarch, will guarantee through the entrusted prerogatives the observance of the common will, the legal expression of which is the

law. To put it another way, the contract means the voluntary decision of individuals to form a social body invested with authority, represented by a sovereign institution that guarantees its proper functioning, by law, for the benefit of all. The citizen cedes part of his freedoms and rights to the state, which in turn undertakes the obligation to provide him with protection and guarantees regarding his fundamental rights. Without this mutual pact between free citizens, on the one hand, and citizens and the state, on the other, modern civilizations would not have been possible, nor would modern democracies be possible.

Through this contract we have the two poles of power: the state with its institutions, which represent the common will, and the population with its rights and freedoms. The idea of the legitimacy of state power is always decided, according to this report, on the basis of the accepted compromise between the popular will and the state political project – by which the rights and freedoms of citizens must be guaranteed, but at the same time the basic needs of the people must be ensured by the proper functioning of the publicly maintained institutions. Compromise has here, the meaning of mutual or explicit agreement between the contractual partners, so as to ensure social cohesion and trust between the parties. The legislative, the judiciary and the executive of power are the levers that make effective this compromise of individual wills with the administrative project of power, of course, provided that their formal duties are carried out with full competence, unaltered by particular interests, not corrupted in any way.

In recent societies, since the media took over the important task of public communication, we also have this interface of the political sphere, namely the window through which we, as citizens, see what is happening in

the institutions that manage state power. The press brings transparency in the public exercise of power, it links the activities of forums and decision-making courts to the will and expectations of the population. Only this fact, that it becomes a witness and advocate of the public will, gives the media the status of „institution of power”. A power similar to that of a referee in sports competitions – to ensure that the rules of the game are followed. Increasing media exposure of the administrative exercise of public institutions leads to the integration of political power into what is called a „transparent society” (Gianni Vattimo), and the reasons on the basis of which the administrative act is exercised, the official speeches¹, the decisions that are taken are part of the strategies of „public thinking”.

The studies included in this volume of professor Sorin Borza show how the most significant changes in the evolution of modern forms of power have occurred, from classical democracies to what is now called by terms such as *e-democracy*, *digital agora* or *smart democracy*. We still notice in these denominations the presence of the technical element, more accentuated of the one related to the information and communication technology. However, the origin of this phenomenon is distant, it resides in the „European way of thinking”, in the philosophical and scientific rationalism that authorizes the common thinking based on logic and expertise, which allows education systems and the criteria of competence/efficiency to favor the birth of technocrats and epistocrats – the faceless officials of the new institutions of power in the digital age. The argument that the author of the present studies builds is not at all simple and neither is it widely shared in the

specialized *milieu*, which obliges us to resume hereby its most important moments:

a) The configuration of the European way of thinking. Sorin Borza finds that social and institutional practices, the functioning of democratic political regimes, but also of the public administration are configured according to what he calls in the first study of the book „the European way of thinking”. Its defining feature is rationality. Its origins are Greek-Latin, it provides the framework for interpreting cultural and socio-political situations, in other words, the horizon of meaning in which we move, from which any hermeneutic enterprise derives its value. Reason is the preferred tool of European philosophers when composing theories of knowledge, of truth, but also when thinking about ethical systems. In particular, I. Kant is illustrative of the latter assertion, being the founder of rational ethics based on the categorical imperative and the assumption of human rationality in general. According to him, man is respectable because he is rational and also on the basis of this attribute man can establish a coherent universal system of freedoms, rights and attributions valid and satisfactory for all. Reason makes human actions ethical, predictable, and civically sound¹. The ideal of

¹ Of course, this thesis will seem naive or inconsistent to some like Nietzsche, Freud, Darwin or Marx who find various irrational formulas – will for power, will for pleasure, libido, the struggle for vital resources, the instinct of possession etc. – by which they prove the fact that man is guided only by reason in the field of knowledge, not even there in its entirety, but not in practical behaviors, in major life choices and decisions. Konrad Lorenz's *ethology*, but also Edward O. Wilson's *Sociobiology* argues that much of human social behavior, even some elaborate ritualization such as food, sexuality, and struggle, has its origins in the animal world.

Enlightenment emancipation, the theory of human rights, the democratic model of civil liberties are based on the definition of man as a rational being.

At the level of knowledge, reason and its methods are considered the only legitimate sources for obtaining a coherent, universally intelligible, and communicable interpretation of the truth., even if it extracts its primary data from the immediate sensory experience. Reason is the laboratory of knowledge, so everything based on reason is good. Progress is made through the rational development of knowledge and technology, social relations and the means of production. The capitalist calculation of production and profit are applied formulas of rationalism, and the administration of the „wealth of the nations” is done by streamlining the distribution of profit between the state and the citizens. The free market, a condition of prosperity, is a rational market. The contractual social model is also justified by reason. The examples could continue in other areas. The European way of thinking can be summarized in the idea of rationalizing individual and social life in as many aspects as possible, the use of founding narratives is a long-proven method, although it seems to be more related to mythology², rather than science. Efficiency, functionality are its versions in

² Not to be overlooked is the theory put forward by Georges Gusdorf in *Myth and Metaphysics*, according to which Greek philosophy was born from the rationalization of mythology and the replacement of myths with dianoethical formulas. So, the first Greek philosophies are only conceptualized mythologies. In fact, Plato never gave up the mythical story, often more convincing and rich in meaning than the theories he tries to impose. While myth reveals, rational argumentation imposes – here we see the difference between two forms of power, but at the same time we can see that reason uses mythical narratives to legitimize its own ambitions.

practical life: „European rationalism paved the way for procedural societies by authorizing the scientific production of founding and implicitly meaningful stories. This became possible when the predictability provided by the development of technologies made it possible to identify the truth in relation to functionality.” (Sorin Borza)

It is obvious, looking with a critical eye, that from the instrument of knowledge and the method of progress the reason, rationalism and rationality turn into ideology (such as *progressivism*), in forms of power³ and social coercion or, in Sorin Borza's terms, in a „social technology” through which power grids, prestige formulas and functional competence are imposed (or required). Finally, the absolute authority of bureaucracies and civil servants is reached. The dictation of the procedures in the selection of officials in any public institution, which masks that „procedural mobbing” of which Sorin Borza speaks, has no other function than the adjustment and administrative adaptation of society to the skills and vision of the technocrats, even if they have not proved by anything that they know nothing but to turn the wheel that belongs to them from the huge administrative mechanism in which they operate. The situation is also valid at European level, because in the last resort the intensely bureaucratic community space, dominated by epistocrats, was realized as a result of the „European way of thinking”. The project of modernity, if such a thing existed in a coherent and systematic way, was realized in part or, rather, in the author's terms, led to a „failed modernity”, if we consider the promise-achievement ratio. But, frankly speaking, history is rarely the mathematical consequence of the promises of those who make the plan.

b) The social control. The populations increase, stimulated by modern living conditions, health care and relative prosperity, the harsher tensions and social problems worsen. The conditions that make possible the increase in population and population growth have nothing to do with balance, solidarity or social ethics. Population growth brings with it differentiation, inequalities, increasingly complex stratification, even segregation. The phenomenon of migration makes the situation even more difficult, because the distance between integration and marginalization/social isolation is huge, significant parts of the population occupying various slices of this spectrum. Then the modern social emancipation supported by industrialization, technicalization, education, changing living conditions, standards of civilization and standard of living, especially in large urban agglomerations, generate different expectations and demands among the population, which the governing systems rush to supply with promises to ensure electoral support. Modern democracies play (on the wire) on the eternal compromise between promises they can seldom keep and ever-changing social expectations, under the unforgiving eye of the majority. Statistics decide the direction of public policies, with no other criteria than the will of the majority. The common good, which in itself should be a qualitative indicator, is redefined in terms of quantity – the masses many decide its significance.

It is clear that the methods of government must be adjusted to the nature of social problems, which change from one society to another and from one historical context to another. Practically the current administrations have to choose between latent social anarchy and social control and the least aggressive or restrictive formula

seems to be that of the domination of the rules, i.e. the formula of the procedural society. The dictation of the rules is the way to neutralize power, the impersonal formula of the authority of the system over the individual in the conditions in which no other mechanism of social cohesion can be imagined. Disseminated in procedures and rules, the public power of the institutions hides its face, it transforms into a rhizomatic, networked authority, and the societies are reduced to the state of a multitude of subjects without a master. In these conditions, the production of consensus is the main task of public discourse: „*The procedural society is not a non-violent society, despite all the promises in exchange for which we are ready to agree that «liberal democracy is the only political system that works». We can of course rejoice at the fact that in the space of Western democracy the body of individuals is no longer (as a rule) the object of punishment. But this does not equal to the disappearance of fear from society.*” (Sorin Borza).

It is but true that the methods of social control, now, are not the most violent, but this does not weaken their effectiveness in any way. William J. Dobson, quoted by the author of the present study, compares the tax inspectors – *soft control* – with the more frightening police officers who made arrests – *hard control* – in totalitarian regimes, to draw attention to the „*subtle dictatorship*” that dominates recent societies, with which the concept of *post-democracy* is already associated. It is true that the prefix „*post* ...” seems to have become a hypnotic refrain of analysts in the last half century, beginning with the so-called *post-modernism*, as if Western civilization had entered a form of *posthumous* existence, but still, we cannot ignore these clichés of theoretical studies. What is certain is that the mechanisms of conditioning the life and activity/options

of individuals are increasingly insidious and refined, so that it can truly be said that today we live a „life on credit” and that in these conditions our options and our discourses are limited or, according to criteria drawn up by technocrats, irrelevant. We are the subjects of a faceless master, and this, instead of arousing anxiety or repulsion, seems to soothe our humiliation of defeat. The fact that no one looks us in the eye with contempt, when it forces us to trample on our principles and pride, gives us a strange illusion of freedom, a false sense of responsible and mature citizens who prefer the transvestite conformist to the risky revolt.

c) The era of generalized communication. The silent but terribly efficient revolution of technology and media has moved almost all relationships between institutions-individuals online. Even political discourse and public decisions occur in a transparent manner, in the eyes of ubiquitous observers, and the populations participate, even if passively, outside the electoral processes and moments of legal manifestation of possible forms of protest, in the public exercise of „post-democracy”. The privileged agents of communication „with the public” and those who benefit from mutual credit from both political leaders and the population are experts, epistocrats, to use the terminology of the author. This credit is also about the *European way of thinking*, the authority of knowledge and truth in social life. Perhaps, farther and deeper, a superstitious atavism of the ordinary man towards the „specialist”, the learned man, is manifested here, the knowledge of whom he cannot reach and which for this very reason endows him with magical attributes. The epistocrats of the new forms of authority/political and administrative power are,

in the conditions of digital civilization, the equivalent of the healers of antiquity and the Middle Ages – they have an unverified power³, so quasi-occult, and an abstract charismatic influence that no one can afford to challenge for fear of unpredictable fatal consequences. They seem to be the saviors of a world that they are actually crushing and grinding, through their decisions, to the point of pulverization. But this is the very task of the epistocracy, this is the very secret of the domination of procedural democracy that relies on them – to spread the interests, tasks, duties, obligations of the population, so that all the public power and will is absorbed by them, and the individual freedom and autonomy become simple rhetorical refrains of some infantilized populations and overwhelmed by debts / tasks.

The mechanisms of epistocratic power are organized in a network, according to the rhizomatic formula theorized by Deleuze & Guattari, which contributes to enveloping or even hiding the real decision-making sources in the eyes of the population. The democratically obtained legitimate authority of elected politicians is lost or in any case disseminated through epistocratic networks, so that the result of governance is rather a hybrid product – political decisions filtered and modified according to the taste or interests of these expert bureaucrats who control power through the supposed authority of „knowledge“. The principle on which they are guided is no longer mere

³ „ ... supporters of the epistocracy are called upon to provide an answer to a classic but still equally legitimate question: how can non-epistocrats (*epistophs*) know if epistocrats intend and even manage to cheat? In my opinion, the problem of epistocracy has no applicable solutions outside the moral framework, regardless of the argument we use.“ (Sorin Borza)

equivalence – *knowledge means power* – but a more insidious, ideological one, namely: *the communication of the fact that possessing knowledge means even obtaining public credit, therefore of power*. That is why permanent communication functions as a charger of authority: *to claim that you know and that you can demagogically replace the fact of knowing and being able*. Public messages even become elements of power, so language provides a political function, creating the illusion that saying something means doing that thing. Let's just think of the promise, which is a language formula with explicit performative commitment – that is, it must have a practical effect – or of the programs of government and public administration. These are part of the official rhetoric, they circulate with persuasive power in the social environment, they generate emulation and adhesion, in the end public acceptability. However, they often remain simple elements of communication, are never done in a practical way or change their form under the pressure of circumstances and interests of any kind.

The two attributes of recent societies – *post-truth* as an episteme and *post-democracy* as a form of government – intertwine treacherously and profitably in communication activity, where official rhetoric stands for actual action. Public messages no longer have the function of informing or transmitting epistemic content of general interest, but mainly to maintain in permanent activity the communication mechanisms and the courts of authority that administer them. In a different way than the totalitarian regimes did – for which ideology was not just discourse, but an instrument of power, a form of social action, – with other slogans and by resorting to refrains that flatter people's democratic expectations, current political regimes

use communication technologies to tame populations. The rhythm and accents of the official messages create conditioned social reflexes, civic obedience. All the more so now, the era of generalized communication⁴, as some analysts have called the world we live in, it can be called *global logocracy* without hesitation.

All the changes made by recent societies through the spectacular technological advances and especially of communication technologies have led to what Sorin Borza calls *digital populism*, i.e. the new form of rhetoric of political power that uses those technologies and associates itself with the media institutions that ensure the public circuit of official messages. In the new configuration of power structures, the social contract itself, which is the basis of the organization of any society, the mutual credit granted between institutions and the population undergoes certain changes. A great part of the public decision meant for the smooth running of society – the eternal refrain of political power – is handed over to certain „technology managers” and procedures that constitute

⁴ Sorin Borza speaks of mediocracy, as the form of power obtained and administered through the media by certain „elites” associated with political power in order to control or direct social actions: „The globalization of the frameworks in which we convey and value information strongly centralizes social authority and (with the disappearance of barriers to communication between cultures and civilizations) gives rise to a specific elite – *mediocracy*. This elite operates simplifications of the official discourse of power and „translates” for the general public messages meant to legitimize one or another of the competing interpretations of social facts. With the interested support of mediocracy, the current political message focuses (outside the framework of traditional nationalism) on issues capable of widespread public mobilization.”

themselves into invisible elites, without ideological adherence, that create and ensure the soft formulas of social control, by the pre-interpreted, scientifically packaged, therefore authoritative processing and transmitting of the public discourse.

The rhizomatic distribution of power weakens the power of the state, on the one hand, but on the other hand makes it makes the citizens devoid of being responsible to it. What is commonly referred to as „trust in institutions” and actually vices state authorities significantly changes their referent once state-citizen relations are multiply mediated and disseminated in networks of bureaucratic administrators, who are not themselves part of the formal commitment of the state towards the citizens. The citizen was transformed into an abstract, impersonal court – which ensures through the obligations assumed towards the state, from which no one is exempt or forgiven, the progress of society and the colossal bureaucratic factories that manage power, – but it becomes, through its problems and needs, a mere „case to be solved”, which is dealt with by one or other of the delegated institutions, or in many circumstances by no one. The social contract has increasingly lost its value of „agreement among peers” established in mutual benefit and has become a business between service providers and customers. The citizen has become a simple client who is handled, always for a fee, by one or other of the agencies or departments of state institutions. The contractual model, which was based on a civic ethos, on a freely agreed social commitment, was transformed into a business-type contract between the state and the citizens.

Of course, only totalitarian states have control over their citizens and responsibility for their essential issues,

which in principle excludes the citizen's freedom of choice and independence from official policies/decisions that have the power of law. The „weak” state of liberal democracies does not cease to avail itself of the lives of its citizens – through their strict, legal obligations – but only formally and minimally engages in the problems they face from education to health, guaranteeing some standards, fatally unsatisfactory for most.

Sorin Borza's „critique” elements in the present study do not in any way abolish the „procedural society” or „digital power”, because these are the real forms, perhaps the only possible ones in the given conditions, of the relations between the societies and the institutions of power, but they observe with lucidity the limitations and constraints of their functioning for individuals/citizens. The association of power with modern technologies and, more recently, with those of digital communication lead fatally to a society of control, configuring with non-ideological means the performances of the Panoptikon – the transparency of people's lives. Under these conditions, the ideal of personal fulfillment becomes a simple variable in a bureaucratically controlled society, and freedom is a refrain that puts smiles on the faces of „faceless masters”, the true engineers of destinies of recent societies.

Vianu Mureşan

The European Way of Thinking and the Crisis of Democratic Practices Within Procedural Societies

Abstract:

In modern societies, the European rationalism gave birth to a „European way of thinking“. Starting with the twentieth century, the contractual political model appears to be crushed by successive crises. Their causes have non-convergent interpretations. The rationalist interpretation of knowledge as the foundation of progress in modern procedural societies can be legitimately questioned by considering the challenges facing the show society¹ (and the technical civilization).

The easy access to knowledge resources does not materialize directly in the ability to understand and interpret facts, and the declarative democratization of access to information does not automatically lead to free and ethical access to authentic resources of authorized decision-making. A process of ideological exploitation of the results of open source science – against the background of which science in general finds itself in an identity crisis – has led to a crisis of the foundations of classical contractual democracy. Democratic communities are called upon to seek solutions to the continuing tendencies to limit the decision-making powers that remain at the level of the citizen.

Keynotes:

reflective democracy, procedural society, European way of thinking, social technologies, postmodern vasality, knowledge communities

¹ Debord, Guy, *La Société du Spectacle*, Gallimard-Jeunesse, 2010.

1. How does the „European way of thinking“ influence democratic practices?

There is a European (Greek-Latin) model of the conceptualization of history that subjects any understanding of the world to an ethical regulatory framework: we have no meanings with wide social impact outside the predetermined cultural framework on the basis of which we assign value to facts and produce hierarchies. The deliberative turn² of liberal democracies is the expression of the tendency of modern thought to formalize procedures for recognizing the truth (the values). The way people view history and judge history is backed in every age by a sense of good that dominates the social mind. The common individual lives every day of his life under the pressure of this social sense – which, once internalized (has become „faith“) – turns into automatic thinking.

Even if, for the moment, it is difficult for us to accept, modern rationalism itself feeds a particular scheme of reporting to knowledge and produces a specific interpretation of the results of the action. Modern rationalism, armed with the presumptive innocence of Aristotelian logic (and, consequently, the whole of European science) seems to have kept a safe distance from the emotional charge of mythologies that legitimized the exercise of power in the ancient or medieval world.

But this is not as clear as it is claimed. The fact that we understand science in relation to an associated³ moral

² Goodin, R. E. (2000), *Democratic Deliberation within*, Philosophy & Public Affairs, 29(1), 81–109. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2672865>.

³ The interest in applied sciences is only a minor symptom. When we „do something“ with the results of scientific research, we associate value judgments to them. This ideological contamination of the

dimension, leads to interested interpretations of the results of the knowledge process.

This non-theoretical interest traces the applied directions of research. Science and, at the limit, the whole culture and human creation remain linked (in the subsidiary) to the concern to find and maintain control over resources – all of which are presented as a condition of a good life. The interests of knowledge are politically oriented in this sense as well – the political action lives (and dies) between judgments filtered by particular experiences. But what are the guidelines of this mechanism of historical refocusing of the interpretation of the results of knowledge processes?

In Europe – and later on through diffusion all throughout the West – the interpretation of social becoming and the historical course takes place in a rationalist scenario. In all modern societies, the prestige of the regulatory framework stems from a formidable claim to scientific objectivity⁴.

The procedure for establishing hierarchies of value in modern societies appeals – without exception – to scientific reasons. *The entire political modernity is marked by the interested alliance with scientific prestige*⁵. This alliance produces immediate effects – both in terms of trends in scientific research and in terms of political action. But

results of scientific research is noticed by Max Born (in his memoirs) who wrote in 1930: „Now I am convinced that theoretical physics is in fact philosophy.”

⁴ Even if this is sometimes difficult to accept – the most inhumane political measures demanded in their time a rational-scientific support and always found „specialists” with credible status to support them.

⁵ The discussion of the „non-Platonic” nature of mathematical concepts is not new (Lakoff), but there are few occasions when this changes the tone of sociological analysis.

what are the strengths, the lines of force, of rationalism in Europe today?

The political modernity appears as a product of the transfer of technologies for the validation of interpretations through scientific substantiation and democratic processes have borrowed the binary logic of socio-metric methodologies for searching for truth. The habit of statistically analyzing physical phenomena is translated socially as certification by majorities. The social effects of this transfer often appear to be disappointing and the tendency to identify the majority opinion with the public good has proved to be full of dangers.

The procedural security of the process of „recognition” of the truth and all associated social values cannot hide the non-objective dimension of the way of using scientific discovery (as it appeared in previous eras) and failed to keep under control the social conflict triggered by the authoritarian scheme for the exploitation of scientific prestige. This failure has not been openly acknowledged and does not currently know substantiated critical examinations⁶.

The failure of modernity (which we talked about in more detail on another occasion⁷) is intimately related to the inability of the dominant reason to offer at the social level and especially at the general human level what it had

⁶ Of course there are various observations, such as those made by Konrad Lorenz („Irrational and unreasonable human nature” – so democracy would be „unnatural”) but they are seen rather as figures of speech and have not gotten systematic attention.

⁷ Sorin Borza, *Modernitatea ratată [Failed Modernity]*, Ed. Eikon, București, 2016.

promised⁸. Modern rationalism did not stop cruelty and did not prevent the holocaust of the twentieth century – it was powerless in the face of the repeated crises facing Europe.

Theorizations about the various categories of crises⁹ – assuming *ab initio* the relevance of socio-metric assessments – tend to underestimate the fact that human evolution and the development of human societies did not proceed according to the scenarios of reason. What are the immediate consequences of the tendency to place social interpretations in the context of the European way of thinking?¹⁰

It is easy to see that any significant socio-historical change is prepared by appeals that are reflected in a model of reconstruction of procedures for identification and recognition of values (moral, but not only). The one aims at a political change, he/she begins with a strategic project to abolish conceptualizations aimed at publicly accrediting the protocol that legitimizes the exercise of authority. This

⁸ As the cradle of modernity, Europe is today crushed by successive crises (economic crises, the crisis of civilization, the „crisis of genuine leaders” and lately the health crisis Covid 19) maintained at the deepest level by the crisis of a way of thinking.

⁹ Europe has „as its nucleus a certain structure of the spirit, for example, a determined form of ethos, a determined way of approaching the world as a whole and of forming the world, through activity”, (Cf. Max Scheler, *Der Genius des Krieges und der deutsche Krieg*, in Max Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 4, A. Francke Verlag, Bern, 1982, p. 182.

¹⁰ The crisis of European humanity, the crisis of European sciences (E. Husserl), the crisis of European man and the crisis of European culture (Fr. Nietzsche), the crisis of meaning (Jan Patočka distinguishes three fundamental movements of human life: the movement of acceptance, the movement of defense and the movement of truth) ecological crisis (J. Larchet), the health crisis etc.

conceptual denunciation precedes open attempts to change hierarchies and power relations. Even when these hierarchies do not derive from authoritarian political commands, they are still based on the field of forces and claims that compete for domination in the space of a spiritual civilization.

The legitimacy of the political act in modern societies is grounded on a public consensus on an interpretation of everyday life. Any governance bases its authority on a *grand recite* (a great story) that entails an agreement. There is always an elite that creates the conditions for putting into circulation a story that it uses to explain public actions. We always have a discursive ground by virtue of which the sentence of the „chosen one” becomes enforceable¹¹. Any modern authoritarian leader speaks „the language of his people” – and „brings up to date” the procedures for the normalization of values. Any *aggiornamento* takes place within the horizon of particular purposes even when it proposes justifications drawn from the real needs of society.

The credibility and social relevance of European values is based on the classic set of cultural narratives on the horizon of which we have today a determined understanding of common concepts such as freedom or democracy. Any re-questioning of them is declared unacceptable.

It is necessary to note here that the *European way of thinking* does not work as a simple alternative to knowledge¹². It is not a measure of relevance in relation to a given

¹¹ There is a seductive dimension and a quasi – „erotic” relationship that the leader maintains with the public when he mobilizes it.

¹² Of course, the critique of Western exceptionalism does not resolve the basic issue and goes far too easily over the fact that Western civilization continues to attract immigrants from all over the world

cultural space, but passes equally, as a reference for what we consider to be good or bad throughout the world and in history. It did not give birth to a simple *community of knowledge*, but has led to the formation in a direct ‘slipstream’ of a form of narrative reconstruction of reality¹³. The expression ‘European way of thinking’ is used as a cover with the meaning of way of thinking humanly and in this sense (as a tool for building the good) it circulates with the claim of a legitimate foundation of political action.

The European rationalism appears as a procedural pattern of the act of thinking in any modern society. Its authority is supported by the reference to „science” (objective and producing certainties¹⁴) – any bringing into discussion of evidence that questions its own discursive version is rejected in principle, treated with contempt, possibly mocked at as being non-compliant. The power of the arguments of mainstream science is based on rating. But it doesn’t matter much if this rating is based on

like a magnet. How then is it that the „European way of thinking” remains associated with strong positive connotations even within worlds for which Christianity is a certain religion?

¹³ Despite the fact that the end of those *grandsrécits* (invoked by J. F. Lyotard) has already been prophesized – the increased appetite of contemporaries for the escort narrative cannot go unnoticed. The European way of thinking insistently offers some great *grandsrécits* stories – freedom, democracy, human rights etc., and reconstructs reality (*teukhein*) using the coded language of power: the set of consensual „scientific interpretations” is established at the level of the social imaginary – justifying various political actions and then size them morally.

¹⁴ All this starting from the fundamental premise that the purpose of science would primarily be prediction and not understanding.

emotions (fear, adoration) or „stellar ignorance”¹⁵ (simplism). The science that produces „procedural certification” is publicly declared an instrument available to all. This claim, however, deserves an applied analysis. Let's at least look at the way of social validation of the procedures and see if this is exactly the case. How do the „abbreviated narratives” of science (popularization variants of the great scientific theories) reach the public space and how is the scope and nature of the influence they exert among the masses decided?

The „great narratives” compete in the space of common sense (dominated by emotions and their provisional character). Modern rationalism has become aware of the volatile nature of their public success in these conditions. In social terms, this competition generates the series of philosophically theorized crises starting with the end of the XIX - th century: *the crisis of European humanity* (Edmund Husserl) or *the crisis of unity of meaning* (Jan Patočka) ultimately manifests itself as apparent effects of the crisis of science (which also appeared against the background of *the crisis of the foundations of mathematics*). The fact that we can no longer speak of an „ultimate source

¹⁵ Gustave Thibon, *Ignoranța instelată [Starry Ignorance]*, Romanian translation I. Nastasia and M. Nastasia, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2003 („A solution, in order to be truly assimilated, first requires a certain ability to pose and feel personally the problem that the solution solves. The weakness of religious education is that it offers solutions long before problems have matured in minds and hearts. It makes one think of political marriages between child princes who had to wait years for their union to take place, but between God and the soul of the „believers”, how many marriages officially proclaimed and never committed!”) The problem of ideological attachment can be viewed analogously: ideologies sometimes offer solutions to problems that the public does not have and did not know ...

of knowledge” (Karl Popper) has facilitated the organization of a space for „negotiating the public relevance” of science. The European rationalism paved the way for the procedural societies by authorizing the scientific production of „founding stories” and implicitly of meaning. This became possible when the predictability provided by the development of technologies made it possible to identify the truth in relation to functionality. But why would this be relevant in the political space?

The operational transfer of method has produced a subtle form of co-dependence between the political justifications of social actions and a consensually grounded interpretation of the truth of science. The crisis of the European way of thinking is linked to the deep crisis of the foundations of mathematics¹⁶. The perception of democratic majorities as the golden rule of the optimized nature of social and political decision is constantly undermined by the visible inability of European democratic regimes to keep under control the phenomenon of terrorism and new threats posed by the health crisis and the increasingly drastic limitation of human freedoms. The tendency to refine governance models with a strong regulatory focus is justified as an attempt to limit the influence of personal and group interests in public impact decisions. However, procedural societies are not marked by equidistance - the central set of rules that dominates the market for human interactions is visibly marked by a certain ideological choice.

The most democratic political regime is the result of elections that involve a competition for power and whoever has the power wants guarantees of efficiency. The

¹⁶ To be seen Russell’s paradox etc.

repeatability of science results is tempting for the political competitors – they hunt down certainties (in the sense of capacity of predictability) and seek to undermine any data or evidence that calls into question the ideological foundations on which their actions are based. Politics is – through its consequences – a choice of a way of thinking that allows the reconstruction of the social according to partisan interpretations and particular experiences. This confrontation is pragmatic and, given the stakes, it tests competitors' respect for the values of the society where they do politics.

An established collective sense of the concept of fairness or good is born even in advanced societies following agreed procedures. Of course, no one will agree to extract the scientific truth from consensus, but there is an almost universal practice of judging the results of scientific research in direct connection with the investigative procedures used. *Mainstream* science is denoted by the usual term science. Procedures are used in the process of scientific research and their correctness is enshrined in a tacit form of agreement obtained within a *community of knowledge*. This perspective appears transferable with immediate profits in the political space with the marked difference that the agreement of the majorities is the consequence of some emotional evaluations derived on the basis of personal and subjective feelings (thereafter treated procedurally as value judgments, given that in most cases they are not even judgments of taste).

There are several ways to „fabricate” the consensual position – democracy being the systematic mechanism with the most defenders. The *procedure* of election, of

political decision-making in democratic societies has always enjoyed the attention of the social sciences. From a technical point of view, we have formidable examinations of political decision models and their relationship to access to power. But why have procedures become so important? Or more precisely – *what is done (socially) with the procedures?* At a primary examination, the procedural systems produce a reconversion of social violence¹⁷ – proposing solutions to keep aggression¹⁸ under control within the „anonymous crowd”. Is democracy its own solution in communities where, as Darwin pointed out, competition between closely related individuals has stimulated evolution? And, above all, does the democratic procedure really work in the interest of individuals who choose to accept a restriction of their freedom for the promise of a better (safer) life?

In this sense, any procedural system carries in itself a subsidiary mechanism for the management of fear. Procedures consensually regulate the competitive field that no form of modern society can give up. The subtle forms (derivatives) of social aggression typical of the globalized world, the atypical manifestations of civic pressure that „administer” fear in the Community space, the whole arsenal of constraints available to the new

¹⁷ The neutrality of the procedural management of social relations is meant to dissipate and divert the potential for collective violence to impersonal courts, „taking the targets in front of the shooters”. Institutions and bureaucracies disperse tasks, responsibilities, so that we are in a situation where social violence no longer confronts direct opponents, but *diagrams of forces* (Foucault).

¹⁸ Konrad Lorenz, *Așa zisul rău. Despre istoria naturală a agresiunii [The So-called Evil. On the Natural History of Aggression]*, Romanian translation Ioana Constantin, Ed. Humanitas, București, 1998.

bureaucracy¹⁹ is formidable evidence of the competitive dimension modern civilization camouflages but in no way eliminates.

The modern societies often practice certain forms of *procedural mobbing* from which a group of individuals in society gain obvious competitive advantages. The most democratic regimes exploit consensual regulations as an opportunity, forcing the selection of the social response to administrative and political decisions. More directly, the choice of procedures for the moral labeling of social action gives rise (in democratic systems) to a subsidiary form of selection of traits and characteristics that increase the individual chances of affirmation for members willing to reach consensus. These individuals do not assert themselves socially starting from free personal choices: they configure their social reactions in the wake of civil fear and act considering that discipline ensures and provide them a high degree of personal security. How sustainable this way of thinking is and what kind of experiences actually justify its perpetuation – we will see next. What does political freedom look like in procedural societies and how the *European way of thinking* – can be a support for democratic decisions – seems a minor issue precisely because European-Western democracies pass as exemplary socio-political models.

¹⁹ Illustrative for the process of conjugating procedural power with political authority Krislov Samuel. *Representative bureaucracy*. To be seen also Ludwig von Mises *Birocrația [Bureaucracy]*, and respectively Milovan Djilas, *Noua birocrăție [The New Bureaucracy]*, but also the studies of J.S. Mill who noted the contradiction between bureaucracy and democracy. He emphasized the idea that in all systems marked by bureaucratic procedures there was a constant tendency to establish a technocracy that tends to reproduce and impose its own hierarchies of value through the exercise of power.

2. Modern Thinking and the Ethics of „Institutional Reason”

The functioning of political institutions enshrines the dominance of procedures, but the way in which institutions remain key instruments of the exercise of a will²⁰ remains transparent. In modern political systems, the will of the leaders (and of the dominant elite) resorts to instrumentalization: a whole procedural scenario justifies the executive action for which a corresponding set of „rational” arguments was identified *post-factum*. However, the criteria on the basis of which we establish the rational character of a support remain strongly rooted culturally. We decide and argue the rational character of actions on the horizon of judgments determined by historical experiences. All these arguments then receive collective validation and become a way of thinking. Institutional reasons are without exception consensual – they are never too far away from the culture and mentalities that dominate a certain form of civilization. Europe has produced the first models of democratic institutions, and this is not at all a coincidence: in Greece, ancient philosophy facilitated the emergence within the community of a new way of thinking about freedom and a new perspective on the human condition.²¹ „The European way of thinking” has facilitated (out of efficiency reasons) the transfer of procedural practices and has led – out of reasons of interest – to the overbid of the impersonal nature of the executive action.

²⁰ Of course, it is not always an individual will of a leader, it can be the aggregate expression of a will that stems from group interests – but this detail does not change the essence of things.

²¹ Plato is not a simple creator of concepts, he eventually created a new human type and, in this sense, a socio-political space and a new world.

Institutionally one works with the tacit presupposition that behind the *regulations* (ordinances, laws) lies an infallible logic and an *enlightened reason* that follows and objectively reproduces an original and natural process of becoming. It doesn't take too much field research to see that the most respectable institutions remain the „aquariums” that filter reality – and they don't do so disinterestedly. There is a general tendency to silence the ideological contamination of institutional reason, and we have little reason to believe that modern institutions would be willing to re-examine their claims of objectivism and doctrinal detachment. This claim to enroll in the natural course of becoming proper to physical reality – functions as the ultimate and undisputed ground for the political decision.

Procedural modernity has something of the senior sufficiency of the monarchies of divine right²²: only that the new deity is now the ethical reason whose procedural foundation seems to be the scientific methodology²³. The reason why this claim was not suitable for any critical analysis on the merits is axiomatic: modern reason (as the „core” of the European way of thinking²⁴) does not account

²² „... the bureaus usurp the power to decide many important matters, making decisions according to their own judgments on the basis of the merits of each case, that is, in a rather arbitrary manner.” (according to Ludwig von Mises, *Birocrația și imposibilitatea planificării raționale în regim socialist [Bureaucracy and the impossibility of rational planning in a socialist regime]*, p. 43).

²³ This mechanism is not a recent innovation – let us remember that Marxism self-proclaimed on any occasion as „scientific materialism” – which did not in any way prevent the horrors of Stalinism or the suffering of peoples who went through Soviet experiments.

²⁴ In an already classic text (*The Tragedy of Central Europe*) Milan Kundera intuited that Europeans have more in common than a

for someone who is not able to recognize the objective-scientific structure – the truth – and therefore legitimate authority as the undisputed guarantor of socio-political action. Let us, however, lean on this axiom, looking (as science proposes) at facts.

The procedural mechanism by which modern societies legitimize social action is a product of the ability to squeeze consensus by isolating challenges in their symbolic stages. Public cowardice / indifference is maintained by the lack of physiognomy of the will to create constraints. Despite this deliberate depersonalization of the executive branch, the mechanism of imposing a political will is far from the innocence it claims. The evidence of objectivity and the allegedly scientific aspect of the arguments at stake save but appearances. Procedures are „imbued” with power relations through which subtle forms of exclusion and implicit subordination are perpetuated.

The modern procedural society is marked by an increase in the level of symbolic violence (the development of the online environment and the expansion of public space in the virtual unequivocally proves this phenomenon) and, in parallel, by a generalization of the formal model of social interaction. The European way of thinking partly explains this effect and substantiates the practical ways in which interpersonal relationships convert into moderately institutional relationships. This trend is easy to be seen from a simple analysis of Community regulations as they appear in EU documents.

common geographical space. „Trying to draw exactly the borders of Central Europe would be pointless. Central Europe is not a state: it is a culture or a destiny. Its borders are imaginary and must be drawn and redrawn taking into account each new historical situation.”

When we speak at Community level about „European values” (clearly indicated in Article 2 TEU Treaty – Lisbon, 2007) we do not mean a simple political commitment – but we are talking about a legal obligation as non-compliance can lead to the appeal to the Court of Justice. Conferring legal force to these principles and values shows the importance given to the conceptual foundations of *the procedural society*.²⁵ **The Europe of procedures is a derivative of the European way of thinking.** Western civilization remains uncompromising in relation to the respect for the values that articulate and reproduce in *soft* versions an ancient *leitmotif* of classical Greek civilization: *the one who does not think like we do is „barbaric”*²⁶. This theme, regardless of the way in which it is resumed²⁷, arouses hostility. And it is presumed that part of the violent actions facing the big European cities have their origin in the refusal to accept this idea. The Myth of peace-keeping reason²⁸ does not hold up, and it is unlikely that our attempts to charge reason with something it cannot do have proved unrealistic.

²⁵ Any voice that disagrees with the tone set by Brussels appears „anti-European” – without a too careful analysis of the messages or the rationale. Brexit and, more recently, the sanctions imposed on Hungary are symptoms that eloquently show how necessary these analyses are.

²⁶ The Platonic idea that „everything that is not Greek is barbaric” is classical. However, it is no coincidence that Hannah Arendt considered totalitarianism to be a political form of Modernity. Of course, we will not find such a formula in European discourse – but it is clear that the level of civilization is measured in relation to the adequacy of these values and this „European way of thinking”.

²⁷ Lucien Cerise, Samuel Krislov, Wiliam Dobson.

²⁸ Of course, the peace of the modern world is not crushed today by caterpillars – but fear has not been removed from the streets or even from the *smart* homes where the luckiest of contemporaries rest.

The procedural society responds to the anarchic tendencies of exercising individual rights through the technique of division and multiplication of administrative obligations and through the artificial creation of needs²⁹. The procedural society – as a product of institutional reason, faces a series of new challenges for which we do not yet have formidable, redoubtable theorizing. However, there are certain ascertaining premises the analysis of which can contribute to shaping some solutions:

1. The measures to combat the various manifestations of crisis in modern societies may give the impression that institutions of force (specific to the procedural society intensely bureaucratized and formally restructured by *social technologies*) unjustifiably restrict individual freedoms for control power, more precisely as part of the strategies for maintaining / reproducing power schemes.

Apart from this shortcoming which is the subject of common criticism, we must note that complex societies have an increased anarchic potential (to be seen the difficulties of implementing the *deliberative democracy*) and in the absence of law enforcement institutions the „rule

²⁹ Financial loans bring with them long-term commitments, obligations and debts, often over several decades, so that individual freedom of choice is significantly restricted from then on. Man is caught between the need to have income, so a secure job or secure business, and the obligation to pay installments, taxes, fees etc. Under these conditions the market is a fundamental tool of social control. It is enough to overwhelm the market with products that people are stimulated to want (i.e. to produce „needs”), to always bring out new generations and series of tools, appliances, high-performance machines for the purchase of which they want to work, to earn money or to borrow, so that from that moment on individual life is nothing more than a variable function of the market.

of law” may come to a standstill. For this reason, the *active individual freedom* specific to modern man imposes innovative governing solutions³⁰. In the immediate practice, the „institutional reason” does not produce structures, methods, and operational forms of administrative power through which it can coherently manage societies in which all the individual freedoms promised by the political system would be allowed and exercised. The ordinary political discourse talks about the guarantees that the system can offer to those who adhere to common social values. *The logic of the functioning of institutions derives from an axiomatic of the will to power* – so that the recovery of an ideological³¹ identity appears as an alternative means of collective operationalization of the way of entrusting political power – with simultaneous observance of democratic principles.

2. The usual exercise of procedural power does not redistribute its benefits to the people from whom it has been „entrusted”, but feeds and serves the interests of technology administrators who do not declare any ideological attachment – and consequently do not risk to lose public support. The bureaucratic-technological infrastructure now manages the relations of ordinary individuals used to the political power, which means that democratic

³⁰ The idea is not new – but realistic solutions capable of eliminating the system of postmodern vassals are not outlined. *Deliberative democracy* does not eliminate the dominance of „authorized opinion” and the possibility of asserting social engineering as the core of government science. To be seen also Godin, E. Robert, *Reflective Democracy*, Ed. OUP, Oxford, 2003.

³¹ The debate over the „death of ideologies” reflects conceptualization tendencies meant to justify the expansion of procedural societies.

regimes (at the limit, nor the social contract) no longer function as a (directly) politically controlled relationship, but only mediated and deeply reconfigured bureaucratically³². Contemporary social technologies allow bureaucratic systems to structure complex systems of *postmodern vassals*. *Post-democracy* arises once with the capitalization of power in a formal space created within procedural systems. The public response required by the procedural shift of the exercise of power is to provide formal support for the development of deliberative networks of political participation.

3. The procedural society admits the epistemic (scientific) critique but rejects any debate of its ethical dimension with the argument that the methods in sciences cannot be subjected to the moral dimension. Under this premise, post-democratic regimes (n.b. illiberal democracies) are used to justify political technocracies based on an error of classical logic.³³ It may be true that the ideological justification of political action allows for emotional attachments and subjective reporting to the historical realities. However, this type of argument has no demonstrative value: the fact that certain democratic exercises have brought to power corrupt or incapable decision-makers does not turn the democratic system into something

³² Usually the message betrays the author, so that the social effects of public messages are not directly related to the direct interest of some decision makers (people-institution), but to the mass effects of the persuasive focus of messages (what should they do and not in relation to their truth or value in itself.)

³³ David Estlund seems to be in favor of this system of democratic validation of procedures for allocating *decision-making power/ competences* in politics.

essentially bad. It is necessary to denounce *the limits of modern democracies*, but this criticism must not provide the „physiognomic” elites with reasons to establish prison discipline.

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The Social Engineering and the Procedural Coding of Public Discourse

Motto: *First speak, then vote.*
(Robert E. Goodin, *Innovative Democracy. Democratic Theory and Practice after Deliberative Turn*, 2008)

Abstract:

The global attempts to stop the crises that successively grind modern societies by perfecting control technologies have offered for the time being, only emergency solutions. There are apparently all the means to ensure a humane life for the most members of society. But this possibility was born on the horizon of an abuse: it has already been seen (starting from historical experiences) that we cannot fabricate a conforming procedure that identifies objectively (and universally) what it means to be human and especially, how can and should be good for people to live their lives.

The tendency to morally validate social action by establishing consensual decision-making procedures and public action (of a rationalist nature) develops on a cultural-ideological background with a major political stake. The procedural society creates and maintains the power asymmetry and exploits the public communication environment: a critical analysis of the online society (modern procedural societies) aims to identify possible ethical decision-making models that can ensure the overcoming of the deficit of expressive democracy (expressive democracy) and an effective participation in the democratic process.

Keynotes:

*problems of epistocracy*¹, *procedural language*, *social technology*, *post-democracy*

1. How has the procedural model become a modern *social technology*²

From a political point of view, Europe appears today as a heterogeneous bloc of institutions dominated by ethical imperatives and procedural details. The neutral aspect of the management of procedural interactions in modern communities allows the short-circuiting of the classic path of intraspecies³ aggression by diverting and impersonating it to the formal enemy (institutions, regulations). This short circuit facilitated the perpetuation in power of a new bureaucratic elite (some texts identify it as an epistocracy) – which has acquired specific skills in managing executive procedures.⁴ This „procedural aristocracy” actively filters the rules of interaction in

¹ David Estlund, *Autoritatea democratică: un cadru filozofic [Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework]*, NJ, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2008.

² Social technology in the sense considered here appears as a practice of using human and digital resources to influence social processes includes the use of computers and information technology for government procedures. The term „social technology” is actually older, was first used at the University of Chicago by Albion Woodbury Small and Charles Richmond Henderson in the late 19th century. At a seminar in 1898, Small described social technology as the use of knowledge of the facts and laws of social life to achieve rational social goals.

³ Desmond Morris, *The Naked Ape*, 1967, (*Maimuța goală*, Romanian translation Valeriu Rendec, Art Publishing House, București, 2008)

⁴ Philip Tetlock, *Expert Political Judgment: How Good is it? How Can we Know?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

communities and interestedly controls the way of building social hierarchies. The management of procedures follows independently of the concrete object of the activity – a homogeneous work scheme: the procedures arbitrate the social competition starting from the ideas that enjoy the open support of the political power.

The procedural model replaces the deliberative practices of classical democracies with a model of authorization of social action borrowed from the practice of scientific investigation. The claim of procedural approaches to distance oneself from partisan ideologies is then used as a dogmatic argument against any contestations⁵. The expansion of procedural systems and the populating of the political space with formal models of fairness has led to the accentuated bureaucratization of societies where scientific knowledge and new technologies have also established „good living” standards. Within this mimetic scenario, modern societies justify their expectations of the masses. Based on common needs (identified algorithmically) – integrated premium conditioning systems have been put into operation. The conditional mechanisms predetermine in the alternative the individual and collective choices of the members of the societies dominated by the procedural model.

On a political ground – the problem of procedural societies is not the contestation of the democratic process (vote) – but the suspension of the deliberative stage within the political decision-making mechanism. This phenomenon has been examined insistently in several reference texts, but most analyzes have been limited to accounting

⁵ The truth is unique – the bizarre option of discussing alternative solutions appears.

for „post-democratic interpretations of democracy”⁶. Looking at things pragmatically, it would be more important to identify the pattern of functioning of current post-democratic practices and, starting from this model, to offer ethical solutions to overcome system crises.

The justification for the requirement to put in parentheses the public deliberation of joint decisions is based on a transfer of procedures for validating the correctness of scientific research practices in the social horizon. The authority of the „expert” is presented as a sufficient basis for substantiating decisions. This attempt to use the knowledge-truth-competence (social) relationship to publicly impose values and justify certain decisions with mass impact appears as a tool of classical social technologies. A new „democracy at the disposal of experts” is not, in reality, something completely new⁷ and the associated risks have already been theorized⁸. In essence, criticism attacks the logic of political discourse in the space of illiberal democracies – which often ends the *leitmotif* of autocracy: the language of power exclusively occupies the

⁶ Danilo Zollo, *Il principato democratico. Per una teoria realistica della democrazia*, Feltrinelli Publishing House, Milan, 1992, Jean Marie Guehenno, *La fin de la democratie*, Flammarion, Paris, 1993, Christoph Mollers, *Demokratie. Zumutung und Versprechen*, Ed. Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, Berlin, 2008, or Paul Ginsborg, *Wie Demokratien leben*, Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, Berlin, 2008.

⁷ *In nuce* the Platonic principle of *oikeiopragia* sends, of course in other frames of thought, to a close idea. This is also the reason why part of Karl Popper's fears about Plato's city are well-founded. (*Societatea deschisă și dușmanii ei – The Open Society and Its Enemies*)

⁸ Jack Knight, Johnson James, *Priority of democracy. The Political Consequence of Pragmatism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2012, or Helene Landemore, *Rațiunea democratică [Democratic Reason]*, Princeton, University Press Princeton, 2012.

entire social field and its use certifies a presumed complicity of users within a group that shares essential resources. The entire public discourse is structured around the requirement of competence: specialists appear more and more often on the social scene as arbiters of disputes with political content. Their authority is frequently extracted from the position they hold at an academic or institutional level. It is easy to understand why institutions – as an environment proper for managing procedures – have at their core a complex process of coding public discourse.

The fact that institutions are no longer mere means designed to provide public services is easy to prove. Even when certain institutions go bankrupt (they lose their social relevance) the discursive skills of the bureaucratic elite (who populated them in the past) are recycled – by reusing them in new structures that are not subject to public hostility. Political leaders have understood the defensive capital of taking on an institutional position. Procedures are pragmatically restructured based on their ability to offer competitive advantages in a society where ethical norms require group confirmation for any public action.

The first consequence of this short-circuit produced by the institutions led to the emergence and development of *the parallel market of vectors of political power*. The impersonal nature of procedures („we are all equal before the law”) has transformed „corporate actors” into social instruments capable of amplifying decision-making power to the point where society has become deeply „asymmetric”⁹. If institutions can operate in a regime of relative

⁹ Corporate actors can get informed at any time about any aspect of the privacy of „natural persons” (individuals) while, with rare

transparency of document management – it is becoming increasingly clear that content management (information) is becoming increasingly complicated in the context of connection¹⁰ management – highly professionalized. The immediate consequence of this professionalization and the generalization of procedural mechanisms in all sectors of social life provide conditions for the assertion of a new model of political governance. A new social technology¹¹ profoundly reshapes public perception of democratic systems and puts into circulation new meanings for classical political concepts. What is the conceptual significance of freedom today and how does this semantic shift affect the political relations of the individual with society?

Even if this is less obvious – in the times we are going through a „revolution”¹² takes place: the *revolution without revolutionaries* is the work of the *faceless elite*. Barricaded

exceptions, individuals do not have access to essential data on internal decision-making mechanisms within institutions that can invoke and invoke security reasons at any time.

¹⁰ Sorin Borza, *Managementul conectării și resursele ideologice ale puterii [Management of Connectivity and the Ideological Resources of Power]*, in *Sfera Politicii*, (145) / 2010, pages: 73-80.

¹¹ Without subscribing to the opinions of Lucien Cerise – we must note that the critical voices and accusations coming from the political direction seem more and more intellectually outlined. He considers the term „invisible slavery” synonymous with those of social engineering, cognitive infiltration or neuropiracy (according to Lucien Cerise, work cited, p. 19)

¹² Jack Goldstone defines a revolution as „an effort to transform political institutions and justifications for political authority into society, accompanied by formal or informal mass mobilization and non-institutionalised actions that undermine the authorities”, Goldstone, J., *State, Partide și Mișcări Sociale [State, Parties and Social Movements]*, (Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics), Cambridge University Press Publishing House, Cambridge, 2003.

under the guise of procedural objectivity, the members of this elite (*epistocracy*) impose patterns of ethical judgments in the public space. The objective-scientific appearance of the process of elaboration of the procedures works as a formal justification for the delegitimization of any attempt of critical monitoring of the decisions¹³. The claim of the new elite is the „temporary and motivated suspension of democracy” (of deliberation) with the argument that science (immediately embodied as „expertise”) has by now the practical ability to provide „the greatest good for the greatest number of people” – of course assuming that the identification of the „public good” for a humanity „in general” could take place beyond the subjective preference of individuals and, of course, at the cost of a statistical flattening of diversity.

Within this procedural society, „power without heraldry” matured and with it appeared the first symptoms of the failure of modernity¹⁴. Modernity has not fulfilled the promises (primarily those related to freedom, democracy and well-being) that have ensured it unparalleled

¹³ David Estlund recognizes a social authority calibration scheme that starts from the premise that „the experts know the truth” to derive from this the conclusion that „experts should be given the exclusive authority to regulate” to manage public space procedurally. On the other hand, Estlund's epistemic proceduralism provides a moral basis for blocking this deduction. Rejecting the epistocracy – Estlund shows that and experts can also express themselves under pressure from interests. Estlund, David, *Autoritatea democratică: un cadru filozofic [Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework]*, NJ, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2008.

¹⁴ Failed modernity is a „monstrous modernity” (Peter Sloterdijk) not because it abandoned the idea of progress but because it deprived us of reasonable tools with the help of which to decide in which direction it is good (moral) to seek progress.

prestige for decades. Modern reason today faces limits that it was not willing to acknowledge – which is why it has moved to aggressive forms of management of social representations. Populist promises about the „wonderful new world”¹⁵ are to be formally fulfilled through *resemanticization* – and most likely not through an effective allocation of social rights or resources. Despite advances in application areas with a visible impact on the lives of communities, modern political regimes have offered no more freedom than ordinary individuals in times of global control. The price of comfort offered to ordinary people by the expansion of new technologies can be financially reasonable. But it is unjustifiably high, once it comes with an unprecedented increase in the control options now available to the elites of power.

2. The image as a normative tool of social technologies

Procedural societies not only impose a certain scheme of benefit distribution in society, but outline the horizon of preference for whole generations of citizens, on an unprecedented scale. Social networks support an accelerated process of the globalization of need. Not even the sciences have managed to control the accentuated tendency of „ideological packaging” of these human expectations¹⁶. Public communication has undergone significant changes amid changing technologies that provide new vehicles for the public message. A language with specific

¹⁵ The dystopian society imagined by A. Huxley (1932) in the novel with the same name – *Minunata lume nouă* [*Brave New World*].

¹⁶ Stuart Ewen, *La société de l'indécence - Publicité et genèse de la société de consommation*, Retour aux Sources Publishing House, 2014.

coding rules is born in this complex process of public communication management¹⁷.

Modern video technologies are so influential that, in certain situations, they end up questioning data of personal experiences. Contemporary imago-centrism is largely responsible for these changes¹⁸. Against the background of this hostile takeover of reality – rationalism is forced to reconsider its meanings within a „sociology of corporality”¹⁹. The self-image of modern man changes starting from the ability of social communication in the network to function as a „mirror”. Self-perception reflects the influence of the „truth of the network” on the daily decisions of modern man. The procedural society is at the origin of a new type of relationship that arises between human beings at a great distance from each other and there is the possibility that they fundamentally change the way man

¹⁷ Various political regimes have accredited for common expressions or meanings impregnated with interests and concerns of the dominant political group.

¹⁸ According to Georges Ballandier „The imaginary clarifies the political phenomenon (...) because it is constitutive of it. Any power system is a device designed to produce effects, in the category of those comparable to the illusions created by the theatrical machinery.” (*Scena puterii*, Romanian translation Sanda Fărcaș, Aion Publishing House, Oradea, 2000)

¹⁹ Loic Wacquant, „the sociology of corporality that I propose is not a sociology of the body as a sociocultural object, but a sociology that regards the body as an element that underlies the social action.”, p. 126, respectively „The sociology of corporality is based on both a syllogism and a challenge. The syllogism is as follows: if we assume the understanding of the body not only as a socially constructed product, but as a vector for the production of knowledge, the preformation of practices and the exercise of power.”, p. 129 (<http://compaso.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Compaso2014-51-Wacquant.pdf>, accessed on 28.02.2020)

will think the world and think of himself. Perhaps it is not premature to ask about the impact that technology-mediated interaction can have on physiology and, why not, on brain chemistry.

We can already sum up some immediate effects of this new mechanism of social construction of reality. At the communication level, the procedural society gives birth to a particular idiom – rich in socially useful clichés, but without a direct relationship with the truth. The knowledge communities are gradually losing their social relevance because the set of immediate problems that individuals face at the public level can be solved on the basis of optimized „response techniques”²⁰.

The generalization of the use of procedures as a solution to our problems has as an immediate consequence the success of a utilitarian and reductionist way of taking over reality. When we focus on the facts with procedural tools at our disposal, we do so with the intention of identifying classes and our interest in diversity and differences goes in a background. The procedural model of interpreting social contents identifies what we have in common but does not stop here: it presupposes on these bases the necessity of standardizing needs and imposes norms (and associated sanctions) for any alternative reading of everyday life. The ambition to make an inventory and classify things (in order to predict) is rather a statement of sharing in a group with practical interests and only in the alternative an attempt to discover the truth. The *mainstream*

²⁰ The fact that we can find for almost anything we would like to make a „tutorial” detailing the sequence of successive actions that can lead to the desired result is the minor symptom of the generalization of the illusion of competence. But we are well aware that the practical value of „teachings” of this kind is limited.

discourse does not operate with messages of content properly: it refers to the discourse of *escort science* – to „facts and data” processed according to the contractually justified norm, inclusively the findings of scientific research respect pattern²¹ forms – and play the role of identity signal. Their use is (in itself) a statement of programmatic sharing.

The main social technology that legitimizes political actions in modern democracies is the „rational-scientific” recalibration of social-historical projections. The „new world” does not resist the public's perception as a symbolic image, it comes to the collective mind as a simplified equation – a concentrate of „reasoning” with practical and demonstrative value. The specialist is the „cliché image” that any political regime concerned with connection management conveys in the modern political space. This image is a major ideological resource placed at the disposal of power.

The ambition to scientifically substantiate social theories or political regimes already has a tragic history: Marxism or Nazism unscrupulously exploited the public's willingness to subscribe without critical analysis to pseudo-scientific theories that later justified abominable political actions. How did it get there, given the fact that every age has real scientists and scientists who think autonomously?

Each era has consensual elites and, consequently, an intellectual support group that they use as an argument

²¹ According to Michel Foucault, *Ordinea discursului*, Romanian translation Ciprian Tudor, Eurosong & Books Publishing House, Bucharest p.15 – „I assume that in any society, the production of discourse is equally controlled, selected, organized and redistributed through a number of procedures that have the role of conjuring its powers and dangers ...”

to justify purely political decisions. They are responsible for the production of „scientific” evidence that can justify a certain socio-political action. This „escort science” provides procedural models at the disposal of the power and allows a transfer of languages and concepts specific to the logical-mathematical disciplines. This „science” that has lost all contact with the truth ensures prestige and high social positions is circulated at the limit of academic imposture and is difficult to manage because any open appeal is seen as an insult to the „community of interests”. The accentuated tendency to investigate on a statistical basis the social is only the visible facet of this phenomenon. However, what are the consequences of the emergence of these niche languages and how does their use on an academic and institutional scale affect social life?

3. The *scientoidal style* – the socio-political version of the machine code

The procedural language is in this sense – an algorithmic dialect of the wooden language that reinvents itself in the context of the connected society. The major social and technological changes of our time are reflected in the mirror at the level of language clichés. A certain familiarity that academic impostors show in relation to scientific research methods (possibly their formal accreditation as intellectuals²²) allows political actors thereafter to make a transfer of discursive authority: these individuals are exploited as an ideological resource – and their public image is strongly eroded – all for the benefit of these policy

²² Diplomas, prizes, titles...

makers. *Media intellectuals* are an integral part of the political system in modern societies. Humanistic intellectual environments easily maintain the illusion of competence: first, arguments cannot be rejected without the rest (as is the case with evidence from the exact sciences), and, perhaps more importantly, there are various complicities (outside the realm of science itself) that are born (naturally) within closed groups. Media intellectuals speak the language of power. The links between languages to desire and power are strong in Michel Foucault's texts: language „is not only what manifests (or hides) desire; it is also the object of desire; and because the discourse – about which history always teaches us – is not only the one that translates the struggles [fights] and the systems of domination but it is that something *for* which and *through* which the fight is fought: it is the power that must be conquered.”²³

At public and institutional level – the claim of laconicism and precision in terms of science turns into primitive abbreviations and conceptual simplism (for example) in the case of communication on social networks. Even when these messages retain logical structures, they lack social utility because they lack logical depth²⁴. The fact that the public has taken over these „semantic concentrates” for

²³ Michel Foucault, *Ordinea discursului [The Order of Discourse]*, Romanian translation Ciprian Tudor, Eurosong & Books Publishing House, București p. 16.

²⁴ Logical depth, according to Charles Bennett (1990) from IBM, it refers to the process that leads to a certain amount of information, and does not actually measure the amount of information that is produced and can be conveyed. The complexity of the information would be assessed not by the length of a message, but by in terms of the work done previously to get the message across. The criterion of logical depth – shows that a thing is all the more important the greater its evolution over time, the harder it was generated.

utilitarian reasons turns them into the usual vehicles of common messages: they shape (as tools) our very capacity to understand and work with reality.

This already noticeable turn in terms of speech acts leads to a pragmatic reconversion of the old „wooden languages” into environments of shaping social identity.²⁵ Groups and hierarchies within groups are identified through particular discursive „badges”. Public communication is marked and strongly influenced by the declarative intention of belonging to a particular institutional culture and to value specific group landmarks. The tendency to secure the social value of discourse entails a specialized production of institutional expressions with the role of code. Their use allows individuals to be classified into stratified categories and plays the role of tools for recognizing a status.²⁶

The way an individual communicates publicly determines the frames in which his messages will be received and will receive, when appropriate, a response. As Deleuze observes, „There is no mother tongue, but an adjudication of power by a dominant language within a political multitude”²⁷. Individuals seeking status will prefer to use institutional languages as they make it easier to maintain a personal safe distance and will reflect the individual's ability to use the force derived from

²⁵ The „anonymous mass” speaks the same language. It includes only individuals who partisanly and congruently re-signify human values – in terms agreed upon by the dominant group.

²⁶ Orwell was one of the first authors to acknowledge the role of the *new speak* for totalitarian mechanisms. The wooden language procedurally supports the ideological exclusivism of the totalitarian state.

²⁷ Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *Mii de platouri [Mille plateaux]*, Romanian translation Bogdan Ghiu, Art Publishing House, Bucharest 2012, p. 12-13.

belonging to a disciplined group and presumably prone to various forms of interested solidarity. What reasons would we have to look critically at the extended takeover of the institutional model of communication? And especially, what are the immediate dangers that such a model hides?

Freedom and equality are threatened under the spectrum of these discriminatory possibilities of access to re-significations of common values: a rigid formula of identity hierarchy consequently occurs where bureaucratic elites have the possibility to keep privileged social positions under formal motivations. This hierarchy, once established, remains functional and operates beyond the actual message because it is not the literal meaning of the expressions used that is obscured, but the ability of those below the hierarchy to ensure a functional reading of the reality that the discourse regulates. Even when the law speaks and we hear it – we do not have the individual capacity to produce interpretations of its limits. We have every reason to believe that the institutions maintain a body of bureaucrats that they generously reward precisely because they ensure the re-signification of regulations and by this, an ideological reconstruction of reality. Social rules are not born on procedures similar to the results of scientific research. The modern society does not insistently focus on reason because modern man would overestimate its imperatives, but because it has found the most convenient formula to substantiate „objectively” a will that has its own interests and goals. In this sense, institutional language can be examined as an immediate expression of the failure of modernity.

The circulation of a language for the initiated ones is a minimum operating condition for any procedural society.

The more complex the code, the more mediating structures it will require²⁸. Designed to classify this language, it operates with abstractions and remains at the disposal of a technocratic arbitration against which one and the same statement can be true and false – depending on the regulatory procedure we are asked to refer to. This highly formalized discourse allows for its total detachment from content. (of truth, of any *correspondence with reality*). How does the procedural language come to determine the social value of public discourse?

Any discourse of authority interprets (more clearly resemanticizes) for the public the results of the application of the formal code of rules and expressions allowing later the understanding of any reality entered in the field of power interests²⁹. The procedural society is legitimized by the constant recourse to scientific objectivity, which is why the „new wooden language” borrows the aspect of the language used in science³⁰. Despite the conjunctural prestige enjoyed by the discourse with the aspect of logical-mathematical reasoning – the wooden language and

²⁸ „The Renaissance, which brings Europe into what historians call Modernity, has complicated the traditional situation of the single code, adding a second, a third, a fourth, a fifth code to Western societies....” (according to Lucien Cerise, *op. cit.*, p. 84)

²⁹ An eloquent example is the resemanticization of a term such as democracy – and the difficulties encountered in this process have recently been illustrated by the emergence of a syntagm such as „illiberal democracy”. The term *illiberal democracy* is originally assumed by Fareed Zakaria in a regularly quoted article: Fareed Zakaria (1997) „*The Rise of Illiberal Democracy*” in *Foreign Affairs*.

³⁰ F. Thom he also talks about the so-called *scientoid* style: the wooden language claims to be scientific and borrows some features from the language of science, such as the nominal style (substantiation and alteration of verbs), impersonality and timelessness.

the tendencies of procedural approach to social problems prove to be symptoms of a new crisis. The political dimension of this crisis is confirmed by the resurgence of populist parties throughout Europe.

Speech acts that take place in the community and their immediate expression as „public speaking” reflect the adaptive tendency of individuals who feel the imminence of a risk situation and carry out prevention procedures. The attempt to politically equip public discourse is not accidental. Language operates as a component of competitive behaviors: achieving the goal and satisfying basic needs basically motivates linguistic interaction even if the performative dimension of speech acts does not exhaust the reasons why language is a key element of life in the city. Societies have historically legitimized themselves by introducing into the game projections of a future for which people are willing to take risks and deprivations. Discourse with the public retains an implicit political dimension, it delivers „regulatory concentrates” for public behavior that are to be rewarded or punished.

The procedural language (as an instrument of modern oracular³¹ philosophy) formally virtualizes expectations and hopes – all of which significantly influence the political decision-making process. The institutions do not cultivate a problematic thinking, but they function according to historicist thinking³². That is why they assume diagnostic procedures and make a „technological forecast”

³¹ The term belongs to Karl Popper and refers to theorizations that claim to intuit the future.

³² According to Karl Popper, *Mizeria istoricismului* [*Misery of Historicism*]. Of course, Popper is critical of the Marxist philosophy of history and, in general, of any totalitarian utopian system.

(a term close to *social engineering*) so they are ideologically contaminated. As we have seen, political ideologies shape projective models and offer the public a better way of life. Their success and public scope are closely linked to their mobilizing ability. The ideological discourse is the environment where the interested resemanticization of common expressions takes place. Words acquire social meanings in a certain epoch starting from the meta-narratives that the political power can impose within a society. Then, the understanding of the facts takes place within a set of rules that escorts any new entry into the value space accredited by the official elite³³. *The narrative reconstruction of reality* takes place in the conditions in which the opinions of authority are consolidated in the process of contextualization. The responsibility for producing and disseminating the escort discourse³⁴ in procedural societies lies with *social engineering*³⁵ (*and to the institutions as key tools for social forecasting*). Institutions are the pillars of the procedural society – the society within which human existence appears as a construction. They are designed

³³ The political elite filters the intellectual discourse and does so using compliant valorization procedures. The *Think police (Thinkpol)*, described by George Orwell in 1984, discovers and punishes the crimes of thought, that is, those thoughts not approved by the ruling elite. To be seen forms of updating in Kloor, K. (2017). The Science Police. *Issues in Science and Technology*, 33(4), p. 78-84. (accessed on 28.02.2020, www.jstor.org/stable/44577338)

³⁴ The escort speech prepares a social architecture. The procedural language is ideologically „infected” and functions as a primary tool of social technologies. The modification of the escort speech entails the modification of the interpretations even in the case of some concepts with meanings – apparently difficult to diver. Let us but think of the classic political concepts – freedom, justice, democratic state.

³⁵ The paternity of the term also belongs to Karl Popper.

to reshape man³⁶ and this claim has found defenders even among scientists³⁷.

In order to be able to fulfill their mission, the institutions have their own discourse and work with their own *machine codes*. Institutional procedures encode model social relationships. Institutional performance was largely identified with control capacity (by exploiting the perlocutionary³⁸ dimension of the public message) and governments were assessed primarily in terms of cost-benefit analyses. The use of an accounting model to examine the performance of institutions has led social actors to borrow and use common rules of procedure (with accreditation from various sciences) – claiming that due to their technical nature they can preserve a non-ideological dimension for their own decisions³⁹. But what is the symptomatic

³⁶ To be seen also Vance Packard, *The People Shapers*, Ed. Macdonald & Janes, London, 1978.

³⁷ B. F. Skinner – one of Harvard's best-known behavioral psychologists called for „behavioral technology” because, he believes, we would need to „make major changes in human behavior”.

³⁸ According to J.L. Austin, a perlocutionary act is an action or state of mind that arises as a consequence of a discursive act.

³⁹ In order to be able to analyze the joint exploitation of resource systems, Elinor Ostrom identifies several types of rules that work and influence the mechanisms of joint governance of resource systems. Thus we are dealing with: *access rules* – which establish the number of participants, the available resources and the conditions of entry and exit of participants, *rules of comprehension* – which determine what types of actions and outcomes are allowed or prohibited, *rules of position and authority* – which determine the distribution of authority between positions in the organization, *aggregation rules* – which set out how the various actions are assessed and aggregated in the final action, *procedural rules* – setting the rules used in different decision-making situations, *information rules* – establish existing information constraints, rules of reward and punishment, which

model of the new objectivity? How to identify the degree of legitimate authority of the social interlocutors and especially why societies grant credibility to a certain type of discourse and reject others. But what is the symptomatic model of the new objectivity? How to identify the degree of legitimate authority of the social partners and especially why companies give credibility to a certain type of discourse and reject others?

Pierre Bourdieu observes that language exchanges can express power relations in various ways⁴⁰. They are part of an economy – the so-called *economy of language exchanges*. The language specific to the procedural company is a powerful tool for capitalizing on authority. Gross banalities – formulated in accurate procedural terms – end up being rolled into the public space and this resumption allows them to reap a quantitative form of legitimacy. Validated by rating – the carefully dosed portions of the cliché get to enjoy the attention of a wide audience, the interest they enjoy being mainly related to the unprecedented availability to be taken in the absence of any critical spirit⁴¹.

The procedural society promises equal access to knowledge (truth) and this myth is supported by the thesis that

establish the modalities of awarding rewards and punishments (Ostrom, 2007)

⁴⁰ „ ... we must not forget that the relations of communication par excellence represented by linguistic exchanges are, at the same time as well, relations of symbolic power by which the relations of force between the speakers or between the respective groups are updated.” According to Pierre Bourdieu, *Limba și putere simbolică [Symbolic Language and Power]*, Art Publishing House, Bucharest, 2012, p. 51.

⁴¹ In cultural circles, the phenomenon of accreditation by prestige (which can sometimes be legitimately gained) is obvious: the political attaches cultural success to later enjoy „validation by association”.

information is a fairly distributed good. Procedural systems for exercising political power give rise to a „legitimate language” on the basis of which social identities are then structured. In our opinion, an analysis of the consequences of the intensive use of *legitimate language* within the *procedural societies* can provide the basis for an explanatory theory regarding the contemporary revival of discourse and perhaps even of the populist policies in Europe.

The main premises of the revival of populist discourse in modern societies need to be critically evaluated. Based on this assessment, certain models of democratic response can be considered:

1. The procedural society puts into circulation „discursive badges”, „keys” that open to individuals the access way to various positions in the system. The use of „badges” entails the recognition of certain rights, of a status, being at the same time access codes to resources and top hierarchical positions. We can even speculate on the existence of a complicity of the „badge owners”⁴² in order to recruit hierarchical staff who ensure the operationalization and control of social and political power resources⁴³. The presumption that these signs of authority are deserving and comprehensive for certain competencies (attestation of expert status) is (at least in the procedural society) a

⁴² Academic cards, I believe, are part of the category of these conspiratorial „badges”, as long as they delimit drastically and preliminarily between the eligible people of the most important positions in all governmental and budgetary institutions.

⁴³ This observation has nothing to do with the Jacobin intransigence that was critically placed in relation to „an aristocracy of knowledge” – starting practically from the critique that J. J. Rousseau makes to the sciences and arts.

sign of manipulation of social relevance criteria. There is a need for a critical exercise that modern knowledge communities must put in the service of identifying the content value of public discourse.

2. Coded language (used as a subsidiary vehicle within procedural systems) is built on the principle of logical ambiguity, so that the value of adequacy to facts is unverifiable, truth and falsehood being dependent on conjunctural interpretations, both plausible in parallel grids. The procedural language as a language of power is used as a tool to undermine deliberative democracy⁴⁴. There is a need for a consensual commitment to set in the public space operational criteria for validating the content of the public message. The „official” interpretation constitutes simultaneously an „access code”, which one does not have unless it is delivered in advance in exchange for consensus.

3. The „networks of truth”⁴⁵ function as a resource of impersonal authority which then substantiates the „objectivity” of generative policies. These, kept away from any attempt at ethical dimensioning, feed and exert elite pressure on political decisions and social values. Of course, these networks are not perfect, there often appear

⁴⁴ Dryzek and Young object to the term „deliberative” democracy. Dryzek prefers the term „discursive democracy”, and Young prefers the term „communicative democracy”. (according to Patten, A. & Kymlicka, Will, *Introduction: Language rights and political theory: Context, issues, and approaches*. 2003.

⁴⁵ These discursive formulas once accepted by the public become cliché truths the contestation of which implies a social price that is difficult to accept.

„alternative truths” circulated on channels that challenge the *mainstream*. But they rarely become able to question „networks of truth” officialy, even if the beneficiaries of the benefits of power are (usually) few. How can these networks be maintained in the long run?

4. The procedural language has a „rhizomatic”⁴⁶ expansion – a mechanism that allows it to generate symbolic power autonomously. Leaving the condition of content vehicle – the procedural language becomes in itself an autonomous manifestation a social presence – which, beyond its informational value, authorizes a specific level of mass influence. In modern societies, procedural languages are linked to other force instruments [tools] of political power.

⁴⁶ „A rhizome will not stop connecting some semiotic links, some organizations of power, some occurrences that refer to the arts, sciences, social struggles.”And moreover, the „collective assemblies of enunciation work, indeed, directly in the machine assemblies, and a radical rupture cannot be established between the regimes of signs and their objects.” according to Deleuze, G., Guattari, F., *Mii de platouri [Mille plateaux]*, Romanian translation Bogdan Ghiu, Art Publishing House, Bucharest 2012, p 12.

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The Crisis of the Terms of Social Contract in Modern Societies

Abstract:

The widespread use of procedural models in the context of the digitalization of public services has led to a specific formula for bureaucratising activities and a growing concern among people about the possibility of using technology as a political advantage. Convenient, at least at a certain stage, digitization (e-services and the digital aristocracy) has made social-political relations credible in modern societies. Critical analyses have recently emerged regarding the ability of digital technologies to maintain individual power relations in democratic settings. What is it that led to the contesting of this model that promises to ensure ethical management of interpersonal relationships in modern societies?

Keynotes:

postdemocracy, generative policies, knowledge community, networks of truth, procedural society, rhizomatic systems, digital democracy

1. The truth of *power relations* and its influence on generative policies

Beyond the fact that it is still seen as the best political regime, modern democracy is a consensually legitimized technique for formalizing decisions (dominated by the „reason“ of knowledge communities⁴⁷). The prestige of

⁴⁷ Sophia Rosenfeld, *Democracy and Truth: A Short History*, PA

procedural democracy is extracted from the presumptive identity that politics accredits between *science* (scientific rationality, truth), *procedures* (technologies) and *the right decision* (simultaneously honest and efficient). In the context of the accelerated digitization of public administration services (e-Services), more and more questions⁴⁸ are emerging about the capacity of „digital democracy” (*e-Democracy*) to maintain a functional link between the citizen and the political decision. As a promise – this link appears objectively ensured by the application without exception of neutral procedures – the legitimacy of which is argued on a scientific basis.

Procedures (with rare exceptions) are institutionally authorized and acquire legitimacy by appeal to reason – but they still bear the imprint of an interested paternity: the claim of equidistance and morality under which democratic procedures lay can be dismantled upon any brief examination of the consequences.⁴⁹ In modern societies, the democratic procedures acquire new expressions under the pressure of patterns with epistemic design: in this way a „science” of methods for recognizing and circulating social values (good, right, true) is born and,

University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 2019.

⁴⁸ To be seen Daniel A. Bell, *Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy*, Princeton University Press, 2015, or Helmut Wilke, *Demokratie in Zeitender Konfusion*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 2015 more recently David Runciman, *How Democracy End*, Basic Books, New York, 2018, Daniel Ziblatt and Steven Levitsky, *How Democracies Die* Crown Books, New York, 2018 and Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains*.

⁴⁹ It is unlikely that any dictatorship will publicly admit that it is not the expression of a popular mandate, just as it is unlikely that the distribution of the costs of operating political regimes will be proportional to the benefits.

consequently, to publicly authorize political decisions. The birth of modern procedural societies is the first condition for the implementation of post-democracy⁵⁰: the mechanisms of political choice are filtered into the space of digital democracy (*e-Democracy*) by a new elite capable of imposing new directions of interpretation of classical political concepts.

Obviously, the *interested resemantization of major political* concepts based on the premise of the unambiguous nature of officially acceptable definitions entails the danger of behavioral dogmatism with predictable historical consequences⁵¹. Of course, older or newer historical events demonstrate how politicized this thinking mechanism is. This conceptual model has not been completely abandoned⁵² – even if the terms of trade negotiation appear in a completely different form. In the space of procedural societies, the promise of a better future is a construction of the „probability calculation” type and not an attempt at emotional engagement – as proposed by classical ideologies. The asymmetric character of the distribution of social costs is still presented today as a rational practice

⁵⁰ Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy After the Crises*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2020. Crouch's first thematic paper on the postdemocratic phenomenon, *Post Democracy* was published in 2003.

⁵¹ The circulation of ideologies with a dogmatic core (an indisputable central „truth”) was the antechamber of dictatorships until the middle of the century XX. All these dictatorships worked by proposing a projective social ideal for which societies were called to pay a price. The reason for this requirement was derived from the very good ratio between the price paid (the solidary sacrifice now required) and the benefits with a community perspective that ideologically consensual individuals are to share.

⁵² And we have pragmatic explanations for that. It remains effective and is unlikely to change soon given human nature.

(possibly with scientific bases) – a legitimate expression of a thought dominated by the logic of necessity and honesty. We can identify here a conceptual sequence that modern rationalism proposes as a justification for action in the space of digital democracy: the *formal logic* (dominated by procedures) is a *condition of scientific truth* (the product of calculating thinking) and the *legitimate basis of political decision* (an honest science usually comes to unique conclusions). A „scientifically” governed society thus becomes the historical manifestation of a political plan of tenacious administration of legitimate procedures⁵³. This is, in the end, the most classic mechanism that conceptually substantiates the practical exercise of thinking *with public*.

In an already trivialized formula, the politically correct decision is ethically calibrated and socially quantified taking into account the scope of the „public good” (or „the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people”). Of course, the expression „public good” remains to this day the subject of ideological controversy⁵⁴ and this is happening for no theoretical reasons. Its reading remains permanently related to a type of experience based on which we (concrete individuals) accept active participation in *communities of thought*⁵⁵. This participation is not optional and

⁵³ Of course, the task of legitimizing the procedures is a difficult task and cannot be entrusted to anyone.

⁵⁴ There are so many public positions expressed by people with very different ideologies, culture or knowledge – but none of them lead to unchallenged solutions. Why then would it be surprising the demagogic exploitation of common phrases in propaganda actions specific to totalitarian regimes? „Gemeinnutz geht vor Eigennutz!” – (Common interest before private interest!!) – Adolf Hitler, *Anton Drexler, NSDAP Program*, 24 February 1920.

⁵⁵ The expression „community of thought” seems an understatement:

for this reason no thought can prevent its political annexation. Modern rationalism is a key to understanding the facts and as a way of thinking, history is exposed to the danger of politization. The failure of modernity (its promises proved impossible to fulfill) must be interpreted in connection with this phenomenon: *modern communities of knowledge are structured around power relations*.

The modern claim to liberalize political participation cannot be supported by a simple reference to representative democracy. Political voting does not mandate content of thought: it presupposes the sharing of common values, but in no case guarantees consensual civic perspectives. The fear that the mandate of political participation has led to the weakening of modern democracies is not new – which is why various *formulas have been tried to revive deliberative democracy*. We can identify in globalized societies a clone mechanism through which the *democratic certification* of the validity of opinion *with* public is made. The digital democracy is the creator of a new model of majority formation. The social networks take on consensual themes that they select and then roll them to the stage where they work inertially and become clichés of language. *The truth in the network* preserves the impersonal authoritarianism of the old „it is said ... it is believed”, but within the presumed consensual majorities it is loaded with the authority that derives from rudimentary constructs of the type – „several heads always think better than one” (cliché used in the political space with the form „the people is always right”).

in any case it is not very clear what mechanism is considered valid in order to ascertain a background community. The social location of thought is identified differently, either as „situational determination” (*Standortsgebundenheit*) or „the place in life” (*Sitz im Leben*).

The unprecedented development of social technologies is pressuring the public to comply with the truth of the network. Any contesting involves personal costs that are hard to accept. Against the background of the general anesthesia of the critique of the public message, the *connected societies* fall prey to certain *networks of truth*. In the increasing process of *rhizomatic*⁵⁶ extraction of authority in procedural societies – the elites adopt populist formulae of expression. Modern technologies for circulating personal opinion offer generous possibilities for making legitimacy through accessible procedures for partisan exploitation of consensual themes. A significant phenomenon of this trend of *certification of messages by rating* is the telegraphic and image-descriptive nature of mass communication. The contact of the individual with cliché images brings the public into the situation of passive consumer of conventions. Prolonged exposure to imaging exercises leads to changes in public perception of the social phenomenon. What we call *common sense* is dimensioned at the level of a society on the basis of these consensual judgments. Images⁵⁷ are used as the primary vehicles of influence, and

⁵⁶ According to Gilles Deleuze rhizomatic systems are centered – the networks of automata are finite, where communication is made from a neighbor to (any) other neighbor, individuals are interchangeable, are defined by a state of moment (according to Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *Rhizome, Mille plateaux*, Minuit, Paris, 1980, p. 9-38)

⁵⁷ The contemporary world is more and more obviously and deeply interested in an active politics of representation. The impact of this policy becomes overwhelming with the unbridled proliferation of „equipment” of realistic representation. The copy takes over more and more of the prerogatives of the model. The getting out of derision of the mimetic is the effect of the possibilities offered by the new technologies of „fabricating” reality. In this sense, television and the Internet have gradually become major tools for the socio-historical

this is increasingly difficult to prevent as long as the *connected society* does not tolerate dissent well – and any individual prone to critical analysis risks isolation⁵⁸.

2. Imagocentrism and digital democracy (*e-Democracy*)

The expansion of contemporary imagocentrism is not at all foreign to the versatile nature of the visual message. The image (unlike the verb) is susceptible to cross-coding.⁵⁹ It often assumes a cross-cultural message and can be revalued by abruptly changing the angle of perspective. But there is an immediate consequence of the versatility of the image: it maintains the feeling of accessibility. The wide range of interpretations to which the image lends itself to, allows the „democratization” of the feeling of competence. We shall find very many people who consider that they „understand” an image even when in front of a text with a similar message a good part of them would prove to be – functionally illiterate. The *illusion of competence* is one of the specific social features of modern man. It can be (and is) exploited politically. Our public behaviors are shaped by these interpretations and the best proof that

establishment of cultural values and, in the alternative, of ethical landmarks.

⁵⁸ An economist of Stiglitz' s stature feared that the capitalist system carries with it the vectors of its own implosion (accepting criticism, divergent opinion etc.). The most superficial analysis shows how any political system allocates significant resources and activates increasingly effective consensus-building procedures.

⁵⁹ Coding is a key element of constituting group solidarity. Repeated changes in society lead to the inability of the individual to assess the public perception of (political) action in the absence of the management of common clichés that act as „*letters of code*”.

this is the case is the phenomenon of commercial advertising. *The image distributed in the network*⁶⁰ becomes power due to its ability to ethically reorganize daily life. The political space will methodically exploit this gap that product marketing opens at the level of the public space. Political ideas are treated in procedural systems as consumer products. Any ideological construct is valued in the modern era in the process of its introduction in the *circuit of libidinal economics*⁶¹.

The political power subjects the classical concepts of government to a continuous process of self-re-*semantization*. The procedure of transfer of legitimacy exploits a particular mechanics of social behaviors. Exposing the individual to a form of information that does not involve an effort of reflective evaluation leads to *passive consensus*. The proliferation of this way of delivering knowledge is related to a phenomenon that is brought into discussion too little: the *industrialization of consensus*. The nature of the consensual criteria that later on generate hierarchies structures, in subsidiary, the political, the ethical and the civic. We want to live better (to have the widest possible access to resources) and as public relevance becomes a condition of competitiveness in society, we have transformed the image into a privileged „resource” of our social identity.

The obvious link created between the market of public image vectors and power (access to resources) reconfigures

⁶⁰ Imagocentrism flourishes under the sign of that form of „grammatical violence” which J. F. Lyotard invokes. He argues that the vocable „we” is a political grammatical category, characterized by imperialism.

⁶¹ Jean Francois Lyotard, *Économie libidinale*, Minit Publishing House, Paris, 1974 (Romanian translation, *Economia libidinală*, Pandora M Publishing House, Bucharest, 2001).

not only the status of the image in the modern world, but also leads to the standardization in parallel of some procedures and rules of performative exploitation of iconic-⁶²messages. The images are less and less – a symbolic correlate that makes reference to something external and, increasingly, an autonomous cause that triggers social action. Changing the functional focus of the image has led to profound changes in the state or in everyday life.

3. The dictatorship of access codes and the narrative reconstruction of the political space

The procedural society tends to control by institutional means the means of industrializing consensus. One of these means is the *discourse with public* – a situation in which institutional prestige (role creator) is used as a vector of influence. Institutions continue to function within democratic frameworks providing protection to an elite with their own socio-economic interests. They build sets of rules that provide protection and force their identification with impersonal entities⁶³. The intensive use of the new technologies enables this *faceless dictatorship* to apply a discretionary network management and simultaneously creates an adjacent field of sanction. The one

⁶² Even if it seems like a variation on cynical realism (the elites of manipulators who use „political formulas” to fool ordinary citizens) imago-centrism is more than a social technology: the environment of generative policies that reproduce procedural capable often to turn against their own creators.

⁶³ Louis XIV-th, „the sun king” often stated, when counter-arguments were brought to him – „The state is me.” Of course, it would be inconceivable for a high-level bureaucrat to claim such a thing. But surely, to themselves, some would be willing to believe that this is the case.

who does not speak the language of power cannot possibly (in principle) tell the truth.

No matter how democratic the formulas for certifying social relevance would appear to be – we see clearly how important the role of *connection management*⁶⁴ is in the process of *narrative reconstruction of reality*. The social significance of the facts is dimensioned in the perspective of their valorization within the discourse of the elite. The procedures for selecting the criteria of social relevance remain at the disposal of the political power. The networks produce prestige and ensure credibility, but the *truth network* is managed politically through compliant procedures. Despite these findings, it would be pointless to equate the criticism of the procedural society with a critique of procedures (of institutions seen as a pragmatic expression of them). Such a delineation may seem specious, but things do not look that way.

I would like us to examine, in order to test comparatively the hypothesis (regarding the *narrative reconstruction of the political space*) – an „import” of research method specific to the exact sciences and which is often used for the analysis of the procedural society⁶⁵. In 1929 the Hungarian physicist Leo Szilard raised a very legitimate question: *could we possibly know everything about the world without changing it?* And the answer he himself gives is

⁶⁴ To be seen Sorin Borza, *Managementul conectării și resursele ideologice ale puterii in Sfera politicii*, no. 145, 2010 (<http://revistas-ferapoliticii.ro/sfera/145/art11-borza.html>)

⁶⁵ The political sciences today are dominated by statistical analysis and the methodology of analysis borrows a „metric” aspect whenever it has the opportunity. All this – as if – the political phenomenon could be isolated in a virtual laboratory where experiments can be kept under control.

no. For our analysis the question is: *can we aim for a „scientific“ management of democracy?* And most importantly – how could a democracy, the procedural practices of which make it predictable to the smallest detail, look like? Szilard’s observation shows the limits of the „calculating“ way of thinking (*rechnende*) and reflects the human cultural significance of „reflexive“ thinking (*besinnlich*, Heidegger) of which the political analysis cannot be deprived of if it aims to remain relevant to political practices.

In light of this „import“ of research staff – the conclusions seem predictable, some might even say simplistic. Without claiming that we know everything about the procedural society – we can admit that it cannot remain the same from the moment its profile and working mechanisms become the object of research. Let us turn to these presumptions – to clarify the importance of critical analysis of the role of procedures in digital democracies.

Let us first note that the procedural societies rely on the performative dimension of their own discourse with public. The construction of messages maintains a utilitarian relationship with the truth: it is used selectively – as an argument for predefined ideological theses and especially for encouraging consensual political behaviors. What is presented as a „product of scientific research“ guides public reactions and action manifestations being used thereafter to manage the partisan process of narrative reconstruction of the political space. This shift also has effects on the way science is understood in the modern world.

The current discourse of the sciences strongly emphasizes the applicative dimension of research. Without being in itself a thing to be criticized, this reorientation involves

major associated risks. Equating the practical applicability of a theory with the essential criterion of recognizing its truths threatens to re-signing the classical concepts of epistemology. One of the immediate risks is the politicization of the process of scientific knowledge and innovation and the accreditation of a *mainstream* discourse with a dogmatic aspect. If there is to be a proper procedure for reading the results of scientific research – assuming it will ensure the connection to prestige and, implicitly, to the discourse of authority.

The elementary equation of performative management of „legitimate” language has transparent political premises: *electoral success* (votes) - *access to power* - *legitimizing public policies* (accreditation of procedures and institutional formulas that stabilize society and hierarchies). This equation that begins and ends with procedures – remains of course a generic model as we have the historical experience of regimes that, despite their praetorian aspect and sometimes despite well-founded public policy measures – have had internal challenges and deep political crises. What is it that leads to an increase in „entropy” in the political systems procedurally stabilized?

The widespread use of procedural systems has led to an increased bureaucratization of activities in public systems (updated as e-Services) and a growing concern of people about the widespread use of *social technologies*. To describe bureaucratization, Weber uses a metaphor – he speaks of „a carcass as hard as the steel of obedience”⁶⁶. Convenient, at some stage at least, bureaucratization (and bureaucratic man) has made political relations credible in

⁶⁶ Max Weber, *Etica protestanta și spiritul capitalismului* [*Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*], Romanian transl. Ihor Lemnij, Ed. Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003.

modern societies. What has led to the challenge of this model that promises to ensure ethical management of interpersonal relationships in modern societies?

The thesis I support is the following⁶⁷: the procedural systems in the incipient phase set into motion a reforming language that the bureaucratic exercise of power gradually erodes (make it devoid of meaning). The institutions consolidate to themselves an identity on the basis of this language, which they are not willing to give up even in the stage of decline – a stage in which they lose their reforming meaning. Against the background of the erosion of the old procedures following the changes that the society registers naturally, the institutions acquire a conservative and even retrograde aspect. They are undergoing a process of formal restructuring – but the changes in form carry with them classical schemes of allocation of authority. The new procedures are not qualitatively different from the ones they replace, even if the ideology underlying them works with different interpretations of major political concepts.

The procedural societies do not fundamentally change the mechanism of construction of social hierarchies, even when they claim that they can ethically arbitrate and manage social competition objectively. Institutions „become of age” and procedures change when they do not reflect a real power relationship within a community. The value of a regulatory procedure is directly proportional to the force capable of enforcing it. The more obscure this power is, the greater the mass respect for it. Which is why – the modern exercise of power takes place under the

⁶⁷ I am convinced that what I want to outline here does not belong to the field of evidence, but it deserves thorough research because – if the thesis is confirmed – we could have a lot to gain.

shield of procedural systems. Institutions are instruments of authority that implement ideas that the political elite can accredit as values. They have a specific jargon and compliant enforcement procedures. Corporate actors (institutions, enterprises, schools) become key channels for disseminating and validating models of human interaction and this thing nowadays changes the nature of the decisions that individuals make in ordinary life situations – not just decisions with political impact. Procedures that initially regulate behaviors and public relations thus end up becoming frames of value judgments. In the midst of these judgments, an epoch then puts into circulation its own *weltanschauung*, which legitimizes a certain social hierarchy.

The political discourse is increasingly depersonalized and this trend is explainable in the context of its success in forming majorities. The majorities want to hear their voice and share the authorship of the dominant discourse in the absence of an elementary analysis of the content. *Equal with regard to procedures* – individuals with different interpretations of the world work together out of interest. But the relationship between social effort and reward is justified in the light of criteria that have nothing to do with scientific objectivity. The one who decides how we measure the importance of social input – will do so on the horizon of „thinking *without* the public”. The procedural society has not eliminated the danger of dictatorship: it is able to guillotine dictators (who appear less and less) but it is not able to dethrone its „faceless master”⁶⁸, nor to deny

⁶⁸ „To achieve impunity one must become invisible. (...) True power is invisible. A visible power will always be less powerful than an invisible power.” (according to Lucien Cerise, *Neuro-pirații. Reflecții despre ingineria socială [Neuro-pirates. Reflections on social engineering]*,

the emotion of participating in its excesses. The shield of democracy has proved useless when the community is threatened not from the outside, but from within.

It has been seen in the last century that rationalism, which has not brought with it a more secure society (the way it was hoped since Kant's⁶⁹ time), leaves behind a world dominated by „non-personal”⁷⁰ conflicts. But we know well that institutions are inert armors for partisan ideologies: populated with bureaucrats, they move at the pace dictated by the „faceless aristocracy”⁷¹. Institutions have become the main executive power and once they are born they acquire a kind of autonomy that exceeds even the will and project of the one who devised them – they register a development on a generative model. The generative policies are products that are born as a result of the inertial functioning of institutions. The consequences of generative policies often appear beyond the ideological project that initially underpinned them and this is an indisputable symptom of the failure of modernity.

The modern exercise of power (with procedural physiognomy) is, however, deeply ideological and retains the aggressive potential of any competitive system. Man has not overcome his fear and even in the most democratic

Romanian transl. Ruxandra Iordache, Mica Valahie Publishing House, Bucharest, 2018, p. 35)

⁶⁹ A rational project of eternal peace appears today as being devoid of pragmatism...

⁷⁰ We are asked not to take things very personally (the rules are administered institutionally) – at the level of system what happens to us could have happened to anyone and anyone in our situation would be treated the same way.

⁷¹ We could call it the *Enter* aristocracy because it was given the power to impose the cumbersome institutional mechanism specific to the bureaucratic state.

societies politics engages demonstrations of force. But, in the case of modern democracies, the way in which the instruments of force are administered does not have the transparency and primitivism of open confrontations. The „faceless master”⁷² paves the way for a *soft* crowd control formula: the *dictatorship of access codes*. The existence of highly specialized languages that allow a limited category of executives to implement compliant procedures does not democratize traditional mechanisms of power at all. Western democracy has transformed the society dominated by class (caste) hierarchies into a somewhat more fluid market for authority trading, but it does not eliminate power asymmetries. It remains further on (as a market open to the „libidinal economy”⁷³) characterized by monopoly situations. The political controls the market of authority (social, intellectual) and cultivate partinic⁷⁴ marked values. Of course, it does not do so with the primitive means characteristic of classical political dictatorships. But maintaining control is essential for any elite that targets power and the subtle way of modern control is related to procedural institution. *Procedures play the role of machine codes in the political space*. Their administration remains a major competitive advantage in any information society.

The public hostility manifested in relation to the excessive tendency to regularize human relations within the

⁷² Sorin Borza, *Geometria consensului*[*Geometry of Consensus*], Ed. Eikon, Bucharest, 2012.

⁷³ Jean Francois Lyotard, *Économie libidinale*, Minuit, Paris, 1974.

⁷⁴ Modernity has innovated in advertising when it took advantage of the rational (scientific) character of some values to impose standards of social behavior. But this innovation does not serve individual freedom. The declared procedural character of the transactions carried out in supposedly democratic frameworks suffocates the contesting act by partisan diversion.

procedural society has a distinct pathology. It indicates the collective need for a fundamental resettlement of social-human relations in a world where the scope and quality of the connection to information is decisive in the process of asserting identity. Before being „what he knows” modern man is „what he can”, and this „rhizomatic power”⁷⁵ now acquires a new meaning: the reality we live in has become a field of forces (meanings) governed by the dictatorship of access codes. The procedural language is an essential condition for access to resources. This reality crystallizes at societal level and provides the space for multiplication based on generative models⁷⁶. The political decisions appear as nodes in a network of influences that claim autonomy in relation to the ideological project that motivated them. These networks are the *milieu* for generative policies⁷⁷.

The generative policies appear only in societies in which the bureaucracy has reached the systematic stage

⁷⁵ Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guatarri, *Mii de platouri*, Romanian translation Bogdan Ghiu, Art Publishing House, București, 2013.

⁷⁶ L.-E. Cerderman, *Agent-Based Modeling in Political Science*, The Political Methodologist, vol. 10, no. 1, 2001 The generative modeling is a computational methodology based on artificial agents. The main artificial agents of the political space are the institutions „In these complex adaptive systems, computation is used to simulate the behavior and cognitive processes of agents in order to explore emerging macro phenomena, ie structural patterns that are not reducible to, nor can be understood in terms of properties of agents of micro level.”

⁷⁷ The generative policies are the product of institutional systems capable of independently determining characteristics of an administrative process that would normally require decisions taken on the basis of a democratic consultation. The computational treating of social information is considered a more appropriate form of judging a political situation with the argument that it eliminates ideological parasitism that a human decision maker cannot repress.

and their immediate historical consequence is the establishment of the procedural society. The analysis of the institutions of modern democracy through generative modeling procedures could provide a useful perspective on how people will relate to politics in the XXI-st century. We have every reason to believe that the historical understanding of political systems has lost its relevance or actuality. If that's the way it is, we have every right to ask ourselves how will the exercise of political power take place in a world where the progress of social technologies increases the possibility of total control?

4. Post-democracy⁷⁸ and the political consequences of contesting the classical social contract

The exercise of power in the structure of modern democratic societies does not take place automatically on the basis of a direct link between the group of voters (population) and the elected ones (the representative structure) operating in political institutions, but a diagram of forces in which the filters of bureaucracy and, more recently, of technological programming, take over some of the administrative tasks, models them and reproduces them according to algorithms independent of the social will and finally packs them contractually in the form of rules, regulations, taxes, restrictions, debts etc. The outsourcing of the mechanism for identifying social preference directly leads to an increase in the authority of a bureaucratic-type of elite. The increased digitization of the social-political environment (favored by the challenges

⁷⁸ Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy After the Crises*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2020.

of the health crisis) shapes an elite with specific features within the procedural societies.

There is already a significant set of criticisms of bureaucracy⁷⁹, having, of course, varying degrees of virulence. Ludwig von Mises unequivocally states: „No one doubts that bureaucracy is entirely harmful and that it should not exist in a perfect world”⁸⁰. Such a sentence is difficult to be taken without objection; however, it focuses on the irritation that a large part of the public in modern societies feels towards the continued limitation of access to free choices of life. Perhaps, in essence, the objection of principle we can bring to procedural systems is the fact that they aim to „adapt” man to the needs of the system, rather than to restructure institutions based on human needs. Is the procedural society, for that reason alone, a „society of indecency”⁸¹?

The bureaucracy and the technocrats called to propose public policy solutions alter the political decision, in fact they divert it in favor of the officials of power⁸², most of them neutral in relation to the electoral game. So, social

⁷⁹ Milovan Djilas (*The New Bureaucracy, Noua birocratie*), Ludwig von Mises (*Birocrația-Bureaucracy*), W. Niskanen (*Bureaucracy and Representative Government*), author’s note.

⁸⁰ Ludwig von Mises, *Birocrația și imposibilitatea planificării raționale în regim socialist [Bureaucracy and the Impossibility of Rational Planning in the Socialist Regime]*, Romanian transl. Cr. Comănescu, Ludwig von Mises Institute Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006, p. 40.

⁸¹ Stuart Ewen, *La société de l’indécence: Publicité et genèse de la société de consommation*, Paperback, 2014.

⁸² William Niskanen points out that high-level bureaucrats, despite their image of civil servants, pursue career interests and for this reason are working to expand the agency, the office in which they work. According to *Bureaucracy and Representative Government*, Aldine-Atherton Inc., Chicago & New York, 1971.

harmony is not established on the basis of a „social contract” enshrined by the democratic mechanisms, but on the basis of non-negotiable sets of bureaucratic regulations, which the administrative institutions issue and authorize and for which there are official explanatory „narratives”. This model is replicated throughout the space of modern democracies and so far, no formidable or redoubtable criticism has appeared against them. This should give us food for thought.

The legislative, institutional, bureaucratic procedures are altogether legitimate forms („nonviolent” – the velvet barricades behind which the real agents of power act) of exercising power, as well as instruments of social control. The tensions, latent or current social violence are (potentially) defused, dissolved through institutional filters that take over any problem behavior and provide a corrective response. In short, the authority and legitimacy of institutional procedures – identification with rational „social morality” in the Kantian sense – are elements of strategies of domination and social control. The forms of political organization specific to the European space are practical-administrative subsystems of this cultural model through which it legitimizes itself. Is this model applicable in democracies where the classical social contract (as it appears in J. J. Rousseau) remains valid?

The procedural society is not a non-violent society, despite all the promises in exchange for which we are ready to agree that „liberal democracy is the only political system that works.” We can of course rejoice at the fact that in the space of Western democracy the body of individuals is no longer (usually) the object of punishment. But this is not the same as the disappearance of fear from society. The topic of „non-military wars” is not attractive for the time

being and associated with conservative⁸³ theorists, possibly with insufficiently sound research. But discussing it is more necessary today than ever: the Western leaders' concern for political issues raised by illiberal tendencies manifested by states with constitutionally democratic political regimes that are an integral part of the EU⁸⁴ (or NATO⁸⁵) shows the practical limits of a civilizational model – considered to be exemplary. It has become clear that the expression *European way of thinking* does not guarantee a consistent unity of ideas in Europe, and even less a predictable and convergent way of political action. To whom then does this conceptual delimitation serve and, above all – what are its immediate consequences? Is European rationalism a „collection of specific decision-making formulas” or does it rather indicate a particular way of life and form of culture⁸⁶?

The answer to these questions does not need philosophical reformulations and it would not be useful to theorize new formulas of crisis. The critique of Western

⁸³ George Ritzer (to be seen McDonaldization), Guy Debord (*Societatea spectacolului - Society of the Spectacle*), Alain de Benoist (*Contra liberalismului - Against Liberalism*) and particularly Al. Dughin (*The fourth political theory - Eurasianism*).

⁸⁴ The political measures taken in Hungary and Poland are moving asymptotically on a trajectory that confirms the older diplomatic concerns of European leaders. Recent positions (refusal to agree on EU budgets) confirm the heterogeneous nature of Community interests.

⁸⁵ Turkey.

⁸⁶ Perhaps this question does not appear imperative today since (starting from common logical-mathematical models) modern technology and the social facilities associated with it are in themselves answers that the European citizen enthusiastically accepts. However, there are recent signs (terrorism and the phenomenon of migration) that are worrying and, in the light of which, an unbiased debate on the „European way of thinking” becomes necessary.

exceptionalism does not resolve the issue on the merits and goes far too easily over the fact that the Western civilization continues to attract like a magnet immigrants from all over the world and of all religions. Are the cultural-religious foundations of Europe defining in relation to the life choices that modern man makes or are they just emotional foundations of regional claims of ethical dimensioning of history? How is it then that the *European way of thinking* is associated with strong positive connotations right within the worlds for which Christianity remains a religion among others?

The most democratic of the Western governing regimes maintains political stability through the use of consensual regulations and conventions that are continuously subject to constant pressure from contestations. The revival of conservative theories⁸⁷ and of illiberal democracies in Europe shows how well-placed Foucault's critique remains, that of „prison society”. The totalitarian political dictatorship represents (in Europe) a stage which is consumed historically and it is hard to believe that a discourse in totalitarian terms would find enough partisans to make up a critical mass. But this overcoming does not rule out the possibility of *subtle dictatorships*⁸⁸ – which may resort to subversive procedural artifices and terminologically elegant camouflage: post-democracy is a symptomatic example in this respect. Post-democracy⁸⁹, as a historical

⁸⁷ The concept of „trash metaphysics” proposed by Aleksandr Sekatski well illustrates this trend of geopolitical resettlement.

⁸⁸ William J. Dobson, *Dictatura 2.0. În culisele luptei mondiale pentru democrație [Dictatorship 2.0. Behind the Scenes of the Global Struggle for Democracy]*, Litera, 2016, Dobson noted that tax inspectors could sometimes be more effective tools of coercion than arrests.

⁸⁹ Hans Magnus Enzensberger (*Sanftes Monster Brüssel oder die*

phenomenon, goes hand in hand with postmodernism⁹⁰ – the phenomenon that has allowed the uncontrolled multiplication of complex codes of interpretation of reality. The „semantic hyper-heterogeneity deriving from an unlimited multiplication of codes is in fact intended to put an end to communication and identities, which are necessarily based on a centripetal and unifying movement⁹¹”. The complexity of the access codes used in the procedural societies aims at delocalizing the identity as the first stage of the process of inoculating the acquired helplessness (resignation to be helpless – *learned helplessness*). Justified by the increased need for security – this complex code entails the strong fragmentation of society into subgroups with precise levels of access, the individuals at the base of the social pyramid entering into a relationship only with the authorization and mediation of a controller. The institutions are presented as *checkpoint* structures that ensure the stability and the predictable functioning of the system.

Entmündigung Europas, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 2013 talks – with a relatively solid set of arguments – about „entering the post-democracy era”.

⁹⁰ We have good reason to wonder whether or not postmodernism appears as the stage name of a reality more difficult to accept! – *failed modernity*. I have dealt with this subject in a separate volume. *Modernitatea ratată [Failed Modernity]*, Eikon Publishing House, Bucharest, 2016. Postmodernism is not, no matter how we look at it, a gratuitous revolt against rational order. Postmodern man has kept intact his survival instincts: he does not refuse the „dictatorship” of dominant reason because he no longer believes in its foundations, but challenges his authority since he has become deeply dissatisfied with his own condition – which he considers the direct consequence of a thinking based on legally formalized values, the challenge of which disproportionately provokes coercive institutional responses.

⁹¹ Lucien Cerise, *work cited*, p. 88.

It is presumed that there is a „hidden conflict” between legitimizing narratives, from which it is claimed the existence and functioning of institutions of power and the bureaucratic practices that actually administer these institutions, a conflict that, on the one hand, weakens the functional efficiency of institutions for the benefit citizens, and on the other hand, it at least partially diverts the purpose of their functioning in the direction of reproducing the authority of the institutions as such, in other words, part of the resources of these institutions are consumed precisely for their perpetuation, situation from which they also extract their power and their officials, privileges/ advantages.

The era of technical communication, computerization and digitization allow institutions to perfect „social programming”, i.e. they become the tools through which real power passes from the control of the physical body (*hard control*) to subtle forms of mastery of the individual decision process (*soft control*). There takes place a methodical process of transferring social responsibility – through which political communities are called to become „communities of thought”: in this way a substitute form of legitimizing appears (authorization through „scientific” discourse) that leads to the „usurpation” of the classical mechanisms of democratic delegation of power. That is, societies entrust their power to institutions, but once they take possession of it, they rethink the purpose of power in the sense of feeding and reproducing it for the benefit of the bureaucratic elite:

1. The tendency to consider democratic practices as replicable procedures on the model of scientific techniques of „searching for the truth” connected with the assumption

according to which a *deliberate turn* of modern democracy would be necessary requires a thorough critical analysis. The immediate political consequence of the claim to reform societies by transforming them into „communities of thought” (consensual-scientific knowledge) leads directly to a denunciation of the classical social contract (as Rousseau predicted it- a contract among equals⁹²). The digitization of relationships in the public space entails an abnormal formula of social contract. The *techno-political contract* aims at accrediting consensual procedures for validating decision-making discernment in situations of public interest and paves the way for the establishment of a new elite in power. The elite without physiognomy uses institutional tools refusing to assume direct responsibilities. It comes to the situation in which individuals no longer pay for action failure or for the lack of morality – they being accounted for generic „system errors” or the failure of generative policies.

2. The exercise of procedural power and the globalization of social control technologies increase the power asymmetry and maintain among ordinary people the feeling of induced helplessness⁹³ (*learned helplessness*). Institutions use digital resources to „squeeze consensus”⁹⁴

⁹² The citizens are not equal in terms of knowledge capabilities and, consequently, nor are they in ideological discernment.

⁹³ Seligman's studies prove that subjects who aggressively face insoluble problems or problems the difficulty of which exceeds their ability to formulate solutions end up generalizing the inability even in situations where they have to solve solvable problems (developed at their level of competence). Hiroto, D. S., & Seligman, M. E. Generality of learned helplessness in man. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1975 31(2), 311–327, <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0076270>

⁹⁴ To be seen also Sorin Borza, *Geometria consensului [Geometry of*

and then apply generative rules and policies that they unequivocally accredit as democratic solutions. Fixing in power an elite whose decisions can no longer be socially reevaluated (nor political „judged” at the level of the simple voter) is viewed with hostility by the general public – but the lack of clear alternatives at the level of public consciousness paralyzes reactions of historical content.

3. The generative⁹⁵ policies are residual products consistent with the generalization of the illusion of competence. The procedural systems propose to communities normative formulas for approaching social interaction – with the claim that once with their use anyone can make the best decision in a given situation. How good these decisions are we are to find out in the forthcoming years – but they certainly materialize as behavioral choices that are easy to anticipate. The predictability and unitary character of the behavior in the political space determines an exponential increase of the capacity of response of the elite to any contestations.

4. The European way of thinking (the European rationalism that underpins the logic of procedural society) opened the way for the widespread practice of *social engineering* and (in the context of the accelerated digitization of the political space) has triggered the crisis of the foundations of modern democracy. The „failed modernity”⁹⁶ is the conceptual expression of the crisis in which digital

Consensus], Eikon Publishing House, Bucharest, 2012.

⁹⁵ Policies which in turn produce new regulations, rules and social procedures and, of course, associated executive institutions.

⁹⁶ Sorin Borza, *Modernitatea ratată [Failed Modernity]*, Eikon Publishing House, București, 2016.

democracy is struggling and is historically materialized by the failure - de facto - of deliberative democracy⁹⁷.

⁹⁷ *Deliberative democracy* (Goodin E. Robert) and *Reflective democracy* they are expressions of common nostalgia for a real sharing of decision-making power – a sharing that procedural societies reject using the real limits of knowledge skills (at the level of the general public) as an argument for centralizing decision-making power – left to „faceless elites”.

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The Political Authority and New Populism in the Digital Age

«La dictature parfait serait une dictature qui aurait les apparences de la démocratie, une prison sans murs don't les prisonniers ne songeraient pas à s'évader. Un système d'esclavage ou, grâce à la consommation et au divertissement, les esclaves auraient l'amour de leur servitude».

Aldous Huxley, *Le meilleur des mondes* (1932)

Abstract:

A certain part of the recent thematic literature defends the thesis that representative democracy has exhausted its possibilities of expression in the new digital context and, therefore, in a world that is increasingly conflictual and dependent on connection management, another model of governance might be needed.¹ The common arguments used in favor of this idea have already been subject to formidable critical analysis. Regardless of the angle of the approach, all these analyses start from the factual observation that the crisis of democratic practices is linked to the erosion of the epistemic dimension of democracy² (Kovik, 2017) and (more recently) the digitization of the political process as a whole.

Given that common concepts such as „democratic legitimacy" or „political correctness" often take on contextual meanings - it is natural to ask whether and to what extent we can identify in the

¹ Estlund, David M., *Autoritatea democratică: un cadru filozofic (Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework)*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009.

post-truth era common patterns of political authority. The analysis we propose hereby- seeks to identify a functional framework that allows the valorization of the competence of experts (epistocrats) – able to optimize public policy decisions and those of political strategy – without affecting the quality of democratic governance mechanisms. The revival of populism and the impact of the „post-truth era" on civic consciousness seem to be the major preconditions for the setting in of digital populism. The critical examination of the relationship of epistocracy with truth and individual greed is the starting point for procedural solutions. The major hypothesis for which we are arguing here is that any valid criticism of the authority of the epistocracy in the digital age must be limited to the "input" area of the democratic decision.² (Jeffrey, 2018): „What we decide" is not exclusively a matter for the epistocracy, but „how to do what is decided" is rational to fall within the responsibility of the experts. In practical terms, the search for formulas to control the society of greed questions the possibilities of democratic political regimes to procedurally decouple the political decision from the new digital populism specific to the post-truth era.

Keywords:

epistocracy, digital populism, e-democracy, procedural society, post-truth era

² Jeffrey Anne, (2018) „*Limited Epistocracy and Political Inclusion*”, Epistems 15, 4 412–432 Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/epi.2017.8

1. The civilization of greed³. The Authority of the Epistocracy in the *Post-Truth* Era

The issue of the normative substantiation of the decision-making authority within the democratic⁴ political regimes occupy a marginal place in the field of debate specific to the political theory with the argument that it implies evidence. The concern for the socio-historical consequences of political decision-making (to the detriment of fundamental questions) follows the current direction of applied science research. The growing interest

³ To Hobbes, for instance, happiness is but the transition from one form of greed (*cupiditas*) to another. Romanian academician Mircea Malița said that we live in a „single civilization” of greed, but in „ten thousand cultures” of greed. In the same order of things, – *appetites divitiarum infinitus* („unlimited appetite for gains”) is a recent papal accusation („*Evangelii Gaudium*”) which is, nevertheless, part of a series with ancient history. Pope Leon XIII-th in the encyclical „*Rerum Novarum*” (1891) and Pope Pius the XI-th in the encyclical „*Quadragesimo Anno*” (1931) have touched upon the same issue. To be seen also Robertson, Alexander F., (2001) *Greed*, Cambridge, Polity Press, and Robinson Matthew and Murphy Daniel, (2009), *Greed is good: maximization and elite deviance in America*, Lanham, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., for a psycho-political analysis of the concept. Modern economic structures and institutions appear to be conducive to the emergence and systemic expansion of a greedy society.

⁴ See Narow's theory of impossibility which accuses democracy's internal inconsistency even more recently *Democracy: The God That Failed* a 2001 writing by Hans-Hermann Hoppe. An analysis of the legitimacy of global governance also appears in Erman, Eva „*A Function-Sensitive Approach to the Political Legitimacy of Global Governance*”, British Journal of Political Science. 2020. 50 (3) (07): 1001-1024. doi:<http://dx.doi.org>.am.e-information.ro/10.1017/S0007123417000850<https://search-proquest-com.am.e-information.ro/scholarly-journals/function-sensitive-approach-political-legitimacy/docview/2416943367/se-2?accountid=136549>.

in the actual process of exercising political power is explainable: for us, power in office matters and we seek to design methods of controlling a mechanism that produces immediate transformations in everyday life.

The exercise of power takes place in a specific, determined social context and produces historical effects – while its intellectual motivations appear as post-factum analyses of a „Kantian contract”⁵ (moral) which aims to leave behind primitive determinations such as fear or greed. This contract has few signatories in real life, so modern political systems have developed in the public space a dedicated apparatus that justifies in procedural terms government decisions or unpopular actions. The procedural society and technocratic governments were born as a result of the political interpretation of the values that guide the behavior of individuals in the democratic space. „Smart democracies” (anchored in constitutional laws) are increasingly faced with the danger of cynical contamination of the rationalist vision (which takes the form of technocracy).

The immediate consequence of the establishment of procedural systems of governing is „the failure of the state in formalism”⁶ (Marga, 2021, 40). The power structures that work in any society are based on the specific regime in which procedures justify hierarchies and selectively provide opportunities for assertion. Each major culture proposes a model of human affirmation – on the canvas of which the social practice then weaves the network of relationships and interactions that will lead to social

⁵ A contract of *zoon politikon* with its own conscience that *a priori* norms the framework of social relations.

⁶ Marga A., (2021), *Statul actual (The Current State)*, Meteor Press Publishing House, București, p. 40.

differentiation. Procedural governments are the main means of asserting faceless elites. Beyond the techno-objective aspect of social decisions in procedural societies – there is always a will (with its own interests) that proposed the axiomatic basis of the algorithm meant to lead to practical and alternative solutions of action.

For reasons of optimizing the interaction of the elite with mass individuals, each regime of exercising power establishes procedures to legitimize authority. The modern people's concern for „algorithmic legitimacy” (Waldman, 2020)⁷ seems rather a derivative of the subsidiary process of symbolic articulation of authority (Hankiss, 2001)⁸. For instance, the premise that (democratically held) political elections automatically lead to correct political decisions is at least debatable (Achen, Bartels et.al, 2017)⁹ and history

⁷ Waldman, Ari Ezra (2020) „Algorithmic Legitimacy”, Chapter in *The Cambridge Handbook of the Law of Algorithms*, edited by Woodrow Barfield, 107–20. Cambridge Law Handbooks, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, doi:10.1017/9781108680844.005.

⁸ To alleviate the fear, human beings and communities have opened two lines of defense. The first – such as the walls of the house and the city, respectively tools and weapons, laws and institutions. The second line was armed with the protective sphere of the symbols: myths and religions, values and belief systems, scientific ideas and theories, moral and practical rules of behavior to which a series of empirical practices is added – a diverse range of everyday rituals and trivia. See also Elemer Hankiss, *Fears and Symbols: Understanding the Role of Fear in Western Civilization*.

⁹ Achen, Christopher, Bartels Larry M, (2017), *Democrație pentru realiști (Democracy for Realists)*, Princeton University Press, or Esaiasson, Peter, Mika el Persson, Mikael Gilljam, and Torun Lindholm (2019), „Reconsidering the Role of Procedures for Decision Acceptance”, British Journal of Political Science 49, no.1 (2019): 291–314, doi:10.1017/S0007123416000508.

contradicts it but flagrantly in various eras. A certain part of the study seeks to explain whether and under what conditions modern societies can provide conditions for making decisions of public interest based on objective procedural arrangements. They conclude that, although procedures are not the key to acceptance of the decision, agreement on procedures remains a reasonable way to resolve collective decision-making issues (Klosko, 2004)¹⁰. Let us see how this research is allocated problematically.

The best-known ones are centered upon key questions. Could we or can we design an equidistant framework for substantiating political authority? Is it possible and desirable for democratic systems to be reformed on a procedural basis in the direction of *algocracy*?¹¹ (Danaher, 2016). Can

¹⁰ Klosko, George (2004), *Democratic procedures and liberal consensus*, Oxford University Press on Demand.

¹¹ An accentuated trend of the last years is the administration of the public decision-making processes (bureaucratic, legislative) through algorithms, i.e. their transformation into step-by-step computer-programmed action instructions. Usually, the protocols specify steps to follow for the procedural integration of a set of „inputs” used later to obtain optimized solutions. The analyses identify a number of issues regarding the moral or political legitimacy of procedural systems. Algorithmic governance poses a significant threat to the legitimacy of these processes - this phenomenon appears in the literature as „the threat of algocracy”. According to Danaher, J. (2016) „*The Threat of Algocracy: Reality, Resistance and Accommodation*”, *Philosophy and Technology*, 2016.29 (3), pp. 245-268. <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-84981156473&doi=10.1007%2fs13347-015-0211-1&partnerID=40&md5=e3e6a334096fe4a952b96953537d5619>, DOI: 10.1007/s13347-015-0211-1. The term explicitly appears with Danaher in order to „describe a particular type of system of government, one that is organized and structured based on computer-programmed algorithms.”

we put an end to individual greed?¹² (Fromm, 2015) and can we objectify decisions through procedural social adjustments¹³? We also do not have a clear analysis of the relationship that the epistocratic decision has to the truth¹⁴ (Standbrink, 2015), and with the natural inclination of the human being to pursue his individual interests. It is not at all clear how thinking and the ability to solve problematic situations in the community is influenced by greed¹⁵ and how expertise and a high level of academic training influence the individual's relationship with moral values and

¹² Erich Fromm (1958) observes that „Most of us in our culture are greedy: greed for more food, drink, sex, wealth, power, and fame; their greed may be directed more toward one or the other of these things, but what they all have in common is that they are insatiable and, implicitly, never satisfied”, in *Anatomia distructivității umane (Anatomy of Human Destructiveness)*, (Romanian transl.) Trei Publishing House, București 2015. Cinematography also provides thematic illustrations of the public perception: „*Greed ... is good. Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit.*”, Gordon Gekko (Michael Douglas) in *Wall Street* (1987).

¹³ MacCoun, Robert J. (2005) „*Voice, control, and belonging: The double-edged sword of procedural fairness.*” *Annu. Rev. Law Soc. Sci.* 1 2005: 171-201.

¹⁴ Strandbrink, P. (2018) *Epistocracy and democratic participation in a post-truth world*, *Democratic Theory*, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85047292108&doi=10.3167%2fdt.2018.050102&partnerID=40&md5=912215183f2b8103816c2a-f5e4a45ee5> DOI: 10.3167/dt.2018.050102

¹⁵ The classical illustration of the phenomenon is „political capitalism” – denounced by Max Weber. This is characterized by three specific ways of manifestation: „predatory political profits “(out of financing wars and revolutions – classical piracy), „obtaining profit by force and domination“ (by conquests, exploitation of colonies etc.), and „obtaining profit by agreement with and under the protection of political authorities.“ The Weberian theory identifies three types of capitalism: traditional capitalism, political capitalism and rational capitalism.

eliminate the danger of the establishment of hybrid political regimes.¹⁶ (Mapping, 2008).

Our age repeatedly invokes rationalist imperatives and uses truth as the ultimate argument for social authority. But we see clearly that the standards (formal criteria) in relation to which we decide what is true and what are not products of the negotiation. Whoever chooses the criteria for establishing values (including the value of truth) does so in relation to their own *weltanschauung*. As we know, conceptions of the world are configured individually in connection with a conjunctural set of personal interests and beliefs – they are deeply ideologically marked. Ideologies constantly resort to a subsidiary process of narrative reconstruction of reality¹⁷. Thus, any society that proposes arbitration and ranks individual elections consequently produces an ideological elite. The recurring problem that arises in the wake of this selection is the emergence of social scenarios based on the presumption that the ideas of the elite regarding the good reflect a generalized conception of the whole community and a shared vision of how each member would like to live their life. However, this consensual scenario has strong counter-arguments¹⁸.

¹⁶ See also Mikael Wigell Mapping, *Hybrid Regimes: Regime Types and Concepts in Comparative Politics*, in *Democratization*, 2008, 15:2, 230-250, DOI: 10.1080/13510340701846319

¹⁷ Potter, Jonathan, and Margaret Wetherell (1987), *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*.

¹⁸ „Our society is the greatest social experiment ever undertaken to answer the question whether pleasure (as passive affect in contrast with active feelings, such as well-being and joy) can be a satisfactory solution for the problem of human existence”, according to Erich Fromm, *A avea sau a fi? (To Have or To Be?)*, Romanian transl.

No matter how reluctant we are to the relevance in the current context of the „iron law of the oligarchy”¹⁹ (Michels, 1958) we have enough evidence to prove that the most liberal democratic systems do not come together with solutions to abolish social stratification. Egalitarian ideologies themselves – cannot suspend certain forms of meritocratic selection²⁰ and it is less likely that the modern world will produce an immediate revolution in the field. Given the direct impact of these historical findings on optimized governance models in modern societies (and which enjoy wide public support) – the issue of the limits of competence of the epistocracy in the post-truth era²¹ is becoming a major subject of analysis.

The predisposition of philosophers (from various eras) to consider the political decision as the prerogative of „connoisseurs” is notorious. „The fact that there is an intuitive recourse to epistocracy has been evident since antiquity.”²² (Landa & Pevnick 2020). The issue of authorizing

Octavian Cocoş, Trei Publishing House, Bucureşti, 2013, p. 17.

¹⁹ Michels Robert, (1958) *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* New York: Dover Books.

²⁰ It is true that the way in which they define the idea of „merit” is often difficult to understand in terms of logic, and sometimes not even common sense.

²¹ Schindler, Sebastian (2020), „*The Task of Critique in Times of Post-Truth Politics*”, Review of International Studies 46 (3) (07): 376-394. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.am.e-nformation.ro/10.1017/S0260210520000091>.

²² Landa, Dimitri and Pevnick, Ryan (2020), „*Representative Democracy as Defensible Epistocracy*”, *The American Political Science Review* 114, no. 1 (02, 2020): 1-13. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.am.e-nformation.ro/10.1017/S0003055419000509>. <https://search-proquest-com.am.e-nformation.ro/scholarly-journals/representative-democracy-as-defensible/docview/2330853801/se-2?accountid=136549>.

public decisions on a meritocratic basis has a long history²³. As expected, current political philosophy is dealing with the subject in a broader thematic framework²⁴ (Darwall, 2013) mainly analyses related to the issue of authority. For some authors²⁵ (J. M. Bochenski, 1974) „the field of authority is not real, but ideal”²⁶ and this becomes increasingly evident as a significant number of individuals extract extensive forms of representative authority through primitive recourse to ratings. Modern communication networks have allowed the structuring of strong forms of consensus that do not require direct commitment from individuals and no immediate confrontation of the discourse practiced with reality. Validation of public discourse without reference to truth leads to the destabilization of classical formulas for accrediting decision-making competence. If the domain of authority can be seen as a class of ideal configurations, then

²³ Beginning with Plato (*Noocracy*) and going all through Machiavelli, the classical German philosophy and with various accents in modern Sociology and Philosophy. There are a series of contemporary thinkers who propose critical analyses of democracy beginning with Jürgen Habermas, Robert A. Dahl, Robert E. Goodin, Bernard Manin, Joseph Schumpeter, James S. Fishkin, Ian Shapiro, Jason Brennan, Hélène Landemore, Thomas Mulligan and Hans-Hermann Hoppe.

²⁴ Darwall, Stephen, *The second-person standpoint: Morality, respect, and accountability*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Oxford Scholarship Online, 2013. doi: 10.1093 / acprof: oso / 9780199662586.001.0001.

²⁵ A reference text for the identification of this framework – J. M. Bochenski, *Was ist Autoritat?*, Freiburg im Breisgau, Verlag Herder, 1974 (Romanian translation Th. Kleininger, *Ce este autoritatea (What is Authority?)*), București, Humanitas 2006). In this text, authority is directly related to the credibility of the bearer of authority, that is, the presumption that he always knows and tells the truth.

²⁶ Bochenski, J. M., *Ce este autoritatea (What is Authority?)*, București, Humanitas Publishing House, 2006.

it is but natural that the analysis of the political authority be made in connection with the symbolic charge that the authority receives at the level of the collective mind. How does this type of authority work in modern political systems?

In a symbolically accentuated horizon (as the political space is) the *deontic authority* (of the superior, of the leader) appears sufficient to substantiate some generic decisions of a strategic nature. But tactically – the need for *ate epistemic authority*²⁷ (Pertti, 2018) becomes pressing – in conditions in which the consequences of the tactical decision are easier to assess in terms of the performance of social and administrative practices. There is an increasingly visible tendency in modern man to base his daily decision on epistemic authority.²⁸ (Bourdieu, 1989) Despite the explicit referral to science and truth – modern expertise uses a large amount of data that the expert does not obtain directly – so that sufficient elements (recognized as true because they were transmitted by authority) they end up in evaluative sentences without having directly passed the test of truth. The post-truth age²⁹ is, at least in

²⁷ Pertti, Alasuutari (2018), „*Authority as epistemic capital*”, *Journal of Political Power*, 2018, 11:2, 165-190, DOI: 10.1080/2158379X.2018.1468151. The term also appears contextually with similar significance – as „ontological authority”.

²⁸ Bourdieu, P. (1989), *La noblesse d'État. Grandes écoles et esprit de corps*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, Berman, E. P. *Creating the market university: how academic science became an economic engine*, Princeton/NJ: Princeton UP 2012, Münch, R.(2011) *Akademischer Kapitalismus. Über die politische Ökonomie der Hochschulreform*, Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, Moulrier-Boutang, Y., (2007), *Cognitive capitalism*. New York: John Wiley & Sons. The common feature of the new class is the high level of diplomas, cosmopolitanism and distancing from their national communities.

²⁹ Relativization of facts – the statement according to which knowledge

part, a product of the procedural society which encouraged the misinterpretation of deontic authority as an epistemic authority³⁰. Beyond this ascertaining observation – it must be said that the relationship between truth and political authority is still insufficiently clarified. Clarifying this is a condition that we must meet before moving on to a robust analysis of the role of policy experts.

2. A factual analysis of the authority of the epistocracy in the post-truth era

The problem of the *epistocracy*³¹ has taken on new dimensions as advances in technology have provided increased opportunities for the exploitation of individual prestige capital in the political space. *Experts* have become

is but a (mere) product of power, history and perspective – is a central aspect of conceptualizations concerning this phenomenon. In 2016 *post truth* was chosen as „the word of the year” by Oxford Dictionaries. According to Oxford Dictionaries, the term refers to „circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to personal emotions and beliefs.” The term has been in circulation ever since 1992 (by Steve Tesich in *Washington Post*) with the explicit meaning that „the truth itself has become irrelevant.”

³⁰ Hannah Arendt emphasized the close connection between erasing the differences between truth and falsehood and totalitarianism. The presumption of epistemic competence of the political decision-maker it is easier to be publicly accredited as the complexity of scientific support for social performance increases. At the public level it becomes virtually impossible to differentiate between science and scientific discourse used to justify „*alternative facts*”.

³¹ Mittiga, Ross, (2021), *Political Legitimacy, Authoritarianism, and Climate Change in American Political Science Review*, 1-14. doi:10.1017/S0003055421001301, „Another potential base of CL (*contingent legitimacy*) is the *epistocracy standard*, which holds that only those governments that operate in accordance with the best available evidence in critical policy domains are legitimate.”

major decision-makers with the public and this status provided them with opportunities for social assertion that extremely different individuals as intellectual potential (or baggage of knowledge) rushed to take advantage of. The fact that people with extremely different analytical potential have been labeled as experts has been facilitated by the recent trend to computationally model administrative decision-making systems. The rudimentary interpretation of the relationship between truth and political-administrative decision (action) has led to the designing of algorithmic management situations of democracy³² and associatedly, to an increase in public confidence in expertly managed political governance systems.

As expected, the epistocratic model rapidly entailed a substantial set of criticisms, being labeled as re-feudalization³³ (Habermas, 1961), post-feudal system

³² Recent experiments (University of Geneva) presuppose the possibility of direct democracy and the abandonment of a representative parliament with the improvement of the ability to model the decision by computational simulation of individual preference. Recent analyses „discuss the relationship between democracy and the algorithmic turn – which the authors define as the central and strategic role of data processing and automated reasoning in electoral processes, governance and decision making.” According to Anita Gurumurthy and Deepti Bharthur, (2018) *Democracy and the algorithmic turn*, SUR 27 (2018), accessed on 20.06.2021, <https://sur.conectas.org/en/democracy-and-the-algorithmic-turn/>

³³ Habermas (1961) theorizes the re-feudalization of the public sphere (*Refeudalisierung*) and signals the danger of mass servitude (*mass serfdom*). Habermas, J. Says „contemporary politicians following the feudal monarchs who promoted carefully crafted public personas through portraits on coins and spectacular events, displaying a *showy pomp* – in *The structural transformation of the public sphere. An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*, Cambridge: Polity Press. 1961/1989.

of bondages³⁴ (Borza, 2014), corporative feudalism³⁵ (Lovelace, 2020) or neo-feudalism³⁶(Galbraith 1961, Wallerstein, 1992). Ted Nace observes (perhaps too abruptly) that „what is not so well known is that, long after the ratification of the US Constitution and the adoption of the Bill of Rights, most aspects of employer-employee relations continued to be governed by a common law legal structure which continued to apply the principles of privilege and hierarchy derived from feudal society in the late Middle Ages”³⁷... (Nace, 2005) All these criticisms (Hedoin, 2021) essentially accuse modern leaders of being able to systematically turn private or group interests into social goals in the sense that „the selfishness generated by the system makes leaders value personal success far more than social responsibility.”³⁸ (Fromm, 1971)

³⁴ Borza, Sorin (2014), *Geometria consensului (The Geometry of Consensus)*, București, Eikon Publishing House. In essence, feudalism is a system in which a central government systematically redistributes its power to the people who support it. An analysis of feudalism in academia can be found with Tilman Reitz (2017) *Academic hierarchies in neo-feudal capitalism: how status competition processes trust and facilitates the appropriation of knowledge*, High Educ (2017) 73:871–886 DOI 10.1007/s10734-017-0115-3. Reitz talks about „the nexus between *expert status and knowledge sinecures*.” p. 879.

³⁵ Lovelace Steve (2020), *Feudalismul corporativ: sfârșitul statelor naționale*, <http://steve-lovelace.com/corporate-feudalism-the-end-of-nation-states/> acc.01.05.2021

³⁶ *Neofeudalismul (Neo-feudalism)* by John Kenneth Galbraith, (1961) or more recently, Immanuel Wallerstein, Karen Orren, Lynn Nelson, or Victor Baines (1992). The concept of *neo-feudalism* is one of the most contentious and controversial approaches in the contemporary interdisciplinary social, historical, economic and political studies.

³⁷ Nace Ted, (2005) *Gangs of America: The Rise of Corporate Power and the Disabled of Democracy*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

³⁸ Erich Fromm, (1971) *A avea sau a fi?(To Have or To Be?)*, Ed. Trei,

Even if the direct reference to re-feudalization can be denounced³⁹ (Drahos, 2002), we must note that the meritocratic distribution of resources takes place in any society in connection with a consensual perspective on social roles and performance. Paradoxically, the way Jeffrey Friedman⁴⁰ observes, the acquisition of expertise is „the one that (...) makes people more dogmatic” (Friedman, 2019) and publicly justifies their claim to decision-making authority. The frequency of attendance and visibility in the public space does not vary in proportion to the intellectual relevance of the speech or the quality of the opinions. But the frequency of appearances can be linked to the associated public prestige which allows an opinion leader to circulate and defend points of view that will be taken over and publicly accepted. In the field literature it is sufficiently proven (Kraft, Lodge, Taber, 2015) that there is no direct link between the media visibility (rating) of the person and the quality of ideas or speech, but we have every reason to believe that any *influencer* can use his or her credibility to give facts and situations a guided reading of subjective goals, beliefs, and interests. This capacity is used within the political system as a lever of power. The

București, 2017, p. 23. This criticisms can, of course, be extended to all „thing-centered” (not person-centered) societies.

³⁹ Drahos, P. & Braithwaite, J. (2002), *Feudalismul informațional: Cine deține economia cunoașterii?* (*Information feudalism: Who owns the knowledge economy?*) Earthscan...

⁴⁰ Friedman, Jeffrey, (2019) *Power without Knowledge. A Critique of Technocracy*, Oxford, OUP. The major thesis in Friedman's work *Power without knowledge* (*Puterea fără cunoaștere*) shows that the ideas that govern people's deliberate actions are so heterogeneous („presumption of ideational heterogeneity”) that their behavior cannot be reliably predicted. As a result, a technocracy of experts is unable to achieve its goals.

public discourse always accompanies political decisions the social price of which cannot be silenced – which is why any legitimacy of the exercise of power is rewarded. Consensual intellectuality is the systemic product of this mechanism of mutual validation.

The codification of social interpretations is the prerogative of the elites. The pre-existence of a criterion (whatever it may be) regarding the values, on the basis of which we then conduct judgments, attaches the perspective of some interests of the elites involved in this arbitration. Therefore, social arbitration is an ideological construct and maintains a lucrative relationship with the truth. Post-truth politics and alternative facts appear as products of self-negotiation between the bearers of the escort speech and the exponents of political power. Recent populist movements are politically justified as riots against these „new urban elites”⁴¹ (Gauland, 2018) whom they perceive as illegitimate consumers of resources. How society offers more to those who (according to the dominant mentalities at a given time) produce more important public services – the target of populist criticism remains the way of setting the criteria of social value.

We can count on quite heterogeneous lines of argument that defend the epistocracy. Consequently, we do not have a unified theory of epistocracy or a convergent theoretical scenario. Regardless of the conceptualization scheme used - the common ground of the epistocratic position leads

⁴¹ Alexander Gauland, leader of the right-wing populist party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), he sees both his own populism and others as a form of opposition to the „new urban elite”. (Alexander Gauland, „Warum muss es Populismus sein?”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 6, 2018.)

to the assumption that decisions always have better results when left to experts than when they reflect the will of a majority – as in democratic settings.⁴² (Brenan, 2016). Of course, these assumptions tacitly admit the premise that the result of the expert's decision can be immediately measured as a social fact or political phenomenon for which common sense should constitute a sufficient evaluation instrument (tool)⁴³ (Landa, 2020). It may well be objected here, on the one hand, that the value of social facts often suffers from interpretations which differ from individual to individual, while, on the other hand - policy makers have the opportunity to stimulate a certain interpretation of the decisions taken⁴⁴ (Slaughter, 2004) so as to assume responsibility only for those results considered publicly desirable. Procedural societies place the responsibility for decision-making failure on the institutions (generically designated – *system error*) Once we accept

⁴² Brennan, Jason, (2016), *Împotriva Democrației (Against Democracy)*, Princeton Oxford: Princeton University Press.

⁴³ „Electoral elections provide a link between the expertise of incumbents and the well-being of experienced voters sufficiently effective to ensure a certain level of well-being. But how well this expertise can be capitalized on and, ultimately, how great the well-being of voters in representative democracies depends on the underlying political institutions and the social and political practices associated with them.” (according to Landa, Dimitri and Ryan Pevnick (2020), *Representative Democracy as Defensible Epistocracy*, The American Political Science Review 114, no. 1 (02, 2020): 1-13. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.am.e-nformation.ro/10.1017/S0003055419000509>. <https://search-proquest-com.am.e-nformation.ro/scholarly-journals/representative-democracy-as-defensible/docview/2330853801/se-2?accountid=136549>.)

⁴⁴ Slaughter, S., & Rhoades, G. S. (2004) *Academic capitalism and the new economy. Markets, state, and higher education*. Baltimore/Md., London: Johns Hopkins UP.

that the epistocracy is an essentially pragmatic solution⁴⁵ (Holst, 2012) for the social challenges facing our age – its defenders must first clarify the issue of methodologies whereby the results of a political decision can be calibrated (and compared) using consensual methods of analysis.

Usually the set of arguments used, on the one hand by the opponents of the epistocracy and on the other hand by its supporters – develops premises in different spheres of political practices: democratic mechanisms are strongly valued in the area of "input" of the political decision-making process, and the epistocracy is justified by evidence extracted from the area of socio-economic „output”⁴⁶ (Landa & Pevnick, 2020). In this sense democracy proves to be easier to be justified *deontically* (by resorting to ethical imperatives) while the epistocracy derives its consequentialist legitimacy from judgments regarding the results of political decisions (the results of our actions are those that measure the timeliness and usefulness of a decision).

⁴⁵ Holst, Cathrine, (2012) *What is Epistocracy?* („*Ce este epistocrația?*”), in *Știința Sacră (Sacred Science)*, ed, Simen Andersen Øyen, Tone Lund-Olsen and Nora Sørensen Vaage, Wageningen Academic Publishers,. 41–54. doi: 10.3920 / 978-90-8686-75

⁴⁶ There is an opinion that „the selection of the basic goals that the political community should pursue is much less epistemic than the choice of optimal policies. For example, although it may require considerable expertise to determine which approach to taxation would be best for the disadvantaged, the decision to focus on the welfare of the least favored (or not) may not require expertise beyond the comprehension of ordinary citizens.” according to Landa, Dimitri and Ryan Pevnick, „*Representative Democracy as Defensible Epistocracy*”, *The American Political Science Review* 114, no.1 (02, 2020): 1-13.

Obviously, the analysis of the epistocracy is not limited to clarifying the logical framework in which utilitarian arguments can work. The critique of deliberative democracy⁴⁷ does not provide sufficient justification for the epistocracy and this does not require more complex arguments. Defenders of epistocracy openly admit the fact that human nature cannot simply be changed through epistocrats's decisions, so in order for the epistocracy to function effectively, it must rather exploit the pre-existing features of human nature – as it is. In this sense, it becomes necessary for epistocracy theorists to close an older controversy beforehand: does human nature predispose to harmonious coexistence or, rather, (the way Hobbes thought) – *homo homini lupus est*? Despite its essential character, this dispute does not receive solutions within a pure theory of elites.

The attempt to set rules for decision-making has led socially and historically to a series of mass failures and tragedies.⁴⁸ It is not necessary to presume a causal link between the political rise of the epistocracy and the emergence (establishment) of dictatorial regimes. We can admit, however, that totalitarian regimes manipulated, according to their own power interests, the criteria for selecting obedient elites capable of receiving public recognition. The quality of the expert, once obtained, will produce an

⁴⁷ Biesta, G., „*Sporadic Democracy: Education, Democracy, and the Question of Inclusion*”, in *Education, Democracy and the Moral Life*, edited by M. Katz, S. Verducci, and G. Biesta, 101–112. Dodrecht: Springer, 2009.

⁴⁸ The competence criteria were diversely substantiated: the census vote was economically substantiated, the Aryan competence was based on racism – biological factor and we can find many other examples.

asymmetry marked by authority⁴ (Prior, 2007) between the elite and the general public. But what is the concrete way in which the expert can receive public recognition?

In the specialty literature, the basic level of decision-making competence is known as the epistemic threshold. The epistemic threshold should ensure, based on valid criteria, the identification of „experts”⁴⁹. We do not yet have homogeneous accreditation procedures – academic position or scientific prestige (domain) are still indicators of competence best tolerated at the level of public opinion⁵⁰ (Slaughter, 2020). Of course, as can be seen in concrete social and historical situations, this epistemic threshold has been used as a tool to eliminate political opponents: authoritarian regimes partisanally set epistemic thresholds by which select epistocrats willing to support the system⁵¹. These thresholds are changed or

⁴⁹ It is entirely possible for them to create a perverse epistocracy, one that sets a kind of threshold of knowledge that refers only to the knowledge of incorrect political or religious statements, the knowledge of a revisionist history, or something like that. This threshold would be more accurately described as an ideological test of litmus or loyalty threshold than as a test of real and accurate knowledge of the world.

⁵⁰ Slaughter, S., & Leslie, L. L. (1997), *Academic capitalism, in Politics, policies, and the entrepreneurial university*. Baltimore/Md: Johns Hopkins UP. There are studies that show that „maybe two-thirds or even three-quarters” of the total payroll income of 1% of U.S. employees is taken from „their work and therefore ... their education.” The self-reproductive and closed meritocracy of the rich, in which money is turned into skills, and skills are converted back into more money, closes the middle class's access to political decision-making positions – this is Markovits's gloomy message, in Markovits, D. (2019). *Capcana meritocrației (The Trap of Meritocracy)*, New York: Penguin.

⁵¹ The Stalinist communist regimes (1945-1960) conditioned, for example, access to the University by the existence of a staff file attesting

interpreted differently depending on context. Even when the procedure for selecting „experts” was questionable – political regimes managed to impose an appearance of objectivity derived from the competitive nature of the position – which, once occupied, was accompanied by a corresponding set of privileges. For example, academic positions (as accreditations of epistemic competence) only coincidentally reflect a parallel hierarchy of scientifically obtained performance. Consequently – the position of expert remains temporary and depends essentially on the preferences of a dominant group able to impose the rules of the social game because it proves a latent potential for violence and can form majorities to confirm the opportunity of their action. Technocratic authoritarianism is masked by claims of non-ideological validation of political decisions. But these claims cannot answer the simplest objections regarding the way of recruiting the elite who manage the escort speech in the media. Is there then a practical way of constructing decision-making procedures that the epistocracy should not partisanally manipulate?

In theory, any non-ideological legitimation of the epistocracy should be concerned with setting criteria for identifying experts, uncontaminated by group perspectives or interests. For the time being, we do not yet know how we can achieve this. Under these conditions, do we have the opportunity to implement the classical Platonic principle of *oikeiopragia* in democratic frameworks? And if we succeed, how can it work within a connected society and what will ultimately be the practical way to certify expertise?

to the origin of the candidate from the working environment and „healthy origin” (not to come from bourgeois or rich families).

For the most ardent defenders of the epistocracy, the difficulties of rationally fixing the epistemic thresholds are obvious. Without challenging (difficulties) – they can object to the most formidable criticism with the observation that – the epistocracy does not consider the possible existence of a perfect epistocrat, devoid of personal preferences and foreign to any group interests (impartial epistocrats – the „castrated” elite⁵² – Gellner, 1981). In addition, the hypothesis that experts (better informed people) make (usually) better decisions for the community can be successfully tested. For this reason, they do not need to be perfectly rational (Lippert Rasmussen, 2012), but only to prove more efficient in performing certain tasks. This line of defense has quite a lot of weaknesses: on the one hand, good (or bad) social decisions are constantly evaluated in relation to an ideologically predetermined set of expectations, while on the other hand, social developments often depend on a complex set of factors which cannot be kept under experimental control – as is the case in scientific research situations. To overcome these difficulties, some authors consider mixing solutions: they suggest that „in order to cope with the multidimensional social complexity, it is necessary to integrate expertise”⁵³ (Ebeling, 2014). In Ebeling’s opinion citizens should follow the epistemic conciliation, model which, according to him, does not involve recourse to compromise and has nothing to do with the idea of consensus. This thesis has a

⁵² Gellner, E. (1981), *Națiuni și naționalism (Nations and Nationalism)*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

⁵³ Ebeling, Martin, (2016) „*Epistemic Political Egalitarianism, Political Parties, and Conciliatory Democracy*”, *Political Theory*, vol. 44, no. 5, 2016, pp. 629–656., www.jstor.org/stable/24768073 accessed on 21 April, 2021.

pronounced theoretical nature and despite the prior step made – does not offer functional formulas through which the integration of expertise can take place⁵⁴ without causing major breakdowns of the underlying mechanisms of democracy. In the same line of thought, supporters of the epistocracy are called upon to answer a classic question, but still just as legitimate: how can non-epistocrats know (*epistoplebeians*) if the epistocrats set out, and even manage, to cheat? In my opinion, the problem of epistocracy has no applicable solutions outside the moral framework, regardless of the argument we use.

4. How are democratic mechanisms restructured in the age of digital populism?

The emergence of conceptualizations about the „*post-truth*” era is often interpreted in connection with the heightened power asymmetry that the advancement of new technologies introduces into the political space⁵⁵

⁵⁴ We find, of course, theorists who prefer to give up democracy using instrumental justifications. „High-stakes instrumentalism” (HSI) claims that we can even use undemocratic procedures to prevent high-stakes errors – unacceptable or extremely discriminatory social situations. Normative democratic theories are ready to admit that when there are superior instrumentally undemocratic procedures available, they must be used. Moreover, institutional reform is needed in these situations. Democratic theory should, for practical purposes, be reoriented to difficult moral and empirical questions about the instrumental quality of procedures.

⁵⁵ Anna Visvizi and Miltiadis D. Lytras, (2019), „Technology is part and parcel of social life. It conditions its development. At the same time, to a large extent, it is driven by demand that the socio-political process creates.”, in *Politics and Technology in the Post-Truth Era*, Emerald

(Visvizi & Miltiadis, 2014). Media campaigns are, as a whole, narrative reconstructions of reality, but their success is conditioned by the existence of credible and co-interested influencers. The immediate consequence of technological progress is an increase in economic performance and – implicitly, the provision of key resources that can ensure the social legitimacy of any hybrid⁵⁶ regime (Morlino, 2009). The post-truth era produces effects in the space of a bidding economy that can ensure a high standard of living and it is unrealistic to criticize it as a simple conceptual slip. A relevant analysis of the post-truth discourse can only be made in political contexts. We see clearly how modern communication technologies are the vehicle for logically fractured messages or theories, and justified criticisms have already been made of how they are used ideologically. However, modern democratic regimes can only be conceived in the context of recent changes in the field of digital technologies⁵⁷. What is the impact of the widespread use of these technologies on the democratic mechanisms specific to modern political communities? We do not need in-depth analysis to prove that majority electoral democracy remains a fragile

Publishing Limited Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley, p. 283.

⁵⁶ As we have already shown, the term *hybrid regime* refers to various political regimes that combine democratic elements and significant elements of autocracy, Morlino, Leonardo (2009), „*Are there hybrid regimes? Or are they just an optical illusion?*” European Political Science Review 1, no. 2 (2009): 273-296.

⁵⁷ „Technology affects us not only as consumers, but also as citizens. In the XXI-st century, the *digital is political*.” According to Susskind, Jamie, (2019), *Politica viitorului: tehnologia digitală și societatea* (*Politics of the future: Digital technology and society*) Romanian translation Adina Ihora, București, Corint Books.

political scenario in the post-truth era⁵⁸ (Gilens & Page, 2014).

Technologies have been perceived by common sense as an extension of power⁵⁹ (Langdon, 2010) – possibly as an instrument with a prohibited regime of exercising domination. The achievements of science and technology have always been seen as a source of power. Recent advances, however, are not mere quantitative accumulations: they change the relationship of the modern individual with the world because the discoveries in neuroscience⁶⁰

⁵⁸ A frequently cited study states bluntly: „Our findings indicate that the majority does not govern – at least not in the causal sense of the actual determination of policy outcomes. When the majority of citizens do not agree with the economic elites or the organized interests, they generally lose.”, according to Gilens, Martin and Benjamin I. Page, (2014) „*Testarea teoriilor politicii americane: elite, grupuri de interes și cetățeni de rând*” (*Testing American political theories: elites, interest groups, and ordinary citizens*) in Perspective asupra politicii 12, no.3 (2014). (Gilens, Martin & Benjamin I. Page, „*Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens*”. Perspectives on Politics 12, no. 3 (2014): 564–81. doi:10.1017/S1537592714001595.)

⁵⁹ There is an „almost religious belief that the widespread adoption of computers and communications systems along with easy access to electronic information will automatically produce a better world for human life”, according to Winner, Langdon. (2010) *The Whale and the Reactor*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press,. <https://doi.org/10.7208/9780226902098>

⁶⁰ Panksepp, J., (1990) – *A role for „affective neuroscience” in Understanding stress: The case of separation distress circuitry*. In: Puglisi-Allegra, S. and Oliverio, A., Editors, 1990, *Psycho-biology of stress*, Kluwer, Dordrecht, pp. 41–58. Panksepp introduces the concept *affective neuroscience* considering that the study of emotions is a sub-field of neurosciences, distinct from cognitive or behavioral neuroscience. More recently, the social aspect of emotions in the brain has become the subject of research for social-affective *neuroscience*.

(Panksepp, 1990) or potentially invasive innovations in digital systems⁶¹ (Suskind, 2019) it not only perfects human abilities, but adds new abilities to the human being. Human nature changes structurally by virtue of the fact that some of man's interactions with the outside world take place in virtual space. Disconnecting social action from the limitations it imposes on physical space has biological consequences that field research (Jost & Amodio, 2014) is talking about quite carefully for the time being.⁶²

The socio-political influence of the holders of advanced technologies and (implicitly) economic resources is not manifested in our age in a passive and mediated way, but is actively reoriented towards the extended control of decisions with public impact and a strong professionalized management⁶³ that of collective preference. Resources

⁶¹ „For the generation now approaching political maturity, the question will be another question: to what extent should our lives be directed and controlled by high-performance digital systems and under what conditions?”, according to Susskind, Jamie, (2019), *Politics of the future: digital technology and society (Politica viitorului: tehnologia digitală și societatea)* Romanian translation Adina Ihora, București, Corint Books,. We also have formal EU concerns about e-democracy illustrated by various reports since 2017. (https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2017-0041_RO.html)

⁶² As they conclude, micro-psychological and macro-historical processes modulate each other in profound ways. Zmigrod, Leor, Ian W. Eisenberg, Patrick G. Bissett, Trevor W. Robbins, and Russell A. Poldrack. (2021) „*The cognitive and perceptual correlates of ideological attitudes: a data-driven approach.*” Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B 376, no. 1822 (2021): 20200424.

⁶³ Zmigrod Leor and Tsakiris Manos, „*Computational and neurocognitive approaches to the political brain: key insights and future venues for political neuroscience*”, Phil. Trans. R. Soc. 2021,

allocated to traditional forms of lobbying tend to decrease in favor of direct funding to influencers (or social networks) that deal with automatic data processing and focuses primarily on the performative dimension of political communication. The experience gained during the last political elections in the reference democracies (such as the USA⁶⁴) shows that effective modeling of collective preference is possible through the use of algorithms capable of partisan control of political messages with significant social impact (Reisach, 2021).

Something is happening in this context that has not captured (only marginally) the critical attention of political analysis. Modern man no longer understands and uses applied science only to develop pre-existing abilities, but adds to his physical body a dimension that changes the very nature of the relationship that human beings can have with a (virtual) reality distant in space and inaccessible senses. Technologies (bio-technologies) gradually lose their instrumental dimension—they become part of an organic-functional entity and this fundamentally changes the way in which human being socializes and projects its role within the community.⁶⁵ There is a complicity of

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<http://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2020.0130> („these approaches can shed light on the cognitive structure of ideological beliefs, illustrating that there may be core neural, perceptual and cognitive dispositions that facilitate ideological dogmatism, extremism, or conservatism”).

⁶⁴ Persily, Nathaniel, (2017), „*The 2016 US Election: Can democracy survive the internet?*”, *Journal of democracy*, 28, nr. 2 (2017): 63-76.

⁶⁵ Alain Badiou asserts that the instinctual reason proper to democratic materialism (which he defines as a partnership between parliamentary democracy and the neoliberal pragmatism) replaces love with physical beauty, politics with technical power, art with commercial

individuals willing to affiliate – as members of the group having opinions close to a statistical average⁶⁶ – and against the background of this uninteresting complicity of truth, the decisions they take part in are increasingly suspicious from the point of view of critical discernment.

One of the major paradigms of policy interpretation is already overly optimistic: theories of majority electoral democracy (governing „by and for the people”) and „median voter theory⁶⁷” (Hotelling, 1929, Black, 1948 and Downs, 1957) prove to be rather methodological clichés and, paradoxically, annexes to the new forms of populist discourse. The discussion about populism occurs in the specialty literature with an emphasis on the statistical phenomenon. This emphasis, however, is not accidental. We can see a resurgence of populism even within democratic systems considered stable. Traditionally associated with poverty, lack of education and emotional voting – the populist option should not find too many supporters in the community. However, even within the EU we have up-to-date illustrations of the successes of populism which clearly show that, in the age of digitalization, the revival

skills and science with a competitive genius, (according to Alain Badiou), (2011), *La Relation énigmatique entre philosophie et politique*, Ed. Germina, (1998) *Abrégé de métapolitique*, Ed du Seuil.

⁶⁶ 2 The word „statistics” was born from a notion with clear political connotations – appeared in the eighteenth century, *Staatwissenschaft*, „state science”.

⁶⁷ Hotelling, Harold (1929). „*Stability in Competition*” *The Economic Journal*. 39 (153): 41–57. doi:10.2307/2224214. JSTOR 2224214, Duncan Black, (1948), *On the Rationale of Group Decision-making* and Downs, Anthony (1957). „An Economic Theory of Political Action in a Democracy”. *Journal of Political Economy*. 65 (2): 135–150. doi:10.1086/257897

of nationalist-populist discourse needs other explanatory models⁶⁸ (Engesser, Esser & Buchel, 2017). It is worth considering as a basis for discussion – a homogeneous set of premises that can be agreed upon without creating additional controversial ground:

1. The lack of interest of *mainstream* discourse towards the conceptual-philosophical knowledge systematically doubles the epistocracy tendency to manage the progress of science and technology in political settings. The immediate effect of this phenomenon is a parallel crisis of reflexive democracy⁶⁹ (Dine & Shields, 2008) facing procedural societies and increasing the electoral legitimacy of „chameleon democracy”⁷⁰ (Gori, 2013). Invoking the „sentences” of science (understood as product of knowledge and research practiced in institutional settings) as a foundation of government decisions is one of the causes of the crisis of rationality and the political template on the basis of which failed modernity³ (Borza, 2016) develops the main social pathologies. The most acute of these seems

⁶⁸ Engesser, S., Ernst, N., Esser, F., & Büchel, F. (2019) *Populism and social media: How politicians spread a fragmented ideology*, Information, Communication and Society, 20(8), 1109–1126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1207697>, H. Liued, (2019), *From cyber-nationalism to fandom nationalism*, Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429447754>, Fuchs, C. (2020) *Nationalism on the Internet: Critical theory and ideology in the age of social media and fake news*, New York and London: Routledge.

⁶⁹ Dine, J., Shields, K., (2008), *Fair Trade and Reflexive Democracy*. Eur Bus Org Law Rev 9, 163–186 <https://doi-org.am.e-nformation.ro/10.1017/S1566752908001638>

⁷⁰ Gori, Roland, (2013), *La fabrique des imposteurs*, Editions Lesliensquilibrium.

to be the taking of „network voices” (consensus) as a source of truth (and, consequently – as the legal basis of authority).

2. Even when it refers to facts – epistocratic authority encourages a guided reading of reality. Modern scientific knowledge objectifies its hypotheses on the basis of a consensual agreement on the model for investigating the truth. Universities deliver truth-access procedures, and modern science receives official recognition as long as the procedural model of discovery is followed. The tyranny of the proceedings remains in its essence – a scheme of political domination, which illustrates the topicality of the Weberian warning that „the trees of freedom will not rise to the sky.”

3. The globalization of the frameworks in which we convey and value information strongly centralizes social authority and (with the disappearance of barriers to communication between cultures and civilizations) gives rise to a specific elite – *mediocracy*. This elite operates simplifications of the official discourse of power and „translates” for the general public messages meant to legitimize one or another of the competing interpretations of social facts. With the interested support of mediocrity, the current political message focuses (outside the framework of traditional nationalism) on issues capable of widespread public mobilization. With the interested support of mediocrity, the current political message focuses (outside the framework of traditional nationalism) on issues capable of widespread public mobilization. In this sense, *digital*

populism appears as the key vehicle of liquid democracies⁷¹ (Valsangiacomo, 2021) and the main catalyst for the radicalization⁷² of the political message.

4. The digital age has not fundamentally reformed the system of legitimating of the political act. Authority is still a relational⁷³ product (Emirbayer, 1997), it depends on recognition – the agents of this process being consistently relocated. Consensual opinions increasingly accept the

⁷¹ LD is characterized by three main properties: proxy representation, voluntary delegation, and online deliberation. In essence, as Valsangiacomo points out, „LD is a liquidity-driven decision-making scheme– i.e. the systemic and flexible mix of direct and representative democracy – embodying the principles of voluntary delegation and proxy voting”. However, „it remains unclear how LD could be effectively integrated into existing democratic systems”, according to Valsangiacomo, C. (2021). *Clarification and definition of the concept of liquid democracy. Swiss Political Science Review*, 00, 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12486>

⁷² The new populism is the emotional and aggressive response of a generation (which has not directly experienced the Holocaust or war) to the latent violence of procedural authoritarianism. *Ours* are the ones who can protect us – they can offer us defense against violence, if necessary through the use of violence. Modern *panoptikon* no longer obscures the perspective of „an obscure chamber of power” – where public opinion suffers (far from our eyes) partisan developments – but it *produces* directed public opinion using a natural reflex exploited by particular social engineering techniques. Most likely – Karl Popper did not suspect how the possibilities of new technologies will evolve and how neuroscience can be used in the process of social modeling at the time when he introduced the term into circulation. The repetitive exposure to convergent readings of social reality – which the individual takes as such by giving up a critical personal analysis – leads to consensual public views and attitudes.

⁷³ Emirbayer, Mustafa (1997), „*Manifesto for a relational sociology*”, *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 2 (1997): 281-317.

decoupling of the exigencies of classical rationalism and come to be fabricated through quantitative rating⁷⁴ validation procedures (Ottermann, 2000). Against the background of situations where this validation model (by consensual majorities and selective use of experimental evidence) has not always been satisfactory⁷⁵ – analyses have appeared that examine with conceptual-ethical tools the functioning of democratic mechanisms. This concern is justified by the assumption that the digital society offers everyone a chance to participate in politics - impossible to corrupt. However, in recent times (the pandemic crisis) it has become clear that digital democracy⁷⁶ (Johansson, 2017) has little to do with direct democracy.

5. Procedural societies failed in formalism⁷⁷ have created the cultural and social conditions of the fracture of the classical line *truth - justice - good* and allowed the contingent legitimation (*contingent legitimacy*) of digital variants of enlightened authority⁷⁸ (Mittiga, 2021). The

⁷⁴ Ralf Ottermann (2000), *Soziologie des Betrugs* Hamburg.

⁷⁵ We sometimes encounter situations of primitive change of camps: epistocrats who „failed”, elites who changed rhetoric in favor of interest groups that could offer greater privileges.

⁷⁶ Johansson, Marjut, (2017), The Digital Agora of Social Media: Introduction. Discourse, Context and Media. 19.

⁷⁷ Obviously, political elites do not draw their authority only through official recognition (it is not enough for the system to appoint them as decision-makers) even when they hold positions of political and / or administrative power. The prestige of the modern epistocrat is based on the personal ability to produce consensus and to publicly accredit validated interpretations in the network as justified facts in terms of applied science.

⁷⁸ Mittiga, Ross, (2021), Political Legitimacy, Authoritarianism, and Climate Change in American Political Science Review, 1-14. doi:10.1017/S0003055421001301 „It does suggest, however, that

way it has been seen, *digital agora* and *e-democracy*⁷⁹ (Veit, 2014 & Salvati, 2017) have not provided tools for stopping re-feudalization for the time being⁸⁰ (Habermas, 1962) to a more and more abruptly stratified society and (despite all appearances) does not provide wider access to political decision-making. „Intelligent democracies” (Marga, 2021, p. 38) which could better and more promptly respond to the challenges of modern society are not necessary and immediate consequences of digitization.

6. Modern technologies of social interaction enable solidarization of enormous masses of digital citizens – which are not animated by his belief in common ideologies (ideas), but the tendency to be included in benefit-sharing groups (immediate or only potential). Opinion trends that receive public support are not successful by virtue of objective relationship with the truth (*post-truth* era) – this being treated as a label that „escort *influencers*” stick to the power discourse. The analysis and understanding of

a capacity for authoritarian governance, as well as a means for expeditiously adopting it in dire circumstances, constitute essential components of political legitimacy”.

⁷⁹ Veit D., Huntgeburth J., (2014), *Introduction to Digital Government. In: Foundations of Digital Government*. Springer Texts in Business and Economics, Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg. https://doi-org.am.e-nformation.ro/10.1007/978-3-642-38511-7_1 and Salvati, E. (2017). *E-Government and E-Democracy in the Supranational Arena: The Enforcing of Transparency and Democratic Legitimacy in the European Union*. In R. Luppigini, & R. Baarda (Eds.), *Digital Media Integration for Participatory Democracy* (pp. 101-129). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-2463-2.ch006>, Pernice, I. (2016). *E-government and e-democracy: overcoming legitimacy deficits in a digital Europe*. HIIIG Discussion Paper.

⁸⁰ Habermas, J. (1991 [1962]), *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

these socio-political phenomena remains a philosophical approach that cannot be replaced by honest descriptions or statistical inventories.

7. The digital age does not annul the sectarian reflex of interest groups, but undermines with new tools the competition of ideological innovation in the logical field. We cannot talk about the „death of ideologies”⁸¹, but we are witnessing a process of rewriting doctrines in a procedural key. The post-truth era is the consequence of filtering social trust (Zmerli, 2008) through the sieve of new technologies. Social Engineering (Popper, 1970) provides the political system with packages of knowledge that allow the control of collective emotion and increase the danger of establishing a "society of lies" (Reinhard, 2006).

8. What we today label as „populist discourse” is not aimed at a systematic and

deliberate private audience for access to information, but an audience with discernment affected by the political reinterpretation of reality. The reading of the populist message is filtered by the interpretive authority of the digital epistocracy that conveys theses with a scientific design but practices the „proletarianization” of political discourse. The „enlightened authority” reconsiders in a partisan context the limits of rational action, given that at the level of modern knowledge communities the results of scientific research set the framework for judgment. Context takes control of the values (Marga, 2021, 35) that political action later uses to create group advantages and ultimately leads to „asymmetric societies” (Coleman,

⁸¹ Sartori, G. (2007), *Teoria reinterpretată a democrației (Reinterpreted Theory of Democracy)*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași.

1982). For this reason, the digital epistocracy (and implicitly the academic environment) plays a privileged role in the process of political management of the connection⁸². (Borza, 2010)

Even if this minimalist set of premises may undergo more pertinent reformulations – we have sufficient reason to critically question the direction of the research that shows – using statistical bases, that populism still has ethnocentric foundation. Obviously, there is no question of suspecting the good faith of studies that show the revival of populist discourse, but in the light of an obvious need for terminological clarification – it seems necessary to see what we say when we use the word „populism” in the digital age. This review acquires practical relevance based on an honest recovery of reflective democracy⁸³. The erosion of the public space (of the *agora*) by relocating an important part of social life in the digital environment entails forms of dependence and possibilities of decentralized censorship for which we do not have formidable alternatives for the time being.

⁸² Borza, S. (2010), *Managementul conectării și resursele ideologice ale puterii (Connection Management and the Ideological Resources of Power)*. *Sfera Politicii*, (145), 73-80.

⁸³ The abundant recourse to empirical politics leads to limited solutions and emergency measures.

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