Academic Research Report

with regard to the implementation of project PN-II-RU-TE-2014-4-0051 (project no. 173 / 2015) for the period October 2015-September 2017

Project title: Intergenerational Dynamics of Vulnerability in American Trauma Narratives

(project coordinator: Dana Mihăilescu)

There have been three stages of research for the project Intergenerational Dynamics of Vulnerability in American Trauma Narratives (October-December 2015; January-December 2016; January-September 2017).

The aim of the first stage of the project implementation (October-December 2015) was to carry out preliminary documentation so as to establish the main concepts and research tools to be used in the project. We commenced by undertaking individual and comparative analyses of intergenerational legacies of vulnerability in American narratives. Our activities have resulted in the following research outcomes:

(1) an oral presentation at an international conference:


(2) two articles by Dana Mihăilescu accepted for publication in two special issues guest-edited by top scholars from the United States, Great Britain and Taiwan, one in a special issue on Graphic Details: Confessional Comics by Jewish Women edited by Heike Bauer, Andrea Greenbaum and Sarah Lightman for Studies in Comics (an ERIH Plus journal indexed in international databases and visible on Thomson Reuters / Web of Science), the other in a special issue on “War and Life Writing” edited by Louise O. Vasvári și I-Chun Wang for CLCWEB:
Comparative Literature and Culture (an ISI-AHCI-indexed journal published by Purdue University Press and published in 2016). Details about the results of the two articles will be given below, on discussing the second stage of research of the project when the issues actually appeared.

(3) publication of a book on intergenerational legacies in Jewish American media and literature:


The volume Regimes of Vulnerability in Jewish American Media and Literature examines regimes of vulnerability from the end of the nineteenth century until post-Holocaust times, as rendered in Jewish American magazines, movies, literary texts and graphic narratives, ranging from the well-known movie The Jazz Singer and highly-acclaimed narratives of Delmore Schwartz, Will Eisner and Miriam Katin to the more obscure and short-lived magazine The American Jewess or the less scholarly analyzed literary works of Katharine Weber and Susan Geroe Simpson. The volume shows that the evolution and shifts of regimes of vulnerability for the Jewish American community over time have been the result of various generations’ engagement with the precariousness of their group in relation to mainstream Americans but also with that of their generation in relation to previous generations inside their community. The book ultimately proposes a critical approach that moves beyond a tendency to reify the narrow binary according to which strength stands for power and invincibility versus vulnerability which is equated with weakness, helplessness and victimhood. Instead, the volume clears a path for more nuanced accounts of vulnerability in which affinities and tensions function concomitantly to make and unmake the concept and thus, hopefully, to carve a space for innovatory ethical and humanitarian vantage points.

So far, the book has been included in the collections of sixteen libraries from the United States and Europe (National Library of Israel, biblioteca Universității din Varșovia (NUKAT), Brandeis University Library, Harvard University Library, HCL Library, Columbia University Library, New York Public Library, University of Pennsylvania Libraries, Library of Congress, United States
Holocaust Memorial Museum, Hebrew Union College, University of Pittsburgh, Portland State University, Arizona State University Libraries, Utrecht University Library, Biblioteca Lucian Blaga din Cluj-Napoca, as visible on the website:  
and the Yad Vashem library from Israel (http://db.yadvashem.org/library/item.html?language=en&applid=sapir&itemId=12603448).

(4) starting a series of lectures for early career researchers entitled Dynamics of Vulnerability and Traumatic Affect with the purpose of creating a forum of early career Romanian and international researchers who discuss and archive their exploratory work-in-progress and lay the basis for the development of future cooperation. Details about the lecture series will be included below, on discussing the research outcomes of the second stage or research from 2016.

For the second stage of research within our project (January-December 2016), we have targeted two major objectives: 1. refining our individual and comparative analyses of intergenerational legacies of vulnerability in American narratives as they result from distant or recent major traumatic events, focusing on such tragic happenings as those occurring in the wake of the Triangle Company Fire from New York on March 25, 1911, the tragic events during the Holocaust reflected in the American media and in the consciousness of survivors who emigrated to the United States, or tragic events during the Cold War; 2. the analysis of intergenerational dynamics in trauma narratives by ghostwriters and proxy-witnesses as well as in transmedia narratives.

To that end, in this stage of the project, we carried out research by accessing the resources available in Bucharest libraries (Central University Library - Ana-Maria Gavrilă; Central University Library, the American Studies Library at the University of Bucharest – Dana Mihăilescu; The Romanian Academy Library, the American Studies Library – Mihaela Precup). Roxana Oltean enjoyed a research stay at the Eccles Centre for American Studies, British Library, London, between 4 September and 10 September 2016. Roxana Oltean’s aim was to broaden the area of investigation of vulnerability as a constitutive element of American collective and national identity at the start of the Cold War by including the Anglo-American
dimension of analysis. Roxana Oltean accessed especially the “US-UK special relationship” collection from the ECCLES Centre and analyzed the complex relations of the political and diplomatic (inter)dependency of the U.S. and the UK as expressed by the affirmation of American invulnerability and as reflected in classical and more recent studies and historical analyses (Ryan, Baylis, Herring, Hathaway, Dobson, Ovendale, Danchev, Wevill, Baker), literary works (McEwan) and primary documents like correspondence, diaries, diplomatic reports of biographies of significant figures (Wheeler, Kerr, Dalton). Starting from the above sources, Roxana Oltean analyzed the influence of the United Kingdom in the setting-up of the notion of the Cold War, a brand subsequently associated with U.S. foreign policy, thereby proposing an approach that can nuance recent re-evaluations of the Cold War in the American space which can be henceforth seen as a broader and more antagonic phenomenon (following Saunders, Barnhisel) than its current representations in historical documents and studies. Similarly, in view of the potential to nuance contemporary discourses on Cold War American identity as a basis of an invulnerable stance or of an acute vulnerability, Roxana Oltean also examined documents displaying the rhetoric of vulnerability used by the UK in order to engage the United States in a paradoxical politics of both firmness and accommodation towards the Soviet Union.

Dragoș Manea enjoyed a research stay at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies, Freie Universität, Berlin, Germany, July 29 – August 29 2016. For the duration of the stay, Dragoș Manea mostly focused on the following topics: the dynamics of cultural memory, the remediation and representation of cultural memory and personal trauma, and the relevance of the concept of vulnerability for philological research—topics that are of crucial importance for his activity within the project.

The research outcomes we have undertaken for meeting the above-mentioned objectives are the following:

1) the continuation of the lecture series we have developed regarding the impact of vulnerability on American culture;

2) organizing a workshop about the intergenerational dynamics of vulnerability in American trauma narratives;
3) publication/submission of articles to international (ISI-AHCI or international databases-indexed) journals and/or in collective volumes; more precisely, we have published the following articles in 2016: two articles in ISI-AHCI journals (CLCWeb and French Cultural Studies, the latter being an ISI journal with impact factor of 0.143); an article in an ERIH-Plus and international databases-indexed journal (Intellect, Ingenta) which is also visible on Thomson Reuters/Web of Science (Studies in Comics); an article in an ISI-AHCI indexed international volume which is available on Web of Science, published at Cambridge Scholars; an article in a collective edited volume published by the University of Bucharest Press; three articles in an authored book published at the University of Bucharest Press; a book review in an international databases-indexed journal (Journal of Jewish Culture and History).

4) participation at international conferences (4 conferences held in Romania and 4 conferences outside Romania).

Below we provide further details about each of the research outcomes listed above.

1) The continuation of the lecture series we have developed regarding the impact of vulnerability on American culture ("Dynamics of Vulnerability and Traumatic Affect" Lecture Series, http://americanstudies.ro/?article=338). To date, we have organized three lectures as part of this series:

On 16 October 2015, Susanne Knittel (assistant professor of comparative literature at Utrecht University, the Netherlands: http://www.uu.nl/staff/SCKnittel/) offered a lecture entitled “The Transatlantic Eugenics Movement as a Site of Memory”. The presentation analyzed the concept of eugenics during the Nazi period in transatlantic perspective, starting from the term of the “eugenic Atlantic” theorized by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder in their book Cultural Locations of Disability (University of Chicago Press, 2006) in order to pinpoint the convergence of seemingly disparate discourses about race and disability. To that end, Susanne Knittel examined the Nazi "euthanasia" program during World War II and contemporary issues concerning genetic engineering and assisted suicide, highlighting types of vulnerability they impinged on people with disabilities and emphasizing how ideas of progress and human improvement carry with them mechanisms of repression, othering, and exclusion that must be resisted.
On 18 May 2016, Mihaela Precup, associate professor at the University of Bucharest and a member of our research team, offered a lecture entitled "Trauma and Representation in the American Memoir of Mourning" in which she focused on the representation of trauma in memoirs of mourning by contemporary American women authors like Joan Didion, Patti Smith and Meghan O’Rourke and on how they negotiate public norms regarding the duration and rituals of proper mourning and how these practices affect in different degrees the vulnerable self of the person affected by the loss of a life partner, an offspring or a close friend.

On 28 October 2016, Angela Drăgan (lecturer at Dimitrie Cantemir University) offered a lecture entitled "Vulnerable Sites of Remembrance: The Legacy of the First Encounters between Japan and the U.S." in which she examined the first diplomatic exchanges between Japan and the United States as a result of the forced debarcation of the U.S. Commodore Matthew Perry in 1853 and she highlighted how the vulnerabilities of each side in relation to the other were used by the opposite party at the time as well as how they have affected the future development of foreign relations between and for the two countries.

2. We organized a workshop about intergenerational dynamics in American trauma narratives. Entitled “Remembering the (Post)Communist City. Vulnerable Sites of Intergenerational Traumatic Memories in Transatlantic Perspective” (http://americanstudies.ro/?article=366), the workshop was held on 4 June 2016 within the annual conference of the English department at the University of Bucharest (http://www.unibuc.ro/depts/limbi/literatura_engleza/docs/2016/iun/01_15_05_24ACED_18_-_English_Department_Conference_Programme.pdf).

The point of departure for our workshop was the connection between memory and the city as most famously explored by Pierre Nora’s collection Lieux de mémoire/Realms of Memory (1984, 1989), where he diagnosed the death of “authentic memory” and its replacement in the urban space with sites such as memorials, museums, and other visual representations that, together with various commemoration practices, regulate national life frames (Judith Butler). Additionally, Andreas Huyssen’s Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory (Stanford University Press, 2003) emphasized the high stakes of urban spaces and media as material palimpsests offering “traces of the historical past in the present.” More recently,
identifying specific coordinates of the connection between memory and the (post)communist city in contemporary societies has been an increasing focus of international scholarship and public attention. The topic has been competently broached in Augusta Dimou, Maria Todorova, and Stefan Troebst’s edited volume *Remembering Communism. Private and Public Recollections of Lived Experience in Southeast Europe* (CEU Press, 2014), which records the dynamic processes of memory practices that mirror ongoing developments of private and public memories and identities in Southeast Europe by concentrating on the post-Stalinist era in Bulgaria and Romania, with occasional references to Poland and the GDR. *Memory and Political Change*, a collection of essays edited by Aleida Assmann and Linda Shortt (Palgrave 2012) examines mediated representations of the past during transitional historical periods. The significance of considering (post)communist sites in transatlantic perspective has gained momentum especially thanks to Andaluna Borcila’s *American Representations of Post-Communism: Television, Travel Sites, and Post-Cold War Narratives* (Routledge, 2014), which explores American ways of mapping the disintegration of communism and U.S. narratives articulated around post-communist sites and subjects in television news broadcasts, travel guides, and return narratives by East European immigrants to the US.

Having as special guest Andaluna Borcila, associate professor of American studies at James Madison College/Michigan State University, our workshop contributed to this ongoing conversation by exploring the innovative insights cultural studies scholars can gain from considering (post)communist sites in connection to intergenerational (traumatic) memories in transatlantic perspective by addressing some significant loose ends in need of scholarly attention, such as the relationship between remembering and representing (post)communist cities; the transmission of memory and historical knowledge; the impact of vulnerability, generationality, and various media on the production and consumption of (post)communist city memories. To that end, the workshop included three presentations, with Andaluna Borcila as chair and Mihaela Precup as respondent.

Dana Mihăilescu’s presentation, “Images of Childhood from 1950s Communist Bucharest in Memoirs by Women Émigrées Authors to the United States,” examined the representation of vulnerable childhood in the early years of the communist regime in Romania, in the 1950s, a
topic that has not been seriously tackled by scholars to date. Dana Mihăilescu analyzed the particulars of this representation in memoirs written in the 1990s-2000s, in English, in the United States by women authors who were born in Romania and emigrated with their families to the U.S. in the 1960s so that, in their case, the transatlantic perspective is defining for the remembrance of vulnerable childhood under communism.

Roxana Oltean’s presentation, “Sites of Vulnerability and Return in the Communist City,” analyzed sites of memory in the communist city, in official documents from the United States drafted under pressure as a result of traumatic events in communist cities (i.e. the image of Budapest as a city of mourning after the 1956 revolution or the image of Bucharest as a city of hunger between 1955 and 1957) and in a series of narratives by American journalists and authors (journalist Robert Kaplan’s travelogues Balkan Ghosts. A Journey through History, 1993 and In Europe’s Shadow. Two Cold Wars and a Thirty-Year Journey through Romania and Beyond, 2016 and Saul Bellow’s semi-autobiographic/semi-fictional work, Dean’s December, 1982).

Andaluna Borcila’s presentation, “Romanian Cities as Sites of Revolution: Televisibility, Remembering, and Touring Communism” captured a range of ways in which Romanian cities as sites of revolution have been represented and produced as sites of encounter for American viewers/readers/travelers, and their functions in representing post-communism and remembering communism. It also exposed and interrogated the functions of a larger discourse on post-communism that emerged in the U.S. television coverage of the events of 1989 and is reproduced 25 years later, one that represents Romanian sites and subjects as traumatized and deformed by communism. It moved from Romanian sites in revolution in the U.S coverage to the remediation and remembering of these sites in Petru Popescu’s The Return and to the representations and mapping of București as a site of “bloody revolution” in present-day tours of the city, touching on the media discourse about them but also suggesting how we might begin to understand them as simultaneously practices of remembering and ways of capitalizing on a dominant regime of seeing and a dominant regime of memory.

3) Publications/ submission of articles for publication:

a) Articles published in ISI-AHCI journals:

Dana Mihăilescu’s article was accepted for publication in 2015 in a special issue on war and life writing, but this 2015 issue of CLCWeb was actually published in May 2016; the article identifies the specifics of Holocaust child survivors’ memoirs as reflected in the narratives of Aharon Appelfeld who was born near Czernowitz in 1932 and was deported to Transnistria in 1941. The article investigates whether the structure of Holocaust child survivors’ memoirs is similar or different from that of memoirs by adult survivors and to what extent these narratives highlight vulnerability given the young ages the authors had during World War II. To that end, Appelfeld’s English-language memoirs published in the U.S. and his lectures around the U.S. are placed into conversation with critical ideas from the American public space as to the vulnerabilities specific to the 1.5 generation as theorized by Susan Rubin Suleiman (a comparative literature scholar from Harvard) and with the American discourse on the vulnerability of Holocaust child survivors as initiated by psychologist Bruno Bettelheim who had been an inmate of Dachau and Buchenwald before managing to flee to the U.S. in 1939 and who identified “deferred mourning” as a fundamental concept for this generation. This article won the 2016 UEFISCDI publication award, PNIII-P1-1.1-PRECISI-2016-10947, August 2016 (http://uefiscdi.gov.ro/userfiles/file/PNCDI%20III/P1_Resurse%20Umane/PRECISI_2016/PROCES%20EVALUARE/PRECISI_Rezultate%20eligibilitate_lista%201_25_08_2016.pdf).

Dana Mihăilescu’s article used as case study a 2012 transmedia travelogue by Thomas Duranteau, Des miettes et des étoiles, about the author’s trip to Auschwitz alongside Holocaust survivors. This travelogue was used as a point of departure for exploring transnational and intergenerational ethical dilemmas surrounding trips for youngsters to Holocaust death camps especially organized by U.S. institutions. The article addressed the following core question: how can such trips not simply be forms of trivialization and manipulation of the Holocaust and of victims’ and survivors’ vulnerabilities? In response, Dana Mihăilescu examined the controversial American discourse at the basis of this problematics, using the 24 May 2006 special episode of the Oprah Winfrey Show in which the well-known American TV star and producer invited Elie Wiesel to join her on a return trip to Auschwitz and considering the manner in which Hollywood has represented the Holocaust over time and thereby influenced the American and global audience as exemplified, for instance in the documentary Imaginary Witness, Hollywood and the Holocaust (2004). The article showed how Thomas Duranteau continues to use forms of complex representations of vulnerability of Holocaust survivors and their children as initially underscored by the American graphic artist Art Spiegelman (an explicit, assumed source of inspiration for Thomas Duranteau’s transmedia narrative) and as theorized by the American scholar Marianne Hirsch, while foregrounding vulnerability under the guise of deformed bodies and sutured consciousnesses in various directions for victims, perpetrators and by-standers, thereby extending the transnational, intergenerational approach mitigating for an emphasis on contradictions and complexities of Holocaust due to American scholars Marianne Hirsch, Anne Rothe, Alan Rosen, etc. This article won the 2016 UEFISCDI publication award, PNIII-P1.1-PRECISI-2016-13096, December 2016 (http://uefiscdi.gov.ro/articole/4386/Premierea-rezultatelor-cercetarii--articole.html).

b) Article published in an international databases-indexed journal (article accepted for publication in 2015 and published in 2016):

Dana Mihăilescu’s article probes to what extent the 2014 transmedia graphic narrative by Liana Finck, A Bintel Brief. Love and Longing in Old New York, contributes to historical and artistic representations of the vulnerability of Eastern European Jewish immigrants to the U.S. in relation to the expectations of the American mainstream (1) by the inclusion and visual adaptation of immigrants’ 1900-1920 letters about their everyday life or catastrophes like the “Triangle” company fire from 25 March 1911 to the widest-read Yiddish paper in America, The Forward; (2) by highlighting the role of these immigrants’ letters in contemporary U.S. as part of a legacy they have transmitted to the third generation of Jewish Americans as represented by the graphic artist.

c) Article published in an ISI-AHCI indexed (Web of Science) international volume:


Dragoș Manea’s paper analyzes Israel Zangwill’s The Melting Pot—an 1908 melodrama about a pair of immigrant lovers and the dream of writing the great American symphony—a success in its time that popularized the metaphor of the melting pot as the locus of American assimilation beyond vulnerable stances while at the same time subverting the discourse of Anglo-conformity commonly associated with it. In conversation with critics such as Hayden White, David Biale, and Bogdan Stefanescu, this paper explores the workings of melodrama as a narrative mode and the role it plays in proposing and legitimating a novel conceptualization of American identity, one derived from the protagonist’s position as a traumatized subject.

d) Article in an edited collective volume:
• Dragoș Manea, “‘If the accident will’: the conventionality of chaos in Kurt Vonnegut’s 

This paper attempts to offer a broadly narratological analysis of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, focusing on the novel’s rhetorical strategies and narrative structure. In conversation with Peter Brooks, Hayden White and Evelyn Ender, Dragoș Manea concentrates on narrative hysteria, a series of conventions meant to give the impression of structural chaos starting from the characters’ vulnerability, while at the same time emplotting the novel in a fairly straightforward manner. Manea argues that the power of the novel lies not in any radical formal experimentation, but in its intricate tweaking of convention.

e) **3 chapters/articles in an authored book:**


This paper is a case study which is part of a broader project analyzing the discourse about the U.S. and the Cold War as produced by or reflected upon American radio stations transmitting from beyond the Iron Courtain (Voice of America and Radio Free Europe). More precisely, the paper examines the use of the theme of vulnerability – a leitmotif of American identity according to Crockatt – in the ideological discourse of Voice of America radio station from a historical, cultural and discursive point of view, whether one refers to American historic vulnerabilities (as illustrated, for instance, by Dudziak), to the vulnerability of the communist system (thereby reiterating the position of power on the part of the U.S. as discussed by Saunders in relation to Cold War rhetorics) or to the new global configuration in the wake of Stalin’s death in March 1953, when we can notice a brutal change from an antagonistic type of relation, at least at the level of ideology, towards the possibility of some form of rapprochement given a new form of vulnerability raised by the specter of the global nuclear war (fol. the transatlantic contextualization due to Lagadec).
This paper focuses on a historical milestone moment for the formulation of the vulnerability of American identity, i.e. the early 1970s disclosure regarding CIA’s implication in a series of associations and institutions representing the initiatives of American citizens, such as the student associations or Free Europe Radio which was presented as a private company financed by donations from average anti-communist U.S. citizens. The propagations and implications of this event are examined in reference to the scandal and debates it generated, one which resulted in a crisis moment for American identity by exacerbating the vulnerability of this construct. Starting from Crockatt’s analysis of the feeling of national vulnerability and American identity crisis correlated with outside factors as well as from scholars’ nuancing the notions of power, disagreement and American identity during the time of revisionism in the 1970s (Falk, Hunt), this article correlates the insistence on national vulnerability with the anatomy of the American nation-state, and especially with the analysis of the collective subconscious represented by the activities undertaken by secret services and reflected in the mediatic storm occasioned by the disclosures about CIA practices and, later, Watergate.

This paper tackles the hearings of the Foreign relations committee presided by William J. Fulbright regarding the American government’s financing the continuation of the activities of Free Europe and Liberty radio stations. The hearings are used as case studies for analyzing the way in which they staged American identity as one suffering from a potentially fatal vulnerability. Using the framework of transatlantic relations during that period of the Cold War (cf. Lagadec) and the history of radios uncovered by Johnson and Parta, Roxana Oltean shows how the discourse resulting from the debate concerning the role of radios on American foreign
policy was affected by the debaters’ clashing views as to the sources of American vulnerability as projected both outside and inside the borders of the U.S.

f) Book review published in an international databases-indexed journal:

http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/RF5y2EwBDZJ3kdleVgv/full.

Dana Mihăilescu’s review highlights the major contribution to extant literature brought by the anthology of literary narratives published by Elaine Saphier Fox at Northwestern University Press, in 2013, an anthology including literary works by 24 Holocaust survivors from the U.S. who belong to the the Hidden Children/Child Survivors Chicago Group. This consists in the interweaving of text and images and the creation of transmedia narratives that combine poetry, prose vignettes and visual artefacts like photos, identity documents and drawings as ways to represent child survivors’ traumatic vulnerability as linked to the dissolution of structures and values learnt in protective and caring families that utterly fail in front of violence.

4) Participation at 4 international conferences held in Romania and 4 conferences outside Romania:


Dana Mihăilescu’s presentation examined the manner in which the vulnerability of Holocaust survivors takes nuanced contours for survivors that have given several testimonies over time, depending on the time, location and media of these. This topic was broached by an analysis of the multiple testimonies of Ruth Glasberg Gold, born in a Jewish family from Czernowitz, deported to Transnistria, and later settling in the U.S.; Ruth Gold’s testimonies included a written Romanian-language text from 1944, after young Gold’s repatriation to Romania; two
audio English-language testimonies given in the U.S. in 1993; an English-language memoir, 
*Ruth’s Journey*, published in 1996 in the US; a video testimony from December 1996 for the 
Holocaust Education and Documentation Center, Miami, Florida.

- Ana-Maria Gavrilă, "Alejandro Jodorowsky’s Therapeutic Dreamscape: Blending History, 
Memory, and Symbolism in The Dance of Reality." *Discourse, Culture and Representation II 
International Conference* organized by the Department of Humanities at Sapientia University in 
collaboration with the American Hungarian Educators Association (AHEA), Miercurea Ciuc, 15-16 
international-conference](http://ghtk.csik.sapientia.ro/en/news/discourse-culture-and-representation-ii-
international-conference)

Ana Gavrilă’s presentation analyzed the autobiographic film “The Dance of Reality” (2013) by 
Jewish Chilian director Alejandro Jodorowsky, considering the way in which he has presented 
his unhappy childhood in 1930s Latin America in connection to the imperialist presence of the 
United States and the intergenerational issues he had to tackle because of an abusive father, all 
this rendered in a hyperbolic and mystic visual style in which personal and collective 
vulnerability interact and influence each other. The presentation highlights Jodorowsky’s 
innovative ideological and aesthetic strategies of representing the vulnerable self during World 
War II by means of such techniques as magic realism and fantasy used as alternatives to the 
American cinematic discourse about the memory of the Holocaust based on the comparison of 
an intergenerational dynamics characteristic of Latin American and U.S. film makers.

- Mihaela Precup, “A Widow Shall: Joyce Carol Oates’s A Widow’s Story (2011) and the Public 
[eaas2016.org/conference-program](http://eaas2016.org/conference-program)

Mihaela Precup’s presentation examined bestselling American author Joyce Carol Oates’s 
memoir, A Widow’s Story (2011), and showed how the author negotiated the public norms of 
mourning by at times including the possibility of manipulating the idea of vulnerability of the 
grieving person in order to meet the expectations of contemporary American readers of trauma 
memoirs. Mihaela Precup addressed the following core questions: Why does Oates not build a 
more comprehensive portrait of her husband, publisher Ray Smith? Should we assume that she 
is too distraught to make this selection as a result of the husband’s death? Considering the fact
that Ray Smith died in February 2008, and the book came out in 2011, by which time Oates had already remarried, are we free to still assume that this is the work of raw grief, as it appears to be intended?


Dragoş Manea’s presentation examined The Starz television show Da Vinci’s Demons which premiered in 2013 to accusations of straight-washing and general skepticism regarding its portrayal of Leonardo Da Vinci, the Italian Renaissance painter who is generally considered to have been homosexual. In conversation with Lauren Berlant and José Esteban Muñoz, the paper examined the narrative strategies employed by Da Vinci’s Demons both in depicting the title character’s vulnerable homosexual encounters and in normalizing him through the emphasis placed on his largely heterosexual lifestyle. It also explored the series’ reception in the online gay community, where Leonardo’s straightwashing has been read as a traumatic rewriting of queer cultural memory.


Dana Mihăilescu’s presentation disseminated the above-presented ideas from the article on the same topic published in French Cultural Studies, while adding the importance of the Nuremberg Medical Code from 1949 which set the basis for the development of bioethics and
discussing the problematics of the implementation of this code which only occurred in the 1970s after several U.S. trials and media coverage stories that disclosed the continuation of the practice of eugenics in medicine during the Cold War by the manipulation of vulnerable groups as to “undesirable” social status or disability-related health conditions (i.e. William Hyman vs. Sloan Kettering Institute for Cancer research trial, 1965; the Tuskegee study about he use of 399 African Americans from Alabama for secret medical experiments which was made public in American newspapers in July 1972).


Mihaela Precup’s presentation focused on the representation of children’s vulnerability in the verbal-visual format of American transmedia (autobio)graphic narratives. By reviewing narratives in which authors narrate their traumatizing experiences regarding the paternal figure in their family as they grew up as well as autobiographical narratives by fathers that put forth the difficult experience of paternity, Mihaela Precup demonstrated that paternity is an important source of the vulnerability of the autobiographic self in whose case the process of creating an (autobio)graphy functions as an significant gesture for regaining control over one’s life story.


Ana Gavrilă’s presentation examined Katie Green’s transmedia autobiography, Lighter Than My Shadow (2013), structured as a graphic narrative. Ana Gavrilă examined the dynamics of individual vulnerability and the image of the female body, as well as the symbolic-visual representation of traumatic experiences that the artist confronted in her adolescence: anorexia and the feeling of obsession it gives rise to, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. The author showed that the traumatic subject matter is remarkably balanced by the childlike and effective art style,
as Green attempts to translate her struggle with eating disorders, her body-image anxieties and suicidal thoughts, and ultimate recovery through graphic medium - “I want to live. I want to draw”. The key element of Ana Gavrilă’s study, in the case of people affected by trauma, focuses on the way the vulnerable body demands attention to all the messy elements of corporeality every time we are required to represent ourselves visually.

For the third stage of research within our project (January-September 2017), we have targeted two major objectives: 1. continuing to identify the role of media adaptations and transmedia narratives from the United States that combine images, artefacts and texts in generating an intergenerational dynamics of vulnerability; 2. proposing a nuanced definition of vulnerability from the perspective of intergenerational dynamics and ethics as reflected in trauma narratives from the U.S. via our series of lectures for young researchers.

To that end, we have undertaken research trips to libraries from various European universities. Dragoş Manea enjoyed a research trip at John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies, Freie Universitat Berlin, between 29 March and 5 April 2017, continuing to do research about the dynamics of cultural memory, remediation, the representation of cultural memory and personal trauma and the relevance of the concept of vulnerability for philological endeavors. Dana Mihăilescu enjoyed a research trip to “The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People,” from Jerusalem, Israel (8-15 May 2017), a research trip to the humanities library of Goethe University from Frankfurt (2-15 June 2017) and a research trip to the library of Uppsala University (21 August-7 Septembrie 2017). During her research stays, Dana Mihăilescu consulted books and documents about the vulnerability of various generations of Eastern European Jews who immigrated to the US at the beginning of the 20th century or after World War II as well as theoretical studies about memory and vulnerability and their representation in written and visual media. In Jerusalem, Dana Mihăilescu primarily consulted American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee documents about the condition of Jews from Eastern Europe, esp. Romania, and oral testimonies of Holocaust survivors; in Frankfurt, she perused books about memory and vulnerability (Alan Rosen, Aleida Assman, Astrid Erll, Alexandre Dessingué, Christina Kraenzle, Oren Meyers, Jakon Lothe, Nanci Adler); in Uppsala she focused on studies about multimedia testimonies centered on the representation of
vulnerable identity (Adam Brown, Roy Schwartzman, Aleksandar Stević, Henry Gonshak, Angi Buettner). Roxana Oltean enjoyed a research stay at the Eccles Centre for American Studies, British Library, London (8-15 August 2017) and a research stay at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies, Freie Universitat Berlin (19 August-1 September 2017). During her stay at ECCLES, Roxana Oltean continued the main line of research started on per previous research trip to London, from 2016. In order to tests the perceptions, opininions and representations of American (in)vulnerability in the context of Anglo-American relations in the early Cold War period, she focused on British novelist Ian McEwan’s novel, The Innocent, a love story framed by a fictionalized representation of Operation Stopwatch/Gold, a spy-operation undertaken by American and British secret services in Berlin, in 1953-1956, in view of intercepting underground Soviet communication lines by building a secret tunnel up to them. One partial conclusion is that McEwan’s novel eloquently and subtly illustrates the theme of Anglo-American (in)vulnerability in the early Cold War period via a type of writing which both imitates and subverts the espionage novel (Guyver), via abrupt turning points of the plotline associated with an increased awareness of limits of self- knowledge (Wells), via the motif of British innocence (Dodou) and of American innocence, this latter much less explored by the critics (see McEwan, Book Launch Event, British Council, Paris, and the collection of interviews published by Roberts). Additionally, the “special relation” between the UK and the US after the fall of the “Iron Curtain”, both syntagms being well imprinted on the collective imaginary following Winston Churchill’s 1946 speech from Fulton, Missouri, is also reflected in the potentially allegoric nature of the novel in which the love story and inter-state relations are overlapping (Benyei, Head, Slay, Ryan), just as they become complicated by images and narrative structures that suggest inversion, submition and abjection as a poetic or psychic subtext of political realities (Colebrook, Heiler, Fortin). Roxana Oltean’s research trip to Berlin continued her research from London, 2017, especially by focusing on how the city of Berlin as a locus of personal and collective vulnerability sustains the creation, negociation or negation of images or discursive constructions referring to Anglo-American relations during the Cold War. Roxana Oltean therefore examines the Anglo-American perspective on Berlin in a number of media (such as novels, films, TV reportages, written press) and discourses (cultural, historical,
political, literary), exploring literary and cultural studies works (Lee, Pike, Young, McLean, Parker, Bathrick, Rentschler), historical and autobiographic narratives (Murphy and Kondrashev, Bagley, Steury, May), and newspaper articles (New York Times, Washington Post, Life, Saturday Evening Post).

The research outcomes we have undertaken for meeting the above-mentioned objectives are the following:

1) the continuation of the lecture series we have developed regarding the impact of vulnerability on American culture;

2) publication of articles in international (ISI-AHCI or international databases-indexed) journals and/or in collective volumes; more precisely, we have published the following articles in 2017: one article in an international databases-indexed journal; two articles in collective edited volumes published by Berghahn Books and Palgrave;

3) submission for publication of a book which has been accepted for publication and will appear at Lexington Books/Rowman and Littlefield; submission for publication (in October 2016) of an article in a collective volume about memory which will appear at Walter de Gruyter (the volume is currently under peer review); submission for publication (in May 2017) of an article in a collective volume which will appear at Winter Verlag.

4) participation at 8 international conferences (2 conferences held in Romania and 6 conferences outside Romania).

Below we provide further details about each of the research outcomes listed above.

1) the continuation of the lecture series we have developed regarding the impact of vulnerability on American culture (“Dynamics of Vulnerability and Traumatic Affect”) via which we have proposed a nuanced definition of vulnerability from the perspective of intergenerational dynamics and ethics.

To that end, on 7 April 2017, we organized a workshop entitled “Vulnerabilities as Sites of Action Involving Modes of Historical Representation”. Our point of departure was the fact that, over the past decade, vulnerability has become a primary category of analysis for many scholars working in the interdisciplinary fields of ethics, gender, memory and trauma studies, especially thanks to philosopher Judith Butler’s feminist-informed works (2004, 2009, 2013) posing the challenging problem
of how to ethically relate to present-day violence and politics via the creation of alternative empowering forms of vulnerability. It is especially in the 2013 book *Vulnerability. New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy* (Oxford University Press) that Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers and Susan Dodds propose a welcome taxonomy of different sources of vulnerability (i.e. inherent, situational, pathogenic) and potential/“dispositional” vs. actual/“occurent” states of vulnerability, one which allows scholars to identify context-specific forms of vulnerability and to emphasize the complex, multiple facets of vulnerability. This workshop contributes to this direction of scholarly research by making its primary focus the issue of **vulnerabilities as sites of action involving modes of historical representation** and sustaining a relational approach in which, on the one hand, institutional and individually-internalized discourses of vulnerability might lead to discrimination, stereotyping, paternalistic interventions which keep one even more incapacitated from one generation to another and, on the other hand, there is a potential form of resistance as long as generations manage to transmit to one another the importance of autonomy, ethical responsibilities and capabilities also characterizing vulnerable individuals. More precisely, our workshop has proposed a definition of vulnerability as a broad multilayered and complex concept by looking (1) at how and what kind of vulnerability informs us about non-normative human and non-human forms of life especially thanks to the contribution of posthumanist studies on understanding memory and life and (2) at how vulnerabilities can be sites of action subverting or sidestepping the victim/saviour scenarios of many historical accounts of traumatic events in comparing the American and the Romanian contexts. We discussed these ideas in connection to the two presentations of the workshop: *(1) Kári Driscoll and Susanne C. Knittel (Utrecht University), “Memory after Humanism: Vulnerability, Disability, Species”; (2) Ana Bărbulescu (University of Bucharest), “Vulnerabilities of Post-Communist Romanian Historiography as to Holocaust Representations: Competitive Identities and Dangerous Memories”.*

On **19 May 2017**, **Ramona Dima (PhD student at the University of Bucharest)** continued to broaden the understanding of vulnerability by her exploration of the specifics of the LGBTQ community in her talk, “An Overview of Queer Romanian Contemporary Cultural Products and Practices” in which she contrasted the situation in Romania to that from the United States. On **19 July 2017**, **Olga Ţ Stefan (curator from Zurich, Switzerland)**, offered a challenging talk on the “future of memory”, which is also the title of an exhibition Olga organized in România and the Republic of Moldova in 2017 by which she has brought to the foreground documents and specificities of the Holocaust in Romania and the voice of survivors who have given her
testimonies, most of them currently living in the United States or Israel and putting forth the intergenerational dynamics of vulnerable identities their families were confronted with. On 26 September 2017, Ana-Maria Gavrilă (PhD student at the University of Bucharest and a member of the present project team), broadened the area of analysis for defining vulnerability by exploring private and public moments of vulnerability as reflected in the manner in which two well-known American visual artists have performed and written their identity, i.e. Annie Leibovitz and Sally Mann, via a fragmented construction. More details on the series and the abstracts of the presentations can be found at the following link: http://americanstudies.ro/?article=338.

2) publication of articles in international (ISI-AHCI or international databases-indexed) journals and/or in collective volumes:

a) one article published in an international databases-indexed journal:


Ana Gavrilă’s article analyzed the autobiographic film “The Dance of Reality” (2013) by Jewish-Chilian director Alejandro Jodorowsky, considering the way in which he has presented his unhappy childhood in 1930s Latin America in connection to the imperialist presence of the United States and the intergenerational issues he had to tackle because of an abusive father, all this rendered in a hyperbolic and mystic visual style in which personal and collective vulnerability interact and influence each other.

b) two articles published in international collective volumes:

Drawing on the work of psychoanalysts Claudine Vegh (1979), Paul Valent (1998, 2006), Nathan Durst (2003) and literary scholar Susan Rubin Suleiman (2002), this paper explores a series of testimonies taken in the 1980s and 1990s by psychoanalyst Judith Kestenberg for her project, Child Development Research, currently part of the Kestenberg archive (Oral History Division, Hebrew University of Jerusalem); they were given by child survivors who were between 0 and 8 years old during the Holocaust and they belonged to child survivors from Romania and Poland, being representative for understanding the specifics of vulnerable memories for child survivors who were very young during the war and for whom the different contexts in Romania, Poland and the United States influenced their future development. The analysis of these testimonies highlights a dynamics of vulnerability because of the Holocaust both inside the category of child survivors and intergenerationally, in the relations they later established with their parents/children. The paper means to answer the following questions: What specific forms of memory can be detected from the testimonies of young child survivors? To what extent do these memories take into consideration the age of the children during the Holocaust, their location, whether or not they were still living with their biological parents? What are the effects of their vulnerable memories upon their and subsequent generations’ future life development and existence in relation to trauma?


The paper explores the graphic representation of a subversive type of femininity in the ongoing graphic narrative *Saga* (a winner of 5 Eisner awards from 2012 to date). The authors prove how, set in a world in which the vulnerability and precarity of characters results from their being affected by a global war, *Saga* makes use of a subversive model of feminity in the representation of “dangerous” women by utilizing vulnerability as a source of empowerment.
3) submission for publication of a book at a prestigious publishing house and of 2 articles in edited collective volumes:

   a) articles accepted for publication in edited collective volumes:


   In late October 2016, Dana Mihăilescu’s article was submitted for consideration of publication in a collective volume aiming to identify the similarities and differences of memory dynamics in the Eastern European and Western (U.S.-discourse dominated) spaces, i.e. After Memory. Rethinking Representations of World War II in Contemporary Eastern European Literatures (eds. Matthias Schwartz, Nina Weller, Heike Winkel – accepted for publication in the “Media and Cultural Memory” series of Walter de Gruyter publishers, currently under peer review, to be published in 2018).

   Dana Mihăilescu’s article examines the so-far ignored impact of American ghost-written Holocaust narratives on generating an intergenerational dynamics of vulnerability by the authors’ status as proxy witnesses, focusing on two narratives about Holocaust survivors from Romania published in the U.S., The Seamstress (about Sara Tuvel Bernstein’s experiences, as written by Louise Loots Thornton and Marlene Bernstein Samuels and published in 1997 in New York) and Live! Remember! Tell the World! The Story of a Hidden Child Survivor of Transnistria (about Leah Kaufman’s experiences, as written by Sheina Medwed and published in 2005 in New York). The article aims to address the following core questions: How do narratives by Holocaust survivors from Eastern Europe ghost-written by a professional Western author contribute to cultural representations of World War II vulnerabilities in contemporary times? To what extent do these autobiographies both reflect and go beyond reflecting their construction in the West, in terms of general Western, English-language autobiographical practices as identified in particular by David Roskies and Naomi Diamant in Holocaust Literature. A History

- Roxana Oltean, “‘No Protection at Home,’ ‘No Resting Place Abroad.’ Vulnerable Subjects and (Trans)National Contexts in Frederick Douglass’s Life Writing’ (article submitted for publication in Mapping Transnational America, EVUS series, Winter Verlag, eds. Adina Ciugureanu, Nicoleta Stanca; the abstract was accepted in March 2017, the final article was sent on 30 May 2017).

The article uses as starting point the transatlantic dimension of African American Frederick Douglass’s autobiography and shows how his work opens a conversation about relevant ethical issues regarding not only the abolitionist cause, but other 19th century and contemporary thorny issues. The vulnerable character deployed in Douglass’s autobiography (a slave that escaped captivity but remained under the specter of racism and discrimination) opens up the discussion of themes such as personal responsibility and ethical resorts against abuse and the response to the other’s suffering as an ethical reaction. The article brings to scholarly attention a series of issues, from the Master-Slave dialectics in an American context to the Nietzschian fight for articulating one’s self in African American literature (Willett), but also to considerations of forms of interdependency and interconnection (Fineman), the role of retributive anger and justice in redressing social problems (Nussbaum), so as to interrogate the means in which vulnerable individuals and issues produce novatory ethical connections.

b) a book accepted for publication at a prestigious publishing house, for the series “Lexington Studies in Modern Jewish History, Historiography, and Memory” (publishing contract signed in April 2017, the book is forthcoming in 2018/2019):


This book is a comparative study of the Jewish response to their vulnerable identity in Eastern Europe and the United States as reflected in narratives written by Jewish immigrants from Russia and Romania to the United States at the end of the 19th century – the beginning of the
20th century. The major goal of the book is to prove how dilemmas related to Jewish vulnerable identities were at the basis of its modern reconfiguration in the case of Jews immigrating from Eastern Europe to the United States, and how the reconfiguration of identity relied on the modification of ethical responsibilities in different regimes of state (autocratic vs. democratic states) via an intergenerational dynamics of relating to the idea of vulnerability.

4) participation at 8 international conferences (2 conferences held in Romania and 6 conferences held outside Romania) where we disseminated the results of our research articles related to the role of American media adaptations and transmedia narratives combining images, artefacts and texts in order to generate an intergenerational dynamics of vulnerability:

- Dana Mihăilescu, “The Agency of Memories about World War II across Time and Media: On Ruth Glasberg Gold’s Multiple Accounts of Holocaust Experiences.” Seminar “Searching for the
Agency of Memory” (organizers: Codruta Pohrib, Maria Zirra) for the American Comparative Literature Association Convention, Utrecht, Netherlands, 5-10 July 2017, https://www.acla.org/annual-meeting/meeting-schedule/program-guide#/calendar/1.


Finally, we point out that the current grant has represented both an excellent opportunity for undertaking research and an excellent occasion to offer consistent financial support (through the payment of monthly wages) to the early-career PhD students on our team who don’t have a tenured position in a university or a research institute, i.e. Dragoş Manea and Ana-Maria Gavrilă. The grant has also helped the two doctoral students on our team to successfully finish their PhD theses: Dragoş Manea defended his PhD thesis entitled Towards a Poetics of Historical Fantasy in Contemporary Television and Graphic Narratives. Anglo-American Cultural Memory and the Ethics of Adapting History on 10 July 2017 and Ana-Maria Gavrilă submitted her PhD thesis, Autobiographical Snapshots: Rethinking Identity through Image and Text, in September 2017, and will defend it in October or November 2017.

Project coordinator,

Dana Mihăilescu