

## **SCREENING THE THAW ERA: ROMANIAN TELEVISION IN THE 60S AS A PUBLIC SERVICE TELEVISION**

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### **Résumé**

Cet article a pour but d'évaluer le rôle de la télévision roumaine dans la modernisation de la société à partir du début des années 1960 et jusqu'à la montée en puissance de la dictature de Nicolae Ceausescu, dix ans plus tard. La discussion vise trois aspects conjoints de cette modernisation : la dimension économique, la dimension sociale et la dimension culturelle. Des études sociologiques sur les publics, des données empiriques sur la couverture télévisuelle du territoire et des recherches d'archives sur les échos des diffusions télévisées montrent l'image d'une société clivée entre une couche urbaine grande consommatrice de culture classique en quasi-synchronie avec les habitudes urbaines occidentales et une couche majoritaire, rurale ou périurbaine. Toutes ces données rangent la télévision roumaine, avant 1973 du moins, plutôt du côté des télévisions publiques européennes que du côté d'un outil de propagande communiste. Ainsi peut-on affirmer que la télévision fut, avant le début des années 1970, l'une des premières institutions européennes dont les principes furent plus ou moins similaires à travers toute l'Europe.

### **Mots clés**

Télévision roumaine, ère du dégel, les années 60, télévision européenne, Roumanie socialiste

### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on the role of the Romanian Television in modernizing the Romanian society from the beginning of the 60s up to the rise of Ceausescu's dictatorship, one decade later. The paper discusses three interrelated aspects of the issue: economical, social and cultural. Early studies on audience, official political references to television, as well as empirical data about television consumption and archival research on the echoes of television as a new cultural media in the press show that, during the 1960s, Romanian society, cleaved between a thin urban middlebrow and

highbrow class, and a thick rural and peri-urban class, witnessed a partial synchronization with social and cultural urban life in western European countries. Romanian Television, at least before 1973, proved to be more like a version of European public service televisions than a political and ideological communist propaganda and it can be thus considered one of the first and, of course, the most salient European institutions whose principles were more or less common across Europe.

### **Key words**

Romanian television, Thaw Era, Socialist sixties, European Television, Socialist Romania

## **Romanian Thaw Era : economy, society and culture**

On one hand, an overall uplift of the economy – and a more balanced relation between the consuming and accumulation funds as a result of a significant increase pace designed as “the Romanian miracle” – resulted in an improve of the material culture in the Popular Republic of Romania. This is not a specific Romanian phenomenon, as some recent researches prove<sup>1</sup>. What is specific, instead, to Romania (except of Yugoslavia, of course), is the conquest of a political autonomy towards the Soviet Union, firstly marked by the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from the Romanian territory in 1958. It convinced the Romanian communist power to seek support and legitimacy within the Romanian society itself: the Thaw Era in Romania began less as a series of changes at the top level of the Party, but more as a cultural and economical stance of de-sovietization, a return to the cultural and historical national patrimony and a febrile search for renewing partnerships with Western powers. Partial de-sovietization is obvious to anyone reviewing the printed press of the 1960s, and many historians point to this process when talking about the Romanian communist era. The political landmarks of this movement are given by Malita and Giurescu (*Malita and Giurescu: 2011*) who consider that the Thaw Era began in Romania in 1962. In 1964 the Romanian Working Party stated the equality of all communist parties – regardless of the size of the countries they belonged to – in what it has been known ever since as the Declaration of Independence. From the economical point of view, the prime-minister, Ion Gheorghe Maurer, refused to undertake the so called “Valev Plan”, a Soviet initiative from 1964 which was then trying to organize the economy of the communist Eastern Europe, following a regional “economical specialization” and assigning to Romania the role of an extensive agricultural country. The rapid pace of industrialization could keep its way and raise hopes for higher incomes within

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<sup>1</sup>Television is a typical post-Stalinist institution, as some historians emphasize. I think mainly of Paulina Bren’s book, *The Greengrocer and his TV. The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring*, which depicts everyday life in Czechoslovakia after the August 1968 invasion. Other books have been published over the past decade in the same line, edited by David Crowley and Susan E. Reid. For instance: (2002) *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*. Bloomsbury Academic; (2012) *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc*. Northwestern University Press ( but this concerns only URSS and Czechoslovakia).

one of the poorest and the most rural of all European nations (see *Crowther:1988* and *Murgescu:2010*). The distancing from the Soviet guardianship opened for Romania opportunities to cooperate with Western strong economical powers: West Germany had become by the end of the 60s one of the strongest Romanian partners, together with France and the United States. The Tourism Congress organized in August 1964 in Bucharest gathered many Western (and other) journalists in an effort to make them praise the New Popular Republic and stimulate the interest for the Romanian touristic attractions: the Black Sea, the Danube Delta, the remote traditional culture and way of life, the mountain resorts on Prahova Valley, the new urban commodities etc. Some of them reported about Romania on their return home, and the official journal of National Journalists Organization published such a selection (different articles in *Presa noastră:1964*). Obviously, this opening couldn't have been initiated without at least the mutual support of people who, in return, felt the de-sovietization as a national revival and, in many cases, a personal victory over the foreign repression. We can advocate for the idea of a cultural Thaw Era in Romania as a consequence of the two upward processes. The distancing from the Soviets and the approach to Western culture and economy resulted partly in a re-establishment (on the highbrow cultural level) and partly in a reform as attempt to catch up with the mass cultural European trends<sup>3</sup>. People press reappeared, a concern for the material urban culture became sensible, together with a critical stance on local and particular institutional faults and flaws: a general review of the official Romanian Journalist Organization Journal called *Presa noastră (Our press)* from its beginning – 1956 – up to 1965, when Ceausescu came to power, acknowledges the presence of the latter as soon as 1959, and the review of the official Cultural Party Magazine *Contemporanul* testifies the presence of the first in 1962, as a weekly column called “Quotidian Beauty” (“Frumosul cotidian”), dealing with exterior and interior architectural design, household products, fashion, furniture. Of course, one of the landmarks of this new press discourse is the emergence of the TV chronicle in July 1963: six years after the Romanian television had begun to broadcast (*Contemporanul:28:1963*).

However, we have to insist on the partiality of the de-sovietization phenomenon, mainly due to the fact that, despite a firm claim of independence towards the disguised imperialism of the Soviet Union, the general outlines of the socialist/popular regimes had been designed by Moscow. Therefore, talking about “mass culture”<sup>2</sup> in the Romanian 60s, we have to identify a practical form of the phenomenon in more or less informal frames (as the “factory clubs”

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2 I have in mind Dwight Macdonald's study (1962), *Against the American Grain: Essays on the Effects of Mass Culture* and its both American (Christopher Lasch) and European echoes (in Edgar Morin's papers, for example). In 1959, Irving Howe wrote about mass society in *Partisan Review*: “a relatively comfortable, half welfare half garrison society in which population grows passive, indifferent and atomized (...); in which man becomes a consumer, himself mass-produced like the products, diversions and values that he absorbs” (Howe:1959:427). The collocation initially designates a negative ethic category, but things change by the end of the 1960s, concurrently with the popularization of De Certeau's (1980) theory about ordinary people's “tactics and strategies” of “making”. Until assimilating the “mass” into the “people” in the official speeches of the 1970s, the 1960s brought a remarkable, although diffuse concern for ‘mass culture’ and how it arises from the occurrence of the collocation in different Romanian press releases. At the end of the 1960s, in Romania were being published books that attempted to broach the “esthetic” dimension of the collocation, in order to avoid falling into the trap of some excessive politically engaged interpretations. Therefore, these books echo some French studies about “stars” (for instance, Edgar Morin's (1957) *Les Stars*). See, for example, most of Ecaterina Oproiu, the best Romanian TV critic's books: *Un idol pentru fiecare, (An Idol for Everyone, 1970)*, *Greta Garbo, biografie (Greta Garbo, A Biography; in collaboration, 1972)*, *3 x 8 plus infinitul (3 x 8 plus infinity, 1975)*.

where one could dance, listen to music, play or attend theatre shows, or taking part to scientific and professional presentations and conferences, or the new media content – television shows) and a phenomenon bearing the same name but tightly linked to soviet-originated political propaganda interests: amateur artistic movements ideologically directed, political mass meetings, patriotic labor. For instance, in 1963, a conference about The Press and the Problems of Mass Culture discussed issues about the working class participation to cultural and social events, with no reference to the aesthetic meaning of “mass culture” as opposed to highbrow culture (*Presa noastră:5-6:1963*). Romanian media balanced incessantly between an aesthetic approach of “mass culture” and a normative (or ideological) approach, trying hard to merge the two criteria on the implicit basis of the aesthetical quality preeminence over the ideological rightfulness (*Potanga:1972*). According to this explicit position, the socialist human being is a thirsty consumer of highbrow classical culture and of contemporary socialist culture, this mix formation making him classical and modern, national and universal at the same time. What he rejects – or has to reject – would be precisely the modern culture considered on its individualistic potential.

These three nationalist tendencies – political, economical and cultural – had also a particular meaning in the European symbolic identity of the Romanians. The national cultural “restoration” meant firstly a comeback to the Western cultural patrimony and made up, for instance, with the French cultural model. Thus, in 1963, Russian language was not compulsorily any more to be studied in schools, where pupils could chose instead other foreign languages. Two thirds of them preferred French<sup>3</sup>. A new cultural and economical agreement with France (1963) opened up the way of long lasting cultural exchanges suppressed in 1948. This restoration was made possible not only as a result of a more autonomous position within the Warsaw Treatise, but also as a new state policy giving up the outrageous propaganda characterizing the Stalinist epoch. These last years of Dej’s regime were, together with the first years of Ceausescu’s, the less personalized ones. This was the decade when institutions prevailed over people, leading them, and when ideological straitjackets gave way to a more politically neutral institutional discourse. This is the general frame of the Romanian post-Stalinist society in which television appeared.

The crucial conclusion to be drawn is that television, in the Popular Republic – and then during the first years of the Socialist Republic of Romania – was not mainly a political propaganda instrument. It borrowed instead the features of a Public Service Television (whose model was the BBC) and of national media, as was the case in France (*Mustata:2012 and Bourdon:1990*). If historians of French television insisted upon it having been used especially by De Gaulle as the voice of his France, which entailed the ire of many Television employees, this institutional reality was not underestimated by Romanian press, where we could find these Notes about France in 1964:

“Listening to the succinct but also interesting presentation Mr. Renaud, the vice-president of ORTF, made about the concern of this institution about orienting the radio and television programmes, we could face the falsity of the idea that the capitalist media lacks political content or, to put it briefly, lacks a very neat political direction from the State representatives (...) What can be said for sure is that all French television programmes serve, often in witty manners, a general interest for

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3 Programme called *Cinq colonnes à la une*, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July 196, « A l’Est, du nouveau » - archives INA, BNF, Paris.

influencing the public towards some precise (political, i.e.) requirements”.  
(*Manea:1964:21-22*)

This excerpt acknowledges that Romanian television did not seek to oppose itself to “capitalist” national televisions but, on the contrary, its representatives were glad to find institutionally similarities between the former and the latter. Thus, it is tacitly accepted that television doesn’t have antagonist purposes within two antagonistic societies – the capitalist, on the one hand, and the “popular democratic”, on the other – but a common objective carried out in specific ways which are not, under a closer scrutiny, as different as people may think. Why this media convergence concept in terms of institutional policy? Because, it seems to us that the general principles of a Public Service Television were accepted in Western Europe and in Eastern post-Stalinist Europe as regulatory for the reshaping of a broader cultural European society, based on common values beyond opposite (for instance) economical policies. In a way, trying to avoid both the political and the economical grip, European television embodies an Enlightenment ideal-type institution serving an ideal social body, eager to become more cultivated, more tolerant, more citizen-minded.

Between 1946 and 1962 (roughly speaking, as signs of normalization had already appeared after 1958), it was a time of terror in which Soviet trails, purges, mass arrests and the changes of the social and economic structures set up a new world to whose birth attended, however, an old, predominantly rural Romanian society. Romania submitted to the program enforced by Moscow, while the occidental cultural and political elites slowly died away. Meanwhile, in 1958, the Soviet troops retreated from Romania at Gheorghiu-Dej, the Secretary of the Central Committee of PCR’s request, accepted by Nikita Khrushchev. A final wave of arrests followed. In 1962, the collectivization of agriculture came to an end. The Gheorghiu-Dej regime, together with the soviet-inspired social, economical and ideological principles, attained a stability which permitted to relax the struggle with the capitalist ‘enemy’, especially because a profitable economic relation with it promised the improvement of a precarious economy, the most backward in Eastern Europe.

At that moment, Romanian Television had already begun its regular broadcasts, even if only a reduced number of privileged people were able to watch them. Up to 1965, and beginning with 1960, the number of subscriptions (indicating the number of official TV sets owned by people) multiplied by ten: from 50,000 to 500,000. In the next years, the increase pace stabilized at 200,000 per year (in a report from 1973, these data appear to be constant from 1964 to 1973), growing up to around 2,000,000 in the first years of the 1970s (*Matei:2013*). Like elsewhere, watching TV was not always an individual practice. On Wednesdays, for instance, RTV broadcasted in the afternoons only, especially for “workers’ clubs”, trying to bring television inside the official „mass culture” frame. Television territorial cover was at the same time limited to some more urbanized regions and to bigger cities: in 1965, only 40% were covered, with better signal in Bucharest and around, especially towards Brasov, in the North. Transylvania was better covered (with Brasov, Targu Mures, Cluj, Oradea, Deva) than Southern Muntenia and Moldova (excepting Iasi, in Moldova was implemented a system of transceivers in the big cities like Buzau, Focsani, Suceava, Botosani, but the signal was poor). In Dobrudjea, Constanta received TV programmes, whereas the Northern half, including Tulcea, was not covered. Only Bucharest had, by 1965, more than 10 subscriptions for 100 people, followed by four Transylvanian cities, Brasov, Cluj, Timisoara, Arad and by Constanta, with more than 5%. Overall, Romanians still lacked a televisual culture, in the

countryside this had been an evidence up to the the 1990s, and that is why we are able to assert that television broadcasts addressed mainly, in the 60s and even during the next decades, cultivated urban public (*SRR Archive files:1965*). The first article about the new RTV was published in the official magazine *Presa noastra*, quoted above, in 1958, delivering a few data about its material basis and its activity. The main area of programming consisted in live broadcasting from the two studios of 90 and 400 sqm: theatre, opera, light and classical music, dramatizations for children. The sound and image footages are introduced during late 1960s, and this entailed the beggining of a new stage in the television evolution, that of information magazines (*Cornescu:1960:31*)

## Beginnings of a professional Romanian television: a European window

In 1962, Gheorghiu Dej appointed Silviu Brucan director of the Television (officially, his office was that of Vice-President of the State Committee for Radio and Television, but he was the responsible for Television). Newly returned from the United States, he had been the ambassador of the Romanian People's Republic. He was given free hand to improve and direct the investments (*Mustata: 2012*) and he tightened links with BBC, eventhough, at the same time, French television programmes were taken as model. In 1964, when RTV had already become an acknowledged technical and cultural media, Sasa Georgescu wrote in an article entitled "Television Newsreel" ("Publicistica de televiziune") that we

"are living the victory of television all around the world" under the guise of an introduction for a short report of the news departement. In addition to the four daily newscasts (the main one, the "village" journal, the "pioneers journal" meaning the journal for children and the sports news), "our studio realized round table debates and this is a television genre most appreciated by the public, which is not at all a surprise, given the fact that one of the most successful broadcasts of the French television, "Cinq colonnes à la une", often makes recourse to the same formula". (*Sasa Georgescu :1962:56-58*).

That is to say, despite the fact that the general outline of the controlled public sphere, created to "constructively criticize", was borrowed from the Khrushchev Soviet Union (*Crowley and Reid: 2012*), despite taking Lenin as a source of inspiration for an article about the nature of documentaries published in *Presa noastra* in 1964 (*Rupea:1964:11*), television programming formulas, technical devices as well as audience measurements, did not come from the East, but mainly from the West. In an official meeting of the National Council of the Radio-television from 1973 (the institution had been created by Ceausescu in 1971), the envisaged material investments would come preponderantly from the West than from the East (7.2% versus 2.7%). In an article about this last topic, M. Demetrescu points out the refined methods of audience measurement data and criticizes only its commercial goals. It is obvious that the article suggests that developing an audience measurement service would help television and radio makers better target their public, not in order to earn more money as western or "capitalist" media do, but to educate and inform their public (*Demetrescu:1964:35*). It is worth noting that, during the 60s and afterwards, Western and national data about audience coincide. This coincidence, never pointed to explicitly, underlines the popular regimes' impotence to create a new consciousness. On both sides of the Iron curtain, television audience enquiries show the need to be entertained, then to be informed and lastly to get

cultivated. A list of television audience preferences, published in a collective research focused on mass culture, arranges in this order: movies, light and popular music, dramatics, entertainment, sports and an information magazine called “Transfocator” (the one which took the format of “Cinq colonnes à la une”) (*Campeanu:1970:123*).

RTV accepted an invitation to the second edition of the Television Festival in Monte Carlo, in 1962. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of January, Petre Gheorghe, Vice-President of the State Committee of Radio-television, gave an interview in Monte Carlo in order to disseminate data about the national television. The interview was broadcast by Tele Monte Carlo and is a good database for official data of the first years of RTV. Of the 28-30 broadcasting hours per week, about 30% was live broadcasting, 50% studio broadcasting and 20% film broadcasting. Each evening broadcast was opened by children programmes. On Wednesdays and Sundays there were programmes designed to be seen collectively, by workers and respectively by peasants. Most part of studio broadcasting consisted of dramas: for children, opera, theatre, music and debates (SRR Archive Files:Monte Carlo 1962). It is easy to realize that the RTV programme copied the public service television programmes from Western countries and scheduled mainly a culture and a cultural entertainment, the differences between the RTV and RTF programmes (with which RTV signed a partnership in 1963), as we can infer, consist in the dimension and quality of the technical and human resources much more than in a general concept about a Western and an Eastern television.

Silviu Brucan was removed in 1965, when Ceausescu came to power, but the investment trend in television industry went on an even accelerated pace, together with a general increase of Romanian economy and of consumption goods. A breath of consumer society permeates Romania in the mid-sixties, when newspapers started inserting advertorials and when the first comments upon television advertising were made within the first TV chronicles: in a late 1963 issue of *Contemporanul*, advertising spots are criticized for their lack of imagination; the trend will be maintained and a few years later the same topic was screened in an information magazine (Ileana Costin: 1963:6). Advertising, as well as television itself, was not considered to be a capitalist social product, it was their subordination to commercial logics which had to be changed. The author of the first TV chronicles did not sign with her real name, Ecaterina Oproiu, using as a surname a combination of her daughter’s first name and the first name of her husband: Ileana Costin (Radu Cosasu: 2014). But what else could determine a consistent improvement of advertorials except for competition in selling products?

Entertainment stakes were given higher concern together with the increase of interest for “mass culture” phenomena. More professional articles were emphasizing the need to boost cultural and technical quality of TV shows, but there is hardly any explicit ideological criticism towards successful musical genres in Western capitalist Europe Romanian media should be cautious to. Light music was not criticized in itself, on the contrary, opinions went asserting the need to create better light music songs, for an audience tired of the same foreign songs clumsily performed by Romanian singers (SRR Archive Files: Legatura cu telespectatorii:1964). This is the context for the launching of the biggest Romanian light music festival in Mamaia, a brand new Black Sea resort achieved in 1963. At the same time, Mamaia festival became a major TV show surviving during the bleak 80s up to the end of Ceausescu era. Mamaia was intensively promoted in Romanian media and the tourism conference organized in Bucharest one year later helped extend its promotion within

European television: some French television news magazines, including documentaries about the new socialist Romania, have never forgotten Mamaia, besides the Danube Delta, Bucharest and traditional popular culture. The first Mamaia Festival, in August 1963, was allocated, in *Contemporanul*, some long reports and syntheses, among which a cover article signed by Ilie Purcaru in the 6<sup>th</sup> of September issue. It was then that new musical stars, performers and composers, appeared: Aurelian Andreescu, Margareta Pislaru, Dan Spataru, Florin Bogardo (Purcaru: 1963: 1). Leisure and money generated entertainment, information, traveling, the purchase of industrial products or of semi-cooked food. In 1967 the Romanian chain store 'Gospodina' ('The Housewife') opened; it provided carry-out food. At the same time neighborhood restaurants appear and student clubs (in the so-called Houses of Culture). In the same year, Pepsi-Cola launches the first bottling line. At the beginning of the 1960s the largest stores in Bucharest are inaugurated: 'Eva', 'Adam', 'Romarta' (other big stores, such as 'Unirea' or 'Cocorul', open in the 1970s). The only great store built before 1945, resembling Lafayette Galleries, was named in 1948 'Victoria'. During the late 60s, 'Loto' national company used to offer trips to Paris and Rome.

Television history showed not only a partial ethical westernization of the Romanian mass culture, but also a discrepancy between a prevalent rural society and a political, scientific and cultural elite that gathered inter-war personalities, survivors of Communist prisons, new figures of Party intellectuals and young men eager for affirmation. Media discourse persisted, partly because of this cultural tension between "low" and "high" cultural and social practices inherited from interwar, partly because it took for granted the practices of the public service televisions from Western Europe, in elitist convictions: opera, light opera, classical music, theatre and diverse dramas were indeed mainstream cultural forms screened by all European national televisions, but Romanian audience asked for more folkloric music. At the same time, emergent Western "counterculture", to which European PBS television was reluctant, couldn't be screened in Romania (except for some jazz concerts, during the second half of the sixties and the early seventies). Fashion shows were designed to enter the "club culture", where "club" meant entertainment and cultural after-work places. They were aired on TV not as autonomous shows, but the presence of fashion topics on printed press and on television, in more pleasant layout as years went by, fostered the idea of a mass cultural convergence between Western and Eastern Europe.

## A Public Service Television ideologically diverted

Finally, during 1971-1973 the official ideology had witnessed a loss of prestige, along with the ascent of the consumerist society. Ceaușescu endeavored to retrieve the preeminence of politics in a campaign of official speeches and of institutional creation unparalleled in neighboring countries. From that moment until 1989 the negotiations between the central political power, on one hand, the economic and socio-cultural democratic institutions, and the people, on the other hand, had turned into small guerrillas. As a result of these negotiations, television eventually lost ground, being almost dissolved between 1985 and 1988 when it broadcast ordinary issues only two hours daily; in addition, live transmissions on political problems and, exceptionally, sports shows. It's not all about censorship, but, as I have already mentioned, about the conviction that, in fact, television couldn't serve the consolidation of socialism. Here is what a former State Secretary relates with regard to Ceaușescu's opinion



about television towards the end of the regime, when the broadcast had been reduced to two hours daily:

“He was being told: ‘Comrade, two hours of television every day, isn’t enough!’ And he used to reply: ‘It’s true, we could add some hours; still, education and culture can be done only by reading, attending plays and going to exhibitions, and not on television, as long as the same show is being watched both by the co-operating peasant and the scholar. Most popular television broadcasts are sportscasts.’” (*Andrei and Betea, 2011: 143*)

*Cultural turn* draws our attention to practices, habits, survivors’ memory rather than on focusing on official documents, noteworthy as far as they determine the practices that they refer to. Post-Stalinist (*light*) Communism, when individual opposition to Power didn’t imperil people’s lives immediately, failed to change the evolution of the occidental ethos, from the ascendancy of great and, in general, compact community identities to the dominance of individual sensibility, of small and marginal minority groups and especially to the satisfaction felt at owning and using goods. I will try to explain this failure from Bruno Latour’s perspective unfolded in his most recent book, *Inquiry into modes of existence*, namely through the theory of the mediations by which we experience the world. Politics, economics and science claim that these mediations can be removed from the anthropological equation of truth. In an interview taken in the November 2012 issue of *Critique*, Latour contends:

“Fast, early, diffuse universalization – including the theme of progress, as a matter of fact – the modernization front, at large, constituted the optimistic hypothesis. If we tell ourselves now: ‘Let’s try to understand mediations, necessary at least for the achievement of scientific objectivity’, we find that the price of such undertaking – like, in other context, the cost of political reliability –, the price that must be paid in order to obtain composition effects, becomes astronomical. (...) There are no possible recourses, and when economy, for example, attempts to produce them, this also costs. If we forget this, we side with ideology” (*Latour: 2012:963*).

In Romania, politics attempted to make the first shortcut to ‘truth’ by force, after 1946. The price to pay was known, being given the URSS experience, and this price shouldn’t have seemed too high compared to previous wars. At the same time, Communism developed a whole “scientific mythology” (Boia: 1999), another shortcut to truth. Well, after attaining a relative economic independence towards URSS and especially after electing Ceaușescu president, the regime pursued a competition policy with the capitalist world, not only on moral level (the myth of the scientific objectivity was subordinated to it, because it was claimed that only Communism empowered scientists to spread the truths they discovered and to make them accessible to everyone), but also on material level. However, estimations proved wrong. Khrushchev-originated Thaw Era couldn’t possibly last. Giving up the fierce war on capitalist societies and replacing it with an economic competition in which socialist society tried to use its enemy’s weapons (material prosperity, social and cultural emancipation) were dangerously relying on human being’s self improvement drive. Investments in consumer goods, in mass culture infrastructure and finally in reshaping the social ethos towards more genuine access to public opinion, eventually proved nothing compared with the difficulties of socialist societies to satisfy a set of inner urges strange to the Enlightenment ideal-type of the human being, thirsty for culture and for knowledge. Between

this historical human type, forged beginning with the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and all along the next century, according to two main versions, French and German, and the socialist human type, the difference lies in degree, not in nature.

That is why the topic of the free expression of public opinion in a socialist society was largely approached at the same time. To criticize what was called “backwardness” in institutional policies and in individual attitude, “bureaucracy” or lack of taste across all parts of the public sphere became an explicitly encouraged media must from the late 50s, and the drive kept its way all along the sixties. The new Constitution from 1965 guaranteed the freedom of public opinion. Its 28<sup>th</sup> article was proudly quoted by the press: “Freedom of speech, of press, of meetings and demonstrations is guaranteed to all the citizens of the Socialist Republic of Romania”. (*Presa noastră: 1965*)

This Thaw Era was not meant to last. Television largely conquered the private daily life of many Romanians and eventually the Party tried hard to take advantage of the situation. But at the same time, as it was designed to entertain more than to educate, it contributed to the assimilation of Western culture and delayed the socio-political revolution which Ceaușescu intended to produce, fully aware of the fact that the future of Communism and the competition with the capitalist ‘free’ world depended on the urgency of its success. Though television seemed to accelerate the perception of the real throughout its monopoly on social media – when movies, series, varieties, plays, sports and feature reports ‘filled’ beforehand a set up schedule which didn’t allow changing the channel –, it slowed down the pace of public life, tamed it. Television played the role of a trainer of time and pace whose manifestation foiled propaganda by its incorrigible frivolity, rather than serving it. In 1970, television was seen by the political power as a ‘huge ideological polyp, with millions of aerials’ (*Popescu: 1972: 140*). It constantly disappointed Ceaușescu, who denounced the “falling behind’ of the press and of people’s conscience in relation to the socialist material achievements. I find the passivation of the audience and its political implications extremely interesting in an age when activism was exceedingly praised.

What Romanians call today “cultural resistance” was often nothing more than programmatic passivity as opposed to the activism embraced by the Communist regime led by Ceaușescu. From the perspective of social conduct, television contributed more than we imagine to opposing an individualizing passivity to ideological activity. Thus we should talk about politically connoted, marginal conduct – in the sense that social behavior was somehow distant, lazy in relation to the socialist ethos – rather than about cultural resistance conceived as intellectual labor, more or less in the service of a national brand (since the Power’s idea of television was idyllic in its elitism). Here it is, for instance, a dialogue from a show made by the former reporter Alexander Stark:

R: What do you do all day long?

AP: I walk.

R: And do you take any advantage of this, do you learn something when you walk like that?

AP: Absolutely nothing.

R: Knowing that you don’t take any advantage of walking, do you continue doing this, though?

AP: I would like to know many things, but it’s impossible.

R: Why?

AP: Because I don't have studies. After eight classes, you can't reach too far.  
(...)  
R: Can you name a great poet?  
AP: ...Kafka.  
R: Yes, but Kafka wasn't a poet. (Stark:1975:32-33)

Regarded from this point of view, the social conduct connected with passivity and impeached by the critical thought descending from the Frankfurt School, must be partly understood as a reaction to summonses diffused by the press in the name of the Communist Party. The very same television through which the political power summoned people in ideological and informative programmes to work more assiduously and, above all, more efficiently, broadcast American series and varieties which canceled the expected effect. The signification of this passivity changes as soon as the Communist regime is replaced by capitalism, presided over by the implicit discourse of the wish for accumulation. Precisely for this reason, to speak about Romanian television after 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1989 means to discuss a cultural and political phenomenon different, to a great extent, from how it was before. This is to be continued.

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(1963-1975) RadioTV

(1956-1965) Presa noastra

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