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Subjective timeline of the '90's*

Petre Popovăț

*For Romania,
the '90's began in December 1989.*

December 16, 1989 The 1989 Revolution starts in Timișoara. The spark of the revolt is the eviction of the protestant pastor László Tökés. In the beginning, a few hundred parishers protest in front of his house. The revolt expands in the entire city.

December 17 Protesters are shot at. There are many dead and wounded.

December 21 In Bucharest, Ceaușescu organizes a “denunciation” rally against the “hooligans” in Timișoara. The rally turns against him. Many participants shout out “Down with Ceaușescu!”, “Down with the Communism!” A barricade is set up in the University Square, in the night of 21/22 December. The Army and the secret police (Securitate), drive tanks into the crowd, leaving many dead and wounded.

December 22 Protests continue. Hundreds

of thousands gather in the city center. At 12.06 Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu run away with a chopper from the roof of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party headquarters. The building is occupied by the demonstrators. So is the national public television. A new body is created – the National Salvation Front (FSN) - in order to fill the power vacuum. The declared purpose of FSN is to “bring democracy, liberty and dignity to the Romanian people”. The head of this body is Ion Iliescu, former high-ranking activist of the Romanian Communist Party, fallen off the graces of Ceaușescu. In the '80's, due to his “gorbatchevian” orientation, he is considered to be an alternative to the dictator. As dusk settles, the “terrorists”, left unidentified to this day, start shooting at the peaceful demonstrators. Many die and are wounded.

25 December After a show trial, Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu are sentenced to death and executed.

26 December Petre Roman is appointed prime-minister.

* The material is almost exclusively realized by putting together data from the following books: Domnița Ștefănescu, *Five years in the history of Romania*, Edit. Mașina de Scris, Buc., 1995; Domnița Ștefănescu, *Two years in the History of Romania*, Edit. Mașina de Scris, Buc., 1998; Emilian M. Dobrescu, *Românografia, bilanț și perspective*, Edit. Compania, Buc., 2000

1990

Between **the 8th and the 28th of January**, twenty political parties are founded. Their number will go up.

January 28 The National Peasant Christian Democrat Party (PNTCD) and the National Liberal Party (PNL) protest against the decision of FSN to run into the elections. FSN is supported by the workers and miners in the mining area Jiu Valley. Armed with clubs and other specific weapons they came for the first time to Bucharest. The slogan "Death to the intellectuals!" is heard for the first time.

January 29 FSN supporters assault the headquarters of some opposition parties.

February 9 As a consequence of many anti-communist dissidents leaving the FSN Council, the Provisory Council of National Unity (CPUN) is established.

February 15 The Romanian Peasant's Museum is created by government ordinance no. 130. Painter Horia Bernea is appointed director.

February 28 During ample street protests against FSN and the former apparatchiks and secret police officers leading it, miners come for the second time to Bucharest to intervene.

March 15-20 Violent confrontations between Romanians and ethnic Hungarians in Tg. Mureș.

March 24 The Romanian Information Service (SRI) is founded and replaces the former "Securitate" secret police.

April 22 University Square is occupied by anti-FSN forces who believe that FSN is just a successor of the Romanian Communist Party. The protest will establish a record of length (53 days in a row). Ion Iliescu calls the protesters

"hooligans". The insult is turned into a title of honor. University Square is called "Hooligania". The protesters wear badges on which it is written "hooligan". The balcony of the University is open. People make speeches, sing and shout out slogans. University Square is declared "Communism-Free Zone". The leader of the movement is Marian Munteanu, president of the Students' League.

May 20 Parliamentary and presidential elections, validating the victory of FSN and Ion Iliescu.

June 13 Order forces attack the hunger-strikers who had put up their protest tents in the University Square. People are arrested. College students are beaten up. Confrontations with the police forces take place. State institutions are set on fire.

June 14-15 A new coming of the miners ("mineriada") led by their union leader, Miron Cozma. All the persons present in the University Square, even passers-by with an "intellectual look" (i.e. beard, glasses) are savagely beaten up. 185 persons are arrested and 560 wounded. The City Health Department acknowledges six dead. In reality there were more. On the 29th of June, unidentified bodies taken from the Forensic Science Institute are buried.

August 24-25 On the walls of the Architecture Faculty from the University Square one can read "Square Tien An Men II".

November 6 The Civic Alliance is founded.

December 25 Former King Michael I is not allowed to enter the country. A wave of protests follows the decision of the authorities.

1991

January 23 Land Law is adopted, allowing the restitution of farming land expropriated from the peasants and given to the Soviet-style agricultural cooperatives.

February 6 Romania agrees with the dismantling of the military structures of the Warsaw Pact.

April 4-6 Iliescu and Gorbachev sign the Romania-URSS Treaty.

July 20 Greater Romania Party (PRM) is founded. It is an extremist, nationalist, anti-Hungarian and anti-Semitic party led by Corneliu Vadim Tudor.

July 30. Privatization Law is adopted.

September 25-28 A new "mineriada" led by Miron Cozma leads to the toppling of the executive. Acts of violence and vandalism take place. The result: three dead and 455 wounded. The miners ask (with no result) for the resignation of President Iliescu.

1 October Theodor Stolojan becomes the new prime-minister.

The Parliament adopts the Constitution adopted by the **8th of December** referendum.

1992

March 27-29 FSN splits in two between the supporters of Petre Roman and those of Ion Iliescu. The latter forms the Democratic National Salvation Front (FDSN), registered on the 29th of April.

April 25-27 King Michael I and other members of the Romanian royal family manage to come to Romania on Easter. In Bucharest they are greeted by almost one million enthusiastic persons.

September 27 Parliamentary and presiden-

tial elections validate the victory of FDSN and (in the second round) Ion Iliescu.

November 4 Nicolae Văcăroiu is appointed prime-minister.

1993

February 1 Romania signs in Brussels the Europe Agreements; May – the implementation of the commercial provisions within the European Agreement has been initiated, through an Interim Agreement.

September 28 Romania becomes a member of the Council of Europe.

1994

May 17 President Iliescu signs the European Convention on Human Rights.

May 21 World Bank and G-24 (The Intergovernmental Group of Twenty-Four on International Monetary Affairs and Development) give Romania loans of over 1 billion US dollars.

May 23 PNȚCD reacts to a statement made by Ion Iliescu. He stated that adopting the land law is the greatest mistake of the past four years.

May 24 Opposition representatives condemn the statements of Ion Iliescu who criticized the judges who ruled in favor of the former owners of nationalized buildings.

June 20 Nationalized Building Law is adopted, without solving the issue of restitution of the buildings nationalized by the communist regime to the former owners.

August 11 The "Caritas Scandal" bursts out. Caritas was a pyramid scheme. The owners stated that they were a charitable association which

took money from people and gave it back 8 times more in a few months. Many citizens were at a loss. One million complaints were filled against the 600 such “charity associations”.

September 13 Bucharest Court of Law decides the freeing of the former members of the Political Executive Committee of the Romanian Communist Party who were still incarcerated.

October 7 Former King Michael I and his wife Anna are stopped on the Otopeni Airport and forbidden to enter the country. According to an official press-release, “The Executive does not consider appropriate their presence in Romania”.

1995

January 13 Emil Constantinescu announces his intention to run for president of the Democratic Convention of Romania (CDR) and, in the future, for President of Romania.

January 21-22 The 4th Congress of the International Association of the Former Political prisoners and Victims of Communism takes place in Budapest. Constantin Ticu Dumitrescu, Romanian former political prisoner is elected president of this body.

February 11 The European Agreement with Romania, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Slovakia enters into force. Romania may now officially apply for EU membership.

March 31 Dumitru Iuga, President of the Free Union from Broadcast Public Television is on his 13th day of hunger strike, protesting against the attempts of the power to control the editorial policy of public TV station.

Airplane accident: TAROM 310 Muntenia Airbus aircraft crashes near Bucharest. There are 59 victims.

May 8 By the grave of Nicolae Ceaușescu, a group of nostalgic *aficionados* of the Communist regime celebrates the founding of the Romanian Communist Party.

June 12 Ion Iliescu explains on the public TV station that he had no connection with the KGB.

August 26 Prime-Minister Nicolae Văcăroiu affirms that 60% of the state budget is money coming from fiscal evasion.

October 6 Corneliu Coposu, President of PNTCD and leader of the Opposition, is decorated with the Grand Officer of the Legion of Honor Medal.

November 11 Corneliu Coposu passes away. King Michael I is not allowed to participate at the funeral.

1996

February 17 Tennis player Ilie Năstase announces he will run for mayor of Bucharest from the part of PDSR (former FDSN).

May 18 After only three years from its inaugurations, the Romanian Peasant’s Museum receives from EMYA (European Museum of the Year Award) the award for best museum of the year.

June 16 Victor Ciorbea, former union leader, is elected mayor of Bucharest.

August 28 For the 3rd time Iliescu decides to run for President. The Constitution of Romania only allows for two presidential terms.

September 4 Emil Constantinescu, from the part of CDR, decides to run for President.

September 16 The Hungary – Romania

Neighbourhood Treaty is signed.

September 18 The Lower Chamber votes for the amendment of the Criminal Code. According to article 200, homosexuality is punished with prison from six month to three years.

November 3 CDR comes in first in the parliamentary elections.

November 17 In the second round of Presidential elections, Emil Constantinescu is elected President of Romania.

November 20 Victor Ciorbea is appointed prime-minister.

1997

February 3 Former King Michael I is allowed to return to Romania "without any pre-conditions".

July 14 Bill Clinton's visit to Bucharest.

August 19 By governmental ordinance the miners who will become unemployed due to the restructuring of the field will get up to 20 compensatory salaries. First strikes in the world asking for unemployment take place (80,000 requests of being let go).

1998

January 23 Extreme weather affects the country.

July 6 Romanian education system is in shock: one out of three candidates did not pass the high-school final exam (Baccalaureate).

1999

January 18 The fifth „mineriada” begins.

January 20 The miners outnumber the police forces, surrounding and disarming them.

January 22 Prime-Minister Radu Vasile and the leader of the miners, Miron Cosma, meet for negotiations in Cozia.

February 15 The Supreme Court of Justice sentences Miron Cosma at 18 years in prison.

May 7-9 Pope John Paul II comes to Romania.

August 11 Total solar eclipse.

December 31, 22.00 hrs Most of Romanians prepare to party. Year 2000 begins in 2 hours.

Translated by Cora Moțoc





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The colours of transition

Șerban Anghelescu



Transition as a notion implies the existence of two different, consolidated structures, between which a society, an individual, an object moves and is becoming. Transition is an intermediary period of time meant to disappear once the passage¹ ends. It is a fluid bridge between the stage left in hindsight and the desired stage. It represents a fascinating field of study for sociologists and anthropologists because of its richness in ambiguities, paradoxes, tentative to regression, loss of identities, frauds and impostures. Historians have agreed to define *transition* as the period of time when a certain situation slowly or violently dissolves, while in the meantime a new system is being formed.

Social actors of the past, either voluntarily or non voluntarily engaged in disintegrating old empires or religions, do not have a clear consciousness of their limited existence, while millenialists and socialists have a rational and relatively clear image of the community or society they want to achieve. The latter are inexperienced novelties up to the moment when we exclude imaginary times and the edenical spaces which utopists claim to reconstitute. The passage conform a revealed model or *science* and *law*

will torture the social reality for making it to coincide with the ideological project. It will invent a linguistic screen that it will present as the only coherent and controlled reality.

In the case of Romania, transition leads to a lively liberal, known, society that is not utopic at all. What is missing is the tyranny of a unique and frozen model. The temporary advantage of a unique structure is that it mobilizes all energies in a single direction, contrary to the competition between alternative models. It is interesting to notice how the notion of *transition* has been accepted in official language and that this very fact represents an elementary precaution. Political blunders, stagnations, mistakes that our leaders make during the passage will be blamed on transition, which by definition implies risk and being out of line; a no man's land where everything is permitted. Moral responsibility is perceived differently or completely disappears.

A word also about ritual transition, the only perfect notion because its symbolic process of transformation is codified uniformly and produces in masses adults, deceased in peace, monks, shamans, etc. We will let now personal memory speak, leaving aside any kind of theory

¹ Passage is a concept defined and theorized by Arnold Van Gennep, 1909, *Les rites de passage* (Librairie critique Emile Nourry, Paris) and Victor W. Turner, 1969, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-structure* (Aldine Publishing Company).

or any field research, to present this period fragmentarily, with colours, tones or accents of the passage that appear or disappear.

Firstly, Romanians that went into the streets experienced the unbelievable feeling of freedom and of power, believing that they could become writers of history and not slaves. Endless television transmissions gave the possibility to participate in provisional parliamentary debates, which provided full transparency of the political act. However simultaneously with the appearance of trust, suspicion is created. The assassinating snipers that are called terrorists are in the collective memory exotic beings with multiple identities, masters of subterranean areas which are thought to be spread all over Bucharest. Below the visible surface exists a hidden reality. Nothing is anymore what it seemed to be. The Romanian citizen becomes hermeneutic in the market, in the media, in the family; he sees hidden meanings everywhere. He won't let himself being manipulated. He knows that everybody conspires against him. Nothing is pure, nothing is clear. We are lied to and sold out, says the man in the street when he faces surprises. He invents hidden enemies, just as the communists, obsessed with conspiracies did. It is just that now the enemy, the foreign agent, the capitalist or the informant cannot be punished.

The forms of protest vary from the threat with suicide through hunger strikes to playful demonstrations. He protests playing, singing, yelling, saying a prayer, drawing and marching. Piața Universității has become a sacred place, isolated, of those that are pure and free. It has become an island of solidarity in a hostile world, a place for confession and of spontaneous speech. The intensity of those days had something of a religious eruption of free politics, of initiation and salvation in opposition with rational practices.

Communism spoke of social homogeneity, the indestructible unity of people around the communist party without ever taking it further



than this so-called ritual language. An extraordinary communion of freedom and victory established itself in the days following the Revolution followed immediately by deterioration and foreseeable ruptures in a free society which reflects differences. Political ruptures frequently oppose different generations in a family. Social fragmentation disturbs those used to uniform values. The ritual show of power in the communist times did not permit even the shadow of a conflict. The perfectly directed unique will constructed history through unanimous applause. The suddenly opened possibility of competition between different political groups paralyzed those not used to the notion of option. The result is that many believe in all forms of power; those political leaders fighting as animals in a

zoo for a bone are actually all aligned against the people no matter their doctrine. In a world dominated by show, extreme poverty and wealth, instead of being discrete, are being shown in broad daylight.

Opinion polls show that Romanians only have trust in two solid institutions: the church and the army. Despite the continuous and well-known human degradation existing in military life, this institution impresses because of its apparent equality and discipline, while the rest of society shows signs of anarchy and wounded mobility. The time and space of cult acts do not listen to the rhythm of the social changes. The same goes for the exact number of days and nights spent in the army, which forces the body into an exact and cadenced rhythm. They provide fixed and steady points in a chaotic society.

Orthodoxy, even fundamentalism, gains ground. Filocalia appears again. In religious printing houses theological studies and patristic works are printed. In busses or trams, people make the sign of cross every time they pass a church or monastery. They say frequently "God help me" and they repopulate the churches. Charismatic priests are in the centre of much listened to intellectual groups. A known painter oversees evening meetings of Christian reflection. Well-known monks are assaulted by the crowd. Holy remains attract pilgrims that look for healing and celestial protection. A Cathedral of National Salvation is in projection. It is supposed to stand up against the monster that is called the House of the People.

The billboards all across the city promise initiations in Greek and oriental mysteries, the supreme knowledge of metaphysical secrets and physical equilibration through yoga. A guru, now arrested, places the foundations of ashrams in Ferentari, an area of Bucharest with a bad reputation, and convinces his followers to drink their urine for therapeutic purposes, to meditate on

the ruins of Dacians², and to practice tantric sexuality. Mysterious Dacian writings find their so-called deciphers. Isis, Osiris, Zamolxe, Graal have a threatening place in people's mind.

The science-fiction literature feeds into people's desire for fantasies. Sorceresses that are self proclaimed princesses and queens of white witchcraft, cure impotence, heal alcoholism and assure the success in exams and business. Books with recipes for success and happiness welcome you in bookshops. They propose fast and sure methods to become slim, to improve sexual performance and success in communication. One can apparently learn anything as long as you use easy and fast, at hand relational strategies.

Pedestrians move quickly on skates or skateboards, eating in fast food restaurants standing or eating snacks made in small pastry shops that have appeared almost overnight.

You can rely on matrimonial agencies to find your partner. Specialized agency "Bon Mariage" prepares weddings into the smallest details, while other companies supply you with complete funeral services. Entrepreneurs in funeral furniture make mortality a flourishing business. Dead or alive certain institutions are taking and guiding you comfortably, rapidly, without any mistake and any pain.

TV commercials promise perfect protection of the dry but happy body. Menstrual blood and babies' urine are absorbed better and better. It is sufficient to stick a plaster on your bare foot or a belt around your waist to become a fit person, or to obtain wonderful buttocks and covet breasts. A pierced and tattooed body reminds of tribal practices, but this analogy remains superficial as long as we do not know what is actually encrypted on our body, as the so-called "savages" did know.

The herbs and the flowers, the roots and the seeds used in teas and macerated or transformed into powders show the increased trust in the

² Dacians are inhabitants of the antique province of Dacia, conquered by the Romans in 106 A.C. It is said that they are the ancestors of nowadays Romanians.

healing capacity of nature, conquered by the pharmaceutical industry. Magic, homeopathy, naturism, occultism, initiating secrets, universal conspiracies all together form the desire for everything that opposes the visible, rational organized world and the hidden structures that saw daylight. Two naive notions coexist: that of extreme rationalism, which professes through adequate techniques health and prosperity, and invisible worlds, in which resides real power.

If in the 70's Bucharest's inhabitants bred minks for food and clothing, nowadays they surround themselves with „un-useful” pets that conquered sensible hearts. A new industry is born from a changed attitude towards our Earth's cotenants; you see birds, cats and exotic dogs, veterinary shops and ambulances, thousands of types of special food for delicate four legged pets, sophisticated cages and fake bones. We learned to love dinosaurs, mongooses, caimans. Due to television and cinematography we discover a fascinating alterity in our furry, scaly, winged neighbours. We make them human. On the opposite, you see packs of dogs that belong to nobody and in the same time to everybody, which attack or lick you and make city authorities to face serious moral issues. Should we kill them kindly, feed them, or adopt them? Fighting dogs are instruments of their master's unrestrained aggression. Guardian dogs defend their masters possessions.

We do not live in a beleaguered society, but lattices protect ground floor windows, the number of metal doors equipped with advanced locking systems rises and security systems are widely abound. However, the fear is justified, as the thief or the burglar knows exactly the clues of the protected values. Windows of wood disappear. Window frames that close themselves hermetically and isolate sound and tiles and marble define new or renovated houses. The colours of the walls; red, orange or lemon yellow contrasts with the general grey which is applied on the outside of buildings.

The newly appeared huge shops, super or hy-

permarkets, are like everywhere in the world: cold, over-luminous and populated with a greedy magma. The individual disappears under the pressure of his bustling fellows and is under the threat of the thousands of objects that dominate his life. One supermarket is enough to find out almost everything about one human kind and its newly created civilization. Small neighbourhood shops with strange American names or names derived from abbreviations of their owners' names appear. The shops clients know personally the owner of the shop, and the owner, at his turn, knows the clients' families. In the shop you can buy things on credit and you can drink a beer on the sidewalk, even if law forbids this.

Bucharest citizens that live in this transition find out about their fortunes in the newspaper each morning through astrology articles, the weather report, the exchange rate, stock exchange news and the rapes and the arsons that happened the day before. At the same time, the citizen is prepared to navigate through the world, knowing his place under the stars, hostile clouds or the friendly sun and the atrocious bare facts, the anomaly that lights the monotony of the quotidian and gives him shivers.

Public memory modifies itself with each major social change. The first movement is destructive: the emblematic monuments of the communist époque fall down. Statues of Lenin and Petru Groza are lying together in the backyard of Mogoşoaia Palace. The second movement is self-recuperating: not only the history that was disfigured or forbidden by the communist regime recurs, but the real history of communism shows-up for the first time. The masters of memory are the masters of society.

Finally, let us reflect on 80 years old individuals who lived an exceptional experience. Their world overturned twice, not taking in account their personal lives. White turned to black and then back to white again. In the name of human dignity and democracy, the communists have suppressed private property and elementary human rights. In the name of this same human

dignity, tens of year's later, property has been restored, but the amazing cancellation of communism and the peaceful continuation of the broken history seem to be impossible.

Even if we would consider against all reasons that Romanian people lived a nightmare from which they awakened suddenly, they could not resume overnight their anterior state of being. They remain the masters of that long nightmare and, consequently, remain different from all those who did not live in it. The liberated victim

does not lose immediately its deep distinction of victim. Probably, transition will end together with the disappearance of mentally composite human beings taught in the first place to live schizoid in the totalitarian regime and then to reconcile a life of imprisonment with a life of freedom and astonishment.

*Translated by Gabriela Cristea
and Dennis Van Peppen*





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Rumours, gossips and opinions



Well, the '90s span till more or less '95-'96 because that's when everything happened. Afterwards... one can't tell: what's 2000, what's '98! That's what I think. (woman, 42, designer)

I remember that there had appeared many political parties. Shooting up like mushrooms. Everybody started developing political opinions, discussing politics everywhere, including at work. Nobody could tell how much of it was work and how much was pure talking. Each person was the smartest in what he was saying and everybody was arguing. There was a point where you could either shut up or argue. And I remember a moment during a family meal when everybody was fighting on politics and my mother-in-law said she wasn't interested in all that stuff and that she liked Ion Rațiu¹ because he was wearing a bow tie. (woman, 42, designer)

When a dissident happened to arrive from abroad, he was accused of not having eaten soy salami, soy food. (woman, 51, secretary)

There had appeared this slogan that everybody knows: 'If you hadn't eaten soy salami, shut up' or something along the line. (woman,

42, designer)

Because of the de-industrialization, people had been warned to undergo professional reorientation but some went hedge and ditch because they were too smart. For example, a friend's neighbour would walk up and down an alley... walking and dangling. The man had attended three faculties, among which Law and Philosophy, but he went crazy because he had nothing to do, no place to work. There were others too who were setting themselves on fire in front of the city hall or of the government... (man, 23, student)

In schools, uniforms ceased to be used, which lead to conflicts between well-off and poor parents during consultations: 'My child doesn't have to wear a uniform like others do because I have money... why does he have to look like all the rest? He has to stand out. We don't mix with the communists and with the poor.' Then, children reacted: 'I won't go to school dressed up like that. Give me money to buy heaven knows what shoes, jeans, blouse or mobile, because everybody would laugh at me for not having what they have and then would think I'm down on my up-

¹ Presidency candidate in 1990, from the opposition.

pers. (woman, 51, secretary)

It was in 1990, right after the Revolution, during the second semester. I had to go to school; I put on my uniform, got dressed and automatically tied my pioneer tie around my neck. I stood out in the hall to put on my shoes, to take my coat and my mother saw me and asked me where I was going with that tie around my neck: 'Now, with the tie? Haven't you heard on the radio that the communist party is gone, the eagles, the pioneers, the UTC (YCU-Young Communist Union) all is gone?'

I replied that I couldn't go without the tie because they would send me home and mark down my grade for bad behaviour. 'Take that tie off because you will make a complete fool of yourself, nobody else will wear it' 'I won't take it off because I don't want to come back home again to grab it'.

Finally, she took off my tie and hung it in the hallstand and I took it back and went to school. On the way, I watched my classmates to see what was going on, how they were dressed. When I reached school, there were several mates with the tie, but few. We didn't need it anymore. (woman, 27, psychologist)

Right after the Revolution we received some guarantees on our salaries, which had been previously deducted on a monthly basis in order to become social parts in the company. I got 7000 lei which meant a lot of money and which I used to buy a washing machine, not automatic, like those today. (woman, 42, designer)

Everything was marvellous. From scratch and total interdiction, to free access to everything. It was pure madness and we enjoyed all the crumbs we were thrown. The shops were full, but full with junk, and it was only later that I realised it. Right during the summer after the Revolution I went to the seaside and made friends on the beach with some very nice Italians but who told

me that we were 50 years behind. I got really angry and I replied: 'How come, can't you see that shops are loaded with things and they look great?' I was really having a go at them, how was it possible for them to say such things? Then I learnt they were right. (woman, 42, designer)

After the printing houses were privatised and started mushrooming, I remember that everybody was reading bad literature, sob stuff like that written by Sandra Brown. (woman, 26, student)

After the '90s, a book almost meant two kilos of meat. (woman, 51, secretary)

When Sandra Brown appeared, my mother wouldn't let me read, because she was saying that those weren't books for my age, but she bought them and all her neighbours and everybody had one of her books at home. So, one day, when my mother was at work, I searched for the book and I read it up on the library, to have time to put it back in case she returned. I had been doing it for two days and I don't know if I liked it or not because I was dead scared not to get caught. After that, I bragged in front of all my friends that I had read Sandra Brown... I was the coolest of all for a while. (woman, 25, fashion designer)

After the '90s the rockers came forward. Everybody was either a rocker or a depeche-fan¹. Those were in open conflict with the punkers. I remember I once got caught in the middle of one of their rows, when coming back from some friends' place, somewhere between Universitate and Romană, because they used to gather around Romană. I remember that they were quite exclusivist people and used to set up takings and if other kiddos would show up to take round the plate they would pick on them for being on their territory. (woman, 25, fashion designer)

¹ Depêche-Mode fan.

The first issue after the '90s was that people ceased to go to the theatre... and to the opera. There appeared TV channels, privatised cinema halls which determined the price of the tickets to go high, yet the main phenomenon remained TV and video. We used to go to all sorts of cheap thingies to rent a video and back then we thought it was a blast. We managed to get our hands, as many other people also did, on many video and audio cassettes. To be honest, they were quite low-quality stuff, all pirated and doubled, but we managed to get very many at the time. And we still have the majority of them. I know because I went abroad and I came back with some money. That's when I bought our first colour TV set, around '92. (man, 50, physicist)

They used to broadcast all sorts of news on TV, one freakier than another, but true, about how corpses of the victims of the revolution had been taken to the morgue and then found in common pits together with unidentified people. There was also news about soldiers on duty who were asked to act and then killed. Now I couldn't tell why. Did they know something? Had they done anything? It was a tragedy anyway. (woman, 42, designer)

I guess that around the fourth grade it happened for me to get a computer as a present, if I'm not mistaken an HC-90, a computer manufactured by ICE FELIX. There and then everything came upside down: a new Radu was getting born. I received it full of excitement, enthusiasm and anticipation: 'I had a hard on', even if I ignored the meaning of the expression back then. And I loaded the first game, feeling that my heart would leap into my mouth. The first game that I had was kind of like the 'worms' on Nokia, that with the dew warm which has to eat all kinds of junk and which keeps on growing bigger and bigger. Of course that back then you needed a shoebox-sized computer and a TV to play that game but it was something! (Radu P., 23, student)

There used to be people who could have had initiatives and ideas during the '90s, yet, if the system didn't back them up, it was very difficult. You need support. Take agriculture, for example, which could have been a real success in our country, but since we are not given free hand on the matter and we are imposed all sorts of restrictions... it is difficult. (man, 50, physicist)

There had appeared those crooks who used to go to Turkey to buy things that they brought back and sold in the country. They seemed extremely beautiful to me, but in fact they were mere crap. We had some neighbours who used to do it and whom I once asked to fetch a pair of trainers for our boy, but good stuff, because we had bought others before and they fell apart after a month. They told me they couldn't do it because they had to buy only bad merchandise, because it was very cheap so that Romanians could afford it. And everything which was good and valuable was retained by the custom officers at the border anyway. (woman, 42, designer)

In my high school, there were colleagues who became lady-escorts, who would get to school by car together with their friends and other colleagues would go to Ioanid Park to smoke weed, marijuana. (woman, 26, student)

I remember the time when there had appeared those women pictures on the panty packages, the strongest porn photos of the time. I would always buy my mom panties for a special occasion because I knew she wouldn't need the boxes and thus I could keep them! It was very funny because I even started to exchange boxes with the block neighbours. Well, I only exchanged the doubles! One of my friends had an aunt living abroad, Italy I guess, and she used to send his mom hotter panties than those you could find in the country and the photos on the boxes were ten times better because they would show the full feminine splendour. Probably my mom ig-

nore the real reason for my inclination to buy her panties only even now. (man, 23, student)

There had appeared foundlings and dopers. And a friend, who wanted to test the feeling, beat one of those to take his aurolac bag. (man, 23, student)

You know that dumb head Nichita, don't ye? That who became a big singer and writer. Well that, around '97 was my girl, didn't squeak! I took her from a canal. She was stuffing 'er face in a bag. I be damned, but if I hit her phizog she was on all her four! After wining the jackpot, she would walk down Roman? street, across McDonald's, with say five gorillas on a motor bike and would beat people if looking don't know how at her. (woman, 40, matron)

With these peelers around here there is something else, 'cause I know 'em all, they're my boys. Let them mess with my girls or with me 'cause I give them zip. Look, do you see that down the corner? He pays us a visit every two days. We know each other very well. Tell him about Lulu and he'll lick your feet. (woman, 40, matron)

My daughter got married at eighteen with an Italian boy and of course that they went to live there. I felt embarrassed to say this at work, because everybody was narrow-minded and they would ask me how I could let my child leave the country, because it was a shame and that real Romanians didn't leave their countries. (woman, 42, designer)

So, in my case, I very strongly registered this change that occurred by means of a, let's say, liberalization. Before, there was no discussion about going abroad, to communicate with other people, so you were very restrained. In what regards work, I used to work before, that is projects for the Institute were many as well and from this point of view that was a big change. After the

'90s there appeared the visits abroad, business trips, of course. I travelled more or less all around the world: Europe, America, Asia. It was a time when I used to travel three times a year to three different places: Switzerland, America and Japan. (man, 50, physicist)

The first thing that put a mark on me after the opening of the borders was that my cousins from Kiev, Germany and America popped up. They came to see how 'we were hanging on'. And I tried, at my turn, to leave but I didn't get the US visa. I had been invited there but I just didn't get the visa.

Anyway, then you could openly state that you had relatives and friends abroad, without any impact on your profession, without staining your file or things like that. So I could overtly and without fear admit that I had relatives in the States, relatives in Germany, friends in France, that is everywhere. I got rid of a huge stress. (woman, 48, lawyer)

Those working for a private company, for a boss, had always earned more than those working for the state. And of course that people, seeing this situation, considered that working for a private company was more appealing than working for the state because it was better to graduate from high school and to get a job at a company right away than to go to university.

This is on the one hand. On the other hand, I know people who, lacking certainty in a company, being afraid of it getting closed down or Heaven knows why, still preferred to work for the state. (man, 50, physicist)

After the 90's or so a significant accent has been placed strictly on the economic, material, practical side, such as Law, Business and things like that, to the detriment of Humanities, therefore to the detriment of those who want to become teachers or men of letters or... everybody has to do many things at the same time in order to pay for maintenance, food or who knows what

other things. In a way, you are forced to undertake intellectual prostitution or something along the line.

You can't do the things you really enjoy because you can't support yourself financially. You end up working for all kinds of companies which are far from your professional background. Listen, for example I met a taxi driver who attended various faculties but who couldn't support himself, so he somehow decided to go for such a job. (woman, student)

Along the fourth grade my parents bought themselves a car, because after the Revolution it was easier. Before that, not everybody had a car. Of course we are talking about a Dacia which made me really proud! It seemed the coolest car on earth to me so I became a car driver more or less around ten: I used to drive the Dacia through the orchard dragging the tow away after me! I was a real slick. (man, 23, student)

I recall the college years, this being around 1999-2000, when I used to stay in a hostel which belonged to the Business University, near Obor and I discovered that in a students' hostel you could make money out of anything: it was important to have imagination! For example, my roommates and I had learnt from the elder students how to cash in on Romtelecom telephone cards!

We used to gather money and buy four or five telephone cards worth one hundred thousand or two hundred thousand lei and, because there was a public telephone in the hostel, we used to rent them!

And the business really worked because many people needed the phone, but, out of various reasons, they thought that a phone card wasn't that necessary since they weren't using it all the time!

So, those who wanted to use the phone and had no card would rent one from us, as follows: paying for the conversation, plus half the amount extra. And with the money gathered by the end of the month we used to buy goods necessary for ev-

eryday living like soap, detergents, juices, cakes etc., and the rest we would share between us! There weren't big amounts but we used to get the double or triple of the sum invested by each of us! (woman, 25, euro-councillor)

I also remember a different type of business also unfold in the student hostel and which had to do with the one-cent-per-minute-week-end Connex subscription! The persons who owned such a subscription would play their minutes for all their worth: and if you wanted to talk to somebody on Connex and you had no mobile phone or you were on a different network, you would go and pay 3000 lei per minute and you would thus speak your lungs out. Well, on certain limits, because the number of minutes of the cent-Connex subscription owners wasn't limitless, they had only about 500 per month!

Another business which used to run pretty well but only during certain times of the year, more precisely during the summer when the hot water used to be cut off for the three-week revision, was that with the electric boiler.

We had a mate who got the brilliant idea of investing in a boiler and who got pretty nice money out of it!! 10 minutes of hot shower would cost 30000-40000 lei but I can say that people were queuing for his boiler!

This mate had to bring partners in the business because he had the disadvantage of not living in a room close to the bathroom, so he had no plug socket: thus he made a deal with those living in the room next to the toilet to give him a plug socket and current... Well, the current was for free anyway, regardless of what you were using because it was included in the rent but the plug socket was on a different territory so he had to give a quarter of the profit to the people providing electricity! (woman, 25, euro-councillor)

When the water meters appeared we felt really happy because we could finally see who was using those huge quantities of water we all had to pay for.

We used to have endless rows in our association because nobody seemed to understand why we were paying for so much water and each of us was trying to blame somebody else.

I used to believe that the Braşoveanu family, because of their two big dogs, was using more of it than us, the old people, and that is why I said that they should extend their maintenance costs and pay for the animals as well!

Now, with the water meters, things have changed! Yet, in the first month, everybody tightened their belts, at least that's what I think, because everybody wanted to prove that they had always used very little water and that others were thriftless.

My wife used to heat the cold water in a kettle to do the dishes because cold water was cheaper. Yet, I once saw one of my neighbours, Mr. Petrescu, from the fourth floor, that is the last floor, taking hot water out from the heating pipes with a bucket. That's how I realised why our calorifiers weren't too warm and why they provided so little heat.

Of course that I laid a claim to the association and Mr. Petrescu was threatened with a raise of the maintenance costs if he made a bloomer again... but who knows? He may do this during the night as well, because who would play the guardian during midnight?! (man, 72, pensioner)

I remember that around '97-'98 I couldn't sleep at night because I desperately wanted a mobile phone and all my night dreams used to revolve around it: how I would receive one or how I would find one down the street. The first mobile phone which appeared in Romania was a brick, a 509 Bosch I guess. But I can say I desperately wanted that brick! Yet, I received a trifle of an Ericsson for my birthday, with only one text line on the screen. But I used to brag about it because nobody had one in my class.

Honestly speaking, it was useless: 'But that's not the point, the point is that I had it.' I used to call Customer service or ask my mom to call me

once in a while from the house phone!

Then after my best friend got a mobile, we used to beep each other because calling would have cost too much!

When around girls, we just wanted to look loaded. I remember that I once received a phone call from somebody... my mom I guess, while pretending to talk on the phone. Then I can say I felt really embarrassed and I think that history would have repeated itself even today if I hadn't grown up in the mean time or if they hadn't invented the enclosed minute subscriptions! (man, 24, student)

Another thing which crosses my mind and which has also changed my life, even if I am not sure that for the better, has been the remote control TV set. My son has been living in England for about seven years now and a year after he left he came back home with money and he bought a remote control TV set for me and for my wife. We, being old, didn't want such a TV set because we had heard that it could cause damages to your eyes, thing which actually happened because ever since we've had it, I've had surgery done on both eyes because of the cataract.

Yet, our Sirius had broken down and couldn't be fixed anymore. So, as I was saying, my son brought us a remote control TV set. Well, my wife can't pronounce this word even today. She calls the remote control the little box with buttons! The truth is we don't really use it, for fear it should break down.

We didn't even take it out of the plastic bag, we just keep it like that on the TV set and we only use the buttons from the TV. My wife has recently started to turn on the TV because she would not even touch it before. Now I have stuck two coloured papers on the buttons for her to know what to press to turn it on and how to switch the channels. (man, 72, pensioner)

Before, during '91, '92, many businesses have started like that, with videos. They used to bring them from abroad, from everywhere and they

used to cost you an eye here. Many, very many people have started their business like that. And they used to cost around 300-500 dollars and around that time the exchange rate for the dollar was 22, 25 lei... I don't have the old passport anymore. Ah, before, when going to the exchange house, they used to note everything I exchanged on my passport and there was a limit regarding the sum. I know that after the '90s you were allowed to exchange as much as you wanted, not until 50 dollars as before. And I am telling you this because I also had a few dollars and I was shrilled to have been able to exchange the sum into lei. (woman, 48, lawyer)

Damned capitalists for handing me a lemon big time with their FNI (NIF)¹! I sued them dozens of times, waited in longer queues than those during the communist regime, cursed everybody and nothing. Only the big fish got their share and us, the mumpers, swallowed the bait. (woman, 70, pensioner)

After the '90s one may have had the chance to, on the one hand, get these cars, articles of luxury, and on the other hand, complain about how poor you were and how many things you lacked. The '90s triggered a very significant gap. That is you get down on the street and you encounter

people complaining about their misfortune while wearing ostentatious clothes and driving an Audi. Is it normal? It's Balkanic, I may say. One cannot tell where we are. Is it in the middle of the road, at the bottom or on the top? (woman, 48, lawyer)

In the past, if women had a condom, a sterilizer, well, that meant going to jail. Or the curettage. Both you and the doctor would go to bat. I was pleasantly surprised and it was also a great relief to discover the contraceptive pills, the tampons, the nappies for mothers. I know because I had a curettage done right after the '90s. It happened, what could you do about it? Well, I was dead scared but not of the complications. Of the prospect of clapping me by the heels. See, my mind still preserved the idea that you weren't allowed to have an abortion. After that, it has been a real relief.

This freedom of speaking your mind, of doing anything, have been a greater gain than having more and more money, only that people, unfortunately, take only the material side into account. (woman, 48, lawyer)

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¹ The National Investment Fund.



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My generation among generations

Maria Mateoni



How can I write about the '90s disregarding the Revolution, because, for those of my age it is then when everything has started, the awakening and the disappointment, once with the shattering moment when down the streets of Timișoara people were being gunned down, stepped over by tanks?

The 1989 Revolution was a shock, because, due to my indoctrinated child's naiveté I would still believe that Ceaușescu had no idea of what was going on in the country, had no idea that the shops were empty and we had nothing to eat. I used to tell myself that he was lied to by those surrounding and frantically applauding him during the Party's plenary meetings. I cannot explain myself where this need to believe in a good Ceaușescu came from, probably from an incessant urge to believe in something good, in an ideal.

And as the belief in God seemed appropriate only for naïve and less learned people, I left my grandmother alone to go to church, because my mother was being caught in her job at the factory and I carried on with my rather earthly and quite revolutionary ideals.

I was a student, belonging to the YCU¹, when the Revolution started in Târgu-Jiu. Without it, I

could have become the vivid reincarnation of the new man.

This thought startles me even now, giving me shivers down my spine, hence a sometimes-ravishing revolt against communism, against manipulation and the well-concealed lie.

I remember the inspection we had, just a few weeks before the Revolution and which remained carved into my mind like a foretoken.

We were waiting for an inspector from Bucharest, a certain comrade Vlăduțescu, if I'm not mistaken, and our economy teacher had long warned us that we were supposed to learn from the party's plenary meetings and from Ceaușescu's speeches.

She had also indicated us what exactly to learn and each of us had to know by heart a certain part, everything was staged, the roles were well distributed.

I also remember the teacher's sickly fluster and now, that I think of it, I recall that it must have been a severe control, dictated by fear.

The fear of collapse, because in the Soviet Union there was Gorbaciov's Perestroika and the other communist countries had already changed their orientation. Romania was the only one left, with a Ceaușescu standing his ground, deter-

¹ Young Communist Union.

mined to carry on with his spectral ideas.

Thus, the comrade inspector came to our high school in Târgu-Jiu. We all delivered our speeches the way we could. We had to defend the sole Party because it represented the entire nation and the socialist-type democracy, which was the real democracy.

I forgot the bit I had to learn- I guess that knowing it would crown it all- it was something about equal rights and about the entire nation's chance to work.

I was supposed to say that we didn't have redundancy like in America. We all had to fight against the market economy, the biggest scourge of humanity.

Some girl in the group was supposed to talk about the market economy, one with good memory and who had learnt The Comrade's speeches more efficiently than I had. She used to jump in the conversation every time one of us would lose track or stammer.

Moreover, she used to articulate the words and to speak perfectly, in a very soapy manner, as expected, taking after the recitals delivered during Cântarea României Festival¹.

But we used to have a classmate who started to make practical jokes, telling quips about Ceaușescu and sharing with us what he used to secretly hear from America's Voice. He kept on saying that Ceaușescu was going to be overthrown and I was either angry or dead frightened.

And here I see our guy putting a straw fig in the hair of the girl with perfect articulation, ruining the hairdo which she so carefully arranged for the inspection.

And as she was jumping on and on in the conversation, completing our speeches, the fig was haughtily dandling onwards and backwards. I can remember feeling all my bones stunned and then there followed the laughter coming from the boys in the last row, the deadly pallor

spreading on our teacher's face and finally the inspector's fidgety laughter.

The rest is a blank page because the end of the story has been completely erased from my memory. I can only remember that for me the inspection represented the first sign that Ceaușescu's regime was going to collapse.

Once with the events in Timișoara, the Revolution also triggered my free falling, my remorse, an imaginary guilt, exacerbated by the passing of time. Then, the need to believe in something.

Because I took refuge into my room to follow the events live. I had been watching that broadcast revolution for days so that I nearly set my TV on fire. So that my mom would tell me sometimes, turn it off, girl, because it breaks down. No, because it ends in a jiffy. It, meaning the Revolution.

But the Revolution was not about to end, I had all the time in the world to admire Iliescu for a modesty overemphasised by his worn out sweater like that of a worker leaving the Canal, or Petre Roman's scholarly youth. Everything was beautiful, everybody could speak live, the peasants had been returned their land.

There was one guy showing up on television in order to comment the first legal decisions taken by the National Salvation Front and who was repeating the words 'extraordinary' and 'we have never had such freedom' after every sentence. They used to pray while showing the dead people in Timișoara. Shootings started in Bucharest.

There were incessant discussions about the terrorists coming from the Orient to attack the national television. Terrorists were all over the place, but especially on top of the television and in the neighbouring blocks.

I really bought this lie regarding the live broadcast Revolution, since I was as gullible as mostly all my peers back then. I remember I also said a prayer; I used to know it from my grand-

¹ Praising Romania Festival.

mother who had died in the meantime.

How sorry I felt for having accused her of ignorance! Had the old woman only known that times changed and I changed with them, that we started a revolution, that youngsters died and that nowadays you aren't supposed to whisper 'Our Father' secretly, at home, in front of the icon, but to say it down the street, in the marketplace, for all dead people!

In that provincial town, where I used to go to school every day, things were perceived like that. We also tried to start a local revolution, in our school. So that we stopped going to classes and we asked for another principal.

There was one, a certain Mischie, who, in the meantime became the prefect of the district and I hear now that he has been replaced.

It is said that he has stolen from the state's funds. We couldn't replace Mischie because he left the school later out of his own will in order to go to parliament and our local revolution quickly ended up with a few poor marks.

Thus, everything left was the great broadcast revolution. And between the bachelor apartment where I used to live and school and my addiction to follow the events on TV I got caught by the miner riot.

At the time, I used to live on Minerului Street¹, a street near the high school, where during winter I would get it in the neck from the kiddos gathered around the block who used to throw snowballs at me during winter and pinchings during summer.

That was a street full of people (because at the time people would still have many kids), with men gathering together to fix their cars and with women cracking in front of the blocks, like women at the countryside. There was a lot of gossiping, but a lot of politics as well, and not only did people express their opinion but they also definitely knew what and how.

The undeniable truth, that's what commu-

nism had taught us, and that truth was at the time in the hands of one man, Ion Iliescu. He became the hero of the Revolution and my neighbours would worship him. He, the hero, with a waggish smile on his face and by means of the TV screen, was asking me to defend him from the 'ragamuffins' manifesting in Universităţii Square, as we had previously defended the planned economy during the inspection.

I didn't do it out of fear and that was the beginning of my viewer position. I was very well acknowledging the situation and the climax was reached when the police tried to disperse the „ragamuffins”.

One of the neighbours took his TV in front of the block. Television was again getting all the attention. I remember one of the TV presenters, a certain Stark, who showed up with a bandage wrapped around his head and rattling away, saying that he got beaten up by the „ragamuffins”.

Once in a while images with the racked television would take turns with those down the street. The broadcast 'ragamuffins' were gypsies. I clearly remember that one was saying that he was innocent, that he only threw a petard.

But the atmosphere was still apocalyptical since the women around the TV wouldn't stop saying: „Dear God, what would those people want now, since they wanted freedom and freedom they have got, now that we are swamped by work and they are howling down the street!”- „Hoodlums, says another, during Ceauşescu's time they were forced to go to work and now they keep on screaming down the street, what is Iliescu supposed to do to them, can't you see they are gypsies?” “What would I do to them if they were in my hands!” says one of my neighbours, a brawny mechanic wearing a grease-stained T-shirt.

There I stood, with them, for days, because the TV was in front of the block, right next to my window, I couldn't ignore it. I remember the no-

1 Miner's Street.

tification according to which the miners were coming to Bucharest to bring order into the country, my neighbours' pride, many of them miners themselves, but in Rovinari and Motru coal fields not in Valea Jiului, where the ones bringing order were supposed to come from.

I don't know any of my neighbours to have gone to Bucharest, but they all stood by their comrades and supporting their decision to make things right and fighting against the „ragamuffins”.

Even now I can see the images broadcast then, very few showing the miners' intervention, the majority displaying the moments when they were waiting in the train station, with some freak miners, dozing, since they were dozing most of the time down the streets or in train stations.

I am saying this because I remember my neighbours' reaction, their discontent, because people were asking themselves why the miners didn't finish 'cleaning up' why they were loitering without taking action. A few of my neighbours who were miners were waiting for the signal coming from the union leaders in order to head to Bucharest.

Later on I had the chance to see images with aggressive miners, with bats in their hands, hitting people down the street. I especially remember the images with the workers in Bucharest, congratulating them, middle-aged people who were saying that the miners were the nation's pride. It is more than obvious that I cannot forget Iliescu's apparition at the balcony, while pi-

ously thanking the miners for their self-denial.

Big technical perversity can the television be if in wrong hands!

After the miner riots, during the fall of 1991, I went to university. My mother was afraid of letting me go, since Bucharest was a dangerous city. She kept on telling me that I would be better off in Cluj, since it was quieter, cleaner.

This is when I grew wise and I realised all about the 'ragamuffins'. The walls of the Uni-

versity still preserved the marks of the Revolution. You could still see inscriptions saying 'Down with the communist regime'. I couldn't even get the chance to properly read them and at the time I didn't think to write them down.

Well done for those who did, Irina Nicoau gathered them up in a booklet. I didn't think that they would be gone. After the miner riots the inscriptions had been scraped, direct order from the leaders, the walls washed because there were no money for re-

newal in the emptied funds of the town hall.

Even if everybody wanted the Revolution to be forgotten as street riot, concealed and settled according to the rules of those acting as its unique representatives, the students of my generation wanted to carry on.

I wanted it less, it took me some time to understand and from then on I kept on feeling the fear of being once again lied to I had the chance to witness manipulation, to learn the feeling produced by imposture, no matter the form. I used to sit back, either admiring the active ones or



suspecting them of God knows what hidden interests, neither of the two attitudes being eventually carried out. But I was curious, that is why I was letting myself dragged in all sorts of new situations.

I remember the moment when I stood in the airport waiting for Queen Ana, without being a royalist and without believing in the monarchy as an alternative to the actual situation. But I went with a few colleagues who, with several exceptions, were not real royalists either. What really mattered was not to be a communist, you could have been anything else but communist. And for the majority of us, Iliescu was nothing but Ceaușescu's prolongation, so you weren't supposed to be with him.

Pretty much everything organised was in the ragamuffin spirit, since we were all students, right? The students who between 1991-1992 heavily protested against Iliescu's regime were the models. They were the authentic revolutionaries (what is authentic is, by all means, an instance connected to the époque, to time), we pertained to the afterwards, we were the descendants. We used to be, at least during the '90s, in the shadow of those 5-6 years older than us.

Coming back to the Queen Ann moment, some of us went, I ignore the number, to the airport. We were supposed to take, I can't exactly tell what, the trolley to Eroilor station and I had no ticket. I just stepped in like that, with no ticket and I got caught and the ticket collector, a sturdy woman with funny accent started to pull my clothes.

I was trying to escape and she wouldn't let me go and as there were several boys in the group determined to defend something, no matter what, things were kind of getting out of control. The lady ticket collector wanted me to pay the fine, the colleagues wouldn't let me since we were heading to the airport to see Queen Ann.

Everybody was in touch with our aim in no time. That was the sparkle which triggered a scandal I shall never forget. It only took a few

minutes, a few implicit words, for the trolley to be split into two, ones with us, the others with the lady ticket collector. I can't even remember how many curses we had been hurled at back then, but at least we got out of it unharmed.

We finally reached the airport and saw the Queen. Yes, she seemed a quite reserved woman as I had already been told before. 'She has something distinguished in her, my colleagues told me, she is a real lady.' That meant, I reckon, the opposite of the proletarian, of the communist-type man. One was the blue blood king and the other the miners' hords.

Only after years did I manage to realize the big gap between workers and intellectuals that the '90s envisaged. The communist propaganda had been effective. 'The bearded people', 'the ragamuffins' were on one side, the miners, the women in Apaca on the other. I am afraid that the gap still exists and that it will take time for it to vanish because the revolution still carries on and the revolution means enthusiasm, hope but also disappointment, frustration, hatred.

Coming back to the '90s, I remember that I had a colleague in the Union of Students' board. We had only one thing in common, we both wanted to become archaeologists. What a passion this archaeology was! Or had it been nothing but a subtle way to find refuge in the most remote time possible?

I guess she made her mark in the field. As she couldn't work for the institute because the vacancies were soon gone, she went to Switzerland. I haven't heard anything about her, but she was a tenacious girl. It was something tough in her attitude and, unfortunately, she wasn't really letting you time for rebutting.

She used to speak quite a lot but she did it well. She was the one who would organize all types of protests, what you could still do after Universității Square had been evacuated, meetings with political prisoners...

The meetings were very well organized and *Memoria* journal was very common among us. The items present in the University library

weren't enough anymore so then our colleague who was part of the Union of Students, used to help us to get our hands on one of them. She saw it as a mission, since, as she herself had told us, one of her brothers had actively participated in the Revolution and then in the protest in Universităţii Square. For her, the model was embodied by that brother investigated by the Security forces and then beaten by the miners.

This girl really shared a terrible regret for not having been part of an older generation, eventually her brother's and an impetuous desire to carry on with the protest. At the same time she was extremely haughty as if assuming her brother's persecution.

Many folks would envy her for it while at the same time splitting hairs and analysing her behaviour. The boys were the ones who would usually take the mickey at her since from time to time they used to call her 'the man-woman'. It is only now that I have come to realize the meanness, the impotence and the number of cultural stereotypes behind this judgment.

One of the actions organized by my colleague was the one meant to set the Bassarabian Ilie Ilaşcu free. The protest started in front of the University and we knelt in the middle of the road, facing the roadside crucifix set up in the memory of those who died in the Revolution and we all said "Our Father" while holding candles in our hands.

I wanted to be touched by the event in order

to experience that elevating feeling similar to those gunned down during the Revolution. But I wasn't. I had listened to so many broadcast prayers so that the gesture, the posture, all seemed fake to me and I soon felt ashamed.

Maybe those around me and whom I was touching with my shoulders, honestly believed in that prayer for the soul of the dead. I didn't, I just involuntarily pretended because my own words seemed when empty, when perverted.

We set a protest in front of the Russian Embassy, shouting my lungs out: "Down with the communism" and "Bassarabia, Romanian land". I somehow wanted to tell everybody that I wasn't going to be fooled anymore. As far as I am concerned, there was something else beyond that protest meant to set Bassarabia free, an inner moaning, a cry: 'I managed to break free, I will never be manipulated either by you or by others!'

But it was just an illusion because I was looking for answers outside. Freedom isn't an emanation of the government and, regardless of the place, in my country or outside of it, freedom is nothing but a state of being. One more or less important, according to age, experience, education, character. Because I would never do today what I used to do in the past and not out of shame, a vivid proof of that being the afore-written words.

Translated by Raluca Vîjia



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The age of the lost innocence

Zoe Petre



During Christmastide, 1989, when I used to cry like a dumb head in front of the TV, watching monasteries, censers and the Madrigal Choir “fully coloured”, I had no idea that, before the end of the year, an avalanche of events would bit by bit steal this happy, naïve, childish innocence away from me.

On 5th January, I reckon, I was summoned by the Ministry of Education. Schools were about to start and, according to the syllabus, pupils in various grades- 8th, 11th, 12th- were studying the period after the Second World War.

The inspectors didn’t know which way to turn because nothing fit anything: not the glorious accomplishments of the popular democracy, not the collapse of the colonial imperialist system and not even the “golden age” apotheosis.

I can’t remember the solutions I suggested back then and it didn’t even matter because, without our knowledge, of those summoned there, somebody – I can’t tell who and to what extent was that slick – had the uninspired idea of quickly reprinting P.P Panaitescu’s manual *Romanians’ History*, not exactly the best inter-war manual and written by the great Slavic specialist moved by his own commitment – belated and all the more zealous- favouring the right.

Yet, I clearly remember the conversation I had with a former student, who became a clerk in the Ministry, and who wittily recounted what

had happened there during 22nd December and afterwards: how Minister Teoreanu managed to hide himself under his desk on 22nd in order to tail out later; how, on 23rd, the fearful comrade Apostol, chief of the Social Sciences Commission, one of the most displeasing characters of the teaching control and censoring system, also known as ‘the bulging frog eyes’ had fussily locked himself in his office and had shown up with a slavish and praising adhesion telegram, and how- that was the real revolution- not even one of the typists had accepted to type it for him.

How Teoreanu had showed up again, encouraged by the 22nd December proclamation and how he had to leave again on 4th January, enraged and threatening everybody: “Never mind, we can leave now, but you shall see that till April it will be also us who shall return!”

It was precisely this last episode that we found particularly hilarious: poor fellow, we said, he didn’t understand anything.

Also at that time, when about to leave, I bumped into a weird philosophy gathering- former students and a few colleagues who made it clear to me that, predictably abandoning the scientific socialist classes both in secondary schools and in universities, they had gathered there in order to overall convert to teach democracy classes.

I took a glimpse of comrade Clătici, the ideo-

logical senior sergeant of the University Centre, getting her notebook ready. Stunned, I tried to mumble an objection but a highly respectable colleague of mine encouragingly tapped my shoulder saying: “never mind, it goes like that as well” and entered the packed room.

Otherwise, everything was just great. It was for the first time in my life when the ministers of Education, of Culture, those that interested me – where no longer mono-lingual ogres or some mean and fearfully ignorant lady comrades with pointy buns on top of the head. As Minister of Education they had chosen Mihai Şora – back then I only knew him from hearsay, and it was only afterwards that I had the privilege to personally meet him- and as Higher Education Deputy Minister they had appointed Professor Cornea, clever, efficient and almost paternal and who was backed up by my old university friend Mihai Zamfir. A real miracle.

After years of joyfully playing upon Pleşu’s witty saying: “It is not the minister of culture but the minister’s culture that I fear” – the minister was Pleşu himself.

On the other hand, in the university nothing was as easy as it seemed while under the euphoric feeling given by the first days. On the other hand, I must confess that I only managed to discern an inner perspective of the revolution- which I used to ignore completely – when I heard my colleague Lucian Boia saying: “Maybe now we can get rid of the apotheosis teachers”.

The truth is that for 15 years history had been the main means of promoting both the cult of the national-communist regime and that of Ceauşescu’s, so that, proportionally, the concentration of political promoters was at its peak.

Boia had referred to them by the term *synecdoche* hinting at a certain important Professor of the faculty, Gh. Ioniţă, one of Ceauşescu’s proponents, a long run activist of the CC¹ Propaganda Section and till recently a dean.

He had actually preceded, *horribile dictu*, at the head of the South-east European Studies Institute, our distinguished, fine, unrivalled Professor Mihai Berza.

One couldn’t imagine a more painful and significant contrast: on the one hand the learned aristocrat, with his ‘eternity coated’ Byzantine saint-like looks, like my mom would affectionately say, charming successive generations of students to whom he used to recall the gold of the Venetian doges, the haughty Florence, the ravishing Amalfi (whose citizen of honour he actually was, after dedicating an outstanding PhD thesis to the respective city) or Prince Cantemir’s tragic destiny.

On the other hand, the thundering ogre who was literally patching his scientific work by pinning down quotes from the Comrade’s work, and who, on any occasion, used to throw endless fabricated phrases about The Golden Age as apotheosis of the national history (and universal, but that hardly ever mattered). All of a sudden, when I heard Boia uttering that phrase, I understood.

The students had understood a lot quicker. After the fervent revelations caused by our happy helter-skelter discussions on our outstanding professors schooled in Rome and Fontenay-aux-Roses, about the autonomy of the university and about scholarships abroad, they had withdrawn in their own assemblies and had shown up three days later with a precise demand: not to be forced to take political promoters as teachers, at the same time presenting a list of undesirable persons.

Their maturity was indubitably contrasting my silenced and euphoric innocence, all the more as they brilliantly organized a boycott, which they sacredly respected for two semesters.

The contested teachers immediately accused us of manipulating the students. Even if things were completely different, I would be a hypocrite

¹ Central Council of the Communist Party.

to pretend that, once seeing how serious and determined they were, I didn't embrace their cause.

Their list was almost identical to the one in my mind. Yet, I remember having tried to put away some of their redeeming and just anger, claiming that one or two of their targets were, beyond the undeniable propagandistic activity, more worthy and capacitated teachers than others.

Speaking of one of them, Armand Goșu got really upset and bluntly told me: "You didn't study political classes with this gentleman!". The naiveté that characterized my fervent defensive attitude regarding that cause struck me as evident only much later. It was only on 14th June 1990, while the miners' revolt was at peak, when the worthy person in question, the named Gh. Iscru, showed up at the university leading a commando group ready to take over the Dean's Office helped by the miners, and then later, when he started to ostentatiously, fanatically and unprofessionally claim various delirious theories on different TV channels.

Other cases were simpler: the apologetical boom usually had as other a shattering counterpart. The paradigm of such a characteristic alloy for the politics of the member of the Party keeps on being, for the majority of us, the only university teacher, member of the CAP¹, and who would invariably present himself as "history lecturer PhD captain Vasile Budrigă, commander-in-chief of the army in the university of Bucharest".

He managed to tempestuously begin his teaching career, yelling at the feared assignment commission that it was his sacred right to be appointed member of the Faculty, thing which actually happened; he had a less tempestuous advancement while endlessly working on a PhD thesis he himself defined as a "valorisation of the original material published by the inter-war

press."

I once tried to convince him that he shouldn't keep on using that oxymoronic expression but he immediately replied that since nobody was reading newspapers anymore, the materials published were therefore original.

When he finally attained his goal, for the first time he brought the television to immortalize him.

My younger boy, was about ten back then and who had personally met the gentleman in question during the successive union Christmas trees, when hearing that the Romanian television had come to immortalize Budrigă while defending his thesis, immediately added: «And is he going to appear on "Embarrassing but true"?»

When courses on the history of the Nation and of the Party were introduced in the syllabuses of all faculties, the cooperative history PhD captain was sent to lecture to the philologist students, and he categorically told the fourth year students that the national language was unitary, with no dialects.

The students happily contradicted him saying that they had just attended Professor Coteanu's lecture on the dialects of the Romanian language which triggered his nervous barking: "Who is this Coteanu that has no idea about the documents of the party?" Coteanu, back then a member of the CC and Dean of the Faculty of Letters, made a huge scandal in the Rector's office, while Budrigă was disciplinary moved to Măgurele to enlighten the students there, and Professor Radu Manolescu, a distinguished specialist in the Medieval period, and myself, were asked to clarify the situation to the litigant.

Manolescu tactfully asked him: "Comrade Budrigă, what language do you speak?" – "What do you mean what language, he angrily replied, I speak the Romanian national unitary language!"

1 Agricultural Production Cooperative.

– “Sir, you speak the Daco-Roman language” Manolescu replied at his turn. “Get out of here, comrade, that was in times of yore!” shouted my learned colleague.

With a naiveté quickly annihilated by facts, I thought that we would at least get rid of Budrigă. No way! He immediately found champions precisely among my colleagues who, in the past, used to pull his leg, together with the Head of Department, Professor Ioan Scurtu, who told me in a very deep philosophical tone: “he may be an idiot but he is ours.”

And he aggressively defended him. Since he didn’t leave out of his own will, he didn’t leave the faculty at all till 1997 or 1998 when he suddenly died. Meanwhile, our man had laid the foundations of an obscure party influenced by Lenin and Ceaușescu’s doctrines, whose secretary general he was, publishing- even today I wonder on what money- a publication, called ‘the Socialist Sparkle’.

In its first year of existence, PRO TV channel ensured this party a national fame, dedicating it a brief documentary, displaying the residence adorned with Lenin’s portrait and with Ceaușescu’s fiery red complete works, with a political staff which gathered another three rightful members, apart from the secretary general- two of Budrigă’s four daughters and somebody else- an acting member who, during the sessions, used to take a seat on a smaller and more shaky chair.

Looking towards Dâmbovița, Vasile Budrigă pathetically exclaimed: „There is no point in cursing Ceaușescu now, look at this clear water, which, during the bourgeois period, used to be a *pestilential* water (sic!)”

With regretful ingenuity, I vaguely imagined that, touched by Liiceanu’s Appeal, Ceaușescu’s proponents in the Faculty would leave tiptoeing, overwhelmed by their own culpability. It is more than obvious that this cohort decided to rather die than surrender and we were all of a sudden faced with a civil war.

The students caught me completely unaware when they fervently asked me to become the

dean (which, obviously, offered unexpected ammunition to the opposite group, which had all the time sustained the fact that the stability and the undisturbed continuity of our marvellous faculty had been exclusively staggered by the despicable manoeuvres of some profiteers of the Revolution. Ioan Scurtu, our colleague, subsequently published some indignities of the kind).

I really tried to convince my proponents that a man’s muscles were requested to move „history’s front” from the area of party propaganda into that of the honest research of the past, till a young and ardent colleague of mine looked me straight in the eyes and strenuously said: „Please forgive me for not having the time to be polite, but you have to play Gorgona’s part there!” And he convinced me.

When I went to break the news of this unexpected promotion to my venerated teacher D.M. Pippidi- persecuted and humiliated for years in the faculty precisely for being the embodiment of the superiorly clever erudition and of the flawless intellectual elegance- he told me while sensing the thrill in his tone: „I have never thought to live the time of such a retaliation.” Even only for this and it was worth it.

This is how I became a dean- dignity which, in the year of grace of 1990- cured me of many naiveties.

In the University, the atmosphere was feverish and quite affable, only that I found it difficult to understand why the rector, a well-known mathematician, was apparently bemused by the stubbornness which characterised the refusal of the students in the History section to work with some teachers and he kept on repeating me *ad nauseam* that even Călinescu or Barbilian had been previously boycotted by students, shutting his ear to me when hearing me telling him dozens of times that, compared to Ion Barbu and Călinescu, those contested then didn’t know the multiplication table and they used to place a comma between subject and predication.

Yet, I kept on progressively learning everyday

that, beyond the narrow limits of a privileged minority – to which those who became my university colleagues by the Party's grace and by that of the socialist nation also belonged – many common people had perceived the Revolution not as a miracle but rather like a punch in the nose: like an assault against their own identity.

On 29th January, while passing by the residence of the Peasant party in Rosetti Square, I saw some things which astonished me. Even if at dawn, the booze shop on the other side of the street was as opened as it could have been and also assailed by miners- what the hell are the authorities doing, I said to myself, full of a monumental and stupid naiveté- and the crowd buying gape seed at the residence of the party was receiving some mysterious white parcels. When I came closer, I saw that the parcels were actually photocopier reams. Not even today can I figure out why they needed them, but that pleased and slick attitude they had while marching down the boulevard, holding their pray, cleared my mind.

It became all the more obvious to me when, entering a neighbouring tobacco shop, I saw the shop assistant emphatically crossing herself up

to her navel while saying: „Praised be the Lord for finally getting rid of these, I was so afraid of living next to their bloody residence that you can't imagine, it's so good we've got rid of them!" So that in June, when I saw the people in Bucharest, both men and women, fervently applauding the miner cohorts, I was able to save my perplexities.

It may be that all these bits and pieces of unexpected and vexing experiences have concentrated somewhere, without me knowing it. On 11th March, in the morning- it was Sunday- I woke up as if from a nightmare, all in a very cold and extremely political sweat.

All of a sudden and on a national scale I realized my stupid naiveté while mocking – sometimes, a long time ago, in January- minister Teoreanu's good-bye speech. In the same evening, I was gathering the pieces of the Proclamation from Timișoara, despite the drunk TV announcer's aggressively criticizing it. The age of innocence was over, and the age of confrontations about to begin.

Translated by Raluca Vîjăiac





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Students' strike

**Magda Manoliu, former university lecturer,
63 years old**

Interview done by Vlad Manoliu



It was during the university year 1990-1991. After the 1989 Revolution, things initially changed very slowly. I was part of the Department of Modern Languages within the Technical Engineering University, hence a sort of 'PE and music' in a faculty where the teachers were, as they are today, more than 90% engineers. What did it mean? That they had very little or no pedagogical training and we, the humanists, were the only ones who still had some.

Immediately after 1989, the students had gradually started to become conscious of the fact that the faculty belonged neither to the teachers, nor to the state, existing through them, through the students. A faculty cannot exist without students, hence the students have the right to decide on certain things essential to their future, to the way they learn. And what happened?

First and foremost, the students started to get together on the corners down the halls, in lecture rooms (during breaks and after classes) and to openly state their discontent regarding certain teachers. For example, a former party secretary on the entire Technical Engineering University had a son who had got a girl pregnant, a student from the Faculty of Roads and Bridges. And his daddy did nothing but expelling the girl. The boy peacefully continued his studies.

Of course that all these had happened before 1989. But after 1989, the final year students

couldn't forget the respective teacher and, according to our opinion and of that of many of his colleagues, they did the right thing. Anyway, there had been many situations when teachers had been taken out of the lecture rooms by the students.

And because of the fact that these student measures, to call them like that, didn't always have the anticipated result since there were numerous disorders, some connected to the students' discontent regarding the syllabus, others having to do with the relationships between teachers and students, other with the schedule, the students went on strike.

The strike was connected to those in the entire Bucharest University Centre. As a matter of fact, I would like to discuss how this strike echoed in the teaching staff in our faculty. I must confess that, after 1989, a significant number of my colleagues in the Technical Engineering University resembled a hencoop full of frightened hens. It was as if throwing a blinding light in the middle of the coop late in the night and they were stumbling over on the corners without knowing how to cope with the situation, what to do, how to deal with the students.

I once again emphasize the fact that their lack of professional behavioural studies in what concerned their relationship with the youngsters was more than obvious. We, in the Department

of Modern Languages, who had always been eager to embrace the new, were more adaptable, our relation with the students being indisputably smooth in all respects.

Yet, given the fact that the main part of the syllabus was technical (since we were working in a technical faculty), our attitude was hardly important equally for students or staff. So, at a given moment, the teaching staff in the Technical Engineering University was invited to attend a big, big meeting, chaired by the Rector, Vice-rectors and all the important names of the University; a meeting meant to bring together all the University teaching staff- quite many- hence, absolutely all the teaching staff was summoned in an enormous lecture room and the administrative staff of the University brought into discussion the issue of the strike.

Various speeches had been delivered and I must confess that they reminded me of the speeches delivered during the Party meetings, prior to 1989. The old, big-bellied and important 'big bugs' started to say that order had to be pre-

served, that allowing students to do what they were doing was unconceivable, that we had to do something and to reach a common ground regarding our attitude towards the students. We had to vote and to state who was for the students' strike and who was against.

The main issue was: the opinion of the teaching staff concerning the students' strike. We had to choose between: agreeing with, returning a blank voting paper or being against the strike. Good! Everybody in the university, more or less important, played the progressive part at the time. To my bemusement, everybody voted against the students' strike. The only ones standing by the students had been very few! That's it! That wouldn't have been such a problem. Yet, after the vote, we took a break and then we carried on discussing more important issues for the moment. During the break the people avoided us, the ones defending the students, as if down with leper.

Translated by Raluca Vîjăiac



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The day when the bats arrive

Alina Iordache



13th June 1990. North Railway Station. I was just getting off the train with my mom and dad. Two people in their sixties.

Close to the exit, a manly voice clearly whispers to me from behind: 'Get lost, the miners are coming!' A tall man, wearing a navy blue suit and a white shirt, passes me by skimming the ground. He slowly slides in front of us before me being aware of it. I don't get it. I don't utter a word to my folks. He seems ghostly.

We head, as we have done it lately, directly to Universităţii Square. Being away since the night before, we have no idea of what has happened. My mom starts talking to one of the architecture teachers. She can't get it: what does it mean 'swiping the people off the road'?! A confused and frightened crowd, looking as if waiting for the worse.

I take my dad and I bring him in front of one of the soldiers. We speak loudly and provocatively about the facts displayed in front of our eyes. He smiles flatly, ironically, mockingly. I step forward. We can almost touch each other. He and I are practically two. We dance a sort of induced tango. Busses could be seen at the back. Not empty, as they were going to say later on. They covertly swarm with professionals, watching over the events. We feel swamped, dirty inside, puppets of a cruel, absurd and ridiculous staging.

I take my folks to 'Capşa'. As if, desperately, I

were able to erase... The restaurant takes some time to open, quite a lot after the normal hour. We are announced that all we can get is soda. As I usually drop by, one of the waiters recognizes me and, also whispering, advises me to get out quickly, all the more as I am accompanied by two elder people. We leave. I feel completely bemused after his explanation: the miners are expected to come to teach the students a lesson.

If two people tell you to make tracks... We head towards The Athenaeum. All the adjacent streets are full with trucks. From behind the tarpaulin, the fresher face of a rookie looks down the street. The street seems hectic. People keep on running out of the underground. In the back-soldiers with guns. You cannot use any means of transportation. Somebody has mercy on us. We pay for one-way tickets to Sinaia, but we get to the train station. We step in a train as if expected to arrive. We arrive in Braşov just in time to watch Răzvan Theodorescu speaking about a Bucharest, other than the one we have just seen.

For me, June '90 is surrounded by mystery. A mystery which equally surrounds me. As one of my friends would say: 'Just imagine you had stayed. With your 3 centimetres of hair, they wouldn't have had anything to pull. And then you should have seen a different situation!...'

Translated by Raluca Vîjăiac
Alina Iordache



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Universității square

Vlad Manoliu



Daily or almost every day I used to take time to go to Universității Square. I saw it as a moral duty. On the other hand, I had the feeling that, if going to the Square, I would have been able to recharge my batteries. Let's not forget that we are talking about the spring of 1990, when all of us were susceptible to the political stimuli.

All of a sudden we had the chance to say NO, we had the right to overtly express our opposition. There I had the chance to live many moments which brought me to tears, but it is only one of them that I have clearly engraved in my mind.

It was Sunday, during the evening, when, getting to Universității Square, I saw a very unusual group ahead of me. Two very well dressed women were supporting a very, very old man who could barely walk. I accidentally followed them with my eyes, thinking that they had randomly got there. I was wrong. They arrived at the Faculty of Architecture, they got a fisherman campstool out of a bag, placing it in the shadow of a tree and then they carefully sat the old man on it. All of a sudden, I could see everything clearly. He was an old father, brought by the two daughters to the anticommunist marathon.

During working days, I used to meet with my wife, who was coming from the faculty, after fin-

ishing classes. In the same Square we bumped into loads of good friends we hadn't seen for ages. Caught in the every day life, we just knew about each other's existence, that we were OK. But we used to meet in the Square now. It had become the nodal point of many persons' daily existence, at least of ours and of that of our old time friends, together with whom we would listen to Vișoșki and to Russian anti-Stalinist ghetto songs.

We were unexpectedly turning young again, singing together 'Better ragamuffin than activist/ Better dead than communist'¹ At the fountain in front of the faculty of Architecture, I could see many different people staying together as one.

What did Universității Square mean to us? Maybe the smiling face of the distinguished old man sitting on the fisherman campstool and listening to the ragamuffins' song; maybe the peaceful revelation that no matter what Iliescu and his acolytes may want and do, there is no way back to communism; maybe the happiness to see that friends brought together by the difficult times before 1989 stick together; it may be simply our decision not to pull back an inch, no matter what. Since it cannot be any other way.

Translated by Raluca Vîjăiac

¹ The last two lines of the refrain of the "Ragamuffins" Hymn – the representative song for Universității Square.



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Author: Victoria Moțoc

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The summer of our dissension

Victoria Moțoc



I was 20 in June 1990. A wonderful age. I was pretty, young and full of hope. Universității Square had taught me a lesson of what freedom and lack of constraints really meant. It had taught me how to laugh, how to cry, how to sing and how to rejoice. How to live during days and nights next to familiar and more often unfamiliar people, a sublime exercise of freedom. Of a ‘we cannot take it anymore’.

Even if I am not a whiner, I also cried back then when Universității Square was closed and I came to terms with the fact that the results of the May 1990 elections represented the wish of a people, which know what it wanted and which deserved its leaders. The only things left in the Square were the tents belonging to some ‘opponents’ some of them bohemian, some homeless. People who simply didn’t want to ‘go home’ yet.

Still, during the night of 12th to 13th June, the police forced its way in the tents and in the flesh of some people whose only fault had been that of ‘having hanged around there’ a little longer. They weren’t aggressive. It’s just that they were ruining ‘Romania’s image in the world’. And for this, they had been arrested and savagely beaten. And during the next morning the Square was ‘clean’ (Even today I find myself astonished by that obsessive drive towards cleansing manifested by Iliescu’s regimes, even if, psychologically, I can explain it.)

Fevi, a colleague in the Philology section, a year elder than me, told me about the abominable acts which had taken place during the respective night and I decided to go and see with my own eyes. Universității Square was surrounded by policemen. One could hardly enter in the University.

I managed to get in making use of my student license and after endless rows with a braided officer. Inside, everybody was hustling and bustling. Marian Munteanu was at the Union of Students, trying to find out how many of our colleagues had been arrested the night before.

Other mates were writing a protest meant to be passed on to the newspapers. Other colleagues were peacefully sitting down in the library, diligently preparing for the exams as if Romania had been at least the USA and the things taking place in front of their eyes a grotesque street performance which, anyway, was none of their business.

Around noon, right in front of the policemen rows, there had appeared a furious crowd which started to step by step push the policemen to the back of the Square. Then, a real fighting with bats, fists, stones, bags and sticks had been unleashed. Even if exceeding the number of their opponents, the policemen had to withdraw and the buses they came with took fire. Then, some

youngsters with incendiary bottles showed up, together with more and more people. Rain started to fall down and Marian Munteanu opened the University balcony.

I know that his message back then had been one of non-violence, calm and tranquillity. I couldn't believe that everything that was taking place at the moment was real. I found it difficult then as I do now to exactly remember their words. The only thing vibrating in my mind was this: this is a revolution! And I wanted to be part of it. I stayed with my friends at the University till late in the evening. We had no radio or TV. We had no idea of what was going on in the rest of Bucharest or in the country. We stayed at the University, helped to put out the fire on a burning bus, heard the people screaming down the streets and saw the helicopters watching over Bucharest.

During the night I went to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and I saw the first victims. They were people with broken heads, torn clothes, while the streets were full of pools of blood. One could sense a smell of smoke and tear-gas everywhere. Flames were coming out of the windows from the ground floor of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. And I was afraid. I decided to stay in the university till the next day. I had no idea that I was going to get home a lot later.

During the night we could hear gunshots. Towards three in the morning we heard people hooting and the noise made by the crowd running down Brătianu Boulevard.

At four in the morning the policemen surrounded the University and the Faculty of Architecture for a second time. It was quite. It was quite again.



The Working Class Goes Straight to Heaven

At four thirty almost five in the morning I was sitting together with Mihai, smoking a cigarette and watching outside the window towards the Square. All of a sudden, the policemen spread around the University and around the Faculty of Architecture started to withdraw and there had appeared trucks loaded with miners. I courageously watched outside the window.

A young man, probably heading to work, got out of the underground station. It was five in the morning. They jumped on him. The bats were going up and down. The miners resembled a crowd during a rugby game. When leaving, the young guy, disfigured and breathless, had his shirt completely covered in blood. I felt sick. One of the miners dragged the man's inert body and stuffed his head in a garbage bin.

Mihai grabbed my hand and said: 'Let's hide'. I started to run chaotically down the stairs inside the Faculty of Geology. We entered a lecture room. It was I, Mihai, a girl and another boy. The boys managed to break the lateral side of the lecture room and we practically submerged under the floor. We placed the wooden bits back and we waited. What for? I cannot tell. The only thing I remember is that it was dark and we were shivering and covered in dust. All our senses had been annihilated. We knew we were alive only because we were able to hear. I could hear the miners yelling, swearing and those beaten up screaming in pain, a voice pipe asking for an ambulance for Marian Munteanu.

They came to check the lecture room three times and I could feel their steps above my head thrice.

The third time, they hit the spot. They told us to get out. Two hulks grabbed me by the hands. First, I could feel the punch in the face (in the spirit of the good Romanian macho tradition), then the slapping when I tried to say something. Then the kicking down the stairs

from the second to the first floor. On the first floor, a stocky guy, with his hair cut according to the norms, grabbed my hair and started to shout: 'She's high, she's high!'

The truth is that my eyes were wide-awake. Then they started to kick me with their bats. It was on that occasion that I could discover that it is only the first one that causes pain, then your back goes numb and it is more or less bearable. Once on the ground floor, a bespectacled gentleman, probably a Professor in the Faculty of Geology, in a suicidal act of courage, threw himself in front of the miners who were dragging us, pretending that we were his students. A truncheon immediately hit his face, breaking his glasses. Blood was oozing down his cheeks among crocks.

And they threw us down the Square, in that space of death, where dozens of miners, true gladiators of the darkness, were making use of their bats and chains. They entrusted me to the crowd as if I had been a medieval witch. In order to be lynched. They gathered around me, ripped my clothes off, cut my trousers with a hatchet. And this, till two students in a police school lifted me up and made me run beyond the policemen rows who were imperturbably watching the miner-patriotic display.

I wasn't off the hook yet. I was expected by the workers and by the FSN¹-fan pensioners. They pulled my hair, poured milk on my head and they even broke a glass on my head and a miserable old man was squeaking: 'Let me hit her too, let me hit her too!' Afterwards, they placed us against a wall, while waiting for a car.

It was the first time when I was finally breathing that morning. I slowly licked the blood on my lip. I had the acute feeling that I was in one of Sergiu Nicolaescu's movies. While waiting for the car I heard a voice coming from behind. I could see out of the corner of my eyes that it was an old man dressed in a kaki raincoat. 'Why did you arrest these kids?,' he said. 'They are le-

1 The National Salvation Front.

gionaries' the trooper who watching us quickly declared. 'Legionaries, you say', murmured the old man. 'Well, if the legionaries still existed...' he added going away. It was the first time when I could smile.

Then the patrolwaggon arrived. They took us randomly, students, passers-by, gypsies. They took us, I found this out only later, to a police station, in Măgurele. They left us in a hangar, men and women separately. They didn't give us water and we couldn't go to the toilet. They kept on threatening us that the miners were going to come. People also got beaten up, but I was spared.

That was a nightmare which taught me many things. I found out that the gypsy (excuse me, the Rromani) nation would never perish. Even if thoroughly searched by various policemen, the Rromani ladies, to be politically correct, managed to find, God knows where, a few packages of Carpați which they shared with the fellows in need. I don't want to know where they had them hidden and I don't care. I just want to use this chance to thank them for their generosity. Even more savagely beaten than me, a nice gentleman

stood in front of me while I started to cry desperately and smiled at me till he finally got a smile back. There, at Măgurele, I found out that hope dies last.

On the 15th in the morning, some gentlemen, about whom we had been told that were prosecutors, arrived. They wrote down our statements, took our front and side photos and our fingerprints. Then, again we had to wait. On the 15th at noon, all of a sudden and without any explanation, I was washed, cleaned and they bandaged my wounds. I was told that they had arrested me by accident, and then I was transported in a black car to some alley in Grozăvești.

Then, I had to undergo a week of clandestine living in a house which belonged to some friends, Marcel and Barbel. I chain-smoked Bastos cigarettes, swearing myself to leave Romania for good. I went to Austria on 1st of July, determined never to come back. I came back on 20th July. Determined never to leave for good again. At the end of the day, this is also my country, not only theirs.

Translated by Raluca Vîjăiac



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The miners on the miner riots. January-june 1990



1. The miner riot¹ in January 1990

I still remember that we took part in the first riot, that during winter time and it was very cold. I even remember that it was very cold. As far as we could find out... the people in Bucharest were going to break and steal... and in front of the Parliament, or anyway I can't tell exactly the place because I don't know Bucharest very well, Iliescu showed up and thanked us. As a matter of fact we had been sent by the company. We had been told that we had to go to Bucharest.

Weren't you surprised?

Of course that we were surprised and we kept on asking ourselves why but we could also watch on TV the events taking place in Bucharest. But everything had been set up by our leaders and not by the foremen because they had little interest in sending us to Bucharest. But, if we received an order, we said that we had to obey it. And I remember that we went to Petroșani by car and in Petroșani we stepped in the train and we went. The trains weren't waiting for us in the train station but after half an hour they gave us a special train to go to Bucharest.

And didn't that seem weird to you?

Yes, it did, since I was sitting there asking myself: what are we going to do there? Why do they take us there?

But hadn't you been told that they were going to take you there for this or for the other?

Well, as I said before, the times were quite confusing... This is how I remember it, taking into account what we also saw on TV. And I know that shops were broken into in Bucharest, at least that's what I heard and that democracy was in danger. And I also know that mister Iliescu summoned all the good men.

But do you consider yourself a good man?

I think so.

And when he summoned all the good men, would you have gone?

I wouldn't have gone on my own account!

But what if you had been on leave?

If I had been on leave I would have carried on with my stuff...

Yet, as a good man, because the president appealed to the good men, wouldn't you have gone?

I personally think that it would have made no sense and now I wonder why they asked us to go to Bucharest because they could have taken care of their problems alone. Still, I believe that they must have talked to the big bosses here in The Valley and this is how they organised the departure.

And what do you think, did they set up a real democracy back then?

No, no. Because afterwards things went

worse than before and the situation was tougher, especially after the major redundancies.

But what do you think now: did the miners have anything to win or to lose after the riots?

I think they had more to lose.

Let's come back to the first riot. How did things really go in Bucharest?

Well, we got there in the morning and by night we were already back. But the first thing we did was to go in front of the Parliament or anyway some building, perhaps in Victoria Square and mister Iliescu showed up and he thanked the miners for being a force in the country and stuff like that. But I know that the entire demonstration had been peaceful. Even from the north railway Station we had been expected by a couple of cars with milk, three with bread and they shared all of this with us. I know that there hadn't been destructions or things like that at that moment. I also remember that there were people who were taking us to their hearts. And almost everybody was saying: "Well done, miners!" and "Well done for having come to help us get rid of the scum". Yet, after this riot, I never took part in any other.

Why is that?

Because I know very well what I had to go through during the first one. When we got to Bucharest, in front of the Parliament, the miners were eager to get a closer look to mister Iliescu and I, being shorter and caught in the crush got stepped over. I cannot say they hurt me because the soil was yellow and soft. They couldn't step aside because they were very many and I also don't believe that they stepped on me deliberately... it's just that coming so many from behind and being such a big group they couldn't walk either on the left or on the right, so they had no space to move.

But then I said to myself "I will never set my foot on this ground ever again" and it has been so. When I got back home I was covered in yellow soil and my back kind of ached. Arriving at Vulcan I stepped off the bus in the station. But I didn't know what to do to get back home sooner.

I was wearing the overalls but I was covered in yellow soil and my neighbours knew I was no drunkard to fall down God knows where. So I started walking between the blocks and I didn't even use the front door to get in, I used the back door.

But didn't you feel sorry for missing the second riot in June 1990 which was of bigger proportions than the one in January 1990?

No, I wasn't sorry. This was also because someone had to stay at work to keep an eye on the appliances.

Yet, hadn't you been forced to take part in that manifestation?

Yes, of course. I didn't want to go anyway and I talked to a foreman to let me stay in the mine. And he was more understanding, saying that someone had to stay at work. And that was in fact true, since the people going to Bucharest were going to put things in order for us too and those at home were going to watch over the appliances for them. Yet, in spite of the fact that I had to stay in the mine as it had been decided I was dragged out of there by some of my colleagues.

Still, I took off my glow lamp and I wanted to keep a low profile so as not to be seen. Then, a miner, one who was taller and around 40, saw me and took me out to go with the others and pushed me towards the bus. But I said that I had to stay at work to keep an eye on the appliances and if something may have gone wrong, I would have answered for it.

And I blocked the bus door with my hand, saying that I didn't want to go. But this miner had a scoop shank and he hit me so hard with it that I almost lost my conscience. I shall remember this for the rest of my life. And when he raised the shank to hit me again, I finally stepped in the bus. And that's how we got to Petroșani at the Industrial Complex.

But, the person who hit me asked another two miners to watch me in case I wanted to run away. And in the Marketplace, in Petroșani, I told them that I had to go and buy cigarettes but,

more than that, I needed to run away. But they came with me, bought the cigarettes and came back.

And how did you get rid of them?

Actually I didn't. I kind of had some chaperones with me who had to take care of me not leaving the gathering in front of the Industrial Complex. I don't know for how long we had to stay there because some of the miners left the place, heading towards Bucharest. In the end, as people were bunched there, I somehow managed to get away. And, together with a colleague, we hitchhiked and we managed to get in a car which took us to Vulcan.

And did you go to the mine?

No, I went home, spent a couple of hours there and then went back to the enterprise. And there I changed shifts with the colleague who had to stay overtime since I didn't manage to come back in time. Then I did his shift as well.

But afterwards, weren't you angry with those who had forced you to go with them?

No, I wasn't, because I also took into consideration their judgement. I told myself that they weren't actually thinking too much because somebody had to stay behind to take care of the appliances and they hadn't even given it a thought. And I had similar problems once. It was another manifestation of this kind, a strike, not a riot. Anyway, people were supposed to go to the Industrial Complex, in Petroșani. I was working on the second shift and a boy, a miner, seeing me with the lamp in my hand said: "Hoy, you're coming with us!" And I said: "No!" Then, a guy called Radu, grabbed me and started to say: "Mates, this hasn't taken part in any of our manifestations!" And he started pulling my clothes towards his sector, where their group was gathered. But then, a colleague in my sector, coming out of our sector, grabbed his neck, hit him against the wall and said: "What's your problem with him?" and this other mate replied: "Well, he has never taken part in any manifestation! Let him join us!" But my colleague told him to mind his own business and then this

other guy let go of me.

What did you expect from the Revolution in December?

Once with the Revolution, I hoped for a better life, for an easier job, because eight hours in the mine is quite tough and when we shifted to six I saw it as a progress, meaning something easier for us, but then it had been even more difficult especially in what regards the provision with materials. During Ceaușescu's time, people were saying that we had little or no freedom, but I say we had certain liberties because after work I was able to do, not everything I wanted but at least my things at home. Now, even if we have more freedom, we have nothing to live on.

(B.V- former putter at E.M Petroșani)

2. The Miner riot from June 1990.

How was it to be a union leader immediately after 1989 ?

It was very difficult to be a union leader immediately after 1989 because you had to deal with many problems which never ceased to come up. I had always tried to deal with the problems not by myself but together with the members of the Union Council.

Every time after the council meeting we used to pick up 4-5 members and thus go to the very difficult spots in the mine when needed, to see if working conditions were getting better or not. And, unfortunately, in many cases, no change was registered, on the contrary, it was getting worse. The working material provision was every day more difficult and some materials, especially nails, were kind of given another destination, situation that occurred with the screws as well. Some people were taking advantage of the situation and were trading the materials in Turkey or God knows where. From this point of view, the Revolution also triggered a bad change, most of the people disregarding work discipline, some of them coming at work drunk or during the shift they pleased...

Ceaușescu's regime kept the miners under

control. Because, during the democratic regime, each of us, being granted freedom, interpreted it to our knowledge and this turned into chaos. Thus, each of us, when faced with the smallest conflict was threatening with going on strike, with making a scandal and a mate was there to say that he had his team and that nobody could force him to do anything. After the Revolution, all off us, even the Union and the leading staff had more than a dozen of problems while working with people.

Did you take part in the first miner riots?

I didn't take part in the first miner riots but I had the misfortune to be part of that in June 1990 in Bucharest. Being already a union leader, you couldn't follow your conscience, you had to do the way the crowd was telling you to, if not you would have been swamped.

If I had followed my conscience I would have been there because I have always been a proponent of negotiations and of peaceful discussions instead of fights because these never seem to function.

Yet, how come that you took part in that miner riot in June?

In June 1990 the officer on duty came to my house and said that he wouldn't work in the third shift because he wanted to go to Bucharest. I hadn't even had the time to turn on the TV to see what was going on. Thus, when I got to the mine, the miners told me that chaos was unleashed in Bucharest and that we had better go there. Then I said: "How now, should we solve their problems? There are many inhabitants of Bucharest who have to solve them!" In the end, I had to call Cozma at home and this is how I could find out that he was in somebody's house to watch the world football championship because that somebody had a colour TV.

Apparently he didn't have a colour TV yet. I finally managed to get in touch with him and he told me that I was crazy, "what Bucharest?" His answer was so edgy because the same day we had had a council meeting with unions and there had been no discussion about Bucharest.

So isn't it as they say now, that Cozma organized that miner riot?

No, it isn't, at least that's what I think because he told me "Stay by the phone and I will call you from the Administration". When he came back from the Administration he said: "The train station is full, there's no way to stop them! So, if people want to go to Bucharest, let them go!" That's why I say that I don't think that it was Cozma who got them there because when I called him, the train station was already full.

Then who led them there, because, at least lately, there had been great emphasis on Cozma having organized that riot?

I think there had been other persons infiltrated among them. Of course that we have no names, not even one and maybe we will never have any even if there had been many people who weren't in the union together with Cozma, and he knew it.

But do you have clear pieces of evidence to prove that it had been a fabric?

I have a doubt because I don't think that the miners would have gone to the train station without having been urged to do so, but I can't say who talked them into it.

What did you do after getting to the mine?

After I got to the mine people had already started to leave the second shift also and then I told the officer on duty to allow those who wanted it to go to Bucharest in order to avoid any conflict. Thus, we brought them food and the buses took them to Petroșani.

Did you see any miners who didn't want to go?

I can say almost half of them!

Was there any pay back?

Some blaming between them like "Hoy, why aren't you joining us because you also take advantage of the strike!"

Did they believe that by going to Bucharest they would have got certain advantages?

This is what they mainly believed, that by going there, they would have got certain advantages.

So, did they go there with a very pragmatic goal in their minds?

Yes, they thought that if going, they would have been given I don't know what. But it wasn't like that! I finally got to Bucharest by train and that train functioned under emergency conditions stopping only 2-3 times. We got to the North Railway Station and from there right to Victoriei Square. In Victoriei Square we met our union leaders and they talked for like 4-5 minutes, then the President and the Prime -minister arrived and from then on we headed directly to the University. We arrived at Bucharest only on 15th in the morning and by the time we got there, the University had already been vandalised. It may very well be that it had been vandalised by the miners as well but by the time we got there, it had already been vandalised.

What did your group do there?

There were several burnt cars turned up side down and the miners helped the people to lift them up and to take them away. They started to clean up the places in Universităţii Square where the opponents' camp had been placed, but I think that this could have also been done by those living there. That order had been carried out by the police and afterwards they followed the police through Bucharest to do things like: doing away with the stalls which had been abusively installed, which didn't seem fair to me. As far as I am concerned, I didn't take part in these actions because I didn't find it right to.

But what was really going on?

A guy or two used to come to pick up a group of miners and then they would leave together.

But were these people civilians or what were they wearing?

Yes, they were civilians!

And what were they saying?

Let's take you to the Liberal Party, to the Peasant Party because they have drugs there and all sorts of things...

Did the miners buy it?

Yes, they did and they even put the objects taken from these residences into cars. But I told

them: "Hoy, when it comes to the point, nobody will believe that you have been there with the police since there is no minutes to prove it." They took these objects from some people and gave them to others.

On the 15th in the afternoon, the miners had been divided into two groups: some at Polivalentă Hall and others at Casa Scânteii. I had to go to the Polivalentă. There we watched football matches on TV and in the morning there arrived cars with food. Since I was the leader I divided the food, slicing bread, salami, ham and everything else. The supplies had been sent from Bucharest, I don't know exactly from where, in special food vans; then, some inhabitants of Bucharest also came to bring us more food.

Then, I also wanted to eat with the miners I knew.

While I was eating, a car arrived, a tip-up truck and all the miners around me stepped in it. This is the moment when I felt awful because they had come there with me and they were leaving God knows with whom. I really felt deserted. Then, I asked them what they were doing and where they were going. Then, the driver replied: "Don't worry, I'll take them to Ferentari!" And there was another civilian in the cabin with the driver. And then I told to my buddies: "Hoy, if someone came to your house pretending to force his way in, how would you feel? Would you like it?" Then, they got the point, stepped off the car and joined another group.

Did all of them step off?

All of them!

And what was the reaction of the driver and that of his companion?

They asked me why I was doing it, why I wasn't letting them go. They were really angry and even shouting at me: "Let them go!" but they finally filled the car with another group and left.

But didn't they say anything else?

They said nothing else, apart from asking me why I wasn't letting them go. But I said that they had nothing to do there since those people in Ferentari did them no harm. The tip-up truck

had Bucharest number plates but I cannot tell where it came from and how.

But what did those in that tip-up truck really do?

I can't exactly say since I hadn't been there but when I came back I found out that some of the people who went there came back with certain valuable things, even colour TVs and cassette players. And then, those joining me where throwing this situation back at me, that they didn't go and that they lost so many things.

Yet, which was the slogan which made them go there?

To put the crooks in order. This slogan was on everybody's lips.

And there was another thing which bemused me: after all the miners had left, there had remained a group which had been given guard clothes [of the old patriotic guard, n.red.] These kept on hanging around for another 5 days to clean Bucharest. After all that we tried to gather them around and to take them to the train station.

Was it difficult to gather them around?

Very difficult because under such circumstances when they come from various mines, one can easily lose control over them because they mix so that you cannot tell who belongs where. You say something to your mate and a stranger has a go at you for bothering him. Thus, when they are bunched, one can easily lose control.

Did the leaders lose control over the crowd in Bucharest?

I think they did! And I especially remember a scene. A civilian showed up and said: "And that was Universităţii Square" And the miners immediately let into him with hoses and sticks.

And who was that civilian?

I don't know and neither did the miners but then another man showed up and said: "Hoy, the guy you smacked was the mayor of the sector." What else can you say when they were taking it back on each other, it was just something difficult to understand. At least I couldn't understand it.

Had there been many violence scenes?

Yes they had, why should I deny it? To my shame, there had been. But I told my people over and over again " Mates, don't do that because they are going to have you on film twice or maybe three times and then you won't be able to deny it. You deny once, you deny twice but you can't keep on doing it forever and there will be a time when you have to take responsibility for your acts." Some got it, some didn't! The truth is that there were also civilians who were coming down to provide the miners with alcohol bottles meant to open their taste for fighting, for chaos. All of it left me a bitter taste. And between brackets: the drinking problem was already endemic. There was a time when during each miner strike cars were coming with free booze for everybody.

Who was sharing it and why?

I can't understand who was interested in doing it and why.

It is indeed difficult to understand.

I think there were interests dictated from above. And that was the very reason why the strikes were so difficult to hold in check because when the miners were stoned they became very difficult to control and I think that that was also the point.

Yet, generally speaking, did the union leaders try to stir or to prevent the miners from becoming aggressive?

All the leaders I had the chance to meet during my time, since I had been a leader up to 1991, had tried to control the miners. And even before going to Bucharest in June 1990, we had a little gathering and we decided to do our best to hold them in check. [...]

And did Cozma agree with it?

Yes, he did, but I don't think he was able to keep his word. He saw that people were into it and he decided to go for the violent version according to which the force and the crowd were the key to everything. And the miners believed the same thing. When I told them that we should go to negotiate they replied: " Dude, these days

nobody goes to pay respects anymore, you have to stand your ground!”

Where do you think they got this mentality from?

They got it from others who embraced it and tried to put it into practice. Sometimes, during the strikes, while gathered at Paro?eni or Vulcan, for example, there were groups of miners throughout the Valley who were gathering the others from the rest of the mines and if they didn't want to go, they were threatening them.

(Nicolae Croitoru - Union leader at E.M Vulcan from March 1990 till October 1991)

3.

Did you take part in the June 1990 miner riot?

During the miner riot in June 1990 I happened to be in Bucharest visiting my godfather. And he told me: “look what is going on!” (he was talking about the events in Universităţii Square). “Wait and see that the miners are going to come to Bucharest!” he added. But I said: “Why should they come here? What should they

do?

And it was indeed so. The miners came to Bucharest. And I met them there by chance and I asked them: “What is going on? Why are you here?” And they said: “Well, can't you see what these folks are doing here?” You couldn't actually talk to them because they were very nervous. I remember that Romeo Beja was with them but he wasn't yet a leader, still he was definitely after fame, wanting to be seen.

Since you had been a witness back then, did you see any violent scenes or something which you particularly remember?

Yes, I saw street fights. And I could see that the miners were being manipulated. There were all sorts of civilians saying: “this one is high, or that one is a ragamuffin” and the miners were taking him down immediately. They didn't take the time to check it. So they were being manipulated, it was obvious. All the more, I could see miners in clean overalls, which is hardly possible. The miner is a poor soul: with broken boots and a torn sheepskin coat. So you could tell who was a miner and who was pretending to be.



Yet, what were those in clean overalls?

Some destabilizers since they were guiding them: “go here, go there”, because the miner cannot know where to go.

Who do you think is responsible for the riots?

I think that Cozma had his big share all the time. Because he was the first to mention the alternative to go to Bucharest both in June 1990 and in September 1991. The truth is that he didn't say to the people: “Let's go to Bucharest!” but he rather asked them three times: “Shall we go to Bucharest?” which was actually a rhetorical question under the given circumstances. Since he was such an influential leader he should have said: “we are not going to Bucharest! We stay here and let the representatives go!” but he didn't do it and he was actually the only leader who asked the miners if they wanted to go to Bucharest or not.

(Ion Munteanu, non-commissioned engineer, former leader of the Free Democratic Union from E.M. Paroşeni)

4.

The people had already been put in fear of the great monopolies, of closing down the mines and thus of losing their jobs and they acted accordingly. The 1990 miner riot was caused by people's fear. This is what happens when you play with people's sub-conscience and you seed the fear that they are going to lose everything.

(V.C- former miner foreman, presently a pensioner)

5.

There (in Petroşani) we benefited from several sets of cars which took us to the North Railway Station, in Bucharest. From the North Railway Station we walked to Universităţii Square, being led by those who were familiar with the city, I mean you can very well understand... we knew some of them, they were security members [infiltrated after the 1987 strike, editor's note] placed in the Valley and we knew them very well and they were the ones who were familiar with

Bucharest. And they were showing us (the security people and the inhabitants of the city – but I cannot tell who they were) which were the residences of the parties, those of the newspapers, where we could find Băcanu, Raţiu, etc.

(V.C- former miner foreman)

6.

Nicolae Cămărăşescu was one of the people who guided us through Bucharest. I met him while he was a security member infiltrated here in the Valley. As far as I know, he was one of those who entered the residence of the Peasant Party and took out lots of dollars. I know it because he came back to the military camp, where my group and I had been accommodated, with booze and money (you could see his pockets full of dollars). And he was bragging, while being drunk: “Dudes, I can close this military camp down!” and we were dead scared because we had no idea what he wanted to do even if we were carrying guns. And that is because we had been given guns and patriotic guard uniforms, but the guns had no bullets so we weren't able to use them. There were around 800 soldiers in that camp together with around 600 miners. And we were eating in the same hall with the soldiers. And trust me, we were ashamed of those soldiers. We were served some enormous stakes, plus three beers and a glass of brandy while the soldiers were only given bed-plate (rice). We used to take half of our helping and share it with those kids. We spent an entire week in that military camp.

(V.C- former miner foreman)

7.

I was legally questioned by the military prosecution for the June 1990 miner riot being accused of the fact that us, the foremen, the engineers and the managers, actually organized the strike. Yet, I denied it and I explained how we had been summoned and told to leave, how we got to the railway station in Bucharest or to the military camp in Ghencea. And the military pros-

ecutor replied: "Admit that you vandalised the residence of the Peasant Party"

They were actually looking for a scapegoat instead of the real guilty people so that we could be in a foul-up. I realised it right away so I replied: "How should I say that if it isn't true! Maybe the residence of the Peasant Party had been vandalised by the miners but, by the time our group got there it had already been destroyed and some miners were pulling down an antenna..."

During the same trial he made me accept the fact that us, the engineers and the foremen had actually organized the riot... when actually the other foremen and I, together with the engineers took part in the riot in order to hold the miners in check because if the miner gets angry he lets his anger out and we went there to put a restraint on them because if it had been only the miners and the brigade leader, it would have been a disaster. If it hadn't been for us they would have all probably started drinking because they carried money with them.

Coming back to the trial, I can say that, at the auditions, I blew the lid off the identity of those who had summoned us there.

I was afraid but I had no other choice. And, at the end of the day, everybody knows who they were since an entire country saw who thanked us... I think that we were off the hook not because those who had asked us to come are still holding the power but because we were very heterogeneous, both ethnically and from the point of view of the positions that we had: Romanians and Hungarians, Germans and Gypsies; foremen and brigade leaders, engineers and managers. And I think they were afraid of unjustly condemning somebody and make the whole story go public abroad.

As a matter of fact, the prosecutors knew the facts because during the riot we had been filmed by a French team, right when we entered the military camp where we had been accommodated. And this tape was later broadcast on CNN or I don't know on what other foreign TV channel

and everybody could easily see that we didn't do anything... now that I think of it I pray to God to keep those people safe and sound because it may be because of their tape that we got out of it unharmed.

This is why I say that I would definitely not take part in any of the miner riots again! Because of these riots an entire country and the whole working class was put to stick both inside the country and worldwide. And I don't think that the journalists had this interest. They just did their job.

Now, while looking back, I realize we only had been a bunch of idiots for having gone there and they also took us for fools. In 1998, during the whole year, I had been almost monthly asked to go to Bucharest for the trial. And it was only last year (2001) that they exonerated me. And when they did that, they said: "You are exonerated but you are still at our disposition." And then I got mad and I told them: "Why is that? If I am guilty, take me in now, if not, the only way I can come here again will be with handcuffs." And then the prosecutor started to laugh and said: "You are free to go!"

(V.C. former miner foreman)

8.

During the last meeting I told the prosecutor: "Sir, in the mine it is the same like in the army, you have to obey the orders. If the manager ordered me to go to Bucharest, I had no other choice! The manager is responsible for me, I am responsible for the people under my command. That is why I took the tally book with me and registered the people in Bucharest."

You had to go, you had no other choice and if the governing people hadn't asked us to go there, I think nobody would have gone... Yet, the miners had been manipulated because we had threatened with losing our jobs, with the coming of the great monopolies which would have closed the mines down, this kind of rumours. The psychosis had been huge... But it is more than obvious who thanked the miners for

this manifestation and implicitly who generated the psychosis...

I had 150 people under my command, out of which 90% joined me and the rest stayed behind for the inspection (for watching over the machines) in the mine.

(V.C- former miner foreman, presently a pensioner)

9.

For example, during the June 1990 miner riot we were kind of expecting to be fired at even from Basarabi Railway station and we were making plans and thinking of what we were going to do once we got there. We thought that in Bucharest army troops were fighting with security troops, those who had fired at people during the Revolution and that we had been summoned there to join the army which was faithful to the new society, to the new leadership of the country. And it was more than normal for violence to explode in the days to come. Never mind the fact that, concealed by these events, a lot of people cleared the scores with others.

(Petru Braiț- former electrician at E.M Petrița, former leader of those made redundant)

10.

The question of our manipulation has been asked all over again. Of course we didn't believe it at the time. Practically, manipulation ceases to be effective when the man becomes aware of it. The January and February miner riots had been but a sort of trump for certain leaders who implicitly were trying to say: "If it happens for something to go wrong in Bucharest, look how prompt the miners are!" I blamed it on the need to be part of certain events unfold in the country during those days. In 1990 Romania was a country which belonged to the miners!

(Petru Braiț- former electrician at E.M Petrița, former leader of those made redundant)

11.

I also took part in the June 1990 miner riot.

I will never forget it for the rest of my life. I was working in the first shift. And I heard my mates talking that Iliescu and Petre Roman had asked the miners to go to Bucharest because the opposition had attacked the Television, Cotroceni Palace and the Government.

My mates knew all that because they had been announced by our union leaders. And Miron Cozma addressed all the mines by saying: "all the good people should come and defend the State". And then we were immediately given some sets of cars and we left. This is where I would like to say that lots of innocent people got beaten.

They got beaten both by the army and by the miners because as soon as we got there the two joined forces. Yet, one can say that the miners are not generally violent, just easily susceptible and the majority of the miners here have barely graduated a few grades, very few having gone to trade schools.

A lot of poor quality miners have been brought to the valley: thieves, burglars, robbers. And to be honest, no one did the tally for the miners who went to Bucharest then. Other people came down from the country, from Craiova, Târgu-Jiu, etc. and many overalls and boots had been sold on a lot of money, even in Bucharest.

(Nagy Bela- former brigade leader, former leader of those made redundant)

12.

It wasn't only Miron Cozma who affected our image. I personally entered the television with him and somebody gave Cozma a gun which he personally handed over to Răzvan Theodorescu, when entering the television, and Corneliu Roșianu, the editor at the moment, is a witness of that. And Cozma said: "we aren't here to cause violence", in order to be judged for illegally carrying a gun.

Watching back retrospectively I cannot believe that we went there to defend the state, I'd rather say that it was a political game directed by... Iliescu. And I am not afraid of saying it be-

cause the Romanian Constitution states it that I can express my opinion and I think that nobody can take this right away from me.

He is to blame for having summoned the miners and their leader in order to nail him for 18 years when he didn't need him anymore. And Cozma is not to blame for the 1991 miner riot either. I think that Miron Cozma properly defended the miners' rights. Today, their life is tougher!

(Nagy Bela- former brigade leader, former leader of those made redundant)

13.

We were a sort of bodyguard of the F.S.N¹. The police even gave us to drink... packs, packs of whisky, when we didn't even know what that was. And then they took us to the Triumph Arch. During the night they were taking us to sleep in a nearby room while during the day we were asked to act. Yet, something didn't fit there. Because as we got on one side, they appeared to pick us up on the other, "let's go on the other side". And there you could find two or three guys, but they were wearing clean overalls, which is hardly the case in a mine. And they made us move from one side to the other. We didn't pay attention to those guys then, only afterwards. It was only afterwards that we could see clear! I think that Cozma also had been manipulated.

(G.V- locksmith at Vulcan mine)

14.

I didn't take part in the miner riots because I cannot be influenced by the effects of the collective mechanics. Even if I had been afterwards questioned by my colleagues regarding my lack of commitment, I overtly told them that I couldn't have been part of such a manipulation.

(D.L- electrician at the Vulcan mine, emigrant in the U.S.A with the Visa Lottery)

15. The February 1990 Miner Riot

We had the feeling that we had to protect Iliescu, that is why, in the train, on the way there, we were thinking of the fact that we had to make sure that nobody would beat Iliescu, take him out of the country or something along the line. The word Iliescu was part of the daily routine. Afterwards I got home and I was hospitalised, but it wasn't only me, I can say it was one of ten of those coming back from Bucharest who was ill.

(Holban Marian- former underground electrician, at present a union leader at Petroșani mine)

16. The June 1990 Miner Riot

June was a little different. It was my birthday and I had a lots of guests, parents... when, the TV programme was interrupted and we heard another appeal to the country and... that moment I knew for certain that in the city people were going to Bucharest. That is why I told my wife that I was going to go and see what was happening. My wife, seeing me so determined to leave, said: "leave your keys at home!" That was her insurance that I wasn't going to leave because there I had the keys from my drawer in the mine, the entrance mark and other things. Well, OK, I said, I'll leave them! And I put them there. My wife must have probably thought: "if the keys are here, he won't go!" Arriving in the city, I could see that things were better and more broadly organized this time. There were cars taking the civilians to the mines in order to get dressed and thus go to Petroșani. That's exactly what happened to me.

I was in slippers and in shorts. It was 6 when a van stopped right in front of me. There were around twenty civilians in it. "Hoy, what are you doing?" I asked. They replied that they were going to get dressed in order to go to Bucharest.

Meanwhile, dozens of cars from Uricani, Bărbăteni, Lupeni, were heading towards

Petroșani. The doors of the van were opened: one could see the bats and the hoses hanging. You could tell that they were all equipped. I finally got to the mine and they gave me the lamp without carrying the entrance mark, they gave me a trip supplement and I could really see that everything had been organized by the union. After the appeal transmitted on TV according to which destabilizing forces were trying to overthrow the government and that democracy was in danger, we all knew that Universității Square was full of “ragamuffins” intending to destabilize the country.

And, at the moment, we really believed that there was a group of antigovernment people sleeping there, but we had no idea who they were, what they wanted, or which were their ideals, I thought that they were a group of people who didn't like the actual government and, back then I honestly didn't like this idea.

I got this opinion because both mass media and the press of the time were very manipulative and there existed no other TV channel apart from TVR¹ which was a proponent of the power. That is why almost everybody was angry to see what was going on there and at the mine they used to talk in very tough terms about how we were going to rack and ruin this time. “This time” they said, because we had already been there twice and things had been carried out peacefully.

On 13th during the evening we already knew that people were fighting in Bucharest. The security forces were fighting with some groups which were claiming something.

Now I tend to believe that these were people who knew that Romania wasn't going to find its right way too soon and they wanted to set a much real democracy than the one existing now in the country. Maybe at the moment they didn't all know it, but their leaders did!

The first set of cars arrived at the North Railway Station in Bucharest around 5 in the morning. On the platform we found layers of coffee and a little parcel with: a tomato, a schnitzel,

cheese, a bun and two minced-meat balls. A civilian was waiting for us and he said: “Guys, you've got a supplement, you have everything you need, go straight to Victoriei Square.”

We lit the lamps and the show was fascinating. The miners were marching in rows and if someone would stick his head out of the window, the miners were using the tomatoes in the package to hit him. We got to Universității Square where Iliescu showed up and told us to go directly to Universității Square to clean it off.

I personally believed that we were supposed to arrange the flowerbeds or something along the line. When we got there we found two buses completely burnt. Their wheels had entered the asphalt after melting; the ragamuffins' tents had already been scattered and the “ragamuffins” locked up in the University.

What did the miners together with Cosma do? Cosma was in a TV car with four megaphones above, guiding us: “Don't let them run away, none of them can escape!”, the University was still closed. Then four miners carrying axes climbed the lightning rod, made a hole in the roof and entered the attic.

And those four miners opened the University door. Can you believe it? Only four miners managed to open a university passing through the hundreds of people gathered there!!! I didn't meet those miners but I don't think they belonged to the security troops, on the contrary, I think they were real miners, because they were too determined.

Those inside were many and I think that they could have taken the miners down if they had wanted, but they didn't. Yet, the University door could have been tumbled down with axes, but Cosma didn't allow them to do it...

The moment the door opened, the University was ravished. Those inside were dragged out and smacked. They caught Marian Munteanu and Cosma personally was smacking him, dipping him into the fountain and then smacking him again and again. Marian Munteanu was already injured a bit, a broken lip as far as I could tell,

when Cosma started to hit him. But after that smacking, I thought that the man must have died. Afterwards, an ambulance arrived and took him away and then Cosma said: "Come and clean the place where these ragamuffins have shitted!" And people started to clean up!

There was also a crane there which wanted to lift one of the burnt buses, but it couldn't reach it because of the trolley wires. Then, a miner came and said: "Hoy, let's move this bus in order for the crane to take it away!" This is how people gathered around and started to struggle (yet, it was stuck in the asphalt as its rims had melted) and they tumbled it twice.

Afterwards a raid was initiated in Universităţii Square and those who had a ragamuffin badge were taken away and smacked... I had one at home but I have no idea what I have done with it! After gathering many of the ragamuffins, they locked them up in a bookshop: boys, girls, youngsters, elders. There were all kinds of people who were wearing those badges...

Then the police cars arrived to take them away. The miners were also literally cleaning up, meaning real and figurative cleansing, that is smacking. There were also some guys there who were guiding the rest, that is giving orders, but the most savage beatings were administrated by the miners, that is to anyone who seemed a suspect... since they were "a bit stoned".

I only entered the University the next day, out of curiosity. The University was a complete ruin. It was more than obvious that it was a miner's and not a security person's job. The security people only gave orders, they didn't practically touch anything, maybe they didn't even raise the fist at somebody. They only manipulated. By arriving there, I could find a teacher pretending to go along with the miners, but he also couldn't believe his eyes. All lecture rooms were destroyed, I don't think that they missed any. The one completely vandalised was the gym, where they even used the axe to hit the walls and even the floor... Then I left the place...

I spent that night at Polivalent? Hall because

some of us had been accommodated there. We had watched Romania-Cameroon football match when we lost with 2-1. After watching the match each of us on his best account, we came back to the Hall. There were some big orange plush curtains there. Well, the miners took them, cut them and turned them into laces for their boots. So, they all changed their laces, wearing orange ones!

Afterwards, in order not to get bored, we saw some movies on the projector. "The Lonesome Wolf" starring Chuck Norris, and then another movie... then, all the miners in the room started to shout: "Porn! Porn! Porn!"... they all wanted porn movies. But how should they broadcast porn movies when they had none!...

There were many aluminium boxes down the hall, mineral water bottles, the cars were bringing us ready-made sandwiches, cigarette packs: BT, Apollonia, Snagov... We slept there, each of us where he could, on chairs, on the floor.

In the morning, we started to think of what we should do. Right next to Polivalent? Hall there was the Children's Wonderland. I, together with around seven mates, said: "Hoy, what's our business with these people of Bucharest? Let's better have fun!" We had money.

Right there, in the neighbourhood, there was a cart track with wooden raceway and carts. And we all stepped in those carts. The guy responsible for them was very happy to see he was selling the tickets because we didn't go there forcedly to say: "Hoy, if you don't let us in the carts, we will smack you, or something along the line". We paid honestly... it wasn't expensive: five lei a round.

We played around for like two hours when... my cart went off the track. My brother, who was on one side, came to help me push back the cart. Yet, another cart came from behind, caught his leg between the buffers and broke it!

This is when the good time was over. We quickly called for an ambulance to take him away. We put him on a crowbar and this is how we took him to the ambulance, because it couldn't enter up to there

The miners who were passing by and who were seeing us were immediately asking us: "Hoy, what's wrong with him, who smacked him, tell us quickly, where do they live?" "Relax, mates, nobody smacked him, it was just an accident!" My brother was urgently taken to the hospital and I met him again only at the Globus Circus.

That was the last meeting of the entire group of miners and Iliescu's last speech. Meanwhile, our group wandered around, took a bath in a lake or a walk through Bucharest. I can say that our group didn't touch a soul, but I could see many extremely violent scenes...

There were also some groups of miners, let's say more peaceful, which, even if guided by the security people towards somebody, were just catching the person, hit him once or twice with the rubber bats and then let him go or hand him over to the police.

To my mind, what really influenced these negative acts had been the poor quality of many of the miners in Valea Jiului.

When faced with a tense situation which can generate conflicts, like those in Bucharest at the time, a more or less learned man tries to avoid violent manifestations, but those with little or no education at all were heading towards these conflicts, hitting without thinking, believing that physical strength is more important than brains.

Still, in Universităţii Square this is exactly what happened. In Universităţii Square we met some miners from the mines around Piteşti. They were very calm, didn't join the fights at all. I guess that they came there to be numerically impressive. Even the way they spoke was different from that of the miners in Valea Jiului, they weren't cursing, weren't displaying a low language, they were completely different.

I guess that the majority of those who had been involved in fights were Moldavians, people with very little education, coming from the countryside... I could also see a lady getting smacked, an innocent woman... they hit her with the pressure hoses with metal insert which they had

bluntly chopped with an axe down the sidewalk so that all the wires were coming out of them and if you hit somebody, they were scratching the skin.

I could also see how a miner, a bastard, hit a woman's back three or four times with such a hose. Can you believe that he left her all fringes? I dread to think of it. It was something inhuman. And I also saw how some guy hit another with a scoop stick. This is again inhuman.

I could get a close look to other things, when people got punched... and I could perceive that man's reaction, the wince caused by the awareness of the fact that he was going to be hit and then the falling down on the asphalt or the hitting of the head against the sidewalk.

I witnessed an entire scene from the moment when the fist was raised and till it reached its target... I can't describe that man's look when he saw the fist and till the moment of the impact... I don't wish this to anybody...

I can definitely say that of those who came down to Bucharest, only 95% were miners. But they were very little learned miners; very few were slicks from Valea Jiului to say that they did such things. This is how we were. We were looking for having fun and we had thought of what to do long before.

That is why we had a sort of plan: "mates, now we are watching football, afterwards we are going to have fun in the pleasure ground, then we are taking a walk through Bucharest"... That's why I am telling you that if all miners had drunk, it would definitely have ended up in a catastrophe.

I think that of those who lent themselves to such things only approximately 20% had been our miners and exceptionally very few from other mines. The rest had been padding, as a number... other also did real cleaning, meaning helping the authorities to take the waste from the square.

I myself didn't take part in any of these actions because I realized that it was all a felony. I was only 26 back then, I enjoyed life and having

fun and mostly that is why I went.

Eventually, it was all over. In the end Iliescu delivered a speech... we all carried bats when he came, but a bulky guy with a white helmet showed up and said: "Hey, mates, the television is going to come down with cameras. Why don't you throw those bats?"

All of a sudden I could hear a noise: "bang, bang" and the next moment everybody was empty-handed. Iliescu came down immediately accompanied by a group of people, thanked us for our efforts and appreciated our spirit of unity.

He also wished us to keep up the good work, etc. and all the miners cheered and applauded him. Afterwards, he let us know that the sets of cars were waiting at the North Railways Station in order to take us home. Then, at Globus Circus I met my brother again who was constantly asked what happened to his leg. And he was taking the mickey saying that he got beaten or stuff like that, but in the end they all found out the truth.

There was another miner with both hands in plaster and he also had a stupid accident, that is he grabbed a branch while being in the car and he fell off on the hands. So only stupid accidents, nothing near us getting beaten or some-

thing along the line. We all happily went home because we had been the ones dictating the law in Bucharest.

But perhaps now, when looking back, I can say that it would have been better to overthrow the regime then. And I think we would have, because Romania was getting swamped by information at the moment... And once with the miner riots we sort of came back to what we used to have before the Revolution: you couldn't say a word at work because you would have been thrown obstacles in your way according to a very simple logic: "If you are not with us you are against us!"

This has carried on ever since, taking back the old security people eager to spill the bins as soon as you say something. After the Revolution, this situation kind of disappeared but the miner riots reinstalled this feeling: lack of safety at work and fear of not ruining your life for saying something wrong. I felt sorry! And I can say it had been a huge loss.

(Hoban Marian- former miner electrician, presently a union leader at Paroşeni mine)

Interviews done by **Alin Rus**

Translated by Raluca Vîjăiac



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Martor is indexed by EBSCO and CEEOL.

Smacked by the miners

Mihai Ionescu, scenographer, 62 years old
Interview done by Vlad Manoliu

On 14th June in the morning, around 11.30, when the miners' cohorts, waving their bats, invaded Bucharest, I was walking down Maghereu Boulevard, heading to the Union.¹ I met two colleagues, a property man, Bordeianu and Vasile Neagoe (a coward for a fact) a production manager. They were also heading to the Union. When we reached the traffic light in front of Notara Theatre, we wanted to cross the boulevard towards Eva shop. The miners were zealously marching on the middle of the boulevard, entirely blocking it.

Since the light was green, we walked through them. The two I was walking with stayed on the sidewalk because in the meantime they got red light. I passed those guys by and I stopped in front of Eva shop waiting for them. All of a sudden, I started hearing all sorts of opinions among those stopped to watch the miners passing by. And I heard a voice: "We shall teach them a lesson! They won't gather together for the rest of their lives! We'll take this Bucharest slyness and their stupid actions from the University off their mind! We'll put things in order!"

The civilians were taking to the miners. There were civilians and lasses down the sidewalk, buying gape seed.

While waiting, I was filled by a very irksome feeling, a sort of civic attitude. And I told the guy: "Yes, but why using the bat, mister?" Because they were waving bits of high-tension cable, and bats which were practically pick-mattocks or scoops and others carried crowbars. After my stupid question (I must have been an idiot when asking it), a guy said: "Hold on a little, mate!"

He was all dressed up in brown, wearing a helmet and a brown overall. I sensed that his tone was not announcing anything good but the next moment I was blocked on both sides, two miners grabbing my hands. Next, from behind, on the left side I received a punch in my jaw-temple, which I didn't like at all. It made me shaky.

The next moment, a guy whose face I remember only for that event showed up in front of me. Then, images started to slowly become blurry. The guy, wearing a short-sleeved shirt

¹ Mineriada – generic term attributed to the aggressive movements of the miners towards Bucharest, while led by the leader of the miners' union in Valea Jiului, Miron Cozma, targeted at violently stopping the protest against Iliescu's regime. The Romanian term 'mineriad?' means precisely miner riot and was coined during these particular events but has no exact counterpart in English.

with white and red little squares, seemed to be a civilian. He started hitting me like a boxer. And he kept on kicking my stomach and my phizog and my eyes became blurry. Obviously that I was also hit from behind. Those two were holding my hands while others were knocking my head off.

I honestly felt like melting, and I melted, I stepped out. As if in another world, dreaming, feeling something flowing down my face. I could very vaguely hear a crunching of angered ladies. I could distinguish two ladies shouting: "What, are you trying to kill him? Let him be!" Hence, I felt free and I fell down.

Those women and a guy fetched me and tried to lift me up, because I wasn't able to stand anymore. They supported me and dragged me near Eva shop, near an indentation. They took out some paper handkerchiefs and tried to wipe the blood off my face. The great production manager had vanished and Bordeianu showed up again.

The guy who helped said: "We must get a car to take him to the hospital." Bordeianu said he knew me that I was with him and that he was going to get a car.

He stopped a car which would take me to the hospital; all the more, it turned around there, even if it was a one way street and it drove in the opposite direction. They put me in the car and took me to the policlinic on Dorobanți Street near the German kindergarten.

They left me in a surgery where I met Doctor Safta, may God keep her safe, who was terrified and completely outraged, calling them "beasts and murderers".

She was actually expressing a perfectly normal point of view, after seeing the way I looked like. She cleaned all my wounds, stuck some bandages into my nose to stop the bleeding and then sent me to Hospital No. 9, to "Bagdasar". My head was all wrapped up in bandages and I felt as if it had been a huge bushel.

I was becoming more and more conscious. After the moment when they picked me up from

the street, I started to come into my senses and to realize what was going on. That things were wrong and that I wasn't one piece. Bordeianu found a minibus pertaining to I don't know what filming crew, put me into it and took me to "Bagdasar" Hospital.

I could see the climax of abomination only on my way to the hospital. Since the center was blocked, the car was redirected on small streets and we got to Rosetti Square, where everything was a turmoil with miners running randomly. It was pretty tough to drive towards the University round about, since the traffic was very heavy, with cars driving in all directions. It is there where I saw the first thing which terrified me.

A young girl, probably a student, had her bag hanged around her neck and they were pulling her arms on both directions; she was trying to get away shouting, but I couldn't hear her because I was in the car. They were jerking her on both directions and one of the miners was burning her hand with a cigarette. That seemed the utmost cruelty. And that wasn't all. Even if you weren't able to see the man who was the target of the miners' anger (because of their number), you could see the sticks and the rubber bats going up and down.

The image was terrifying. You could only see them going up and down and you could only guess that they were beating a poor soul to death.

And we passed through the round about and we stopped near a bridge next to Șuțu palace, at Bucharest History Museum, where there was a big bunch of miners, some with discoloured, torn overalls, some with newer ones and others with those brown overalls which seemed pretty new. And they stopped a white Olcit and the guy who was driving locked himself up in the car, but they broke the windshield and the side windows and they ruined his car and then, dragged him out of the car and stepped over him.

Meanwhile, the string of cars moved a little bit and we arrived at "Luceafărul" cinema hall. This is where I could witness two horrifying

scenes. You know, more or less like everything we know about the Nazi horrors.

Firstly, I saw a clamshell lorry scale (for building materials) in front of the church, at Saint George. Next to it, there was a group of brutes, carrying scoop sticks or any other bloody thing and other miners were coming from the crowd and they were almost throwing a man or a woman into the clamshell and they were pushing the others next to the cabin while hitting them with a stick. A terribly horrifying thing.

And then, another image, a woman who was half way on the boulevard, she might have been a gypsy, a cleaner gypsy... the utmost abomination, she was trying to escape from the hands of those who were grabbing her: one was grabbing one of her hands and the other another, while a third was pulling her hair for a fourth to hit her with one of those high-tension cables, over the breasts and in the thorax... they were hitting her while she was screaming. Now, that I am recounting these things, I get goose bumps. I had never thought that things like that could exist!

Only after seeing these scenes, I got horrified. I told myself that I got away cheaply. At that moment I couldn't think of who got them there. These were afterwards reactions. Slowly, while driving towards Unirii Square, the traffic became more fluid and we could finally get to the hospital. We got there, and I saw lots of people, crushing, and injured men. We were waiting when Bordeianu asked me: "What shall we do, mister Ionescu? Don't you know anybody?" I remembered that doctor Nae Popescu was working there, the CPR unit coordinator.

Bordeianu went and asked for doctor Nae Popescu at the information office. But Nae had already left. Yet, another doctor, one of Nae's colleagues, attended me. He took me and sub-

mitted me to a very minute checking, he also did me a puncture in the spine, taking some liquid out to see if he could let me go.

Apparently I had been lucky, because the liquid was clear. He sent me to the medico-legal hospital and to doctor Popescu at Colțea Hospital- the present manager of the hospital- to examine me for the rest of the injuries. And I finally got home where I started to use poultices. I must tell you that I had to use them till the end of August because my bruises wouldn't go away.

The next day I went to the medico-legal hospital. Those guys saw me and they mentioned on my medical certificate all my injuries, bruises, but I liked the doubt it contained, a doubt which I was able to notice only later, after I got back home: "the injuries could be caused by the events on 14th June". Which actually meant that it wasn't certain. I got hit by an elevator! It was formulated so as not to upset anybody. I have it even now- I don't know what I can use it for! The truth is I had head injuries and my occipital and my nose were broken, and my jaw was misplaced.

Of course that I also had to see doctor Popescu at Colțea Hospital who took off the bandages that doctor Safta put in my nose and they seemed endless, like spaghetti... but they proved very useful since they stopped the bleeding. The man more or less fixed my nose but he said that I might need a surgery. I had never had it done, I was left with a deviated septum, but I said that I was OK. My left eye astigmatism is also a consequence of what happened then, of that hit on the left side of my head. That's it. I have some scars on my face, still visible. A man can put up with everything.

Translated by Raluca Vîjia





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„The days of the national shame“

Vlad Manoliu

In June 1990, I was working at the Technical Engineering University in Bucharest while living relatively close to my job, so that on 14th June, in the morning, when the miners arrived in Bucharest, I wasn't present in the city centre. Hardly had I reached the University when I received a phone call from a former student, a police officer, who warned me not get near the city centre, regardless of the situation. Why? Because I was bearded, bespectacled and I used to wear jeans. In other words, I fit the description of a ragamuffin from Universităţii Square perfectly. Which I actually was!

Completely disregarding what was happening in the city centre and planning to go to the Academy Library, I thought that my ex-student was overreacting. Calm, with a folio under my arm, I headed towards the Academy. But, down the stairs of the Faculty, I met a colleague of mine, an associated professor from one of the Departments who, with a deadly pallor, grabbed my shirt and asked me where I was going. He was extremely nervous. I told him that I was going to the Academy. He started yelling at me and calling me irresponsible for not knowing what was going on in the city. And he told me

what he had seen around the University while coming to the faculty. It is more than obvious that I didn't go anymore and thus I got rid of a potential conflict with the miners. And all that just for being bearded and bespectacled.

Then, I had the chance to see enough terrible images about the miner invasion, so easily authorised by our chosen ones. On the evening of 15th June, after our biased television had tried to explain how necessary that miner riot had been, after seeing how Ion Iliescu was thanking the miners for the “high civic spirit” they employed in cleaning the capital city, after seeing the crime acknowledged by the state, I felt terribly ashamed for being Romanian.

For the first time in my life, I felt sorry for being Romanian and, looking at my wife, who experienced the same feeling, we asked ourselves what we were doing in Romania. I will never forgive Ion Iliescu for that feeling of not finding our place in our own country. I think that this is the reason why I can call 13th-14th-15th June, ‘days of national shame’.

Translated by Raluca Vîjia



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Author: Ovidiu Caraiani

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The group for social dialogue

Ovidiu Caraiani, PhD lecturer, 50 years old
Interview done by Vlad Manoliu



‘The Group for Social Dialogue’ was founded in January 1990, as a group of critical reflection, organized mainly around a strong nucleus gathering together several intellectuals from Păltiniș (and around the philosopher Constantin Noica) such as Gabriel Liiceanu, Andrei Pleșu, Andrei Cornea, Radu Bercea alongside with dissidents of the communist regime such as Gabriel Andreescu, Doinea Cornea, Radu Filipescu, Stelian Tănase, Dan Petrescu. The main aim of the group was trying to lay the foundations of a civil society in Romania, society which was quasi-inexistent till 1989, during the socialist regime. Its members were aiming at critically discussing and analysing the fundamental concepts of a democratic society: the rightful state, freedom for the press and for television, the problem of the social and national minorities. The group was thus trying to recreate an underground network of the civil society (which successfully functioned in countries such as Hungary, Poland, The Czech Republic). The lack of civil society central nodes was a huge handicap. The Group for Social Dialogue considered the remedy of this handicap to be an essential, major responsibility.

Initially, the group was quite heterogeneous, intellectually speaking, having various drives. It changed on the long run. In the last years, new

members joined the afore-mentioned ones. This is the case of Marius Oprea, Alexandru Lăzărescu, Alexandru Tocilescu or Andrei Oișteanu. The main form of manifestation of the group was constituted by various and in the majority of the cases quite heated debates and round tables on complex themes and I would like to randomly mention some: in 1994, G.D.S¹ together with Anna Frank Foundation, organized ‘It May Be Your Turn Before You Know It’ or ‘The Freedom of the Press and the Protection of the Private Life’ or ‘The Right of Possession over Land, a Fundamental Human Right’; a round table which gathered important personalities of the Romanian exile (Matei Călinescu, Virgil Nemoianu, Ion Vianu), entitled ‘The Exile and the Kingdom’; an important debate on the education law and on the student manifestations. In 1995, another round table, ‘The Problems of the Creation of a New Civil Society in Central European Countries’ where they invited Jacek Vodz, the manager of the Political Sciences International School in Katowice.

Beginning with 1997, there was initiated a series of meetings dealing with the problem of revealing the files of Security as political militia, actually a crucial problem for the organization of the civil society in the attempt to create a mo-

¹ G.S.D.- The Group for Social Dialogue (translator’s note)

dern Romania.

The creation of an ideological movement in this direction was an important task assumed by The Group for Social Dialogue.

Then, there followed 'Bucharest and Its Spiritual Referential Points', a discussion on the project dealing with The Cathedral of the National Redemption and also discussions on the alternative manuals and the reforming of the secondary school education according to European standards. Of course, there are many things worthy of being mentioned and I may have accidentally left out certain themes. According to the necessities, there were organized conferences or round tables. I don't think that there was any programmatic regularity. When a crucial issue for the Romanian society came up, there was a meeting.

The influence of The Group for Social Dialogue was important. In the first years it actually generated a sort of fascination among the Romanian cultural milieu. If I were only to mention it, starting with Victor Ciorbea, Emil Constantinescu and ending with president Traian Băsescu, I might say that more or less all the important political actors have faced the G.D.S' 'panel of judges'. This turned G.D.S into a sort of entity with moral and intellectual posture. At the same time, it became a kind of court of justice for the civil society. The politicians wanted to be acknowledged, to be endorsed by those pertaining to the G.D.S. This has been Iliescu's major frustration, that of not having been legitimised by the Romanian intellectuals. Miron Mitrea represented one of the interesting experiments of the G.D.S, since they thought that they might turn him into a sort of indigenous Lech Walesa. It didn't work.

The Romanian society was so ill so that it was only normal to express great opposition against the civil society. I think that this is the reason why The Group for Social Dialogue has been lately given more or less the second place. Gabriel Liiceanu was saying last night, during a TV show, that he was going to try to relaunch

The Group for Social Dialogue, even if the members had changed and the group hadn't been spared some inner conflicts. I would only like to mention Gabriel Andreescu, who was excluded from The Group for Social Dialogue because of a press conference where he sustained the fact the main reason why the truth regarding the former Security political militia couldn't be exposed in time was Andrei Pleșu. Having no evidence to sustain this theory, he obviously placed himself in a difficult situation and was excluded.

Then, there is Dan Oprescu, whom was later exposed as Security stool-pigeon and even as fervent sneak of his good friend Stelian Tănase.

These things indubitably showed that, any of the groups founded in Romania after 1989 had its people with concealed stories, with various 'backgrounds', who were filled by great enthusiasm after '89 but who were also driven by personal interests. This sometimes made G.D.S look like a non-unitary group, torn apart by inner conflicts. It is difficult to say how they managed to gather their protagonists and guests. Their meetings were announced post-factum in '22' magazine. They used to publish summaries of the meetings, of the most important ones, on a page or two of this magazine. They were available to the public, but unfortunately only to a certain public, the one reading the magazine. Invitations were sent on an institutional level. But, if you weren't invited, you ran the risk of being denied the entrance. It happened to me once. I gave them a phone call because '22' magazine, distributed on a Tuesday morning, stated it that we were invited on the same Tuesday afternoon at a round table, debating the theme 'Romania and the Rightful State', chaired by Gabriel Liiceanu.

I was surprised by that public invitation and, instead of having a normal reaction and going according to the invitation, I called and asked if it was possible to take part in the round table. They asked me for my name, told me to hold on for a moment and afterwards informed me 'we are sorry, but you cannot join us unless you have

an invitation'. The unpleasant feeling that I experienced was that I had been sort of checked... I told this to Gabriel Andreescu after a month and he very elegantly apologised on behalf of The Group for Social Dialogue, inviting me there. I only took part in a meeting dealing with the access to the Security files. Of course, if you had gone there directly, nobody would have stopped you. I was the one who had made the phone call so it was a misunderstanding.

Another intensely debated subject within The Group for Social Dialogue was that of the dissident engineer Gheorghe Ursu. There was even a foundation named 'Gheorghe Ursu' which tried to find out the truth and to find the guilty ones in order to be brought to justice. Sorin Vieru is the president of the foundation.

Various important political subjects and cultural as well as institutional events were discussed. I thought that due to their way of being, by means of various articles published in '22' magazine and due to the direct influence that they had on various decisional factors in Romania, they would influence democracy for the better. At the round table which debated the issue of the rightful state, Costin Georgescu was invited, and that was during the miner riot in January 1999. He was the second boss of the Romanian Information System, preceding Virgil Măgureanu.

Alongside round tables, meetings and conferences, political debates, the main instrument of manifestation was '22' magazine, founded by The Group for Social Dialogue. It had a significant influence on a great part of the Romanian intellectual milieu, dealing with issues such as: the problem of communism, of the Holocaust, Mircea Eliade's case within the Romanian culture (this had been one of the most debated cases because of the apparition of several articles written by some Romanian commentators from abroad, like Norman Manea). The same magazine publicly acknowledged Horia Roman Patapievici's value. Thus, the magazine kept on maintaining its position within the public con-

science also due to several virulent articles against Ion Iliescu's neo-communist regime.

G.D.S's decline started around 1999-2000. First of all, it had been that very tense and difficult to manage the moment constituted by Gabriel Andreescu's statement concerning Andrei Pleșu, a founding father of the group. Afterwards, one or two years later, there was the tension between Gabriela Adameșteanu, managing editor of '22' magazine' and Gabriel Liiceanu, regarding Constantin Noica's case, another hugely debated situation. It is more than normal for a group of social reflection to be very difficult to organize, being a big utopia. But if you set such utopia as a target, you must act accordingly. The Group for Social Dialogue made its point on several occasions by means of various manifestations, being a co-organizer of many protests against the ruling group. You kept on hearing of them in the first years. But now... I questioned the students and practically only 2% knew something about the group. There is also that 'Green House' where you can listen to jazz or blues concerts, you can watch theatre plays... 'Humanitas' bookshop... could gradually turn into a special attraction for the youngsters with cultural preoccupations.

'22' magazine made it possible for an important debate among the Romanian culture within '97-'98- 'Between the Grotto Nationalism and the Nowhere-land Europeans'- to take place, debate which involved writers, men of letters like Gabriel Andreescu, Horia Roman Patapievici, Alexandru Paleologu, Octavian Paler. A dispute by means of which each part involved was trying to impose its own image about a fair and eventually veridical Romania.

Practically, each of us has his very own country. We cannot say that we have an absolute image. The Group for Social Dialogue, as well as '22' magazine' filled this huge emptiness. What will be their future? We shall see.

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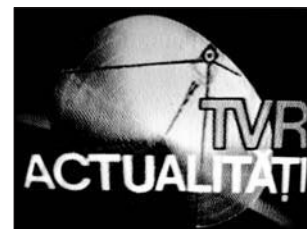
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Another type of television

Vlad Manoliu



We really enjoyed the moment when private televisions appeared. And that is because at the same time we could watch something different from the twin-brother-like news bulletins we were used to. A TV channel was saying one thing, while another was saying something different. The broadcasters were more or less clumsy at the beginning. But all in all, we could say that we had the possibility to watch pieces of news which weren't always respectful with those holding the power, thus sharing with us things which had been unconceivable until 1990. We were being told all sorts of things about cinema stars, about the opening of various shops in Paris or London or about gossips dealing with Romanian politicians. Even if, at the beginning, this type of news was pretty feeble (because Iliescu's adulation took a bit longer), yet, they gave us the possibility of gradually getting used to having our own opinions about the leaders of our country. If right after 1990 Iliescu was regarded as a necessary evil, by the end of the decade, the informed people would laugh at him, would signal and imitate him...

The multitude of news represented one of the first contacts with the freethinking. Those televisions proved helpful by presenting us the same man (or the same events) from various angles or points of view. In order to be able to do it, they started making use of the money provided by advertisements. When the first commercials had been broadcast, my wife and I would watch TV

while enjoying the show. Our daughter from Germany was laughing at us, saying: 'How can you be happy when somebody stops the movie three or four times to tell you nonsense?' We used to minutely watch them, sometimes paying attention to very bad commercials (because they used to be very bad). We would just sit there, not so much seeing the display of some more or less important products, but simply enjoying the freedom of having commercials, in other words, the independence that those commercials granted to the respective televisions. They didn't depend on the government finance anymore. They had their economic independence, hence the independence of saying something different from what those holding power really wanted them to. We were able to watch on our televisions, what, before 1990 we had been able to watch only when travelling abroad.

Of course that in the mean time we also learned how to get angry and, by the end of the decade, we used to change the channel while commercials were broadcast, but we used to watch them at the beginning. I think that this is another characteristic of the '90s. Bit by bit we got used to the freedom of the televisions, freedom which had also much to do with the money provided by commercials.

Translated by Raluca Vîjia



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Television after 1990. The nation's chemistry

**Șerban Georgescu, film editor,
35 years old
Interview done by Gabriela Cristea**



When talking about television, everybody refers only to what is made manifest on the screen. They have no idea that a television also means the technical part: the cable boys, the people who do the filming, the montage and who have a very important role in creating the final product. I was part of these people. I used to do the montage and, in my first years in a television, I only had to do with the technical part. Practically, I can tell the subjective story of the man who helped others grow and become famous.

I really wanted to do this job. And when saying 'television', I really had a broad sense in my mind. Television means television. I didn't know the difference between montage and filming. It doesn't matter why you are there. What is really important is to be there. I had the chance... kind of accidentally, to be part of Channel 31, which, back then, was a district television around Ian-cului area. They had two hours of sports, while broadcasting CNN in the rest of the time. Back then, due to Sârbu¹'s vision, a bunch of people gathered around and happily worked for more or less three years. I am not very good with dates, but I think it was around '93, when we first started to broadcast. And, if I am not wrong,

I think that that was the first private TV channel. I cannot tell if SOTI was private. I have no idea! It was one of TVR²'s attempts to create its own 'private' TV channel... they used to do the filming there, in the television, with borrowed equipment.

That's what I know, that Sârbu and his Channel 31 were the first free-lancers. We were a bunch of people doing everything: from fixing the carpet till broadcasting live. Practically, everything. We did everything, up to broadcasting and filming and the great advantage that we had as compared to TVR was that the only journalist seedbed was there and they were already jaded. This is what happens to all of us sometimes in our job. Well, here, in our television, we had that amazing chemistry... because we were all kids, resembling that American movie... hence we only broadcast for several blocks around, and that was a television! We had the chance to learn things: from simply doing the montage you could turn into editor, because that man was simply needed and they had no money to hire somebody else. And if you managed to skilfully move the buttons, 'well, mate, tomorrow you are an editor or whatever else you want!'

I was 21, had been part of that television for

¹ Owner of a private TV channel.

² The Free Romanian Television, the national TV channel.

several years and the idea of competition was driving me crazy. Others appeared: Antena 1, Tele 7 and they used to broadcast movies! We didn't. A movie was a TV symbol. If you broadcast movies, you are successful. PRO TV was only broadcasting sports. These guys broadcast movies, so we are doomed. They beat us. There were several morning shows: 'Good morning, Bucharest!' I can't really remember, I forgot them. All the more as there was that carousel where you entered on one side, being something and got out on the other side, being something else. You were completely lost. I know that we had around 10-11 people in the editorial staff, together with a secretary. A certain Ciurăscu was editorial office secretary. Do you remember him? During the Shot Guy¹'s time, he used to be the presidential spokesperson. And he used to broadcast... I don't know where from: Tudor Ciurăscu. I cannot tell how he ended up there. From TVR... Maybe they had vacant places... The rest of us were people on the television car, broadcasting and doing the montage. We did everything, so that it was a sort of... 'You go!', 'No, because I did it last time...' all the time.

I remember that, like any other job with its own professional diseases, ours had them too: I used to take very little sleep and I would very often wake up in the middle of the night, thinking that I forgot to do I don't know what thing while being on air. My mother was very scared... look how her son ended up! I used to watch TV and fall asleep. If hearing commercials, I was up on my feet, looking for the central control desk to switch. Because you were supposed to broadcast I don't know what... Because of being so tired, you were just losing track.

Channel 31 lived till PRO TV appeared. It was a sort of PRO TV embryo. Meanwhile, while the old Channel 31 still existed, Antena 1 and Tele 7 ABC appeared and we were kind of left behind... They all entered the market very determined and some of our people started migrat-

ing to other televisions. It was a sort of special migration in both directions. The moment a TV channel was more or less on top, everybody was heading towards there. The only ones who were left behind at Channel 31 were the cullies, how shall we call them, the delicate persons. And Sârbu, in a very demagogical manner, promised that we were going to see what was to happen! He used to be a normal guy at the time. We used to be together every New Year's Eve, Christmastide or Eastertide. It was that kind thing of not having any obligation and we were happy to stick around! In the end, it proved a successful solution.

We represented a sort of hybrid of PRO TV. It was a very cheap and insignificant re-branding... immediately afterwards there had followed that huge boom when PRO TV aggressively entered the market.

For me, that was an incredible world. I was working with many people whom, up to that moment, I had only seen on screen. Wow! Afterwards, I had my share of big disappointment when realizing that between actor and real human being there was a huge difference. Being an actors is a role, a thing on the screen and that's it... I was really disappointed! Actually, this is one of the things that a television does: tricking you.

Then, a lot of Americans arrived, to teach us... There is a difference between having a scholarship abroad and learning in your own country. I think you learn better here. This is just a subjective opinion, but in our case, in television, those guys were pushing us forward and we were learning because we were interested in preserving our jobs. The televisions also sent people abroad and the scholarship they got didn't change anything of what they had to do when coming back. Here, at home, everybody was more motivated to show his best shot to the boss, to the American. Here, at home, you are somebody. Abroad, you are just one of the many with a scholarship.

¹ Hint towards Ceaușescu, who was shot in 1989.

It is a common practice for people to move from one television to another. I didn't do it. I pursued my job and, to brag a little, I ended up being very good at montage. And they kept me there, while at the same time taking very good care of me, because I was good at what I was doing and I had a good relationship with my colleagues. I used to do the montage for commercials, for movies. I didn't fall for the stereotype of doing the montage for news and thus getting jaded. I had this luck, to be very good at it and hence respected.

In 1996, the PSD¹ regime was overthrown. I remember that PRO TV had a campaign with 'You are voting for the change!'. And many people say that PSD or FSN was overthrown because of that campaign. And it really meant something... I was already part of the Promo department at the time and we found it very funny that we were playing with the nation's chemistry. We shall add a drop of it and wait and see what's going to come out of it! Things had already been decided way above us, and yet, I remember that at the time there were some of Cristoiu's editorials which stated it that it was the PRO TV team- he had no idea that it was the Promo department- which had an impact on the Romanian voting public. It was about that commercial with a fist, coming out of a sheet of paper and saying: 'You are voting for the change!'

The funny thing was that the guys who were good at montage and editing were hunted by the political parties, in order to help them with their campaigns. I was doing the FSN campaign during that time. We were more or less four guys, a kind of double agents. We didn't know each other very well. After doing the montage in televisions during the day, we used to film at the parties' residences during the night, hidden, protected. I was in charge of Ion Iliescu's campaign and I benefited from the strictest SPP² protection. It was funny, but when entering there,

dressed up like I also do it now: orange trousers or cut shorts, the agents were asking 'Who's the guy?' never mind, Iliescu used to say, he knows to do stuff... It was very funny!... And then, I used to watch the product on screen!

That thing with the double agent seemed very funny to us. Actually, it was the Balkan gypsy show. They knew where we were really working and what we were really doing. And I found it unbelievable that I knew what they were going to say in a week and they didn't care. For them, it didn't matter that afterwards I was going back to the television to do something else which wasn't in favour of their party. But they didn't care...

Anyway, when we started to know each other- because the television world is small... it was practically a secret who we did the montage for. Now, there is no problem. We used to gather around and say: 'Are you crusading for...?', 'No, pal!', 'Yeah, mate, but you are the only one doing this type of montage...' As a matter of fact, I knew the way that or the other would do the montage... well, the best guys... And we used to start all this row over some beers: 'No, mate, are you crazy, how should I do the montage for I don't know what party!? I didn't do the montage for anyone...' Or even better, we also did this trick, having this lie at hand: 'Bloody bastards, they didn't take me to film their campaign!'

I think that politics influenced television very much. But I cannot say much about it because I am not a political analyst. If I watch TV, I am not influenced by what I see, but those at the countryside are. They were watching TVR. And they were voting accordingly.

There hadn't been any staff tensions between PRO TV and TVR. One of the best men in what regards the montage area, Costică Marciuc, had already seen one of my movies when meeting me. And he came to PRO TV, to some of his for-

1 The Social Democratic Party.

2 The Guard and Protection Service.

mer television colleagues. They used to gather around for food and drinks, stuff like that... I told you that migration within televisions was a fashion back then. And they were talking where it better suited them. So... And my boss took me with him for a beer. And that's when I met him. He asked me for how long I had been doing it. I said: three. He cursed me, hang you, I don't buy it! It was actually a compliment. He had twenty years of experience, of doing montage. That was my first medal. He was thrilled to see that a kid was such a quick learner. And this happened because right after the revolution, you had to do something. I was born more or less in the outskirts. I think that the school was there. The district school! If you did nothing, you were swamped. That's what happened here as well. When I entered the television, after two weeks, those guys were saying that I was as asshole as when I first arrived. After another ten days they all said that I pulled their leg before, that I had played the maiden part in order not to do that thing or the other. When that guy called me an asshole, I startled! I was afraid of not losing what I had always dreamt of.

Ever since I was a child, I have loved commenting the movies, the image. Without knowing anything of film or montage theory. I would have insisted more on this scene, that shot was I don't know how... that's what I used to say, driving my friends crazy. Or I would take movies and watch them all over again till learning them by heart. From text till the way a certain guy moved a camera... And I fell for it. I was a kid, but I met lots of cool people, elder than me, who accepted to let me into their world. That's how I learnt.

I left PRO TV. I wanted to see the world. Actually, this is how everything began. In 1997, they opened a television broadcast station in Sinaia, PRO TV Sinaia. I was working a lot. I think that in three years I worked as much as I would have worked in five. How many nights I stood up, even if already stressed... I lost my hair, I didn't know what to do. I told Sârbu, I want there, I want to go to Sinaia. I am taking

some kids, I am teaching them how to do the montage, how to film, I hang around a while... But, no, take care because you are going to singe your feathers!

And this is when I had a revelation. I realized that that was the age when one had to see the world and that I had enough, I was going to quit my job. I'll leave for a year, I'll see what it is there to see and, when coming back, I will still remember my job. Now is the right time. I won't do it at 40-50... And I went to buy myself equipment. I was dreaming of the Frozen North, I had always loved that. And, while buying the equipment, I had the second revelation... I shall follow these things, these lights crossing my mind. I say: why should I leave now and break my back working out there? Why shouldn't I start making documentaries on their money? And I went to Sârbu and I told him, I need you to let me go for two months because I can't take it anymore! And he did because I was like his child. He helped me and I went to Alaska, together with a Romanian expedition which wanted to conquer McKinley and stuff like that...

I used a poor camera and I did the filming under terrible conditions. I think that for what it had been, it came out pretty OK. They broadcast the movie on PRO TV and the people enjoyed it. They used to do Romanian expeditions around the '70s, but afterwards, in the '80s and '90s, nothing. This domain had been forgotten for fifteen years. Finally, a Romanian was filming other Romanians abroad... It was something different, not only news, wars and politics.

Oops, I saw that that was the trick! And I went next year as well, because those were the conditions. Afterwards, my trips started to bother many people. Hoy, this may be good, but he can afford too many things in this institution! And that's how I left PRO TV.

Then, Bose, as a managing director at Prima, called me and summoned me there. Of course that I went to improve their promo. Well, well... After four or five months, I left that place as well. Even if I did a good job, what I wanted to

do wasn't exactly what Prima had planned, being still an entertainment television. It was '98. I was 25 and I was making big money. And I said to myself, guys, I am only taking your money! I was just guiding two men, showing them what and how to do and that was it, because they had the same shows and they had nothing else to advertise. And I just wandered around for three months, listening to music. I had no idea what to do... I was completely jaded.

And then I said to myself, hey mate, it's time to make some money for yourself! And I set up a company, which went on very well. It had its ups and downs. Afterwards, I turned myself into a mere televiewer. I used to suffer when seeing the bad quality of certain stuff and be excited by the good quality of other. Ah! I am not there! I didn't do this... And, obviously, with my company and in order to make money, I entered this publicity, advertisement area. I had a good time making commercials. For around three years. And then, I got bored again. I think that there are very many clever guys who are wasting their time on trying to make somebody buy something. And I came back to my old love: the documentary, and I came back to television, but this time as somebody selling his product.

I was really successful with 'The Everest!' I was both the cameraman and the director. In TVR I entered the week's 'best of' that day. A documentary doesn't attract a general wide public. But I know that those in Arbomedia, those who do the advertising and watch the rating, placed this film on the third place. For me, the movie had been a great thing. It is only now that it comes out on DVD. After two years of drawling. Juridical drawling. I swore myself I was never going to return to a television. But it is this thing of bovine sentimentalism: when I see a nasty stuff on TV, I get mad. Who could have done it? It doesn't matter the acronym of the television, but I would really be happy for somebody to change that stuff. I am personally offended by the bad quality of that image.

When I see something cool, I am envious. I

remember the joy I used to feel when coming home to see one a good promo, mine or of one of my colleagues', or a nice campaign... it was flattering. It's a mirage! I have just returned to Realitatea TV, because I really liked the idea of starting all over again with a nice team, of learning new stuff. I have already experienced nice things! But it won't last... because I don't want the documentary thing to slip off my fingers.

Now, I came back to television because I have missed it. I have had my own production company for several years, which moves on pretty well and I left television aside. All the more that I don't find time to do documentaries anymore, because last year I had to deal with taxes, rates and did nothing else. But now, Bose called me to come and change the promo for Realitatea TV and I landed here for a while. If the majority of the people leave television in order to have their brain washed, I came back for the same reason.

I have several of the first commercials which appeared on TV on tape. Because I was working for Channel 31, the first private TV channel. Only TVR and Channel 31 had equipment for advertising. In TVR, the guys used to do underground work, filming commercials. Yes, that was a beautiful world! In time, the agencies started looking for private entrepreneurs. That is, for us. This is how I ended up doing montage for commercials. I did the montage, the screen versions. I think I filmed and did the montage for 90% of all commercials on all TV channels. Hence the waking up when hearing a commercial. I thought I was at the mounting table and I forgot to put something in! Yes, I had a lot to do with the evolution of the commercial in Romania.

I used to be the witness of technical changes for a long time. But, this, again, is the part of television people speak very rarely about, even if it is so important. For example, even in cinematography, special effects, music and filming effects have changed the movie very much. I remember the way we worked and what mounting

table we used and the trouble we had to go through. How we managed to inscribe over a commercial: 'Colgate makes your teeth turn white', for example. We used to print the slogan on a paper, stick it on a wall, while filming with a camera. And if the guy printed something on a poor quality paper, I can't even imagine the result. You know, there were some unimaginable, unbelievable things going on back then. You had to make I don't know how many copies of that tape, till you got it right. If a guy from a foreign television had seen something and had come to ask you to do that stuff, you couldn't do it... The success of a certain group of people doing montage resided precisely in this. We used the microscope for nail and the other way round, we drained a machine of all its technical capacity, making it doing things which weren't even mentioned in the technical book... It was something crazy because you had to invent everything since we had no equipment.

I don't know if today one can do this any longer. I came back to television two or three months ago. I know it sounds pathetic, but at the beginning of 1990, one could say that certain

families were created... It was that amount of time that one was wasting within a television. I must have spent around five New Year's Eves and Christmastides with my colleagues. We used to share and smell everything together. After 48 hours of incessantly doing the montage, certain bonds were created. I think this is very important for a team! It is like a sort of magic which keeps the group together, I don't know what it is, but it is effective...

The girl I am visiting right now to borrow a car from used to be my colleague. We cursed each other, threw each other out, yelled at each other: give me lights or I'll set the house on fire! This is a nice side of the problem. Only the building yard crews are like that, where people interact perfectly. Or maybe, how shall I know, the pioneer spirit of the '90s, like in the Wild West, kept us so close... we were all in the same boat. Inventing a world!

Translated by Raluca Vîjăac





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Bread and journalism

Filip Florian



In that world which was about to blow off (a world with newly formed political parties, with huge political passions, with the ferociously defended mysteries regarding Ceaușescu's execution, with second rank communists and with concealed security people skilfully and at the same time brutally gaining control over the power, with agonizing street manifestations, with democratic naiveties and with blunt manipulations exercised over a lost and scared nation) minding your literary business was impossible. Even preposterous.

The team from 'Cuvântul', to which I also pertained, wasn't randomly formed in a day, but according to a recipe which took its own time in order to generate the magic potion. As main alchemist, Radu G. Țeposu really knew how to select the people who were to be part of the team, by carefully dosing the magic substances, looking for traits which transcended skilful writing, self-denial, irony, the spirit of comradeship or loyalty or the fervent involvement in a world of new beginnings. All the young writers, when undertaking crazy journalism (similar to marijuana, in what concerns the sense of voluptuousness and addiction), lived unique experiences within 'Cuvântul': confraternity, the charm of endless discussions and of nights spent together, the obsession of the perfect text, the laughter, the sadness, the empty pockets, the vanity of the gold-

smiths.

A former colleague (and friend), a political talk show moderator, recently made a confession during a TV show, regarding the times of yore, saying that, while getting close to the editorial office of 'Cuvântul' every morning, he used to feel his heart beating faster and his hands shaking with joy. And that is how we all felt. And in the '90s, when news was present everywhere, when there were so many things revealed (like a coffin, locked for half a century), reports, commentaries, investigations, they all were the spice of the world. In the hundreds of pages that I wrote during the two and a half years spent there, I managed to comprise the long and filthy history of the dissidents isolated in psychiatric clinics, the film of the last twenty four hours of the life of the Ceaușescu family (with the episodic apparition of a fox, crossing the street while Ceaușescu was trying to run away), Ion Iliescu's life within the Technical Publishing House (with the Russian tea habit, the mania of fixing the broken bolt handles and blinds all by himself, his custom of playing revolutionary songs on the guitar and of giving cookies to his subordinates during festive days), the mystery covering the shooting of two security officers in Sibiu in December 1989 (precisely the chief of the archives and the chief of the classified correspondence), the religious fervour mini-novel, entitled the

New Jerusalem (with all its features resembling a South-American novel), etc.

In my mind, the miraculous time at 'Cuvântul' deserves the title (a bit soapy and worn) 'the most beautiful years'. And since we were speaking about Radu Țeposu's alchemist abilities (God rest his soul!) then you should find out that the magical substances that kept us together had been the following: Ioan Buduca, George Țira, Ioan Groșan, Radu Călin Cristea, Răzvan Petrescu, Marius Oprea, George Arun, Tudorel Urian, Petre Barbu, Carol Sebestyen, Mircea Țicudean, Dorina Băeșu, Lucian Ștefănescu, Dan Bănică, Mihai Cojocă and Constantin Rudnițchi. Afterwards, in the autumn of 1992 – when the seeds of market economy started to grow and market economy meant money and as the love for money is the root of all evil – the magic at 'Cuvântul' started to vanish and we all began to squander, reorienting especially towards the foreign radio stations which started subsidiaries in Bucharest and which were indeed fascinating.

The mirage exercised by 'Europa Liberă'¹ was huge. The symbol, the myth of the redeeming Occident and the memory of that wince during childhood generated by the jammed voices, broadcast on short waves, really made the difference. Liviu Tofan's admirable character and Neculai Constantin Munteanu's charm made life better in an editorial office where we were learning other type of journalism on the fly and where- I can say it now, since it's been so much time- people were rather edgy, a bit infatuated,

the wallets were loaded, the free gesture and the great friendship were kind of living their last days or turning into theatrical gestures. I myself, as editor of the office set up by 'Europa Liberă' in Bucharest, turned not only into a journalist but also into a very infatuated person. As époque, things were rather tragic-comical: Iliescu's regime was functioning full-speed, and the dignitaries and the government officials were still looking at us through the smoky lenses of the cold war.

Therefore, while trying to get an interview from the controversial commander of the 'Two and a quarter' secret service (U.M. 0215), I was struck by the astonishing reply provided by a colonel, the head of the press department for the Internal Affairs. With a very slick smile, the fellow (I guess Vasilescu was his name), said: 'get out of here, do you think we are that stupid!? As if we didn't know that 'Europa Liberă' does espionage for the Americans, for the CIA, it is no pint in you pretending to be journalists...'

Later, in 1995, I ended up at Deutsche Welle. Loads of work, monotony, honour. The romantic days were already gone for me. I was like a football player passing from one club to another, only interested in the financial aspects of the contracts. I used to yearn for the years spent within my dear team, 'Cuvântul', where I would have gladly given up my life on the field without needing a dime.

Translated by Raluca Vîjăiac



¹ 'Free Europe' radio station.



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Football '90

Viorel Moțoc, journalist, 35 years old
Interview done by Petre Popovăț



In order to talk about what the Romanian football meant during the '90s, we must take into account what it had meant before this time. Anyway, the year 1990 found the Romanian football in a very good and paradoxical situation: worldwide, the Romanian football had remarkable results. For the first time in twenty years, the national football team had managed to qualify for a final stage of a competition, while in what concerned the Romanian football clubs, the results within the European Cups were remarkable. Steaua was disputing the second Champions League final, in 1989. That, after having won the Champions League in 1986 at Seville, playing against F.C. Barcelona. In 1990, also at club level, Dinamo managed to qualify for the final stage of Euro League. Hence, the results on an international level were good, heading towards very good.

The national championship milieu was dominated by two hegemonic clubs- Steaua and Dinamo, one team belonging to the army and the other belonging to the Security Forces. Teams which gathered the best football players in the country and which thus had obtained very good results. In the past, the players used to earn more than the average Romanian wage, but nobody can say that they received the amounts offered to the professional players in the really important championships abroad. For example, for having won the Champions League, the players

from Steaua football club received an ARO car each and some bonuses of several tens of thousands of lei. After 1990, the income started to be more substantial, but by no means can one say that they reached the level of those offered by the Occidental clubs.

What I really wanted to say is that the situation present in 1990 affected the results obtained by the Romanian football during the entire decade. On an international level, the national team got the best results of its entire history (three qualifications in world championships, two qualifications in European championships) while the national championship kept on being dominated by corruption, padded results, a situation tracing its roots in that prior to 1990. Corruption used to exist before. A somehow similar phenomenon to that present among the entire Romanian society took place. Once the fear of the repressive security forces vanished, the entire environment atomised and each of us tried to cope with the massive loss of authority that the security forces and the state had registered. The privatisation of the clubs had been a pervert phenomenon, as well as that involving the state companies. For example, the main clubs, Steaua and Dinamo, step by step and by means of certain tricks (not necessarily financial, rather administrative) managed to be passed on from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of National Defence to the

hands of certain managers.

Favoured by a loss of authority, an interesting phenomenon, called 'the cooperative' appeared within the national championship. Before '89, the small clubs used to depend on the two big ones, being more or less their affiliates. Everybody knew that certain small clubs in the countryside were actually playing for Steaua and others for Dinamo. Meaning that, the moment they met the direct adversary of the representative, they used to be tough, while at the same time giving up their points in favour of the 'senior', of the 'mother-club'.

Once these major clubs started losing their authority, the small clubs regained their independence, thus discovering that they possessed certain power. Under these conditions, 'the cooperative' was the one deciding who was the champion and who was demoted. The following teams were part of 'the cooperative': Gloria Bistrița and its famous Jean Pădureanu ('Papa Jean'), FCM Bacău, Ceahlăul Piatra-Neamț, FC Argeș, etc. Other smaller teams used to join them as well. It was precisely the way it used to be during the championships in the past: one year pulling the strings for Steaua, the next, for Dinamo. They were dividing the points between them based on a mutual agreement: you win on your ground and I win on mine. If we were to compare this situation to the overall society, the presidents of the cooperative used to be a sort of local barons. The moment the centre turned weaker, the clubs gained certain independence, thus being able to manage their own business and to follow their interests. A certain part of the referees was also co-opted in this. One cannot make a general statement, but the situation with the affiliate referees had been known for a long time and if you wanted to avoid problems during a match, you were supposed to summon X or Y referee.

As a matter of fact, the Romanian football is no longer profitable. In order to attain this goal, a football industry is also needed, so as to gain

money from selling the broadcasting rights, from attracting sponsors, publicity contracts, tickets, subscriptions, an entire adjacent industry (which



presupposes selling T-shirts, flags, banners with the symbols of the club) and transfers, money obtained from the participation on various European competitions. In our case, all these are inexistent or very little present.

If analysing the '90s, the biggest money had been made from transferring players abroad. That was a phenomenon similar to third world countries. We exported raw material and all the money were spent on consumption and not on development. The major clubs (Steaua and Dinamo), those having the best players in the '90s, quickly sold them in the first years, thus getting the money. Both presidents, the one from Dinamo as

well as the one from Steaua, had been involved in legal problems. Vasile Ianul from Dinamo was in custody, while Cornel Oțelea from Steaua was on remand. At the moment, millions and millions of dollars had been obtained, but nobody ever knew what happened with the money. There was another case, involving Steaua, the one concerning the transfer of Ilie Dumitrescu to a club in England. The account books of the club in England were stating a sum, whereas in Romania, the situation was different. The difference resided in something more than a million dollars. What had been done with that money, nobody knows! The thing is that the presidents of the respective clubs, instead of investing money in modernising the clubs, meaning in building centres for children and junior players, in creating training centres, they squandered the money, so that nothing could be done with it and, the more the time passed the less we had to export and there was no other source of money left.

Given the fact that the clubs receiving the players were from the Occident, the transfers had to obey their laws. A club pays another club for transferring a player, then the player receives an annual fare and the negotiator, or the procurator receives his negotiable commission. The most famous procurators were the Becali brothers, Ion (Giovanni) and Victor. There are others as well, but not that important. Florin Iacob from Timișoara and Cămătaru in Craiova, Ilie Dumitrescu who made an attempt after quitting sports... But the main players in the Romanian football environment are under the supervision of the Becali brothers.

An interesting phenomenon was that of the apparition, actually that of the reinvention of the football supporters. They adopted an attitude different to that before 1989. In a certain way, they sort of turned professional, taking from the oc-

cidental models. Good and bad things together. The good things resided in building that supporters' corps (juridical persons). But they also borrowed some extremist habits. It is interesting to see how they adopted all this behaviour. The visual animation, the banners, the sound and light shows, an equipment called style. If you remember, the slogans that could be heard during the Revolution were actually borrowed from the stadiums. 'Ole, ole, ole, Ceaușescu is gone, mates!' is a slogan coming from the stadiums. Many of the songs sang during that time were actually rooted in the sports. Habit which was also perpetuated in the years to come.¹ During a world championship, after defeating England, people were shouting right in Universității Square, the sacred place of the Revolution and of the Ragamuffin movement: 'We the ragamuffins pissed on the hooligans!'

In the '90s, the national Romanian football team managed to obtain the best results of all its history. In 1994, Romania was present in the United States, in the quarters of the World Cup and it scored the fifth rank in the final classification of the championship. A real success for the Romanian football! The main players of the so-called 'golden generation' played for prestigious football club: For Ajax and Einhoven in Holland, for Real Madrid and Barcelona in Spain, for Chelsea in UK. Within the German championship, Lupescu and Dorinel Munteanu had played for years at the highest level in Bundesliga. A bit later, Hagi and Gică Popescu had really made it at Galatasaray in Turkey and, together with their team, they reached important stages in the European Cup. Mircea Lucescu managed to build a successful international career as a coach, winning a European cup.

We must think that everything which hap-

¹ Indeed, on 13th June 1990 there was a political demonstration, targeted at setting Marian Munteanu, the soul of Universității Square, free. During the manifestation, there had been an announcement concerning the resignation signed by Peter Mladenov, the former Bulgarian communist leader. Someone wrote on a big piece of carton: 'Mladenov: 1; Iliescu :0' As if on a finger-post. People immediately started shouting: 'The tying, the tying!' (Petre Popovăț)

pened in football after 1990 cannot be severed from the phenomena taking place within the Romanian society. The Romanian football carried on a set of flaws pertaining to the previous system and, one way or another, managed to perpetuate them. At the same time, the sense of renewal and change also appeared but it was always affected by corruption and by the intervention of several people belonging to a system which used to function in the past.

A certain intervention of the political side was also felt, meaning that sooner or later, politicians discovered that it was quite fashionable to be connected to the football phenomenon and that, by getting closer to this world, they would

gain popularity. They used to go to certain matches, sitting in the official stand. There were also other politicians helping certain clubs connected to those pertaining to their departments like Steaua, Dinamo and Rapid. On Rapid stadium there is a grounds called 'Bănescu Grounds', since it had been built during Bănescu's mandate, while he was Minister of the Transportation and another 'Văcăroiu Grounds', built while he was a prime-minister, both of them being Rapid's fans. Today, George Copos, the president of the club is a Deputy Prime-minister.

Translated by Raluca Vîjîiac





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Politics

Zoe Petre



When, at the beginning of the summer in 1992, the University Solidarity appointed Emil Constantinescu recently elected Rector of Bucharest University- as candidate of CDR¹ for the presidential elections, a group of colleagues and I decided to support him and his campaign the best way we could. We were sure then, thing confirmed today by facts, that Emil Constantinescu, of all the candidates that the opposition had available at the moment, wasn't only the most likely to win over Ion Iliescu, but also a good president for the democratic Romania that we desired. That he was going to have the same priorities that we also thought important and fair, that he will not hesitate when faced with essential matters, that he will do his job no matter the risks, that he will break the terrible chain of national and international complicities which had compromised the huge chance Romania had gained once with the December 1989 Revolution.

Both the 1992 campaign and that in 1996 had, in their own way, been adventures. I will further on describe how in 1992 a handful of intellectuals without previous experience but with the utmost determination to learn fast, managed- guided by the candidate himself- to rise the score

from 2% at the beginning of the campaign, to the challenger situation of the second round, facing the experienced Ion Iliescu and up to the final result of 38%. That is more than 4,5 million votes, approximately two million more than the very political formation.

Perhaps I will speak some other time about how the 1996 campaign was perceived from the place were I was, how I had the feeling that the more CDR's chances were growing, the more aggressive the main opponent was becoming (in 1992, during any meeting with Ion Iliescu we used to be surrounded by bodyguards with machine guns and pistols kept at sight, but in 1996 both these guys and individuals like Dan Iosif had their knives in our necks), how we had to fight the poles, the 'poisoned phone calls', TVR, Antena 1 (where, during the first debate, they filmed our candidate's socks for half an hour).

Anyway, towards the end of the campaign, there was a sort of sense of victory in the air, to which we deliberately turned the blind eye in order not to be disappointed. At the end of the last debate hosted by TVR, before the second round, even the most sceptical of all of us, Emil Constantinescu himself, had a moment of certainty and he gave me the huge pleasure of look-

¹ The Romanian Democratic Convention.

ing for me through the shadowy studio, in order to rejoice together.

On 17th November, at 9 in the evening, I was at the campaign office, typing on the computer-driven by a confusing combination of conscientiousness and superstition – the outline of the speech the candidate was supposed to have delivered if defeated. I was more or less on the first half when Dorin Marian entered the door with a livid expression on his face, leant on the wall and said: ‘We won’. Automatically, I saved the ‘NO’ speech and came back to the ‘YES’ draft. I very well knew that it was pointless, that nobody would read it, that the winner Emil Constantinescu was to speak from his heart and not from some papers (which actually happened), but I was determined to stick to the ferocious discipline of the campaign which demanded never to allow your candidate to be off guard.

Afterwards, our presence as President Constantinescu’s councillors seemed so natural to all of us, the majority from the close stuff, so that by the end of November 1996 we had no idea that somebody might have asked himself why the team included us and not others. Now, that I think of it, it is possible, for the parties present within CDR to have been bemused by the organization of the presidential team without their direct participation. I was quickly provided with the proof that, first of all, a woman’s presence in a position of authority wasn’t easily accepted. I remember- I think I mentioned it before- how General Vasile Ionel quickly turned pale when he wrongly assumed that I could have been his successor for the job of national security councillor: he was anyway disappointed by the fact that a university person, outside the system had become the president of Romania, but a lady in his position was out of question! He was at least spared from this situation.

In spite of the general victory feeling, times were tough, Emil Constantinescu was not any president, but the first democratic president of Romania, faced with an institutional system which had been hostile to him a minute before

and he needed to be surrounded not only by abstract expertise, but also by people he could trust. During the four years while I was a councillor, it was more than once that I had the feeling that I was stepping on a thin layer of ice behind the president, a layer full of wild beasts swarming underneath. You need friends and not clerks for this type of crossing. This is how, for four years I had the privilege to be associated to a state politics which makes me proud, as historian, dignity and as human being.

Not only once after year 2000 had I been vehemently contradicted when making this statement. This is why I keep on repeating it on every occasion, because, beyond any other consideration, Emil Constantinescu’s staff was the one which managed to move the East NATO and European Union borders from Tisa to Prut, thus generating a new development for the history of Romania. In a nutshell: Romania came to a standstill between 1990-1996 because its governing politics had been naturally and deliberately placed – both on an economic, politic and ideological level – closer to the former Soviet republics than to ‘the Vişegrad countries’. The CDR government and president Constantinescu personally managed to defeat the inner and external forces which had prefigured a second Ialta, thus planning to place Romania within the new geography of the unite and democratic Europe. If somebody believes that this irreversible turning point could have been achieved without the will, courage and determination of a man who, without any hesitation, had risked his political career, his success, popularity and even the affection of those who had voted him and the minimal trust of those who hadn’t, in order to place the citizens of his country in the area of the long-lasting progress, that someone is terribly wrong. I used to be a committed witness of that constant and determined battle and I see it as the utmost privilege of the position I had been assigned to.

In all ex-communist countries, the beginning of the ‘90s had been, with local variations, a rad-

ical turning point in all respects and that of building a new political class was by no means an exception. Everywhere, the collapse of the communist regimes had immediately brought some persons in the limelight - sometimes personalities who didn't have the minimal political experience, either in the traditional sense of the already-established democracies, where it takes years for a political person to be formed, where he hierarchically passes from the stage of parliamentary expert or communal councillor to that of MP or minister and where the political elite needs time to gradually sediment (either for the common well of the respective government or not), or in the sense of the hierarchies which, during the communist regime, built the party and the state nomenclature on their own criteria, from the 'clean file' to the skilled inner negotiations and flunkeyism.

In Romania, this phenomenon of renewal of the political class had its particularities and failures, starting from shyly and sporadically in the years preceding the Revolution, and up to 1996 when it managed to get a significant dimension. Yet, as Romania - different from Poland or Czechoslovakia - had no real dissident movement, but only a few isolated protesting figures, the heterogeneous, uneven and motley character of the newcomers was really glaring: from venerable survivors of the communist jails to young ambitious and with very little scruples wolves, from one or two authentic dissidents to patched university people. Each of us faced this high level projection the best way he could. Some of us hold their temper, others lost it in an instance. Different logics of the various parties they represented brought variations to this panoptic manifestation. Faced with a party like PDSR¹ (then, PSD now), built on the old recipes of influence and on a well-worn routine, to which a new solidarity generated by the post-December complicity was added, with a common

culture which ranged from the recognition of the inner hierarchies to the Ceaușescu-like tenacious idealization of the national history, the new political body promoted due to the 1996 vote, started the race with a huge handicap.

By comparison, in Cotroceni we had the advantage of the fact that the presidential team was already used to the situation and decided to stick together. *A blessing in disguise*, a well concealed blessing had also been constituted by the fact that the people around Ion Iliescu had tried to cause us problems by using the old tactics of 'the burnt land': while, publicly, an entire ritual of *passation des pouvoirs* was elegantly displayed, the chief of the Presidential Administration (the same general in the previous passage) was causing the resignation of the majority of the clerks. In the afternoon when the new president was to come to Cotroceni, the palace was almost deserted, with two or three 'classical' secretaries, some of those meant to bring coffee to the boss and who were crying in the scattered offices. The photocopier was on, but for paper clips I had to ask somebody to rush to the campaign office (I had to quickly send the speech the president had offered during the ceremony of investiture to the newspapers and to the embassies)

At least the furniture was there, not like in the government office where, on 11th December, during the installation, Ciorbea's team couldn't find at least the curtains or the hygienic paper holders. At the moment, we thought that we were faced with the work of a few angry peddling clerks. The recent situation that Tăriceanu's government team has been faced with, enlightened us a little bit more.

We had to quickly invent a new institution. Romania's presidency had been based, even from the days of the CFSN, on the former CC² and, by the time we got there it was, on top of it all, also quasi-militarised, with bullet-proof doors and TABs³ in the courtyard. The cars left imme-

1 The Party of the Social Democracy in Romania.

2 The Central Committee - important political organization during the communist regime.

3 Self-proof auto tank.

diately, but we had a tough time in dealing with the bullet-proof material situation which was eventually solved in a week or two. It took us a bit longer to demilitarise the access to Cotroceni, but with the enthusiastic help offered by Nora Cofas, the new manager of the Museum, we also managed to solve that situation as well. Unfortunately, in 2000, Iliescu's newly installed team put into practice the old rules again. During his first visit, Vladimir Tismăneanu asked me, in a very amused tone, about the armed soldiers who used to wander down the corridors of the palace during Iliescu's time.

The less visible and more substantial part was the organization chart. Like any other institution, the Presidency also had one, but I was more or less stupefied to see that it had a strange asymmetry, running counter any principle of institutional management: beautifully drawn, more than 80% of the partitions representing the departments and all the connections with the exterior, from parliament to banks, were directly connected to the partition standing for the presidential councillor for national security. The rest was rather decorative drawing.

Another weird thing: the typists were almost all gone, but a few state councillors and councilors were still present. One of the guys who was still trying to preserve his place, a former PDSR MP, told me sneering: 'The only way I can leave this place is if Severin appoints me ambassador' (he finally left, but he kept on suing us till around 2002). Afterwards, probably wanting to compliment me, he added: 'I thought you were going to come accompanied by all the drug addicts and all shaggy guys from Universităţii Square, yet I see that the secretaries are quite neat.'

What was really extraordinary was the meeting I had with Dan Iosif. He entered the door and instantaneously declared his love for me for having won over his death enemy, Iosif Boda, during a broadcast TV show, afterwards throwing a quote from Kant and another from Nietzsche and openly stating his willingness to work

with me. The truth was that after knowing that he was a presidential councillor, I was stupefied to find out that he was only a clerk with a high school diploma in his pocket (bureaucracy can have its bright side because since he didn't have college studies, he couldn't have been placed on a higher position) hence he considered that it was his very right to preserve his job. Luckily, after briefly exposing my reasons not to indulge him, he didn't insist, quickly joining the cabinet of his eternal protector, senator Ion Iliescu. After he left, the office-bottle-warehouse where he used to unfold his revolutionary activity had to be, as they say now, severely disinfected.

Apparently, the contact that the current Presidential staff had with the new team wasn't completely smooth, either. During one or two months, till they got used to us, the eternal refrain was: 'How polite they are!' I completely managed to understand this exclamation in 2000, while leaving, when one of the cleaning ladies, told one of my colleagues, while crying: 'Now, Mister councillor Pascu will start calling me you wench and he will keep on cursing me from dusk till dawn!' Mister state councillor Pascu used to be head of the technical department of the Presidency up to 1996 and had been fully involved in the Costea business, the one with the electoral posters; now he was coming back on the same position.

Another component of the same type of problems was the relationship with the bureaucracy in the ministries. I personally had much more to do with the Ministry of External Affairs. I had great communication and collaboration with the successive ministers and secretaries with whom I maintained a cordial and even friendly relationship after Pleşu was appointed head of the ministry, with many of the ambassadors, especially with the young ones and with some high officials, mainly with Mihnea Constantinescu and Cristian Diaconescu, characterized by outstanding competence and efficacy. But both the ministry and the diplomatic group were dominated by a bureaucracy almost completely swamped

not only by routine but also by the mythology of its own perfection dating far back from the glorious days of the '60s-'70s (actually of the '68, the year when Czechoslovakia was invaded, till '78, the year when Pacepa went astray). This bureaucracy was still preserved- with diplomacy, of course but also with incredible perseverance- rooted in the stereotypes of a routine called 'experience' and 'competence'. With a stupefying haughtiness for those who didn't know it, it had even tried, when Adrian Severin was still a minister, to promote a normative act which would have stated it that the only institution allowed to conceive, project and guide the Romanian external affairs would have been the Ministry of External Affairs: not the Parliament, not the president-not, practically people's will- but the technicians of diplomatic relationships. I could barely stop them from doing it.

I generated a small revolution whose proportions I was going to realize only later when, the second day after the elections, the moment we had to arrange the participation of the new president at the extremely important OSCE summit from Lisbon I asked for the information in the file to be delivered to me also on a disk, calmly letting them know that there were elements to add to the MAE analyses and that, my president was not to deliver the dry discourse the ministry had prepared for the predecessor as official speech. I had the chance to later on find out that Iliescu was actually orderly reading those dry and full of clichés texts, that he actually trusted the information which was usually taken out of a dusty computer, without being at least updated, so that my demands of rethinking- not to mention those of reformulating- the files had been perceived as an insult.

The thing is that we had to put the basis of a relatively autonomous diplomatic service within the Presidency, which - making the proof of their remarkable professionalism, all the more as it consisted of five young university people, specialists in international affairs but without any kind of previous bureaucratic or diplomatic ex-

perience- realized hundreds of analyses, of sketches of officials conversations, of theses of the interventions the president had at the highest levels. Every December, for four years, we used to fight the high MAE¹ officials for days, trying to explain to them that president Constantinescu was **not** sending Christmas telegrams to Saddam Husein or Chaddafi. I shall later on explain how the 'system' had its revenge for all that. I will furthermore add only one detail: in spite of our appeals, all the projects of diplomatic correspondence we used to receive from MAE invariably started with the well-known formula 'I shall take the delightful opportunity', expression which to us, those in the Presidency, together with the President, seemed- I keep on thinking it was a rightful judgement- horrible. This stylistic incongruence remained a sort of epitome of the four years of delicate confrontations.

Benefiting from a Weberian education, I am fully aware of the fact that there is no administration without bureaucrats. Yet, in our country, regardless of the place or time, bureaucracy cumulates the inevitable flaws of the job, showing an inertial passivity which is sometimes shocking. One can add to this the feeling- sustained by the most varied sources, from the big PDSR bosses to the tabloids- that the authority alternation in 1996 was a little accident on their way, which was anyway temporary and insignificant and that things were quickly going to go back to their place. I know at least one ministry where every more or less significant strike made the officials drink champagne celebrating the fact that 'tomorrow the government is going to be overthrown' and where the 1999 miner riot aroused whispered enthusiastic comments. At the respective moment, even TVR set some megaphones in its yard, ready to again receive the big redeeming crowd, so that we shouldn't be surprised to see the ministry directors waiting every morning for the usurpers to fall...

I, as well as the others, also had my share of discussions on the miner riots and there are still

things to add. Yet, since I am subjectively writing for 'Martor' magazine, I will add something else. One of the most important domains of activity of the Romanian Presidency as envisaged by the Constantinescu administration was the one focusing on culture. I used to have an excellent relationship with the Ministry of Culture- as compared to many other ministries- especially due to the direct relationship I had with Ion Caramitru, who was imaginative and friendly and with the state secretaries, Maria Berza, an old friend of mine, whose competence and intelligence nobody places under doubt, Ion Onisei, efficient and serious and Hunyor Kelemen a very promising young politician. That is why, during the spring of 1998 I invited Irina Nicolau, with whom I used to share an old complicity- of the cigarettes pondered on in front of the Academy

Library, of the too rare but all the more precious post-December chats, of her wonderful books and articles in '22' or 'Dilema' magazines-to ask her to join our team. Then she told me that she was very ill - almost nobody had any idea about the terrible truth- and that she was not after new responsibilities. She told me she was sorry, because she was very fond of all of us, and that she was aware of what we had to fight against. 'Don't lose your nerve' she said 'no matter how hard it is, do something essential and do it right' and she gave me a brass little ring, one of those delicate or extraordinary gifts she was capable of making. That bright memory has been living in my mind as a sort of lucky-charm up to the present day.

Translated by Raluca Vîjüac





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Through the cigarette smoke

Victoria Moțoc



Now I smoke *Virginia Slims*. Some long, toothpick-like cigarettes, with a minimum quantity of tobacco, which grants me (does it?) perfect health till an old age. Actually, this is the little trick of a chain smoker who wants to, but cannot quit them anymore.

The history of my more than 15 years of smoking is part of my life.

In 1990 I used to smoke *Carpați* and *Bucegi* with the innocence of my twenty years of life. I was a connoisseur. I knew that those produced at Sfântu Gheorghe were the best and I used to generously offer them to my smoking brethren. I would offer them with the elegance with which the loaded people of today offer cigars. I was thirstily draining them till burning my fingers down the University halls or during the parties in the student hostel. I was elegantly spitting the wires or the wood I found while smoking and I didn't care a bit for the deep yellow stains that the vice had imprinted on my fingers. Well, those were revolutionary times! And in jeans, T-Shirts and with loose hair, we wanted to change the world. And the cigarettes.

The transition fulfilled our wish, at least the second part. I don't know about changing the world, but we definitely changed the cigarettes. We went for others which were better, more refined, more Occidental. But equally deadly.

At the beginning and only for a while, the

cigarettes from the neighbouring and friend countries entered my life: *VEK*, *Vikend*, *B.T.*, *D.S.*, *Apollonia*. All smuggled. Bought at a corner of a street from some kind of slick who was showing you a bit of a package popping out of his pocket. Or, in the middle of the night, from a student hostel room, from a foreign student or from his girlfriend. What a life! Sealed packages, filter cigarettes. Balkan spicy-smoked taste on its way to the Occident. I liked them then. But not for long. That is because the Romanian commodity market hybrid surprised us. The almost legal *Bastos* and *Assos* popped up. Without any type of warning they entered the Romanian shops and the little trade shops at the first floor of the blocks. I was quite reluctant to them at the beginning. Meaning? How could I smoke without fear, without previously trading with the smugglers, without the killing looks of the neighbouring shop assistants I used to wake up whenever I felt like smoking? I knew it was the beginning of the end. I didn't grow fond of these two 'traitors', *Bastos* and *Assos*. „The Cigarette” 1 and 2 scandals proved me I hadn't been wrong.

There were other attempts. A non-filter *Lucky Strike*, a *Kent*, a *Marlboro*, a *Rothmans*. But they yet pertained to a world I didn't have access to. If you want, they represented the classy people you bump into while being at a

party you take part in by mistake.

Towards 1994, I spent a long time around *Monte Carlo*. Varying it with *Winchester*, when, financially speaking, *Monte Carlo* wasn't accessible. *Monte Carlo* was sweeter, fuller, more refined. *Winchester* harsher, spicier. Well, a real Saxon! *Viceroy*, together with blue *Gauloise* had been my biggest passions. I loved the French more. Stylish, elegant, sombre. With no stamp, because it couldn't fool around with formalities. It seduced me due to its cleverness and ability and I decided to stick with it without minding the consequences. It was Latin, as I was. I thought I understood it, knew it, and that it had been wandering through the world only to find me. I had the faith of any other trustful woman who was ardently in love. I was seduced and abandoned. Because, one day, *Gauloise* disappeared from the Romanian market. I only thank it for doing it elegantly, feeding me with the illusion of staying for a little longer. The last time I saw it was in Carrefour, on its own territory. Ever since, I received no letter from it. *Viceroy* gave me comfort for almost a year. Till one day when I decided that I had to give a chance to a Romanian as well. And I found *Record*. Simple but honest. It wasn't pouring in your ear its ideas of being some kind of prince, but it fulfilled my needs, why lying? But one cannot live without poetry and *Record* couldn't offer me that. It was prosaic and kind of bland even if helping me to survive my first job as editor at *Rompres*. And, believe me, that hadn't been easy. For any of us.

More mature, free from preconceived ideas, more experienced and with more intensity I launched myself in a quest for new cigarettes. I had money and I could test the rich ones as well: *Kent*, *Marlboro*, *Dunhill*, *Rothmans*, *Camel*. There was no point, they didn't match my first love. Or maybe I wasn't the same either. I perversely tried the feminine ones, even if now I feel ashamed: *Kim*, menthol *Pall Mall*, *More*. I burnt all the experiences till the end. And thus, from cigarette to cigarette, I ended up totally confused. There was a time when I used to win over them. But that was when I still knew their names, when *Kent* was only of one type, not of eight, as I used to see them, stuck in the mouths of some brawly men. But now, when the majority of them are made in Romania, how could I make any difference and name them? Who should I hate, who should I love?

I had, due to a natural evolution of things, my own riot. I will not smoke! At all. Ever. I managed to keep away from the vice for two years, displaying a sort of kingly superiority. Worthy of better causes. I found reasons, set goals, militated in vain. Bloody weed! How stupid! I came back to them, repenting for my deeds. Using the back door. And here I am now! Through the coffee vapours, in this September day, I have the courage of sharing with you the history of my sad cigarettes.

Translated by Raluca Vîjia



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Second-hand bookshops

Vlad Manoliu



One of my colleagues used to notice the fact that the social flusters bring to the surface the weirdest, most interesting and unexpected habits. After lying for decades in the owners' houses they seem to fight to get to the surface, bringing with them the possessors' feeble hope for winning.

Right after the '90s, every Romanian who had an old item, even if it wasn't high quality stuff, felt like sitting on a treasure and used to ask you for an eye if you wanted to buy it. All the more as the first so-called 'antique shops' were more consignments of goods, meaning that the owner of the item set the price which, in many cases, didn't represent the object's real value but that subjectively assumed by the owner. They used to ask for a fortune on junks or ridiculous sums on amazing things whose value they completely ignored. Hence, during this first faze of the antique shops, one could buy extraordinary things for very low prices. The best example was that a decoration or a Romanian inter-war medal, or let's say one from the first World War which was available in hundreds or thousands more pieces, was sold for more than a republican denar or roman imperial. That was that! You very rarely find such big mistakes today.

Social movements bring to surface new, rough, even unprincipled people, hungry for money and power, sometimes talkative and al-

most always demagogical. They want to display their newly achieved social position, purchasing huge houses where they gather old and expensive objects, meant to give brightness and prestige to the new type of parvenu and to prove the thickness of the wallet. Hence, the antique shops went on mushrooming all over the place. At the beginning, small rooms, stuffed with furniture, paintings, chandeliers, adornments, old coins, carpets... Step by step, the owners of such rooms whether extended their shops or went bankrupt.

I remember a broadcast TV show about the artistic preoccupations of the Romanian rich people. A fat, fussy, middle-aged lady, was fretting her gizzard in front of the camera, exposing the way she used to relax when contemplating one of Nicolae Grigorescu's paintings- of course- while at the same time sipping from crystal glasses. 'I cannot remember its name now... something with B...' said the lady, referring to the newly purchased Bacarras.

Till 1990, the word second-hand bookshop used to define a shop selling old books. Usually, the workers were book-lovers and the shops always pertained to the state. Since the '90s, the term started to be redefined, first of all in Bucharest, then, feebly, in the entire country. The second-hand bookshop ended up meaning, like in any other civilised country, a shop where old and beautiful things were sold, in other

words an 'antique shop'. The owners of such a place and the shop assistants are usually great fans of beautiful things and they sell and buy everything which is able to enchant your eyes and your soul, from nick-knacks to wonderful objects. Bucharest is now full of dozens of antique shops and I have started to visit them, especially in weekends. If you wander around the antique shops in the Capital every fortnight, this is like a walk through the museums. Sometimes you can look for art-nouveaux objects, some other time you can go and see paintings, furniture...

At the beginning, the prices didn't exactly match the value and, with a bit of luck, you could find very cheap things. But, gradually, things have fallen to their place. Now you can very rarely find the famous bargain. At least in what regards the antique shops in Bucharest, you rather visit them for doing a bit of window-shopping than for buying very beautiful but expensive objects.

As I was saying, buyers are today's new upstarts, crazy for big names, the majority of them remembered from school time or from newspapers. Yet, in the antique shops you can also find

the real art-loving people. They watch, enjoy, have a word with each other or with the shop assistant and thus, gradually, these shops turn into some sort of clubs for those who love the beautiful. They very rarely buy because it very seldom happens for them to be rich. Intellectuals had never had much money and this has always happened everywhere in this world. Our situation is a bit different because we have also had the switch of political regime with its post-revolutionary chaos. So that the inveterate fans talk to each other... and very rarely buy something for their soul collection.

Till the end of the decade the auctions for art objects also appeared. What is being auctioned can be seen displayed in some antique shops or specialised halls. You can attend these auctions, you can withhold certain objects, and you can come back.

No matter the evolution, the antique shops are one of the most pleasant manifestations of the Romanian society after 1990.

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Books and music

Ciprian Voicilă

What I can definitely say about the music of the '90s is that it was different than that of the '80s. My mother's idols were Angelea Similea, Mihaela Runceanu, Dan Spătaru, Șeicaru, Hrușcă, certain singers adopting a style I could define as sentimentalist-romantic. Since I had no cassettes to record on- the first ones I laid my hands on were Raks- driven by the innocence of the age, I recorded the songs of the new Gods over those of the respective great artists. At the beginning, my ears were listening to a sort of melange: Doctor Alban with *No Hash, Hash, No Heroin*, M.C. Hammer, Gypsy Kings, Enigma, Depeche Mode, Roxette, Milli Vanilli, New Kids on the Block, Madonna. The walls in my room quickly got covered by posters from *Salut* magazine, the first teenager magazine edited by the actor George Mihăiță.

There was some guy Ștefănuș living in the neighbourhood who was Michael Jackson's replica. He had a real sanctuary dedicated to Michael in his bedroom. He had posters with him including on the ceiling. He was able to perfectly imitate that crawfish walking specific to all Michael's fans. There were fights in the city between rock and Depeche fans. For Jackson's fans, the moment of epiphany was his coming to Bucharest for the *Dangerous* concert. The *Black and White* video clip was projected on screens. Michael was walking in a white shirt, surrounded

by some brutes.

Around the eighth grade, Bebe, a rocker from a neighbouring block initiated me into the Metallica spirit. It was from him that I recorded *Kill 'Em All* and *And Justice for All*. Those songs had something romantic in them. I liked their vocal, James Hatfield, because he emanated virility. At that time I would have liked to wear a T-shirt with skeletons. It would have been cool to display a skeleton through the wreath produced by the Kim cigarettes, stolen from my mother or through the Monte Carlo wreath. I wore it only too late, when I couldn't look at the world through Gun Slash's locks, the Guns guitarist... On the late T-shirt I imprinted Guns'n'Roses and a skeleton with a rose in its mouth. Guns' songs were even more romantic and we usually picked up girls while listening to them. You used to take the girl and walk her through the rainfall of the *November Rain*. I usually got my information concerning the mythical lives of the rock bands from *Rock* and *Heavy Metal* magazines. I really enjoyed Laurențiu Lenți Chiriac's chronicles. Late in the night, Petre Magdin was presenting old bands on TV.

I equally liked the Romanian bands. 'Sarmalele reci' with *She is Doing Tantra Yoga* and 'Timpuri Noi' with *Running, Running through the Cornfield* and *My Name is Luca*. I used to kneel for years in front of those from *The Doors*.

The leader of the band, Jim Morrison, seemed to me the most metaphysical vocal. I borrowed the lyrics anthology *An American Prayer* from my friend Iuxel. I read it as if the fifth gospel. My fascination grew bigger when I found out that Jim Morrison had been irrevocably marked by Nietzsche and Rimbaud.

When I started asking myself why Nirvana Fans were hanging around with their boots unlaced and why at the middle of the night, during the 'trash hour' the rockers were hitting each other as if in a savage dancing I felt that I was contemplating new horizons.

That was around 1993 and I was fifteen. I was in search for myself. I firstly found myself in Sven Hassel's books, a Danish who ended up in a Nazi marching regiment, in the 27 shellproof machines regiment. His books were published one after another at Nemira publishing house: *Liquidate Paris*, *The OGPU Prison*, *Comrades of War*, *Assignment Gestapo*, *Monte Cassino*, *SS General*, *The March Battalion*.

Every two weeks I used to go to the city centre where I knew that the book salesmen were gathering. I used to wait for them shivering, from around six in the morning. I was shyly getting closer and asking if some new books from Sven Hassel were for sale. In the twelfth grade I used to wrap myself in a sheet during summer time. I had the Romanian language and literature commentaries at sight and under the sheet *Monte Cassino*, recently reedited by Nemira. Sven Hassel's books on the war managed to install a durable peace between me and my stepfather, whom I used to pass them on to with enthusiasm.

In some afternoon I watched a movie with two old men on TV. One of them was dead funny. Completely bald, baby-faced, he was sitting on one side of a bed, talking. He was soliloquising. Delivering a speech about some authors I had never heard about: Platon, Kant, Eliade, Nae Ionescu. His liveliness was contrasting with the shabby, kind of dead room he was in. The second old man had a deep-wrinkled rebellious

face, and ruffled hair. He was stammering. The two used to be very good friends when they were young and they were complimenting each other. The former was saying that the latter was the most lucid man he had ever met and that he was hoping to make peace with Apostle Pavel till the end of his life because he had made him wrong in one of his writings (*The Temptation of Being*). The latter was saying that the former was the only true genius he had ever met. The first one was Petre Țuțea and the second Emil Cioran. The film on the two of them was called *Admiration Exercise* and had been produced by Gabriel Liiceanu.

A little while after watching the movie I found *Between God and My People* (1992) at a stall, a book containing some of Petre Țuțea's interviews and writings, edited by Sorin Dumitrescu at Anastasia Publishing House. That used to cost one hundred lei, quite a lot for my school-boy pocket. In order to get the money, I sold my Sven Hassel collection to Bogdan, a 'bookseller', one living on the selling of books. And I bought *Between God and My People*. I was especially fascinated by the photo on the cover. Țuțea's eyes were shining and he was holding a finger up, towards God.

There had followed six years when I devoured all inter-war writers' books. A particular category was represented by the books that subconsciously created me a level of aspiration which I was going to become conscious of only later. Eliade's *The Shortsighted Teenager's Novel*, *The Conversations with Cioran*, Liiceanu's *Păltiniș Diary* and H.R Patapievici's *Flight Within Arrowshot*. Eliade, 'The Shortsighted Teenager', proved fascinating to me due to the exercises for educating the will he used to practise on him, due to the conscience of a mission, to an amor fati. A tension of virility, a teenage energy in search for its manifestations was especially vibrant in the novels –*The Return from Heavens*, *The Hooligans*, *The Valentine Night*– and in his essays from *Oceanography*. Liiceanu's *Păltiniș Diary* (first edition 1983, reed-

ited in 1991) was describing an autonomous Castalia where a master wasn't teaching his students some kind of meta-language like in *The Game with the Glass Beads*, but the idioms of pure philosophy. The master was Constantin Noica, who between 1949 and 1958 had been submitted to house arrest in Câmpulung-Muscel, while being a political prisoner between 1958-1964.

Since I had no money to buy it, during a summer vacation, I transcribed half of the volume of *Conversations with Cioran* on a Mathematics notebook, using a lead pencil. Cioran was gathering proselytes by means of his outspoken nihilism. He was promoting the suicide, declaring that in Râșinari village, where he was born, his model had been the village drunkard who had inherited a fortune and he was drinking like a fish, hanging around with a fiddler while in the afternoon running into the thrifty peasants who were going to work their land. Finally, *Flight Within Arrowshot* (Humanitas, 1995) was putting together the biography of a young self-taught intellectual who had discovered on his own account a technique of survival during communism: 'I don't know how others managed to preserve their integrity during communism, but I was redeemed due to my friends (...) friends of ideas. I saw culture as alchemy, and the most difficult philosophy (Hegel, for example) was perceived by all of us, full of emotion and enthusiasm, as initiation in a model of human being closer to the perfection we all aimed at from our neophyte position.' (H.R. Patapievici- *Flight Within Arrowshot*, Humanitas, Buc., 1995, 5-6)

I have asked myself two questions. First: why are the authors I have already mentioned so popular among young readers, especially among adolescents? Because they manage to give sense to their lives. Precisely at the age when tormented by the fear of what is going to be, Eliade is urging you to create your own destiny because you have a mission to accomplish. Noica is tempting you towards the philosophy-knots (the greatest achievement of the human spirit). Cio-

ran is telling you that there is no sense in life, that everything is meaningless, everything is pure fiction. In order for you to get away, you have to appeal to curses or to writing, the only ones granting you catharsis. The second question: how can one explain the huge success registered by the interwar authors' books after December 1989?

After the '90s, the former Political Publishing House turned into Humanitas Publishing House, run by one of Constantine Noica's disciples, Gabriel Liiceanu. This is where many of the authors prohibited by the communist regime started being published. Everything forbidden by the communist regime had a particular charm, reminding you of a forgotten normality, had the perfume of a beautiful coat recovered from some wardrobe. This publishing house published within the *Totalitarianism and the Literature of the East* series the books which emphasised the terror of communism (Vasili Grossman – *Panta Rhei*, Aleksandr Soljenitiĭn- *A Day of Ivan Denisovici's Life*, Virgil Ierunca- *The Pitești Phenomenon*, Constantin Noica – *Pray for Brother Alexander*, Paul Goma- *Rainbow Colours* and *Gherla*, Monica Lovinescu's *Short Waves* volumes.) they also published author series – Nae Ionescu, Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Eugene Ionesco, Constantin Noica, Lucian Blaga. Mircea Ciobanu's conversations with King Michael I of Romania (1992). Mircea Vulcănescu (1904-1952, the philosopher, economist, member of the Dimitrie Gusti Sociological School) is rediscovered. Because he used to be an under-secretary within the Ministry of Finance (January-August 1944), part of Marshal Antonescu's government, he was sentenced to eight difficult years in prison. He died in Aiud jail, trying to save a young man with whom he had been locked up in the insulator.

Other publishing houses publish poetry written in the communist prisons by Radu Gyr, alongside with the memories of the theologian Nichifor Crainic (*White Days, Black Days*, Gândirea Publishing House, 1991). Dacia

Publishing House publishes Nicolae Steinhardt's *The Happiness Diary* (1991), a vivid description of the common life in the communist prisons (Gherla, Aiud) and Alexandr Zinoviev's *Homo Sovieticus* (1991). The tendency is hence towards the complete recovery of the inter-war political memory.

Steinhardt, a close friend of the philosopher Constantin Noica, is sentenced to 13 years of hard labour because he refused to be a witness of the prosecution in the trial against Noica. On 15th March 1960, in Jilava prison, Steinhardt the Jew, turns to the Orthodox religion. *The Happiness Diary* opens with a question: how can you evade a self-centred universe? One of the solutions would be mystical, being the solution of faith, as Steinhardt states it. When you lack faith you still have three other valid options.

The solution of the living dead. Before the investigation, you try to convince yourself that 'I will die this very moment'; 'if the individual strongly believes it, he is saved. Nothing else can touch him anymore. There is no other thing he could be threatened, blackmailed, tempted or enchanted with.'

The solution of the riotous fellow. 'The solution resides in the total maladjustment to the system. (...) the riotous fellow has no fix home, no papers, he is not employed, he is a loafer, a parasite, a ragamuffin and a moocher.'

'to sum it up: when faced with tyranny, exploitation, misery, adversities, disasters, banes, dangers, not only will you not give yourself up

but, on the contrary, you will juice all these feelings out of the crazy craving for living and fighting.'

Ioan Ioanid's *Our Every-day Prison* is published, a sort of Romanian *Gulag Archipelago*. The writings of the theologian Dumitru Stăniloae are also rediscovered. The painter Sorin Dumitrescu publishes *Seven Mornings with Dumitru Stăniloae* (1992) at Anastasia Publishing House, a book containing conversations with the Romanian theologian. The same publishing house publishes books written by Vladimir Losski (*The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*-1992) – a Russian theologian, expelled in 1992 by the Soviet government; by Vladimir Volkoff (*The Evil's Trinity. Indictment during the Posthumous Trial of Lenin, Troțki and Stalin*-1996; *About the King*-1992); by Paul Evdokimov (*God's Crazy Love*, 1993)- also a Russian theologian who emigrated to Paris; *The Saint Angels* (1992) by Ileana Princess of Romania.

The *Bachic and Political Ideas* (Victor Frunz? Publishing House, 1996) written by the writer of epigrams Păstorel Teodoreanu (Al. O. Teodoreanu) are also published. Păstorel had been sentenced to prison because he had disturbed the regime by writing epigrams of the kind: 'I bemoan Stalin, and I'll pass / To you my little secrecy / I fear that will kiss the arse / Of the entire committee.'

Translated by Raluca Vîjăiac





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Another egorhythm. Algorithm for the concealing of the own self

Călin Torsan



There are objects in this world with precise utilitarian destinations, but which, in case of necessity, are used for various other purposes. These new functions eventually get to define the respective objects.

The necessary condition for the success of such use reorientations is represented by a certain morphological availability of the respective object towards its new use matrix. Hence, you can very well scratch your ears with a pencil, whereas you cannot do that with a belt. Yet, the belt can be used for very successful teaching purposes. That is by means of body corrections applied to naughty children. Thing, which, again couldn't be accomplished with, let's say a key. Which, between you and me, could be used to open a bottle of beer. Living surrounded by objects, we very often end up being one with them. Being like them.

I was a bit more than an object when, in July 1989 I was discharged from the army. Physiologically speaking, I had the specific behaviour to a living organism. I was breathing and this managed to sustain my vital functions. There had been nine months- which could have, theoretically, lead me to a different life- since entering University. Forever groping when coming to screwing a bulb, I was ardently preparing myself for becoming an engineer. An electrical engineer.

Not even today can I say what that means. Yet, the word seemed interesting to me. Being a very diligent student during the twelve years spent in school, I had no other option at the moment. With a sickly panic regarding everything, which dealt with the electrical current- dating far back from my summer holiday in Tatarciuc when one of my colleagues had died electrocuted on one of the locomotives in the North Railway Station- I was getting ready to serve it for a lifetime.

Yet, as the objects I have speculated on, due to the December coup d'état, I ended up having a different destiny than the one I had prefigured.

I, as well as my entire generation, had to live the tumultuous nineties. Those were years of complete reconstruction. Years when I learnt to stand on my own two, like a baby, even if I had already turned twenty. Step by step...

The first step. Even if the entire tradition as brilliant student was as heavy a burden as it could have been for an adolescent, the first step towards my redefinition as a person was to abandon college. It took time to make up my mind because I couldn't identify with anything in that school. I had no friends, because I had already become sick of them from the army, I found no subject able to attract me, or teacher to make me want him as a model.

Anyway, the insecure teaching situation welter I let myself into, made my decision easier to a certain extent. I had already achieved the counter performance of having to retake exams during the autumn session of exams. Right from the first year. If I hadn't passed my algebra exam I would have failed to get my remove. Rightfully. The day I found out the news, my walking towards home had been incredibly slow. I was recreating all kind of soothing scenarios for my parents. I finally got home. But nobody was waiting. My mother had gone out with my nephew and my father was still at work. I didn't feel like eating, I actually didn't feel like doing anything, I was just under the pressure caused by the fact that I had to let my parents know that I was a dropout. A night before I had received a cassette from Alecu, a hippy friend. Pink Floyd. Of course I hadn't heard of them- the fact that I had never had a cassette player played its part in that situation- and my poor English was even making me mispronounce their names.

Actually, I used to have a cassette player after all, like any other Romanian, but the way it popped up in our house practically made it unemployable. Another sense shifting. It happened that one of the kids taking Maths tutorials with my father had died in a car accident. Making proof of the generosity specific to stricken people, but also getting rid of something they didn't need anymore, Costel's parents gave us his cassette player. As charity... the machine was left locked in a cupboard for months. Nobody felt like using it. It represented the exponent of the tragedy lived by the Stănescu family. It had that heavy significance that the alms had. You can't eat that like *éclair* either. Eventually, we started using the machine. At the beginning only on Thursdays. In the evening. The way we used to push the *play* button as if a ritual and the way we rejoiced as if indigenous when seeing every facility it was offering us was definitely worth of a documentary. We had played the same two tapes for months. Both with Julio Iglesias. My father had brought them from one of his col-

leagues, more skilled at stuff like that. I remember my mother's regrets when I dared to wipe some of those songs out in order to record I don't know what crap from the radio.

The cassette player was something you weren't supposed to play with too much.

So, I put the tape into the machine, sprawled on the carpet and pushed *play*. *Shine on you crazy diamond* was the bird, which gave me wings in order to differently perceive my newly dropout condition. It was then when I simply realized that, on earth, there were important things and things which only seemed important. The fact that I was dropping out of school had no importance to me. Of course, that way of perceiving the situation could have been a very risky one for my future. But that was how Pink Floyd had taught me to think. Those Englishmen had offered me the first moment of grace in my life and I had no intention to give it up from then on.

I had understood that music existed and that it was worth looking for in every corner it could have been hidden.

Initiation. It was Saturday. A rainy day. I had finished playing the weekly football match we used to unfold in the courtyard of the Favorit kindergarten and we were all ready to go home. Silviu invited me over to show me how he had managed to put a song from *The Other Words* on guitar. I had thought that about music for a long time, meaning that it had to be put on. From cassettes and records. At the time I couldn't have imagined that I would have been able of creating a song. As modest as it would have come out... If you had told me that somebody knew how to sing, that would have automatically meant for me that he knew all the usual mountaineer hits. And that was it.

We went upstairs, at Silviu's, in OS-1 block and he played me a song that really impressed me. While my ears were following Silviu, my eyes got caught by a handicraft whistle, like the ones you find in Sinaia and Predeal. Red and

with some carved ornaments. Even if common, that thing meant a lot to me. It practically changed my life. It gave meaning to this long way we all take from dippers to coffin. It made me a musician. It gave me the possibility to meet interesting people, who taught me various things. It took me all over the country, to Greece, Italy, Hungary and Serbia. As a matter of fact, that glimpse, that peep made these memories possible.

So, seeing that handicraft whistle, I asked Silviu if he wanted us to try *Whistle Bud*, Phoenix's song. What we got was a mishmash, but our immature grown-up irresponsibility made us feel happy. Till I left, and that was late in the evening, we managed to produce some other famous refrains. I with the whistle and Silviu with the guitar. 'I have a weird whistle at the countryside, not like this one.' - 'What do you means weird?' - 'Well, it has more holes and it is bigger than this one. It is foreign.' - 'Foreign?' - 'Yes, yes, foreign. German or something like that. My cousin used to play it. The Painter. It sounds like a flute, it is brilliant. I'll bring it to you maybe you learn how to play it. I think it also covers more musical notes. I have to go to the countryside next week and I'll bring it with me.'

This is how I got my hands on the first block-flöte- how the Germans usually call it- of my life. It was the spring of 1992. Then others and others followed. Forerunner of the flute, that block-flöte was an instrument very famous during the baroque age. There is an impressive musical literature dedicated to it. Suffice it to mention Bach. Nowadays there is a tendency in music consisting of the reinterpretation of the scores of those times using instruments built by the modern string-instrument makers following the patterns of the respective age. You can see it - the right flute - every week on Mezzo. If you can get this channel.

In a few weeks we would have ended up in the street. I cannot even remember how we got the idea. I must have seen it in some movie. Silviu, Alecu, Tibi, Jean and I. All guitarists, apart

from me. We only knew three songs we kept on rehearsing. Like a barrel-organ. *Whistle Bud*, *Fade to Back*- one of Metallica's songs on flute, can you imagine?- and a blues Alecu had shown us. We had been the first to take to the streets and play. I am not saying it in order to brag. I am just stating facts. Of course that we represented a model for other generations of musicians who abandoned their inhibitions and started singing down the streets, but we opened the path.

Between 1992 and 1994 we had been the first street singers.

The third step. We played for two years at Kretzulescu's, under the arch which now shelters a religion library. We started working at around ten. We fixed our buttocks on the stone stairs and step on it! We used to break for about four hours, for a *shaorma* and for the small football match we used to play using a small ball that Silviu had made of cloth. We used to play exactly in the same place where we used to sing. Our games were kind of horrifying for the passers-by. The little ball would fly God knows where. Either in the head of a respectable gentleman or in the shop windows of the library next to which we were actually manifesting our talent. Everything we managed to build through music was ruined by football. 'How can that be? Isn't it enough that you keep on stepping on our nerves from dusk till dawn?' the bookshop assistants were shouting at us- and I have noticed that the respective type of shop assistant has a particular ego, which means that, dear God, they work with books and not with salami and sausages.

The money we would earn was quickly spent on sweets and the dinner we used to take at Lido's almost every day. We also took up pipe smoking, out of snobbery of course. And we had two pipes each! Now, you can't get your hands on them because they are extremely expensive! Not to mention that we preferred good-quality tobacco, Captain Black. There had been years when we could have purchased instruments, but

who was to know that the folly was to carry on even after a decade?

At that time I was attracted by the Movement for Romania, urged by the late-teenager bravado. Actually, it wasn't the movement itself that was appealing to me but its newspaper which had the same name, spelled in green on the frontispiece. I was taking delight in flicking through the pages of the respective newspaper while travelling by bus. I used to fold the magazine in such a way so as to make the title fully visible to the passengers.

I was gradually turning into a small stall legionary. I had got a pair of army boots from my brother and I was putting them on be it winter or summer. I used to have barrack-like looks. Therefore, when it came to give a name to our band we insisted on *Little Green Sleeves*. It had a twofold meaning for us. *Little Green Sleeves* - a medieval English song - was one of the first songs we had rehearsed together. That since withdrawing from the shadow of the Kretzulescu church. Since we had enlarged our repertoire. We used to earn our money more and more honestly. It couldn't have passed a week without us learning two or three new songs. We mainly did it for us, but also for those who happened to pass us by more than once. We also did it for the bookshop assistants who were cursing us in silence. Since we were hurting their ears anyway, at least we were trying to do it in as varied a way as possible. The other meaning of the band's name, whispered to our close friends in a very complicit way, was actually concealing inter-war nuances. Hence, *Little Green Sleeves*. My first band...

The acid test. Everybody knows that in the long block in Kretzulescu, the one which runs across the residence which shelters the Musica shop, there are a few S.R.I offices. The irresponsibility we made proof of while singing there, all the more as we used to also play a few legionary hymns taught from a score book of the kind, indicates a certain freshness but also the

exact value of the happiness we employed in everything we did. We had no need to pretend or to fool anyone. We were just us. It was us and our music, lamer and uglier than the one we had listened on cassettes and records.

I have a strange and embarrassing memory of the S.R.I gentlemen. I used to shiver for a while after the conflict I had with them in a beautiful summer afternoon. We were close to our lunch break. *Shaorma* was popping out as the only life priority we had when two men in suits scattered the content of our hat with their broad palms. They were *stoned* and they found it appropriate to chill out with another beer, this time on the money we had earned for the respective day. We were shocked. We were starring at the emptied hat without being able to believe our eyes. We quickly ran after them down the sidewalk parallel to the Musica shop. We caught up with them. They weren't in a hurry. They had no reason to be. The tramp granted by the badge in the pocket was very powerful. As a matter of fact, they wouldn't have been able to run anyway. They went stumbling along like in a weird dance. 'Our parents would never do such a thing!' we hurled at them in an ethical and moral tone. 'Hoy, go to hell you loafers! After letting you play for two years without saying a word, do you still cut figures with us?' 'Our parents would never do such a thing!' we hurled back and I don't know why that thing with the parents kept on eating into me.

Afterwards, one of them tried to hit me. He slapped me on the nape, but he only managed to partially hit me since I stepped aside. Anyway, that was a broad, big, indecent palm I still remember very well. I was going to see the guy again in a few years in various pubs in Bucharest. Either in Cișmigiu, or in Lipsani. Each time he was drunk. And each time he was telling those with him in a very loud voice about what he had done in the prisons where he used to work. He was a former chockey guardian. Watching over prisoners. A very lyrical life. When you see people like that, you can't prevent yourself

from thinking of the extenuating circumstances which can many times justify our deeds. Well, we depend on many things. On the way our parents wiped our arses, of the first marks our primary school teacher gave us, of the success of our first kiss. There are things we carry with us up to the grave, memories neatly folded up in the secret chest of the soul. In the majority of the cases we are what we are because of these things. So, that guy is trying to slap me. Things quickly get nasty because we try to fight back. I kick that guy in the arse and the two go crazy. They start running after us around the parking lot in front of the Telephone Palace. People gather around as if at circus. 'Good people, take these two out of here, otherwise, we are going to have to hit them!' I don't know where I got those lines from. I mean, I know because I was dominated by the huge tension of the event. Of the follow-ups. I have always had an obsessive fear of follow-ups. I cannot understand why each step we take has to have consequences.

We kept on hanging around the parking lot and those two had no chance to lay their hands on us. Moreover, the people were quite having a go at them. 'They are drunk and they stuck their hands into our hat!' we were shouting to the astounded passers-by. 'They say they belong to the S.R.I!' And then, as a blessed breeze, as a cooling rain during a hot afternoon, we felt the public opinion pouring over the entire scandal. People let drive at those two and coked their goose, saying that, *what are they doing wrong, they just sing down the street to make pocket money, you keep on seeing things like that in the Occident, what, would it be better for them to be on drugs and hit us in the head during the evening because they have no money for drugs? Bloody bastards, together with your damned Security, the Revolution was in vain and people died for nothing because not even one hundred revolutions will ever change you!* Somehow, this shock cleared the pedants' mind a bit. They just slacked it, a little too much-we should have thought about that- and they went up, on Victo-

riei Way, waving those fists big as a sailor's knot and yelling at us for the last time, *wait and see, you legionaries, because we gave it hot to those like you at Gherla till taking the shit out of their heads!*

We came back to the instruments we had left next to the arch at Kretzulescu. Two or three kids who were worshipping us had kept an eye on them. They lived next to Sala Palatului and they dropped by to listen to us every day. They used to do it for hours. They were staring at our faces, at the instruments and after that we used to invite them in for a football match with that cloth ball. I saw one of them again after years. He is working in Musica shop. Selling blank CDs. He is a grown-up. It wouldn't be a bad idea to get what he still remembers of those times on a tape...

Yes... So, those kids were waiting for us next to our instruments. We were quiet. There was not much to say after such a scandal. We were still shivering. They suspected that that was the last day when they had the chance to listen to us playing. I felt a deep pain when thinking that the whole story was over. But it was also obvious that we couldn't sing anymore. We went back to our homes in high dudgeon and on that road of defeat, Merișică, one of the Gavroches who were joining us in our pain, made us a gift: a small clasp knife with green hilts. I think Jean still has it. We got home late and the only soothing thought was that early in the morning we were going to go touring to the seaside. To Costinești. It took me quite some time to fall asleep, tormented-as always- by the fear of what the respective scandal could have triggered. Of the fear of the follow-ups.

Perseverance. It must have been around 1996 when a very early phone call woke me of my sleep. I was thinking *who the hell is taking the mickey at me so early in the morning?* It didn't sound like Jean's voice, even less like Adi's. These were the boys in my band and we used to pull each other's leg in such a way.

Hear this, with Mister Călin Torsan, please... Mister... Yes... That's me... Who am I talking to? This last question of mine triggered an unimaginably long verbal triad. I was silent, listening, scratching with my right hand, deeply stuck in my sport trousers, cursing. The gentleman on the phone, because he was really a gentleman, kept on explaining to me something about the Pitești phenomenon. Yet, I had only heard about the Mudava phenomenon. I used to read about him in Păunescu's *Flacăra* magazine. He was one of those healers...

The voice I was hearing in the receiver kept on saying that if you also want to take part, because I don't know who directs the show, that I don't know what senior citizens will come, there will be knot-shaped bread and wine, that everything is being sheltered by Ion Creangă Theatre in Amzei Marketplace. I hadn't heard about that in my life either. Anyway, I hadn't been to the theatre since I was a child, since they used to take us from school to Țândărică. *There is only one problem. We have no money because nobody backed us up. We are doing it out of a human drive, for these people who have suffered so much. Who do you think that takes up such actions for the Romanians? That's why we thought that your band would be the most appropriate to...*

I kept on hearing that no-money thing all the years I spent playing the whistle. As if you can tell one who comes to your house to make a chair or fix a pipe, *you know, pal, we don't really have money, but we'll sort something out.* And to make matters worse there is enough money in this show business. Only for artists there isn't. There is so much money laundered- you learn who does it and why- that not even the babies' arses haven't been so well washed in this world. *Anyway, the event will also echo in the press and I think it would be good for your band to...*

To what, mate? To what? This is another thing which drives me nuts. I go crazy when I hear about something echoing in the press. I foam at the mouth when I hear the word *event*.

Or *project*. I puke my eyes out when I hear project. I puke over this entire cesspool full of impotent creepers who stick to an idea like glue, an idea that they squeeze out like a lemon into all types of *projects*- a word uttered in full mouth, as if during the Logopedics class: *prOjects. Fuller. As if you had an egg in your mouth. That's it... Well done! PrOOjects.*

This word, always accompanied by the stemmed plastic folio, kept on popping up during the nineties. Of course, I know that it existed before. Ceaușescu also used to utter it. *Pro-jegts*, as he used to say. But it seemed that during those days it was devoid of meaning. While, within the new Romanian society, it was going to find its place, once with the assimilation of its position as finance tap. They say that with a project- which should be well organised, but I personally don't believe in this type of things- one can get funds. Funds to support the Project. The funds are from various associations, foundations, societies, private individuals or corporate bodies, corporations, agencies, institutes and institutions, governmental or non-governmental organizations, trusts and other similar shit, which makes you wonder where they come from and where they go. Always obscure, represented by spokespersons with thin glasses and academic language, these strange human conglomerates feed the clumsy and fetid financial flow. They make money move. As if it were a baby you have to walk in the park in order not to yell in your ears.

One will always be able to pay some kind of jerk walking in front of God knows what Parliament residence in the world, naked and with a newspaper in his hand- making thus fun of the entire world of the press- but nobody will be able to solve the problem of the drinking-water in an African little town. And do you know why? Because there is no money. Well, if money moves, how the hell are you supposed to find it? It is a traveller. It travels. It quickly gets out of side, worming its way down the paths of the human lack of common sense.

Eventually- and I will explain to you why I did it- I accepted the challenge. We accepted taking part in the show on the Pite?ti phenomenon. I was saying that I was going to explain why... Well, we all did the singing bit because we really took great pleasure in doing it. At the time, I didn't even imagine the possibility of earning money from singing. On the other hand, if it were for these guys, you would give up everything which is not connected to business or arrangements. It would be enough for you to sing inside the house, yet, you know, there is that joy or pleasure of showing the others what you can do. What comes out of you. Mainly to friends. Then, to your friends' friends. And this is how you create your public. Moreover, when you create a new song you end up thinking about these people. That, *how would they like it? Or this other one?*

The respective evening, we arrived at the theatre two hours before the beginning of the show, as we had been asked to. A great fluster had taken over all those involved in creating the show. And that was simply because nothing had been settled. Not even the props were complete! Anyway, I don't think that there was any idea able to guide the show and I realized that only when the director went outside, around the theatre looking through trash for various objects which could have appeared on stage. To complete the atmosphere...

This is how the props were in the last moment enriched with a barrow and a porcelain lavatory, abandoned God knows in what garbage bins. They had been given a quick wash, thus cleaning off the rust and the shit and afterwards they popped up on stage in order to plenary emphasise the self-centred atmosphere. 'The guys from *Little Green Sleeves!*'- 'Here we are...' - 'Come to the stage for a moment... Quickly!'

We stepped on the stage, we were questioned about the songs we intended to play, we were told that yes, *this one goes, we would like you not to sing the other one because it doesn't fit the overall atmosphere, but, yet, get ready to play it*

if necessary, if we have to make the show last a bit longer. 'I think it would be better for you to play without the glasses' says the director, leaving me speechless. That was because my dioptries are quite severe and I had no chance to get around in the semidarkness on the stage. 'Do I really have to... That is, couldn't we solve it some other way, I mean, there is no problem but I can't see anything...' - 'It is better my way, Călin. Please. Is it impossible?' 'No...' , I stammered, 'I'll try to get the job done without the glasses.' 'We'll draw the way you have to move around in chalk.' - 'Well, what do you mean move along? Aren't we playing seated?' - 'No, no... the director gets worked up again, 'this show is a bit more complex than a concert. That is, you don't simply enter the stage, play and then, good-bye, you leave the stage. No. You shall see, there is a bit of staging, you will have pre-established paths you will have to follow, then you play and you will keep on staying on the stage till the actors finish reciting the last lines.'

We started getting nervous. All of us. The way that guy spoke to us, as if the destiny of the entire human kind depended on the way we were going to move on the stage- gave way to insecurity and to a state of excitement we had never felt before. Obviously, we had to let all that out. The chance, bad luck for the director, made it that the moment of our liberation occurred during the show. One which was meant to be sombre by all means. We were going to face again that type of sobriety in years, during some pathetic shows, organized by the Army's Culture House and where, together with a few actors, we used to rattle our instruments in order to pay homage to Eminescu.

A few minutes before the beginning of the 'Pite?ti Phenomenon' they once again specified our tasks. I was supposed to do the opening of the show. I was a kind of trumpeting angel who, with a whistle on the corner of the mouth, had to cross the dark stage and afterwards, with a few musical notes, had to sit in the background between Tibi and Adi. These two were hidden for

the moment. One was crouched in the improvised barrow and the other was solemnly counting the seconds, with his feet stuck up to his knees in the porcelain lavatory. Two projectors made them visible precisely when I was supposed to get up on my ear. After the lights were on, Jean, the last of us, was going to enter the stage, with the guitar in his shoulder belt, and he was supposed to give Adi a ride across stage in the barrow. That was what the director had in mind. From then on we had green light to do our musical bit.

Things took place almost the way I told you. Almost. The crust of the fluster we had accumulated because of being caught in a show which seemed posh to us and which we had no idea how to deal with, cracked two or three minutes before the beginning of the show. And, as one always has to have a pretext, in this case ours was represented by some cloaks we had to put on. 'And do we really have to put these on? They are very thick and they doesn't leave our hands free so we can't play because of them...' - 'Come on guys, please, do this too because there is only one minute till we begin. I am asking you, please, help me... I have had enough trouble with this show already.' - 'OK... We'll put them on.'

That was easy to say. And easy to do. But, when seeing each other, wrapped in those moth nests, gathered from God knows what closed down theatre storehouse, we all burst into laughter. It was not a normal, but a nervous, sometimes hysterical laughter, which made the director crack. From then on, till the show was over, nobody could talk some sense into us. We took over that tepid cultural hall and its success or defamation depended entirely on us. We paid no attention to any indication hurled at us by the director from the back of the curtain, all the more, we even indifferently forgot everything we had been told a few hours before.

The show can begin. *The show must go on!* Silence took over the place. It is the sign of the level of hopes of the public. Darkness... I enter

the stage, trembling with laughter, focusing both on the white chalk stripe meant to guide me and on my friends' off-censored laughter. Because of the laughter, I cannot play the whistle at all. All I can do is to walk slowly and crookbacked, in order to find my way. Close to the centre of the stage I stumble over the cloak. It is only God who still keeps me standing. Yet, the sound of the thud cannot stop the roars of laughter coming from the boys backstage. With my heart turned to ice, I can feel the public's bewilderment. I know they are all serious, Christian people who had suffered a lot. People who had lost families. Even though, I can hardly prevent myself from laughing. I can hear the director's lashes spitted through the teeth full of cavities.

The light from the two projectors uncovers me sitting, with the whistle in my hands, at full sight, and with a smile hidden by the cloak's hood. I had barely attained a doubtful normality when the devil tempted me to watch those recently starting their parts. Adi was lying in the barrow, resembling an odalisque immersed in the pool full of rose water and Tibi, with his shinbones stuck in the loo-God knows what symbol in the director's artistic view- was trying to hold his equilibrium. Perceiving the majesty of the absurd I again burst into laughter. This time, an unconcealed, assumed laughter, so that the spectators were completely still. Taking into account the fact that we were laughing without any restraint - all three of us on the stage - it looked like that was the way the show was supposed to go on.

After Jean assumed his role, walking Adi in that barrow, everything turned into a little party. We were all laughing when we felt like and we cared for nobody else's opinion. We tried to carry on our little musical bit. That was singing. But completely shaken by laughter, we didn't make much of our songs. Especially I, who was supposed to blow the whistle, focused more on the theatrical side of the business. Jean was shouting his lungs out when reciting Gyr's lines, all resembling a magazine pamphlet. Yet, *Rise*

you, George, Rise You John! literally made the public rise. We were more or less off the hook. Nobody was actually interested in that show to have fluency or an inner logic. The stake was for all those involved to get out of that filthy cesspool. And the applause represented the endorsement granted to the organizers.

By the end of the entire thing, while listening to some famous actors yelling God knows what religious prose, the Bread-Man arrives, an appliance containing a hundred and something fresh loaves of bread, bought from Amzei marketplace a little time before the beginning of the show. The director was dragging it down the stage, with the despair granted by the obligation of carrying out a burdening task all by himself and during a limited time. He was playing his own card. When seeing the signal he shared with us during the rehearsal, we were supposed to break the thick paper, which was covering the loaves, and after that break them and share them with those in the public. Adi was the only one who was supposed to do something. He was supposed to pour white wine from a five-litre bottle into some small plastic glasses and then to share it with those in the public.

During that sacred moment we were going to give the exact measure of our interest for the show. I don't know how we did it, but we didn't manage to properly unwrap the Bread-Man so that, out of his groins, the fresh loaves spread mostly down the floor. The director was dead nervous. He started yelling at us as if he had paid us. Saying that we were good for nothing that we hadn't even been able to share the loaves properly...

Meanwhile, Adi was taking in glass after glass of wine, in full shortsighted and extremely confused view of the former political prisoners.

It is useless to say that the success was huge, worthy of a big stage. We had been given endless rounds of applause. That was going to make the director chill out. He had managed to come out of it with flying colours.

Late in the night, we all headed towards our

homes, all drunk both because of the success and because of the wine we had taken in from a second five-litre bottle. It had been our payment for having taken part in that shit. The director had bought it especially for us, thinking we would be glad.

And I can't say we weren't...

Acknowledgment. The fact that I had blown the whistle for a decade, with my eyes popping out, willy-nilly got me close to some, let's say, artistic personalities. That was the proof of my existence in that tormented and tormenting world of culture.

Nicu Alifantis was the first V.I.P. I bumped into in my loose career as a Romanian artist. More or less chronologically, Grigore Vieru the poet was the next personality I met. Then, after a year, music made it possible for me to meet some other famous characters. I caught fleas for Marian Munteanu, got drunk together with the Archbishop of Târgoviște, had Sorin Dumitrescu as a spectator and I made the dust fly during a backstage conflict with Virgil Ogășanu. I received money in the hat, while at Kretzulescu's, from Rudel Obreja's fists and from Mihai Pocorschi's charity, in order to be defied in the same place – another type of contiguity- by Costi Ioniță's blue eyes. I took part in TV shows together with Dan Iordăchescu, the tenor and with Bianca Ionescu, the soprano.

I slowly started to take into account only the human side of these people. Their flaws, complexes, insecurities and grouch. I finally understood that social victory is only a surface thing. That it is based on circumstances. And on the efforts and shoulders of God knows how many people.

Translated by Raluca Vîjia





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Charts and paradigms

Alex. Leo Șerban



When they tried to establish a chart of the Romanian movie from its beginnings up to the present day, the journalists interested in this subject- and who obviously believed it would have been an interesting subject for the public!- had to face two obstacles which apparently had nothing to do with each other. No, it isn't (only) about the low appetite of some of those questioned to undertake a 'test' which uncovers them either due to their verdicts and idiosyncrasies- or, bluntly, due to their inconsistency and inherent 'friendships'...

One deals with the frailty of the canon regarding the seventh art: how many of our critics (who aren't just chroniclers!) have seriously bothered their head discussing this canon- given the fact that the Romanian cinematography keeps on being the Cinderella of the arts, exercising a quasi-null influence on the cultural paradigm, blocked in the literature-music-painting 'royal triad'? In Romania, due to too many reasons in order to be analysed here, the cinema is *not* part of the compulsory cultural canon. And maybe it is not just mere happening that the only cinema men valorised by the afore-mentioned paradigm are *not only* film but, more importantly, theatre directors: Liviu Ciulei and Lucian Pintilie. With

us, the 'big' film battles have been given on journalistic ground, being punctual and mainly connected to the financial frauds of the CNC¹ juries. The only critic who initiated a salutary work of re-establishing the position of the cannon- that of yesterday and that of today- is Valerian Sava and his *Critical History of the Contemporary Romanian Movie* (Meridiane Publishing House, 1999) whose first published volume stops immediately after 'the obsessing decade'... But Mister Sava is a concealed, marginalized, isolated or simply ignored 'franc-tireur': if the discussion of the canon is difficult in what regards literature, then, when coming to the cinema, it is simply accidental!

The second obstacle deals with the too recent moment (approximately four or five years) when I was the witness of the outburst and settling of a potential 'new Romanian cinema' created by the young generation (from Cristi Puiu to Cristi Mungiu). Even if, let's say, some of the best Romanian movies of all times (Pintilie's *The Oak*, Nae Caranfil's *E Pericoloso Sporgeresi* or Danieliuc's *The Conjugal Bed*) were produced in the recent years after the Revolution, only Danieliuc's movie managed to be a debut which indeed brought something new; the other two did noth-

¹ The National Council of Cinematography.

ing else but to vividly and freely further on pursue important filmographies. Under the given circumstances, I don't think one can speak of a 'renewal' of the Romanian cinema before the substantial series initiated by Puiu's *Stuff and Dough*, recently followed by Caranfil's *Philanthropy*, Mungiu's *Occident*, Radu Muntean's *The Rage*, Titus Muntean's *Exam* and now *The Death of Mister Lăzărescu* directed by the same Puiu... All these titles (not at all equal in value, but having something in common) successively appeared during the same year or quite recently one after the other, creating the impression of a conjoined revival movement (thematic and formal) and of a re-evaluation of the native cinematographic tropisms.

Now, leaving aside these considerations which are more connected to the history of the art under discussion, one must say that- beyond hierarchies and canons- the new thing that the cinema after 1994 has really brought about has obviously been the thematic freedom. The directors were finally free to turn their own stories into movies, to screen the books they liked the way they pleased or to do both, intermingling personal obsessions with suggestions from literature. The strong word here is 'personal'. Because, otherwise, of course, the directors of the communist regime *also* mixed literary suggestions with their own ideas- only that none of them was one hundred per cent 'personal', but filtered through the alienated filter of censorship. And censorship had a right of 'final cut'- as, ironically, the producers from the big American studios have always had. The communist censorship used to cut off the too transparent hints or the 'inconvenient' subjects and was indifferent to the commercial impact of the movie- anyway, except for the historical or detective movies directed by Sergiu Nicolaescu or for the improvised shows signed by Mircea Drăgan or Geo Saizescu, one couldn't talk of 'commercial success' in Ceaușescu's Romania... Obviously, 'the capitalist censorship' was mainly interested in the profit: if a movie contains things susceptible

of sending the average viewer away (from the subject to the direction), that film is 'readjusted' till it fits the standard format.

The paradox is that the big problem of the Romanian movie before '89 was the existence of censorship and the great problem of the post-December Romanian movie is the lack of censorship! The cinema has managed to get rid of the ideological censorship but I think that some commercial censorship would do it no harm. It is obviously not the case of the author movies but that of the commercial movies: in the case of the former, the censorship coming from the public is very effective... Used to the non-problematic movies and craving for easy entertainment (all the more as various televisions have inoculated it *this* type of fraud!), the Romanian public is not yet (and I am moderating my language!) doing justice to the offers coming from the authentic cinema men. We are faced with, as the Americans state it in movies, 'a situation', because an 'authentic cinema man' doesn't lend himself to 'paying services' to the population, the mediocre directors who could have served the public have vanished and the average spectator is waiting to see detective movies and comedies; hence, there is a fatal syncopation between supply and demand. An authentic cinema man- as opposed to a standardized craftsman- wants to express *himself* or to express Reality or both, while the great public- as I said- is not interested in 'Reality' but in entertainment. And when this public cannot find it in the cinema, it remains indoors, with the TVs on. Sleeping slaves of automatisms.

Yet, the Reality (a very difficult to grasp, but still operational concept) keeps on being- especially now, half a century after its amputation from cinemas and television- the only serious motivation for a young director to take up movies. The movie *is*, by definition, Reality (that is Truth) for 24 photograms per second. And what the documentary-as cinematographic manifestation- again by definition, used to do, has been recently claimed by the action movies. The full-length films of the last period of time (the

one I mentioned at the beginning) also presuppose taking possession of this vast and damaged territory called 'Reality'. Circumstantial or not, the moment the documentaries signed by young directors try to save 'the white spots' of the more or less recent history (see Iepan's *The Decree Children* or Solomon's *The Great Communist Plunder*), the full-length films signed by their peers nervously focus on the today 'reality', revealing the meanings of the moment. Moreover: there is a fertile hybridisation exercised by the documentary over fiction (like in *The Death of Mister Lăzărescu*) or, symmetrically, exercised by fiction over the documentary (like in Thomas Ciulei's *That's the Way Things Are*). It doesn't matter that we didn't yet reach a 'fluid border' between fiction and documentary, there are signs that at least in what regards some cinema men- the strict delineations between genres and species have turned futile and at the same time

inoperative for the critics... What eventually matters is a huge- and undoubtedly unpremeditated- recovering effort of the anthropological dimension: *all* Romanian movies after 1990- no matter the quality!- represent a devoted mirror of the human mutations (sociological and of any other kind) that the Romanian society has undergone during the past fifteen years. From this perspective, the value of the cinema productions comes second to the interests an anthropologist can take in any of the titles appeared after 1990! Yet, as my competence cannot reach any further, I shall only hope that such a subject is exciting enough so as to be granted a serious study. Anyway, it would be a salutary sign that at least in this area, the cumbersome cultural paradigm which focuses on literature so and so forth is- beneficently- put aside...

Translated by Raluca Vîjăiac



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Bitter honey

David Reu, film director, 60 years old
Interview done by Ioana Daia
and Daniela Alexandrescu



I met film director David Reu in the spring of 2001. We were instantly taken with his incredible energy, with his charm and funny stories, as well as with his gentlemanly manners. I then discovered a man who, apart from his impressive career as a documentary film-maker (we will only mention here “Țuculescu”, “Calea Moșilor – trecut și prezent”), also manages several other different projects both editorial and in the field of the cinema.

Much to his amazement, instead of discussing his films, we challenged him to tell us about an episode which many would deem unimportant, but which may be representative for the crucial moment of the 1990s. However unusual and singular it may appear to us now, back then it was not at all uncommon that a film maker should become a professional beekeeper or that a film studio should start out as a bee entrance.

What we found very difficult during the transition period from the 1990s onwards was finding a job that would suit your interests and your education. And in the cultural field this was all the more difficult as various domains were disappearing and others became more and more prominent. For instance, press and television

which were liable to help solve the current social conflicts got the upper hand, while documentaries became less and less important. You had to have the strength and the energy young age gives you in order to make yourself known in this new context. I was already getting old, I was already older than 55 actually, and I was beginning to ponder more serious matters. I wrote a film script about the transition period, which I called “Un zid părăsit și neisprăvit” (*The Unfinished, Abandoned Wall*), hinting at the fact that everything was about a group of people gathered in one of the abandoned and unfinished “hunger circuses”¹, Ceaușescu’s pet project.

Let’s talk about the transition period ... For us, documentary film-makers, the transition is a little more special because people have given up this cinema genre altogether. Nobody planned or meant for this to happen. It happened because of the carelessness and sheer stupidity of those in charge of this field at the time, to which I may add the desire to have smaller or greater personal benefits or something... The general managers who kept coming and going at the time, although fellow film-makers, pursued their own interest and ruined the documentary genre entirely.

¹ Grocery department stores meant for the working-class people, in the form of grand buildings which were left unfinished after the Revolution.

“Sahia” Studio¹ released theme films. Then they all got started: this can’t be done, that is impossible, he should be kicked out because of this and that; I had a history of making films about young pioneers and about the Pioneers’ Palace, and I kept out of the dispute because Liiceanu had stated very clearly: those who had done this and that should stay out of business for five years! Let’s stay out for five years, then ... But I’ve been doing that for fifteen years now and I’ve realized that the right things are still not done. But I’m still out of this business ...

It was a difficult period. By 1989 I had already made a film about the Getae-Dacians and their science. In fact, it was about their calendar system. Then I managed to make a sequel of the film in foreign languages. Around 1992 I made another film about the village of Săpânța, “Viața în credință” (*Life through Faith*). At the time the village was facing problems caused by some personal interests, which proved petty in the end, of a bunch of wise guys who are now living comfortably in France, in ... And they were destroying everything. There I managed to get a film that would speak about the need for faith to keep the whole society together, and not just as petty interests. I made the film during those street protests ... I went with them, the mayor included, for a drink of palinca (traditional alcoholic drink made from fruit) and all that... I realized then what the deal was with them. And in my film I stressed not only their faith and traditions and that cemetery of theirs and all that. I was still working for “Sahia” Studio and I took the UNESCO guys with me there.

During the same year I made “Nepotul str?zii” (*The Grandson of the Street*). He was the first grandson of the street because he was the child of two street children who lived in the area near Gara de Nord (*North Central Station*), among the pipelines and in the underground of the same station. I put a lot of love in this film

about these unfortunate children and I took the footage of the street baby at a time when I was still hoping that more efforts could be made to help them. To this day I live with the regret that so little was actually achieved. In time and on different occasions, I also contributed to a certain relief of their situation, at least in the case of those living around Gara de Nord. I made friends with the general manager of CFR (*Romanian Railway Service*), as well as with the ministers, but my powers as a film director were rather limited.

Most of my colleagues from “Sahia” Studio took to jobs where all they had to do was to warm up a chair and destroy the field of documentary films in order to get a salary ... But I can’t name a single one that actually kept making documentary films. One female colleague got a high position with the Ministry of Culture: she was in charge of filling the bosses’ glasses with sparkling mineral water... Another fellow director, turned general manager, became a businessman in God-knows what television department ... The script writer I worked with for my “Probleme personale” (*Personal affairs*), banned by the Second Cabinet², was elected prefect at Cluj. All these happened during the years 1990 and 1991, after the Revolution. And he asked me to come to Cluj for a film, a monograph on the city. How clever the new prefect is and how splendid his organization methods! ... He continues the methods used by the former chief party-secretary. And I continued the tradition imposed by “Sahia Film” studio and its own chief party-secretaries ...

Before 1989, there used to be a time when people at “Sahia” Studio would talk about a Romanian school of documentary films. At that time, I used to have teams of 10-15 people who would finish the production of a film in a week. I took a team with me, I was the director, I felt the joy of setting the limits of footage-taking, of

¹ Documentary film studio.

² The department led by Elena Ceaușescu.

decided how they were to be edited, and so on ... But after 1989 I stopped doing all these things, I simply couldn't do them anymore. But the urge to work is still a human characteristic. What else am I good at apart from making films? I know how to keep bees. Oh, these bees do allow themselves to be exploited ...

Beekeeping instantly became my trade in 1992-1993, when I felt that making other films for "Sahia" Studio was not an option anymore. And I had to have an income, a steady job of some sort ... I started off and, while waiting for another opportunity to make films, I took to the road with my beehives, camping near one false acacia in the field or another one on the hills ... I would take them in sunflower fields and I would then sell the honey. I don't think that this whole beekeeping business was a sad story, although it actually was. It was a bitter story. I had no choice. What was I supposed to do? Later I started developing things and went back to my trade. But at that time nobody needed documentary films. They were all pulling in different directions; they all wanted a television station ...

It wasn't easy for me then, meaning that it was all so sad, but I'm not in the least ashamed because I kept working. I had to get over that period when there seemed to be nothing one could do to earn one's living. And I need money even for as little as a camera. It was then that I remembered about my hobby, bees, and I used my knowledge of them working together with a colleague who had more beehives. I too built some five or six, and finally ended up with ten of them. Using beeswax, propolis and mastic resin, all mixed up in certain quantities, I prepared a depilatory wax and managed to burn my legs and those of my wife. And I would take the thing to the local fair, actually to that Dâmbovița bazar, and we arranged the cubes one next to the other ... We would shout: "Don't shave with an axe, use beeswax!" And there was another former colleague of mine, a film director, who sold shoes, clothes she had received from Israel. She sold these things, and, right next to her, I sold my de-

pilatory wax and made some money that I used to get sometimes a new lens, some other times a new tripod and that is how I set up a studio of my own and got back in business.

I used to have beehives scattered around, but in time I started collecting them from my friends and taking them away. Where to? I had my place in one friend's bee garden, at "Sahia Film". A friend had only one of my beehives. I collected that one too, and managed to gather ten of them. He owned around 70 or 100, and a big lorry where he had set the beehives. Each time I went over to help him I was happy because it was an opportunity to get out of Bucharest to the wonderful forests and fields surrounding the city. My beehives were in his bee garden. We would travel to the Danube Delta where we could find wild flowers and the first yellow rape flowers. Then, twice a year, we would search for the false acacia flowers, first in the fields around Bucharest, then over at Drajna de Sus, where we found the false acacia blooming for the second time. And I got some honey from him, as he couldn't sell it all. I knew people, some rather wealthy, who would buy honey from me. And I sold his honey and a little of mine to them. I also made the depilatory wax myself. It was virtually brain surgery. I remember I used to add four measures of mastic resin and one measure of beeswax, and the compulsory ingredient, namely 100-200 grams of propolis, as it has aseptic properties. There was another substance that I would use, some mineral oil product resembling wax. But it's not of the same quality as genuine beeswax ... Use Reu Davy depilatory wax!... I did a responsible job, I gave it a pharmaceutical aspect and I also tested it to see if it was good, if it peeled off. And there were times when I and my entire family burnt our skins – yes, the family were called to participate in my experiments. I would also prepare syrup bottled in special containers. I added honey from lime tree blossom, from wild flowers and so on... I recommended that it should be taken in the evening, against fatigue. One small glass of lime tree honey to be

taken in the evening. The same kind of honey can be added to lime tea and you sleep like a baby ... Sometimes I would laugh my head off and there was no one around to take shots of that. Of course, I had labels too. Check this out, colour labels: *Davy Apicultor* ... I would stick this on the depilatory wax. "Depilatory wax – a recipe from the Pharaoh's Egypt" ... The labels were for the 100 and the 200 grams containers. Look, from 1992 ... "Validity 2 years. It lengthens the time period between depilation sessions." And I had all the necessary documents. One can tell that mine was a legitimate business. I was authorized by the state ... "Production and selling of food and beauty products prepared from bee honey and other derived substances. Arrangement services and facilities for hygienic comfort, agro-tourist camping import-export." What do you think?! I have a certificate for agricultural production activities ... I didn't need it to sell my stuff at the local fair. Anyone can go and sell anything they please there.

I used to tell the story about the propolis to the people who gathered around my camp. They asked why I added propolis to the composition ... Well, let me explain! I told them all about propolis, about the poplars outside villages, about the little mouse who dared to enter the beehives ... I would make up a story of some sort. And they would buy one or two chunks of the thing, and I earned yet another two or three thousand lei from the long story.

I know one thing, namely that, if you make one think or another, you can't be sure who's going to sell it. I had to sell it somewhere. I took it to a stand in the old city quarters, in Lipscaeni Street where there was some big department store. Some times people bought it, sometimes they didn't ... So I said to myself: why don't you take it to the local fair. And there I took it. I had heart from this colleague of mine that she went there to sell clothes. So, I went along ... She would go there and recite her little "poem", something with a "hat" and "this and that" ... And I went there with her to find a place ... And

a nice little spot we found and people there sold used tires, old tools, rusty cooking machines ... And there I was, with my goods. The passage from art and documentary films to depilatory wax is not an easy one. So I found a method of selling my stuff.

The local fair took place on Saturdays and Sundays. In fact, on Sunday mornings I would go there and meet all sorts of people looking for the things they needed. For instance, one of my first photo cameras was bought there, at the fair. I traded all sorts of things and got more equipment for my studio. I got myself a Smena 8 camera, as I liked black and white films a lot. I used a whole film in black and white on the days of the Revolution. I bought them and developed them myself, I did everything myself. I got another interesting camera from the fair. That's how my studio started. I sold my depilatory wax on a box left from an old piece of editing equipment, a player. I used to put the box on the ground, take the depilatory wax from inside the box and display it. I bought this Smena 8 camera with the first money I made there. Later I started using more compact cameras, and then modern professional ones. I used to meet former colleagues there but I wasn't at all ashamed. They had come there for cable and other stuff... For instance, there was a former cameraman there, who boasted that he once had a camera and that he had sold a film he had made during the Revolution, for which some Americans paid 15000 dollars. A small treasure, I used to say to myself back then... At the time I sold a cake of depilatory wax for 2000 lei, if I'm not mistaken. If I managed to sell ten cakes, I got 20 000 lei and I considered myself rich! I had enough money, so I suppose I could have got back home. But it didn't last for too long, the whole business ended within a year or so. I would also sell honey there. I had a firm of my own, *Davy* ... The firm had a bank account and a certificate from the city hall ...

There, at the fair, I met guys who, poor devils, sold the little they had left ... If memory

serves I got a nice knife there. Sometimes I had to add some money, but I always got what I wanted. This is how I became familiar with the fair because I hadn't had many previous experiences of that place. But it's true that it was at the fair that I sold the first Trabant; I had become braver. I sold that car there to get a new one. Later I reluctantly got myself a Dacia.

They had given me a place for my beehives where the Korean Embassy is nowadays, right next door from the Chinese Embassy. And, silly me, I went to see the place: 250 square metres it was ... They were supposed to allot it to me, it was as good as mine, but I was stupid enough to say no. I had to buy that land then ... Now the land in the vicinity of the Chinese Embassy is worth a thousand... What am I saying? It's more like several thousand euros per square metre. I would have been a little Becali¹ now. We joke about these things, but that's how it was back then ...

It was a difficult period. I couldn't get out of Bucharest for an entire week and couldn't film anything ... And then I would take the beehives and leave the city one way or another. Do you have any idea what a beautiful feeling you have spending time with them? During the day I gathered two or three carrots, one or two onions and some other spring roots, I added some leaves from I don't know what plants, I boiled all together and got a soup. It tasted absolutely delicious! It was our soup. We had a pavilion where we slept; it was so huge you could park half a lorry underneath it... I was playing the servant. In fact, we used to say that we actually helped each other, that I had no other place to keep my beehives. I let them with him, I took them back and go with them in the fields ... And we spent the night under that half-a-lorry pavilion. I had a tent and a family with me. And we lit up the fire. There were a lot of mosquitoes there, and I suffered like a martyr because of them. I swallowed all over. On the other hand, you had the feeling

that you did a nice and profitable job. I gave it up when things with my former trade began to improve.

We dearly remember the old beekeeping days ... We didn't squander out time. For me and for my former colleague it was a matter of surviving that tough period ... Each of us was struggling. Some people wanted to make a film with somebody who was selling images showing the misfortunes the country was plagued by at that time, and wanted to take part in the footage for documentary films on wretched children, asylums, the Romania of the handicapped. Others wanted a position in television, and they are still holding it. Some others were looking for jobs: manager, assistant manager, warehouse supervisor, door-keepers and public clerks. There were many cameramen and directors who did nothing and lived off the money they got from renting the buildings.

I was in the beekeeping business in 1992 and 1993. In 1995 I realized that I could set up a firm and start getting orders. I retired in 1995, so as not to be competition – I would have my own business and that was that.

I had orders for traditional films, not only for digital films, from CFR. The history of the railways ... The Saligny Bridge, the Teodorescu Bridge, the one next to it. And back then, I took the footage on traditional film ... My firm was first called Publiferom and then Reu Studio.

Later on I tried to diversify my business. I got into publishing. I published "Din porunca lui Zalmoxe. Pietrele dacilor socotesc" (*As Zalmoxe Commanded. The Computations of the Dacian Stones*). I also began publishing photo albums... In time, I took a greater fancy to photography, greater than the one I had for film making, because film making after 1990 involved a lot of money. You had to be young and have enough energy, too if you wanted to struggle to get that money. I had orders for documentary films on technical matters, meaning

¹ Businessman who is heavily contested by the media.

films on the production process at Automatica and other orders from the former scientific advisors I had worked with at "Sahia Film". But these orders were limited by the low budget invested in making documentary films by those who thus wanted to advertise their products.

The money I needed for my studio I got by doing all sorts of jobs and by working for instance at weddings and baptism parties. I made films on both occasions and managed to earn my money in an honest manner. "Hey, boy, you with the pictures, come over here!" And I went. I had a Smena from before the Revolution and I had recently bought a common compact camera which I used to take photos in Herăstrău Park and at wedding parties. "Here you are, sir ..." "And how much would this be?" "Nothing, sir, the groom pays for them." I was somewhat ashamed. I can't afford it. If I accept money for my photos, I'll have to charge the poorer client too. My profession is my profession. It's one thing to take a picture at a wedding party, and another to take pictures for your client. I mean I didn't accept money for it. It's professional ethics. That's how I managed to get money for my equipment. I wouldn't have pulled it through otherwise.

I thought of setting up my own firm because I knew a lot of people in the technical and economic fields who managed factories and plants, like Automatica and so on, where I could get some solid orders. Thus I went on with my plans. I worked with rented equipment and with cameras that were only half paid for ... I worked in the field of bank restoration, then I worked for the construction company in charge with the bank restoration. And orders kept coming in during a considerable period of time ... The restoration of the Romanian Commercial Bank, of Exim Bank ... I filmed the restoration procedures, meaning mending the interiors of the banks, broadening and transformations, the ex-

teriors ... I took footage of the stages of these repairing procedures. This was how the construction company managed to get new orders. I had already worked with them on other films at "Sahia" Studio and now they invited me to film the bank restorations for them. There was a whole series of buildings done by reputable companies for the International Bank of Religions and other banks as well. People knew me already and called for me whenever they needed.

I got more orders, I made some films for CFR, and one for the Museum in Deva ... I mean I went on making films. And I also handled other things. I tried to accumulate money like a bee would honey ... I learnt the lesson my bees had taught me.

I also worked for the electoral campaign of PSD¹ because I had seen the mistakes the coalition, the CDR² had made before ... When I saw the stupid, utterly idiotic things they had done, I said to myself that the others would win the elections and maybe they had got smarter since they last lost political power. And I worked for this electoral campaign and I even supported the former mayor of District 1 who looked like a very serious man to me. I thought that better times would follow. I have no regrets about it because I did my job in earnest and I praised nothing of what was not praiseworthy. It's true that one of the films showed Iliescu saying that we shouldn't replace their corrupt people with ours and I approved of what he said. I allowed myself to include the statement in a film I made. Perhaps that was what Iliescu thought, but facts must have been different. And so they were. When their corrupt people started pouring in from all over the place, I was a little ashamed of myself, but there was nothing I could do. That's how things were and unfortunately I was part of what happened. I think I also worked for the Democratic Coalition back in 1996 ...

In the field of documentary films one is

1 The Social Democratic Party.

2 The Romanian Democratic Convention.

happy with one's work if the film is truthful, meaning that things are as they really are ... You start being unhappy when you see that things will get exactly as ordered ... But you say to yourself, hey, he's the client, I do as he tells me to do. The documentary I would have loved to make would have looked very different, but I couldn't make it. The documentary films I used to make were actually very different because then I would do as I pleased.

Documentary films teach you to know and especially to be willing to admit that this country is beautiful precisely because of its people. You

cannot make a documentary without including people in it. And these people are and must be beautiful. You have to understand them. And your understanding of them influences your mind too. You can't live your life begging and asking for mercy, you can't lie to people unless you yourself are superficial and eager to climb the social ladder as quickly as possible. God kept me somewhat safe from such things ...

Translated by Alina Popescu





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Byzantium or Istanbul?

**Magda Manoliu, former university lecturer,
63 years old**

Interview done by Vlad Manoliu



We began our little frontier trade immediately after 1989. A lot of Turkish firms mushroomed around Gara de Nord, offering transport to Istanbul (there where coaches leaving every hour – you weren't even allowed to book your place in advanced, you just went to the station and got on the coach to Istanbul). Many people went there, bought all sorts of goods from the Turkish bazaars and then returned to Romania where they would sold them. The coaches were overloaded with these people we can't even attempt to call retailers. Most of them had jobs and had become retailers only on their spare time. They bought leather jackets, T-shirts, cosmetics products ... and brought them back home. They of course had all sorts of arrangements made with customs officers. While traveling, one of these retailers collected a certain sum of money from each passenger and, when they arrived at the border – because the coach's luggage compartment was crammed with bales containing the merchandise – they gave the money to the customs officer in order to avoid the check. The sum they usually gathered was considerable, I can't remember the exact amount but I think it must have been between 5 and 10 dollars for each passenger.

As we wanted to go to Istanbul in search of the old Byzantium, we decided to take one of these coaches because it was much cheaper and

much more convenient for us. Alright, it was a plan then. We set off and we wandered like a bunch of lunatics through the whole of Istanbul for two days (unfortunately we only had money for a couple of days). We visited Saint Sophia, the Blue Mosque, Top Kopi and a lot of other wonderful places. We promised to ourselves that we would one day return and got on the coach back to Romania. I forgot to mention that it was five of us, I, my husband, and some friends. Our fellow travelers had gathered around the coach and were chatting. I accidentally overheard what they were saying. They were raising the problem of how much to ask each passenger to contribute to "smooth" the passage through customs. I started actually paying attention as they started talking about their shopping in Istanbul, about the prices they paid ... Their language was a rather colourful one with many grammar mistakes and slang expressions, it was something altogether entertaining. Having raised the question of the individual contribution to the common bribe, they settled an amount and then one of them said to another, "Man, you go to those in the front too!" And the man replied, "I won't! Can't you see they have no luggage?" "You go, man!" He came over to where we were staying and told us that, alright, the deal was that the customs checkpoint was almost in sight and we all had to pay five or ten dollars each but I

can't remember the exact sum. We told them that there was no need for us to pay as we hadn't bought anything from Istanbul. In utter amazement, the man gave us this shocked look and asked, "Then why on earth did you go to Istanbul in the first place? What did you do there?" We didn't even blink when we told the man that we wanted to simply visit Istanbul. "What did you want to visit?!!!" The man was a complete mess and he managed to utter, "Alright". Then he left, went to the back of the coach, flung himself on the chair and let the others know that,

"We can't ask for money from them, they went there to visit the city!!!" There was a moment of silence on the coach and that was one of the few occasions when we got to be perceived as a breed of rare animals on public display at the zoo. We were completely different. The funny thing was that they didn't seem interested in us. No! They simply pitied us. The people we traveled with we felt sorry for poor us.

Translated by Alina Popescu



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Author: Petre Popovăț

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The passport

Petre Popovăț



One of the first measures taken by CFSN¹ was to reopen the borders and implicitly to grant each citizen of the “New Romania” the right to own a passport. This meant that anybody (almost anybody) could own and store in their desk’s drawer a document that allowed them to (theoretically) travel **at any moment** to any destination in the world. I had been haunted by the strong desire to travel throughout the entire communist period, when I wasn’t at all allowed to leave Romania. I wasn’t trustworthy and the authorities were afraid that I might not come back. And they were so right in their suspicions! I had tried several times to cross the border as a “tourist” to Switzerland, where I had been invited by some friends who at the same time had managed to get me a job which would have become available for me as soon as I had inevitably signed the request for political asylum.

So, in February of 1990 I rushed to the police precinct in Luigi Cazzavillan Street where passports were issued for the people. I wasn’t exactly hoping to go abroad soon – my friends wouldn’t invite me now. “You are free now, so it’s your business to find means to travel if you want to see the world ...” -, but I couldn’t help the urge to hold in my drawer the long-awaited

passport which turned me into an equal of any Western citizen. I knew that in order to go through the entire procedure you had to stand in line. A queue! ... That was a phenomenon characteristic of the years before the Revolution. We had queued for hours to buy meat, milk, gasoline and even cigarettes. One more queue (the last one, perhaps) would not make much difference.

I went to the respective office and found out that they had already made a list with several hundred names of those who wanted a passport, a lot more than the logical limit of those who stood any chance of submitting their papers before closing hours, even if the schedule had been adjusted significantly. The next day I went back and, although it was before sunrise, I put my name on the list in a rather worrying position: I wasn’t sure I would be able to squeeze myself into the clerks’ timetable. This fear continued to cast a shadow on my joy for 14 hours, the time I spent queuing. It was the first time in my life when I was crammed up in the same room as hundreds of other people, considering that the room couldn’t accommodate more than fifty or sixty, who were leaning against one another, stepping on one another’s toes, breathing the al-

¹ The Council of the National Salvation Front.

ready stuffy air, but feeling the same kind of special emotion that made you forget all hardship. All you had to do was count down the 114 ... 79 ... 43 ... 21 people in front of you, and you would be the happiest man on earth. You simply forgot the inhuman and perhaps even humiliating conditions you were forced into, you forgot other queues you had experienced trying to get the necessary documents. One more step and you would be ... a free man! A couple of days later (I can't remember how many, but I know I counted them down) I queued again (for just 2 hours this time) and finally! I was holding the object without which my life made no sense anymore. I was so happy that I wasn't bothered that on the front cover of my passport there was still the old emblem of the Socialist Republic of Romania defying me ...

The first trip abroad

Three months after I had got my passport, I received a phone call from Switzerland saying that a Mazda was waiting there for me to drive to Romania. The car was for free, the customs was virtually inexistent (they had issued a law stipulating that, until the 30th of December 1990, any product, from needles to the Queen Mary II, that was brought to Romania through customs would be tax free), I had my passport in my pocket and I didn't have to ask for anybody's permission to get on board a plane to Zurich. I got the Swiss visa in 24 hours (which was unbelievable!!) and ... here I was, at Otopeni Airport. It was the first time I had ever stood on the other side of the ugly wall made of frosted glass which separated those waiting for their friends to arrive from the happy ones who were leaving. My first impression was of an incredible mess, of the arrogant customs officers and of the moustache of the woman in uniform who threw a disgusted look at my still virgin passport. I hate to travel by plane but that particular morning I was convinced that God hadn't promised me happiness only to brutally take it away in a plane crash.

After a two-hour flight the plane landed on the Zurich Airport, on the land of freedom ... A couple of potholes in the concrete run way made me keep my enthusiasm in check. Nothing is perfect! This impression held until I entered the airport building ... The flowers sold there overwhelmed me with their multitude of colours. In Romania I would only see carnations, 3 lei each, which you could find in all flower shops. Well, here the countless kinds of flowers had no name (I wouldn't have known them by name anyway); they had been shipped in from all over the world and they smelled divine. Next, fruits on sale ... I couldn't believe my eyes that on the 9th of May I could buy fresh strawberries, fresh melons, fresh pineapples (the only form in which I had ever tasted it was that of Chinese or Cuban preserves), fresh papaya, mango, and grapes, not to mention the common apples which had suddenly ceased to be so common – I had never seen so many different sizes and colours gathered in one place. Small stands selling books, clothes, “Officier Suisse” pocket knives, spirits, cigarettes, and so on were also present in the little Garden of Eden where I had just set foot. I felt the most wretched of all men, as I had no money to do some shopping; I should have been a millionaire to do so anyway because I couldn't resist any of the marvels on display all around me. Besides, I was in quite a hurry to get down the escalator and to catch the train to Lausanne. Zurich Airport, as I later found out, is the only one in Europe which has both an airport and a railway station. I had bought the tickets in Bucharest, but, because I was too excited and I wanted to look more like a true-blue Swiss, I took them to the ticket stand (I wasn't alone there) to check their validity and see if everything was alright. A most unfortunate urge! The clerk politely and in a cold voice told me that the tickets were valid alright, but from Zurich Station to Lausanne, so I had to pay 17 more Francs for the tickets from the airport to the city. I could have bought 2 pocket knives for that money! And to crown my misery, no ticket collector asked to see my ticket

during the few-kilometre journey.

Finally ... The Swiss trains. To get on a Swiss train you take a step directly from the platform, without climbing steep steps meant for basketball players, and then you reach the luggage compartment. Here you find, in a perfect "Swiss" order, all the passengers' suitcases which they collect as they get off (each passenger takes his or her own piece of luggage, of course). The wagons have no compartments, but they form one long hall with all the necessary comfort, air conditioning and clean windows. Once in a while, a lady passes by struggling with a cart laden with coffee cups, tea, cold and tempting soft drinks which I could barely ignore; I had just wasted a good 17 Francs I had considered safe. At the end of the aisle there was a public phone which you could use at will, even when the train was moving, to call people in Canada if you knew them and you had change. Never before had I seen a public phone in which you could insert different coins which, if you didn't use them all, were returned to you. I still had a lot to learn ... In Romania we would still insert small disks resembling the coins used for public calls (1 or 3 lei coins), which had been made at various workshops. It appears that many years before, these small disks were pierced in the middle and a thread had been tied up to them so as to allow one to pull it out as soon as the call was over.

For the next 2 and a half hours my nose remained stuck to the window pane of the train taking me to Lausanne. There was Switzerland! The Switzerland I had dreamed of, the Switzerland I had seen in my daydreams, "my" Switzerland! I saw ploughed fields criss-crossed by multicoloured lots drawn as if with a school ruler, but lacking any human presence, houses, and loads of them, which I watched from behind because nobody would even dream of building a house facing the railway. Well, I don't think that the people whose houses stood so close to the railway were the richest in the village. Still ... Behind these houses there were tools, ladders and

wheel barrows stored up. All seemed brand new and unused; I could almost catch a glimpse of the store labels still stuck in a corner. But I was especially impressed by the cement factory built near (2-300 metres away from) a couple of houses with squeaky-clean windows. I couldn't help myself but think of our Comarnic where the cement factory had turned the roofs, the windows, the leaves, the few remaining flowers and probably the people's souls into a uniform grey surface. I couldn't for the life of me understand how the Swiss had managed to build such effective filters and to keep the buildings so clean.

When I got to Lausanne I felt a little as if I had arrived in Bucharest: a flat (nicer than ours, though, but not too good looking), a Romanian family, Romanian food, Romanian words spoken about Romania. That was my impression until I got out in the street and into the first shop. I was familiar with other people's experiences and I tried to keep my emotions and tears in check at the sight of shop windows filled with meat. I was weak, though ... I could hardly conceive that everything there was available to regular customers who did not need special permits and tags. We still didn't have supermarkets in Bucharest, so I was for the first time in my life faced with such an avalanche of different goods, one more tempting than the next and, fancy that, even affordable! Then the long walks through the city ...

Well, my favourite pastime was to "visit" all pub toilets. It wasn't because I couldn't curb it or something. I just considered the whole thing as a sort of sport. I won if I was able to figure out the flushing system in the shortest period of time. I crowned myself champion, as each time I was able to guess that I was supposed to press a certain tile in the bathroom floor with my foot, or that I had to clap my hands or whistle a certain tune or other such nonsense that replaced (uselessly, I'd say) the classical chain in the wall or the common button. (After a few years they marketed an improved system which, after flushing, activated a sponge dipped in a chemical solution which was placed on the toilet seat, and

the toilet seat started spinning round as it disinfected itself automatically. One day, pressed by a certain torturing necessity, I entered a toilet and discovered that my “predecessor” had forgotten to flush. I did that for him, and one second later, I flung myself on the toilet seat. Somebody with a weaker heart would have dropped dead if they had felt that something was pocking them vigorously in the back and the seat underneath them started spinning round all by itself. I had completely forgotten that the system was turned on automatically.) My visits to public toilets had one other purpose: washing my hands and consequently getting to use the most exquisitely perfumed liquid soaps which would charm my nostrils until the next corner where I would again find a restaurant with a toilet and more liquid soap and ... Still, once I almost got into trouble. Literally and metaphorically ... I found that there was no water tap. Thinking myself cleverer than the system, I concluded that it was a photo-electrical cell activating the water flow and, in order to avoid splashing too much of it, I placed my hands as high as I could, close to the pipe where the water would gush from. The result was the one I had anticipated but it was 70 Celsius degrees hot water that came out. The lower I stooped, the cooler the water became. That was a precious lesson for me and since then, I’ve limited myself to rational hand-washing, namely only when needed.

One other thing that delighted me was to see people smiling in the streets, in stores, in restaurants or in the lifts of blocks of flats. I went down with one person in the morning, who was a complete stranger to me, and I got a smile and a “bon jour” and, after helping the person with the lift door, I got another smile and a “bon journée”. I was doubtlessly in another world. I don’t know whether it was better or worse, nicer or nastier. The only thing I knew was that this world which was completely new to me and which I had just begun to explore, after the initial shock had passed and I was beginning to somehow adjust, offered me a feeling of freedom

and peace of mind. My fellow men didn’t step on my toes anymore; I wasn’t aggressed in any imaginable way. My God, why hadn’t they given me the passport back in 1981?!

The second trip

As my girlfriend at the time was on a study trip in France, I suddenly found myself all alone, with money in the bank, with a car and a holiday I hadn’t taken yet. I decided to take advantage of all these and to run away on a short trip abroad. The decision, which had taken me exactly one minute, made me feel not lonely but free. I was a free citizen in a free country, as they say. I weighed all my possibilities: Yugoslavia, Hungary or Bulgaria, and from that point, over to Turkey. These were (except from the USSR) our neighbouring countries and I didn’t need a visa to get there.

I chose Bulgaria (the border with this country was the closest to Bucharest) and, if I felt like it, if I had money and time, I would even go for a visit to Istanbul. The problem was getting petrol in Bulgaria, where Romanian cars needed special cards, which I didn’t have, but it turned out that nobody there really made much fuss over them but they wouldn’t sell any petrol to you either. There was another reason why I chose Bulgaria ... In 1965 I received a visit from 4 Mexican friends. The days I spent with them positively delighted me but we eventually had to say good-bye. As they were headed to Istanbul, I suggested that they took me to the Giurgiu customs by car (just to spend another hour together) and, from there I would hitchhike back to Bucharest. Then I had no idea that the sight of the barrier being lifted to let them pass and to brutally stop me would be so painful. I watched their car disappearing into a world where I obviously did not belong and I remained standing “alone and miserable”, tears of spite in my eyes, and realizing how helpless I was. As they said, “What would have cost me to go with them?” They couldn’t understand what it was that made

them so special compared to me and what allowed them to enjoy an elementary right which was forbidden to me. Well, in 1991, I was set on taking my revenge on fate and to experience the feeling of seeing the barrier between Romania and Bulgaria being finally lifted for me too! In the end I decided to leave Romania through the Vama Veche customs because I was especially interested in the Bulgarian seaside.

The road to the customs checkpoint was the same as the one I used to take (by motorbike, and then by car) each year when I went to the seaside. The only difference was that for the first time, I had to drive a few hundred kilometers to get from the village to the customs checkpoint. The joy only a pioneer to unknown (and even forbidden) lands could feel was significantly diminished in my case by the sight of the long line of cars waiting to be checked and allowed (or not) to leave the country. The check was tighter because of smuggling problems, as hundreds of persons were resorting to this solution in order to scrap together a small capital that would allow them to set up a business of some sort. Most had previously been honorable individuals who had never done anything illegal. They would take huge quantities of produce out of Romania (it was usually fruit stolen from can factories) that they knew would sell well in other countries and they would bring back equally large quantities of goods (they had been legally bought) Romanians were so eager to buy. It was an illicit business, masked as an "innocent frontier trade", but which was liable to bring a huge profit in record time. This profit included of course the bribe one had to give to the customs officers. So, a queue at the border ... I smoked standing by the car, chatted with those in front of me in line (I felt a tinge spiteful because they were a little closer to the target than I was) and with those behind me (this time, I felt a little superior).

The vehicle in front of me was a minibus overloaded with people, men and women who looked like a bunch of accountants or high school teachers. They didn't seem at all to be

smugglers. A lady in her mid-forties came over to me and asked rather bluntly what was that I was transporting. I didn't get her question and answered that I was driving to Bulgaria and, if possible, to Turkey. "That's very nice", she said, "but what are you transporting to Istanbul?" "What do you mean by that? I'm transporting myself and my luggage." I noticed that I had offended her and I couldn't for the life of me understand why. She had just turned her back on me when I insisted, "Madam, I am just a simple tourist". She didn't believe me and asked me to prove that I wasn't hiding anything from her. I opened the trunk where I was carrying one rucksack with two or three shirts, some underwear, socks, a warmer coat, a rain coat and a portable toilet kit. She couldn't believe her eyes. I watched her as her eyes were searching every corner for an ingenious secret compartment where I could have hidden bearings, taps, the dismantled parts of God-knows what piece of machinery which I might have traded for blue jeans, carpets, leather jackets or Turkish gold. Her suspicions disappeared only after she had lifted my rucksack and felt how light it was. Then she remarked in an extremely disgusted and spiteful voice, "Sir, but you are really nothing but a simple tourist!" And she left giggling and in a hurry to bring the amazing piece of news to her colleagues. From the Vama Veche customs building I could hear a roar of laughter.

The importance of owning a passport ...

I had a Ford, a big, powerful, beautiful car which, at the same time, was also very old. It spent more time in repair shops than on the road. That had been its fate until the mechanic told me that I had to change the pistons. If I had had more money, the whole thing would have been very simple: there were a lot of specialized stores selling brand new spare parts which, nevertheless, must have been a lot more expensive than the 300 Swiss Francs I had paid for the whole car. The solution (in my case) was to find

the necessary spare parts in a workshop selling dismembered cars. That was how I got my solution. Or at least so I thought because, once I got to the workshop, I found that the spare parts were not compatible with my car. I was lucky, though, because the workshop owner accepted to have them back and gave me the money I had paid for them. Still, I panicked: my holiday was already in sight and my good-for-nothing car was useless. Then I had my moment of inspiration! Instead of traveling back in forth through Bucharest looking for spare parts, I rushed back home, I packed the things I would strictly need in a rucksack, grabbed my passport, dashed to Gara de Nord and got into a coach headed to Istanbul.

I'm not familiar with how things are nowadays but in the mid-nineties there were numerous Turkish companies transporting people on the route from Bucharest to Istanbul every one hour. And the coaches were never empty! I left Bucharest at 4 o'clock in the afternoon and arrived in Istanbul at 6 in the morning the next day. Waiting for the stores to open, I took a breath of the Bosphorus air (which I was already

familiar with and which I had been in love with since my first visit there). Then I went into a store and bought the spare parts I needed at a symbolic price because they were made in Turkey and not in Germany. The Turks made under Otosan license the exact brand of Ford Taurus 2000 that I owned. The price, road cost included, was much lower than the one I would have had to pay in a Bucharest second-hand store. I was thrilled, so I skipped a 10-dollar-per-room night in an Istanbul hotel I had checked in on previous occasions and got straight into the next coach leaving for Bucharest at 11 am. The first thing I did the next morning, without even going home first, was to go to the workshop which I left in the evening driving my car. The exhaust pipe wasn't blowing smoke anymore. Then I realized the advantages of owning a passport. Istanbul had become an extension of Bucharest: if you couldn't find the goods you needed in one district, you just went looking for them in the next one. Or in the next country ...

Translated by Alina Popescu





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Author: Petre Popovăț

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Primitive accumulation of capital

Petre Popovăț



A friend showed me, in a street behind the blocks of flats in Colentina, a restaurant which seemed to have appeared there out of the blue and which was owned by a Gypsy. The story of the place was very simple.

In the winter of 1990, the man planted a collapsible table in front of his house and he started selling Carpați cigarettes for 3 lei each (instead of 2,50) and beer in one-litre bottles for 10 lei (instead of 8). He had a lot of clients in that poor district, considering the fact that our factories produced too little and the market was over saturated with goods we hadn't seen before, like American cigarettes and German beer, which were sold at prices that were too high for the common people.

After a period of prosperous business, the entrepreneur built a small stand in his yard. Now he also sold biscuits, chocolate, chewing-gum, instant coffee etc. He probably got them through the minor smuggling activities from Turkey and Yugoslavia. The business kept prospering and that was how the restaurant appeared. The friend who showed it to me was almost outraged at the idea that a "nobody" (and a Gypsy on top of everything) had become the owner of a restau-

rant. And he also criticized the building itself which, to be honest, was in the worst taste imaginable with a *jet-d'eau* from plaster representing some angels, all erected straight in the middle of the front yard.

My friend was wrong. Although in May 1990, following the almost disastrous sale of a small flat, I had placed a rather handsome sum of money in a bank account, I still wasted my time in front of the TV watching the debates in Parliament from dusk till dawn, I almost lost my voice shouting at meetings organized by the Opposition that Iliescu should leave Romania and spent hours in the University Square. Meanwhile, our Gypsy man was busy carrying bearings to Istanbul and bringing back blue jeans. The obvious result? He had accumulated a capital (even if his business was on the very edge of legality), and I had squandered mine until I got to live off a lousy state salary. Who had been the smarter of the two? Whose character had been stronger? These are questions I can't answer. But I can certainly say who the winner was.

Translated by Alina Popescu





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The traders



In the first years after the Revolution I can't say that I achieved much. I didn't have much money, apart from what my parents gave me and that wasn't much. Around '92, thanks to my friends, my curiosity and my defying character, I started doing drugs. First I did it for fun, but I soon became addicted to heroin. I had already become familiar with a lot of young people who sold drugs but money to get them was the real issue. Heroin was very expensive and I needed ever more. I couldn't give up drugs, so I had to find a way to make money. I began by taking things from the house and pawn them for drugs. Later I was planning on getting them back.

That's how I lost most of the valuable things in our flat. My mother was so upset that she got seriously ill. I couldn't think of anything else but money: how to get them and how to spend them on drugs. That's how I started stealing. I stole cars and from cars, things like stereos, mirrors and generally anything that I found inside. Then I sold everything and get drugs. I also stole from stores, any kind of stores. In '96 I robbed a woman who was just getting out of a bank and had a lot of money on her. I wasn't thinking straight: I could have killed her because I actually stabbed her with a screwdriver. The woman pressed charges and I was arrested. I was sentenced to prison and spent two years there.

There was a good part to this story: in prison

I managed to give up drugs at a time when nobody believed that such a thing would be possible anymore. When I got out, in '98, my mom's health was even worse and soon she passed away. My only surviving relative was my brother who had a family and couldn't do much to help me. So I didn't really know what I could do to earn a living, especially that there was nothing in particular that I was good at. I had no income. Then I asked some friends for help. I knew they had made some money working abroad and I asked them to help me. Their "work" was actually to steal from credit cards. After I had started making money myself in this way, I had to pay for any piece of information they gave me because that was the rule, even if the people who gave you the info were your friends. Everybody knows that you can make a lot of money stealing from credit cards. I went with them to Spain and I learnt how to do things. I got a lot of money out it. At the beginning I was in the front line, meaning that I was in the greatest danger to get caught by the police. Later on I became the least in danger to get busted. I bought myself everything I needed to make sure of that: a video camera, which we called the pussycat, and I started renting the cars I needed to go to different places, generally to the ATMs I surveyed with my pussycat. We almost got caught by the Spanish police once or twice but we managed to escape.

In two years I had gathered so much money that I went back to Bucharest and bought a flat, a cool car and set up a firm, a restaurant which is doing very well! When I look back on things in the past, I myself am amazed at what I was capable of doing and I can say in all honesty that during my prison years I hadn't even dreamed I would end up doing such things. Frankly, I can't say that I am proud of the way I got my first money and I'm no role-model, but I am proud of the fact that I managed to start again from scratch at a moment when I couldn't have sunk any lower. I had hit rock bottom. And I want to tell you something else: as soon as I got back to Romania, I became completely legit. I didn't even cross the street on the red traffic light. I can say that I obey all Romanian laws. But I had to live for many years at war with them to realize that they are actually made to be observed.

(Aurelian P., 28, self-employed)



The Revolution found me and my family living reasonably comfortably: my mom was a shop assistant and my dad worked at the subway. We were lucky to have my grandparents, though. They lived a few kilometres away from Bucharest and they had a lot of land where they

grew water melons. My dad and I went to collect them, first by car, some family friends' Dacia because we didn't own one, and then sold them in Bucharest. We would spend weeks on end sleeping in the car or even outside, next to the water melons to keep watch because we couldn't take them all home. This situation lasted for two or three years.

Meanwhile, my mom quit her job at the store because the salary was very small, and we bought a TEC soft-drinks distributor. All family members took turns selling drinks, but I spent the least time doing that because I had to go to school. That was the first time when I could truly notice that my family had begun to prosper. At the time everybody drank that kind of soft drinks and they didn't just have a glass while in the street, they even brought 1 or 2 litre bottles and bought differently-flavoured soft drinks which they took home.

But there was another craze sweeping the country: everybody traveled abroad and brought back clothing. So I left the soft-drinks distributor business to my family and I began taking regular trips to Turkey together with a couple of friends of mine. At first we would bring back blue jeans, leather jackets and all sorts of clothing, one more colourful than the next, and they sold well, we had no complain about that. Around '97 - '98 designer clothing came into fashion and you just couldn't be seen wearing any kind of blue jeans. They had to bear the name of the designer. People didn't want to wear suits made in Istanbul anymore, but demanded Emporio Armani ones, so we too advantage of the whole thing. We would bring back from Turkey suits that we sold as designer clothing after we had attached to them original labels we had got from friends who stole them from the West. We would take the suits to a tailor's and we would ask the man to add something to the label so as to make it distinct from other. In case a buyer saw that other people had similar clothes, they would have the proof that theirs was the original thing

and that they hadn't been cheated.

I don't mean to be mean but the snobbery characterizing the Romanians was our principle advantage in this business. You could sell any piece of nonsense as long as our Romanian client saw a designer label on it. We sold everything for prices three or four times more expensive, and even for more than that. We did exactly the same thing with perfumes. I remember that once we brought back some gym suits, which we pretended to be designer made, and a few days later we found out that others had brought the same kind of gym suits to sell in their stalls in the bazaar. We had added the usual fake labels, but that wasn't enough anymore, so we took them to the tailor's and we had a sort of colourful star sewn on their pockets. I

can't even begin to describe how proud our clients were to see that they had bought the original gym suits, as they had the star to prove that. The other gym suits sold in the bazaar did not have it.

Now things have become more difficult because Romanians travel more and more and they have learnt how things really are, what quality is merchandise and what isn't. But, at the time, if you were smart enough, you could make some handsome money from other people's stupidity.

(Sorin I., 34, self-employed)

Translated by Alina Popescu

Interviews done by **Iuliana Căpâlneanu**





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From state-owned business to private business

**Romeo Cristea, private pension broker,
52 years old**

Interview done by Gabriela Cristea



I only started my business in 1993. I had acquired the notion that I ought to set up some kind of “private business”. Such a notion had previously been completely foreign to us. I had reached the conclusion that, as an engineer, there wasn’t much that I could still have achieved at the institute where I worked. Research had limited my options. After only three years it was obvious for anybody too see that research activities weren’t going anywhere in Romania. There were no money available for investments in the field and Romania had clearly become a retail market for the rest of Europe!

I watched how things went around me and I set off to do something other than research. That’s how I got to meet a lot of people and to travel to numerous places ... It was a period of transformation for me. I had my vision then and I understood pretty well that I had to do something different. I am somewhat sorry that I hadn’t started doing what I began in 1993 a lot earlier, even as early as 1990. Those who started before me are those who are now richer and have managed to stay in all kinds of business up to now.

Well, 1993 had just begun and I, plucking up all my courage, resigned my job. I felt a bit sorry, but it was for the best. I chose to change my life, learn something new and get into trade instead of remaining a poor intellectual for the rest of

my days. Some acquaintances of mine had tempted me to do so ... They had already got into trade and it was the period when people in Romania were free to own a passport and to travel all over the world. Once they had started traveling, they noticed that they could bring things back with them from the places they had visited, which they began to sell for a nice profit. But that wasn’t something new ... The Romanians, even before 1990, had had this sort of commerce bug in their blood. Whenever they traveled, even if the trip was only as far as Russia, they would take some goods with them and traded them for other things which they would bring back with them, and it was good stuff that people here really wanted to buy. They were also tourists of course ... This situation was continued after the Revolution but at a larger scale and involving more valuable items ... And more money, I might add ...

My business initiative was not very impressive. It wasn’t before some time that I noticed my trade was beginning to prosper. A thought kept popping up in my mind: I, an engineer, was selling things?! But there was really no other solution so I went on with it. I noticed that other intellectuals were doing the same thing, that it wasn’t only uneducated people involved in trade. I wasn’t envious. I even appreciated that people without much education prospered then and are

still prosperous now, even better off than people with a university diploma. They have nothing to lose and they perceived freedom through a different lens. And they were even more daring! They have excellent opportunities of actually achieving something, although their fear of failure is a lot greater! They had the strong desire to win unlike many fellow intellectuals. The latter have no such desire because they have been educated differently.

Coming back to our muttons, those who dared won! I saw traveling to foreign countries first as an opportunity to visit those places. I never went abroad without including in my schedule a few days when I was nothing but a tourist getting familiar with the place. My 18-year old daughter joined me in one of these trips. She visited Beijing and the Great Chinese Wall. Both she and I saw this as a personal achievement. The other day I watched a TV traveling documentary showing wonderful places in India, Thailand, and China ... I had been to all those places, I visited them all and it wasn't without great satisfaction that I remembered having been there.

Regarding the commercial part, I would buy things there, first one or two packs, which I brought back by cargo planes. Later I developed my business because it was already going well. But I lacked experience in the field. I would borrow the money I needed. At the time there were loads of people interested in lending me as much as I wanted. They had already accumulated a significant capital. It was usury, obviously ... getting profit from money lending. 5 % a month was a huge sum if you compare it to the percentage banks charge you nowadays!

But I took my chances and began doing business. The wholesale stores in Bucharest and around the city were getting bigger. It was a very complicated activity: you were up on your toes all day long. You had to have a car to travel, people to help you with the transport, the unloading and the distribution of the goods to different locations, and with the arrangement of various

stores. I had stores in Herăstrău, Europa, Flora, Prisma ... But we weren't very familiar with book keeping ... Especially me, an engineer ... Book keeping, annual balance sheets, monthly balance sheets, all that was foreign languages to me ... I was over the moon with my prosperous business but I also had to pay the money back. Sometimes I couldn't do that, and I had to borrow more money to go abroad again. I was somewhat at peace with the fact that I had a lot of merchandise in my stores, which I would sell sooner or later. That was the biggest mistake many of us made, especially those who paid for their journeys abroad with borrowed money! One couldn't understand that our trade would soon disappear ... It took me personally five years to come to this realization and it wasn't until 1998 that I began to make an assessment of things and to start paying my debts. I had no experience of customs procedures that I could speak of, seeing that my methods of bringing goods into the country hadn't involved going through customs. There were people who had less trouble buying goods. They bought more for less. I bought less for higher prices. When I got back with my merchandise, I had to include everything in the final price: the higher acquisition price, the customs, the shipping etc ... and the final price I ended up asking for my stuff was considerably higher than those of my competition. In time I began closing my stores and I had to re-evaluate the situation. I had to sell what I had managed to acquire up to that point, meaning a thousand square metres of land near Lake Băneasa, in order to pay the 25 000 dollars I owed. And of course I was left with a lot of unsold merchandise ... My trading days were then officially over! I wasn't earning anything and my personal satisfaction was long gone too.

I am still stuck with a few stores from that period but I don't own them. Instead I pay a huge rent for them. It's a grocery store and a computer service store. I can't say that business is good, especially now when people do their shopping at supermarkets. They get better prices

there than at corner shops. My clients are mostly retired people living in the respective neighbourhood. Those who can afford more do their shopping somewhere else ...

Some time ago, around 1994-6, you could make a living off these stores. The tough period came only later. Even if we owned our business, we still worked for the state. Everybody was talking about freedom but everywhere you looked you saw yet another obstacle to this freedom. Only serious businessmen, true businessmen will pull through. We, the small entrepreneurs, will go extinct! Maybe if you're the owner of a small store, you still stand a chance. You make a decent living, without getting a spectacular profit from your business. That would actually be impossible seeing that rents are astronomical. We still work for others, not for ourselves. We work for the city hall, which asks for huge rents in the case of commercial spaces downtown, we work for the state budget, as its losses too have to be covered somehow and state pensions have to be paid on time. The number of people paying taxes has diminished ... In the 1990s the ratio was four active people to one retired person, nowadays it's one to two.

When I realized that that wasn't working either, I tried something else. As early as the 90s I had become acquainted with life insurances made in foreign currency. I had even began paying some insurance money ... But only those who had enough patience and a broad vision of what this field was to become in time kept paying the insurance bonuses and they are now rich. I began dealing in life insurances in 1999. There were even laws for it. As my tourist commerce ceased altogether in 1998, I had to find an alternative. And I found it eventually. It took me two years to decide whether that was a good financial alternative or not. Beginning with 2001, I've started seeing my job from a different perspective, I've had a vision and I believe in it. This is my main occupation at the moment because there are still many things to be done in this domain. And I've started enjoying my job es-

pecially because we don't sell anything.

These special social and financial programmes need not be sold on the Romanian market. These financial programmes have to be learnt! Our duty and responsibility is to shape the Romanian market. Thus, from the private sector, from the trade sector, I have begun to see things with different eyes and to re-think my strategies. I think that my job suits me and I like it because at this point you have to like people. We are shaping the market in this domain as we speak. The Romanians are not a financially educated people. They have lost the ability to make savings. Financial power is low, that's true, but still, 20 % of the total population is financially strong. And they lack information in this domain, they are not trained and they are not used to value themselves and their families.

Lack of trust could also be an obstacle. Some believe that our transition to capitalism has ended, but that's not true. It is still going on and it will continue, regardless of our joining the European Union or not. We, the Romanians, still have a lot to reform in our way of thinking! Of course people are right to be cautious seeing that we've had so many financial frauds lately! You can't expect them to go blindly for one thing or another! But there were no laws for this field in 1990! This is where we went wrong! We have to compare things with the present situation ... The lack of a proper legislation back in 1990 allowed these pyramidal investment games. They were all personal initiatives taken by people who put their financial interests first, by diabolically skilful people with guts and no ethics who knew exactly what they wanted! There were no laws, so they made their own laws and reached their goals.

I wouldn't want to dwell too much on these things because I would eventually have to end up discussing politics and I don't want that. Truth of the matter is that people were ignorant in the field of finance. They didn't know the first thing about mutual funds; nobody really knew anything about that, actually. Although there

were TV commercials saying that we could rest assured our money was safe... Safe, my foot! The state ensures such a safety! But has the state come up with a law? Have they explained what mutual funds are? People back then and people now haven't the faintest idea what these things are. In Europe, as well as in the States, mutual funds represent risk funds! Who would invest in such funds? Only those people who already have loads of money, money that they can spare and risk by investing it in such mutual funds. FNI (*the National Investment Fund*)! Not to mention CARITAS which was a typical case of such a pyramidal investment game where nothing was sold! ... Nothing at all ... Multi-level marketing systems came only later. They existed back in the 90s but nobody knew about them. Only a handful of companies sell their insurances using a multi-level marketing system. Having been through the CARITAS¹, people have begun to liken financial marketing systems with pyramidal investments. Ignorance brings about distrust!

The State hasn't intervened until late in the 2000 by passing the 199 Law which explained the difference and which forbade pyramidal investment games. Why wasn't this passed back in 1991, 1992 or 1993? This law also explains what a multi-level marketing system is, what a stage marketing system represents and how this system has become the biggest job provider in Romania and worldwide.

I like this system in particular because people are first informed. Nowadays people who think they are done learning have a lot to lose. We, the Romanians, especially have a lot to learn still! If we don't learn, we can't make any progress. My current job, life insurance and private pensions,



transforms you a great deal. I think that this field represents the future because we work with people's way of thinking, because I am confident that someone has to do this sooner or later.

In the end, as you're asking me for three words, three adjectives that would describe life in the 90s, what else can I add? It was ... a pioneer's kind of life, you know, beautiful, pleasant ... hmm, free ... democratically reckless! Meaning, that democracy was misinterpreted! Everybody said that we were a free country and that we would learn more about democracy. In fact, it was all a savage version of democracy! A misunderstood version of democracy ... And that is why we have difficulty reaching the level of business in developed Western countries with a capitalist culture! The very utterance of the word "capitalism" presupposes an effort! It's like we're trapped in a precipice ...

Translated by Alina Popescu

¹ Pyramidal investment game. Both FNI and CARITAS led to the ruin of people who participated in these games.



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If somebody tells you “tomorrow”, this means “it can’t be done”

Sorin Minea, businessman, 55 years old
Interview done by Petre Popovăț

I think that the 90s represented the most beautiful and incredible period in my life. They followed immediately after the so-called revolution. I had taken part in it ever since the beginning and people were convinced that we would experience a tremendous transformation – we still couldn’t say much about its nature, but we could swear it wasn’t far –, and we understood democracy as a form of anarchy with meetings in the public square, University Square and all the other activities I participated in.

Well, everybody back then was into politics. Some people, those who were more experienced than me and than most of my countrymen, got into business. They knew what had to be done: they got themselves commercial spaces and land properties – in a nutshell, they were better prepared. And they are still in business nowadays. They made profits of several millions with only a couple of thousand dollars investments. The rest, I included, who had no money to begin with and no connections, didn’t even dare dream of going in business back then. We dreamed of better jobs. I was a veterinarian and I used to dream of a position at a better clinic which I eventually got.

As I was involved in politics, one day I, actually my wife ran into Preda. Preda Mihăilescu, who lived in Switzerland, was a former high school mate of hers and he invited us over for a

party. There I met Toni Uncu and Stelian Tănase, and we began meeting regularly, once a week, to discuss politics.

Preda told me that he had a friend in Switzerland who dealt in meat (I didn’t have a clear idea of what his business was) and who wanted to import sheep from Romania. Wasn’t I interested in going to Switzerland to deliver the sheep to him? I for one told him that I hadn’t the faintest idea where to find that sheep in Romania but, back in the 90s, who on earth would have refused a trip to Switzerland? I was at 2 Mai (*seaside resort*) when I got a phone call from Vintilă [Mihăilescu, Preda’s brother]: “Sorin, we’re leaving for Switzerland the day after tomorrow. Won’t you come along?” I remembered things very clearly: I hadn’t a penny to my name, I left the holiday money on the table for my wife, I arrived in Bucharest with only 10 lei in my pocket and other such details. I had inherited some paintings from my father, which I sold for 200 – 300 lei. That was the worst business initiative I’ve ever had. I could have got at least a couple of thousands for them now. Anyway I used the money to go with Vintilă to Switzerland by car.

The journey there was like a dream, we were all flat broke, we slept in the car, the Swiss wouldn’t let us in, the tires were worn out, it was exactly the period following the miners’ revolt, I had participated in the event in University

Square ... As soon as we stopped at a customs checkpoint we would hear: Romania ... miners ... Iliescu ... bye-bye! And we were stuck there. I remember a severe quarrel we had with the Italian customs officers: we made it clear to them that we weren’t miners. And we got lucky ... They reached the conclusion that Minea could well be an Italian name. And then I said, “Of course it is, my grandfather came to Romania from Italy.” Ha, ha, ha! And they let us pass.

From Switzerland we went back to Italy to buy car tires and then went back to Switzerland where we met my future business partner. He wouldn’t even hear of buying sheep from Romania! He invited me to Switzerland because he wanted to export goods to Romania. As to the prices in Switzerland compared with those in Romania, only God knew the real situation ... But I suggested that we set up a sort of salami and sausages factory. I told him about the way we used to eat and all that, and he said: “Look here, I’ll send a lorry with salami and sausages for free. You sell the merchandise and thus show me that you can run a business.” Before I left he asked, “Do you need more money?” – “I guess so.” – “How much?” I replied that around 20 000 dollars would do. When I found myself actually holding the 20 000 dollars I simply couldn’t believe my eyes. And I came back to Romania with 20 000 dollars in my wallet.

The shipment from Switzerland came right before Christmas and it was all wonderful ... Then I realized for the first time what Romania really represented; I gave a TV interview. I went to the customs checkpoint to receive a food shipment and then to sell the goods. A free shipment, it was. And then I had an idea for a new business ... The Romanian Government gave me that idea, as it had passed a wonderful law: if you sold your merchandise for dollars, the customs tax was zero; if you sold it for lei, they would tax you. So I had to sell the food for American dollars if I wanted to avoid paying taxes. But that was impossible. I think I spent an entire day at customs and made friends with everybody ... Bu-

reaucracy was the God they all revered there.

Nobody did any business. Then they suggested store locations in all sort of places ... As a businessman, I used to meet all kinds of people, and everybody had a commercial space to offer me ... the prices were ridiculously low. I didn’t have that kind of money and to be honest I didn’t really know what I was supposed to do. Back then we were all very proud and it all seemed like a game to us.

Businessmen fell into three categories: those who knew exactly what they had to do, and these were former Political Police officers and former Party members, the elite, as well as people who had come from abroad and who had a pretty clear idea of what was to become of Romania, of what would make the value of different goods rise and who knew how to break the existing connections system. That explains why former Party members and Political Police officers were included in this category: they had connections. The second category included people like me, the “poets” of the business world: business was a sort of adventure deep in the Wild West, a source of entertainment for us. And the third category was made up of the rest of the population who had acquired the notion that any Romanian citizen was a virtual general manager of a small stall opened in his or her own flat. There was a real inflation of general managers at the time. The contracts and company statute were standard documents: some sinister pieces of rubbish which you paid for, a guy would give them to you, you never even bothered to read them because you wouldn’t have understood a word – not that I understand a great deal more now ... But that was the ritual to follow in order to set up a firm.

I set up the firm, I rented a store – they robbed me blind – that I had found in Buftea: a disused factory. I rented it and invested in repairing and began the production. I used the 20 000 dollars I had, plus the transport which had cost around a million lei. That was quite a fortune back then (it was the winter of 1991), actu-

ally it was a real fortune. Well, that was the first salami and sausages factory with private capital. Our products sold like hot cakes, but ... nobody paid me for anything. All stores were state-owned and the usual Romanian “double-crosses” had begun. One other thing I love: all the managers of the state-owned stores who “double-crossed” me then are still comfortably seated in their chairs as we speak. One of them is the general manager of a big multinational company, and I still run into him once in a while. His “double-cross” cost me around 40 million in terms of what this money meant back in '91. That was serious money. But life is like that sometimes. Meanwhile, they have turned into businessmen.

The business environment was a completely idiotic one. I said that then I gave my first interview: I was a vet in Brănești and a group of people from the National Television came there and asked ... I had been to the Ministry of Finance to submit the documents for my future firm, you know, and they asked what the deal with business in Romania was. I was cranky that day, so I answered, “Man, something did indeed change in Romania: the bribe is paid in dollars, not in lei anymore.” That was the only change I had noticed. For the smallest problem you had the guy behind the desk would ask for money. That was positively unbearable and unconceivable: whatever I did, I got stuck in the same bureaucratic and connections maze. After the interview I received the visit of an inspector from the Ministry of Agriculture who had come down to give me a fine. He couldn't find me, so he fined a colleague of mine and, still as a consequence of the above-mentioned interview, Olaru – that was the name of the blockhead of a director we had back then – made me quit from the Sanitary-Veterinarian Agency, saying that he was firing me because I had spoken ill of the government. That wasn't the first time I had spoken ill of the government and it certainly wasn't the last.

Well, that's how I started doing business. That was the best period of my life! Nobody knew how we were supposed to pay our employ-

ees, nobody understood a thing of what we were doing and nobody had the faintest idea where we would sell our products. All the people we had employed – with only one exception, namely the guy who robbed me blind – were all novices in the business world. We met in the morning and spent the day talking about how we would do business, but we clearly had no idea what we were saying. It was beautiful, all was absolutely superb ...

Business went on more as a matter of reflex. The market was free, everybody worked as they pleased, and nobody was checking on anybody, nobody was aware of what was going on, yet everybody wanted something to eat. I don't know how to explain this but the atmosphere was very poetic: we would come to work in the morning, we would work day in and day out, our employees didn't ask for anything, poor things, the state was the all mighty master and all business was run having the state as intermediary. Businessmen were a rare species. The businessmen I used to meet with at the time were all at my level of experience, meaning that they were all “poets” playing businessmen. I had started attending meetings with those businessmen who are still in business today and who are very rich. Naming no names, I was offered all sorts of things. It was then that I truly saw how business was done. One of the first proposals I received was to make an association, get about a million and a half from the Swiss guy, then kick him out and set up a firm of our own ... That proposal came from an important businessman who is still active on the market today ... And my response was, “Of course, dear boy, we'll become associates, we kick the Swiss chap out after we've robbed him clean, then you'll suck me dry and I start again from scratch. Thanks but no, thanks.”

During the same period I opened up the place where I work now. At first I had only a piece of land and the skeleton of the building, all worth a million dollars. I asked for money from abroad, I exchanged them at a bank, I bought

the building at an auction and met with one of the ministers at the time who asked me, “And how did you say you got the money?” – “I was sent a million from abroad and I exchanged it.” – “Where did you exchange it?” – “At the bank.” – “You idiot, why didn’t you call me? I would have done that for you and for a better price!” I wasn’t alone at that meeting; my partner was there with me. He gave me a look and then asked, “Man, are you sure the guy is the minister?” I said, “Yeah, man, he is.” – “And how on earth do you do business here, in Romania?” I said, “You seem to have got the hang of it, pal.” Just like that! During his staying here he learnt a word, his first Romanian word: “tomorrow”. And he used to say something like, “If somebody tells you ‘tomorrow’, that means ‘it can’t be done’”.

To this day I can’t say for sure whether at the beginning we were making money or not. I had settled my salary at a hundred dollars per month. That was a real fortune in the 90s, now you would starve with a salary like that. And we had three managers and six employees. That was our grand factory which went on impeccably: we were all “businessmen”, we all drove second-hand cars and we felt ecstatic (other drove trucks), we all discussed business all day long and had business meetings with “important businessmen” and we all went to state-owned firms to beg for something. At the time you went to a state-owned firm hat in hand, you begged and bribed people to send you the raw material you needed. They would always give you a cold shoulder and speak to you on a superior tone, “You’ll never be like us, you poor thing! Just take a look at our huge factories ...” They have all gone bankrupt! All of them! And that is really strange. All those who were once general managers of state-owned companies are now prosperous businessmen and own parasite companies which are slowly destroying the old

ones. And I can’t think of any exceptions! And everybody says that these are truly successful people. Back then they were all FSN members, then they became PDSR¹ members and then members of the Peasants’ Party. That was simply a huge mess: everybody was involved in politics, everybody was a businessman and everybody was rich.

Paradoxically, in Romania you can’t get rich from business, in the sense that you’ll never own a huge bank account. You can raise the value of your investment. Those who own huge bank accounts are generally those involved in more or less legal import-export activities and those who did business during that period, meaning those who “double-crossed” everybody back then. These are the millionaires. And if we take a closer look at them, we’ll see that these people have become politicians: ministers, senators and so on. They’re all filthy rich, they still can’t get enough and they keep asking for more.

So, I negotiated for a space to run our business. I was trying to also get a store or something. But I came face to face with the heads of the various influence networks operating at the time. They were disgusting! They would openly ask for astronomical sums of money ... They wouldn’t seem so impressive now, but back then they were huge. And each of these guys had a bank account with hundreds of thousands of dollars in it. He was a clerk, a politician and a businessman. And they looked down on the likes of me, who were trying to actually do something, as if we were a bunch of half-wits. Funny thing is that now, looking back on things and trying to remember all those that I’ve met and who understood business the way I did, I’m not sure I’d still find 5 % of them still active in the field. And if you don’t count those who enjoy political support, the percentage would drop to 2-3%. Some of them entered politics, and they enjoyed the political support that allowed them to “double-

¹ The Party for Social Democracy in Romania.

cross" their business partners ... You have to be naturally gifted for this. I for one honestly admit that I'm not ... They've "double-crossed" everybody and they prospered, but most of them went bankrupt and disappeared from the market. Those who tried to do business legally and who are still in business nowadays can't represent more than 2 % of the total number. This happens because, from 1990 up to '94-'95, you would make no profit whatsoever regardless of the nature of the activity you were trying to run legitimately.

There was a period between 1992 and 1993 when business was possible and profits made from our industry were impressive. After that everybody went into the same kind of business, there was a competition going on. It was the first industrial branch where competition became dramatic and where it still is. That had been the situation until '94 when political influence began to make its presence felt. The second generation of businessmen was "born". The year 1990 had represented the poetical phase for the likes of me and the prosperous phase for those who knew a thing or two and had begun to learn more. Those were not true businessmen. As I've said, they were former officers and former respectable Party members, as well as former representatives of Romania to different organizations. They had the necessary connections, a clear direction to follow and money to spend ... Now I read that I don't know what chap tells the story of his bread-and-butter beginnings, of how he started by first selling colour TV-sets. These are old wives tales. I know I had a 20 000-dollar capital and I'm not afraid to admit it. The 20 000 dollars were chicken feed, as later on I received a million that I was free to invest. So if some chap comes along and says that he started his empire with an investment of 10 dollars, I'm in stitches. There is no such thing.

After this period, they began implementing political programmes all over the business world. If you wanted to do business, you had to be involved in politics. And they also started granting

exemptions from taxation, from paying the VTA etc. I think I'm the only one to have survived in my field. I can't speak for others, though. We were the first company to set off, and many others have gone bankrupt along the way.

The company was first called Angst, and then it became Angst SRL. I was free to choose whatever name I pleased. The Swiss guy was called Angst and his Swiss company was also called Angst. He had asked me to give it a name. I wasn't exactly enthusiastic at the prospect of naming it Sorin Minea. I saw the Angst label and the name sounded cool in Romanian because very few people actually know what it means. I myself was ignorant of its meaning "anxiety". I found that out years later. In German it means "fear", "anxiety", so I told him, "Man, can I name it Angst?" - "Give it whatever name you please." I set up Angst SRL and then I re-named it Angst SA (Share Company) because it mirrored the contribution to the registered capital.

I was supposed to get equipment for it. Back then you couldn't buy things on leasing. So I asked for money from Switzerland as a contribution to the registered capital. But because we were a SRL, according to the law, the money contribution had to be bigger than that in assets. Otherwise we had to pay taxes and I couldn't afford that. Then we turned our SRL into an SA, so that I could have a bigger contribution in assets, meaning the cars that I needed so badly. What on earth was he thinking when he gave us so much money then!!! He made a massive investment then. I think it must have been more than three million dollars. It's equally true that the three million soon turned into an even more impressive sum, but I still don't know how important that sum really was to him. To me that was a considerable sum ... I wouldn't have had to work ever again, if it had been my money. Now, to tell you the truth, I don't think that three million is such a big deal. A piece of equipment is worth several hundred thousand dollars. But, at that moment, it seemed like a fortune to me. The first million had been transferred straight

into my bank account. I could have taken the money and run to the Maldives with the prospect of leading a blissful life. I hadn’t even thought of doing such a thing.

At the beginning, money meant nothing to me (and I suspect others had similar views). It was all fun and games. Unlike those who had started doing business having a clear idea of what they would do, those who had also had money before, the rest of us were nothing but poor wretches. We lived off a salary which we supplemented with occasional tips. I would go on house calls, castrate a dog or two and thus get money for a pack of cigarettes, for petrol and for an evening out once a week, as the rest of our parties were usually organized at home. The need for clothing, cars or stuff of the kind was not exactly obvious to us. Under the Ceaușescu regime, you were a Rockefeller if you owned a video player and a colour TV-set! You needed nothing else and we didn’t exactly understand the real value money had. We weren’t ready for what they call “market economy”. For that you should have been involved in a certain structure and you should have seen it work. Moreover, you should have been familiar with the world of business. You should have been able to predict that real estate agencies would become extremely prosperous, that commercial spaces would become an excellent source of profit – not on the spot, but in ten years time. You should have had the money for a long-term investment and managed to get a profit 20 times as big. Well, we hadn’t the faintest idea about these things. We did business and lived off our salaries. These salaries got bigger if we managed to quit our jobs in a state-owned company for some private activity. We had the possibility to become our own employers.

But there was another paradox: when I worked for a state-owned company, the pleasure of playing truant was greater. Once I had started working for my own company, I realized that wasn’t a solution anymore. And the funny part was that my salary was not bigger. At the begin-

ning it couldn’t have been bigger than what a country vet earned in a month. Politics had started to lose its influence, the University Square effect was wearing off, money kept pouring in every month, I had no idea how to monitor a bank account, I understood nothing of the nature of the capital I was investing ... I didn’t understand a thing. It was all a matter of intuition, actually. You jump at a certain opportunity and you stay clean of anything illegal.

The poetical atmosphere of 1990 was indeed wonderful. The tragedy began the moment business started working. Then you realized that you could go bankrupt at any time, that you could lose everything you had achieved in a matter of minutes and that competition could get stronger than you at any minute. Between 1990 and 1992 they couldn’t do anything to you, as the press was weak and control was virtually inexistent. Once in a while you would get a visit from a chap asking for bribe but that was it. I remember that the first inspector from the Ministry of Finance who came by our company checked the files to see if they were bound together and fined me for not having rope-bound files according to a law for the 60s. I had no idea what he wanted for me. The moment we began to make some sense, poetry turned into hard work. You had to find people to work with, you had to decide for one direction and start investing accordingly.

There is also a generation conflict involved. I am 51 and my generation was born during the communist period. Communism educated and shaped our minds. My thinking can’t be different now. I was already too old when the revolution broke out; my reflexes had already been conditioned. That dream we used to dream – getting a pair of blue jeans and a video player ... Well, now I own at least five video players and I have so many pairs of blue jeans that I will never get to wear them all. But I still have the reflex: the “that can be arranged” reflex, the “you have to bribe somebody, you have to grease the wheels a bit” reflex. We had been educated to think like that. You would take a pack of Kent to

the doctor and a pack of coffee to the police officer. You can't just erase these habits from your brain. And it is precisely my generation that runs companies nowadays. Some of the managers have been more deeply influenced by communism than others. Those who have been marked for life by communism are those who are still against our joining the European Union and against free competition, those who are still pulling the ropes and take advantage of their political connections. Nothing has changed for them actually. Back then they managed to get a free TV-set, now they manage to avoid paying taxes.

Then the next generation took over ... They are people born five or six years before the Revolution who have no idea what happened on those days and what had been going on before. The minute they took over they began studying hard. They graduated from different faculties, their language was different – they spoke the economic jargon, the language of commerce which we could barely stammer. To use a political term, they represent the second wave. They are the ones who nowadays know exactly what to do and what direction to follow. Their greatest disadvantage is that they are still taking orders. But they had become European citizens long before we even began dreaming of it. Their idea of work is different and it has been influenced by the American and European mentalities. It's very difficult for us to adjust to their way of thinking and to follow the same paths. They believe that the minute you get in business you have to adopt an extremely tolerant, peaceful and patient attitude. If we had been patient in 1990, we would have gone bankrupt. If we won't be patient now, we will go bankrupt soon. They took over not a moment too soon. Today's successful businessmen, be they communists, former Political Police officers or anything else, are those who were able to make quick decisions, those who had a lot of courage and who were never idle.

So, they are those who never backed down,

who always tried to adjust their plans, to move quickly and at the same time to be quite aggressive. I suppose that must also have been the situation in Europe hundreds of years ago. There were people who had an idea or the intuition for a future plan, who took their chances and who had a lot of talent: they managed to convince others to work for them. That is an advantage for people of my age because it would be very difficult for me to learn how to use a computer now. Let's be serious, I can play computer games and I can read emails but not more. It would also be very difficult for me to learn the economic jargon. It would be downright impossible. And then – and many people don't understand this – I am always careful not to hire people how are dumber than me, lest a smarter one should take my job. It wasn't until quite recently that I finally managed to get it through my head that my employees have to know their respective jobs much better than I do. If they're not a lot smarter, I lose. They have to come up with ideas, my only talent being to apply those ideas and to make them work.

Now, if the Romanians hadn't been a slightly aggressive nation, we wouldn't have the slightest clue where we are headed. Any decision I make implies taking some risks. A big and rich company can afford to wait. It loses a couple of millions but it then wins due to its tenacity. A new company can't afford to wait because it usually loses a lot. And then decisions must be made in a matter of seconds. But for this you must be a little reckless. If back in the 90s there were no foreign companies, no multinationals ... Oh, the mixed companies of the 90s ... It was like this: you had a friend abroad who came to Romania and you set up a mixed company because that had its advantages (Law 35 and the hell if I know what else). He was a nobody abroad, you were a nobody here, but together you were the proud owners of a mixed company. That was pretty much the story. Nowadays foreign companies investing here are different. They are very powerful, multinationals with capitals of millions of

dollars. And if we join the European Union, the scenario will be the same as in the whole of Europe: small companies will be taken over by big ones and nobody will be able to do a thing about it. You can’t have thousands of companies working in the same field.

Those who have been in business for years and have accumulated loads of experience are truly advantaged. They know the market and they can make decisions in the blink of an eye. In ’92 or ’93 somebody came to me with a business proposition and told me something about a business plan. I burst into laughter and I said, “Sir, I can’t possibly give you a business plan for the next three years. How the hell am I supposed to know what will happen in three years time? I can’t give you anything of the kind!” If mine had been a Western company, I would have had to make a business plan for the next ten years. Here we can’t, at least for now, make a long-term plan – for a year, maybe, but that’s the best we can do.

So, we are given the opportunity to win and the basic idea is the following: in business you work not for yourself, but for the very pleasure of doing something. The minute you make money your goal and you are obsessed with the idea of winning, my honest opinion is that you lose any chance of success. That’s the secret of the 90s. Those of us who started their business back then didn’t think they would get rich. They all saw it as some kind of fun (the 90s kind of fun), something that offered you independence and at the same time kept you busy. Now you start thinking that you might also get some profit out of it. You might not get any, but the minute you start planning your profit and you say to yourself “I invest 1 leu but next year I want a profit of 7 lei” and the business context is similar to the virgin Romanian market of the 90s, you stand no chances of success.

If I were to get in business now, in the 2000s, I would adopt a different strategy. I would make a business plan and decide the sum of money that I would need. At present, when-

ever I discuss buying a store, I first count the money in my wallet. When I bought my first store, I had no idea how much money I had. I had no idea what would sell there either. I remember that I took a walk there, I gave it a look and I said to myself, “Man, I think this will be a smash!” Why did I say that? Beats me. But I gave no thoughts to the rest, to taxes, to anything else for that matter. I made no plans for my money. It was all a matter of “it does” or “it doesn’t”. The decision had to be made in five minutes. I made some wrong decisions and said “no” when maybe I should have said “yes”. But now I’m trying not to think of how much I will make tomorrow or of the profit that I, Sorin Minea, will make from that business decision. And I am convinced that the minute I started thinking of profit, the whole business would go down the drain.

As long as you dedicate your life to the company and you encourage people’s initiatives and you don’t see the company’s activity as mainly an economic one but more like a competition, you stand good chances of succeeding. And you also need a bit of intuition. The minute you start thinking: now I have to organize it so as to ensure a huge profit of which I will have my share in a bank account and I’ll use it to buy a yacht and God knows what else and travel God knows where ... So, the minute you change, your company changes with you. I’ve changed neither my manner of dressing, nor my manners.

I have a pet theory: the communists imitated the “bourgeois – land-lords”. What did they think these bourgeois did all day long? They lived in mansions, had servants, threw parties day in and day out and bribed people around them. That was their picture of the noble people’s lifestyle. And they imitated that lifestyle. What precedents were there for the businessmen of the 90s? The Communist Party was the only role model. And what did Party members do? They had villas, went hunting, owned cars, bribed people, they had the power to order others around, they actually had absolute power. What had they imagined? That the Party model

was the one they were supposed to follow. The moment they became businessmen, they would go to Paris to buy a pair of socks, to London for underwear and so on ... That's rubbish. It's not so much something that they want to do as it is a lifestyle they consider normal. The moment I begin aping something or somebody, I am no longer me. I cannot see the logic in changing your lifestyle and your mentality. Those who were adults during the 90s and felt the need to show that they were indeed businessmen because they owned a yacht and they dressed well, because they had access to people in the government and ordered poor people around, because they could afford to shout and wore Armani suits, all these people made a huge mistake. I occasionally come across such Armani-suits and I notice that some of them can't string up a sentence (and I feel sorry for them), some have no idea how to dress although they have people who could teach them, while others, when trying to speak their mind, fail miserably. And these are the people who dare tell me what to do.

I was once at one of the ministries, attending the ceremony for a guy being appointed to a new position, and I told people there, "Sir, there is something I cannot comprehend, namely why do you always have to appoint former businessmen who went bankrupt? If they went bankrupt, how the hell do you think they'll do well in their new positions? That I cannot understand. This guy failed in his business and you want him to be a state secretary? On what grounds? Do you want him because he's incompetent?" – "He speaks well, you see ... " – "He may be good at words but he can't do business. So, we'll never speak the same language". He lost all his money, so now he wants mine. He has all the shortcomings that I can think of. If you get a partner, make sure he's an honest man.

And now we go back to the old Romanian paradox ... We make money but we make it slowly. Others got into politics and got rich in the blink of an eye. So, I reckon politics is a better

source of profit than business. And I start beating myself up on that again. In 1989 I was inside the National Television building too. Why on earth didn't I become a member of the National Salvation Front? Now I would have been a popular political leader and I wouldn't have had to work anymore. The state would have given me a car, the bribe I would have taken myself and I would have lived happily ever after. That's where we part ways. They were trained for political positions and unfortunately people in Romania don't really understand what politics is about. A political position is a position within the party. That's the main idea: the party is everything and everywhere. And it is the party that helps you to make money. You join the party, you get promoted. If you don't join the party, you don't get promoted. And who joins the party and then leaves? Opportunists do. Is the opportunist a fair character? Sorry, but I don't think so! Basically they front all opportunists in the party and then they are amazed that none of the let's say honest party members is visible. We have no intellectual party members, great men are invisible ... Of course they are. They aren't opportunists and they'll never understand why it is necessary to become a party member in order to get a salary.

The whole business is absurd. I did it for forty years and I won't go back to it. You take a look at them and one says to you, "I am a politician". You simply can't be a politician, dear boy. You've had no experience and no education for that. You've been a communist for 30 or 40 years and couldn't have changed over night. You were a Party activist, you agreed with the Party methods or perhaps you didn't, but its ideas stuck with you, and so did its methods. That's it, you can't change your ways anymore. You'll always be the same. That's why I am saying that these people cannot do more than imitate the communist lifestyle and mentality. That is the explanation for the chaos in Romania. That's the reason why our fate could never be completely shared by Poland or Hungary.

Romanian companies and companies with Romanian capital, those companies already on the market, will disappear. We are not united, we don’t have a powerful Romanian community abroad, and we don’t share that drop of poetical spirit and ambition people in the West have. Sometimes it’s better if you decide to sell your company but sometimes you’d better help it grow. If I had made a takeover proposition to anyone in the 90s, they would have laughed to my face. Now everybody would love to buy my business. We have brands now. Now is the time for Romania to show its true potential.

And now I go back to that idiotic slogan the miners had, namely “We won’t sell our country!” We didn’t, we gave it for free. Moreover, we even paid good money for them to take it. The law says that foreign citizens cannot buy land properties here. Well, they’re in for a nasty surprise: all those Romanian citizens who bought hundreds of thousands of hectares of land were backed up by foreign citizens and by Romanians living abroad. Romania is not a fiscal paradise, but there are plenty such places abroad. Everybody is taking their business abroad; off-shore

companies have become a fashion and so on ... Nobody has ever bothered to check. Theft has become an institution. It’s still difficult to do business. And unfortunately, I see what happens with foreign citizens in Romania. They say that Romania is a corrupt country. I don’t think so. They know more about corruption than we do. They are awfully good at buying us out; even better than we are. I don’t know how they learnt that but it’s sure that they did. They learnt how to bribe us, an art we’ve never really mastered, and what working on commission means, at a time when we had no idea what a commission was. That’s how they’ll put us out of business soon.

To me the 90s were a wonderful time when I lived the kind of life I had always wanted to lead during the communist period, a time of great possibilities when I could do whatever I wanted and when I could prove that I was better than all the rest.

Translated by Alina Popescu





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The real estate market in the '90s

Monica Cherecheș, Claudia Băltășoiu



The first Romanian real estate agency was set up in April 1990, while now they are at least “three in each block of flats”, as a real estate agent once remarked. The amplitude reached by this phenomenon is closely connected with the country’s transition from a totalitarian regime to democracy, from a centralized economy to a capitalist one, from common property and state-owned factories to private property. Most of the people living in cities became owners of their flats virtually “over night”, and all they had to do for that was to pay a symbolic sum to the state. Once that deal was perfected, the flat became an exchange object on a market that was free, yet new, uncertain and unstable. The Pandora box now open, all the ills of the trade have come to the surface (cheats, speculations, theft, frauds), as well as the hope trade gives you (solving a problem, a better life). The image of the real estate agent is perceived against this dual background.

In our analysis, we viewed the real estate market as a system, and the real estate agent as the representative figure for the system. In other words, the analysis of the representative category will suggest the evolution of the whole system. Thus, our attention focused on the professional activity of the real estate agent. To understand the evolution of this profession is to understand the evolution of the real estate market during

the 90s because the social status of the real estate agent has continually changed function of all changes on the market, and we can consider him a chameleon who changes colours to survive in its environment. The ideas briefly presented here are the conclusions reached following the analysis of three interviews with real estate agents who have worked in Bucharest for a long time and who began their activity in the first years after the Revolution, namely 1991, 1993 and 1995.

The birth of real estate agents and real estate agencies. As the interviewees told us, the beginnings of the real estate agencies were marked by one constant element: real estate agencies were only one of many possible lines to follow in business. Entrepreneurs tested the free market at multiple levels and set up firms which dealt in more than one activity.

General Rom Service was the second real estate agency to be set up in Romania (...) As at the time we had the possibility to set up firms dealing in more than one activity, ours was a real estate and a security company. After four months, when the security business got worse, we gave it up and preserved only the real estate agency ...

(A.A., a real estate agent from 1991)

We started our business by accident. I worked in a state-owned company and was also the owner of a transport agency: we organized trips to China and Thailand and brought back goods which we distributed for selling. One of my associates worked for a Romanian-American company and his job was to find commercial spaces. Another associate was in the petrol cash-tickets and later, as he noticed that real estate business was going well and became more and more important, he simply changed his line of business. There were basically many small firms or companies back then, and real estate agencies were among them. In time they became the most important representative of the business environment (...) At first we thought of going into international tourism activities, but in the end my business partner, who was also a relative, and I went our separate ways. He continued his trade with goods imported from China and Thailand, and I focused on cash-tickets and later on real estate activities.

(I.M., a real estate agent from 1995)

If at first the real estate business was only an option which later turned into the main or singular business line of a company, the real estate agent profession began as an attempt at doing something different in order to get some money.

My previous 18-year experience in constructions helped me a lot, and I thought it would be a real advantage and a welcome addition in this new activity of mine. One or two months before, my brother, who was a nurse and who wanted to supplement his income, had got a job at this agency. One evening he told me he worked three or four hours a day after finishing his hospital duties: "I use newspapers and I deal in selling one-room apartments and regular flats". And, as he had me thinking, I said that maybe I should give this real estate agent business a try. He took me to an interview ... (A.A.)

I'm not sorry I chose this field, even if many

people have a wrong image of what it represents. For instance, many people chose this domain when they are between jobs. We even employed people with a university diploma. There was a time when five Law School graduates worked here ... (I.M.)

In '93 I found a newspaper ad. I think it was in the "România Liberă" Daily. I was a poor engineer back then. What kind of future could I have had in Romania? So, I saw this ad saying, "Do you want to make money?" – there was even a catch, i.e. the question mark –, and then it went on, "Loads of money?!", with an exclamation mark, and then, "A lot of hard work, long office hours, big satisfactions" and I said to myself what the hell was that all about? Well, nowadays an ad like that would get no response but at that time people found such things interesting. So, I decided to give it a shot. I got there and found myself in a flat similar to this one, somewhere in District 3, and I was stunned. I wondered again what that was all about. I was told that I "should come to an interview on this date because this was just a preliminary meeting". That made me say to myself that those guys must have been a bunch of crooks and that they wouldn't see me there too soon. But then I changed my mind and said to myself let's go back there ... and the guys there had said, "You come at 10 am sharp. If you're late you don't go in at all" (...) The guy in question was a Canadian, so you understand that the being-on-time business was pretty serious. So, I supposed I would have done something completely different now, had I not become a real estate agent (...)

When I arrived there for the interview I expected to find 20-30 candidates, but there were 120 of them. The condition was that you should have a university degree. You even got paid for the six-month training period. I thought it must have been something illegal because why on earth would they have paid us for not working? ... This is what the guy basically wanted: he wanted to build a team and he was enthusiastic

about his job in the real estate field. When I was inside the interview room, the Canadian guy came to me and said, "You look like the most successful real estate agent in Canada", and I said to myself that that must have been the deal, real estate agencies. He asked for my name and stuff, and then said, "You'll get very far". I said, "Come on, sir, give me a break, 'cause I'm a country boy and I haven't been around for long, in Bucharest, I mean. I got here in '86". And then he taught me about different types of flats 'cause I had no idea about those things, I was at a complete loss. The man had a sort of test to see if you were aware of what he perceived, of what he knew was needed in the real estate business in Romania. And he wanted to see if you had some general knowledge of things, 'cause even if you had a university diploma, you could still spell "mi-au" as "miau", and you see, he wanted educated people who could read and write properly, a team of intelligent people who could make intelligent conversation. After the interview there were only 20 of us left, and they told us that we had to bring some money as pledge. "If you decide to leave after 6 months, you get your money back, but we'll pay you during these six months". Only ten of us were supposed to make it. So, we paid 200 dollars, we got a receipt and stuff. And that's how I got started in this real estate business and almost everything I know I learnt during those six months, including how to make a business plan etc.

(F.S., a real estate agent from 1993)

Playing on a market without rules. The first law regulating the selling of flats was passed in 1992. Due to the previous lack of regulations, the real estate business was regarded, and sometimes with good reason, as a form of cheating.

You would spot a poor old man, cheat on him, you would buy his house for chicken feed, and then sell it for an astronomical price. Well, those who wanted to make a living from cheating were free to do that because no harm would

come to him. Back then you could speculate the market and make it look all legal, but nowadays, with the new law from 2005, speculation has become impossible because even if you buy you cannot sell again before a period of three years. If you don't do that, you have to pay taxes on the profit from the sale. Speculation is rare now. But things used to be different: you would find a house, buy it and a month later you would sell it for a bigger price. (F.S.)

The period between 1990 and 1995 was one of the best ever for our business, for the profits we made because people were ignorant, they hadn't been educated to know all terms of a sale; most of our clients were retired old people. In 1990 prices for flats began to rise, but pensions and salaries remained the same. At the time, as nobody really knew the real value, the real price for a flat, people made all sorts of speculations: people with money would buy flats situated in nice neighbourhoods for very low prices, then they would redecorate them and in the end they would sell them again for a handsome profit. That's why I say that until '95, business had been excellent for those who had some money and who had had the vision of investing in real estate business. (A.A.)

The 90s were a period when cheating in the field of real estate was commonplace. For instance, somebody bought a piece of land in Bucharest and he intended to build a 10-storey block of flats, but in that particular spot the ground-water layer was very close to the surface and topographical measurement were usually false. The man had already bought the property and his only remaining option was to build a 1-storey high building with a garret. There were other additional unpleasant aspects, like the willful omission of information concerning a building. People were cheated, they paid for the respective properties and then they discovered that they had bought something completely different from what they imagined. I remember that I once

did business with some Dutch guys. One of them had seen a piece of property somewhere selling for 15 000 – awfully cheap, I thought – and he urged the others to buy it immediately. I told them that I smelled a rat because it couldn't have been worth only 15 000. We bought it in the end and we later found out that the seller didn't have the ownership documents for the respective piece of property. The ownership property document was a fake. Here is where the real estate agent intervenes: he isn't just a mediator and a councilor. If you intend to do this job for the rest of your life you can't afford to think otherwise. I once helped a client and from then on he would do business with no one but me. Contact with people is very important (...) In 1997 things had evolved considerably; until then it had all been a matter of speculations. They would buy a flat, they would paint it during the night, and then the next day they would hurry to sell it. I still see pictures of those people in the papers and they have become celebrities ...Those

who could, did business that way, and it wasn't such a tragedy because the law allowed transactions of that kind. (F.S.)

Some of the old fear has disappeared because the government has passed laws to prevent frauds like selling a building or a piece of land to more clients. In such case nobody usually got into trouble and only the last client was really left to suffer the consequences because there were no legal documents for the property and so on. (...) The press published a lot of articles offering details about real estate transactions and people have become more knowledgeable in the field. Buyers have become more suspicious regarding agencies and the legality of their documents etc. There had been a lot of ghost agencies before, which would give you a fake address for a place which they had actually rented, and if something went wrong, in a week they were gone. I know of such cases. And it was only natural that the client should try to find a trustworthy agency



that had a solid reputation on the market. (A.A)

Apart from the foggy legislation which allowed unorthodox transactions made by various characters on the real estate market, there was another element which had a negative influence on the way in which real estate agencies and agents were perceived. Generally speaking, the birth of the free press ushered in a period of social chaos in the context of the transition. People were used to have one price for a certain product all over the country and they couldn't understand why different merchants asked for different prices for one and the same product. It wasn't only that they did not understand this aspect, but they would also hurry to label the differences as attempts to cheat them on the following grounds: the merchant cheated me because I found the same product someplace else, only cheaper.

Those who went to real estate agencies felt cheated when they were asked for a commission for the agency's services. At the beginning of the 90s, many clients would use the information they got from the agencies to close the deal themselves, without paying the agency its commission.

Real estate activities are services free from charge. I don't even know if the person you take to see a house is really interested in buying, if they have the money or not. You make a lot of phone calls, you're on your toes all day long but you make a profit only after you've signed the contract. (...) The client may well go back, knock at the door and make the deal with the owner of the flat and then you get into law suits ... Many have now noticed that this isn't exactly the best method. (...) Back in the 90s such cases were relatively numerous because people were reluctant to pay a commission and take a real estate agency seriously. (I.M.)

"You learn everything as you go along".
Apart from legislative aspects, which instead of

making things clear would only serve to make speculation possible, the ups and downs of the real estate business have been caused mainly by its novelty and by the social and economic particularities of the post-revolutionary transition. The profession of real estate agent was built gradually during the 90s. At a more careful look taken at the dynamics of the real estate market and at the status of a real estate agent, we notice that a diversification of the offer led to a specialization of the agents, while the increasingly demanding requests led to a higher professional training. At the beginning of the 90s most real estate transactions were made with flats. Houses, pieces of land, offices and industrial spaces were only rarely bought and sold through real estate agencies. In the second half of the 90s, the real estate market began to diversify its offers, to become more dynamic due to the increasing demand for pieces of land in the areas surrounding Bucharest and for office spaces.

The modifications in the offer, following the apparition of big developer-constructors, led to a specialization of the real estate agents either on different fields, or on different areas of the city. The increasing demands from the clients also influenced the professional quality of the agents. A better understanding of the field of public services, the possibility to choose between one agency and another, and mortgage loans are all aspects of this more refined type of demand. What is more, companies slowly became constant clients of real estate agencies. Thus by the end of the 90s, real estate agencies were working more and more frequently for local companies and even for foreign companies seeking locations in Bucharest. This type of contact contributed to a higher level of professional training from the part of the agents.

The Offer

Until 1999 all agencies had covered the entire spectrum of the real estate field: sales, rentals, flats, houses, pieces of land, commercial spaces, virtually everything ... Agents would deal

in whatever raised their interest (...) Beginning with 2000 most of the important agencies have begun setting up more and more departments according to different market segments, and this means that one or more agents deal in only one particular domain: rentals of office spaces, of commercial spaces, of industrial spaces, flat or house rentals, flat sales. The market has begun operating a selection of the agencies and of the agents and then it's only natural that this kind of departmental organization should appear aiming at controlling the market.

Now there are agencies specialized in one zone or another: some agencies cover the area between Piața Victoriei (Victoria Square) and Otopeni and no farther because they don't have the time to cover more areas. I cover all of Bucharest (as my specialization is industrial spaces) and the surrounding areas and I deal both in sales and in rentals. And that's how it should be actually because I can't cover only one particular area in Bucharest. Our demands are as follows, "I seek a storehouse of 1000 square metres and 100 offices for storage and production". Many clients indicate a specific area, but there are others who pay more attention to budget details and to means of transport ... Under these circumstances I have to cover the whole of Bucharest because we can't tell our client that "we have no agents covering this area". We have to give them an affirmative answer. (A.A.)

Until '98 or '99 people hadn't had many choices because there were no new buildings under construction. Now they can choose between paying 60 000 euros to a chap for a flat and buying a house with three or four rooms somewhere near Bucharest. Their choices are no longer between one concrete flat and another. The market didn't offer many choices back then, your options were limited and clients weren't even very demanding. There were a lot of properties to be sold and not many clients willing to buy. (...) You ask me to name some differences: there are many differences to speak of even in

this domain because, you see, basically the job is the same for a beginner today as it was for one back in '93, but today's agent has to deal in commercial spaces and pieces of land too. Earlier I only spoke about the "concretes", as we call the flats in blocks of flats. (F.S.)

Even as early as 1990, but especially from 1995 onwards we have witnessed the apparition of firms and people specialized in constructions who bought small pieces of land, but the selling of land properties took off about six years ago because living had improved and people had more opportunities to earn money. Up until then, transactions in Bucharest had been done for personal needs and at a small scale. Now we have residential areas, suburbs and recreation quarters, all offered by construction companies which have earned some money from building small blocks of flats. They decided to re-invest this money and thus the business of building massively in the areas surrounding Bucharest took off. Back in 1999 and 2000 investors would buy 2-3 hectares because they had a feeling that there would be a development in constructions there. (A.A.)

The Demand

Financial efforts you had to make if you wanted to buy something were considerable in 1990. At present, with all these credits, chances of buying things have improved visibly. More people have now access to credits than in the period between 1990 and 1998, when credits had an intolerable rate of interest. You couldn't go anywhere near a credit. It was suicide. (...) Time has shrunk; it's not what it used to be then. You didn't go to see the offers before you showed them to the client and you risked nothing if your offer wasn't serious. The client wasn't at all upset by that. Now the demands from our clients have grown and consequently you can't afford to deal in all fields of the real estate business because you don't have the time for that. Thus the top 10-15 agencies have developed this departmental system. (A.A.)

We've made progress, it's true, but it was at gun point. They threatened us: "do this, or else ..." It's a good thing that we got smart in the end. The fact that situation in Romania and the direction it is headed are clearer now, in 2005, has a positive influence on the field of public services and especially on the domain of real estate transactions: you can't just talk to the man for two minutes and then go arm in arm to see the place. Public services represents more than that. You have to be a true professional. (F.S.)

In '95 the agents who had been active all this time and had learnt to anticipate changes on the market began to become visible, to make assessments – estimations would be a more accurate term – of sales values according to the surface in question ... If I have a flat and I want to sell it I ask for a certain price. The agents must be already able to tell you if the price is appropriate and to bring arguments for his statement: you tell your client that a square metre of concrete costs this much, that a flat in a new building is worth that much ... and you demonstrate that the price your client asks is not right. Some people tended to ask 25 000 dollars for a flat in the Sala Palatului area and then to buy a three or four-room flat somewhere in Berceni which they would furnish and they still expected to be left with 13 000 dollars for a car and for a blissful future life. That's how things worked between 1990 and 1994, and even as late as 1994. Things went through a period of changes which started in 1995 and ended in 2000, and now there are agents who tell owners what to do and suggest a

correct price for their properties according to the market level, the existing demand and so on ... because there are more elements involved in estimating a piece of property, you know. (A.A.)

The real estate advisor has a very important role. There are people who say, "Look, I have this much money and I want to know where I can invest it in order to make some profit". The agent is more like a broker, if you want. Nobody is all-knowing of course, and you win some and you lose some at the stock exchange. (F.S.)

To sum things up, this profession has evolved from a sort of part-time job to a full-time occupation, culminating in its acknowledgement by the law and the recent inclusion of a real estate management M.A. programme in the offer made by the Academy of Economic Studies to its graduates. Moreover, the Government Ordinance No. 3 from 2000 regulates the activity of the real estate agent. If real estate agents of the early 90s were but a bunch of amateurs, people willing to earn more from an additional activity which complimented a completely different main occupation, the real estate agents of the late 90s have grown to view themselves and to be viewed as true professionals and specialists in their own kind. The transformation is huge and it offers us the greater image of the evolution undertaken by the real estate market from legally doubtful transactions to a respectable and fully functional institution.

Translated by Alina Popescu



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Shop windows

**Magda Manoliu, former university lecturer,
63 years old**

Interview done by Vlad Manoliu



Until the '90s our favourite walking places had been those outside the inhabited areas of the city. We would go to Her?str?u Park or to Cernica, in the forest. In 1990 we started taking some very strange and unusual walks, or so we thought – we began taking walks in the streets and looking at shop windows. We became aware that we were going through a frenzy caused by the colourful shop windows and by the multitude of names. We would walk along Calea Moşilor looking on each side of the street, mentally recording each new shop. Instead of the once familiar painted boards saying “Alimentara” (*grocery store*), “Textile” (*textiles*), “Carne” (*butcher's*) and so on, we now saw more cheerful names: “Blănăria La Popescu” (*Popescu's Fur Shop*) and I don't know what *Café* ... The shop windows were always extremely colourful and overloaded.

Somehow that represented the beginning of a new life for us. And the old habit hasn't died: we still go and have a good time in front of new shop windows. You don't have to buy something; their very existence is enough for us. Nothing seemed more noxious than the monotony of the streets before '89. The decade between 1990 and 2000 was also a decade of shop windows diversity in Bucharest. The beginning was a rather shy one, but then things began to develop into

something more complex and shops started looking different. Today, the sight of an “Escalada” store downtown and that of a Turkish bazaar in Obor Market are not shocking anymore. Back then the simplest Turkish products carelessly displayed on a stand represented a sort of gateway to a new world. And I think we weren't the only ones who felt this way. If you remember how things were before 1990, you most certainly remember that if we wanted a better dress, we would look for somebody who received packs from abroad and we would buy old or new clothes for astronomical prices without giving a second thought to fashion (even if we would have loved fashionable clothes). Little by little, during this decade, we have grown accustomed to take into account our figure when we bought something, to be mindful of the fashion magazines and of our budget. We buy what we like and what we can afford. Sometimes we shop in second-hand stores, some other times we buy new clothes, and there are days when we just visit the “Escalada” as if it were a museum. At any rate, the changes in the way the world presents itself to our eyes have triggered a change in the way Bucharest and its shops look.

Translated by Alina Popescu



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Through market economy. From one astonishment to the next

Violeta Mayer, enterprising, 59 years old
Interview done by Răzvan Nicolescu

I'm a photographer and I accept tips. The Revolution found me at IMGB. I was a technician at the Metallography Laboratory – department for the microscopic study of metal composition... Right after the Revolution, salaries were re-negotiated... 6000 lei for the laboratory janitor. Well, they gave me the same sum. They said they would not give me more because I was a photographer and I accepted tips. But they had forgotten to say that I had taken photos of them, too, and they never brought me as little as a bar of chocolate to thank me ! Well, I developed the films they would bring with them from their delegations and not only! Or, another example: at a certain time, the photos on our work cards were changed. The factory had 10-13 thousands workers. They forced me to take their photos. I took them ; while I received 1 leu for each photo, they received 50, and they also kept whatever else was left... there were too many... How could they use tips to justify a lower salary? How could I be given the salary of a cleaning woman after I had worked there for more than 20 years ? But, I had nothing to say. I stayed for a few months only and I left.

Luckily in the 1990s my father was still working at the „Miorita” milk factory and he had a stall with icecream in Doamna Ghica. I suggested to him (...) to sell other things, too: groceries, cigarettes, it was still possible, then...

My father, a very honest man, said, “how could I compete with the neighbour who keeps the same goods ?” He couldn't... Of course, after he had taken his stall away, another man replaced him, and what a competition he used to make! But my father couldn't possibly compete with him. There was a certain thing, you know....no longer possible today: how could he open a stall with the same goods, being also a friend of the guy? He couldn't!

The same year, in summer, I started a business with a former colleague (I was still working at IMGB then, I worked there till '91, in spring), a small workshop for making snacks. Why that ? It was my idea. My sister met a few people roaming around these products, saw that there were only about two important producers in Bucharest then, and they were doing great, and she told me: “Violeta, let's do it!” I...I didn't agree. She kept on insisting, and one day this colleague of mine came to me, I talked to him and he told me about his having a house at a distance of 25-30 km from Bucharest, about his providing the corn, the corn flour, about the smaller price, he had received the house from I don't know where, finally, the very thought made me happy! I came up with the money for the snacks machine, I went to buy it from Botosani, I brought and installed it, I arranged with the electricity, 'cause we didn't have three-phase

current... The family association had his name. I didn't mind, because the verbal agreement had been that we would produce and sell through his association, and we would share the profit: we would subtract all the expenses, in a fair way, and then we would share what was left. But, after we had made the association, after the machine had started to produce, in a week or two changed things: he started to tell me that he couldn't find corn, that the maize flour was expensive... He had forgotten we had to sell and share the money. The firm being registered on his name and his family's name, they also sold the product. He had suggested to me to divide the production in two parts – half for him, half for me – but I had to sell my part alone. And, how could I sell it if I didn't have anything, documents of the firm, anything? So I realized it was high time to step back. I did so in two, three weeks... (...) So, that was the way everything ended; he went and bought another machine, and I started to look for another place to go on... And I couldn't find it. That was the first time I felt I was going crazy: I had taken the car I had bought, but I had no place for it. I don't know what was in my head – crazy ideas!

I rented only the ground floor. But I couldn't connect it to the electricity network, because RENEL wouldn't approve... Until I found the suitable person to help me with the agreement, I kept wasting my time: from July, 1990 until April 1991, I couldn't do anything. Meanwhile my colleague got richer and richer: it was the time when there were only a few producers and the production was all right... We moved there only in 1991, in spring, with the machine and the workers...

The idea was to make snacks and sell them whole sale, because one couldn't sell too much and, being very cheap, you earned almost nothing. It was all about producing. But, I could hardly imagine that the machine had so many problems, meaning that it worked with a lot of difficulty. But, I ran into a former colleague, from Otelul, too, who, as he was retired, came

and helped us – a meticulous man, a wonderful man, God rest his soul! He died saying: "Here, you'd need a team of people!" I happened to find some pleasant people, dealing with wrapping, nice people. So, after all, it all turned out to be a pleasure!

In '92-'93 Robert, my sister's son, came with a Volkswagen from Germany, and we decided to take him with us to help us carry the bags: about 20-30 sacks with maize flour that we had to carry every day by a Dacia, from a distance of 60-70 km... it was rather difficult... I don't remember how much he asked for it then: about \$ 9000. I paid the money and took the car. I never drove it, only my sister did. It wasn't new, it always needed fixing. And, not knowing what to do, she took it to a service. But not at Volkswagen, it was too expensive. Oh, I don't know what those people did or didn't do, but the fact was that it had problems all the time. The problems didn't disappear and they cost us a fortune... In addition, the car was stuck at the service workshop and we couldn't carry the maize flour, the snacks... For example, schools demanded 5-6 bags every day, but it was all for nothing if you couldn't take them in the morning, when the students came. And how were we supposed to transport them since we didn't have a car? 'Cause the person who sold them made profit with them! And if you don't take the bags, he finds other producers, for there were so many already...

Oh, and my sister had children, grand children and someone had to look after them. When there were problems at home, she used to leave everything and go there... And this is how she started getting in trouble: she had to miss work either because of the car, or because of the children. When she became the boss, the problems with the car started – it didn't bring maize. Now I believe it wasn't important to have a bigger car, I think it would have been better to have somebody to deal with the supplies... But could you trust anyone? You don't know what he can do with the car; you don't know if the person buys what you really want... Moreover, one of the girls

working at the wrapping section was more like a shrew, she was the only one who had graduated from high school and she enjoyed drinking. She was drinking, she was nice, full of life (...) and she taught the other girls, too: they used to sell a bag, or two with snacks, they got money and they sat and bought something to drink... With nobody there to keep an eye on them, work slowly came to a stalemate and I closed the shop... So I didn't have a business partner to work at the same pace as me, and my sister made me take more than one step behind...

In 1990, in autumn, I set up a table. I had a table in the Miniș Market! I rented the place, I brought a table and started to sell all kinds of goods, for I was allowed to do that, then. I used to buy them from the Exposition, the place with the big en-gross. I'll never forget that piercing cold, that winter...

Meanwhile, the market management gave us the permission to bring that stall from the TLCR (father was their employee). We arranged at TLCR to move our ice-cream stall, and their manager agreed. If he had remained there, he would have had to sell their ice-cream and he would have gained nothing more. So, we took the stall from Doamna Ghica and moved it to Miniș. That was in December, 1990.

So, father came to Miniș, too. He came as an employee of TLCR and the stall still belonged to them. They allowed us to sell some things which were ok with the icecream, I don't remember what, exactly. What we could not sale there we would take to the market stall and sell it there. Almost immediately we started struggling to buy the stall, for TLCR had started to sell them. And we struggled and struggled for one or two years to buy it, and finally we succeeded. It was meant to be! After buying it, father resigned.

Up to then I had had a family association; then I created the LTD. In this way, I was allowed to have employees. I employed them, and then I introduced all kinds of goods for sale: sweets, drinks. But no cigarettes. I didn't have any restriction, but I thought it had to be decent;

after all, it was an icecream stall. That is, they were kind, they moved the stall there, they also sold it to me, we shouldn't be rude...

So, we had a stall and the production of snacks. I gave up the table after that memorable winter. My father and sister both stayed outside, all the time, they were frozen to the bone, it was horrible! But I had to do everything for money, I had to pay my debts, because I was in debt. And we kept on like that for about two years, or even a little longer. And I said : „Let's extend our business, we can't deal only in snacks, can we? Let's make a shop, too!”

There were many places sold at auction then, and we thought of buying one. The ABC („Tobacco”, in the past) sold something. I went there, I saw them and I found a place on Mărgeanului, selling by instalments. Somewhere in Rahova. I didn't like it too much, though, I don't know why, but I said : „Let's take it!” That happened in.. 1994! I had to invest a lot of money then, because the ABC didn't give me the whole place. It had about 62 mp, but they gave me only 58 mp, and I had to build a dividing wall, I had to make a lot of things. And that cost me something... a few years passed! Because when you invest money, you bring everything with you, you bring shelves, you gather your customers... The agreement was the following: we take the shop, I was to take care of it for as long as I could, and my sister was to stay in the snacks business. But my sister was busy with her te children, the grandchildren, so she couldn't take care of the business; she lost it. So in the end we went bankrupt again; we were left with the shop and the stall...

It was well with the stall... At a certain time, an acquaintance of mine appeared with a machine for juice, that one called Magic ! (...) There were the TEC and the Magic ! The woman, who hadn't seen me before, was pleasant and she told me that the machine was a fountain of money, and that I should buy such a thing right then! So, she recommended me Magic firm, but I was short of money at that moment, and, because I

had to buy it with cash, I bought a smaller machine and placed it at my father's. It didn't have too much power of refrigeration, but it was running ok. At that moment, the woman with the machines asked me : „Why don't you buy a bigger one, for street commerce, with better cooling power ?” I answered, I don't have any money, only if I can take it in instalments.” She told me to make a new type of contract, they had just appeared, and guarantee with the house. I told her I won't touch the house ! All my life I've avoided a thing like this... And I gave it up. But later on the girl from Magic firm appeared and she told me: „OK, we're giving it to you on easy!” I say: “And according to what contract, seeing that I won't guarantee with my house!” and she answers: “There will be no contract!”

Many times during these years I found myself astonished... Or, for example, I went to an whole-sale and I had 700 000 lei less than necessary to pay for the goods. About.... 10-12 years ago... This shop-assistant, who didn't know me, told me: „It's OK, you'll bring it to me in two or three days..” And I told her: „But you don't know me!” And she said: „ I bet you'll bring it!” She was sure I was going to bring the money back to her! Then it happened to me once again. I told to myself that maybe I had the word „sucker” written on my face, on my forehead, that I wouldn't steal! Or maybe I'm a reliable person, you can easily see I'm not one of those who don't bring back the gift... I don't know. No, that was called market economy. And they knew how to do it, they took the risk and attracted customers. They went on well, and we paid our debits honestly.

The Rush. We would buy from wholesale stores, and from the Metro, for a year. Flora was a very big one, very uncivilized, but all the people there sold things first hand and you could buy all the goods cheaper. In the smaller ones, like Chirigii or Manor, the people sold again what they had bought from Flora and they added a small supplement. And then, we used to buy directly from Flora so as to make sure that our

store or stall were more competitive.

I used to carry everything with my car, the one I had had since leaving the factory, a 1310 Dacia. I would go to the shop many times a day, and to the stall, too: I had to go to the market for vegetables and fruit from Voluntari for the shop, and then I had to go to Manor for the stall, then to Flora, for the shop... Then another one opened in Metalurgiei, where I used to go to buy eggs and vegetables and fruits for the shop... And that was how I used to walk all day long and I couldn't go on like that, I was more and more tired.

The Miniș Market is one for old people, the retired, the poorer ones... There are very few people who have the money and want special things. But I always tried to bring such things. Just as I used to do with the shop: wandering about more, keeping better company, enjoying better shops... I was trying to bring quality products into my shop, I couldn't afford bringing in any cheap stuff... So, my shop also entered this better world... But the stall was visited by the people who lived nearby. On Saturdays and Sundays, on holidays... I was trying to buy all kinds of boxes - father had some very good customers who would always look for special candy boxes. I used to bring them, and then these customers came to us only, because they knew I was in the habit of bringing things especially for them... There were all types of people... people who owned something and poor ones, but I didn't think at the risks taken if I couldn't sell your stuff... Today, you take 100% risks because you no longer sell them. Now they are sold in supermarkets, in big shops, not in the little ones.

It was difficult with the shop... I would get sick before I reached Rahova! I got sick at the very prospect of travelling that far. I had to be happy, but I was sick Oh, and finally I really started to enjoy it. It got better and better, but there was something else: we happened to have some very good shop-assistants. They kind of stole from time to time, but they were good. That had eaten me alive all those years: the in-

ventory, the fact that they used to steal... I had almost got over those, too, I was OK, I liked to bring in supplies... I'm sorry I don't have a photo from that period. When the girls took photos at the shop... It was pleasant, the girls were very nice. The shop-assistant is very important in a shop – they have to be kind, pleasant, gentle. I had a girl – she used to keep the bags for the customers, she used to say „How do you do !” She would say it for her own interest, she knew each of them would give her something, but that was not my problem, it was her business, all that mattered was only that she was gentle and kind. I would have enjoyed to teach a lecture, to make shop-assistants smile, laugh, help the clients nicely... That was a shop with a high profit. And I had two fabulous shop-assistants, especially Jeni, one of them. The girls kept pestering me, saying that Jeni used to steal, and some other things... I also had an older one, who was extremely kind. She helped me with some problems, my own family wouldn't have done that. But she had the foulest mouth you've ever seen!

But I got ill for one year and a half because of so many errands. My father was already very ill, mother couldn't walk any more, my sister had separated from me, in the meantime....For she had wanted to change the agreement : because of her money problems in the family – they could hardly manage – she wanted to share our daily profit, then to spend her share for her own needs, and to use mine to go on. In business, if you don't go on with the money, you can't advance. If you spend it, what will you do ? And we didn't come to an agreement. There were talks, rows and we split up.... That happened in 1996.

Meanwhile, I went on struggling with Mărgeanului and Miniș...Father died, mother was going from bad to worse, and my business was not quite good... I couldn't manage with the supervision any more. When I was there, I didn't know what was going on there, when I was here, the other way round. As a rule business, if you're not able to keep an eye on things, you'd better

give the whole thing up! I wasn't the boss any more, people were, and I didn't know exactly what they were doing... And if you depend on them, you are the fool: you pay salaries, taxes, rents, but you are controlled and so business comes to a stop. So I finally gave up Mărgeanului, because that was so very far away from home, about 15 km, while the stall from Miniș was at about 3 km.

I miss the customers, who were very pleasant. They were sorry, too, when they heard I had left. One of them, a teacher from a Nourishment School on Viilor, could hardly believe his ears. She said I should have told her, and she would have become my partner, she would have helped me with money and would have come to help me sell. But I hadn't told anybody: I made the inventory and I left... I just couldn't go on...

A week after I was numb... Years after, I wouldn't hear about business... when somebody reminded me about the shop, I wept and wept and I left, so as to avoid questions... Not because of the shop, but of the people I had brought there – they used to come to me, we used to sit together... Even the teacher I mentioned used to come to Jeni and she would give her invitations for the Opera House and for the shows her daughter used to be in, as a ballerina...

And I was such a sucker! At that time they had started to do away with the stalls in Bucharest and they were all trying to find a commercial area. But because I am a gentle person, if I had decided upon a sum, I wouldn't dare to change it! I asked for \$ 1.000 for seven rows of shelves that I had left there, for the alarm, for a wall built there, for a desk, for a dividing wall. The wall alone had cost me one million. I didn't ask for too much. It was a trifle. And he gave me the money with difficulty and he didn't even greet me when we met again later. He was a sales agent for Colgate. He received a shop he painted, and when he opened it, it became a very busy and profitable place... We had freezers we had obtained only after selling for a few years, after we had gained trust....

For five years, as long as I had the shop, I had tried to buy it. And I couldn't. Maybe I didn't have the suitable people... I couldn't even find out whose place it was. Nobody knew who the owner was: it didn't belong to ABC, it didn't belong to I don't know what Food Store, it didn't belong to the Bread Factory; it was nobody's! I couldn't find the owner! And how hard I had tried!... I used to pay the rent for ABC, but they didn't even talk to me, as they didn't have the slightest interest to sell it. They lived off the rents, and that meant a lot.

That was how I left after five years, because I had become tired... The guy who came after, a well-connected youngster bought it after a little more than one year, paying \$ 12 000! 38 mp, but what a place! When he decides not to work, he can rent it for \$ 400-500 a month. That is, my rent for all these years!

The Miniș Market. I gave up the shop when the stall was doing well. For example, I could earn at the stall as much as I earned at the shop, from only one business, a fact that had never occurred to me: nobody in the whole market had a percolator, with drip coffee. I didn't want to use one, I said, could I know what those people would sell and what they would do while I was away all day long? And I started shyly with the coffee business, and slowly people started to give me one hundred, two hundred, three hundred thousand a day...But, as I wasn't there all the time, I couldn't possibly know what was exactly happening, I took for granted what they gave me. At a certain moment some new shop-assistants came to me – they were husband and wife. She was the one who worked, and he would only come in the evening to help her. I realized that after a short period of time those people bought tyres for their car, they were doing well! I don't know what had got into me once: I took once a shop-assistant from the shop and I brought her to the stall, because there had been something wrong with the one working there. I was amazed to see the amount of cash she had made from selling coffee! It was only then that I understood

the story: she gave me almost half a million a day, and the others three hundred, only because I couldn't control them. And the shop-assistant from the store made better coffee, but I still didn't keep an eye on her, because I couldn't.

In the end the girls ended up making three-four millions lei every day, only from coffee. From this sum, two/three million represented your share, for a third is the expenditure, and after paying the taxes I still had one million and a half. And I didn't carry as much as I used to at the shop. And that was why I was pleased to stay there. I didn't find a shop-assistant to leave at the end of the day with less than 400 000 a day. But there was nothing I could do about them, I wasn't strong enough to stay there all day long. I didn't have the time, I was in a hurry, always on my toes. Only this year I realized that in the evening I used to prepare six types of coffee, two litres each! Can you understand what madness there was in the morning! And slowly, another one got a drip coffee machine, and then another, and I earned about 400 000 lei a day! The shop-assistants, the accountant, the rent, the rates, taxes, profit taxation, with all these I am left with 10-12 million lei a month. I can't agree with less.

You know, some buildings have been demolished, my profit has increased a little bit during the last six months, but there's yet another cadishness: about five years ago, the market was granted by the Town Hall of District 3 to a firm, under the condition that they improve it in one year or two. They came and raised the rents up 18 times over. I hoped and hoped to build some shops, so as to live in more civilized conditions, but they did nothing, and there has been a long time since they only took the money for rents. A huge price! I pay about four million for only a square metre every month. The stall being very little, we take the goods out. I wouldn't take them out, but the neighbours do this, and I wouldn't sell it otherwise. So I take the goods out and I pay 60 000 extra every day for the little table outside. Then, they ask 100 000 for garbage, so that makes two millions a month.

But the trick is another one: opposite my stall there were three stalls, they made them pull them down, there are only two left (...)

The stall was OK for about three or four years after I had taken it. Suddenly a stall opposite mine was sold. The girls told me to buy it, but I can hardly manage this one, so I said no. And a young man of 32 came, with a huge power to work, a man with his wife, brothers and all types of boys, and they are always carrying something. He comes from the wholesale, he has all the connections he needs with those people, he had a warehouse and put here all the goods, for sale; he sells them at the stall and has destroyed us all. He sells, there are people queuing up, and all we can do is watch. I can't afford to do what he does: a bottle of Bergenbier is brought for 11 000 lei, I sell it for 13 000 lei, he sells it for 11 000 or 12 000 lei, because he went there and took 300 boxes and received 50 for free! He is young, and this is the real financial power: the strength to carry things! There are products brought in boxes, he has got a warehouse, he can carry, I can't. So, he can afford those prices, and all the people go to him. He has already ordered a shop for himself, he told me it was worth about 300 million. He's also got strange customers, you could bring as many quality products as you want, they usually buy what's cheaper, worse on the market...

From one astonishment to the next, all these years. The worst period was the beginning of 1991. In May-June, when we started producing in the house from Pieptanari, I earned 6000 lei and the rent was 6000. As long as we hadn't obtained that three-phase current piecework, the machine wouldn't work, there was no production, and I was still paying the rent to the man, because my rent was his salary. And I couldn't make both ends meet!

There were a few months when I had no income. I was crying! Once I broke my glasses... I remember that happened in December...and I didn't have money to go and make another pair! But a few colleagues I had never talked to – we

weren't angry at one another, I have never quarreled, but they had the feeling that I was proud, somehow, that I hadn't paid any attention to them, but, oh, you can't be friends with everybody – it was they who gave me the money! I remember I took very many days off in November-December to arrange the problem with the three-phase current... I also received a bonus for Christmas! In life, you receive things when you least expect it!

Whenever I needed money, someone happened to help me. My mother had a very good friend who lent me money whenever I went and asked her for it. My sister was amazed: "You, there, she has never let you down!" She gave me as much as I asked for! Of course, I didn't return the money the way I had taken it: I also knew the interest given, when to give it, and I used to give her more than that interest, every time. I was so glad that I had support; I had a place to go... Or, another friend came and asked me: „Violeta, don't you need money? You see, I'll give it to you... I have to receive some money back and I don't need it...." Some special people... I was deeply affected by all those things. Astonishment, one after another, all these years. And she asks me: „Violeta, if you want, I'll give some more to you..." I said, "No, I can manage." I couldn't believe it. At that time my parents did have money, but they were frightened, they were afraid... And, in order to avoid discussions, I took it from such friends, I knew I could cope with the situation, and, if it was going to be all right, I could give the money back!

When I had rented the house from Pieptanari and I was beating the air, mother started to cry: "Give up the snacks business, God knows what else could happen! " Months were passing by, and I couldn't solve the problem. „This is not OK !" she used to say. I told her there was no way back for me. If I stopped, bankruptcy was the word for me; I couldn't have paid my debts... On the other hand, going ahead meant the end of the road, I say: "It isn't possible!" These were the facts, I was so patient... And I was so disappointed...

I had money only when the machine for snacks worked, but I used it to pay for the car! If I had continued business as it had been settled in 1990, if everything had been fair with that colleague of mine, I would have had money indeed! He had bought so many things...it was meant to happen!

I paid all my debts only in 1991-1992.

After that I was able to gather money and I bought the minibus. Then I could arrange the shop, then the machines for juice... I used to work every day, from seven o'clock or so till about 9-10 p.m., also on Saturdays and Sundays. A huge period of time. It was terrible work, like Sisyphus.

The machine now worked, now it didn't, on Saturdays and Sundays we had to go to the mill, at the market to buy maize, we had to buy maize flour. Then we gathered too many bags with salted chuff: tens a week, something had to be done with them. So we went back to the market and got rid of them... We ourselves were like machines...

There were many customers who bought especially from our shop. The firm is called Roberti CS and I put its name outside. But all of them used to come "at Jeni's", she was one of the shop/assistant, a very pleasant one. Men were sent to Mrs. Jeni by their wives! And at a certain time I thought of changing the name, from Roberti to Jeni... You enjoy hearing such stuff... She was kind to them and, in spite of being extremely fat she was always nicely dressed, perfumed... She was rather pretty; she had a nice head... The prices were like those in other shops, but many used to come only for her. She succeeded in winning people's hearts. I had her at the market, too, and people were also coming for her sake. Such a human being is difficult to find.

It seemed strange to me when, after working for me for seven-eight years, having a work register, she suddenly decided to go. No comments.

And I have my own pride, if she didn't mention the place, I didn't ask, either. But she still calls me, we meet, she comes with flowers. She said she wanted to be free; she had worked since she had been 15-16. And I guess she lives into an ill-famed company. She has a good friend, a former dancer in Japan, who had returned with a lot of things and business... anyway, I know they wandered about a lot, she taught her things.... I don't know what she did, finally I heard she was away in Spain, she worked there for a couple of months, and then she returned. Her friend threw herself out of the window, they say, God knows what had happened to her in Japan... Then, Jeni went to Italy...

Opposite my block of flats there's ten-storey one. Very few go to work in the morning. Has everybody stopped working these days? I don't know, but I can see that very few people work. In 1990 people were more relaxed; they were even in a better mood... They felt differently, they already saw themselves in the West. There was much money... Now they are winthdrawn, you can see they are worried. They forget their goods on the shelf, deep in thought, disappointed (...). Those years were very beautiful. Now we have become strangers. Then we used to say that parents and children became strangers, that they didn't have a home, that we didn't have food for them. Now it's worse. People are strangers to one another (...).

What was beautiful about those years? But what am I saying? It was wonderful ! The fact that after so many years people call me up – at Christmas, on my birthday – they ring me to ask how I feel, to talk, to be together, for a short while. That means I was good to them. If I hadn't behaved nicely, they wouldn't have called, would they? It's just a thought...

Translated by Alina Popescu



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Second hand

Petruța Burcea

Back in 1994, during my hippie days, I would turn the city up-side-down looking for a pair of flaring blue jeans. My sis came over and said that she had found the item at the Eroilor subway station, in a second-hand clothes shop next to a pastry stand, and she also mentioned that clothes were really cheap there. I went there, stepped inside and was welcome by the smell of old clothes. It all smelled a little dusty, or at least that was my impression of the odour that was making my nose turn. But that didn't matter much because my chief goal there was to find a pair of flaring blue jeans.

After a serious dig in the heap of clothes (they had been simply piled up there), I found my first absolutely cool and really cheap flaring blues jeans. After an even deeper dive into the pile, I also discovered a leather brown jacket which looked cool too. I liked it so much that I couldn't care less that the lining was shredded, that the sleeves were a tinge too long and that the collar was a little worn out. I just bought it! When my mom saw me she almost went nuts. Fancy her daughter wearing somebody else's clothes which on top of everything were also shabby! Yeah, but there weren't any young people my age looking like me ...

After this episode I began hunting down second-hand stores where I would find countless funny and interesting clothes which were also cheap. I found a suspicious looking shop – the circumstances escape me, I think somebody must have told me about it – in the narrow passage at the first tram stop after Crângași. Back in those days, in 1994 or 1995, we used to find them in underground locations, meaning at subway stations. There was one at Unirea. Later, in 1997 and 1998 I think they had begun to surface in all sorts of little street shops or even at the ground floor of blocks of flats facing the street. It was in these places that I found my coolest skirts and dresses, and even a pullover which I adored and which disappeared together with my little back pack, both stolen in Paris. I cried then ... You know things are like that when you grow fond of only one piece of your wardrobe. You wouldn't give it to anybody. I haven't given up exploiting second-hand shops. It's even more amazing as people exclaim in amazement, "Wow, where did you get that one? How much was it? Oh, yes ..."

Translated by Alina Popescu



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Aid transports and clothes

Livia Gheorghită

The '90s were an essential period in our lives, right? They represented the awakening, let's say. Consequently, when I saw the theme "Martor" suggested, the 90s, I tried to remember all I could from that period of awakening for me and for others ... And then the thought popped up right before my eyes ... clothes ... clothes ... clothes: a vague feeling of estrangement and a powerful fit of anxiety mixed with frustration and drunken elation ...

At first I wonder why clothing ...?! Can't I relate to something a little more stylish, or at least more picturesque? I'm simply awful! Clothing!!! Then I sit and go down the memory lane back to those awakening years. The 90s meant the Revolution ... Ok, and what happened right after that? Well, I received aid transports! My mother had a friend living in Switzerland. She had been a beautician working in a salon at the ground floor of the block of flats in Tineretului quarters where we used to live ... I had known her all my life, as well as a crazy hairdresser who would always give me a crew cut and would keep talking and talking for hours in a strange and loud voice, saying that she was actually giving me the haircut you would find on the great Parisian boulevards ... Anyway back then she was nothing more than a fruitcake to me! Flori her name was. I haven't heard from her since. But Ruxi, the beautician, we would meet again in the 90s and

she would come to us in the shape of huge packs brought to us, at night, by a whole array of strange and semi-mysterious individuals.

But coming back to the issue of clothing ... Why clothes ...? Because we got huge quantities of them, all tenaciously packed and wrapped in small or big cardboard boxes. Each and every one of them smelled divine. The advantage these boxes presented was not only their arriving by surprise ... like a joy bomb dropped on us, like a cheerful terrorist attack on the safety of our home, but also their arriving not only on holidays but virtually at any time of the year: in summer, in spring ... But they arrived at intervals long enough not to spoil the fun.

For me, it is there, in those big and colourful boxes where various and astonishing treasures lay hidden, that I place the beginning of my 90s smelling of perpetual spring, of Ariel and Persil ... They had been tightly packed, yet they remained incredibly soft, like those in TV ads, and always full of surprises. That was the beginning of a new world ... endless waltzes with my mother as my partner and the house as our dance floor. And there were the endless trial sessions, the splitting of the spoils amongst ourselves, and later, when enthusiasm had sunk, we would notice that we had been the lucky ones again, as my father never got to wear the four shirts he usually received because 2 of them were not his

size and the remaining two were always too colourful for Romanian tastes! And then my heart would shrink and I would do my best to convince dad that he could at least try to wear one or two shirts because I wanted him to share in our joy. But my dad would give me an understanding smile and tell me, “Don’t worry, dear, daddy doesn’t need them!” That feeling of guilt would later stop me from waltzing around because there were still too few clothes that my dad could wear.

In the 90s, clothes helped me form an image of the West and Westerners who not only smelled divine, a state we could never achieve despite the huge quantities of “quality” washing powder we used, but also dressed in more and more peculiar ways. After the adrenaline rush of the first packs, my mom and I noticed that some clothes were not only conspicuously brightly coloured, but some were downright embarrass-

ing to wear! That aspect has remained an unsolved dilemma for us. I still can’t understand how sane women could wear bright-pink overalls which were more or less puffed, or turquoise short and wavy dresses with light violet flowers, spangles and shine stones sewn on them!? How could they wear pullovers made of nets which you could never get the hang of? And I was also under the impression that men were all dressing up like clowns. Anyway, despite this drawback, both my mom and I were always sharply dressed although our outfits were a tinge too large.

But, like in any story, there came a moment when I gave up wearing Ruxi’s gifts, and my mom found herself a good seamstress who turned all her overalls into either skirts or trousers. That’s how we won the battle.

Translated by Alina Popescu





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The 90s or the arrival of fruit yoghurt into our lives

Despina Bădescu

The years before fruit yoghurt had been dark. I remember an empty fridge, which seemed determined to remain empty, standing across the way from the shelves loaded with rare preserve jars (green nuts, rose, wild strawberries, blackberries, orange peels cut in rose-like shapes) which bored me stiff. Only our guests from abroad were in awe of them. What fascinated us was rather a Nutella jar we would receive for Christmas or at Easter. We had even developed a technique of leaking the jar little by little and using a teaspoon. Thus it lasted at least one and a half months. We were also fascinated by instant pudding, that Western magic powder which turned into a flavoured, sweet and a little jelly paste. Well, I admit we didn't really know what artificial food flavour was back then. And Its Royal Majesty the Packing was even more fascinating than the taste. There were tinfoil, glossy, beautifully drawn labels, small boxes, tubes and all the other contraptions that I was collecting and storing in silent rows.

Fruit yoghurt came to our doorstep during the 90s. When I had heard about the Revolution and of people gathering in street meetings, I made a quick assessment of things and asked

whether all groceries would turn into what we called "shops"¹ where we could go and do our shopping in more humane conditions. I can't recall the answer but I distinctly remember that in January 1990, in a supermarket on Magheru Boulevard, I bought a small bar of chocolate shaped like an umbrella that cost me a fortune: 15 lei. And it was an awful kind of chocolate which tasted dusty and too sweet and looked suspiciously light brown. But it was shaped like an umbrella and that was what really mattered. Then Mr. Fruit Yoghurt came along. It was small, expensive, imported, light, sweet, with a lot of chemicals in it, and bottled in beautiful, cosmopolitan-looking packs. And it was a lot tastier than the poor piece of fruit on the label, which, in its natural state, would have been completely ignored. Its first visits to our fridge were timid and only on special occasions, namely when we got visitors from abroad. At the sight of the yoghurt, they would immediately become tense and asked what had happened to those old and boring fruit preserves.

Then one sweet day, the big thing happened: four packs of fruit yoghurt suddenly appeared in our fridge. It was the kind of Western looking

¹ Stores in communist Romania called "shop" where goods were sold only for foreign currency and which were destined mainly for foreign people.

packs, stuck together in fours which you could buy and bring home and place in the fridge in full formation. I took a couple of looks at them, arranged them on the shelf, then opened the fridge again to see what they were doing, all four of them. My mother threw a careless remark, "I took more of them because we might run out of yoghurt soon!" Four packs of yoghurt in one shot. My head was spinning. It was so Western. That was it: my family had fruit yoghurt in the fridge!

Time passed by and we got over the Y2K. One day, in the supermarket, I realized that I was ignoring Mr. Fruit Yoghurt altogether. I thought it was obsolete, that it contained artificial food flavours, sugar or saccharine and its colours were almost fluorescent. I said to myself that I would buy either yoghurt, or fruit. I still care about fruit yoghurt but it is history now. I put it on my mental shelf, next to the tape cassettes.

Translated by Alina Popescu





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My supermarket

The first supermarket I came across had a slightly different name – it was a *supermarché*. I mention the name because the most powerful effect it had on me was at the level of sound.

I was a pupil and during the summer holiday before the 8th grade (it was in 1995, when we lived in Râmnicu-Vâlcea) we traveled abroad for the first time. It was a trip to France. It was a two-week trip organized by our class. Each of us would be put up by a French family in a little town called Brignole, one hour's drive from Montpellier. On week days we and the French pupils would have a common schedule focused especially on local sightseeing and on the activities organized by the school in Brignole. Week-ends would be spent with the families that would put us up. This is why each of us, with the respective host family, ended up in a *supermarché* on the first Saturday after we had arrived.

The word was already familiar to me: during the previous week I had heard it a million times – that is why I mentioned that the word in itself had a very strong and immediate impact on me. Besides, two of us, two of the girls, had already been at the supermarket on two evenings during the week. From their discussion and from the stories they had told us we had retained the basic idea that “there was no such place back home”. Almost any conversation on this topic would end in a cheerful and anxious conclusion,

“They said we would go again!” We asked the family where we lived, the Barras, if there was a “supermarket trip” on our schedule too. On the Saturday of our arrival I met several of my mates and as soon as we laid eyes on one another, we began chatting enthusiastically in Romanian, even if we weren't that close friends. The most frequent questions were, “Have you been to ... yet?” and we would list the various departments: toys, wines, sweets etc. Now I remember less what I actually saw there and more what impressed me, the magic I felt when I uttered those words.

I don't doubt that going shopping at the *supermarché* was actually an ordinary event in the lives of the families where we lived. And still, I think that when they took us with them, they were well aware that it would all be new for us. It wasn't very difficult to imagine that, just as our teachers had told us, “Give them traditional presents: decorated pottery, traditional towels because they love them” and “get involved in all family activities”, our French colleagues and their parents had been told, “Take them with you everywhere, shopping too. It will all be new and exciting for them and they'll be happy”. Maybe that was the reason why going to the supermarket that day looked so festive. It soon became a routine, but I began perceiving it as being a routine activity only after we had moved

to Bucharest, a stone's throw away from Billa Supermarket.

Today, after so much time, I don't use the French word anymore. I assimilated or I was assimilated by the term *supermarket*. Yet, most of the times I only use the names of the respective places: "Billa", "Carrefour", "Cora". Where I used to live, in Titan, many people don't know the names of the bus stops. Instead they use old names, or reference points such as "the bus stop at the cemetery", "the Billa bus stop", "the 13th precinct bus stop", and the supermarket is such a reference point.

When I go shopping and I happen to notice certain things, I often wonder whether the old *supermarché* that I remember is but another reference point. Yet, every time I ask myself this I notice that comparisons are almost impossible. I put this situation down to the fact that what then seemed like a great "event" and an absolute novelty has meanwhile turned into a routine, and to the differences between the life experiences of a French buyer and those of a Romanian buyer (I now think of my childhood "expeditions" taken every fortnight to the countryside, 180 km away from Râmnicu-Vâlcea, in order to pick up the produce that would feed us for the next two weeks). Beyond the limits of these experiences I can guess a certain routine and a sense of logic in the general attitude of the people who queue up at cash registers and wait for a cart to become available during "shopping rush-hours", in the attention paid to various labels or in the glances used to ask for the spouse's opinion on one product or another.

There are also many funny things going on – children who are keen on riding a car-cart or on their parents buying a certain brand of chips,

couples who read the receipt left in the cart by the previous client ("Oh they bought minced meat for 123.800 to go with their beer; twelve cans of it!"), older people who won't leave their bags when they go inside, taking the wrong cart,

the sudden gesture with which a leaking milk bag is thrown back on its shelf.

People in the area are not surprised to run into old acquaintances when they go shopping at the supermarket. Whenever I meet my neighbours we greet each other as if we hadn't just done that on the steps of our block of flats. But things are different

when we run into a public figure shopping at the supermarket. Since I moved near the supermarket, five years ago, I've seen only one such character shopping at Billa, namely Marius Țicu. I couldn't avoid looking at him because everybody else was looking in the same direction.

Two or three years ago I started running into old school mates among the girls who invite you to taste this and that or give you flyers. I would stop and exchange a few words while they went on working, and then I would leave myself. All the meetings that I've mentioned, regardless of their nature, make that place feel more familiar: I'm not intimidated and I don't feel insignificant. I like shopping in any supermarket, but I am at my most comfortable in my neighbourhood supermarket because I know where I can find each product and for approximately what price (once every 10 or 12 days we get a products "catalogue" in our mail boxes), the hours when the crowd is smaller and it is a place where I can find many familiar faces.

Translated by Alina Popescu





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Supermarket

Răzvan Marin, marketing agent, 29 years old
Interview done by Dan Bărbulescu

In September 1996, when I got the job here, Metro was the first supermarket in Romania. Until then there had been only ... the Mega Image in Lizeanu Street. It had opened a year before. It was awfully crowded there too, people were crammed up inside because it was something new ... Still, there wasn't much difference between a supermarket and a regular grocery store. But Metro was something completely new.

Their marketing strategy targeted only companies, and entrance was allowed only to those who had cards. They hired young people during the summer. The store opened in November 1996, and I was hired in September. It was during the elections campaign. They said they would only hire students. They had begun to issue cards in June but they worked with people who were not students and those people couldn't care less about the job. They would just carry their bag to work and then spent the day doing nothing because their duties were not very clear: each had to make ten cards a day or something of the kind ...

And there was another trick, namely that you could issue cards to peasants, agriculturists, and you could make up names for people who didn't exist. The norm was of 10-15 cards per day. And you went to see people and not all of them agreed to get a card because they would say, "What need do I have of your supermarket, sir?"

They simply had no idea about it, that's what was going on actually. They only had a presentation booklet. "Leave me alone, sir, I have no need for that, I have my own supplier ..." And you had to ask for a fiscal code, and you can picture their reaction to that, "I won't tell you anything, sir, leave me alone". Some of them had come from abroad and they had heard of Metro, "Oh, man, we'll have one here too!" A couple of us, like me, for instance, had to cover nasty areas, such as Ferentari or other God-forsaken places. I would carry a small briefcase made of plastic and a stick, because there were so many dogs there, and I would walk in awfully muddy streets all over Bucharest. Some of my colleagues, as they couldn't find clients, used to invent names. They said, "I have this many clients", and then filled in those forms with fake names. They wrote down names, such as Vasiliță Ionela from Ciorogârla, which were obviously fake but there was no way anybody could check on them.

We had our strategies. We would tell them that it was the first supermarket in Romania, that it was such an honour for them, that you had to be somebody to get in, that it was a big German consortium with 500 supermarkets worldwide and stuff like that. You would say, "Sir, you'll find anything you want there, from food, cosmetic products and electric drills to fur-

niture”, or something like that. You told them that they would find anything they needed there. Then there was nothing except for markets and small corner shops. There were several thousand such small corner shops all over Bucharest. You climbed down the stairs of your block of flats and you found yourself in front of such a shop.

The supermarket opened in mid October and there was a huge crowd, loads of people gathered there for the occasion ... We were supposed to finish our job after the official opening. We were officially called marketing agents. It was rubbish ‘cause all we had to do was to make Metro cards. And they gathered us all, the marketing agents, to help the women from the cash registers to put the products in bags or to sort out problems that appeared, like for instance when the machines wouldn’t read bar codes. You had to hurry up to find out what the problem was, ‘cause everything had to be done quickly in that crowded place. People weren’t supposed to wait in line for hours, you know. That still happened, though. They had to wait a lot at the gates until their cards were checked, and then they waited at the cash register and the supermarket was very far away, across from Otopeni Airport. We were taken there by special buses, and there were certain fixed places where my colleagues and I waited for the buses. We left for work at 5 am.

The salary they gave us there was about 100 dollars and that was a lot back then. It was ok, they also gave us food and we would smuggle lunch tickets. They needed our help with the cash registers until things settled down and the crowd calmed down a little and the cash registers began reading the damn bar codes and all problems were finally solved.

We had made a list of all companies in Bucharest, so that none could escape our knowledge. We kept reconfiguring the city areas ac-

cording to whatever happened to come up. A few months later there was a long line of people waiting outside our gates to get a card. They had found out about the supermarket and they had hurried there. That happened despite the fact that, when I was out in the street, and told people “look here, man, they’re opening a new supermarket”, most answers I would get were negative. But if his neighbour had told the same person, “Check this out, neighbour”, he immediately went down there to see what the thing was all about. And there were a lot of people who would come to the supermarket with somebody else’s card because things were cheaper and the atmosphere was different there. We were more isolated back then. Many people started coming just to get a card so that they could go in too. The limit for a card was of three names, I guess. That was the company politics: only companies could own cards and use them to get in. That’s why they only sell in bulks. This might be the situation in other countries too but I wouldn’t stick my neck for that.

I know that Iliescu or Văcăroiu attended the opening, but I don’t remember very well. Things were pretty crazy at the time, you know. It was something new and they were the first to open such a supermarket. When Carrefour opened theirs in 2001, things went equally crazy. Figures also speak of that craziness. These supermarkets made you feel as if you had been somewhere in the West, they were little consumerist islands, a place where you could do your shopping differently. You go there and pick up whichever products you choose and you can have a good look at them before you do that. It’s not like “Alimentara”.

Translated by Alina Popescu



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Dorobanți private market

C. T. market seller, 54 years old
Interview done by Șerban Anghelescu

When I went there for the very first time I was already working for “Arta publică”, I had a job, but she said, “Godmother – ‘cause she’s Silvia’s godmother; one of them anyway – come with us to the market”. And there was a devilish Gypsy woman and a drunkard sleeping there in a room they had given her. They cooked there and everything, you know, all in that room? There were rats there. Well, in the end the manager invested in the place, modernized it and had tiles put on the walls and floors, it was the most beautiful market at the time, a real place of luxury. The first private market in the whole country it was.

She says, “Do you want to come along?” “Yes, I do”, I answer. “Alright, be there at 9 in the morning”, she says. I went and I found that Stanca, the cleaning lady, was drunk. She says, “What are you doing here? Have you come to take my job?” “Woman, you must be crazy”, I say, “leave me be”. I phone Tania and say, “What am I to do now?” She says, “I can’t make it today, so go with Stanca and she’ll show you how to cash in”. She was with some men, ‘cause whenever she found one, she wouldn’t let him go for days. So, I was left with the Gypsy woman. I thought the manager would come and show me how things were done, and how to cash in. I had never done that before. So we got started. I say, “How do you cash in here?” She says, “Not

here, ‘cause they won’t give us enough for a drink”. I felt sick to my stomach. “How much should we cash from the guy with the corn flower?” That was when the merchants usually came. “Nope, be serious, he’ll bring us beer at the office soon.” Man, I thought that if I told Tania about this, she would drop dead. At a certain moment I went really mad and I went to Tania and told her, “If the Gypsy won’t let me cash in, I’m outta here”. Tania phoned her and said, “Stanca, you let her cash in, you hear?” “What? She’s here to take my job! She should go.” In the end, she cracked. I let her do her tricks with one or two merchants, so that she could get something to drink, and then I cashed in the taxes and took the money straight to the manager, as she lived across the street. When she saw me coming, she said, “Why, godmother, that much money?” Stanca wouldn’t bring her a dime.

The tax was 15 000 lei per stall. When I was hired, the stalls were made of concrete. Later on they brought stalls made of tiles, which they had taken from Floreasca, and then they ordered those that we have now somewhere in Transylvania. Then we had people coming from Galați Market and from other cities to ask us about the place. I worked there for six months. I got angry and I left, ‘cause I already had a job. A month later I was called back and I worked there for another eight months. All janitors there got in trou-

ble because the walls were covered in tiles. It looked great, brand new and expensive. We had a cleaning lady and I used to tell her, "Sanda, please clean the tiles today". "No, I won't, lady Tanța!" She wouldn't do it and she would say that to your face. "Well", I told her, "if you won't do it, I'll fire you". The manager was in Greece at the time. I could have fired her then, but she kept coming back and cried her eyes out until the manager hired her back.

The merchants used to wait for me to open the market at 6 in the morning. At ten in the evening I would close it, especially in summer. They were real merchants back then; they would sell their stuff in front of the market and straight from the car. Now we have some crooks that buy cheaper produce from Obor and Rahova Markets and then sell it here. The peasants living outside Bucharest, from Teleorman County sold nuts and those from Moldova brought beans, and even endives; those from Baia Mare brought cheese and milk. Everybody knew that. They would come from outside Bucharest, on Tuesdays there were two people coming from Baia Mare, and then another two on Thursday. At the beginning there were even shepherds from Sibiu coming to us to sell their produce. It was so beautiful! We had uncle Istrate who would even play the shepherd's flute. I was having so much fun! He drank hot beer, and I had never seen anything like that before. In December people would bring ham and lard bacon, but they had their clients who would ask them, "Have you brought *palinca*¹?" and they would show them the drink. I knew what was going on. I knew all the time, but I wasn't to blame if people sold their produce illegally. There were a lot of people coming from the Republic of Moldavia and there simply weren't enough stalls for all of them. They thought I wouldn't rent them any. They sold vacuum cleaners, air conditioning equipment, bed sheets, underwear, beds, virtually anything. They even exchanged money. They

brought salami, caviar, Manchurian caviar. They knew that the police weren't after them. They just came to me and said, "Hey, we're here!"

We had storehouses and things were as civilized as they could be. It's such a shame that they fired the manager. They just threw her out as if she had been a dog. The city hall sent the special troops and threw her out. She took them to court and their case is judged by the Court in Strasbourg now. That's too bad; she worked her fingers to the bone! Honestly she did. She worked; she lived and breathed for this business. All the money she made she invested in the market. She made all the changes: new ceilings, new tiles, new fridges and all the rest. The new and civilized offices were built thanks to her. There used to be little rooms there, rat infested and in ruins. Mayor Gherasim is a jerk. Tania paid for everything, the central heating and the storage. Once you would have frozen to death waiting in line at 4 in the morning. Now we have a boiler and hot water. She had imagination. She had worked at the market since she was 17, and she had loads of experience. She had seen all the markets in the city: Floreasca, Dorobanți, 1 Mai, Amzei. She had worked with the scales; she had collected taxes and supervised the market. I was a new comer. She had traveled to Spain, Greece, Turkey, and Hungary, and she copied what she had seen there.

There were all sorts of inspectors coming at the market; police inspectors, finance inspectors. It was all so cute. We would receive them, we would prepare some hot coffee and chat like civil people. I had a mighty fine office with the latest music playing all day long. I had a library, a phone, and a cash register. At the beginning I only had the receipts. Then I evolved. I was fashionable, always on top. We had a book stand, a flower shop, leather goods and shoes. Once we had some Italians with "pancetta". Their boss called me *signora* and everybody has called me *signora* ever since. We sold cooked meat too, but

¹ Traditional alcoholic drink made from fruit.

it smelled awful. Everything was very expensive. There was a fishmonger's, a butcher's, a baker's and a confectioner's. We were the first to use plastic stalls and they all followed our example. We cleaned the place with a hose and with washing powder. Sometimes I would go back soaking wet. In the evening there was only me and the janitors left. Poor devils, I tortured them! They missed the last bus home too. Each morning we had the garbage collectors driving in. I paid for each cube metre of garbage but sometimes they cheated me. I was the one to prepare the buckets with the chlorine and the detergent 'cause otherwise they would have stolen some of it. I helped with the cleaning too. I would stay until 1 in the morning sometimes. They would say, "It's easy for you, Tanța, 'cause you live nearby ..."

"And, so what? Wouldn't you want me to move to the country just to please you?" I told them to make it quick but to do their job well. We had some bodyguards who stole from the peasants, the bloody bastards! They stole like there was no tomorrow. And now theft has become a fashion. It's difficult to work with people. The janitors got drunk. But bottom line is that it wasn't all that bad. The peasants were very nice, but there was a whole Gypsy mafia around the market. I never took a bribe in my whole life. The peasants were indeed very nice and behaved like gentlemen. They were eager to cater to your every need.

(The host intervenes.)

Tanța would sometimes come to Floreasca Market and would leave with 4-5 boxes of green salad. I had no idea why she did that. At that time, salad sold for, let's say, ten lei and they sold it there for twenty.

I was sent to get that salad, make no mistake. I met somebody over at some friends' place. They brought pigs from a farm. I don't know if the pigs were stolen but he sold them cheap ... He asked if I wanted half a pig and then I



bought meat for some of my neighbours too. Half a pig was for Florica. When we left here, everybody was dead drunk. We were all piled up on top of the pigs. Florica also gave us something to drink. We arrived at the house of the doctor's friend, a four-storey house with a narrow staircase. And can you imagine what he told us? He said that he couldn't carry heavy loads 'cause he was sick. And the wife was sick too. If you had seen me, you'd have fainted. The doctor and I were busy carrying the pig by its legs and the guy said, "Lift the pig up, man, 'cause it will get contaminated!" Fuck your contamination, man, and I pulled him down the stairs. Our backs hurt for three days. We didn't get the pig's back muscles 'cause he stole them, but God didn't help him. His house caught fire and burnt to the ground.

The manager took regular trips to Greece and she would let me and Doru to take care of her dog. We had the key to the house. The dog would only eat Sibiu salami and beef. I had driven people crazy 'cause I would go over and say, "The manager sent me to get a slice of beef." "For whom?" "For the dog?" "May it burn in hell!" The dog was a wretched street bitch which got sick one day. Its tits had swollen so I phoned the manager in Greece. "Hello! What should I

do?” “Call the doctors, money is no object”. The doc gave me an ointment, and I spent my day salving the bitch’s tits. The bloody hound from hell was a vicious beast. I would take it to the market and kept it with me. Nobody dared enter the office, so I couldn’t get a bribe anymore because of it. When the manager came over, we were all over the bloody dog looking bright and cheerful. Mammy’s Năița. When the bitch disappeared, she posted notices all over the market, on every wall and in every window. She offered a reward and put up a newspaper ad. Some people phoned her in the middle of the night just to make fun of her. People at the market mocked her too and told her, “Madam, I saw the dog somewhere in Călărași and we called its name before every house fence”. I heard some say that they had seen it in Scânteia Square.

Work at the market was a torture for me. I was up to my eye balls in it despite all advantages. I would indeed take something home with me, like salmon for Grigore to cook. He made some stew and soup and there would still be some left. It was huge and also expired. We had a check once and the inspectors found expired pieces of Czechoslovakian salami and bacon, so the doctor came over to me and said, “That’s it, you take the bag to the office and pour chlorine and detergent on the produce”. He cut the salami in halves: one, two three pieces. I plucked up my courage and told him, like, sir, I beg of you, stop cutting the salami! “Why the hell do you want with it, Tanța, it’s expired!” “Give it to me. I’ll eat it, and I’ll be alright, you’ll see!” “Then you’ll be responsible. You go to the garbage bin and you throw all this away”. I took the bag straight to the car trunk. That salami would have fed all my neighbours. I brought back a bag full of beef and pastrami once. Doc, do you remem-

ber that I once called for Grigore when those guys were throwing away a huge box with greens? The bloody bastards wouldn’t lower the prices and they preferred to throw the produce away when it spoiled! I saw them throw boxes full of grapes in the morning! And what about the mustard? I brought home countless boxes with Dijon mustard jars! It was enough to last my neighbours a whole year.

I didn’t have time to eat at home. I would leave at half past five, as I had to open the market at 6. When I opened the door, the peasants were right behind me pushing and almost suffocating me just to get a better place, and all I wanted was to turn on the lights! Now they have become a bunch of gentlemen and they never arrive before nine. Each has a stall and scales. When they used the market scales I had to ask for their IDs and I held them until they left. But can you guess what they did? They would leave the ID there and then disappear with the scales. I would call the police immediately but they never listened. Fancy the cops minding my bloody scales! I was supposed to pay for the damage but I never did that. At the end of the day, after they had sold their stuff, they would bring the scales back together with some fruit, cherry or apricots. Sometimes it was tomatoes, cucumbers, pepperoni, vegetable marrows or carrots. They would bring me boxes with sausages. The doc here was living the grand life back then. We would get checks from the police or the Finance Guard, and we would receive them with glasses with whiskey and cognac, and we would fill up their car trunks with stuff. We kind of “brain-washed” them.

Translated by Alina Popescu



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Fast food

**Tudor Anghelescu, 28 years old
and Mihai Melinescu, 28 years old
Interview done by Șerban Anghelescu**



The subjects of my interview, two young friends, are naturally cutting in the other's discourse. In order to preserve the fluidity of the text I will only provide the initials of the youngsters' names, T and M, thus marking their speech. My own interventions in the text will be marked by the letter?

T.

That night we were coming from Club A and felt overjoyed. I was the happiest and far tipsier than he was. I am never violent when I've had one too many glasses, I'm calm and only waddle a little, I mean I'm not changed in any way, you can't tell that I'm drunk or anything, you have to really know that I've been drinking. My eyes are bloodshot and water a little, that's all. We got there, ordered a lot of food, heaps of it really, we sat at the table and started digging in. We were talking, can't remember what about, it must have something about one of my unhappy affairs, 'cause this is the usual conversation topic in Club A, and I was playing with the vinegar and oil bottles in their stand on the table, when, the reason escapes me, I simply poured a drop of vinegar in the pepper spoon and I even gave it a taste and liked it so, that I poured some more, and one of the ladies there saw me doing it and started yelling like a harpy "how dare you, sir"?

M.

But maybe we should mention what we were wearing at the time. You can't remember. Well, I'll tell you. I was wearing leather head to toe, including my black leather long coat, Gestapo style, and you were all leather too. We were wearing black leather top to bottom, we were basically made of leather. We were ridding out bikes and I think we had our guitars with us, too. We looked weird. And we raised the snakes. She insulted us to our face, not a respectful word came out of her mouth, said that we had to pay, that we had no shame, called us hooligans and kept yelling and screaming and cursing.

T.

I remained calm and didn't yell back at her, saying yes, madam, sorry, of course I'll pay for it, how much would that be? And she came up with this unbelievable price, 100 000 (that was the price for a really consistent meal in that fast food, n.n.) for the spoonful of pepper in the bottle stand. I took out a hundred-thousand bill from my wallet, gave it to Mihai and said "go and pay for the pepper". And he goes, pays and I say: where's the receipt for the 100 000 that you paid?

M.

It was 50. 000.

T.

It was a hundred, I've got the receipt at home. It was huge, anyway.

M.

Then I went back. He was cool as a cucumber but very silent, while the women were all climbing the walls, real madness it was. It was pretty late, I was of course having a good time, I was a little tipsy, so you can picture the pretty mess the whole thing was. I was cast as the advocate. Taking my part really seriously, I said: "We've messed things up and are willing to pay for it! Please give me a receipt." What happened next? She wrote the sum on a receipt, on a regular cash receipt, a slip of paper really. O.K. ... and I went back to our table to finish my dinner.

T.

Mel, you've got it all wrong! This is what happened... Before getting any kind of cash receipt



I went to the cash register too, right after you had asked for a receipt and got nothing, and told them: "Give me a receipt, man!" My voice was tough and dry, rather than violent. They said they wouldn't and then I leaned over the cash register, took the key and said that I would give it back only if I got either my receipt or my money back. You can't basically sell something without giving me the receipt, and I won't pay for something I don't get. And then, the first thing they did was to call the public guards. One of the women phoned a guy she called by name and told him: "Man, come quickly 'cause I'm in serious trouble over here", and stuff ... She hit the panic button, dude.

Then they started pouring in, one squad of guys in black after another, and then the police followed. The first ones that arrived were really cool. The women were climbing the walls, I tell you. They asked us to step out of the fast-food restaurant. We did, and I told the guy who looked in charge: "Chief", I say, "the deal is that we got in, had our dinner, spoiled a spoonful of pepper, paid for it, and now I want my receipt. But she won't give it to me, I want my money back." The guy talked to one of the women and then I got a scrap of paper on which the woman had written the sum. I started laughing, obviously, and I said I wanted a cash receipt. I gave the scrap of paper back. The women were hysterical. When I took away their key they got violent, they hit me even, but I didn't feel a thing. The cops came. The first ones had left saying: "Please don't go back in there!" I said: "I won't leave until they've given me the receipt, so here I am." "Come in the morning and talk it over with the manager." I said: "I don't want to talk to the manager. I want the receipt or my money back."

The first police car came right away but left quickly. They took down our names, we gave a short version of what had happened, but they didn't write a report or something like that. They told us to leave and to talk to the manag-

er the morning after, and they went away soon after. We weren't very convinced, tough. I said: "I'm not going anywhere, man, until they've given me the receipt!"

They called the second police car when they noticed that I was going to go back inside. The guys in the second car were much tougher and really pissed us off, Mihai and me, 'cause we can't stand being bullied by the police, and so I started shouting at them and telling them in a really annoyed voice this time: "Look here, I was sold a thing, doesn't matter what, a spoonful of pepper at an outrageous price, and got not receipt for it!" And the cop answered right back saying: "Right, she can't sell without giving you a receipt." And I say: "Well then, she has to give me the receipt!" On the other hand, the dame says: "Where am I supposed to get a pepper receipt? There's no such thing." – "Well, then why did you ask for money?" The cop says: "Yes, sir, you're right, you go ahead and press charges." – And I say: "Where am I supposed to do that?" – "At the precinct." – "But you are from the precinct, you take down our complaint." – "No, you come to the precinct at 8 tomorrow morning." That got on my nerves. I say: "Man, you're a cop, make her give me the money back or a receipt for it!" And I kept saying that until one of them, the chief, I guess, started being rude. And there followed the usual conversation between the police and the ordinary citizen ... "Are you making fun of me now?" – "No, officer, you're making fun of me!" – "And who exactly do you think you are?" – "And you, who do you think you are?"

When I asked the first cop for his name, he locked himself up inside the car. The chief, an older man, noticed that I was pissed and was heading in his direction holding my phone, on which I only meant to take down his name. I sent messages to the precinct in order to write down his name; I was angry with him and thought that I would after all make an effort and wake up at 8 the next morning and I would go to the precinct to press charges. But he locked him-

self up inside the car and, when he saw me coming closer, he blocked the door as if he was afraid I would force myself in or something. He sat there, hands on the steering wheel.

?

Forgive my interruption, but this brings to mind something that happened in front of the Academy building. It was back in the 90s and I was just getting inside the Academy building to read something. There was a great commotion in front of the main gates on Calea Victoriei, as Iliescu was expected to arrive soon (the President, n.n.). The place was packed with guards and men in black suits who kept their eyes on the entrance where a policeman in uniform and two huge bodyguards, as sharply dressed as you would expect, were standing. One of them asks for my I.D. I look back at him and ask: "Do you have an I.D.? Show it to me." They kept a spiteful silence, give me a hair-raising look and refused to show me any I.D. They were obviously from the Guard and Protection Service, but wouldn't show me as much as a fake I.D. I think they must have had loads of them, but they just wouldn't take out one, although they were supposed to present one if asked for it. In the end I told him the following: "Look here, I haven't a clue who you are, but I see here a police officer who looks like a nice man, wears a uniform too and I don't suspect him of having stolen it ... See, I'll show my I.D. to him." I took out my library card and I went inside. They are probably trained to keep the secret.

T.

... Well, now ... the whole thing cooled off, meaning that I got no receipt, the women were still yelling, the third police special squad was already there, and in the end we left, the money stayed there and we told to ourselves that we would come back in the morning. The next day I got up at 6 in the evening. I never set foot in there again.

M.

I went back there once, alright. I said to myself: let's go, I was with a friend at the time, coming from a pub, the Music Club, and felt like getting something to eat. He says: "Let's go to Împinge Tava¹, dude! Come on, come on ...". And I say that I don't feel like it. In the end we went...

They brought us the order and you go figure out the scandal that broke up again. A youngster goes ballistic 'cause they brought him too few French fries; another youngster tells him: be polite, dude, the ladies have been up and about for hours. And they almost started a fight and I was laughing my head off 'cause things like those seemed to happen whenever I was around the place. And these guys did more than pick up a fight, they kicked up the counters, toppled the tables, broke the windows, a might fine mess, I tell you. The women seemed less inclined to climb the walls and less scared than they were

when we caused trouble. At a certain moment, as I turned around to ask my friend: "Ion, what should we do now, man: leave or stick around?" – we were sitting away from the fight - , hardly had I managed to pick up what was going on when I suddenly saw that people were leaving. And off they went. Both parties. Five minutes later we were having our dinner in peace when the Bidepa guys (a quick-intervention private service) showed up. I thought that was very funny, the irony of it all. We hadn't done anything wrong and they had got there in a matter of seconds. And now, a good 10 minutes after something that might have posed a real threat on those women had happened, the bodyguards came to the rescue.

Translated by Alina Popescu

¹ A fast-food restaurant.



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Old and new mentalities

Ștefan Aioanei, shoemaker, 76 years old
Interview done by Vlad Manoliu

In the end sun shone brighter when you weren't alone, right? I only know one thing: no sword cuts off a bowed head. I mean, you shouldn't stick out like a sore thumb when everybody else keeps a low profile. As a boy, I learned that you should stay low – my old man slapped me till I got the hang of it, you know! Whatever you might be thinking, keep it to yourself or whisper it into your mother's or your wife's ears, and that's that. You nod to your bosses and drop a "that's true" once in a while – that won't kill you, right?

Now I see that having ideas is in great fashion and everybody is keen on being top of the heap. And if you don't like this or that, you just go and work for another employer. You go back to square one. When you get the job, you start squabbling over money, over ideas, over your own person. But there's a catch here, and a big one this is – you must know a good trade, not just one that is in demand, but one that you know in and out, like the back of your hand; and you must be tough, 'cause you don't want people coming and blowing your chances away from you! You keep your chin up, but not without good reason. And that makes you a winner. That's what my grandson, Ionică, keeps telling me. My son has no clue about these things. He's afraid of others and of me. Now he's unemployed, now he's, as I say, busy selling bags of

trinkets at a street corner. He comes home with a host of fears about him – an imminent earthquake next year, too many thieves in the streets, Iliescu would "give us" this and that but the people around him won't let him. My son had only 10 years of schooling, then he graduated from a vocational school, and I bet he's already forgotten all about it – it's like flogging a dead horse, I tell you. When he's in company he feels top notch – but he won't dare do more than give people a nudge or whisper. Ionică is different. He was in the 10th grade in 1990. When I went to his school, a lady there told me, "old man, your grand son has potential. But he needs peace and quiet, a library card and a word of encouragement", and she schooled me to keep an eye on the boy and see who he's hanging around with, to tell him a couple of old words of wisdom, but to let him learn things the hard way too. "You know, old man, that times have changed. No more fear. Now it's the time for smart people to step forward. Now you can't hide behind the old crowd mentality any more."

In time, I managed to get it through my head, but my son simply wouldn't get it: forget about school, send the boy to work! But I never gave up. I gave him the room in the back, 'cause I took his father to live with us and even my wife said: "Get him to live with us, Fănică, 'cause he's lonely and this is a good and respectful kid."

And I brought him to my house and things started rolling. My old lady knits pieces of macramé to get more money for the daily needs. She sells her stuff quite well, but it's darn hard work, sir. I go fishing now and then. Once in a while, I mend the neighbours' shoes or boots. Whenever I make a trip down Calea Moșilor towards Sf. Gheorghe, via the route on the 21 tram, I make sure that I get my veneer from the wholesale store. Time went by and Ionică got to college, and now he's the one bringing me money for the veneer. We supported him through school, and now he, the apple of his grandmother's eye, is providing for us! He's like the Easter Resurrection light to her, you know. While he was away to college I took all sorts of jobs – now he says: "I'll get the money from now on, grandpa." He says that he does all kinds of things on his computer. After graduation, he studied one more year, 'cause it's a good thing to know more, right? He's got a decent job, drives around the compa-

ny's car when he pleases and they give him petrol for it too, can you believe it? He's a tough boy, nobody's toy. But when he drops by our place he's got tears in his eyes and he would just about take us to live with him and his wife. But I won't allow it. 'Cause his is a different world. We are like the meek of the world – we catch wind of what's going on and we are glad, but we keep to ourselves. He helps us go by. When he's got some time to spare, he comes with me to the pond and we fish. He just did that three days ago. But I know that he actually came by to tell me that they're going to start up a family. That's mighty fine, I say! Mighty fine! He won't be all alone when I'm dead and gone. 'Cause all men die, what would you expect?

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Internet café

**Tudor Anghelescu, 28 years old
and Mihai Melinescu, 28 years old
Interview done by Șerban Anghelescu**



Back at the Internet Café where we used to play all day long, you know, where I pushed the alarm button when we had that Chinaman situation, there everybody had weird names and nobody knew the others' real names, all we knew were their nicknames: I am Monk. Then there's Padre, the Lieutenant, K1 and a certain Chinaman, a huge guy, a lot bigger than me (the chap in question weighs 127 kilos) who was dead drunk that night and had started kicking the computers and scared the daylights out of a poor youngster who had just been employed, I'm sure you know the type: the "mechanic" who turns on the computer and takes your money at the end, as he's also the administrator. We mocked at him by calling him the DJ.

I like those nicknames. Why a "mechanic"? Because when your computer broke, you would start cursing and yell, "Mechanic, come and fix it!" A computer has nothing mechanical in it of course. We often play on the Internet, and the players are from all over the country, and sometimes from abroad. Your Internet server is not in Bucharest but in Buzău or in some other city or even abroad. Our partners were the two, three, four, five guys in the café and others all over the country. You access the Internet and you get a list of all the players who have nicknames, one weirder and crazier than the next, and it's only normal that after countless hours of playing to-

gether you get to know them all. During the game we can communicate with each other in writing. Those who have been kicked out of the game temporarily are dead, as it were, and until the next round they can write to each other. They write messages. People greet each other in a number of very interesting ways. When you join the game you have to greet everybody with either a "Hi" or with a "Re" (from "respect"). They are all in English. When I used to play, I was a legend among the kids 'cause I played well and whenever I rode my bike down Dorobanți Boulevard or past Caragiale High School, I would hear, "Re, Monk!" When we meet each other in the street we call each other by our nicknames simply because we don't know the others' real names. I only recently found out that Gaijin, for instance, is a medical student. Another guy, "Le grand séraphin", is a professional singer. Then there's Montela Lonely Killer who works at Biomedica medical centre. Most of them don't play at home. They usually gather at a café. There's a chap with a Pharaoh's name, Akhenaton, who plays at home.

The game is one of *counter-strike* and it's based on getting the others in trouble and on pissing them off. It's a team game and you can create a strategy or you can simply play it, as you please. It is a game in which you basically blow off some steam, meaning that to get to pull the

trigger of the machine gun a lot, there's blood everywhere, man, it's so cool! There are terrorists and anti-terrorists crammed up in tiny locations, but in the general mayhem we still have a goal: get a good score, meaning killing as many enemies as you can and staying alive for as long as you can. Apart from this, there were some pretty glorious moments, moments when the way your team had worked together and the manner in which you eventually killed the bloody bastard in that virtual space would lead to standing ovations. The team included only strangers, people who had never met, but they all played for the same team. When you die, the team continues to play to the last man. Even if you're dead, you can still see the team. You see through some other player's eyes, usually somebody you choose. At the end, when there's only one left, the dead men's team places its last hope on the still living member, and if this guy works miracles and kills all the enemies, thus winning the game for the whole team, he gets standing ovations and congratulations and so on. Some people are calm, understanding and tolerant but there are others who curse and call you foul names. Or they kick your ass during the game. There's always at least one game administrator, meaning a guy with unlimited power who can kick you out, give you privileges and one of the possible punishments is public humiliation. He can also give you a "slap", meaning exactly what you hear: he grabs you, holds you up in the air and starts slapping you until you find yourself lying half dead in a corner. These games are really funny. And they represent an entire world! Talking about Gai-jin, who's a medical student, I am a journalist and an amateur musician, the other is a professional musician, but there are also many players with a rather dubious character, all bloody jerks.

Bozgoru is a huge man whose job is to be sick, meaning that he thought to himself that he must be sick since he felt like kicking everybody's butts. He used to tell me how he had beaten up people, and he would say, "Man, I beat

the hell out of them, I punched the daylight out of the bastards but I liked their attitude: they fought back. What I like in the fight is to see that the others fight back". He was involved in I don't know how many law suits. I watched *Jesus of Nazareth* when it was released. The people at the café, as they knew I was kind of good at theological stuff, thought I was a priest. I would explain to them that I wasn't but they wouldn't understand. That was one of the reasons why they respected me; the other was because they rarely escaped unscathed from a night's game. Some of them had a good heart, like Bozgoru, for instance, who despite his huge body had the mind of a newly born babe. As I was watching the film, a Gypsy boy passed by and suddenly asked, "Why are they beating him up like that? Who is he?" Bozgoru turned round and said, "What are you, nuts? Haven't you heard of Jesus Christ? That's Jesus Christ over there". "I had no idea".

They are all great. People in your generation (the interviewer's generation, n.n.) couldn't have been so weird and completely detached from reality. We couldn't have got together. Under normal circumstances people like us could not get in touch with one another, yet when we play we are all the same. When he looks at me he sees a soldier and when I look at him I see a soldier too. The guys in Buzău decided to meet those in Bucharest and came down here by car. Some of them are 30 or 40. The game proper is rather stupid, there's no story to it: it's like playing cops and robbers. Imagine that all you have are four or five streets, not more, and you can't get any further 'cause you run into walls. There are two bases. We meet in middle ground and we shoot at each other or we have to rescue some hostages or they have to place a bomb in our base. The game is between two teams with no more than nine members each, one round lasts three minutes and people play for hours. Your virtual character, the one you see on the screen is no Prince Charming, he doesn't evolve and he doesn't get any better, there's no progress. But you can get better after using the mouse and the keyboards

for a long time. There are games where characters do evolve, they get faster and better. The Americans came up with the vocabulary for the game. I can give you tons of abbreviations which are all very cool. Take for instance *evilol*. The particle *lol* means *letting out load* and there's another reaction that almost won't let you write "*rofl: rolling on the floor laughing*". If I'm in *evil*, it means that I have malicious intentions. Many things in *counter-strike* gave birth to Romanian words. There's for instance "apăsac" (a *pusher*). The "pusher" is the dumb head who, instead of firing short bursts of gunfire, simply presses "shot", the gun goes up, and he doesn't aim properly, he just keeps shooting like there's no tomorrow. Then you hear screams and yells, if there're two or three team members in the same café, "Go over there and shoot him; hold the bridge". The American military command *go, go, go* turned into *g. g.*, meaning "*very well, excellent*". At the end of the round, if I played well, all team members tell me, "*g. g., Monk*". When you are killed, you wait until your team members are either victorious, or they get killed themselves. Then you start a new game. The weapons you use are incredibly varied, from the simplest pistol to Kalashnikovs, M4s or rifles with a gun sighting telescope. There are *snipers* in the game and this gives birth to all sort of funny expressions, like "Mr. Sniper". When you kill somebody from behind, that's called "*la spapanache*". Being a *camper* is embarrassing because a *camper* cheats, hides away, watches but doesn't play, hides behind walls and is often punished. A *head-shot* is the most glorious moment because you get to shoot your opponent in the head or you kill him with a knife.

Dying by the knife is the greatest shame imaginable, they all laugh at you. There are some absolutely delicious situations when there are just two players left, one from each team, and they write messages to each other to decide where to meet on the map and then they fight only with their knives. It's very beautiful. Why is



it such a shame to be killed with a knife? Because more often than not you have earphones on and you can hear the others coming. You must be a complete idiot to hear somebody's footsteps next to you and to still do nothing.

It's all a matter of reflex and of speed in this game. It's like in a 19th century duel: who pulls the trigger first lives. There is another strange thing going on sometimes, meaning that when we play together I sometimes have astronomical scores, a lot higher than my abilities would allow, while his scores are low, or vice versa, and at the end of the evening – actually, it is more like 7 in the morning – we make an assessment: the game was good or it was bad, and do you remember when I killed that guy? This game was wonderful precisely because it helped us make

friends with people whom we would have never met otherwise. We can't see them regularly, we don't go out for a cup of coffee and we don't meet in the street for a friendly chat. The game is the only common ground we have, there's nothing else to give us something to talk about. I met Serafim at Vama Veche. I was in pub, minding my own business, when I heard desperate yells, "Lieutenant Monk!" It was Serafim, dead drunk, and he was shocked to see that I was wearing American military fatigues, while he was all in white like an Arab sheik. Talking about dressing up at Vama Veche, I heard a kid telling his mom when he saw us riding our bikes, "Look, mommy, the Americans and the Arabs are friends again!"

On the evening of December 29th we got together to play. We spent hours playing until we were simply famished. There are a couple of kids whom we nicknamed "darts". A "dart" is a kid who darts out of the café and runs round the corner, on Calea Floreasca, to buy you a shaorma. That's all you can get at that hour. You give them a 5000 lei tip or a kick in the ass. Internet is really cheap, you pay by the hour or you get an eight-hour pack with a discount. A "mechanic" wanted to borrow my bike for a kid who'd get him something to eat. I hate lending my bike. They all admire us for our bikes and they all know they're expensive. In the minds of the people around us our bikes are actually two or three times more expensive than they really are. They even asked if my bike was worth 5000 euros. In fact, it's worth only 2000.

It was a cold, rainy night and Mihai said that he'd lend him his bike. We all gave him some money, he got on the bike and off he rode. It was pretty dark in that Internet café so I couldn't see the kid's face very well. I didn't know him at all, but we trusted Pescaru' (*The Fisherman*), the "mechanic". We had known him for a long time because he lived in the neighbourhood. The kid took the bike, collected money from guys there, rode into the night and never came back. We waited for half an hour, then we waited another

15 minutes, and the guys there started making fun of us, "he stole your bike, man". Mihai took my bike and went to look for the kid. It was raining cats and dogs outside. I went down to the shaorma stall and asked the Arab guy there – he's a friend of mine – if he had seen anything. He hadn't. I went down Calea Floreasca, I reached two restaurants that were still open and still nothing. I ran into a police car. They hadn't seen anything either. I gave them my card, told them my name and asked them to give me a call if they saw anything. They recognized my name and they said "alright, we'll go but it's rather late". Later on I took a ride myself and found nothing. I went to the 1st police precinct on Ana Ipătescu Boulevard that night. Then, on the 29th of December, there was no one at the precinct to solve emergencies, be they rape or murder. Not a human soul.

The next morning we went there together. For quite a while I thought that the "mechanic" had been in cahoots with the kid who took our bike, especially because the thief and Pescaru' had both been released from prison in summer. I talked to Pescaru', who told us that indeed he had done time but he hadn't done anything. He had covered up for somebody else because the guy had a child. We first found the thief on the Internet 'cause he had a couple of websites with poems dedicated to his fat and ugly girlfriend. One website had his picture and a picture of him with the girls from ASIA. Next we went to the police and told them we had pictures of the guy and a website. They said that they couldn't access the Internet: "We have a computer but we don't have an Internet connection". We printed the photos, took them back to the police and told them, "We have his and his girlfriend's names, his girlfriend's phone number and we know that he was released from Jilava or Rahova State Prisons this summer. Go ahead and find him!" "We just can't find him like that. If you can get us an ID number or something ..." We even knew his birth date and his zodiac sign because he had posted his personal data on the In-

ternet site: his birthday, his sign, his favourite colour and his favourite flower. "We can't find him". This still happens even if there are loads of computers out there and you can search for all kind of stuff according to various criteria.

When we finally took him down to the precinct, everybody there recognized him instantly because they had caught him the first time. Almost a month later I got a phone call from a very nice guy, whom we had almost bribed. He washes cars and sells flowers, he's almost homeless and we call him Sato. Sato had said that he would help us find the thief. A month after he called Mihai: "look, I'm here at the florist's across the street from Nick's on Dorobanți, you come quickly 'cause our man is here too". I was nearby, at the bike workshop. Two other cyclists came along. When a bike is stolen, all other cyclists help you find it; it's like with taxi drivers, they all stick together. My men were twins dressed in Mountain Bike gear, meaning chest armour, shoulder pads and protective gear for their elbows and hands. We got there, caught the creep, kicked him in the face – he was so terrified that he wet his pants; the thought of touching him almost made me throw up - , made him kneel, tied his legs with my belt and asked Sato for some rope with which we tied up his hands and left him lying there, face down. We called the police and told them: "we want a car immediately across the street from Nick's on Dorobanți". "What happened?" "There's been a theft and we caught the thief". "What's your name?" "Anghelescu", I said. And that was it. The car came down immediately and a couple of civilians got off. They were amazed to discover

that it was all about a bike stolen not two minutes before, but a month before. They took him down to the precinct, and we followed on our bikes and remained there until ten in the evening. At first, the guy refused to tell whom he had sold the bike to. The cops were nice and they gave him some cigarettes. They were all very calm. They discovered that the accused had also stolen a cell phone and one other bike. The jerk lived in an underground flat, two doors away from Mihai. They took him to the prosecutor's office and then released him on the grounds of his not being dangerous. Seeing that the law wouldn't solve our problem, we made some phone calls and I eventually met a guy in front of the police precinct. He had been recommended to us. He got off a red Matiz so I thought that we couldn't have got ourselves a worse help. We went back to the precinct, entered the chief's office and I saw the man suddenly standing up. What I had seen in 80s films was happening before my eyes in the 90s reality. The chief called a subordinate officer, gave him some orders and the man said, "Yessir! The bike was sold". The thief admitted having sold it to a man selling apples at Obor Market and that he got 1 million lei for it (approximately 200 euros). The bike was actually worth 1 000 euros. The apple merchant wouldn't admit anything and refused to come to the precinct and ... that was all, things ended there.

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The ambiguities of kinship and ownership during housing restitution in Bucharest

Liviu Chelcea



It was in a pub that I first met Bartales, a 25-year old man at the time. A friend of mine who was familiar with my PhD research topic¹ told him about me and that I would like to interview him at some point. Explaining to him what I was interested in learning about was easier than it had been during interviews with older persons. Unlike many of my older interviewees, he assured me that he would tell me “everything” but that if I didn’t mind, it would have to wait for some other day. That evening there were too many people present and he wanted to drink. Together with another friend of his, we stayed until late that evening to drink “tea” (as they called the combination of Red Bull and vodka). We talked about Turkey (where Bartales had been traveling extensively in the countryside each summer for the last eight years, learning Turkish from the peasants he had put him up.), how he had spent a night in the New York City Police Department under arrest for not paying the subway toll, and about American cities that we had both visited at different periods. I was struck from the beginning by his sharp language, keen sense of observation, vast travel experience, and blunt, funny and intelligent remarks.

His vast financial resources, much larger than that of an average person from Romania, were also a surprise to me. About a week later, he called me up on the phone and asked if I wanted to meet to talk about “that stuff”. We met that very day and spent about five hours talking about his family and relatives, the property they had lost and which they thought should own, about corruption and property in general. He was extremely well organized in his narrative, and open, too (which made things much easier for me).

He began first by telling me about the nationalized house where he and his family had lived from 1963 through 1998 as tenants. Like the vast majority of the population, his father was an employee of the state. However, he held a senior position as the director of a key cultural institution in Bucharest. Although he was not a Party member, he was a well-known name in musical circles. He was the descendant of a major Romanian pre-war personality of the musical scene and he had inherited that profession. Before 1990, Bartales’s family had not done much research about those whose house it was that they lived in. They knew that it had not been na-

¹ I.e., housing nationalization and restitution in Bucharest. The title of the dissertation is *State, Kinship and Urban Transformations during and after Housing Nationalization* (Bucharest, Romania, 1945-2004), University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Dec. 2004.

tionalized, but rather it had become state property when it had been left vacant. The initial owners died without anyone left to inherit the centrally located and beautiful villa into which Bartales's family moved. After the 1989 Revolution, sometime in 1994-1995 (before legislation was passed allowing tenants to buy nationalized houses) they learned that someone had claimed the house in court. Initially they did not know who it was because as tenants they were not part of the case between the former owners and the state. After some investigations at the ICRA to which they belonged, they discovered that the claimant was an old physician and his niece, the daughter of the old man's brother. The old man was in his 90s, and according to Bartales, he was a cousin of the wife of the former owner. "Kinship relations my ass," Bartales added, "very close relative indeed. They were super-entitled [to a claim]." Ironically, it turned out that Bartales's father had been at some point a patient of the old physician's niece, herself a physician. As the real engine behind this claim, she assured Bartales's family that she would not evict them, that she respected them and that she would not "step over dead bodies". Nonetheless, she spent many hours explaining to them that they should understand that she wanted to get the house and that they should not be mad at her.

The first court decision was favourable to the claimants. The daughter of the claimant was a friend of Bucharest's mayor at the time, which as I'll show later in the study may be an important asset since the lawyers working for the Municipal Council can be soft on those cases. Bartales said that although he was quite young during those years, he remembers that his family had some good connections too. His mother was a close friend of the wife of an MP who was also a leading figure in the party to which the Mayor belonged. They asked the Attorney General (the highest hierarchical level in the Roma-

nian Juridical System) to declare the restitution verdict unconstitutional. Bartales's father found more archival material that apparently weakened the case of the claimants. The chances that the Attorney General would overrule the restitution decision increased because during those days, the Parliament voted for the pro-tenant Law 112/95 and the Romanian President (a vehement supporter of the tenants) disregarded the ideal separation of powers and instructed the judges not to rule in favour of former owners. The outcome was favourable to the tenants, as the Attorney General declared that the solution given by the lower court was invalid. There followed a period of stagnation regarding the ownership of their house, a period during which, Bartales insisted, lawyers and tricksters made huge fortunes. According to him, lawyers were contacting old persons telling them, "Listen, Grandpa, I can recover your properties: you give me the paper and the signatures here and I'll get you back the houses". If successful, the lawyers would take half of the elders' half, Bartales said.

After a while, however, the old physician's niece reinitiated the trial because she too claimed that new evidence was found. Things lingered on without any clear result, and then, about a year after the case had been reopened, Bartales's father got a phone call from the municipal administration. It was an unofficial discussion, and the person who called put forward a deal to the Bartales's family. The house where they had been living, the official said, had been unofficially booked for a very high state official who would like to turn it into his own private residence.¹ If they agreed to the deal, they were to be given another huge apartment (400 square metres – actually larger than the current one) in another dream villa, also nationalized. Bartales's father hesitated, especially since he did not know what the new court decision would be.

The court trial lingered for a few more years,

¹ Later on, it turned out that the house was booked not for the high official himself, but for his son's family.

until 1998, when a man who stepped out of a latest-model Mercedes Benz rang the bell of their house. He introduced himself as a lawyer who, from that moment forward, was the legal proxy of the old physician. He said that the old physi-



cian had died the year before, but had delegated to him all the legal matters concerning the house. He told Bartales's family that he wanted to buy the house. When they told him "Well, but it is in the object of a court trial", he answered by saying that it would be taken care of. After one month, during which Bartales's father learned that the lawyer apparently was a former Political Police colonel, the municipal council

which held the ownership rights to the house stopped sending lawyers to the trail to defend its patrimony. That helped the lawyer to assume full ownership of the house. He showed again at Bartales's house, saying that he did not want to evict them. Instead he wanted them to accept some money and to go somewhere else. First he offered them 25 000 dollars, a substantial amount by Romanian standards, but very small compared with the prices for real estate on the market. With that money Bartales's family could easily have bought a more than decent apartment in one of the high-rise complexes built since the 1970s in the outer circle of Bucharest.¹ Bartales's father refused, saying to the lawyer (and to himself) that he had "done something for this country!", and that he cannot be thrown out in the street just like that. Moreover, the sum offered by the lawyer was still very little compared with what the villa would fetch on the real estate market. They refused, only to have the lawyer show up again the next day with the offer doubled, i.e. 50 000 dollars in cash. Bartales's family hesitated to accept this offer too, lest they should be cheated. They negotiated with the lawyer and they settled for an arrangement that stipulated that the lawyer would buy them a luxury apartment. This was centrally located, in a high-rise apartment built in the downtown of Bucharest right before the fall of Ceaușescu in 1989, during his ambitious plan to convert a huge central area into a highly modern administration centre. The apartment's price was around 46 000 dollars but it was still under construction at the time of negotiations. It belonged to the Municipal Hall and it should have been sold as a social housing. This meant that it was a heavily subsidized price and one could have got it only with insider knowledge and influence, two advantages which the "lawyers" seemed to possess. Although called "so-

¹ These are physically quite similar to the federal projects that popped up in American cities since the 1950s during the programmes of "slum" clearance, with the notable difference that the stigma and sometimes crime associated with them was not, overall, present in their state socialist equivalents.

cial housing”, compared with any other high-rise apartment constructed after 1950 it was a rather luxury apartment (two levels, several rooms, two bathrooms, centrally located). The only supplementary request the lawyer made was that Bartales’s house should be vacant by November, so that he could take control of it.

They agreed to the deal. Between November 1998 and April 1999 (until the construction and the connection to the utility networks of their new apartment were finished) they lived in the apartment of the sister of Bartales’s mother. The “lawyer” also offered similar deals to the two other families who lived in their former villa (although in much more modest conditions). When I asked about these two families, Bartales dismissed them quickly as “semi-rednecks” (semi-cocalari, i.e. poor and uneducated, in colloquial Romanian). In exchange for leaving the house, the lawyer bought them modest apartments in the periphery of Bucharest, in a more working class neighbourhood.

As if that were not shady and strange enough for Bartales’s family, another thing happened shortly before they were to vacate the villa won by the “lawyer”. Someone else contacted Bartales’s family. A very well-mannered man in his 60s showed up at their door, and, according to Bartales, after excusing himself a dozen times said that while browsing the papers left by his diseased mother, he discovered a will left by the initial owners of the house. They made his mother the sole heiress of whatever goods they had. He had just discovered this and insisted that he did not need the house and that he would be happy if they could find a mutually beneficial solution. The house itself was not an issue, since he would have been satisfied with some compensation. Bartales insisted that, finally, here was an honest claimant. But, he added quickly, acting in good faith regarding nationalize houses is a lost cause, since there was nothing this claimant could change.

DISCUSSION. Bartales’s family experience as tenants in post-1989 Bucharest touches on several key points. It touches on issues of class and housing before 1989 and afterwards. They lived in a central area of Bucharest, in exceptional conditions compared with the majority of the population. Houses like the one where Bartales’s family lived are now valued at around 1, 000, 000 dollars on the real estate market. Another domain of analysis contained in such stories has to do with the decisions that the tenants had to make. Confronted with the situation of their house being restituted and also with the highly improbable, but logically possible situation of being evicted, they faced several dilemmas and mobilized different resources. Are the claimants real relatives or are they just trying to make money? Could they trust the claimants’ promise that they could remain in the house after the restitution? Trying to cope with the trials, Bartales’s family also faced the prospect of practical decisions. Who from their family should go search the archives, sit in courts, and ask for information from the ICRAL? Who had the time to do that? Could they use their apparently extended networks of friends in high places? And were the “lawyer’s” words and offers reliable, taking into account his shadowy past and current dealings? Bartales’s family was peculiar in respect to the availability of financial resources and connections, as well as in the very high value of the house they occupied. The other issues were confronted by all tenants.

Bartales’s family was atypical in yet another respect. They were simultaneously tenants in a nationalized house, and claimants of nationalized goods. They had relatives whose properties had been confiscated by the state. The 1990s made them simultaneously supporters and adversaries of the nationalized housing privatization law. They were themselves claimants for nationalized property through two separate venues. One had to do with a person not related genealogically, but who, over the last 20 years (but

especially in the last seven to ten) had become part of their nuclear family. The other venue involved their direct blood relatives with whom they were in constant conflict. These were two separate cases, so I will describe them separately too.

When he was a child, Bartales's parents hired a babysitter for him. Like most of the Romanian active population, both his parents worked. Yet, what might be called middle- and upper-classes during the state socialist period sometimes employed elderly persons to teach their children prestigious foreign languages (German, English or French) and to look after them while the parents were away at work. This was the case of A. B., described by Bartales as "the person who raised me". A. B. did not have any children and although at the beginning she earned some money from tutoring and babysitting Bartales, she thereafter did it voluntarily. She was involved in babysitting children of "respectable families" as Bartales put it (i.e. persons with a higher class status and cultural capital during socialism) and teaching them French, the high culture language from before 1945 in Bucharest. She had just one other sister, also childless. They descended from a pre-communist landed family with many properties. Bartales said that he became attached to her and she to him. Apart from babysitting Bartales, A.B. ate and spent time together with his family. After Bartales grew up, she continued to visit them about three times every week. Since the mid-1990s, her health worsened as she approached her 90s. One time, she got a heavy flu and Bartales's family decided to keep her with them in their house. They rented out the one bedroom apartment where A. B. lived (in a semi-central area) for 100 dollars/month. That apartment had been in the early 1990¹ by the old woman, according to Bartales,

with money from them. When they moved out from their villa in 1999, they took her along to their new apartment in the high-rise.

According to Bartales, A.B.'s former family wealth was fabulous. Until 1921, A. B.'s parents had thousands of hectares. After 1921, with the money obtained as compensation for expropriation and with money made on the land that was still left to them, A.B.'s parents built houses for their three daughters (out of the five children they had). A.B.'s mother built these houses for her daughters, with the dowry she had received from her parents when she married. The houses were situated in a semi-central but valuable area of Bucharest. From the late 1980s to the present, they were occupied by some employees of an embassy and by the very offices of an ICRAL. Although I have not seen them, Bartales said that they were quite valuable, one of them, for instance, was valued at no less than 700 000 dollars in the late 1990s.² A.B.'s father also owned a house, but Bartales's family decided not to claim that one because after 1989 it was used by a holding company controlled by somebody described by Bartales (and by the mass media in general) as "super-Mafioso". Besides, they did not have all the necessary papers, which meant more time and energy spent on archives, lawyers and so on.

The trail for A. B.'s family house did not work out. They started relatively late, in 1998-1999, but the main problem, Bartales said, was that did not hire a "super-Mafioso" lawyer. They agreed that the lawyer would take the case for free, but if successful, he would get 35% of the money obtained by selling the properties. Instead of bribing and seeking connections, as Bartales viewed the situation, the lawyer was uninspired and cheap. The trail lingered for a while; therefore, when the new restitution law was

¹ This is the year when the apartments built and owned by the state were privatized to the sitting tenants.

² The sum of 700 000 dollars is huge in the Romanian context. A two bedroom apartment in the socialist high-rises built during the 1970s and 1980s is about 20 000 dollars. The average wage is about 100 dollars, although it tends to be higher in Bucharest.

passed in 2001, Bartales's family reformulated their "restitution" claims and waited for the administrative rather than the court decision.

As they organized their efforts to recover and appropriate A. B.'s would-be inheritance, Bartales's family faced a new challenge. A. B. made Bartales her universal heir, i.e. he was to inherit any current and future property rights. This elevated Bartales to the same legal status as a niece of A.B. who lived in Switzerland. Prior to initiating the restitution trials, Bartales's father had contacted the niece in order to let her know that they had begun the trial preparations and they were shortly going to register their case in court. He asked her if she wanted to join the restitution claim. The niece was rather unenthusiastic. She said that she left Romania for good and that she did not want to have anything to do with the claim and with Romania in general. After two years, however, the Swiss niece changed her mind. Her lawyer put forth claims on her behalf and sued Bartales's family for inappropriate handling of the inheritance rights. Bartales and his family, on the other hand, became rather angry at her for the way she behaved toward A. B., in the past, as well as her sudden interest in restitution: "The niece," Bartales said, "never helped A. B. It's true that she invited her to Switzerland a few times in the 1970s, but that ended as soon as A. B. gave her niece whatever was left of the family jewelry".

DISCUSSION. As for the majority of former owners, the claims formulated by Bartales's family are expressed mainly in the language of kinship and inheritance. The rights to inheritance have to be proven in order to qualify people as appropriate owners. In that respect, as nearly two generations had passed in the almost 50 years between nationalization and restitution, principles of descent become crucial. For Bartales and others, restitution reorganized the past in terms of kinship and degrees of closeness. The living and the dead are reviewed and given rank, appreciation or dismissal. These are some of the

issues that are worth discussing in a more in-depth manner. The story of the relation between A. B. and Bartales's family also touches on the issue of what makes kinship. As more recent studies have argued, behaviour and sharing make kinship rather than past genealogical connections. This theme is highly significant for tenants, who question whether the current claimants behaved like kin towards the persons whose houses they reclaimed after 1989. The conflict between Bartales's family and the niece of A. B. also points in the direction of conflict between relatives and the importance of material interests in the constitution and reconstitution of kin networks.

Through an additional restitution claim, Bartales's family was involved in another way in the changing of kinship and social relations. His grandfather had two first cousins. Both of them had unfortunate destinies. One of them (E.) died very young, while his other cousin (P.) became mentally ill and never recovered. Following his sickness, he was declared "legally incompetent", which meant that a tutor had to be appointed in order to manage the wealth formally owned by P. Bartales's grandfather assumed that function. His responsibilities were quite serious, since the wealth of the two cousins consisted of 50 apartments distributed in two apartment buildings in Bucharest, 50 hectares of land, a villa in Predeal (a nice resort town in the Carpathian mountains) plus a couple of commercial spaces in downtown Bucharest. The wealth that became Bartales's grandfather's responsibility was quite substantial, representing a commercially, profit-oriented (as described in chapter 1). The nomination of Bartales's grandfather as the administrator became a source of conflict between his side of the family and another branch of the family, represented by another relative (D.). D. accused Bartales's grandfather of cheating and unjust administration of the estate, a bitter conflict that was subsequently passed down to future genera-

tions and so on, according to Bartales.

This property rights dispute was different from the previous two in respect to the actors involved. In this latter case, it was Bartales who was the active participant, rather than his father. By the late 1990s, Bartales's father had become seriously ill, and Bartales had by then grown up and become a law student. Bartales's approach to the situation was rather blind to past conflicts. As he was aware of the conflict between his father and D., he chose to talk directly to D.'s son (T.). Before nationalization he had never met T., but together they managed to work as a team. Retrospectively, he recognized it as a smart move, saying, "We were enlightened enough to unite our efforts and to get beyond the dirt from the past". The major part of the potential inheritance (the 50 apartments) was lost because it had been sold to the sitting tenants (see the description of the privatization law above in chapter 4). The main properties that they sought to obtain were the land, the resort villa and the two

commercial spaces (one of which hosts a famous student underground club) and they agreed that whatever they obtained would be divided in equal shares.

DISCUSSION. This last story points to the conflict associated with the handling of wealth controlled by kin networks and especially to the relations created during and by restitution. A conclusion to be formulated is that one of the effects of restitution is the increase of kin solidarity and the resocialization of individuals as members of a larger genealogical and lateral field of relatives. It also raises the question of the meaning of the restitution. For Bartales, restitution was something to be dealt with pragmatically, rationally. Weighing potential financial gains against "dirt from the past" he had no doubt which was more important.

Translated by Liviu Chelcea



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The perfect female body, a socially constructed individual obsession?

Flavia Jurca



It is always a risk and a challenge to scientifically discuss beauty and its associated themes. The very concept of beauty varies ad infinitum across epochs, cultures and from one individual to another. Even from early childhood we learn from observations on those surrounding us how to classify objects and beings as “ugly” or “beautiful”. The aesthetic reference points an individual acquires are the result of a continuous process of assimilation and internalization of significances the culture he/she belongs to assign to the notion of beauty.

Why is there a concrete preoccupation with a beautiful female body?

1. First of all, because the image of the female body occupies a significant space within all kinds of public discourse. Femininity and beauty form an inseparable association of terms within the public sphere, and this association is mirrored by the constant presence and high frequency with which female nudity is legally and desirably presented. In short, a beautiful female body is unveiled and nobody raises any objections to that, as opposed to male nudity which is, more often than not, censored, as it is automatically condemned by the public.

2. Secondly, feminine beauty represents the most frequently used means of promoting and selling things in our society (despite the sexist

content of such practices), from the Pirelli calendar to the publishing *Playboy* empire, built on the basic idea that beautiful women can sell anything and in any quantity.

3. Due to the “over-exposure” of the female body and to the saturation of the market with images of female beauty, nowadays there exists the tendency to state that this field holds no more secrets and that the significances attached to it have already been analyzed and classified.

4. As a consequence of three waves of militant feminism which have swept and left their mark on Western civilization, and which “sanctioned” the social imaginary focused on the female body and its beauty, the physical aspect still remains the primary (and the most comfortable) means to evaluate women, while to them this aspect is still the most problematic relationship they build with themselves and with the world.

This analysis of *the social image of the perfect female body* and of *the way in which it influences the lives of the subjects of the study* is built on the premise that this product of Western culture (i.e. the perfect female body) is far from being completely understood and, if we were to use a term coined by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, also far from being completely *tamed*. Although deeply steeped in the collective imaginary never to be eliminated, the image of the perfect female body gives birth to a series of lifestyles, be-

haviours, and visions of the self and of the world which range from the realm of relative sanity to mental illness. The reason for a sociological preoccupation with an otherwise rather frivolous topic resides precisely in its being delimited by the above-mentioned realms ...

The interest in the image of the perfect female body and in the manner in which it influences human behaviour (especially female behaviour) may be demonstrated by referring to the evolution in the field of public services offered on the Romanian market:

1. the cosmetics and body-care products industry has developed immensely during the past years;
2. the existence of a section dedicated to dieting, bodyline, and food hygiene in every women's magazine;
3. an increase in the number of young girls experiencing eating disorders (after 1990);
4. younger ages at which such disorders appear;
5. the considerable increase in the number of advertisements for miraculous products promising a rapid weight loss, both on TV and in women's magazines;
6. the apparition during the 90s of an impressive and rapidly growing number of aesthetic surgery clinics and of assisted weight loss medical centres.
7. the presence of at least one type of treatment for losing weight in most beauty salons.

While eating disorders are identifiable due to a diagnosis grid used by psychiatrists and represent the object of medical research and treatment, body-image disorders represent the study object of the present paper. They are brought about by the contact young girls take, from increasingly younger ages, with beauty and social desirability standards which are present in the groups they belong to and in the media. The body-image disorders represent the object of in-

terest of sociological studies precisely because they account for the manner in which culture and its disseminative strategies influence the individual, turning a repetitive and essential physiological act (i.e. eating) into a social ritual laden with a host of significations.

Roland Barthes¹ notices the fact that the passage to a consumer society in the West of Europe represented a major psychological break, as it changed the way in which people viewed food. Famine disappeared from the daily reality of the Westerner, and fear of starvation and the need to fight for food were quick to follow and were replaced by the certainty of plenitude. The ancestral fear of starvation was replaced by its opposite, namely by the fear of obesity, and the success of dieting as a lifestyle and as a solution to individual problems demonstrate the existence of a series of penitential values (an inheritance of religious ethical values) which condemn hedonism (in this case, indulging in eating pleasures). That is why "healthy" food products are more successful on the market nowadays, as they offer a higher moral comfort than those which only induce pleasure (people are willing to pay more for "healthy" food and to spend more time looking for them and selecting them). Moreover, nowadays it is almost a sin to indulge in the Rabalaisian pleasure of eating in abundance.

The Romanian specificity of this phenomenon

Speaking of the post-1990 Romanian context, we may safely state that the traditional way in which woman has been viewed and socially valorized coexists with the Western model. The vast majority of Romanian women have for certain adopted numerous elements and practices belonging to the lifestyle and modes of thinking of Western women. The smashing success of the hypermarket magazines in Romania is proof of

¹ Barthes R., 1970, *Pour une psychologie de l'alimentation contemporaine*, Paris, Seuil, pg. 307-315.

the fact that Romanians too have begun to celebrate mass consumption as a public ritual invested with multiple significations, some of which having been assimilated together with the Western consumerist society pattern. Compared with the communist period, when consumption was controlled and restricted by the totalitarian state, the present day consumption market, especially that of food products, has grown progressively larger and diversified. We may speak of the existence of over-abundance on this market, even if this is not counterbalanced by an equally strong financial power and by an increase in the level of consumption. Another major change which we must take into account is freedom of speech and the diversification of the mass information (and entertainment) sources. On the symbolical market of public communication, nearly every message may be spread to the remotest corner of the country. The limits in the field will soon be settled, legislation in the domain of mass communication still allowing the existence of aberrant phenomena (for instance, the production of advertisements offering misleading information about miraculous products, such as sachets with plants which cause an effortless loss of body weight). Apart from these two pieces of evidence of social change, during this period we have also been able to notice that there are consequences to the assimilation of the Western consumerist-society pattern and of the lifestyle which accompanies it¹: on the one hand, we are facing the multiplicity of eating disorder problems (where we take into account the cases which have been recorded and treated by physicians and psychologists, and not the actual number of cases) and the apparition of body-image problems, on the other.

In an article published in *Eva* magazine²,

which referred to the obsessions regarding the image of the body and to the cult of weight loss developed by the Romanian society, there is a paragraph which represents a valid synthesis of the particularities of the Romanian context. "Nowadays the desire to be healthy and to feel comfortable in our own skin is not experienced unless it is dictated by fashion. We take up yoga or martial arts but the aim is not spiritual fulfillment, but the hope that this will change our lives and that this change will lead to a weight loss. We do not want to enjoy our embellished bodies; we simply desire somebody else's body, preferably one belonging to a celebrity. That is why beauty deserves any sacrifices. But beauty is still such a subjective issue that no matter how many sacrifices we end up making, we'll never manage to please everybody".

As I have mentioned earlier, there is no universally valid pattern of the perfect female body, the interviews taken to various young women have revealed the fact that each of them *has an extremely clear mental image of what the perfect female body looks like*. In most cases this image is described by reference to a celebrity or to a friend. We must also take into account that this individual model of the perfect female body comprises elements which do not belong to the image of the body proper, but are necessarily associated with it and they are even given a body of their own. Thus, when they think of this model, young women evoke not only physical details, such as height, waist width, the aspect of the abdomen, but they mention attributes, such as "radiant", "mat and smooth skin", "gleaming", "happy", "at ease" etc. E.D. expresses this quite suggestively: "I instantly think of Angelina, Angelina Jolie. Of course, she's unquestionably gorgeous, if you measure her, she'll turn out standard-perfect, but her image wouldn't be complete without the feel-

¹ *Consumerism* is the American term for the Romanian "consumism". The author prefers the latter, a borrowing copied after Pascal Bruckner's French word, because the explanation he attaches to this concept in "Tentația inocenței" (Romanian translation) is closer to sociological requirements than the American version which defines an economic reality. [the present translation will use the American term, because the word "consumism" as such does not exist in English].

² Jurca, F., *Slabă-Frumoasă? (Is Thin Beautiful?)*, *Eva*, nr. 18, July 2005, p. 23

ing she's giving you, namely that she's comfortable in her own body, that she celebrates it as a precious and unique gift". The name Angelina Jolie, an American actress nominated by *People* magazine as the most beautiful Hollywood actress, is almost stereotypically associated with the image of the perfect body young women have in mind. Other celebrity names that are mentioned, such as Sharon Stone or Charlize Theron (both are actresses), send to the one and the same reality. The individual pattern of the perfect female body bears a strong emotional characteristic: the people whose bodies are considered perfect also possess attributes which young women desire for themselves. P. L. remarks: "there are many women with beautiful bodies that anybody would love to have; still, I don't think a body is truly perfect unless I desire it for myself, unless the possessor of that body arouses my jealousy through more than just a couple of physical characteristics which any surgeon can provide for you".

Women's need to compare themselves with other women is no novelty. What is truly new is the result of the manner in which the identity of the female individual is constructed, namely through the socially induced idea of a competition for success and for getting men's attention which remains fixed in the blueprint of female personality.¹ From what I have learnt from my young interviewees, it appears that both those who suffer from eating disorders, and those who do not have turned comparison with other women into a constant mode of interaction with the surrounding world. These comparisons are not selective, as the young women do not refer themselves to only one model, but they rather represent a total "score" of the body-image in the match between themselves and those they compare themselves with (women from their entourage, women on TV or in magazines). But if this aspect seems to be rather commonplace, the psychological consequences it entails are less so:

I discovered that, the more frequent they are, the worse the temporary psychological state gets, negative aspects prevailing in most cases. T. B. explains this: "Sometimes, when I leave home, I happen to like what I see in the mirror. But I eventually get to the subway and see all those scantily-dressed skinny teenagers who look the way I'll never ever look. I open a magazine and see an actress whom I admire. I usually think to myself: "look at her, her legs are just like yours – no, hers are much more beautiful and smoother!" The visible result after a while is that I begin to cover my body more and more. I'll end up going out in the street with a bag on my head, and that will be the day when I've grown totally depressed by the way I look. I don't know, but I think I'm obsessed by the fact that I'll never look as good as the women and girls around me. Sometimes I wish I were invisible".

Comparisons are made partially – thighs, waist, legs, bust, face etc – but also on the whole, the results being always negative for the woman who draws the comparison between herself and the bodies of other women. This sounds illogical because it is self-evident that the women she sees present solely their public image. If she could see them at home, in front of the mirror while they are attending to themselves, would the result of the comparison still be negative for her? E. D. makes a surprising remark: "I don't think there's anybody in the world that looks worse than I do, firstly because the others are more inclined to ignore their little imperfections. I saw women wearing no make-up when they were going out ... there's nobody that can convince me that they were not actually better looking than me ... even without any make-up on; it's not like they had put on another layer of make-up under the street make-up, right?" The negative attitude towards their physical aspect is a constant element in the 11 cases I have considered for my analysis. The differences are only subtle,

¹ Festinger L., 1957, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, chapter "Social Comparison"

but the cause for this surprising attitude may be explicitly identified in the general preoccupation of society and of the media with the image of the perfect female body. The severe and constant evaluation young women subject themselves to is the result of a preventive, formal reasoning: "the more strict I am with myself, the better my chances to discover and maybe correct my shortcomings before others get to notice them".

Looking for a way to get the perfect body has become part and parcel of the moral Decalogue of young women nowadays, as they think that it is their duty to make any necessary sacrifices in order to get closer to the socially desirable ideal through the individual pattern of bodily perfection. The successful image of the beautiful woman who makes no efforts in getting what she wants and who represents the focus of everybody's attention has become irresistibly attractive. Some women are even experiencing a pressure which increases with the passage of time. S. N. is worried by the awareness that "if I don't do something now, while something can still be done, in a few years' time, it will all be in vain. Did you know that after the age of 25 your bones stop growing and skin begins to lose its elasticity? That's why this is the best time to start doing something, not when, after I lose weight, I begin to look as if I were wearing the skin of a larger person".

The health these young women are enjoying now is taken for granted as something which allows them to imagine and then apply their personal plans to modify the image of their bodies. This means that, more often than not, they resort to solutions which promise rapid and amazing results. In all earnestness, L.N. describes her plans to change herself: "I am currently struggling to eliminate sugar from my diet. Bread will be next. Salt I gave up a long time ago. The next on my list is meat, although I can't remember the last time I had pork. To make my ordeal bearable, I ordered Mihaela Tatu's miraculous herbal diet. All I have to do is add those herbs to my food and I lose weight, while I still enjoy tasty

meals". If the model for the individual image of the perfect female body is a certain celebrity, it is probable that the young woman will go on the same diets as the celebrity in question, as it is the case with E. D. who, imitating Angelina Jolie, has recently begun to eat only proteins – texture soy, tofu, fish, meat, eggs, dairy – and a few other foods, associating her diet with isometric exercises (highly intense physical efforts which stretch the muscles and the bones to their limits, the kind that bodybuilders usually undertake). T. B. chose the British pop singer Geri Halliwell as her role model, not because of the way she looks, of her talent or her success, but for the merit, which T. B. considers amazing, of having managed to lose a lot of weight in a very short period of time. T. B. tells me that Geri's diet has its risks, among which the most visible are short-term amenorrhea and, in the long run, even sterility. But T. B. does not seem worried, on the contrary: "Even my doctor told me that in time I will become unable to have children, but who wants children these days anyway? It's very difficult to take care of yourself as it is, but it all becomes an impossible task when you also have to take care of a child who depends on you entirely. I have completely different expectations. I haven't graduated from faculty just to get married and become somebody's mother. I want to enjoy all my possibilities while I'm still young". Her statement is paradoxical seeing that the diet she is subjecting herself to leaves little room for "joy", the self-imposed restrictions eating up all her time. But it appears that the satisfaction of being in control of what is happening to her body is greater than the sacrifices she has to make.

According to the young women I interviewed, eating is more than just a physiological process, which takes medical aspects and can be reduced to a bunch of descriptive-scientific observations. Eating, through its collective (getting out with friends, parties etc.) and private components, is viewed as a powerful social event regulated by norms and bearing significations which are derived from both the local culture and the rela-

tionship young women have established with their need to eat. Although the sense of personal independence is very strong in the women I interviewed for this study, adherence to social values is equally strong. It can be noticed at a closer look taken at their actual behaviour, the differences between acknowledged and practiced values having to also be considered.

Losing weight has become synonymous with beauty to such an extent that in the messages we receive via the mass media, the two notions have grown to mean the same thing, turning the slim female body into the central object of a cult or rather of an ideology and ordering the world in terms of bipolar and radical terms, such as the slim and beautiful, on the one hand and the rest of a rather undefined world, on the other. The Internet hosts websites of fun-clubs adoring anorexic actresses, forums where young women can discover how to acquire an eating disorder (!) in order to become thinner and to identify with the successful image of their favourite actresses, to win the admiration of their group of friends and to arouse the envy of their girlfriends, how to access the countless pages which offer thousands of diets, most of the times ignoring the warnings which accompany these diets. The whole of society has developed a taste for celebrating self-imposed suffering in view of losing pounds ("the hedonism of self modification"), chatting about the latest diets becoming part and parcel of daily habits, alongside talks about the weather and the latest news. What is more, openly expressing satisfaction about the way in which you look places women in two possible categories: she is considered either a lucky person with a gorgeous body or an obese person who has given up wishing the best for her and is currently fooling herself with slogans. Young women are more susceptible to internalize the cultural pattern of the distorted body image as social necessity precisely because they are young and looking for role models who could help them assess themselves and their relation with the others. Although they are not aiming at becoming part of a mass of identical indi-

viduals, but rather at proving their own uniqueness and individual value, they end up becoming (at least temporarily) serial Guinea pigs for the dieting industry and for the magazines whose target they are. A certain reason for hope is represented by the fact that the higher they reach in the professional hierarchy and the older they get their preoccupation with their body image is pushed to the periphery of their self-image. But until then, young women are assimilated by the social desirability pattern in what concerns the perfect female body, which is necessarily and at all costs thin, the behavioural patterns this voluntary adherence brings about causing serious damage to their future health and well-being.

By being automatically associated with pleasure, food is seen as a threat to the model of the ideal female body which becomes almost impossible to attain, as it involves sacrificing one's temporary comfort. No matter how difficult it may seem to operate with the concept of the "perfect female body", it brings forth a series of behaviours which are easily identifiable and recordable, the term being extremely clearly defined in the collective, as well as individual imaginary.

Engaged in the search for a method of getting the kind of body that is closest to their individual ideal of perfection, young women seem willing to give up the present in view of obtaining future, rather uncertain gratifications. They ignore their present image in favour of the way in which they will look after their efforts have borne fruits. This is how we get to witness what Robin Gerber once said: "Women don't need an Afghan burkha to hide themselves under". With the notable difference that an Afghan burkha is meant to hide a woman's face from the looks of those around her, while the idealized image (the individual image of the perfect body) covers the actual image of the body from the eyes of the woman who denies it and who willingly refuses, in the name and for the sake of belonging to the cult of those devoted to the social ideal of the perfect female body.

Translated by Alina Popescu



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The small entrepreneur

Elena Radu, owner of a chain of cosmetic beauty centres in Bucharest, 39 years old

Interview done by Carmen Mihalache



How I got in this business ... I passed the faculty entrance examination during Ceaușescu's regime, at a time when a student was just a student and the prospects of getting a job were null. I couldn't get money from home because there wasn't any to send, and all the money I could count on was the pension I got from my dad. So I slowly began to learn: I divided my ration card ... Back then they didn't give us the scholarship money directly. We had a ration card and a seat a day or something like that ...

That was during my first year of studies, in 1989 or 1990. In 1989 the Revolution broke up, I was in my second year and I got a job in education. So I started working, making some money so that I could buy things and stuff ... My parents have five children and only my brother and I were that young. So ... When I was in my second year, I took a part-time job at a school, and so did a colleague of mine from the faculty. We supported each other and together we began to sell things to students in the hostel. We would buy bars of chocolate from the corner shop and then re-sell them to students in the hostel ... We didn't get much profit from that 'cause sometimes we ate the chocolate ourselves ... Later on, we started buying beer too, and all sorts of clothes, bathing suits, blue jeans jackets, and I myself can't remember all the things that we used to sell back then! We advertised in the hos-

tel, sold our stuff door to door, until a new friend of mine asked: "Since you've got a regular store in your room, won't you sell some wax my mom prepares at home?" And I said that I'd give it a try, if he brought it over.

So I began selling wax. After a while I told myself that I should give it a try 'cause back then I was waxing at a beauty salon. Let's do that ourselves, I said, seeing that we've got wax and everything ... I mean, I would sell it, and from the profit I made, I would get some for myself. So, I told them "let's depilate ourselves for free!" So we depilated one another, and, seeing that it worked, I said that I would turn that into a job. I got into the waxing business and I even have pictures with my advertisement posts saying "Cheap and quick waxing". I posted them in the Regie Student Complex, in Grozăvești, and I started getting busy.

The little shop I had in my room had begun to get in the way, because, while I was attending to my female clients, a chap would show up for a beer or I don't know what else, so I put an end to my sales in the hostel and focused on my depilation business.

I got the hang of it quickly and I became quite good at it after only one month's practice. I still have clients from my first month in the business, that's why I say that I was good. They must have been pleased with me! And I got start-

ed. This happened when I was in my fourth year of study, then the fifth came and I was still in the depilation business and I began to extend it... It was 1993, yes ... After I graduated from faculty, I thought that I should also get my master's degree. That was the first year when we had had a master's degree programme at the faculty and I had no idea what it was, if it would be of any use to me or not, but I decided that I would better be safe than sorry. I took my master's degree, I remained a little longer in the hostel – and that was good because I already had clients there. I graduated and I thought that I shouldn't give up on my faculty diploma which wrote that my graduation mark was 9, 24. I studied biology. So, I took a job in education but asked for a part-time job because I had realized that I couldn't attend to my clients and to my pupils at the same time ...

I had many clients. I was alone in the business, yet I had hundreds of clients a month. Yes, I did. I can't make an assessment, but on busy days I would have up to 20 clients. I had free days, I had to take a break for a few days; I wouldn't have made it otherwise ... I didn't work round the clock but still I worked hard. Sometimes until 1 in the morning ... I had appointments for half past five or six in the morning ... I even had appointments for 1 in the morning, if memory serves. It wasn't the usual schedule but it happened. And I said to myself that I should get involved more seriously in the business because I had no social status. Who knew about me? I worked in the hostel! I had to do something about it. I tried to talk to some friends of mine who had two salons and were about to open the third in the hostel. I told them that I could put in my time and my experience and they could put in the money... I'm happy it didn't work 'cause nothing would have come out of it. I'm saying this because later on I worked for them for a year and I realized that we didn't see eye to eye on a number of things ... we had different principles and ways of thinking ... So.

As I was saying, I took a part-time job in ed-

ucation and kept all my previous clients. I had no time left for myself. Not one hour. The only free day was Sunday. On the rest of the week days I had appointments, I had to clean my room and I was supposed to also go teach my pupils. Sometimes I would go to school first, then back to my room which I would clean, then I had appointments, and then I would clean again. So I had no time left for myself or for my friends ... That's when I fell ill. It must have been because of all the exhaustion and the stress. I developed an allergy to the smell of wax and to stress. The allergy caused by stress had the symptoms of an incipient asthma, so I said to myself that I had to give up something, but what? If I had given up cosmetics, all the money would have gone too and I wasn't prepared for that ... Besides I had grown fond, very fond of my job as a beautician. I forgot to tell you that, after graduation, I had taken cosmetics classes.

How did I get to that school? Well, a friend of mine claims that I graduated those classes thanks to her. Because she had been to the school but, as she had no calling for the job, she had given up and told me that I was good and I should give it a try. But I think that I would have ended up taking those classes friend or no friend, because all I did was depilate and I knew nothing of cosmetic treatments ... I also thought that I would develop my business and turn professional. I had a feeling that was what I was going to do, that I would stay in that business, and then I decided I had to learn and get a diploma, right? I went to a one-month school – I wanted to learn fast. I had been in school for six years and I didn't have what it takes to spend two more years in school anymore. I took those fast courses and I got a diploma. The Christine Valmy School. Now classes last six months but back then they would only last for one month. Well, later on, I went back to school for a two-month specialization course because the Ministry of Labour demanded that. But right after I graduated from faculty, I only did a month of schooling.

I can't tell, I don't even remember if that was actually the first cosmetics school in Romania. What I know for sure is that it was set up after the Revolution. Christine Valmy, who I think is a celebrity ... she was born in Romania, she emigrated to the States, she set up cosmetics schools there and then she came back to Romania ... There was a time when she would come back here every month to sign the diplomas but in the end she gave it up. In fact, as far as I know, the school only bears her name now, she's not ... I mean, they work under license, she only sells her name through that school, but she's not actually involved anymore. She has other people doing the job for her. Her beauty products were also on the market back then. Now they've disappeared.

So, I took those classes ... And I chose to give up my job in education after one year of teaching, and I went on working in the student hostel. I was again annoyed by my having no social status, by my not doing what I would have liked to; how long was I going to ... I got a visit from the friends that I told you about; those that I had worked for. They were opening their third salon in the area, but not in the Grozăvești Student Hostel where it had proved impossible, and they needed help: somebody they could trust with the new place. They knew me, they trusted me and they hired me but it wasn't what I expected. I only lasted 11 months there. I had limited authority; I only did what I was told to do. They limited my possibilities, they inhibited me, and I felt I could have done a lot more for that place, I could have run it more efficiently. And the salary was small, so I said to myself that it wasn't worth the effort. Besides, during that year, I had lost half of my previous clients because the prices they had there were twice as expensive. So people stopped coming to Henriette Body Centre.

That's when the owner left ... She was leaving for England for a month or two, I can't remember exactly. She gathered us in a meeting and asked if she could trust us, if we would stay

until she came back. That was when I told her that I was out! Although I had no back-up plan! I had no idea what I would do next: where would I work, what would I do? ... Nothing.

Then I went back to the student hostel. I set up a firm ... you know, I rented a space, a very small one, it had only 12 square metres or maybe less, and I took in my first employee. She was with me for six months. After that I also hired a manicurist – the first employee was a beautician, of course. I don't recall the details but I think the third employee was hired after one year or so ... Well, during the first year, employees would come and go, but what is important was that after a year or so, I would take in another employee. I remained in that 12-metre space for a year or two, no, it was longer than that, almost four years that I spent in that space – so, it was for quite some time – , and there were four or five of us working there. I employed five people: four beauticians and a manicurist. Or something like that.

After four years, I rented a larger space, three times as large actually, meaning 35 square metres, and I opened a hairdresser's, although I knew almost nothing about that. Well, I knew something but not much, I'm afraid. And a massage parlour. I had taken massage and make-up classes, but I only did a little massage because I wasn't very fond of the thing. I still have the hairdresser's, and the manicure-pedicure salon, and the massage parlour and the beauty salon. And that's pretty much where I stopped.

The second salon is not exactly a salon but it isn't a would-be salon either. The stress that had caused my first asthma symptoms triggered a second fit, and I couldn't take any medication anymore. I had taken that medication for seven months back then and I felt alright for the next seven years ... The relapse was so serious that, after seven years, I had to go to the doctor's again and I had to stop working altogether. The smell of wax was the worst. It was the stress too, but the smell of wax was the death of me. Two months after I had opened my salon and the

hairdresser's, in February, I had to give up using wax for depilation.

I was only at the beginning with my investments and I was in debt. I couldn't have rented a flat and furnish it properly ... If you take a look at a salon, you say that there isn't much to it, but that little that you see costs heaps of money ... It was a lot of money for me; maybe it would be small change for Gigi Becali, but to me it was a fortune. And I couldn't and wouldn't move. I improvised something there, in that place where my poor clients had to stretch their legs inside the fridge; I moved the sink, I adjusted the place, and I had them stretch their legs into the closet ... I could only do treatments, that was ok. That was happening in February and in December, a year after I had opened the hairdresser's, I managed to rent a flat downtown, I bought some furniture for cosmetics use, meaning the few things that I need in order to cope with wrappings, treatments, massage, and all the other cosmetic procedures, because I didn't want to give up the clients I had made ten years before. Most of them followed me there; some of them stayed with the girls at Grozăvești. What I can say is that a second salon is just a beginning, it's not something serious. I only go there if I have appointments, and I only stay for as long as I have appointments. That's pretty much the level that I've reached.

I for one can say that things haven't been so tough for me because I'm a fighter, or so I think, that I am a fighter. But I'm not saying that to compliment myself ... it's more like a self portrait. I can't say that it was difficult because I'm used to difficulties. I left the Chamber of Commerce in tears a couple of times, when I had to change the papers – the registration certificates were being modified at the time. I was a nervous wreck.

Let's begin with the first legal procedures that I had to go through when I set up my firm:

all I needed was money because there is a special office at the Chamber of Commerce which deals with these things, and it makes little difference whether you pay the commission to the guys at the Chamber of Commerce or you pay it to a lawyer who might turn out to be the wrong person for the job. And here you only go once and you say what you want ... Well, should I tell you about all the nasty things that happened then? Alright, I wrote down what I wanted, the setting-up act was not impressive, a mere two and a half pages, while other were 10 pages long, as some people wrote down all possible codes 'cause you never know what you'll end up doing in the future. I was determined to stay in this particular business, and I also got into trade with beauty products and stuff like that. And I asked for a CAEN¹ code because I had decided that that would be my future business and I wanted to know the CAEN code for it. As they also offered consultancy services, they were supposed to be able to help with that.

Setting up the firm didn't seem all that difficult to me because I went to the Chamber of Commerce, I paid and I got the papers. That was easy enough. But getting all the necessary approvals was the nasty party: I needed approvals from the Sanepid [*Health and Anti-epidemic Centre*], from the Fire Department, from the Environment Agency ... I didn't need an approval from these guys but I had to get a document from the city hall saying that “no authorization is needed” which cost a million lei or thereabouts! That was six years ago. But I didn't need it! I didn't get that document after all because I said to myself that something like that was intolerable: I didn't need that piece of paper, so why should I pay one million lei just to get a “no authorization needed”? Well, I didn't get it.

Later the legislation was modified and I had to change my documents too, I had to change my registration document. That was a really

¹ The classified list of professions in Romania.

crazy adventure! Rumour had it that the commission you'd have to pay to a lawyer for all the trouble with changing the registration document was about 100 or 200 euros or thereabouts, I can't recall exactly. But it was a good deal of money anyway, so I said to myself that I'd better do the job myself! Had I known what was going to happen, I would have paid the lawyer! I went to the Chamber of Commerce twelve times. I went in Octavian Goga Street: "no, not here, you go to Romexpo Complex". I went to Romexpo only to discover that I needed one more printed form. Where on earth was I supposed to get it? In Octavian Goga Street. From there I went back to Romexpo and then back again, and I had no car or a taxi to take me there; it was just awful. I left the Chamber of Commerce in tears five times. I had no car, and I can't say that I own a car even now, I use the family car but that happens seldom. So, after I had reached a certain

level where I could withdraw my file, I got an appointment to go and get it. I went and asked for it. The clerk who gave it to me said: "The printed forms have been modified". – "I beg your pardon?!!!" – "The printed forms have been modified again". – "And what should I do now?" – "Well, you go back to square one". – "You must be joking!!!" You can imagine that I was on the verge of attacking the bloody clerk after all the trouble that I had gone through, I was almost in tears and I felt like smacking the idiot with that file! Was I to blame that the printed forms had been modified? But let's resume.

I can give yet another example. By the way, let's say that they got something wrong in your file ... No, better yet: I told you that it hadn't taken much time to set up my first firm. After that I said to myself that I wanted a specific domain and I needed the specific CAEN code for that. They gave me the wrong CAEN cod, and



when I wanted to undertake that activity they told me that it wasn't included in the CAEN. I went back to the Chamber of Commerce and told the clerk there, "Look, madam, I have a problem here". And she asks, "Have you paid the 200 000 lei tax for information?" – "I need no information; I just want to tell you that there has been a mistake!" They won't even talk to you until you've paid that tax because anything they say is information. I don't know if the tax is still 200 000 or 400 000, I think it is 200 000 lei. "Madam," I said, "you are the ones who misinformed me in the first place. I inform you that the CAEN code you gave me is wrong, and you will also have me pay for your having misinformed me. This is beyond my power of understanding!" Well, I went into fits, I felt like crying my eyes out right there in that office! I felt like ... like just forgetting all about any business. I paid for the whole thing, later I paid one more million to get the CAEN code that I had asked for in the first place. But they won't admit to their mistakes!

I never said I quit! No, no, no. There was never a moment when I would say "no more, I've lost all hope", because the business as such, not the bloody documents, was a pleasure: it was a pleasure to receive my clients, to work with people, with a team of my choice. It was what I was meant to do on this earth. No, I would have never given up. People, even those who won't admit it, think that each person has their fair share of hardship and difficulties in life, so I couldn't have been the one to make a tragedy out of everything that went wrong ... And the nervous wreck that you end up being!

I am mixing things up now because I tell you things as I remember them, with no specific order. For instance, after I moved to that larger salon, after I had redecorated the whole thing, 35 square metres in a student hostel, the respective hostel closed down for repairs for one whole year and I had to move again. And you can imagine that, seeing that I was moving to another place, even if I had all the necessary approvals

and the conditions were similar, I had to let the Chamber of Commerce know that I was moving from the block of flats D to the next door block of flats A, into an identical space. The announcement alone cost me two and a half million lei and I also gave a statement which said that the conditions in the new locations were the same, although the old documents were still valid. So, as I had made the announcement, I also had to send somebody over to the Chamber of Commerce to get new approvals. There was a sink in each of the three rooms. They said something like, "no, you need at least four sinks, three are not enough to get all the towels washed in time". "I take them home with me and wash them there daily". – "No, it's not enough". – "Why ever not?" – "Because you must have a contract with the Nufărul Laundry Service". – "But they'll charge 65 000 lei for washing a towel and a new towel costs 80 000, so what should I do, get single-use towels? I can't get them dry here because there isn't enough space, so I can't get them dry; I take them home with me". – No, you must get a receipt from Nufărul in order to prove that you have the necessary condition, as I have no way of knowing what you have at home; you might not clean them well enough". But you can tell a clean towel from a dirty one immediately, not to mention that you can also smell the difference! If I get the receipt, then ... won't they still check if the dirty towels and the clean ones are stored separately? ... No, the rule was that, if I had only three sinks, I had to close down half an hour earlier and sterilize the place. I said that yes, I did sterilize all instruments bowl. No, the bowl, they said, was for washing hair! Yes, I said, but a hair wash doesn't take 12 hours! She has three clients per hour at most, and the bowl it used half an hour out of six; she can clean the instruments during the remaining six hours, so we don't need a fourth sink. They kept saying that there wasn't enough space, and I would still need a fourth sink!

So, that's all I can say ... it's all rubbish, if you're asking me. Not to mention the statements

my accountant has to write, and she's always on the move, going from one place to another, I have no idea what she's doing right now ... At a certain point we had to buy one account book for all activities; I think somebody needs to sell their paper badly! That's what I thought, anyway. And the thing with the cash register was exactly the same, but what can you do! Seeing that I had only four employees, my account register would have been huge, right?! The thing they wanted us to buy can't be stored anywhere; it is twice the size of a regular school notebook and it has so many pages that, if my grandchildren inherit my business, they will never be able to employ enough people to fill in all the pages! But you were supposed to buy it within a certain period of time and adjust the records. My accountant had to stand in huge lines because the scandal was huge and you had to get one by a certain date, otherwise you would get a fine. They had to extend the deadline because the previous had been too short ... What can I say, there's too much bureaucracy, and we won't be able to get rid of it because I've heard that Americans are also up to their necks in it ... So, I don't think we'll ever manage to get rid of ours.

I'd rather things went this way: what business will you be in? I want to open a beauty salon. Alright. For a 35-square-metre salon you pay the state this much, regardless of your profit. And the rest wouldn't have to be a problem: statements which you made or didn't make, the profit that you made or didn't make, and how the business goes and so on ... you just pay the state and mind your business. You wouldn't have to pay people to take care of all the documents and ... And I can't recall exactly all the details, but there's so much bureaucracy around, and everybody knows this. My business is listed as a small enterprise with less than nine employees and worth ... I can't remember the exact sum but it's below the usual monthly circulation. I don't know how much I still have to pay but I can't get beyond this level, although I wish I could!

I am still in debt because the recent move

cost me ... Well, that doesn't matter anymore. I say that in the end it's worth it because, at the end of the day, I have a profit and I earn more than somebody working for the state ... I am at a middle-class level, and, you know, I can afford to take a holiday abroad or to ignore the fact that I pay 100 000 lei more for a pair of shoes; I have done for a long time ... One of my minor dreams was to always have fresh fruit at my table, which I have already fulfilled and I realize that back then this dream would have been impossible and that there are many people now for whom this remains a dream. And still I have to be happy with what I have. I also get the satisfaction of working with people, with my content clients.

I've read many books, yes. I think that you must have a very good basic training in the field because there are many salons which ... well, there are women who become involved with wealthy men ... It's not a big business, investments are not that impressive, although you have to have some money in the first place, and in my case, money was a problem ... These women I told you about think that, if they own a salon, they do nothing all day long but do their nails and hair ... I do my nails at home, I never get a manicure at my own salon and I also do my hair at home – I straighten it – because I don't have time and I can't take my clients' time. They have priority at the salon and I only do my hair there when I am invited to a wedding party or something of the kind ... In all the other cases, I do my hair at home. Of course I go there for a depilation because I can't do that myself, although sometimes I do it myself. And those women imagine that if they are the owners, they get to live the grand life. In fact, this position involves knowing your trade very well and showing people respect, be they employees or clients. You're not supposed to take your employees for slaves. They're your employees and your colleagues with whom you have signed an agreement, and if you're business goes well, they are happy too ... We all are happy. And I wouldn't trade my satisfaction for all the tea in China.

I don't mean to sound idealistic or romantic and to say that I do everything just for my personal satisfaction. If there were no profit coming out of it, I wouldn't do it. It would be impossible; you still have to make a living, to eat something, to travel, to buy clothes. If the business had been bad, I would have given it up, pleasure or no pleasure. Now I've managed to balance them nicely, you know: the decent profit that I make and the satisfaction that I get ... I can say that I'm happy with what I've achieved.

Still, you have to know things. That's what I've been telling you: there are these girls who take some money from I don't know what Arab or Turk and they open a beauty salon with it, but they show no respect to their clients, to their employees or to the trade, not to mention that they don't know the first thing about the job ... For instance, I know somebody who ... The recyclable wax that we use is thrown away after one week: we use it and then we throw it away. We have a special morning when we change the wax. We do it because after a while it starts causing burns or it won't come off, and that's when we dispose of it. The employee comes and says that the wax has to be changed, and they say, "It's just fine! You go ahead and use it". If you use it for too long, your clients will suffer. I wanted to change the wax supplier and the wax wasn't good, so I had to throw it away, and my money went down the drain too. But you can't help it. One of the women that I told you about could never understand such things because she knows nothing about this business. She would say, "The wax is good, how can it not be? I paid good money for it; you go ahead and use it". You lose customers this way and your employees have to struggle with their task. Well, the example I gave you is a practical one, and there are many others I could speak of. You have to know the trade, you have to like it and you must be aware that profit won't come overnight. The profit in this business comes in time but it keeps coming, there are no breaks. Take sales, for instance: you sell ten Opel cars in one month, so

that you could afford one at the end of the month! I can't do the same in my business. Things go slowly here, the old-fashion way. It's an old-fashioned kind of business.

That is a reason why many have gone bankrupt: they don't know how to balance quality and the price for it: most beauty salons are neighbourhood salons where people come to gossip about all their neighbours, to curl their hair and perhaps to buy Turkish shirts in installments. You won't find anything like that in my salon. It is indeed a neighbourhood salon meant for students because there are many students and graduates in the area. But most of my clients are 25-30-year old women, and only a handful of them are between 40 and 50; they must be about four and they are very demanding. The salon has a tradition and a target public. And our prices are average. I think I saw posters advertising for lower prices: 20 000 lei for a haircut, but generally speaking, my prices are lower than the average. In a student neighbourhood prices have to match their possibilities. There are of course salons where only celebrities and VIPs go, and there prices are huge; I can give you names, if you want. The offer is the same but ... I could afford some of the things they use because buying a more expensive hair dye is not such a big deal. But if I get it, I have to include it in the price for our services because I can't buy it for less. And then the client would have to come with her own hair dye, which she can buy in a store, and you lose money: you lose the trade markup, and then you might not be familiar with that hair dye and your client might be angry because the resulting colour is different from the one she saw on the pack. When you work with one type of hair dye only, you get accustomed to it. If I buy more expensive hair dye, I would be unable to sell it, and if I buy two kinds of hair dye, I would make an unjustified investment. You work function of you clients. A 50-ml tube of facial cream at the Marriot cost 11 800 000 two years ago. I wouldn't be able to sell that cream if I had ten years to do it: it would go beyond its expiry date three

times over. If I decide to sell a cream for 500 000, let's say, that would still be expensive for my clients. You have to make a selection of your clients but the most important thing is to keep them coming.

When I attended that cosmetics school, I noticed that my colleagues found it difficult to learn about the human skin and stuff like that ... I thought it was piece of cake, as I had already studied about it in my anatomy classes, I had passed a faculty entrance examination, anatomy had been a basic subject during faculty years, so ... It was easier for me to understand certain things. If I had been a mathematics graduate, maybe I would have been in serious trouble but I can't be certain. I still think that my previous training was of some use. At least I am aware that mathematics wouldn't have helped, but I knew a lot about skin and that was helpful. There are other things too, such as metabolism and so on ... Anyway, I went through a lot of books after graduation. I read them indiscriminately, and they were of all kinds: books I had bought at exhibitions, at conventions ... Yes, I love to read these books because when a client asks, I am able to supply the information. For instance, I had clients asking me if wrappings would help them lose weight. I answered that it would have been wasted money because the only way to lose weight is through diet and exercise. With wrappings, you pay four million lei and you go home with one kilo less but which you'll put back in a week.

I gave up my job in education for something that would get me more money. The money I earned was not enough for a decent living. It's not an option to graduate from faculty, pay rent somewhere and live off a salary not bigger than ... I don't even know the current salary but it must be 4 or 5 million a month. And if you're a biology teacher you can't live off private lessons the way math, Romanian, French or English teachers do. They can get loads of tuitions and things are ok, but if you're a biology teacher ... Pupils don't need private lessons in geography or biology. You can't make a living this way and that's that! The high school where I had classes was a bad one and I had no satisfaction whatsoever! The pupils were positively retarded, they almost fell asleep during classes and they used to say that the brain is located in the stomach ... What satisfactions did I get in the end? No money, stupid pupils, the high school was at the other end of the city, on Republica Boulevard and I had to go there daily ... If you want a career in education, you must have somebody to help you, like in medicine; in time you will eventually manage to climb the career ladder to the top. And we all know how that is done: when the school inspector comes, you pay him/her. You take one exam but you pay a three-month salary. I have no regrets. I am happy the way I am now.

Translated by Alina Popescu





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Education

**Diana Perju, 34, English teacher
at “Grigore Moisil” High School in Bucharest
Interviews done by Carmen Mihalache**



I talked to a number of randomly-chosen teachers who were acquaintances of friends of mine. They are generally young people who entered the system after 1990, and some even graduated from faculty after the Revolution. I asked them for an honest opinion regarding the wins and losses that the Romanian education has experienced after 1990, and I also asked about the manner in which they were affected by the frequent changes in the quality of education services. My other questions regarded the existence of a crisis situation in the domain of education, the changes undergone by the student-teacher-parent relationships after the Revolution, and by the relationship all three have developed with the school as an institution; they also referred to the social status of teachers, to the way in which they are viewed and assessed by parents, students and society, to the differences between past and current generations of students, to the specific difficulties with which teachers have to cope and about the way they solve these problems. Their personal ten-year experience has allowed them to form some clear opinions and these opinions have a lot in common. I have chosen only one speaking voice because the discourse is actually a synthesis of virtually all the problems met by those who struggle to apply an education system whose effects will only become visible in time.

On the one hand, I am happy that I have the opportunity to talk about the problems we have in education which, from my point of view, is a really sore spot, and on the other, I see that everybody seems to be an expert in matters of education, as they also seem to be in matters of politics and football, and consequently, they all come up with ideas.

The frequent system changes have indeed influenced the field of education ... For starters, and this is the most serious aspect, those who were behind the changes didn't have – and still don't have – anything in common with education in general, with the teaching profession, with teaching and its problems, with the feeling which you must present to your students, and with all the other aspects that make this job so special.

Their next mistake was to treat high school education in the same way as university education. That's absurd because the two represent completely different systems, as different as the demands of either pupils or students.

What else can I say? They couldn't agree on having or not having a holiday, on having or not having a separate period of evaluation, and the change was each time supported by solid psychosocial, methodological and philosophical arguments ... and you would do your best to believe in these arguments ... Well, now we have

stopped believing in something; I mean we've stopped believing in the wisdom of decision taken at high levels.

Don't tell me that it all happened because of the general transition period! That's true but only in part because in the case of all these particular changes, there wasn't either the necessary time, or the intention to get a feedback reaction or to analyze the effects operated by the change, so that all changes could be done in all awareness of what has to be change and in what way.

On the other hand, I think we're dealing with an absurd mentality which is very common and frequently met, namely that if you become a teacher or you are elected in a senior position, you must be good at what you do ... What I mean to say is that experience is crucial in these cases. My point of view in the matter is that of somebody who has a 10-year experience and who is aware that it is absolutely necessary that one should talk to more experienced people in order to solve problems and to fellow teachers in order to better understand the mentality and needs of students of all ages. Team-work is vital. You can't know everything because you're only human ...

The situation before and after 1990 ... well, many things have changed. Most of the times, many good things have been applied in the worst possible ways. For instance, teaching focused on the student: I think that's a very good approach. The teacher is no longer the focus point of the class but the student; the student is given more freedom to notice what his/her reactions are to different stimuli, he/she becomes an active participant in the process of understanding him/herself and the transformations undertaken by the self ...

Alternative textbooks are also a very good idea, especially because you don't have to go through the whole book; it is more like an instrument. There are many good and interesting ideas to be found in different textbooks and thus you're given the possibility to use them according to the needs of your students – some students need this kind of textbook, other need a

different type. Classes are also very different. But now we get to the very delicate and thorny money problem. How can you possibly get to use all these varied and wonderful ideas when textbooks are so expensive? As a teacher, you have to become acquainted with all textbooks, and, as you don't receive them for free, unless you use them for teaching ... you would have to make photocopies, to buy auxiliary teaching material, to make more copies to avoid time-consuming dictation ... all paid for with your money.

People have made and are still making such a fuss about teachers giving private lessons ... This becomes a problem under only one condition: when the teachers give you good marks only if you take private lessons with them, but this is blackmail and theft ... The necessity of giving private lessons is brought about by many things, some of which are determined by those who rule the country. Since you need money to survive, to be able to come to school with a full stomach, with decent clothes on and in good health, and with the auxiliary material that your students need, where are you supposed to get this money from, seeing that salaries are the way they are?

Seeing that time spent at school is limited and you have many students in a class, and there is also the syllabus which ignores the reality of school competitions, when are teachers supposed to tutor students for these extracurricular activities? On their spare time? And tuitions should include one student? Two students? And where should they take place? If the timetable and the school organization force students to work with teachers whom they might not like, the system should allow students to choose another teacher and take private lessons in order to understand what the other teacher failed to make them see. Shall I go on?

I have already told you that perceiving private lessons only in respect to the money teachers earn – this is an income the state does not control, which is not shared – will lead to a disregard of the essential idea. We need a legisla-

tion regulating this issue, but this legislation should take into consideration the opportunity and necessity of private lessons and the moral aspects of the process and of the relations which led to this necessity; it should not be focused on the economic aspect. Teachers need money in order to become better professionals and ultimately to help their students get better results. Maybe the goal is to prevent students from getting that good, or to favour only a handful of students. Equality of chances is not an issue simply because it is an impossible task: nobody can conceivably guarantee that. There will always be losers and winners, and all we can do is make sure we get fewer losers.

The money problem is far more serious than meets the eye because it affects both teacher-student relationship, and teacher-parent relationship. The teacher begins to be perceived as a sort of slave who must obey the student's family. Don't get me wrong here: a teacher should act in the student's best interest since they know so many things about child psychology, about the psycho-social needs a child has and so on. I can tell you from my own experience that parents are by far the greatest problem. I'm not talking about those who make some time for their children but about those who are busy all day long, who often have a lot of money – some of that money is given to the child as proof of the fact that they love him/her and all sacrifices are made for him/her – , who think that they know their children although they only see them once a day, in the evening when they come back from work and who are very frustrated, angry and reproachful when teachers give poor grades and fail to educate their precious babies - that's what teachers are supposed to do! Apart from the family model which influences the student's behaviour, there is also the need to survey the student in order to make sure that he/she is not neglected or abandoned and so on. Some children will turn into problem-kids only to attract their parents' attention.

On the other hand, parents themselves need

counseling. They themselves have become confused after 1990, and they too need to understand the changes that have taken place and to find a personal and effective way of coping with them because they have to be able to educate their children to do the same. Being a parent is not an easy job, but being a caring and responsible parent is even more difficult: you care what happens to your children and what will become of them. School is often sanctioned for children's misbehaviour, but how are teachers supposed to be able to teach children a set of values and attitudes which they don't also find at home, in the street and on TV? Since the media only promotes false values, since success is presented as having been achieved thanks solely to fake values – and children are very mindful of such aspects – , how can school still influence their education? This is how we reach a level where education is limited to a mere transfer of information.

I haven't the slightest intention to give a pessimistic tone to my discourse because I have faith in children, in their commonsense; I trust them more than I trust their parents or grandparents. I've witnessed arguments between older persons and teenagers on buses or in the streets, and I must say that the elders' behaviour was worse than that of the youngsters'. I saw children struggling to pull away from their parents' behaviour. This is not the general rule, but there are others like these children and this awareness is what still motivates me to keep teaching. The fact that you still have a reason to fight poverty, bureaucracy, ignorance and stress keeps you going. The awareness that you're not alone in this battle makes you want to continue. Your students notice that you're on their side, that you care and then they start helping you help them change. Many positive changes in students are achieved out of love and respect for one teacher or another. And then it all becomes worth it. In fact, this is the only thing that actually matters.

At this point, I would also like to add that I can still hear teachers say that they used to get a

lot more respect before 1990. On the other hand, I think there are a lot of people who now work as journalists or occupy high positions and who once were trouble-makers at school or frustrated pupils ... and I do not believe that they are the most entitled to judge the process of education and its goals. But, and this is a very important “but”, respect is something that you earn. It doesn’t come for free, and this is the second big problem. I’m not very sure whether it was respect or fear that students felt before 1990. I think that it was fear that people felt. I’m saying this because I can still get respect nowadays but you have to fight tooth and nail for it. Your student will respect you for what he/she sees in you. They won’t respect you for your university diploma (as far as they’re concerned and from what they’ve heard, university diplomas may well be questionable), for the difficult exams that you had to pass or for the hard work that you’ve put in. They want to see the results of that hard work, how that hard work has turned you into a better teacher and human being. And there is

also the problem of reciprocity. If you don’t respect them, why do you still hope for their respect? Are we all talking about equality, human rights and reciprocity? And aren’t all these meant also for those in less privileged positions?

There are still many things that I could add. Each child is a poem ... some poems are Romantic; some are postmodern ... Once I heard a British teacher expressing the problem of education in a very eloquent way. It happened at a training course. By the way, these training courses are compulsory and they are paid for by the teachers themselves ... how do you like that? So, as I was saying, that British teacher told us never to forget that, “A teacher touches a student forever”. This is something that must be cast in stone. We all should remember that. But parents, the media and those who make the decisions should also remember these words.

Translated by Alina Popescu





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Reforms, reforms

**Gabriel Răducan, mathematics teacher,
former general school inspector
Interviews done by Ana Pascu**

The education reform began in 1990 and it took some dramatic turns, as serious and touchy problems were approached without full knowledge of what they presupposed. First of all, thanks to a programme financed by the World Bank, they changed school textbooks. Alternative textbooks were printed by companies which had won public auctions and competitions, but the syllabus was still the same. New textbooks covered the old syllabus. At the same time as the movement for changing the textbooks, there was also a movement for changing the curricula and the syllabus. They first built the roof, and then the walls and they left the foundation to be built last: they should have changed the syllabus first, then the curriculum and textbooks should have been the last to be changed. These mistakes are the main reason for which we still observe the old syllabus which contains things that cannot be done in class using the new textbooks. This situation has triggered a frantic search for material that may easily be adapted to the new syllabi. This is how publishers who have already noticed the mistakes manage to earn an extra buck. That's how they began printing exercise books which are promoted in schools, while textbooks aren't actually used for class work anymore. And this goes for most school subjects. The first textbooks were printed in 1995 or 1996, or perhaps

as early as 1994, and the first to be published were textbooks for the 1st and the 2nd grades, then they came back on their decision, they organized other competitions, there was a parade of ministers who changed things at random, some approving of the new syllabi, others rejecting them ... And we should also mention the thousands of dollars that have been squandered on this form of education. There were some training courses for teachers, professional trainers began to appear; later, they announced that the money for these courses had been all spent and ... the ordinary tax payer is left to suffer the consequences.

Before 1990 textbooks had been written by academics or by university professors... University professors were also members in the commissions which approved the use of certain textbooks and of curricula. After the Revolution, things changed: a team was created by the National Council of the Curriculum, which included teachers, researchers, psychologists, methodists and even university professors and whose job was to create a syllabus. The National Committee was then called to approve it. This National Committee consisted solely of university professors and a handful of prestigious teachers from all over the country. In 1999 they went

back to the old situation, meaning that they got to decide on the syllabus and the National Committee was supposed to only give its approval. University professors support their own view of the matter, meaning that they require that students should acquire as much information as possible. From 1960 onwards, we have witnessed a slow transfer of university syllabus first to the 12th grade, then to the 11th grade and so on, until secondary school pupils got to learn things only university students were expected to know. That led to excessively demanding syllabi. Nowadays we are again witnessing the same phenomenon: things that should be taught in faculties are taught to pupils.

The National Council of the Curriculum must take determinate action if its real aim is to actually change the current syllabi. They are afraid of reactions from certain academics and are less mindful of the textbook being adapted to the age particularities of the pupils. Nobody seems to care that there are no reasons to include certain information in the secondary and high school textbooks. If the syllabus is demanding, the teacher will automatically supply information. Around 50 % of the time is dedicated to teaching as such, and the rest is taken up by practice. The children who grew up in the 80s had a lot of time to study because they did not have TV programmes, extracurricular activities and so on, and they were able to concentrate only on the idea that study was the key to future success. How did that saying go? "Knowledge is power". Teaching was the main activity and the child rose up to the challenge. Now, if you teach too much, the pupils won't even bother to pay attention.

Before 1990 we had had a unique set of textbooks and only one syllabus for all schools in the country. Children in Bucharest and children in Timișu-de-Sus studied the same things. There were no alternative textbooks. Now we have at least three kinds of textbooks for secondary schools and as many as 30 types of alternative textbooks on the whole. Any teacher can write

textbooks. This was my advice to teachers who complained that textbooks were not good enough: "Who's stopping you from writing a textbook of your own in collaboration with a publishing house, which will include your teaching material and will observe the syllabus?" The teacher can use his/her own textbook after it has been approved by the local authorities.

Textbooks are usually selected by the teacher. So, let's say that I want textbook 1 for 5th grade A, textbook 2 for 5th grade D and textbook 3 for 5th grade E. This decision belongs to me and it is based on my assessment of all textbooks. This is of course the ideal situation. But there are cases in which textbooks are sent from the County Inspectorate. "You are supposed to use these textbooks and keep your mouth shut".

Another aspect considered by the reform is changing the syllabus so as to change the pupil's mentality. Skills and abilities become the main focus, while the content, previously favoured, is cast in the background. This necessity has never actually been understood. Content has been the main concern for the past seven years, not the cultivation of skills and abilities. There have been published tons of books containing grading criteria and which are not consulted by teachers unless there's an inspection coming. Teachers' mentality hasn't changed at all ... That is why I am so upset ... They fail in their duties precisely because they haven't managed to adapt. Pupils become nervous, they can't stay put behind their desks, the teacher tries to punish them with low grades and this is what triggers the complete annihilation of teacher-student communication.

Marks for primary classes have raised a lot of disputes because it was easier to grade pupils with marks from 1 to 10 than to assess their activity by qualificatives. With two "good" and a "very good" you could get an average of "very good" at the end of the semester. The pupil wasn't very well aware of how this average was achieved either. It's a highly subjective system. When you have two "sufficient", one "good"

and a “very good”, the correct average isn’t exactly obvious anymore. The interesting effect of these qualificatives is that children are not afraid of school anymore. I asked children about it, and they told me that they liked going to school because they were not afraid of getting a 2 or a 3 for not having learned the lesson. Things get a little more complicated for them when they reach the 5th grade and they receive proper marks. They can be flunk ...

Private lessons had been a reality before 1990 too; I remember having read in the *Scînteia Tineretului* Daily about the case of a famous teacher who was defended by the General Secretary of the city of Sinaia himself against accusation of giving private lessons, as the respective teacher was a respected figure in the community and many of his private students went on to graduate from respected faculties.

Private lessons are usually given to children whose parents are well-off. Poor children who want to learn have to study really hard. There are also children who don’t learn because they can’t understand things. But there are parents who can afford to give their children private lessons as soon as they get a 6 or a 7 in chemistry, biology or music. The solution is getting a tutor. They decide that tutoring is necessary even from kindergarten: generally, children living in big cities are taught English or German from tender ages, and competition within the “special classes” leads to tests. The child wants to learn and he/she gets private lessons. Primary school teachers give private lessons too, precisely because no parent will accept to have their child pushed aside. If a pupil is flunk, private lessons are needed again.

And here we witness the birth of an alternative school which Western countries would never accept. They would even consider such a possibility. “Do you mean to say that you take private lessons for that?” Due to an accessible syllabus, a Western child has no difficulty adapting and responding to the teacher’s demands, even if

he/she misses school for an entire month for, let’s say, medical reasons.

Before 1990 teachers had been hired and promoted according to Party directions. Regardless of their rank, teachers who lived closer to the school building got hired. For instance, two teachers would measure the distance between their homes and school by the foot. If one of them lived 500 feet away from school, and the other 520 feet away from school, the one living closer won and he/she was hired full-time at the respective school. That was one criterion. Another criterion was the exam for titular positions, which involved a lot of studying and university knowledge. Passing the exam was pretty difficult.

There are few vacant positions in cities and a lot of them in the countryside. Before 1990 teachers were given teaching positions according to a governmental plan. Each faculty graduate received a teaching position at Urleasca-din-Vale, Ghimpați or other such places, according to their graduation mark ... They were forced to spend at least three years there, after which they took the exam for becoming full teachers, and later they participated in the national contest; this was an opportunity to move closer to home, if their marks in the exam were high enough. After 1990, the ministry sent a memo which said that all substitute teachers were to become full teachers. So, if the poor fellow had been a substitute teacher at “Mihai Viteazul” High School or at “Sfântul Sava” High School for 20 years, he was to be finally promoted to full-teacher. These positions were occupied without a proper exam. Nowadays any graduate is free to participate in the contest directly. And if the contest happens to be difficult, they don’t pass and they prefer waiting for another 2 years or so to competing for teaching positions in the countryside. Villages don’t have good teachers; they don’t have at least decent teachers, faculty graduates. Education in villages will soon become a joke, but the kind of joke that can only make you weep.

Before 1990, I used to read in the newspapers about French teachers going on strike ... They published articles like these on the last page. We were amazed because a teachers' strike seemed inconceivable to us.

After 1990, we reluctantly signed an agreement for a Japanese strike. It was only for one hour. I think it must have been back in 1992 or 1993. We didn't know what to ask for: a salary raise, a 4 % of the GDP, as other countries allotted 6 % of their GDP for education, but we didn't even know what the GDP was or what the deal with the budget for education was. What seemed really shocking to us was that they all agreed with us: both the minister of education and the school principles; I don't think that this is a normal situation. In a strike there must be two opposing sides, the owner and the employees, whilst here everybody agreed on the protest. The slogans were also strange: "We taught you then, don't harm us now". It was all about some funds which had to be allotted to education. It all culminated in eggs being thrown at the walls of the ministry buildings.

The strikers did indeed prove that they were united ... In 1993, 1994 and 1998 they came to Bucharest from all over the country by coaches. They protested in front of the Parliament building and in front of the Senate building, and there were also street meetings ... Although teachers made threats, they never actually interrupted the school year and they never meant to do that.

(Gabriel Răducan, mathematics teacher, former general school inspector)

Immediately after the Revolution pupils were confused: they had been on holiday, they still had their school uniforms and they didn't know whether to wear them or not. We are of course talking about 5th to 8th grade pupils, as the others were supposed to wear them anyway. At the first parent-teacher meetings everybody came up with suggestions on the matter. Regardless of

their financial situation, there were parents who wanted their children to be allowed to express their personality and wear different clothes at school. If you looked at them individually, they were all nice, but if you took a look at the whole class, they seemed a little too colourful. The notes they passed to each other during classes wrote, "look at her blouse; see how he looks today; she must have spent a lot to look like that". So they ended up paying a lot of attention to clothing. At the subsequent teacher-parent meetings, very few parents agreed to have the uniforms back, even if we were considering a different uniform design, one that was to be suggested by students or by parents. We had uniform competitions, a parade, and design competitions just to allow them to choose a uniform to their taste.

In time, parent committees decided that the general aspect of students should be regulated by the introduction of standard uniforms. At the beginning these uniforms differed from one class to another, making each class unique. Parents were the ones who bought the cloth, and had the uniforms sewn, as they had to suit each student. Students were initially proud of their uniforms, of their class having a distinctive mark, and they were thrilled that the other students were envious, called them "nerds" and even punched them in the street ... The following year they began experimenting with secondary school uniforms. There had been similar experiments before but they had failed. It wasn't until 2000 that they finally introduced a school uniform, and the first step was unique vests and coats. Uniforms had been designed by private firms, and one major problem appeared in September and October, when uniform money had to be collected, although not all people could raise that money. Primary school teachers even began to raise money from 4th grade pupils in order to get their uniforms done for the 5th grade in advance. Primary school teachers have more authority after having taught a class for four years.

There aren't many cases of eccentric students in our school. They are somehow forced not to be eccentric, as they have to sign an admission form which also stipulates that wearing a uniform is compulsory. Only 3 or 4 other schools in the neighbourhood have uniforms for their students; in the rest of them, students wear black skirts or trousers and white blouses or shirts. Blue jeans are very fashionable, and children also wear T-shirts instead of shirts or blouses, and sports shoes instead of street shoes.

Most pupils think that they must wear only what is fashionable at the time, and they wear the same kind of clothes at home and at the cinema too. They wear blue jeans and T-shirts all day long no matter where they are. This is not exactly healthy. But if a child smells bad or something of the sort, the others reject him/her and that is good.

(Adriana Răducan, mathematics teacher)

I was in the 2nd grade when the Revolution broke out and then I witnessed all the changes that followed: we wouldn't address our teacher with "comrade" but with "Miss" but I remember that when she entered and we stood up to greet her, we still called her "comrade". She would give us all sort of small punishments in order to make us cope better with the changes ...

School uniforms were a major discussion topic and we even had to write compositions expressing our opinion on the matter, as well as our preferences regarding a future new uniform prior to its introduction ... The fact that we didn't have uniforms anymore was felt as a burden because you always ended up not knowing what to wear ...

We kept wearing our old uniforms until we got in the 5th grade when uniforms changed, so we had had two years to become accustomed with the idea that we wouldn't wear uniforms anymore. As 5th grade pupils, we already considered ourselves young ladies and the standards we imposed on ourselves and on our female colleagues were also higher. The next demand was

that we should wear white blouses and black or navy-blue trousers ... Trousers for boys, and trousers or skirts for girls.

I got to high school and discovered that each high school has its own uniform: "So, high school X has blue uniforms" or "You're in cherry-coloured uniforms so you must be from "Creangă" High School". You represented the high school because you wore its uniform. And you ended up in funny situations, such as seeing an old lady wearing cherry-coloured clothes in the street and automatically thinking, "Oh, she must have studied at "Creangă" High School". It was obvious though that the students at that high school must have worn a different kind of uniform back then. There was a strict association between uniform and a certain high school.

I felt comfortable in my uniform and I was grateful that I did have to worry what I would wear the next day. But still I had some trouble choosing my coat, skirt and trousers. Each of us adopted a certain style according to personal tastes and the only thing that mattered was the colour. People from the school board had said, "It must be a shade ranging between red and dark red." So, the choice of colours and of designs was really broad and we chose anything that would suit us. I became a high school student in 1996 and for a while we had to wear uniforms too.

We were granted a lot of freedom, but there were still some limits which in time began to disappear. A simple cherry-coloured vest or a hair ribbon was enough. I could tell the difference because in my spare time I could wear clothes as colourful as I pleased.

Just think of how fashion changed for school children ... Pupils in secondary school have the mentality that we used to have in high school or something of the sort ... They grow up faster. Now they're wearing low-waist trousers, short blouses, which can be larger or tighter function of physical characteristics ... Colours are a big issue now, pink and light blue are highly fashionable, but it used to be orange and green, al-

though uniforms were blue or green ... Young people usually go shopping for clothes together. The one who wants to buy something usually takes along someone older or more popular, someone who's the centre of everybody's attention. They think that advice from a more popular school mate will make them more popular too. And that's how they got to wear white sports shoes that are knee high with colourful laces, which I personally don't like. I even asked the girls why they wear them: "Do you really like them?" At first they said, "Yes, I do; they're fashionable, everybody's wearing them". "Do you really like the way they look on you? Would you still wear them if they weren't fashionable?", I insisted. They said "no". So, they don't like

those shoes and they only wear them because they are fashionable.

(Irina Răducan, university student)

Pupils realized that they have some power, and that they have enough to even replace the teachers whom they do not like. There were small protests against unpopular teachers on school hallways or in front of the school back in 1990 – 1991; they even wrote their demands on walls and ... they were usually successful. The power to replace teachers created a certain feeling of freedom and empowerment among pupils.

Translated by Alina Popescu





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Belfast

Interview done by Bogdan Iancu

I arrived in Bucharest in 1989, when I began my faculty studies; well, it was actually the Agronomics Institute. After graduation, I specialized in naïve music criticism and public and private sound effects. I still work in the field. I've lived in Bucharest ever since. What can I say? I was lucky then, as I am lucky now, to find an escape: I lived in underground rockers' communities with all sorts of weird hippies and interesting people. That was my good luck.

We used to gather in various places: at Muzica [*prestigious music store in Bucharest*], at Mozaic, in Cișmigiu Park, and we would exchange tape cassettes, disks, and posters. The deal was, "I give you a pack of coffee on a Metallica poster" or "I give you a pair of design glasses for an Antrax poster". At the time we would listen to a lot of heavy metal: Metallica, Antrax, Led Zepelin, Sex Pistols, but I would also listen to a lot of punk. We used to go out together for a beer, as alcohol was the common element that connected us... We got into trouble with the cops... I even went to reformatory school once: I had had a punk group before 1989 which we called "Vi-danj" and I played at Buzău with some friends – we had said something like, "let's get ourselves a punk group" and it was ok for a while.

When the Revolution broke out, I was in Bucharest and I also wanted to write some of that stuff on the walls. But I was afraid and I ended up writing nothing, but I went at the Dalles Hall on the evening of the 21st. Back then I was friends with Laurențiu Cățlan. His memorial plaque is still there, at the Dalles Hall; he was among the first to be mortally wounded on the street barricades. I remained there until they began driving trucks into the crowd; at that point I left together with two friends of mine because I realized that things would get ugly, dear citizens, and they would beat the crap out of us. So, I left with my mom to the countryside, at Țândărei, Ialomița. She had got on the phone as soon as she had seen those horrors on TV and she had told me, "Come home at once, if you don't want to get in serious trouble!" Ok, mamma!

I returned in January. I had spent the holidays in peace with my folks, I met childhood friends and we celebrated the Revolution in our own way. I came back to Bucharest in January. I lived at the Agronomics Institute, and then I moved to Grozăvești¹ where I would spend a lot of time doing nothing in especial, and in later years I even lived there illegally 'cause I wasn't

¹ Student hostel quarters.

entitled to a room there anymore; in 1998 I moved out of there for good.

We were a rather numerous gang there: there was Leo, Piele (*skin*), Vio, Poetu' (*the poet*), Viorel Moțoc, Alex Tomasseli, Mihai Călin, the actor, Maria Răducanu, the jazz singer. There were some honky tonks there too and we first stormed the Cecenia¹ ... at that time the pub had an earthen floor and metal tables; everything was so deliciously undignified that we felt ecstatic. Who else was there? Oh, yes, there was the Gri-gore-musical-ear group; these guys just popped up out of nowhere: Octav Segărceanu and Adi Chișu were mathematics students. You can bet that we spent more time at the Cecenia than reading at the library, but it was like a forum to us. That pub was like a forum. When we were dead drunk and felt like taking a walk, we were paripatetics but we usually spent our time debating things at the pub; that was our academia ... Now they call it by a more sophisticated name, the Azteca. There used to be some interesting people there. I remember a guy called Horia, a drinking pal of mine. They said that he had been a member of the Political Police or something of the kind. He was really screwed and a first-hand alcoholic who, when dead drunk, told us about his glorious deeds, as well as some macabre stories. The guy read all sorts of "fashionable" books, books on parapsychology, and once in a while he also gave us money for a drink. There was another guy, Miler, a philosophy and philology graduate and who lives in Canada now. He had a huge library in his hostel room where he would receive the chosen few who were allowed to read his books. Cioran, Eliade and Nae Ionescu where the fashionable readings back then and everybody went nuts about them ... but what I liked best was that Nemira Publishing House had printed the "Nautilus" series, as I've always been fond of sci-fi books.

The parties at Grozăvești were regular orgies.



One guy would bring the music, another would provide the amplifiers, beds would be taken out of the hostel room and brains were evicted from our skulls to make room for alcohol. We had up to 70 people at the party and we would all chip in for drink; we were like a corporation. Nobody would bother us there. The cops would show up, have a drink with us and then they would leave. They knew that they could have a word and a drink with us there. When the party was over, the room looked like the city of Dresden after

¹ A sordid pub in the Grozăvești student hostel quarters.

the bombings. Once in a while we smoked some pot from a Polish guy called Tomek. Sometimes he was so high that he wasn't afraid of anything anymore. We were like a lost poets' club. In 1996 there arrived a group of girls who were members of Gregorian Bivolaru's Yoga Movement and who would have like us to become members too, but they ended up drinking with us ...

Life at Grozăvești was fabulous, a real tribal life. Whenever Leo cooked, you could smell the delicious smell all through the corridor. We would celebrate the day of the satisfied tongue, when we would eat like pigs. We had hot water at the showers all the time, and also sex ... I remember a story about a guy I had met in a pub, at the Butucei. The bar was ours, the guys in the tribe. The space belonged to the University and a guy called Radu Cartianu, the brother of the chap from Timpuri Noi, had rented it. Sometime in the summer of 1996 we all lived in the bar because we hadn't solved the accommodation problem yet. The whole thing was utterly demented; we even had a TV set there and we would all gather up to watch films; when people came in for a coffee, you could hear voices say, "Take your God-damned leg off my mattress, if you don't want trouble". And it was in the summer of 1996 that a guy, George Sfârșeală from Buzău, a painter, arrived. He was pretty talented and he just hanged around the Butucei; he picked up chicks with his painting and everything. From painting to sex there was only one small step. As he didn't have a room of his own and we, the merry urban tribe, were already crammed up in ours, where could he go? He usually took the girls to the showers. One evening he picked up a girl and off to the showers they went; 20 minutes later he showed up with blood on his face: "man, I slipped on the tiles at the showers and bumped my head on the glass walls! Well, we eventually took him to the hospital and it all ended well.

We were the Grozăvești nightmare for years on end. I lived in the D wings for four years.

Lady Viorica, the building administrator, gave me a room every year 'cause she had taken a fancy at me, and she would change it later so that I wouldn't get caught. At the time I was working at Tele7 TV station, at 2M+, at the *Național Daily*, the *Cotidianul Daily*, and at Mediafax news agency. The guys from the League also helped me get a room at the hostel. I often went with them, as I was pretty close to the student high circles: Marian Munteanu, Roncea, and The Movement for Romania ... I had my moments of "insanity". Cioran, Eliade and others like them also had their moments of "insanity", right? Why shouldn't I go crazy with Marian Munteanu's Movement for Romania? All intellectuals go through their moments of crisis.

The "Cross March" was organized in 1992. There was a powerful movement amongst students at the time demanding closer relationships with Basarabia, and an integration of the inhabitants of the province in the "Romanian cultural space"; that was when I met and befriended a lot of people from Basarabia. At Lent, a group of students left Chișinău on foot and they were met at the border by a numerous group of "martyrs" – I had remained in Bucharest because I was busy – among whom there was Rafael Udriște, Sorin Popescu and Romeo Moșoiu; they were the great "leaders". They proceeded on foot on a course from Iași to Bucharest. They brought a cross into the University Square; they went to the Patriarchy and attended the religious service; Teoctist himself, the Patriarch of Romania, came and gave them his blessing. They were all busy doing all these things. Strikes were the only occasion which still brought us together.

I hadn't been a personal witness to all these events. In 1990, when the events in University Square took place, I had heard of Marian Munteanu but I hadn't met him personally; I played some small part in the street riots 'cause I was somehow a street-meeting addict, a "punk". They had camped in front of the National Theatre but I can't remember very well. Frankly, at the time I was more interested in all

sorts of books I had always wanted and which I was finally able to find in bookshops. I can't say that I'm a very good observer even now. I used to hang around with the punkers at Piața Romana (*The Roman Square*) and The Museum of Romanian Literature. I once heard Pitiș say that, as he walked in the streets of London, he wasn't amazed to see a punker wearing their weird clothes and with a hair crest on his head in the middle of a discussion with a very serious businessman. I have always wanted to see such a thing going on in our streets too, so that I could feel the same sense of normality.

I would hang around in clubs too. There was Club A, then the one at the Faculty of Letters where I saw one of the last concerts performed by Roata – the owner of this club was Giuseppe, the guy who also owns the Surmont stores in Bucharest –, but I generally didn't have much time for these things: I was busy doing something a little more lucrative, namely sell tape cassettes in Piața Romană. I was in a fantastic punkers' gang with other weirdoes; I've even kept in touch with some of them. We would make handsome money from the selling of tape cassettes and records. In 1991 a tape cassettes was sold for 1000 lei, and in 1993 it was already worth 3000 of which we would get about a half. They cost 1500; there were some records registered under license in Russia and there were others produced by a guy, Andrei Tropilov. He was a painter from Sankt Petersburg who had opened a record store and a studio where he also did some recordings; he imported records under license and can you imagine what he would do next? He would modify the cover: the record, the music as such, would remain intact, and he would only modify the record covers and then he would sell them. Now they are valued at 500 euros each. With us, at Piața Romană, you could find anything you wanted. It was five or six of us. We found out that a guy had I don't know what

albums, we went at his place and made copies. That's what the 90s were to me. We would give the cops some of the profit or a beer; they were really tolerant ...

That was the beginning of the 90s: music, the possibility to look for anything and find anything you wanted and the knowledge that there were places in Bucharest where you could go to buy tape cassettes and records. CDs were still very expensive; you couldn't even consider buying them. The area between Piața Romană and University Square was the most sought for in Bucharest. For instance, Leo, a chap from our gang, sold tape cassettes and records at the University. There were people who would sell their stuff door to door at student hostels. They were very well connected guys who were supplied with tape cassettes which record companies from abroad would have destroyed and consequently, you could find some very interesting stuff with these guys. They sold cheap anyway. I would also go to festivals, such as Skip where I saw some great groups: Paradise Lost, Iron Maiden and so on. In 1994, as I hadn't got a ticket, I simply jumped over the fence and barely avoided being clubbed by the cops. I sold them some idiotic excuse; I used to have long hair and a gendarme asked when I had washed it last. I answered that it wasn't longer than that very morning because I wanted to go to the concert. He said, "I don't buy it." I said, "Go ahead and smell me." Then he asked, "Well, it's very nice that you washed your hair, but why don't have a ticket?" That was a great series of concerts. The concert performed by Timpuri Noi, for instance, it was after they had released that album with the picture of a child's head on the cover – it was a picture of Ion Rațiu actually. Then they went on to release an unplugged record of the concert at Ion Creanga Children's Theatre. There were also the concerts at Tei where you always had nasty scuf-

1 Grigore Preoteasa Students' House of Culture.

fles between rockers and punkers. The 90s were marked by the grudge that only here, in Romania, could be felt.

I remember that one year, right before April, there had appeared some posters announcing a Pink Floyd concert at Bucharest. The city was about to burst with excitement when they found out that the concert was actually a joke on Fool's Day. In the winter of 1996 I went to a concert at Preoteasa¹ and I was amazed at the launching concert for Domnișoara Pogany (*Miss Pogany*). In Grozăvești there had been only one big concert before the student strikes in 1995: the group in question was that of Grigore-musical-ear; they were decent enough to be taken for gigs abroad actually. They even released an album and they played at ProFM and 2M+ radio stations. I worked there too, at 2M+ radio station, when they were located in Victoria Square. There was a guy there, a certain Boby Torok, a Hungarian who had spent some time in America where he had been a member of some white supremacy groups. His show was a perpetual subject for scandal: for instance, he would

ask on air, "What on earth shall we do with our politicians?" And he also provided solutions: assassins on motorcycles as they had in Colombia.

Oh, let me tell you how I got my nickname: Gibson had just released his "Braveheart" and they said I looked exactly like one of the guys in the film, so they called me Braveheart. After a night of heavy drinking, one of the guys missed the name and pronounced it Belfast. That's how I got stuck with Belfast.

Let's go back to Grozăvești. We started leaving the place beginning with 1998. We couldn't make it there. We would keep going back there for a while and the last party was in December 2002. It was Leo's birthday. The main core of our gang was made of 10-15 guys but the rest kept changing. If we were to talk about the experiences each and every one of us went through, you'd get a volume thicker than the Encyclopaedia Britannica ...

Belfast

Translated by Alina Popescu





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My America

Cora Moțoc



I'm still seized by a sort of dumb nostalgia when I think of the 90s, the Revolution, the Topi-Top and Bonibon candies, of the protest or support marches, of the miners' revolts and of Petre Roman, of the high-waist, pleated violet (or indigo) blue jeans, of the tightly-fit dresses and the knee-high leather boots (a little like Julia Roberts' in *Pretty Woman*), of the Elton John, Sinead O'Connor, Glen Medeiros and Roxette videos, of the small corner shops (their ancestors, actually) selling Turkish cheap goods, of the juice distribution-machines where you got unnaturally-tasting, funny-coloured beverages, of the chewing-gum wrapped in pictures of famous football players (the pictures were usually those of van Basten and Ruud Gullit) or of sport cars, of skipping school to see a teenager-show hosted by a girl called Ambra on Rai Uno (she would always wear the coolest of outfits), of *Lambada* and the Adidas Torsion TV ad ... But that's only natural: I was a teenager back then. I only missed one year of the decade: the year when I went on a scholarship to the States.

I had no idea about the Romanian government's scholarship politics. The National Bureau for Scholarships Abroad was set up in 1998, and I had been to the States on scholarship from 1995 till 1996. Everything was still at the beginning; people either improvised a lot or followed old procedures. We were the Guinea pigs for an

entire host of education experiments: we had been the first generation not to go through an exam to pass from the 10th to the 11th grade, the first or the second generation to study in the modern languages department (we were obviously considered a bunch of pariahs compared to the Brahmans from the mathematics-physics department, and that situation went on even after we had begun to take part in school competitions), and the first to put their education on hold in order to study on a scholarship abroad.

My departure to the States, where I was to study in a public high school for a year, had come somewhat as a surprise: it was the result of a mind-blowing series of events and happy coincidences. I'm still brooding over that particular occurrence.

One of the English teachers in our high school was an American who had come all the way from Alaska to teach us. She had come to Romania through the Peace Corps Organization. She taught feminist American literature, everybody wanted to marry her off to some Romanian guy, and she had never heard of Anthony Quinn. One day we received an official announcement from the State Department offering 5 AYUSA (Academic Year in the United States) scholarships: a public high school, "accommodation" at an American family and all the other goodies. *The catch* was that only one of five was a fully-

funded scholarship. For the remaining four, transportation was not included. I had never before seen a one-dollar bill, let alone 1253 of them. That was the cost of a two-way ticket, plus three-day accommodation in Washington DC. My folks were both teachers, and we weren't strangers to scrapping in our wallets for some change to buy bread, but the matter of actually owning a pair of blue jeans and a leather jacket, like the rest of my mates, had been decided over once and for all. I had gone over the initial trauma and I had adopted a Chekhovian style wearing long skirts, extra-large jumpers and boots that would have looked familiar to a Russian kolkhoz worker.

The catalyst in my struggle for the New World was my mother. I was keen on going but I knew that we were short on cash and that my only chance was to get the fully-funded scholarship. I was floating in an atmosphere of dim frustration which was sending low frequency waves to my stomach, as if I had had a tank in there. "You're nagging me with that English stuff of yours but you haven't proven anything yet. First, try and see if you get chosen. Maybe you're not even as good as you think you are. If you manage to get one of the scholarships, I'll sell some of the stuff in the house and we'll send you there." I gave it a shot. There were 300 candidates and many stages: a file, an essay, a written examination and an interview with a professor from the English department at the University of Bucharest and with an American guy (someone from the Embassy most probably). The final exam was held in Bucharest; I had a 38 degrees fever and went in third for the interview; I remember quoting from Bobby Kennedy (a risky, yet inspired move).

Two months later I received a phone call. I was second on the list. It figured! Why should I have a peaceful summer? All summer long, with father as my companion, I gathered (i.e. begged for) money from all kinds of people who thought

that I was a worthy investment. We managed to collect the whole sum only one day before I left and we made the transfer. I left on the 11th of August. I was flying to the state of New York, "somewhere near Rochester". The rest of my Romanian mates went to different other places. At the airport we were all wearing AYUSA T-shirts so that we could be easily recognized, and we were even asked if we were from the gymnastics team headed for the Atlanta Olympics. When I arrived in Rochester I couldn't make out a thing of what the policewoman at the desk told me. Well, it happens. It still happens that I don't always manage to understand everything that is said with that nasal "Rochester-like" accent. But back then I almost burst into tears when, after three repetitions, I still couldn't understand a thing. She gave up and let me pass. I used to look less suspicious then.

Well, if Rochester hadn't thrown into fits of excitement, when I arrived at my final destination, I realized that the following year would be one of initiation. I was in the very heart of America. I had hit the core of it. I was *in the middle of nowhere*, as they say, meaning in the very core of nothingness. "The town" where I was supposed to spend my next year was called Ontario. It was made up of about fifty houses, a gas station and a drugstore. Then came the sweeping plain, fruit trees, a highway and, of course, Lake Ontario which was still at some distance from where I would live. It's cool for a week. It's like a week's vacation at a sanatorium: you sleep, take long walks and meditate. But one whole year in such a painfully normal place, as the Americans refer to it, can make you go nuts. I was somehow like the lady from the Peace Corps, who had told us about the scholarships. The only notable difference was that I was there to study, not to teach, there was nobody interested in marrying me off and I knew fully well who Mircea Albulescu¹ was (just for the sake of the comparison).

¹ Famous Romanian actor.

The time I spent in school was sometimes funny, and sometimes annoying but pretty easy-going compared to what I had to go through in Romania. My first essay in English literature was posted on the wall-gazette. (Yesssssss!) We did old English literature for one semester, and my American mates were positively horrified: they read Chaucer “translated” in American English or with the aid of a dictionary, if they dared, and watched video tapes with Hamlet (the Mel Gibson, not the Laurence Olivier version). I had known the “*thine own self be true*” and “*to be or not to be*” stuff from back home ‘cause we stood no chance of cheating with our English teacher. I had some problems with the vowels but in the end it all worked out. I will never forget the shock that I caused when I pronounced “*shit*” instead of “*sheet*”, “*bitch*” instead of “*beach*” and “*piss*” instead of “*peace*”.

The thing that proved the death of me was (again, obsessively) feminist literature. I asked the teacher to prepare an alternative reading list for those who did not find Toni Morrison and Gloria Steinem appealing. I think Mrs. Strickland (the English teacher, that is) was a bit horrified to discover that I liked Hemingway and Tennessee Williams, but she soon realized that I came from a patriarchal culture and it wouldn’t have been wise to push enlightenment down my throat.

The rest could be described as a series of strict rules combined with the freedom of choice given to students. You were not allowed to keep your cap on (the famous baseball cap which is part and parcel of any American wardrobe) during classes or chew gum. You weren’t allowed to run on the corridors, although the break between classes lasts no longer than two minutes and you had to get from one place to another carrying a pile of books. You needed a special written permission from the teacher if you wanted to get out of the classroom during class. But you were free to come to school barefoot (in summer some would wear slippers to school), ask the funniest questions, contradict what the

teacher and address them by their Christian names. You were also more than welcome to sit on the library floor and read undisturbed while sitting on the fitted carpet.

What made feel really uncomfortable was the 8 am class on the first day at school (and all the 8 am classes that followed) when, as I was seated at my desk, minding my own business, I suddenly saw my classmates standing up, facing the flag, taking their right hand to their hearts and beginning to utter the flag oath (they were accompanied by a voice coming from the speakers in the classroom). I was kindly explained that it was done at the beginning of each school day and that I was invited to join in. I opted for civil disobedience and remained seated.

During my year in America I satisfied my strangest desires: I went to the audition for the school choir and the teacher gave me a musical score (most American students play at least one instrument), but I explained that I had a very good singing voice. I could sing only by ear and I made a demonstration with Ella Fitzgerald; I entered the school music hall, which premiered at Christmas; I did community service at a senior citizens’ home where I played bingo and the winners got candy for prizes; I did babysitting and washed cars at a gas station for some extra cash; I went to a classical music concert at the Rochester Philharmonic and I sailed down the Niagara by the “Maid of the Mist”; I wrote an essay on Orwell and one on *The Rhinoceros* by Ionesco for a literature contest; I applied for Harvard Law School and failed; they would have accepted me at Northeastern but I gave up sending the necessary document on time; I traveled as far as I could between Boston and California.

Bottom line, I managed to get through that year, I learnt a lot, but I decided that I was hyperventilated by the American vastness, that I was getting too fat because of American food, that I tended to get lost in the neighbourhoods with identical houses, that I reacted violently to hypocrite politeness and that I generally preferred Europe.

I returned with the full conviction that my year there would be validated and I would go straight for faculty. What followed were countless trips to the Ministry of Culture building and just as many failed negotiations. My diploma was never validated because they said that they did not study the same subject matters in the States. I still can't fathom where I could have studied Romanian language and literature in the States but that matters little now. I managed to win a

battle though: I didn't have to repeat the year. All I had to do was to pass the school-leaving examination, meaning that I spent one year waiting for that opportunity.

The topic we had to discuss at the exam was from Mircea Eliade and I took that for a sign. And a sign it sure was.

Translated by Alina Popescu





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Scholarships for studying abroad during the '90s

Alexandru Bălşescu



The scholarship, meaning the purse with gold (or silver) pieces offered by various education institutions or by organizations/ foundations, like Soros, to students from Romania, was (and still is) an opportunity which is viewed from a variety of perspectives by each individual. I am the fortunate beneficiary of such an opportunity. I shall briefly recount what and how it happened and how I perceived/ still perceive the series of events which has brought me here (meaning to Teheran at the moment and to Bahrain in general).

My story can only refer to education in the field of social sciences and I cannot presume to generalize... I began my studies in sociology in 1993 – I think that the Soros foundation had arrived to Romania a year earlier and this was among the first pieces of information that I acquired at the faculty: Soros was giving scholarships to those who wanted to study abroad. It wasn't until 1995 that I discovered how things were supposed to proceed: I was in Prague at a conference on civil society from the perspective of European enlargement, which was organized by the afore-mentioned foundation. I liked it there and I began to think of getting a more consistent experience abroad. The idea of continuing my studies abroad was born on that occasion. Only later did I begin to understand the mechanisms behind scholarships and their diversity.

Were I to classify and qualify them, I would say that there were long-term scholarships (M.A. and doctoral programmes) and institutional or individual scholarships which somehow coincided with the place: institutional scholarships in Europe and individual scholarships in the US. These are of course very broad definitions ...I mean, the European “money purses” were received from continental institutions or through continental programmes, which were represented in Romania, such as Tempus, Tempra, Socrates etc. ... all sorts of names which sent to a more or less imagined antiquity ... They involved prior and independent acceptance from a chosen University and an examination of the programme by a jury. One implied condition was scientific, theoretical and physical involvement in one network or another, meaning placing yourself under the patronage of one or more personalities. My first scholarship was through the Tempra programme, it was for a DEA in Lyon.

The American “money purses”, a lot more sought for back then (I'm not aware of the current situation), stood under the sign of intellectual adventurism: it was necessary that the student should pass the TOEFL language test, the GRE “intelligence” test which contained the same kind of problems and picture puzzles that one could have found in Romanian magazines during the communist period, before the arrival

of the coloured pictures in the publications nowadays; the student was also required to translate a series of essays or students' papers and to try and get recommendation letters (or just signatures on already written letters) from professors with whom he/ she had closely worked. The candidate was also supposed to spend some time on the Internet (a novelty at that time) and to select a series of universities where he/ she intended to apply. Due to the high cost of each application (an average of 50 USD per university), this lottery depended on the financial power each person had. If you were rather well-off, you had the possibility to apply for more universities ... The average recommended number was 5; I really don't know why ... All documents had to be placed in nice bubble envelops and sent via air mail to resounding addresses ... As a colleague and good friend insisted, who is now in a doctoral programme at Columbia University, in New York, I participated in the recommended average number of applications and found myself, after the French DEA, at the University of Columbia, Irvine, in a doctoral programme at the department of anthropology. The scholarship was offered by the Centre for European and German Studies at Berkley. This is the point at which we begin to observe the similarities between the European and the American systems. In the American case, those who examine the student's application file try to obtain a scholarship from an institution somewhat independent from the university (in case the university doesn't have enough money). The difference between this system and the European one is that more often than not the student and the intellectual patron have never met. Happiness or deception with erotic undertones take place after the student is admitted in the educational factory across the Ocean.

I couldn't exactly tell why I had chosen Irvine and I even remember being asked about it several times, and each time I gave a different answer, while being secretly convinced that that would be my opportunity to meet the California

of the 60s. I was sorely mistaken but that's another story ...

Let me go back to the theme regarding the "possibilities" of getting a scholarship abroad. The prior conditions regarded general education, being fluent in one foreign language or another weighing as a decisive element ... my French was rather bad, yet there were some signs of us being somewhat familiar (I had after all spent 10 years trying to learn it ... These conditions had also to do with curricular activities during the faculty graduation exam (what we could abstractly call "merit"), with more or less fortunate life occurrences and decisive encounters and with the financial power the student/ his family had if the student aimed at getting an American scholarship ... It sounds rather Marxist, I'm sorry, but the costs of the above-mentioned procedures, including the costs for legalizing all necessary documents, easily reached the sum of 600 dollars, and that was quite a fortune ten years ago (and I believe it still is for most students nowadays).

I don't think that I would exaggerate things if I said that the desire to "leave" was a general feeling among my faculty colleagues, but information and awareness of the possibilities and the real conditions were really insufficient. It so happens that most of my friends (from sociology or Letters) left on scholarships: some came back, others are still wandering ... I had a colleague with the funniest trajectory which went straight against the general flow: he went to Moscow for a MA programme. The fact that his name was Ivan could have helped him. I met him at the Dales Bookshop in the summer of 2001, if memory serves. He told me that he intended to go to the West after having figured out how things went in the East. My case appears to be a mirror case: after experiencing the Wild West, I'm headed for the Exotic East ...

Translated by Alina Popescu



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Bucharest-Cluj, via Ploiești
Short History of the Long Making of a Doctor
within the Private Romanian Teaching System

Daniela Alexandrescu



1991 was the year when I passed and at the same time failed my university admission exam. Chronologically, because emotionally things were different, this is the short story: I had failed the admission exam for the public University and nothing else really mattered, in spite of the fact that my folks were really happy for me being a student within the private teaching system.

My dad had come, soon after passing my baccalaureate exam, pay attention that we registered you at the ecologists and you are going to sit the exam in a week. I had a go at them because I didn't want there, I wanted to attend a public university. And I went to sit the exam. One can never know...The exam, an intelligence test. I had a great time in solving the logical problems and I was among the first students who entered the University. Now, you are already a student, you will be completely relaxed during your admission exam at the public university and you will succeed, my folks used to encourage me.

The exam for the public university practically consisted of three exams: Physics, Biology and Chemistry. The first year with a multiple choice test. I used to take up tutorials in Physics, had been submitted to various tests in Biology and had refused to attend the Chemistry tutorials after a month because I didn't like the teacher. I flunked with flying colours.

That's it, I shall work for a year and sit the

exam again next year. I had graduated from the Health Secondary School, I had good grades and the possibility to get a job as nurse anywhere I wanted. My folks were absolutely against the idea, saying that if I had started to work, I wouldn't have felt like learning. And mark my words, said my dad, the best universities in the West are private, where not anybody can get in. These are at the beginning, but you will see that in years we will have the same situation. And then there had followed the enumeration: the boy or girl of such and such person, good kids as well, also attend private universities. There was a generation behind which could have been my example. And the supreme argument: the rector was a Jew, that is one can imagine his money and influence, and that he will bring the best teachers and you will have indisputably better conditions than those in the public university. I very hardly fell for the compromise: to attend their courses for a year and then to try again at the public. And I kept on fantasizing: I shall pass the exam but since I am already going to be familiar with the subjects, I shall cumulate two years in one.

And this is how I started University.

There were several lecture rooms spread all over the city. The labs for the practical course were quite all right: substances and instrumentarium for Biochemistry, ingenious appliances for experiments in Biophysics and computers for

Biomathematics. And for Anatomy, the paradise of dissections- the Medico-Legal Institute. The Rector had publicly stated his intention to build a university campus in the next few years and there were already rumours among the students regarding the area under discussion.

The teachers had either taught in the Medical schools in the country and had been retired- some of them surprising us due to their intellectual vivacity- or had come from the research field, or were sharing their time between the lectures in a public university and those in our university. I have beautiful memories with some people who were retired, but whose lectures were a real pleasure to attend.

We were a very heterogeneous crowd. Some colleagues were in the same situation as I was, meaning they had recently graduated from the secondary school and had directly joined the University, some of them without even trying to sit an exam at the public university. There was a rumour that a girl had actually entered 'Carol Davila' University but had preferred to come to the Ecological University. Others ended up there after a series of fails in the exams at the public university- the old-timers had failed 6 or 7 times. Some were working in order to support themselves, the occupational range being very wide: there were people working as nurses, secretaries, doorkeepers or guardians. Some had their own business. One of the colleagues had no problem in accepting that she was prostituting herself. There were also students who had already graduated from a faculty. The most unusual cases were that of a lady engineer in her late fifties, who had discovered and patented a cure for burns but which she couldn't legally apply because she wasn't a doctor and that of her adoptive son. The lady, a more diligent student than her son and then most of us, was going to literally retire while in school, but, in spite of the ironies targeted at her by the majority of our colleagues, she was going to get the much desired diploma. There were also foreign students among us- not Arabs or Greeks, like in the public

University, but a Spaniard and an Italian girl. The former had a brother, also a student of the same university, but in the previous year. Spanish citizens, the brothers were actually Romanians and their family had a long time ago settled in Spain. Their father had a clinic there and he was really determined to have his children schooled according to the Romanian medical tradition in order to make them worthy followers. Within the same unusual frame we can include the several nuns-only one of them was going to graduate.

The motivations for attending the medical school varied from vocation, to searching for a respectable social status or for a profitable job (at the beginning of the '90s being a doctor was still associated with certain advantages, one of the yardsticks for measuring the validity of this assumption being the ferocious competition during the admission exam at the public university), to the continuation of a family tradition or to getting over the frustration one of the parents had for not having been able to do it himself/herself up to getting the title of doctor without the intention of the possessor to ever put in practice what he had learnt or to the mere investment of some time and money into an academic activity.

The fee wasn't very high, as compared to the average wage. The faculty granted only one research scholarship for the highest grade on each semester (if there was more than one person with the same grade, the sum would be shared).

I was pleased, I liked medicine, I had pretty good research conditions, I got used to the mixed student environment, my parents were backing me up so I decided to carry on within the same university.

During the next summer of the first academic year, there were many of my colleagues who went to sit the exam for the public university. Some of them made it, others were accepted for money, but they gave up in order not to lose the year they had already passed.

The next two years passed without any significant event in my life. Some of my colleagues

abandoned the faculty, finding various other orientations, from dentistry to social assistance within the private or the public teaching system. One of my colleagues became an instructor within the Waldorf School. Others didn't manage to get through the ordeal by fire called Pharmacology. Very few went abroad. At the end of this period of time, the ones who were left had to take an exam at the most important pre-clinic subjects. Everybody passed the exam, even if announced as eliminatory, the faculty organizing also a second session of exams. The first ten students took part in an day-school programme, organized by the faculty, together with two hospitals in Bucharest. The students used to work as outer personnel in the surgery and internal medicine sections, benefiting from a scholarship from the faculty. The programme was at a certain moment ceased, after the first probation period, I cannot tell why.

In the fourth year, we started to hear for the first time about the notification for crediting and unfolding of teaching activities. We say that as more than normal. Some of our colleagues had been transferred from other private faculties, including from other cities- a considerable number of students had come from Iași – in search for better teaching conditions. Some also had migrated from our university. To the comparisons between the private and the public system, not always made in favour of the latter, there had been added those between various private faculties. Nobody was yet discussing disestablishing any of the schools. The University, initially, a Ltd. Company had functioned from then on being coordinated by a recently constituted foundation, the Romanian Athenaeum – the accent being deliberately switched from the economic status, which was obviously placing the strongly promoted non-profit condition under question - to the academic status.

The next year, things started to change. C.N.E.A.A (The National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation) was asking the Universities to fulfil a series of conditions in

order to get the accreditation, some of the most important being reduced to having their own teaching staff (but which was obviously going to be appointed by already acknowledged faculties) and their own space. The problem of the clinic spaces had already been very ingeniously and cheaply solved by the rectorship: as the hospitals in Bucharest were a battlefield for the public medical faculty, already with traditional rights and for all the speciality faculties from the private universities in the capital city, they simply moved the centre of interest to Ploiești. The students in the two final years in the Ecologic University in Bucharest had therefore undergone their clinical probation time in hospitals in Ploiești. That was a long period of time when I used to commute almost every day. At a quarter to seven I used to be around Universității Square, next to the Rector's Office. We would get in the buses the faculty had given us and would thus head to Ploiești. The lucky ones would still manage to get an hour of sleep in the car. In what regards the trip, I remember a spring with fields of red lollypops, the long conversations on various themes and certain houses we used to look for every morning. The buses were dropping us off at the key points near the hospitals where we were undertaking the probations, and they were picking us up from the same spots. And we had to be there at the fixed time, or we were going to get back home by train. I have the most diverse memories from this period of time: the filthy sheets from the dermatology clinic, the mornings when we used to start our probation programme a bit late because of a coffee drank in some tavern, the professionalism of the doctors in the haematology or cardiology departments, the day when we spent about two hours on a lawn around the train station because we had missed the bus. And only one regret: that in almost one year of commuting to Ploiești I didn't go to see the Museum of Watches. When coming back, we usually ate the sandwich we had made at home. Because the day wasn't over. In the afternoon you

had to attend the courses from the residences in Bucharest.

On the score of the news regarding the accreditation of the Vasile Goldiș Medical Faculty in Arad, many of my colleagues had moved there, even if they had to retake a year or two, because the institution, initially a subsidiary of the Ecologic Faculty, had been set up only in 1992. Rumours had it that some persons had managed to transfer even to public faculties.

The academic year 1996-1997 brought with it a more uncertain situation: inspections from the C.N.E.A.A, memoirs, public manifestations, protests organized by the Union of Students from the Carol Davila University, the public medical faculty, transfers from one private faculty to another and back, the failed attempt to create a university fusion. Our medical faculty hadn't been accredited. Everybody was looking for somebody to blame and they used to put the blame on everything: the lack of honesty of the councils, the conspiracy organized by all the other private institutions, the rector's Judaism, the policy of the government. The solution that C.N.E.A.A proposed for the graduates from the non-accredited faculties was that of a national exam consisting of a selection of subjects taught during their university years. Only those passing it would have been granted the right to take part in the graduation examinations. The filter subjects, term which replaced the official one of selection subjects, were more consistent in what concerned the medical school than those for the resident exam. And it additionally comprised the pre-clinic subjects taught in the first half of the faculty.

I didn't attend the first session of that filter exam, organized in Cluj. It was too close to the ending of the academic year. Our rectorship had set an additional test, baptized 'graduation exam', which consisted of an internal medicine test, a surgery test and the last one for which you could choose between paediatrics and gynaecology and back then it used to advise us not to go to Cluj. Those who still wanted to take the selec-

tion exam couldn't get their registration certificate, a compulsory document for the test, without previously having passed the graduation exam. All the more, we were still hoping for the better. Yet, nothing changed. I joined the public protests for a while. Then I made up my mind. The next summer- the initially announced session from February, had been cancelled- I was going to sit the filter exam. I mugged, getting together with a few colleagues and reading not only the treatises in the bibliography, but also a manual of semiology published in Cluj. We had been warned by those who had already sit the exam over the difference between the academic languages in various university centres: Cluj was closer to the German school, while the faculties in the south were especially connected to the French clinic teaching system.

The very matriculation day, a few minutes before, I had found out that the medical school within Titu Maiorescu University had been accredited. Some of my colleagues went home, being sure that they were going to have the possibility to get a transfer there.

The exam was, indubitably, the toughest of my life. A week before and even during the exam, I reread hundreds of pages daily. We had six days of exams: five in a row, consisting of theoretical testing based on the multiple choice test and another day, two or three days after the first five, consisting in the practical exam. The results were given the same evening. The tension was terrible. I had never seen so many people bursting into tears when seeing a grade higher than 5. I could see how, day after day, the doctors watching over us during the exam, finding out that we had passed another test, had a different look in their eyes. For the practical exam we had been one by one taken to the ward, through very well delineated spaces, which allowed no potential crossing with other candidates, in order to take the clinic diagnosis test and then to another two rooms for the interpretation of some tests or of an electrocardiogram and after that of a radiography. Indeed, schools were different. A col-

league of mine who was very appreciated for his clinic sense had failed the practical test for such an incongruity. After having passed the exam I was more convinced than ever that I wasn't able to fail any exam I would have wanted to pass.

The colleagues who either didn't sit the exam or had failed one or more tests, could indeed transfer, after a simple test, to the accredited medical school within Titu Maiorescu University. Yet, even if being ready to take their graduation exam, they had the surprise to be sent back home the same day. They were granted the right to take part in the exam only during the next session. The ones who had moved to Arad had also graduated from the faculty, which had been meanwhile accredited, and could take the gradu-

ation exam. Anyway, those of us who had successfully passed the filter exam came back to Cluj the same autumn of 1998 to sit our graduation exam. During the same period of time or a bit later, I had received an invitation from the Ecological University. It was addressed to all the graduates from the Medical Faculty. I didn't go. I found out from my pals who had attended the meeting that the Rectorship had awarded them a certain 'excellency diploma'. This is how my medical school student years came to an end. In what concerns the apprenticeship years, those of the resident probation, this is another history. For the next decade.

Translated by Raluca Vîjăiac



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Fragments from his diary in Iberia

Petre Popovăţ

When, in 1998, I had the chance to take a one-month unexpected trip to Spain and Portugal, I had decided to keep a 'travel diary' for the first time in my life. At the beginning, I conceived it only for myself, in order to be able to remember after a while where I had been and what I had seen.

I used to write it on the spot, 'down on my knees', on a notebook or, at most, writing down my daily impressions during the evening. Hence, it was written while in action, without letting myself driven in the subsequent interventions of improving the style or of completing the information. It is presented as raw material, without having been submitted to montage.

Once in Bucharest, I read it to some of my friends. Now I shall reveal certain fragments of it. I hope that the impact felt by a Romanian (completely caught unaware) when in touch with the fascinating Iberia will be noticed.

Sunday, 3rd May, 1998. [...] I fell in love with Spain ever since in the plane. When, among clouds, the Spanish land finally appears, you cannot prevent yourself from having a shock. It is a really special landscape. The land, recently ploughed, has all colours: ochre (all shades), yellow, brick-red, up to Pompeian red. I don't know how the lots are divided, but the delineations have the most unusual shapes. They are not rect-

angular, but round and very irregular. Seen from above, you may think that is a copper plate with integrated circuits. [...]

Tuesday, 5th May, '98. A little more vernal. Walked through the city and seen the city centre (Plaza Mayor) which saved the reputation of the city a little bit because, between you and me, this is a bit nasty. New houses, facing brick, posh bad taste. I cannot say I am crazy for Benavente. I have barely seen two girls worthy of you turning your head after them. All the rest- dull and dressed like servants.

The bars- the same as up to now. For each glass of wine you are given (the price included in that of the wine) a 'pincho': a little bowl with 4-5 olives (incredibly tasty!) or some anchovies, or I don't know what else. Yet, there is hardly any ashtray in the entire bar! The cigarettes, paper napkins, olive pits are elegantly (this is a must if you don't want to make a complete fool of yourself!), thrown on the floor and next to the counter, there is a thick layer of filth. At the beginning I was shocked, but now I almost like the custom. There is certain voluptuousness in throwing everything on the floor...People are extremely friendly (especially with the Bavarian people we have just separated from).

After lunch, a *paseo en la ciudad*. A couple of Roman churches (one with a Spanish baroque

portal dated 1735). If the touch of time were still present and the facades weren't restored (99% with the obsessive facing brick), you would really feel like in a Spanish city, exactly the way you would have imagined it. Yet...Everything seems like fabric.

On our trips by car (about 10-15 kilometres) we find many dovecots down the fields. Specific countryside architecture made of pressed soil, with some high briquettes. I have seen only a dove, even if Alvaro says he is seeing thousands of them. Doves are edible and (Alvaro dixit as well) very good for fertilizing the soil. Yet, I wonder how they train them just to leave their droppings on the field without eating the grains.

The fields are opened (thousands of hectares mostly unproductive). They look weird and while among them, I keep on thinking that if I had been Don Quixote, I would have had exactly the same behaviour. It is difficult not to lose your mind and not to have hallucinations. Still, I have seen a very little and insignificant part of Spain. Will I ever see the rest? For the moment I have been promised a ten-day trip to Lisbon.

Friday, 8th May. [...] This part of Castilla reminds me of Dobrudja: in what concerns the light and the sound of silence (stupid figure of speech, but perfect if you want to render reality)

We have dinner in a fabulous restaurant, at Pobladura del Valle (12 km from Benavente). Outside there is a stone frontage and when you enter the restaurant you realize that you are in an old taphouse (wine cellar) carved in the bank of the ravine. The walls are made of clay. On one of the walls there is an engraving: 1851. This is a huge underground cave, something wonderful! High canopies and a projector at ground level (on the respective ravine). Some crazy foods are ordered: fried pig blood in onion, spice sausage boiled in wine, slices of a sort of a very dry *jamón* (apparently ass meat) and some other tomfoolery which now, after a few hours, burn my stomach and I dread to think of what they will burn tomorrow. But tomorrow is another day!

P.S. The wine cellar- is decorated with wooden ethnographic objects (winegrower and peasant tools) worthy of a museum. In the centre, an impressive winepress, with stones and a screw. Everything is authentic and denoting good-taste. Alvaro says that almost all peasants in the area used to have such wine cellars and that the one we see is not one of the biggest.

Saturday, 9th May [...] In what regards the style. I can see that the Portuguese have a very special type of humour. One says to the other: 'There is somebody looking for you...' - 'Who?' asks the fooled. - 'Un caralho!' (a penis) And the rest of them keep on laughing for half an hour. This would be nothing, but the joke keeps on being made on and on. *Caralho* is a word they use almost all the time. They must be obsessed. As a matter of fact, it keeps on appearing in the riffraff songs I keep on hearing. The word is respectfully uttered, almost in adoration. They are all mad as a March hare (and loud, on top of it all!)

I used to read in a French novel about the habit of the Portuguese males to caress their *caralho* in public, as if a natural gesture. I immediately connected this with one of Mario's gestures, which kept on driving me mad and Mario was Brazilian (another type of Portuguese). I could see the gesture in Carlos, when he came to Bucharest. Now Jorge also obeys the national gesture. I am surprised that Alvaro didn't take after them. Disgraceful, gross, idiotic.

At midnight, we all head towards Portugal in a full van, with three narrow seats in front. There are three of us and I am not small. Jorge is driving and in order not to fall asleep, he is singing (yelling) his lungs out 'Oh, meu caralho! etc etc.' It is cold in the car, it's not possible for me to fall asleep and we arrive at our destination around seven in the morning, on full rain. [...]

Sunday, 10th May. Today, after finishing eating, we stopped on the beach for a while, I en-

tered the ocean with my shoes on, had a drink of salty water (not like that in the Black Sea) and starred at the big and yet calm waves in awe. The water is silvery and the ocean looks like an old serious man who knows his power and sends controlled waves to the shore, until he gets mad and sends waves big as a house. Well and truly, this is terribly beautiful and impressive! [...]

Thursday, 14th May. I forgot the essential: I went to Cabo da Roca in the afternoon, the most occidental European place (latitude: 38° 47' North, longitude: 9° 30' east, altitude: 140 metres). 'This is where earth ends and the sea begins' (Camoës). The place is strange because winds blow from all directions. (The sea is wide open' – Tudor Mușatescu). The sky was cloudy and the sun (at its sunset, not at that of Europe) was sending three beams through the clouds. There were three light discs on the ocean (the beams reflected), which managed to make one think of something supernatural. Yet, that was the end of the world. Since it was late, Carlos promised me to come back tomorrow, to get my diploma. Actually, a certificate stating the fact that in such and such day I was present in the most Western European point.

Friday, 15th May. [...] I got the certificate which says: 'The undersigned certifies the fact that Petre Popovăț visited Cabo da Roca (Sintra-Portugal), the most occidental point of the European continent, 'where earth ends and the sea begins', 'where the spirit of Faith and Adventure lies, which pushed the Portuguese caravels towards searching for new worlds for the world' Sintra, 15th May, 1998 (ss) Undecipherable'. After that, they applied the wax seal with the insignia of the city hall. [...]

Thursday, 21st May. A few things about the Portuguese... (Research on 38 persons between 4 and 72 years old. Margin for error: $\pm 99\%$). They are extremely hospitable. I found out that Carlos' family makes no exception. My heart

breaks when seeing them sleeping: Mariana and Marta in a cot and underneath, on a mattress, the lamp-post of Carlos. This, while I keep on staying comfortably in their double bed (hélas!)

They are friendly and open. The 18-19 year old kiddos, Rui's friends, call me 'Petre' and 'you' without being disrespectful. They are smiling most of the time and are quite generous. I recently met Antonio and he gave me a ride through the entire Lisbon and he didn't drop his bundle till feeding me the inevitable *bacalhão* (cod) at a certain inn. Jorge invites me over and then shows me Lisbon during the night and we don't enter any bar because I don't want to. (...)

The Portuguese are conceited. For them, in their country everything is 'the most': the biggest factory in the world, the eldest settlement in the world, the most expensive in Europe, the most beautiful in the world etc. There is no point in trying to get this out of their minds. They are so childish! But maybe this is their charm.

The Portuguese ladies are very fond of kissing (women with men). I am in a house and a couple shows up; the lady kisses me on both cheeks and afterwards she introduces herself. He hugs me as if being his best friend and after that he also introduces himself.

The Portuguese are lousy drivers. They love speed but they are completely uncivilised down the streets. They curse and stick the middle finger to each other and don't help those stuck in the traffic.

They speak a lot, fast, loudly but... in Portuguese. You look at them feeling like a bum and they keep on explaining something to you for half an hour and at the end they ask you: *entiendes?* What shall you do? You nod. But you got scratch. You tell them in Spanish (all Portuguese understand Spanish, but they feel amazed and indignant when the Spanish don't understand them) speaking slowly and using short sentences. They answer back in a verbal triad, in Portuguese, while you yawn, minding your own business. It's pointless to try to keep

the pace. It's true, those of them who have been to Romania complain about us doing the same thing. [...]

Saturday, 23rd May. A visit to Expo '98! The last world exhibition of the century! Yesterday they had the official opening. I expected to see quite a crowd, but many people had probably thought the same and didn't show up. The exhibition is big, perhaps huge. The entrance ticket costs 5000 escudos, around 30 USD. Very few places in the shade, no place to drink water for free. Official languages: Portuguese, English, Spanish. Why Spanish and not French? Any Spaniard can understand if he reads Portuguese, especially if looking for identically spelled words on the signposts.

I feel amazed when seeing a plan written in Braille. At the beginning, I praise the organizers who take care of our peers in need. Then, I ask myself: blind people are going to know how the pavilions are disposed in order to see WHAT? I would call it black humour if I didn't know that it is stupidity sans frontières.[...]

[...] I visit the Romanian pavilion. In a space a bit bigger than a bachelor flat in Berceni, the exhibition is dedicated to the Danube Delta. On the right side- a fishing boat, up on the left side- a screen with some dull, ugly, mute images. On the middle, about five or six ex-comrades. Pathetic. The personnel: three or four blondes who can speak Portuguese. On a wall- the Romanian Peasant Museum shop window! It comprises a horrible Lippovan costume, a Macedonian one (of the same quality), a Romanian one and the last one, a Tartar costume (the nations have been alphabetically grouped...) I had no idea that Romania is a multinational state. There is no explanation, either for the meaning of the word *Lippovans* or for the presence of the Macedonians when the pavilion of the Macedonian country is placed a few yards away. Next to the costumes, there is the 'Triumph' poster. If you are not an expert, you don't understand any-

thing. Or, even worse, you get it wrong.

A funerary stele from Histria, two coils of rope aimed at suggesting the fact that they pertain to the same époque (even if almost new). In a small shop window, the Hamangia replica with the following explanation: 'The Thinker and his woman (his wife). The Hamangia culture' It's clear, isn't it? What could a Swedish or an American have made of it? In the end, another small shop window with a few jewellerys, Macedonian as well.

A CD Rom allows you to pick up images with about twenty Romanian personalities (Brâncuși, Enescu, Cioran, Mircea Eliade, Ilie Năstase, Palade, etc). They are all with their mouse on Nadia Comăneci. I take a look as well: recent photos, together with Ion Iliescu, during the wedding etc. Everything is awkward if not outrageous!!!! [...]

[...] And...finally, the Utopia show! In a room of 10 000 places, a show like nothing I (or the others!) have ever seen. Lights, sounds, remarkable effects (directed by means of forty computers), people flying and dancing in the air without any visible sustaining cable, the ocean suggested by a huge cloth partially filled with air and which let dragons out or the statue of Liberty as a naked woman, lying, of whose sex a door opens and a character shows up. Not even the smallest obscenity! The folder I took with me explains everything better. I am speechless with enthusiasm. An absolutely grandiose show, organized by Canadians, Belgians, Frenchmen, Americans, Portuguese. [...]

Sunday, 24th May. [...] Deep in the mountains, right in the middle of the forest, Alvaro shows me the house which he inherited from an aunt. A complete wrack, also made of stone and on the frontal, the date: 1839. I liked the system they had for marking the borders of the property. An old neighbour showed us a hole in the stone next to the house threshold. From that hole, you had to measure a few metres. From the

house corner, also in a stone, a barely visible cross was carved. From then on you had to measure other meters, so and so forth. The signs were remembered by all neighbours so as to avoid conflicts.

Thursday, 28th May. [...] *Monasterio de San Lorenzo de Escorial*. A big building, a monastery and a palace pertaining to the one on whose kingdom 'the sun would never set'. A terribly austere building. In a hall, walls with old maps. I will stop to analyse the one representing Transylvania. For Valachia Pars, between Tergoviscia and Pitesi, there is Bocaretz (!) and Dâmbovița flows into the Danube in the same place with Olt... [...]

[...] This diary starts getting me mad!!! I entered the Gothic Cathedral in Toledo. I have never seen something more extraordinary. I feel angry for having to keep on inventing admiring epithets for each page and I don't know that many in Romanian. I think that nobody has ever made something more beautiful than this cathedral. Fernando Martin, my guide, says that I haven't yet seen the cathedral in Burgos, the most beautiful gothic monument. I will have to pay for the petrol (Alvaro has left me his car) and I have to see it no matter what. Till then, I have no words to express my admiration towards the one in Toledo. I simply lack the terms. I shall only bring into discussion the French gothic statue (13th century), made of painted wood, representing the Madonna (carrying her Child who caresses her chin), having the most beautiful smile in the world.

Friday, 29th May. [...] PRADO. A building which seems modest, cubic, painted in a dirty red. Pretty dirty inside as well. There is no normal circuit; the rooms intersect, you circle around and you kind of get in a tangle.

Goya. The painting with those shot persons looks like an amateur's work of art. Flat painting, a flaw which is not visible in reproductions. A bit vibrating here and there. A good drawer, a

good colourist, but that's about all. He was a good photographer.

Sagrada Familia. Saint Joseph has an extremely Semite looks, with a smile full of satisfaction (he will go down to history due to the Baby he is looking at).

Christ on the Cross. Sad, suffering looks. But the ephube-like body seems like resting. As a matter of fact, the feet lean on a solid base. (...)

El Prendimiento. (Jesus' Catching). Spots of colour, it looks modern, vibrant. A very small but extremely suggestive painting. He can do it if he wants to!

Maja Vestida and especially the *desnuda* one: a gallery painting, with no further thing to comment upon. The fact that it is a Goya represents no excuse. How would some make themselves famous? But how could the snobs let themselves fooled?

If I hang a painting with melons and cherries in my living room, I am a lout; but if the painting is a Luiz Melendez (1716-1780), I am somebody! (...)

Murillo. A bit better, but colours used to be expensive in his times as well and he proved very parsimonious when combining them.

Velasquez. I like him the best. But it is obvious that he did the portraits for money. The Count of Olivarez is on a horse in a marry-ground. Yet, the jesters are masterpieces. They used to pay less (or nothing at all) and the painter was painting for his own pleasure. (...)

[...] I know I am a grumbler. But about masterpieces (acknowledged as such) I cannot add anything more than others, smatter than me, already have. But nobody can prevent me from seeing what others more stupid haven't. Snobbery and preconceived ideas, such as stupidity and arrogance should be left out.

Bartolomeus Strobl (1591-1642). 'The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist'. A huge painting, so dear to my Romanian peers who recognize Michael the Brave in Herod's face. It is true that the faces of those present in the painting ac-

tually pertain to famous people in the époque. In the foreground there is a citizen who, undoubtedly is Henry IV of France. But where would they have seen our Michael, who had died when the painter was 10? (19 when the French monarch died. That is tolerable.)

Salome, with her tits exposed, displays the saint's head as if a hasting. Herod-Michael sits at a table, continuously eating. Now, he has passed on to fruit. Salome shows him the head on the tray with an inquiring look on her face and the king makes a bored gesture with his hand, having the exact expression as if saying: 'Thank you, darling, but I am full and I cannot eat anything else. Please, bring me a coffee.' Who doesn't believe me, should at least see the photos!!! [...]

[...] I'll pass on to El Greco. This is a real painter! This is a real portraitist! This is a real genius! The covetous state it that he had astigmatism. I wonder why did the Spanish call Mr. Theotocupucus (the variant chosen by the organiser) El Greco and not El Griego (as it would have been correct)?

Dear God, this Japanese who passes me by is so beautiful! [...]

[...] In a shop window, a book: Doina Popa-Lisseanu, Panait Istrati: Una escritura encendida, published by Universidad de Educación a Distancia.

It is raining outside, I feel hungry, through the windows of the restaurants I can see people shovelling heartily and I remember the Charlie Chaplin movies. And all this in order to be able to see the Burgos Cathedral tomorrow because I wouldn't have enough money for petrol if spending it on food. Damned trips to the Occident, they are not for me! What a pity! I am still 57!

I enter a bar and take the cheapest thing: a *bocadillo de salchichas* (three sausages between two slices of warm bread) and a potato salad. The bartender asks me what I want to drink. Well, I haven't thought of that. I feel too ashamed to ask tap water (for the Spanish that would be a

sacrilege) and I ask for a glass of beer. When paying, I take the last 5000 Pts note with a hidalgo gesture. How should this guy know how hard it is for me to part with it! I wish he didn't have money for the change so that I could have my revenge because he was born in another country than I was and to tell him full of disgust that I don't carry change. Not only does he have change, but he also gives it to me in many coins. For me to learn the lesson. That cost me almost 600 Pts and I am still hungry. With about 900 I would have got a two-course menu with two very tasty dishes of my choice. In addition to that, bread, a cake and a bottle of wine. But I may have run the risk of discovering God knows what gastronomic wonder of Madrid. Moreover, the wine would have knocked me off (theirs is very strong) because I wouldn't have let it on the table.[...]

[...] It is nasty, I am tired, bored and I want to go back home. I am thinking that Alvaro is going to be there as well and that I will have to sleep in the basement. Yet, no matter the conditions in one's country... You know, whoever noticed this wasn't stupid, and I would have never believed I would end up missing my country so much. I think this is all about the country and not only about friends and familiar things. This is something more, but I don't want to think of it because I would have to use big words and I don't like it. I prefer mockery. That's that! [...]

Saturday, 30th May. I notice the Spaniards' lack of clothing elegance. Especially if compared to the Portuguese. You see the Spaniards dressed with the first thing they got their hands on. They all wear grey and white trainers. A certain kiddo looks niftier, as if coming from Dobrița and going down to Tg. Jiu, to the disco. Anyway, the Romanian ladies are better dressed (long live the second-hand shops!). In our country you can at least see a preoccupation for wearing nice clothes. I live in the city centre and I haven't seen anything remarkable in their shops.

There were some clothes in the shops in Lisbon that would have knocked your socks off! (honestly!)

There were Afro-Americans in Portugal as well (arrived from Mozambique or Angola, their citizens). The Afro-American ladies- absolutely gorgeous; the Afro-American men-black. Those in Spain (where on earth would they come from?) are ugly, dirty, ragged. And the women make you run as fast as you can.

In Madrid- lots of beggars (drunk, on drugs or simply idiotic). I don't remember seeing them in Lisbon.

[...] In the evening I go to FERIA de Andalucía en Madrid, a sort of fair with games, raffles, candy floss and games at bo-peep, organized by some guys from Seville. As a matter of fact, around thirty huge tents (like our wedding tents), turned into pubs. Young or not-that-young men of Seville, some wearing specific costumes, are caught in a flamenco in almost every tent. More women than men, with *castañuelas* in their hands, dance like anything. If you watch them, you feel bemused. They look grandiose, as if Queen Sofia were doing their laundry on Thursdays. They don't give a damn about anything; they are more than queens. They are the women of Seville. They dance beautifully, undulating their bodies and the extremely delicate hands have their very suggestive language (each with its suggestion...). They are so elegant that you wonder where they may have got that elegance from and how it could be explained. It is the first time I see flamenco live. I think it is more beautiful than the one in pubs or during concerts. It is honest. I find out that each dance has four distinct beats. It is true. I can count them: 1...2...3...4. And the shoes are terribly noisy. (like the castanets). I like the dust coming from the platform. Well done, girls!

Sunday, 31st May. [...] There is a TV set in the bar and they broadcast the Madrid *corrida* live. The show completes the image I have had in my mind ever since seeing the dancers. The same snake-like movements of the matador. The same haughtiness, this time when facing danger. The matador has just been hit by a horn. I cannot tell where, but he doesn't seem to care. He is looking at the bovine full of despise, while recovering his feet and sticking another two *banderillas* in its back. The *banderillas* have the Spanish national colours (red, yellow, red). Patriots even when cruel. Since the *corrida* is, however, an 'art' full of cruelty, in spite of its being damned elegant. The today's matador is as handsome and macho as he is an idiot. He needs five blows to finish the poor animal. I hope the bull kicked him where I think of.

The second torero is an artist: he moulds the bull like wax. Less ballet, much more bull-hunting. And the animal is not butchered, but sacrificed.

By the way, in Benavente (between 8th and 14th June) a great annual feast takes place: Toro enmaromado: a bull, indeed pulled by a rope, is allowed to chase the crazy Benavente inhabitants. They say that the streets are full for a week; they all walk around stoned and they have a great time. They also let around five cows go loose, and they are worse than a bull. It's a pity I have to be on my way in a few days.

Wednesday, 3rd June. I'm in the plane heading to Milan (the place of call for Bucharest). After also seeing a sunrise (equally spectacular as the sunset) in Spain from the airport, I am sitting in the plane whose departure has already been delayed for a few minutes wetting my pants for fear.

Translated by Raluca Vîjăiac



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The first east-west encounter

Vintilă Mihăilescu



For me, the first days of the Revolution especially meant the contact with the West. Why was that? Because my brother, who lives in Switzerland, was a very active member of the Helsinki group, with very many press contacts and he used to give my address to everybody. Hence, right from the first day, when the whole story broke out in Bucharest (after taking my family to a safe place, taking into account that bullets were whistling around there), I started to heroically broadcast about the unfolding of the events, below the living room table, God knows what or for whom. Later on, when arriving to Germany and Switzerland I was surprised to find out that people used to know me due to those first 'reports'! Connected to this idea, I was faced with a bigger surprise which I understood only later: a lady reporter with great experience concerning war reports and who had been sent by my brother to stay with us, went to Timișoara to do a report on that 'massacre' which had impressed us all. When coming back, the first thing she uttered was *fake*! And she explained to me how they had done the set-up. Of course I didn't understand a word, of course I didn't believe a word and that I was shocked and cursed her till the cows came home. I could see the thick end of the stick a month later when my brother sent me the article she wrote for that newspaper she worked for and in which, on two pages, she was

presenting precisely the official version of the 'massacre in Timișoara'. I talked to her after several months, when I had time to understand what had happened a bit more and I told her: 'I nearly felt like smacking your face for what you told me about Timișoara back then. You had the chance to see. You were experienced and you saw that it was a set-up. Why did you write exactly the opposite on those two pages?' – 'Well, they made it very clear to me: I either write like this or I go and write somewhere else..' And that was my first question mark connected to the background of the press liberty.

On the other hand, it took time for me to understand what I had done in those first days and I think this is a pretty edifying story. For example, during the first days of January, on 2nd-3rd January, I guess, when things were still unclear, two guys, a sort of emissaries, a French and a Swiss, popped up in front of my door. Of course I had no idea who they were (one of them said he was the president of the Independent Radio Station Association in Europe or something of the kind- which sounded very impressive!) and they invited me to France. There I lived in Forcalquier, the headquarters of what I was later on going to realize it was Longo Maï, one of the most solid cooperatives *soixant-huitarde* in Europe. I had the chance to speak about freedom on their radio, I really enjoyed eating together,

didn't exactly get what they did there or how they earned their living, but I didn't get many things anyway and the place- somewhere in the South of France- was much too beautiful in order to ask yourself vile questions.

From there, I headed towards Switzerland, where I met some persons who seemed very important and chewed the fat a little bit. My mission was to break the ground for the official visit that some dignitaries, well, some 'emissaries of the Occident' were going to pay to Romania. Hence, in January, I was the one in charge with organizing the first visit of a parliamentary delegation from Switzerland, which arrived with a personal plane on Otopeni Airport. The whole story was quite hallucinating because I obviously had no idea of what that meant. I remember that I was with a friend of mine at 'Intercontinental' where we discarded everybody saying that we had a political mission, while I was using seven phones at the same time (and they weren't mobile phones), the rooms in the hotel weren't yet reserved, I yelled at them and they emptied the rooms in two minutes, I immediately asked to talk to Petre Roman (I knew he was something big around there) and I told him that a Swiss Parliamentary delegation wanted to talk to the country administration...In a nutshell, I organized this first visit of a Swiss Parliamentary delegation completely lacking a full understanding of the facts. There was also the problem with Ceaușescu's famous money.

I will make a digression here, because things are connected...My brother, in Switzerland, together with a larger group, but that was his initiative (right on 22nd, 23rd, 24th December) managed, due to a lawyer's help, to block some funds - or that's what they thought...What did that mean? It's hard to say. He really got involved in that thing with Ceaușescu's funds. I was supposed to negotiate with the Romanians; he was going to take care of things in Switzerland, together with the lawyer from the 'Marcos case' in Philippine. Neither of us really knew what was all about but we had a patriotic mission to ac-

complish. So, I had been caught in this story till one day when I asked my brother: 'Good, what shall we do now with this thing?' - 'What thing?' - 'Well, the one with Ceaușescu's money' - 'What money?' I say: 'What, are you crazy? The one we talked about!' - 'I don't know anything...' And he laughed. In order for him to later on tell me that two persons had allegedly disappeared on that network. And he didn't feel like being the third at all, hence, he wasn't going to put me in the position of being the fourth. So we suddenly left that game which was too big for us. But, at the moment, I was still involved in that story and the discussion between the respective Swiss delegation and the provisory Minister of Finance had to deal with that issue as well - and I obviously took part in it.

The other side of the shield was even funnier since the Swiss invited a commission from the municipality in Bucharest to visit Switzerland. I was supposed to organize this delegation as well, because I was their only contact. Hence, I vamped up the delegation. I obviously took mayor Predescu as well, but the rest of the group were people from the town hall caught by the revolution in the same place. Well, I also did a bit of selection and I gathered two or three people from the town hall and the rest were friends of mine, also from the revolution, chosen according to other criteria than the political-administrative ones. This delegation was grandiosely received in Switzerland, with press conferences, with an absolutely memorable stage on the airport of Geneva: we were hence received in the protocol hall in order to drink a glass of champagne, and at a certain moment, one of the fellows in the delegation went to the toilet. After fifteen minutes, the guy wasn't coming back...What had happened? The door wouldn't open because he hadn't washed his hands. That was the most stressing contact we had with the Occident.

The second thing was even more interesting. A delegation from 'The Revolutionary Bucharest' had been invited to France, also to

Forcalquier. But, since things were more stabile, the delegation was only made of people working in the town hall. District boys, workers, unemployed persons, all gathered together in eager rivalry- but it didn't matter because they all had their position!- and they were all visiting the Occident for the first time. And we arrived at Forcalquier which, I repeat, is a sort of headquarters of a cooperative, which in France is considered a sect, with a very strong network (it has many more subsidiaries in France and not only). Leftist...to say the least. The dark figure of the group was the famous Rémy. He used to be present on the '68 barricades and had previously taken part in the war in Algeria. The whole story was based on some phalanstery principles- they worked and shared everything together. With an ideology which rather headed towards anarchism. I knew I was going to France in order to meet the capitalist dawn, freedom and democracy. And I was faced with that thing which didn't fit our perception at all. At least I was curious. But the others were indignant because they had expected to be received in a five star hotel and the reality was that we were all sleeping in some countryside stables, because- at the end of the day, that wasn't important, what really mattered was to be and to work together, right? We were together on the 'barricades' and our people felt like anything but doing that. We had to take part in various debates- we were coming from all ex-communist countries- but Romania's delegation found a field and started a football match and it was impossible for anyone to take them out of there. Since they don't show us anything and they put us in this damned stable, at least we should play some football!... And during the three days of great meeting between East and West, Romania's delegation had played football and had cursed capitalism.

The more interesting side of the story and that really confused me, was the relationship between the Swiss bankers and that organization, which, I repeat, was as anarchist as it could be and which represented our first contact with the

'Occidental capitalism'. The members of that cooperative used to take at arms in order to protect themselves from the police the government had sent them around the '70s, '80s, hence, long after '68. They were armed and protecting themselves while in the mountains, so to speak. They had weapon deposits prepared for 'the great revolution' which was to come, had contacts all around the world. They gave up that strategy- I later on found out- around year 2000; they reached the conclusion that 'the great revolution' wasn't going to come and then they changed tactics. Both the Swiss visit to Romania and the Romanian visit to Switzerland had been organized by Longo Mai. It was only later that I finally understood- and only on the surface level- that a third of the income the organization benefited from came from Switzerland. How was that possible? -Common business. In 'the industry of the humanitarian actions' as some stated it. So, this first contact left us (the few of us who went there, apart from 'the town hall football team', which quickly solved the problem) with a very prudent image, so to say. In as much as we found it very difficult to understand how those positions, which in my mind were at extremes, managed to combine: hence, on the right bank- capitalist extreme, or whichever way you want to call it, the Swiss banker and his private jet, his bank account, his image, and on the other, this network which was clearly not only leftist, but also sharing an anarchist ideology. Therefore, we reached the conclusion, which turned into a premise, that things were far more complicated than we had expected, that the other Europe, towards which we were heading, wasn't as monochrome as we had imagined.

For a few years, around 3 or 4, I was also present on some lists of the possible contacts, a sort of potential people of the future. Therefore, there was hardly any weekend without me being involved in a workshop, in a colloquium around the Europe where my position and that of the others was simply that of witnesses. Which meant that I wasn't an anthropologist, we

weren't actually considered to be professionals in a domain or the other, but, if you were more or less fluent and coherent in a foreign language, you were made part of those conferences, debates, so and so forth. Hence, I was the inner witness who was exposing the communist Europe to the Occidental Europe. And I was valorised as such. I started to get away from these networks and to be more or less excluded from them the moment I became an anthropologist with the ambition of having a more professional discourse. Yet, this interested nobody. I was supposed to narrate- obviously in a very intelligent way- about the communist society. The moment I stopped 'narrating' because I had my reserves and my opinions, things started getting a different course.

Around '93-'94, in Brussels, during a very noisy conference with hundreds of guests and to which I practically had no idea why I had been invited, with ambassadors, with Jacques Rubnik, with great commentators, all of a sudden Vintil? pops up. I cannot say why I was there, but it must be because up to the respective moment, I had properly fulfilled my tasks and I was present on a list with potential people of the future in Romania. I remember a very weird moment when the ambassador of Poland in Paris, if I am not mistaken, stopped the plenary discussions in order to say that he visited some colleagues from the European Commission in Brussels and that he wanted to tell us a thing which he found very weird, that was the fact that he discovered some offices which were dealing with determining 'the nations with European vocation' -and, implicitly, of those nations without a European vocation, as far as I could tell. Obviously that the respective European vocation spanned only up to the frontiers of the Carolingian Empire, thing which was easier understood later on. The war with Yugoslavia was being prepared and the difference in European vocation was passing through the middle of Yugoslavia. That moment, a Swedish who was chairing the conference, said: 'Well, thank you, we have to recess now because...the

lunch is getting cold'. Under this pretty ridiculous pretext, the discussion was stopped.

The next day I was invited in a show, *Le Divan de l'Europe*, at TV 5 International, a very important show, ideologically speaking, where the great European minds used to debate the big problems Europe was faced with at the moment. I was surprisingly invited, together with Jacques Rubnik and with the Hungarian Minister for Minorities. When I found out that they were going to bring Transylvania into discussion and when I also saw the minister coming with two suitcases full of documents, I said to myself that I got into lumber. I only knew history on a common sense level, like any other person, and here he comes with documents, mopping the floor with me. To cap it all, when I entered the studio, I saw a map of Romania hanged on a wall, but without Transylvania. The national and patriotic responsibility made me draw the attention to those people, saying that I am sorry, yet I am here to represent Romania and I cannot start the show with such a map. They said: 'Well, excuse us, this one is left from another show, a historical one...' I say: 'Well, OK!' I was very proud for setting down my foot. They took the map off the wall, which lent me wings to carry on. What was going to happen next was the great confrontation with the Hungarian minister who couldn't speak French very well and who, I could find that out only later, was ten times more stressed than I was because I could speak French well. The editor of the show was very clear: 'Well, I ask the questions, none of you steps in, you don't take the very words out of each other's mouth. I punctually ask the questions and you answer, nobody breaks the rule, nobody speaks with nobody unless I ask the question!' Which was a different image from what I used to know about dialogue in such a situation. It was a funny moment when Transylvania and the Romanian-Hungarian relationships were brought into discussion and the minister said: 'Yes, relationships are tense, but because of the Hungarians who did this and the other...', moment when I jumped in and, full of

respect, said that the Romanians had done this and the other...For a quarter of an hour, each of us kept on saying not that 'you do the villainies!' but 'we are to blame!'. Each of us fearing the other. That happened to the general stupefaction, since they were expecting to see a conflict, some tension to make the show successful. Afterwards, we went together for a beer, when we spoke English and we carried on being friends for a long time.

Another incident took place when Rubnik led the discussion precisely to the story regarding the nations with European vocation and how Europe, of course, had to open up, but the real Europe was that one. And how within that Europe there were yet nations which didn't really have that vocation. Hence, in diplomatic terms, the idea was that there were two Europes. This is when I broke the rule and I asked what was the respective dichotomy based on, 1000 years after the Carolingian empire. Did nothing happen in a thousand years? Should we come back to religious wars? Was that Europe's future? I was very aggressive, to the editor's despair who wasn't able to stop me. When I came back home, I saw the show my wife had recoded. Watching it, I had a very weird sensation that it didn't fit me. And I suddenly understood: everything I said

was there but had been switched when they did the montage. Firstly, I was on screen, angry, making a row, nobody could tell why and afterwards they presented Rubnik, replying nicely, calmly about the nations with European vocation. Meaning that, all off a sudden, the hysterical Romanian started to make a row, commenting on the relevance of the idea regarding the Europe of the privileged nations, so and so forth and after that Rubnik showed up to return things back to their place. One couldn't make anything of my replies; all the more, the significance, the message was exactly the opposite. So, they did a great job when doing the montage. I asked a lawyer if I had any chance to sue them, but he said I didn't: from a juridical point of view, everything was Ok, nothing had been added or taken out! I had to make do with sending the editor a short letter simply saying: *Chapeau bas!* And this is how my Occidental media career was over. After this incident, the rate of invitations dramatically decreased and after a year or two I was only invited in anthropological contexts. And, not to forget, when I saw the movie in Bucharest, I was surprised to see the map back at its place on the wall...

Translated by Raluca Vîjăac

