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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*

Sometimes when women go to work they say they have come for a rest.

Ashwin and Bowers

Work is not to be measured in how many hours you spent with your buttock on a chair.

Manager of organization Alpha

Let the clients wait, it tells them who is the boss, who decides.

Manager of organization Beta

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 suddenly introduced in a society, whose perceptions of time management derive from a non-capitalist organization of labour? Do they create a parallel understanding of time proper to workplaces or do they allow 'time' as defined outside the workplace to enter freely into such enterprises? What effect does the confrontation of different understandings of time use have on work values and work practices? Who manages the individual's time on a daily basis and at the lifetime level? In this essay I will focus on the relation between time and work values, using ethnographic material gathered from service enterprises in Bucharest, Romania (1999–2000). Most data come from two private organizations, each of which belongs to a different segment of the labour market: the private enterprise Beta (the marketing department of a

foreign language school), representative of the new local business initiatives, and the NGO Alpha, typical of the top-end labour market under Western guidance. In order to explain work practices, the trends in the management of time at the workplace are put into their cultural and historical context. The main actors in time management and the aim (or meaning) of time use at both the daily and lifetime level are considered. Finally, I draw a parallel between individual and national time, with respect to their measurement, management and orientation.

Time Discipline

E. P. Thompson's study, 'Time, Work-Discipline and the Making of Capitalism' (1967) opened the way for analyses on the link between the organization of work and the perception of time. The study shows how the demands of the capitalist organization of work gradually imposed a new understanding of time during the process of industrialization in England and how impressively individuals resisted the change in their perception of time – the complete 'conversion' to the new notion of time taking some centuries. This imposition was reinforced by a moral endorsement from the Protestant ethic, while other notions of time were condemned. 'Waste of time is thus the first and in principle the deadliest of sins', declared Richard Baxter's *Christian Directory* (Weber, 1984[1904]: 157).

The introduction of clocks and time-pieces in factories became an early tool for imposing the new work discipline. In Engels' account of work conditions in nineteenth-century England quoted above, punctuality and precision in time keeping are essential means for the exploitation of workers. Attali asserts that the invention of instruments for measuring time is a reflection of the desire for power: for mastering metaphysical uncertainty, for mastering the time of others and one's own, in the present and the future. In *Histoires du temps* (1983) he studies the history of these instruments and through it the history of the perceptions of time and of human inscriptions in time. 'The use and then the abandonment of an instrument for time measurement reveal the contemporary social order, while participating in it' (Attali, 1983: 9, my translation). At any time in history, several instruments of time measurement, and thus several notions of time, coexist.

In the two business enterprises that I will refer to in this essay, the organization of time was a proof that the spirit of strict discipline of capitalism (Benjamin Franklin's 'time is money') and the dictatorship of time decried by Engels had no translation into daily practice, though emphasized in managerial discourses.

Beta is the marketing department of a language school, which claims to be 'Western' and 'modern' in its marketing techniques, teaching environments and methods. Forty employees aged twenty to thirty (mostly good-looking women) try to sell ten-month English language courses to potential clients recruited from the

street (in order to obtain their telephone numbers), subsequently re-contacted by phone (to persuade them to come to a presentation of the school) and given a full survey of courses on site, during which sales were negotiated. Employees have no fixed minimal wage and are paid only a small percentage of the price obtained for each course sold. While the appointments with the clients were strictly monitored (the clients were reminded twice of the appointment-time by phone, which made them arrive on time), the manager often summoned his own employees only to let them wait for ten or fifteen minutes as a test of their commitment. He also called them in everyday one to two hours earlier than needed, for so-called training that seldom took place, and kept them after work for motivational talks, even though employees were paid per sale and not per hour. Despite the manager's rhetoric which emphasized the importance of getting a profit out of every activity, his behaviour indicated a loose perception of time: he thought it normal himself to spend the whole day at work, even if he had nothing to do. He also demonstrated his power through a manifest lack of consideration for the time of the others. Clients – at least, those whose appointment hour was respected – perceived arriving on time and respecting the appointment hour as a positive sign of a Western-style work culture, and liked to stress how pleased they were to have been treated this way. Clients who were made to wait tended to get angry because this contradicted their expectations of a Western style business – and often vented their feelings when they saw the high price of the courses. Employees, caught between the manager's incoherent discourses and wayward practice of 'Western' time management and the even less convincing financial rewards of the enterprise, offered no open resistance but simply left the job. Staff turnover took place every six weeks. This indicates that most service employees take into account, at least symbolically, the equation that time equals money: to them it stands for capitalistic practice and personal affluence.

The NGO Alpha is a humanitarian organization, funded from European sources, in which managers trust that work practices will arise naturally out of the humanitarian commitment of its employees. The headquarters comprise employees, mostly twenty-five- to thirty five-year-old social sciences graduates, who are well remunerated. Here, where the flexibility of the hour of arrival at work is balanced only by the flexibility of the hour of departure from work, it is the organization of tasks over longer periods of time that is problematic. Report deadlines always force employees to work extra hours, while less pressurized periods give way to coffee breaks (though the preparation of reports could have taken place in advance). This slackness is especially unproductive when several persons depend on each other's work, as this is often the case. People have to waste days waiting for an essential response from somebody else, who is caught up trying to meet a deadline. Attempts are made to plan at least one to two weeks in advance, but timetables are not respected when another 'priority' arises.

Changes

in legislation or changes of appointments with other institutions are then offered as reasons for the disruption of work-schedules. The employees' main complaint is the organization's 'lack of management', which prevents them from having reasonable work systems, or 'restraints' (e.g. successive deadlines, quality norms) to act as markers of their time. This does not stop the organization surviving, but prevents it from expanding its activities. The scarcity and preciousness of time implied in 'time is money' is not embedded in this organization, because there has been no coherent attempt to make it real.

The importance of the discipline of time required by capitalist organization is such that the use of time in the enterprise might provide us with a key factor for understanding disorder and failure to improve work and business practices. However, given that the managers are unable to inject or implement a sense of time proper to the organization, the perception of time use coming from the larger urban context is what penetrates through external constraints. In general it still rules in organizations. I will focus on the perception of time in the urban environment in the following part of this chapter.

Changing Trends in the Allocation/Management of Daily Personal Time

I will survey the main historical changes in the management of time in the last half of the twentieth century in Romania, because of their continuous relevance to the lived experience of service employees through different eras.

Comparative studies between the way people express and measure time reveal that ecology (Thompson, 1967) and occupations (Whipp, 1987) are the decisive factors in shaping their perceptions. Thompson asserts that task-oriented time is characteristic for non-industrial societies. For example, Nuer time is structured by the daily needs of the cattle and by their seasonal needs (change of pasture, etc) (Evans-Pritchard, 1940). Similarly in English rural life in the past, the timetable for work used to be a function of the seasonal needs. The way people measured the time was loose: dawn, morning, dusk. In Romania, where industrialization was forced upon peasants only about thirty to forty years ago, Thompson's analysis of the industrialization process in England still holds true. The perception of time takes more than a few years to change. 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 most of the day during the winter when there is less to do and the days are shorter.

In urban Romania, where the enterprises I have studied were situated, contrasts radically with rural areas, because of the difference in the organization of daily work: in the countryside tasks are still dictated by the seasons and the consequent

amount of work they bring, whereas in the city the hours of work are strictly regulated and the watch or clock gives 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 contains both rural and urban members. Having been educated to use daily time in a certain manner, later external constraints are likely to be resisted (which does not mean that people cannot succeed in imposing these themselves). What becomes then of Bloch's assertion (1977) in response to Geertz's suggestion that people could freely oscillate between several perceptions of time, each linked to a particular context? It is certainly true that if the context had the power to impose a certain notion of time, people would be constrained to learn it and comply with it. Yet, as the preceding part of this paper has shown, the reverse is often the case.

The socialist period was characterized by the gradual imposition of the state as manager of people's daily time. Logically, this should have been restricted to the workplace, to the eight hours work per day plus additional time for work meetings, party meetings, organized party demonstrations or compulsory 'voluntary' extra hours. However, the economy of shortage imposed additional hours for queueing, from which no family could escape (Schwartz, 1975; Câmpeanu, 1994). Queueing would normally take two or three hours every day (much more for retired people and children), in order to buy different types of food from different shops, which generally sold only one product at the time. Queueing was not only time-consuming, but domestically disruptive as it was impossible to foresee it. While queueing especially appears to disturb family life, waiting for buses for hours while heading for an appointment affects punctuality in relation to others (including people at the workplace). Planning and control over one's own time is thus difficult. Phenomena like this '*étatisation*' of time as Katherine Verdery has called it (1996) undermined people's own responsibility for their use of time, especially in the public sphere, reduced the importance of time-keeping and the potential for its fruitful use. Time was an efficient political tool and the 'colonization' of individual time was an important way of counteracting possible acts of resistance.

If queueing has disappeared from shops in post-socialist Romania, it has not disappeared from administrative offices (witness the huge queues for paying taxes). There are several other forms of time-wasting that these offices impose through their bureaucracy, lack of information and lack of appropriate internal services. Each time one finds out that s/he needs a fiscal stamp or a copy or a blank paper while dealing with officialdom, one has to go to the nearest post office or library (supposing s/he knows how to find the way), then back for another queue at the office requiring the stamp or paper. Most administrative branches have not internalized these services and have not displayed information on the procedures. To obtain the smallest bit of information, one is forced to queue. But this might

also prove useless, if the employee is unable to provide information or is unwilling to investigate further. For solving each administrative problem, an employee loses one or more half-days of work.

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

One of the most striking behaviours to a Western eye is to see how people are prepared to save just a little money by spending so much of their time. While many could not afford to give up any opportunity for saving (for instance: retired people who do not have any other means of obtaining money), others simply do not equate time and money. One of my informants who was a high school teacher would spend twenty or thirty minutes to go to his school in order to make urban phone calls for free from there, while this would save him only a fifth of what he would earn by giving a private lesson in the same half hour – or so his wife complained. (One might note also that he was making private calls on public money.) However, she herself would shop in five different supermarkets in order to get the best prices.

Who attempts to play God the Father in Romania after 1989? On a short-term basis: enterprises. Urban dwellers are dependent on them for financial reasons and most private enterprises exercise their power through time abuse. This is common both in enterprises that pay by commission and in those where wages are paid for an eight-hour working day. In the marketing department that I observed, the working day was called 'flexible': i.e. rather unexpected and chaotic. It was typical to send employees home for two hours to change their clothes and eat and to come back afterwards. Thus, while there were only six hours per day of effective employment, the employee was at the company's disposal for ten hours or more. 'Staying around' was a constant requirement and justified by the fact that one should 'catch the job'. If one considers that these requirements also took place in the 'training' period, and that they were accompanied by a complete lack of security about a possible contract and possible payment (the training period simply grew longer and longer), the feeling that one's time was not respected also grew more justified. Indeed, new employees would not know if the month they had already spent in this rhythm would bring financial rewards or assure them of a job. Some employees were called to work but deliberately not given any clients, thus being deprived of the possibility of making any money. (If the contract was not concluded, work with the clients was not paid for at all. Also the

risk of going to work but not having any client was a constant pressure, but the manager who could foresee it again preferred to keep employees around 'just in case'.) Consequently the working day of the employees at Beta was neither task-oriented, nor strictly measured; it was just as loose as their income opportunities. As for the better paid and often more secure jobs in the top labour market: there is a frequent requirement to do unpaid extra hours. As one of the top labour market employees told me, 'As soon as they pay you more than usual, they think they can ask you to do anything.' So time, after all, is still of less value than money.

Though the 'time is money' equation rhetorically rules in many enterprises, neither the managers, nor the employees have changed their behaviour in consequence, both lacking the practice of responsibility towards their own time. This means that when work or business commitments are not respected, the individual believes that this has happened because of external causes beyond their control, not that s/he transgressed any ethical principles. The manager of Beta expressed his regret that the employee called upon to work had no client (i.e. no possibility at least to try to earn some money), but he believed he had no responsibility for this and blamed the poor situation of the Romanian economy. This lack of accountability becomes more obvious when trying to discover what *does* manage the individual's life in the long run.

Managers of Time, Managers of Lives

In the socialist period, the state was overwhelmingly present on a daily basis, impinging on the personal management of daily time. Individuals remained free to organise their lives within the limits pre-set by the system. Lifetime jobs and fixed wages generated a feeling of long-term stability. Professional and/or financial events that would dramatically change one's life hardly existed. Typically, people would get married, acquire a house, have children, then 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 over one's lifetime was not more contested than God's will – except by intellectuals.

While private enterprises have replaced the state in many cases as the managers of individual time on a daily basis, they appear to have no great impact for the long term. This is due to the fragility of both the enterprises and the individual's position within them. While commercial pressures could prevent young women from having children, for example, women would always have the option of giving up the job, if they wanted to.

Therefore on a long-term basis, one could master one's life, but can one see that far ahead in a survival economy? Living from one day to the next because

of economic constraints and social instability renders long-term life planning obsolete. The bank in which you saved your money for a private flat could collapse tomorrow and you might recuperate your money (partially) in two to five years' time; the company for which you work may get restructured tomorrow or you may get fired without notice; the political regime might change or you may have the chance to win in one of the TV game shows, which you play everyday. Fate is finally responsible for events that you have assumed you initiated for yourself.

Though there are more risks than in long established capitalist societies, usually there is some freedom of choice about how to employ one's time and how to trade it against money and pleasure. This also depends on how 'choice' is defined and by whom. The notion of freedom of choice in general is a new concept in Romania; during the socialist period, state control made most people think that they had no freedom of choice. There was choice, but not in the consumerist sense where both choice X and choice Y would bring you a certain satisfaction. Applying rational thinking when choosing between being obediently conformist and taking the dangerous path of dissent was tantamount to no choice in the end. As in the case of daily time, which appears determined by external factors (the climate for the rural population, the state during the socialist period, or commercial enterprises today in urban areas), one's lifetime tends to be perceived as predetermined or at least to have its main limits set by external factors or 'opportunities'. That does not mean that life itself would be thought or lived as predetermined. But we cannot refer to choices in terms of time unless we consider the orientation of time: the meaning or the reason for this choice.

Meaning/Purpose of Everyday Time

Time is measured in the Time of Codes (Attali, 1983) by sophisticated and precise watches. People are reminded by them 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 is aware of every minute one unwillingly spends in a waiting room, but we do not notice time passing when engaged in pleasant activities. This may appear to be a common trend in industrial societies, but there are some fine details. The readiness with which we forget what time it is when happily engaged in an activity belongs, in a way, to an 'age of innocence'. Responsible, mature women will arrive late because they met with 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 a time-limit is often absent, even when it is entirely one's own responsibility to manage one's 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 from the English expression is that while 'waste' extends over a period of time (necessary for the activity of 'wasting' to take place), the '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 after the event. Time that is positively 'spent' is referred to as *timp petrecut*, literally 'time passed'. (In English we refer to time 'spent', as for any other consumable.) Linguistic uses provide some comfort in the situations observed above.

For many of my informants who were in full-time employment (sometimes also on second jobs), the aim of a busy day was to make it to the end and go to bed. This could unfortunately also be said of many Westerners. The French call this kind of life '*metro-boulot-dodo*', (tube-work-sleep). Romanian urban dwellers however, have much more diversity in their spatial destinations: they need to visit five shops rather than one to buy food, they have dozens of offices to go to for paying their bills and other matters, they have second jobs and greater family commitments. They must have some way of restoring their energy! The explanation may be quite simply: they go to work in order to rest, as Ashwin and Bowers were told by their Russian informants (1997: 28). Between the multitudes of commitments they have every day, most service employees count on their work hours as the most stable and reliable amount of time for collecting thoughts and recovering energy. People describe the time they spend at their workplace as 'I stayed at work' and a very widely circulated joke about the state employees is a pun on the similarity between state (*stat*) and stay (*sta*). When the only purpose of an activity is its end, its 'destination', it is easy to understand why in the absence of coherent time management at the workplace, work time and work obligations are respected as little as possible, and why extra activities of a more pleasant or of a greater personal value are performed in order to 'fill' the time (knitting, chatting, phoning home, solving personal problems).

The slack attitude at the work place is not to the liking of all service employees and in the NGO Alpha, the sense of duty and interest in its progress does not allow for any rest during the working day. But employees complain that their daily time has no planned shape or 'destination' either. The succession of events in the workplace is too rapid and does not allow them to plan, look back on their planning or realize that they have accomplished anything during the day. Thus, in the first half hour when employees arrive at work, they wonder how, when and what they should do, whereas before the monthly deadlines everybody has to work non-stop to finish. These times are so pressurized that they are treated as a constraint, not as an opportunity to give real meaning to employees' jobs. Deadlines are not creating positive rhythms; they remain disruptive events (for example, by forcing employees beyond the eight hours of their normal working day).

Daily time appears to have no proper purpose. The capitalist measure of work in terms of hours, not tasks, is imposed on employees who used to understand time as task-oriented. It encourages the meaninglessness of daily time and incites the employees to wait for work time to pass (when they can). Daily time contains only an alternation between a time of constraint and a time of pleasure, time 'spent' and time 'lost', time of sleep and time awake. This echoes on a small scale Leach's structuralist view of time as a sequence of oscillations between polar opposites, a pendulum-like movement (1961). Repetitive daily activities receive meaning only in the long term, when a succession of accomplishments can be reviewed.

Individual Time and National Time

In his lecture, *Times and Identities* (1991), John Davis asserts that while all people experience duration, they have different notions of time that are relevant for their social life and the construction of their identities. Two different symbolic representations of time can coexist in one culture, depending on whether they refer to time in its daily acceptance or to time as 'history'. 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.

What a close look at Romanian history reveals is the fact that the present transition from socialism to capitalism could be situated within a long series of historical transitions: from an agrarian to a modern capitalist state, from capitalism to Soviet socialism, from the Stalinist form of socialism to Romanian national socialism (to mention only the most recent), most of them against the background of external wars and treaties constantly reshaping the borders. 'Being Romanian has meant centuries of being survivors, principally by mechanisms other than overt conflicts' (Verdery, 1983: 370). One could establish linearity in the flow of history, where key events are remembered to be written in history, while 'transition' periods are erased. The positive history of the nation was generally written, especially during the last fifty years of Marxism, through this process of selected memory. However, if the periods of transition are not to be erased, we should follow rather the interpretation of the Romanian philosopher Lucian Blaga (1969) who sees Romanian history as alternating, but what defines it is the alternation between periods of peace and periods of war, i.e. between periods of the assertion of the national soul and periods of survival. This, together with the geographical alternation of hill/valley that characterizes the Romanian territory, says Blaga, has shaped the Romanian soul. This interpretation re-evaluates and reconciles current 'transitional' abnormalities. It also echoes on the historical scale the understanding of time we have noted on the daily scale, which resembles Leach's pendulum model. Unfortunately this interpretation of history is not popular.

Other similarities between the time of the individual and the time of the nation (or history) can be found. Understanding agency in the management of national time helps in understanding agency (or the lack of it) in the management of the individual time. History remains 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 the understanding of individuals' histories, which gain meaning as part of a national project. The answer to questions of the management and orientation of historical time is called 'the Romanian destiny'.

Most philosophical and even sociological works on this issue concentrate on Romania's '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 has published many history books since 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. The national anthem urges on Romanians: '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: first, the extension of various empires, then in the twentieth century of zones of influence; and currently, the economic needs of the European market (Chirot, 1976: 121). The Romanian *principates* of which modern Romania is composed have always turned toward Western Europe, though some historians claim that this model, borrowed or imposed from the West has proved inadequate to solve Romania's problems and has become a major handicap (Roberts, 1951). The revelation of power-games such as the Yalta Conference or the Kosovo crisis in Spring 1999 has often led to disillusionment with the West and to the reinforcement of nationalistic movements. However, neither the pressure of Western agencies, nor the revolt of national pride in the face of the Romanian government's present servitude towards Western countries, seems to change the Romanians' will to join the European Union and NATO, which are viewed as guarantors of future stability and economic prosperity.

Conclusion

The recurrent theme in my ethnography is that time and timing in Rumania are not rigorous and their control is minimal. Both the individual and the nation tend 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 organization. The absence of work discipline and the lack of education in the management of time allows 'time' as defined outside the workplace to run freely into enterprises. This 'laissez-faire' in time discipline is due to a tradition of non-agency in time management, which has been shaped by historical circumstances throughout 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 at all: it is neither for sale, nor for purchase. They do not manage their time- they simply use it. Some of the paradoxical behaviour signalled above (the willingness to give all of one's time to a Western style manager, but the impatience over a waste of time with state administration) comes from the fact that Romanian urbanites try to comprehend the capitalist notion of time as a commodified value through their own notion of time.

The dialogue with history allows for a parallel between individual and national time regarding their orientation and meaning. While history does not yield a strong sense of direction or 'destination' and continues to appear meaningless, the individual's understanding of her/his personal life will follow the same trajectory. A lack of meaning is an inevitable consequence, both in work practices and values, and in the individual's sense of self.

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Time and the Work Ethic in Romania

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