

A TALE OF TWO CHILDHOODS:
THE VIRTUAL CHILD AND THE REAL CHILD IN ROMANIA, 1970s AND 1980s

Laura Visan, MA

Interdisciplinary MA in Popular Culture

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Popular Culture

Faculty of Social Sciences, Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario

**JAMES A GIBSON LIBRARY
BROCK UNIVERSITY
ST. CATHARINES ON**

© June, 2006

ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the everyday use of propaganda in Romania, between 1971 and 1989. It explores the way in which the propaganda discourse of the Romanian Communist Party was disseminated through popular culture artifacts targeting children: Pioneers' magazines, textbooks, Almanacs and moralizing stories. These artifacts configured the image of a model child, whose preoccupations complied with the requirements of the Romanian Communist Party and communicated a set of recommended practices, to be followed by Romanian children. At the same time, the thesis incorporates the response of the *actual children* to these desirable practices, and implicitly, their response to state propaganda.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1 - THEORIES OF PROPAGANDA AND RECEPTION.....	5
CHAPTER 2 - CONFIGURING THE VIRTUAL CHILD.....	39
CHAPTER 3 - THE REAL CHILD RESPONDS.....	78
CONCLUSIONS.....	112
WORKS CITED.....	116
NICOLAE CEAUSESCU SURROUNDED BY CHILDREN.....	APPENDIX 1
THE EXPEDITION.....	APPENDIX 2
BUILDING THE HYDRO-ELECTRIC PLANT.....	APPENDIX 3
THE NEGATIVE HERO.....	APPENDIX 4
INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....	APPENDIX 5
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	APPENDIX 6

INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the everyday use of propaganda in a totalitarian society – Romania between 1971 and 1989. The research represents a bi-focused perspective: on communist propaganda's grip on popular culture, and on popular culture as the everyday interpretation, negotiation or resistance to state propaganda.

The cult of personality reached its peak during this interval, when an Orwellian propaganda machine was set in the service of Nicolae Ceaușescu, the president of the country from 1974 and General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party (the RCP) since 1965. Citizens of the socialist republic had all their rights encroached upon, being subject to a continuous surveillance and risking imprisonment for the slightest protest against the regime. Under the pretence of *scientific nutrition*, consumer goods were almost completely absent from the market, transforming Romanians' daily life into a continuous fishing and hunting expedition. In spite of all this, people had to be grateful for Ceaușescu's *fatherly care*, and for the opportunity of being born in Romania. This is what state propaganda advocated through all channels available.

Called *the offspring of socialist Romania*, children were granted particular attention; hence considerable indoctrination efforts were directed toward them. For best results, their initiation as brainwashed trustworthy citizens of socialist Romania had to start at an early age. Considering its wide scope, this enterprise was likely to be successful, however, families and peers exerted active counterbalance to it. The main research question considered in this thesis is the extent to which, if any, Romanian children were influenced by the communist

propaganda communicated through popular culture artifacts targeting them: school textbooks, Pioneers' magazines, TV shows, moralizing stories, Almanachs etc.

This thesis brings several new elements to the study of popular culture. First, it explores how Romanians negotiated and interpreted the propaganda discourse of the RCP. Both adults and children made instrumental use of this type of discourse, trying to adjust it in accordance to their personal needs, and, whenever possible, draw personal benefits from it. The wooden language of Nicolae Ceaușescu's speeches and the clichés of the state propaganda discourse became topics for jokes and everyday mockery. It was a survival strategy, a form of resistance in a country dominated by coercion and fear. In turn, children used to simulate devotion to the Ceaușescu family in order to obtain a privileged position in the Pioneers' hierarchy, and implicitly more notoriety among their peers.

Second, this thesis deals with the everyday living practices and daily rituals in Romania during the last two decades of communism, and the degree of resistance inherent in these practices. This area of research represents a significant sub-field of popular culture studies.

Third, the thesis attempts to contribute to the study of child and youth from a novel perspective: that of researching their daily habits in a totalitarian society. Moreover, the thesis compares the actual practices with the repertoire of desirable practices, as recommended by the propaganda apparatus of the RCP and communicated through various texts targeting children. Not much research in this field has yet been undertaken, therefore my thesis aims to address this knowledge gap. Considering the amount of energy and money invested by the RCP to transmit its indoctrinatory message to the young generation, this area of research deserves greater attention.

The thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter 1 will review several key works dealing with the study of propaganda and the main theories of audience to test if any of these theories may be applied to the study of totalitarian spaces. Then it will explore the patterns of indoctrination recurrent in Nazi Germany, in Soviet Russia during the Bolshevik era and the Stalin years, and in China during the Cultural Revolution, respectively. My purpose is to establish if the *topoi* of the propaganda discourse in these three contexts may also be traced in Nicolae Ceaușescu's speeches. Chapter 1 will end with an analysis of the theoretical paradigms for analyzing the everyday realities in former totalitarian areas.

Chapter 2 presents the methodological techniques employed in this thesis and the reason for selecting them. I will use a mixture of approaches throughout the thesis: discourse analysis, semiotic analysis and semi-structured, open-ended ethnographic interviews.

Chapter 3 begins with a concise presentation of the state's version of Romanian history. More exactly, I will focus upon the use of history as a propaganda instrument to the benefit of the Ceaușescu family and the RCP. The main reason for approaching this topic is that these refashioned myths played a significant part in the authorities' endeavors to indoctrinate Romanian children. Further on I will discuss the recurrent themes in Nicolae Ceaușescu's speeches, by analyzing two categories of speeches: general ones, addressed to a broad category of public, and speeches dedicated to youth and children – members of the UCY, Pioneers and Homeland Falcons. I will refer to the model of an ideal child, as proposed by the Romanian president; at the same time, I will suggest why, in my view, we should call this desirable model of child *the virtual child* rather than *the ideal child*. Chapter 3 also employs semiotic and discourse analysis to examine several artifacts targeting children. By analyzing these artifacts, I wish to look at how they communicated the recurrent

themes of the presidential speeches to children. At the same time, I will focus upon the set of *desirable* daily practices for children, as recommended by the RCP and Nicolae Ceaușescu.

In chapter 4 several members of the Romanian diaspora in Canada are quoted, who remember their childhood years under the Nicolae Ceaușescu regime. The respondents were questioned about the popular artifacts they were exposed to, the survival strategies of their families and their everyday habits. By undertaking these semi-structured, open-ended interviews, I aimed to explore the everyday living practices of Romanian children in the 1970s and 1980s, and the extent to which these *real* practices complied with those recommended by the state propaganda.

In this thesis I hope to contribute to the study of everyday rituals and living habits under a totalitarian regime. In Romania this area of research remains relatively neglected. But in my view, moving beyond the ethereal space of pure theory to the more prosaic context of queues for food, VCR evenings or unheated block apartments is a necessary step for reconstructing the collective mentality of people who lived in former totalitarian areas.

CHAPTER I

THEORIES OF PROPAGANDA AND RECEPTION

This chapter will review several key works dealing with the study of propaganda to observe their strengths and limitations. The discussion will first identify the main trends in defining propaganda and briefly discuss key studies of the effects of propaganda on audiences. I will then move to a comparison between the patterns of indoctrination employed in Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union under the Bolsheviks during the Stalinist regime and in the late socialist years, and in China during the Cultural Revolution. Theoretical paradigms employed for analyzing the everyday realities in former totalitarian areas will be also incorporated in this section of the thesis, while considering popular resistance to the authorities' indoctrinatory efforts. In China, for instance, since this social phenomenon has not been researched extensively, there is little information regarding resistance under Mao. The few existing studies are worth mentioning however, inasmuch as the last two decades of communism in Romania were strikingly similar to the Cultural Revolution years. The importance of incorporating the audience into an analysis of propaganda will be emphasized throughout this literature review. The effectiveness of an indoctrination message may not be assessed without evaluating the recipient's response to it.

Trends in defining propaganda

The majority of theories concerning propaganda propose a behaviorist model, based on a stimulus – response framework. This approach is reminiscent of the “hypodermic needle” or “magic bullet” theory of audience elaborated by H. D. Laswell, a law professor at Yale University. According to this ‘hypodermic model’ based on a stimulus / response

mechanism, audiences are viewed as “masses composed of identical, passive, isolated individuals who react the same way to stimuli transmitted through the media” (Martin 30). Laswell even asserts that, in order to be effective, propaganda should be concerned with multiplying “those stimuli which are best calculated to evoke the desired responses” (630), while suppressing the ones that provoke an undesired response. Laswell, and the theoreticians who have followed him on the behaviorist path, base their theory upon the postulate of a gullible audience, eager to buy everything, figuratively speaking.

In his 1964 study dedicated to communist propaganda techniques, John C Clews also defends the communist propaganda techniques. The first chapter of his work bears the title “What is propaganda?” a question that the author fails to adequately answer. He mentions three definitions of the term – two extracted from *Webster’s Dictionary* and the third enunciated by Leonard Doob, a well-known proponent of the stimulus-response pattern. Clews describes propaganda techniques from a diachronic perspective, from the Crusades to the Soviet Union. His work reinforces the behaviorist model, with the public positioned as a defenseless – and sometimes even brainless – victim of the propagandist. He paraphrases Gustave le Bon, a late 19th century French writer, who considers that “a man alone (...) may be a cultivated individual, but put him in a crowd and he is a barbarian, a creature acting by instinct” (Clews 7). Further on he refers to Serge Chakotin’s work *Rape of the Masses* (1971). According to this author, a former student of Pavlov, men are subsumed by their basic instincts which include the “struggle against death and danger; the instinct for food and drink” (10), and propaganda functions by activating these instincts.

Clews clearly shares the views of the authors he cites and argues that the indoctrinating message reaches its target if it manages to subdue individuals by exploiting

their instinctual needs. At the same time, “effective propaganda is always on the offensive” (11). But reducing the individual to his senses, ignoring his capacity to respond to a propaganda message is overly simplistic. Its fallacy becomes obvious when applied in a totalitarian context. As I will argue throughout the thesis, the propaganda activities carried on by the Romanian Communist Party in the 1970s and 1980s and the absence of any alternative message did not elicit a favorable response from the public. To the contrary, the few primary sources that gather together memories of Romanians exposed to political propaganda demonstrate their resistance towards the official discourse.

Following these early behaviorist approaches, several researchers developed a competing perspective for studying propaganda. This model locates propaganda, as well as communication, “within the wider context of political phenomena and theory: legitimation, democracy, bureaucracy, social administration, public opinion, social control, the nation state” (Robins, Webster and Pickering 5). Terence Qualter called for researchers to abandon their reliance on empirical research and stimulus-response pattern, and to focus, instead, upon “the role that public opinion can or ought to play in a democracy, and the impact of propaganda and the manipulation of public opinion on the theory and practice of democratic government” (29). However, Qualter’s approach is not substantiated by evidence beyond the theoretical level. The authors do not explain how this model would function if implemented in a society, what is expected from the state institutions, or the role of the audience within this model. Their theory represents an idealized definition of propaganda rather than a viable alternative to the behaviorist approach.

The works on propaganda published in the last two decades continue to be shaped by Laswellian theory. In their 1991 study, *Age of Propaganda. The Everyday Use and Abuse of*

Persuasion, Anthony Pratkanis & Elliot Aronson state that their purpose is to teach readers “how to guard against the abuse of persuasion techniques by unscrupulous communicators” (xiii). Though formulated in a more sophisticated manner, Pratkanis & Aronson’s definition of propaganda preserves the behaviorist pattern.

Propaganda has evolved to mean mass ‘suggestion’ or influence through the manipulation of symbols and the psychology of the individual. Propaganda is the communication of a point of view with the ultimate goal of having the recipient of the appeal come to ‘voluntarily’ accept this position as if it were his or her own (9).

In Lasswellian tradition, the authors assume that vulnerable audiences might be incapable of discerning the propaganda content of various messages. Pratkanis and Aronson analyze how propaganda is communicated through political discourse, advertising and various forms of public education. They grant considerable space to advertising, and provide numerous case studies of campaigns in order to demonstrate that this industry represents an aggressive form of propaganda in capitalist societies. In fact, the term *advertising* is often substituted for *propaganda* throughout this book. The main shortcoming of this study is that it fails to evaluate the readers’ response to the advertising language, as well as towards the other types of discourse – political and educational. It is difficult to accept the idea of a naïve public, especially in the case of Western societies, where people have access to a plethora of alternative discourses. As this thesis will demonstrate, even in totalitarian contexts people developed aberrant readings to propaganda messages transmitted by the state and sought alternative discourses, even if (quasi) clandestine ones.

Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell distinguish between the concepts of propaganda and persuasion. While propaganda “attempts to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist” (Jowett & O’Donnell 13), persuasion aims to satisfy the needs of

both persuader and persuadee. Despite this dual perspective, their definition of propaganda is still based upon the stimulus-response model. In their view, propaganda represents “the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist” (16). The novel aspect of this definition is the explicit mention of the propagandist and his position of power in relation to the recipient. Jowett and O’Donnell mention that the propaganda message has to be target-oriented in order to be effective, but they do not discuss the role of recipients in assessing the impact of a certain propaganda message.

Theories of audience

I will now refer to the main tools used to understand Western media audiences. I wish to test if any of these tools may be applied to the study of propaganda discourses in (former) totalitarian contexts. An analysis of propaganda in such areas would not be complete without incorporating the readers’ perspective. Research on former communist areas, for instance, would have to explore how the public discourse was negotiated and interpreted by ordinary people in accordance to their personal needs. By this everyday appropriation of propaganda discourses, by decoding them in an aberrant manner, people transformed this type of public speech into a form of popular culture. I will briefly discuss below the main approaches to the study of audiences, to see which of them (if any) helps us understand the meanings people gave to propaganda discourses disseminated by the communist state.

In her key study *The Nature of the Audience* (1995), Ien Ang reviews the main ways in which the media audience has been studied. She begins by pointing out that “the most influential conceptions of the audience are incapable of doing justice to the heterogeneous ways in which (...) the media are used and take on meanings for people” (209). The first

approach presented by Ang is that of the audience as mass and market. This is similar to the “hypodermic needle” model of propaganda, as developed by Harold Laswell. The mass audience is presented as an amorphous group composed of atomized individuals, vulnerable to manipulation. The main shortcoming of this model is that it disregards the audience reaction to the messages it receives. Or, as Ang puts it, this model “does not give us any understanding of the worlds of media audiences themselves” (211). The model draws heavily upon the behaviorist models employed in the study of propaganda.

Another theory of audience views audiences as potential consumers, and reduces them to demographic indicators in quantitative research. Ang argues that the main shortcoming of this approach is its de-humanized nature, its incapacity for “insight into the more qualitative and more ‘subjective’ aspects of media consumption” (211). It goes without saying that this model is completely incompatible with a totalitarian society and centrally controlled economy, where marketing techniques were unknown, and marketing itself was perceived as a poisonous capitalist device. Audience studies were forbidden in Romania, for fear that they would reveal the unpopularity of the works produced by Ceaușescu family or those dedicated to them.

A change of perspectives in audience analysis arose with the theory of uses and gratifications. According to this theory, when choosing to watch a particular TV program or read a certain magazine, the readers select these media products because they will offer them some gratifications. Ang, citing Denis McQuail, proposes several categories of gratifications: information, personal identity, integration and social interaction and entertainment. Thus, people do not expose themselves to media because they need a way to spend their free time, but because they need information, models of behavior or aesthetic pleasure. However, Ang

mentions several shortcomings of this theory. First, not all uses of media result in gratification. Ang provides the example of the parents forced to listen to the loud rock music preferred by their teenage children. Second, the researchers do not pay attention to the meaning or interpretation of media. As Ang puts it, they analyze *why* people use media, but are not interested in *what* people get out of the shows they are watching. Finally, the author suggests that this theory implies that, since that media can offer us everything we want, there is no need to change them.

This model may represent an interesting approach for reconstructing the everyday living practices in Romania and the evolution of public taste in the last two decades of communism. As far as official media were concerned, people did not have much to choose from. Gratification needed to be sought elsewhere: in the broadcasts of foreign radio stations that were critical of Nicolae Ceaușescu, in the programs of the neighboring television networks, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Serbian or Russian, whose programs still left room for Western music or cartoons, or in the children's magazine *Pif*. These are only three examples from a range of subversive media choices that compensated for the dullness of Romanians' everyday existence. A Romanian interviewed by researchers explained that "[M]ost people [in the South] had their aerials tuned on the Bulgarian channels. The Bulgarians would broadcast longer hours, till midnight. There we could watch music videos and sports. One year I watched the whole World Cup. For people living in Bucharest, the Bulgarian channels were that open window to abroad that we needed so badly." ([http / martor.memoria.ro](http://martor.memoria.ro)).

The last theory discussed by Ang is that of reception. This approach looks at "how audiences construct meanings out of media offerings" (214). The meaning of texts is not fixed; rather they acquire meaning when decoded by audiences. The author observes that

unlike the gratification researchers, who prefer more standardized methods of work - questionnaires, for instance - reception researchers employ methods such as group interviews or individual interviews. In her study, Ang provides the example of various readings of the well-known American TV show, *Dallas*. It would be interesting to perform ethnographic research on the ways *Dallas* was read by Romanian viewers. When broadcast by Romanian television in the late 1970s, it was the last door opened to West, and people perceived it as a breath of fresh air. Reception analysis may be thus performed in a variety of cultural contexts, including former totalitarian areas such as Romania. It represents the most relevant means of reconstructing people's everyday negotiation of propaganda discourse, and collective attitudes towards the political leaders. The researcher of pre-1989 Romania cannot resort to archival research, because media discourse was almost entirely dedicated to praising the Ceaușescu regime. Moreover, samizdat press did not exist in this country. By applying reception analysis, materialized through ethnographic interviews, the researcher will have access to people's repertoire of everyday living practices under communism. A significant part of these daily rituals was represented by people's attempts to appropriate and interpret the RCP's propaganda tenets. Romanians humanized the omni-present propaganda discourse by mocking it or ignoring it. This was a form of resistance confined most of the time to the privacy of personal apartments, for fear of authorities' reprisals. This *popular version* of the state propaganda discourse represented a form of popular culture. Nicolae Ceaușescu's and the RCP's ideals, the stereotypes of political discourse, became topics for everyday jokes. The interviews I have undertaken demonstrate that even children were familiar with this survival strategy.

Patterns of indoctrination: Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, China during the Cultural Revolution

Nazi Germany

I will provide below a comparative analysis of the propaganda in Nazi Germany, in Soviet Russia during Lenin's and Stalin's years, and in China during the Cultural Revolution, in order to trace any similarities between these totalitarian regimes and the Nicolae Ceaușescu regime. My analysis will focus upon the *topoi* of the indoctrination discourse in these three contexts. The discussion of themes and stereotypes of indoctrination will be complemented by references to popular resistance in these three sociopolitical contexts.

Ian Kershaw (1987) and David Welch (1993) examine the rise and fall of the myth of Hitler. Kershaw proposes a new approach: a focus on the image of Hitler as Führer. His book deals with "the propaganda image-building process, and above all with the reception of this image by the German people (...), less what Hitler actually was than what he seemed to be to millions of Germans" (Kershaw 2). In turn Welch, dissatisfied with the biographical approach to Nazism, prefers to look at the "social bases of concepts like 'consent' and 'resistance' to National Socialism", in order to offer "a synthesis of intention and structure in explaining the Nazi regime" (Welch 2). He contends that previous research has only focused upon the organization of Nazi propaganda apparatus, and the techniques it employed. "Without attempting to assess the reception of propaganda, writers on the subject have generally assumed that Nazi propagandists invariably achieved their goals" (5). This study responds to the call launched by historians in the 1970s for a reorientation of perspective. Researchers were advised to incorporate to their study everyday life rituals and aspects of what was traditionally labeled as low culture. "Traditional" methods, such as archival

research found a useful complement to ethnographic methods, such as interviews or diary analysis. Or, as Welch puts it, German historians discovered “the attractiveness of *Alltagsgeschichte* (‘history of everyday life’) or *Geschichte von unten* (‘history from below’)” (4). This approach quickly demonstrated its effectiveness, particularly in the study of resistance under totalitarian contexts. Romanian researchers, too, employed it in their post-1989 accounts of people’s everyday forms of resistance during the communist decades.

Both Kershaw and Welch agree that an effective propaganda message should not attempt to convert the *faithless* but should rather persuade those receivers who are already partially convinced. People’s values and beliefs should be used as a basis for elaborating new propaganda messages. To Welch, propaganda is more than the mere art of persuasion; propaganda should appeal to the intellect as well as the affect. It would be thus too simplistic to consider it a mere scaffolding of lies and deception. To strengthen his argument, Welch raises a question: why did so many people vote for the NSDAP¹? His view is that “many groups, rather than being ‘seduced’ by Nazi propaganda, perceived voting for the NSDAP as being in their own interests and that Nazi propaganda served to reinforce such beliefs” (8). Effective propaganda must thus convince the addressees of the potential benefits they could draw from political choices. The interviews I undertook for this thesis confirmed the fact that people attempted to gain something from Nicolae Ceaușescu and the Romanian Communist Party. It was their way of negotiating everyday life in a political regime that preached general welfare but imposed poverty. By addressing the most acute problems confronting German society of the 1930s, Hitler’s propaganda succeeded in triggering a favorable public response. Germans were persuaded by promises of palpable benefits, such as a decrease in unemployment. Conversely, Nicolae Ceaușescu addressed broader political issues but with

¹ Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National-Socialist German Workers Party)

no impact upon people's everyday life. His ambition to be seen as an internationally acclaimed political leader, or his fight against the international arms race were irrelevant for ordinary Romanians, stuck in endless queues for foodstuff. The propaganda apparatus behind Hitler managed to create the impression that the Führer truly cared for his people. Romanian authorities were not even able to preserve appearances in this respect. Joseph Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda demonstrated more talent in suggesting that people would benefit by endorsing Hitler than did the activists of the Romanian Communist Party. The ethnographic interviews that have since been undertaken revealed that most Romanians responded with either indifference or irritation to the propaganda messages (<http://martor.memoria.ro>, *Muzeul Țăranului Român – Anii '80 și bucureștenii*) However, several segments of the population had a positive response to these messages. Miners, for instance, enjoyed special privileges during the last decades of Romanian communism, such as generous wages and recreational facilities. Even if Nicolae Ceaușescu ostentatiously distanced himself from the Soviet Union, the tradition of the hero worker Stakhanov survived, to a certain extent, in Romania. Miners benefited from the Ceaușescu years; they equated state propaganda with a fulfilled promise of welfare. In Romania even school children developed this skill of *bargaining* with the regime. In other words, they developed an instrumental relation to propaganda. For instance, many of them simulated enthusiasm in undertaking Pioneer rituals – such as reciting patriotic poems in front of a large audience – to draw personal benefits from that. Most often, children aimed to obtain the bonus of notoriety over their classmates. This topic is discussed in richer detail in the interviews to be analyzed in Chapter 4.

I will refer below to the repertoire of myths revolving around the Führer, and compare them to the circulation of similar themes in Romania in 1970s and 1980s. The Romanian

historian Lucian Boia researched the mechanism by which myths are constructed and their relation to history. Like Roland Barthes (1972), he defines the myth as an “imaginary construction (...) meant to emphasize the essence of cosmic and social phenomena, in close connection with the fundamental values of the society and aiming to ensure the social cohesion” (Boia, *Istorie* 46). According to him, myth is perceived as a guiding principle, an “ethic code and a model of behavior” (46). Kershaw argues that the popular enthusiasm for Hitler had its roots in the tradition of a Kaiser, who would “crush Germany’s internal enemies and, at the expense of ‘inferior peoples’, would provide the new nation with the greatness it deserved” (16). Furthermore, the author contends that the Hitler cult was consolidated by three factors: popular disappointment with the Weimar political system, the underestimation of Hitler before 1933 and the fact that Hitler embodied an “already well established, ideological consensus” (Kershaw 46). This best explains why the Germans continued to credit Hitler in spite of their unfulfilled expectations. By endorsing the Führer, they nourished and consolidated his myth. Here resides the essential difference between Hitler and Nicolae Ceaușescu. People naturally linked the Führer to a historical tradition, which bolstered the regime’s propaganda. The Romanian president tried instead to appropriate history and artificially linked himself to the tradition. Public spaces displayed frescoes depicting the emblematic figures of Romanian history. The row of *voievozi*² ended with the portrait of Nicolae Ceaușescu, in a majestic pose. But people saw this construct as made of papier mache, and responded with irony and jokes about the president’s heroic ambition. This *folie de grandeur* irreparably eroded the RCP’s propaganda discourse.

A common ideological construct in Nazi propaganda was that of the negative *other* undertaking hostile actions against his homeland. The Nazi regime transformed Jews into an

² Voievod (pl. voievozi) - term of Slavic origin that denoted the ruler of a historical province

epitome of malevolence so that it could divert people's attention from the social and economic problems that confronted Germany in the 1930s. Jews could be thus held responsible for all incompatibilities between what propaganda promised and what actually happened. The myth of the malevolent other was complemented by the myth of an international conspiracy against Hitler's Germany. Hitler gained immensely from the anti-communist paranoia that dominated German society in the 1930s. Following the 1933 elections, Hitler's prestige increased among the middle class by the repression of the Left. Due to these radical measures the Hitler myth was very appealing to the poorer sections of the population. At the same time, "[F]or a nation that believed so strongly that it had been wronged at Versailles and was now surrounded by hostile nations, such an appeal provided the basis upon which Nazi propaganda could build up its support" (Welch 17). The myth of the endangered homeland in need of a savior was common to all totalitarian regimes. If people responded positively to this ideal, propaganda could put censorship, intimidation and physical coercion into a favorable light, and present them as strategies for preserving the sovereignty of the country.

Manipulative messages endorsed by Goebbels' Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda presented Hitler as 'People's Chancellor. Leaders of totalitarian regimes that succeeded the Hitler era adopted this type of term. They wished to be perceived as men from the people, who have not forgotten their roots, and have not cut their ties with the masses. People were reassured that the Führer was working for their benefit, and were expected to regard the inherent difficulties of their everyday life with a tolerant eye. The causes of these obstacles were to be found in the earlier political regime, the weak Weimar republic, in this case. Germany experienced a 'great awakening' whose central feature was the Führer, as the

father of the nation. Kershaw refers to the fervor with which Hitler was greeted after 1933, speaking about a “feeling that dynamic and fundamental change was taking place in the interest of the whole nation and of national unity, that an end was being made to the old policies which pandered to particular interests and therefore perpetuated social and political divisions” (54). This myth had a surprising counterpart in the war years, when Hitler’s popularity began to fade, and even in the aftermath of the war. There were people who regarded Hitler as an honest person, whose laudable intentions were thwarted by a hostile entourage. A similar phenomenon occurred in Romania following the 1989 Revolution. Nostalgic members of the populace commiserated with Nicolae Ceaușescu, as the victim of his malignant wife, Elena. A collection of urban myths emerged, according to which his traces of humanity were brutally repressed by Mrs. Ceaușescu. For instance, it was said that the shortage of consumer goods on the market was the fault of Elena Ceaușescu, while her husband would have liked to provide foodstuff for his people.

Much Nazi propaganda targeted youth. Two structures were created to incorporate the young generation: the *Hitlerjugend* -Hitler’s Youth- and *Bund deutscher Mädel* -the League of German Girls. Welch quotes Stephen Roberts, a German who observed the triumph of propaganda over children. “In every case the children wanted to join the *Hitler Jugend*. To be outside Hitler’s organization was the worst form of punishment” (Kershaw 62). Kershaw reproduces a paragraph from *Völkischer Beobachter*, the NSDAP organ: “The three-year-old little daughter of Sturmführer Schmalzgruber of Burgau presents him with a large bouquet of flowers (...). And again I see, so often as before, that joyful sparkle in the Führer’s eyes as he lays his hand on the children...” (Kershaw 43). However, it would not be appropriate to argue that all children were caught up in this enthusiasm towards the Führer.

Furthermore, it is difficult to say if *all* kids who joined the Hitlerjugend did so out of commitment for the leader, or if they had other motivations. The interviews discussed in Chapter 4 of my thesis demonstrate that children have the capacity to assess the benefits they could draw out of such affiliation. This raises the question of regarding dissent and even resistance under the Nazi regime. According to Welch, this approach is complicated by the scarcity of credible public opinion surveys from the period. Fearing repercussions, people sometimes preferred to say what the interviewee expected to hear. Kershaw and Welch mention several groups that developed a more reserved, if not critical, attitude towards the Nazi regime. There was a deep hostility that prevailed “among those sections of the working class who had been brought up under the influence of socialist and communist subcultures and traditionally anchored in the ranks of organized labor” (Kershaw 34). Aware of their subversive potential, Hitler attempted to gain their good will. Initially at the level of public discourse; slogans like *Arbeit adelt* (Work ennobles) and *Arbeit macht frei* (Labor liberates) aimed to position workers as a privileged social class. Then, “May Day was transformed from a traditional Socialist celebration of working-class solidarity into the ‘National Day of Labour’, a reaffirmation of the national community, when employers and workers would parade side by side throughout Germany and listen to a speech from Hitler” (Welch 56). In addition to these changes, the Nazi regime provided tangible bonuses for the working class, such as material compensations and access to recreational facilities.

Welch also mentions the existence of two countercultural groups of youths, *Swing-Jugend* (Swing Youth) and *Edelweisspiraten* (Edelweiss Pirates) “who rejected the Hitler Youth, though for different reasons” (62). The Swing Youth were an elitist group who disparaged the nationalism promoted by NSDAP, and preferred to listen to jazz and swing

instead of *völkische* music. The Edelweiss Pirates rejected the regimentation practiced by the Nazi regime, and remained “unimpressed by the propaganda eulogizing a *Volksgemeinschaft*” (63). Both the Swing Youth and the Edelweiss groups failed to fulfill Hitler’s desideratum. These are two examples of active youth resistance to Nazi propaganda. Such vocal manifestations did not exist in Romania of the 1970s and 1980s. For fear of coercion, people only expressed their dissatisfaction towards the regime in their own apartments, surrounded by safe audience (i.e., people who were above the suspicion of co-operating with the *Securitate* – the Romanian secret police).

Soviet Russia in Lenin’s and Stalin’s years

In his key work, *The New Man in Soviet Psychology* (1959), Raymond Bauer observes that the Bolsheviks had a different approach to human nature than the Nazis. While the latter viewed humans as subject to instinctual and unconscious drives, the Bolsheviks believed in man’s rationality – but rationality confined to limits imposed by authorities. “For the Nazi, man was a marionette who moved when one pulled the strings. For the Bolshevik, he is a robot who can be trained to act independently within specified limits” (Bauer 178). The Nazis’ subject is not able to discern what is right or wrong for himself, so the political apparatus have to make the decision on his behalf. The Bolshevik instead understands what is right for himself so he follows the line of the Party. By putting this emphasis on rationality, the Bolsheviks wished to distance themselves from the past, which, according to them, was shaped by deterministic conceptions. Bauer contends that, with its denial of consciousness and responsibility, determinism was not compatible with a mechanism of punishment and reward. Determinism viewed society and not the individual as guilty, therefore it would have

been impossible to point at anti-social or deviant elements and sanction them. Moreover, “the determinist conception of man furnished a poor ideal for molding new citizens” (179). At first, the Bolsheviks did not resort to social control. It was considered that all the problems of the new world would be resolved because a socialist government had taken power. But as Bauer contends, the need for intervention in people’s lives soon became evident. Far-reaching efforts to control all people’s activities characterized the early Stalinist years. The author notes the difference between persons who emigrated from Russia before or immediately after the Revolution, and émigrés who left their country later. The latter ones are more disciplined, less contemplative and spontaneous. “They are more manipulative and better extemporizers. Rationality is more prominent, and emotion less so” (182).

The Romanian historian Lucian Boia draws a comparison between the dominant mythologies of communism and fascism(s). The author employs this plural *mythologies* to emphasize the various ways in which these phenomena materialized in different countries. Boia states that the ideologies of the twentieth century may be more accurately defined through the different emphasis they put on individualism or, alternatively, on collective values. These ideologies range from liberalism to collectivism. According to Boia, this distinction is more relevant than the traditional distinction between *right* and *left*, when one looks at the various manifestations of fascism.

Boia contends that at the core of both communism and fascism resides a similar voluntarism, a will to create an ideal society and a new man. “The millenarist mentality is easily detectable in all cases. (...) There will be nothing after communism (anyway, we are not told what it could be), and the Nazi Reich, literally respecting the tradition, proclaimed the will to live *a thousand years*” (Boia, *Mitologia* 77). However, there are several

differences between the two types of regimes. As mentioned above, Bauer has already discussed a fundamental discrepancy – non-rationality vs. consciousness. Lucian Boia also refers to the communist's respect for science – or what he acknowledges as being science, while the fascist extols action. The author refers to Hitler's preference for people with rudimentary scientific culture but healthy bodies. In the school curriculum, physical education had to prevail over knowledge. Boia considers that this preference for virile idiots could not have been declared valid in a communist society. However, Boia's view is not entirely applicable to the Romanian context of the 1970s and 1980s. Both at the discourse level and in practice, the Nicolae Ceaușescu regime praised the physical strength of workers more than their intellectual achievements. This preference became obvious in the mid and late 1980s, as we will see in Chapter 3.

In his keynote work, *The Birth of Propaganda State*, Peter Kenez analyzes the institutions engaged in disseminating propaganda during the Bolshevik years: the press, cinema and publishing. The author suggests that we should renounce the hope of ever finding an all-encompassing definition for propaganda. Instead, he proposes the following approach: “Propaganda is nothing more than the attempt to transmit social and political values in the hope of affecting people's thinking, emotions and thereby behavior” (Kenez 4). The nuance proposed by Kenez should not pass unnoticed: propaganda is *an attempt* to indoctrinate the public; its success may be quantified only by assessing the response of the audience.

Bolshevism entailed a revision of Marxism. As Kenez observes, Lenin believed that the workers were unable to understand their own interests; therefore they needed to be led. He believed in the role of intellectuals as propagandists, who put their knowledge in the service of the regime. Bolsheviks regarded the Russian people with a condescending eye. “Lenin and

his fellow revolutionaries in this respect were no different from the majority of Russian intellectuals, who saw little that was valuable in the indigenous culture of the Russian people” (Kenez 6). Propaganda needed to be tailored to the audience’s capacity for understanding. Bolsheviks decided that propagandists and agitators should carry out propaganda activities. The former were to debate issues like unemployment or the superiority of capitalism over socialism, while the agitators targeted the masses. Their duty was to persuade, and at the same time raise public indignation towards the former political order. However, these two approaches were often interchangeable, in accordance with the needs of the person or institution that generated the indoctrinatory message.

Kenez provides a useful clarification with the focus of his book. Even though he describes a *propaganda state*, we should not consider the Bolshevik state a totalitarian one. “When I talk about totalitarianism, I think of a well-functioning state or Party machinery that successfully controls every aspect of the life of the citizens” (11). The author further observes that the Bolshevik regime did not encroach on people’s everyday lives. Nonpolitical art or literature could still exist under the Bolsheviks. Besides that, we should keep in mind that the Bolshevik organizations in the villages remained ineffective, due to a lack of reliable cadres. The author contends that only by studying the methods of mass mobilization employed by the Bolsheviks could one understand the development of Stalinism as totalitarian era. While the 1960s in Romania, with their political and economic thaw were reminiscent of the Bolshevik years, the decades that followed were similar to the early Stalinist years. Under the Ceaușescu regime, people had to cope with the RCP’s everyday intrusion in their private life. The public discourse was exclusively dedicated to the alleged

achievements of the Romanian people under the lead of Nicolae Ceaușescu. Whoever dared to manifest his/her overt dissent towards the regime openly risked severe repercussions.

Jeffrey Brooks investigates the economy of gift in the Soviet Union during the 1930s. His approach is, in my view, fundamental for understanding how ordinary Russians interacted – or, more accurately, were compelled to interact – with the Stalinist regime. Until the completion of the first Five-Year Plan, Brooks observes, media emphasized the need for public sacrifice. People were expected to cut their needs to a minimum, so that the coming generations could lead a prosperous life. By 1932 this rhetoric was radically changed. The entire nation had to rejoice at the success of the first Five-Year Plan. Under such circumstances, “[T]he ethos of self-denial for a cause prevalent in the 1920s gradually gave way to perpetual indebtedness” (Brooks 83). This was a reinterpretation of Marcel Mauss’ theory of the gift in a socialist key. Mauss spoke about three obligations incumbent in the ritual of presenting gifts: offering, receiving and returning. People were offered the gift of a wealthy, happy life that could only be reciprocated by boundless commitment to Stalin, and willingness to drudgery for state’s benefit. “What more can I give the homeland to repay her as a true daughter for my training and for all her attention and love?” asked the prize-winning collective farmer, Mariia Demechenko, a Don-Cosack winegrower and student of agronomy” (Brooks 84). Soviet media used Alexei Stakhanov, the hero-miner, as endorsement of the rhetoric of gift. By exceeding the quota fourteen times, he manifested his gratitude for Stalin’s fatherly care. Voicing the alleged enthusiasm of workers, the Soviet daily newspaper *Pravda* required higher norms of production. As Brooks observes, the publication constantly reminded ordinary people that their lives had become better and better, therefore their indebtedness increased. The dynamic of social interrelations was refashioned in accordance

with this phenomenon. Brooks observes that personal ties with Stalin were deemed more important than the ties with one's family, relatives or friends. Soviet media encouraged familiarity: shock-workers³ and collective farmers addressed Stalin with the informal *ty*, as they would have called a close friend.

The Romanian context of the 1970s and especially 1980s was reminiscent of the Stalinist 1930s. "Romania's Conducator [leader] had been cast in a hard Stalinist mold, and his political style was overwhelmingly indebted to the values and methods of Stalinist political culture" (Tismaneanu 189). However, such intimate approaches to the leader as described by Brooks were not allowed in Romania. The Party etiquette prescribed a certain distance between Nicolae Ceaușescu and the Romanian people, as expressed in a well-known formula – *comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu, General Secretary of the RCP*- and the use of courtesy pronouns. Children were also required to observe this ritual of address, even if the state's propaganda urged them to consider Ceaușescu as their devoted father. However, the rhetoric of the gift was preserved. Countless panels displayed inside schools all over Romania read "*We wish to thank Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu for the magnificent life and study conditions he has created for us*". A patriotic song broadcast by Romanian radio and TV stations expressed Romanians' hearty thanks for the Communist Party. The difference between the two regimes is the degree of compliance. In Soviet Russia "many no doubt rejected this message, but few could disregard it" (Brooks 89). In Romania the underground social-economic system was more pervasive than in the 1930s Soviet Union. Besides their daytime role of faithful servants for the Ceaușescu regime, most party activists were deeply involved in this underground system. Their position facilitated access to a variety of services and consumer goods unavailable to ordinary people. But activists and *Securitate* or *Militia*

³ The workers who greatly exceeded the quota assigned to them by the state enterprise for which they worked.

agents represented only the first echelon of this system. Individuals such as grocery clerks, employees of electronics stores, pilots, sailors and other persons who were permitted to travel abroad also held privileged positions in this parallel economy. Romanians who wished to purchase food over the quotas allowed by the state, or skip ahead on the waiting list for color TV sets had to contend with parallel system. The need to offer tangible gifts in exchange for such favors prevailed over the abstract indebtedness to the Ceaușescu family. This underground system had its own rules and its specific currency. Besides money, Kent cigarettes and Amigo instant coffee represented valuable means for buying favors. Even children were familiar with this reality. On each celebratory occasion, they would offer such products or imported cosmetics to their teachers, for a bonus of benevolence. “A smaller committee was then organized within the big committee⁴. It was made up of mothers more specialized in deluxe purchasing, who were closer to the comrade⁵ and knew her taste. The purchase was beautifully packaged and handed in to the comrade, in a small circle; later on we were all thanked, during a meeting with all parents” (Muzeul Taranului Roman 73). The gift rhetoric was thus twisted: the gift represented bribe, a means of stimulating social networking in the communist society. It could hardly be considered a sign of people’s gratitude toward the Nicolae Ceaușescu regime.

Sheila Fitzpatrick reconstructs the urban milieu of the Stalin years, with its similar repertoire of survival strategies. As the author notes, Russians perceived the state as an obtrusive presence in their lives. She regards the *everyday* in terms of people’s *everyday interactions with the political regime*. The survival strategies were not limited to the daily chase after bread, but also to the endeavors of hiding one’s thoughts, to avoid state

⁴ Each class had its own committee of parents

⁵ Comrade teacher

repercussions. According to Fitzpatrick, the climate of the 1930s “encouraged fatalism and passivity in the population, instilling a sense that the individual was not and could not be in control of his own fate” (219). But this fatalism coexisted with gambling impulses. From time to time, people were willing to take risks, by telling anti-Soviet jokes or by making fun of Stalin. According to the author, this behavior was a direct consequence of the unpredictability that governed the Soviet society of the 1930s. Not even extreme caution and reverence towards the regime could guarantee that a person would stay free. This inclination to risk ran counter to the state’s discourse, which attempted to inculcate calculation and planning into its citizens. However, in most cases resistance and opposition to the Stalinist regime was tacit; “a degree of skepticism, even a refusal to take the regime’s most serious pronouncements fully seriously, was the norm” (222). The political initiatives of the state were responded to with a shrug of shoulders and a “This too will pass”. Véronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya and Thomas Lahusen edited a volume that gathers together several Soviet diaries of the 1930s. They consider that “the essence of a diary is the space of tension between different – often heterogeneous— times, between the personal, the intimate, sometimes the bodily, and the social” (Garros and Korenevskaya and Lahusen, XIV). The volume juxtaposes testimonies from the Stalinist social elite with those of outcasts. Enthusiastic tones from the diaries merge with the desperation of the destitute agricultural worker, a former kulak, who cannot make ends meet and provide a living for his family. The proud achievements of the regime evoked by *Pravda* are contrasted to the diary of Ignat Danilovich Frolov. His continuous preoccupation with the weather or the funeral of a neighbor who drank himself to an early grave do not leave him much time to observe the grandeur of the Stalinist era. He only interacts with the new order when he has to deal with

the collective farm. Otherwise, his everyday universe remains largely unaffected by the political changes that have occurred in the Soviet Union. In turn, Andrei Stepanovich Arzhilovsky, the kulak whose farm was collectivized by the state, remarks that “[P]eople used to shop just once a week, but now you have to chase around looking for bread everyday. We’re so used to the lines. We can’t imagine any other way of life” (Garros et al. 113). Leonid Alekseyevich Potyomkin, a geologist, was an enthusiastic supporter of the Stalinist era: “Tirelessly working to raise my cultural-theoretical level, embodying absorbing in myself the ideal of a social activist and theoretician, a revolutionary, a party worker of the great school of Lenin (Garros et al., 1995: 257). He concludes, further on: “Life! I have triumphed!” (Garros et al. 282).

Russians’ interaction with the state could be defined in the terms of a binary opposition “us” and “them”. As Fitzpatrick argues, ordinary Russians perceived that the breach between themselves and authorities was irreparable. “They” concentrated all privileges in their hands and had the power to dispose of people’s fate. Nonetheless, there were persons who benefited from the regime, such as the shock-workers, who transgressed this demarcation line that separated the two realms. Authorities were quick to reward their efforts. “*Homo Sovieticus* was a string-puller, an operator, a time-server, a freeloader, a mouther of slogans, and much more. But above all, he was a survivor” (Fitzpatrick 227).

Again, there is a difference of degree between the Stalinist 1930s and the last two decades of communism in Romania. Everyday living in Romania depended more on negotiating, as a skill for survival. “For me the barter was the intricate web of connections. Bookshop assistants, chiefly the seniors, heads of departments, head grocers, etc. I took a book from the bookshop and traded it for meat from somewhere else. People were killing to

lay hands on good books such as Clavell's *Shogun* or Fowles' *The Magus*."

(<http://martor.memoria.ro/>). I emphasize these aspects of negotiation because, as the analysis of interviews will demonstrate, even the children were familiarized with the advantages of belonging to the underground social network. Romanians' everyday life naturalized practices of bargaining, trading and exchange beyond the reaches of the state.

China during the Cultural Revolution

The Cultural Revolution in China of the 1960s had a major impact upon the social and cultural policies developed in Romania beginning in 1971. Following a one-month visit to China and North Korea, Nicolae Ceaușescu decided that the ideological activities in Romania needed major adjustments. The political content of artistic production had to be increased, while the values alien to the communist ethic, such as cosmopolitanism, were deemed as undesirable. This topic will be discussed in broader detail in Chapter 3, in the section dedicated to Ceaușescu's speeches. I will pay special attention to the presidential address that followed the visit to Asia, known as the *Mangalia Theses*, named after the Black Sea resort where the July 1971 RCP plenary was held.

In the years that preceded the Cultural Revolution, Mao Zedong repeatedly declared that remolding people, especially intellectuals, requires time and patience. "We must oppose the method of "finishing people off with a single blow... Persuasion, not compulsion is the only way to convince them" (Dittmer and Chu 210). The Chinese leader asserted his support for a "cultivation theory" as Lowell Dittmer puts it. However, the first years of the Cultural Revolution brought a radicalization of this view. Launched in 1966, it aimed to disrupt existent social and political hierarchies and replace them with structures that were allegedly closer to people. "Under the attack on the Four Olds (old ideas, old culture, old

customs and old habits), it sought to introduce new educational, social and cultural practices to undercut the privileged position of professionals and intellectuals” (Evans and Donald, 2). Mao required that education, literature and art should contribute to the consolidation of the socialist system, while rejecting capitalist and bourgeois values. He thus rejected the theory of art for art’s sake, and required that political criteria for art should prevail over the aesthetic ones. Propaganda messages had to be easily comprehended by the populace. The Soviet model of *ROSTA*⁶ posters was grafted to the Chinese tradition of posters. These printed productions had to comply with the artistic principles established by Jiang Qing (Mao’s wife): “On the basis of her ‘three prominences’ (stress positive characters, the heroic in them, and stress the most central of the main characters)” (Landsberger 49).

While posters covered a variety of topics, I will only refer to those displaying children. As Landsberger contends, children and youth were viewed as the generation that would take an active part in modernizing the country. The year 2000 was invested with mythical signification, as a time for socialist resurrection. Chinese children were likewise exposed to a range of themes such as the moral duty of respecting the flag, their country and the Great Wall, or showing respect for family and teachers. Landsberger also mentions propaganda themes like “Pay attention to hygiene!” or cultivating international friendship between kids worldwide.

In her article “Children as Political Messengers: Art, Childhood and Continuity”, Stephanie Donald examines the ideological role of children in Chinese political posters. As in any other totalitarian society, in China children were considered the base of the family, while the family was the base of the state. The former represented a material value, an asset, due to

⁶ Posters with propaganda content usually displayed in shop windows in the Soviet Union (1930s).

their potential to transmit indoctrinating messages. “The posters declare [...] that children are active components of the body politic, with the narrative implication that, as such, they need to be educated into its ways” (Donald 80). Chinese children were already indebted to the state at their birth. Consequently, Donald brings into discussion their peculiar status as young citizens. There are very few posters in which children appear accompanied by their family, since they were already appropriated by the political regime. At the same time, the researcher observes that children in posters are “doubly subjected” (83). They have to respond both to the requirements of the state, while “also carrying an emotional appeal to the adult spectatorship” (83). Donald thus proposes an interesting approach, according to which children must respond both to ideological commandments and to an adult gaze. She contends that posters depicting children targeted the juvenile audience and the adults equally. Touched by the image of a rubicund child picking flowers, parents were expected to develop a positive response towards the propaganda message contained in the poster.

Xiaomei Chen deals in her article with the reception of these posters by recalling her and her friends’ childhood years. One of the respondents admitted that, up to a certain age, she let herself be persuaded by the indoctrinating message of the posters. In turn, Chen herself remembers that posters became “indelibly inscribed as part of [my] childhood world of wonders, [my] wanderings, and the emotions associated with growing pains” (Chen in Evans and Donald 109). The brutal everyday realities of the Cultural Revolution decade are *humanized* through this retrospective look. Many people who lived in a totalitarian regime reinterpret their past through a nostalgic filter. Objects or rituals that populated everyday existence under communism, and that usually generated a reserved or hostile response, are now regarded with an amused tolerance. Chen admits that her perspective was probably

filtered by almost two decades of living in Western Europe and an academic career in a Western university.

People generated various meanings and uses for the posters. An old peasant who had hung thirty-two posters in his room was widely applauded for his revolutionary enthusiasm. It soon turned out that he actually used the posters as wallpaper made of high-quality material. A product designated to ideologically elevate people was reduced to its condition of commodity. Ironically, commodification, the appanage of Capitalist societies, defeated the Cultural Revolution. The peasant resisted the propaganda message conveyed by those posters by ignoring it.

Considering the emphasis it laid upon children, the Chinese model of propaganda was similar to the Romanian one. Both Mao and Nicolae Ceaușescu considered children an important target for the indoctrinatory messages transmitted by the state. Both political regimes aimed to create a new generation of *new men*, educated in the spirit of communist ideology. The artifacts dedicated to the young generation, be it posters or illustrated books, transmitted a repertoire of desirable everyday living practices to the readers. Like the Chinese children, Romanian ones were exposed to the rhetoric constructed around the new millennium and its promises. A song performed by all Pioneer choruses evoked year 2000, when kids would become adults and would transform all the daring dreams they once had into reality. The children's magazine *Start 2000* projected a utopian future, dominated by alternative sources of energy and anthropoid robots that would perform house chores. In turn, when asked to depict the year 2000 as they would see it, Romanian kids replaced buses with space shuttles, and pedestrians with astronauts in imponderable positions. This future full of promises was meant to divert children's attention from their unheated classroom or the

miserly toys waiting for them at home. Children were recommended to obey their supreme parents, Mao and Ceaușescu, respectively, to do physical work for the benefit of the authorities, and to dream about the bright future of their countries. However, the interviews I have undertaken demonstrate that Romanian kids remained largely immune to this type of messages. In most cases, this type of response was due to the family and peer's influence.

Theoretical paradigms for analyzing the everyday realities under socialism

“In all the voluminous discussion one subject is generally left out: the everyday mythologies and rituals of ordinary life. They are hidden behind political, ideological or artistic screens, deemed irrelevant for the heroic conception of the national identity in Russia or for Soviet ideology, inscrutable to many Western political scientists and journalists (Boym 2).”

A bottom-up approach is of capital importance for understanding the post World War II context in the Soviet Union and the communist states in Eastern Europe. By scrutinizing the everyday living practices in these societies, the researcher may find out how people interacted with the communist authorities. Furthermore, these rituals open the path for studying the Romanians', Poles' or Czechs' everyday negotiations with the political regimes in their countries. As Svetlana Boym contends in the opening of her book, “[T]he study of the Russian everyday reveals some centuries-old mechanisms of cultural survival, arts of minor compromise and resistance” (5). Sheila Fitzpatrick, who researches the everyday practices during Stalinism, proposes a similar approach. Her book focuses on practice, “that is, the forms of behavior and strategies of survival and advancement that people develop to cope with particular social and political situations” (2). Negotiating and interpreting the state

propaganda discourse represented a key everyday practice in totalitarian spaces. Not even the coercive political regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu could prevent Romanians from giving various readings to the public discourse. Although propaganda was ubiquitous and communicated through all channels available, it could not trigger a favorable response from the majority of population. Romanians gave an instrumental use to propaganda: they attempted to use it according to their personal needs. It was difficult to obtain concrete benefits by negotiating this discourse, but people had at least the satisfaction of mocking it, searching for alternative (semi) clandestine discourses or simply ignoring it. As the interviews in chapter 4 will demonstrate, even children were familiar with this type of survival strategy, and developed their own instrumental uses of propaganda.

Understanding the past is also important because some people living in post-totalitarian societies are still sentimentally attached to the communist decades, which they remember as an era of fairness and equality for everybody. This requires an analysis of how the everyday realities of the past are preserved in the present and reinterpreted through the filter of nostalgia. “A Russian philosopher wrote in 1995 that, from the vantage point of the first post-Soviet years, he had come to recognize that the grayness and fear of Soviet reality had been indivisibly linked with a very real optimism and warmth, with accompanying forms of “human happiness”, “comforts and well-being”” (Yurchak 8). Alexei Yurchak explores late socialism, aiming to avoid the extremes of either the traditional negative approach, or the romanticizing perspective. The numerous examples provided by the author are closely related to this chapter’s focus on survival strategies and everyday living rituals. Yurchak analyzes how people positioned themselves vis-à-vis the political regime. His intention is to discard the binary-opposition model, heavily employed in the analyses of totalitarian systems. A

socialist context, he suggests, should not be discussed as oppression vs. resistance, state vs. people, official economy vs. second economy, official culture vs. counterculture, truth vs. lie, and so on. These categories should be interpreted as complementary rather than contradictory. He traces the origins of the binary constructs in the discourse of the Cold-War era, which articulated the Soviet Union and all of Eastern Europe as an antithesis of the West. Yurchak paraphrases Gal and Kligman, who argue that in socialist contexts “[r]ather than any clear-cut ‘us’ versus ‘them’ or ‘private’ versus ‘public’ , there was a ubiquitous self-embedding or interweaving of these categories” (Yurchak 7). Gal and Kligman further consider that “[e]veryone was to a certain extent complicit in the system of patronage, lying, theft, hedging, and duplicity through which the system operated” (Yurchak 7). The two American researchers are clearly right when they refer to the survival schemes that Romanians employed. But the authors suggest that this compliance was voluntary. The testimonies of Romanians recalling the years they lived under the Nicolae Ceaușescu regime emphasize how belonging to social networks was the sine-qua-non condition for providing a modest everyday living. Purchasing eggs from a RCP activist who, due to his privileged positions, had connections at a state farm, and paying three times their normal price was no longer a shameful choice, but a necessary compromise for feeding one’s family. Most everyday strategies should be relegated to the same category of necessary partnership. People did not enjoy the complicity Gal and Kligman spoke about; they coped with it, *grinned and bore it*, as a Romanian saying goes. This interweaving involved negotiation and exchange, but not the sense of being on the same barricade. The goods providers or the intermediaries were perceived as a necessary evil for everyday survival, and regarded with reserve, if not even a small degree of antipathy. In turn, neither did these providers wish to spend more time

than necessary with their customers. The two spheres, “us” – ordinary Romanians — and “them”— people who had access to goods— services and favors were demarcated with clarity. “Inventiveness, humiliation, patience were required to an ordinary man searching for foodstuff. Theft, an almost compulsory relation in-kind payment and barter were also entailed. A network which, in normal conditions, does not exist, but which is rapidly created in crisis situations” (Muzeul Taranului Roman 10). The term “complicity” proposed by Gal and Kligman needs therefore to be further nuanced when applied to Romania. In the Romanian situation, the binary-opposition model may still be viable. As long as we do not see the favors or commercial exchanges as negotiations with the regime, but strictly as pragmatic gestures, meant to provide the minimal conditions for everyday living, the separation between “us” and “them” is easily observable. Even children were educated in spirit of this opposition. One of my interviewees remembered how her family advised her to be careful when conversing with a colleague whose parents were *Securitate* agents.

In the 1980s Romania was going against the current of the Soviet Union and the neighboring East European states. Romanians feared informers. “An important aspect of the 80s was the feeling of uncertainty and suspicion towards the people around you. I was obsessed that informers may exist among people close to me – colleagues, friends” (Muzeul Taranului Roman 63). This anxiety has not disappeared completely from people’s (collective) mentality even after the 1989 Revolution. Upon reading Yurchak’s book, I discovered a set of personal freedoms enjoyed by Russians but unconceivable in the 1980s Romania. In fact, many Romanians perceived the Soviet Union as an aspirational model of democracy, and Mikhail Gorbachev as a visionary leader. Late socialism “became markedly an explosion of various styles of living that were simultaneously inside and outside the

system and can be characterized as “being *vnye*” (Yurchak 128). However, leading a *vnye* existence would not have been possible without the tacit acknowledgement of the Soviet authorities. The modest and bohemian cafes where young people met and conversed were established with the approval of the state. Another example would be the socially peripheral and underpaid jobs that educated young Russians willingly accepted just to get more time to read or think. The Soviet authorities seemed less willing to regiment young people, both physically and ideologically, than their Romanian counterparts. That is why the breach between ordinary Russians and state was less acute than in Romania. Yurchak’s analysis brilliantly renders the context, everyday realities and people’s interaction with authorities in the late years of the Soviet Union. However, his model of analysis cannot be extended to Romanian society in the 1970s and 1980s. Here, fear of reprisals confined alternative discourse to the intimacy of private apartments. Even children were familiar with political anecdotes and rumors, their families’ survival strategies, and the double language for relations with authorities: simulated enthusiasm vs mockery, cynicism and critique in private areas and safe spaces. As I mentioned above, this double language represented a lesson children learned from early on for their own and their families’ safety. The following chapters of my thesis will focus, on the one hand, on what Romanian children learned from propaganda, what they were compelled to say, and on what they actually thought. The interviews will reveal that kids were aware of this discursive schism. Moreover, they employed the state approved discourse to their own benefit.

This chapter considered the shortcomings of the behaviorist model of propaganda, especially when applied to former totalitarian areas. Incorporating the audience response to the state propaganda discourse, analyzing the way this discourse was negotiated and daily

interpreted by its target public represent an essential condition for understanding the interaction between people and the totalitarian state. A researcher of former totalitarian areas such as Romania should incorporate people's response to state propaganda discourse for two reasons. First, he would have access to a bottom-up version of history, to the collective mentality of people and to their repertoire of everyday practices. Second, he would be exposed to a set of popular culture forms and practices in a totalitarian context– i.e., the way state propaganda discourse was read by people, transformed into an everyday topic for jokes and mockery, and people's daily manifestations of resistance to this discourse.

In the following chapter I will analyze the recurrent themes of Nicolae Ceaușescu's speeches after his 1971 visit to China and North Korea. I will refer to the model of an ideal child, as configured in the presidential speeches, and suggest why this construct should be called *the virtual child* rather than *the ideal child*. A considerable part of the chapter is dedicated to the semiotic and discourse analysis of several artifacts dedicated to children. By undertaking this analysis, I will look at how the themes of the presidential speeches were transposed in texts targeting children and at the repertoire of desirable everyday practices for kids, as proposed by these texts.

Chapter 3 will analyze the interviews I have undertaken with members of the Romanian diaspora in Canada. It contains the accounts of *real* children, who experienced the Nicolae Ceaușescu regime, their *real* living practices and the way they coped with the everyday context of the 1970s and 1980s.

CHAPTER 2

CONFIGURING THE VIRTUAL CHILD

Romanian communist leaders re-invented history to serve their ideological purposes. The events that could have depicted them in an unfavorable light were simply eliminated from scholarly texts or any other publications with historical content. Under communism, history ceased to represent a succession of events with causal connections between them but rather became a sequence of moralizing stories meant to expose the courage and integrity of the communist leaders.

Following the 1989 Revolution, Romanians had access to several demystified versions of their country's history. However, the historians who attempted to deconstruct the previous communist myths and to demonstrate that Romanian history was used by the RCP for propaganda purposes were received with hostility by a surprisingly large segment of the audience. The authors who questioned the exceptional nature of the Romanian people, as heralded by the pre-1989 communist propaganda, were labeled as enemies of the country by media voicing popular indignation. The hostility of some Romanians, when confronted with this revised history of their country and not with the fictionalized version presented by the communist state, demonstrated their vulnerability to communist propaganda. Their skepticism towards such historical revisionism was determined by the turbulent context of the early 1990s. The communist social hierarchy and system of values collapsed. The heroes of the communist decades, particularly the workers and the people who benefited from the regime but had no connections with the political apparatus, saw their privileges brutally

revoked. Their jobs were no longer necessary in a society that was experiencing a painful transition to capitalism and market economy. This category of people developed a hostile answer towards the post-1989 public discourse, while abandoning themselves to nostalgia for the Ceaușescu regime. They shared the view that the president was a true patriot, who provided a modest but safe existence for his people. Consequently, they regarded all post-communist deconstructions of the RCP's version of history as gratuitous attacks against their (the people's) own past, better than the present of the 1990s. Even nowadays, almost twenty years after the Revolution, the number of nostalgic Romanians remains large.

However, the Romanians for whom the pre-1989 everyday living represented merely an opportunity to exercise their survival skills, as well as the young readers, developed a positive response towards this reinterpretation of the historical discourse. Their interest was mostly due to the fact that they remained largely immune to the propaganda of the presidential speeches, and even searched for alternative discourses. At the same time they wished to explore areas of history that were obscured by the communist discourse, such as the monarchy decades in Romania. These facts were confirmed by ethnographic interviews undertaken by social researchers who attempted to recuperate the collective memory of the pre-1989 years.

Past rewritten, myths refashioned. Romanian history as propaganda instrument

It is important to review the principal myths of the communist version of Romanian history and the way these myths were deconstructed through the post-1989 accounts. This type of approach is preferable to a chronological perspective for three reasons. First, the state-approved historical discourse abandoned strict chronology for the sake of propaganda purposes. Decades of modern and contemporary history were eliminated from this discourse,

because they were not consonant with the values promoted by the RCP. Second, history as propaganda was communicated through these fabricated constructs. All media available reiterated and disseminated these myths. Third (and most important in the context of my research), this type of discourse was also transmitted through schools. Children represented an important target for RCP, because they had to be educated in accordance with the communist values. The new version of history with its pantheon of communist heroes played a significant part in the attempt to indoctrinate Romanian children. One of the popular culture artifacts I will analyze below in this chapter, *An Unforgettable Visit*, is extracted from one of the beautiful books meant to popularize the state acknowledged historical discourse.

I will begin my analysis by referring to a stereotype formula of all pre-1989 propaganda speeches. It was said that the Romanian people never initiated attacks against other nations, but only carried on defensive wars. The battles they lost were often overlooked. Works published after the Revolution disputed this theory and analyzed the motivation that stood behind it. This myth aimed to instill people with national pride and encourage them to close the ranks around Nicolae Ceaușescu. The last two decades of communism, the 1970s and 1980s, were characterized by a wave of nationalism in the rhetoric of the Ceaușescu regime. This position was complemented by increased distrust towards neighboring countries, especially the Soviet Union, which was witnessing, from the mid 80s, Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika*. This stereotype of the external threat also aimed to persuade the audience that the echelon of Romanian sovereigns and *voievozi*, the pantheon of heroes, was gloriously being continued by Nicolae Ceaușescu.

Nicolae Ceaușescu was positioned by the pre-1989 historical discourse as a leader with an elevated moral stature and a key role in the international relations area. Accordingly,

statesmen who had contributed to the enlightenment and prosperity of the Romanian people but were not affiliated with communism were eliminated from the official historical discourse. An example in this sense was King Carol of Hohenzollern, whose reign commenced on May 10th 1866, and lasted for 48 years. Because the monarchy represented a forbidden topic in the communist era, most historical texts published before 1989 left the reign of Carol I unmentioned, and skipped directly to World War I. After 1989 the positive role of this king “who indeed represented a great sovereign, a respected arbiter of a half century of political equilibrium” (Boia, *Istorie* 299) was unanimously acknowledged.

The interwar decades were most affected by the communist obfuscation. Historians stressed the workers’ demonstrations against the bourgeoisie, and upon the brutality with which these protests were repressed by authorities. This account had two aims. The first was to create a revolutionary background for Nicolae Ceaușescu, who was a teenager in the 1930s. His hagiographers emphasized the role he played as a young underground militant. Being surrounded by this mythical aura of a juvenile hero, Ceaușescu was presented as model to several generations of children. The second goal was to emphasize the role of the RCP as a protector of workers, and to present it as a distinct, respected voice in the interwar political scene. After 1989 historians initiated the deconstruction of communist ideological accounts, and demonstrated that the party actually had a marginal political role and was affected by continuous internal struggle. At the same time, post-1989 research demonstrated that the interwar decades represented a time of prosperity for many Romanians. Even if the peasantry continued to live in modest conditions, cities developed, thanks to economic growth. Prices rose, but so did salaries; this “probably explains the weakness of the union movements. The workers went on strike and demonstrated in the streets only in 1920, 1929

and 1933. After the economic recovery in the 1930s, social protests were rare and insignificant” (Georgescu 218).

In 1945, at the end of World War II, Romania was under complete Russian control. Petru Groza, placed in this position by the Soviet Union, led the Romanian government. Under his command, elections were organized in 1946. Officially, communists won them, although all foreign observers present there had declared the victory of historical parties, the Peasants' National Party and the Liberal Party. On December 30th 1947 King Mihai I was forced to abdicate, and Romania became a republic. The country was now completely dominated by communists. Following the Soviet model, agriculture was collectivized beginning in 1949. Media trumpeted the enthusiasm with which people donated their lands and animals to the state, as a token of their unconditional endorsement for communism. Post-1989 research has re-written the history of collectivization, according to the testimonies of persons who witnessed this event or were personally affected by it. Collectivization raised a wave of dissatisfaction and resistance among peasants. Villagers greeted cadres who propagandized for collectivization with hostility or worse. In this violent process, the peasants who continued to oppose it were either shot or imprisoned together with their entire families. Along with this process, commercial enterprises, banks, buildings and various other assets were nationalized. The pre-1989 historic discourse presented nationalization as an act of justice that returned these assets to their right owner: the Romanian people.

In 1965 Nicolae Ceaușescu became the General Secretary of the RCP. The first years of his role were accompanied by a political and cultural thaw, and by a relative economic prosperity. In the late 80s, when confronted by the chronic lack of consumer goods, Romanians remembered this period as the golden years of communism. Not only did

Ceaușescu initially enjoy the sympathy of his co-nationals; he was also well liked among the Western leaders for his alleged courage in disregarding the Russians. According to Vladimir Tismaneanu:

In the late 1960s and 1970s, Nicolae Ceaușescu ...was described by Western media as something of a maverick. It was fashionable in the late 1960s to discover Ceaușescu's "autonomy" in foreign policy and credit him with a genuine commitment to Romanian national values (Tismaneanu 187).

Ceaușescu's popularity reached its peak in August 1968 when he publicly opposed the Soviet invasion in Czechoslovakia. Post-1989 Romanian historians demonstrated however that this act of courage represented the president's strategy for consolidating his public support⁷.

In 1971, following a visit to China and North Korea, Ceaușescu decided to implement the model of Mao's Cultural Revolution in Romania. The cult of personality reached unprecedented heights. Romanians had to cheerfully acclaim their leader, in spite of the miserable living conditions they had to bear. Whoever dared to oppose the regime was severely punished. People lived under terror almost twenty years – until December 1989, when Ceaușescu's dictatorship was overthrown:

Far from having tried to become a 'de-Stalinizer', Ceaușescu was loyally attached to the most compromised Leninist-Stalinist dogmas and had attempted to simulate a 'mass movement regime' through steady infusions of zeal and political fervor (Tismaneanu 189).

This state-approved version of history aimed to generate a positive public response towards the RCP and its leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu. The majority of its themes were reiterated in each presidential speech. Thus, the ideological constructs proposed by the propaganda apparatus around RCP did not remain confined to historical texts, but were

⁷ Cioroianu, 2002; Tismaneanu, 2003

transmitted to the Romanian people through each channel and on each occasion available. In the next section of my thesis, I will analyze the recurrent themes in Nicolae Ceaușescu's speeches, besides the historical constructs.

Recurrent themes in presidential speeches

I will mention two categories of presidential speeches: general ones, addressed to a large category of public, and speeches dedicated to youth and children – members of UCY, Pioneers and Homeland Falcons. However, Nicolae Ceaușescu never adjusted his speeches to the type of audience he targeted. He spoke his speeches in the same way to the RCP members, to the *working people from cities and villages*, as a fashionable pre-1989 syntagm went, or to children - Pioneers and Homeland Falcons. These speeches were constructed around a fixed repertoire of themes, which will be briefly reviewed below.

Beginning with 1971, Ceaușescu's directives for strengthening the ideological activity and enlightening the masses would be echoed by all artifacts dedicated to children. These artifacts accurately mirrored the unimaginable scope attained by the personality cult constructed around Nicolae Ceaușescu and his family. In the early 1970s Romanian children were exposed to stories with proletarian morals but less to the image of the presidential couple. In the 1980s schoolbooks and other publications dedicated to children would open with the portraits of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, with excerpts from their speeches and / or with large accounts of their working visits around the country.

To analyze Nicolae Ceaușescu's speeches, I will employ discourse analysis. I will search for the meanings behind the stereotypical language of these speeches, and discuss the significance of the recurrent syntagms in these speeches. In spite of an ambiguous tone, created by the wooden tongue typical of communist exhortations, the speeches represented

diatribes against imaginary enemies of the Nicolae Ceaușescu regime. The thousands of pages covered by these speeches may be reduced to a simple binary opposition: us vs. them. Although lengthy, these speeches had a simplistic structure and reiterated a limited number of themes. This topic will be discussed in broader detail in the next chapter.

Researchers in the capitalist West have traditionally employed discourse analysis to explore how dominance and hegemony relations are maintained and reproduced through public discourse. If applied to totalitarian contexts, this type of exercise needs to readjust its purposes. Dominance has different meanings in these two types of societies. In capitalism, “[D]ominance is (...) the exercise of social power by elites, institutions or groups, that result in social inequality, including political, cultural, class, ethnic, racial and gender inequality” (van Dijk 249-283). Access to social power is shared between several groups – people who, as van Dijk observes, have access to public discourse. Dominance is thus a versatile and difficult to analyze concept at the level of Western societies. In totalitarian spaces, dominance is equivalent to repression and coercion. An oligarchic political apparatus has access to the power structures of societies, with some restrictions, though. It was only the rulers of the country who had absolute power and privileges; in Romania’s case – the Ceaușescu family. Discourse analysis performed in capitalist contexts has to deconstruct texts in order to trace practices of power. But leaders of totalitarian regimes overtly expressed their power and authority over the population in the speeches they gave or books they wrote. Dominance was strongly asserted, not suggested. A researcher does not have to dig for expressions of power, because they stand at the surface of the discourse. He has to look for something else which lies behind the standard language of official speeches. This is what I have undertaken in this thesis.

One important theme was Nicolae Ceaușescu's ideal of molding the new man, and the role of school in this respect. At the Xth RCP Congress, in 1969, Ceaușescu did not make yet any remarks about the ideological role of school, but only mentioned the formative goals of this institution. Moreover, he spoke about the importance of school in fostering initiative and a receptive mind towards everything new. This position changed in 1971, when the president recommended that all institutions with a formative role should contribute to *molding the new man*. This syntagm would be obsessively repeated until 1989 as the paramount desideratum of the Ceaușescu era. The regime needed a malleable substance that could be *molded*. Above everything, a yielding, unquestioning nature was required of the new man.

In subsequent speeches, the president suggested that the new man should be molded from an early age. Children:

Want to become familiar with Prince Charming, created by Ispirescu, but they also want to know the Prince Charming of today, the hero of the struggle for social and national justice: they want to know what the dragons of Fairy Tales look like but also what the dragons of modern times look like, and who was the brave lad who cut off their heads (Ceaușescu *Speech Delivered* 59).

The opposition between what children read and what they *should* read, according to RCP, is emphasized by the adversative conjunction “but” that links the two phrases. The traditional child read fairy tales by Ispirescu, a Romanian author – not a word about imperialist authors like Perrault, Andersen or the Brothers Grimm. But beginning in 1971, even Ispirescu's Prince Charming would fall into disgrace in comparison with the everyday hero – Nicolae Ceaușescu. He was the “brave lad” who cut off the heads of modern dragons (i.e., the voracious capitalists). He was the defender of the country, and every Romanian child should know his biography. From his position as father of the nation, Nicolae Ceaușescu claimed to know what was best for children. He knew that youngsters no longer

believed in the fiction of fairy tales, but, as genuine communists in the making, they wanted facts. The way in which school books and all artifacts dedicated to children responded to Nicolae Ceaușescu's *indicații* will be analyzed below in more detail. The young communist hero was substituted for Prince Charming, fighting to rescue his country from the bourgeois-landlord regime. These socialist fables represented in fact endless multiplications of the same pattern: Ceaușescu's childhood and youth, according to his officially fabricated biography. The fairy tale as dream and evasion was replaced by the fairy tale as propaganda.

To put this ideal into practice, Nicolae Ceaușescu stated that the preeminent role of school needed to be that of disseminating communist ideology. "We must turn every schooling unit into a powerful centre of the education of children and young people in the socialist and communist spirit" (Ceaușescu, *Speech Delivered* 54). Furthermore, a teacher was expected to act as a communist agitator rather than a pedagogue. Teachers were required to support the endeavors of the communist regime to combat "the tendency of parasitism, of an easy-going life without work" (Ceaușescu, *Exposition on the Programme* 177) especially among youth. Political training – i.e., communist propaganda— had to be intensified in schools and universities, and reinforced by practical experience, acquired by youth in factories, mines or in agriculture. Ceaușescu also adopted the Maoist practice of sending young people to the country immediately after university graduation. He could thus prevent any inclination of *young souls* to rebel against the regime, and also prevent them from getting in contact with "the cosmopolitan attitudes, various artistic fashions borrowed from the capitalist world" (178).

This leads us to another theme of the presidential speeches: the preeminence of physical labor over the intellect. Prior to 1971, intellectuals still held a significant position in

the Romanian social hierarchy. Nicolae Ceaușescu even spoke about “our valuable intellectuality, profoundly devoted to the people and country, active participant to the edification of the socialist order” (*The Xth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party* 74). Two years later, the president would change his opinion. He decided that the students who attend the Party schools – the privileged disciples of the regime – would be recruited with priority from among the working class. They needed to have “a longstanding practice in production” (Ceaușescu, *Exposition on the Programme* 176). The president thus offered a clue about his new vision of society and education. Workers would be the patricians of Romanian society. Consonant with the Stalinist model of the 1930s, hard work and physical chores acquired a quasi-sacred status in the 1970s and 1980s in Romania. A new man could best legitimize himself through surpassing the expectations of the Party, as expressed in the Five Years’ Plan.

The role of the media in disseminating state propaganda represented another recurrent theme in Nicolae Ceaușescu’s speeches. Beginning with 1971, Nicolae Ceaușescu would become more vehement in criticizing the media for their ineffectiveness in transmitting the RCP propaganda messages. Ideological activity in general and media in particular were urged to place more emphasis upon national traditions and the enthusiasm of Romanian workers. Radio and TV should more rigorously select the programs they broadcast, granting priority to socialist productions – both indigenous and foreign. Shows that contained “ideas and principles alien to our [communist] philosophy and ethics, the spirit of violence, the bourgeois way of life and mentalities noxious to youth education will be eliminated from the radio and T.V. programmes” (Ceaușescu, *Exposition on the Programme* 179). The Romanian president provided an alternative to the American thrillers or Westerns to be banished from

TV: operas, operettas and ballets reflecting the people's fight for socialism. Again, this idea was of Chinese origin: comrade Jiang Ching, Mao's partner was a fervent supporter – and sometimes author – of popular operas, broadcast all day long by Chinese radio stations during the Cultural Revolution. More rigorous control was to be exerted upon all artistic productions, to ensure that they respected the ideological tenets of communism. The censorship agencies would thus become an unavoidable presence in Romanians' life. The consequence of this decision would be that, beginning with 1971 Romanian popular culture artifacts would become an important channel for disseminating communist propaganda. By suppressing any alternative discourse, such as the occasional old Westerns broadcast from time to time by Romanian television, British TV series, or foreign songs, and replacing them with propaganda messages, the Ceaușescu regime aimed to expose people exclusively to its own discourse. However, as the numerous interviews undertaken after the 1989 Revolution emphasized, Romanians did not comply with this directive, even if they risked sanction for that. Be it improvised aeriols for Bulgarian or Serbian television, listening to foreign radio stations, VCR evenings or simply reading a book purchased under the counter from a bookstore shop-assistant, in exchange for a pack of Kent cigarettes, all these represented ways in which Romanians coped with Ceaușescu regime by ignoring it.

The virtual child

In his speeches, Nicolae Ceaușescu repeatedly expressed his expectations for the Romanian child and youth – Homeland Falcon, Pioneer or member of the UCY. He thus sketched the portrait of an ideal offspring, who complied with the RCP requirements. Considering the topic of my thesis, I chose to discuss this topic separately from the section dedicated to recurrent themes in the presidential speeches. I will review below the main

physical and moral traits of this ideal child, as indicated in this type of text. In order to highlight the way in which Ceaușescu's *indicații* were put into practice, this discussion will be followed by the semiotic and discourse analysis of a set of artifacts targeting children. This analysis will mainly look at the moral and social standards the ideal child had to observe, his extra-curricular activities, the way he positioned himself in relation to his biological family (i.e., parents), as well as with the imposed one (the Ceaușescus).

My original intention was to call this child, throughout my entire thesis, *the ideal child*. After undertaking the ethnographic interviews required by this research project, I realized that the *real* children of the 70s and 80s never aimed to reach this ideal. The child who used to play behind the block, queue for oranges before Christmas, and mechanically recite patriotic poems while his thoughts were elsewhere, remained indifferent or derided RCP propaganda. I therefore decided to label this model *the virtual child*. This choice was determined by the irrevocable breach between the *real child* and the state-approved image of the child, emphasized by my interviewees. I had to identify a syntagm which, if juxtaposed with the *real child*, would suggest a binary opposition. The formula *ideal child* would have been inappropriate in this context, considering its positive connotations. It would have suggested that Romanian children truly wished to follow this model. I employed instead the term *virtual* to suggest the idea of a construct that did not exceed an abstract level. *The virtual child* never came to life. Its existence was confined to the pages of *Cutezătorii* and *Șoimii Patriei*⁸, to the propagandistic TV shows, or to Nicolae Ceaușescu's speeches.

In the speech delivered at the National Conference of the Young Pioneers' Organization, on October 22nd, 1971, Nicolae Ceaușescu sketched the portrait of the model Pioneer. The red-kerchief bearer must possess a daring spirit, skill and diligence, all

⁸ Homeland Falcons' magazine

accompanied by great knowledge. However, the example Ceaușescu provided was not consistent with any of these traits; he praised “the initiative taken by a unit of young Pioneers in Bucharest concerning their participation in patriotic work” (Ceaușescu, *Speech Delivered* 538). This kind of work did not require any astuteness or audacity but rather physical strength. By performing such civic duties, Pioneers compensated in fact for the indolence of local authorities, which never employed enough workers to clean alleys, or whitewash the trees in spring. It was an evident breach between the list of Pioneers’ desirable attributes – all of them connoting the intellectual sphere – , and the case discussed by Ceaușescu, where the single quality required was enthusiasm in volunteering for chores. This breach represented a moment of involuntary sincerity from Ceaușescu’s side: it was good if a Pioneer studied. It was more useful if a Pioneer worked. In this sense, Ceaușescu’s advice is also relevant: “you must prepare to attend the new vocational school, the lyceums...” (539). The vocational schools represented genuine workers’ academies; great emphasis was laid upon practical disciplines, to the detriment of theoretical ones. In this discourse, vocational institutes preceded lyceums, fewer and fewer with the passing of years. The priorities of the communist regime regarding education were clear.

The second part of the speech touched on the duties children have towards the Communist Party and its leader. Children were encouraged to study assiduously, and, most important, to love their parents, the Communist Party and their homeland. According to Nicolae Ceaușescu, parents should be loved because they work for their children. It is the Party that ensures children a happy life, “a luminous future” (Ceaușescu, *Speech Addressed to the Children and Youth* 537). The Party played a more significant role in children’s lives than their biological parents. If family had to provide the material resources for children’s

everyday life, the Party dealt with the luminous, spiritual (i.e., ideological) dimension. Most important, it was a duty of honor for the young communist to love his country. Another mission of the Pioneers was that of co-operating with their fellows from the socialist countries in the fight against “imperialist aggression” (543), because of which millions of children were dying of starvation or various diseases. *The protector and supporter of Africa* was one of Ceaușescu’s favorite postures, which allowed him to repeatedly denounce the criminal indifference of the West toward this neglected continent and its children. Nicolae Ceaușescu was not only the father of Romanian Pioneers but also the protector of destitute and famished children from all over the world.

In the end of his speech, Ceaușescu addressed the Pioneers’ parents. The family was called “to pay greater attention, greater care to the education and raising of our homeland’s children” (545). The fact that parents needed to pay “greater attention and care” meant that the president was not pleased with their work. The family was required to involve itself more actively in the process of molding their children into new men. It was expected to represent not only *the basic cell of the society*, as called by the communist rhetoric, but the basic ideological cell of the society. The interviews contained in the next chapter of this thesis reveal to what extent Romanian families conformed to this demand.

Semiotic and discourse analysis of artifacts dedicated to children

The next section of this chapter will undertake semiotic analysis and discourse analysis of various artifacts targeting children. These products responded to Nicolae Ceaușescu’s call for strengthening ideological activity and disseminating of RCP propaganda. By analyzing these products, my purpose is to identify how they communicated

to children the recurrent themes of the presidential speeches as discussed above, as well as the myths of the state-revised version of history. At the same time, by looking at these texts, I will establish a repertoire of *desirable* everyday living practices for children, from the RCP perspective.

I will apply semiotic methods in the case of artifacts constructed around a visual representation. My intention is to observe what meanings were generated by the posture of Nicolae Ceaușescu in a certain illustration, his outfit or a bunch of flowers presented to him by a devoted Pioneer. In other words, the next section explores how the pre-1989 Romanian society communicated through these signs, as components of the communist visual language. The texts I analyze represented a channel for disseminating the myths generated by the Nicolae Ceaușescu regime. Referring to Barthes, John Fiske notes that “myths are actually the product of a social class that has achieved dominance by a particular history” and “the main way myths work is to naturalize history” (Fiske 89).

In selecting the artifacts, I tried to cover diverse types of texts Romanian children were exposed to: stories, texts from schoolbooks, cartoons, Almanachh illustrations and even mathematical problems. My intention was to demonstrate that, regardless of their type, all texts were pervaded by communist propaganda. The artifacts will be analyzed using discourse analysis and semiotic analysis. The first type of analysis will be employed for the short story *We Love Work* and, for the mathematical problem. Semiotic analysis will be applied for the rest of artifacts, which contain a visual dimension as well. *An Unforgettable Visit* and *Motivating the Absence* combines both types of analysis.

“Munca ne e dragă” (“We Love Work”)

This story was included in the *Reading* textbook for the third grade. “It is fall. In the fields, orchards and gardens the co-operative farmers work hard to gather the crops. We went recently to visit the orchard of the Agricultural Production Co-operative. After we were shown various types of trees that grow in the orchard, we helped the farmers gather the fruits.” (Serdean, Ditulescu and Paveliu 13). The young readers should understand from this opening paragraph that co-operative farms work with enthusiasm for the benefit of the state. In reality, the collectivization process initiated in 1948 by the communist authorities was equivalent to a personal crisis for tens of thousands of peasants, forced to give up to the state their lands and assets. State propaganda trumpeted this process as the victory of communism over the reactionary forces of the past. Except for memories of collectivization victims, Romanians did not have access to an alternative discourse until the collapse of communism.

The *Reading* textbook for the third grade propagandized the state-approved version of Romanian history. Furthermore, the text legitimized as commonsensical the practice of using pupils as laborers in agriculture. Children had to be persuaded that it was their moral duty to put their education second to performing various chores for the communist regime. Most families opposed this kind of practice but they could do nothing about it. The state appropriated children and used them as dirt-cheap labor. Ironically, the country that heralded its progress and prosperity on all channels available made widespread use of children and youth as labor force.

“How beautiful it was! The work is pleasant but requires much attention. Apples and pears, particularly, are delicate. We only picked them by hand” (13). The text represents a plea for physical work. Even if it requires adroitness, it is still physical work, and the characters of the story perceive it as a beautiful experience.

Further on the pupils visit the silos, where fruits are kept and stored. No rotten fruit should arrive on the table of the Romanian consumer. The heroes of the story understand how they can enjoy fresh and beautiful fruit regardless of season. The truth is again distorted; anyone who bought fruit or vegetables from the *Aprozar*⁹, the produce store before 1989, knew that the beautiful fruits mentioned in the text were mainly nonexistent in the socialist market. Moreover, due to chronic shortages, fruit and vegetables could only be purchased after waiting several hours in a queue. Prior to leaving the co-operative farm, the detachment commander asks the farmers how grapes can be kept fresh until late in the winter. He receives an *agronomic* answer but the question is, why preserve fruit for so long if the Romanian market abounds in products?

Several days later, children visit the vegetable garden. The reader may wonder when the children in this story have time to learn, if they spend so much time in the fields. “Kids, the peppers must be gathered, comrade teacher said. What if we gather them, to give a helping hand? Yes, yes, we answered gladly” (14). The teacher seems more willing to involve students in agricultural work than to educate them in the classroom. It is another sign that the communist regime preferred physical to intellectual accomplishments. The next week the children have to clean the trees of caterpillars and their nests. “But until then we have some work to do in the classroom. I notice that you love work, and I am very happy about that”, the teacher concludes (13). The time spent in the classroom is presented as an unwanted break from the active trips in the fields. Children learn from this lesson how to prioritize activities in their schedule: patriotic work must come before personal education.

This text complies with Nicolae Ceaușescu’s indication that physical work should prevail over intellectual activities. The author suggests that gathering vegetables is more

⁹ An acronym of *Aprovizionare cu zarzavaturi* (veggie store)

commendable and more fun than studying. A similar message is conveyed by the mathematics problem presented below, but in a subtler manner.

Indoctrination through Arithmetic

Mathematics problems had their ideological function as well. “A Pioneers’ unit has gathered 320 kilos of plantain and 408 kilos of milfoil. How many kilos of medical plants have been raised in all?” (Rosca, Tifui, Mandric, 1984: 70). “In a classroom there are 15 girls and 6 more boys than girls. All of them went to pick the apples from the orchard of the production co-operative farm. They were required to form teams of 4 pupils each. How many teams were formed?” (Rosca, Tifui, Mandric, 1984: 136). Such a word problem was usually inserted in a set of ideologically neutral problems that dealt with purchasing stamps, marbles of different colors, or notebooks. By performing elementary arithmetic operations, the second grade pupil found out what change he was due to receive when buying notebooks. At the same time, s/he was instilled with the idea that gathering medical plants that had to be delivered to school or performing agricultural work for co-operative farms was as normal as collecting marbles or exchanging stamps with friends. This type of problems naturalized the use of children as labor force in agriculture.

Nicolae Ceaușescu surrounded by children (APPENDIX 1)

The representation I will analyze below is extracted from the 1989 *Cutezătorii* Almanachh (see Appendix 1). It reinforces the propagandistic construct that positions Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu as the loving parents of all Romanian children. In numerous presidential speeches, children were advised to venerate the RCP and their homeland, while

biological parents were reduced to the role of food-providers for their offspring. The image presents Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu surrounded by Homeland Falcons and Pioneers. Children are waiting for their turn to offer flowers to the presidential family. Due to their stature, the Ceaușescus stand out among the crowd of enthusiastic kids. This oversized posture is meant to emphasize their power position over the kids and at the same time their status of demigods, inaccessible to masses. Both the president and his wife have big, strong hands, almost disproportionate to their bodies. Nicolae Ceaușescu holds a bunch of red carnations with the right hand, while his left hand surrounds the shoulders of a Pioneer. The president does not look at the Pioneers around him but to an indefinite point above the group of children. He has the confident look of somebody who expects a promising future. His entire posture projects him beyond the immediate reality. This impression is confirmed by the way in which he holds the bunch of flowers: with only two fingers, as if the carnations hindered him. Elena Ceaușescu instead is more focused upon the meeting with children. She holds the flowers with a firm grip and looks smilingly at the Pioneer who has offered them. Her right hand rests upon the child's shoulder. Nicolae Ceaușescu has a protective, even parental attitude toward the Pioneer – as I mentioned, he keeps his arm around the child's shoulders. His wife instead treats his boy as a young comrade she is proud of. Elena Ceaușescu is depicted as a mother who refrains from sentimental effusions but is completely devoted to her children. A stereotype occurs in all the representations of the presidential couple: the girl always offers flowers to Nicolae Ceaușescu, while the boy offers them to Elena.

Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu are surrounded by a mass of smiling, well-fed children. Their rubicund faces connote socialist prosperity, equally distributed among all

members of society. Although purchasing consumer goods represented an everyday challenge for ordinary Romanians, Nicolae Ceaușescu referred in all his discourses to the unequalled rise in people's living standard. State propaganda obsessively reiterated this idea in all the materials transmitted to the public. The breach between propaganda and everyday reality was in this case grotesque. It was unlikely that children who spent six or seven hours per day queuing for food could view this image as realistic. The persons I interviewed – whose answers are analyzed in the next chapter- mentioned that, as kids, they were fully aware of the shortages on the Romanian market. However, the communist regime persisted in transmitting messages that were either ignored or decoded in an aberrant manner by the target public.

With few exceptions, all children have blond hair and dark eyes. This detail is anthropologically inaccurate, because Romanians are predominantly dark-haired, not blond. It may be regarded as a graphic device, meant to enlighten the entire image, and confer it a paradisiacal air. This impression is emphasized by the light-blue background, upon which the red flag of the Romanian Communist Party, and the tricolor national flag wave. These flags are the guarantors of Romanian prosperity.

All children look alike, as if the same set of features was endlessly multiplied. Although they are different ages, considering the different type of uniforms they wear, all children have the same height. Only the Pioneers who offer flowers to Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu are a little taller than the crowd. This leveling has the following subtext: in spite of the alleged attention granted to them, children represent just a mass, a group of indefinite extras. It is Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu who are the true heroes in this image. Such representations transmitted the message to children that the presidential couple was

intangible, and at the same time held supreme power in Romania. Children were thus discouraged to express any form of dissatisfaction towards the presidential family.

The Expedition (APPENDIX 2)

The 1988 edition of *Vacanta Cutezatorilor* (“The Daring Ones’ Holiday”)

Almanachh launched a contest for Pioneers. The publication provided the first frames of a cartoon series, while the readers’ task was to continue the story. The plot revolved around a group of Pioneers who visited a cave, and found a mysterious inscription on its wall.

Whoever entered the contest had to continue the story, and to create the accompanying illustrations. As reward, the best story was to be published in the next year’s volume.

According to the winning entry, the Pioneers in the story take part in a mountaineering exhibition. They wear their Pioneer uniforms, but have no backpack or other accessories necessary for such an undertaking. The red kerchief has two significations in this context. First, it denotes the bearer’s courage; the child who wears it does not need any other equipment for climbing a mountain or entering a cave. At the same time, it denotes the fact that its bearer belongs to a privileged group, the Pioneers. Readers are thereby told that they should be proud to be Pioneers, and that this pride must be signified by wearing the red kerchief.

Close to the entrance, the three children, Iulian, Oara, and Săndel find a drawing made with white paint on the wall: the head of a horse above an arrow. This symbol is not decoded. The Pioneers continue their way through the cave and find some traces of steps. A little bit later they run into a metallic grating, an obstacle for animals. Readers are presented several disparate symbols, a horse head, the steps and the grating, whose significance or

relevance for the story is impossible to trace. The Pioneers continue their way on a path, although the girl, Oara, points out that it is late. The author reinforces here the stereotype of girls' / women's fear of unpredictable situations. Oara is probably afraid of dark but her colleagues ignore her apprehension: "no problem, we have a flashlight". The two boys that accompany her put their scientific interest above the girl's anguish. A Pioneer should stand above such mundane obstacles as fear. The story also contains a physical trial. At a certain point the path is interrupted, and the Pioneers have to jump over the breach. The story suggests that a true Pioneer should follow the Latin adage *mens sana in corpore sano*. Romanian Pioneers have many talents.

The climax of the story comes with the Pioneers' discovery of a cannon that lies in a secret hall. They observe an abandoned military hat next to the cannon, and a pair of binoculars hanging on the wall. An inscription on the same wall says "Death to the Fascists! We'll defeat them!!" Readers are further informed that, "With this cannon Hitler's army was stopped in the narrow path of Olt". This statement is not made by one of the Pioneers but simply inscribed in the penultimate frame of the cartoons, as an authorial intervention. It is, however, redundant. The hat, the binoculars and the cannon connote a military confrontation, while the inscription on the wall clearly dates the event: World War II, after August 23rd 1944, when Romania turned against Germany and moved to the side of the USSR.

The propagandistic purpose of this cartoon series is obvious. In 1989 Romania celebrated 45 years since "The Revolution for national, social, anti-Fascist and anti-imperialist liberation", as the RCP propaganda discourse referred to the days after August 23rd. This moment was invested with symbolic signification: it represented the collapse of the old world, "the landowners'-bourgeois regime", and its replacement with a new order –

communism. Although it contains the traditional repertoire of adventure stories for kids – traces, inscriptions, secret or double entrances, this cartoon’s story represents just a pretext for reiterating the role the propagandistic clichés of the communists’ role in the anti-Fascist fight. The story is inappropriately called “The Expedition”, because its heroes do not have a goal to reach or a predetermined route.

“Let’s announce our discovery to the County Museum of History!” the girl proposes in the last frame of the cartoons. Her fear of dark is compensated by a strong civic sense. She wishes to share the group’s discovery with her fellow townsmen who will visit the local museum. A true Pioneer should be ready to share his achievements with the people in his / her neighborhood especially if these achievements regard the past of their homeland.

The graphic evolution of this cartoon series is interesting. While the first frames are drawn in rich detail, the last ones are merely sketched. The Pioneers who initially displayed a sort of vigorous beauty, are now reduced to caricatures. The last two cartoons seem realized by a different hand than the previous ones –hastier, without rendering details. The author may have intended to shift the reader’s attention from the graphic dimension to the message he had to communicate, the moral of the story: the triumph of communism in Romania.

Building the hydro-electric plant (APPENDIX 3)

The short story “O vizita de neuitat” (“An Unforgettable Visit”), by Dumitru Almas was published in the third volume of the series “Povestiri istorice” (“Historical Tales”), by the same author. These richly illustrated books aimed to teach children the official version of Romanian history and represented an obligatory complement to History and Reading schoolbooks for primary school. Unless protected by family influence, children were thus

fully exposed to the state approved version of Romanian history. Dumitru Almaş, a Romanian historian and author of historical novels, was well known for his re-interpretation of Romanian history according to communist requirements. He popularized his version of past events through stories and novels dedicated to school children and teenagers.

From the very first line, “An Unforgettable Visit” re-enforces the myth of an unhappy *autrefois*, when people could only dream. Now their dream has become reality: “You must know, my dears, that in the years since we have been led by the Romanian Communist Party, headed by comrade Nicolae Ceauşescu, we have built great works, of which we hardly dared to dream formerly” (Almaş 65). One should notice the affectionate, fatherly tone employed by the author, “my dears”, meant to entice his juvenile audience and win its benevolence. This formula is reminiscent of traditional Romanian fairy-tales; “An Unforgettable Visit” must be read as a fairy-tale transformed into reality, with a true Prince Charming, as Ceauşescu suggested in his November 1971 speech.

In plain language, the story explains to the young readers how the *Portile de Fier* (Iron Gates) hydroelectric plant was built. While in fact Romanians and Yugoslavians constructed it in co-operation, this ‘detail’ is omitted in the story. Yugoslavia, the neighboring country, is mentioned only incidentally. Its president, Iosip Broz Tito, attended only the inauguration feast, on May 16th, 1973. The message transmitted to children is clear: it is only the president of Romania, Comrade Nicolae Ceauşescu, who always acts heroically. It is he who works, risks his life, finds solutions, while other countries’ leaders only get involved in the final celebration. The story was published in the 1980s, a decade characterized by Ceauşescu’s nationalist discourse and resentment towards other countries.

Following the opening praise for Nicolae Ceaușescu, the author explains why we need hydroelectric plants, and how skillful and courageous are the people who construct such works. Almaș zooms in and introduces the children to one of the thousands of workers, helped by their marvelous machines, who labors on the Iron Gates building site. This encomiastic approach is interrupted by a fairy-tale intermezzo when the author draws the portrait of Alexandru, “a lad from a village in the Sălaj county” (68). The smart lad, who successfully overcomes all the obstacles in his way, is a well-known character of Romanian fairy-tales. This time the lad no longer occurs in a mythical context but has a definite biography, according to communist standards. This is a communist variant of the American Horatio Alger myth, only this time the hero does not evolve from rags to riches. Instead, he acquires elevated spiritual satisfactions by working hard for his country, and manifesting his gratitude for the Communist Party, which discovered him in an obscure village. Alexandru completed his military service – compulsory in Romania – and immediately joined the Iron Gates building site. One year later he was promoted to the position of excavator mechanic. The professional accomplishments were nicely complemented by personal fulfillments: he married Octavia, a young electrician. Young readers thus become acquainted from an early age with the desirable model of family, in concordance with communist values. They should understand that superior education is not required or desired in order to become privileged men in the communist regime. With few exceptions, the Party depreciates intellectuals; conceptual or creative thinking, the talent of operating with abstract concepts are less important than physical strength and the ability to handle an excavator. As a model family, Octavia and Alexandru have three children, a girl and two boys. Even the books dedicated to kids were used as channels for Ceaușescu’s pro-natalist policy. In Romania abortion and

contraception were forbidden, because the regime aimed to increase by any means the population of the country. The target to be achieved was 30 million inhabitants by 2000, while in 1989 Romania counted approximately 23 million people. According to state plans, each family was supposed to have at least four children. As we notice, not even Octavia and Alexandru have managed yet to reach this standard. However, their kids “grew up together with the dam, at which their parents were working with much zeal and love” (68). The young audience is taught that love must be directed towards work and the communist edifices that wait to be erected all over the country. Octavia and Alexandru’s daughter is named Octavia. To differentiate her from her mother, people call her little Octavia. The girl demonstrates from an early age a vivid interest in her parents’ work. Instead of dolls, she prefers to join her mother, who installs an electric pipe, or her father, in the cabin of the excavator. This story reconfirms the expectations of the Romanian Communist Party from the young generation, repeatedly expressed in Nicolae Ceaușescu’s speeches: a desirable incongruity between the biological and social age. Even if only four or five years old, the child should manifest a sharp civic conscience and enthusiasm for working, along with disinterest in the gratifying pleasures of childhood, such as dolls or games.

The critical point of the story is represented by a spring flood, when the huge waves of the Danube are close to destroying the scaffolding and foundations of the dam. Day and night, workers have risked their life to fight against the waters, and protect the dam. But they are increasingly demoralized, and need an impetus. Nicolae Ceaușescu enters the scene. Flying by helicopter, he arrives at the Iron Gates, where, “he took counsel with the engineers and with his energy and ability, known by the entire people, he found a way of facing the Danube and defeating its destroying force, of eliminating the misfortune, the catastrophe”

(68). Readers are not told exactly how Nicolae Ceaușescu encouraged the distressed workers or what technical solution he identified to protect the Iron Gates dam. Two myths are reactivated in this context: *Ceaușescu, the polyvalent expert*, and *Ceaușescu, the socialist deus ex machina*. The first myth was constructed around the president's alleged ability to solve all problems in all fields. Be it a prolonged drought, the international arms race or a dam in danger of destruction by enraged waters, Nicolae Ceaușescu had all the answers. The complement of this myth is the image of Ceaușescu as supreme salvager. When the situation is desperate, when ordinary humans have lost all hope, Ceaușescu descends from his *machina*, most frequently the helicopter, and restores things. This is how the god of a Godless country descended from the celestial sphere.

The president's unforgettable visit infuses the workers with courage and enthusiasm. Nonetheless, the story is far from a happy end. After numberless days of pulling logs and huge tree roots from the water, Alexandru and his excavator gets stuck amidst the Danube waters. He does not get scared but asks his colleagues to send him diesel oil by boat, in order to continue working. The relation between the worker and his working equipment, i.e., the excavator, is reminiscent of the Romanian fairy tales, in which Prince Charming has a special relation with his horse. The animal is promoted from the mere condition of a vehicle to that of a partner, whose advice and boldness often rescue the main hero from most problematic contexts. Following this pattern, Alexandru's excavator is personified: "Don't give up, lion – he asked the engine - beat with your fire the rage of waters, and I'll feed you with diesel oil..." (68). In Romanian fairy tales, the hero feeds his horse with hot embers, so as to enhance its strength. At critical moments, the horse is promised an extra portion of hay or barley; this gratification is meant to stimulate the animal's courage, and tell him that his

endeavors will not pass unnoticed. The author applies this imagery to an excavator, in an attempt to humanize it and stress the liaison between the communist worker and his machine. The engine itself is personified; it seems to remain insensitive to Alexandru's supplications, until he brings in the supreme argument: "As the word of comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu has lit up the flame of trust in my heart, I light now the fire in your heart, dear engine! Don't give up on me!" (68).

Everything proceeds smoothly after this dramatic movement. The Iron Gates hydroelectric plant was inaugurated, and the Ceaușescu family proudly participated in the opening feast. Little Octavia was one of the Pioneers who greeted the president and his wife by offering them flowers. The gesture of presenting the Ceaușescu family with alms (flowers or bread and salt, as the symbol of Romanian hospitality) was depicted by state propaganda as a privilege reserved for the most devoted Pioneers. In reality, devotion was necessary but not sufficient, as the persons I interviewed remembered; the Pioneer's parents were expected to hold a significant position in the Communist Party apparatus, and the child had to be in perfect health – (s)he was thoroughly checked before getting in contact with the presidential family. (The interviews in the next section will demonstrate to what extent ordinary children – the real children – were interested in this privilege.) At the end of the story, Nicolae Ceaușescu awards Alexandru a medal for his endeavors: "As an accolade for your devotion and heroism in building and defending this dam!" (68).

The story is accompanied by two spread illustrations that do not respect the logical structure of the text. The first image shows Ceaușescu shaking hands with Alexandru at the inauguration of the dam. The second image presents Ceaușescu offering advice to the workers – it is probably the moment of his decisive intervention, without which the dam

would have been destroyed by the Danube. In order to respect the narrative structure, the analysis will commence with the second image. In the foreground one can see Nicolae Ceaușescu surrounded by a group of workers and probably an engineer who takes notes on a small pad. The background displays, most likely, a component part of the hydroelectric power plant and a maze of cranes. Similar to all representations of Nicolae Ceaușescu, this one is idealized. In contrast with his actual stature, Nicolae Ceaușescu is portrayed as a man with broad shoulders and athletic build. Adjusting all (slight) imperfections of the president, portraying him in the most favorable posture and as much younger than his biological age were common practices meant to emphasize the fact that he is the *chosen one*. Gods cannot have acne or liver spots on their hands: this is a human attribute. Nicolae Ceaușescu was above such petty physical defects.

Like all the characters depicted in this storybook, the president has big hands, with palms as wide as shovels. This physical aspect denotes his masculinity and practicality, the fact that he is used to physical work. Although he now holds the highest position in the state, he has never forgotten his days of drudgery—a myth promoted by the official version of history. The president feels at his ease when surrounded by working people, because he is one of them. He stands with his feet slightly apart from one another, and oriented towards exterior, in a position that demonstrates self-confidence. In this picture, Nicolae Ceaușescu holds the left hand folded, while with the other one he points at the technical ensemble behind him. He does not have an indexical gesture, does not point with his forefinger, but with his entire palm. This was his usual posture when giving indications, or addressing people from the rostrum of the Party conferences. No painter or graphic designer would have dared to reproduce the president in a different stance.

Nicolae Ceaușescu scrutinizes the dam. Concentration shows on his face, but he still has the power to smile, a sign that he is confident in the future of the Iron Gates. He wears a brown costume, a beige turtleneck sweater, a brown cap and brown shoes. The vestments and their color signify earnestness and reliability. The jacket, with four large pockets, represents the outfit of a person who wants to communicate their decision-making power in the socialist society. As the smart, expensive suit is nowadays equated with the business world, the multi-pocketed jacket designated the man who worked for the benefit of his countrymen and his socialist country. The pockets were supposed to contain utensils necessary to his everyday activity, from pencils to tape measures and screwdrivers. To solve the difficult problems he is confronted with, he only needs his own hands, some simple instruments and the skills acquired during his years of socialist education. But for those problems that appear insolvable, the intervention of the president is always necessary. His position of supreme expert is thus reinforced.

Ceaușescu wears a cap. In the communist dress code, this object is the key sign of the working class. On more pretentious occasions, the president wears a hat and an overcoat with fur collar but in critical moments like this one, elegance would be inappropriate. Due to his clothing, there is no discordance between Ceaușescu and the workers around him. By semiotically making this paradigmatic selection from a list of possible presidential outfits, the illustrator and the Party bodies that endorsed the publication of this book suggest to the young audience that Nicolae Ceaușescu is, above everything, a sober and reliable person, not interested in frivolous matters, such as clothing, and who always feels best among ordinary people.

Four workers surround the president. Behind them one can notice the profile of a man who listens carefully to the president's comments. He does not wear a hard hat, as the workers do, so probably he does not belong to this social category. This half-profile placed at the margin of the page represents a graphic artifice meant to induce the idea of multiple audiences. The public who has come to acclaim Nicolae Ceaușescu cannot be composed of only four workers and an engineer.

Three of the workers gaze at Nicolae Ceaușescu, while the fourth regards the dam with much determination. With one exception, all workers have a confident look. This exception is the mustached worker behind the president whose eyes express concern for the future of the dam, and at the same time hope that the president knows what needs to be done so that the Iron Gates will not be destroyed. Workers wear uniforms –light blue, blue, violet and brown – and rubber boots. These different colors do not signify any kind of hierarchy but, again, are a graphic device meant to avoid too brownish a tone of the illustration.

All the workers and the engineer who coordinates them have huge hands. Their palms are half-closed, in an unnatural posture that betrays nervous strain. It is the strain of somebody who, in spite of his endeavors, cannot find solution to a difficult problem he is confronted with. The position of their palms can be also interpreted as the clumsiness of somebody who usually undertakes a manual labor by manipulating various tools, and who does not know what to do with his hands when deprived of those tools.

The image also includes an engineer. He functions as the liaison between the two planes of the image: the foreground, with Nicolae Ceaușescu surrounded by workers, and the background, with the technical ensemble. His clothing and his activity signify the fact that the character holds a superior position. He wears a white shirt, black tie, blue trousers and

black shoes, no rubber boots or hardhat. The man also wears a blue overall over his suit. Normally, workers and sometimes engineers would wear the overall in factories, in order to protect their clothes. In this illustration everything is clean and aseptic up to the smallest detail. The overall has thus lost its practical function in this context, preserving only a symbolical function –signifier of the Romanian blue-collar universe. With a smile on his face, the character writes down something on a small pad, most probably Nicolae Ceaușescu's recommendations for saving the dam.

The complicated ensemble in the background likely represents a part of the Iron-Gates hydroelectric power plant. It is designed in rich detail, so that the young readers could understand the true potential of the mastery of Romanian workers, under the guidance of Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu. Nearly ten cranes can be noticed in the illustration. The crane could be considered the symbol of socialist Romania, complementing the presidential assertion that the whole country is a building site. Children should be thus proud to live in a country that develops at such a rapid pace. Their parents probably know that there are not so many reasons for pride in these constructions. Nicolae Ceaușescu's assiduous building campaigns were not motivated by concern for his people but by his obsession to destroy the non-communist past of Romania.

The second illustration reflects the happy end of the story. Now that the Iron Gates hydro-electric power plant is ready, Nicolae Ceaușescu has come to congratulate the workers. In the foreground one can see the comrade shaking hands with Alexandru, little Octavia, a group of Pioneers and several workers. The background displays the power plant functioning at full capacity. Nicolae Ceaușescu has now exchanged the multi-pocketed jacket for a smart blue suit, white shirt and a brown tie with white rhombuses. He has adjusted his outfit to this

festive moment, when a new achievement of the communist regime is being celebrated. With his right hand, he shakes Alexandru's hand. With a typical comradely gesture, the president pats the arm of the brave worker with his left palm. This gesture has two semiotic readings: congratulations for how the worker has acted during the crisis situation, and encouragement for him to continue his drudgery on the country's building sites.

Even if this is a celebratory moment, Alexandru has not abandoned his blue uniform and the hard hat. Kids should understand that the Romanian worker is so devoted to his mission that he does not abandon his uniform even on festive occasions. The blue coat is his insignia. The single ornament on Alexandru's jacket is a communist medal. This decoration signifies the exact moment of the story depicted by this illustration: Alexandru has just been awarded the decoration, and now the president shakes his hand. A true communist does not need material rewards. His single motivation is a thriving socialist Romania, and his ideal compensations – a medal and warm presidential congratulations. With his disinterest in earthly gratifications such as salary raises, the communist employee is superior to his greedy capitalist fellows.

Alexandru keeps his left hand on the shoulder of his daughter, little Octavia. The girl looks with much admiration at Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu, and waits to hand him a bunch of red roses. In this context red is no longer a sign of love, but of communism. Octavia holds a position of power among her colleagues, because she is the one who will offer roses to the president. In pre-1989 Romania, the *official* middle-class flower was the red or pink carnation. Children brought carnations to their teachers at the beginning of school year; directors of communist enterprises offered carnations to their women employees for March 8, International Women's Day. Roses had a special status, because they were difficult to find.

They were reserved for privileged occasions and persons. Upon the occasion of Ceaușescu's visits, only two or three Pioneers and Homeland Falcons, the *elected ones*, had the honor of presenting roses to the comrade. The second ranking of children could only bring carnations to their supreme father. The flowers were not provided by children themselves but by officials of the Communist Party in charge of organizing the presidential visit. The floral hierarchy functions in this image; it is only Octavia who will offer roses. Brooks' theory regarding the economy of gift is best illustrated in this context. The girl is offering Nicolae Ceaușescu a gift (i.e., a bunch of flowers), to manifest her gratitude for an incomparably more precious gift she was offered: the privilege of leading a happy life in Romania. Octavia was offered the chance to become a Pioneer, to receive free education; her parents were highly appreciated by the communist regime – what else she could wish? She was thus indebted to Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu for her happy childhood.

Her colleagues hold bunches of carnations in their hands. Even so, if the first Pioneer is ready to offer eleven carnations, his fellow behind is more modest, depending on the number of flowers he holds. There are three Pioneers waiting to make their homage, two boys and one girl, taller than her colleagues. Like little Octavia, all children look like miniature adults. Their decent smiles demonstrate that, in spite of their young age, they are trustworthy citizens of socialist Romania. The girl and one of the boys are looking at the president, while the modest boy casts a glance at young Octavia. Without much success it appears, because the girl is overwhelmed by two major events: she will present roses to Nicolae Ceaușescu, while her father has been awarded a medal for heroism. The child's look signifies respect for his colleague and her father's achievement, but also a certain romantic interest.

All children are wearing Pioneer uniforms: white shirt, blue skirt or trousers, brown belt – with the crest of socialist Romania on the buckle – and, most important, red kerchief. Children were presented two alternate justifications for this color. Teachers selected the rationale they found most convincing. The kerchief was red because it represented a piece of the Communist Party flag. Or, it was red as the symbol of communist heroes who fought for the freedom of their country. These scenarios are similar to what Chinese pupils were taught during the Cultural Revolution: “The kerchief symbolizes a corner of the national flag, stained red by the blood of revolutionary martyrs” (Donald in Evans and Donald 85). In China the red kerchief had a quasi-sacred status. The author mentions the case of a pupil who mislaid her kerchief. She was “first punished and then rewarded for her suffering by the ceremonial bestowal of a replacement kerchief” (85). In Romania instead, pupils who committed this offence were only scolded by their teacher and asked to buy a new kerchief. The “blood of communist heroes” could be purchased for a modest amount from any haberdasher. It is only little Octavia who wears the standard Pioneer uniform, with the white beret on her head. Romanian girls were required to have a decent hairdo. They had to wear white bands on their heads and, on festive occasion, had to attach immense ribbons to these bands. It was an attempt to feminize the quasi-military Pioneer uniforms. *An Unforgettable Visit* reinforces two themes recurring in Nicolae Ceaușescu’s speeches. First, it contributes to the molding of the new man by offering children a fairy tale with contemporary heroes. Young Alexandru and his bulldozer replaced Prince Charming and his steed. Second, it reiterates the presidential principle according to which physical labor is more commendable and useful for the socialist society than intellectual activities. Children are also instilled the model of a socially desirable family, in accordance with the RCP’ system of values.

The negative hero (APPENDIX 4)

Romanian children were also exposed to a plethora of moralizing stories that disseminated the image of the lazy pupil, unwilling to go to school or do his homework. It contradicted the ideal of the virtual child, the industrious Pioneer, as portrayed in Nicolae Ceaușescu's speeches. The tone of such stories was paternalistically ironic, meant to discourage children in following the example of the *negative elements*. Mircea Sîntimbreanu was the author of numberless short stories dedicated to children. He used to give, through "real life" examples, lessons of civic conduct, preparing the young offspring for the bright future of the multilateral developed socialism" (Cernat et al. 228).

Sîntimbreanu's story, "Motivarea absentei" (*Motivating the Absence*) is a good example in this sense. Its main hero is *Mișu*, a child who tries to find an excuse for the classes he missed. The name *Mișu*, a diminutive from Mihai, connotes lack of seriousness. It is the name used par excellence in humorous pieces, designating a kind-hearted but gullible "jack", incapable of assuming ambitious ideals. In fact, most of Sîntimbreanu's negative characters have diminutive names. It is a sign of authorial condescension for the sinners against the Pioneers' morale rather than a marker of sympathy. Such characters do not deserve to be taken seriously.

The character is a little Oblomov. He did not have a particular reason for missing school; he simply wishes to enjoy the pleasure of doing nothing. The only thing that disturbs his reverie is school, as a distant but unpleasant reality. "It's school, *Mișu*, school that began two months ago, school towards which you left two or three hours ago..." (Sîntimbreanu 5). The author moralizes about his bohemian character. By repeating the word school, he

attempts to induce a feeling of guilt in any reader who is in the same situation as *Mișu*, or would be tempted to follow his example.

The next part of the short story presents *Mișu* brainstorming to find an appropriate excuse for his absence. The pool of excuses is deliberately exaggerated, so as to render the despair of the lazy child who has no courage to take responsibility of his gesture. It ranges from the most banal motivations, such as sickness or the door lock that has jammed, to earthquakes, flooding or locust invasions. *Mișu* seriously deviates from the model of the ideal Pioneer. Not only does he miss school, but he also prepares to lie in order to rescue himself. The authorial voice intervenes again through the mediation of an old woman, who wishes the boy “good luck, dear, good luck and brains...” (Sintimbreanu 7). The author still hopes that *Mișu* will find his right way, in compliance with the principles of the communist state. Paradoxically, considering the atheism of the communist regime, the author’s attitude reminds us of a pastor, worried for the sheep that has strayed from the flock.

Even without reading the story, one could easily tell that it revolves around a negative character by looking at the accompanying illustration. We see a child leaning his head against his arm and with a sad expression on his face. In fact, all little “delinquents” in Sintimbreanu’s stories look the same. A pupil who has strayed from the communist morale, who has disappointed his supreme parents, Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, has a heavy conscience. He cannot smile happily, as deserving Pioneers do. An alarm clock is pulling *Mișu*’s ear, while with its other arm, the clock is pointing to the opposite direction. The angry alarm clock is the signifier of the communist way of managing time. The regime aimed to plan in the minutest detail Romanians’ time, and thus had increased control over their everyday life. Romanian children had a busy schedule, with extra-curricular activities

supervised by RCP. These activities represented another channel for transmitting propaganda messages to Romanian children. Straying away from all these, *Mișu* was implicitly less exposed to indoctrination, and less inclined to become a trustworthy new citizen. He had an aberrant reading for the discourse propagated through school (i.e., by ignoring it). Romanian children had to be discouraged from following his example.

Concluding remarks

The artifacts discussed above revealed the most significant living practices of the virtual child. This *desirable* type of kid preferred to gather crops for agricultural farms rather than go to school. Even so, he did not neglect his duties as a pupil. He was so proud to be a Pioneer, that even in his spare time he wore his Pioneer uniform and the red kerchief. His ideal was to offer flowers to Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, as a sign of gratitude for their parental care and for the happy life he led. This child did not need toys; playing around building sites or sitting in bulldozers next to his father represented a more alluring alternative for him than hanging around with other youngsters behind the block of apartments. Earnest and hyper-decent, he always considered that serving the RCP and his homeland was his supreme duty. He had definite goals in all his undertakings. A trip to the mountains did not represent a holiday, but an opportunity to find historical traces that attested the heroism of RCP members. But more than everything, he was mature beyond his years.

In the next chapter I will evaluate the response of *real children* towards this set of everyday living practices. Their answers will demonstrate if there is any similarity between the real children daily rituals and the virtual child's habits.

CHAPTER 3

THE REAL CHILD RESPONDS

This chapter analyzes data collected from eight interviews with members of the Romanian Diaspora in Canada. The respondents were questioned about the years they spent under Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime, and asked to remember the popular culture artifacts they were exposed to as children – movies, magazines, books etc. What kind of reaction did they have toward such materials – acceptance, indifference or rejection? Further on, the respondents talk about survival strategies in their families, of neutralizing the insistent communist propaganda, and about their everyday habits. Last but not least, the respondents are required to undertake an exercise of imagination, and think how their life would have looked like if the communist regime had not failed.

My intention to employ interviews drew upon a previous study in this field. In 2003 a group of researchers affiliated with the Museum of the Romanian Peasant in Bucharest produced a volume of oral testimonies entitled *Bucharesters and the 80s*. The authors interviewed 195 Bucharesters of various ages and occupations in regard to their everyday rituals and survival strategies prior to 1989. In the volume preface, one of the researchers remembers that the respondents “were eager to tell their story, with a feeling that their story was worth being told and most often, **with pleasure**” (Muzeul Taranului Roman 8). Respondents had the pleasure of telling stories and remembering their everyday life. However, in spite of their inherent humor

and even nostalgia, the stories depicted the daily reality as it was, dominated by suspicion, fear, and gloomy. This book helped me realize that the ethnographic interview is the only research method available for reconstructing Romanians' everyday life in the 1980s, inasmuch as samizdat¹⁰ press was not available in this country. Furthermore, Romanian media exclusively disseminated the official public discourse.

I undertook semi-structured, open-ended interviews, as this type of investigation best serves the purposes of the thesis. A structured interview would have been too rigid a device, due to its "inflexible, standardized, and predetermined nature" (Fontana and Frey 650). My research is not meant to be a survey with predictable answers. Any kind of details regarding the respondent's life practices under communism, memories or even jokes of that time were welcome. Such affective knowledge is always helpful when the researcher attempts to reconstruct the atmosphere of the last two decades of communism. As in the case of structured interviews, the list of questions was the same for all respondents. Nevertheless, the sequence of questions was altered in some interviews, according to the respondents' feedback. I was even ready to skip a certain question, if perceived by respondent as invasive or embarrassing. Fortunately, this was not the case.

Conversely, an unstructured interview would have been counterproductive for this research. This kind of interview "attempts to understand the complex behavior of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry" (653). Due to its very specific content, the research for this thesis could not have been undertaken by simply attending the activities organized by Romanian Community and asking casual questions. Some degree of planning was required for my interviews. It goes without saying that I had to arrange in advance the time and place for interviews, and that prior to commencing them, my

¹⁰ Samizdat press = underground publications

respondents were exposed to several bureaucratic processes, such as signing a consent form (See APPENDIX 5). Such details are not compatible with an unstructured interview.

The whole process of interviewing was facilitated by the fact that the respondents and the investigator come from the same country. Speaking the same language as the researcher and the feeling of a shared past helped the respondents gain confidence and encouraged them to speak.

My first intention was to show the interviewees the artifacts analyzed in my thesis, and ask for their feedback. However, I anticipated a set of similar answers, accompanied by a wave of mockery. This approach may have been entertaining for the potential reader, but unproductive for the purpose of my research. By exposing the respondents to a set of artifacts, I would have probably *predetermined* their (the respondents') answers to a certain extent. But by asking respondents to recall their own past, I had access to the experiences that were most powerful for them.

More than a set of visual representations of Nicolae Ceaușescu and moralizing stories, the artifacts I analyzed represented a set of everyday practices. These stories configured the image of a model child, whose preoccupations complied with the requirements of RCP. I wanted to observe how *actual children*, the children who played behind the blocks and exchanged surprises from the chewing gum purchased by their parents on the black market, regarded this model. For instance, I asked the interviewees if they would have wanted to offer flowers to Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, or if they used to read *Cutezătorii* magazine. These are only two examples of commendable practices, in accordance with the expectations of the communist regime.

The respondents come from different regions of Romania, have various backgrounds, and, most important, they represent different age segments – from late twenties up to forties. My rationale for selecting people of different ages was that I wanted to see whether the perception of the communist regime altered with the passage of time. The seventies were more difficult years than the sixties, but if compared to the eighties, they represented a cornucopia decade. To emphasize the potential differences of perception, the interviews are arranged in decreasing order of the respondents' ages. The pseudonyms I chose correspond to the respondent's gender.

A prerequisite in selecting the respondents was that they had lived at least 12 years under the Ceaușescu regime. By this age, children would have already been exposed to an impressive amount of propaganda through various channels and were already regimented in structures like Homeland Falcons or Pioneers. Since the regime collapsed in December 1989, the youngest participant had to be 28 years old – born no later than December 31st 1977. The interviews were conducted during September 2005. They lasted approximately 40 minutes each, and took place at the participants' homes. The sample of respondents was gathered through my contacts within the community of Romanian immigrants in Toronto and GTA, as well as in London, Ontario. In selecting them, I used a snowball sample technique.

The Romanians who agreed to talk about their experience with the communist regime will be briefly presented here. Ada is in her late forties. She arrived in Canada 11 years ago, and currently works as mechanical engineer. Andrei, an engineer in Electronics, is in his early forties. Arrived in Canada eight years ago, he is the employee of a small electronics company. Sebastian is 37 years old. He arrived in 1997, two weeks before Andrei. Sebastian works as engineer in the automotive industry. Marius is in his mid thirties. He has been living in Canada for four years. Similar to Sebastian, he is engineer in the automotive industry. Zoltan is 33. He arrived in

Canada in 2000. He is an IT engineer. Ben is 33, and has lived in Canada for five years. He is a PhD candidate. Anca, a graduate student, is 30. She left Romania in 2002. Cristina is 28. She arrived here in 2004, to pursue graduate studies.

ANALYSIS

The first set of questions revolved around the subjects' own understanding and experience of propaganda. At the beginning of the interview the respondents were asked to define propaganda. Their answers revolve around the same parameters: propaganda is a lie; propaganda is an attempt to induce certain beliefs into people's minds through existing media. All respondents refute the "hypodermic needle" model of propaganda developed by Harold Laswell according to which audience is reduced to the condition of a victim, incapable of defense against indoctrinatory attacks. Their answers demonstrate that we cannot assess the effectiveness of a propaganda message without analyzing its impact upon the audience it targets.

Three out of eight respondents automatically equate propaganda with communist propaganda. Their definitions do not refer to a generally valid truth but to what "they" did, how did "they" attempt to deceive population. In this context "they" should be read as a reference to the leaders of the communist regime. Sebastian does not refer explicitly to communism but considers that in certain contexts violence may be used to instill certain ideas in people's minds. His definition makes thus indirect reference to the communist era in Romania, when physical aggression was sometimes employed as a means of persuasion.

Further on, respondents were asked to focus upon the propaganda carried on around the Romanian Communist Party and its leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu. The answers provided may be summarized as follows: communist propaganda was ubiquitous. It resided in the media, in

comrade Ceaușescu's pictures, displayed everywhere, in Pioneers' demonstrations, sometimes even in everyday rituals. Andrei observes that the apogee of communist propaganda was in the 1980s, because the preceding decade still allowed the existence of alternative discourses and Western influences in Romanian milieu. Sebastian mentions that even cartoon books dedicated to children were imbued with communist propaganda, because:

in most cases, the heroes of cartoons were in fact communists who had fought against Capitalism, against Fascist Germany, against America, against everything that might have cast a shadow upon communism and socialism.

Zoltan, instead, does not explicitly refer to the channels through which he was reached by communist propaganda but refers to his perception of these propaganda messages: "Until I was explained what was communism in fact, I believed in this propaganda".

Anca refers to the dissemination of propaganda through the political discourse of Romanian Communist Party. She considers this discourse a lie:

I remember they kept saying that everything went well in the country, we were the best, the country had no external debts, we led an extraordinary life, there was food on the market, we had everything, the Communist Party was perfect. It wasn't true.

The next set of questions refers to the experience of being Pioneer. Becoming a Pioneer represented an unavoidable experience for any Romanian child. The Pioneering years usually began in the second grade, and lasted up to the eighth grade. When finishing primary school and entering high-school, the Romanian teenager was incorporated in the Union of Communist Youth (UCY). Prior to wearing the Pioneer's red kerchief, most children had to try first the orange shirt of the Homeland Falcons. Chronologically speaking, the Falcons represented the first form of regimentation that targeted children. In exchange for all the advantages offered by kindergarten, such as free meals, boarding and access to entertaining

activities, kids had to manifest their commitment for the communist regime by joining the Homeland Falcons. Some kids avoided this stage, especially those who were taken care of by grandparents. In most cases, kindergarten was the solution for parents who did not want to leave their children home alone. But no alternative existed to Pioneering. Whoever went to school had to become a Pioneer.

I commenced by asking the respondents if they were proud to become Pioneers. If so, how long did this enthusiasm last? I also wanted to see what the respondents thought about the compulsory Pioneering rituals, such as collecting reusable materials or attending Nicolae Ceaușescu's working visits.

Seven of my interlocutors were proud to become Pioneers. Ben is the exception; for him joining the Pioneers' ranks was simply "OK". But this pride had nothing to do with the communist regime as such. Ada, Sebastian and Cristina were enthusiastic about joining the Pioneers because thus they could acquire positions in the Pioneers' hierarchy, and manifest their power over the rest of children. "I was the boss in my classroom. The feeling of power was super", Ada says.

Sebastian:

I was group commander. I liked when comrade teacher had something to do and had to leave the classroom, she would let us, the group commanders, take care of each row of desks...so there were three rows of desks, a detachment commander and three group commanders. The group commanders were standing in front of the row they were in charge with, and had to write down if somebody was cheeky and restless.

Even if he held the lowest position in the Pioneers' hierarchy – group commander — Sebastian could invest himself with the authority and power of his teacher. As far as Cristina is concerned, by enthusiastically joining the Pioneers, she could get involved in artistic activities

meant to consolidate her public image. These three respondents do not regard becoming a Pioneer as a token of their devotion to the Ceaușescu family, but rather as a public relations activity out of which they could draw personal benefits. In the same category I would place the respondents who admit that they suffered for not being made Pioneers in the first wave, because they did not have good marks or for any other reason. Their chagrin was not at all due to the disappointment they might have provoked in their supreme parents, Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, but to vanity. Joining the Pioneers in the first wave, a privilege reserved for the elite of the classroom, would have brought them status among their colleagues.

The communist sovereigns would have probably been disappointed to find out that, far from nurturing themselves with socialist ideals, Romanian children were pragmatic and knew how to negotiate with their Pioneering experience in order to obtain maximum benefit from it. In other words, they were regimented in this structure only at a physical level. By examining the interviews, it is clear that wearing a commander's cord – be it blue, yellow or red, in a decreasing order of their importance in the Pioneers' hierarchy – was not a signifier of commitment to the communist ideals but of increased prestige over the mass of less fortunate colleagues.

Other respondents declared that they were more interested in the gratifying pleasures which accompanied the Pioneer membership. These pleasures ranged from trips to the History Museum or out of town, to more palpable benefits, such as a red kerchief and the plastic ring that was holding it. Sebastian remembers having chocolates together with his colleagues as the climax of the first day of Pioneering. Even Zoltan, who says that initially he found communism appealing, as much as he understood of it at a young age, does not mention other reasons for pride than the kerchief and its ring.

Each of the interviewees was exposed to a different scenario when (s)he became a Pioneer. While Ada, received the red kerchief in the classroom, Sebastian was taken on a tour to the plastics factory, Ben – to the Military Academy and Anca to Târgu Jiu, where the sculptures of Constantin Brâncuși¹¹ are displayed. Zoltan witnessed an innovation in the ritual, and climbed the second step of a pedestal brought to the classroom for that festive occasion. The rite of passage from the quasi-obscure condition of an ordinary child to a member of the Pioneers' caste was thus modified by each schoolteacher, according to his / her time and disposition. Besides that, school teachers had a considerable potential of transmitting communist propaganda to their pupils. Cristina's experience is relevant in this sense, because she knew both sides of the coin: an open-minded teacher, followed by an "indoctrinatory" class master, who was educating children in full compliance with the ideological norms of communism. Everything depended thus on how much enthusiasm a teacher was willing to invest in spreading the communist word among children.

The respondents also undermine two other communist myths: that of the Pioneer enthusiastically collecting reusable materials, and that of the Pioneer or UCY member who toils with Stakhanovite enthusiasm in the fields or factories, to help the working people of Romania. Marius, Ben and Andrei remember that the whole activity of collecting scrap paper or chestnuts was a sort of mockery. In turn, Anca remembers the compulsory patriotic work as a pleasant time spent in the country, without doing anything. "We were a group of girls. We were hiding in the maize fields, had lunch there, and when it was time to go, we were coming out. We weren't working at all."

Ben instead speaks about the chores he was exposed to as child and teenager:

¹¹ Famous Romanian sculptor

Paper was awful...at the beginning of school each of us was supposed to bring to school 10 kilos of paper, I don't know how many kilos of chestnuts, and so on. (...) But from this point of view the worst time was in high school, as UCY member. They were exploiting us big time, in the sense that they were asking us to peel potatoes, gather crops...

This answer demonstrates once again the irremediable breach between the rhetoric of the Romanian Communist Party and its leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu, and the popular interpretations –and adjustments according to the personal interests and benefits -- of this rhetoric.

Further on I asked my respondents to remember if they ever attended a working visit to their region by Nicolae Ceaușescu. Romanian children had to read to a plethora of legends about *voievozi* who dressed up in simple clothes, and wandered across streets or fairs to see how people lived. The greedy *boyar* or the merchant who was trying to deceive his honest fellow was revealed by the *voievod*, and exposed to public disapproval. The masses were thus reassured that the ruler of the country was always on their side. Attempting to gain the sympathy of Romanians, Nicolae Ceaușescu chose to perpetuate this populist rhetoric, and posed as the leader always ready to encourage or support his people. Communist propaganda presented Nicolae Ceaușescu's working visits as generators of spontaneous popular enthusiasm.

The respondents who witnessed such visits found alternate sources of interest to the presidential couple. Ada, a very enthusiastic Pioneer, was there when, in 1969, Richard and Patricia Nixon, joined by the Romanian presidential couple, visited the Pioneers' Palace. Ada admits that she was so fascinated by Patricia Nixon's perfume, that she didn't even observe "poor Ceaușescu or his wife, who did not impress me by anything". In her micro-community – the classroom, Ada held the highest position, that of detachment commander. Although the regime had hoped that such positions might trigger her fidelity and gratefulness, Ada is a living

proof that this initiative failed. Frugality, considered by the communist regime as a token of moral strength, appears thus to be an undesirable ideal for her. In turn, Sebastian also disrupts the myth of the enthusiast popular response. There was no trace of spontaneity; everything was carefully planned and arranged up to the minutest detail by authorities:

We were not standing where we would have liked. There were the representatives of the Party who, neatly dressed, with striped suits and ties, blushing and chubby, were positioning us with their little hands, mightily yelling you here, you there, stand still, don't move. When the comrade appears, applaud and yell: long live comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu, hooray, hooray! (...) Kids were taken and led to the front, with bunches of flowers but probably they were thoroughly checked. They were kids of Party members who were highly trusted.

Sebastian's opinion is confirmed by Zoltan. As Pioneer he could only attend Ceaușescu's working visit because his (Zoltan's) parents held important positions in the local apparatus of the Communist Party. "Since the majority of Pioneers were sons of party members, of course I was invited", he says. Nonetheless, according to the state propaganda, there were no discriminatory criteria among kids: comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu was pleased to meet any child, provided that (s)he was a zealous Pioneer, with high grades and consistent extra-curricular activities, such as patriotic work. In reality children of *nomenklatura* were more equal than their fellows with *sane* origins.

The theory of spontaneous enthusiasm was rejected both by Marius and Anca, who recall the megalomaniac stadium shows prepared in honor of Nicolae Ceaușescu's visits or to celebrate a national feast. Thousands of people wrote the name of the president or adulatory phrases about the unflinching advancement of communism in Romania with their bodies. Rehearsals for such events usually lasted several months. But children would look for the benefits of such activities; as Andrei says, "it was nice, because we were all together, all

classmates. Nobody cared why we were going there. We were all together and didn't go to school".

One of the key rituals of such visits would take place when children, Pioneers and Homeland Falcons, offered flowers to Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu. *Cutezătorii*¹² magazine often displayed on its cover this moment of homage, and noted that each Pioneer should feel proud to have this privilege. How proud would have my respondents been? Except for Ada and Zoltan, nobody else wanted to offer flowers to the presidential couple. Ada and Zoltan would have used this opportunity to increase their notoriety. "You may have had the chance to appear on TV", they both said. Before 1989, Romanian television only broadcast for two hours per evening. Even so, the program was almost exclusively dedicated to praising the accomplishments of the Ceaușescu regime. Penetrating this panegyric would have thus been extremely valuable for a child's prestige in his classroom or even in his family. Ada says: "your mom could have seen you". Such an appearance would have legitimated perhaps her desire of being treated as an adult by her parents – a desire shared by so many other children. By appearing on TV she would have succeeded where her parents never did: appropriating, even for a minute or two, a media space reserved to Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu. Ada and Zoltan would thus use the personality cult generated around the presidential couple to consolidate their own micro-personality cult. In order to consolidate their personal brand, my two interlocutors would have been ready to use the Ceaușescu family as endorsers.

Anca and Cristina explain *why* they would not have wanted to offer flowers to Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu. Both of them speak about the anti-president remarks they heard at home, which shaped their perceptions of the leader and the situation of Romania. In Anca's family, for instance, everybody was against communism, as she declares. Besides her parents'

¹² The magazine of Romanian Pioneers; in translation *Cutezătorii* means "The Daring Ones"

apprehensions about the communist regime, Cristina had a personal reason for not wanting to render homage to Nicolae Ceaușescu. She was in charge of providing foodstuff for her family:

I remember very well the nightmare of queuing, 6-7 hours spent in a line. I knew it was their [Ceaușescu's, *my note*] fault because I had to queue. I didn't love them from any point of view, because they were the ones who made me queue. (...) They were up above, they were guilty, and I didn't want to give them flowers.

I will discuss below in detail the role of family in protecting children from the ideologically-correct messages they were receiving through all channels available. For the moment it is important to underline that, although the state rhetoric summoned children to regard Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu as their parents, children were not willing to forget about their natural parents. Ben used to perceive the Ceaușescus as some "intangible gods, up there". Furthermore, "parents are a warm notion which has nothing to do with Ceaușescu's sour, stereotype smile in all school books". Children could thus sense that the whole rhetoric constructed around Ceaușescus' parental love for all children was void of essence.

The next questions referred to the media and artifacts Romanian children were exposed to. I asked the respondents if they used to read children's magazines, especially *Cutezătorii*. In most schools pupils were obliged to subscribe to *Cutezătorii*, otherwise it is doubtful that the magazine could have survived only by sales. Like any other pre-1989 publication, it contained a consistent amount of propaganda: articles about Nicolae Ceaușescu's meetings with children during his working visits, a plethora of photos from these events, commentaries on his discourses or, as a type of indirect propaganda, reports from different schools. The heroes of such accounts were Pioneers, always in competition with their colleagues at getting good grades and doing patriotic work. It was their way of manifesting gratitude for the wonderful living and working conditions the Communist Party was providing for them. These

pages were sometimes dedicated to condemning the negative elements, such as the pupil who tried to cheat on a term paper or missed the patriotic work days.

Except for Anca, all interviewees were subscribers to *Cutezătorii* and all of them used to skip the first pages. They were not interested in slaving the most beloved son of the country, as Sebastian ironically remarks, paraphrasing a fashionable pre-1989 syntagm. Each week, when receiving a new issue of *Cutezătorii*, Sebastian would begin to read from the back cover, which contained cartoons with communist heroes. Zoltan was more interested in the *crafts* section of the magazine, which taught kids how to assemble various things of wood or plastic or how to make batteries out of tomatoes and copper. The intrinsic irony of such pages was they involuntarily acknowledged the generalized lack of goods in the Romanian market. In a prosperous country children do not need to learn how to make batteries out of tomatoes or skirts out of curtains.

Because I sensed my respondents' inclination to humanize all communist rituals and take all possible benefits from them, my next question was: *Would you have liked Cutezătorii to write about you?* The answers confirmed my expectations. Except for Marius and Sebastian, who declared that they would not like any kind of magazine to write about them, the rest of interviewees admitted that they would have liked to find an article about them in the *Pioneers'* magazine. The desire for popularity is again at work. Ada would have liked any kind of article, "just to be there, in *Cutezătorii*. Not at *Don't do like them* section...but something heroic, something about our detachment". Andrei considers that anybody would like a magazine to write about him. Besides that, he felt that as a child you cannot sense the propaganda content of a publication. Ben would have liked *Cutezătorii* to write that he was the toughest, so that he could show the article to his mother. Cristina would have wanted to see all her extra-curricular

activities reflected in the magazine. The single interviewee who saw this wish fulfilled was Zoltan. As a Pioneer he had sculpted a landscape on a copper sheet, and was awarded the third national prize. *Cutezătorii* dedicated an article to this accomplishment which made Zoltan very proud, inasmuch as the entire school knew about the copper landscape.

Several respondents drew a comparison between *Cutezătorii* and *Pif* magazine. *Pif* was a French magazine of cartoons, named after its main hero, *Pif le chien*. It contained different types of cartoons, from mere gags like *Pif et Hercule* or *Placid et Muzo*, with two animal heroes in conflict, to more elaborate stories, involving human beings: *Rahan*, *Dr. Justice* etc. *Pif* magazine had its own ideological *parti pris*, in accordance to the views of its editor, the French Socialist Party. But this bias could only be observed at a close reading, such as a thorough discourse analysis. Andrei compares *Cutezătorii* with *Pif*: “It’s a big difference...you cannot compare them. Compared with *Pif*, yes, *Cutezătorii* was propaganda.” It was impossible to find out from *Pif* who the president of France was and what was his strategy against the arms race. In *Cutezătorii* text was predominant. There were pages without any images, while *Pif* was richly illustrated. If the readers of *Pif* were treated as children, the readers of *Cutezătorii* were expected to behave like little citizens. A gadget such as a water pistol, a rubber snake or a sling accompanied each number of *Pif*. These destructive or scary toys would have been incompatible with the sobriety promoted by *Cutezătorii*, but the young Romanian *Pif* readers were mesmerized by them. Besides that, the idea of receiving a small gift together with the magazine was nonexistent in communist Romania. *Pif* was very difficult to find, as Andrei recalls: “you had to queue on the day it was brought to kiosks”. When asked if he used to read *Cutezătorii*, Sebastian compares the comrades from *Cutezătorii* cartoons with the heroes of *Pif*, and remembers too that *Pif* was not easy to get hold of. The preference for *Pif*, to the detriment of *Cutezătorii*,

demonstrates that the Romanian children were immune to the anti-Capitalist messages of state propaganda disseminated through all channels available, including the press dedicated to children. They preferred to queue for the magazine they liked instead of reading *Cutezătorii*, brought weekly to their desks. *Pif* gradually disappeared from the market. Children of the 1980s could only have access to the *Pif* collection of older neighbors. Only the privileged kids who had relatives abroad, such as Anca, had the opportunity to read the *Pif* in the '80s and not a shabby, ten year old copy.

I also wanted to find out if the respondents watched TV during their childhood. Due to a national policy of saving energy initiated by the Romanian Communist Party, the TV program was constantly reduced. Thus, if older interviewees remember “Program 1” and “Program 2” of the Romanian television, younger interviewees only witnessed the era of a two-hour TV program per day. While Andrei remembers watching *Daktari* and *Flipper* in his childhood years – late 1960s and the 1970s, when the access to Western production was not completely denied, Anca recalls movies where the agronomic engineer fell in love with the teacher from the village. This was a common topic of Romanian movies in the 80s. This decade was dominated by indigenous productions; the few foreign movies broadcast on TV were Chinese, North-Korean or Albanian. In the years that preceded the 1989 Revolution, Nicolae Ceaușescu referred to these three countries as the friends of the Romanian people. This reorientation towards countries that had never been traditional allies or partners of Romania aimed to emphasize that the country would not follow the same path as the neighboring countries. Romania would not implement *perestroika*, it would not allow any deviations from the political orthodoxy or any sign of economic decentralization. Relations with neighboring countries, not to mention with Soviet Union, were glacial in the late 1980s. Instead, Nicolae

Ceaușescu was obviously welcoming to China, North Korea and Albania. This friendship helps account for the particular traits of Romanian communism.

On Sunday the TV program lasted longer than two hours. In the morning Romanian television broadcast *Children's World*, a program dedicated to Pioneers. Andrei and Sebastian remember that they were not willing to watch this program: "It was propaganda. You could tell it wasn't something natural" (Andrei); "I didn't have the patience to watch more than three minutes, because there were only Pioneers, patriotic songs and poems" (Sebastian). Ada however used to watch *Children's World* with much interest, because this program functioned as an exchange of experience for her. She wanted to improve her artistic performances by learning from the Pioneers who performed in the show. Her interest was thus determined by the need to increase her popularity among schoolmates or family members. Marius watched this program for similar reasons. It broadcast various activities from the Pioneers' Palace – aircraft, karting or modeling contests - which seemed interesting to him. He joined the local branch of the Pioneers' organization and the literary club. "We had to write stories and read them to the public. I had to write a story about the life of a poor child in Africa as I would imagine it." This answer demonstrates that the extra-curricular activities organized by Pioneers' organizations and promoted through channels such as *Cutezătorii* and *Children's World* represented an attempt to inculcate in children a positive attitude towards the communist regime. These socializing activities aimed at educating children in accordance with communist values. Marius, for instance, was asked to write a story about a poor child in Africa, so that he could understand how fortunate he was in being born in Romania. Once persuaded, Marius was expected to act as an apostle of communist regime among his peers. At the same time, by joining the literary club, Marius learned what censorship meant. Prior to reading his composition in front of public,

Marius had several meetings with a teacher who suggested what he was supposed to write or what had to be eliminated from the composition. Once again, it is obvious that some teachers played an extremely important role in molding a child's consciousness. In absence of parents' intervention, a too zealous teacher might have been successful in indoctrinating the pupils. Marius is a relevant example in this sense. As a consequence of his activity at the literary club and at primary school, he came to consider the communist regime normal:

I remember very well, in the elementary school, when they were telling us how bad was capitalism, so many murders in America, and how nice was in Romania, there were no murders at all. I was thinking how fortunate I was for being born in such an extraordinary country like Romania.

It was only the discussions with his parents and grandparents that made Marius change his mind about the positive nature of the communist regime.

Nicolae Ceaușescu wanted children to behave like small citizens. He would never adjust his discourse so as to make it intelligible for a juvenile audience because Romanian children were expected to be familiar with his campaigns against the international arms race or with the requirements of the Five-Year Plan. These problems were thus addressed in front of Pioneers or Homeland Falcons, who were required to pay all due attention to the president's exposition. My respondents' memories demonstrate beyond doubt that Nicolae Ceaușescu's expectations were unreasonable. Like all kids in the world, Romanian kids were not interested in politics or economy but cartoons and movies. Because Romanian television would only broadcast ten minutes of cartoons per evening in 1970s, and up to ten minutes cartoons per week in the late 1980s, children reoriented towards other television channels: Bulgarian, Russian or Serbian. Each block in Romania hosted a forest of antennas on its roof, although these devices were quasi-clandestine. People would even improvise antennas out of

zinc basins. Courses in Bulgarian language were booked well in advance but most people learned the basic words of this language from TV programs. “Bulgarians were anyway much more advanced than us”, Ben thinks. Cristina agrees; like Ben, she used to watch cartoons, movies or Arabella – a delightful Czech series for children – on Bulgarian television. But the most daring approach belonged to Serbian television, according to the interviewees who watched its programs in their childhood. It was only the southwestern area of Romania that could receive the Serbian programs. Ben considered himself fortunate when he would go to his grandparents and watch the Serbians. Marius and Anca remember how fascinated they were by the reports on Serbian television:

Marius At that time they had reports against Ceaușescu regime, which I found extraordinary. They were showing empty grocery stores, and telling what a hard life Romanians had. I don’t know how they managed to make these reports. I couldn’t believe I saw something like that on TV.

Anca We were looking covetously at what they had in their grocery stores, Coca-Cola and all the chocolates in the world. It was only on Serbian TV that we could see full shelves.

These two accounts demonstrate that children and youths in their early teens did not believe what propaganda discourses kept repeating: Romania was a prosperous country, and each person had his portion of wealth in this promise land. The interviewees also demonstrate that the abundance and persistence of propaganda messages do not guarantee the success of indoctrinatory efforts. Although Romanians were exposed from all directions to the tenets of Romanian Communist Party, a single breach was sufficient to disrupt the entire ideological construct. In case of Marius, Ben and Anca this breach was represented by Serbian television. For them, the Serbian reports made the huge amounts spent by Romanian Communist Party on propaganda useless.

Beginning in the mid 1980s Romanians who could afford a VCR had another alternative to the two-hour program of Romanian television. Among respondents, it was only Anca who had a VCR, thanks to her relatives abroad. The other respondents participated as often as possible at video nights organized by different persons. Sebastian preferred movies “with beating, with shots, with war, with Jackie Chan, Bruce Lee and Arnold Schwarzenegger”. So did Marius, while Ben watched *Top Gun* and *5 ½ weeks*. For two reasons the VCR evenings should be considered as a form of popular resistance to communism, even if confined to the space of personal apartments. First of all, people were resisting the hypocritical chastity imposed by the communist regime. It is interesting to notice that while Romanian television was broadcasting innocent Chinese or North Korean movies, with happy peasants and cranes returning to their home country, VCR fans were more attracted by the violent side of Asia. Movies with Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan were widely appreciated in Romania. Ben however had more romantic preferences, while Ada watched movies like Peter Shaffer’s *Amadeus*. Violence and sex were two taboos of the puritan socialist society. The movies broadcast by Romanian television represented moralizing stories, constructed on the narrative patterns of socialist realism. People were thus seeking what the ideal socialist society could not show them: dynamic (or even aggressive) movies, sexual intercourse on TV screen or, as in Ada’s case, movies with a certain substance, with a solid plot and good actors. Cristina confirmed the fact that people craved images and stories they could not get in Romania. She remembers that her family and friends were thrilled when they could get hold of American movies, thanks to a relative who worked at the airport. Probably a movie like that “would seem stupid to us now”, she laughs. But back in the 1980s that movie was invaluable, because it was impossible to see it otherwise.

Romanian television did not broadcast American movies. The VCR groupies had ascendancy over their friends or colleagues who had not seen the movie. That VCR cassette represented their form of dissidence.

The second aspect I would like to emphasize is the breadth of social interconnections generated by the VCR phenomenon in Romania. A whole web of personal relations was set in motion in order to get hold of VCR cassettes and then exchange them. Cristina speaks about a friend of her family who, thanks to his job at the airport, could more easily find cassettes. Furthermore, the VCR evenings represented an opportunity of socializing with friends and relatives, and at the same time making new acquaintances. Marius remembers: “on evenings, after my parents had fallen asleep, I’d leave home with my brother. Somebody was organizing video marathons all night long”. The communist regime did not allow the existence of private enterprise. In spite of that, the VCR phenomenon functioned as a market economy in miniature. Some VCR owners even used to sell tickets for the video marathons they organized. Zoltan, an aficionado of VCR evenings, was spending a lot of time washing bottles and selling them just to get money for the movie marathons. His case is particularly interesting, because his parents held solid positions in the local hierarchy of the Romanian Communist Party. Even if he was only a child, Zoltan benefited from the advantages of this status – for example, access to consumer goods that were absent from the market. It is thus clear that the communist authorities could not attain their desideratum of having people’s lives under complete surveillance. Romanians coped with the communist discourse by finding alternatives to it.

The last set of questions referred to the way in which respondents related to the communist regime through their everyday living rituals. I began by asking them if they lived

in a block. Nicolae Ceaușescu's ambition was to industrialize Romania. A gigantic heavy industry infrastructure was erected beginning in the 1960s. In fact the whole country was a building site, as a fashionable cliché of the 1980s said. Because the labor force was insufficient, many people were asked to move from villages to cities. Old houses were demolished, and whole districts of blocks were built, in order to accommodate this wave of uprooted populace. However, these people could never fully adjust to this imposed change of status. They brought with them their former habits of living, incompatible with an urban existence and often annoying for their neighbors. Blocks were a semi-rural community, a *mélange* of people with different backgrounds. All respondents declared that they lived in blocks. I asked them if they were aware, as children, of the small espionage activities practiced among neighbors, or which of the neighbors were informers for Securitate¹³. The answers confirmed the difference between the 1970s and 1980s. Nicolae Ceaușescu gradually became an unavoidable presence in Romanians' lives. His picture was in each classroom, in each room of a public institution, excerpts from his speeches could be found in every publication, while radio and television programs were a continuous ode to socialist Romania and its president. By the 1980s censorship became even more drastic. People who overtly protested against the regime risked severe repercussions from the Securitate. This repressive body was so frightening because people knew it almost exclusively from the urban myths generated around it. Children did not remain insensitive to these invocations. Ada, Andrei and Sebastian, the older respondents, who were children or teenagers in the 1970s, did not know anything about informers among neighbors. Their blocks represented small communities, with a pleasant atmosphere and warm interpersonal relations. Ben, though,

¹³ The Romanian secret service and the most feared repressive apparatus

recalls his block as a place where “everybody knew everybody, and the key word was: watch out, that one is...”¹⁴ Cristina confirms:

We used to call them tablagiu¹⁵ 1, tablagiu 2. It was one who was driving me nuts, a very annoying one, he was checking even us, kids. He didn’t have anything to do, was a retiree, but everybody knew he was a Securitate agent. He used to live at the ground floor. He was like a badger, was following us everywhere, and we didn’t know how to run away from him. We also knew which of our colleagues were sons of Securitate agents, so we had to be careful what we were saying.

I mentioned earlier that the communist regime expected children to behave like little adults. In a way they did. From an early age they had to develop an ability to censor themselves and repress their spontaneous reactions. Otherwise children could have endangered their parents’ jobs or even freedom. Cristina recalls how frightened she was after she had told at school several jokes about “the shoemaker”¹⁶. For several weeks her parents lived under a terrible tension, waiting for the visit of a Securitate agent. Romanian children had to live in a climate of fear and suspicion where, except for their families, nobody was completely trustworthy. Trying to learn everything about your neighbors is usually a hobby of older ages. But Romanian kids had to know as much as possible about their block neighbors so that they (the kids) could stay safe. Children were thus forced to grow old before their time. I asked respondents to recall the breach between what they thought and what they said. Ada, Andrei and Sebastian said that they never believed in what they were forced to recite or sing. They would mechanically perform their roles in various shows dedicated to Nicolae Ceaușescu and the Romanian Communist Party, hoping to increase their popularity. Because they did not live their childhood years in the 1980s, when suspicion and

¹⁴ Informer

¹⁵ “Tablagiu” = person with “tables” (epaulettes) on his / her shoulders; it was the pejorative name for any Militia and Securitate worker.

¹⁶ In his youth, Nicolae Ceaușescu worked as a shoemaker. Joking about this was strictly forbidden.

informer-phobia reached their peak, these three subjects can only think of the obligatory artistic displays as a type of schizoid breach between thoughts and words. Cristina, instead, remembers that she had to be control her speech in front of her indoctrinated class master.

Ben had this nuanced point of view:

This double message with which we were raised has developed us intellectually, I think, but on the other hand it has kind of crushed us as people, as citizens. It manifested everywhere, when we were writing something we knew there were certain canons. We knew that words have a double meaning, their surface meaning and another dimension.

Furthermore, Ben speaks about the consequence of this dichotomy: the fear that you could not hide your thoughts deep enough so that the communist authorities would not be able to read them. This dominated Romanian society: “everything was listened to, they¹⁷ could intrude in our lives. Private no longer meant private but public. Telephones under surveillance, microphones...” (Ben). This phobia is still alive today, Ben thinks. Some people still fear that their telephones are tapped or that they have microphones hidden in their houses.

Anca says that she did not feel the need to talk outside her house because all the discussions were taking place inside the family. Her parents, grandparents and relatives were extremely critical of the communist regime. “I kept things in mind but I did not talk about them”, she says. Anca introduces as a key issue the role of family in counteracting the communist ideology disseminated through school or various artifacts children were exposed to. This topic was approached by some respondents, when asked if they regarded Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu as parents. Ada, for instance, remembers that in her childhood the Ceaușescus were still “the comrades” and not yet “mom and dad”. At that time propaganda was insisting more upon the Romanian Communist Party than on the presidential couple.

¹⁷ The Securitate forces

“From, let’s say ’66 up to the 70s the Party was stronger than the beloved ruler. We still had parents”, Ada says. The pro-Ceausescu indoctrinating messages were not targeting children yet, so Ada’s family did not feel the need to discuss the political regime with her. Her parents used to listen to Radio Free Europe¹⁸ but Ada did not see anything extraordinary in that. Because the political regime was not yet as oppressive as it would become in the eighties, it is possible that people did not feel the need for an alternative discourse so acutely. In the 1980s listening to Free Europe became a widespread evening habit among Romanians. Andrei and Sebastian have similar memories as Ada. Except for an appeal to vigilance – do not tell anyone that we are listening to Radio Free Europe – their parents did not discuss the political situation with them. Neither did Zoltan’s parents talk with their son about Nicolae Ceausescu or about the Party. But the motivation was different: they did not want to jeopardize their positions within the Communist Party. Moreover, too much curiosity might have not been beneficial for their kids – Zoltan and his brother. For this reason, instead of discussing politics, Zoltan’s father directed his children towards fiction. Zoltan remembers that he read thousands of books in his childhood and early teen-age years. His reading functioned thus as a diversion: they prevented him from thinking too much about what was happening in Romania.

Ben’s family would not hide politics from him but neither would his parents tell him grave things, “because I was a child, and a child will be a child.” But the main strategy of his family was to openly discuss most of the problems. “I never had that sensation of foggy muttering”, he recalls. Cristina remembers that her parents were listening to Free Europe, “like most of the people”. They were trying not to talk too much in front of her and her sister.

¹⁸ A radio station with an extremely critical discourse against the communist regimes from East European countries; its programs in Romanian language were listened to quasi clandestinely by numerous people in Romania. It broadcast from Paris and Munich.

Besides that, her parents did not discuss the situation in Romania with their neighbors but only with trustworthy friends, "people they had known from years". In this context, trustworthy should be read as not having any contact with the Securitate. Nonetheless, Cristina's family did not refrain from making malicious comments about Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu. These comments and the six or seven hour queues for foodstuff prevented Cristina from considering the Ceaușescus her parents.

Anca and Marius' grandparents had suffered because of communism. Anca's grandfather had been a member of the royalist army:

He kept telling us how good the king was, and what the communists had done to us, that they had taken everything from us. My grandparents had been kulaks, they had had lands and threshing machine. My great-grandparents had had the first taxi in Craiova¹⁹, taxi Chevrolet...And they²⁰ took us everything.

Communist authorities had brought much suffering to Marius' family, too. His grandfather had been school headmaster in his youth, and the son of a kulaks family. The communists, who had just acquired power in Romania, threatened him with a gun, in order to convince him to join the Party. His grandmother was a schoolteacher, and she could not advance in her career because she was descended from a kulak family. "The fact that I was raised with my grandparents was very good, from my point of view. It opened my eyes about what was really happening." It is thus obvious that the family had a key role in immunizing the child against the influence of communist propaganda. Moreover, it could even determine if the child changed his attitude toward Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu and the communist regime. Anca had witnessed from the very beginning the hostile attitude of her family towards communism. But Marius, who considered himself lucky to live in Romania, because there

¹⁹ Town in the south-western region of Romania

²⁰ The communists

were not so many murders as in America, changed his view after listening to his grandparents' confession.

Peer influence could substitute for the parents who were not willing to discuss these issues with their children. Zoltan began to reconsider communism after returning from a Mathematics and Physics camp. He was so influenced by the conversations he had with his colleagues, all gifted for sciences, that he refused to become the commander of UCY (the Union of Communist Youth) in high school. But how old were the respondents when this *epiphany* took place? I would first consider Andrei's answers; he considers that children cannot discern the propagandistic content of a certain event or artistic production. According to him, one's conscience begins to develop in early adolescence. Marius remembers that, as child, he could not perceive the propagandistic content of the programs he watched on TV. But in the fifth grade he began questioning the communist rhetoric, following the conversations with his grandparents. In his turn Zoltan remembers:

 The idea of communism seemed appealing to me at the beginning. I liked it, as much as I understood of it.
LV: *Until what age did you find this idea appealing?*
 Until the ninth grade, until 15 years.²¹

Further on I asked the interviewees if they, their families or someone close -- relative, friend or neighbor -- had any bad experience with the communist regime. Ada was in her student years when she was not admitted as a member of the Romanian Communist party, "for an absolutely ridiculous reason", as she says. Andrei tells the story of a colleague who had problems with the Securitate because he brought a sandwich and an umbrella to one of Ceaușescu's working visits. Andrei and one of his friends stood up for the accused and voted

²¹ Zoltan's apprehension towards communism and Nicolae Ceausescu was determined by the discussions he had with his camp colleagues.

against the sanctions proposed by the enterprise council. A Securitate officer held Sebastian's identification card because he (Sebastian) was chewing gum. But all these incidents took place in the late teens or early adulthood of the respondents. Marius, instead, experienced an unpleasant experience in the fifth grade. Pupils were obliged to have their hair cut very short – so that it would not exceed one centimeter in length. The teachers would get their palms through children's hair, to see if children respected this requirement. "My hair was going a little bit over the teacher's fingers", Marius remembers. "She took the scissors and made layers into my hair. She did that to all the boys in the classroom." I asked him if he linked this incident and the absurd regulation that caused it with the Ceaușescu regime. Marius answered that he only revolted against his teacher. He considered that the radical measure taken by the teacher was an excess of zeal on her part. Anca speaks about an abuse against her family. Although her parents were entitled to get a three-room apartment, because they had two children of different sexes²², this right was denied to them because they had relatives abroad. This was a frequent reason for discrimination in Romania. More often than not, people were denied certain privileges or things they would have been entitled to. The authorities wanted thus to punish the entire family on behalf of their fugitive relative who had betrayed the communist regime.

My next question referred to the lack of consumer goods on the Romanian market. Although the communist propaganda trumpeted the general prosperity of Romanian society, people had to queue for hours in order to purchase foodstuff or other products, such as toilet paper. More often than not, the amount of products offered for sale was insufficient for all the persons who queued. Thus many people waited for hours, and eventually went home

²² According to the communist regulations, four persons were supposed to live in three rooms. A boy and a girl were not allowed to share a room. If the children were of the same sex, they were allowed to live in the same room.

empty handed. Ada remembers that the severe shortages occurred in her student years, at the beginning of the 1980s.

As children we had oranges and bananas for Christmas, and we considered this absolutely normal. So the fact that you could find them every day, or that you could eat strawberries in January was something like...in the movies. There was no such thing it was only imperialist propaganda. Russian movies weren't showing something like that.

Sebastian speaks about the sacrifices made by Romanian parents in order to get hold of foodstuff for their children. Both he and Marius remember that, as children, they did not feel the shortage of foodstuff on the market but they admit that the pressure upon parents who had to procure food must have been terrible. For Zoltan's parents it was somewhat easier. Thanks to their positions in the Communist Party, they had access to many products hard to find on the market. But in spite of this quasi-privileged status, Zoltan himself had to queue seven or eight hours, to purchase oranges before Christmas. He sat in the queue in the morning; in the afternoon, when his parents returned from work, Zoltan was among the first people in the line. Bananas and oranges were usually brought in the evening. "I remember it was something we waited for, like...something very rare", he says. I asked him if he used to make any connection between the seven or eight hour queues and Nicolae Ceaușescu. Zoltan recalls that people in the line were talking about Ceaușescu but he did not pay attention.

First of all, I was never alone when queuing. All gang, 15-20 kids, was queuing. We were playing, we were beating each other but we kept our place in the row. We were playing all sorts of games, chess, or we were playing with the Rubik's cube.

Zoltan remembers queuing as a form of socialization. People were attempting in various ways to make the hours spent in line agreeable. They used to read, play chess, backgammon or simply chat with their neighbors in the queue. A sort of circumstantial solidarity united the people in line. Their common mission was to purchase 30 eggs or one kilo of poultry meat

per person. Once accomplished, people returned to their families and forgot the friends from the queue.

Ben recalls the queuing rituals:

We had developed a way of promptly reacting when the truck with food was coming...we were kids, we were playing, and suddenly you could hear "the machine has come". We were little automatons, we were very well organized. In that moment the majority of the gang was taking its place in the queue, while two of us were going to announce our parents. Sometimes we were staying for hours, in winter, for a pack of butter or whatever that mysterious machine was bringing. Because we were born in this atmosphere, this thing had its degree of normality. Now I look back at this with horror.

Ben also remembers the strategies of survival developed by his parents, like the majority of Romanians confronted with the scarcity on the market. In parallel with the socialist economy, an underground barter system developed. For instance, Ben's father used to go to the countryside and exchange his gasoline quota for pork meat, or chocolates bought from Bucharest for eggs. While Nicolae Ceaușescu was publicly declaring the unprecedented advancement of Romania, people had to resort to primitive economic mechanisms in order to procure their food. "Since the center would not supply what people needed, they struggled to do so themselves, developing in the process a huge repertoire of strategies for obtaining consumer goods and services. These strategies, called the "second" or "informal" economy, spanned a wide range from the quasi-legal to the definitely illegal" (Verdery 27).

Anca and her family were to a lesser extent affected by the scarcity on the market. Their relatives from abroad used to send them packages with foodstuff and foreign currency. There were several stores called "SHOP", located in the proximity of hotels, where people who disposed of foreign currency could purchase things lacking in the socialist economy.

Nevertheless, there were moments when not even the help from abroad could offset her family's shortages:

I remember that I found my mother in the kitchen crying, and I couldn't understand why. She said that I had to pass an admission exam to high school, and she didn't have any meat to make me some schnitzels. My mother had set all her relatives and connections in motion but still couldn't find any meat.

Cristina's family used to go every summer to the seaside. The Romanian Black Sea coast was frequented by numerous Polish tourists, who had many things for sale, from cosmetics and sweets to electronic appliances. "They were making quite a trade there with everything: soaps, sweets, tape recorders, clothes, blue jeans...I felt in the seventh heaven when my parents got me blue jeans from there." Otherwise, Cristina's family would use her relations: the uncle who worked at the customs ("he was bringing us chewing gum. It was a dream"), and the uncle who worked at the airport.

All respondents shared a common memory, that of oranges and bananas available only once a year, before Christmas, and only after seven or eight hours of queuing. I asked them: *wouldn't you have liked to find oranges and bananas in January or in mid-summer, not only before Christmas? Did you have any feeling of frustration about that?* To my astonishment, they answered that they could not imagine something like that. "It was like an established rule", Ben thinks. "Usually you feel the lack when you are accustomed to a certain presence, or in our case...Ever since I was born shelves were empty." In his opinion, the only persons who could suffer such frustrations were the old men, who had known the prosperity before World War II or people who had traveled abroad. Ben remembers that his father visited Poland in the 1930s and was astonished by the prosperity he found there,

although Poland “was supposed to be in the same boat with us. Well, it wasn’t, they were going up, we were going down”, Ben concludes.

I asked the interviewees if they expected the communist regime to fall. None of them ever hoped that something like this could happen. “Nicolae Ceaușescu seemed immortal to us”, Ada remembers. At the same time, Marius used to wonder which of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s sons would succeed to his father. The last question of my interviews was: “*How would your life have been if the communism had not collapsed in 1989?*” Ada and Andrei think that they would have led a predictable and insipid life: same work place until retirement, modest salary raises every five years, same Dacia²³ automobile and no prospect for a brighter future. Sebastian would have probably lived a similar life to that of his parents. Marius would have done his utmost to leave the country. He admits that ever since he ceased to believe that it was better to live in Romania than in America, his dream was to emigrate. Anca and her family would have immigrated to Israel. “We were allowed to immigrate to Israel in Ceaușescu’s time. The Israeli state would offer money to Ceaușescu and the Communist Party, several thousands of dollars, for each Jew who was immigrating to Israel. It would have been impossible to live in Romania any longer.” Zoltan is the only respondent who admits that he would have tried to benefit from the communist regime. He would have gone to the university, then find a job and take a position within the Communist Party. In its turn, the system would have rewarded his faithfulness with an apartment. “I don’t think I would have been against the regime, because I would have used its good side. Definitely, I would have been a user”, Zoltan smiles.

²³ The traditional Romanian automobile; initially it was produced in partnership with Renault.

Concluding remarks

The communist regime in Romania allotted impressive resources for propaganda that targeted children. The juvenile audience was perceived as naïve and easy to influence. But the leaders of the Romanian Communist Party neglected the role of family, relatives and peers in educating and molding the children. The childhood memories of the people who participated in my interviews demonstrate that the effect of communist propaganda was minimal upon them. I say minimal because two out of the eight respondents --Marius and Zoltan -- trusted Nicolae Ceaușescu and the Romanian Communist Party. But their epiphany moments, which occurred in the fifth grade for Marius and at 15 years for Zoltan, led to radical changes of perspective. Marius was influenced by his grandparents, while Zoltan was influenced by his peers. To summarize: a massive investment in propaganda does not guarantee its effectiveness.

The effectiveness of a propaganda message cannot be assessed without considering the response it generates within the receivers. Regarding an audience as an amorphous mass willing to swallow everything is a superficial approach. The best examples in this sense are *Cutezătorii*, *The Homeland Falcons* and other magazines dedicated to Romanian children. Their editors did not make the smallest effort to give a palatable flavor to the indoctrinatory messages they sent issue after issue to their juvenile audience. Like Nicolae Ceaușescu in his speeches, these magazines addressed children as small citizens, already aware of the economic and political situation of Romania. The consequence of this approach was that children used to skip the first pages of these magazines. “Those pages were...to be given away”, Ben concluded. Kids wanted to be kids without the concerns of “citizens”. They preferred to read the French magazine *Pif*, which never mentioned the international arms race

or the outstanding accomplishment of Romanian agriculture. Its main hero was not Nicolae Ceaușescu but a yellow dog, with long floppy ears. The audience response to a certain product or artifact cannot be disregarded. When it is, the audience will orient itself towards alternative discourses, and develop an attitude of indifference, if not hostility, towards the messages being conveyed.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has attempted to deconstruct several myths and stereotypes and also bring a novel contribution to an area of popular culture studies in which not much research has yet been undertaken: children's everyday living rituals in a totalitarian context.

The thesis has emphasized the shortcomings of the behaviorist model of analyzing propaganda. One cannot assess the effectiveness of an indoctrinatory message without assessing the public response it generates. Receivers should not be victimized and deemed incapable of negotiating a propaganda message they are exposed to. The need for incorporating the audience response in the study of propaganda is essential especially in the case of totalitarian societies. In Romania, for instance, the Romanian Communist Party used all channels available to transmit its indoctrinatory messages to the people. At the same time, alternative discourses were hardly available and (quasi) clandestine. However, in spite of the amount of money and energy spent by the RCP, the propaganda discourse failed in most cases to reach its target. Except for the social groups that benefited from Nicolae Ceaușescu's political regime, the majority of Romanians developed personal readings of this discourse, by ignoring, interpreting or negotiating it. The aggressiveness and ubiquitous nature of the RCP propaganda did not ensure its success. This fact was confirmed by ethnographic interviews undertaken on various occasions after the 1989 Revolution.

Moreover, as the persons I interviewed for this thesis confirmed, children developed this type of instrumental use of the propaganda discourse. My thesis has demonstrated that Romanian children did not represent a vulnerable audience. They cleverly negotiated the

indoctrinatory discourse, in search for possible benefits. My respondents remembered how they used to simulate enthusiasm in reciting patriotic poems in order to gain extra notoriety among their classmates or a position in the Pioneers' hierarchy. It was a well-calculated public relations activity: Romanian children employed the cult of personality constructed around Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu to consolidate their personal image.

But most important, this thesis has attempted to deconstruct a cliché regarding Romania during the last decades of communism. It was often said that no resistance to communism was manifested in this country. It is partly true: with few exceptions, there were no vocal and overt manifestations against the Nicolae Ceaușescu regime. Romanians, however, often expressed their dissent towards the political order, but they did that in the privacy of their personal apartments or at work, among a small number of colleagues, persons who were deemed not to have any connection with the *Securitate*. For fear of coercion, Romanians' resistance had a passive character, but its existence could not be denied. People mocked the RCP propaganda tenets and transformed them into a topic for everyday humour. Others coped with this everyday indoctrinatory assault by ignoring it or by searching for alternative discourses. At the same time, all daily rituals and habits entailed a certain amount of negotiation with the political regime. One of my respondents remembered off-interview how she attended a lunch organized by her friend, an exquisite cook. Because of severe food shortage, the host could only prepare a simple bean cake. All guests ostentatiously praised the cake. The interviewee saw this incident as an act of dissidence: obstinately celebrating a birthday surrounded by friends, despite food scarcity, unheated apartments and daily interruptions of electric power. As the respondent explained, these almost surreal lavish compliments for the host's modest meal were a form of rebellion

against the Ceaușescu regime's austerity. Examples in this sense are countless; let us remember another interviewee, Zoltan, who as child, used to wash bottles in order to get hold of money for tickets at VCR evenings. These activities may seem anecdotal at first glance. But they represented ways of resisting the political regime of the 1970s and 1980s and its aggressive propaganda discourse. In the case of Romania, we could speak of an *intimate resistance*, manifested almost exclusively in safe spaces. Nonetheless, the importance of this phenomenon for understanding the relation between ordinary Romanians and the Nicolae Ceaușescu regime cannot be denied.

In my future research, I hope to focus upon the way adults negotiated the propaganda discourse of the Romanian Communist Party. This approach would complement the research undertaken in this thesis, which focused upon children.

At the same time, I wish to analyze the concept of *virtual child* in broader detail by applying it to Western contexts. This approach will allow me to explore how advertising, as the Western propaganda discourse *par excellence*, configures the Occidental virtual child. This type of analysis will also incorporate children's response toward the advertising discourse, as well as the parents' role. In Romanian society, family and peers played a major role in neutralizing the influence of state propaganda discourse. Parents and grandparents managed to persuade even those few kids mesmerized by the laudatory discourse of the Romanian Communist Party into changing their attitude towards the Ceaușescu regime. Romanian parents had a relatively easy mission, because their discourse competed with the dry, ideologically-imposed message of the Romanian Communist Party. Conversely, the child growing in a capitalist society has to choose between the alluring promises of various

advertisements and his parents' advice. The relation between child and his family is no longer one of 'complicity' as it happened in Romania, but rather a conflicting one.

Most important, this thesis emphasizes the need for a range of comparative studies of popular culture in former communist regimes. Researchers should attempt to explore the various degrees of state intervention in people's everyday life, and at the same time, the response people developed to this type of intrusion. It should be analyzed how people negotiated the state propaganda discourse in their countries and how they made use of it. My thesis represents a contribution to the studies of popular culture in non-Western societies. I hope to expand it in the future by analyzing the context of former communist states, such as Poland or Czechoslovakia. Understanding people's everyday living practices and the way they interacted with the communist regime is important, inasmuch as these two states experienced a certain degree of openness towards the West. Viewed from Romania, they seemed to be a waiting room for the Occident. I wish to explore whether ordinary Polish or Czechoslovakian shared this view and if so, how this influenced their interaction with the state.

WORKS CITED

“Almanahul *Cutezătorii* 1989” (The Daring Ones’ Almanac, 1989). Ed. “*Cutezătorii*” magazine.

“Almanahul Vacanța *Cutezătorilor*” (The Daring Ones’ Holiday Almanac 1989). Ed. “*Cutezătorii*” magazine.

Almaș, Dumitru. *Povestiri istorice*. (Historical Tales). București: Editura didactica si pedagogică: 1984

Anghelescu, Șerban. “Spre-Texte” (Fore-Texts) in *Anii '80 și Bucureștenii* (Bucharesters and the 80s). Ed. Muzeul Țăranului Român (The Museum of Romanian Peasant). București: Paideia, 2003

Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Selected and translated from the French by Annette Lavers. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972.

Bauer, Raymond A. *The New Man in Soviet psychology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959

Bignell, Jonathan. *Media Semiotics: an introduction*. Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press: 2002.

Boia Lucian. *Mitologia științifică a comunismului* (The Scientific Mythology of Communism). București: Humanitas, 1999

Boia, Lucian. *Istorie si mit in constiinta romaneasca*. (History and Myth in the Romanian Consciousness). București: Humanitas, 2000

Boym, Svetlana. *Common Places: mythologies of everyday life in Russia*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994

Brooks, Jeffrey. *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! : Soviet public culture from revolution to Cold War*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000

Carey, James. "Mass Communication Research and Cultural Studies: an American View" in *Mass Communication and Society*. Ed. James Curran, Michael Gurrevitch and Janet Woollacott. London: Arnold, 1977. pp 419-426

Ceaușescu, Nicolae. *Exposition on the programme of the Romanian Communist Party for the improvement of ideological activity, for raising the general level of knowledge and the socialist education of the masses, for grounding the relations in our society on the principles of socialist and communist ethics and equity. Decision of the plenum of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party*. București: Agerpres, 1971

Ceaușescu, Nicolae. "Proposals for Measures meant to improve the political-ideological activity, the Marxist-Leninist Education of the Party members, of all working people" in *Romania on the Way of Building in the Multilaterally Developed Society*. Volume 6. București: Meridiane Publishing House, 1972. pp 173-182

Ceaușescu, Nicolae. "Speech Delivered at the National Conference of the Young Pioneers' Organization - October 22, 1971" in *Romania on the Way of Building in the Multilaterally Developed Society*. Volume 6. București: Meridiane Publishing House, 1972. pp 534-546

Ceaușescu, Nicolae. "Speech addressed to the children and youth – Homeland Falcons, Young Pioneers and Members of the U.C.Y., Workers and Peasants, Pupils and Students – participants in the traditional New Year's meeting" in *Romania on the Way of Building in the Multilaterally Developed Society*. Volume 23. București. Meridiane Publishing House, 1982. pp 328-333

Cernat, Paul, Ion Manolescu, Angelo Mitchievici and Ioan Stanomir. *Explorări în comunismul românesc*. (Explorations in Romanian Communism). București: Polirom, 2004

Chen, Xiaomei. "Growing Up with Posters in the Maoist Era." *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China*. Eds. Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999. pp123-138

Chu, Godwin C. and Francis L. K. Hsu, eds. *Moving a Mountain: cultural change in China*. Honolulu: Published for the East-West Center by University Press of Hawaii, 1979

Clews, John C. *Communist Propaganda Techniques*. New York: Praeger, 1966

Donald, Stephanie. "Children as Political Messengers: Art, Childhood, and Continuity". *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China*. Eds. Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999

"Congresul al X-lea al Partidului Comunist Român." (The Tenth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party). București: Editura Politică, 1969

Downing, John, Ali Mohammadi and Annabelle Stebbins-Mohammadi. *Questioning the media: a critical introduction*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1995

Evans, Harriet & Stephanie Donald, eds. *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999

Fiske. John. *Introduction to Communication Studies*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990

Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *Everyday Stalinism: ordinary life in extraordinary times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1999

Fontana, Andrea and James H. Frey. "The Interview: From Structured Questions to Negotiated Text." *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 2nd edition. Ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks / London: Sage Publications, 2000

Garros, Véronique, Natalia Korenevskaya and Thomas Lahusen. *Intimacy and terror: Soviet diaries of the 1930s*. New York: New Press, 1995

Georgescu, Vlad. *Istoria românilor de la origini pînă în zilele noastre*. (The History of Romanians from Origins up to the Present). București: Humanitas, 1992.

Martor. Revista de antropologie a Muzeului Taranului Roman. Revue d'anthropologie du Musée du Paysan Roumain. The Museum of The Romanian Peasant Anthropology Review. 2003. Aspera Pro Edu Foundation. 13 March 2006
<http://martor.memoria.ro/index.php?location=home>

Jowett, Garth S. and Victoria O'Donnell. *Propaganda and Persuasion*. Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1986

Kenez, Peter. *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet methods of mass mobilization, 1917-1929*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986

Kershaw, Ian. *The Hitler Myth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987

Landsberger, Stefan, Anchee Min and Luo Duc. *Chinese Propaganda Posters: 1921-1971*. Köln, Los Angeles: Taschen, 2003

Laswell, Harold D. *Propaganda Techniques in the World War*. London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1927

Martin, Michele. *Communication and Mass Media: culture, domination, and opposition*. Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice Hall Allyn and Bacon Canada, 1997

Muzeul Țăranului Român (The Museum of Romanian Peasant). - *Anii '80 și Bucureștenii* (Bucharesters and the 80s). București: Paideia, 2003

Pratkanis, Anthony R, Elliot Aronson. *Age of Propaganda: the Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion*. New York: W.H. Freeman, 1992

Qualter, Terence H. *Propaganda and Psychological Warfare*. New York: Random House, 1965

Robins, Kevin, Frank Webster, and Michael Pickering. "Propaganda, Information and Social Control". *Propaganda, Persuasion, and Polemic*. Ed. Jeremy Hawthorn. London: Edward Arnold, 1987. pp 1-18

Roșca, Dumitru, Vasile Țifui, and Lidia Mandric. *Matematică. Manual pentru clasa a II-a*. (Mathematics. Schoolbook for the second grade). București: Editura didactică si pedagogică, 1984

Șerdean, Ion and Florian Dițuleasa and Eliza Paveișu. *Citire. Manual pentru clasa a III-a*. (Reading. Schoolbook for the third grade). București: Editura didactică si pedagogică, 1985

Sîntimbreanu, Mircea. *Recreația Mare*. (The Big Break). București: Editura Ion Creangă: 1978

Tismăneanu, Vladimir. *Stalinism for All Seasons: a political history of Romanian communism*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2003

Verdery, Katherine. *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996

Welch, David. *The Third Reich: politics and propaganda*. London, New York: Routledge, 1993

Yurchak, Alexei. *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was no More: the last Soviet generation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006

oferă copilului o abun-
argumente moral-politice,
motivații cu înaltă și tot-
entă valoare pedagogică,

d câteva dintre elementele
urează universul de înce-
ilor, ai o dată mai mult re-
etelor transformări revolu-
viața patriei, le redesco-
de copii, împrumuți de la
cunoașterii în sensul cel
al cuvântului.

faptul că în acești ani co-
trat într-o școală nouă,
dispoziție o puternică bază
le învățămînt, săli de clasă
atelieri și laboratoare
e. Poate, în aceeași pe-
ăl sau. mama au devenit
unui nou colectiv munci-
o fabrică sau într-o uzină
ernizată, într-un institut de
au pe un șantier, într-un
activitate în care revoluția
tifică a deschis noi căi de
economico-intensivă. Sau,
te la țară, copilul de țăran
saltul produs în toate lo-
urale de marea revoluție

id în mod sigur martorul
ării fără precedent a loca-
sformate într-un adevărat
obținerii unor recolte de
se situează în jurul cifrei
g la hectar, recolte ce par
ecorduri față de cele obți-
mai citiva ani în urmă. Să
ăm la aceste elemente ce
periența de viață a copilu-
familie obișnuită mutarea
într-un apartament nou,
unui televizor modern și
ile mai confortabile, a au-
a aparatelor casnice în
versitate, a tuturor celor-
ce contribuie la ridicarea
trai al oamenilor în so-
astră.

lea argumentelor econo-
pe care le oferă anii
obișnuite astăzi, întâlnite
dar de excepție la timpul
tează și dezvoltă în con-
erațiilor tinere cele mai
mente patriotice, de dra-
de patrie, partid și popor,

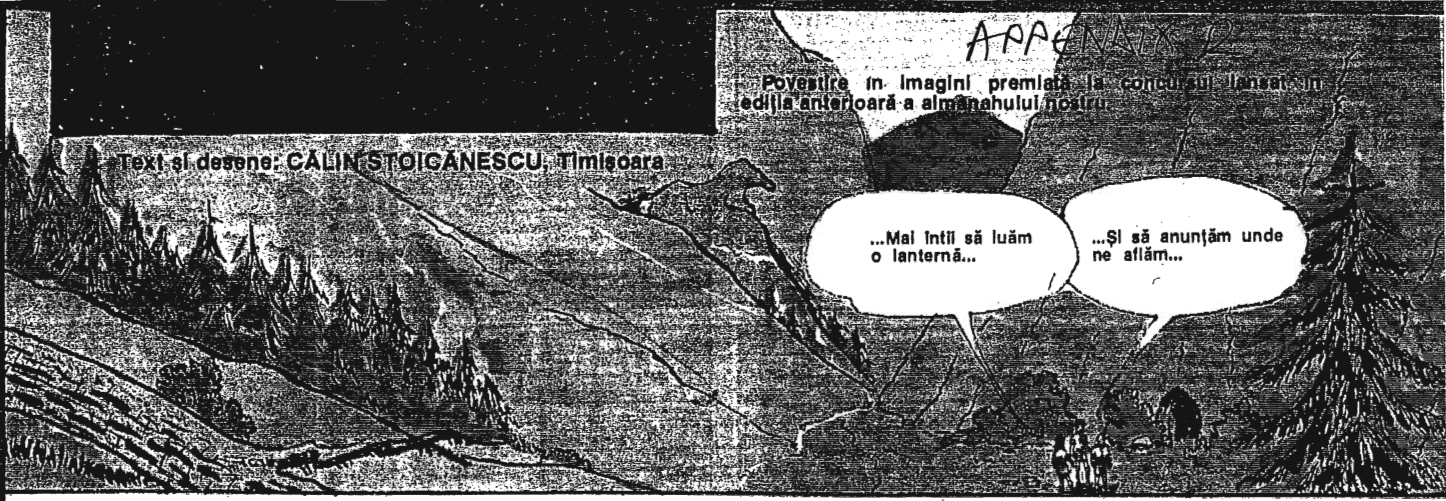


de aleasă prețuire față de iubiții
noștri conducători. Copiii țării știu
că bunăstarea familiei lor și a marii
familii pe care o formează patria nu
vine de la sine, că munca părinților
lor, a tuturor oamenilor țării, întreaga
activitate politico-socială condusă cu
clarviziune de partid, în frunte cu se-
cretarul său general, tovarășul
Nicolae Ceaușescu, asigură mersul
înainte al întregii noastre societăți,
că marea șansă a vieții tinerelor ge-
nerații este aceea de a trăi și munci
în acești ani luminoși din istoria
nouă a patriei. Milioanele de copii ai
țării sînt mîndri că s-au născut, se
formează și cresc în cea mai rodnică
perioadă a multimilenarei istorii ro-
mânești, perioadă inaugurată de
Congresul al IX-lea al partidului și
gravată cu nepieritoare cuvinte în
inima și conștiința întregului popor,
perioadă ce poartă numele marelui
său ctitor, Epoca Nicolae
Ceaușescu.

Atunci, în iulie 1965, comuniștii
patriei, în numele întregului nostru
popor, l-au ales în fruntea partidului
și a țării pe cel mai iubit și stimat fiu
al națiunii noastre socialiste. Iar anii
ce au urmat, mai bogat și mai lumi-
nos unul decît altul, au înscris în is-
toria modernă a României impresio-
nante realizări, care confirmă marile
calități, înmănunchate generos, ce
structurează personalitatea de ex-
cepție a tovarășului Nicolae
Ceaușescu, conducător înțelept, pa-
triot desăvîrșit cu strălucită vocație
revoluționară, om politic și militant
prețuit pe toate meridianele lumii. În
acest timp eroic, țara, întregul nostru
popor, sub conducerea Partidului
Comunist Român, în frunte cu se-
cretarul său general, într-o indisolubilă
unitate de conștiință și de acțiune, au
obținut cele mai grandioase victorii
în dezvoltarea multilaterală a
României socialiste pe drumul lumi-
nos al comunismului, rod al gîndirii

Povestire în imagini premiată la concursul lansat în ediția anterioară a almanahului nostru

Text și desene: CALIN STOIGANESCU, Timisoara

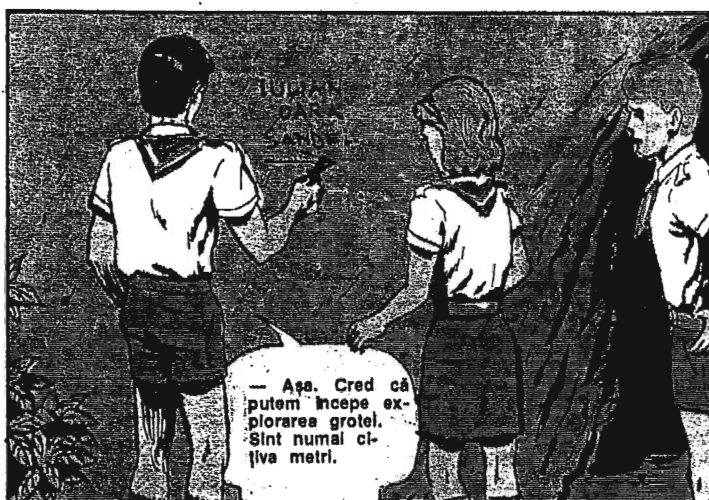


...Mai întâi să luăm o lanternă...

...Și să anunțăm unde ne aflăm...



Lanternă avem, lat-o. Numai atenți să fim! Mai întâi să găsim ceva cu care se poate scrie pe piatră.



— Așa. Cred că putem începe explorarea grotel. Sînt numai cîțiva metri.



Să ne sprîmîm. Dați mîinile.

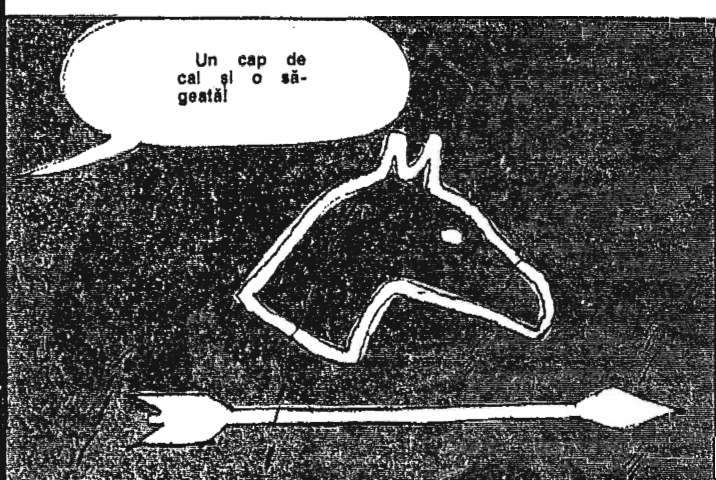
După mine!



Ce-i aici? Ce părere aveți?



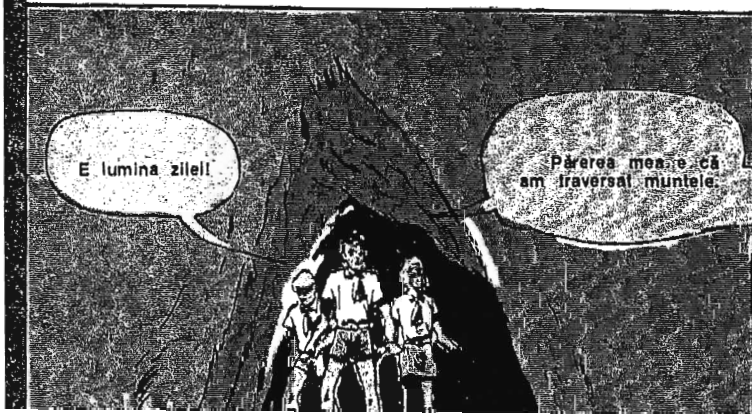
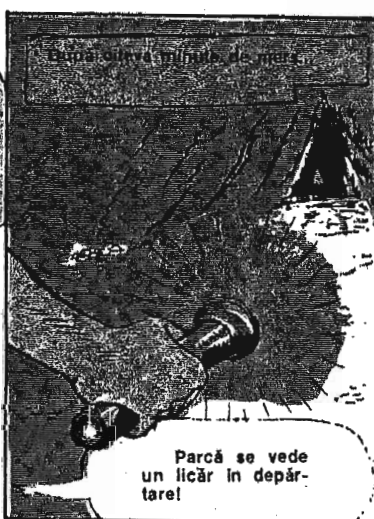
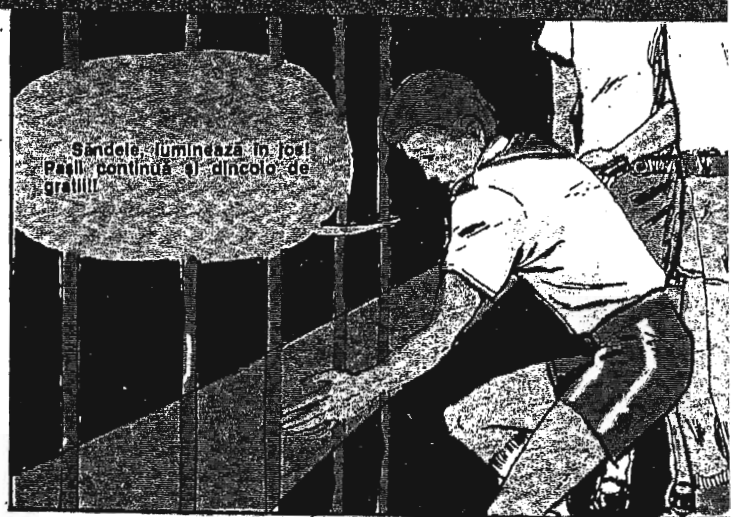
— Săndele, în stînga parcă e un desen.

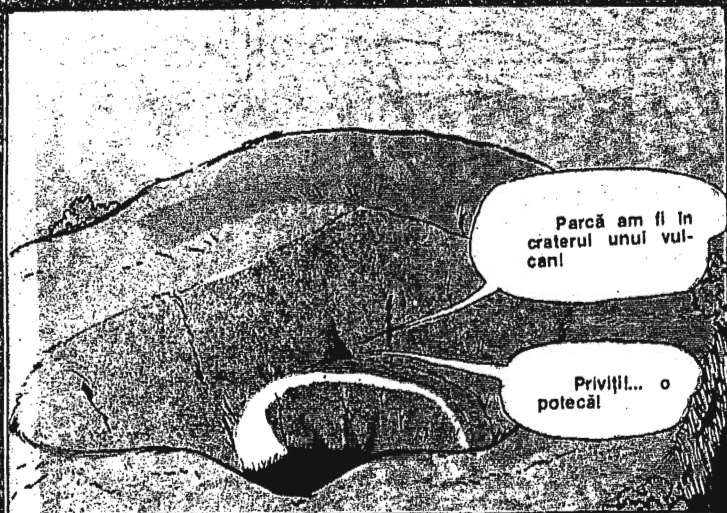


Un cap de cal și o săgeată!



— Ia uitați-vă! Urme de pași...





Parcă am fi în
craterul unui vul-
can!

Priviți!... o
potecă!



Surparea nu
pare adică.

Băieții Vă atrag
atenția că e tirziu...

— Nici o pro-
blemă. Avem lan-
terna...



Poteca, șerpuită în spirală, se întrerupe brusc.

S-a surpat o mică porțiune.
Este cazul să ne amintim de sări-
tura în lungime de la lecția de
sport.

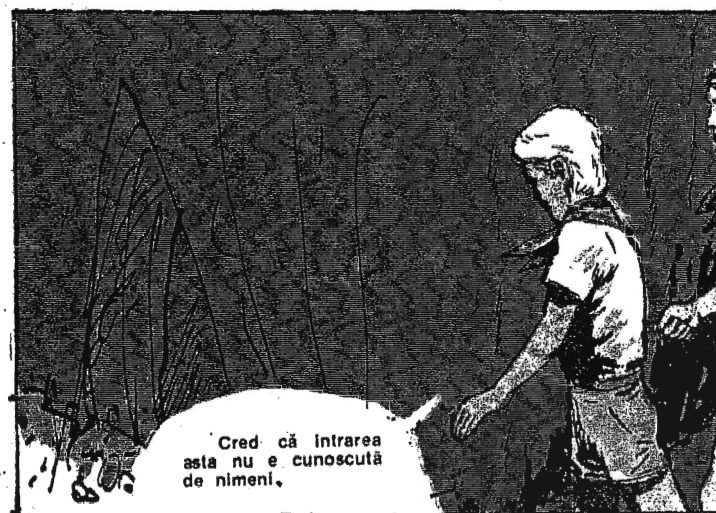


Asta e! E rindul tău,
Oara.

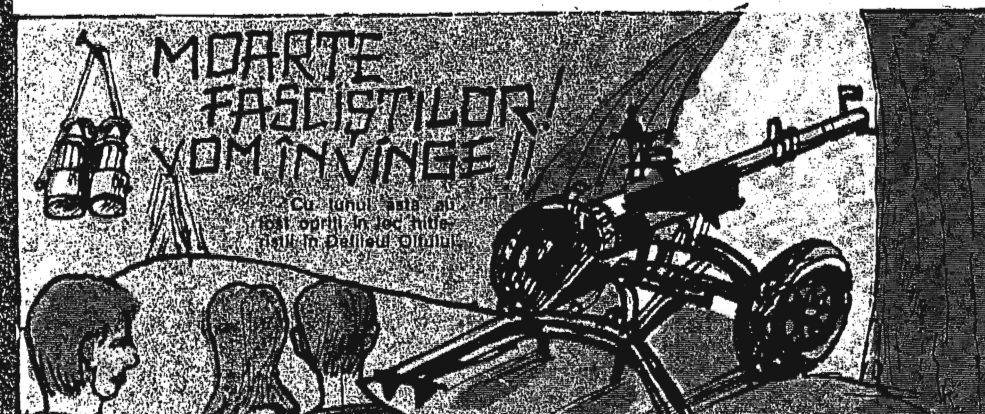
Vini! Unu, doi...



Priviți, o sală de
arme!

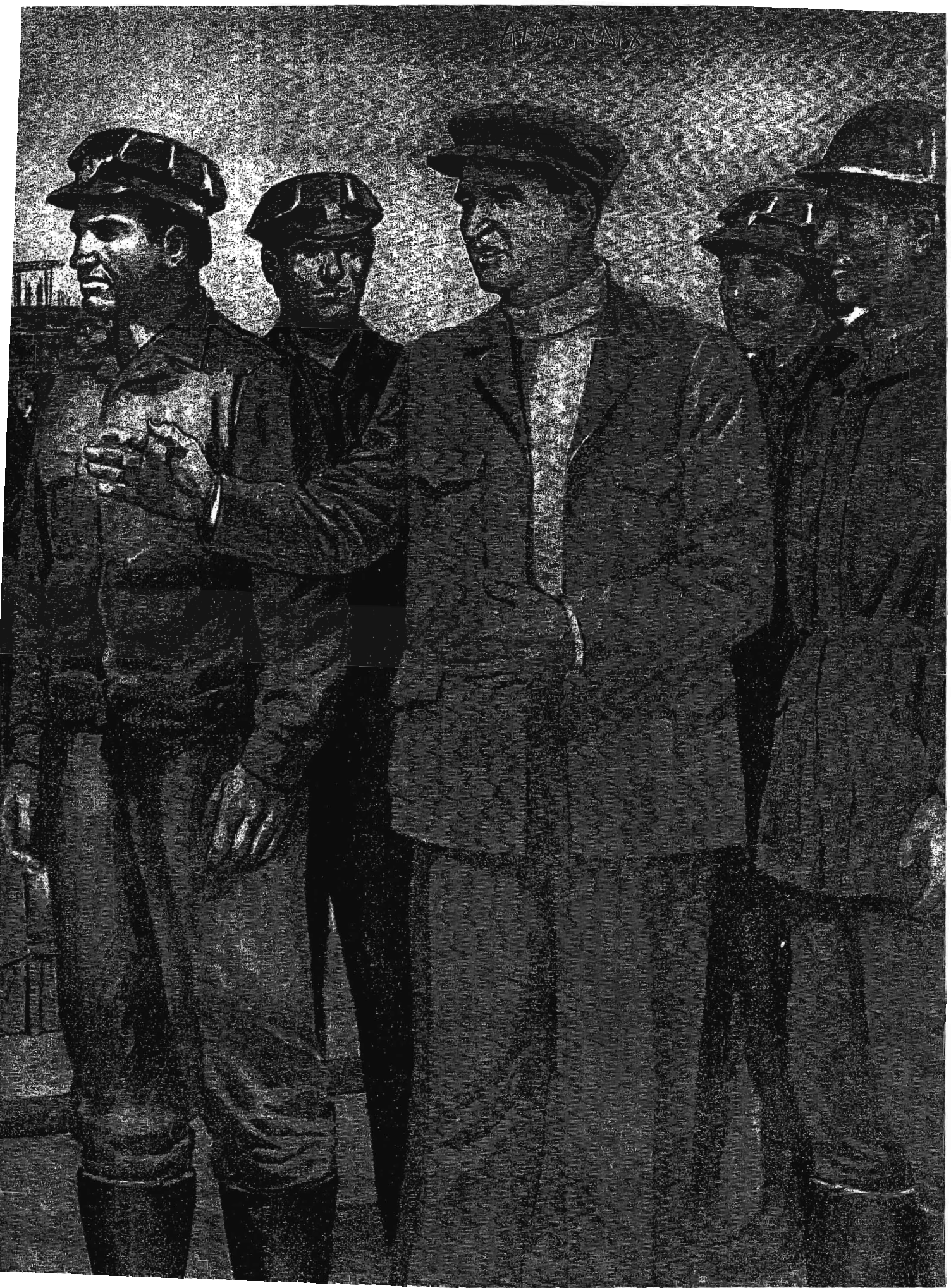


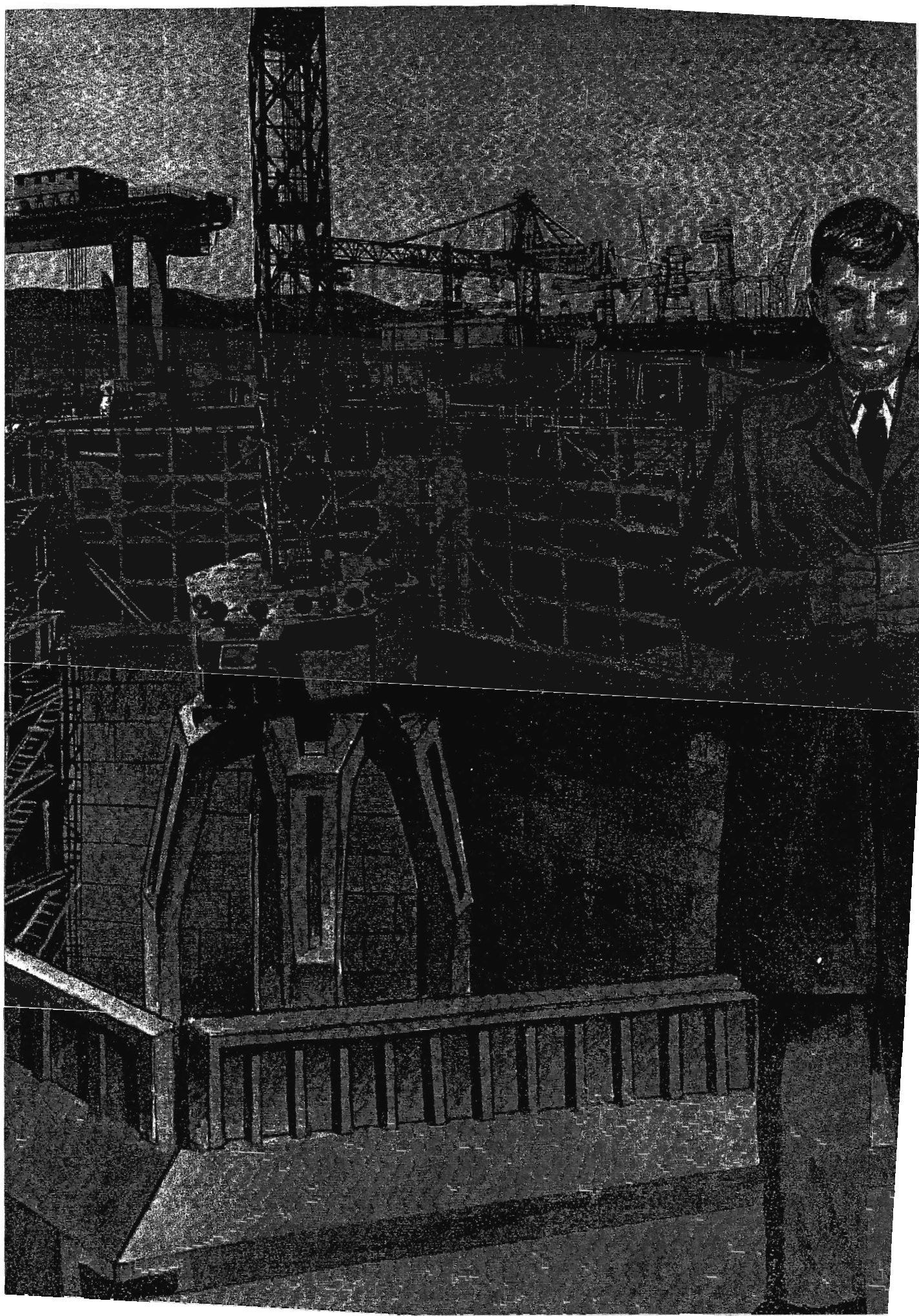
Cred că intrarea
asta nu e cunoscută
de nimeni.

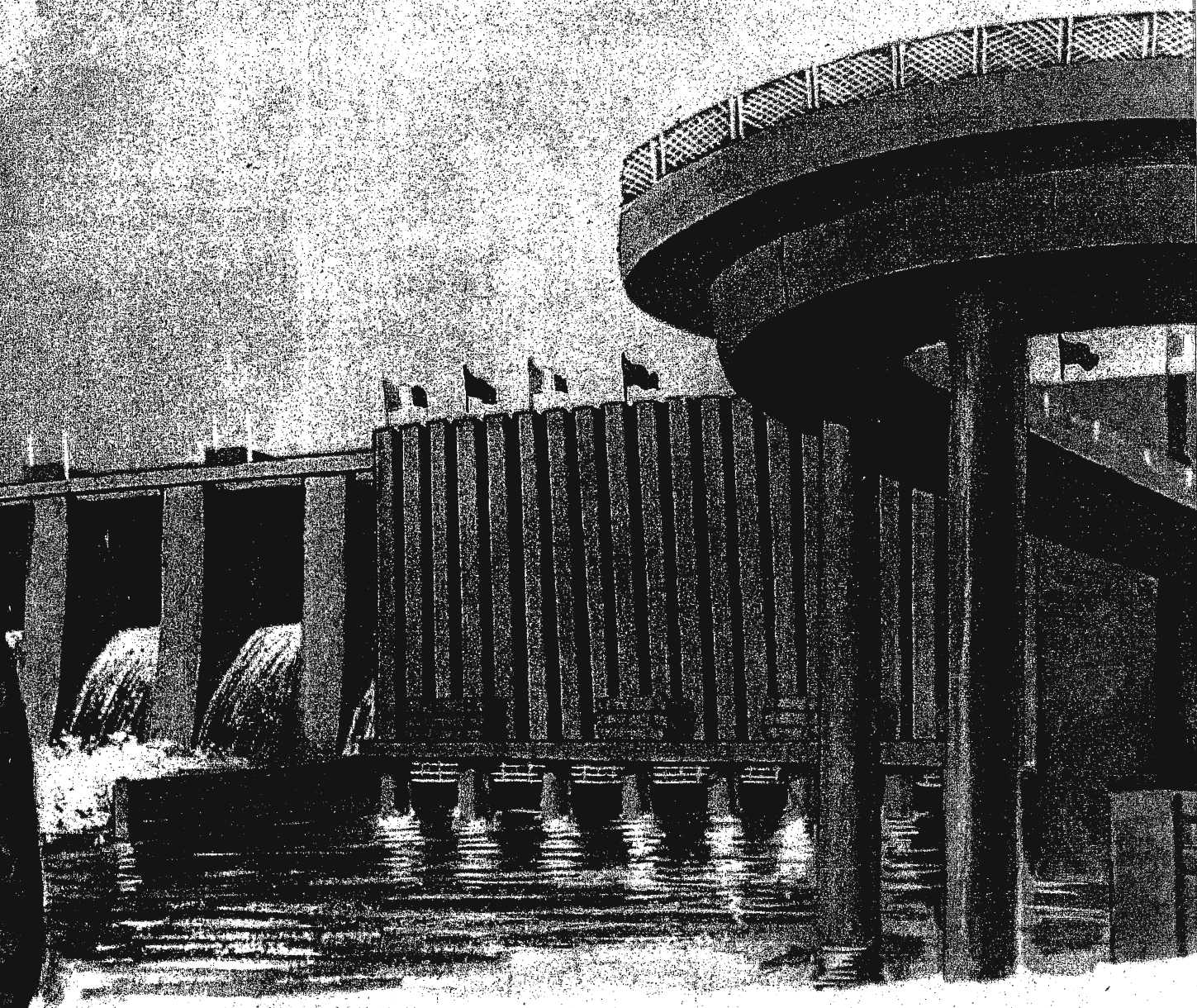


Să
anunțăm
descoperirea
noastră
la Muzeul
Județean
de Istorie!

ici
vom
reveni
cu
o
exped
mai
ampă







O VIZITĂ DE NEUITAT



rebuie să știți, dragii mei, că în anii de cînd ne conduce Partidul Comunist Român, în frunte cu tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu, noi am construit opere mărețe, la care altădată abia îndrăzneam să visăm. Printre aceste opere mărețe se numără și Hidrocentrala de la Porțile de Fier. Acolo am construit un baraj, adică un uriaș zid de beton, așezat de-a curmezișul Dunării, ca apa fluviului să se adune într-un lac mare, iar cu puterea ei uriașă să pună în mișcare turbinele, pentru ca acestea, la rîndul lor, să producă electricitate. Îndrăzneată și grea lu-

Căci, gîndiți-vă și voi de cîtă pricepere, de cîtă putere, de cîtă voință au avut nevoie cei peste zece mii de oameni care au muncit la înălțarea aceluia baraj întru stăvilirea valurilor unui fluviu! Dar nu numai atît: ei au construit acolo și ecluze, un fel de porți mari prin care să poată trece vapoarele. Apoi, în acel baraj au instalat turbinele, adică un fel de roți mari, pe care apa le roteste cu viteză. Din rotirea lor se naște acea forță uriașă numită electricitate, pe care noi o folosim ca să punem în mișcare mașinile și să luminăm casele și străzile.



mormăie și plescăie întruna ca un motor ce nu-și găsește pornirea și se frământă pe loc, zguduît de rateuri:

— Apă... foc... nor de lăcuste... uragan... farfurii zburătoare...

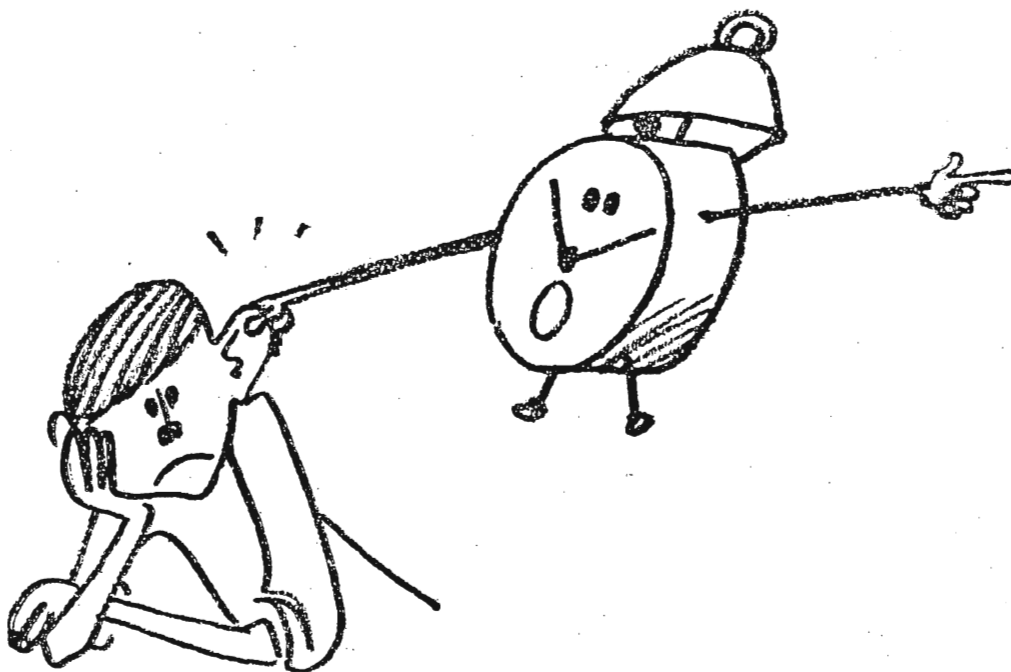
INVADATORII!!!

Bezmetic, un funigel îi tot atinge nările și, gîdilat, cu ochii la cerul gol din care extraterestrii întîrzie să se ivească, pe Mișu

il apucă strănutul. Și nu-l mai lasă. Trecînd prin fumul înserării.

o bătrinică întoarce capul:

— Noroc, maică, noroc și minte...



APPENDIX 5

BROCK UNIVERSITY – INFORMED CONSENT

Title of study: Popular Culture as Propaganda Instrument in Communist Romania (1971-1989)

Principal Researcher: Laura Visan

Interviewer: Laura Visan

Name (please print) _____

Male [☐] **Female** [☐]

By signing this form, I certify that in December 1989, when the communist regime collapsed, my age was 12 or up.

- I have been offered and have read the Letter of Information provided by the principal researcher;
- I understand and agree that my participation in this study will last approximately 1,5 – 2 hours;
- I understand and agree that my participation in this study will involve participating – as respondent- at a semi-structured, open-ended interview that will be audiotaped;
- The investigation aims at establishing the ways in which the respondents, in their childhood years, were coping with the propaganda and how much did they believe in it (if at all);
- I understand that my participation in the research may involve minimal psychological risk in remembering the communist years and Ceausescu's dictatorship. These risks will not be any greater than those encountered in everyday life;
- I understand that participation in this research is voluntary;
- I understand that I may withdraw from the interview at any moment or for any reason, without any negative consequences, and without having to provide any justification for my act;
- I understand that, at any moment of the interview, I may ask question to the researcher;
- I understand that I may not answer questions I perceive as harmful, offensive or embarrassing;
- I understand and agree that my participation in the interview will not be compensated in any way;
- I understand that all personal information will be kept strictly confidential by the researcher;
- I understand that no identifying aspect concerning me will be disclosed, at any moment of the research;
- I understand that only the principal researcher named above will have access to the data;
- All audiotapes and written records will be kept in a secure place;
- Tapes and transcripts of audiotapes will not include names of the participants;
- 1 year following the finalization of the paper, the audio recordings will be erased;
- Paper records will be kept for up to 2 years after the research after which they will be shredded;
- I understand that my answers will be included in the researcher's MA thesis which will be deposited in Brock library;
- I understand that I will receive a copy of the chapter in which these interviews are included;
- I understand that a copy of the thesis will be available at Brock University library if further reference is needed;
- By signing this form, I certify that I am freely and willingly participating in this research and I am providing my consent.

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in the study, you may contact Laura Visan at 905-471-5640 or at lvisan@hotmail.com or Dr. Marian Bredin (tel: 905-688-5550, e-mail: mbredin@brocku.ca). You may also contact the Research Ethics Officer at Brock University (reb@brocku.ca) (905) 688-5550 ext. 3035) if you have question or need more information regarding research participants' rights.

I have fully explained the procedures of this study to the person named above.

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

This study has been reviewed and received clearance through the Brock University Research Ethics Board (file# 04-411).

Thank you for your co-operation. Please keep one copy of this form for further reference.

APPENDIX 6

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How would you define propaganda?
2. What do you remember about the communist propaganda – the propaganda around Romanian Communist Party and its leader, Nicolae Ceausescu?
3. As a child, what programs did you use to watch at TV? What did you think about the shows for kids? Did you watch programs of other televisions (Bulgarian, Serbian, Russian etc)?
4. Did your family have a VCR? What did you use to watch?
5. Please describe me the circumstances of your joining the pioneers. How was your pioneer life?
6. Have you witnessed any of Ceausescu's working visits? Would you have liked to give him and his wife, Elena Ceausescu, flowers?
7. Would you have liked *Cutezatorii* magazine to write about you? What kind of article?
8. What did you think about Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu? How did you regard them?
9. Did you live in a block? How did an ordinary day look like?
10. Were you affected by the lack of consumer goods (food, clothing etc) from the market? What did you think about the communist regime and Ceausescu in such moment?
11. What were your / your family's strategies for survival – e.g. listening to foreign radio stations, especially Radio Free Europe, using a codified language etc?
12. Did you, your family or somebody close (relative, neighbor) have any bad experience with the communist regime?
13. How did the breach between what you thought and what you said manifest? Please provide examples.
14. Did you ever expect the regime to fall?
15. What would have happened to you if the regime had not collapsed in 1989 / if you had not immigrated to Canada?
(The second part of the question applies only if the respondent immigrated to Canada before 1989).