Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology

Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia

"Be European, Recycle Yourself!"

The Changing Work Ethic in Romania

Monica Heintz

LIT

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This book advances an explanation of the socio-economic crisis faced by Romania at the turn of the century. It is based on an investigation of working habits identified by foreign agencies, Romanian officials and ordinary Romanian citizens alike as a factor hindering economic development. Monica Heintz ties her analysis of the ethic of work to lack of self-respect in postsocialist Romania. In doing so she unravels the dynamics of social, political and economic changes and their impact on individual values. The interaction of two contrasting value systems, the local-oriented system of socialism and the global orientation of the postsocialist era, has led to an unexpected loss: the demise of individual and national self-respect.

On the basis of its highly original Romanian ethnographic materials, this study raises more general issues concerning the transition from a socialist closed economy to a capitalist open economy and from a collectivist ideology to an ideology of liberal individualism. Heintz offers an original critical analysis of individual and collective perceptions of capitalism and its liberal ideology. At the same time, her subtle analysis of recent East-West encounters in the field of work and commerce has implications that extend far beyond postsocialism. Without a better understanding of individual needs and expectations concerning work, emerging economies will be unable to develop adequate principles of economic organisation and management, and social policy too is likely to be flawed.

Monica Heintz received her PhD degree at the University of Cambridge. After working for several years as a research fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, she is now Lecturer in the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Paris 10 – Nanterre and a member of the Laboratoire d'Ethnologie et de Sociologie Comparative, Nanterre.

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Cover Photo: In socialist times workers had to go through regular "recycling" (*reciclare*) sessions as part of socialist efforts to build the new man. In 2005 numerous billboards at seaside resorts exhorted Romanians to recycle themselves once again, this time to become Europeans. Their text played on words to bring out the similarity between recycling garbage and recycling (teaching) people to make them better, environmentally responsible citizens. However, between the undifferentiated grey dustbins of the socialist era and the anticipated colourful future of the recycling norms of the European Union stands the discouraging present: plenty of shining moralising signs but no bins at all (summer 2005) (Photo: Monica Heintz).

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Preface

This book is a study of the work ethic and work ethics in Romania at the turn of the twenty-first century, just a decade after the fall of Ceauşescu. Monica Heintz focuses on three institutions in order to examine the ways in which Romanians were coping with the process of adapting to work under the emergent capitalist economy. The institutions, a state run music school, a private language school, and an NGO dealing with seriously ill children, each had different administrative structures, internal hierarchies, and what might be considered working moralities. Each was poised in a slightly different position in relation to the socialist past and the rather less known future; together they provide a fascinating and complicated set of insights into the Romanian work ethic as the country moved slowly and erratically towards accession to the European Union.

Developing an approach to her subject which is both innovative and original, Dr Heintz complements her study of the institutions themselves with a parallel critique of social theory. She explores and probes the world of each institution, considering in turn the major aspects of its function and structure, the practices of its agents, its pervasive temporality, and its place in wider historical and global processes, from the perspective of a particular theoretical approach. Thus the social structure of the institutions is presented within the framework of functional analysis, the work practices within that of practice theory, and so forth. Perhaps unsurprisingly, each of the theoretical edifices she builds to deal with her material is found to be, in some way, lacking. As we progress through the chapters and become increasingly involved in the detailed case studies, we find that we have simultaneously embarked on a journey through the halls of anthropological and sociological theory. Heintz's explorations as she maps the terrain of post socialist enterprises lead her into a complex and elegant deconstruction. At one level, implicit throughout her text is the problem of universality which has long preoccupied social scientists. Is marxist theory, for instance, applicable only to the analysis of class based industrial societies, or does it have a wider, even universal, application? Should functionalist analysis be limited to the context of apparently stable, orderly social forms and institutions, or can it transcend the specificity of particular socio-economic contexts? Anxieties about what E. P. Thompson referred to as the 'poverty' of theory, about its contextual and historical limitations, have been with us for a long time. In a way, Monica Heintz skirts these anxious questions and goes instead straight to the heart of the matter, to the more fundamental problem of the capacity of any one particular theoretical stance to deal adequately even with those

contexts, structures and situations to which it seems most perfectly and aptly fitted.

To date, very few anthropologists have taken on the subject of work and its transformations, ethical and practical, as two very different sets of values and indeed , senses of political economy, confront each other face to face in the former socialist states. This theme alone would make Monica Heintz's book an interesting and important one. But Heintz aspires to provide more than just an account of socio-economic change in institutions and ethics. The internal relations of the institutions she is considering, in conjunction with the vignettes, drawn from personal experience during her fieldwork, of a series of rather surreal encounters with Bucharest bureaucracies, provide a rich and varied set of accounts of diverse attitudes to the past and navigations of the present. This complexity is reproduced in the range of theoretical dilemmas she covers from chapter to chapter.

By now there have been many 'postsocialist' ethnographies and anthropological studies and critiques of that rather slippery concept, the 'transition'. Although it deals with Romania after socialism, and directly addresses many of the problems associated with the end of the socialist period and the move towards capitalism, this book is neither a traditional ethnography nor an analysis of transition. Rather, it is a close and detailed study of a series of established anthropological themes, as they can be identified and elaborated upon in three distinct institutions or workplaces. The socialist past is present throughout the book, but as a backdrop, a remembered past rather than an object of nostalgia. This distinguishes the study from the many recent studies which have emphasised nostalgia for socialism, and the loss of, and longings for, the stability and security of the centralised state economy. In the film Goodbye Lenin, we see the hero fabricating a complicated web of lies, half truths and deceptions, to protect his mother from the knowledge that socialism is over in the GDR. As anthropologists many of us have, rather like the boy in the film, accepted perhaps slightly uncritically the idea that for many of the people who live in the former socialist bloc, the postsocialist 'transition' is a state of fear about the future and mourning for the past. In most of these studies, indeed in most of the work by anthropologists working in the former socialist states, the people studied are portrayed as (often, but not always, unintended) victims of global economic and political forces, as representatives of a 'grass roots' social stratum which ultimately comprises the true 'losers' of the cold war. In these narratives, one set of victors stems from the 'west', in the form of business entrepreneurs, development consultants, religious evangelists and political idealogues; the other set is indigenous and dominated by representatives of the old order of corrupt *nomenklatura*. In this book we get another narrative, told from a very different per-

spective. While the past, and particularly the ambiguous legacy of the socialist past, is a major topic of the book, there is a sense in which, unlike other studies situated in the same period, Monica Heintz's work is definitely future orientated. As an observer, and one who occupies the challenging and often painful position of local and outsider simultaneously, she weighs and assesses what she sees: looking critically, sometimes with barely disguised impatience, at the plight of Romanians as they try to grapple with the weight of their national history, their lack of something easily translatable into a Western 'work ethic', their preoccupation with personal relations and the distortion of these through endless corruption, she unpicks the notion of a national 'mentality' which holds together Romanian discourses of self and collective identity. The past is there as an explanation for some of the current conditions, but never as the only lens through which the present and future can been seen.

This lack of nostalgia for the past, both on the part of the anthropologist and of the people with whom she worked, is striking. This is not a study of unemployed textile workers or miners, or downtrodden agricultural workers abandoned and forgotten on a decaying former collective farm. Quite the contrary. Productive labour barely enters the picture here: rather, work in this book is connected to the provision of services and the fostering of skills and talents. It is not a book about deindustrialization, or primarily about decline and regret; rather, many of the characters are young people, just beginning their working lives, and looking forward to the future and towards Europe. In this sense, it is a very European book. Perhaps, in the light of this, it is not surprising that, rather than lament the demise of socialism and the welfare state, these young people look at a series of different pasts, including socialism, to account for the Romanian "mentality" which stands in the way of success, and seems to make either a moral society or a successful work ethic unattainable.

However, other voices also come through clearly. In the state run music school, teachers who were trained and worked under socialism try to retain various kinds of good practice in a rapidly privitising and competitive field. In the NGO, the workers attempt to provide a climate for democratic practices and decision making, rather than autocratic individualism. In the private language school, we seem to encounter the worst of several worlds; a brusque and ruthless style of management leads to profound resentment and a total lack of commitment or ethic on the part of the bullied and harassed workers. In all of these cases we see how easy it is, but also how ineffective, to shift blame for present failures onto a troubled past or a particular mentality. Heintz shows the impossibility of effecting any real kind of change in social and work relations in a climate of endemic mistrust, marked by small

and large acts of cheating and corruption, and a lack of commitment to or identification with the products of work. It is not only practices of work, and wider practices of sociality, which must change, she implies; in the end it is the making of the moral person which must change, a process which would involve a move away from a resigned acceptance of either victimhood or a particularly 'mentality' towards a new sense of self esteem.

This is not an easy book. Falling somewhere between a standard ethnography, a work of philosophy, and a critique of social theory, it forces the reader to confront, over and over again, the significance of the relation in anthropology between data and theory. In so doing, it challenges and pushes both theory and ethnography in new, often unexpected and frequently rather unsettling directions. But it is precisely these challenges which make it such a fascinating and cumulatively compelling study.

Frances Pine

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I dedicate this work to those who have inspired it most directly, the people to whom I refer in the next pages.

Chapter 1
Introduction

This book is designed as a quest for explanations of the socio-economic problems faced by Romania during the period 1999-2001, a period of 'crisis' during which Romania's main political and international goals – NATO and EU integration – were far from being realised. It was a time when intellectuals cast explanations of social and economic distress in fatalist terms that designated a perennial 'Romanian mentality' as the root of all social failures. It was a time when the public also came to endorse these explanations, perhaps prompted by a 'turn of the century' sense of decay and imminent catastrophe. This study unravels this phenomenon of self-blame and analyses in parallel the socio-economic mechanisms through which 'positive' values become 'negative' practices. The study is based on an investigation of work places, identified as one of the main factors hindering economic development by foreign agencies, Romanian officials and ordinary Romanian citizens. On the broadest level, it is about work ethics and a lack of self-respect in postsocialist Romania.

The book has three principal aims. First, I unravel the dynamics of social, political and economic change and the impact social change has on individual values. Second, I highlight the interactions between two value systems: the old, socialist, locally oriented system, and the new, postsocialist, globally oriented one. Third, I criticise the discursive production of a lack of individual and national self-respect, manifested primarily in discussions on the 'Romanian mentality'.

Romania stands here as a case study for a country experiencing rapid societal change – the transition from a socialist closed economy to a capitalist open economy and from a socialist collectivist ideology to a liberal individualist ideology. The book emphasises the lack of co-ordination and the disorder generated by the rapid transformation of social, political and economic structures after 1989.

In a global world, where each locality becomes an intersection of cultures, the individual lives in perpetual confrontation with various sets of

values. Ethnographers require new analytical tools to address this conflict. One such tool suggested by this study is the concept of self-respect, which evaluates the manner in which the individual copes with her/his personal conflict of values. Thus, the book proposes a way in which ethics and values can be approached empirically, from a historical and dynamic perspective.

Finally, the book warns of the potential collateral damage of East/West encounters in the field of business and work, thus providing a critical analysis for the management of relationships and communication with developing countries. It examines individual needs and expectations about work in emerging economies, upon which principles of organisation and management, directions for social work and for the implementation of development policies can be built. Despite having been conceived as a purely academic project, by responding to a social demand this study also belongs to the corpus of applied anthropology.

1.1 The research project

My interest in Romania's changing work ethic was triggered by the increasing popularity of judgements on work performance and work values among Romanians. Only subsequently, during my fieldwork, did I become aware that attitudes and values of work are considered part of the Romanian 'mentality' and are thus, for those who believe in such ethnic determination, unchangeable. In an opinion poll conducted by the Metro Media Transylvania Institute and the Soros Foundation in November 1998, from a representative sample of 1253 people, 34% (i.e. the relative majority) of the interviewees asserted that for the Romanian economy to improve, people should work more (Telegrama, 26.11.98).[1] Access to public discourses and explanations concerning work ethics makes the individual work ethic a complex outcome of external influences, personal experience and circumstances. I view the elaboration of a work ethic by employees in Bucharest as an example of how the individual internalises, transforms and makes personal the (often external) imaginary worlds of 'proper' behaviour in the workplace. From the beginning of my fieldwork, I chose to look both at what people say about *munca* ('work') and at what they do in their work (which may also be called *munca* or not).

[1] An opinion poll conducted in March 2005 by the Institute for Free Initiative on a sample of 1208 individuals, exclusively from urban centres, showed that 20% of the interviewees considered that working more would improve Romania's economy. Though the figure is smaller, "working more" is still the more widely shared opinion (ILI 2005).

In order to study how work ethics are manifest in practice, I chose to undertake ethnographic fieldwork in several service enterprises, to see people 'at work'. The choice of the service sector was suggested by the absence of a concrete, measurable output (products), which makes the evaluation of work performance difficult, and lets work practice depend more on the work ethic of the employees than on coercive means of control. In two enterprises, I worked as an employee myself; in a third one I conducted interviews. I also followed the employees in their alternative work activities at home and 'in the street'. My ultimate aim was to render transparent the forms of work ethics manifest in regular employment; the conclusions derived from the other sites were only used in order to clarify this point. The empirical evidence suggests that employees' attitudes at work depend on their private lives and on the difficulties of everyday life. Thus, I needed to explore not only the physical and social context in which these employees worked, but also the conditions in which they lived: their environment, their financial power, their understandings of some larger cultural concepts that have an influence on work practice, and their daily interactions.

I conducted fifteen months of fieldwork in Bucharest during the period 1999-2001. I participated in the activity of two private enterprises, working as an employee for four months in each: a private business (the marketing department of a foreign language school) and a Romanian/ English non-governmental organisation (NGO). For one year, I also closely monitored the activities of a state institution belonging to the Ministry of Education, primarily through informal interviews conducted with the director of the school. In order to see interactions from the client's side, and also because this is part of everyone's life in Bucharest, I participated in and observed interactions between clients and administrations, shops, maintenance services, and flat owners' associations. The observation of practices was complemented by informal interviews with workmates, relatives, acquaintances and friends. One of the main means of getting information about people's work ethic, changes in their work ethic, their perception of the self, and on duties and responsibilities, was by introducing stories in the third person – mostly about people unknown to my discussant, often cases known from the mass media, which solicited comments or judgements.[2] This had several advantages: by distancing my interviewees from the case analysed, they were less prone to subjective evaluations and tended to state general

[2] Thomas Widlok has argued solidly for a similar approach, the 'moral dilemma elicitation', derived from research in linguistics (Widlok, Forthcoming). Unfortunately, his material, which could have provided some guidance, was unavailable at the time of my field research.

ethical considerations;[3] it also allowed me to have my own input and thus enter into a real dialogue with my interviewees. Bringing in my own personal experience made people confident and stimulated the conversation. Consultation of the Romanian mass media, legislation, statistics, and writings in sociology and philosophy was also important for locating the practices and discourses observed in their social, economic and political context.

1.2 Presenting and analysing the ethnography

Anthropological writings contain three types of texts, writes Ioan Lewis (1999): the account of facts observed by the ethnographer, the presentation of the socio-economic context in which these facts are situated, and the theoretical development. This present account is no exception, as all these structures of writing seemed indispensable for the development of my intended explanation. We can categorise some chapters as being more ethnographic and focused on the enterprises studied and the interactions linked to work places (Chapters three and six). Other chapters situate the enterprises in the cultural (Chapter one), physical (Chapter two), economic (Chapter four) and historical (Chapter five) context. The last chapters (Chapters seven, eight and the conclusion) develop the theoretical arguments raised in the first chapter through the analysis of some cultural notions. However, in my account, it seemed unfruitful to separate clearly the three types of texts. The ethnographic material itself contains socio-historical references and the attempts at theorisation made by my informants, themselves aware of many factors influencing their work. My effort in this book consists mainly in synthesising and linking different popular theories to social scientists' debates. This led me to structure the book as a quest, in which from one macro factor to another, the search goes deeper to a final explanation situated at the micro level of social interactions.

Before proceeding to the field, my readings in urban anthropology, social history and the sociology of work and organisations, economic anthropology and the anthropology of postsocialist countries suggested several factors that influence the practice and values of work in societies around the globe. The influence of these factors has been confirmed by my findings, but the weight given to each of them differs from that found in other social contexts. I discovered other factors also to have a bearing on people's work ethics. For clarity of exposition, I deal with these factors and their influence on Romania's changing work ethic in turn, each one in a chapter as outlined below.

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[3] The need for this indirect approach is equally a reflection of distrust and of the difficulty in asserting 'one's personal work ethic and practice in public.

I begin with a presentation of the debates surrounding the economic 'crisis' in 1999-2001. While respecting the knowledge inherent in these debates, I try to translate these into social scientists' terms, to ground them in ethnographic material and theoretical analysis. I emphasise that Europe is the catalyst for the elaboration of these theories.

In the second chapter, I analyse some environmental particularities of urban spaces and urban life that influence the work of city inhabitants.

I introduce my main three field sites in the third chapter and focus on the discourses and practices of the employees and managers of these organisations.

The fourth chapter places service enterprises within the context of the Romanian economy, by giving a short overview of the economic structure and of the economic problems after 1989. I do not restrict my analysis to work in the formal economy, but also explore work in the informal economy.

A study of the dynamics of changes in work ethics could not neglect the historical perspective and parallels with the past. In the fifth chapter, I will describe those aspects of socialist organisation that still have a bearing on Romania's work ethic today. This is even more necessary as my interviewees made constant references to the socialist period and the socialist legacy.

It appeared from my data that the elaboration of a work ethic depends at least as much on the disorder created by rapid change as on the socialist legacies. Consequently, I focus on the impact of these changes, within the enterprises and 'on the street', in Chapter six.

The structure of time in the workplace differs with the level of industrialisation of the country (Thompson 1967) and the type of occupation or industry (Whipp 1987). The interpretation of time depends on the wider cultural setting. In Chapter seven, I show the relevance of time for work ethics in the Romanian context.

Through my discussion of the factors mentioned above, and my ethnography of the work places studied, I intend to redefine the notion of a work ethic, and to inquire about its distinctness (if any) from an ethic of human relations. Changes in work ethics emerge under the influence of both work ideology and work performance. Thus in the final chapter I outline a micro-sociological study of the language used in work interactions, which allows us to see the importance of personal input in work relations in the absence of set rules of behaviour, as well as the role-play between 'pretending' and 'being'.

In conclusion, in order to understand interpersonal relations and individual ethics, I will address some aspects of the self, notably the split be-

tween 'being' and 'pretending to be' something, between values and practices of work. The confrontation between what should be (i.e. ethics) and what is (i.e. reality) takes place both at the individual and at the national level. This discrepancy between what interpersonal relations in workplaces are and what they ought to be is at the basis of my proposed interpretation of the ethnographic material, which relies on 'self-respect' as an explanatory key term.

A differentiation along gender and age lines would undoubtedly have broadened the analysis and refined my conclusions, but it was beyond the scope and the data on which I based my study. Gender has been discussed amply in studies of postsocialism (Rai et al. 1992; Bridger et al. 1996; Pine 1996; Buckley 1997; Gal and Kligman 2000); less so age, though writings on social memories emphasise time and generation (Watson 1994; Yurchak 1997 and 2006).

There are relatively few anthropological studies of postsocialist East European urban spaces, and even fewer studies of workplaces. André Czegledy dedicated his doctoral work to the business reorganisation and formation of joint ventures in Hungary (Czegledy 1996). Birgit Mueller conducted research in several East German enterprises after the reunification and showed the mental barriers workers had to cross in order to integrate themselves in the Western culture of enterprises (Mueller 1995). David Kideckel conducted research in the declining mining industry and the chemical industry in Romania and emphasised the marginalisation of the working class after socialism (Kideckel 2002). More recently, Elizabeth Dunn has written a detailed analysis of the engineering of souls and human relations entailed by the need for new values that accompanied the transformation of a Polish state enterprise, Alima, into a joint Polish-American private business, Alima-Gerber (Dunn 2004). Dunn sees changes in labour discipline not only as a key factor in changing the economy, but also as a key factor in changing notions of personhood, gender, kin relations, and 'home'.

By its focus on the transformation of small- and medium-sized service enterprises, which has not been previously researched, the present book is intended to complement this corpus of ethnographic work.

Chapter 2
From a Romanian 'Work Ethic' to 'Romanian Mentalities' and back again

In this book, I use the concept of a 'work ethic' to designate a set of values pertaining to work. My construction of the field of work values finds its first inspiration in Max Weber's seminal work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber 1984 [1930]). The intellectual and popular debates surrounding 'Romanian mentalities' (*mentalitate românească*) cover the same epistemic ground as my empirical research on Romanians' work values, and more. In Romania, the term 'work ethic' (*etica muncii*) is not commonly used, having been tacitly banished from discourses after 1989 due to its link to socialist ideology.[4] Thus, I have had to rely on public debates about Romanian mentalities in order to extract the material concerning work values. In this first chapter, I will retrace the use of the term 'work ethic' from the scientific literature to the Romanian reality. I will then tackle the public debates on Romanian mentalities and take into account the other directions in which these debates point. Finally, I will focus on the catalyst of these debates: comparison with the West and the desire to 'be European'.

2.1 Work ethics

The conceptualisation of the Protestant (work) ethic in the social sciences originates in Max Weber's work on the origins of capitalism (1984 [1930]). Weber refers back to Protestant teachings from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, which are conceptualisations of a desired ethic and not reflections of social reality. Weber's hypothesis is that the interpretation of Protestantism illustrated in these teachings created the conditions for the formation of capitalism. He does not deny, as has been imputed to him later, that other social and economic factors also stimulated capitalism, or that

[4] Kideckel argues that even the term 'workers' has been discredited after 1989: 'Concern about working conditions is marginalised and delegitimised, and many braches of industry are scorned as socialist survivals' (Kideckel 2002: 114).

other religions (Catholicism, for instance) contained teachings directed towards an ethic of work. Nor did he claim that once capitalism was in place, the Protestant ethic was what kept it functioning. Weber's seminal study is dedicated to tracing the origins of capitalism and is not an analysis of institutionalised capitalism as such (Aron 1970: 220). Even if subsequently contested, Max Weber's thesis gave birth to the concept of the Protestant work ethic (PWE), which has received much attention, to the point of becoming an ideology of capitalism (Anthony 1977; Rose 1985).

2.1.1 The PWE: Weber's ideal-type

The Calvinist doctrine of predestination asserts that only certain beings are chosen to be saved from damnation. The choice is predetermined by God and unknown to men. Consequently, it becomes obligatory to regard oneself as chosen, lack of certainty being equivalent to lack of faith, and to perform 'good works' in one's daily activity, which becomes the medium through which the certainty of being 'chosen' is demonstrated. The highest form of religious/ moral obligation was to succeed in worldly affairs (this is known as 'the calling') and success became a sign of being 'chosen'. Thus, work was transformed from a necessity (to satisfy survival needs) into a calling – work for the sake of work, for the infinite accumulation of wealth and for its minimal enjoyment.

> Waste of time is thus the first and in principle the deadliest of sins. The span of human life is infinitely short and precious to make sure of one's own election. Loss of time through sociability, idle talk, luxury, even more sleep than is necessary for health, six to at most eight hours, is worthy of absolute moral damnation (Richard Baxter, *The Christian Directory*, quoted in Weber1984 [1930]: 157).

These were the conditions set by the teachings of that time for certain salvation: a frugal life, self-discipline and business success. Weber writes: 'Truly, what is here preached is not simply a means of making one's way in the world, but a peculiar ethic' (Weber 1984 [1930]: 51). Two characteristics are specific to the resulting work ethic: the existence of a permanent surveyor/ spectator who sees all (God), and the unlimitedness of work (i.e. not work for a mission, but work for work per se). This last feature continues well into the present as an ethic of life, as Bell observes: 'Behind the chiliasm of modern man is the megalomania of self-infinitisation. In consequence, the modern hubris is the refusal to accept limits, the insistence on continually reaching out' (1976: 49).

This particular ethic of life, labelled a work ethic because it is centred on work, helped to bring about capitalism: 'The essence of capitalism as conceived by Weber is embodied in the enterprise whose aim is to make

maximum profit and whose means is the rational organisation of work and production' (Aron 1970: 218). Rationality and bureaucracy are inevitable in capitalism. They have created an 'iron cage' in which modern man is deprived of the enjoyment of life. 'The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so', writes Weber at the beginning of the twentieth century, proof that Weber himself believed that the PWE did not exist in its original form any more (1984 [1930]: 181). As Turner remarks, despite Weber's methodological individualism underlying the agency of the individual, he also believed that the individual is 'caught in a network of social circumstances which constantly work against his intentions' (Turner 1981: 353), thus caught in the fate of history. This is because, in contrast with subsequent social scientists that considered the PWE something worth transforming into an ideology, Weber had more sombre predictions about the lasting consequences of the Protestant ethic's strict rules, when emptied of their soul. He quotes Goethe at the end of his book: 'Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart, this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilisation never before achieved' (Weber 1984 [1930]: 182). From a socialist perspective, Emile Durkheim goes further, stating that the search for increasing abundance is not ethical at all 'if it does not succeed in calming the desires of the greatest number' (1950: 16).

2.1.2 The current work ethic within developed industrial countries

The work ethic defined by Weber is no more than an ideal type, closer to an ideology than to an ethic encountered in practice. Bauman warns: 'Weber's tale is not and never was an account of a historical event' (1987: 150). Weber has actually never claimed that Christian treatises or the teachings of self-made men like Benjamin Franklin formed the reality of that time (the same is true about Biblical commandments). Subsequent writers like Anthony (1977) indeed assume the existence of a monolithic PWE and contrast the current values of work met in practice with past ideals as they stem from Protestant teachings. Joyce (1987) criticises this stance and shows the heterogeneity of values existent at any one time, which vary depending on social class and type of enterprises/ industries, and highlights a more complex link between values and practice. Rodgers shows that in mid-nineteenth century America, work values were no longer linked to God, but were spread intensively through newspapers and school education as work ideology (1974). The work ethic was 'the gospel of the bourgeoisie' and did not penetrate in its ideal form into the working class. This ideal was meant to serve the needs of industrial development for time organisation, speed, and

regularity. For instance, in England the existence of 'Saint Monday'[5] was contrary to these needs and had to be eradicated through disapproval in the name of the work ethic (Thompson 1967).

Bauman asserts that the work ethic was a means for the upper class to maintain social order (1998). De-industrialisation said *Farewell to the Working Class* (Gorz 1982) and prompted a search for alternatives to what is perceived as the 'crisis' of modernism (Gorz 1985). Growing unemployment since the 1970s dictated the replacement of the work ethic with an 'aesthetic of consumption' (Bauman 1998), which in fact serves the same purpose as the work ethic did at the height of industrialisation: to maintain social order. If this work ethic is still alive today in developed countries, it may be an unfortunate anachronism. And it appears to be still alive, as Howe found when conducting research on administrative practices in a social security office in Northern Ireland (1990). There the categories of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' are still used by state employees, influencing their distribution of unemployment benefits to those seen to 'deserve' them (i.e. those who have looked for a job, albeit unsuccessfully) and not to those 'undeserving' of benefits (i.e. people who have not looked for a job).

The move towards the idea of a 'balanced life' – balanced between work and personal life (Pahl 1995) – is slow compared to the needs of the new economic organisation. Most people still hide their anxiety behind work, instead of turning towards the other main areas in which Pahl considers that the individual can escape from existential anxiety (1995: 16).[6] The term 'workaholic' emerges to underline the similarity of reason and purpose behind drug and work addictions. The requirements of the post-industrial era render the concept of a 'hard-working individual' obsolete. Despite this, now and then, political currents like Thatcherism in England return to an emphasis on wealth, hard work or individualism. Work values do not disappear according to the needs of economic organisation. In his overview of the concept of work, Applebaum concludes that today 'the work ethic is still strong enough to determine status and influence in society, even though real power is based on wealth and ownership of prosperity' (1992: 571). The heterogeneity of a work ethic in Western countries is as great in the present as it was in the past. Work ethics vary between different capitalist countries as work values depend on the historical period, class, and occupations.

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[5] At the beginning of the twentieth century in England, there was still a high rate of absenteeism at work on Mondays. These were ironically called 'Saint Monday', by extension of the Sabbath, a holy day dedicated to rest.

[6] In his opinion, these other areas are love, religion, drugs, and place (community).

2.1.3 The image of a capitalist work ethic in Romania

Romanians have access to scattered images of this diversity of work values and practices, which arrive in Romania through media, foreign consultants, translations of Benjamin Franklin or of new books on image-production, friends recounting their experiences in the West, and Romanian immigrants in the West. Images retained from this proposed kaleidoscope, although slightly outdated, impress as novelties. Thus, Romanians admire the evidence of hard work, of the division of labour at the level of enterprises and society, of the lack of tricks and bribery, of apparently friendly but strong hierarchies, and they recognise these features as an ideal that is not put in practice in Romania.[7] In the interviews I conducted, no reference was made to the values of an 'aesthetic of consumption' (Bauman 1998), or to a balanced life, and no thought was given to the 'praise of idleness' (Russell 1976) or to 'the right to be lazy' (Lafargue 1994). A capitalist work ethic (Western style) meant for most interviewees hard work; for a smaller group, work well done; and for a minority of intellectuals, intelligent organisation and management of human forces.

The multinational companies active in Romania impose an organisation of work which confirms these ideas: employees are required to work more than ten hours a day, a condition accepted because of the higher pay offered, and their work is thoroughly checked. In a software company working 24 hours a day, seven days a week, on line, even the five-minute toilet breaks are scheduled in advance and controlled, and a quality controller monitors the work performed, watching over employees' shoulders. Other multinational companies have health programmes, checking employees' blood pressure every day and providing them with lunch in their office. One software engineer who worked in such a company, though appreciative of his exceptional working conditions, said he could not help thinking about Charlie Chaplin's lunch in *Modern Times*.

I have discussed work values and working conditions in other countries (on the basis of my own work experience in the West) at length with my Romanian workmates and acquaintances. From these dialogues it emerged that the practices and values I described were quite different from the image of work in the West held by my interviewees, and quite different from the

[7] My focus on images of a work ethic obscure the fact that what is mostly discussed and copied from capitalism is the strive for success and the praise of individualism, understood in the sense that Durkheim (1950) criticises most: of selfish, atomistic behaviour. The image Romanians have of capitalism is that of savage capitalism, which is both an inheritance of the hidden economy under socialism and a consequence of the disordered implementation of capitalism today.

work conditions proposed by international companies in Bucharest. Some of my accounts surprised my interviewees, such as my statement that the division of labour has proved detrimental to the pride one takes in work, and that since the 1980s attempts to address this problem have advocated a transformation of work (Wood 1989) in the West, from Fordist assembly-line work to more flexible specialisation. Another surprise was my assertion that Westerners would not necessarily take on two jobs if given the opportunity, or work 70 hours a week in order to prove their commitment to a job. The concept of privileging quality over quantity, or the rational calculation of gains and losses for establishing a balance between quantity and quality, seem to have no place in the rhetoric of the capitalist work ethic in Romania, which emphasises 'hard work'. As a result, new Romanian companies that wish to impose what they take to be modern capitalist principles propose values that do not suit the requirements of the post-industrial era. While these companies suggest different principles, their employees are still trying to show their commitment by acting according to their own understanding of a work ethic derived from the general rhetoric.[8]

The information available to Romanians on the work ethic of current capitalist organisations is often inaccurate or propagandistic, a fact that hinders the positive role it could take by suggesting motivating narratives about work. The capitalist ethic of work serves as a term of comparison or as a model, but its complexity and contradictions are unknown.

2.2 Intellectual debates generate popular theories

It seems that knowing why something happens partly alleviates the burden of its happening. At least this is what the continuous search for explanations by each individual shows. None of my interviewees would abstain from trying to find an explanation for economic and social problems. In general, this means embracing one of several explanations proposed by intellectuals and popularised through the media. I will analyse below a series of such explanations presented on popular TV programmes or in the press, from March 1999 to April 2001, in order to see how they are reflected in ordinary people's opinions.

[8] This means that they spend long hours at work rather than organise their work efficiently in eight hours, and perform tasks individually rather than co-ordinate with the work of their colleagues (see Chapter three for a detailed account of work patterns in a service enterprise).

2.2.1 Explanations of economic problems

I shall note first that the period during which I conducted my main field-work, 1999-2001, was characterised by a steep economic regression and included an electoral year. These two features radicalised the explanations of social and economic problems that circulated in the media. The discourses of politicians (in the Opposition) and even of intellectual sympathisers of the Democratic Coalition (in the government) did not simply refer to 'slow processes' but declared an economic 'crisis'. Some concrete figures that impressed one then were: Romania's GDP in 2000 was only 76% of that in 1989, one of the worst years of the socialist period; during the past ten years economic growth had been negative; and around half a million people, of a total population of 23 million (in 1989), had left the country to migrate to more prosperous ones, and many more worked temporarily (and often illegally) in western Europe.

Was the term 'economic crisis' justified? Or was it rather the reflection of the discrepancy between the high expectations after 1989 and economic indicators? Most groups of the population inside the country and most international organisations outside became impatient. For the former, the 1989 revolution failed to keep its promises: the economic situation worsened and Romania became more vulnerable in the international arena. For the latter, Romania did not live up to the requirements attached to foreign aid. As ten years had passed since the change of political systems in December 1989, blaming the legacy of the past regime for current economic problems had became too easy a solution. Other Eastern European countries also had a socialist legacy and yet proved able to achieve economic progress despite it, argued Romanian political analysts. Nonetheless, in 1999-2000 officials still largely invoked the socialist legacy, as well as the legacy of the previous governments (1990-96), i.e. that they hesitated to implement radical change. 'Faulting the communist era for most of what is wrong about the present is itself symptomatic of that era' (Lass 1999: 282). The Opposition party at the time, the PDSR (Romanian Social Democratic Party), labelled in the national and international press as the 'ex-communists', as well as some nostalgic socialists, blamed the fast pace of changes imposed by international bodies and considered this to be the reason for the economic crisis. But the European reconstruction after the Second World War showed how rapid changes could be coped with successfully. Two amendments were usually made to this disadvantageous comparison: firstly, it was reminded that the respective European countries had benefited from significant American funds (the Marshall Plan), while Romania did not enjoy enough foreign support; secondly, it was noted that all west Europeans had accepted the necessity to work harder after the war.

More sophisticated explanations were developed by Romanian analysts, most of them well grounded in history and in the awareness of the phenomenon of globalisation. The process of de-industrialisation, which occurred in western Europe in the 1970s, has been faster and more violent in Romania; it surprised the Romanian government after 1990, and initially they tried to resist it. This could be explained by their incompetence, but also by their predilection for symbolic thinking. Industry in Romania was equated with production, the worker, and modernity – a goal for which Romania had longed for since the nineteenth century and which was achieved only in the 1960-70s, not even thirty years before the dismantling was to start. As Silviu Brucan, a Romanian political analyst, observed: 'The transition in Romania is double: first to a market economy, second to an information society, which most Romanian leaders ignore totally' (Antena 1, 2000c). Today economic success resides in the development of the service sector, despised and underdeveloped during socialism for ideological reasons.

The global economy forced Romania to enter into the international market, a competition for which it was not prepared. Foreign products, at high prices, invaded the Romanian domestic market, while Romanian products could not find a market, either domestic, or foreign. Some analysts (even foreign specialists) consider that Romania would have needed a protectionist policy until it was able to enter the market competition. They argue, in neo-Marxist terms, that Western countries looking for new markets in the East forced the Romanian government toward openness, under the threat of suppressing foreign aid. Romania was thus colonised by foreign products, which is the only colonisation that interests Westerners today. In the opinion of a famous journalist, C.T. Popescu, the United States, for instance, wishes to become 'the first shareholders in the Commercial Society of Earth' (Antena 1, 1999b).

Some positive points of view on the future development of the economy were also expressed, mainly by officials, who tried to convince citizens that economic problems were temporary and that improvements were about to come soon. The announcement of the 'Economic Strategy for Romania in the Medium Term (2000-2004/5)' (Antena 1, 2000a), a major document compiled in view of the negotiations with the European Union, offered the (then) Prime Minister, Mugur Isărescu, an occasion to reassure the population that 'We are not going the wrong way, but we are making lots of mistakes on the way' (Antena 1, 2000a). His statement responded to the worries of 74% of the Romanian population, who believed that Romania had gone in

the wrong direction.[9] The same event also led to warning the population that economic progress should not be judged with the obsession of urgent needs in mind, and that its cost would be high. The figures of economic growth established by the Strategy in the Medium Term appeared overly optimistic, given the performance during the preceding years (it was subsequently confirmed that this optimism was justified), and had the effect of reassuring the population that technocrats (a much appreciated category of officials, as opposed to talkative politicians) had things in hand. Did not the Prime Minister himself insist on manifesting rationality and realism, because 'no international organisations deal with dreamers' (Antena 1, 2000a)?

2.2.2 The 'Romanian mentality' explanation

However grounded the officials' explanations might have been, most Romanians remained sceptical. Statistics compiled by the Centre for Urban Sociology (April 1999) and by Media Metro Transylvania (November 1998, March 1999) at the time showed that trust in political representatives and state institutions had degraded over the period, while the hope that Westerners would help was vanishing. Nonetheless, there were some explanations provided that found a strong echo among the Romanian population. These were exactly those explanations that blamed the performance of the many, meanwhile making them responsible, and giving them agency in the national context. While dissatisfaction inside the country had led to targeting, as scapegoats, first the socialist legacy, then neglect on the part of the West, as well as corruption and disorganisation at the top political level, since the end of 1997 a 'blame us' discourse began to parallel the others. This might have been influenced by the dissatisfaction manifested by international bodies, but was especially triggered by the new government's need to justify itself against the accusations of the population. Before 1996, when the 'ex-communists' were still in power, intellectuals could hope that political change would be beneficial for the country's economic development. After 1997, when policies designed according to the Western model had been implemented by eminent intellectuals without positive, rapid results, the intelligentsia identified the mentality of the 'population' as the factor responsible for the failure of the economic reforms. Social and political analysts' explanations were propagated by the media, entered everybody's home, and, surprisingly, quickly became a popular theory. This is how the

[9] According to a study undertaken by Metro Media Transylvania and the Soros Foundation in September 1999, i.e. just four months before the Economic Strategy was made public.

'Romanian mentality' came to be seen by everybody as the final factor responsible for the inertia and the disorganisation of the country.

There is nothing paradoxical about the fact that Romanians explain their economic failure in terms of mentalities, though the consensus around this explanation is astonishing. This attempt appears paradoxical, however, to the Anglo-Saxon social anthropologist, because anthropologists have discarded such theories a long time ago and explain social phenomena by invoking economic, political and social factors. The Romanian language reveals two understandings of the term 'mentality'. The first is a definition akin to Lévi-Bruhl's notion of mentality as a structure of thought proper to an ethnic group (1910); the other equates 'mentality' with 'culture'. In both definitions, 'mentality' is an essence shared by all Romanians, the origins of which can be traced back to the nation's history and the national landscape. The Romanian mentality in the first sense could be defined in the same terms in which Constantin Noica, a Romanian philosopher, defines nationality: a unique conjuncture in which we are born. As he remarks, the sky is not seen in the same way from every point of the earth. This definition is also akin to the way in which ethnicity was understood and studied during the Soviet period. The Soviet ethnologist Bromley gave the following definition: 'Common characteristics of culture and psychology, ethnic consciousness and an ethnonym may be regarded as ethnic features proper. To a greater or lesser extent the members of every ethnos necessarily possess such features, irrespective of whether they live within a compact area or are dispersed' (1980: 154). In its second sense, 'mentality' (unlike nationality or ethnicity) can be changed, and this change, very much seen as a historical evolution, is what officials and analysts hoped to trigger by their discourses.

I could not overlook the paradoxical nature of this self-blaming explanation (though it is certain that everybody tends to blame his neighbour more than himself). In seeking an answer to this phenomenon, I open the way to various hypotheses, which the present study seeks to examine. A first hypothesis is that through self-identification as responsible for economic failures, citizens see themselves as masters of their own destinies and acquire a role in the current transformation, which otherwise would remain unintelligible to them. Another hypothesis is that the explanation in terms of mentalities responds to some problems generated by daily human relations, that is, it actually explains more than economic problems: a certain social and moral crisis.[10]

According to officials, personalities, media, people interviewed in the street, friends, acquaintances, and even foreigners, what prevents Romania

[10] Of course, an elementary observation is that a cultural explanation is more readily accessible to non-specialists than an economic explanation.

from being successful economically is the Romanian mentality. The term mentality is therefore used negatively in most references.[11] When the Prime Minister of a state (Mugur Isărescu, in the speech mentioned above, Antena 1, 2000a) concludes that two factors would lead Romania into the EU: the first is a change in mentalities ('we need to change the conservative mentalities', 'we need to get rid of the old habits'), the second is a reduction of unnecessary expenses from the state apparatus, one understands that even for a well-known technocrat,[12] 'mentality' is as concrete a factor as public expenses.

What then is the 'Romanian mentality'? For the mayor of Bucharest in 1999, Viorel Lis, the Romanian mentality means that when construction of a building is scheduled to be completed by autumn, it will actually be three to four months late. As he sympathetically put it, 'We [the city council] will do it, but you know how Romanians are, it could be three to four months late' (Antena 1, 1999a). For a well-known football trainer, appearing on a popular TV show at the time, *Chestiunea Zilei* (PROTV 1999), thanks to this mentality football players put money before professionalism and the reward before their work. As the host of the TV show, Florin Călinescu, replied, this is the same everywhere in Romania. For the satirical journal *Academia Caţavencu* (1999), it means '*Fotbal SI, Trabajo NO*' ('yes to football, no to work') – in Spanish, a reference to the fact that Romanians spend hours in front of the TV watching cheap Latin American TV series. For the writer Horia Patapievici, also interviewed on the TV show mentioned above (PROTV 2000), the Romanian mentality means that Romanians consider themselves 'good at everything' and would never admit they are not experts in everything. This results in *bricolage* instead of work well done. Counteracting this, the presenter Florin Călinescu evaluated this mentality positively as a source of adaptability. Andrei Pleşu, the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1996 to 1999, also supported Patapievici's opinion: 'We, Romanians, are a nation of commentators, good at everything. The most typical exponent is the politician, who, at the end of a discourse, is happy only because he proved he was right' (Antena 1, 2000b).

What strengthens these opinions is their continuity over time, the fact that they can be situated in an intellectual tradition. In the 1930s, the psychologist Rădulescu-Motru (1938), who established a typology of Romanians' qualities and flaws, wrote that Romanians are good at talking, not at working. The academician Constantin Bălăceanu-Stolnici, after reviewing

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[11] This is not surprising, the writer Horia Patapievici argues, because Romanians get a very bad opinion of themselves as soon as things go wrong (PROTV 2000).

[12] Mugur Isărescu is an economist and has been governor of the National Bank since 1990, interrupted but by a short period (1999-2000) as Prime Minister.

2000 years of Romanian history, concludes that 'Romanians are masters in building on an approximate, non-dogmatic basis', a characteristic that has been developed not as a default, but as a mechanism of survival under invasions of migrant people and foreign domination (Antena 1, 2000b). 'Superficiality' helped people survive during communism as it did during the Fanariot period.[13] For the historian Constantin Drăghicescu, the Romanian mentality means that Romanians are content with appearances, with 'let us pretend to do it' (*hai să ne facem că*), while for the philosopher Alexandru Paleologu, it means that they are adaptable (Antena 1, 2000b).

The majority of Romanians embrace the opinions that well-known historians, philosophers and social scientists have voiced during popular TV programmes, though in a simplified form. They conclude that the 'Romanian mentality' is to be blamed for the economic problems, but do not seem to have a clear idea about what this mentality is. In general, it is reduced to 'Romanians do not work', as revealed by street interviews broadcast on radio and television. When I asked my interviewees specifically what mentalities they were complaining about, I received vague answers, referring to the 'atmosphere' or people in general. Some notions appear recurrently in these answers: 'balkanism', 'orientalism' and a lack of 'civilisation'. 'Balkanism' means essentially laziness and cheating, and it is an entirely negative characteristic, subscribing to the (real or supposed) international stereotype linked to this term. At the beginning of the 1990s, Romanians resisted the international geopolitical divides that placed Romania in the Balkans (on the grounds that, geographically, it is not). Yet by the end of the 1990s, Romanians came to accuse themselves of balkanism. 'Orientalism' sounds equally negative to Romanian ears (probably given the historical conflicts with the Turks: Orientals) and differs from the European representation of the Orient analysed by Said (1978). Thus, for instance, Bucharest's mayor, Viorel Lis, insisted on changing the layout of the city's open markets, mainly because they looked 'oriental' and not 'occidental' (food in the open markets is placed on the floor; markets sell products as diverse as in Turkish bazaars, etc.), and only secondly for reasons of hygiene or convenience. He quite aggressively advocated 'civilised' markets, as opposed to oriental, balkanic markets. He is not the only one who has stated his preference for 'civilisation': most newspaper advertisements in the 'rent' or 'buy' columns ask for flats in 'civilised' areas. Lack of politeness is also considered a sign of the lack of civilisation. It is often said that civilisation is something Romanians still have to acquire as part of their evolution; it is one of the fac-

[13] A difficult historical period under the Ottoman domination, which lasted from 1716 to 1821 in Wallachia.

tors, together with the economy, that place Romania 'fifty years behind Europe'.

Cultural explanations are more popular among non-specialists than those explanations based on macroeconomics or economic history because they also offer answers to daily problems faced in human relations, which cannot be directly explained by the state of the economy (for instance, lack of politeness in public spaces). These cultural explanations today take the form of mentalist, psychological and evolutionist theories. This might be due to the ignorance of other forms of cultural analysis – we should not forget that the social sciences were banned and could not develop during the socialist period, so that after 1990 the tradition of writings current in the 1920s and 1930s was resuscitated, a tradition that was both mentalist and psychological in nature. It could also be due to the revival in the 1990s of the definition of culture as an essence specific to a nation, reflected in the popularity of books such as Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilisations* (1996). Or perhaps the well-established heritage of German romanticism inspired by Herder persists in the whole of Central Europe. Through all these approaches the nation is criticised, but is also asserted, and most Romanians seem to take pleasure in talking about the characteristics of the nation, either negatively or positively.

2.3 Longing for the West: 'Be European, recycle (yourself)!'

It becomes obvious that the comparison and the ongoing dialogue with the West form the basis of all explanations of economic crisis in terms of Romanian mentalities. Though it starts with a comparison of their respective economic contexts, it ends with a comparison between the imagined mentalities of different nations. The Romanian mentality is measured against the standard of the 'ought to be' mentality of successful capitalist countries. Moral judgements linked to this mentality and its consequences cannot be understood apart from its measurement against an imagined Western standard. The economic success of these countries, which Romania wishes to follow, tends to place them as models, at least in terms of their work, if not their lifestyle. Of course, information about what may constitute a Western 'mentality' is limited, leaving space for imagination and interpretation.

2.3.1 Imitation

The first symptom of the will to become Western is the imitation of Western appearances, from the mayor's cosmetic changes imposed on open markets, to dress, music or the use of English and French words. At the beginning of the 1990s in Estonia, the consumption of Western goods was perceived as a return to 'normality', an appropriation of Westernness and a rejection of

Easternness (Rausig 2002), the latter being identified with Russians, who form Estonia's largest ethnic minority. This phenomenon was not inhibited by the high prices of Western products. The same phenomenon has taken place in Romania, and at the end of the 1990s, Americanisation and 'McDonaldisation' (Ritzer 1993) were still carrying on without being criticised. Few analysts denounced the presence of American consumer culture before the new millennium, when the prospect of European integration and intellectuals' criticism of the Bush administration became more manifest. Patrons in elegant clothes visited fast food outlets, more expensive than Romanian restaurants, on Sundays; TV shows were copied from American or European television; advertisements propagated the language of individualism ('you deserve', 'only for you'); managers imitated individualist or capitalist discourses in companies; and American books on how to be successful were widely read by secretaries. As all copies, such manifestations are judged inferior to the original.

2.3.2 Western superiority

The second symptom of the will to become Western is an exaggerated respect for everything that is Western, accompanied by contempt for the Eastern or Oriental, a category into which Romania occasionally falls. 'Abroad' is often not named, but whispered as a secret thing, as 'out there', 'outside', 'other places'. Of course, 'abroad' means the 'civilised' world of industrial countries. Only 'they' have a culture or a civilisation. To cite one example – there are extended discussions in the press and among ordinary people when important companies are to be sold to foreigners. Western investors are always considered the first choice, while Eastern investors (South Koreans, for instance) are only second best. When the cost of telephone calls increased after Romanian Telecom (Romtelecom) was sold to a Greek company instead of a German one that also bid for it, it was confirmed that business with people from the Balkans should be avoided. Extensive speculations are also made about why companies from the Balkans are able to fight better against Western companies for Romanian assets: they know how to bribe. There are cases in which Western companies also 'turn Balkan style' while doing business in Romania (Heintz and Jansson 1999).

2.3.3 Western migration

A third and most concrete symptom of the will to become Western is emigration to the West. Since 1990, half a million people have emigrated, mainly young, educated people. Most students I talked to dreamt of leaving the country because they dislike the 'Romanian mentality', but also because

they have created an ideal and labelled it 'the West'. A student in architecture (21 years old) complained that he was obliged by his clients' bad taste to design ugly houses, and that he was paid as a student only, though doing professional work. He was sure that 'this would not happen in the West', partly because personal qualities are appreciated there, and partly because Westerners could not have bad taste.

2.3.4 Romania's image

A fourth symptom experienced at the national level is the effort to appear in a good light in front of the Western world. This is because Romania hoped to be admitted into Western structures such as NATO (which Romania joined on the 2nd of April, 2004) and the European Union (to be joined in 2007), to 'get into Europe' and thus to become Western, but it is also due to a sense of shame that 'Europe is watching us'. Ion Luca Caragiale, the most famous Romanian playwright, caricaturised this desperate fight for European recognition already at the end of the nineteenth century (Caragiale 1884). We can state that politically there is a tradition of creating appearances for western European consumption. At the beginning of the 1990s, a Commission for the Improvement of the Image of Romania Abroad was created. In 1996, the government granted a huge amount of money (four million US dollars – under debate when the scandal exploded in May 2000) for the publication of a book, *The Eternal and Fascinating Romania*, intended to improve Romania's image abroad. During the TV talk show quoted above, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs recommended that Romanians at least try to pretend that they work if they wish to be accepted in the European Union (Antena 1, 2000b). The need to propagate a good image abroad may reinforce national cohesion, as 'dirty clothes should be washed within the family', but it also suggests that Romanians can only rise to the level of Westerners by pretending.

This implicit comparison with, and judgement by, Western standards inevitably embarrasses the social anthropologist, who could be suspected of imposing her own Western standards when in fact referring to those of her informants. Constant attention needs to be paid here in distinguishing between the informants' and the anthropologist's reference values and judgements, even more so given that the evaluation by Western standards was generally disadvantageous for the practices observed. As the painter Horia Bernea, founding father of the new Museum of the Romanian Peasant, warned: 'We apply to Romanians criteria that renders them non competitive. They do not work for the sake of work, but for the result' (Antena 1, 2000b).

2.4 Conclusion

In an initial response to the continuous complaining of the wider population, who, in despair due to the low standards of living, seemed to regret the passing of the socialist regime, Romania's intellectuals blamed the performance of the working class for the country's economic failures. As this explanation was accessible and less abstract, and because, as I will show in subsequent chapters, it responded to concrete problems created by daily interactions, it became the most popular. For those propagating this idea, the good news was that the performance of the labour force, unlike history or globalisation, could be changed! Though generally taken negatively, as blame, this attribution to the labour force of a role in the economic situation also leads to the empowerment of the population. This attitude is in opposition to social inertia and the fatalist acceptance of historical and current international circumstances. Advocating changes in 'mentalities' linked to work also asserts that economic success is in the hands of the Romanian population. Few Romanian personalities propagate this positive understanding of 'mentality' as a characteristic that could be changed by education,[14] and many more consider mentality as an ethnic given. At an empirical level, the case of Romanian migrants working abroad in a different socio-economic context constitutes the best proof that there is no predetermined mentality that makes Romanians perform work in a certain way. By investigating those social causes that produce the 'Romanian mentality', I will show that it should be understood as a social and cultural product and not as an ethnic given.

In order to allow comparison with other social contexts, I will replace the notion of mentality, linked to work and understood as a cultural product, with the concept of a work ethic, which can be analysed from an empirical point of view. I acknowledge that this is an artificial replacement: as long as Romanians do not refer to a work ethic, this concept risks being no more than that imposed by the anthropologist. Popular opinion was explicit on this point: 'A work ethic? There is nothing like this in Romania', answered the majority of my acquaintances, who are intellectuals. However, using the concept of a work ethic will allow us to begin an investigation of work values, even if the term will need to be subsequently redefined. One last remark before this study proceeds: even if Romanians are not linked genetically by a common mentality, they have in common the belief that they share

[14] One supporter of the educational method was the presenter of a popular TV show, Florin Călinescu, who always ended his show with an invitation to 'work and win' (playing on the advertisement 'watch and win' used by some popular TV game shows).

a Romanian mentality. This belief becomes then a strong cultural feature that influences the way in which people act, as individuals and in the community.

Chapter 3
Bucharest Landscapes

Whichever way you choose to go to Bucharest, you will probably get the same ambiguous feeling upon arrival. Suppose you go by plane and land at Otopeni airport. You will see lots of people waiting for their friends and family and everything will seem so familiar. Maybe you just notice that people are more nicely dressed than you, carry flowers with them and, on the whole, emanate a feeling of being involved in something quite important. Thus, if you are a Western anthropologist or a Western tourist, you will involuntarily cast on them the same expectations that you have for 'your people'.

As you leave the airport, you will be immediately surrounded by a bunch of taxi drivers, jumping around and offering to take you to the city centre 'for just $25'. No one will offer to help you with your luggage. If you turn the taxi drivers down, you might get a look despising you for your poverty or meanness. Some might insist, and this is how you will discover that $20 will do, and even $15 if you actually take the cab. If you are strong enough not to surrender, you will find that by bus it costs just 50 cents to go to town. As you hide yourself safely among other passengers, you might be surprised by the paternalistic tone of the bus driver who welcomes you on entry. He will explain that there is no need to get a ticket as proof that you have paid, because he will take care of it when the controller comes. You see most people holding a ticket in their hand, but cannot raise your voice; your luggage is heavy. And do not expect to be offered a seat.

You thus get to Bucharest, where hopefully some sort of accommodation is waiting for you, so that you are not confronted with the outrageously high prices of hotel accommodation. But not before taking a short walk from the bus station to your flat, which would allow you to meet at least ten of Bucharest's 300,000 vagrant dogs. With luck, you might not know that some of them have rabies and some

> just bite. As they bark at your heavy luggage, you might start to feel slightly out of place.
> And here you are, looking down from the height of your flat, in one of Bucharest's socialist blocks of flats, which are so repetitive that at first you won't be able to distinguish between quarters. You might even think that you are strolling in the same familiar quarter, when really you have walked across Bucharest up and down. But I suppose by then you will already be accustomed to these things and will have stopped filling your diary with details about blocks of flats, pollution and dogs…
>
> (Author's diary, March 1999)

3.1 Romania – a brief overview

Before looking more closely at Bucharest, the site of my research, I will give a very brief overview of Romania, the country of which Bucharest is the capital. This attempt would be overly ambitious if the existing literature and significant number of similarities with western European countries did not justify my restriction to only general, simple remarks, necessary for the understanding of the next chapters. This presupposes however that the reader has a certain familiarity with European social, economic and political structures, forms of family life, religion and science.

Romania is situated in south-eastern Europe, at the crossroads between Europe and Asia. It is the second largest country in Eastern Europe[15] (after Poland) in surface and population, with 237,000 sq km and 21.7 million inhabitants, and a low population density (91 inhabitants per sq km) by European standards. The population is divided between 52.7% in urban areas and 47.3% in rural areas, a ratio that makes Romania a rural country compared to its European neighbours (from the 2002 census). The landscape is diverse, ranging from mountains and hills to plains, to the Danube Delta and the seaside (the Black Sea). Situated on the 45th parallel, Romania enjoys a continental climate, with a marked difference between summer and winter, and even between day and night.

The official language is Romanian, which is the language of 91% of the population. According to the 2002 census, Romanians represent 89.5% of the population, the other main ethnic groups being Hungarian (6.6%) and Roma (2.5%).

After 42 years under a socialist regime (1947-1989), Romania became a democratic republic in December 1989. Since then, it has embraced the

[15] Eastern Europe is here a political term covering the countries belonging to the former socialist bloc outside the USSR.

ideas of a free market economy and political democracy in line with western European countries. The democratic regime emphasises the strength of the president elected by universal vote. A bi-cameral system is in place.[16] The most important political parties today are the Social Democratic Party, the so-called 'ex-communists', in power from 1990 to 1996 and from 2000 to 2004; the 'historical' parties (resuscitated centre-right parties from before the installation of the communist regime); and a nationalist party, labelled as the 'extreme-right', the PRM (The 'Great Romania' Party). Other important parties are the ethnic Hungarians' party and the Democratic Party, which were in power as part of the Democratic Convention during my fieldwork in 1999-2000, and the latter also from December 2004 onwards. The post-socialist Constitution appeared in 1991, but the whole legislative apparatus was still under construction at the time of my fieldwork, which meant that Romania functioned in many domains with a mix of old (socialist) and new laws. A new constitution was adopted in November 2003, following a referendum in which Romanians were invited to vote on a constitution 'by European standards', the constitution that Romanians needed for joining the European Union.

The economy is in 'transition' from a state socialist economy to a market economy. The privatisation of state assets, the liberalisation of prices, decollectivisation and the introduction of a valid system of investments are the main economic objectives. The 'Reform' – as officials call it – has caused inflation, unemployment, negative economic growth and social troubles. I will analyse some of these aspects in Chapter four.

Theoretically, there were no social classes under the socialist regime, though it is popularly said that party officials constituted a separate, privileged class. After 1989, the restitution of property to former owners (from before the 1947 nationalisation) should have brought back the old class system. This was prevented by the limits fixed on the restitution of land and buildings and by changes that had occurred in economic structures since 1947, which lowered the value of the assets returned. A class of *nouveaux riches* appeared after 1989 (Sampson 1994), many of them former party officials who had recovered assets from the crumbling socialist economy and built from there. A small underclass is surfacing. Apart from these, the economic situation leads only to differences in degree in the population. It is hoped that these 'many' will become the middle class (according to the French meaning of *classes moyennes*) of tomorrow.

The family unit is the nuclear family, but great emphasis is placed on the extended family in the countryside. In urban areas, financial restrictions

[16] This system is heavily criticised as delaying legislative decisions.

dictate whether more than two generations will live together. Consequently, extended families (three generations) often share the same household, allowing for children to take care of their elderly parents and parents to take care of their grandchildren. Space restrictions and the financial situation also dictate the number of children in a family. As a result, the birth rate has dropped radically since 1989 (zero natural growth between 1995 and 2000), a common pattern throughout the postsocialist states, facilitated also by the legalisation of abortion in 1990.

Education is compulsory and free for children from seven to fourteen years old. It is organised on the French model, with emphasis on general rather than practical education; there are also professional schools, but they are not very highly regarded. There are no fees for state schools and a limited number of places at public universities. It is thus possible for everybody to attend school up to the higher level, notwithstanding her/his financial means, provided one succeeds in the selection process that intervenes at several levels. There are a few private institutions of education (mainly universities), for which there is strong demand. Arts and sciences are considered among the few things that insure Romania's pride among other European nations. There is intense cultural activity, particularly in urban areas and in the performing arts.

The religion of 86.7% of the population is Orthodox Christianity, according to the 2002 census. The other numerically important denominations are Roman Catholic (4.7%) and Lutheran (3.2%). Despite the interdictions during the socialist period, Christians continued being baptised, married and buried in their faith, even if not educated in faith.

This brief narrative should provide a frame in which to draw a portrait of Bucharest, the capital.

3.2 Bucharest, the capital

Bucharest is the main city and the capital of Romania. Its population (without the suburbs) was approaching 2 million inhabitants in 2002, thus concentrating 10% of the Romanian population and almost 20% of its urban population. Indeed there are few large cities in Romania, and the largest of these has no more than 350,000 inhabitants, perhaps as a consequence of the hypertrophy of Bucharest (CNS 1998). Therefore Bucharest stands alone in the Romanian landscape by its size and importance. In the following paragraphs, I will focus on Bucharest and on the features that distinguish it from other urban and rural areas.

3.2.1 Description of the city

The city is situated in the south of the country and is accessible by plane, train and car.[17] Bucharest was first mentioned in documents in the fifteenth century and became the capital of Wallachia (one of the three provinces that form Romania) in 1698. It has been a capital ever since, first of Wallachia, then (from 1859) of Romania. It had a period of glory between the two world wars when it was known as 'little Paris'.[18] The bombing during the Second World War and the 1977 earthquake had devastating effects, but they were minor compared to the effects of Ceauşescu's building programme, started in the aftermath of the 1977 earthquake. Two thirds of Bucharest's city centre were destroyed between 1977 and 1989 and replaced by buildings inspired by the socialist-realist architecture of the People's Republic of China and North Korea. This added to the already existing quarters – dormitories at the periphery. Apart from a few exceptions in the city centre, in 1989 Bucharest was a city boasting a homogeneous architecture: large buildings of ten or eleven floors bordering large, straight avenues.[19] This should have accustomed the viewer to a certain order and monotony. However behind the blocks there were twisting streets, houses and slums waiting to be demolished, and building sites scattered everywhere, with diversions through streets that led to diverted public transport, which generated a feeling of disorder (estimated as temporary).[20] Many large buildings in the city centre were unfinished in 1989 and remained so for many years. After 1989, Bu-

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[17] One of Ceauşescu's great ambitions was to make it also accessible by ship, by bringing the Danube, from 64 km south of Bucharest, to the city. Thus Bucharest would have been added to the glorious list of Danubian capitals: Vienna, Budapest and Belgrade, to which it aimed to compare. (The Danube/ Bucharest/ Black Sea Channel remained only a project.)

[18] For a detailed history of Bucharest, see the impressive monograph by Giurăscu 1964; Potra 1981 provides a somewhat nostalgic account.

[19] Inside the flats, the same order, or monotony reigned. Flying at the height of these buildings as in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* (1997), sometime at the beginning of the socialist era, one would have noticed in the evening the same mothers, dressed similarly, preparing food from the same uncoloured tins in front of the same type of cooker. The way individuals have appropriated their space in order to cope with the conditions of daily life has changed (and was much diversified) during the socialist period (Buchli 1999).

[20] Reviewing the accounts of foreign travellers to Bucharest from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, Potra notices three frequent remarks: astonishment at the contrasts between edifices and quarters, ranging from very rich to very poor; the co-existing contrasts between the Occident and the Orient; and the hospitality of the people (1992: 268).

charest's landscape became more complex. New glass buildings housing banks or foreign companies were built in the empty fields between old houses and grey blocks. Thus, facing the Victoria Palace, from which the Romanian government directs the country, there were new and old large buildings, some crumbling houses, a number of glass-walled banks and a still unoccupied field, full of garbage, where occasionally you could see children playing with canine corpses. All the quarters are similarly endowed, except for separate quarters of villas at the periphery, restricted to the wealthy or to foreigners. Humphrey (1998) has observed a similar phenomenon in Russia.

This picture would not be complete were we not to mention the service enterprises, located on the ground floor of the blocks, in new purpose-built buildings (in the case of banks and multinational companies), in open markets, in small kiosks on the sidewalk (most of them illegally built immediately after 1989) or simply on the sidewalk itself. The contrast between the layouts of these enterprises matches the contrast between buildings. Crowded kiosks, in which food, sanitary and miscellaneous objects are sold together, run alongside spacious, well furbished, clean supermarkets; further, spacious yet empty and dull former state shops display mainly their restricted hours of opening. The pavement is washed every hour in front of a fast food outlet, while the wind regularly brings back the garbage from a neighbouring empty field. Horse-drawn carts or convertible Mercedes can emerge among the Dacias (the most popular Romanian car).

The last interesting element here regards human appearance: people's clothes. Though they are also very diverse, clothes tend to be new and fashionable, in any case well tended. Romanians consider clothes to be a good indicator of financial means, though perhaps they are not anymore, as everybody displays her/his best in public (and hides at home under torn, old clothes). Clothes are indeed very much for display, as is shown by the frequent discrepancy between them and their suitability to certain circumstances.[21] This display carries meanings that I will discuss later.

Bucharest's architecture is a good illustration of the changes that have occurred since 1989 in the country. The homogeneous, grey, undifferentiated Stalinist town – hiding its old, not yet 'accomplished' face – became punctuated by 'modern' capitalist buildings, which contrast strongly with the old, pitiful remains of residential houses. Bucharest's inhabitants started losing their familiar landmarks at the end of the seventies; the change of street names at the beginning of the nineties accentuated the feeling of disorientation. They perceive today the spatial density of differences, and the speed

[21] On the flight between London and Bucharest, Romanian women stand out from the crowd with their high heels and fur coats.

with which they develop, as chaotic. This is similar to the images of other 'post-modern' cities, theorised pessimistically as chaotic and unintelligible (Westwood and Williams 1997: 4). However, the transformation of the landscape in Bucharest is incomprehensible in other ways. The unintelligibility comes from the financial hierarchies now displayed through the architecture of buildings, the layout of shops or the brands of cars, hierarchies for which socialist education has not prepared Romanians.[22] Thus the Bucharest landscape is a metaphor for the contrasts and chaos of everyday life and is a constant reminder of these for its inhabitants.

3.2.2 The advantages, responsibilities and failures of a capital city

By virtue of its position in the economy (Romania's primary industrial and commercial centre) and by its monopoly of political institutions, Bucharest enjoys many advantages and takes the lead in many domains: political, economic and cultural.

Bucharest is the site of Romania's political, governmental and legal institutions. Though each county (*județ*) has its own local administration, they are all subordinated to the capital, which decides on internal legislation and policies and co-ordinates their implementation. Attempts were made recently to decentralise these institutions, but these efforts were not accompanied by sufficient information, funds or training to render local representations autonomous and efficient. The less favoured areas also prefer a central administration and redistribution of funds at the national level rather than having to rely on their own resources.[23]

The presence of important state institutions, together with Bucharest's geographical accessibility, attracted investors and multinational companies early in 1990, thus boosting its economic power. This also brought more job opportunities and more qualified people from smaller cities. Less qualified or older people, and former industrial workers, moved back to the countryside to which they used to belong. This virtuous circle (more qualified people–> more foreign investors–> more opportunities) continues, and as a

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[22] Wealth itself remains rather abstract, as all the rich buildings or shops are workplaces, not residences; therefore wealth cannot be attributed to any concrete individual.

[23] Both issues came up repeatedly in contacts between the NGO that I observed and its state partners. The provincial local administrations were asking the NGO to establish a link between them and the governmental administration since NGO employees were in Bucharest anyway, and knew how to speak the 'Bucharest way'. The central administration was asking the NGO employees, who were travelling around the country, to communicate with the local administrations, as they would see them face-to-face.

result, Bucharest has more to offer in terms of employment than any other Romanian city. In February 2000, while the national rate of unemployment was 12.2%, Bucharest had only 5.3% unemployed, the lowest rate in the country (CNS 2000).[24] New enterprises also brought changes in the urban landscape, changes in the offer/ demand balance of goods and services, and deepened differences between segments of the labour market. Bucharest is today the most 'capitalist' site in the country and the leader in changes toward capitalist structures.

The above economic and political functions and their relation with the larger context give specific cultural functions to a city. Eames and Goode, in their attempt to characterise the city as a whole and its link to the larger area, distinguish three functions: maintenance of cultural continuity; the generation of ideological/ cultural change; and the integration of the larger area (1977). By being host to institutions of cultural transmission (universities, theatres), to new organisations stimulating change (new enterprises, non-governmental organisations), and to mass media that help integrate the nation, Bucharest fulfils these three functions.

These differences between Bucharest and the other Romanian localities hinder Bucharest's integration into the larger area. This is because Bucharest enjoys the economic and political power to impose its model, but this model is contested. The criticism and scepticism with which political decisions are met also reflect on the site where they originate, on Bucharest. Public surveys conducted in the capital inspire decisions for the whole country, despite the fact that Bucharest is not representative of Romania, but very much an exception. Bucharest is also an anti-myth: it is dirtier, uglier and more aggressive than the other cities; its architecture epitomises chaos and instability. No song praises it; no movie idealises it.

3.2.3 Bucharest's quarters: Local communities?

As a town with more than 2 million inhabitants, Bucharest has its own subdivisions. Administratively, it is divided in six sectors, displayed like radials. Each sector contains several quarters and a part of the city centre, whose boundaries have slightly changed in the last fifteen years, determined by the new location of important enterprises or institutions. Quarters are similar architecturally and commercially; those at the periphery remind one of a provincial setting. The city centre draws the most attention: TV interviews are conducted in the city centre; public institutions (including all local, sector institutions) are based there, important enterprises (banks, etc.) have

[24] In April 2005, the unemployment rate was as low as 3%, while the median age for one's first job was sixteen.

their headquarters there; housing prices can double or triple, depending on whether they are located in the 'civilised' areas of the city centre or elsewhere. Quarters do not correspond to particular ethnic or socio-professional divisions. They are not the small villages inside American towns studied by social scientists in the tradition of the Chicago school (Hannerz 1969; MacLeod 1987; Bourgois 1989). The inhabitants of the same quarter do not share anything but a space similar to all the others around it, a space into which strangers also intrude by establishing enterprises. This space may have its own symbols, indeed, but they are those with which only youngsters identify (the imitation of American street boys, *'băieți de cartier'*, in rap music, is very fashionable). This could be explained by the huge population of the quarters (a block of flats can house 150 families, i.e. 500 people), but also by the lack of neighbourhood policies. The community was based on the workplace under socialism, and consequently a community based on residence was not particularly encouraged by socialist policies (Andrusz 1996: 64).

The idea of a community was discarded after 1989, as was the notion of voluntary work for the benefit of the neighbourhood. Even members of the same association of owners, who shared the same heating expenses, janitor, etc., in a residence, could not agree on a common policy for preserving their common property. In fact, they were dubious even about the usefulness of any common decision. At one such meeting held on a Sunday morning in front of my residence, only 30% of the members attended, while the others passed by and refused to stop despite their neighbours' calls, because anyway the meeting would not change a thing. No common neighbourhood policy meant that while some neighbours were leaving the front door open so that vagrant dogs could get inside the block and they were feeding them, others would take the opportunity to put poison in the dog food. Truly, few neighbours know each other and most would share the narrow lift space without saying 'hello'.

The city councils of administrative sub-units (*sectors*) are all situated in the city centre, far from the problems specific to the quarters. They administrate social assistance, unemployment, and other benefits, mostly financial. There has been no coherent attempt so far to implement a neighbourhood policy to encourage the spirit of neighbourhoods. Schools, under socialism, used to educate children in 'community' spirit through practical activities like sowing flowers along the streets. Neighbourhood schools (and nurseries) still tend to bring the community together, because parents are concerned about the well being of their children and this leads them to adopt common policies regarding financial help or investment in school material.

Bucharest's massive layout cannot be broken successfully into more manageable pieces of 'communities' – neither the anthropologist nor the local people could do it. In this respect, the capital differs radically from villages or smaller towns, where communities can be formed on the basis of kin who are close by. It is as difficult to identify with a neighbourhood as it is to identify with Bucharest as a whole.

Notwithstanding the length of time spent in the city, everybody remains a stranger – Simmel's typical urban dweller a century ago (1980 [1950]).

3.3 Being in the street

Describing the city as a whole allows us only to guess the place individuals hold in the landscape. As Bucharest is the locus, and not the focus, of my research, I will now turn to the consequences of this chaos and strangeness for its inhabitants and for my investigation of workplaces. The term 'street' refers more generally to public places and includes streets, means of transport, shops, etc. At the beginning of the century, the Chicago School promoted a method of research inspired by journalism and an explanatory model inspired by the natural sciences – human ecology, the analysis of the adaptation of inhabitants to the urban environment (Rémy and Voyé 1993). Park's method of 'deep' journalism helps to build an impressionistic picture of the consequences of city life (a default option in cases where total comprehensiveness is humanly impossible) and emphasises communication as a unique way of cementing relations in the urban anonymity (Park and Burgess 1967 [1925]). As a result of urbanisation (of the adaptation to the spirit of competition and freedom of cities), urban social relations become impersonal, superficial, transitory, and segmentary – reliance on family and neighbours is replaced by a reliance on impersonal, professional groups (Wirth 1980). Though the ecological model could be easily criticised of naturalism, this early approach to describing urban life appears still valid for exposing the physical implications of living in Bucharest.

3.3.1 City aggressiveness

Bucharest is seen as an aggressive city, both by its inhabitants and by tourists. This aggressiveness triggers a survival type of reaction, which is not always justified by actual danger, but rather by an exaggerated fear of danger. It should be remembered that before 1989, the media never disclosed any of the deviances taking place in Romania: robberies, rapes, gang fights, and accidents. Now it has turned toward the 'sensational' and spotlights every single astonishing act of aggressiveness. A comparison with reports of

deviance by the media in France or the United Kingdom would show that the nature of criminality in Romania is significantly different. The Russian mafia has no equivalent in Romania (if we define the Russian mafia more restrictively as organised crime and a system of protection of property, as in Varese (1994), not in the wider sense, including also bureaucratic networks), though the number of bodyguards hired in Bucharest would suggest the contrary. Sensational events showed and commented upon on the TV or on the front page of newspapers are fatal road accidents, thieves caught after having performed serial robberies, and prostitutes recounting their stories. My informants however seemed to conclude that the country as a whole, and especially Bucharest (from where the national media draw most of their news), has become dangerous and aggressive. Thus, when on the street, one needs to be on the defensive.

This could explain why a passer-by approached to ask the time or for street directions would avoid you or would not stop to answer, if s/he is alone. If the same question were asked when more people are around, everybody would volunteer to add her/his own opinion. The perceived need to be on the defence could explain why most women carry their handbags across their stomach, looking suspiciously around, and why they check their bags automatically after passing close to you. The same people will voluntarily engage in conversations when children and pets are around, because of the confidence their presence inspires.

There are, however, forms of aggressiveness in Bucharest that are constantly present. The presence of 300,000 vagrant dogs used to be one of them. In 2000, 25,000 cases of dog bites were reported to Bucharest hospitals (reported by Bucharest mayor Traian Băsescu, as part of his campaign for evacuating the dogs from Bucharest). Another undeniable inconvenience is the climate, which is extremely harsh in Bucharest, with very hot summers (in July of 2000 temperatures reached 46 degrees Celsius) and cold and snowy winters. As the snow is not cleared, streets remain frozen for weeks. There are no structures in place designed to cope with these surprising variations of temperature. In July of 2000, after several hot summers and under the pressure of circumstances, the government issued a decree stipulating workers' protection in difficult climate conditions (at the same time in Greece, when temperatures reached 43 degrees Celsius, the government declared a state of emergency).

Driving in Bucharest is also an adventure, as road signs can be old, hidden behind trees, or simply not respected. There are a huge number of holes in the road, often 15-20 cm deep and covering large surfaces – car drivers have to slalom between them, endangering other cars. Pedestrians cross the street anywhere and walk in the middle of the street because cars

are parked on the sidewalk. Most cars are old and in poor condition, which delays their responses and makes them unreliable. Young drivers, especially if boasting new cars, will drive 100 km/hour in the city and play on their brakes in order to frighten non-experienced drivers or female pedestrians. Several experienced drivers from provincial towns told me that driving in Bucharest is madness and they would not risk doing it.

Walking in the street, one would be taken aback by the smell of the refuse remaining after the garbage collectors' (REBU) trucks pass and which is not cleaned up by anybody. Here and there in the city centre, as in all quarters, there are fields of garbage. For street garbage, there are bins everywhere in town and pedestrians use them. But most bins afterwards are just emptied straight onto the grass nearby. In 1999-2000, there were many attempts to force REBU (the inheritor of the state enterprise) to surrender its monopoly on Bucharest. It was argued that its monopoly was responsible for the dirtiness of the capital compared to other Romanian cities. Once, in the building in which I lived, the phone line did not work for two weeks while Romtelecom could not manage to repair it. It was said that the line was cut somewhere by rats.

Street aggressiveness is thus present at every step: the smell, dogs, beggars, pollution, dirt, together with what a metropolis always has to offer: congestion, noise, the aggressiveness of the unknown. This is the medium or the 'atmosphere' Bucharesteans complain about; this is how they justify their 'defences', which they keep up after leaving the street. Approaching social interactions on the defensive, with the expectation that others will be aggressive, undermines their encounters with shopkeepers or with neighbours and destroys the bases of social relations.

3.3.2 Anonymous in town, but surviving through networks

The size of the city and the fact that it draws its population from everywhere bring impersonality in daily relations. An urbanite encounters many strangers in her/his activities, whose social status, education and backgrounds s/he might not be familiar with. Thus contact is rather difficult and presupposes openness, a condition that runs counter to the 'safe' distrust towards people met in the street. Children are taught from an early age not to speak to strangers, and adults share among themselves strategies on how to avoid being tricked. All in all, there is a distinct lack of trust between people in the city, a point I will develop in Chapter six. Diverse social contacts also necessitate the ability to embrace different roles.

In a large city, everybody is anonymous and this can be played to one's advantage. If one is anonymous, s/he bears no long-lasting responsibility for her/his behaviour in a certain interaction. Impoliteness towards some-

body likely not to be met again is easily forgotten, thus easily performed. Each interaction can be thought of as a unique relationship established between two persons. Managing in this particular interaction is the ultimate goal, and all means are allowed. This would explain why street peddlers sell counterfeit products to passers-by: they are interested only in the immediate outcome, not in building a long-lasting relationship, and their anonymity saves them from pursuit. This is also a way of thinking and doing for many shopkeepers, who feel their business/ job is only temporary.

One cannot be self-sufficient in the urban area, but must depend on the division of work among all the strangers whom s/he might never meet. This interdependency forces each individual to have minimal trust in others. State institutions should guarantee the probity of some relations, but though there are protective laws and institutions in Bucharest (e.g. the Office of Consumers), they are not well enforced by controllers or the police. There is then another way people can get around this uncertainty, which was described in the 1960s in urban anthropology: social networks (Cohen 1969). Relying on networks allows one to find a path through the strangeness or aggressiveness of urban life by breaking the anonymity of a selected number of people, towards whom one bears responsibilities and who pay her/him back. Efficient networks are easier to establish in an urban area, where one belongs to several milieus: work, neighbourhood, associations, and kin. (Mayer [1966] developed an interesting account of how urban diversity enlarges one's network for electoral purposes). Most problems are solved through networks: finding a good job, solving an administrative problem, buying meat that is surely fresh.[25] For those who are left out from these effective networks, the uncertainty only increases.

3.3.3 Fragmented perceptions of reality

Another characteristic of urban life that has consequences for work practices is the fact that the individual has only partial perceptions of city life.

The difficulty in embracing the totality of activities developed in a large urban setting prevents its inhabitants from seeing the other face of the coin and locks them in their own world of complaints and misery. Even if the media provides information on city life, the area covered is never sufficient for making apparent to the individual the mechanisms that make the city work. The interdependency of people and activities in the city however makes this knowledge essential for positioning oneself. A banal example would be that of an interrupted phone line, imputed to the neglect of the co-

[25] A more detailed account of the role of networks will be given in Chapters five and six.

owner of the line (also a neighbour), while in fact the phone lines were cut in the whole building and the problem originated with RomTelecom. Lack of information and lack of understanding often generate frustration or envy and are at the root of many conflicts.

Partial views also generate fear – the city has always had hidden spaces, contexts, and relations in which an individual thinks s/he could not perform. This explains why many people with whom I spoke were reluctant to change a job they did not like – some women confessed they were frightened to go to an interview at the other end of the city, frightened to engage with a different milieu.

The unknown and the impossibility of gathering valid information about it are circumvented by rumours. Rumours *(zvonuri*) are a solid inheritance from the socialist period, when they were the only way of spreading information that was not linked to the fulfilment of the quinquennial plan and were often more reliable than official information. Rumours filled in the space left by the individual's insufficient information on a matter – today they also compensate for her/his insufficient research on a matter. They are easy to generate, as everybody has their own opinion on everything and shares it generously, as if it were 'real'. Scepticism – the most common way to refer to anything linked to the state of the economy, people's life projects or the political sphere, propagates itself through a certain type of rumour. As the receptor of the opinion/ rumour is sceptical her/himself, s/he is more likely to be sympathetic, believe it and share it. For instance, rumours lead people to exaggerate the rate of criminality in Bucharest. Rumours are introduced with 'it is said' (*se zice că* or *cică*), the impersonal form. Rumours are like a feature of the city, floating around, for which people are simply channels of communication, with no agency of their own. Therefore spreading a rumour does not entail any responsibility. The content of rumours is often questioned, but it is also added 'that there must be something true to it'. The implication of relying on rumours and not on information for daily life is not easily calculable, but it certainly adds to the approximate, fuzzy view that one has of city activities. Spreading rumours also has a positive consequence – that of temporarily establishing a feeling of community, because rumours function in a way resembling that of networks.

Urban space, by its aggressiveness, engenders fear, and thus also distrust. This leads to a lack of social cohesion, supported by the anonymity of inhabitants and their lack of personalised engagement with others. The existence of networks creates inclusive and exclusive boundaries in the apparently homogeneous disorganisation. All these concepts that I have merely touched upon as ecological factors will be analysed in Chapter six as consequences of the disorder created by change.

3.4 Conclusion

The flavour left by street interactions is present in the way people engage in other relations; it constitutes their experience or background on which these relations (e.g. work relations) are based. Thus, ecological factors influence work relations and work practices and need to be taken into account. The approach inspired by early urban sociology remains restrictive, because its ready use of the concept of 'natural' as the ultimate explanation does not lead to further inquiries into the use of space (city as focus) or human behaviour (city as locus). This is why my ethnography of Bucharest has moved towards a situational approach, as proposed by Hannerz (1980), with its emphasis on relations/ interactions for arriving at the global picture, in order to allow for the understanding of daily problems experienced by any urbanite. I have dealt here only with the effect of urban features on interactions, but I will analyse in Chapter eight the power of the language used in interactions. There is one major conclusion that I draw from the ecological approach. As ecological factors are significantly different from urban to rural areas, I delimit clearly here the extent to which I can generalise the conclusions of my research. These conclusions come from fieldwork in an urban area and do not apply to rural areas.[26]

Perhaps the main delimitation of the conclusions that I can draw from my research comes from the type of work in which my informants were engaged, their work in service enterprises, and this is the factor towards which I will turn in the next chapter.

[26] It could be argued equally that my conclusions may be restricted to the capital. Unfortunately, there was no opportunity to compare my findings with similar works on other Romanian cities. Cities from other historical regions of Romania could present significantly distinct features, as their pre-socialist history was also very different.

Chapter 4
Work in Service Enterprises

The definition of the service sector is problematic, because of the variety of industries to which the term 'service' could be applied. Gershuny and Miles (1983) state that definitions are useless, because 'service' refers to at least four categories: 1) service industries (which include tertiary industries, goods services, personal and public services, cultural industries); 2) service products; 3) service workers; and 4) service functions. In Romania, the tertiary sector is assimilated to the service sector, and is defined as incorporating all activities that do not produce anything tangible, i.e. not agriculture or industry – a definition in place from the socialist period. This definition is more restrictive than that used in developed economies and is one of the reasons why the service sector appears to be so small by comparison: only 30.5% of the active population works in this sector (CNS 1998) and contributes only 30.3% of the GDP (CNS 1999). The main reason for this underdevelopment remains the difficult position services used to hold in the socialist economic organisation.

There are however common features that unite different service enterprises in Romania and they refer to the conditions in which work is assessed. First, the absence of concrete, measurable output (products) makes the evaluation of labour input problematic (Gershuny and Miles 1983: 35). This is a problem also faced by managers in industrialised countries. Second, quality standards are still lacking that would insure the output (the service provided) is good. International quality standards were established only recently (ISO 9000). Third, socialist ideology devalued services, and this is still reflected in the chronic distrust of clients towards service providers, which biases their evaluation of the product (Verdery 1996; Humphrey 1999).

As evaluating the quality of work and services is problematic, service enterprises and their employees are left on their own to define the work and business practice that would appear most beneficial to them. This makes service enterprises the ideal place for studying work ethics as a product of

organisational/ individual elaboration. I will begin in this chapter with a materialistic, restricted definition of a 'work ethic' as 'rules of conduct' (Oxford Extended Dictionary) in work, as opposed to a set of values linked to work. Thus I will analyse the rules of conduct of work in each organisation and I will compare them to the practices of managers and employees. I will focus on three organisations that provide public and personal services in the fields of education and health.

4.1 Methods – the three organisations chosen: Each representative of a part of the labour market

One of the most delicate questions in anthropology is how representative is the object of study. While it is obvious that it is not possible to conduct fieldwork in more than a handful of organisations (rapid social changes necessitate the almost simultaneous observation of sites, if any comparison is to be meaningful), the question regarding what three organisations can tell us about the Romanian service sector remains open. I have tried to choose organisations representative of the range of choices offered to employees in the labour market: to represent the most common ownership and management structures, to have a range of different positions in the labour market and local histories 'representative' of changes in the economic structure. I initially thought that the study of one private and one state enterprise would be sufficient to 'represent' different organisational models and would allow for a comparison of practices and values linked to work. As the study progressed, and following the interviews conducted with Bucharestean employees, I noted that there was an essential distinction that created notable differences in the work ethic of private sector employees: the type of contract and the pay. Social psychology studies conducted in the West in the 1960s also found that money was the main incentive for work (Argyle 1990 [1972]). In the absence of (and probably the impossibility of compiling) statistics, we can roughly estimate that in Bucharest about 40% people are employed in state enterprises, with low but secure pay and employment stability, 50% are employed in private enterprises with low and often uncertain pay (where payment is based on commission) and variable stability; and 10% are employed in the emerging top end of the labour market, with high salaries and secure employment.[27] Private enterprises are hiring people under 35 years

[27] There are also cases of enterprises that have two different faces for two categories of employees. For instance, in a successful software company, there was a department of well-paid computer scientists with long term contracts, and a more 'worker-type' department, in which employees received the going minimum wage and had no work contracts, but only 'civil conventions'. It is interesting to note that the

old (in 2000, job notices in newspapers always gave a strict age limit), while state enterprises give no restrictions. However, state enterprises do not hire a lot, having already undergone massive restructuring and having employees unwilling to leave because of the difficulty of finding another job after age 35. Additionally, the low pay they offer does not tempt young people. Service enterprises traditionally employ mostly women, and 75% of the employees with whom I worked were women.

Following the classification of enterprises according to the type of contract and pay proposed to their employees, I undertook intensive fieldwork in three organisations: a state institution, Gamma, a private firm, Beta, and a non-governmental organisation, Alpha.[28] All of these organisations deal directly with clients, thus allowing the observation of relations between manager/ employees, employees/ clients, employees/ other employees and manager/ clients. I worked as a regular employee in the two private organisations (Beta, the firm, and Alpha, the NGO), passing through all the work positions in each of them, with the notable exception of the position of manager, a shortcoming which I addressed through frequent interviews with managers during the whole period of the study. Besides daily observation of work performance and work-related problems (including the use of my own person as an experiential subject), I also engaged in many informal discussions about employees' hopes, expectations, and dissatisfactions about their jobs and about their personal lives. These led me to grasp the way employees experienced their daily work and the place work had in their lives.[29] We discussed together most internal and social events, which proved to be the best and the most ethical way to understand their personal judgements and values. I inquired into the history of each institution/ organisation and into how, by whom and in what form the service was provided before the establishment of the enterprise; I also tried to obtain data on the financial and legal side of their functioning. I will present below a profile of each of these organisations.[30]

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organisation of work, as well as employees' attitudes towards the two categories, were substantially different.

[28] The names of these organisations are fictive in order to prevent awkward identifications.

[29] The narratives collected in the volume edited by Littler (1985) provided a good source of methodological inspiration for this research.

[30] The state institution, Gamma, the firm, Beta, and the NGO, Alpha, present common characteristics from the perspective of my study, all being 'workplaces' from the point of view of the employees and 'organisations' from the point of view of the social anthropologist. From now on, I will use the term 'organisations' to refer to these three entities.

4.1.1 The Gamma Music School

The Gamma Music School is a state school created in the 1960s to provide free complementary music education to children in elementary school (ages 7 to 14). Before, music education was provided through private tuition (a practice that continues today). Its relevance was questioned during the socialist period, as it is rather a luxury education, and this questions continues to arise now and then after the fall of the regime, as funds allocated to education have diminished drastically (legislation allocates 4% of the GDP to education, but economic constraints reduced this to only 2.8% in 1999). Besides individual instrument instruction, the school also offers classes on music theory, the history of music and of painting/ sculpture. Teachers are on state pay rolls (which means a salary of 100 to 150 €/month, according to their seniority and their results) and enjoy the status of *cadru didactic* ('pedagogue'), which allows them to have extended paid holidays, an annual bonus of an additional month's pay, and some other educational benefits for their own children.

There are two such music schools in Bucharest and they justify their existence through the good performances of their pupils in national and international competitions. The mere existence of the school depends on these performances. The school I observed has forty teachers, the director being a teacher who is democratically chosen by her colleagues and validated by the Ministry of Education for a four-year term. All teachers are graduates of the National Music Conservatory. Additional staff include one administrator, one secretary, two janitors and two technicians, all employees with a high school education. The shortage of staff at the administrative level could not be remedied because of the Ministry's limited funds. The director has then to undertake administrative duties (calculating wages, scheduling expenses), not only to manage them. As a director, she receives a monthly allowance of $15 in addition to her salary and has reduced teaching hours. There is also a shortage of staff at the level of teachers, who are hired as state employees. Young graduates prefer to reorient themselves professionally in order to get better-paying jobs than to accept the low salaries offered to young teachers.[31] Schoolteachers welcome the shortage of staff, as this gives them the opportunity to redistribute teaching loads among themselves. Thus, many teachers accumulate two teaching loads and even supplementary hours (paid by the hour) within the school. Those who do not have this opportunity (some instruments are more in demand then others) travel to other cities in order to supplement their salaries by teaching in music schools

[31] In 1999, when four places for piano teachers were advertised, only one candidate applied.

there or by giving private lessons. Teachers also took the initiative of leading advertising campaigns in neighbouring schools in order to stimulate demand for courses, and subsequently forced the state to grant more teaching hours (and the indispensable funds) that they could distribute among themselves. In general, music teachers live from one pay cheque to the next, as the demand for private tuition dropped after 1989, and only foreigners have the means to pay for it.[32] Work contracts are in general permanent contracts. Following the restructuring imposed by the Ministry of Education at the end of the 1990, those who left were young teachers on temporary contracts. As the school is a state institution, the state decides when to cancel a work contract and the director has only the task of recommending whom to hire or fire. The director would not usually make such recommendations, except in very grave cases (e.g. there was a case of repeated drunkenness during teaching hours in which she intervened and the teacher was fired).

At the time of my fieldwork, the director was an instrument teacher, a woman in her late 40s, who had worked in the school for more than fifteen years. She was respected by her colleagues and appreciated by parents for her kind attitude towards children. The director had administrative and management duties. Her main role as a manager of human resources appeared to be that of pacifying conflicts arising between teachers, as she refused to evaluate them and hired/ fired only at the demand of the Ministry of Education. In this position of peacemaker, she did not play on her status as director, but on her personal relations. Thus she would get upset, or threatened to get upset, with some teachers, but did not make any official threats. Statutory ways of making teachers obey the rules were either firing or deducting their pay. She applied the first sanction only in extreme cases, and would not fire her colleagues because they 'needed money so desperately' and because the school would not benefit directly from the money thus saved. The director had no other choice but to resort to her personal relations with the teachers in order to bring them back on track.

The Ministry allocates funds for staff salaries and primary maintenance work, but does not provide any other funds for furniture, consumables, or computers. Thus, while the education provided is free, parents are required to contribute annually to these expenses. Most of the parents are highly educated and consider it worth investing in their children's education, thus they contribute financially. Their contribution that helped the school acquire a second-hand computer and printer ('in only two years!', as it was pointed out to me) indicates a good level of co-operation between parents

[32] In 2000, foreigners generally paid $5/hour.

and teachers, parents' appreciation of the teachers, and the existence of a community around children's interests.

4.1.2 The marketing department of Beta

The marketing department is the core of a firm that I will call hereafter Beta, first registered in 1997, which provides foreign language courses to adults.[33] Despite the fact that this is an educational institution, like Gamma, the language used in order to define the organisation's relationship with its beneficiaries (in Beta they are 'clients', not 'pupils') is telling of Beta's real vocation, as is also the fact that at the heart of the organisation is the marketing department. The professorial body, less important numerically, plays only a secondary role. Language courses are a compulsory part of students' curricula in state schools. Adults can receive private tuition at home or in one of a dozen private specialised institutions with the same profile in Bucharest (according to Bucharest's Yellow Pages 2000), which are Beta's direct competitors. The firm is situated in the city centre, in a building with five rooms for individual tuition and one large classroom for English courses, with a capacity of ten to twenty pupils, which are available for teaching from nine o'clock am to nine o'clock pm every day. Clients are mostly adults; the flexible timetable allows employed adults to attend classes. Teachers are mostly students or recent graduates in foreign languages. The core of the firm is the marketing department, through which courses are sold and whose existence definitely places the organisation in the 'business' category (the word business is also present in its real name). The marketing department is very shrewd and uses Western marketing methods, surprising in the Romanian context. We should add to this the fact that course prices are quite high, a fact that creates difficulties in attracting clients.

The marketing department comprises three sub-departments and several categories of employees. Appendix 1 shows how the diagram of the enterprise was formally designed. The three departments, 'sampling', 'telemarketing' and 'sales',[34] are formally equal in importance, but work in sales in more prestigious than work in telesales, which in turn surpasses work in

[33] The firm had to change its name in 1999 because of some outrageous articles in the press that attacked its credibility.

[34] The function of each department is stated in English, which is part of a strategy to impress employees and clients, who need to be seduced by the modernity and Western character of the firm. English was also used as much as possible in discussions with clients, and as part of their marketing strategy, salespeople had to demonstrate that their English pronunciation was superior to that of clients.

the sampling department, thus introducing an unofficial hierarchy among employees. The mission of the sampling department (approx. fifteen employees) is to hand out leaflets about Beta in the street and to obtain the names and telephone numbers of potential clients. The leaflets advertise a special promotion on language courses and a gift (a mobile phone, a camera or a watch) for those starting a language course during the promotional week. This promotional week never ends, of course. Their work involves standing outside for several hours at temperatures below zero degrees Celsius during the winter and above 40 degrees during the summer, spotting well-dressed people aged 30 to 55 years, trying to engage them in conversation in order to gauge their interest in foreign languages, and ultimately to obtain their name and telephone number. The samplers hired are female students with a very good appearance.

The names and telephone numbers are then taken over by the telemarketing department and potential clients are contacted and persuaded to come to a presentation of language courses at Beta. Work in the telemarketing department (approx. twelve employees) is the most difficult, because the ability to persuade potential clients depends entirely on the voice of the female employees. Telesaleswomen train extensively in order to acquire the right pitch and voice inflexions that would make clients at least curious enough to visit Beta. The message they have to convey contains only 'good news': a free, one-week English course, which the client can obtain by coming within 24 hours to a presentation of language courses at Beta. The potential client is verbally assured that his decision whether or not to commit to a ten-month course will not impede him from receiving this 'gift'. The difficult message that also has to be conveyed is that the client should bring cash for an advance payment for a ten-month course, in case s/he freely decides to buy one. Few people had bank accounts or carried bankcards or cheques at the time. This requirement makes clients suspicious, and many refuse the offer. They fear it is a trap and they could get robbed, or they feel that the one-week free course is not free unless they buy a ten-month course as well. The fact that some clients anticipate making use only of the one-week course should not be overlooked. To relax the pressure, the client is given a few hours to think it over, and needs to phone back the same evening to make an appointment for the next day. The next day, the client meets the members of the sales department: five employees plus three managers, known as 'sales representatives' and 'take-overs' (price negotiators), respectively. The presentation generally lasts one hour, but can be up to two to three hours if it seems a contract is imminent. The client is welcomed by the sales representative, introduced to the school, to the structure of classes, given a short English test and engaged in a conversation in English, then s/he

is 'taken over' by the negotiator, who tries to convince her/him to buy, schedules the payment, negotiates the price and, if successful, concludes a contract. Thus before getting to know the language teacher the client has to deal with at least four employees – in reality the number is much higher, because most managers come to introduce themselves during the negotiations. This is meant to put some pressure on the client. The sales department is the most valued, because lower managers play a role here as negotiators (the job demanding the highest marketing abilities). Both women and men work within: men mostly as negotiators, because the role is said to require aggressiveness, and women mostly as sales representatives, because of their good appearance.

All employees in these two sub-departments are students or recent graduates, from 19 to 28 years old. In addition, there is a more permanent staff composed of four people in administration and accountancy. The management is a 'one-man show'. The owner – 'general manager'– decides every detail linked to the behaviour of his fifty to sixty employees (the number varies a lot over time). There is an intermediary level of management of three men, but though their prestige is rhetorically asserted, they correspond rather to a lower-management type if we consider their scope for decision-making and low pay. The standard of pay for the employees is average for the Romanian economy, but the conditions of work are claimed to be Western (air conditioning, etc.). There is no fixed compensation, with employees receiving a percentage depending on the type of contract concluded (in the sales department) or fixed amounts depending on the number of clients coming to the presentation (in the telesales and sampling departments). This makes departments dependent on each other, though their employees have sometimes opposing financial interests: for instance, a telesaleswoman might notice that a client is ready to come to a sales presentation, but not to buy a course and, still, it is in her financial interest to incite her/him to come, even if this makes a sales representative (and the firm) lose time and money. A sophisticated and quickly changing system of bonuses is in place, bonuses being paid on the spot, while wages are paid monthly.

The manager is a young man of 30, a graduate in economics from what he rates as a 'useless' school, who claims to be a millionaire and boasts a convertible Mercedes and a Rolex watch, as well as friends similarly endowed.[35] He is a very active, but also violent person, who often uses very colourful language, though perfectly mastering the literary forms ('he won very important literature prizes in high school', said his mother respectfully).

[35] A relatively classic scenario: the business is registered in the name of the manager's parents, modest retired people, in order to pay fewer taxes on profit, but the benefit and the administration belong entirely to their son.

He has a sense of business, recognised by businessmen who come in contact with him, and is a perfectionist in the art of sales, though definitely unconcerned about the product sold or the ethics of business. His declared aim is to have lots of money and to be a real businessman, and in the training provided daily to his employees he refers frequently to how he 'made it' through hard work and how his business friends envy him. He is a typical *nouveau riche,* with all the display, values, claims and lack of culture associated with this that Sampson describes (1996).

The success of his business could be placed somewhere on a scale between surviving and profitable. It is said to be a small, temporary business (that the patron himself talks scathingly about), filling a gap until he collects enough money and contacts for a different, larger project. The main handicap of this firm (besides the economic situation of Romanians who cannot afford to pay the price of English lessons even if they desperately wish to) is the turnover of employees.[36] This takes place on average every six weeks (not including the many who drop the job during the training period) and forces the general manager to hold collective interviews (ten to twenty potential employees attend them at each session) almost daily in order to maintain the required number. Training sessions are very time consuming, as all employees need to learn by heart and interpret a standard speech written by the manager, and their ability to recite it is checked regularly. In addition, the manager changes the speech every week or so, in order to make it more engaging and in response to current misinterpretations from clients. Given the rate of turnover, there is no firing; employees only quit their jobs (which involves renouncing the last two weeks' pay).

4.1.3 Work practices: Employees and managers

I will show how these ideologies translate in the practice of managers and analyse whether managerial discourses provide a useful and efficient framework for the activity of employees. The two private enterprises observed offer completely different models of management practice. The state and the private organisations are also different with respect to employees' work.

In Beta, management of human resources is realised chiefly through discourses. Beta is a 'one-man show': the 'boss' points out through daily behaviour that he has the power to decide the fate of his employees as they are part of his business, while employees do not protest when they are on duty and fulfil the requirements. The manager makes all the business deci-

[36] I have identified this handicap after consulting readings in management studies and receiving comments from specialists in this field, but the manager of the firm never acknowledged turnover as a handicap.

sions. This control is tight because he does not trust any employee or lower level manager. The only voice one hears in the public space of the firm is his, as he criticises his employees in very harsh terms or praises them in dithyrambic words. In turn, employees spend their time criticising the manager and planning when to leave the enterprise. It is interesting to note that all this whispered gossip is conducted while employees wait for their turn to work (i.e. wait for their clients), in the same room in which sales activities are going on and in which the manager is also present! As for the language teachers, the manager ignores them almost totally, because they do not bring him money in a visible way (payment for the entire course is obtained before the course starts). Thus for instance he loosely controls their punctuality and is concerned only with their appearance, as this could affect the decision of prospective clients who pass by. All his attention is directed to the marketing department, in which he is always present, again from fear of delegating control to employees. Through a window, the manager watches his employees at work with potential clients and he intervenes in their work when the required energy seems to desert them. The target being only to attract clients, and thus money, as quickly as possible, every potential client is of the utmost importance and every failure of the employees to transform her/him into a client is examined, judged and followed by a training session, which means showing over and over again how the work should be done. This is stimulating for the employees, as they have continuous feedback on their work and interest shown in it. Employees obey through fear, as the boss can turn quite violent. The only form of protest they use is to leave the enterprise or collective whispered gossiping. Their pay is decided entirely by the manager and there is no negotiation. It is low and completely uncertain – the employees being paid on commission – while daily they witness large amounts of money being handed to the owner/ manager when courses are purchased. To give an idea of the discrepancy, a course in an individual class costs $400 for ten months (two hours a week), i.e. $5/hour, while the teacher is paid $0.65/hour and the total that all the employees of the marketing department (i.e. sampler + telesaleswoman + sales representative + negotiator) get when selling the course is $10. By comparison, employer's profit seems huge.

In contrast, the management strategy of Alpha, the NGO, is to maintain an informal, friendly atmosphere in the workplace and to limit the need for control. The lack of formal assessment of employees' activities gives them freedom, but means also less interest from the managers and consequently less value for their work. If employees are sometimes praised for their efforts or criticised for their failures, observations remain abstract, undirected and uninformed, which deprives them from the capacity to motivate and support further activities or to propose a solution to the problems of

the organisation. It is impossible for the managers to be better informed, because they have their own tasks in which the evaluation of employees is scheduled only occasionally, referred to as 'learning what they do so that we can help them better' (see Appendix 2 for the model proposed by the temporary director for exposing the desired hierarchy in the NGO). Everybody has to report directly to the Romanian general manager and this makes information impossible to handle. We should remember here that this manager is not the ultimate decision maker, but has to report to the Western consultant in order to receive instructions. The Western 'consultant' is not based in Romania and does not speak Romanian, thus making communication more difficult and delaying decisions. The main problem identified by the employees themselves is a lack of communication and decision-making. These problems aside, the employees are relatively satisfied with their work in the organisation: their pay is two to three times higher than the average Romanian wage, and the activity of the organisation (which has a humanitarian character) generates satisfaction. Employees often work unpaid overtime at work or at home, as they understand that they have tasks to finish, not just hours of 'sitting with their buttocks on a chair', as the intermediary director puts it. Everybody is her/his own manager and picks up among the duties to be performed those that are the most urgent or most preferred. But nobody undertakes to co-ordinate these activities, which complicates things – since all projects are common, none is individual.

In the Gamma Music School, strategic management is provided by the state, and the director's task is only to solve problems raised by contradictions in state directives. Alternative jobs tire the employees, who are rushing between different commitments, among which their school job comes last, as it is stable and does not need to be fought for. The director of the school discreetly warns teachers about absences or late arrivals, which appears to be enough to bring them back on track for a while. Being herself a teacher, the director refuses to evaluate her colleagues, leaving this duty to the Ministry of Education, who conduct a bureaucratic assessment. All organisational problems (conflicts between teachers regarding the distribution of classrooms, timetables, etc.) are solved privately, through friendly visits or phone calls. Relations in Gamma are horizontal, and not vertical as in Beta.

4.1.4 The NGO, Alpha

Alpha is a medium-sized non-profit organisation first registered in 1991 in Romania. Alpha's goal is to improve the lives of institutionalised Romanian children. Initial funds were donated from abroad to improve the material conditions of children (by refurbishing orphanages, etc.). Gradually, Alpha moved to developing programmes targeted at a specific group of children

(with a terminal illness), mainly living with their own families. The NGO is now the main service provider for these children, estimated to number 6000. It has been quite successful in securing funding, mainly from western European sources but also from the Romanian government. Alpha has its headquarters in Bucharest, where ten employees work, and, through one of its projects, another thirty employees work in seven locations all over the country (see the official diagram of the organisation in Appendix 2). Work in these locations is in collaboration with state organisations (hospitals), on the basis of contracts established under the auspices of the funding agencies. I travelled to these locations now and then for the 'evaluation' of employees, but I will mostly refer to the intensive fieldwork I carried out at the headquarters. The difference between this site and the others is very important; employees at the headquarters have different qualifications, much more power, only sporadic contact with clients, but constant contact with other NGOs and state administrations, and a higher rate of pay. The competition during the recruitment process suggests how desirable a job at the headquarters was compared to jobs at the other locations: one out of fifty graduates was successful in her/his application to the headquarters, and one out of five in her/his application for specialist jobs in other locations. The employees at the headquarters were mostly social sciences graduates, between 25 and 32 years old, who were considered by managers to be responsible persons who would not need to be thoroughly checked. They also proved to have strong personalities and even greater career expectations. None of them stayed more than three years in this NGO before moving to a more important position (the separation in these cases was not very friendly, because they were generally fired by the management due to a clash of personalities), or abroad (in which case, despite the separation, contacts and services between the NGO and employees continued).

In 2000, Alpha was developing six projects, ranging from purely informational ones to distributing money and specialised interventions. All these projects are meant to help children and their parents: to help them know their rights (laws, benefits) and use them (individually or through legally constituted associations of parents), to provide them with social and psychological support and with a specific type of medical intervention. Some projects are also targeted at specialised professions (doctors, psychologists, social workers, etc.). They provide specialist information and support to facilitate contacts and exchanges of experience. The type of work involved for the employees at the headquarters is mostly paper work: editing leaflets of information for parents and specialists, writing presentations for state administrations and funding agencies, designing proposals and reports for the funding bodies, and researching and filing relevant information on legis-

lation, funding, medical and social news. Their work also requires establishing and maintaining contacts through phone or by visit with administrations, hospitals, and other NGOs, and providing information, support and getting feedback on services from the parents of affected children. Presenting these activities *en masse* is not mere chance, as the diagram of the working of the headquarters in Appendix 2 confirms: besides the manager, everybody occupies the same position in the NGO and the distribution of tasks is loose and never acknowledged. The aim of the management is that all employees be interchangeable (in some respects including the manager), and that everybody knows about all of the projects (but does not bear responsibility for any particular one). The goal is a fluid system of organisation, completely at the opposite end of a Taylorist type of division of labour.

Several managers were almost simultaneously in charge during the time I worked in this organisation. There was an executive manager (29 years old), who had been in the position for two to three years, but was now preparing to leave the NGO definitively for study abroad (from where she hoped not to have to return). Though she was an energetic and determined woman appreciated for her efficiency, her disengagement with the work grew and became more obvious to the employees as the time to leave got closer (i.e. the last six months). She was only an executive director, in charge during the maternity leave of the general manager (which lasts two years in Romania). To compensate for this lack of status, she relied heavily (on a daily basis) on the advice or directions given by a Western consultant (male, about 30 years old), who had administered the initial funds in 1990 when the NGO was registered only abroad. Though the Western 'consultant' used to visit Romania quite often (every couple of months or so), this did not prove sufficient for directing the whole activity of the NGO. Thus a temporary director was named for three months, to cover the period from the executive director's departure until the arrival of the general manager, who was about to finish her maternity leave. The main task of the Western consultant assigned to the temporary general manager (a 50-year-old experienced architect, with a good sense of humour and a vast and diverse work experience) was to implement some changes, from changes in the physical work environment (renovation of the office) to changes in the spirit of work relations. In reality, contradictory directions and the reaction of some employees made him abandon the human resources policies early on, not without a certain frustration. The general manager (a woman in her mid-30s, trained as a doctor) returned from her maternity leave after almost two years of total break with the NGO's activities, but as she had been in the organisation for eight years before she left, most employees hoped that she would provide the 'real' management they expected. Her arrival was supposed to be accompa-

nied by the leave of the temporary manager and by the gradual disengagement of the Western consultant from the activities of the NGO, but these processes were taking place quite slowly.

Alpha is in the top end of the labour market by its standards, the salaries offered to its employees, and the importance of its funding and projects. However, it works from one day to another, maintains its activities at the level of survival (that of meeting funding bodies' requirements) and cannot develop further despite the existing market demand. Alpha is strongly handicapped by a lack of employees, being forced to keep their number to a minimum by the funding bodies. It is also handicapped by the turnover of managers and by the unclear position of the informal manager, the Western consultant, officially not part of the diagram, but unofficially the final decision-maker. It is not clear to an employee who provides the 'real' management of Alpha. This proves detrimental even to daily activities – for instance, it is not clear who should sign contracts or bills or have the final word on a collective decision.

4.2 The organisation as a system

The study of organisations holds an important place in sociology, but it has not received attention in anthropology until recently (Wright 1994; Gellner and Hirsch 2001). From the Taylorist and Fordist rational organisation of work, to the system theories of the 1960s, all 'deterministic' theories (Grint 1998 [1991]: 113) have considered the organisation as a bounded whole, with its own rules and functions: a functionalist perspective. As many theories of organisation are intended to feed the theories of management, managers and employees are viewed as separate groups, one that makes the rules and the other that conforms (or not) to them. Other theories, like the institutional theory in vogue today or the older population ecology theory, place the organisation in a wider context, but only in order to explain its actions as a whole, i.e. managers' actions. For purposes of clarity, in this chapter I will begin with a functionalist perspective and study the functions and dysfunctions of the enterprise from inside. In the following chapters, I will address the problems caused by the impact of the external context on the functioning of the enterprise. I will look at the work practices and discourses of employees and managers and will evaluate the result of their performance in terms of the success or failure of the business project.

4.2.1 Functions and dysfunctions

We can compare work practices with the rules of conduct stated by managers in order to see whether the system functions as initially designed and

whether its rules are coherent and effective. My immediate conclusion from the field analysis of the two private organisations is that rules are respected, but that they are not effective. The first proof of their lack of efficiency is employees' turnover: every six weeks in the marketing department (less among teachers), and every one or two years in the NGO. In Western countries, this is a sign of employees' dissatisfaction with their jobs, as Lawler established through empirical studies as early as 1973 (1973). This also seems to be true for Beta, as most employees quit suddenly after being scolded publicly by the manager, renouncing their wages and rights solely to escape the pressure of the management. For Beta, unexpected and frequent turnover brings considerable losses, as new employees do not have the experience and necessary knowledge to take over immediately the tasks of those who left. For Alpha, the NGO, the turnover undermines its credibility before other institutions and is a handicap especially for its relations with state institutions and parents.

At Beta, employees conform to work requirements out of fear and need for money. Because of the manager's control, their objection to his rules can only take the form of quitting. On the contrary, in the Gamma Music School, dysfunction comes from an inappropriate structure and assessment of work. The state is meant to be in charge in Gamma, but the state is very far away. Employees are not responsible directly to their director, but to the state, thus they 'obey' the director loosely, out of mere politeness. When the director made remarks about cleanliness to the janitor allocated by the state to the school, the janitor merely tried to look busy the next time the director passed, but no signs of greater cleanliness were evident on the school premises.

In the NGO, there are no rules as such, but only a framework, a state of mind, is provided. The problem here does not come from non-conformity to rules, but from their lack of efficiency. The 'we are all equal' type of discourse that governs Alpha makes everybody in the enterprise feel the entire burden of management responsibility and under pressure all the time. No clear distribution of tasks allows responsibility to be shared between employees or to be borne entirely by one of them. As a result, this lack of hierarchy leads to disorganisation: several un-co-ordinated people perform the same task, while other tasks remain neglected. This means a loss in terms of time and money, leaves the employees with the feeling that they are doing useless things, and gives an additional task to the manager: that of choosing between two performances at the risk of upsetting some of his employees.

A naïve Taylorist idea behind many management theories is that managers are to convey the appropriate mentality to employees to make the workplace efficient. These theories then ask what sort of mentality should be

given to employees, and how to communicate it. Consequently, the manager is considered the incarnation of the superstructure that provides ideologies for the employees. The above analysis demonstrates that there is no simple transfer of ideologies from the top (managers) to the bottom (employees). Managers and employees derive different ideas from their position in the enterprise, and also play back the discrepancy between discourses and practices of management, the result being failures like the labour turnover in Beta. I have described this clash of values in more detail elsewhere (Heintz 2002).

4.2.2 Work ideologies – the rules of conduct in work

Managerial discourses provide an interpretation of the social world and its functioning, and explain and justify actions. They are one of the main ways of motivating employees and inducing a certain spirit, the 'spirit of the enterprise', as well as the main way of providing the rules of conduct at the work place. These are meant to generate a certain work ethic among employees. Managerial discourses themselves are the product of ideologies. I will demonstrate here that these ideologies differ greatly from one organisation to the other, despite the fact that they are embedded in the same society. This shows the heterogeneity of ideas and values about work that exist simultaneously in Romanian society.

In the marketing department of Beta, the owner calls for complete obedience on the part of his employees and imposes himself as a model to them. The words repeated daily are 'You are here to shut up, listen and learn' and ' the intelligent employee is the one who knows how to imitate his manager'. His own model is an English manager under whom he worked in Indonesia for a number of years in the 1990s, who (as he asserts) even checked the cleanliness of employee's nails and hair as part of his daily supervision. Though he would not go so far, our manager required a certain kind of make-up, a certain lipstick colour, a certain length of hair, and skirts from his female employees, who were all university students or graduates aged 20 years or more. The boss is always right, and making him trying to make him recognise his mistakes always ends in threats and scandals. The counterpart is that the manager indeed provides his employees with practical instruction on marketing strategies, taught with passion and a certain professionalism. His tactics are to alternate between coercion and paternalism (the stick and the carrot). His main advice: do not trust anybody in business. For the manager of Beta, both the workplace and the business world are competitive places, thus the rule of mistrust should be applied both within and outside the enterprise. Employees have no right to have their own ideas and depend on him for the smallest decision, under threat of being fired. Despite

the lack of real power of the intermediary managers in the organisation, hierarchy is very much emphasised by the manager. This is meant to impress potential employees invited to collective interviews and potential clients invited to buy a course. 'Impressing' the client by word and gesture is a recurrent theme in the manager's discourse; one concrete manifestation of this is his perpetual rewriting of the employees' speeches, the constant revision of their capacity to 'impress' the client.

The management of the NGO is situated at the opposite extreme, their manager (actually, several managers) trying to maintain a democratic regime, in which highly educated employees are encouraged to participate in management decisions. Every single employee is paid attention to and consulted before s/he is allocated an activity, and monthly democratic meetings are organised for planning the activities of the enterprise. These meetings last forever and often do not lead to concrete results, because the goal is to reach a unanimous agreement and this is difficult, even where there are only ten employees. Although democratic voting could be used, meetings are inevitably postponed until the manager privately persuades each employee of the qualities of the majority's decision. Would this correspond to Marx's ideal of a willing and total embracing of a collective position by each individual? In a sense, yes, but it is not Marx who inspired this type of organisational behaviour, but the new directions in management, which encourage recognition of the value of each employee and the creation of a 'family spirit' based on sympathy and responsibility, not on control, as a guarantee for the efficient running of the organisation. The response of the employees however is perpetual criticism of 'the lack of organisation' and realistic management in the organisation, though they would never point to the managers as responsible for this (except in confidential conversations we had outside the workplace). The managers themselves admit the lack of organisation, but do not identify the principles on which the management is conducted as being its cause, and in general do not feel particularly responsible for it (certainly, as there are several managers, responsibility slips somehow from one to the other). The final scapegoat, the English manager, does not understand Romanian.[37]

The ideologies involved in the two private organisations can easily be labelled, for they are constantly apparent in the managers' discourses: fierce capitalism in the marketing department and democracy in the NGO. One can recognise pieces of management theories: the fierce capitalism corresponds to the idea that, after all, enterprises exist to make a profit (as opposed to

[37] There was a tacit understanding that one needed to listen to this manager, who ensured ongoing relations with the funding bodies, but that he did not know very well how to respond to managerial problems.

enterprises of the socialist era); the democracy corresponds to contemporary neo-human relations theories: 'render your employees responsible in order to motivate them and use their creative resources'. Foreign consultants, like true missionaries, have introduced Western management theories in Eastern European countries as new religions (Kostera 1996) – neither to be questioned, nor to be criticised.

4.3 Interrelations: The culture of the enterprise

I have alluded several times to a 'culture of the enterprise' that would help an enterprise to function efficiently. This is because of the popularity of the term in Western countries, but also in Romania, where many of the books espousing it have been translated and distributed through bookshops. In developed industrial countries, the awareness of the importance of human relations at work began with the Hawthorne project in the 1930s, which demonstrated the de-humanisation of employees under Taylorist and Fordist rational organisations. Conducting a survey in the Western Electric plant of Hawthorne, Elton Mayo discovered the famous 'Hawthorne effect': employees worked better if their work received adequate attention. Previously, improvement was thought to come from a better aggregation of tasks. After WWII, the focus on individual behaviour continued under the influence of psychological approaches: the motivational theory of Abraham Maslow (1943) that proposed a hierarchy of needs and satisfaction, and Frederick Herzberg's (1966) notion of the 'enrichment of tasks'. Studies in social psychology revealed a link between personal motivations, incentives and job satisfaction in work, and absenteeism and labour turnover. Consequently, in Great Britain for instance, human resource management since the Second World War has drawn heavily on psychological approaches (Rose 1990). This is not possible today in Eastern Europe, as studies in the social psychology of work are only starting to be developed (e.g. Roe and Russinova 1994), thus human resource management necessarily relies on studies of social psychology conducted in other social contexts. In the 1970s in France, the sociology of organisations adopted an interactionist approach to the strategies of the employee/ actor in the works of Crozier and Friedberg (1980), underlining workers' strategies to obtain power in organisations. In the 1980s, sociologists forged the notions of a 'culture of the enterprise' and 'identity at work', reflected in the research conducted by Renaud Sainsaulieu (1988). D'Iribarne further analysed national differences between models of enterprises (1989). But all these social theories of organisation oriented towards the human factor seemed to be ignored by the managers of the organisations I studied.

4.3.1 Negotiating values: Managers and employees

A Marxist view of managers' ideologies versus employees' practice does not provide a faithful account of reality, because managers' discourses are an object of interpretation for the employees. There are, in fact, more values than those of the managers involved in the creation of a culture of an enterprise. This is a point raised against many 'best sellers' in organisational culture (Carroll 1983) designed for Western enterprises. In her book on the privatisation of a baby food company in Poland, Elisabeth Dunn shows how labour relations, notions of personhood and human relations are negotiated by Alima workers in meetings with the managers of the American company, Gerber, where each party brings to the table their respective (socialist or Christian) values (Dunn 2004).

The encounter between managers' and employees' values sometimes leads to clashes. In the marketing department of Beta, the manager's discourse regarding control of the cleanliness of nails (which he did not perform), the colour of lipstick (which he did control), and his personal remarks regarding the attitude a woman should have were unfit for graduate employees who were already aware of having been hired for their good appearance. Often in discussions they underlined the fact that this did not make them feel proud or motivated in any sense. They simply felt like objects exhibited in order to dupe the client and make a profit for the manager/ owner.

It is accepted in sociolinguistics that the background culture determines the interpretation of discourses and practices by the listener-observer (Giglioli 1972). In the NGO, the fact that the managers did not state that they wanted to evaluate their employees, but rather wanted to learn about their needs, thus taking a humble position and putting themselves at the disposal of their employees, was interpreted as weakness, ignorance, or hypocrisy and not taken seriously. The discourse differed too much from what employees used to hear from friends, and from their past experiences. Instead of cooperating and giving the necessary feedback during these evaluations, they rather were tempted to impose their views on managers, whom the discourse had rendered vulnerable and weak.

Some apparent misinterpretations of rules are rather negotiations of rules. An interesting case is that of the double hierarchy in the NGO. For a hierarchy to be efficient and useful it must be recognised; in order for it to be recognised, a hierarchy should take into account cultural criteria that confer authority – in Romania, the recognition of the authority conferred by seniority. It is no wonder that at Alpha a parallel hierarchy based on seniority in the enterprise was created in the space left by the 'we are all equal' refrain. Because senior employees know better than a new manager, the employees resisted and criticised all attempts by the new management to change things.

After all, they knew that other attempts by the old management had proved useless. As the flow of information is not one determined by an official diagram, the power is 'stolen' from the actual management; the managers do not control all the information, because they have not always been in the organisation. The negotiation here is a negotiation of power. Though it does not bring any financial reward, access to a niche of power and authority is tempting for most employees. Those who had spent a longer time in the organisation competed with the existing managers in terms of power and authority. This is by no means unique: Crozier notices the same tendency among factory workers in France, who acquired more skills in order to get more power (Crozier and Friedberg 1980).

4.3.2 The interdependence of resources in the system: Teamwork

Teamwork does not arise as a spontaneous consensus between employees, but is very much the creation of the management, though ultimately employees decide whether or not to play by its rules. The lack of work collaboration in the NGO, where personal relations between employees were very good, is such an example. The management did not establish any blueprint for communication or the circulation of information, thus isolating each employee in her/his own work. Several employees independently of one another sometimes performed the same tasks, and the performance of other tasks was handicapped by dependence on the work of other employees, who did not give it the same priority. Typically, meetings would start half an hour late, because half of the employees (including the managers) would arrive late, thus wasting the others' time. This would eventually lead to tense relations, even between very good friends (employees who were also friends outside of work), who would take offence personally.

There are cases in which the management does not wish to form a team or a team spirit, as in Beta. The Beta manager strongly believes in individualism and inculcates his employees through long daily speeches: you have to think of yourself, of your money; you need to think about his interests as well, because that is why he employs you and puts his fate in your hands. The only possible form of co-operation is determined by self-interest. When employees sometimes work in pairs (for instance a sales representative with a negotiator), money is used to motivate their co-operation. The nature of everybody's activity (teachers are on their own, sales representatives are on their own) does not require teamwork. However, incompetence in other departments handicaps one's work, because of the chain through which potential clients arrive.

Interestingly, when there is no need for teamwork, one can however find solidarity. This is the case in Beta, where opposition to the 'system' (the

manager) forges very good relations between employees, who plan their departure together. On the contrary, in the Music School, where teachers are completely independent but have to share material conditions with others (rooms, pianos, pupils), there are many more conflicts or cases of reciprocal cheating. The director, called upon to solve these conflicts, considers them 'childish'. In a way, we can consider that individualistic thinking lies also behind these cases, fuelled by the fact that there is no coherent attempt by managers to create a 'spirit of the enterprise'.

4.3.3 The open system: Relationships with clients

The beneficiary and ultimate judge of the work performed in service enterprises is the client, thus the managers have to direct their strategies towards satisfying her/him. Each of the organisations I studied had a different approach, determined by the power and position it held with respect to its clients.

The state school has a monopoly on music instruction, as there are only two such institutions in Bucharest and places are limited. However, as music education is not compulsory and competition for places is moderate, the client's satisfaction remains a desideratum. We must remember that the service here (art courses) is provided to children, and children have no right to comment on teachers' performance. Moreover, as teachers are perceived as 'artists', 'original' behaviour on their part (including late arrivals for courses, etc.) is perhaps anticipated and excused.

The same monopoly of services and the non-profit character of the service provision[38] should create a similar relationship between the employers of Alpha and the parents of affected children. But this is not the case, as all employees have humanitarian feelings and compassion for the children. Personal feelings dictate patience, benevolence, and the acceptance of extra work whenever necessary. The temporary manager at Alpha instilled the idea that when it comes to the well being of the children, the end justifies the means. This strategy is used in relations with state institutions (especially hospitals), in which NGO employees are more rough and formal than in their interactions with affected children's parents.

Most concerned with the client relationship is the manager of Beta, who has built all of his business strategies on projecting the 'image' of the business. In their daily training, marketing employees are reminded that the product does not count, what is sold is a spirit, an emotion. It is accepted by lower managers that the courses sold are not good. None of the employees' suggestions for the improvement of the text of contracts or of the organisa-

[38] Their service is addressed to 'beneficiaries' and not to clients.

tion of courses is taken into account. Any time an employee takes the initiative to note dysfunctions in the business, he is reminded that it is not his duty to do so. The manager's argument is that the client buys a course once, not twice; thus, s/he does not need to be turned into a faithful client. The company's image is important for potential clients, not for existing clients, who cannot withdraw from their contracts. For instance, the presentation room where potential clients are invited is cleaned and arranged every day, while toilets used by existing clients are not well maintained. The image of the firm is also a reflection of the image of the employees – this is why the manager insists on their 'style' and beauty. Every gesture and attitude is important – all employees are educated to know this. Gender differences are very important here. Single clients are always targeted by employees of the opposite sex (male teachers were sometimes taken from their classes to come to impress a woman at a sales presentation), while couples could sometimes be difficult to deal with because of potential jealousies. Even if the manager does not try to create a spirit of the enterprise at Beta, he feels he needs to project the image of such a spirit, through a respectful attitude towards his employees in front of clients. Employees are pressed to show the same respect towards the clients. Once a client has paid for the course entirely, there is no need for such courtesy any more, and employees are left to judge for themselves about the behaviour to adopt towards them. Employees have compassion for clients, because they are thought of as being on the same side of the barrier (against the manager); they become 'poor clients' once they have bought a course. Employees usually hide, shamed into avoiding clients to whom they sold a course they judge worthless. It would not be surprising to see that this compassion is also manifest, *nolens volens*, during their work, to the detriment of the business and to their own financial disadvantage.

4.4 Conclusion

I began this chapter with a functionalist/ systemic analysis, which considered enterprises as bounded wholes, whose organisation depends only on the application of internal rules and the coherence of the internal structure.[39] Consequently, the lack of fit between practices and values inside an organisation should adequately explain dysfunctions arising in the organisation. This perspective did not prove to be sufficient. It appears that even when managerial discourses point to a coherent ideology and when employees adhere to the rules of conduct set by managers, they also interpret them in the light of their understandings of work derived from the larger social

[39] Incidentally, managerial discourses can also be incoherent or inefficient.

context in which they live – Romania in the first decade of the 21st century – hence my focus on interactions between individuals. The outside world enters the enterprise through the employees due to the vulnerability of managerial rules, which are not created through negotiation with the employees, but through the imposition of managerial theories created in and for Western countries. Having only a perspective from inside is thus insufficient for explaining the functions and dysfunctions of an enterprise. It is necessary to look at the place that employment occupies in the life of an employee compared to other types of work s/he performs; it is also useful to place the enterprises themselves in the Romanian economic context in order to understand their business requirements.

Chapter 5
The Economic Context during the 'Transition'

In anthropology work is defined from the point of view of those who perform it and thus frequently through language. David Parkin describes the particular categorisation of work used by the Giriama of coastal Kenya (1979); Sutti Ortiz differentiates types of work according to the estimation of work by the Paez Indians of Columbia (1979); Michel Panoff looks at Maenge local terms in order to describe the virtues that the performance of certain activities gives to their performers, in the absence of a unifying term for work (1977). Marie-Noelle Chamoux reminds us that there are societies that do not have a concept of work at all (1994). Before I started my field inquiry, I used the definition of work proposed by the sociologist Ray Pahl for Britain (1988), and envisaged researching four types of work: work in the formal economy, work in the informal economy, domestic work and community work. I set out to explore these four fields, but soon discovered that today in Romania the term 'work' (*munca*) covers only the field of work in the formal economy, a few forms of work in the informal economy, and almost never domestic work (mostly performed by women, these activities are termed *treabă*). As for what Ray Pahl terms 'community work', I could not witness much, given the hardship during the period of my research, and thus I did not discover what term might be used to describe such activities. I will thus consider those activities, profit-making or not, that are referred to as *munca* by my informants. This led me to look constantly beyond workplaces to second jobs and work in the informal economy. As work is primarily meant to ensure an income, I will look at the alternative rewards available, whether obtained from activities recognised as work or not,[40] and see whether they are considered as work or if they are morally condemned. In order to do this, it is necessary to understand the economic context in which the three service organisations described and their employees have evolved. I will first address the transformation of the formal economy in Romania, and

[40] Katherine Verdery offers interesting insights on this point in her description of the Caritas money pyramidal system in Romania (Verdery 1996).

then the indigenous view of the informal economy, that is, how these activities are generally accepted or rejected. Finally, I will look at how these sources of income assure the survival of employees in Bucharest.

5.1 The formal economy: Between the local and the global

The economic transformation necessary for the installation of capitalist structures in Eastern Europe drew the attention of Western economists, political analysts, and international agencies, who found here a unique testing ground for models of transformation (Gowan 1995) or in which to foster their own economic interests. Sachs proposed the model of shock therapy for Eastern Europe (1994) and rejected Dahrendorf's approach of 'open experimentation' (1990), which opposed social engineering by the West and favoured the existing tissue of social institutions. Models of transformation were widely discussed, prognoses were made (e.g. *Daedalus* 1994; Hankiss 1990), and warnings were given. Przeworski cautioned against the undesirable political consequences that could arise from too rapid and extreme an embrace of the market (1991); Burawoy concluded that the 'evolution' to merchant capitalism also represented a less than desirable involution of the industry, the main economic asset of Russia (1996). The contributions of social anthropologists and historians were slow to be taken into account as strategies for the transformation were designed, or so it appears, as only recently have we seen an increase in debates over the human costs of the transformation, human resources, and the ready adoption (without adaptation) of Western models to Eastern Europe. Today Eastern European countries have moved beyond the transition period, and their economic problems have begun to resemble more and more the typical problems linked to globalisation of the economy. Certain legacies of the transition are likely to influence the Romanian economy for some years to come, as certain legacies of the socialist period also do. I will return to some characteristics of the economy during the critical period of the end of the 1990s.

5.1.1 The formal economy in statistics during the transitional period

The year 2000 was an important year for the economic development of Romania in the postsocialist period. Though this aspect was recognised by Romanians only afterwards, 2000 marked the beginning of a period of economic growth that is still under way in 2006. At the time, it was considered only a year when Romanian society had 'reached the bottom'.

In 1998, the GDP was only 78% of the GDP in 1989, while 1989 was the weakest economic year of the late socialist period. Production had con-

tinuously dropped, becoming in 1997 only 66% of what it was in 1990. In 1999, only 57.6% of the available industrial technologies were used. These figures, made public and debated on television, confirmed the opinions of my interviewees, who all complained that they were worse off than before 1989. Macroeconomic figures listed Romania behind the other Central and Eastern European countries and near the former Soviet republics and former Yugoslavia. The privatisation of assets and the creation of new economic units led to an increased importance of the private sector, now assuring 60% of the GDP, thus definitively reversing the socialist type of economy. Meanwhile, the service sector's portion of the GDP remained very small: 30.3% in 1999, compared to 62.7% in neighbouring Hungary, 54.5% in Bulgaria and even 46.5% in Russia. Seemingly, Romania, a country recently industrialised (some 30 years ago), was not prepared to enter the post-industrialisation era yet. 73% of the contribution of service enterprises to the GDP comes from private service enterprises, many of them small- and medium-sized (SME), which have encountered difficulties linked to inflation, growing import competition, high interest rates, high taxes on profit, discrimination with respect to the state sector, bureaucracy, lack of strategies and legislation to encourage investments, loans, etc. In 1998 there were 300,000 registered service SMEs (56% of the total number of SMEs), half of them in debt. Counterbalancing the problems of SMEs, we should note that in September 1999 the informal economy (which works mostly through small businesses) was considered to represent 49% of the GDP (Dobrescu 2000: 75-85).

In 1999, the labour force represented 9.8 million people (out of a population of 22 million), of which there were 4.4 million paid employees, 4.2 million unpaid employees (paid in kind, such as peasants) and 1.19 million unemployed. From 1989 to 2000, unemployment figures rose from 0% to 12.2% (end of February 2000), one of the most troubling features of the new market economy. There were 6.3 million inactive people (i.e. inactive people over the age of 15, half of them retired people). In terms of social security, every two employees had to support another three inactive people. Since social security is assured only through employees' wages, it means that only the 4.4 million wage earners contribute to it. The service sector employs 30% of the labour force. In Bucharest the unemployment rate is the lowest in the country: only 5.3% in February 2000 (CNS 1999 and CNS 2000), a calculation based on the number of unemployed registered for unemployment, jobseeker's support or benefit support.

Inflation was one of the main difficulties faced in daily life, both by enterprises and by people. From one dollar to 80 lei in 1989, the dollar

reached the value of 25,000 lei in October 2000.[41] Changes in wages are slower than inflation and sometimes they remain stagnant, as in the case of the 1999 freezing of wages in the state sector, following a requirement by the IMF. As a result, consumers' buying power continued to decrease considerably, with a drop of 42.6% from 1990 to 1999. As in a vicious circle, with the power of consumption decreasing, the economy cannot be boosted either.

5.1.2 The ambivalent relationship with Western agencies

In Romania, while the PDSR (the ex-communists) were in power, the economic policy followed the model of gradual transformation, despite international experts' preference for shock therapy. Since this policy brought what at the time were considered unsatisfactory results, after the political changes in 1996 the government started to experiment with the shock therapy model. Upon signing Romania's Memorandum on Economic Policies in 1996, the IMF imposed an acceleration of reforms, accompanied by the restructuring and privatisation of state enterprises. In 2000, the results of the new policy were disappointing. Unemployment had grown and the value of wages had decreased, due to the IMF requirement to freeze wages. The term 'experiment', with all of the negative connotations it carries when referring to human experiments, started to appear in journalists' writings. People's overall attitude towards funding and loan-making bodies such as the IMF, the World Bank or the EEC remained positive, no matter how strict their conditions or how sharp their criticisms were, because it was acknowledged that the Romanian government relied heavily on this funding. However, a slow shift in the attitude towards Western agencies was taking place following their implacable pressure: the attitude became more realistic and better informed. While an autumn 1996 opinion poll showed that Romanians were mostly relying on Western countries to help Romania overcome the economic crisis, this reliance diminished by the end of 2000, and only 5% of the respondents to a poll conducted in March 2005 stated that they expected help from the West (ILI 2005).

This dependency on international agencies determined the law in Romania, as successive governments (whether orientated to the left or right) agreed to follow the agencies' guidelines closely in order to benefit from loans, or to join NATO or the European Union. When a EU official says,

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[41] Inflation decelerated after the economic growth that began in 2000, and was succeeded by deflation in 2004. In January 2005, the exchange rate was 30,000 lei to the dollar, and the national currency was considered stable enough to be transformed into a new currency, the 'new leu', the same year.

'We would like the privatisation process to be accelerated' (Reuters, 2 November 2000) and ties this to the EU membership that Romania covets, the Romanian government cannot but conform, however unsuccessful the process of privatisation may have proved to be. One can see how compelling the advice of the European Commission, the Commissary for Enlargement, and of other representatives was by consulting the Romanian press during key periods of political decisions in Washington, or, more recently, in Brussels. For instance, during the week of 2-9 November 2000, when Romanian representatives met with the European Commission, the newspapers talked only of the EU asking for the acceleration of reforms and of its dissatisfaction with Romania's results, as for instance in the field of child protection. On the 6th of November 2000, the international press described the meeting in the following terms: 'EU gives Next Romanian Government[42] Three Months to Show Clear Reform Results' (*BBC Monitoring*).[43] Perhaps this type of attitude pressured the government in a positive way, but it also triggered negative reactions against those perceived as giving advice without considering its consequences and insensitive to the consequent impoverishment of the population.

When, at the beginning of 2000, the international rating agency Standard & Poor's classified Romania as a B country in the category of 'country risk' (*risc de țară*), the media and people interviewed on the street showed discontent. Romania was given a poor rating not because of the size of its external debt, but because of the high political risk, lack of coherency in the application of policies, the rapid increase in its debt and the lack of a hard currency. Though ordinary people also complained about these problems and accused governmental policies in the same terms, they found it disturbing to be given a poor rating by a foreign agency.

It is interesting to draw a parallel to what Gorz has said about the post-industrial era in Western countries: 'Because the curtain has fallen on the old order [NB: industrialism] and no other order waits in the wings, we must improvise the future as never before' (1985: 1). However, the same 'West' that is searching for its own way chooses through the IMF or World Bank to impose the old solution of accumulation and growth in Eastern Europe, instead of giving these countries space and trusting their capacity for improvisation. Certainly, East Europeans agreed to play the game due to their

[42] This was before the general elections in November 2000.

[43] The titles in the national and international press have not changed much since 2000. Today, when the European Parliament has approved Romania's integration into the European Union for the 1st of January 2007, the press waves the threat that integration may be postponed by one year. The urgent problem to be solved today is corruption.

profound antipathy for experiments that the experiment with Marxism left behind. But maybe Gorz would conclude that by this action the West has tried (and even succeeded) to postpone its own crisis.

5.1.3 What the Reform is and what problems it causes

The transition from socialism to a free market economy consists in marketisation, privatisation, decollectivisation, and the introduction of a valid system of investments. While marketisation and decollectivisation were completed relatively quickly in Romania, the privatisation of assets took various but always unsatisfactory forms, and foreign investments arrived only in recent years, as a result of the saturation of the Central European markets and of new prospects for the European integration of Romania.

Marketisation puts an end to subsidised goods. All goods receive a price and enter in competition on the free market. The price is the product of the negotiation between supply and demand on the one hand, and of the competition with similar goods on the other hand. In an economic system where the offer is low, marketisation puts products back on shelves, but at very high prices, because the prices are no longer protected by state social policy. They increase not only with the costs of production (due to the end of subsidies) but also with demand. Immediately after 1989, to most people it appeared as if black market prices (4-5 times higher than state prices) and the black economy had become legal. In Russia, Humphrey observes that many people identified marketisation with 'speculation' (1995). The monetary and financial market was liberalised as well, thus opened to international influences. Unprotected and supported by a poor economy, the national currency devalued rapidly. Money under socialism, not convertible into foreign currency and not corresponding to the level of production, was fictive money that just disappeared when it encountered strong currencies. After 1989, high rates of inflation gave people the feeling they were literally left with empty pockets (Verdery 1996).

There was also an urgent need for new laws that could regulate the free market and the need for a coherent reform of the state system. But politicians quickly elected after 1989 were not well trained in economic problems, and found themselves confronted with a huge system that had to be built from scratch. The debate among Western advisers concerning whether reform should be shock therapy or a gradual transformation added to politicians' hesitations about the laws to be established and of the government about the right measures to be taken. The need for quick regulations in the economy was so acute at the end of the 1990s that the government led the country through urgent ordinances and decrees, because the Parliament could not keep up with the pace for 'legalising' and instituting permanent

laws. The consequence was a high level of instability for investors, enterprises and the public, with ordinances appearing overnight to replace the existing ones.

All new postsocialist governments consider the laws regulating property as the engine of change and privatisation as a way to lighten the burden on the state budget. In Romania, the 'temporary' institution that had the mission to privatise state assets was the Fund of State Property (FPS). Privatisation took different forms in different countries: mass privatisation through citizen voucher schemes or employee share schemes (especially in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and East Germany), direct sell-offs to citizens, and restitution of property. In Romania, all of these methods have been tried, but none have brought tangible benefits to its citizens. For instance, the shares in state enterprises that people fought to desperately obtain were worth nothing in 2000. Nobody had actually informed the owners about the state of their shares, but it was speculated that they worth nothing because of the common knowledge that state enterprises were bankrupt, as well as of the common misconception concerning 'speculation' on shares. The restitution of property in urban areas caused conflicts that still last; cases of unreturned buildings were tried at the European Court for Human Rights, bringing Romania negative publicity and material losses for the state as the losing party. The selling-off of assets to citizens after 1989 worked to the advantage of the rich minority, i.e. former Party leaders. As Harloe states: 'In many cases it is those who have access to various forms of social capital, networks, connections and information, who are able to benefit at the expense of those whose stock of social capital is limited. Ex-members of the nomenklatura, the managers of (former) state enterprises and those who were successful in the second or black economy of the former socialist societies [...] are likely to be among the beneficiaries, while others [...] lose out' (1996: 7-8). In rural areas, land restitution was popular, but caused also a number of conflicts (Verdery 1994, 2003; Kideckel 1995; Cartwright 2001). It incited a 'return' to subsistence agriculture, which threatened to leave the urban population without food (Van Atta 1993). The transformations taking place in rural areas have been amply documented by anthropologists, in all the East European countries (Abrahams 1996; Kaneff and Leonard 2002; Hann et al. 2003).

Foreign investments were encouraged either directly or in joint ventures – this process of business transformation has also been described by social anthropologists (Czegledy 1996; Dunn 2004). The bank system was put in place and bank loans were given, but seldom to small-scale enterprises, which could not present enough guarantees. Scandals arose concern-

ing loans given through nepotism (*pile*) and banks bankrupted by the non-payment of creditors with fictive projects.

Many of the post-1989 difficulties have come from the manner in which these transformations have been managed at the state level: lack of laws protecting the investor, the consumer and the banks, lack of permanent rules for stimulating competition within the economy, and unclear or debatable laws linked to the restitution of property. Other difficulties have come from the lack of a culture of entrepreneurship imputed to East Europeans and citizens of the former USSR (Holmes 1997: 211),[44] the lack of a popular understanding of market rules (the difference between financial investments and speculation, for instance), and from the inertia of the administrative system. The lack of capital for investments and the risky environment are still handicaps for private initiatives. Is this risk smaller when the initiatives are illegal, that is, when they take place in the informal sector?

5.2 The informal sector

5.2.1 Definitions

According to Plattner, the informal sector includes activities that capture resources either by increasing private access to community resources beyond the normative allocation or by partially or totally evading public monitoring as well as any corporate assessment, such as taxes (1989). The informal sector was born at the same time as the formal economy, but was not taken into account and measured by economists until anthropologists' analyses of the Third World and socialist economies brought the term to the fore (Hart 1973). In the 1980s in Britain, the definition of the informal economy was decisive for the quantitative evaluation of its weight in the GDP. Depending on the definition adopted, it could vary from 2 to 22% of the United Kingdom's GDP (Howe 1990).[45]

In the 1970s and 80s, the sociologists Gershuny and Pahl both emphasised the beneficial role played by domestic and informal economies for the unemployed (Gershuny 1978).[46] In the mid-eighties, Pahl retreated from this initial position, as his data showed that the employed benefit more from the household and informal economies, because they have more connections and money for initiatives. This was stated in the context of a decrease in the

[44] In the informal economy, Romanians showed initiative and creativity during the socialist period.

[45] John Davis showed for instance that there is even a substantial gift economy in Britain, though it is difficult to evaluate its size (1972).

[46] In the case of unemployed women, their unemployed status ties them even more closely to the home and to their traditional gender role (Morris 1990).

informal sector and an increase in the formal tertiary sector. It is clear that the state of the formal economy determines the opportunities for the informal economy, but there are still debates about whether a buoyant economy stimulates or blocks the informal sector.

The social anthropologist Keith Hart first coined the phrase 'informal economy' in an article about the 'dual economy' in Ghana, arguing that small-scale informal production does not conflict with large-scale production, but complements it (1973). The common position of all state officials (socialist or not) remains however that the informal economy undermines the formal economy: it is the result of irresponsible and subversive actions of individuals against national interests and these people must be sought out and punished by law. Moral assumptions begin to mingle here with economic reasoning. In his work on Northern Ireland, Howe (1990) concludes that cultural elements (religious, ethnic) are very important in the working of the informal economy and that there is no simple economic link between the formal and the informal economy. Thus, it has become popular in the social sciences to take into account other factors apart from economic ones in studies of informal economies.

According to estimations by the American Treasury, immediately after 1989, Romania occupied a middle position among the Eastern European countries with respect to its hidden economy. In 1998 it was estimated by the same source that the informal economy comprised 49.5% of Romania's GDP. Only 17% was estimated to have an internal provenance (mainly tax evasion), while 32.5% came from export/ import activities, i.e. corruption at the borders. What is significant is that according to these figures, the state would not benefit from suppressing the informal economy, but rather from gaining control of it and turning it into a formal economy.

Gerald Mars drew a typology of 'cheats at work' (1982) in Great Britain, according to the type of work and the attached rewards, based on his personal experience of work in dozens of workplaces over the course of many years. His typology shows the diversity of activities that pertain to the informal economy and is a useful comparison for understanding the phenomenon in Romania, because it clearly links activities to people's primary motivation: gaining money. For the purposes of this study, however, the usefulness of Mars' typology ends here. Mars establishes six types of rewards, each belonging to a different type of economy, by considering legal and illegal activities in light of official, unofficial and alternative rewards (Table 1). Unofficial activities are those activities solidly embedded in official work activities, taking place almost simultaneously with them (for instance, tips and short-changing, the first being a legal activity, the second

an illegal one). This typology draws our attention to the multiple alternative forms of rewards available to employees in the service sector.

Table 1. A typology of work and its rewards (Mars 1982: 8)

	Official	Unofficial	Alternative
Legal	*(1) Formal rewards* Wages, over-time, bonuses	*(3) Informal rewards* Perks, tips, extra work, consulting	*(5) Social economy rewards* Domestic production, barter, 'do-it-yourself'
Illegal or extra-legal	*(2) Criminal rewards* Returns from professional crime, prostitution, etc.	*(4) Hidden economy rewards* Pilfering, short-changing, overcharging	*(6) Black economy rewards* Unregistered production and service organisations, moonlighting

The main reason why an analysis of the Romanian informal sector according to these divisions (legal/ illegal and official/ unofficial/ alternative) is not possible comes from the fact that Romanians do not use such categories in order to define their work activities or incomes.[47] This does not mean that the Romanian interviewees were constantly ignorant of what was illegal (though this happened relatively frequently); it only means that common activities and their perceptions are not categorised according to these criteria. To attempt a categorisation of profit-making activities according to them would draw abstract dividing lines between very similar behaviours.

Do Romanians classify the activities of the informal economy? My interviews revealed the existence of a classification that operates through language in the register of rejection/ acceptance by the community, a classification that depended on the level of legal knowledge and moral expertise of each interviewee. This is a bipolar classification of tolerated and condemned cheating. The term 'cheating' (*înşelăciuni*) is not generally used. When cheating is perceived as unimportant or tolerable, it is referred to by euphemisms such as 'things' (*chestii*) or 'tricks' (*şmecherii*). When cheating is perceived as harmful, it is usually labelled as 'corruption'.[48] Therefore I

[47] Harding and Jenkins claim that there are similar ambiguities in Western countries (1989: 174).

[48] Lovell et al. note the lack of objective definitions of the term 'corruption' in Russia and the fact that definitions depend on moral judgements (2000: 3). Simi-

will divide the presentation of the informal economy into the following subfields: 'intolerable cheating' (generally at a national scale, destructive of the formal economy – theft, corruption, Mafioso activities, etc.) and 'acceptable cheating' (the survival type of tricks performed by employers and employees together, such as tax evasion), adding to that the domestic economy (all domestic activities which are rarely counted as productive, even in the evaluation of the western European states' GDP). Most of the forms of cheating, bribery, and corruption that I witnessed during my fieldwork belong to the category of 'acceptable cheating', while I had information about 'intolerable cheating' only through media and second-hand accounts.

5.2.2 Intolerable cheating

Corruption, extensive border traffic, Mafioso activities, illegal activities that involve state officials, institutions, and the border police are widely commented upon in the newspapers and are considered types of 'intolerable cheating'. Big-time cheaters are not secret; they just cannot be caught and punished. They are denounced, the media uncovers proof of their wrongdoings, the whole country condemns them, the cases go to court, and finally this is where they also die out. When the police or the court fails to discover those responsible, they blame the difficulty of the task or their own inefficiency. The public believes that the impossibility of punishing these criminals is the result of corruption among the police force and judges, whose work is considered to go hand in hand with that of officials.[49]

On a live TV show hosted by Dan Diaconescu (Tele7abc 2000), Mugur Georgescu, the manager of an important enterprise, Germax, with the support of the American Embassy, described step-by-step a case of corruption involving the General Management of Customs, giving dates, amounts and names. This manager, who for six years had imported raising agents for bread, had been confronted by unprecedented small problems concerning the quality of the products imported and their accompanying documents, only to be finally asked bluntly after some months of negotiation to contribute $10,000 to the search for a solution. The manager had collected evidence and was making the case public, in order to put pressure on the court to accept the case for trial. It is difficult to judge whether the police or the court are right in refusing to pursue such cases (they cite lack of evidence) or if they are guilty of incompetence (by not pushing their investigations far

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larly, in Romania the term 'corruption' is negatively loaded. It is used to refer to those informal economic activities perceived as negative from a moral perspective.

[49] In an overview of foreign aid to Eastern Europe, Wedel shows how the appropriation of goods by those who handled them was widespread (Wedel 1999).

enough). What is important here is the conviction of citizens that cheating and corruption are well entrenched at top levels. As one of my acquaintances (a male engineer, 40 years old) with whom I discussed the case after watching the TV show together, claimed: 'The biggest thieves are those who make the law'. 'What can you expect from ordinary people if the top is corrupt?' he continued, expressing a logic one frequently hears in Romania.

Another category of 'intolerable cheating' are those cases where it is not clear who cheats, or whether it is intentional or not, but where ordinary people feel cheated, because they are clearly in a position of being victims. A typical case was the 'Privatisation For One Dollar' scheme, with its stark consequences for many employees.

Searching for a solution to the 'black holes' that many state-run factories faced, and as a way out of the negative interdependence between the organisation of production and that of human resources, the state's solution was privatisation. However, privatisation was seen as an end, not as a means, and as a matter of ownership, not of responsibility. Many proponents of the free market solution saw privatisation as a simple transfer of the rights of ownership from the state to private industries and enterprises, without understanding that there is much more to it than that (Marcuse 1996). The result was a model of privatisation called 'privatisation for one dollar' in the Romanian press. This meant that the state, represented by the FPS (Fund of State Property), got rid of factories by selling them off for almost nothing, in hopes that the debts to the state would be repaid. Many foreign firms bought large plants and were expected, under the pressure of the purchase contracts and the vigilance of the press, to invest money in technology and to make the necessary improvements to increase the plants' competitive position. It was hoped, at a minimum, that privatisation would get the factories working to a level where they would begin to break even. However, one or two years after such purchases, when journalists or labour unions would inquire about the state of things, they typically found that half of the employees had been fired and half of the assets had been sold off, piece-by-piece, for an amount exceeding the amount for which the plant had been bought (Heintz and Jansson 1999). Finally, the plants were often working even more inefficiently than before (occasionally accompanied by the same debts to the state, for electricity, etc., as in the case of Bucharest IMGB, one of the most important producers of heavy engines in Eastern Europe). For the employees, this meant that wages were as low as before, work patterns as irregular and unemployment even more threatening. Though scandals arose in the press and unions protested against the broken promises, the FPS ultimately concluded it would not take any action on the contracts, apart from defending itself in front of the media (again the IMGB case illustrates this well). The lack of a

project or a plan for the enterprises seems clear here, both on the part of the FPS, considered by people as an inefficient institution, meant only to support the huge wages of its employees, and on the part of the foreign buyers. Many factories were bought at a certain moment because it was expected that the price of assets would increase (which indeed happened for private belongings), but there was no project ready for them. An easy explanation, largely endorsed by the Romanian press, is that the new owners bought these factories in order to eliminate a potential future competitor. Another explanation would be that the new management were committed to change, but were unable to make a successful transformation because they encountered inertia and even resistance on the part of the other employees, who did not see and understand their commitment (the blame on 'mentality'). Cheating and corruption was manifested also with respect to the assets of the plant, which, whenever possible, disappeared in directors' pockets sometime during the process of privatisation. Of course, the extent of corruption practices varies with one's position in the hierarchy, and small-scale cheating often accompanies 'big-time' cheating.

The forms of cheating that are reproved by citizens are not necessarily 'big' in the sense of an important economic or political weight, for people are not able to evaluate them on this basis anyway. Nepotism among officials is often considered a form of corruption and condemned, even if its economic cost cannot be quantified. The distinction between 'condemned cheats' and 'tolerated cheats' is just a continuation of the 'us/them' divide that existed during the socialist period: 'they do it for personal benefit, they have not got enough', while 'we do it for survival'. Or, as the engineer mentioned earlier put it: 'Where could we have learnt to do it differently?'

5.2.3 Acceptable cheating

It is worth drawing attention here to several noticeable features of cheating: the variety of forms of small cheating, their common reason for existing (the pursuit of money and survival), the fact that everybody was drawn into it and almost could not avoid it, and the fact that it became so natural that it did not require the existence and safety of networks in order to proceed. If I summed up the opinion of several interviewees, I would draw the conclusion that enterprises cheat their employees or their clients; employees cheat the enterprise or the clients; clients cheat the enterprises or the employees; and they all together cheat the state, which ultimately is seen as cheating them all.

For instance, the forms of cheating current in shops within the employer/ employee/ client triangle are: the employer deceiving the client as to the quality of products (for instance by placing a cheaper product under the same label – who will tell the difference?); the employee short-changing the

client (s/he 'oops! made a mistake', or s/he has got no change); the client shop-lifting from the enterprise (well, s/he just forgot to pay for it); the employee stealing products or profit from the enterprise ('the bottles of wine broke' said Alpha' s driver, or 'anyway there are enough pens in stock so that nobody notices'); the employer short-changing an employee's pay ('oh! You were just in a probationary period and anyway you brought me losses while you were learning the job'; 'she could stay longer at work, it is good enough that I provide her/him a job', asserted the manager of Beta); or the client bribing the employee for a better deal (for instance the traveller who bribes the controller in order to avoid paying for a more expensive train ticket). Apart from this last example, all the others could be (and generally are) individual actions, without witnesses, which ultimately leaves every individual to negotiate with her/himself the validity and the morality of her/his actions. In most cases, these types of cheating involve a one-to-one, face-to-face personal interaction in which the one who is cheating is in an adversary position to the other. One clearly knows whom s/he cheats.

Cheating the state is an entirely different matter, because that state is an impersonal entity and because due to the 'us/them' opposition, cheating the state goes without saying. As Firlit and Chlopecki put it, this is a case 'when theft is not theft' (1992). As laws concerning private investments and taxes are not persuasive enough, most entrepreneurs and employees agree to evade them altogether.[50] In Romania a $200 gross wage demands at least a $300 contribution from the employer ($200 for the employee's wage and $100 for different taxes, social security, etc.) and leaves the employee with $130 net in hand. As a result, both parties agree not to conclude any legal work contract.[51] Some entrepreneurs force their employees to accept working without a contract by threatening them with firing, effective in the context of increased unemployment. In Bucharest this is not as efficient a threat, because, due to the low unemployment rate, a young person has plenty of choice among the lot of low-paying jobs. While legal contracts (registered at the Chamber of Work) insure a retirement pension and medical insurance, most people know that unofficially doctors are to be paid anyway, and that the reimbursement for medical costs is very low. As for a retirement pension, young people do not think so far ahead, and know anyway that there are alternative ways to invent past employment. Most of my friends who were employed with work contracts in well-paying jobs showed me that their

[50] Taxes on profit, wages and activities are considered ridiculously high – though they were lowered by the Nastase government (2000-2004), and the new Tariceanu government (from 2004) made revision of the fiscal law a priority, with hopes that reduced taxes would lead to less tax evasion.

[51] For a detailed discussion on the establishment of work contracts, see Chapter six.

monthly pay slip testified that they received a small amount of money, while in reality they received ten times more as a 'bonus'. They expressed their admiration for the fact that in Alpha one's entire salary was declared to the Ministry of Work. Intriguingly, some of my interviewees worked in joint Romanian-foreign enterprises or those with permanent contracts with European countries, with some employees even travelling and undertaking illegal work abroad for the partner companies. Private companies often keep two sets of books, one for the tax controllers and another for themselves. Many managers register the company in the name of an inoffensive retired relative, as was the case in the marketing department of Beta. State control over these practices is minimal, primarily because of the lack of state financing, and secondly because of the corruption of the state administration. The risk of punishment is small if one has the right connections in the right place, or if s/he distributes enough money to 'persuade' the administration. When bureaucracy is heavy, complaints, fines or trials linked to work contracts or consumer dissatisfaction take so long that they become inefficient, which justifies the use of small 'arrangements'. After all, some interviewees argued, state officials take money from taxes for personal use and not for public investments. Or, as others argued, the informal sector ultimately boosts the national economy more than the formal sector, stuck in inactivity.

These forms of cheating are masked in several complicated ways. Officials, lawyers, teachers, etc. asking for bribes, 'gratitude' money explicitly asked for by medical staff, common cheating of the state (employers together with employees, business partners together agreeing upon a fictive contract), and technological transformations (stealing phone units, software piracy, etc.) are all activities that cannot be performed by a single person. Some forms, technically, could not be done and some others would be too risky. Therefore, previous negotiation and agreement among partners is needed: all partners should have a material interest in co-operating; all partners should either trust the others or know that they do not run a real danger of being denounced (by having a less powerful partner or one that is backed up by some third party, etc.). Studies conducted during the socialist period stressed the importance of networks in the working of the informal economy, the networks being 'trusted' (Kenedi 1981; Wedel 1986; Ledeneva 1998). This is no longer necessary in many forms of common cheating, as some practices became regarded as natural and unquestioned, and also because the state provides weak or biased control, which makes denunciation impractical.

5.2.4 The domestic economy

The domestic economy is large, concerning almost every household, but makes a very small financial contribution to the national economy. In general, Romanians do not acknowledge it as part of the informal sector and often not as work either (especially when the activities are strictly linked to the household and performed by women). For instance, most postsocialist economies have an important agricultural component. Traditionally, rural households were the centres of domestic production, mainly performed by women. The products are often for commercial consumption. However, this is not considered as 'production' or 'business' by those who are engaged in its performance, but simply as a means of survival. There are several reasons for this. During the socialist period, domestic production was illegal because the state did not encourage private forms of property and production. After 1989, domestic production continued to be illegal because of non-payment of taxes. But the passage from one type of illegality to the other has not been understood, or when it has, peasants have chosen not to declare the products sold as a means of protest against the state that keeps them in poverty.

There is less concrete 'production' among urban households; their domestic activity consists rather in the exchange of services based on kin or simple interest, a traditional pattern. In-house production consists of women's domestic duties, childcare (largely provided by kin based in the same or neighbouring household), and men's odd jobs, maintenance, gardening, etc. Most of the activities concerning the home, those for which some family member or neighbour has enough skill to perform, will be solved without using the outside market. Here networks are important, as house-related activities appear to require more trust than other public activities (or as people express it, 'you cannot bring just anyone home'). This has important consequences for the formal economy, as it does not encourage the development of professional service enterprises, but it is an important solution to the money problems most households face. Socialist patterns could also be invoked here, as during the socialist period there were very few service enterprises dealing with repairs, maintenance, etc., and this extends into the present. *Bricolage* replaced professionalism in many cases, this type of activity being easily extended from the domestic to the black economy. This is how somebody 'good at' something became a 'specialist' after 1989. The exchange of services between kin/ neighbours often involves money, but there is an unwritten contract that forces the one who receives money to provide the other with the opportunity to perform a paid service at a later stage.

When money is scarce, as in the former Soviet states at the beginning of the 1990s, the practice of barter (Humphrey and Hugh-Jones 1992) that

existed traditionally in non-industrialised societies appears. Barter is a direct exchange that evades commercial costs and state taxes and remains the only solution in the case of money scarcity. In the former Soviet republics, barter was practised even by the state, which sometimes paid public sector employees directly in products (Humphrey 1985). In all postsocialist countries, dollars and euros[52] are circulated in parallel with the national currency, and daily speculation on their value is common. In Bucharest, barter is not common, except for service exchanges as mentioned above, but the practice is maintained in the countryside, where farm products and services are exchanged.

5.3 Money and survival

5.3.1 How people cope with the lack of money

The topic of money appears repeatedly in people's conversations and references. You cannot admire somebody's dress without being told immediately and exactly how much it cost. You cannot meet a friend for coffee without first running to compare all the coffee prices in town in order to make your choice, and subsequently debating in detail the excellent or poor deal you made by choosing one or the other. One's memory and ability for mental arithmetic are stimulated every other minute, as people have small amounts of money to spend and prices change daily. Considering the soaring rates of inflation, and the constant conversion of lei into dollars required to evaluate any purchase, Romanians are like animated calculators as they go in an out of shops, all advertising reduced prices. However, as it is unlikely that all Romanians have a special talent for doing arithmetic in their heads, it would not be absurd to suppose that while in the street, every one of them is caught up in calculations and conversions, which would explain why when they open their mouths they speak only of money.

Money is an obsession because it is lacking. From my personal experience, living decently in Bucharest without turning money into an obsession required $250/month per person in 2001. The average wage being $100/month, what bridges the gap? There are two possible answers: alternative legal and illegal activities (for those who have the skills, connections, the chance and the strength to find and to perform them), or poverty. Anthropologists working in Eastern Europe have extensively documented people's creativity in making ends meet (Anderson and Pine 1995; Bridger

[52] After the introduction of the euro in the majority of the European Union member states in January 2002, the euro became the main hard currency in Central and Eastern European countries, replacing the dollar.

and Pine 1998). My study comes to the same conclusion – generalisations are impossible given such a multiplicity of ways to make ends meet. There are those made redundant from factories who return to their parents' newly restored land to engage in subsistence agriculture. There are those who complement their income by working as commercial agents – these represent more than half of the jobs advertised in newspapers, jobs to be carried on especially during and throughout your main employment.

Carrying on a second job while at one's main place of work is a common occurrence and is widely accepted, as the following example shows. In August 2000, researchers in the Institute of Nuclear Physics and Engineering at Magurele (on the periphery of Bucharest) were protesting the lack of resources being allocated to research. At that time the average net salary for researchers was $50/month, reaching $70/month for researchers with a PhD and some thirty years' work experience; various bonuses were however added to this basic amount. Though the law stipulated that 0.8% of the state budget should be allocated to research, the budget for 2000 allocated only 0.18%. In a broadcast interview following the protest, the leader of the researchers' union felt compelled to explain that researchers were protesting about the insufficient resources allocated to research teams and not about the poor pay, insisting that they, the researchers, 'manage to survive' (*se descurcă*) – they know some foreign languages and thus can take on translating work, as experimental researchers they have the knowledge and manual abilities to play at being mechanics– but that research in nuclear physics requires funding. Most people have these types of second jobs, which help them to survive. Yet how creative can one be as a physicist when forced to be creative in the alternative economy? Are the researchers thinking about physics or about securing a car-repair job while they are at work? These are some of the broader concerns that intellectuals express.

5.3.2 The 'naturalisation' of small tricks, or 'still the best solution'?

It is clear from the way small tricks are used to 'solve' financial or administrative problems that they have been integrated into a way of life where they are just another social phenomenon. As Wedel's Polish informants told her during the socialist period: 'this is everyday life for us' (1986). An important Romanian opinion maker, Florin Călinescu, has frequently commented on his popular TV programme that services have disappeared, but fortunately they remain in the underground economy. His comments echo that of Wedel: 'The informal structure does what the formal structure is unable to do' (1986: 81). Thus Călinescu propagates a positive view of the informal sector.

Though tricking the state through undeclared second jobs would definitely be justified (as a survival strategy, as 'still the best solution' to eco-

nomic dysfunction, or simply just 'out there'), many other forms of cheating do not receive people's moral support and thus cannot be considered 'naturalised'. When referring to small tricks, people's judgements are not set in macro terms; they do not question whether these activities undermine the economy or not, as they do constantly when referring to big tricks. A small trick is a personal matter; it is not set in the context of the economy or of the enterprise, it is just 'small'. (One can recognise here the behaviour of a 'free rider'.) Small tricks may be subject to moral rather than to economic evaluation, but what is seen as moral or not often depends on the context. Typically, people would be revolted if somebody attempted to extort them, but would have a self-explanatory discourse if they offered bribes to someone else themselves. 'We use language to manage and mask a contradiction: what we do ourselves we may condemn in others. [...] *My* perks are *your* fiddles' (Harding and Jenkins 1989: 174). What people invoke in order to justify their personal behaviour are not social facts, but their social perception of facts, which is often distorted, because it relies on prejudices and assumptions about socialist legacies, wide-spread corruption, etc.

In May-June 2000, Gallup Organisation Romania, in a project funded by the Soros Open Society, conducted a poll on a representative sample of 900 Bucharest inhabitants over 18 on their perceptions of corruption. 91.7% of those polled perceived corruption as a generalised phenomenon. The poll also inquired how much experience with corruption they actually had. 80% of the sample answered that they had been confronted with problems caused by administrative employees trying to get money from them. The total amount of bribes paid to Bucharest administrative employees in 1999 was estimated at 50.5 billion lei, 33,600 times the average monthly wage at the 1999 level. The professions that most frequently received money from the public were: 1) doctors (66.7%); 2) policemen (30.9%); and 3) employees of the local administration (27.2%). The most corrupt institutions were considered to be: 1) hospitals (83%); 2) the police (75%); 3) Parliament (70%); 4) government (70%); 5) local administration (68%); 6) courts of justice (66%); 7) the Fund of State Property (61%).

We can draw several conclusions from these figures. First, corruption is a topic of grave concern and people daily face activities that they 'morally condemn'. Second, there is always less concrete corruption than people think. Third, people participate in bribery, no matter how negatively they view it, as 'still the best solution', without feeling particularly bad about the fact of being involved in illegal activities. Fourth, the institutions that make or maintain the law are corrupt or perceived as being corrupt, which is of paramount importance when one thinks about the input on ethics of these institutions or the public reliance on them to denounce corruption. The

results of the poll also enforce the difference between 'our' inoffensive, natural cheating for survival and 'their' unavoidable, bad, greedy cheating.

5.3.3 Poverty

Since the 1960s, the difficulty in defining and quantifying poverty according to some universal standard has led anthropologists to abandon the concept of poverty in favour of others, such as marginality, deprivation, and suffering, and to focus on difference in local experiences (Good 1980). Poverty 'is always defined according to the conventions of the society in which it occurs' (Hobsbawm 1968). This does not invalidate its reality, asserts Sen, as poverty is not a value judgement or other subjective category, but a matter of fact for people living in a given social context (1981). In the case of Romania, poverty does not mean famine, though people complain about it as if it did – maybe because it is just as painful. During the winter of 1999-2000 there were 60,000 demands in Bucharest for the disconnection of flats from central heating because of the inability to pay. This meant that approximately 10% of Bucharest's households had to spend their winter at 12 degrees Celsius. During the eighties, living with no heating was very common. However, as central heating is present in all urban flats and one needs to make efforts to withdraw from it (which involves quite costly procedures), this is perceived as painful. Anthropologists' new concepts prove useful here; if the above case does not stand for poverty, it certainly stands for deprivation, and, because of higher expectations, it brings suffering.

A 'middle class' in Romania has not yet emerged, but there is a large middle group (roughly 80% of the population), who fall between the very rich and the very poor. The new rich live in villas near Bucharest and in some of its quarters. The very poor live in sewers or in crumbling houses – many of them are (street) children. Begging is common in the underground or outside fast-food restaurants, and what impresses people is the total absence of the usual ethnic divide. Begging was associated with Gypsies during the socialist period, which allowed people to be indifferent to it. Now beggars are Romanians, many with children, a lot of them old, many coming from the countryside. This completely turns everybody against the system and against the rich, and while the need for begging is objected to, beggars are often given money. The 80% that form the middle category are heterogeneous in respect to their means, but homogenous in respect to their own categorisation. A real 'middle class' according to a Western definition is slowly emerging from the young people employed in the top end of the labour market (by international/ foreign companies or international/ foreign NGOs).

5.4 Conclusion

The intention of this chapter was to draw a picture of the Romanian economy, which would allow us to understand the position of service enterprises and of their employees. For the description of the informal economy, I referred to people's way of categorising different types of activities linked to it. This drew us from a strict structuralist approach of social phenomena to an examination in terms of social meanings attached to them, in which morality is the criterion of categorisation. Finally, all the activities performed, whether official, unofficial or alternative, are part of the same objective to make ends meet. Though poverty in Romania does not involve famine, ninety percent of Romanians are reduced to a fight for survival.

The structuralist approach with which I began in characterising the Romanian economy allowed for a clear presentation of the official divisions between different sectors of the economy and different types of rewards, as well as for a redefinition of these sectors through a moral divide. Though the emerging picture has the advantage of clarity, the lack of historical perspective impedes our understanding of phenomena like the 'naturalisation' of the informal sector or complaints against the new emerging social structures. Previous economic social and economic structures need to be considered in order to comprehend the present ones as well as the varying impact of the transformation. The new market economy has not started from scratch, but has built itself out from and in opposition to previous socialist structures (Burawoy and Verdery 1999).

Chapter 6
The Legacy of the Past: Socialism and Postsocialism

Given the strong features inherited from socialist ideology and practices, social scientists have continued to study 'postsocialist' countries as a field, generating specific analytical interests such as continuity versus change and the individual versus the collective.[53] A comparison of ethnographic data from Eastern European countries still supports the assumption that what defines a former socialist country is its 'postsocialism', i.e. its negation of socialist ideology and its inheritance of socialist practices. More historically driven anthropologists notice however that Eastern European countries also have a similar pre-socialist past, which might explain their current common features. Exploring the past allows us to understand some of the anachronisms present in today's social structure, but also some social meanings that are seemingly paradoxical when contextualised only in the present. Furthermore, Romanians make constant reference to national and personal history and to the 'socialist legacy', an important aspect of their social memory. Thus even if the weight and the nature of the legacy is open to controversy, the imagined 'legacy' of work experience and education, which is constantly present in individuals' perceptions of the world, deserves investigation because of its continuous bearing on individuals' work ethics. I will not discuss here the legacy of the pre-socialist period, as today working adults have no direct knowledge of it and there are very few extant structures of service enterprises from before the war. The pre-socialist past will be discussed in Chapter seven with reference to the more slowly changing notion of time.

The legacy that I take into account is the legacy of the socialist system, as well as of the history of socialism as it actually existed. As different economic possibilities and political perspectives begin to differentiate postsocialist countries (Stark asserts that their future economic development is 'path dependent' [1992]), one discovers that socialism had a history, that this

[53] The construction of a scientific tradition and interests proper to each cultural area is a phenomenon that has been described by Richard Fardon (1990).

history is specific to each country and that it has generated different legacies in each of them. This 'discovery' supports Sampson's statement in 1991 that socialism will be best understood after it has fallen apart (Sampson 1991). I shall first describe the socialist system, considered by anthropologists to have left a strong mark on today's postsocialist societies. Then I shall highlight the social facts and meanings from my ethnographic data that reflect these socialist legacies.

6.1 What ought to be and what was socialism

Whether they are inclined to theorise state socialism (Verdery 1991a) or to underline different local experiences under socialism (Hann 1993a and Hann 1994 on the impossibility of building a model of real socialism), most anthropologists agree that the socialist economic and political organisation is a main feature in the characterisation of former socialist countries (Hann 1995: 21). Socialist principles have led to the existence of similar institutions, similar difficulties, and 'perverse effects' in all socialist countries in 'actually existing socialism' (Bahro 1978). An example is the large informal economy, one of the main by-products of the socialist system, which became legitimately embedded in everyday life and persists well into the postsocialist period, encouraged by the new economic conditions. Given different socialist histories in each country, I argue that what makes socialist countries similar for methodological purposes is not the socialist ideology, but a complex set of links between ideology and social practice, how people were led to 'muddle through' (Sampson 1984b) socialist values.

A particularity of socialist countries is their political and social organisation, which is the result of the infiltration of ideology at every level of official and personal relations. But we should equally recall that this totalitarian model never fully worked, that ordinary people were far less bound by ideology, and that their behaviour was mostly a non-ideological adaptation to socialism. 'Muddling through' was far more common than ideological resistance or collaboration with the regime. Economic difficulties during socialism made the fulfilment of basic needs the first preoccupation of the individual; personal ethical discourses were elaborated *post facto* in order to justify 'adaptation'/ resignation to the social system manifested in the compliance with illegal activities or the reliance on connections (*pile*).

In this section, I will give a brief account of the realities of the formal and informal sector, of social policies, and of the ideology of work promoted by the socialist regime.

6.1.1 Economics

State socialist economies are often referred to as centrally planned economies. Communist economists opposed the anarchic, chaotic forces of the market to the rational order of socialist planning. They maintained that the economy would develop more efficiently and quickly if the priorities and policies were set in advance according to the needs of the whole. The five-year plan was imagined, discussed, then voted upon as law by the centre, and then various ministries were only responsible for its implementation and its fulfilment (and preferably over-fulfilment) in the economic units (Holmes 1997: 199). Managers of these units soon discovered that the targets set by the plan increased annually and that the materials required did not always arrive on time or in the right quantities. Their response was to bargain for the targets and raw materials, concealing any excess of production or material for the next plan, and declaring only an acceptable (over)-fulfilment of the plan (Verdery 1996: 21). The state fully participated in this game with budgets and materials, because of its 'soft budget constraint' policy (Kornai 1980). The fact that the state held contradictory objectives at the same time – profitability on the one hand and maintenance of full employment on the other hand – made it redistribute from the efficient to the inefficient enterprises, thus placing itself in a relation of interdependence with these enterprises. This policy generated an 'economy of shortage' (Kornai 1980) in which enterprises competed with each other for the supply of raw materials and other favours.

The conception of the plan and its implementation required a hierarchical administration, from the government through the ministry down to the economic units, with many other intermediary bodies. Information was thus difficult to obtain and there were many opportunities for it to become distorted. A demand had to pass through many hands before it got final approval. All of this left space for the development of personal relations, parallel to the state bureaucracy, to clientelism and corruption that smoothed the working of the system and enabled it to go on. Among party bureaucrats, there were also divisions between those at the centre, interested in augmenting the means of production (the 'input'), and those in the field, more concerned with the growth of productivity (the 'output'). Those belonging to this last category began, at the end of the 1970s/ beginning of the 1980s, to use the language of reform. However, the debate over economic issues was often simply an argument in the dispute for power within communist parties.

Private ownership, considered the principal reason for antagonistic class relations by Marx and Lenin, was suppressed and all means of production became public. This led to 'free rider' behaviour: an individual does not pay his contribution to the public good and this is not noticeable as long as

the others contribute and the machine is still working. Free rider behaviour meant a lack of involvement and responsibility towards public and enterprise goods. Proof that public ownership led to lack of concern and responsibility could be seen in the case of agricultural labour on common property, in the collectives. Peasants were organised in collectives and co-operatives, and jointly owned their means of production (though the land usually belonged to the state). They were also allowed to have small private plots for family consumption. The productivity of private plots was systematically higher than that of the collective and contributed to the development of a second economy.

The state gave priority to industry, especially heavy industry, and neglected the production of consumer goods. This led to a scarcity in supply and thus to competition and strategising on the part of consumers in order to obtain goods. Following Marxist ideology, which saw production as a creative process while exchange was seen as the source of profit and discrimination, the distribution sector was neglected in favour of the productive sector. Ideologically, employees of the distribution sector were at the margins of the system – they were not proletarians and there was a sense of distrust surrounding their place in the system.[54] However, the scarcity of supply put the re-distributor in a position of superiority to those making the demands: the more s/he had to redistribute, the more powerful s/he was. This applied to the high levels of bureaucracy as well as to the service providers; they had control over resources and distributed them in formal and informal ways and through them the informal economy intermingled with the formal economy as a business within a business.

The informal economy appeared in order to correct economic and organisational dysfunctions within the socialist system, but it pre-dates 1947. There are several approaches to the second economy of Eastern European countries: in terms of its legality or illegality; in terms of industrial relations and conflicting interests between management and workers (Burawoy and Lukacs 1992); in terms of workers' attitudes to their own labour (Swain 1990: 89).

In Hungary, from 1982 alternative forms of ownership were allowed to appear, with the hope that a more stimulating competitive environment would be created within the planned economy. The second economy that came to exist in Hungary was a legal version of the form of activities that were going on as 'shadow economies' in other socialist states. Researchers

[54] Ideally, they should not exist at all. The image of displayed goods that nobody needs to monitor and from which everybody helps himself according to his needs, with the generous thought that others may need them too, came forward sometimes in interviews as the typical image of communism.

who studied the phenomenon found that the 'other' economy necessitated a lot of work, secured few rewards, and remained at the margin, thus rendering the maintenance of a job in the formal economy essential. Some examples of tolerated activities during socialism were private tuition by teachers, rent for house owners, and small farming. But they could also be bribes for those in charge of university admission or 'gratitude' money for doctors (Hann 1990: 27). The success of market reforms introduced in Hungary was relative, but still showed that the existence of a shadow economy improved the living conditions of those involved in it.

Steven Sampson shows how central planning, shortages, etc., compelled bureaucrats to manipulate and smooth the way of goods to their factories so that they could work (1984a). There were also underground factories that generated small-scale manufacturing products with materials provided through theft from state factories.

Domestic production, especially peasants' subsistence farming, was viewed by Chayanov, in his *Theory of Peasant Economy* (1987 [1925]), as a form of self-exploitation legitimate within the socialist system. Domestic production and the existence of green markets were not considered harmful and were not regulated by strict laws. There were exceptions: in Romania for instance in the late eighties, peasants were not allowed to slaughter their own cows for meat. Subsistence farming was the main solution to the shortage of food products

The black market economy involved trade with scarce items at much higher prices than those sold in shops. People who made use of it also perceived this illegal petty commerce in negative terms. Verdery notes that Romanian Gypsies were seen as thieves because of their involvement in trade, even when it was a fair trade (1996: 98). The illegal, black market economy functioned only through personal connections because it was based on trust and access to underground information. Verdery found that it often functioned along ethnic lines (1991b, 1993), though family and neighbourhood solidarity were the most frequent bases for connection. When the black market economy became essential for survival (the goods exchanged were mainly food items), it became easy to justify getting involved in it. People got things through enterprises' back doors, by illegal use of the means of production, theft of products, etc. (Humphrey 1983; Verdery 1996). The informal economy perpetuates some traditional ways of dealing with goods, partners and services (business conducted among kin, word-of-mouth advertisement for products based on one's own experience, etc.) that continued uninterrupted during the socialist period.

Domestic production and services, especially women's production, helped reduce the family's external costs for childcare (the occupation of

grandmothers), housework, house and car maintenance. Improvised home-made materials could replace insufficient or costly materials. Household *bricolage*, which successfully replaced non-existent public services, was preferred and stimulated self-sufficiency[55] and the maintenance of the traditional gendered share of duties in the family.

6.1.2 Social policies

According to communist ideology, every citizen had the right and the obligation to work, to participate in the construction of communism. This is why on the labour market there was no unemployment, but rather labour scarcity. Enterprises used to over-employ people, a fact encouraged by officials and often necessary because of the irregularity of production in enterprises. Those solicited to work in enterprises during the busy period remained on the books during slack periods, when they were effectively unemployed. This was a result of deficiencies in the organisation of production, but also of the rigidity of the system, which did not value or even allow 'job-hopping'. The right to work was also a duty and the state practised a constant policy of assimilation of marginal groups such as Gypsies into the labour force, thus hoping to discipline them (Stewart 1990, 1993). The state left little initiative to workers themselves, often placing people in the workplace (as was the case for university students when they finished their education). Some people were underemployed in that their jobs did not make full use of their education or training. At retirement age however, everybody was entitled to a retirement pension.

Theoretically, the socialist system's strength and legitimacy lay in the social contract established with its subjects. Redistribution was need-based: 'to everybody according to his/her needs' (Cook 1994). Indeed the socialist state provided free health services and education, cheap housing, subsidised food, the right to work and the right to retirement pensions afterwards. This gave a strong sense of entitlement, and allowed extensive mechanisms of social security to be supported by state funds. In practice, unfortunately, the scarcity of assets led to distorted practices. Health services were free in theory, but in practice those who could afford to pay got far better service. This was not due to a lack of doctors (the educational system produced them), but to poor technology and lack of investment in its production. Furthermore, the prioritisation of certain forms of care was decided by the state, not by citizens. An indicator of the impoverishment of both technology and people is the decline of life expectancy in the 1970s-80s, especially in

[55] Kenedi recounts with humour how he built a whole house on his own in Hungary at the end of the 1970s (Kenedi 1981).

the USSR. The same phenomenon took place with regard to housing. Housing was distributed through the workplace or city council, but if one lacked the personal connections necessary to obtain a higher place on the list, one had to wait years to get housing. Flats were often small and of poor quality, located in huge blocks, and with central distribution of heating and hot water. Although some workers were allocated flats for a modest rent, from the beginning of the 1970s they were obliged to buy them in instalments, because there were no more resources for subsidised housing. Education was free and compulsory for eight, and later ten, years, but teacher to student ratios were very high, supplies were scarce and classrooms in poor condition.

Marx and Engels believed that it was possible to 'liberate' women by freeing them from the 'oppression' of domestic labour and by drawing them into the labour force. This principle was applied by all socialist states in the form of protective legislation for women and the result was that at the end of the 1980s, 70% of women of working age were in the labour force in Eastern Europe (in Czechoslovakia up to 96%). Women were predominant in the service sector, light industry, etc. Even in these sectors, however, the hierarchy remained gender-based, with men on top: patriarchal relations seemed to survive both at home and at the workplace (Buckley 1989; Rai et al. 1992). At home, women bore the main responsibility for childcare and rearing. Abortion was forbidden in Romania from 1966, when Ceauşescu launched his pro-natal policy in order to increase the labour force and the strength of the nation. This regulation of bodies had dreadful effects on women and is thought to represent one of the most intrusive means of state control over its subjects (Kligman 1998; Gal and Kligman 2000). The state provided cheap childcare facilities to allow women to go to work. However, these facilities degraded over time and often grandmothers took care of their grandchildren while the mothers were at work.[56] The privileging of heavy over light industry also meant that, compared to western Europe or the United States, fewer home appliances that could render women's housework easier were available to women.

6.1.3 The ideology of work

The ideology of work is the result of the elaboration of several political beliefs and ideas in a particular social and historical setting (Buckley 1989). In a socialist system, these ideas constitute a unique theoretical interpretation of reality, over which the Communist Party has a monopoly, while in a

[56] Young grandmothers often took early retirement in order to meet this traditional family obligation.

democratic society several competing ideologies can co-exist in the public space. In liberal systems, the ideology of work is influenced by actual practices and claims (like the 1968 demonstrations in the West), whereas in socialist systems the leaders decide what the 'appropriate' interpretation of the doctrine is at a given time (Buckley 1989: 5). The ideology of work in Romania during the socialist period was the result of the 'pure' Marxist ideas about work and of the practical Marxist interpretation elaborated by the Romanian Communist Party, the president Nicolae Ceauşescu and the Ministry of Culture.

Marx viewed work as both rewarding and alienating, depending on the relations of production in which it is performed. Through work, man transforms the objects of his environment: he satisfies his needs, gives them value and transforms them into possessions that define him. Work defines an individual's identity. But if these products of labour are taken away from him, his self is alienated. Work is then alienation (Ortiz 1979: 210).

State socialism assured that everybody had the right to work and that workers were the masters of their own work. This however led to a 'commoditisation of labour' (Lampland 1995) as much as under capitalism: work became an object sold to the state in exchange for social advantages. Propaganda about commitment to work was the main incentive that officials could supply, given that no real financial incentives that would have introduced inequalities among workers could be given (as the case of Stakhanovism shows). Phenomena like Stakhanovism and model farms, and the way they were dealt with locally, reflect the socialist ideology of work at a given time.

Work was dedicated to the common good and had an aim: the construction of a 'socialist multilaterally developed society' and the advancement towards communism. The fact that under the desired communism everybody was supposed to be rewarded 'according to her/his needs', while an ascetic lifestyle was vaunted, meant that there was no reason for unlimited work for the sake of accumulation, which characterises the Protestant work ethic.

The ideology of work did not directly address the issue of services, because this sector did not produce anything enduring, being just complementary to the other economic sectors. Given that the aim of trade (the main form of service in the past) is profit, trade in communist ideology was reduced to a system of redistribution of products to which everybody was entitled and which bore only superficial similarities to the profit-making trade (for instance by the use of money). Services in general were meant to support workers so that they could engage in productive labour.

This very brief overview of the socialist regime reveals the existence of fixed ideological, economic, political, and social structures, which to-

gether imposed the place of work in people's lives and their appropriate work ethic. The state assigned a workplace and a duty to everybody – to contribute to the development of socialism – and her/his work was a contribution to the development of socialism. Having a workplace was thus sufficient for fulfilling one's duty towards the state, which guaranteed in exchange a (quite undifferentiated) reward and social security. The socialist work ethic, initially one of enthusiasm and willingness to give to society, in practice takes on a mechanical form: it is asserted but not believed. As work becomes a constraint (as was the case during the socialist period), it does not need to be a calling. On the contrary, as its reward is often seen as unsatisfactory, work will actually be undermined as a protest against the system. As a Romanian joke puts it, 'They pretend they are paying us, and we pretend we are working' (*Ei se fac că ne plătesc, noi ne facem că muncim*) (Verdery 1983: 29). Examples from the economic and political sphere show that non-ideological resistance and negotiation were prevalent under socialism. This is the 'actually existing' work ethic that would influence the perception of work after 1989.

6.2 The socialist legacy

6.2.1 The anthropology of postsocialism

The anthropology of postsocialism has been constructed as an extension of the anthropology of socialism, in that it inherited features such as the ideologisation of socialism's interests or the persistence of conclusions drawn in terms of continuity and change with the socialist period. This focus on the ideological framework of societies has generated structuralist studies that conceptualise patterns of continuity/ change with the socialist period, looking at the persistence or reversal of socialist or capitalist ideologies (e.g. Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Gal and Kligman 2000). Some of these studies are conceptually rich and theoretically ambitious, but run the risk of ending in intellectual exercises about the nature of individuals and society. A second type of study, current in the 1990s, is more post-modern in style, describing the difficult experience of everyday life after socialism, the fight for survival (Buckley 1997; Bridger and Pine 1998). With no ambitious theorisation at the macro level and focused more closely on people's 'muddling through' the new political and economic environment, the latter studies are ethnographically insightful, but tend to remain very 'local'. In his review of the field (slightly biased towards American anthropology), Wolfe (2000) distinguishes between the corpus of research on Eastern Europe, which deals mainly with the transformation of the political economy of the states, and the corpus of research on the former Soviet Union, which deals with the concept

of culture in sites affected by social changes. 'The anthropology of Eastern Europe' gradually becomes a term more appropriate than that of anthropology of postsocialist countries, as the authors of both types of studies question the accuracy of the term 'postsocialism'. In their understanding, 'postsocialism' comes to designate only 'the time that comes after socialism' and not an ideology. In order to refer to this historical period more easily (as a shorthand), I maintain use of the term 'postsocialism' in this study and I will propose in Chapter six a complementary reading of the Romanian postsocialist transformation.

The term 'socialist legacy', widely used by politicians to explain the difficulties of the reform, concerns social entities or facts, such as the existence of monolithic factories in the Romanian economy. I shall use it here to define the continuities in practices in the labour market, which sometimes reflect continuities in the social meanings attached to them and sometimes do not.[57]

During my fieldwork in Bucharest, I met circumstances, institutions and people that bore similarities to ethnographic accounts of the socialist period. I also engaged in conversations with people who relied on their memories and on their imagination to notice continuities between the socialist and the postsocialist period. My discussion of socialist legacies in what follows will be limited to the sphere of work. The refrain I heard repeatedly when people referred to the sphere of work and to enterprises was 'nothing has changed'. Some practices seem to support this statement. But I question the continuity of meanings that these practices carry for those who perform them. Today similar practices may be the result of different motivations and values than those held by citizens during the socialist period.

6.2.2 The main legacies affecting employment

Naturally, state administrations and state enterprises feature continuities with socialist organisations. In many respects, they remain indeed the same bureaucratic institutions with which Romanian citizens are bound to deal in their daily lives. Their employees know this well. After ten years of a market economy, the Prime Minister, Mugur Isarescu, listed the reduction of unnecessary expenses from the state apparatus as one of his first economic priorities (Antena 1, 2000a) and a governmental Agency for Public Servants was created in order to restructure the bureaucratic apparatus. But it would be naïve to reduce the problems in the public sector to bureaucracy.

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[57] Many other researchers use the notion of a socialist legacy to refer to the meanings associated with social phenomena rather than with social institutions and phenomena (for instance Dunn 1999).

One example demonstrates the other socialist aspects of the client-employee relationship in a public administration. The international section of the SNCFR Agency (the National Railway Company) is situated on the second floor of an old building in the centre of Bucharest. It has a dozen counters, more than half of them open simultaneously, situated in an open space, where clients are separated from employees only by a high counter, which hides the employees behind. But this separation is only visual, unlike in other administrations where glass or walls clearly separate the administrative space from the public space. One result of this setting is that the function of each counter is not displayed, except for the information booth. The day I visited this agency, there were no more than two or three clients, all trying to find their way around in order to purchase international train tickets. Five or six counters were open, as the advanced division of work meant that one could not reserve a seat, reserve a couchette, buy a ticket and find the timetable of the train at the same counter. The client who needs to perform all these operations has to find out in which order to visit the counters: to get the information regarding the timetable of departures and train numbers from the Information counter, to communicate this information to the employee who operates the reservation of a couchette or seat, to communicate the reservation number to the employee who sells the train ticket, and then to carry the tickets and reservations from one counter to the other. While employees sit behind a non-partitioned counter, only a meter apart from each other, and would theoretically be able to hand tickets to each other, the client has to wait in line at three to four counters in order to buy a ticket. I spent half an hour despite the reduced number of clients and despite the fact that I knew the timetable of my train before entering the agency. Foreign travellers, who are a major part of the clientele, are required to learn on the spot how to dance between counters from impatient directions given by the employees in Romanian. While the advanced 'division of labour' here is the main detrimental factor to efficient employee-customer relations, the indifference and impoliteness displayed by employees do not derive from it. These attitudes are frequently encountered in monopolistic enterprises or state administrations and are supported by the fact that the customer does not have the alternative of solving her/his problem somewhere else. The interesting point in the case of the National Railway Company is that today this impression is incorrect. Though the railway company is monopolistic, any travel agency sells international tickets. Even if clients chose to buy their tickets elsewhere, the dozen useless counters would still remain open and the employees would have even more free time. Indeed, in such a quiet environment, every client represents an unwanted disruption from the usual and expected 'sitting around'.

If in this banal case, the worst consequence of the employees' indifference is that the wrong ticket is paid for, there are more serious cases where indifference costs human lives. In September 1999, after a series of explosions were registered in private flats due to gas leaks, RomGaz, the national enterprise responsible for gas distribution, was targeted by the press. In one of the cases investigated by the press, it came out that RomGaz had received a complaint about a gas leakage before the explosion took place, but the anonymous employee who answered the call had replied that 'it smells like gas' was not conclusive information and that he could not localise the leakage. Made public, his reply was scandalised, but it proved impossible to detect the employee at fault, because in such cases employees typically cover for each other, and no one can be found to shoulder responsibility.

Another socialist legacy is related to people's attitude towards the state. The state is still the opponent, which continues to be blamed, stolen or tricked. This 'doing nothing' instead of working affects nobody but the state, as it involves stealing from state enterprises, tax evasion (tolerated by tax inspectors) or travelling without a valid ticket (tolerated by transport controllers). People perceive such tolerance in a positive light, especially when they are the ones who are cheating. The impersonality of the state is such that not even its officials will identify with it. In 2000, MPs were found to be cheating the Parliament via a sophisticated system that made them appear to be present at parliamentary meetings when they were absent. Government officials blamed the state apparatus as if they had no responsibility in it. Similarly, the managers of Alpha felt that they were not responsible for the inconsistencies in their organisation, only because they were acting in an environment where they did not control all the elements. Or, they were unaware that in a market economy no actor is perfectly informed or totally controls the forces acting on the market. Only the socialist state thought of itself as all-seeing and all-controlling. The fact that an actor does not know or control everything should not deprive the actor of responsibility for her/his actions. People's attitudes towards the state or state enterprises are often reproduced in private enterprises, where the impersonality and unpredictability of market conditions suggest the same uncertainty, implying lack of responsibility for the final outcome.

There were also practices and discourses inherited from the socialist period in the private enterprises I observed. In Alpha, the 'we are all equal' discourse and the need for unanimity in decisions appear to be a correction of the deformation of Marxist principles during socialism: it is Marx on his feet again. In the marketing department of Beta, where the manager asserts the values of individualism and initiative, these values ultimately apply only

to him. Otherwise he closely supervises his employees through a window or checks carefully what a telesaleswoman says over the phone, eventually stopping her conversation or shouting at her while she is still talking with a client, in a 'Big Brother' type of environment. Though these two managerial styles are identical to the managerial styles of 'small bosses' from the socialist period, the employees do not read them in the same context, and the consequences are not the same (e.g. in Beta employees would simply leave the enterprise and thus escape the pressure).

Service enterprises still suffer from the negative image they had under socialism (as a non-productive sector) and in the enterprises I observed this image was exacerbated by the service delivered: 'talk' (*vorbărie,* a term with negative connotations). Marketing in Beta consisted in nothing less than playing tricks through words to clients, and Alpha's counselling was 'nothing but talk'. Many economic analysts, lamenting the fact that 'nothing is produced any more' in Romania, consider production to be the necessary requisite for economic development. Comparatively, service enterprises that give no concrete proof of their work cannot rank highly. The fact that in marketing jobs payment is per sale (no basic wage is ensured) also stems from (and perpetuates) the idea that work without material results does not deserve remuneration. A remuneration system that exclusively rewards results perpetuates the idea that only visible results should be rewarded. The same judgement is often applied to administrative employees, who 'just shift papers from here to there', as one informant told me. Only their monopolistic position and the importance of the 'shifted' papers for one's life protect them from open accusations of 'doing nothing'.

6.2.3 Other work-related legacies

Other legacies also indirectly affect work performance. The informal economy, which boomed during the socialist period, helps to solve the same problems as before, and solves many new ones. Its role in smoothing practices and relations cannot be contested. There are consecrated mechanisms for the resolution of bureaucratic problems. For instance, medical certificates needed for school registration or the establishment of work contracts can be bought illegally for only 20% more than the legal price, and this saves one to two working days. I undertook to get them in both ways, and the comfort of getting them illegally is incomparably greater. This is all the more so as the medical certificate is not accompanied by a medical examination anyway, but is the result of collecting signatures and distributing 'gratitude' chocolates in several medical offices. The practice in the informal economy, compared to that in the formal economy, is often more trustworthy, because it works through networks. The same people perform the same activity, both

in the formal and in the informal economy. Standard medical certificates are not fake, illegally crafted certificates; they are the same standard certificates, signed by the same doctors, stamped with the same stamps, and mostly during the same office hours. The informal economy is strictly linked to the formal one and those involved in it share information with their friends, thus enlarging the informal sphere. I once had to do a translation for an important official, who paid me correctly and promptly, but of course without any work contract. I had been introduced and recommended to him by one of his employees, who obviously took part in his informal network as well. The fact that the employee knew about the informal contract was my guarantee that the verbal contract would be respected.

In many cases, the physical space inside state administrations has remained unchanged for the past fifteen years: one has to bend down to the small window that lets her/him catch a glimpse of the indifferent employee on the other side. Except for a small hole, the window that separates the client from the employee is either opaque or covered with paper announcements. This gives the employee the same superiority s/he used to have under socialism. Indeed, there is no choice about whether to deal with the state administration or not – one simply has to.

I have also observed unpleasant administrative procedures from which the client could have escaped, but did not or maybe did not wish to. At the beginning of January 2000, lots of people queued to pay their taxes, otherwise payable by the 30th of May. These queues were full of older people who spent long hours in the snow waiting for their turn – according to the press reports, one person died of a heart attack while queuing. Where these people overwhelmed by their sense of duty or had they failed to understand inflation? The anticipated rate of inflation was such that waiting until the final deadline in May to pay one's taxes would have made more fiscal sense than paying in January in order to receive the rebate for early payment; certainly, the rebate was of less value than the importance of one's time and health. The apparent lack of rational thinking shows how desperate these retired people were to save money. Maybe this was also a manifestation of nostalgia for the socialist period, when queuing was 'a way of life' (Câmpeanu 1994) and led to the formation of a community. In some of these queues the main occupation was not to protest against the queue, but against those who were trying to jump it. I had to engage in many discussions on ethics and morality while trying to temper older people's reactions against the behaviour of younger people, who were suspected of not respecting the rules of the queue.[58]

[58] These remarks were addressed to me because I was taken for a representative of the youth at the queue and probably also because I was the only one listening.

Another socialist legacy is the force of entitlements. This is manifest in every field of social life and has implications for work practices. Typically, unemployment is viewed as the responsibility of the state. Although the state provides support and training for the unemployed, the labour union leaders complain that there is no personalised service of social assistance, which for instance would visit people at home after they have been fired and ask them if they have found a job. Housing is also viewed as the state's obligation. One of my friends, a 21-year-old female student in economics, complained that even if she were to find a good job after graduation, it still would not allow her to save money to buy a flat and have a family. While I certainly agreed that housing for young people is a major problem, with some 35% of married couples having to live with their parents, I had to point out that young people in Western countries cannot usually buy a flat until they are 35 years old, and even then only with a loan. This information surprised her, and I wondered why. The answer came naturally during an interview with a 40-year-old female worker, who recounted to me how she had been struggling with her first child in rented flats and how she had 'finally' managed, at 21 years old, when her child was 'already' one year old, to obtain a flat. She did not really 'get' it, but had to buy it on her own (together with her husband), a detail she insisted upon as being less convenient than 'getting' the flat from the state (i.e. renting a state apartment at a low price). She further explained how she had to pay for the flat in instalments over the course of fifteen years – in fact less, due to the galloping inflation in the 1990s that allowed her to pay back the whole amount at once, seven years after she had contracted the debt. 'Don't worry', she assured me. 'I also struggled for a long time in rented flats'. Such expectations towards the state indicate the continuity in social meanings attributed to facts and actions, from socialism to postsocialism, transmitted from one generation to the next through evocations of the past.

More importantly, attitudes towards unemployment are fed by the perception of real employment as being life-long, ensuring a fixed wage and a state pension afterwards. Thus, older people used to tell me their children were unemployed only because one or more of these qualities were not met by their actual employment. Many older state employees despise and distrust private businesses or jobs in private businesses. Valentina Marinescu shows in her study of domestic work in three villages from the Moldova Valley that only salaried work performed in the frame of long term contracts registered on one's work card is considered to be 'paid work' (2002: 174). There are young unemployed made redundant from industrial enterprises or recent graduates who think the same. At job fairs, they refused jobs that did not exactly match their skills and refused to adapt to new employment circum-

stances, even if efforts were made by the organisers of these job fairs to persuade them. Part-time and temporary jobs are perceived positively only as second jobs, or suitable for students. Those forced to have such jobs do not show any pride in their work and comply with their requirements as little as possible.

6.2.4 Perceiving socialist legacies

What certainly encourages the maintenance of socialist anachronisms that create dysfunction within the new social and economic system[59] is the way people perceive them: as unavoidable. People easily generalise from one example to the whole sphere of practice, thanks to a generous imagination stimulated by a negative catalyst. The consequence is the amplification of 'socialist' behaviour, amplification that sometimes lacks concrete support. A few examples will illustrate the mechanisms through which these anomalies breed other anomalies.

The assumption that the whole society is corrupt leads many individuals to try to bribe and trick. Once I was recommended by the state unemployment agency for a job in the private sector. At the interview, the coordinator was very distrustful and could not understand why the state agency had made the effort to recommend me: 'Are they hoping for a return?' The distrust between the state and the public sector is often reciprocal. Many state employees told me that they could not get a position in a bank (where people are well paid) without connections, because 'good jobs are never advertised in newspapers'. Another example will show the terms used by a group of female teenagers to discuss 'life'. One of them, a teenage girl, had been expelled from school because of a conflict with a young female teacher that had degenerated into a fight. Another 15-year-old girl told her that the school director certainly expected some money from her and that she should try to bribe him so that she would be allowed to go back to school. The other teenagers agreed that this is how things work and that it was a wise suggestion.[60] To those who believe that corrupt practices will disappear when generations educated under socialism disappear, this example should be worrying.

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[59] Socialist legacies create dysfunction not necessarily due to inherent deficiencies, but often because they are not suited to the new economic order.

[60] Corruption is a special case because, as the former president Ion Iliescu emphasised, it is not a recent, socialist-era practice, but one that is several hundred years old. Indeed, in interviews older people evoked practices of corruption from the interwar period, especially concerning civil servants.

Corrupt bureaucratic practices are sometimes criticised from within state institutions, but state employees I interviewed considered corruption to be something unavoidable, against which they could not fight alone. In a Bucharest children's home where I worked as a volunteer, several young social assistants shared one office. One of the male social assistants described his work in pessimistic terms. He talked about the bureaucracy that forced him to send hundreds of letters to all the police stations in the country (letters which would remain unanswered) in order to track down children's parents, without which the abandoned child could not be adopted or fostered. This is useless, inefficient bureaucracy and takes time, he said, which would be better dedicated to the children themselves, whom the social assistants seldom met, though they were in the same building. He showed me a pack of paper files and rhetorically asserted that this is what children are for him: papers.

Sometimes people continue to express the hegemony of the state as they did under socialism. An ethnographer who gave some official foreign visitors an explanatory tour of the Museum of Romanian Peasants, which had recently won the International Award for Best Museum (in 1996), presented their success confusingly: 'They [the state] forgot about us; this is why we could do what we wish'. While certainly she referred to the economic pressure of the state, this was likely to be understood in ideological/totalitarian terms by the foreigners, in continuation with oppressive practices recorded before 1989. Though there is much continuity between Romanian socialism and postsocialism, this definitely does not concern totalitarian features. It seems to be just a minor adjustment of image, but many make reference to the state in the same 'they' against 'us' terms in order to find excuses for their behaviour. The socialist legacy is certainly one of the best excuses one could find for justifying what they judge as unsatisfactory practices, and politicians often appeal to it too.

Last but not least, the market economy is misunderstood because people know only how socialism works and are not ready to change their perceptions, because they do not even know how 'socialist' these perceptions are. A debate around an infamous young doctor who held responsibilities seen as too important for his age occupied the newspapers and TV for several days. According to the media's account and the images broadcast on television, the doctor had succeeded in bringing important funds for the hospital and in creating a relatively good working atmosphere. The former directors (older and more experienced as doctors) contested him because he was not a brilliant practitioner, but just a good talker, like a politician. The young doctor defended himself, explaining that being a good doctor does not necessarily imply you are a good administrator, and vice-versa, and that his

qualities as a good communicator allowed him to forge a good atmosphere in the hospital and to attract funding. While his explanations pointed to a conflict between generations and to a lack of understanding of a market economy (in which being a good salesman does not mean you are a thief), others would defend the senior doctors' views. As such talk without any basis is much the rule in institutions and firms, most people do not acknowledge that it is a moderating factor on the work environment, but rather see it as another example of cheating and fooling the people. This is what their 'experience' has taught them.

6.3 Conclusion

Investigation of past work structures helps us to understand the new, because the new structures feature obvious continuities with the old: the same setting, the same employees, and the same institutions. This apparent continuity in practice should not mislead us about the continuity of values attached to them. Even when some institutions did not undergo major changes themselves, there were numerous indisputable social changes that affected the social meaning of the 'unchanged' setting, institution or activity. The contrary is also true – new practices may hide older values: 'What may appear as restorations of patterns familiar from socialism are something quite different: direct *responses* to the new market initiatives, *produced* by them, rather than remnants of an older mentality' (Burawoy and Verdery 1999: 2). Revealing past structures in their ideological context helps us determine the different meanings of practices attached to the new ideological context. Furthermore, the continuity in practice and meanings attached to practice is often the result of habit and of lack of motivation to change, but this does not necessarily show that (work) values have not changed. If people attach the same meanings as before to their practices, it could be due to a lasting dissociation between work practice and emerging personal values.

It is difficult to evaluate where the balance between continuity and change now stands because of these different levels of continuity that enter into play. But changes take place very rapidly in Romania, affecting the sphere of work and rewards related to work, and creating a disorder that plays a role at least equal to that of the socialist legacy. It is this disorder, and its influence on work practices and values, to which I will turn in the next chapter.

Chapter 7
The Disorder of Change

In the late twentieth century, the title of a collection of essays on rapidly changing societies captured well the postsocialist period: 'when history accelerates' (Hann 1994). When history accelerates, social changes occur so fast that social theory cannot follow. Since even the steadiest system has a certain dynamic, synchronic approaches are an abstraction used only for the sake of scientific clarity. Theories of social change also use this abstraction proper to synchronic approaches: they explain the passage from stage A to stage B once stage B is attained. For instance, Durkheim (1990 [1897]) and Weber (1984 [1930]) concentrate on the causes of change, Parsons (1951) and Dahrendorf (1968) on the conditional laws, and Comte (1957) on the pervasive trends. These explanations, based on laws of social change, allow also for the forecast of stage B given the evolution from an abstracted stage A, experienced in other social contexts. However, analysis of the dynamics of transition itself, or the study of 'how forms become other forms and how people refashion society by living it day by day' (Lampland 1991: 459), did not stimulate the production of grand causal theories. Probably this lack is due to the difficulty of elaborating laws that govern society at any given stage of transition and in defining the intermediary stages considered to be in disequilibrium. The dynamics of social practice in daily life began to be emphasised by Max Gluckman (1956) in Great Britain and Georges Balandier (1971) in France from the 1950s and 1960s. They initiated the development of a dynamic sociology aimed at explaining disordered social change by focusing on events that reveal it: disputes, crisis or conflicts. These events exacerbated tendencies not manifest in daily life. Balandier's approach notably assigns a role to disorder in the process of social change.

Theories behind current postsocialist reforms do not take into account the disorder caused during the implementation of changes or the by-products of designed changes (i.e. the intermediary stages of disequilibrium), a fact upon which most anthropologists agree (Burawoy and Verdery 1999: 1; Berdahl 2000: 1). While the Marxist system aimed to destroy the whole

capitalist base in order to build a new system, the present transformation is based on the desire to derive capitalist structures from socialist structures. We are facing here again a model of social engineering or, as Gowan calls it, an 'inverted Leninism' (1995: 6). The Marxist transformation chose to erase by force all possible resistance; the designers of the present transformation knew the deforming power of existing structures over the emerging ones, the habits of people accustomed to them and the unpredictability of the global market economy, but chose to neglect them. Common sense points towards the illusionary character of both approaches – although aware of it, the designers were not able to foresee ways of meeting this challenge. Consequently, it is less certain that the *intended* outcome (i.e. the institution of capitalism) will correspond to the *actual* outcome (what form of 'capitalism'?). Social scientists often characterise the present state of postsocialist through images of post-modern chaos, for instance Pine (1997) uses the term 'fragmentation'.

My approach will be to choose a method akin to Balandier's and focus on certain events (e.g. work conflicts, crises) and artefacts (e.g. contracts) that could reveal the insecurity, order and disorder that co-existed during the social transformation. I will first analyse a social conflict – the teachers' strike of February 2000 – and its influence on one organisation, Gamma. I will then give an account of the place and significance of contracts in the social system. Finally I will point to the influence of social disorder on moralities.

7.1 Changes

7.1.1 The myth of positive change

> Din două una, dați-mi voie; ori să se revizuiască, primesc! Dar să nu se schimbe nimica; ori să nu se revizuiască, primesc! Dar atunci să se schimbe pe ici pe colo, şi anume în punctele… esențiale…Din această dilemă nu puteți ieşi…[61] (a conservative politician's discourse) (Caragiale 1982 [1884]: 150).

The theme of 'change' has run positively through Romanian political discourses at least since the end of the nineteenth century. The only reason why this discourse remains effective is the constant dissatisfaction of the popula-

[61] 'From two things, only one, if you please; either we revise it, I accept! But nothing should change; or we don't revise it, I accept! But then it should change here and there, especially in the essential… points…From this dilemma, you cannot escape…' (my translation).

tion at any historical moment. Politicians could only respond to this attitude by promising that things would change. During the current transition, change occasionally became an end in itself: changing the economic structures, changing the leaders from before 1989 regardless of their competence, changing the party in power, changing the work mentality. It is astonishing that the folly of change did not also trigger a phobia of change.[62]

Under socialism there was, at least in ideological terms, only one truth, one solution to social problems. This proved to be wrong and socialism was discarded, replaced in the public space by another winning, unique truth: capitalism. It was a surprise for many that there is no unique truth in capitalism, that capitalism is less programmatic and less ordered, that the best solution needs to be sought on a 'trial and error' basis. Shock therapy? Gradual changes? The results were disappointing. In September 1999, 74% of Romanians concluded that the country was moving in the wrong direction (from an opinion poll conducted by Media Metro Transylvania and the Soros Foundation). Even the minority of optimists believed in change only because they considered it better than inertia, or because they thought that 'it cannot get worse'. Goal-oriented arguments in favour of change have never stated that the intermediary moments of the reform will not be subject to disorder, uncertainty and instability. Officials promised quick improvements in the near future, while asking for 'austerity', restraint and patience in the present. Romanians were used to this way of anticipating future happiness: socialist restrictions were also explained to be the necessary price to be paid for the fulfilment of all desires in communism. If after more then ten years of social changes the great majority were sceptical about the 'way to capitalism', it is because they expected that the transition entails a constant, reassuring progression towards the stage of 'capitalism', and hoped that another fifty years are not be lost before seeing whether the path taken is right or wrong. In fact, what followed the relative equilibrium of the socialist period were instability, disorder and fragility – in other words, the characteristics of an upheaval or revolution.

Different agents – the state, state enterprises, new economic agents and the civil society – infused change in different domains (social, economic and political) and at different levels (national, regional, in enterprises). Since changes were not co-ordinated, perverse effects soon arose from the aggre-

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[62] In November 2000, a major part of the electorate sympathised with the nationalists, because the other two alternatives, the so-called ex-communists and the liberal coalition, had already been in power without fostering any obvious positive change. The promise of change continues: the nationalists promised to institute a reign of traditionalist values, in which their electorate, comprised especially of young people, (see poll conducted by IMAS, 26.11.2000), had yet never lived.

gation of similar behaviour (Boudon 1984) on the part of different agents. The very frame for change, the Romanian legislation, was itself to be elaborated by newly elected representatives lacking experience and overcome by the requirements and the responsibility entailed. The guardians of the law – the police, magistrates – had to change their regulatory role into that of enablers for society. With every piece of the system on the move, in a similar but not identical direction, and especially not in a co-ordinated march, it is no wonder that the system did not function according to the programme. We would rather have to wonder how the system did not fall apart!

A major impediment to change towards capitalism remains the lack of knowledge and education regarding capitalist structures and values. Almost fifteen years after the first declaration of commitment to a market economy, the unemployed still have to be taught the rule of labour offer and demand, the managers of state institutions have to learn self-administration, and the MPs must learn the responsibility of being democratic representatives. The lack of education with respect to capitalist values, the difficulty of aggregating positive changes, and the doubtfulness about whether these changes are positive given their negative partial results, all contribute to deforming the designed changes and generate conflicts and crisis. An investigation of these factors will reveal how disorder is created within the dynamics of change.

7.1.2 Social changes and social conflicts

The rapid changes and the difficulties of the transition have led to a general fragility and insecurity (both objective and subjective) throughout the former socialist states: growing unemployment due to the closure of inefficient enterprises, changing legislation, denunciations of corruption, and changing international circumstances to which former socialist countries have become suddenly sensitive (dependent on support from the World Bank, influenced by crises in Russia or the United States). Meanwhile, the new politics of 'hard budget constraints' (Kornai 1980) and a budget insufficient for coping with unemployment and poverty led to the collapse of the welfare state. Slowly a new 'social contract' is emerging. As Bridger shows for Russia, alternative organisations have appeared to help people cope with the difficulties of the transition. These are the new structures of civil society, the functions of which were held by the state during state socialism (Bridger et al. 1996). This is case with Alpha, created in 1991 as an NGO to take over some social functions of the state. Despite the fact that Alpha's declaration of purpose underlined the provisional character of this takeover, limited to the period of time when the state was unable to fulfil its obligations, the partner state institutions saw this on the contrary as a permanent transfer of functions. Under financial pressure on one hand and people's claims on the other,

the state through its elected representatives hesitates to take a firm position regarding welfare.

'Real' labour unions emerged after 1989 and imposed their claims through strikes, to which the leaders, who needed political support, submitted. The miners' strikes and their marching on Bucharest in 1990 and 1991 brought the country almost to the brink of a civil war between intellectuals and manual workers. Called in June 1990 by President Iliescu to settle the problem of intellectuals' protests in Bucharest, miners came again in September 1991 to claim their rights and brought down the government that had refused to grant them these rights. As a result, miners became the best-paid category of state employees. Later in the decade, the claims of other groups proved less successful. Miners themselves tried again to march on Bucharest in January 1999, complaining about massive restructuring that had been ongoing in the mines in previous years, but without their former success (Rus 2003).

An unusual feature of the transition in postsocialist countries is that structural changes are designed, programmed, and that they have a starting point (a certain stage A corresponding to a specific socialist regime) and a destination (a stage B: the capitalist system as an ideal-type), a fact that many anthropologists have observed (Burawoy 1996; Bridger and Pine 1998; Burawoy and Verdery 1999). As in the Marxist revolution, theory precedes and directs practice.

I will focus on a major work conflict between labour unions and the state that took place at the beginning of 2000 and I will analyse the way in which teachers from the Gamma Music School were involved in it. The conflict mobilised 400,000 teachers and affected 4.5 million people: pupils and their families.

On the 24th of January 2000, the Federation of National Education (the teachers' union) declared a general strike, with firm intentions of pressing the government to respect its previous promises. In July 1998, the government had adopted the 'Teachers' statute' (*Statutul cadrului didactic*), a document considered by the teachers from Gamma to be 'very generous'. It granted the right to an annual bonus of an additional month's pay, rewards for seniority (for years spent in public service) and fidelity (for years spent in the same institution), as well as some salary increases in line with inflation. After having been hailed with enthusiasm, this new policy was never implemented. A few months after it should have been put into practice, in October 1998, the Federation of National Education drew the government's attention to this failure and threatened to go on strike if the teachers' statutory rights were not adhered to. The government signed a protocol with the Federation promising respect of the statutory rights. Teachers waited for the implemen-

tation of measures established by the law and the protocol, but, when the state budget for 1999 was approved, it became obvious that the promise had been broken. In May 1999, the teachers went on strike for three weeks, until the government convinced them that the budget established at the beginning of the year could not be changed and proposed a minor salary increase instead. To prevent the reiteration of this argument, teachers went on strike again in January 2000 while the budget was being discussed, in order to impose allocation of the budget percentage stipulated by law. The moment was strategically chosen, the strike being launched at a key moment of the school year – a week before school examinations. Despite this inconvenience, pupils' families fully supported the strike.

The first claim in January was for an increase in wages, which had been frozen for one year (while inflation was galloping) and were statistically shown to be lower than that of garbage collectors (a painful comparison that teachers brought up in private interviews and even in public debates). The second claim, actively supported by pupils' parents, was to improve school equipment – the 4% of the GDP for education stipulated by law was never implemented during allocation of the annual budget. The strike went on for four weeks, as the government took its time to negotiate the measures to be taken. Finally, the government announced that its solution was to fire 80,000 teachers, i.e. 20% of the total number of teachers, which would allow the remaining teachers' salaries to be increased by 20%. Of course, this laying off would also increase their teaching load by 22-25% (the discrepancy in figures comes from the fact that primarily young teachers, who earn less and have larger teaching loads, were to be made redundant). Thus the solution would have led to a relative decrease in hourly pay. This did not satisfy the teachers, and the university lecturers threatened to join the strike. The leader of the university union explained that they had not joined until then because of the exams period and the responsibility they had towards students. The government was forced to promise to increase teachers' salaries in two stages, in April and September, and to pay the statutory annual bonus. To cover expenses, the government decided to fire 23,000 non-teaching staff from the schools. The teachers were not to receive pay for the four weeks of strike, but the bonus for 1999 was to be paid during the strike month. In exchange, teachers had to work without pay on most Saturdays until the end of the year to recuperate the four weeks of courses lost. The result did not fully satisfy the teachers. While they ensured that half of their statutory rights were respected, the firing of another 23,000 of the small supply of non-teaching staff meant that there were fewer janitors, fewer mechanics, and fewer administrators in the schools, and some of their tasks would fall upon the teachers. The Federation tried to raise its voice, but the

press immediately reacted: 'Teachers have not stopped their claims, now they pretend that…'

The main cause of social conflicts is lack of money. State employees' pay is not revised in line with inflation or prices, as private enterprises will often do. Pay is not negotiable (though this happens rarely in private enterprises too). The second cause is employees' perceptions of employers' (here the state) indifference towards the impact of social changes, manifested through the poor pay allocated compared to the cost of living, disregard for laws/ contracts they have passed themselves, the ease with which they dispose of their employees (in 2000 23,000 people, initially 80,000, were targeted) and, not least, their discourses, which range from indifference to outrage, in response to employees' claims. The causes of the work conflict described above are also present in many private enterprises, but they do not lead to collective action and the protest is generally individual (quitting the job). No unions and no state policies support employees in the private sector.[63]

A few words need to be said about the impact of these conflicts on society. The teachers' strike affected 4.5 million people, primarily children and families, who had to find childcare solutions for the unexpected four weeks' vacation and to make up for the lost classes. The strike begun during the negotiation of the 2000 budget incited other categories of state employees, such as lawyers and employees from the Ministry of Finance, to protest as well, threatening to go on strike in February, because obviously the supplementary percentage allocated to teachers was affecting wages in other budgetary sectors. Bargaining in the government risked being reproduced in the street, becoming a potential source of more general social conflicts.

This state of imbalance did not trigger any form of social change; it just represented a temporary bargaining, which brought about a temporary solution. The disruption caused by the strike did not change the direction of the 'transition' (deviated the 'road to capitalism'), nor was it an indispensable conflict that helped to resolve some problems. This conflict was just a more obvious symptom of a constant state of disorder. I will argue in the last section of this chapter that this disequilibrium produces a deviation that takes place at the level of individual subjectivity. The conflict is not easily erased from the memory of those involved in it. It has the capacity to influence the way they view social changes and the role of the state; it determines their personal ethics and behaviour.

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[63] For instance, there is no compensatory pay when one is made redundant from a private firm, except for 4-8 months compensation if the unemployment rate in the firm's branch of activity is higher than the unemployment rate in the corresponding sector (according to the law OU 98/ 1999).

7.1.3 Social changes and their impact on enterprises

The possibility of choice and change introduced a dynamic dimension in enterprises, which before 1989 had existed only unofficially. At different levels, both decision-makers and employees in the enterprise experienced this change. Choice and change are not unlimited, due to external constraints like the market and legislation, internal constraints like work contracts, and other constraints inherent to inter-human relations. The nature of change generated two series of difficulties. First, recent changes in legislation and the introduction of market competition found most managers unprepared to optimise their behaviour under these constraints, because of their lack of specific management education. Secondly, another series of difficulties arose from the instability of policies, legislation, institutions and the constant readjustments needed following sudden changes in the external work environment. I will focus here on the internal problems of the Gamma Music School, which experienced the major social conflict detailed above.

For a state employee, dissatisfaction with working conditions and rewards could be expressed by quitting (a rare case among instrument teachers, who tend to be over forty years old and who find satisfaction in their profession) or by general conflicts like the 2000 strike. Such events represent a sudden disruption both for the already meagre budget of the individual (wages were not paid during the strike) and for her/his familial life (supplementary hours on Saturdays after the strike, school age children to care for). The result of the strike was detrimental to those employees who were made redundant. Despite the fact that the employee retains the right and freedom to choose and change her life, this capacity is limited by the dramatic consequences of her actions.

The manager in a state organisation is only the representative of the state, in the sense that s/he carries no influence on the budget and its allocation among different tasks in the organisation, but has only to insure the good working of the organisation. For example, in 1998-99 the Ministry of Education imposed a new school curriculum in order to meet (fashionably) the new educational trends. The change was not accompanied by a change in teaching means or by a reallocation of teaching loads between disciplines. To implement the new curriculum, new instrument teachers needed to be hired, but the budget would not allow it. Without additional teachers, the number of pupils would have to be reduced, but this was impossible without affecting the teaching hours of music history and music theory, disciplines complementary to instrument courses – thus, without firing music theory teachers. As this did not appear as a solution either to the manager, or to the staff of the Ministry of Education, a Ministry inspector declared informally that the school should function on a mix of new and old curricula – an ap-

proach both illegal and difficult to co-ordinate, but symptomatic of the functioning of Romanian institutions.

The government debated at length the project of decentralisation and self-management of state institutions. This was mainly intended to alleviate the burden on the state budget by giving institutions the responsibility to secure part of their necessary funds.[64] The manager of Gamma had heard only echoes about this project. Worried about how the school would cope with it, she considered the possibilities of fund raising (also by commercialising small services like the copier, printer, location of school spaces – *bricolage* of their budget). She was limited to mere suppositions given that she had no official information on how much autonomy self-management would actually bring. At the peak of the strike described above, all Bucharest school managers were summoned to a meeting that was supposed to prepare them for the impending self-management.[65] The instability brought by the strike increased the general interest in this event. Yet school managers who attended the meeting discovered that it was in fact an advertisement for a ten-month management course to be provided by the Alliance for the Rebirth of Education, trained by the World Bank (freely), at a cost of $200 per person (to be paid by the school directors themselves). The Music School director returned angry from the meeting and considered it a joke (*'o bataie de joc'*), since no school director would be able to afford such a fee on a salary of $100 a month.

Some researchers ponder whether the analysis of social change is not the result of mere stubbornness by researchers (Drozda-Senkowska and Oberlé 1998), given that one can detect as much continuity as change in former socialist societies. Though it is difficult to measure how radical the structural changes from 1989 onwards were, it cannot be denied that there was an increase in the speed of change, which is disruptive, causes disorder and has a bearing on social life.

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[64] Ethnographies of other socialist and postsocialist countries provide numerous examples of the capacity of state institutions to improvise in finding alternative sources of income. See for instance the case of a work unit in a research institute of the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, which started producing liquor to supplement its pocket (Pieke 1995).

[65] 'Self-management' means that each academic institution manages its finances and its personnel, within certain limits set by the state. As these limits are not known, the word 'self management' was not very informative for school directors.

7.2 Contracts

Contracts – contested, neglected or desired artefacts – are representative of the need for stability in a rapidly changing social environment. While social analysts complain that Romanians have no notion of what a contract is, they cannot deny that in the urban areas contracts are very much sought after, even if subsequently misunderstood or broken. My work in the three service enterprises described in previous chapters led me to observe in what conditions contracts were established, whether they were respected and what significance they carried in the relations between manager and employees (work contracts), enterprise/ manager and clients (service contracts) and between two enterprises/ managers (business contracts). The relationships, agreements, and politics of contracts can reveal many aspects of the social problems encountered in a changing environment. I will therefore describe work and business contracts in order to elucidate the arrival of capitalist relations, the need for stability in the context of rapid change and the lack of trust and social cohesion.

7.2.1 Contracts as artefacts proper to capitalist relations

The social contract that the socialist state passed with its citizens rendered meaningless the other forms of legal work/ business contracts existing between different actors in the system. This was due to the guarantee given, and (in exchange) the coercion exercised by the state on the individual by imposing the contents of contracts through central planning from the national to the individual level. Contracts (as trust) are not necessary in an entirely predictable, controlled environment[66] such as the socialist state was supposed to be, where the agent furthermore does not carry any responsibility for the contract established. Contracts were nonessential before 1989. After 1989 the state withdrew itself from this social contract and other agents (employers, businesses) had to be made partners in the exchange of rights stipulated in contracts. There was thus a move from a moral, but less binding type of contract – the social contract with the state that had failed – to a legal, more binding type of contract that hopefully would not fail. The contracts that are concluded today are not necessarily more numerous or different in form from those concluded during the socialist period; in fact, the continuity of bureaucracy has insured that they remain almost unchanged in many cases. What has changed with the introduction of capitalist structures lies beneath a contract: the reasons for its existence, the power it re-

[66] A similar point is made by Dasgupta (1988: 53), who points out that 'the problem of trust would not arise if it was common knowledge that we were all trustworthy'.

flects and the power it gives, the way it can be enforced and also what it stands for symbolically. Meanwhile, during the socialist period there was the whole sphere of the informal economy that functioned on different bases. Agreements were oral, the state was the enemy and not the enabler of these agreements, and guarantees were given by virtue of belonging to a network – this was yet a third type of contract. This tradition of informal agreements based on personal trust endures today in economic relations, despite the fact that today agreements can receive a formal endorsement as contracts.

Written contracts, as objects, have not changed; their importance is linked to the endurance over time that the written word guarantees (*Verba volant, scripta manent*). What has changed is the mechanism of enforcement: contracts are recorded exchanges of rights (to another's work, products, etc.), useful only if there are institutions that can enforce them. In modern societies this role belongs to the state. Before 1989, the guarantee of enforcement was provided by the mere existence of the socialist state, which did not allow deviations from its planning. The postsocialist state is less successful in its role of guarantor, as court trials are notoriously slow and expensive, linking contracts to potentially high transaction costs. Furthermore, courts are not trusted, as magistrates are considered one of the most corrupt professions. Despite the difficulty of backing up a contract, more and more contracts need to be established, as this is the preferred way of setting up relations in a free market economy, where a greater number of agents need to be co-ordinated. In developed economies, debates have been raised over the declining usefulness of the rigid legal form of contracts (Gilmore 1986 [1974]), over the transaction costs of establishing contracts, and the rapidity with which fixed contracts become obsolete (Crocker and Masten 1995). In Romania, the usefulness of the form of written contracts is in no way questioned by Romanian economic analysts. On the contrary, multiplying the number of contracts and enriching their contents seem to be a constant preoccupation of employers and businesses. Romanian law, built on a model of the Napoleonic Code, is probably the cause of this tendency towards exhaustive requirements rather than comprehensive principles.

However, we should not hasten to conclude that the increased desirability of contracts is a feature of a general change in favour of capitalist values, as contracts are part of the bureaucratic tendency, proper to the rational systems of both capitalism and socialism. Thus the employee needs to have a work contract in order to have the right to a retirement pension or health insurance, and the employer is constrained by legislation to establish work contracts. As the economic picture after 1989 became more complex, the embedded bureaucracy in state administrations has led to a multiplication of required contracts, where formality is empty of significance, as it was in

the socialist period, and which remains an obstacle to a significant exchange of rights. Thus, a work contract registered at the Ministry of Work could be a formal piece of paper produced for the administration, while the relationship will function according to an informal agreement (notably containing the real wage), which is not reinforced by the law. In this case, the formal, visible contract conceals the informal agreement. The necessity of formal contracts becomes an impediment to a guaranteed exchange of rights and reproduces the uselessness of written contracts.

7.2.2 Contracts as symbols for the search for stability

The contradictions underlined above (between the increasing interest in establishing written contracts and their decreasing reliability, between their supposed modernity in Romania and their criticised desuetude in Western capitalist countries) are more readily explained if we consider the instability of the economic context. Contracts are often the only promise that agreements will be respected, that the bargain struck will endure.

The terms in which contracts are negotiated reveal the initial balance of power in the transaction. Clients especially desire service contracts, as a guarantee that the service paid for will be provided. Work contracts are desired by employees because of the advantages and the security they are supposed to bring – less so by employers, because of their unwillingness to pay taxes and to have formal responsibilities towards their employees. Thus many employers lure their new employees with promises that the everlasting initial 'probationary' period will end with the signing of a contract. This was the case in Beta, where the manager gradually extended the probationary period (unpaid) from one to three weeks, and then five or six weeks elapsed before a contract was produced. In reality, this ends up in the best case with the signing of a 'civil convention',[67] which is the predominant form of work contract in the 'low-end' private sector, especially when there is no fixed wage, but rather remuneration depends exclusively on results. A civil convention is a contract between two persons that does not fall under the jurisdiction of the work code, but under the civil law (i.e. conflicts that arise must be resolved in court, a long and expensive procedure). Many employees quit their jobs (even if they are being paid) because no civil convention or work contract is established (this was recurrent at Beta). Without a civil convention of contract, their right to health care is jeopard-

[67] The intention of government officials behind the promotion of civil conventions has been to make contracts more flexible and to encourage the replacement of oral agreements by written agreements. Civil conventions are easier to conclude, but they give birth to a status of second-rate employee.

ised and they have no guarantee that their work will be remunerated. At Beta, when a convention was signed, the manager kept a copy, but the employee did not. I saw no proof during the four months I spent with Beta that any of the civil conventions were registered at the Chamber of Work, which is the necessary procedure for enforcing the convention and for obtaining health insurance (civil conventions do not carry the right to a retirement pension). It is probable that the two or three conventions signed by employees such as myself were concluded only in order to keep the employees in the firm for longer, but that they ended up in a dust bin.

The conditions in which contracts are established and their type (work contract, civil convention or *cumuli* of functions), together with the amount of pay offered, differentiate the segments of the labour market. A work contract in state service enterprises is obtained automatically following the job search, cannot be negotiated, and is the same for all employees with the same status. Work contracts in private enterprises can be situated on a scale, from negotiated work contracts, where the enterprise itself needs to take extra precautions to insure that the contract is not broken (especially in software enterprises in the top end of the labour market), to no contracts at all (in the low-paying private sector). They can also be divided according to the party that desires that the contract not be broken: the employer, the employee, or both. The content of the contract heavily reflects the superiority of the party that desires the establishment of a contract the least, i.e. the one that has something to gain from maintaining the uncertainty of the agreement (that a service will be delivered, a wage paid, etc).

The initial balance of power can change in time and contracts often need to be rewritten or amended by appendices. In many software enterprises, declarations of fidelity and very strict confidentiality rules were recently introduced in order to cope with the growing mobility of software engineers. These appendices are generally very harsh (requiring three-month notices before leaving, two-year fidelity contracts or $20,000-30,000 compensation) and many engineers refuse to comply with the new conditions, which sometimes leads to firing.

The rewriting of contracts is most frequent in business contracts, where both parties try to seize every opportunity to optimise the terms of the contracts or to introduce clauses addressing practical problems that may arise. The possibility of later changing the terms of a contract perpetuates the instability of the economic relationship, which is frightening for the most fragile party. It is interesting that even though the breaking of contracts could be considered unproblematic, given that the state also does it (see the reasons for the teachers' strike), and because of the difficulty in receiving

reparations, the need for stability and the concern for legality make contracts still desirable for the less resourceful.

7.2.3 Contracts and trust

What is at stake in the establishment of a written contract, enforced by a third party (usually the state), is the lack of trust in informal, person-to-person agreements (and/ or in their durability over time), or in the other party's work, business or personal ethic. Contracts are public artefacts; they have the power to appeal to the institutions where modern societies keep their standards of morality under the form of legality.

Trust as a modality of action is essentially concerned with coping with uncertainty over time. It is 'the negotiation of risks occasioned by the freedom of others' (Hart 1988: 191). Implicitly, where there is absolute certainty, there is no need for trust or contracts. Max Weber noticed that the keepers of morality (or trust) in modern states are impersonal institutions and that this indicated a move from personal to impersonal trust in capitalist societies (1984 [1930]). This is actually a more comprehensive view than that of previous utilitarianists, who asserted that modern societies could be founded on rational choice alone (i.e. only on contracts). The prisoner's dilemma shows that co-operation is a rational choice; but also that trust is necessary for the existence of co-operation (Williams 1988: 8). The utilitarian point of view has been gradually abandoned in the social sciences, leaving space for a new interest in conceptualising trust as a way to meet the uncertainty of today's transitional era of decreasing resources and increasing globalisation (Misztal 1996: 4). Leaving the academic space, trust became widely discussed in political and journalistic debates in the West in a programmatic search for new bases of social cohesion and co-operation.

In Romania today, neither trust nor the contract appears able to foster social cohesion, the former because of its relative absence, and the latter because of its relative uncertainty. Occasional reassurances by officials (in his inaugural presidential speech in December 2000, Ion Iliescu expressed his hope that 'economic growth will lead us not to share in detested poverty') are not sufficient for coping with the growing distrust in institutions and people. As I have shown in Chapter two on aggressiveness in the street, in Chapter four on the perception of 'big' and 'small' tricks, in Chapter three on Beta's Fordist organisation, a recognised 'low trust system' (Fox 1974), and in this chapter on the broken promises of the state and of employers, trust today is not a pervasive presence in human or institutional interactions: neither on the street, nor in enterprises, nor in public institutions. Furthermore, real cases of non co-operation and trickery are constantly augmented by individuals' perceptions of more non co-operation and trickery than in

reality exist (see the opinion poll in Chapter four and the perception of criminality in Chapter two). Such perceptions increase the number of such cases by fostering people's predisposition towards them.

> Stocks of social capital, such as trust, norms and networks, tend to be self-reinforcing and cumulative. Virtuous circles result in social equilibrium with high levels of co-operation, trust, reciprocity, civic engagement, and collective well being. These traits define the civic community. Conversely, the absence of these traits in the uncivic community is also self-reinforcing. Defection, distrust, shirking, exploitation, isolation, disorder, and stagnation intensify one another in a suffocating miasma of vicious circles (Putnam 1993: 177).

According to Putnam, societies may evolve towards either of these situations. Without subscribing to Putnam's dichotomy and rather reductionist fatalism, I want to underline that the urgent need for contracts I observed epitomises the initial mistrust with which the individual approaches people and institutions.[68] Trust is intimately linked to ethics, and distrust to the perception of others as being unethical in their work, business or personal behaviour.

It would be a mistake to follow the reasoning of economists and sociologists writing about Western countries and to assume that the desirability of contracts means that there is no need for trust in Romania. It should be taken into account that the Romanian state does not give the guarantees necessary in a contract-based society, that institutions are in constant change, and that contracts are not necessarily honoured. When Alpha would establish contracts with state hospitals, discussions focused on the trustworthiness of the hospital director, not on the comprehensiveness of the contract, because the contract alone did not bring any guarantee – past experiences had proved that hospital directors did not even know the content of the contract.

In the case of Romanian organisations, the relation between contracts and trust is turned on its head. As contracts cannot be concluded if no trust precludes them, contracts stand for (at least a certain degree of) trust, rather than for a lack of trust. Contracts here are a symbolic artefact for the trust between two parties. They are meant to last in time (being in written form) and to be shown to third parties. At Beta, female clients concluding service contracts on their own (i.e. registering for foreign language courses without having previously consulted their husbands) were especially concerned with having a fully stamped document to make their husbands accept their decision to trust; young employees also needed a signed contract to convince

[68] I use the term 'mistrust' (as opposed to 'trust' or 'distrust') for characterising the ingredient that accompanies the establishment of social relations, following Torsello's use of the term in his study of a Hungarian village in Slovakia (2003).

their parents that they were not cheated at work. Hence contracts are thought to convey trust.

The conclusion drawn from the way in which contracts were established in organisations (business contracts in Alpha, service contracts and work contracts in Beta) is that trust concerns the individual as a person, not her or his capacity to respect work or business commitments. This is mostly because the choice whether to trust or not had to operate with very little knowledge or understanding of the interests of the other contracting party. The establishment of service contracts at Beta depended heavily on the trust inspired by the employees and much less on the partial evidence the client obtained during the meeting that English courses indeed were going on or clients indeed attended them. It is in a businessman's interest to acquire a reputation of honesty so that his business can endure (Dasgupta 1988). Clients' distrust was also created in the same manner, arising from a dislike of the manager or of certain marketing techniques, and resisting concrete evidence that courses were indeed delivered or that many clients attended them.

The question of trust becomes important when there is a delay in reciprocating a transaction: between work performed and pay received, between the service paid for and the service received. This corresponds to the rules of gift exchange that Mauss considered exclusive to primitive societies (1954) and which Davis (1992) and others have shown to be present also in modern societies. Trust is often forced to take on a personal form. Initially thought to be a characteristic of pre-modern societies, interpersonal trust has made a come-back and is considered a necessary form of trust in post-modern societies. Even if interpersonal trust is not explicitly sought as an economic ingredient, as it is in the West, and contracts are still ideologically preferred, both postsocialist and developed countries are at present in a transitional stage (from a centrally planned economy to a market economy, and from an industrial to a post-industrial society, respectively) that dictates a similar 'return' to a more personal form of trust, although for different reasons.

The personal character of relations in work/ business contracts is reflected in the continuous reliance on networks when hiring, becoming employed, purchasing or doing business. The existence of networks is consistent with low social cohesion and generalised distrust, as is the case for the Mafia in southern Italy (Gambetta 1988). Networks induce obligations and intense loyalty through shared ordeal, but they 'are also by far the surest source of dependable, continuing rewards' (Wedel 1992: 14). They are crucial in an environment of uncertainty. Not relying on networks brings the

actor into a weak position, which even the much-desired contract cannot strengthen.

Contracts and their dependent notion of trust epitomise some of the more general economic and relational problems specific to an environment 'where neither traditional certainties nor modern probabilities hold' (Hart 1988: 191). These problems also affect individual values, as will be sketched below.

7.3 The disorder of change and ethics

Despite the positive discourse on changes, the above ethnography of contracts and conflicts shows that changes are disruptive for the individual, while there are few possibilities to control the changing environment by multiplying the guarantees of stability (e.g. contracts). Since 1989 the individual has seen a whole world collapse, all of her/his landmarks disappear, and insecurity penetrate all aspects of her/his life: at work (the rising threat of unemployment), at home (increasing poverty), and in the street (instability of institutions, increased criminality). Coping with rapid changes and an uncertain environment has led to the transformation of life strategies into survival strategies. In a way, the 1989 Revolution, thought to have lasted only a few days, has lasted for the subsequent 10-15 years.[69] The way that Romanians described the transitional context back in 2000, detailed in the first chapter of this book, resembles the description of a state of revolution. This observation opens for the social analyst the possibility of establishing comparisons with similar social actions from other dramatic contexts.

7.3.1 The 'abnormal' society

> Without the general trust that people have in each other society itself would disintegrate, for very few relationships are based entirely upon what is known with certainty about another person and very few relationships would endure if trust were not as strong as, or stronger than, rational proof or personal observation (Simmel 1978: 178-179).

Complaints that there is no trust and no morality are current, uttered especially by older people, resembling typical end-of-century criticisms or typical traditionalist discourses. While their contemplation of survival values is

[69] A comparable historical example: historians established retrospectively that the French Revolution lasted in fact ten years, from the fall of Bastille on the 14th of July 1789, to the coup d'état of Napoléon Bonaparte in 1799 (Bertaud 1989).

passive, for younger people survival values are an incentive for behaviour that they would ('normally') disapprove of. One teacher from the Gamma Music School explained to me, boasting with his cynicism, that in an abnormal society you need to behave abnormally in order to survive. Thus he cheated whenever he could and heightened this to the level of principle. He held the conviction that one has to learn how to cheat, lie, and distrust people, and told me that with age I would abandon my idealistic naiveté – when in fact I was merely pointing out some practical consequences of the prisoner's dilemma or the liar's paradox. While he exhibited his provocative ethic in front of friends, with the intention of accusing society for having brought him to adopt it, others are more discreet about their immoral choices. Like Poles under socialism, many urban Romanians have developed an 'elaborate terminology to explain and to euphemise the world of transactions that operate in the twilight between the society's self-image of dignity and the day-to-day imperatives of survival' (Wedel 1992: 16).

In the excerpt quoted above, Simmel warned that a society based on distrust would disintegrate, although examples from southern Italy show that it could endure under a quite different form: with trust existing only inside networks (Gambetta 1998). In fact, after a while, a certain stability is reached in a distrustful environment, as everybody is forced to engage in interactions and learns from them how much honesty to expect from others. The environment then becomes predictable and a new equilibrium is established on the basis of lesser trust. In order to attain this balance, one must learn how to distinguish truthful from deceptive messages by approaching both with initial mistrust. An 'abnormal' society could then become quite stable, which is equivalent to saying that it has moved to another level of 'normality'. Referring to Poland under socialism, Wedel notes that ''normal' had two meanings in Polish life: the way things *are* and the way things really *ought to be*' (1992: 16).

Finally, what is rather astonishing is not the abnormality – the society of reversed values Romanians refer to – but the belief in the provisional character of this stage. This is due to the embedded belief that the need for survival is at the base of aggressiveness and disorder and that this will cease with economic growth (as President Iliescu also stated). The belief that what happens today in Romania is abnormal shows the strength of a different set of values against which abnormal behaviour is measured.

7.3.2 Time discipline

Though order and disorder trigger spatial images, one of their strongest manifestations can be seen in the discipline of time. The looseness or disorganisation of schedules at work or in business, where capitalist agreements

are supposed to impose discipline, is a main cause for work-related behaviour and values. Thompson's study on *Time, Work Discipline and the Making of Capitalism* (1967) opened the way for analyses of the link between the organisation of work and the perception of time. His study shows how the demands of the capitalist organisation of work gradually imposed a new understanding of time during the process of industrialisation in England, and how impressively individuals resisted change in their perceptions of time (the complete 'conversion' of the notion of time took centuries).

The organisation of time in the three organisations I studied was proof that capitalism's spirit of strict discipline (exemplified in Benjamin Franklin's 'time is money' and the dictatorship of time decried by Engels in nineteenth century England[70]) had no translation in daily practice, though emphasised in managerial discourses. At Beta, where appointments with clients were strict (the clients were reminded twice of the appointment hour, compelling them to arrive on time), the manager would let them wait ten or fifteen minutes longer in order to test them. He would also call in his employees every day one to two hours earlier than needed, for so-called training that seldom took place, and kept them after work to listen to his motivational speeches, while employees were paid per sale and not per hour. This behaviour indicates a loose perception of time (he thought it normal for himself to spend his whole day around the enterprise, even if he had nothing to do) and a demonstration of power (manifested by his lack of consideration for others' time). In Alpha, where working hours were rather flexible, the organisation of tasks over longer periods of time was problematic. Report deadlines always forced employees to work extra hours, while gap periods were spent over coffee breaks (though the preparation of reports could have taken place in advance). This looseness was detrimental only when several people depended on each other's work, but this was quite often the case. One would then have to waste days waiting for an essential response from somebody else, who was caught trying to meet a deadline. Attempts were made to plan at least one to two weeks in advance, but timetables were not respected when another priority arose. Changes in legislation or changes of appointments with other institutions were often the reasons for the disruption of time schedules. The scarcity and preciousness of time contained in the capitalist maxim that 'time is money' are not embedded in the organisation of these enterprises, because there has been no coherent attempt to do so.

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[70] 'The operative must be in the mill at half past five in the morning; if he comes a couple of minutes late, he is fined; if he comes ten minutes late, he is not let in until breakfast is over, and a quarter of the day's wages is withheld, though he loses only two and one half hours' work out of twelve' (Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1887) quoted in Thomas 1999: 516).

The importance of the discipline of time required by the capitalist organisation is such that the use of time might provide us with a key factor for understanding disorder and the failure to improve work and business practices. The perception of time current in the larger urban context was what penetrated through external constraints and ruled in the organisations I observed – a theme I will pursue in the next chapter.

7.3.3 The imagery of chaos: A disrupted, fragmented world

Both Western social scientists and ordinary Romanians easily assign the term 'chaos' to the current state of postsocialist societies – a metaphor full of imagery, but which cannot be a valid substitute for analysis, even if the analysis is bound to be somehow reductive. The use of this metaphor for explaining the post-modern world is a sign of our times. 'Even a modest historical exploration makes it seem highly likely that the true novelty of the 1990s is both the lack of historical contextualisation and the seemingly misguided attempt to explain confusion in terms of confusion' (Pahl 1995: 15). An ethnography of contracts and of some social and work crises was my positivist approach to the chaotic picture of Romanian society. The imagery of chaos however has its place in the way the individual understands and places her/himself with respect to society or his/her own history. The chaotic picture is not the result of everybody's experience when walking in the street, having to choose from too many products in supermarkets and encountering dysfunction in daily activities. Chaos emerges rather when the individual has access to a more general picture of the system in which dysfunction multiplies, through images propagated by the media and by theories of analysts. (This point was also made about criminality in Chapter two). It is created by the co-existence of different systems operating simultaneously – trust, market rules, laws, etc. – and by the lack of knowledge about which will prevail at any given time.

An example will illustrate the statements above. In September 1999, before the start of the school year, an epidemic of meningitis was declared in six out of Romania's forty administrative counties (*județe*), and the start of school was postponed until further notice. A few days afterwards, an epidemic of conjunctivitis was announced in Bucharest, and the Ministry of Health asked the Ministry of Education to postpone the start of the school year in Bucharest too. Unlike meningitis, conjunctivitis is a minor illness, which can be cured in days, but the ophthalmologic departments could not cope with the increased number of patients. The Ministry of Education did not like the idea of postponing the beginning of the school year, but could not say no and then let the problem ferment. The day before school was to begin, parents did not know whether they should send their children to

school or not. Just imagine the attitude of parents and grandparents that evening, as they watched the television and waited for the decision. The media interviewed representatives from both Ministries, who all had their own reasons for not taking responsibility for the outcome. The news stories followed each other in the same catastrophic mood. The mayor of Iassy, a major Romanian town, appeared and made an appeal to water suppliers to at least provide cold water in the quarters of his town affected by meningitis (hot water had been cut in several quarters because of unpaid bills). Then images were broadcast from a residential hospital for handicapped children, where the staff had not received their pay for five months, handicapped children were being fed on bread and water, and for months there was no soap or washing powder left to clean up the rooms. Government authorities explained that this was a consequence of decentralisation and that the responsibility now lay with the local community. As local authorities were not traditionally responsible for this hospital, which received patients from all over the country, they had neglected to allocate funds for the hospital in their budget. These are the chaotic images of society as put forward by the media and received by citizens, the type of background against which every individual places her/his personal dysfunctional life.

Structural and conjectural changes create chaos, disruption and displacement. The picture of disorder does not lead to a rejection of changes (though the number of individuals nostalgic for the socialist period should not be minimised), but leaves a feeling of generalised meaninglessness. Changes appear to bring nothing better, but only to perpetuate instability, insecurity and low standards of living.

7.4 Conclusion

The word 'meaninglessness' probably captures best the consequences of disordered change. The radicalness, rapidity and plurality of the current transformation does not allow either social scientists or ordinary people to draw a coherent picture of the national and the individual situation at any moment or to perceive a move towards a future state of equilibrium. More than the difficulty of passing from one social, economic and political structure to another (from socialism to capitalism), what creates the social and moral crisis is the unsettledness of the present.

Chapter 8
The Relevance of Time for Work Ethic

The capitalist understanding of time as money generates the dependence of work practices and values on the management of time at the workplace. However, what happens when capitalist structures are briskly introduced in a society where perceptions of time management derive from a non-capitalist organisation of labour? As I described in Chapters three and six, such enterprises were not able to create a parallel understanding of time proper to workplaces and allowed 'time' as defined outside the workplace to enter freely into the enterprises. This chapter aims to set into the larger social context the trends in the management of time at the workplace that we have seen earlier. Changes in the perception of time over the last half of a century in Romania are addressed in a free dialogue with social history. Their relevance comes from the fact that they belong to the life experience of service employees, which influences their management of time.

The notion of time is the measure of a diachronic perspective and a dimension of all human activities. John Davis, in *Times and Identities* (1991), asserts that while all people experience duration, they have different notions of time, and that these are relevant for their social life and the construction of their identities. One could consider time in its daily use as 'history' – in the same culture two different symbolic representations of time can coexist depending on the relative duration they refer to. The way people perceive 'daily' time is relevant for their social behaviour and the way they perceive 'history' for their identities. The concordance or contradiction between these two scales also generates distinct structures of perception. In my analysis, I will refer to these two scales, and I will add, as a tool that helps to better emphasise the specificity of postsocialist Romania, an intermediary scale: the lifetime scale. Individual history is the first step from daily time to the long-term history of society; it provides the scale on which differences between cultures are inscribed. I will restrict myself to the analysis of some particularities in the current Romanian interpretation of a 'lifetime' that are relevant to work ethics.

What makes time a cultural notion is the interpretation of the inscription of events in time.[71] Time is a flow of events, and the perception of events on an individual or cultural basis makes time appear loose or accelerated, linear or cyclical. It is the perception of events as happening one after the other that makes us think of linearity; it is the recurrence of events with the same frequency that makes us think of the circularity of time. Moreover, this view allows us to understand the subjective side of time perception. A one-hour lesson can seem to last ages or just a few minutes, depending on the student's perception of the interest that the event 'lesson' (or the series of events that form it) has for her/him. The time spent appears meaningful or meaningless (has a 'positive' orientation or not) depending on the interpretation of the events inscribed on it.

I will attempt to analyse Romanian urbanites' perceptions of time at the three scales defined before: the daily scale, lifetime scale and long-term, historical scale. Three dimensions will be systematically taken into account: the measurement of time (instruments for its measurement), the allocation of individual and 'community' time (how and by whom it is done) and the 'orientation' of time (memory, destiny).

8.1 'Daily' time

8.1.1 The measurement of daily time: Watches or words

The invention of instruments for the measure of time is a reflection of the desire for power: for mastering metaphysical uncertainty, for controlling one's own time and that of others, both in the present and the future. Attali in *Histoires du temps* (1983) endeavours to look at the history of these instruments and through it, to the history of perceptions of time and of human inscriptions in time. Each major change in human history corresponds to a change in the instruments of measure and in the use of time. 'The use and then the abandonment of an instrument for time measurement reveals the contemporary social order, while participating in it' (Attali 1983: 9, my

[71] I embrace here the view of time as a succession of events, or 'B-series time' as McTaggart coined it a century ago (1908). Time is thus thought of in terms of before/ after and not in terms of past/ present/ future ('A-series time'). A convincing explanation of why, for practical if not metaphysical purposes, we should think about time as a succession of dates at which events happen is provided by Alfred Gell in his *Anthropology of Time* (1992), who in turn relies on Mellor's *Real Time* (1981). I find it useful for presenting different understandings of time, because it allows us to talk in terms of objective, tangible events instead of in terms of abstract perceptions.

translation). At any one time in any society, several instruments might coexist, thus also several perceptions of time.

Today in Bucharest – more often than in the West – people will ask what time is it in the street. Clocks and watches are still a valuable gift and although it is considered normal that everybody has a watch, it is not abnormal to go out without it. The city is not full of clocks as elsewhere in Europe. The implication is that not having a watch could still be a valid excuse for arriving late. Before 1989, a typical excuse for arriving late at school was that the clock had stopped (at the time, mostly mechanical clocks were used). Though electronic and quartz watches are largely in use today, 'blaming the clock' ('it has stopped', 'I don't have a watch', 'mine does not show the same hour') remains topical.

As for rural Romania, watches are much less used and remain indoors in order not to be broken during manual activities. One would then orient oneself according to the astrological clock (the sun) and the biological clock (sleep, hunger). As a result, timing is almost impossible and the time of appointments is vague. A tractor driver who promised to pass by with his machine 'in the afternoon' to work a field let a peasant family wait until 8-9 pm. The family did not see this as a lack of consideration for their time, and they only pointed out to me the impracticability of harvesting at night.

Timing in urban areas is much tighter. However, most job interviews (the most strict appointments except for business appointments) I was invited to attend were scheduled for instance at '3-4 o'clock', always giving a half an hour margin. I realised after a while that this was indispensable given that apart from the underground, all the modes of public transport have no definite (and advertised) timetable (though they generally run well). This being so, one would not expect the dentist or other service provider to be more faithful than that to the appointment s/he gave. Nor could one expect shops to strictly adhere to their timetables; they will often remain open to welcome a late client or close early to allow shopkeepers to go home.

However, arriving on time and respecting the appointment hour is seen positively as a sign of business-like seriousness and more 'Western'. This is why people tend to be angry when they are given a fixed appointment, which is then ignored, by a company that claims to have a Western style (in general simply by having Western prices). Every day in Beta I noticed clients' impatience when they were left to wait ten minutes past their appointment hour. One is prepared to give more of her/his time for less expensive services (this is why people are willing to queue at cheaper shops), but asks for punctuality from 'Westerners'. That means that most people at least symbolically take into account the maxim 'time is money'. The symbol stands for capitalism and affluence.

The inscription of events in daily time is not closely scheduled. Activities are generally not related to particular hours, but are planned in blocks (x, y and z should be done in a certain lapse of time) or sometimes sequentially (first x, then y). This corresponds to language references in B-series time terms of 'before/ after' and to a measure of time not by hours on the clock, but by activity. The watch is master, but the watch can afford to be imprecise.

8.1.2 Changing trends in the management of daily personal time

Comparative studies between the ways in which in different cultures and people express and measure time reveal that ecological factors and occupations are the decisive factors in shaping their perceptions. Thompson (1967) asserts that task-oriented time is a characteristic of non-industrial societies. For example, Nuer time (Evans-Pritchard 1940) is structured by the daily needs of the cattle and by their seasonal needs (change of pasture, etc.). In rural Romania, during busy times (which are seasonal or linked to the imminence of feasts) people will work until they finish their duties, but will rest the whole day during the winter when there is nothing to do and the day is shorter. In rural England before the industrial revolution, the timetable for work used to be a function of seasonal needs, and the way people measured time was loose: morning, dawn, etc. The industrial revolution and the invention and popularisation of watches brought precision in the scheduling of tasks, because the new organisation of work (in factories, labour-time became the measure for work and its value) imposed it. Change in the structure of time is taking place in a similar way today in Romania, where industrialisation started only forty years ago. And although industrialisation in Romania was forced and rapid, the perception of time takes more than just a few years to change, as Thompson has shown in the case of England.

According to Thompson's theory, rural Romania should contrast radically with urban Romania, because of the difference in the organisation of daily work: in the countryside tasks are dictated by the seasons and the consequent amount of work they bring; in the city the hours of work are strictly regulated and the watch provides the measure. There should therefore be two different notions of time. But this can hardly be the case, since there is no clear distinction between rural and urban people: migration to and from the countryside at different ages is common, and everybody's extended family has both rural and urban members. Having been educated to use daily time in a certain manner, later external constraints are likely to be resisted. What becomes then of Bloch's assertion, in response to Geertz, that people could freely oscillate between several perceptions of time, each linked to a particular context (Bloch 1977)? It is certainly true that if the context has the

strength of imposing a certain notion of time, people would be constrained to learn it/ comply with it. Yet sometimes it does not, as examples from the organisations Alpha and Beta have shown.

The socialist period was characterised by the gradual imposition of the state as a manager of people's daily time. The '*etatisation*' of time, as Verdery (1996) terms it, undermined people's own responsibility for their use of time, especially in the public sphere, and reduced the importance of time and the potential for its fruitful use. The management of time by the state should have been restricted, logically, to the workplace, thus to the 48 hours of work per week plus additional time for work meetings, party meetings, organised party demonstrations or compulsory voluntary extra hours. However, the economy of shortage imposed additional hours for queuing, from which no family could escape (Schwartz 1975; Câmpeanu 1994). Queuing would normally take two to three hours every day (much more for retired people and children), as one purchased different types of food from different shops, which generally sold only one product at a time and in small quantities, so that every citizen could get some of it. It was necessary to wait in line at as many queues as possible and relatively often in order to survey the opportunities, and to be always ready to abandon any other type of activity (even a professional one) in order to join the queue. Queuing was not only time-consuming, but was also disturbing for family life as it was impossible to foresee its timing. While queuing affected one's personal life, waiting for buses for hours while heading for an appointment affected one's relations with others, including professional relations. Planning and control over one's own time was thus difficult. Time was an efficient political tool and the 'colonisation' of individual time was an important way of counteracting possible acts of resistance.

If queuing has disappeared from shops in postsocialist Romania, it has not disappeared from administrations, as queuing for tax payments or the renewal of identity documents shows. Besides queuing, there are several other complementary forms of wasting time that administrations impose by their bureaucracy, lack of information and lack of appropriate internal services. Each time one finds out after an hour spent in line at some administrative office that she needs a fiscal stamp, or a copy, or a blank sheet of paper, she has to rush to the nearest post office or library, supposing she knows how to find her way,[72] to purchase the necessary items. Then she returns and queues again at the office that needs them, hoping to submit the completed file the very day, in order to avoid having to take another day off to solve the

[72] Administrations are open to the public for a limited number of hours every day, thus imposing the stress of rushing when a file is not complete. Citizens could not deal with them by correspondence or email.

administrative problem. It did not occur to public institutions to internalise services such as photocopying. One also needs to queue in order to obtain the tiniest bit of information, because the information displayed on the office door is often outdated or incomplete. This means that even in those administrative offices where the information displayed is accessible, accurate and updated, the citizen cannot trust it, his experience having taught him that this case is quite rare. The citizen wants then to check for himself by asking the state employee whether the information is correct and this is why he will wait in line. In the end, the employee might not be able to get the information for him or be unwilling to investigate further.[73]

What has changed, however, is that the imposition of the state and of enterprises on one's time is increasingly noticed and contested. Quite naturally, those who did not realise the value of their time under the socialist period understand it now, when the capitalist concept of time as money has become familiar. As a result, people tend to be more mean with their time and complain more if it has been stolen. But when allocating personal time between activities, we can still see surprising behaviour. Yes, time is money, but how much money?

One of the most striking things is to see people prepared to save very little money by giving so much of their time. While many cannot afford to give up any opportunity for saving (for instance retired people who do not have any other means for obtaining money), others simply do not equate time and money. One of my informants who was a high school teacher would spend twenty to thirty minutes to go to his school in order to make urban phone calls for free from there. This would save him only a fifth of what he would earn by giving a private lesson in the same half an hour – or so his wife complained. However, she herself would shop in five different supermarkets, despite the consequent waste of time, in order to get the best price for every item.

When no constraints frame somebody's time, this is 'free time' (*timp liber*). Though free time is initially everything that is not 'labour time', a gradual move towards this new understanding of 'time without constraints' is taking place today. The supplement to a major Romanian newspaper, *Romania Liberã*, is called '*Timpul Liber*', and its editorial is always an interview with public personalities about their 'free time'. The standard answer given by the interviewees is that they do not have any free time, because they are always caught up in activities. These activities do not prove to be work activities by any means, and one could loosely call them social constraints; they are just compulsory, as is work. The definition of 'free

[73] A case study analysed in Chapter eight will illustrate the hegemony of bureaucratic constraints on individual time.

time' proposed by these personalities implicitly incorporates social constraints into work. This metaphor points at a real fact: in Romania's survival economy, most daily activities of adults tend to be reduced to potential moneymaking activities. 'Free time' is not 'leisure time', as Sean Sayers remarked; the extensive use of non-work time as 'leisure' is a development of modern industrial societies (Sayers 1988).

8.1.3 The meaning of everyday time

Time is measured in our present 'Time of Codes' (Attali 1983) by sophisticated and precise watches. They remind people of the existence of every second, of every tenth of a second. The value of the second is remembered however only during activities that are viewed negatively. One would be aware of every minute s/he unwillingly spends in a waiting room, but would not notice that time passes when engaged in pleasant activities. This could appear to be a common trend for industrial societies, but there are some fine details. The readiness with which one forgets what time it is when pleased by his/her occupation belongs in a way to an 'age of innocence', where one is aware of time when needed, but could be free of the chronometer when not needed (or simply when forgetting it despite the constraints). Serious, middle-aged teachers at Gamma will arrive late to their lessons because they ran in to neighbours on their way, engaged in a conversation and simply forgot to consult their watches. As the awareness of the flow of time surfaces only now and then, so does the awareness of its value. The 'why' that should accompany the allocation of time is often absent, even when it is entirely one's own responsibility to manage his/her time.

The way people express how time is used contains an implicit judgement on the meaning of its duration. In Romania 'time wasted' is referred to as 'time lost' (*timp pierdut*). The difference with the English expression is that while 'waste' extends over a period of time (necessary for the activity of 'wasting' to take place), 'loss' is a sudden, immediate event, almost an accident. This also implies that the agent has less power to stop the process and that s/he becomes aware that it took place only afterwards.

For many of my informants who were in full employment (and sometimes with second jobs), the aim of the busy day was to make it to the end and go to bed. This could unfortunately be said also of many Western citizens. The French call this life *metro-boulot-dodo*, i.e. 'tube-work-sleep'. Romanian urbanites however have much more diversity in their spatial destinations: they need to visit five shops and not one to purchase their food, have dozens of administrations to go to for paying their bills and other matters, have second jobs and more family commitments. There must be some way they get their energy! The explanation could be quite simple: they

go to work for a rest, as Ashwin and Bowers (1997) were told by their Russian informants. Between the multitude of commitments they have every day, most service employees count on their time at work as the most predictable and largest amount of time when they can collect their thoughts and recover their energy. People make reference to the time spent at their workplace as 'I stayed at work', and a widely circulated joke about state employees is a pun on the similarity between 'state' (*stat*) and 'stay' (*sta*). Passage from being alert and always present at the work place to just being there to fulfil one's hours of work is allowed by state directors' lack of interest in their employees and speeded up by the biological necessity for rest. When one can only look forward to an activity's end, it is perhaps understandable why time and obligations at work are respected as little as possible, and why extra activities, more pleasant and of personal use, are performed in order to 'kill' the time (*omorî timpul*): knitting, chatting, phoning home, solving personal problems.

The loose attitude at the workplace does not characterise all service enterprises. At Alpha, the sense of duty and interest in the activity did not allow for any rest during the work programme. But the employees' daily time did not seem to have a destination either. The succession of events at the workplace was too rapid and would not allow them to plan, respect their planning or realise that they had accomplished something during the day. Thus in the first half an hour when employees arrived at work, they were puzzled (bent over their files in the corridor, which was the smoking place) by what they should do and how and when to do it, while before monthly deadlines everybody would have to work non-stop to finish. The monthly deadline was so rushed however that it was experienced as a constraint to be gotten rid of and not as having potential meaning for employees' work.

Daily time appears to have no destination; it contains only an alternation between times of constraints and times of pleasure, time spent and time lost, time asleep and time awake. On a small scale, this echoes Leach's structuralist view of time as a sequence of oscillations between polar opposites, pendulum-like (Leach 1961). Repetitive daily activities receive meaning only in the long term, when integrated into a life project.

8.2 Lifetimes and destiny

8.2.1 Measuring lifetimes: The calendar

Leach (1961) asserts that it is not time that oscillates like a pendulum, but the 'soul', and that this oscillation is dictated by religion, not by common sense. On the lifetime scale, religion has projected onto the environment events which mark and measure time. Thus, sacred time alternates with

profane time and the 'soul' oscillates between these two. The measurement of sacred and profane durations is kept by the calendar. Written or oral, the calendar is 'the first code, the first social instrument, the first sacred book' (Attali 1983: 38) and the most enduring over time. It accounts for the succession of days and nights and for the succession of religious feasts; it accounts also for the passage of years.

Romanians lead their lives according to the annual Orthodox calendar, Easter and Christmas being the most important feasts. The mythical and mystical dimension of religious feasts is still very present even in urban Romania, having survived the secularisation imposed by the socialist state.[74] The weeks preceding Easter and Christmas are thus directed towards the feast time to come, and many people fast. On a practical level, this period implies expenses, savings for these special expenses, time for spending money, for preparing festive meals and home decorations. Since for religious reasons the public holidays that would allow the freedom to carry out these activities occur during, and not before, the feast, this simply means that people take time off (unofficially) from their jobs. This is why practically all activities are slowed down a week or two before a feast, though the timetable remains the same. It is impossible to solve any important problem, even if the administration or company is officially working, because women are busy running here and there to the hairdresser, to shops, etc. This is widely tolerated, as it is almost a part of the Christmas or Easter spirit to let your employees deal with their problems, and this is best done during the working hours, which corresponds to the working hours of the shops. At the feast time everything is allowed, the order is reversed (Leach 1961). Feast time is also 'community' time, a time of solidarity.

The same aura also surrounds personal life events, which are consecrated by the Orthodox Church as marriage, baptism and funerals. Their sacredness triggers the spirit of solidarity in work mates and managers: they take over duties, letting you attend to your own concerns. The organisation of these events occupies one's time and thoughts, but also demands money. I found that people displayed generosity and compassion in special circumstances like these, qualities that are rather lacking on a daily basis. Religious events give the measure of time and separate it into 'before' and 'after' sacred time: before as the time of restriction and of continuous alertness; afterwards, the time of recovery and remembering – a time of restriction as well, because too much rich food has been consumed and too much money has been spent.

[74] The debate between continuity and revival of religious practices in Romanian towns is analysed in depth elsewhere (Heintz 2004).

8.2.2 Tendencies in the management of lifetimes

In traditional rural society, life events are mostly family events, historical events that have a bearing on individual lives, and annual events (the time of feasts). None of them could be fully 'managed' in the sense of timing, of planning for them, and many of them are unpredictable because they are generated by external factors. Births, deaths and historical changes could be foreseen, but not controlled. Marriages were the only events that could be planned. Though there is human choice at this level, albeit under social constraints, it seems to be altogether a different type of choice. The factors determining these events being somehow natural, their external agency was attributed to God or destiny and thus was fully accepted. This implies that even if one did not control his lifetime, s/he did not feel oppressed by the lack of power to do so.

In the socialist period, the state was overwhelmingly present on a daily basis, impeding the personal management of daily time. In contrast, individuals could organise their lifetime within the limits pre-set by the system, and the stability of the system diminished the possibility that changes would upset their plans. Life-long jobs and fixed incomes generated a feeling of stability in the long term. Professional events and financial events that would dramatically change one's life rarely existed. Typically, people would get married, have children (their number was more difficult to control and the lack of contraception created surprises), then acquire a house, maybe a car, retire on a state pension and raise their grandchildren. This could easily appear to be the result of one's own life choices – a consequence of the hegemony of representation exercised by the state (Yurchak 1997). The state's authority on one's lifetime was not more contested than God's will was, except by some intellectuals.

Who attempts to play God the father in Romania after 1989? On a short-term basis – enterprises. Urbanites are dependent on enterprises for financial reasons, and most private enterprises exercise their power by abusing employees' time. This is common both in enterprises that pay on commission and in enterprises where wages are paid for an eight-hour working day. In Beta the programme was called 'flexible': i.e. rather unexpected and chaotic. It was typical to send employees home for two hours to change their clothes, eat, and then come back afterwards. Thus, while there were only six hours per day of effective employment, the employee was at the firm's disposal for ten hours or more. 'Staying around' was a constant requirement and was justified by the fact that one should 'catch the job'. If one remembers however that these requirements also took place in the 'training' period, and that they were accompanied by a complete lack of security about the future work contract and future pay (as the training period would get

longer and longer and the work contract would not yet be concluded), the feeling that one's time was not respected would be justified. Indeed, new employees could not know if the month they had already spent in this rhythm would bring financial reward or assure them a longer-term job. Some employees were called to work but deliberately not given any clients, thus being deprived of the possibility of trying at least to make some money – if a contract with clients was not concluded, the employee had no pay. Also the risk of going to work but not having clients was constant – around 30% of the clients who accepted appointments did not show up. As for the better-paid and often more secure jobs in the top end of the labour market, the requirement to do unpaid extra hours is frequent. As one of these employees told me, 'as soon as they pay you more than usual, they think they can ask you for anything'. And in Romania, after all, time is worth much less than money.

On a long-term basis, one could plan her/his life, but could one see far ahead when living in a survival economy? Living from one day to the next because of economic constraints and social instability renders long-term life planning obsolete. If the bank in which you saved your money for a private flat collapses tomorrow and you run the risk of recovering (partially) your money only after two to five years; if the company for which you work gets restructured tomorrow or you get fired without notice; if political changes are so important that they directly affect your life; or if you finally have the chance to win at one of the TV game shows, long term planning is useless and can only bring frustration. Fate is seen as ultimately responsible for events that one has presumably triggered. During the socialist period, state control made people think that they had no freedom of choice. There was a certain degree of choice, but not in the consumeristic sense where both choice X and choice Y would bring you a consequent degree of satisfaction. Applying rational thinking when choosing between being obediently conformist or taking the dangerous path of dissent was tantamount to leaving no choice in the end. Since 1989, there has been a greater freedom of choice regarding how to live one's life, but the range of choices is similarly perceived as limited or too risky. The risk factor is a new element people are not used to living with; for the time being they deal with it in a fatalist and not in a calculated manner.[75]

[75] In *Risk Society*, Ulrich Beck theorises post-industrial society as a society concerned with the management, in the present, of future risks (Beck 1992).

8.2.3 Life orientation: Memory and destiny

One's lifetime needs to be oriented with respect to something if life is to be meaningful. The simple succession of events might suffice only if all events give you pleasure. 'Carpe diem' did not appear to be the philosophy of life for Romanian urbanites – some anthropologists suggest this is a characteristic of marginal people (Day et al. 1999). Their lifetime is oriented both to the past, through memory (the interpretation of memories) and to the future, as 'destiny'. Both memory and destiny are present in everyday discourses and laden with judgements. The frequency with which people refer to them depends mainly on their age and personality. Memory contains an interesting representation of the acceleration of events after 1989. When addressing the period before 1989, memory leans on personal events. The period after 1989 appears too dense to be clearly remembered; personal events superimpose themselves, while social events surface as being those that have directed people's lives since the Revolution. Again, the way of remembering differs according to age. Young people I interviewed who were employed in the top end of the labour market – those who are said to form the emerging middle class – think in terms of their careers and mostly look ahead. They do not seem to have time for remembering, except when willing to show the path to success that they have taken. Those who have not succeeded are silent about their past.

The trouble with memories is that they do not confer a meaning to the life of those who are over 45-50 years old. On the contrary, their stories will show that their lives had no aim, no scope and probably no future. This is because the set of values and the planning of life that they had followed until 1989 simply do not match with what happened afterwards. These people belong to what are called the 'sacrificed generations' in political discourses, generations that have to disappear because they can no longer find their place in the system. The younger among them (45-60) have to disappear from the labour market, because they have a 'socialist mentality' or because they are working in structures destined to disappear (mostly industry). The older (over 70) have to disappear because the system cannot support them financially. This is the perception that old acquaintances I interviewed expressed; this is how they perceive the attitude of the political power towards them, as resulting from media discourses or based on the small retirement pensions received. If for the older ones memory can provide a sense of meaning, as they lived most of their lives before these were officially reinterpreted as having been wrong, for the younger ones, memory and destiny leave them equally deprived. The feeling that there is no meaningful future, 'no light at the end of the tunnel', as a teacher from the Music School expressed it, was manifest in 2000 in the lack of democratic participation.

Resignation and scepticism towards promises led 66% of people to abstain from voting at the local elections held in June 2000, and 49% at the presidential elections held in November 2000. The slogan of the Bucharest candidate for the second local election campaign was: 'What do you get if you don't vote?'

Resignation in the face of an unknown destiny easily leads to fatalism and catastrophism. The year 1999 was imbued with negative, apocalyptic premonitions and the 'sacrificed generations' were the voices for it. 1999 was the year of the total solar eclipse, which had its epicentre in Romania. Many feared that magnetic influences would trigger an earthquake. The end of the millennium (celebrated at the end of 1999) added to their fears, along with new interpretations of Nostradamus, seen as confirmed by the Kosovo war. Also, earthquakes in Romania occur on average every ten years, and as two important earthquakes had taken place in Iran and India that year, a devastating one in Romania apparently should have followed.[76] A native 'prophet' predicted the day for the earthquake to be the 15th of January 2000, and though he was scientifically contradicted, people were frightened. Even the city council of Bucharest organised some shelters outside the city (just in case), and published advice concerning behaviour during an earthquake. People living in buildings considered unable to withstand another earthquake were living in fear, stigmatised by the city council with a red sign hung on the building. They could not insure their lodgings any more, could not sell or rent their flats, and received no visits from doctors and friends. In January 2000, newspaper headlines declared that half of Bucharest's population was living with psychoses of the impending earthquake. Afterwards fears gradually vanished.

What is interesting in these representations of memory and destiny is the fact that they are not personal, but collective. The feeling of catastrophe about one's own life is amplified to include the nation. Memory is also recalled collectively rather than individually (Lass 1994).

A distinct way of thinking about one's life and fate, more individualistic, is through astrology. Horoscopes are present in all the magazines and people consult diviners and books about their fate and their personality. However, divination, being associated with Gypsy performers, is not as popular as the interest in the topic. Horoscopes from newspapers are not trusted any more, but a TV programme presented by a 'serious', informed diviner, Urania, has extremely high ratings. Her prophecies address both the individual and the national scale.

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[76] An earthquake took place, but in Turkey, and it was indeed devastating. The result was that fears 'moved' – after the earthquake in Turkey, the anticipated event was somehow consumed.

The burden of history can destroy generations, but history can also give meaning to present sufferings. Individuals search for meaning in history, and integrate their lives in the history of the community (in the case of Bucharesteans, the nation). This develops a national spirit, without necessarily developing what is generally termed 'nationalism'.[77] History can be the scapegoat, and the avenue of escape for giving sense to one's life.

8.3 Historical (national) time and destiny

I will begin this section with a brief overview of the history of Romania before looking at Romanian interpretations of historical time and destiny.

8.3.1 The history of 'national time' – a history made of transitions

Geographically situated at crossroads between the West and the East, the three provinces that form Romania have had a troubled history over the centuries, being exposed to continuous changes of external influences and rulers. Literature, people's accounts of history, and Romanian sayings all stress that Romanians, mainly a nation of peasants, had always to be on the defence against the pagans, Turks or Tatars, and sometimes also against Christians. Defence would mean in glorious times that peasants took weapons and fought. Notwithstanding this, they always had to abandon their houses, burn their crops, poison the water in their wells, and retreat to the mountains until the dangers passed. 'Being Romanian has meant centuries of being survivors, principally by mechanisms other than overt conflicts' (Verdery 1983: 370). These cyclical movements took place both in time and in space (from the plains to the mountains and back).

In its present administrative form, Romania is a country that achieved the unification of its three provinces – Wallachia, Moldova and Transylvania – first in 1859, and again at the end of the First World War, when Bessarabia, Bukovina, and then Transylvania joined Romania by popular will. The modern idea of the Romanian nation can be traced back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and it was explicit in the programmes of the 1848 Revolutions in each province. Previous submission, to the Austro-Hungarian empire (in the case of Transylvania and Bukovina), to the Ottoman Empire (in the case of Wallachia and Moldova), and briefly to the Russian Empire (for Bessarabia), left different economic structures and cultural legacies (for

[77] Nationalism is a compromised term in Romania. It was compromised by the national ideology promoted by Ceauşescu (Verdery 1991b) and continues to be compromised by its perpetrators, the extreme right nationalists. Most intellectuals mobilised their forces against the nationalists in December 2000 elections, when the nationalist leader was a candidate in the second round of presidential elections.

instance different churches), as well as different ethnic minorities in each of these regions. The 're-allocation' of territories continued well into the twentieth century, helped by the important changes in the balance of power brought by the World Wars. After Great Romania (*Romania Mare*) was realised on the 1st of December 1918 (significantly designated after 1989 as the National Day) as a monarchy, there followed a period of economic growth, industrialisation and cultural flourishing under King Ferdinand, before the establishment of Carol the Second's dictatorship (Stokes 1989). In 1940, following a brief ultimatum, the Soviets invaded and incorporated Bessarabia and northern Bukovina to the USSR. Almost immediately, the Diktat of Vienna deprived Romania of the north-east of Transylvania and awarded it to Hungary, which motivated Romania to fight first against the Soviets, and later against the Axis powers (Hungary included). After the Second World War, Romania reclaimed some of the territory lost before the borders became fixed and indisputable: as a workers' state surrounded by other workers' states, there could not be conflicts between them. The socialist policy thus closed a period of incessant concern with territory, although in a more discreet form both Romanian and Hungarian historians continued to document their biased views concerning rights to Transylvania.

This concern with nationality survived and was even intensified (Verdery 1991b) during the socialist period. This has continued after 1989 and is manifest in the high percentage of votes for the nationalist party (they peaked at 28% in November 2000, but fell to 9% in December 2004), in the strong claims at the Council of Europe of ethnic minorities (who form 10.5% of the Romanian population), and the way these claims are perceived by Romanian citizens of Romanian ethnicity.

The economic history of Romania shows the country to have been a typical Balkan colony of Western Europe (Chirot 1976), whose trade function was limited to supplying grain, and which underwent a slight modernisation only between the two World Wars. It was predominantly a rural society where land was owned both by a small class of rich landowners and by a large class of poor peasants. The industrial bourgeoisie constituted a small minority (Chirot 1976). However, after the land reform of 1919, landowners lost their land, and at the end of the 1930s they owned only 10% of the total land. In spite of this, and due to the growth of the population, there was not sufficient land for the peasants: industrialisation accompanied by the transition to a modern state was the only solution (Chirot 1976: 156).

Communists claimed to have accomplished this transition. Indigenous communists virtually did not exist before 1944, but imported 'internationalists' and local opportunists were brought to power due to the arrangements of Yalta. They struggled until they obtained the political power backed

literally by Soviet tanks. They immediately nationalised the (limited) industrial means of production in 1948, but needed fifteen years (until 1962) to succeed in collectivising agriculture (Swain and Swain 1993). The expropriation of the property of the rich brought some additional resources to the state, but did not boost the economy, because they did not actually control many resources. The destruction caused by the war, the post-war looting by the Soviets – for war reparations or just in plain colonial style – and the backwardness of the structures allowed for abrupt economic growth in the first years after the communists took over. As in most European states, recession came quickly, at the end of the 1960s (Lane 1996). The economic situation deteriorated under Ceauşescu's personal dictatorship, as he gradually accumulated state and party responsibilities for himself and his family circles, leading in the 1980s to a considerable shortage of products and low standards of living. From the popular support in the 1960s due to a break with the USSR,[78] the regime grew less and less popular and had to reinforce its means of political coercion through the Securitate in order to maintain itself in power.

On the 22nd of December 1989, the regime was overthrown by a mass revolution, the authenticity of which was subsequently questioned, especially by members of the ex-communist government installed shortly after Ceauşescu's fall, who wished to claim the legitimacy of their hold on power (Glenny 1993)

8.3.2 Measures of national history: Cyclical? Linear?

A close look at Romanian history shows that the present transition from socialism to capitalism can be situated within a long series of historical transitions. Though for my purposes I have concentrated on recent historical transformations to which people I met could refer through their own memories, Romanian history could be read in terms of transitions from one stage to another (often without much difference). This depends on the interpretation of history. As some of the stages through which history 'transits' are different, one could establish linearity in the flow of history. Remarkable events are written in history, while 'transition' periods are finally erased from it. This is how the glorious version of national history was generally written, especially by Marxist historiography. Romania's national anthem

[78] Several events contributed to this popularity: Soviet troops withdrew from Romania in 1958; Romania publicly and noisily refused to join all other East European socialist countries in the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968; Romania remained in close contact with China and Israel, and established breakthrough diplomatic relations with West Germany and western democracies.

calls for a long-lasting rebirth of the nation – 'Wake up, Romanian, from your deadly sleep' – a call to produce that remarkable event that would subsequently be recorded in history, and to break with the intermediary period of inglorious sleep.

However, if shameful periods of 'sleep' or 'transition' between remarkable events were not to be erased, we would come closer to the interpretation proposed by the Romanian philosopher Lucian Blaga, who sees Romanian history as an alternation between periods of peace and periods of war, between periods of assertion of national soul and periods of survival. This alternation of historical time, together with the geographical alternation of hill and valley that characterises the Romanian territory, have shaped the Romanian soul, writes Blaga. This interpretation could allow us to re-evaluate and reconcile current 'transitional' abnormalities.

The interpretation of the current transition as belonging to one of these historical fluctuations is not widespread, despite the reappraisal of Blaga's philosophy of history after 1989. This is because the twentieth-century history of Romania is still in the making, and historians and philosophers have yet to step back and find a measure or meaning for this history. Oral history in the form of collective memory replaces this lack of knowledge only to some extent, being only a 'view from below', much restricted to the politics of mis- and disinformation, one of the most important weapons of socialist regimes. Even ancient and modern history were rewritten and taught in the light of Marxist theory during the socialist period, as a linear, teleological history leading through socialism to communism, supporting praise of the nation. The history of the pre-socialist period, well documented by historians between the two World Wars (Nicolae Iorga, Vasile Parvan, and others), and written with the national enthusiasm that accompanied the Great Unification of 1918, is the main source of knowledge about Romanian history toward which people are turning in the postsocialist period. All in all, history is highly problematic, although – probably due to the way it was taught during the socialist years – it is an important frame within which Romanians define their identity. Making sense of recent events and of their relevance for the history of the nation is thus of utmost importance for defining the identity of current generations, those which only political correctness forbids the social scientist to categorise as 'sacrificed generations'.

The echo of history with alternating beats, pendulum-like, is heard at the individual level, a level at which we have also concluded that time oscillates between times of pleasure and times of constraint, times awake and times asleep, according to Leach's structural model. This alternation, with various degrees of regularity, receives full meaning only when analysed on a

long-term scale: the upper point of the pendulum is not fixed, and we have to see in which direction it will move over time: what is its destiny.

8.3.3 National destiny: Being European

Most philosophical and even sociological works on Romanian destiny concentrate on the Romanian fate in the world and have strong historicist views. The existence of a national destiny is taken for granted in Romanian social sciences. A recent call for papers for the Annual Conference of the Centre for Romanian Studies (a prestigious research centre that published many historical books after 1989) states that 'The Romanian lands have traditionally been a crossroads of Europe, a land and people influenced by contacts with various peoples and cultures, a land traditionally on the border of vast and mighty empires which have influenced its destiny.' This underlines both that national destiny exists as such, and that it has largely been determined by external factors. Romanians internalise these two ideas through the verses of Andrei Muresan in the national anthem: *Acum ori niciodata/ Cladeste-ti alta soarta/ De care sa se mire/ Si cruzii tai dusmani*. ('Now or never/ Build yourselves another destiny/ That would astonish/ Your cruel enemies' – my translation).

Indeed, the history of Romania cannot be understood apart from European history: the extension of various empires, then in the twentieth century of zones of influence, and the economic needs of the European market (Chirot 1976: 121). The Romanian *principates* have always turned toward Western Europe for their model, though some historians claim that this model from the West, borrowed or imposed, proved inadequate to solve Romania's problems and turned into a major handicap (see for instance the history of Romania written in a Marxist mood by Roberts [1951]). The revelation of games of power like the Yalta Conference or the Kosovo crisis in the spring of 1999 led often to disillusionment with the West and to the reinforcement of nationalistic movements. However, neither the pressure of Western agencies (as noted in Chapter four), nor the revolt of national pride as Romania's post-1989 governments bowed before Western countries changed Romanians' will to join NATO and the popularity of the future European integration. In 2005, 85% of the respondents to an opinion poll declared they were favourably inclined towards Romania's integration into the European Union, while only 10% declared themselves against it (ILI 2005). Both accessions are viewed as guarantees for future stability and economic prosperity. In February 2000, Romania was invited to the negotiation table to discuss its future inclusion in the European Union, signed the Treaty of Accession in April 2005, and is due to join the European Union in 2007. The entrance of Romania and other Eastern European countries into

the European Union has been debated extensively during the past years and it would be irrelevant to discuss it further here. The present state of affairs suggests that the constant comparisons between Romania and Western Europe made by officials and ordinary people are justified by political and economic circumstances, and not only by Romanians' traditional claim to Europeanism, caricatured by Caragiale (1881). Nevertheless, it is likely that this claim is what led Romania to apply to join the European Union in the first place, even before any strategic economic calculations.

Whether or not Romania's national destiny is bound to merge with European destiny, whether this will give a new, positive meaning to its national history, and whether this meaning will give some sense to personal, individual destinies are questions foreseen by philosophers. People's current answer to them is yes, as individuals hope that their life will receive meaning when the whole nation will 'really' be European.

8.4 Conclusion

A recurrent theme running through my ethnography is that on all three time-scales (distinguished for explanatory purposes), time is not rigorous and the control of it is minimal. The individual/ the nation tends to let events occur. They are not left to chance, but to destiny, the external benevolent co-ordinator of human/ national life. This concept enters into conflict with the necessities of capitalist organisation. While people could move between different understandings of time depending also on context (workplace, home), the absence of work discipline and the lack of education in the management of time allows 'time' defined outside the workplace to run freely into enterprises. This 'laissez-faire' attitude is due to a tradition of non-agency in time management, which has been shaped by historical circumstances during the twentieth century. Time is a rare thing and it is appreciated as such. While a capitalist logic would conclude that time is 'expensive' and scarce, and should be managed accordingly, most Romanians do not consider time as a commodity: it is neither for sale, nor for purchase. They do not manage their time; they simply use it. Some of the paradoxical behaviour noted above (willingness to give all of one's time to a Western-like manager, but impatience over a waste of time with state administrations) comes from the fact that Bucharesteans try to comprehend the capitalist notion of time as a commoditised value through their own notion of time.

The dialogue with history presented in this chapter suggests a parallel between individual and national time. I conclude that the disordered transformation of Romanian society has not allowed for a time-oriented goal, either at the individual level or at the national level. If this goal exists at the national level, individual meaninglessness can be partially redressed by the

reading of the individual trajectory as part of a successful common trajectory. In the next chapter, I will turn to the consequences of meaninglessness for work practices and values, as well as for the individual's perception of self.

Chapter 9
Redefining the Notion of a 'Work Ethic'

9.1 An ethic of work or an ethic of human relations?

After 1989 in Romania, the concept of a 'work ethic' was one of the first to be discarded, 'compromised' by its association with the old regime. For most people the concept contained the socialist meaning they were used to (see Chapter five), thus as they rejected socialist practices, they rejected the concept as well. As a result, there was a lack of conceptualisation of what one would normally call a 'work ethic' and a lack of framework for discussions of an appropriate work ethic, which affected the homogeneity and the control of attitudes towards work at every workplace. In order to fill this gap, opinion leaders recently began to propose an imported ideology of work corresponding to the Protestant work ethic – if such a unified set of moralities exists and if the information they had about it was accurate. The new rhetoric used frequently by politicians[79] plays on a comparison between the positive capitalist work ethic and negative Romanian work practices. This is why, in 1999-2000, most of my interviewees wondered whether 'there is such a thing as a work ethic among Romanians', the inference being that because of the negative Romanian mentality, there was no work ethic at all. Though denying the logical value of this inference, a careful analysis would indeed lead us to question the existence of a specific ethic that has work as its object. The debate then becomes similar to that between formalists and substantivists in economic anthropology: we could identify for the purposes of clarity and comparison, for the use of Western readers, a set of values

[79] 'We come to work, not to power' was the Liberal party candidate's slogan for the November 2000 elections. Or, more than a hundred years ago, another liberal politician observed: '*Industria romanească e admirabilă, e sublimă, putem zice, dar lipseşte cu desăvarşire. Societatea noastră, dar noi, ce aclamăm? Noi aclamăm munca, travaliul, care nu se face deloc in țara noastră*!' (Caragiale 1982: 161). ('The Romanian industry is admirable, sublime we could say, but it is lacking completely. It is our society, but we, what do we acclaim? We acclaim work, labour, which nobody performs in our country'! [my translation]).

corresponding to a 'work ethic', but we might then overlook the specificity of the notions of 'ethic' and 'work' among Romanians. Inquiring into work ethics would then correspond to one of the ideological concerns frequent among scholars of socialism and postsocialism. I shall remind the reader that, surprised by Romanians' frequent reference to work values when referring to this mentality (see Chapter one), I chose the term 'work ethic' as a conceptual tool of inquiry into practices and values that led to these mentalist explanations.. For the sake of convenience, I began my analysis of work values and practices with a formalist approach. On the basis of this analysis, I can now try to reformulate the notions of work and ethic within an 'indigenous' framework. This is not an easy task today, as Bucharest service sector employees live in a globalised world and have adopted the language of capitalism for themselves in order to compete on the same economic grounds. Both formalists and substantivists would be pressed to clarify the empirical evidence upon which their theories are based. What is an indigenous concept in this case: a concept used by the natives or a concept that, in the anthropologist's view, best describes an indigenous reality? Answering this question is essential, because my ethnographic material shows that the two meanings of the term 'indigenous concepts' are different.

9.1.1 The Romanian work ethic – a heterogeneous set of values

I began in Chapter three by considering the minimal definition of the term 'work ethic' as 'rules of conduct in work' (Oxford Concise Dictionary). Consequently I reviewed the rules given by managers in the workplace. Though the definition is restrictive, the term 'rules' remains convenient because it allows a gradual move from practical norms of behaviour at work to the values underpinning them. These values are ultimately what I define as a work ethic. I inquired into the practice ('how?'), only to arrive at the reason behind the practice ('why?').

My analysis showed that the three enterprises I studied were very heterogeneous with respect to rules and their enforcement, varying from a strict imposition of rules in the marketing department at Beta, to an absolute freedom of movement and thought in the NGO Alpha, where only some principles were presented to the employees; from sets of rules (principles) with their own internal coherence in Alpha to incoherent measures in the Gamma Music School; from Fordist totalitarian rules in Beta to democratic idealism in Alpha. In contrast to the uniformity of the socialist period (see Chapter five), today the ideology of work differs across enterprises, depending on the position of enterprises in the labour market or on individual circumstances.

Even inside each enterprise, managers appeared unable to provide a coherent, realistic image of the desired work ethic, themselves living under the influence of different 'ideoscapes' (Appadurai 1991): echoes of the ideal-type of the Protestant work ethic pierce through the typical 'new rich' discourse (Sampson 1996) of Beta's manager; echoes of Christian moral values are felt in the discourses of the director of Gamma, who is a practising Christian; echoes of the ideal-type of the socialist work ethic unconsciously penetrate the discourses of the intermediary manager of Alpha. To this we can add their concrete life experiences of the capitalist work ethic (for the Beta manager and the interim manager of Alpha, who had worked abroad), and that of the 'actually existing socialism' (for the Alpha intermediary manager and the Gamma director). A third layer of influences comes from their knowledge of ways to turn values around in daily practice, in good conscience. I have described in the previous chapters how this knowledge was forged under socialism and how it is still shared after 1989. The mixture of these often-incompatible ideologies and practices did not provide an efficient code of behaviour or motivating discourses for the employees. For instance in Alpha, where hard work was highly valued and employees strictly selected, managers did not fire those found to be useless or lazy, because 'they needed money too'. Thus, the driver, rendered useless by the fact that everybody in the NGO used her/his own car for business travel, was fired only after he had committed several thefts from the NGO's premises.

With no coherent or convincing set of values offered, employees were left on their own to establish the way they would behave at work, towards colleagues, managers or customers. The rules provided were insufficient or impractical. Employees relied on their own values in the same manner in which they relied on their own understanding of time. There were some apparent exceptions worth mentioning, because their analysis reinforces the above statement. One such exception was the pre-established terms of the dialogue between employees and clients in the marketing department, where the desired image they had to project was clearly described, the exact means for realising this were given (employees were obliged to repeat word-for-word a speech written by the manager) and the manager's control was tight. Only the Image, the appearance benefited from such attention. Pretending had an important role under socialism: it used to hide a different reality. At Beta, no coherent set of values was promoted, but there was a coherent technique of projecting some imaginary values that the manager considered important for enticing clients. However, there were many breaches in this projection too, as we will see in some ethnographic examples from Beta that follow.

9.1.2 Redefining work ethics through practice

From the ethnography of my three main field sites, it appears that dysfunction can arise even when rules are internally coherent, the structure of power allows them to be enforced, and when the rules of conduct fit (theoretically) the needs of the organisation. This is because employees also interpret the rules in light of their understanding of work derived from the larger social context, and they fill the existing gaps with their own rules/ interpretations (not to mention that managers' practices are also sometimes inconsistent with their stated values). Opinion leaders, politicians and managers may try to change values by imposing them from above (this attempt was described in Chapter one, and criticisms of theory before practice are expressed in Chapters five and six), but people would still influence them from below through their practices. Work practices influence work ethics, and the attempted creation of or change in a work ethic that remains a purely theoretical, ideal endeavour has few chances to survive. The socialist state, which played deaf to the voice from below and tried to educate people 'in the spirit of work', finally collapsed. Current sociologists and social historians (Bauman 1998) overlook the importance of ordinary people's practices, which forced leaders to change their discourses and mobilised values over time. Leaders are motivated to adapt their discourses by attempts to maintain social order. A work ethic may change through an encounter with other sets of values (such as the Protestant work ethic), but also under the pressure of employees' interpretations of rules as revealed through their practice.

Practices that do not conform to values are not necessarily perceived as deviant, because justification – as Wedel (1992) showed for Poles under socialism – or interpretation, which is often the result of negotiation, can make them compatible. Some examples below illustrate this point. In a public children's hospital, nurses skipped their regular check-ups on Saturdays, when the doctors were not around. This happened in full agreement with the children's mothers, and appeared even as a favour to them, as the check-ups were tiring – the children would start crying and it was difficult to calm them down afterwards. The nurses felt that if mothers did not notice that their children had a fever, it was safe to skip checking the children's temperature with a thermometer. Luckily, there were no obvious consequences of this interpretation of the rules; none of the children suffering a worsening of their health because of this Saturday looseness. However, a similarly loose respect for rules in an industrial setting, where one of my acquaintances worked, generated huge losses. This particular state enterprise had no stable contracts with clients and its production suffered greatly from the discontinuity of demand (at the time, for more then half the working time, employees were in 'technical unemployment', as there was no work for

them). The enterprise had to develop marketing strategies to gain contracts with foreign firms (being ultra-specialised, the enterprise had to look for clients abroad), which were sometimes successful. When they would bid for a contract by sending a sample of the product, they would often manage to get the contract, as the sample met the high quality standards required. But the mass production afterwards never reached the same quality as the sample, and partner firms would never renew their contracts. As my acquaintance, an engineer, explained, this was not because employees neglected their work, but because they did not take quality controls seriously. For reasons of convenience, some control tests were skipped or their result was not taken into account. A product was slightly bent? It was not removed from the production line, because workers could not imagine this being an obstacle to its use. For the German companies they sometimes worked with, the product had to be perfect. One young informant summarised the rationale behind malpractice or corruption among older employees: 'if it also works this way…[why not do it]'. The problem encountered by Romanian enterprises today is that they are increasingly confronted with European standards of quality and this approach does not 'work' any more.

These practices seem to correspond to the assertions about the Romanian mentality at work debated in Chapter one. What appear different are the reasons behind the practice. Analysis of the negotiation and interpretation of rules throws light on this point. Taken individually, in her/his own economic and social context, each employee has reasons for behaving in a certain way. Rather than being directed by her/his own character and work values, s/he undergoes internal moral conflicts when s/he deviates from these rules. Managers respond with their rules, which distance employees from adherence to their original values, until a relative state of equilibrium is reached. These new values and rules are at a certain distance from the ideal. The negotiation is double: both between different categories of staff (typically subordinates versus their managers) and between values (ideal) and practices (real).

9.1.3 An ethic of interpersonal relations

As a work ethic is linked to money and survival, other spheres of ethics constantly feed it. One example is cheating at work, discussed in Chapter four. In most service enterprises this comprises cheating another person, which bears on the ethic governing interpersonal relations. Furthermore, it is even questionable whether the values encountered in the workplace are linked to work and not to personal commitments – towards the employer, other employees, or clients. Several ethnographic observations have led me to question the existence of a particular ethic linked to work.

Lack of pride in one's work is frequent, and relegates work to the level of a means of subsistence and not of a provider of identity. Work practice is not necessarily the reflection of certain work values, but may be only the result of life constraints. There is no need for work values if there are enough whips. Lengthy discussions about work commitments with my informants suggest however that only (temporary) historical vicissitudes have caused them to lose pride in their work, or to be more precise, in the status conferred by employment. Thus, the Music School teachers complained that the number of hours of teaching they had to do in order to secure their subsistence obliged them to do their work unconvincingly and without pleasure. Instrument teachers, however, are a particular category of employees among service employees, a vocational group, with a distinct professional ethic (a set of values pertaining to the profession of artist) even before having a certain work ethic. Most women employees under socialism used to take pride in the status conferred by work as superior to that of a housewife. Now they prefer to get early retirement by paying for false medical certificates in order to have both a pension and a reward from their work in the informal economy. Horia Bernea warned that 'Romanians do not work for the sake of work, but for the result' (Antena 1, 2000b). The conclusion I draw in my discussion of the task-oriented management of time in Chapter seven supports his statement. If the 'results' of work are not concrete, visible, satisfying, the employee feels no commitment to her/his work.

Given the loose control exercised on some categories of employees, notably state employees, and the difficulty of evaluating work in service enterprises, we could wonder what values motivate the employees to perform their work at all. We should remember at this point that work contracts have almost no value if not endorsed by a personal commitment – trust – between employer and employees (which generally precedes the signing of a contract), as the state cannot enforce contracts satisfactorily. Also, work commitments tend to be more respected between people belonging to the same social circle or network. Work requirements are often manipulated to satisfy a (recommended) client. The employee who does this often has 'a good and understanding' nature. In the marketing department of Beta, sales representatives happened to forget their own financial interest and their work commitments when obeying an inner obligation to be sincere toward a client. Personal contacts in service enterprises make work practices linked more to an ethic of human relations than to an ethic of work. Impersonal relations facilitate trickery or poor work performance; as I noted earlier, cheating the abstract state carries no moral responsibility. Therefore, an employee is motivated to work not by a sense of responsibility toward an abstract work requirement, but rather by responsibility toward the employer, the client or

fellow workers. It is interesting to note that in Western organisations today, there is an increasing focus on personal relations, corporate behaviour, and forging a family spirit (Grint 1998 [1991]). This would suggest that the capitalist work ethic has lost some of its power to motivate employees (as the state of abundance renders sustained work over the course of one's life less necessary) and needs to be replaced by an ethic inspired by the ethic of personal relations. This is also a re-establishment of a pre-industrial form of work, as Grint's history helix shows (1998 [1991]: 321).

Therefore, values intrinsic to human relations, not work values, can be found behind work practices in Romania. Work values are socially embedded values, not impersonal values imposed by the economic organisation. Criticisms of the current work ethic (motivated by Romanians' perception of the capitalist work ethic) in the debates over the Romanian mentality might find a more appropriate target if redirected towards criticising human relations.

9.2 Work ethics – the impact of an ideology

Though the previous observations would lead to discarding the concept of a 'Romanian work ethic' in favour of an ethic of human relations, the notion of a work ethic allows us to understand how people explain the economic crisis in terms of human relations ('the Romanian mentality'). Even if the concept of a work ethic does not fit the Romanian understanding of 'work' and 'ethic', the concept is present as an outside European standard and it is in this capacity that it influences values. Romanians' general dissatisfaction with their current work performance is a sign of concern with work values and even a sign of a change in work ethic for those understanding mentality as a cultural, changeable product. Whether those who complain about the existing work ethic attempt to distance themselves from it or not in their work performance, they are still undergoing a transformation of values. I will show how values are negotiated under the pressure of this comparison and how the result bears more on human relations than on work.

9.2.1 What a lack of money means

Phrases such as 'they treat me as if I were the last man' (*mă tratează ca pe ultimul om*), 'am I not human like all the others?' (*nu sunt şi eu om ca toţi oamenii?),* or the revulsion expressed when saying 'we are treated like animals' (*ne tratează ca pe vite*) show that some forms of disrespect are considered to affect human nature deeply. Hobbes thought that two desires characterised human nature: the desire to survive and the desire for others' recognition (1996 [1651]). The desire for social recognition is strong in

traditional Romanian society, as the aim of one's life is expressed as 'being like everybody else' (*să fiu în rand cu lumea*) and many actions are performed out of shame before others (*de ruşinea lumii*) or out of fear for what they might say (*de gura satului*). For Romanians, respect is the basis of social recognition and one of the most sought-after ingredients in interpersonal relations.

Each time I discussed dysfunction and aberrant behaviour in the workplace with older informants, although the behaviour was resented and disapproved, my informants felt the need to excuse the protagonists: '[it is normal considering…] how much they are paid'. The bitterness with which these words were always uttered questions the apparent materialistic thinking behind this judgement: you pay me only so much, I put only so much effort in my work. The inability to calculate the value of work in money, as I noted in the discussion of time use in Chapter seven, and the limited choice one has between different jobs (and incomes), as mentioned in Chapter four, lead me to think that this materialistic reasoning is only a linguistic frame borrowed from capitalist discourses. Given that a good wage in Romania, one that is worth working for, is called a 'decent' wage, 'how much they are paid' means 'how much respect they are shown through their pay'. An employer (including the state) who does not provide employees with enough means to live, when they have worked for it, earned it, is said not to respect them. Retired people feel their small pensions are a rejection by society, a way of telling them to 'go and die, you are useless' (as one 70-year-old retired woman put it). A 40-year old state employee talked about how she was coping with life: 'it's just that they [the government, the state] do not let us die completely'. When people's incomes are not sufficient to meet their needs, it means that their work is not respected (is it then worth performing well?), but also that they themselves are not respected, given their dependency on money for survival. In his study of food riots in eighteenth-century England, E.P. Thompson asserted that 'it is of course true that riots were triggered off by soaring prices, by malpractice among dealers and by hunger. But these grievances operated within a popular consensus as to what were legitimate and what were illegitimate practices in marketing, milling, baking, etc. […] An outrage to these moral assumptions quite as much as actual deprivation, was the usual occasion for direct action' (1971: 78-79).

The director of the Music School, shocked by the impoliteness of a (private) shopkeeper (which she felt showed a lack of respect), asked her bluntly why she had been so well-served by another employee the previous day in the same shop. The employee replied straightforwardly, 'Yesterday, you talked to the boss. Do you know how much I am paid?' The Music School Director immediately became compassionate – but not because she

accepted an 'eye for an eye' attitude: you don't respect me (you pay me badly), I don't respect you (I do my job poorly), a conflict that would catch the client in between. She knew from her own experience that enduring others' disrespect results in uncertainty about one's own worth. She was sympathetic not simply because the boss was disrespectful of the employee (this she could have imagined to be the case for a whole lot of underpaid employees), but because this had made the employee feel miserable to the point of being indiscriminately rude towards others.

9.2.2 Discrepancies between work values and work practices: Personal moral dilemmas

For any individual, values and practice should conform. If they do not, there are logically two ways to change this: either try to change the behaviour to match the values or to negotiate the values to make them fit the practices. The first attempt is morally recognised, the second attempt, which contributes to changes in a work ethic, is not necessarily condemned, as I have shown for the interpretation of rules in the enterprises I observed.

For the employees I worked with, both transformations from the ideal to reality and from reality to the ideal were taking place. Yet their values and their practices were so divorced from each other that employees remained divided, knowing the good and doing the bad in order to survive.

The socialist period was characterised by this complex relationship between ideals and reality (Chapter five), and most people grew up with this duplicity in their lives. The individual was comforted by the fact that s/he shared these moral ambiguities with everybody else (individual justifications often alluded to others' behaviour), and this diminished her/his responsibility in behaving one way and thinking in another. The individual solved moral dilemmas more easily by hiding in the collective, a move encouraged by socialist ideology.[80] At the end of the 1990s, the perceived abnormality of Romanian society was an excuse for the individual (Chapter six), but there was no excuse for the collective; the unfavourable comparison with the West condemned the whole country, as the terms of the discussion on the Romanian mentality show. Moral dilemmas become personal when the individual tries to single her/himself out from the crowd or, today, by comparison with the growing heterogeneity of behaviour and values within society. For instance, in the NGO Alpha, one employee whose commitment to work would have been considered high had he been an employee in a state enter-

[80] Those who stood out from the crowd were considered abnormal; Yurchak observes that this was the case with dissidents in Russia (Yurchak 1997, 2006).

prise was considered to be lazy and not interested enough in his work, and he sometimes saw himself in these terms as well. Differing codes of ethics (resulting from negotiations between managers and the most influential employees) in different enterprises, together with discussions of the capitalist work ethic in the media, act as a reminder of the 'ought-to-be' standards that one does not meet. This is something that did not happen during the last years of the socialist period. There were motivational speeches, but their wooden language meant that these were ignored by employees.

Justifications then multiply – they are proof that there is a certain ethic (of work, or of human relations, etc.), even if it is not followed. Like complaining, a common phenomenon among Romanians, justifications lead to two conclusions. First, there is an undesirable discrepancy between one's expectations and reality. Second, when people feel that they cannot do anything about this discrepancy, complaining or retroactive justifications remain the only solution. Surrender to the impossibility of respecting one's own declared values is manifest in self-victimisation.

The discordance between values and practice does not resonate equally in everybody's conscience; age introduces differences in this respect, as different age groups have distinct life experiences, social memories and life perspectives. I have already mentioned in the last chapter the age groups most affected by the lack of future prospects and a feeling of guilt for the past. These age groups are more aware of the moral dilemmas they experience in their daily lives. As for the younger generation, as Lass has noticed in the postsocialist Czech Republic, 'in this 'life as usual', everyone accepts that companies should be concerned with profits, bureaucracies with following the rules, and almost everybody, in their daily lives, with trying to work their way around both' (1999: 273).

The existence of an ethic makes the discrepancy between values and practices painful and degrading. The standard of a work ethic cannot be rejected simply on the grounds that it is alien to Romanians' values, because Romanians wish to align themselves to European standards, no matter how high the cost.

The role of the concept of a 'work ethic' for understanding the economic crisis ends here, as it appears to be an ethnocentric concept that should be set aside in favour of an ethic of human relations.

My analysis of work values and practices has led me to conclude that a work ethic is not a theoretical, ideal product, at the level of moralities or political discourses. The existing work ethic does not coincide either with an ideology of work or with work practices; it is the result of people negotiating between them. Romanian work practices show that despite a growing preoccupation with work values in discussions about the Romanian mentality,

'work ethic' remains an alien term in discussions about duties and responsibilities, generated only by comparison with the capitalist work ethic. Values linked to human relations are more important, forming the basis upon which the understanding of work is in fact built. This does not discard the importance of the rhetoric concerning work ethics, which influences employees and plays a role in the economic and moral crisis.

Changing the focus from an ethic of work to an ethic of human relations is not an easy task, as the latter intersects with all aspects of human life, and in some cases coincides with morality (defined in general terms). The topic of morality in social anthropology has seldom been addressed directly (Howell 1997: 6); only recently have anthropologists developed an explicit interest in moralities specific to different spheres of life. I can do no more here than to outline some directions of inquiry into the ethic of human relations centred on behaviour in the workplace in urban Romania. My aim is to illustrate my assertion that there is no special ethic of work motivating employees' behaviour in the workplace, i.e. that this ethic is not different from their ethic of human relations. This will be illustrated through a micro-analysis of case studies. My second concern is to indicate the concrete facts that inspired people to explain the Romanian crisis in terms of mentality. Dysfunctions in work performance are related to broader dysfunctions in human relations, as I have attempted to describe in my account of city aggressiveness and in my conclusion on trust and social cohesion. Leaving the macro-societal level, I will focus here on face-to-face interactions, following G.H. Mead's suggestion that society is built continuously through exchanges or interactions between persons (1934).

9.3 A case study in social interaction

The case study that follows comes from my personal experience of renewing my identity card, and comprises several interactions between the client (myself) and employees from different state administrations. I chose this case because of the first-hand knowledge I have of all the interactions involved and because I consider it representative of relations between clients and public administrations, as well as between citizens and the state. While the action was unfolding, I had the occasion to recount it to several of my interviewees, thus triggering a flow of narratives of similar cases, which led to my conviction about its representativeness. Although the case study directly illustrates only one side of the triangular relationship between client, employer, and employee, namely the relationship between client and employee, it also reflects indirectly on the relationship between employer (the state) and client, and between employee and employer.

When I arrived in Bucharest to conduct my field research, the first thing that I had to do as a Romanian citizen was to renew my identity card, as this is the only piece of identification recognised in daily life in Romania. A banal procedure that all citizens go through every ten years revealed itself extremely 'complicated', as police employees hastened to label it, in my case. Instead of ten days, the process lasted ten months. The complications with my renewal stemmed from the facts that: 1) my expired ID showed that I had once lived temporarily at another address during the last ten years; 2) the place which was my permanent address is owned by my father, who is resident abroad and could not testify *in person* that he had granted me permission to live in the flat. The legislation required this testimony *in person*.

Until these two problems were identified, I was sent several times from the police station where I used to be registered five years before, due to my temporary address, to the police station where I was registered due to my permanent address, and vice versa, but no employee felt it was the responsibility of their police station to solve the problem. Each time, employees dismissed me quickly, saying that they could not do anything for me and that I should ask somewhere else. Nobody suggested whom to ask or where. The conversation would not last any longer than this, and the employee would move on to the next client. When you happen to have a complicated case, employees will let you wait until they have dealt with easier cases (the ones that go mechanically, because you are also asked to present the papers in the order convenient to the employees' work), often under pressure from impatient clients. One day, for instance, there were only four people waiting in line, but they were already exasperated. They had seen other people going through the back door and started raising their voices against privileged clients (with no evidence that such privilege was indeed what was going on). By the end of one week, as nobody wanted to look up the information for me, I had begun to find out by myself, from bits and pieces of information received, some alternative solutions to the problem.

Spending so many hours in queues, I was able to inform myself about many legislative aspects. For instance, in one of the police stations it was displayed that there is a substantial fine for those who do not register with the local police within one month of moving to an area. Though this law is displayed on the police door, when I brought up this rule in front of an employee in order to elicit a response from her, she promptly answered 'you won't fool me with that'. Indeed, it is common knowledge that most students from outside Bucharest live during the whole period of their studies without changing their registered address, because they rent without lease contracts that would allow them to register. Given this occurrence, my argument for speeding up the search for a solution was futile.

On my fourth trip to the police stations, I managed to find, at the police station with which I had no connection besides a five-year-old stamp on my expired ID, an employee who suggested the solution of a temporary card which would indicate that I was *'fără spațiu'* ('homeless', but in socialist terms this meant 'no space allocated'). Two elderly women also queuing there congratulated me for my luck, as it appeared that this employee was especially nice compared to her colleagues. I had no choice but to feel very proud of my success.

However, shortly after the expiration of the temporary ID, which was valid for three months, I found myself in a situation that reminded me that still I had not solved the problem. Before leaving England, I had sent a large parcel of clothing to Romania, in my name, and had to collect it from the post office. I thought logically that my passport would prove my identity, as you do not need to be Romanian resident in order to receive mail. It did not. For this purpose, I needed an ID card, which I did not have, or a temporary ID card, which had just expired. On top of this, the card had no address on it other than the old address, and the mention of *'fără spațiu'*. The female employee got angry at my 'complicated' case and threatened to send the parcel back. She made some cynical comments referring to the fact that I had come from abroad thinking that I was due everything. I desperately tried to convince her that I was also the sender of the parcel, as was clearly written on it, and that there was no use sending it back to England, because I did not live there anymore. Couldn't she give it to me because I was the sender? Neither of us was listening to each other. After this 'exchange' of comments, or rather parallel talk, she sent me off to one of her colleagues, who was supposed to check the contents of the parcel. (She came two minutes afterwards to see herself what the parcel contained). This involved opening the parcel and spreading all of the clothes, including quite a few underclothes, out in the post office. The contents of the parcel disappointed the woman. I had not lied about it and it did not have the glamour expected of a parcel coming from abroad. I was able to gather the torn packaging and its contents and to leave with it. I still do not know whether this check is usual, but from subsequent experiences, I know it is far from compulsory.

This experience was useful because it persuaded me that my ID odyssey had to resume. Now I was prepared to support my claim with a legal declaration given by my father in front of a public notary in the US, stating that he gave me permission to live in his flat. A friend brought this declaration personally, seven months after my own arrival in Romania and after two other copies had gotten lost in the mail. Unfortunately, the employee (female, around 35-40 years old) who examined it at the police station found that the declaration was not valid, because it was not given through the

Romanian consulate in Washington, but through a public notary. My explanations referring to the costs of a three-day trip to Washington for my father proved unconvincing. The employee told me that the police do not trust a declaration given by a public notary, because many notarised documents proved to be illegal. Romanian officials could not know if the declaration was in fact a false declaration that had been merely paid for. My argument that American public notaries could not be judged according to the same criteria as Romanian ones did not work. I could not understand how her reasoning would apply to my concrete case. The papers were just meant to prove that I was telling the truth about my address (in many countries this is done by a simple declaration given by the owner); I did not understand what type of scenario could have been invented. It seemed so improbable that I would go to the United States in order to make up a false declaration stating just that my father had agreed to me living in the flat in which I used to live once (a fact confirmed by the expired ID). The only solution was again a temporary card. The woman who had been nice to me previously was now angry because I had came again, thus abusing her kindness. However, she did agree to reissue a temporary card.[81]

Two months afterwards, my father was supposed to come to Bucharest and I wanted to take advantage of this opportunity to have him give a declaration in person at the other police station. His trip was unfortunately timed exactly when I was to be out of Romania for a few weeks, so we were not able to be together at the police station to submit the documents. Before leaving Romania, I went to check with the employee if it was possible to keep his declaration on file for one month, until I could come with the other necessary documents, which I also needed to bring in person. The employee recognised me on the spot and literally began to shout when she heard this further 'complication', arguing that employees were working in separate shifts, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, and they could not pass documents from one to another. She sent me to her superior and introduced me in such a way that I did not have time to open my mouth before her superior (female, about 45 years old, with the grade of captain) also started shouting that I did not understand what they were telling me and I was asking them to disobey the law. She told me that I needed to be at the police station with my father at the same time, because they would not keep his declaration waiting for me.

I did not change my travel plans, but left Romania with the feeling that there was no solution to my problem. Strangely enough, during my

[81] It is interesting to note some formulas for requesting something in administrative offices as well as in the street: 'I apologise for disturbing you' *(mă scuzați că vă deranjez)* or 'Don't get upset/ angry' (*nu vă supărați*).

absence, my father, after counteracting with threats of a scandal, managed to persuade the captain that it was not so difficult to keep the papers on file. He argued that the law might be wrong or outdated and so he asked for an exemption from it. In addition, he argued that both he and his daughter (a professor and a graduate student, respectively) were not abroad for fun, but for work, which implied that we deserved some respect. From his subsequent account, I understood that he also firmly asserted that, as a customer, he was not supposed to be at the disposal of the police employees, but vice versa. When I went back with my documents one month later, I first met with the same employee who, initially polite, exploded when she recognised me and loudly recounted my 'story' in front of some astonished clients who happened to be queuing there. She sent me to the captain where, naturally, I expected something worse, but the captain was unusually kind and polite, and dealt with me personally as with a privileged client and made my identity card. I must confess that this was even more embarrassing and it felt like the calm before the storm. Ten months after my first attempts, I was finally a citizen with the right papers!

I noticed quite quickly that this occasion was not unique, as I encountered the same unwillingness from the city council employees to transcribe my marriage certificate from English to Romanian. In this case the law had changed, and the superior agreed with my 'unusual' application (unusual only because Romanians rarely get married abroad and then return to register their marriage in Romania), but the employee refused to complete the certificate, invoking a personal interpretation of the law, which I apparently contradicted. Something that should have been solved in ten minutes took five days, two phone calls and three visits, of which one involved standing for more than two hours, just because they had forgotten about me. I then consulted with friends and colleagues, searching for answers and for ways to escape such unfortunate encounters. I was reassured that such circumstances were common; I did not have especially 'bad luck'. My friends were unanimous also in pointing to the solution: 'complicated' administrative cases need to be paid for. As I did not comply with this rule from the start, I had to pay more in time and money. Indeed, one year later when I had to renew my passport urgently, it took me half an hour and 200,000 lei (ten euros) to do so, because the policeman at the entrance told me simply *'trebuie sa dam ceva'*, which means literally 'we [he and I] have to give something' to the others for their work on the passport, and he stated the amount needed. By then I was able to recognise such a demand.

This case study has different levels of relevance. As a whole, the story illustrates those features related to a Romanian work ethic: a rigid bureaucracy and typical socialist indifference, bribing as a solution to inefficient

formal relations, time consuming processes, lack of information, ambiguous legislation, and employees' refusal to perform more than routine tasks. But if we focus here on the ethic of interpersonal relations, the case study also reveals other perspectives: the power game between client and employee, their reciprocal understanding, the performance of roles, and questions about status and intimacy. I will develop these perspectives further below. If we consider the length of this process, the repetitiveness of the encounters, and its implications for other aspects of daily life, it becomes clear that I am referring here not simply to a single event (renewing a document), but to a way of life. Therefore, its relevance for the individual surpasses that of a singular experience.

9.4 Using language

The idea that language is an autonomous but not an independent system of signs, a system that despite its internal structural coherence acquires meaning only in context, is due to Wittgenstein's observation that a word is like a piece in a chess game and to the Chomskian revolution. The meaning of any one proposition is given by the content, the persons engaged in the communication, and the general context of the information – which includes the background, past inferences, etc. These distinctions come from the difference between language as a formal system and speech as an actual product of human contact. The 'ethnography of speaking' (Hymes 1989 [1974]) developed by sociolinguists is concerned not only with what is said, but also with how, by whom and in what context. The way of speaking a language is linked to social status, wealth, and education and determines a speech community. In his study in New York City, Labov (1972) revealed that the failure of black children to pass certain language tests was not due to their lack of exposure to 'good' English speech, but to their perception of the speech event. In other circumstances, black children proved very skilled in their use of language. The speech event is thus as important as the speech community. Austin's term 'speech act', focusing on the power given by words (1962), and the study of the relevance of tropes for cognition led in the 1970s to an interest within British political anthropology in the use of language in the creation and distribution of power (Parkin 1984). The politics of language are not restricted to the political domain – language is political in all contexts because it launches a game of power and authority (Grillo 1989). It is within this framework given by works in sociolinguistics and in political anthropology that I will analyse the identity card case study.

9.4.1 Language and power

One's level of competence in speaking a language determines the power one has in a conversation, and this is an important variable to be considered in the conflict-like encounter between service provider and customer or between employer and employee. In such encounters, the first party speaks the language of her/his profession and, as the conversation takes place in this field, s/he has the authority of competence over the interlocutor. Similar to what Frake (1972) describes as the oratory art of getting a drink in Subanun is the art of asking for things so that they get done in many service enterprises. The economy of shortage in Romania, in which supply was inferior to demand, and the many informal ways of attaining one's aims, helped create a type of interaction that in most cases new economic circumstances did not change and which does not have material justification. Comparison between the illocutory force (Austin 1962) of a message in 'normal' conditions and its power in an encounter between employee and customer can reveal the importance of the situation and its perception, as well as the magnitude of its deviance from 'normal' relations.

In the many encounters with police employees for my ID card, I was often told that I did not know what I was asking for. Briggs notices that the lack of communicative competence is an important handicap for any fieldworker and that one of her/his aims is to acquire rhetorical competence (1986). Being Romanian, initially I did not believe that this would also apply to me, and I continued to think that I knew what I was asking for (a new ID), but I just did not know what the solution was given the circumstances – that I lacked the legal competence related to ID papers, not the rhetorical competence when dealing with the administration. In fact, I was ignoring the need to have a special competence in these circumstances. From what the employee at the first police station told me, it seemed that it was my responsibility, not hers, to figure out what I needed and she urged me not to come back until I could present her with a clear demand and the papers in the right order. As for the other police station, when I insisted that I knew nothing about these complicated ID papers, the employee managed to find a solution for me. She also adopted a maternal attitude, explained to me several times what I needed to do, and three months later scolded me because I still had not done it. In both cases, the employees used my incompetence in their profession as a basis for action. The first scathingly refused to deal with me until I had acquired competence in speaking her language; the second was flattered by the sudden evidence that she was a 'professional', mastering a language that I did not know and that kept me in a weak position anyway. She decided to translate this language in 'lay' terms for me. While such power games are typical in client-employee encounters, they are not con-

fined to this sphere and are frequent outside the workspace, inside the family or in the neighbourhood. Yet the status of the employee (who represents the state), the client's dependence and lack of choice in engaging in this power game, in which s/he will necessarily be the loser, colour such administrative encounters differently and suggest outcomes unrelated to linguistic competence. The case below illustrates this.

I had a most striking experience of the power conferred by language during ten days spent in residence in a state children's hospital. There I could frequently hear medical assistants shout at children's mothers that they were 'insane' or 'stupid', just because they failed to understand where exactly to place medical appliances that they had used. In fact, nobody had told them where precisely, but one had to 'catch' such knowledge from others' experience[82] or to accept the consequences of their ignorance. For important mistakes, the language used was harsher. Only one member of the staff out of ten addressed mothers with the polite form (*dumneavoastră*); all the others used the informal form '*tu*' (regardless of the age of the addressee). They scolded mothers for everything and it was difficult to decide when something that was done was right or wrong. The staff regularly looked down on the mothers as on disobedient pupils, interrogatively or disapprovingly. The superiority of their position (they decided when and whether to provide milk for babies, new sheets, etc.) was further strengthened by the professionalism/ knowledge that their white coats presupposed and exhibited. During the ten-day period, I did not hear a single reply from any of the mothers, and I heard only sporadic comments between mothers regarding staff behaviour. Instead, mothers resorted to another means of dialogue, which was flourishing bribery. Even the poorest mother had bribed most nurses with chickens and eggs. While this did not improve the way nurses addressed her, it at least insured she got the medical appliance necessary for her child. The 'meta-communicative competence' was thus acquired when the dialogue started to involve money.

This example demonstrates how a monopoly falsifies the power balance between employee and client, privileging the former. It opens the way for her/him to abandon the official relationship, entering into an unofficial relationship suited to bribery. The client must develop the 'language competence' to perform in this context, yet maintains the chance to win at the language game through her/his rhetorical competence only. As I mentioned in the case of my ID card, my father had managed to persuade the police captain that the law itself might be wrong or outdated and did not need to use

[82] Briggs would refer here to the acquisition of meta-communicative competence (1986).

money in the dialogue.[83] When I accompanied some female work mates on a shopping trip, I was surprised that these otherwise polite and gentle women could be so firm and assertive when asking for a product: 'I want X', and no 'please'. When there were significant delays in a supermarket, although there were plenty of employees around, my friend protested loudly against their slowness, stating the reason for her courage: 'What? Do they think they are the only ones who sell meat?' Ultimately, I do not know whether it was the change in the economic context (the disappearance of a monopoly) or my friend's rhetorical competence that brought the employee quickly to the till.

9.4.2 The predisposition to understand

It is important to clarify the final point made above, because it raises the question whether (set) structures or (open-ended) interactions shape reality, and whether status or person-related behaviour prevails in an encounter. In order to answer this, it is helpful to look at how face-to-face dialogue actually takes place, and not to restrict the analysis to the power given by social roles, social situation or type of event. An interesting approach to understanding what is beneath encounters comes from ethnomethodology. Based on an analogy between social structure and 'deep structure' (Chomsky's notion of a universal grammar [1968]), ethnomethodologists (Cicourel 1973; Garfinkel 1986 [1972]) argue that the basis of culture is not shared knowledge, but shared rules of interpretation (Garfinkel 1986 [1972]). Unlike ethnolinguists, who derive individuals' knowledge from their terminology of classifications, ethnomethodologists look for the interpretative processes that underlie people's acts. People understand each other in social contacts because they presuppose some intelligibility in the other's speech, because they make the assumption of a shared common sense. This understanding enables them to discern the 'true' intent through the superficial clouds that the speaker creates. This is not knowledge, but a predisposition to understanding, which everybody holds, whether a member of a community or an anthropologist, and uses daily as a method of approach to human contact. Here I will retain from the ethnomethodologists' approach only the rule of the 'predisposition to understand' in a dialogue.

In my initial encounters with employees at the first police station, it was obvious that none of the actors wished to understand the other. The employee kept stating what was the standard procedure for obtaining the papers, while I tried to find a reasonable alternative to prove what standard documents would have normally proven. The parallel discourses were how-

[83] Even in this case I am not entirely sure that what had prevailed were not other characteristics of the interaction: the age of the client or his gender.

ever not due to a lack of understanding of the other's argument, but to a faint lack of understanding, compounded by the unwillingness to understand. 'I don't understand' seemed to be a valid excuse for refusing to comply with the other's demand. The unwillingness came however from different interactional goals: I wanted my problem to be solved without the 'declaration in person', the employee wanted the papers to be dealt with easily, without being bothered more than strictly necessary. The employee knew that there was a solution, profitable to both parties, which constitutes in many cases a hidden, common interactional goal: understanding each other and striking a personal bargain in a business-like relation. I, the client, not having acquired the necessary ability, ignored the way to formulate this solution; it was a deadlock. The following example shows the process through which such alternative solutions are reached.

There is intensive traffic in food and petty products between Hungary and Romania. Before Hungary's entry into the European Union, some products were cheaper in Hungary and some Romanians would travel even from Bucharest (twelve hours on the train) to buy products in large quantities in Hungary and then resell them at a higher, but still competitive price, in Romanian towns. For most people who did it, this was a unique solution to supplementing an income coming from state employment or retirement, and they did this on a regular basis. As one of the women (who worked in a hospital in Bucharest) put it: 'And what would we do if we were sitting at home?' Another woman from Brasov told me how she had surprised her husband by her sudden decision to leave the same evening for Hungary, when she had seen that their money would not suffice until their next pay day. The border police, whose job it was to stop this traffic, recognised all its manifestations and even the traffickers. In addition, the most active traffickers knew them individually. The police were supposed to fine the traffickers and/ or destroy their merchandise. Traffickers had however never heard about any case of destroyed merchandise at this border, though they had heard this had happened at the Bulgarian border. During the trip I am narrating here, from the Hungarian border to Bucharest, at the height of the foot-and-mouth disease restrictions (in March 2001), there were a total of five train inspections, some standard and some spontaneous, which traffickers successfully passed, paying highly, but still remaining in profit. None of the policemen, customs or train controllers, Romanian or Hungarian, refused bribes. Some bribes were real extortion, as it was not clear what the policeman or customs employee controlled, yet they bargained for higher bribes. The traffickers were vulnerable – they would sooner pay anything than lose their merchandise, but they could not be exploited indefinitely, as they did not carry significant amounts of cash.

The encounters comprised two phases. In the initial and official phase, the policeman (or customs official, etc.) checked the luggage and announced disapprovingly the existence of hidden meat inside, then disappeared outside the cabin with the passports. In the second phase, the policeman would return to bargain over the amount of the bribe, slipping money discretely from one hand to another, while maintaining a discourse of 'We are all human, we should understand each other, this is what counts', 'Poverty, what can we do?' or 'We have to check, what can we do?'. I never saw phase two without phase one, although the train was full of traffickers, so the policemen merely mimicked amazement and disapproval in each compartment. The passage to the second phase of mutual understanding and personal business however always took place. It should be noted that the negotiation of the bribe was whispered, while the justifications for bribing/ extorting were asserted loudly, with a feeling of liberation on both sides.

The existence of this unwritten rule, which says that by moving to the field of mutual understanding and personal business, both client and employee will gain, explains why in my encounters with police employees for my ID card, the unwillingness to understand was so persistent on both sides. They did not wish to solve the problem without a reward; I did not want to pay for what was supposed to be a free service. Did they not especially shout at me that I did not understand? By 'not understanding', I was failing the basic test and could not properly enter into either power games or purely rhetorical ones. The outcome of my repeated encounters with police employees (I solved the problem officially, and not through bribes) shows that there are ways to overcome the 'structure', that interactions preserve some of their open-endedness, and that the winner in the power game over understanding is not pre-determined. The 'human' price was however high: degrading encounters that were physically and mentally tiring, uncertainty, unfortunate interference with other projects, loss of time, etc. My stubbornness in not understanding came from a lack of knowledge[84] and from scientific curiosity about the limits of their stubbornness. Others might not be able to comply with the implications of 'understanding', because of lack of money or connections. For them, encounters maintain their degrading nature and might not even lead to a solution.

9.4.3 Role-playing

The customs employee in the above example performed consecutively two distinct roles: a 'professional' role and a personal role. In his *Presentation of*

[84] I knew bribery might be a solution, but I did not know how to bribe. The traffickers in the train told me that I would learn it with time.

Self in Everyday Life (1969), Goffman proposed the model of drama performance for the study of interactions. The role is a model of pre-established action to which the individual resorts in different circumstances. The model underlines the construction/ adaptation of attitudes in an interaction: actors can perform/ interpret their role in a variety of ways. It is often the case that in face-to-face encounters between service providers and customers, the roles (that we detect through language use: verbal and gestures) are intermingled in a less ordered way. A shopkeeper's attitude could oscillate between a commercial attitude ('Buy this, it is the best!') and a 'sincere' attitude ('In fact, in the neighbouring shop it's cheaper.'), or between deference towards a potential client and sympathy towards those who do not afford to buy, or between the strictness of the role and personal antipathy/ sympathy.

The language used (politeness, side comments, interest in the persona of the customer, etc.) is a good barometer of the interest and satisfaction employees find in their work. The case of the monopolistic state administration is peculiar in this respect, as the language used by employees is part of a strategy in a power game. In this case it is the existence of such power games that indicates the dissatisfaction that state employees find in their formal rewards (wages), which draws them to cheat the state and develop a parallel paid enterprise within state organisations. The employee who used to shout at me at the police station repeatedly commented that she had no responsibility; she did not make the laws – she was just an employee there. This epitomises the socialist legacy, but is also accentuated by the present inadequacy of laws, of management, of information, all of which serve to discourage employees from doing their jobs or taking pride in the civil service. This alienation of state employees from their jobs is an excellent example of Goffman's 'role-distanciation' (Goffman 1972). However, the over-representation of the alternative – corruption – gives another meaning to this role-distanciation. The employee could switch from the status of 'state representative' to that of a self-employed person who can deliver a (state) service. Moving to a personal ground, the employee discusses the situation on a person-to-person level and negotiates her price (the value of the bribe) with the client, as if the service itself were a commodity. Besides the particular understanding of work and ethic of work that influences this cheating of the state, there is also a particular ethic of human relations that obliges the client to play along. The employee's switching between roles should be also judged from this perspective.

In private enterprises, the 'personal' role, if it is not mimicked, but real, is more likely to be a manifestation of protest against the employer's interests and thus a sign of dissatisfaction with her/his job. In Beta, sales representatives moved to the personal role, departing from the imposed

'professional' speech, when they felt particularly tired of the manager's requirements and sided with the client in revenge. Most sales representatives felt that the product they were selling was not worth its price; therefore siding with the client, being sincere about the product, was also due to a moral crisis. Language switches from marketing discourses to personal advice as one's personal ethic takes over one's work ethic.

The language used indicates the role one is willing to adopt in a social interactions, but it also allows one to measure the gap between the role one takes for oneself by adopting a certain language and the actual fulfilment of the obligations/ expectations linked to it. There are many cases in which the individual pretends to perform a 'professional' role while acting in her/his personal interest. The case of the janitor at the Music School fits into this framework: the janitor pretended to sweep whenever the director passed, playing the role of a hard-working employee for her, while in fact trying to escape her tasks as much as possible. Within the marketing department, the whole organisation (through its staff and physical setting) relied on its Western appearance and its effect on customers, while its actions did not live up to the role it pretended for itself: the services delivered were far from the quality that had been advertised when the contract was established. Furthermore, the manager's discourses in front of his potential employees presented him as a dynamic, successful businessman, willing to give his employees the opportunity of their lives: money, wonderful work conditions, career. In reality, the wages and the career perspectives were limited, and reflected back on the manager the image of an individualistic exploiter, not nearly as successful as he claimed to be. This deceitful 'face-work' (Goffman 1967) was meant to attract good and enthusiastic employees to the business. When these employees discovered the discrepancy between appearance and reality, they would quit their jobs.

For Goffman, the importance of the drama model does not reside in the analogy between the theatre and the social scene, but in the fact that the set of roles that an individual can perform defines his/her self. Whether we adopt the supposition that the individual possesses one self and several roles (Goffman 1969) or one self and several agencies (as in the case of Melanesian 'partible persons' described by Strathern 1988), it still appears that the behaviour of the individual represents her/him, no matter how distanced this behaviour is from the individual through role-distanciation or the power of the others' agency. Thus, there is no way one can completely hide behind a role or move away from it without being affected/ changed by the performance of the role. The interactions in which an employee engages, the tricks s/he plays, remain written on the self.

9.4.4 The play on intimacy, or the dichotomy between public and private language

One can distinguish two spheres of language use, substantially different but very much intermingled. During the socialist period, these spheres were defined by the place where language was used: one sphere was the home; the other one was the rest of the world. This was a direct result of the fear of being heard making dangerous utterances in public (and everything that was not part of the daily routine was potentially harmful). The 'home' – whose extension cannot be easily defined[85] – provided a safe, hidden place, where only trustful persons were allowed (kin, friends, but also acquaintances that 'inspired' trust). The language used differed in its structure, extent of vocabulary, etc., but even more significantly in the way it was handled, accompanied by facial and bodily gestures, as well as pauses and changes in tonality, listening, and courtesy towards others' speech.

After 1989, the spatial cleavage was removed and now, the spheres cannot be easily defined. As in many other (Western) societies, one would expect that the language used at the workplace (especially in conversations with superiors, during meetings, or public speeches, etc.) would fall into the 'public language' category, and the language used at home would fall into the 'private language' category. The form and the relation of public to private language should be an indicator of the perception of the social context in which language is used, and of the social status and social role of those who use it. However, I noticed that both languages were used at the workplace, since the individual oscillates between different roles. Whether the language used is the public or the private language is a main indicator of the role and social distance one wishes to establish towards the interlocutor. The play on the degree of intimacy proposed becomes so important because of the positive connotations of 'private language'. I prefer here Goody's use of the terms 'status' and 'intimacy' (1978) instead of Brown and Levinson's

[85] In the case of the Gorale community studied by Pine (1997) in Poland, language defines the private sphere as being as large as the village. This delimitation corresponds to a divide between trustful/ not trustful, but also after 1989 with a divide between values linked to work: inside the village, hard work and honesty are appreciated, while outside the village a trickster spirit and individualism are valued (Pine 1999). In Bucharest today, if we define the private sphere according to the sincere, truthful form of speech that is supposed to be associated with it, then the 'private sphere' could extend from the nuclear family to the public as a whole, as the model of familiar talk, thought to represent positive values, has been extended to all scales. The most salient manifestations of this phenomenon are speeches made by TV presenters and politicians.

definition of social roles in terms of power and social distance (1978), because these terms seem better suited to a context created more after a kinship model than after a professional model. Establishing kin-like relations through a more familiar use of language lends the speaker greater opportunities, and thus this language is preferred whenever possible, even in encounters with strangers. This policy has its limits however, as misplaced familiarity in language could endanger the success of the interaction.

The socialist period witnessed a proliferation of 'newspeak' or 'cooked' language (Thom 1989), and its most extreme forms were encountered during work meetings and 'political information' meetings, typical for workplaces. After 1989 the reaction against cooked language led to ultra-liberalism. In some enterprises, besides some rhetorical changes celebrating the newly acquired 'freedom of speech', new forms of official language only replaced socialist language. However, managers of the most 'progressive' workplaces, who had to be called 'comrade X' before 1989, became very liberal regarding etiquette after 1989. They would make a point of claiming that the form of address is not necessarily a form of respect, thus letting employees decide for themselves how they would address their colleagues, managers or customers. The exception among the organisations I observed was again represented by the pre-established terms of the dialogue between employees and clients in Beta. Even there, the 'official' language was often abandoned when employees felt that more intimacy with clients would make them more co-operative. Indeed, clients complained about the stiff, ultra-polite language used by sales representatives and did their best to take the employees out of her/his role. Many were suspicious about too much politeness and challenged the employees to stop confusing them in this way. Officially, professional language is associated with a lack of sincerity, as socialist 'cooked' language was. Ultimately, the use of formal, polite, 'professional' language is adopted by managers, employees or customers when they wish to establish a distance and is perceived as a sign of distrust.[86] The manager of Beta manifested his appreciation towards employees by kissing them on the hair or the cheek, or by making an American 'well done' gesture with his hands. He would congratulate them formally only when he was upset by the overall result or when the congratulated employee was somebody he wished to get rid of. In the same enterprise, while very polite language was used in relations with clients, from the back room clients could hear the scandals made by the boss when he lost his temper.[87] Simultane-

[86] Humphrey showed that Buryat used Russian instead of Buryat to speak about the state, as a way of keeping its (disapproved) policies at a distance (1989).

[87] 'Look at me, follow me, do you think I am your parrot? If you don't work, don't stay here. There are many jobs on earth. I don't even deserve some respect? Get out

ously, both familiarity and vulgarity were showed to potential clients who happened to be around the 'true' face of the pretended 'professionalism', something they did not hesitate to communicate to sales representatives before systematically refusing to become clients of Beta. Language use on a public/ private scale does not help to determine what the workplace meant for these employees, because of the conscious manipulation of personal and official languages at work. Most enterprises do not legislate their own language, but rely on the language employees themselves bring from outside, essentially from the media and personal education. The media imposes the private, public and even the professional language.

I will show the influence of the media through a brief analysis of polite forms of address, as Esther Goody has underlined politeness as an important goal-oriented strategy in conversation (1978). In Romania, politeness is not only intentional, but also reflects respect towards the other. There is a distinction in Romanian between '*tu*' (you, familiar) and '*dumneavoastră*' (you, formal), their use being dictated mainly by the degree of familiarity with the interlocutor. The use of *'tu'* (you, familiar) immediately triggers a certain familiarity, and the rest of the conversation follows in the same vein. TV advertisements from the mid-1990s addressed the public with the familiar form *'tu'* (you), in order to distance themselves from socialist advertisements, which were very formal and polite. Advertisements reflect the way certain enterprises (the most powerful ones, who could afford expensive advertising) address the customer. As they are received via mass media, they have the power to dictate the fashionable language in interactions with clients. At the time, quite naturally, shopkeepers and administrative staff would constantly address you familiarly with '*tu*'. Approximately from the end of 1999 onwards, I noticed an important change in the way advertisements addressed the public. They used the polite forms more often, and in turn shopkeepers began to correct themselves from '*tu*' to *'dumneavoastră'* when addressing their customers. It is however made clear that the polite form is addressed to the elder, and not to the customer as a category. Advertisements for beer, chocolate and dating agencies invite you as '*tu*', because they are addressed to young, 'cool' people and are meant as unofficial, 'between us', internal signs of recognition. Advertisements for washing

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and cry there. Do you think I am your parrot that you cry in front of me? Don't invent excuses: Easter time, etc. You signed a contract; respect your job. I've had enough of paying your wages from my money. Have some respect for your job. It is unbearable to accept these types of clients like the one you had yesterday. What a f…, this 17-year-old girl? It is unacceptable for you to f… your business. Work well if you want to have a conscience, a job, a future. You have catastrophic results. I am nobody's parrot. I paid 45 million for the phone bill ($2250) ...' and so on.

powder[88] and the lottery invite you as '*dumneavoastră*', because they are addressed to older people. One advertisement explicitly said, 'the winner could be you ('*tu*'); the winner could be you ('*dumneavoastră*'). Consequently, when the polite form is encountered in client-employee interactions, it is not because of the nature of the relationship, but because of the traditional respect due to seniority, which was shown by the experience of the previous years to be necessary in interactions with older customers. A tentative use of the polite form as a mark of respect towards customers, not as a mark of respect towards age, was made in Beta, where the manager required extreme politeness from the employees toward customers. Younger customers did not tolerate this behaviour; they explicitly asked for the informal use of '*tu*'. Those employees who were unfamiliar with the use of formal address also broke the rule accidentally.

The above review shows how formal work and business relations become subject to the same rules as other human relations, and how they are dictated by traditional and mass media regulations, which impose respect for age and social status. While at the beginning of the 1990s the media took Western advertisements in their 'raw' form and translated them into Romanian, the market experience gained as years went by has led to the development of new forms of advertisements more adapted to Romanian culture, and thus also more efficient.

Since even in the media, before a large public audience, familiarity and side talk are used as a reaction to rigid language, it is no wonder that both types of language also coexist in workplaces. Returning to the distinction between 'being' and 'appearing', we notice that the memory of socialism (i.e. a time when 'being' was equated with 'private', and 'appearing' with 'public') distorts the distinction between public and private spheres. By the use of private ('real', 'sincere') language, one can claim truthfulness – why not use it and abuse it. The emphasis on 'personal' or 'private' ultimately demonstrates how personal – as opposed to impersonal – relations, behaviour or categories are appreciated. This shows that the basis for ethics is to be found in human relations and not in some impersonal, abstract principles.

[88] Friends drew my attention to the fact that half of the advertisements on TV were for cleaning products; one commented that the level of civilisation is measured in kilograms of soap used per person, and that Romania did not have any chance to enter Europe unless it increased its consumption of soap.

9.5 Conclusion

My analysis of the language used in work interactions is an analysis of work practice in service enterprises. Language is not secondary to work relations, but is their substance. Language and face-to-face interactions are also the vehicle through which I, as a fieldworker, obtained my information. Interactionist and ethnomethodological approaches provided me with useful tools for understanding what was at stake in an interaction. These tools also raised questions linked to the reason why certain forms of interactions or language are privileged over others. While it could be argued that it is already biased to try to show through an analysis of relations that relations, and not work, correspond to a particular ethic, I hope that my conclusions derived from the use of language (personal versus professional; play on the cultural norm of the predisposition to understand) are testimony to the absence of the concept of work from many work relations. The workplace is mainly a privileged place from where one can pursue her/his own relations and interests, as the study of the informal economy in Chapter four plainly shows. While employees may refuse to take responsibility for their work, they accept personal responsibility toward others. When this personal responsibility is also refused, the employee's moral ethics are questioned. The question of respect is recurrent in all the case studies above, where behaviour towards another person was disrespectful or was perceived as such by the other.

Most cases of interaction presented here show the existence of a double language, one standing for truth, and the other one for lies. There would be no duality if there were no will to appear different, to endorse a positive role – for practical or moral purposes – as there would be no discrepancy if personal interests did not constantly conflict with work and business interests. This duplicity between one's values and one's behaviour undoubtedly has consequences for the self, as Goffman's theory of self suggests.

Chapter 10
Conclusion: Self-respect and the Romanian Mentality

If we were to draw a map of the factors that influence the Romanian work ethic or the 'Romanian mentality', we would obtain a web of separate, unequally distanced islands of various sizes: 'economy', 'ecology', 'the culture of the enterprise', 'history', 'rapid change' – the factors analysed in previous chapters. A common thread runs through the ethnography of these macro factors: it is in reality the ethnography of the subjective meanings given by individuals to them.[89] I embrace the aim of Max Weber as formulated by Raymond Aron: 'the end of the science of culture [is] to understand subjective meanings, that is, to understand the meaning men have given to their existence' (1970: 210). The functioning of all the above domains (economy, ecology, etc.) affects the self of individuals. Reciprocally, the individual consequently acts upon these domains, perpetuating or transforming their features. Though these domains are thoroughly related, explaining their aggregation outside the self and then the impact of the realised aggregation on the self neglects the power of transformation of the individual upon each domain, as well as upon their aggregation. In contrast, explaining the totality of these domains through the self allows for an incorporation of the transformation/ creation exercised by the individual. It takes into account the influence that one domain has on the self and through the self on other domains – the self acts as a mediator between these domains (complementing their initial structural link). For instance, the lack of individual self-respect is caused by, among other factors, the urban ecology, and influences in turn, through the action of the individual, the economy. Since 'self-respect' is obviously a notion that refers to a characteristic of the self, one cannot simply refer to 'the influence of ecology on the economy' without losing important elements of the explanation. Explaining the domains through their relation with the self allows us to capture the influence exer-

[89] I use the term 'domain' because it is theoretically neutral compared to the terms 'structure' and 'field'.

cised by attributes of the self – such as self-respect – on these domains.[90] This methodological framework underpins my interpretation of the Romanian crisis, which is based on an analysis of factors influencing work ethics and self-respect. I will describe some implications of this interpretation for the self-respect of the nation. This will allow me to return to the clarification of why the economic crisis is popularly explained in terms of the 'Romanian mentality'.

10.1 Defining self-respect

For Kant, self-respect (or human dignity) cannot exist without moral control of one's behaviour (Kant 1951 [1785]). The individual who does not respect the moral law shows no respect for himself as a human being; he denies his humanity. Immoral behaviour towards an other is a sign of disrespect towards the other and at the same time a sign of disrespect towards one's own self. Therefore self-respect is not a reflection of contentment with one's status, wealth, etc., but of one's choice to act as a human being, in the spirit of morality and respect for the other.

The Romanian science of ethics subscribes to the Kantian view, which underlines the rationality of the individual that compels him to respect the moral law. The most famous Romanian sociologist, Dimitrie Gusti, whose aim was to deduce a Romanian ethic through empirical studies (ethnographic research in villages conducted before WWII) (1969), considered human dignity to be the first and foremost moral principle that the individual should respect. Only after dignity followed, in order, freedom, responsibility, solidarity and justice. Dignity is the consciousness of the individual in recognising her/his own value (as a human being and not as endowed by a certain wealth, status, etc). Gusti also wrote that nobody could aspire to human dignity without an ethical conception of life. As an empiricist and dedicated fieldworker, Gusti tried to keep his ethical views close to the values encountered in Romanian villages. His views were well known before WWII, having been published in high-school textbooks (Gusti and Zamfirescu 1939); they are being revived today and are extremely popular (Stroe 1997: 77).

[90] Bourdieu's notion of habitus (1977), although it refers to the characteristics of the individual, does not account for individuals' characteristics such as self-respect. The notion of habitus implies a kind of isomorphism between (or reproduction of) the objective social structures and the psychological individual structures. Self-respect, however, cannot be found in any form within the objective social structures or domains. It is the result of the individual's perception of his implication in different domains.

Thus the conception of ethic taught in Romania and most importantly transmitted through literary writings is the Kantian one. Romanians are educated to believe that one loses his humanity (*omenia*) if his behaviour does not respect moral values. *Omenia* is a popular concept, synonymous with the more intellectual term of *umanitate* (both mean 'humanity'). *Omenia* is thought to emphasise the most important quality of an individual,[91] and is manifested through respectful behaviour towards the other (*a se purta omeneste*), which includes for instance being hospitable towards the other by providing him with food (*a omeni*). Hospitality is a characteristic that deserves consideration. It is considered one of the most important features of the Romanian soul, one that allows Romanians to take pride and assert themselves among other nations.[92] However, it becomes more and more obvious for them that they are not hospitable, as lack of trust, poverty, and material interests impede on the exercise of hospitality. The justifying discourses adapted to each particular case do not succeed in masking the fact that Romanians do not behave according to a value so dear to them.

The notion of human dignity (self-respect) as defined by Romanian ethics is not a psychological concept, but a moral one. It defines the individual's respect (manifested through action) towards norms and values s/he deems valid (Massey 1983). According to this understanding, not acting morally (towards the other) leads to the loss of one's humanity.

10.2 Self-respect in urban Romania

Between the evidence of others' disrespect (through poor pay, distrust, impoliteness) and the discrepancy between one's practice and the values s/he considers valid (as emphasised in Chapter eight), there is little room left for individual self-respect for most Romanians.[93] With the moral responsibility of the individual diminished, his/her self-respect equally diminishes.

It is with an eye on respect towards the individual, as part of an ethic of human relations, that I have discussed a number of case studies in the above chapters. Kant would have recognised in the arrogance, trickery, and lies encountered in these interactions proof of a lack of respect towards the

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[91] The Romanian playwriter Horia Lovinescu entitled one of his dramas 'The man who lost his humanity' (*Omul care si-a pierdut omenia*).

[92] Obviously, many other ethnic groups consider hospitality as a characteristic that differentiates them from others. Acknowledging this naive belief in uniqueness does not invalidate the importance of the value of hospitality for the respective ethnic groups.

[93] There are differences between different generations with respect to this, because they have different memories of past values and practices and different hopes for the future.

other, but also of a lack of self-respect. However, while Kant, as a philosopher, asserted that the values concerning respect of the other are universal, my work as an anthropologist included showing empirically that: 1) these values of respect towards the other are actually endorsed; 2) the Kantian philosophy is also endorsed; 3) people are conscious that they are not conforming to the values of respect, which results in their lack of self-respect. It is the analysis of discourses on values and their comparison with the observation of practices that led us to the conclusion that individual self-respect is damaged. Self-respect is lost when values exist, but individual practice does not conform to them. The tragedy of my interviewees is that they shared the values of respect or *omenie* ('humanity') and the shame of not living up to this standard. The embodiment of a lack of self-respect is to be found in the person of the old woman who, having been caught without a train ticket but not forced to pay a fine by the conductor, could not stop from justifying her action for hours in front of completely uninterested passengers. It is the self-respect of the shopkeeper mentioned in Chapter eight whose arrogance towards customers is an assertion of her otherwise denied human value, but who recognises that her behaviour is abnormal, generated by her frustration with the pay. It is to be found in the teacher from the Music School mentioned in Chapter six who, hurt by the lack of respect shown by the poor pay he receives and by the disrespect he is shown in other daily interactions, feels like 'nothing', and considers that there is no human dignity he could still fight to maintain. Furthermore, he deduces that there is nothing else to lose and that he could now act immorally. His lack of self-respect is used emotionally as a basis for action. The discourse accompanying his action has the appearance of rationality, as he claims that being selfish is what one should do in capitalism.[94]

The recognition of others' respect is a subjective endeavour, as is the self-respect that leads the individual to behave according to his values. Both, however, have a considerable impact on reality, as they are generated by it and they in turn generate action.

10.3 How individual lack of self-respect explains some Romanian problems

Economic and social circumstances, the work conditions in enterprises, and social and material instability influence the self of individuals and the self of

[94] Pareto would have noted that the derivation 'Romania is now capitalist so I must be an individualist' is caused by the residue formed by his emotional feeling of lack of self-respect (1980 [1907]).

the nation, with which Romanians tend to identify, even if they perceive it negatively. Reciprocally, the resultant lack of self-respect feeds back into the Romanian crisis, perpetuating it through misunderstandings or lack of will to change. The aggressive encounters in the street (e.g. people pushing on the bus in order to get off first) leave the individual with the feeling of having been treated as 'nothing' (*tratat ca un nimic*) (Chapter two), which s/he carries in her/his relations in the workplace, where s/he is aggressive or disrespectful towards customers. This is how, besides their structural reciprocal influence, two different domains (street and enterprise) interact through the individual, and misbehaviour in one triggers/ perpetuates misbehaviour in the other. Poor pay, considered a sign of insufficient consideration for one's work, is reflected in the attitude of the employee towards clients that can afford to buy expensive products (or have lived abroad, as in the case study discussed in Chapter eight). They are suspected of having stolen or cheated to obtain their wealth and will be envied, as well as undermined and extorted as much as possible. Examples can go on and on. My assertion is that the simple aggregation of the working of these domains cannot explain social and moral problems (identified by Romanians as being related to mentality). For this, we need to take into account the subjective meaning given by individuals to their participation in these domains. As my informants expressed their dissatisfaction and lack of pride in their lives, the issue of self-respect due to the (declared) impossibility of respecting one's own values and because of others' lack of respect was often reiterated in different forms. Self-respect became the essence of their own explanations of the Romanian crisis. My interviewees intuitively expressed the difficulty of maintaining self-respect in Romania during the transitional period.

My interpretation of the social and moral crisis with which Romanians are confronted today pulls the influence of the domains 'economy', 'historical legacy', 'ecology', 'disorder of changes' under the banner of the self, as the individual's lack of self-respect is the mechanism that perpetuates the vicious circle of economic and social problems. I view self-respect as the missing element that links the macro factors together. Self-respect would allow the consequences of one positive action on any part of the domain to be felt in the total. Nowadays, positive results are submerged by the totality of negative circumstances. Self-respect, which is a moral personal concept, becomes a concrete social factor by virtue of its power on individual action.

10.4 Individual self and national self

When the cause of a problem is found, ways are sought to eliminate it. In this case, encouraging individual self-respect will not bring economic prosperity, but simply reduce the social and moral problems to a purely eco-

nomic crisis, and set up a virtuous circle, in which the improvement of interpersonal relations brings economic growth and vice versa. It remains to establish what could bring about and then guarantee the conditions for a well-balanced self.

Self-respect is both a duty and a right of the individual. In his *Theory of Justice* (1971), considered one of the most important contemporary reflections on this subject, Rawls appears more concerned with the latter. He tries to answer the question of how society should be structured in order to favour the development of individual self-respect, instead of the Kantian question of what one should do to be a self-respectful person. Thus, society, not the individual, bears the responsibility for the existence of individual self-respect, and behind society, the government has the task of engineering society.[95] His view has been criticised by other philosophers, who mainly accuse him of loading the notion of self-respect with elements of self-esteem, thus exaggerating the obligations of society towards the individual (Sachs 1981). Sachs distinguishes self-respect and self-esteem on a number of points: a) one cannot have too much self-respect or unjustified self-respect, while he can have too much or an unfounded self-esteem; b) being self-respectful is a reason for having self-esteem, but the contrary is not true; c) one could have self-respect without having any self-esteem, but it is inconceivable for a rational individual living within society to totally lack self-respect.

If we restrict self-respect to its Kantian sense of 'human dignity', Rawls' theory concerning the duty of society in guaranteeing the conditions for individual self-respect resonates with Romanian circumstances. Indeed, the aggregation of disordered changes and unfavourable public comparisons (e.g. with the 'capitalist work ethic') expose the individual to a lack of self-respect in the deep sense of human dignity, not of self-esteem, as the Romanian expressions regarding their humanity mentioned in Chapter eight testify. However, how could the Romanian state (or government) bear the responsibility of guaranteeing the conditions for the development of self-respect, when no official identifies with it, as if the state (or the government) were some machine not of their creation? Individual lack of self-respect is not total, and it probably never could be; it is not a psychological characteristic of a solitary individual, but a feature Romanians share with each other and also with the nation. I have shown in Chapter seven how the individual remains linked to the nation by the search for a meaning for her/his existence in the national destiny.

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[95] An account of how the engineering of self took place in twentieth-century Great Britain is given by Nicholas Rose (1990), in his analysis of the domains of work, warfare and child-rearing.

If society were responsible (as in Rawls' opinion) for creating space for the free development of the self-respect of the individual, the same responsibility would belong to the international community in Romania. The pressure of the international agencies described in Chapter four, the headlines of the international press, the imposition of Western models, and the discourses on the capitalist work ethic in international companies – all have pointed in a scathing way to the fact that Romania does not reach the standards required, notably for being 'European'. Romanians have recognised these standards as being the only ones that confer meaning to the national destiny and pride. Consequently, this public 'scolding' by Europe has been also thoroughly internalised. When the president of the country (Ion Iliescu, president from 1990 to 1996 and then again from 2000) declares 'I would be better off as a taxi-driver in Germany' (in May 2001), it is a strong incentive for the ordinary citizen not to derive pride from her/his belonging to the nation, and thus either to leave (for Germany...), or to feel obliged to bear the misery of the nation. As discourses on the Romanian mentality discussed in Chapter one demonstrate, most Romanians believe in the existence of an unchangeable Romanian-ness.

Nowhere was the national lack of self-respect clearer than in the debates following the Kosovo crisis in March-April 1999. The support that Romania's political representatives chose to provide to NATO, against the population's preference for supporting the Serbs (which people justified both on the basis of traditional good relations with the Serbs and in moral opposition to interference in the policy of a sovereign state and to war in general), was accompanied by NATO officials' comments that Romania would have compromised its chances of joining NATO if the country did not pledge its support. This crisis gave a serious blow to the nation's self-respect. Comments were made that Romania 'was already too low in the international esteem to get any lower' (Antena 1, 1999b), that Romania had proved to be a 'bitch', that the shame was too great to allow Romanians to look their neighbours (the Serbs) in the face anymore, that the nation's pride had been lost by too much servitude and opportunism towards the West. 'The price of a subordinate honour is an encompassing shame: such is the nature of hegemony' (Herzfeld 1987: 38).

Herzfeld wrote these lines about the Greeks; Bourdieu has written similar lines about the Kabyles (Bourdieu 1977: 63). It appears that there is here a larger recognition of the consequences of the hegemony of Western representations, to which less developed societies willingly and naively subscribe. The disparaged 'Romanian mentality' is a Western representation endorsed by people whose lack of self-respect does not allow for its rejection and which in turn perpetuates this lack.

10.5 Demystifying Romanian mentalities

> In Transylvania I heard that if my neighbour has a goat and I work hard myself, I could also buy a goat. In Wallachia I heard that if my neighbour has a goat and I do not have one, better his goat dies. After the 1989 Revolution in Romania, I hear that if I have a goat, it is better if it dies than if my neighbour gets one as well (Joke told by a politician in 1990).

This joke is thought to capture the Romanian mentality – it starts by telling us something about the work ethic, and it finally tells us more about the ethic of human relations. More importantly, it shows the terms in which Romanians perceive themselves: negatively, as bounded together and hating/ envying each other in their economic and moral misery. Blaming the 'Romanian mentality' for everything that goes wrong is the reflection of this lack of self-respect at both the individual and the national level, and it is in this capacity that it has an explanatory power.

Moreover, as Romanians would say: 'there must be something true about it'. The ethnography presented here does not invalidate the empirical observations of Romanian philosophers and political leaders (as discussed in Chapter one) – that work is performed superficially, that corruption is widespread, that there is no respect for punctuality. I part company with the philosophers and politicians on the cause of this performance. The cause is not an ethnic characteristic, but an ensemble of social factors, among which the perception that Romanians have about themselves holds a pre-eminent place.

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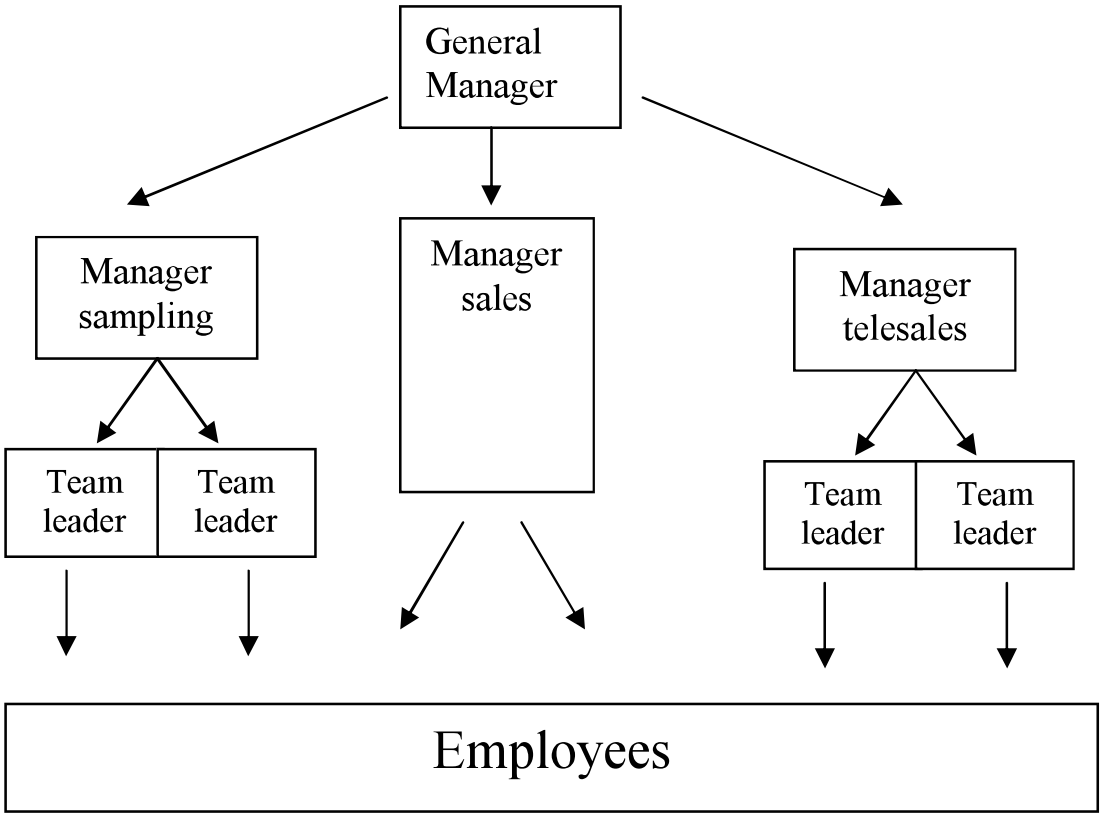
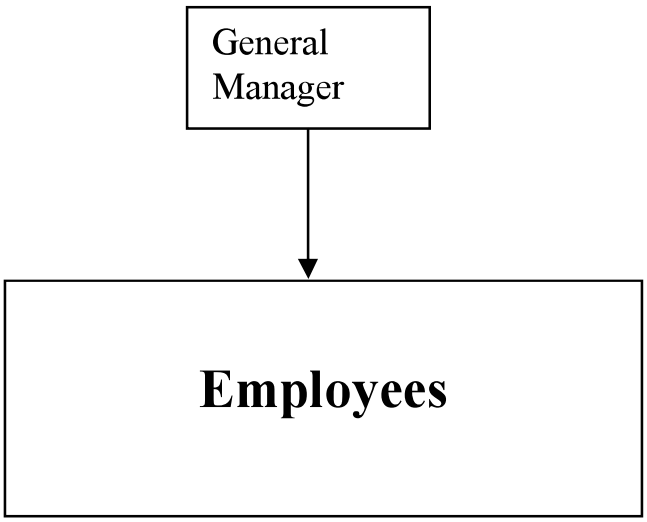
Appendices

Appendix 1: Marketing Department Beta

Official diagram

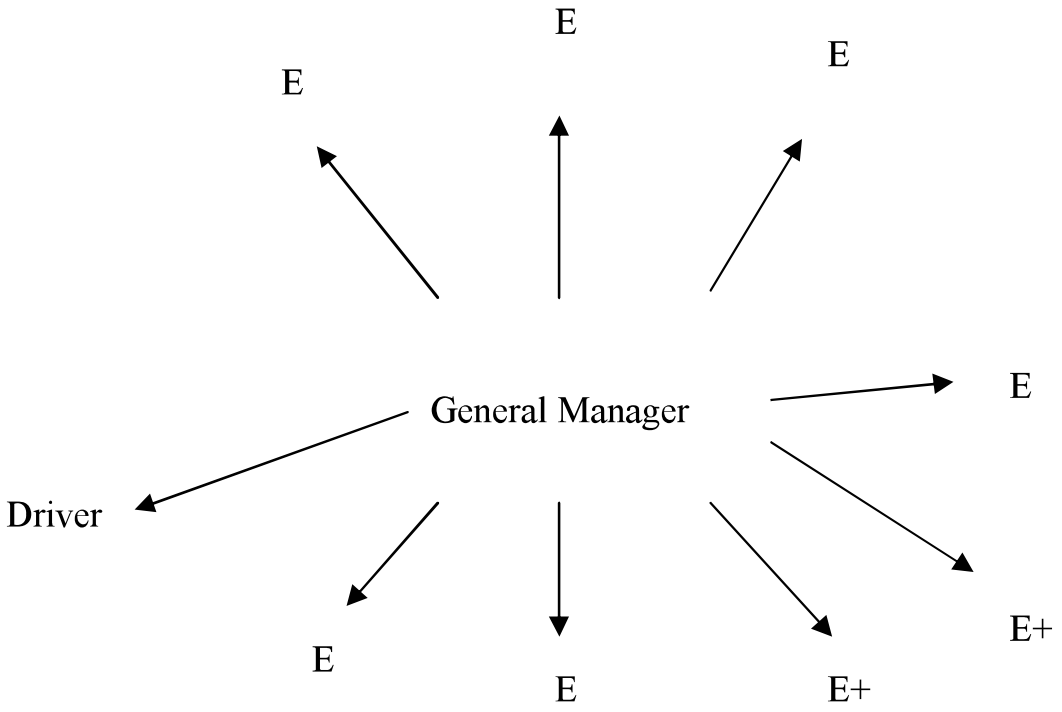


Unofficial diagram



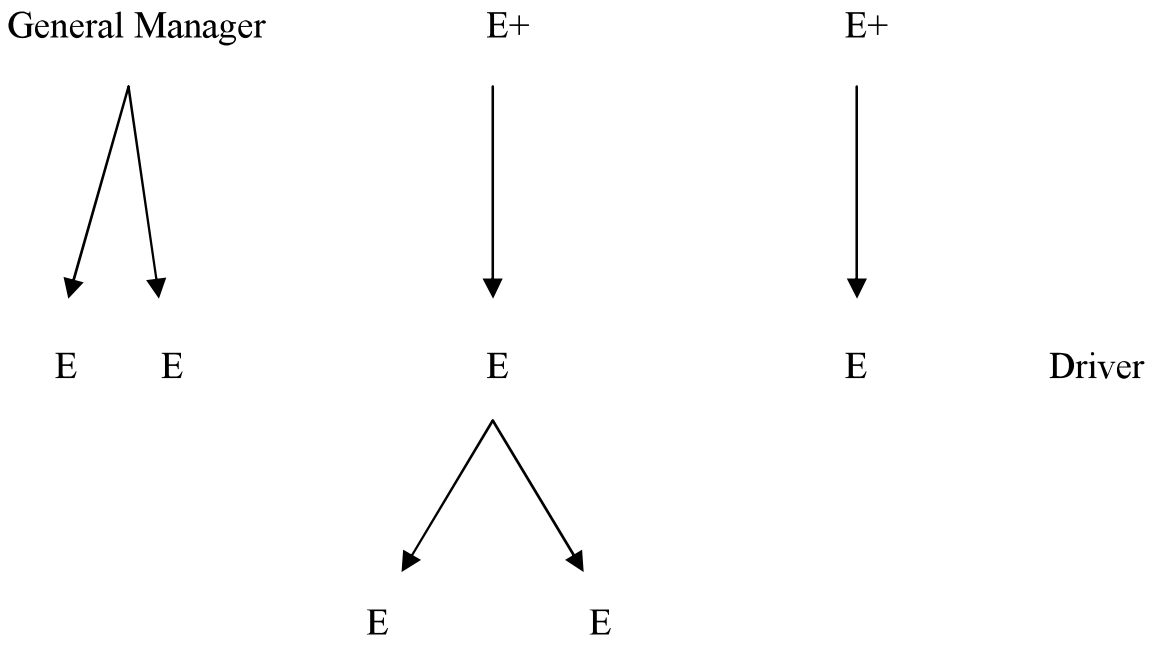
Appendix 2: NGO Alpha

Official Diagram



E stands for employee; E+ stands for senior employees

Unofficial Diagram



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